

Proposed Consumers Affairs Department

Mr. Pennell: Mr. Chairman, may I say that we will continue to operate in the way we have been operating since January 1 of this year whereby the Solicitor General will have responsibility for the administration of the police. They will collect the facts and will report back. Their reports will be delivered to the Department of Justice. If the Department of Justice feels there ought to be further investigation or if they request further information, then further investigation will be carried out under the authority of the Solicitor General in much the same fashion that investigations are carried out in the United Kingdom where 80,000 policemen under the direction of the home secretary work, I might say with respect, very effectively.

Mr. Lambert: Mr. Chairman, may I call it five o'clock? I have several questions I should like to ask.

The Deputy Chairman: Order. In order for the house to proceed to private members' business it is my duty to rise, report progress and request leave to sit again at the next sitting of the house.

Progress reported.

[Translation]

It being five o'clock, the house will now proceed to consideration of private members' business as listed on today's order paper, namely, notices of motions.

● (5:00 p.m.)

[English]

CONSUMERS AFFAIRS

PROPOSED ESTABLISHMENT OF DEPARTMENT

Mrs. Grace MacInnis (Vancouver-Kingsway) moved:

That, in the opinion of this house, the government should give consideration to the establishing of a department of consumers affairs.

She said: Mr. Speaker, on May 13 I tried to place the following questions on the order paper:

1. Are producers of basic foods such as milk, bread, eggs, meat, butter and margarine sharing in the margin of profit derived from recent rises in the price of such foods to the consumer?

2. If so, what is the percentage of profit margin going to

(a) the producer,

(b) the wholesaler, and

(c) the retailer in the case of (1) milk; (2) bread; (3) eggs; (4) meat; (5) butter; (6) margarine?

Three days later I received a letter from the Assistant Clerk as follows:

I am returning your proposed question for the order paper, which I have discussed with His Honour the Speaker.

It is Mr. Speaker's view and, as you know, mine that this question in its present form is not acceptable in that it contravenes the rule that a question must relate to the administrative responsibilities of the government, and it is our opinion that your question does not.

I regret the necessity of giving you this opinion.

As matters stand, Mr. Speaker, the consumers of this country at the present time have no department protecting their interests, no minister of the government to speak for them or to answer their questions. As I interpret this reply, there is at the present no one in the government in charge of a department to whom questions can be directed and who could answer them.

Questions about such matters are being asked by Canadian consumers from coast to coast. With the exception of questions relating to war and peace, the matter I now raise is exercising the minds of people from coast to coast more than any other as the cost of living rises. Consumers need protection. It is precisely because these questions cannot be answered, and because no government department exists which can answer them, that I have brought forward this resolution today on behalf of our party.

This is not something new. As a matter of fact, my colleague the hon. member for Danforth (Mr. Scott) brought up this question in 1964. My colleague the hon. member for Burnaby-Richmond (Mr. Prittie) brought it up in 1965, and the Canadian association of consumers has been bringing it up in its own way for the past six years. Today we are being flooded with mail from people across the country who are desperate and want to know what the government is going to do about the cost of living which is getting beyond their incomes. Nothing in this regard is being done by the government front benches.

From a host of other communications I select one dated March 15, 1966, that came to me indirectly from the town of Espanola, Ontario, which happens to be in the riding of the Prime Minister. It reads:

Whereas, the council of the corporation of the town of Espanola is concerned over the seemingly large increase in the price of goods and services over the last six to twelve months, and whereas these price increases will have serious effects upon people living on fixed incomes and hourly wage earners whose union contracts will not be negotiated within the next year or two;