consumer department, that consumer problems attract many headlines but few votes. Of course there has been some use of law to channel the forces of change to ends which we believe to be desirable— that is to say, designed to promote competent performance of function. But do we provide, or have we provided even the support of which we are capable, to the individual legislator who has publicly identified himself, at some political risk for his future, with a consumer program—the kind of support which should characterize a dynamic movement? Perhaps our problem is partly with ourselves as well as with the general consumer public, and its lack of rapport with us, to the extent there is such a lack.

Now as I said at the beginning, I am taking advantage of this relaxed atmosphere and delightful Spring weather to engage in some self-analysis, without being seriously concerned about the outcome. Nevertheless, our topic does raise some important questions, both of value and fact, which must be taken into account in the development of our programs for economic and political action, and also with respect to education and organization among the consumer public. The Program Chairman of this conference and his Committee are clearly sensitive to these questions. We must give more meaning to "the consumer point of view", in the sense implied in the concept of continuing power.

Let us take full advantage of the conference, to strike flint on flint, idea on idea, to create fire, controlled fire. The development and exchange of information are important but it is going to take some further ingredient to produce a dynamic and effective consumer movement which can both articulate and support a program in the consumer interest, which in the economic field approximates the public interest. We are fortunate to have with us today members of the panel who are trying in their various ways to identify and resolve the problems raised by the subject given us for discussion.

REMARKS

Eleanor Ordway

I would like to say at the beginning that I will confine my remarks to the protection offered to Canadian Consumers by the Food and Drugs Act of Canada.

I believe that consumers want honest and informative advertising and labelling of food and drugs and suitable standards for these products. I think it is of prime importance in the administration of this law, that our Food and Drug Officers should know what the consumer wants and thinks and also that the consumer should know what the Food and Drug can do and cannot do for them. I have noted in the press and have heard from other sources that there is a great deal of public interest in your country about the consumer and her wants. There is
also in my country a growing awareness of consumer wants. No longer is
the consumer a "NEGLECTED CHILD" and in a thriving economy she is and
should be an important figure. I am, of course, pleased to see that
consumers are coming into their own. I also feel that consumers must
be well informed. Their demands must be well founded and reasonable,
so that their complaints will receive the serious attention of the
manufacturer or the Government. I think it is very important that
consumer know that there are things that we as a government department
cannot do, either because the authority is not given by the law or
because we should not do such things in a free enterprise economy.
Furthermore, there are some things consumers can do better themselves.
We in the Food and Drug Directorate try to give the consumer protection,
and certainly recognize the importance of the consumer view-point.
This is evident in the establishing in our organization of a separate
Consumers Section. I do not feel that it is my function to publicize
the Food and Drug Directorate. We are there to give consumers
information on which they can base sound opinions and reasonable
requests. Opinions from uninformed consumers may be based on false
information and therefore be useless as guides to proper action or
even lead to undesirable actions. Governments will learn to disregard
consumer opinion if it is not reasonable and based on adequate information.
If consumers do not know the facts they may want things that are
unreasonable and unrealistic from the standpoint of government and
industry. Therefore, it is necessary to provide them with information
about types of products and about the possibilities and limitations of
(a) government authority and (b) the capabilities of industry in
specific instances and also about the possible consequences if their
opinions are taken or their wants fulfilled.

We in our Food and Drug Directorate work to these ends. Consumers
are encouraged to present their complaints, criticisms and suggestions.
These are studied, classified and tabulated for consideration by us.
If they are justified the action taken may be amendments to standards,
label requirements or increased enforcement action in a specified area.

Recently, I have conducted a national survey of consumer opinions
in respect to labelling, packaging of foods and the use of chemical
additives. The results have been published and I hope will be useful
to government, industry and consumers themselves. They do point out
the fact that a considerable proportion of the public in Canada know
surprisingly little about what one would expect them to know. The
people surveyed were not a select group. They represented urban
chain store customers taken at random. Nevertheless, the results of
the survey pointed definitely to a number of errors in packaging,
labelling and chemical additives with which the government and industry
can see that many consumers are dissatisfied.