

Corporate and Consumer Affairs

[Later:]

Mr. Starr: Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. I asked a direct question of the Minister of National Health and Welfare. Your Honour recognized another member before giving the minister an opportunity to reply. I am not sure, but perhaps Your Honour ruled my supplementary question out of order.

Mr. Speaker: That is a reasonable conclusion.

INDIAN AFFAIRSREQUEST FOR IMPROVEMENT OF WELFARE
CONDITIONS ON RESERVES

On the orders of the day:

Mr. D. R. Gundlock (Lethbridge): Mr. Speaker, I have a question for the Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development. Last week he indicated in this house his responsibility in relation to the welfare of a small group of Canadians. What plans does the minister have for the alleviation of the welfare conditions that exist on Indian reserves in Canada?

Mr. Speaker: Order. The hon. member is asking a question which again is much too wide in scope to be answered at this time.

TRANSPORTPRINCE EDWARD ISLAND CAUSEWAY—
PROVISION FOR RAILS

On the orders of the day:

Mr. Heath Macquarrie (Queens): Mr. Speaker, I intended to direct my question to the triumphant Minister of Public Works. However, in view of his departure perhaps his parliamentary secretary will answer. My question is prompted by a seemingly authoritative article in a leading construction journal. Will the minister advise whether his department in its reappraisal of the design for the Northumberland strait crossing has decided that the structure will not have provision for rails?

Mr. J. B. Stewart (Parliamentary Secretary to Minister of Public Works): Mr. Speaker, I will make sure that the minister sees this question so that he can make an appropriate reply.

CORPORATE AND CONSUMER AFFAIRSPROVISION FOR ESTABLISHMENT OF
DEPARTMENT, APPOINTMENT OF
PERSONNEL, ETC.

The house resumed, from Tuesday, October 17, consideration of the motion of Mr. Turner

[Mr. Teillet.]

for the second reading of Bill No. C-161, to establish a department of corporate and consumer affairs.

Hon. John N. Turner (Registrar General): Mr. Speaker, last evening I described at some length the reasons for the creation of a new department of corporate and consumer affairs which would replace the Department of the Registrar General. I talked about the organization of the department and explained the reasons why we regarded it as necessary to have a department concerned with consumer affairs and the reasons it was logical to combine it with responsibility for the ground rules in the corporate field. I was describing the program on consumer affairs when the house rose last evening. For reasons which are easy to understand we did not have a full house at that time. More exciting events were engaging the attention of many members on both sides. For this reason I think it might be worth while if I recapitulated one or two points I made last night.

Let me say a little more about the importance of a new government response to the problems of the consumer. Government measures to protect consumers are as old as history. In ancient Athens there were functionaries who paraded fully armed through the market place to see that there was fair dealing. In mediaeval Europe the welfare of the people was a dominant concern of the rulers and in part this showed itself in rigorous rules governing market behaviour. The old rules against "forestalling, regrating and engrossing" were widespread and were even embodied in the market regulations of some Canadian towns in the early nineteenth century. Simple rules may have been suitable in a predominantly agrarian society but the growth of industry and cities and the complexity of consumer markets demands a more sophisticated approach. A few years ago a housewife could buy a fat hen or a farmer could buy a horse without requiring any guidance or advice from the government. A good buyer could look into a horse's mouth or look a hen in the eye as well as or better than any government inspector.

Today the consumer's view is often blocked by a cardboard or plastic curtain. Many things today come in packages. Many are often appealing examples of the designer's art and it is clear that modern packaging has made great contributions in terms of convenience and cleanliness. Sometimes technology may triumph over conscience and this is why the government must be prepared to