

From Winnipeg I have had evidence in connection with the price of batteries, a constant source of expense to users of these aids. Recently the price of these tiny button-like batteries rose to 60 cents per battery. Last night it was suggested by one of the hon. gentlemen opposite on the treasury benches, in connection with an increase in the price of milk, that two cents was not very significant. But it is a matter of two cents here, two cents there; it all adds up. And an extra 10 cents every time a battery is needed is a definite extra burden. One lady tells me that the battery she uses was supposed to last for seven days—but it wore out at the end of three days. This complaint was from a local woman.

Now I want to give the committee some evidence about prices charged to repair these hearing aids. A man living here in Ottawa writes:

I have solved the price problem myself by buying hearing aids in England. They cost about half as much as here and the batteries cost about 60 per cent as much. A few years ago my spectacle hearing aid failed and I asked one of the better dealers here about repairs. He said that it would have to be sent to Toronto or Montreal and as a foreign product there might be some delay in doing the work. The cost might be between \$30 and \$40. Having a spare aid, I air-mailed my usual aid to London and had it back in about ten days. The charge was \$3.20.

Surely the Canadian users of hearing aids have a right to expect some protection from this new department. I hope our hands will be strengthened by a whole flood of letters on this subject.

I wish now to say something about the selling practices used to persuade people to buy these hearing aids. Again, I have evidence from a small Ontario town—

An hon. Member: Ottawa?

Mrs. MacInnis (Vancouver-Kingsway): No, I would not call Ottawa a small town. I believe it is fifth on the list of Canadian cities, by population. Here is a letter, addressed to me, which says:

I was offered a position selling hearing aids by one of the distributors. I found that the commission offered for selling added tremendously to the price. I found that hearing aids were being sold to people who really did not require aids. I found the sales pitch positively repulsive. I refused the job.

• (3:50 p.m.)

In corroboration of these statements, I would refer members of the committee to an article which appeared in the *Toronto Star* of May 13, 1967, written by a journalist called Tori Salter. Before writing her article she

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took the precaution of visiting a reputable ear specialist who assured her that her hearing was perfect and that she needed no treatment. Then she went out to buy a hearing aid, and to report her experiences in doing so. At the first place she went to—and I quote from the article—

—the strong-featured woman studied the impressive-looking form in her hands, her heavily-pencilled eyelids narrowing in concentration.

"You have a real problem," she told me. "Your audiometric test shows that while there is considerable hearing loss in both ears, the deterioration is much greater in the right ear. Fortunately we can still help you, but two hearing aids will be required. It will be expensive."

"Expensive?"

"About \$800," she assessed.

And so on, and so on. This was a woman who, just two hours previously, had been to a hearing specialist and had been assured that her hearing was normal and that her ear drums were intact.

Then the writer of this article went on to find out that a survey of the Toronto market revealed prices ranging from \$85 for a box type hearing aid with a cord, to \$1,000 for miniaturized models. I quote from her article further:

A manufacturer defended spiralling costs on the basis of a limited market, which he said made the economies of mass production impossible.

On the other hand, Professor Norman F. Moody, Director of Biomedical Electronics, University of Toronto, commented: "In my opinion, it should be possible to sell a hearing aid which consists basically of a small microphone, some transistors, a receiver, an amplifier and an ear piece, for \$100—and still allow for a reasonable profit after carrying out the necessary tests and fitting."

"Price has little to do with the effectiveness, or lasting quality of a hearing aid," said one dealer. "A poorly designed instrument selling for \$350 may be inferior to a better-engineered product selling for half the price."

What I would like to know is when can we expect some protection for people who have to buy hearing aids and who, at the present time, have absolutely no guidance, and no protection from this merciless exploitation?

I quote from another letter which I have received on this subject, again from a small town not very far from Ottawa. In part it reads:

We are old age pensioners and my husband has tried to get a hearing aid but we just can't afford it. He is very despondent as he can't hear and misses so much. We went to one party and they wanted over \$200. Is there no way he could get one? We live on a pension, and it takes it all.

The points I want to make briefly, Mr. Chairman, are that we do not know anything