

*Corporate and Consumer Affairs*

scattered under half a dozen ministers? I refer to the minister's statement of last night as reported on page 3208 of *Hansard* when he said:

The combines branch has a duty to protect consumers and producers, particularly the small businessman, against the unfair use of market power.

Where is the legislation here that will give these people that protection? Is it to be found in the combines act? That act has not given such protection in the past. Is there any reason to think it will give it now?

**Mr. Woolliams:** It takes ten years to get a combines case to court.

**Mr. Douglas:** What changes will there be in the combines act that will do what the minister says, namely, protect consumers and producers, particularly the small businessman, against the unfair use of market power? If the minister takes the trouble to go to his office he will find it littered with reports of the Restrictive Trade Practices Commission containing complaints about the manipulation of prices and the control of the markets in baking, flour milling, car batteries, tires, sugar and a score of other items. Nothing has ever been done. Where in the few instances the complaints of the Restrictive Trade Practices Commission have been acted upon, the paltry fines which have been levied against the offenders have constituted a farce.

In 1963, for instance, the three largest sugar companies were charged with and found guilty of making an illegal profit on some 80,000 tons of sugar. They were each fined \$25,000, a total of \$75,000 for making an illegal profit on 80,000 tons of sugar. This represents less than a dollar a ton, less than one-twentieth of a cent per pound. As I said at the time, it was not a fine; it was simply a licence fee to commit piracy on Canadian housewives.

What is there in this legislation that will be any more effective in protecting Canadian producers, consumers or small businessmen against the unfair use of market power? What is there in this legislation that will protect the consuming public against predatory pricing? Predatory pricing has been going on for a long time. If the combines act can prevent the fleecing of the public, why has it not been used? If it will not protect the public, why should the government now go through the farce of saying that the public will be protected by putting the combines act under a new minister? Or are we to assume that this minister will be more diligent in the

[Mr. Douglas.]

discharge of his duty than were previous ministers? If that is the implication, it is a serious reflection upon previous ministers.

This bill will, of course, co-ordinate the activities of those administering the legislation protecting the public against products which are injurious to health and against misleading advertising and packaging. That is fine, but what is new? The same powers are involved. It is the same legislation. It is a different minister with a new label, that is all. If the housewife has been complaining, as she has for years, about misleading advertising, misrepresentation and the lack of any unified system of packaging, what reason is there to think that she will be any better protected now under the same legislation that failed to protect her in the past? No wonder the minister said, as reported at page 3211 of *Hansard*:

—we contemplate no substantial increase in government expenditure.

Well he might not anticipate any increased expenditure, because this department will not do any more than was done before. There will be some advantage in bringing these various pieces of legislation under a single minister and attempting to co-ordinate their administration. With a ministerial inter-departmental committee we might have a little better administration of these acts. But in so far as setting up a department to cope effectively with consumer problems, this legislation is a snare, a delusion and a farce. We are now facing the kind of thing for which this government has become notorious. After evading a problem for two or three years it finally brings in legislation which provides a facade behind which it can continue to do nothing.

The second and most important point I want to make about this bill is that what it does not contain is much more important than what it does contain. The outcry of the housewives of this country which resulted in the setting up of a parliamentary committee on consumer credit and prices was not directed mainly against misleading advertising, packaging or the lack of uniformity of weights and measures. The outcry of the Canadian housewives was against the steadily increasing cost of living. They were protesting against the rise in the price of the essential things they needed, food, clothing and shelter. The increase in the price of these necessities has of course continued. It has continued at an accelerated rate even since the housewives made their protest two years ago.