

*Consumer Packaging and Labelling Act***PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS—BILLS**

[Translation]

**CONSUMER PACKAGING AND LABELLING ACT
(BILINGUALISM)****MEASURE TO AMEND**

Mr. Jean-Robert Gauthier (Ottawa—Vanier) moved that Bill C-280, an Act to amend the Consumer Packaging and Labelling Act (bilingualism), be now read for the second time and referred to a Legislative Committee.

He said: Madam Speaker, I wish to thank the Hon. Member for Kamloops—Shuswap (Mr. Riis) for his kind words in support of this Bill and to tell him that we all recognize the major contribution he has made by his consistently positive comments about official languages and the concern he has always shown for the official languages of Canada.

Madam Speaker, I introduced Bill C-280 on February 8, 1988, because after reading Bill C-72, which is now being considered by the House and which was examined in Committee this very afternoon, as I know from spending a good part of the day there, I could find no provision dealing with consumer packaging and labelling. After having noted this omission, I prepared the Bill on labelling now before the House. Some people might think it coincidental that this Bill should have been introduced at the same time as we began debate on second reading of Bill C-72, in which many Canadians have expressed a lot of interest. I must tell you, Madam Speaker, that it is no coincidence, because those who depend on coincidence in politics do not last very long.

In fact, Madam Speaker, I introduced this Bill precisely because, as I said earlier, Bill C-72 to amend the Official Languages Act does not deal with the important issue of consumer labelling. Yet, I believe that labelling is important as it concerns public safety and the right of the Canadians to know what a consumer product contains, and also to obtain this information in their own official language, because we must not forget that, according to relatively recent figures, there are in Canada 4,200,950 unilingual Francophones, 13,804,195 unilingual Anglophones and 3,681,960 bilingual people. These figures were given to me by Statistics Canada. I mention them because we must not forget that, in this vast country, consumer products which are sold and manufactured in one region or province are often transported and consumed elsewhere and must be labelled properly if Canadians are to be well-informed about their contents.

In many cases, the packaging and labelling of consumer products probably represents the first contact many young Canadians have with the linguistic duality of their country.

● (1710)

Everywhere, in their consumer environment, young people see, read and gradually absorb this reality of our society. They realize that in Canada, there are two official languages, two main languages. Many seldom or never hear the other official

language. But the simple fact that it is there on a package of corn flakes or in the instructions provided with a toy or a tool that is used on a daily basis, such as a farm implement or a mower, the fact that instructions are available both in English and French has, in my opinion, a bearing on Canadians in their daily lives.

When bringing forward this bill, my intention was not only to provide young Canadians with a reason to learn the other language that they see on their corn flakes in the morning, as I said earlier, although the idea isn't bad since for many of these people, this would be an enriching experience. No, this is not the only purpose of this Bill. In fact, my first and foremost reason was to preserve labelling and packaging requirements by removing them from the discretionary regulatory field and putting them right in the Official Languages Act, where I think they would be sheltered from any arbitrary decision of the Governor in Council.

Madam Speaker, I felt the need to include these requirements in legislation because I was concerned. Canadians do not usually show much interest in regulations, in general, they don't really know who makes them, who controls their implementation or who amends them from time to time. Given that the Government committed the country to a free trade with the U.S., I thought it would be wise to include in legislation the requirement that consumer products provide Canadians with instructions in both English and French. As it has been said in the House on several occasions and as I have mentioned various times, the trade agreement could well deal a death blow to the specific character of Canada, unless we are careful to ensure by way of legislation that consumer products are labelled in French as well as English. Indeed, to my knowledge, there is no legislation covering consumer products, apart from those Acts which deal very specifically with medical prescription products and dangerous products, explosives, I believe. The Official Languages Act, in any case, contains no provision dealing with this matter.

As I was saying, Madam Speaker, it is no coincidence that I have tabled Bill C-280. I waited to make sure that Bill C-72 contained no provision with regard to labelling. Such is the case. There are therefore no provisions, either in the present Act or in the new one, with regard to labelling and packaging and in my view, it would be a good thing to include them.

As I said, there are provisions dealing with labelling under the regulations pertaining to paragraph 18(1)(j) of the Consumer Packaging and Labelling Act, whereby the Governor in Council may make regulations in matters pertaining to bilingualism. Section 6 of the regulations on packaging and labelling of consumer products deals with prescriptions and exemptions relating to bilingualism in labelling.

We should note that Section 6 contains several exceptions to the rule requiring that the information shown on the label of a prepackaged product be in both official languages. They deal