

• (8:50 p.m.)

What the bill says implicitly and what the minister has said is that the consumer has the right to know. The amendment proposed by my colleague the hon. member for Vancouver-Kingsway (Mrs. MacInnis) provides that not only must the consumer have the right to know, but that he or she must have the right to be able to know. That the consumer shall have access to information is implicit in this bill. We wish to rectify what we think is a shortcoming in an otherwise good piece of legislation. The Minister invited members of Parliament to comment, saying that we should not worry very much about those areas in which the bill might go too far.

Mr. Speaker, the hon. member for Vancouver-Kingsway and I, at least, accepted the minister's invitation to worry more about the bill and we are pointing out an area in which this legislation does not go far enough. We have tried to accommodate the minister and we are suggesting an area that we think ought to be included in this legislation, to make it go further than even he might have thought possible.

I think that two areas have been omitted from this bill, one being that the consumer has the right to be able to know. Unit pricing is one of the tools which the consumer can use in order to know the value of what he is buying, on the basis of per ounce, per pound, per package or any other measure by which the product is sold. I admit at the outset that I want to do all I can to calm the fears and fairly mild objections of my good friends and colleagues, the hon. member for Wellington (Mr. Hales) and the hon. member for St. John's East (Mr. McGrath).

We tried to make our point in committee. We are not suggesting for a moment that this amendment would apply to all products. Actually, it would be impossible to apply unit prices to every one of the tens of thousands of commodities found on the shelves of retail outlets in Canada. Nobody is suggesting that the minister shall do this, because the amendment specifically says "the minister may". I have enough confidence even in a member of the Liberal government to take my chances on the good judgment and good sense of a minister of the Crown and his officials in selecting those commodities and products to which unit pricing can easily and quickly be applied, because I think they will do it, if for no other reason, to see how well this provision works and of how much use it will be to Mrs. Jane Consumer.

Just prescribing the size of packages or reducing the number of package sizes by itself will not prevent the deception or the misleading of the consumer. Those, in part, are objectives that the minister says he wishes to achieve. For that reason we plead with the minister to accept a provision in the bill saying that unit prices may be applied by the minister on any one or more of a given number of products that he and his officials may select, once products have been standardized in terms of packages or the quantities in each package.

Prices in themselves can still mislead consumers, either deliberately or accidentally. For instance, say a uniform package size for 20 ounces of anything is brought in: if

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the marked price is 97 cents, Mrs. Jane Consumer will immediately have to compute the price of the product per ounce. As I said, standardization of containers will not solve the problem, no matter if different manufacturers use the same size of containers, because consumers would still need to compare the prices of similar products put out by different manufacturers if the prices for products in similar sized containers varied. Without a unit price there is no basis for comparing prices for the same product in containers of different sizes. For instances, is the large size cheaper than the medium size, or is the medium size cheaper than the small size?

I wish to cite an example to illustrate my point. I should like the permission of the House to have appended to *Hansard* a table. I will not take the time of the House in reading it. I do not know what procedure I ought to follow, but I should like to have this table included with my remarks in *Hansard*. May I ask permission of the House to do that?

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Richard): Order, please. I regret to advise the hon. member that it is not the practice of the House to do so. I ask for the assistance of hon. members. Perhaps if the table is identified, hon. members can give their unanimous consent to having it included; or the hon. member could read it as part of his speech. In any event, the hon. member will need the consent of the House to implement his suggestion.

Mr. McGrath: Mr. Speaker, I think your suggestion is very worth while. Perhaps the hon. member ought to identify the table which he wishes to read, so that we will not be setting a precedent.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Richard): There will also be difficulties for the translators, and so on. Unless the table is overly long, I suggest the hon. member might read it and identify it; otherwise his action will give rise to a precedent—although I hasten to add that this would not be the first time that I have departed from precedent.

Mr. Benjamin: Mr. Speaker, I do not want to read the whole table to the House. I am quite prepared to identify it.

Mr. McGrath: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker, if it would expedite the business of the House—we are concerned about this bill because it has been outstanding a long time—perhaps the hon. member could read one line from the table and, having identified it, say that the rest of the table covers others sizes.

Mr. Francis: Mr. Speaker, I think it would be highly advisable to follow the hon. member's suggestion. Perhaps we ought to have an indication of what the table includes. I understand it is not customary in the House to table material of this nature, and if we did so we might set a precedent which would not be in line with our previous practice.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Richard): It would not be out of order if the hon. member were to identify the table and read whatever he thinks is necessary from it.