

Combines Investigation Act

Mr. John Rodriguez (Nickel Belt) moved:

Motion No. 20.

That Bill C-2, an act to amend the Combines Investigation Act and the Bank Act and to repeal an act to amend the Combines Investigation Act and the Criminal Code, be amended in clause 18 by adding immediately after line 46 on page 38 the following section:

"37.2A(1) No person shall offer a product for sale to the public under conditions which enhance, or are intended to enhance, the appearance, colour, or other characteristic of the product in an artificial way or through artificial means, or which are intended in any way to deceive the public as to the true appearance or quality of the product, or both.

(2) No person engaged in the supplying of products to the public shall obstruct the view of cash register windows or, in any other way, whether deliberate or not, conceal the price actually being charged to a customer.

(3) No person shall offer a product for sale to the public that does not have the price per unit clearly indicated on the item or in some other way.

(4) No person shall offer a product for sale to the public at a price which exceeds, in terms of price per unit, the price at which smaller quantities of that same product are offered by the same person.

(5) No person shall offer a product for sale to the public at a price that does not fully reflect the intended consequences of any government subsidy programme then in effect with respect to that particular product.

(6) No person who offers a product for sale to the public shall distribute, or offer to distribute, coupons or stamps of any kind that are redeemable for cash gifts, or any other consideration.

(7) Any person who violates subsections (1) to (6) is guilty of an offence and is liable

(a) on conviction on indictment, to imprisonment not exceeding five years; or

(b) on summary conviction to a fine in the discretion of the court or imprisonment for not more than one year, or to both."

● (1610)

He said: Mr. Speaker, the amendment that I am putting forward on behalf of my party is with respect to false advertising. The Food Prices Review Board, which this board set up at a cost of some \$2 million to the Canadian taxpayers, did certain investigative work and made certain recommendations. The amendment that I propose incorporates many of those recommendations. It seems to me it is only right and proper that in a bill which purports to do so much for the consumer, according to the minister, many of those recommendations should be incorporated. Since the bill does not contain them, my party is proposing this amendment. For example, subclause (1) provides:

No person shall offer a product for sale to the public under conditions which enhance, or are intended to enhance, the appearance, colour, or other characteristic of the product in an artificial way or through artificial means, or which are intended in any way to deceive the public as to the true appearance or quality of the product, or both.

Surely, putting that kind of amendment into consumer legislation is not interfering with the way in which corporations do business. Surely, to ask the supermarkets not to place red lights over the meat counters—a practice that is common across this country—thus enhancing the colour of the product, is only common sense. The minister said once that this bill would be the Magna Carta for consumers. Surely, to amend the legislation in this way will assure consumers, when they go to the marketplace, that they will not be confronted with such gimmickry which is designed only to deceive.

[Mr. Deputy Speaker.]

When we teach our children that it is important to tell the truth, we should demand no less from those who are in the marketplace trying to promote their products. There is a double standard in our society when we are prepared to say to our young people "be truthful" and then we permit the practice of deception. For example, it is a common practice to inject into meat certain colouring substances to give the impression that it is tempting or fresh meat. That kind of practice can even be harmful to the human body, yet we do not legislate that kind of deceit out of the marketing practices in this country.

This is not a radical or earth-shaking amendment to any consumer legislation; it is only common sense. I have never sat in the board room of any corporation, but I listen to the consumers in my constituency, as I know many hon. members here do, and I am sensitive to their reactions. One should also be sensitive to the ways in which consumers can be bluffed. This is, in many cases, a widespread practice and the consumer suffers as a result.

The second part of the amendment which we ask the House to consider provides:

(2) No person engaged in the supplying of products to the public shall obstruct the view of cash register windows or, in any other way, whether deliberate or not, conceal the price actually being charged to a customer.

Surely, every customer has the right to know what he or she will be paying and if that is the price rung up on the cash register. There is a move toward computerizing the registering of prices. As I have mentioned before, a new system is coming into being of coloured lines being put on the product. In effect, that is going to be recorded in the computer and the price rung up on the total amount for the consumer. Surely, it is not too radical a request to ask that the price which is rung up on the cash register be clearly visible to the consumer.

The Food Prices Review Board, in their 1973 report on practices which they noted were prevalent in November of 1973, called the hiding of cash register windows "another deceptive device, long protested by consumers". They said it was—

—the practice adopted by many stores, of hiding the back window of cash registers with a large quantity of minor items or magazines. This means that as they unload items from shopping carts, customers cannot watch the price being charged by the cashier for individual products. The board considers that regulations should require that both the cash register windows, back as well as front, should be clearly visible at all times.

The problem of the public not being able to see the price as it is rung up, however, is nothing compared to the problem the public is going to face when it tries to compare prices under a new computer check-out system which will completely eliminate the price marking from the product, at least in any language the consumer can read. I pointed out earlier that when such a pricing system comes into effect it will make the so-called outlawing of double-ticketing irrelevant because there will be no way in which the consumer will know when there has been a price change. Surely, this amendment is not asking too much, and surely it cannot be considered too radical. As I pointed out before, it is the right of the consumer to know, and to be assured that what he has paid is in fact the price of the item he selected and put in his basket.