

Breakthrough For Housewives

The Canadian Government has faced squarely the issue of the misled housewife and the man who is too poor to go bankrupt.

It has not succeeded in eliminating all unfair competitors from the market, but it is trying.

The Canadian consumer may be the best protected buyer of goods and services in the world. She (or he) has a cabinet level agency, the Department of Consumer and Corporate Affairs, working on her behalf and has a generally supportive attitude from the rest of the Government. The consumer is constantly urged to complain — "If a consumer isn't sure whether his problem is under Federal, provincial or municipal jurisdiction, we want him to come to us," Minister Herb Gray, of Consumer and Corporate Affairs, said recently. "If the complaint is under another department, we'll direct him to the right place."

The consumer has acquired several new tools in the past few years:

- Box 99, to which complaints may be directed and to which about 15,000 a year are.

- A planned chain of storefront complaint shops which will be concentrated in low-income neighborhoods across Canada. The staff at the shops (which have already been tried out successfully) will try to resolve difficulties on the spot;

Box 99 letters are filed, coded and referred for action in 24 hours, below and right.

when a consumer complains about a bad piece of merchandise the staffer will call the seller and try to effect an immediate settlement.

- An expanding set of specific safety standards. For example, inspectors from C&CA tested children's car seats and found twenty-six out of forty-five unsafe. The distributors removed the defective models from the stores. New or modified models are tested as they come out.

- A cross-country "Poor Debtors Program," established this year after try-outs in Montreal, Toronto and Vancouver. People who are hopelessly in debt but too poor to pay the customary \$300 to \$700 trustee fee may have government trustees administer their bankrupt estates for \$50. The "poor" debtor must be a "physical person" (that is, not a corporation), his income if single must not exceed \$3,000 a year and his debts must be personal, not business debts. During the try-out, 1175 applications were received and 463 authentic "poor debtors" were eased into bankruptcy.

- A multi-pronged program, in operation since 1970, to reduce confusion in the market place. The thirty different sizes of tubed toothpaste once on the market were reduced to six sizes and the contents are now marked by volume, not

