

Food and Drugs Act

I understand as well that a number of municipal Governments and organizations, such as the Consumers' Association of Canada, the Canadian Council on Children and Youth, the Canadian Association of Retired Persons, and a number of others, have written to the Hon. Member for Hamilton East to express their support for the measures proposed in her Bill.

I think the House and Canadians would be well served by having this Bill referred to committee as quickly as possible. There we can discuss any weaknesses in the Bill and perhaps amend it to cover the concerns expressed before the committee by the Canadian Restaurant and Food Services Association. Hopefully we can come out with some legislative proposals that would serve the Canadian public and at the same time protect the industry and satisfy the problem that exists with respect to ingredients placed in foods which in several cases recently have caused the death of some young Canadians.

We in this Party, without further debate, support this Bill being referred to committee in order to have those things taken into consideration.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Marcel R. Tremblay (Québec-Est): Madam Speaker, I will be speaking on Bill C-289, an Act to amend the Food and Drugs Act, as tabled by the Hon. Member for Hamilton East (Ms. Copps).

Bill C-289 addresses the problems of persons who, in a restaurant, unknowingly ingest food containing ingredients to which they are allergic. The Bill tabled in the House would compel each restaurant to make available for public consultation a list, in English or in French, of all the ingredients in any food sold by it.

The Bill would also compel each branch restaurant to affix on the packaging of any packaged foods sold by it a list, in English and in French, of the ingredients in such food.

The problem which Bill C-289 was introduced to solve is really quite acute in Canada. There are many persons who suffer from allergic reactions to various foods, food products or ingredients. There have even been some deaths caused by severe allergic reactions.

The Hon. Member for Hamilton East has pointed the finger at a considerable problem, and I want to thank her for raising the issue here in the House.

However, the motion of allergic reactions and how they are related to the foods we eat and our daily habits is in most cases ill-defined. In children, we see specific reactions to certain foods, and it is possible to prove that these reactions are due to allergies. Most adults are well aware that certain foods or beverages will cause digestive discomfort or allergic reactions, and that although the discomfort or reaction may not be serious, it is nevertheless unpleasant.

The impact of the substances in question tends to be worse when people are tense, nervous, tired or ill than when they are healthy and relaxed. Not enough is known as yet about the

actual mechanisms of such reactions, and they may depend far more on the characteristics of the person who consumed the allergy-causing product than on the product itself.

Consumers may suffer discomfort as a result of allergic reactions to substances used in the preparation of food, and this is even more likely to happen when they eat at a restaurant or eat food purchased from caterers.

By exercising a reasonable amount of care when shopping and cooking, a person can be reasonably sure of controlling the substances he eats in his own home. Thus, the individual who suffers from allergies will not be exposed to substances that may cause discomfort as long as he eats at home.

However, as soon as he goes to a restaurant or eats food purchased from a caterer, that control no longer exists. Anyone who eats food prepared outside the home has to assume the food does not contain any ingredients to which he could be allergic.

Madam Speaker, in the public mind, allergies may be related to the substances used in additives or preservatives, but that is not necessarily the case. For instance, allergies to basic foods such as nuts, seafood and dairy products are quite common. A person might order a meal in a French restaurant without knowing that a particular dish is prepared with a cream sauce, or in an oriental restaurant without being aware that the meal includes a peanut sauce. Some people are allergic to certain types of oil or certain kinds of flour.

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Furthermore, today's foods are prepared in a very complex way or in recipes with many ingredients. Often, many additives and preservatives are used, which may produce allergic reactions in some individuals.

We know that various substances may produce different reactions in some people. There is no question here of casting doubt on some foods or wondering whether some restaurants use unsafe ingredients. Agriculture Canada and Health and Welfare Canada have published strict regulations regarding food safety and freshness and the nature of additives.

Additives that present a complex risk are banned or subject to very strict control, like sulphites, for example, on which the Government recently imposed strict control after it was shown that they caused too many allergic reactions. Health and Welfare Canada now prohibits their use on all fruit and vegetables sold or served fresh, except grapes.

When people who are subject to allergies consume certain substances, a whole series of physiological effects that may produce reactions occurs and therein lies the problem. This is a matter of information in general and health affecting all consumers. We must ask ourselves how to inform those subject to allergic reactions, who therefore cannot take the chance of consuming food made outside the home.