

Supply—Consumer and Corporate Affairs

afraid we might have to "gum it", as used to be said when all the teeth were gone. Perhaps this is the cutting of the baby teeth. In any event, I hope the examination will not be pigeonholed but will lead to action.

I was grateful to the hon. member for Grenville-Dundas for bringing us down to earth regarding the cost of the consumer affairs branch. It is true that these supplementary estimates call for only \$175,000 but the projected requirement in next year's estimates is \$394,400 which is a big sum of money. I am not as concerned as the hon. member for Grenville-Dundas about the size of that sum of money as I am to ensure that the taxpayers and consumers of this country get their money's worth. I am far less interested in curtailing that amount of money than I am in ensuring that full value is given to the consumer for that money.

This is why I wish to raise this afternoon a few definite and specific problems in connection with the supplementary estimates before us. The minister said he is ready to announce the names of the personnel who are to form the consumer advisory council so that it may begin its work. If he has time this afternoon I hope he will tell us a little more about what the consumer advisory council will be doing, because I believe the minister tried to cover up the fact that the government is not yet ready to deal with the cost of living through selective price controls.

I point out to the minister that the government's policy has been known to change on some of these matters. The Prime Minister and the Minister of Finance have held a bait in front of us in the form of a prices review board designed to deal with increasing wages and other factors contributing to inflation but not with profits. It is possible that in view of the consumer pressure across the country we may yet live to see the day when the minister will see the necessity for the establishment of a prices review board under the jurisdiction of his department. So I should like to hear from the minister what the functions of this advisory council will be, whether it will keep in touch in a real way with consumer opinion across the country, what kind of techniques it will use to find out what consumers want, and whether it will be its job to make periodic reviews or analyses in its reports to the minister.

In my view the department should deal with one specific grievance, which has come to my desk and I am sure will reach the minister, from the Ottawa consumers protest

[Mrs. MacInnis (Vancouver-Kingsway).]

association on behalf of the Canadian consumers protest association. The Ottawa branch is one of 55 similar groups located across Canada from Halifax to Vancouver. I know the minister is familiar with it. As a matter of fact I believe that when the group of women came up from Montreal to see him he ran away and hid from them ignominiously.

Mr. Turner: Wait a minute, Mr. Chairman, I did not hide from them at all. They came up on short notice, as they are wont to do, and my parliamentary secretary, the hon. member for Québec-Montmorency, spent an hour and a half with them.

Mrs. MacInnis (Vancouver-Kingsway): They were not satisfied with the replacement, good as he was. However, I am glad to know that the minister was not in hiding. These people have written to me.

An hon. Member: Perhaps he was shy.

Mrs. MacInnis (Vancouver-Kingsway): I do not think he was shy but perhaps by the time they got through he did not know they were women. He may have thought they were pretty determined individuals. These people are most anxious that the minister should look closely at the recommendations of the Batten commission that tariffs on some essential foodstuffs be abolished. They are particularly concerned about the cost of tomatoes and cucumbers in the winter months. As the minister knows, there is a very limited supply of fresh food in Canada in the winter months, at which time it is possible to get an adequate supply of tomatoes and cucumbers from Mexico. It appears that the cost of production of tomatoes by Canadian greenhouse growers is almost three times as high per pound as that of Mexican growers. Recently in Ottawa Mexican tomatoes were priced at 59 cents for three pounds while Canadian tomatoes cost the consumer 39 cents a pound.

It is not to Canada's advantage to devote resources to growing tomatoes and cucumbers in the winter months. The protection of the industry through tariffs could well be an example of "hothouse" in two senses. The members of the association are most anxious that the tariffs be abolished. If it is necessary to give relief to the Canadian hothouse tomato and cucumber growers, then let it be given in some other form, such as relief in the form of subsidies, but let us not burden the housewives with the high cost of vital fresh food for their families in the wintertime. I hope