

Government Organization

most of the problems which concern the consumers of the nation.

We allow the women to do the buying. They are the ones who have to make the payments on the car. They are the ones who buy the groceries, pay the telephone bill and know when the taxes have gone up. The poor breadwinner is out working so hard that he cannot be bothered with these routine problems.

Mr. Stewart: Mr. Chairman, I should like to ask the hon. member for Timiskaming whether the ladies in the house would not be likely to feel better with regard to the general argument he is now putting forward if he would first deal with the cogency of the argument just advanced by the hon. member for Peace River.

Mr. Peters: Not being a lawyer I am in a very fortunate position; I do not have to become involved in the legal arguments raised in the house. There are others who are in a better position to do this than I. It would be rather foolish for me to argue here whether the establishment of a department of consumer affairs would interfere with provincial rights.

● (5:40 p.m.)

Mr. Stewart: May I ask the hon. gentleman whether he concedes that the legal situation is at least of some relevance?

Mr. Peters: Certainly I agree and I have no argument in that regard. However, the hon. member must realize that sooner or later, and I suggest that the sooner the better so far as the Canadian people are concerned, the government is going to have to face up to the fact that the consumers have some rights, and is going to have to get around the legal problems. The argument about legality in my opinion is more often abused than used.

I note that various members of the government department concerned are in attendance today and I am sure they could advise my colleague why the department is taking the stand it apparently is taking today. It is unfortunate that the government could not meet and decide upon their reasons for not accepting this amendment which would change the complexity of the contemplated department. In my opinion the amendment is not so involved that it cannot be understood.

In view of what the President of the Privy Council has said about the responsibilities and duties of this department, there seems to be some similarity between the department

and a consumers department such as we have suggested. We believe this department should concern itself with the problems that arise in regard to bankruptcies, copyrights, trade marks and restrictive trade practices. There seems to be a difference between our thinking and that of the government in that we are looking at the whole situation from the point of view of the consumer and the government seems to be looking at the situation as it affects corporate bodies and the legal interpretations that are involved.

In the result the consumer is the individual who always is hurt as the result of bankruptcies and the disadvantages which arise from restrictions in respect of copyrights. These are the people who are the victims of any non-competitive system of trade such as is allowed to develop in this country as the result of the structure of many of our corporations.

One of my colleagues referred to the serious labour difficulties that have been experienced in Canada this year. I should like to echo his sentiments and add that in my opinion the situation will become worse before it becomes better. It will worsen because most trade unionists are also consumers and know that if there is a 3.5 per cent increase in the consumer price index the retail consumer price will probably increase by 10 per cent. In this regard it is interesting to note that when one of the larger unions was presented by its bargaining committee with one of the best contracts ever negotiated on the North American continent it told the committee to renegotiate and get a better contract. No doubt this happened because they were aware that recent financial figures indicate that corporations are making higher profits than ever before and are being allowed special concessions for depreciation and expansion programs. The workers of this country realize that they are in a good bargaining position to obtain a fair share of the spoils.

We hope that some protection will be extended to all purchasers in Canada. As the former Conservative government often said, we should have competitive enterprise. So far as the consumer is concerned there is no such thing in Canada as competitive enterprise. Most of the enterprise in Canada is monopolistic rather than competitive. All one has to do is drive down the street and check the price of gasoline at various service stations to realize that the price is always the same regardless of the overhead involved. Anyone