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THE CONSUMER FINDS A VOICE

In an address to the Women's Canadian Club of Toronto on February 8, Mr. John Turner, Minister of the recently-created Department of Consumer and Corporate Affairs, called the new Department "a pioneer venture...the most advanced of its kind in the Western world".

The Minister explained how his Department was constituted and, in the following words, described some of its functions and plans for the future:

...The new Department brings together federal powers and responsibilities affecting the business end of the market-place - combines and restrictive trade, bankruptcy, corporation law, patents and trademarks, and integrates this with direct consumer activity in areas of research, inquiry, information and protection.

In this way, the Department is able to group and centralize the various Federal Government activities relating to performance in the market-place, and provide a cohesive, co-ordinated, effective approach to improving the position of the Canadian consumer.

Further, the consumer is now represented in Government at Cabinet level. All legislation or regulation of the Government is now subject to review and representation on behalf of consumer interests. This act of representation also extends to advocating the consumer's position with industry and business to gain their co-operation. We also will work in liaison with the provinces who share jurisdiction in the consumer field. We can work together on common problems and seek to establish uniform laws across the country.

MAJOR ROLES

As a Department then, we have several major long-range roles to play. These are:

- To advocate the consumer position in government councils, with business and amongst the public;
- to co-ordinate and rationalize Federal Government activity relating to consumers, make it more efficient and avoid duplication and waste;
- to upgrade the enforcement of protective laws in areas of safety, bad business practice, monopoly, misleading advertising, quality control;
- to investigate and research consumers' complaints and problems, and seek to widen the understanding of consumer needs;
- to provide accurate information to consumers on their rights and opportunities;
- to improve competition in the market-place; and
- to provoke a public awareness and debate on the consumer interest.

PRIORITIES

There are no instant or easy solutions promised in the work of the Consumer Department. For it to work properly, we must plan and prepare carefully.

Since its inception, a number of programmes have been started as a base from which to build in the future.