

The Address—Mr. Pearson

session we shall at least be able to make certain changes in this area which are required to bring the legislation into line with current conditions and current thinking.

We are also, as the speech from the throne states, giving consideration to what I consider to be an important and legitimate new federal initiative in the area of consumer affairs. Until the day comes when individual and collective integrity are to be depended upon as the only regulation which is required—in other words, until we reach Utopia—Canadians will expect their governments to do what is necessary to protect the public interest and ensure fair and honest practices for the protection of consumers.

We intend to meet whatever federal responsibilities are required to be met in this area using the present Department of the Registrar General as a department of consumer and corporate affairs and, as such, the main instrument for discharging and coordinating federal responsibilities in this field. We intend to recognize the growing demand for greater consumer protection in so far as these matters fall within federal jurisdiction. And when they are not within federal jurisdiction there is no reason why we should not take the initiative in discussing them with the provinces.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear.

Mr. Pearson: We are also considering with a view to parliamentary action certain recommendations made by the joint committee of the Senate and the House of Commons on consumer credit including a proposal that large companies should be required to make public more information about their business operations. Whole sectors of our economy today are, if not dominated, very largely influenced by a few large corporations. This may well improve our capacity to compete effectively in international markets through specialization, consolidation and maximum efficiency but at present there is not enough information disclosed about their business operations to permit Canadians to judge whether companies wielding such large influence are doing so with the public interest primarily in mind.

For instance, so-called private companies have the right under existing law to keep all their activities private not only from governments but from economists, lawyers, politicians, the rest of the business community and prospective investors. There is a growing and,

I think, justifiable demand within our business community and outside for more information about the operations of corporate business whether private or public, Canadian or foreign-owned.

In the course of his speech the right hon. gentleman mentioned housing. I should like to say a few words about it because I agree with him that this is one of the most important problems facing this country at the present time. There is today an urgent need to do all we can in co-operation with and by way of assistance to the provinces which have the primary constitutional responsibility in this field to make more housing available to Canadians, especially to those in the lower and middle income brackets. In the course of this debate my hon. friend the Minister of Labour (Mr. Nicholson) will, I hope, have the opportunity to say a good deal more on the subject.

But I think we should also pay more attention, as we are beginning to do, to the still larger problem of community development and environmental planning in Canada. I believe the federal government has a duty to suggest new ways in which it may help the provinces and the municipalities, without interfering with their responsibilities to cope more effectively with this larger challenge which is rapidly becoming one of the most urgent confronting every level of government in Canada today. I read the other night in a comment on the speech from the throne that in proposing to deal with these large subjects of community planning, environmental life and all that kind of thing we were off in the distant future speculating about what we should do in this field. There is nothing of the distant future about it. This is an urgent and immediate problem in Canada and it cannot be solved without the co-operation of all three levels of government.

● (5:00 p.m.)

As the speech from the throne indicates, the government is seriously concerned about the need to find more effective ways for all levels of government to co-operate more closely in providing Canadians with a better living environment, both in our urban and in our rural areas. With the steady growth in our population the need for more housing can only increase in the future, and that need is great now. Virtually half of Canada's existing housing stock of 5,400,000 dwellings has been constructed since the end of world war II over a period of little more than 20 years. Much of this housing has been facilitated, if