

Continued from page 15
out information concerning the quality of specific brand products. This is not done. Instead, what the Dept. attempts to accomplish is to inform the consumer of his rights, and to help him to competently choose between competing products so that he can purchase the article with the best quality-to-price relationship. The Dept. attempts to inform consumers of pitfalls, snags, fine print in guarantees, and so on, in the hopes that the consumers will be able to avoid these points of contention in the future.

As part of its public information program, the Dept. publishes the *Consumer Contact*, a folksy, four-page newsletter that comes out ten times a year. The newsletter deals with various subjects of concern to consumers, such as snowmobile's safety standards, types of tires, unknown noxious and poisonous plants and substances, and tips for the housewife. Several other brochures are also available free of charge from the department, and they deal with such items as buying food at the supermarket and the price of consumer credit. *Consumer Contact* is available free of charge to anyone who requests it from: The Consumer, Box 99, Ottawa, Ontario (K1A 0C9).

Most provincial governments, including New Brunswick, have their own Consumer Bureaus. Although there is a degree of overlap between the federal and provincial departments of consumer affairs, there are many areas of responsibility that come under the exclusive jurisdiction of the provincial government. In general, these responsibilities are defined in provincial statutes, and relate to such things as

door-to-door salesmen and collection agencies.

The Consumer Bureau of New Brunswick was set up in September, 1967. In June, 1970, the Cost of Credit Disclosure Act and the Direct Sellers Act came under the Bureau's jurisdiction. A year later, the provincial government increased the responsibilities of the Bureau by giving it jurisdiction over the Collections Agencies Act and the Prearranged Funeral Services Act.

The Bureau has been receiving approximately 50 inquiries per week, along with about 50 phone calls. Unfortunately, the Bureau's Director, Mr. A. S. Ferguson, feels that the Bureau is unknown to fifty percent of the population of this province, and he is embarking upon a program of public information in an attempt to make more people aware of the Bureau and of the valuable functions it performs.

Complaints received by the Consumer Bureau are treated in much the same manner as complaints received by its federal counterpart. Complaints are investigated by the Bureau, although it has found that in fifty or sixty percent of the cases the consumer is not always right, and a legitimate claim does not exist. Where claims are justifiable, the Bureau devotes a great deal of time contacting the people or the merchant, or the manufacturer involved, and discussing the problem with them. In some cases, the business or merchant makes an adjustment to rectify the situation merely on the basis of public relations. This is the most satisfying solution to complaints, although where a company commits an offence against one of the statutes under the Bureau's jurisdiction, the company can be prosecuted in a

court of law.

As well as these government agencies, many people turn to a private organization for advice on matters of concern to consumers. This agency is the Better Business Bureau of Canada which is supported by contributions from businesses. The Toronto BBB, one of the largest in North America with 3,500 members in 1971, is entirely supported by the contributions of its members annual fees, ranging from \$55 to \$1500.

Many people turn to the BBB for simple information about products or brands, and requests for information have been outnumbering complaints 18 to one. Complaints are not entered in the files unless they are made in writing, for the protection of both parties. However, the BBB is not a truly consumer-oriented organization because it actually serves as a vehicle to bolster public confidence in its members, rather than as an agency to protect consumers.

The Canadian Association of Consumers is a 90,000 member organization of consumers. Although hampered by a lack of funds and membership, the CAC has lobbied for new labelling laws, sought fairer marketing practices and has battled against credit reporting agencies and the high cost of loans. It issues a magazine investigating automobile safety standards, repairs, underhanded practices by gas stations, etc.

Some daily newspapers see consumerism as both a circulation booster and as a human angle source of stories. Don Goudy of the Toronto Star's Probe, receives 1800 calls per week, or 76,000 per year, while the Ontario Consumer Protection Bureau receives only 4,000 per year. He attributes this to the fact

that he has two weapons at his disposal, namely the glare of publicity, and a direct line to the advertising department of the newspaper. As well, Mr. Goudy has a good deal more public exposure than does the Ontario Bureau, and he has been proven to be an effective consumer advocate.

There are a great many government regulatory agencies which are charged with the responsibility of ensuring that quality and safety standards are met, fair marketing principles prevail, and the public interest is guarded. However, most of these agencies have closer contacts with the businesses they are supposed to be protecting the public from, with the result that they "tend, in a period of time, to reflect the interest of the industry they are supposed to be regulating," to quote John Turner. Few of these agencies invite public intervention, and even where public intervention is sought, the cost of an appearance before one of these agencies is formidable. The Canadian Transport Commission, for example, requires that all persons or parties appearing before it be represented by lawyers. Although such companies as Bell Telephone have funds set aside for costs such as these, the ordinary consumer has nowhere near the funds necessary to hire competent legal counsel, and thus, in only a few instances do these bodies see legal representatives other than those employed by the companies concerned. This is one of the shortcomings of our system.

The real problem is, however, not that there is insufficient legal rights for consumers, but rather that the consumers are not aware of the rights they do have.

	<p align="center">ENTERTAINMENT</p> <p align="center">7 nights a week!</p>	<p align="center">EARLY APPOINTMENT OR DISAPPOINTMENT</p> <p align="center">GRADUATES (Fall of 1973, Spring or Fall of 1974) who wish to be included in the 1974 Yearbook should have their pictures taken no later than JANUARY 3RD</p> <p align="center">Harvey's and Stone's will submit a copy of the proof you choose to the yearbook automatically.</p>
	<p align="center">PIZZAS to suit your INDIVIDUAL tastes</p>	<p align="center">WANTED:</p> <p align="center">SLAVES</p> <p align="center">for AUCTION</p> <p align="center">Nov. 15, 1⁰⁰ p.m. SUB Ballroom</p> <p align="center">Please leave name with Marg Miller</p> <p align="center">c/o SRC office (by Nov. 13)</p>
<p align="center">LINCOLN ROAD</p>	<p align="center">PHONE: 455-4200</p>	