

Food and Drugs Act

them have covered some of the matters which I have in my bill. Among those pieces of legislation, we have the consumer textiles articles act, which was passed in the last session. We have the Bills of Exchange Amendment Act, which was also passed in the last session which protects the consumer against recourse on promissory notes when there has been a defective product sold. We have had the bill to produce more competition in the drug business, which was known as a bill to amend the Patent Act, Trademarks Act and the Food and Drugs Act. We have had the move by the government to transfer administration of section 33 of the Combines Investigation Act from provincial to federal administration. That is the section which deals with misleading advertising. I might say that since the Department of Consumer and Corporate Affairs took over administration of that section of the law, there have been many more prosecutions and many more convictions. We have also had the Hazardous Products bill, which was passed by parliament, and which does some of the things proposed in my bill. We have had the Consumer Packaging and Labelling Bill, C-180, which was passed by the House this session, and the federal bill on co-operatives, Bill C-177.

All those items of legislation to which I refer were the result of recommendations of the Joint Committee of the House and the Senate. Since I was a member of that committee, I feel a bit encouraged by the fact that many of our recommendations have been put forward in law. Many of us who are backbenchers try to promote new ideas or reforms in several ways. We work on committees, and try to bring in committee reports which will do some of the things we want done. We introduce private members' motions and bills, hoping that the ideas in them will be picked up by the government, by certain ministers, by the press gallery, and that by promoting them in this way we will eventually have them adopted by the government, and adopted as legislation by this House.

In the area of consumer legislation, a lot has been done since we had that committee in 1966. Many of the items I have in my bill, C-39, have been adopted and so the bill is not required in the same way as it was when it was first prepared. However, there are still certain matters that have to be covered, and certain reforms that have to be accomplished. Some people in Canada will argue that we do not need consumer legislation. They feel that with a free market economy all we have to do is guarantee that there will be the freedom of contract, and that the consumer will be protected against fraud and other criminal practices. But, Mr. Speaker, things have changed a lot in the market place, especially in the consumers' market place, since those laws were originally introduced.

Today, the products which are for sale at a retail level are extremely complex. It is not like the days when our parents went into the corner butcher store or corner grocery store. They knew the owner of the store. The products were simple and they could rely upon the merchants with whom they dealt. Today most consumers deal through large supermarkets or department stores. They are dealing with clerks who are part of a long

chain of responsibility within those large stores. The products, as I have said, are very complex and have many additives.

For example, in the grocery business we have what are called convenience foods, prepared foods. They are not simply produced as they were in the old days. You are not getting just a basic piece of meat or vegetable. There are many chemicals and additives put into the package or tin. You have many products that are partially cooked, or that have been cooked and frozen, and so forth. As a result, the consumer is confronted with large, impersonal retail businesses, and he is confronted with products which make it difficult for him, as a layman, to understand everything connected with them.

In addition to that he is confronted with a massive advertising program, a type which was not seen 20 or 30 years ago. Of particular importance is the impact of television advertising, magazine and newspaper advertising, advertising over the radio, and even door-to-door selling. When you put all these together, that type of advertising with that type of retailing, and the type of products being sold I submit, and I think most hon. members would submit that we need much greater protection for the consumer who, even if he is diligent when he goes to make a purchase, cannot possibly deal on an equal basis with the person who is selling to him.

For this reason, I urge the House to pass this bill, particularly those items in it which have not been covered by present government legislation. And I also urge the members of the House to push for further reform in our consumer legislation. Unfortunately, the Minister of Consumer and Corporate Affairs is not here today. I presume he is in British Columbia meeting the British Queen, but I hope these remarks will be brought to his attention. As I said, Mr. Speaker, this bill has been before the House previously and I do not have too much to say about it, but I merely put it to the House that this is an important matter. It covers a lot of important transactions with which the ordinary Canadian has to deal, and I urge that the House accept the principle of this bill.

• (5:10 p.m.)

Mr. W. M. Howe (Wellington-Grey-Dufferin-Waterloo): Mr. Speaker, I hesitate to get into this debate, having been castigated by the press and some other people because I took the side of the manufacturer and the big bad business man in the debate on the packaging and labelling bill. I do have a lot of sympathy for these people, however, and I bemoan the fact that so many people are down on those who run the stores and operate the businesses, who are twisting and turning and doing their utmost to find a product that the consumer will like. There are graveyards filled with products that these merchants have tried to sell but which have had to be thrown aside when not accepted by the public.

I do not think all business people are guilty of fraudulent practices or of trying to put down the consumer. I admit there are areas where there should be more consumer education and better understanding of the products presented, then perhaps mistakes would be avoided.

[Mr. Allmand.]