

THE CONSUMER LOOKS AT PROTECTION IN CANADA

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The consumer is per se a Free Trader, wanting abundance and quality at a low price. We realize, however, that in Canada free-trade policy must be modified by social considerations. We seem to have a tacit understanding to accept the present tariff levels but to resist increases. We reject the assumption that everything should be produced in Canada whether at a comparative advantage or not. When presented with a "Buy Canadian" slogan, we reject the nationalistic, emotional appeal and insist that the consumer should buy Canadian goods only if of equal quality and value.

In Canada, we have an independent Tariff Board that hears applications and appeals and makes recommendations to the Dept. of Trade and Commerce. At the public hearings, CAC regularly presents a brief, putting the case for the consumer, and asking the Board for critical scrutiny of the application (for increased tariff) to make sure that the national interest justifies the increase in cost to the consumer. Several industries under pressure of foreign competition have been asking the Government for increased tariff protection. The stand of the Canadian Association of Consumers has strengthened the government position in resisting these demands.

What Is The CAC?

The Canadian Association of Consumers is a national organization, created in 1947 by Canada's leading women's organizations to "unite the strength of the Canadian consumer". At present CAC has approximately 25,000 members, organized into nine provincial and some 75 local branches throughout Canada.

CAC aims to inform consumers of what they should know for their protection for wise buying. It discusses with government officials what laws are necessary in the interest of the consumer, and advises the manufacturer of the consumers' opinions and needs with regard to his product.

16 national women's organizations, representing some 500,000 women, participate in our work and through their liaison officers CAC is able to contact many thousands of women. These organizations are:

- Canadian Dietetic Association
- Cercles de Fermieres
- Canadian Federation of Business and Professional Women's Clubs
- Canadian Federation of University Women
- Canadian Home Economics Association
- Dominion Council of the Woman's Association, United Church of Canada
- Federation Nationale St. Jean-Baptiste
- Federated Women's Institutes of Canada
- Hudassah Organization of Canada
- Imperial Order Daughters of the Empire
- National Council of Canadian Daughters' League
- National Council of Jewish Women
- National Council of Women
- YWCA of Canada
- Salvation Army
- Ukrainian Women's Association of Canada.

In recent years, the supply and demand of consumer goods has greatly expanded. Moreover, the appearance on the market of many new products as well as new types of old products has made efficient purchasing more difficult for consumers. CAC attempts to help the consumer in making the best use of the consumer dollar.

CAC Services

National CAC office puts out a monthly Bulletin. There are only two paid staff members. They are assisted by a large group of capable volunteer specialists. Inquiries, problems, complaints and resolutions are sent in by individual members, branches, and women's organizations to the Standing and Special Committees. Close contact is kept with Federal and Provincial Governments which are responsible for laws and regulations concerning consumer interests.

At all levels, CAC puts out press releases, articles for magazines and trade journals, radio and TV programs, and organizes consumer schools and speakers' panels to disseminate information for consumers and to interpret the work of CAC to the public. Sources of income are the membership fee of \$1.00 a year which is split 20-20-60 to Local, Provincial and National CAC. A grant of \$10,000 is received from the Federal Government.

The CAC Educates the Consumer

It has been estimated that women do about 80% of the consumer spending which means that we as consumers determine what goods it will pay to produce, where capital will be invested, where labor will be employed. (In one of our provinces in a recent year, there was more money spent on costume jewelry than on education.) A grave responsibility rests on the buyer. CAC warns against "impulse buying" and points out that in the matter of coupons, gadgets and trading stamps, we deserve much of what we get. The advertisers are playing on our weakness of wanting to get something for nothing.

The CAC member learns to know her values and to buy carefully. If she finds the merchandise shoddy or unsatisfactory, it is her duty to return it to her retailer who is usually grateful to her for her mature approach. If she is not able to obtain satisfaction from him she reports the case to her local CAC Branch and the Convener of Consumer Problems gets in touch with the retailer or manufacturer. If necessary, the problem is referred to Provincial or National CAC.

The CAC and Legislation

Accomplishments of CAC include:

- Removal of the Federal ban on margarine (taken to Supreme Court, case won)
- Weight on packaged goods
- New bread and flour regulations, making enriched flour compulsory
- Blocking indirect taxation (sales tax at source)
- Co-operating with the National Industrial Design Council
- Opposing the principle of Resale Price Maintenance (Brief to Royal Com.)
- Briefs to Tariff Board (Potatoes, footwear, textiles etc.)
- Campaign against trading stamps (discarded by some merchants)
- Toy testing and recommendations
- Trademark and True Labelling Act, 1949 (CAC largely responsible)
- Instalment Buying - study and recommendations
- Grading and Marketing of Potatoes - study, recommendations, panels.

Current projects include:

- Meat - Brief sent to Provincial Govt. asking for more adequate inspection of the domestic meat supply. (Meat for export and for sale outside the province must be federally inspected.)
- Milk - CAC is asking for consumer representation on Milk Boards, a price differential between home-delivered and store-purchased milk, public hearings by Milk Boards before any change is made in the price, pasteurization of milk in every province.
- Measuring Cups and Spoons -- CAC working with govt. and indust. representatives towards a standard for m.c. and s. sold in Canada.
- Radio Programs - CAC has sent in a National and an Ontario Branch brief to CBC asking for more informative consumer programs on specific articles and on general economic problems.
- Textiles - informative labels for care and performance, investigation of inflammable fabrics, development of testing and labelling for finishes, better labelling of nylon hosiery.
- Food Grading - uniform terms to eliminate present confusion by variety of terms, e.g. red, grade A, choice, No. 1. fresh, first grade, etc.

The CAC Plays a Vital Role

Through CAC, the consumer movement is firmly established in Canada. It is based on the principle that an enlightened consumer opinion is an important factor in maintaining the economic stability of this country. CAC has become the authentic voice of the Canadian Consumer, comparable to that of Agriculture, Labor and Industry.

CAC has moved from the resolution level to the action level, has gained prestige as a consultant to industry and government, and has won the respect of thinking people throughout the Dominion.