

Government Organization

We are finding that there is no competition in most of the public utility fields. In many ways we have established national monopolies in this respect. There is very little supervision over these public utilities and the agencies which have been created are certainly not capable of supervising them.

This is obviously true in the case of the Board of Transport Commissioners, which has looked at the operations of the Bell Telephone Company and has not been able to decide whether the Northern Electric Company should be divorced from the parent company although it knows full well that there have been many write-offs between these companies which have worked to the disadvantage of Canada and have provided no advantage to telephone subscribers. We have found that the subscriber has had to way of bringing his complaints to the attention of the company except by writing to the president. I was very surprised to hear the president inform us when he appeared before a committee not long ago that all complaints of subscribers of the Bell Telephone Company went to him. I presume the company runs itself and all he has to do is act as a clearinghouse for complaints. This is obviously a field in which the government should be interested, because we should be able to have as cheap telephone service as possible, allowing for a reasonable profit to the company and a reasonable amount of accumulated capital for whatever expansion is deemed necessary.

These remarks also apply to bus services in the various communities. There should be some type of control over such utilities which will provide at least a yardstick for assessing whether the consumer is getting a fair shake. The government is now toying with the idea of doing something in respect of the problem of car safety. They are being dragged into this problem by the scruff of the neck and the minister is fighting vainly to withhold action in this regard. I believe this is a field in which consumers are vitally concerned and will one day decide to do something about it in an election. It seems that the only way of changing the mind of government is for its members to travel about the country and at each meeting they attend a terrific bombardment in respect of these matters. During an election campaign the people are told that policy changes will be made but when we leave the election period the reluctance to continue a particular investigation is obvious.

Therefore, Mr. Chairman, I do not expect that the government will consider the problem of consumer affairs. I do not think they will consider it simply because they did not think about it before the senior civil servants made up their minds what was going to be included in the new department. I believe this is a sad state of affairs and something the cabinet should think about. They should be in a position to make some decisions on their own; they should not have to wait until the senior civil servants decide for them whether they are going to do certain things. They should think about this question and be very cautious in choosing ministers for the various departments before the bill is passed and the departments are established.

I say this, Mr. Chairman, because I honestly think that if this change were made it would be very much appreciated by the Canadian public. I think the government would find that this department would bring in a great deal of good legislation which would provide an outlet for many of the complaints that will occur in the next few months as the cost of living continues to spiral. Consumers have not the right to strike; they have not the means with which to strike. No consumers' campaign in this country, including the one carried out with respect to bacon, has been a success in my opinion. It took five or six years before anything was done in that case.

Mr. Nicholson: Mr. Chairman, would the hon. member permit a question?

Mr. Peters: Yes.

Mr. Nicholson: Is it not a very good thing that somebody has not the right to strike?

Mr. Peters: I agree with that, Mr. Chairman, but I have always thought that a consumers' strike would introduce a new element into the picture. From the point of view of the Minister of Labour it is certainly a good thing that some people have not the right to strike, but I believe he would agree that the reasons behind consumers taking this kind of action would be unlike those of people in other fields.

Therefore I hope the government will give consideration to this matter. I know that the hon. member for Vancouver-Kingsway has been very interested in the problem. I know that all women are very interested in it. I believe it is very difficult for a member of parliament, unless he is badly henpecked—certainly nobody is going to get up and say