

all consumer products. As the regulations passed under its authority are brought progressively into effect, it will go a long way toward facilitating choice among consumer products by providing better information and helping to reduce confusion in the marketplace. Consumers on the whole, and I am referring to modern consumers, are demanding the right to know what they are buying. They want full, factual and complete information about the products they are buying. They are given that right in matters of advertising. We have the right to truth in advertising, the right to truth in packaging, to truth in labelling, and so on. All these rights are aimed at giving consumers a chance to make a rational and intelligent purchase.

The inability, Mr. Speaker, to make a rational buying decision in regard to consumer commodities is not a reflection on the consumer. We are all fairly familiar with the problems we encounter upon going into a modern supermarket. If you want to choose between competing products and make the best buy, you almost need a degree in mathematics or calculus to figure out the best buy. I submit that this inability does not reflect on the consumer. It reflects, in my view, rather on the packaging and pricing patterns in the marketplace, which often have very little rationale. The consumer must act on the assumption that packaging and pricing are rational. If consumers did not act on this assumption, if all consumers insisted on weighing packages, examining contents and challenging the validity of prices in the many sizes of packages, the whole system of mass distribution would break down.

If it is to function efficiently, modern marketing requires that the buyer must be able to trust the package to give relevant, sufficient and accurate information. This, at present, he cannot do. Modern marketing, with the packages acting as salesmen, has created problems not only for the consumer but for the ethical business firm. It has fostered, as an unfortunate side effect, a form of unfair competition which can be seriously prejudicial to business rivals who do not engage in dubious practices.

Mr. Benjamin: When did the minister learn that?

Mr. Basford: Legitimate business can act in its own interest and in the interest of the consumer only if competitive conditions permit.

Mr. Benjamin: When did the minister find this out?

Mr. Basford: This requires laws and regulations to establish a framework of competition prohibiting deceptive and confusing practices and protecting the legitimate competitor from the unfair tactics of less scrupulous rivals.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Bell: Terrific.

Mr. Basford: I am glad that the whip of the official opposition thinks so highly of the bill. Perhaps that means it will obtain easy passage through the House.

Consumer Packaging and Labelling Act

Mr. Bell: I was talking about the speech.

Mr. Crouse: Let us have some more quotations from the scriptures.

Mr. Basford: I am sure that the critics of Parliament will be delighted to know how welcome biblical quotations are in the House of Commons of Canada. Mr. Speaker, I return to the bill before the House. On the basic premise that the consumer has the right to full, accurate and relevant information, the bill before this House seeks to achieve the following objectives. The legislation will increase the efficiency of the average family as a spending unit. They will be able to spend their consumer dollars better and, as a result, live better. It will promote effective price competition by minimizing the capacity of packaging to confuse or deceive the buyer, and permit buyers to purchase more intelligently and more rationally. It will assure a quality of competitive opportunity for all producers and distributors. Small businesses are especially vulnerable to irrationality in the marketplace. Because of its limited resources, the small business has a vital need for competitive standards that permit the focusing of attention on price and quality.

• (9:50 p.m.)

When this bill is passed, the regulations will enhance the integrity of markets in order that they may accurately direct the productive activities of the economy by making it more likely that profits will be channelled to the more efficient producer rather than the inefficient. One of the effects will be to promote sound and effective competition by eliminating unfair or deceptive packaging in commerce and thereby upgrading the economic value of the fair packaging and labelling practices followed by the majority of our businessmen.

It seems that quite apart from this economic rationale for full, accurate and relevant information, the consumer is entitled to the truth about a product for truth's sake. Truth surely is a virtue in itself, and should therefore be sufficient reason for the requirements concerning packaging and labelling which are contained in this bill. We are sometimes told by marketing men that the consumer should and does "vote for the product with his dollars". The inference is that this act of consumer free choice is basically all that is required in the marketplace. I contend, Mr. Speaker, that the voting process—and that is what goes on in a marketplace—is more effective to the extent that full and accurate information is available to the voter, the consumer, and to the extent that he has not been misled. That destroys the operation of a marketplace. Some people who appear before the consumer affairs committee say we do not need labelling legislation because the consumer goes into the market every day and votes for his product. This bill assures us that the voting process is completely unfettered and that the voting is on the basis of complete information.

In adopting these objectives and in drafting this bill, as I indicated earlier, I paid close attention to the representations made by concerned individuals and by organized consumer groups such as the Consumers' Association of