



WINS NEW CAR—Henry Clay Stokes, Jr., of Hertford is the owner of a new car, won at a recent auction sale at Belvidere-Chappell Hill Volunteer Fire Department. Presenting the keys is Wayne Sawyer, department president, with Jimmy Chappell, fire chief, on the right.

Sen. Sam Ervin Reports

WASHINGTON—The Senate Government Operations Committee is considering S. 1177, a bill to establish a new consumer protection agency. Disenchanted consumers will welcome any bill of this nature in the thought that "it is about time" that the federal government lends a helping hand to those who have purchased shoddy merchandise or services.

But before we get carried away in new hopes for the future, it should be recognized that this "age of consumerism" has proposed a very drastic bill. I find difficulty in accepting as valid the thesis which underlies it—that consumers are a class of people separate and apart from all other people in our land and that there is so much antagonism between consumers and producers of goods and services that we are compelled to establish a new super agency to work out problems that up to now we have somehow resolved by other means.

What this bill says is that Americans have reached such a stage of dishonesty and distrust that we can no longer live in harmony without creating a new federal regulatory agency with powers over all governments, departments, agencies and individuals.

The strange thing is that while the advocates of this bill express the utmost distrust of every other American they have the utmost faith in a new agency staffed with bureaucrats that will have vast powers never before granted to any American government. This is so because most of the powers granted to this new protection agency are so broad and so vague that they depend upon the protectors for interpretation.

This bill, in its original form, can be compared to Old Mother Hubbard's dress. It covers everything remotely connected with the production, the marketing, the sale of goods of any kind, except perhaps professional services.

Thus, as drafted, although the bill has now been changed in committee in certain respects, virtually every American would be regulated as a producer of goods and services. What is not readily realized is that we already have a vast network of federal and state agencies regulating many of the same functions in our economy. The Federal Communications Commission regulates television, radio, telephone and tele-

graph communications. The Interstate Commerce Commission regulates transportation systems and facilities. The Federal Trade Commission regulates many business practices. The Securities and Exchange Commission regulates security transactions.

Under S. 1177, the new consumer protection agency would regulate the regulatory agencies as well as virtually every facet of business. The difficulty with this is that we already have a maze of laws and regulations affecting our free enterprise system. Burdening it further with a new super agency is likely to compound many of the problems we now face in keeping businesses, large and small, alive.

Without doubt there are some men in business who are dishonest. There is no question that capitalism is not doing all that it should to satisfy consumer complaints. The system is far from perfect but I seriously question where the process will end if we eventually have to have somebody to regulate the regulators and then that system does not work any better than what we now have. One thing for sure, it will cost the consumer more to add tier after tier of regulations, controls and bureaucrats to the payrolls.

In my judgment, most businessmen are compelled to be honest simply because we live in a competitive society and in our system those who produce the best goods and services for the lowest prices ultimately get the business. Good will is still the businessman's most valuable asset.

Aside from that, I am disturbed about the granting of broad powers to one administrator in the federal government who can preempt the decisions of every other administrator and every businessman and every individual in this nation. Such law is tailored to assure tyranny and even beneficent tyranny soon turns sour.

The bill can be improved by establishing a board of men to exercise its powers. The powers granted to the agency ought to be reviewable. Moreover, the powers granted ought to be spelled out with clarity.

For Congress to enact a consumer protection bill without these ultimate safeguards could spell disaster not only for the businesses and others affected but also for the consumers themselves who ultimately pay the bills.



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For Further Information Contact John A. Hammond, Trust Officer, or Ben L. Allen, Forester, Peoples Bank & Trust Company, Executive Grayson H. Harding Estate, Rocky Mount, N. C. 27801. Telephone (919) 442-7187.

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