

*Supply—Consumer and Corporate Affairs*

The minister's taking of matters into his own hands and setting up his own version of how to control consumer prices has done absolutely nothing to assist the consumer against rising costs and therefore we would like to hear from him just what he has done in this department to warrant the rising costs of the department. In the estimates for 1968-69 the cost of the Department of Corporate and Consumer Affairs is slightly over \$8½ million. The cost in 1967-68 was nearly \$7 million so the over-all increase is slightly over \$1½ million. In the 1968-69 estimates the amount for the new consumer affairs branch is \$394,400. This includes salaries totalling \$220,000, travelling expenses of \$20,000, and office supplies and equipment, \$29,500. This in itself could be criticized in the light of the minister's statement on October 17 last, as reported on page 3211 of *Hansard*:

I want to make it clear, as I attempted to do at the resolution stage, that we contemplate no substantial increase in government expenditure.

My values may be wrong but I consider this a substantial increase. I do not know of any other business that would not consider a quarter of a million dollars in additional salaries and travelling expenses a substantial increase. Neither do I know of any other business that would allow its planned expenditures to increase by well over 50 per cent, as has happened in the consumer affairs branch. With the additional cost so conveniently slipped into supplementary estimates this new branch, which was supposed to involve no substantial increase, is already within five months, less than half a year, costing well over half a million dollars, in fact a total of \$569,300. At this rate one shudders to think what it may cost in two, three or five years. The only hope is that the present government will not be administering it.

**Some hon. Members:** Hear, hear.

**Mrs. Wadds:** Everyone knows that everyone is spending a lot of money these days. The minister reminded us on second reading of the bill establishing his department that personal expenditures on consumer goods and purchases are running at about \$37 billion a year in Canada. This is most certainly a great deal of money but it covers everything having to do with human beings and their living within our society. It seems to me to be quite a problem to know how to cut down expenditures involving personal choices and personal decisions. It is going to be a very large undertaking indeed to assist people in making

[Mrs. Wadds.]

savings in this very broad and rather intangible expenditure of \$37 billion. The approach seems to me to be a very essential one and needs a great deal more careful attention and consideration that we have been giving it so far.

The government seems to have forgotten the old adage not to throw good money after bad. It has been following the procedure of trying to solve the problem of too much spending by more spending. It is true that consumers do need direction and assistance with regard to the features offered by some merchandisers as against others and how to go about finding the qualities they are looking for. However, it seems unlikely that, by spending this large amount of money in this branch of the new department, housewives in northern Saskatchewan or Newfoundland will benefit very much in balancing their own personal budgets. Quite the contrary. It just adds to the over-all inflationary spiral which is already making it so very difficult for them.

The minister received the best of advice from the Economic Council of Canada on how to co-ordinate the many departments already dealing with the protection of consumers. At the resolution stage of the bill setting up his department, on October 13 of last year, as recorded at page 3070 of *Hansard*, the hon. member for Yukon reminded the minister in the most direct terms that it would be wise for him to follow the advice of the economic council when it said:

The implementation of these recommendations does not require a vast expansion in government activity and in the size of the bureaucracy. Any such tendencies should be strongly resisted as being neither necessary nor wise—

In view of the wide scope of consumer interests and the many departments which are engaged in activities affecting consumers, there is no possibility of concentrating all these activities in a single department, nor would it be desirable to try to do so.

The economic council was quite specific in recommending an interdepartmental committee on consumer affairs under the chairmanship of the deputy registrar general. This would have made further use of the knowledge and machinery already existing. It was one of the many steps which could have been taken to ease the growing concern in Canada about rapidly rising government spending.

● (4:50 p.m.)

The government has been warned and warned about its overspending. On page 261