

Home Canning

Consumers are trying to save by raising their own garden products and doing their own canning in readiness for the winter months. At the same time the government, which has manufactured inflation, is failing to protect the consumer from another angle. I hear the hon. member for Comox-Alberni (Mr. Anderson) saying that you cannot have it both ways, but there is one thing that we would like to have, and that is an opportunity for the consumer to save a few bucks.

● (1740)

It gives me no assurance to hear the parliamentary secretary read out a statement from the bureaucracy saying that everything will be hunky-dory because they have gone hat in hand to all these companies and said, "Please give us a polite explanation of why there is a shortage". Any explanation that these companies gave to the minister was said to be a good one and we are now supposed to be encouraged. That is not enough. We can anticipate another shortage this year. As hon. members from British Columbia have already indicated, British Columbia suffers more than any other province from this particular shortage. There is going to be a shortage again this summer despite the assurances of the hon. member for Skeena.

I want to pay tribute to the hon. member for Okanagan-Kootenay (Mr. Johnston) for giving us this opportunity to debate the issue and to bring it to the conscience of the government. If it did not know before it certainly knows now that once more this problem is an impending one for consumers this summer.

Mr. Les Benjamin (Regina-Lake Centre): Mr. Speaker, I want to say only a few words on the motion of the hon. member for Okanagan-Kootenay (Mr. Johnston). I am very happy that he has moved it. It is three years since I ran into complaints from my constituents, including my own wife, about the unavailability of materials for home canning, and the problem has become more severe in the last two years with the rising cost of living. People are trying to can the products of their own gardens, or they go to a farmers' market on a Saturday and take home a car trunk load of vegetables and fruit to can.

I myself have noticed, on going both to the co-operative supermarket and to three private enterprise supermarkets in my city, that on a given Saturday you can get one part of what you require for home canning but not the other two parts. I am speaking here of the old-fashioned pint, quart, two quart sealers. I do not know whether the hon. member for Skeena (Mrs. Campagnolo) has ever done any home canning but I am sure her mother has. These old-fashioned sealers require three components—a rubber ring, a glass top, and a metal screw top. You could get the rubber ring one week but not the glass top. Or you get the glass top but not the metal screw top and rubber ring. This sort of thing has gone on for the past three years.

I particularly welcome the hon. member's motion because I think that some inquiries should be made not only as to the supply and distribution of these particular items but also as to who manufactures and owns them. I do not want to sound paranoid about this, but I have the feeling that the canners of fruits and vegetables are not particularly happy about housewives and families canning

[Mr. Friesen.]

their own fruit and vegetables. They would rather housewives bought the canned goods which they produce. But judging from the way the price of these canned goods has risen in the last two years, more and more families will want to put their own fruit and vegetables in their own glass jars.

I listened to the hon. member for Skeena recite statistics, which I hope were not written out for her by the deputy minister of her department but were obtained by herself. As one hon. member said earlier, she read them well; but if she had composed them all by herself she would not have had to read them. If I heard her properly, she said something about increased production of 17,000 cases of one kind of tops and 18,000 of another kind. I think that those figures are reasonably close, but that would make 35,000 cases in all. That would satisfy perhaps 35,000 families, but there are hundreds of thousands of families in this country who want to can their own fruits and vegetables.

This stuff that the hon. member for Skeena read off is just not good enough. There is not an adequate supply either of the modern glass jar tops, to which I am sure the hon. member for Okanagan-Kootenay is referring, or sufficient supply in some parts of the country of the old-fashioned half pint, pint, quart and two quart sealers. Although you can get one part, you cannot get the other two. Supply varies from one store to the next and from one city to the next. If a housewife wants to spend a day or two canning products from her own garden, it means she may have to go to a dozen stores in order to find the three components that are required.

The hon. member for Skeena can read off all those figures that were sent over to her all she likes, but the fact of the matter is that hundreds of thousands of families over the last three years have been unable to buy components for home canning. Whether or not this motion passes, I hope that the hon. member for Skeena will get the Minister of Consumer and Corporate Affairs (Mr. Mackasey) and the combines investigation branch to determine who owns the canning industry and the manufacturing plant that produces these components that are required for home canning. They ought to determine what happens among the food chains in terms of carrying supplies of these rubber rings, glass tops, and metal screw tops. Let them find out how much they are into this and how much they are not. I am sure that hundreds of thousands of housewives all over the country would be happy to hear more than this House has been told this afternoon.

For years, Mr. Speaker, people have been making efforts to provide for themselves out of their own gardens and their neighbour's gardens. Our great-grandmothers, grandmothers, and mothers canned, and now our wives are doing their own canning. But the necessary supplies are not available. I hope the hon. member for Skeena tries to make some last gasp efforts to save what she, her colleagues, and my friends to my right claim is this great, foolproof system known as free enterprise, a system that relies upon competition and so on for the good of Canadian consumers. This is just not happening, Mr. Speaker.

This may not be a great national issue but it does affect hundreds of thousands of families for many weeks of the year. Yet all we can get from the hon. member for Skeena are some statistics. I am quite certain they are accurate,