

Food and Drugs Act

of partisan wrangling in this House, but this seemed to be an issue on which all Parties could agree.

The Minister said that he would look into it. Several weeks later, having heard no response, I asked the Minister to come to the committee. When the Minister came to the committee, he said basically that no labelling legislation could be brought forward because it would be too costly and too onerous. He said in fact that the onus of deciding to eat or not eat should lie with the consumer. I agree that the consumer has to accept some responsibility. However, in the 1980s, according to the most recent figures of the Canadian Restaurant and Food Services Association, \$11 billion is being spend on food outside the home.

Even employees of fast food chains have told me: "I wish you could pass this law because I'm flipping hamburgers, but when someone asks me what is in the hamburgers, because they may have an allergy, I can't tell them." An employee of a local fast food restaurant actually said: "I hope this legislation goes through because there is not a day that goes by that somebody doesn't ask me what's in the hamburgers and I can't tell them".

I think one letter highlights the situation. It is written in very large printing and reads:

Dear Mrs. Copps,

I'm Bradley Adams. I'm seven years old. I'm very upset that we mostly don't go to restaurants because we don't know what is in the food. I'm allergic to nuts, peanuts and fish. When I eat those things my throat closes over and I could die. I'm really scared. Thank you for helping me. Love, Bradley.

That is from a letter from Toronto. His mother followed it up with a letter thanking me for introducing and supporting this cause. She also wrote:

Even going to a birthday party can cause problems if it is at McDonald's or Chuck E. Cheese. These places will not or cannot tell you what is in the food. Often the staff in these places do not understand why you are asking what the ingredients are and they think you are just another crazy mother. I think that this is what bothers me the most. There has to be something available so that we can know what he is eating and in doing so make life a little easier for both the people with the allergies and those who love them.

If the House deems that the motion I am bringing forward today is worth examining in greater detail, it could be improved upon. It could be made better. I would hope that the latitude I have allowed the Minister in the way of regulations would not place an onerous burden on him. I have been very specific in the legislation, particularly with respect to individual restaurants.

● (1710)

I recognize that for an individual restaurateur, having to label all his or her goods might be onerous. I said in part we should focus our initial attention on the 24 major fast food chains which have what is called a limited menu. They are in a position right now to tell us for the most part what is in the food they are preparing. If the Government, through acceptance of this Bill, moves to require that restaurants with limited menus be required to publish the ingredients on the package or

make available a specific listing, that would certainly be a step in the right direction.

I did not realize until I got involved in this dossier that on average one person a month in Canada dies from a reaction to food. There are literally hundreds who end up sick or in hospital for the same reason. I do not think it is too much to ask that our food and drug regulations require the same kind of information with respect to food in restaurants that they do in grocery stores.

The Hon. Member for Burlington may have been in the House when the original food and drug regulations were introduced. No one in the 1970s thought that the wave of the 1980s was going to be eating out. Most people wanted to know what was in the food bought in grocery stores because they would go home and cook it. However, eating out in this day and age in many cases is a downright necessity.

I have not done a scientific study but the people who die because of this tend to be teenagers. They are just becoming independent, they may be out with their friends and not under the eye of their parents. At the same time, they tend to know they have an allergy. It is not information that is just sprung on them. If they were able, through a listing of ingredients on fast food restaurant boxes, to read that peanuts or fish or some other allergen was in the product, they would be in a position to make an intelligent choice about whether or not they could eat it.

I was pleased to hear most recently when the Canadian Food Services and Restaurant Association came before the committee, that McDonald's, the largest company in this field and a trend-setter, is moving on its own to begin, hopefully within the next two to three months, to provide a listing of all ingredients in all its products. I applaud them for that. I hope that is a trend which the industry will want to follow through on. For the Minister to say, as he has, that it is too onerous a proposition is belied by the facts. McDonald's is already working on a listing and that shows it can be done, especially when you are dealing with pre-set, formula menus which is the case in most big chains.

Red Lobster is looking at preparing a specific menu which would be directed to people with allergies. For example, if you have an allergy to fish, you might not order fish but you might order something else which happens to have a trace of fish in the sauce and subsequently be subject to the same bad reaction. The corporate community is beginning to be sensitive, but I dare say one of the reasons they are acting is because organizations like the Canadian Allergy Information Association, the Consumers' Association of Canada, which has endorsed my Bill, and even the Ontario Medical Association is moving in that direction, along with literally dozens of municipalities and school boards have come together and said we need some kind of legislation. While I do not think my Bill is necessarily the perfect vehicle, it does permit the issue to be referred to committee for further study in order to make a better Bill.