

CONSUMER EDUCATION FOR THE FUTURE; A REPORT TO THE
MINISTER OF CONSUMER AND CORPORATE AFFAIRS.

Canadian Consumer Council.

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CANADIAN CONSUMER COUNCIL



CONSEIL CANADIEN DE LA CONSOMMATION

BOX C.P. 94
OTTAWA CANADA

The Honourable Robert K. Andras
Minister
Department of Consumer and
Corporate Affairs
Room 1403, Canadian Building
219 Laurier Avenue West
OTTAWA
K1A 0C9

Dear Mr. Minister:-

Attached, please find a copy of a report recently adopted by the Canadian Consumer Council examining the need for improvement in the field of consumer education.

In response to the request by your predecessor, the Council initiated a series of extensive studies by the Canadian Association for Adult Education and retained special consultants, all of whom provided substantial aid in drafting this report. The sub-committee of Council which was concerned with this matter was chaired by Mrs. A.F.W. Plumptre, and the efforts by her and her committee resulted in what I consider to be an excellent, well-documented, and forward-looking report. Many of its proposals are challenging in their freshness and scope.

We look forward to hearing your comments.

With best regards, I am,

Yours truly,

HAROLD BUCHWALD
CHAIRMAN

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PRECIS OF RECOMMENDATIONS

The results of the C.A.A.E. Survey on Consumer Education and information available from other sources indicate

1. That there is wide concern regarding the shortcomings of consumer courses in schools which appear to be inadequate and ineffective, and not sufficiently relevant to consumer needs.
2. That several of the consumer courses offered by school boards for adults, according to the survey, did not attract sufficient registrations to warrant the offering of these courses.
3. That consumer education programs offered by voluntary agencies and citizen groups which emphasized co-operative learning and self-help techniques appeared to be more successful.
4. That for all groups (education institutions and community groups) there was a great lack of Canadian consumer information. Even when available, the knowledge as to how or where to secure it was unknown to course leaders.
5. That teachers need specific training for consumer courses and assistance in circulating and using resource material.

In view of these indications, the Council recommends that a new and more comprehensive approach be taken to consumer education in Canada, and that consumer education should be regarded as a process of learning in response to the expressed needs of consumers, rather than as a product offered by experts who define what consumers ought to know.

To facilitate the implementation of this recommendation, the Council recommends:

1. That the Minister strengthen and broaden the operations of Box 99 to be a major consumer resource centre: that this be done in so far as is possible with the participation of consumer and business

organizations and individuals to ensure that this resource centre is relevant to everyday consumer problems and fills the needs of teachers, leaders of citizen groups and individual consumers.

The establishment of a major consumer resource centre would be an important factor in fulfilling the mandate of the Department of Consumer and Corporate Affairs to be the focal point for consumers in the Federal Government. This would entail:

- (a) more staff and funds for Box 99 - for the development of information and resources, as well as dealing with consumer complaints,
- (b) close link with all Federal Departments, so the resource centre is the sole Federal outlet for all consumer information,
- (c) establishing offices in ground-floor premises easily available to citizens in major urban areas, and supplemented by telephone communication lines to distant points within major regions of the nation.

II. That the Minister seek the co-operation of Provincial Governments, especially that of ministers responsible for consumer affairs and ministers of education:

- (a) to encourage the use of resource centres by educational institutions, both students and teachers, and
- (b) to secure co-operation in the development of community resource centres across Canada. (Effort should be made to link these with other services such as legal aid, manpower, etc.)

The development of effective consumer resource centres would require:

- 1) consumer consultants, in addition to dealing with consumer complaints, to engage in field

work, contacting and involving all organizations providing similar service, especially voluntary agencies,

- 11) consumer consultants to develop close relationships with the media, especially facilitating community consumer T.V. programs,
- 111) consumer consultants to encourage and assist in the development of smaller community centres throughout the province-linked by toll-free telephone to core organizations in Ottawa or in the other major urban centres.
- 111. That the Minister continue his efforts to make business more responsive to consumers so that consumer education in the widest sense may be directed predominantly to prevention rather than remedy, by:
 - (a) encouraging voluntary disclosure of more information on products through labelling, etc.,
 - (b) encouraging advertisers to be more responsive to consumers' needs for more relevant information on products and services,
 - (c) supporting the efforts of business to become more aware of consumer problems and to engage in self-regulation,
 - (d) supporting efforts within the government to secure wider public access to information in the governments possession which is relevant to consumers.
- IV. That the Minister foster awareness by the media, especially T.V., of their role in educating consumers, and that funds be made available for national consumer television programs.
- V. That the Minister continue to support the efforts of voluntary organizations and groups to supply consumer information, especially in their educational operations.

CONSUMER EDUCATION FOR THE FUTURE

A Report to the Minister of
Consumer and Corporate Affairs
from the Canadian Consumer
Council

May 1972

Some time ago, the Minister of Consumer and Corporate Affairs requested the Canadian Consumer Council to formulate recommendations to guide him in furthering consumer education in Canada. The recommendations of the Council are set out below. They are followed by a statement outlining the reasoning behind them.

The Council recommends that a new and more comprehensive approach should be taken to consumer education in Canada.

We recommend:

- that the Minister focus his immediate efforts on making existing educational resources more readily available to consumers through Consumer Resource Centres, and that these resources be supplemented as experience warrants;
- that the Minister, through the Provincial Ministers of Education, encourage educational institutions to develop a participatory and research-oriented approach to consumer education;
- that the Minister continue his efforts to make governments and businesses responsive to consumers so that consumer education may be directed predominantly to prevention rather than remedy;
- that the Department foster more awareness and greater use of television and other media for purposes of consumer education; and
- that the Department continue support to the voluntary consumer organizations and agencies in their efforts to assist consumer learning.

THE REASONING BEHIND OUR RECOMMENDATIONS

In many ways, these recommendations go beyond and depart from the traditional focus on consumer education. Not more than a few years ago they might have seemed radical - as quite contrary to the direction in which most of our society was going. At that time it might have been expected that we would suggest compulsory consumer education be more broadly extended throughout the school system, standard curricular be developed in each province, along with standard textbooks, and that additional formal teacher training courses be organized. And a few years ago this indeed would have represented the best we were able to suggest.

We have learned rather rapidly, however, about the shortcomings of present programs across a broad range of activities even despite the best efforts of those involved (e.g., legal aid, manpower training, the school system itself). Were we to make only the traditional suggestions today, we could be fairly sure that they would not only be unproductive in their application, but would die on the vine for lack of personal commitment to them among those concerned.

The traditional focus tended to accept as consumer education what was labelled as consumer education - to define as consumer education what was supplied under that name. Consumer education has, therefore, usually been seen as an activity falling within the educational system. It has most often involved classroom instruction, but has sometimes embraced the use of the mass media for instructional purposes. However, the CAAE survey, which we commissioned, made clear that not all that went on under the name of consumer education was necessarily useful. Furthermore, there were intimations that much activity constituting valuable consumer education was going on outside the school system. In the event, we concluded that it was necessary to look well beyond the label, and that the time had come for a new and fresh approach to consumer education.

What is wrong with consumer education today? No precise answer to this question fell neatly out of our review of the existing studies. What was clear, however, was that something was wrong, as the following highlights and observations from the survey indicate:

- Although high school students were not surveyed and responses from universities, community colleges and technical schools were too limited to warrant any firm conclusions about the adequacy of their programs, almost all teachers inter-

viewed tended to feel that their courses were ineffective.

- In the field of adult education, 5 of the 26 responding school boards offered to provide specified consumer education courses during the 1969-70 school year, but did not attract sufficient registrations to warrant carrying on such courses.
- Where adult education courses were offered in the schools, poor attendance was recorded. Even when course material was designed in response to surveys of community needs or to the expressed wants of potential participants, attendance at school-sponsored programs was nevertheless sparse. (This begs the question as to whether the difficulty lies in course content, or in the time and place in which courses are offered, or in both).

These observations from the CAAE study raise more questions than they answer, questions which are not resolved by looking to studies of consumer education in other countries. But these observations do indicate that the traditional approach - that of experts defining what it is consumers ought to know - has not been markedly successful. Not only are consumers inadequately assisted, in the judgement of ~~their~~ teachers, but they may not even be interested in further efforts of this sort, as is evident from their own behaviour. Clearly, some alternate focus is necessary.

In our considerations of the direction which such a new focus should take, we were able to discern some useful guidelines from other aspects of the CAAE study:

- More interest in consumer education programs was reported by voluntary and welfare agencies, co-operatives, credit unions and citizens' groups whose emphasis lay on co-operative learning, self-help techniques and on courses specifically aimed at meeting the needs of the members, at time and places designed to suit their convenience.
- A good deal of interest greeted efforts outside the formal school system, such as:

- the telephone and letter-answering service of the University of Saskatchewan Extension Department which, in 1969, handled 5,000 letters seeking help with specific problems or requesting resource material for use by the writers in their own educational programs;
- the use of field workers by Memorial University in Newfoundland, and the Fogo Island film process developed jointly by the University and the National Film Board. (The latter was particularly recommended to the Consumer Council as a means of effective consumer education).
- Adult consumers indicated clearly that they were less interested in being taught than in receiving assistance in their own learning processes through more information in advertisements, plain language on labels, access to product test results, etc. Consumers with low incomes showed particular interest in group discussions, demonstrations of product uses, and budgeting.

The pattern which emerges from these observations is quite different from the traditional approach. Rather than seeking consumer education as a product offered by teachers, it looks at the question as a process of consumer learning. Rather than concentrating on consumer education within the school system, it embraces a variety of sources through which individual consumers may be assisted in learning. Examined from this vantage point, it appears that activities organized in response to the expressed needs of learners are likely to be preferable to activities whose impetus comes from those concerned with imparting consumer education.

This alternate focus is, of course, the application of the principle of consumer sovereignty - that is, seeing and evaluating services from the user's point of view. It is clear, upon reflection, that consumer education as we have tended to think of it in the past has been substantially lacking in concern for the principle of consumer sovereignty. This has been reflected in the processes of consumer education courses themselves - in course content (often designed for some prototype consumer rather than for those actually

taking the course), in the location and scheduling of access to consumer education opportunities, and in the compulsory nature of some of the courses offered to young people, among other things.

In summary then, the narrow, traditionally defined focus on consumer education needs to be substantially broadened if consumer education is to become more relevant. But there are other considerations which also argue for a new approach.

- a) The problems traditionally ascribed to consumer affairs - problems associated with the bewildering array of technical products and sophisticated services, the rapid changes in marketing techniques, and the varied remedies with which to deal with specific complaints - continue to increase and to make the process of consumer decision-making ever more complex.
- b) The growing impact of the public sector on consumption decisions is serving to blur the formerly sharp distinctions which separated consumer affairs from questions of government policies and citizenship.
- c) Such events as the campaign to ban non-returnable bottles, the boycott of California grapes, and the refusal on the part of many consumers to purchase laundry products which are not bio-degradable are illustrative of growing concern on the part of many consumers about the societal consequences which flow from their use of many products available today. Not only do these concerns bring into question the implicit assumption which underlies much of consumer education - the assumption that narrowly self-interested behaviour is responsible behaviour - but they further expand the potential range of subject matters embraced in the field.

The concept of consumer education, if it is to be relevant in the future, will have to expand to encompass these broader considerations. Since it is patently impossible for anyone to absorb all this and at the same time to keep their information up-to-date, consumers will more and more need to rely on a selective approach, on identifying their own problems as their needs change and on finding supporting resources which can assist their learning process. Pre-structured course offerings which do not involve participating students in their design seem likely to be perceived as increasingly irrelevant.

A further consideration looks beyond the present. There appears to be a growing number of people who believe that Canada, and indeed the whole Western world, is about to witness a growing diversity of life-styles. This means that the needs of Canadian families with respect to consumer education may become more and more idiosyncratic and less and less predictable. We will be increasingly less able to rely upon the rather standardized images, implicit in many consumer education programs to date, of individuals and families and what constitutes their well-being. In the process we may come increasingly to recognize that the consumer well-being of each of us is constituted not merely of visible and obvious components, but embraces as well many invisible and subtle elements.

Given indications of the deficiencies of current approaches, the need for greater selectivity, and the growing diversity in consumer preferences, we are calling upon those interested in consumer education to shift its focus and to set out upon a course which is highly experimental and continuously responsive to changing consumer needs. Our recommendations are designed to take us in these directions - to be relevant to the changing world of the future.

RECOMMENDATIONS

CONSUMER EDUCATION AND CONSUMER RESOURCE CENTRES

Canada is rich in consumer education resources. There is an abundance of consumer expertise scattered through the governments, businesses, industries and voluntary associations, and in the homes and schools of this country. There is also a rich store of information with respect to products and their characteristics, the laws of different jurisdictions, the pitfalls awaiting unwary consumers, the techniques and experiences of consumer self-help activities, the sources of supply of particular goods and services, the uses and abuses of products, and the remedies available to dissatisfied consumers. More important even than these, there is a great deal of goodwill and willingness to make this expertise and information available.

But the consumer does not have access to these riches as he needs them - unless he is blessed with extraordinary luck, energy or money. We need to make these resources more readily available to each of us as we need them.

We therefore recommend that the major focus of the Minister's efforts in the field of consumer education should be directed to the establishment of consumer resource centres: information centres not only for the individual consumer, but for educators and consumer groups.

The essential core of such a centre already exists in the Department of Consumer and Corporate Affairs - BOX 99 - and there are a number of other potential centres throughout Canada under the sponsorship of provincial governments, voluntary associations, business associations, and citizen groups. Such centres, to be effective, should be distinguishable less by what they do than by the way they do it. It may be said of consumer resource centres that "what is essential is invisible to the eye". Among other things, they should:

- be predominantly concerned for the consumer
- be prepared to try to help with any consumer problem
- know how to go about obtaining information and have a knowledge of the workings of government and the marketplace.
- have a capacity to gain direct access to people and resources as necessary.

- be persistent and inventive
- be prepared to take the initiative in putting people with common concerns in touch with each other
- facilitate consumer learning and consumer responsibility by showing the consumer how to help himself, and,
- perceive that the best interests of business and consumers are fundamentally in accord, rather than at odds with each other.

We suggest that such potential centres as already exist be identified and reinforced and more effectively linked to give consumers much wider access to existing learning materials and existing expertise. Such a program would require no new legislation, but would require modest funding. In large measure it consists of a rearrangement of our normal routes of access to the sources of consumer learning. Whether additional resources are necessary will become clear only as the identification and pattern of use of such centres develops.

We therefore recommend:

1.

With respect to a federal Consumer Resource Centre (now Box 99)

- that the Minister begin immediately to strengthen and broaden the operations of BOX 99 by identifying and reinforcing those elements that have entered into its successful efforts.
- that a National Resource Centre function out of street-level, store-front offices in the nation's capital, open within and beyond normal business hours and linked to regional offices by toll-free telephone.

- that its services be made more widely known to Canadian consumers generally (much of the information available from the centres is not used because Canadians are unaware of BOX 99's existence)
- ~~that~~ educators and students be encouraged to make use of its resources.
- that its services be made more readily available on a walk-in and telephone basis, both within and beyond normal business hours
- that the Minister seek through the Cabinet such commitment to the operations of BOX 99 and Information Canada as may be necessary to ensure that the resources of all federal government departments may be tapped by a single consumer enquiry to BOX 99 or Information Canada.

We consider the establishment of a major consumer resource centre to be an important factor in fulfilling the mandate of the Department of Consumer and Corporate Affairs to act as a focal point in the Federal Government for consumers.

11. - that the close co-operation of provincial governments in the development of this and other potential consumer resource centres be actively sought; (among all the issues in the consumer field which require the close working liaison of different levels of government, consumer education and information may be the most vulnerable to inadequacies in federal-provincial working arrangements).

111. With respect to the regional offices of the Department of Consumer and Corporate Affairs:

- that the Minister indicate to his regional consumer consultants that the predominant

- focus of their efforts should parallel the functions of the Ottawa-based consumer resource centre, i.e., the servicing of consumer enquiries and complaints
- that regional consultants engage wherever possible in direct discussions, and that they be encouraged to bring together those people with common concerns who indicate an interest in working with one another to resolve their consumer problems.
- that personnel policies with respect to consumer consultants should be examined in the light of the probable needs of the future; in the course of this review, consideration should be given to the desirability of downgrading such prerequisites as formal education and institutional experience, and placing high priority on such characteristics as concern for people, knowledge of the marketplace and of government, ingenuity and persistence in dealing with problems.
- that consumer consultants be placed under the supervision of the person responsible for the operations of the consumer resource centre, rather than maintaining the division of responsibility for consultants which exists at the present time.

IV. With respect to other consumer resource centres:

- that the Minister encourage such other centres as may be operated by provincial and municipal governments, business associations, community colleges and other organizations, as well as individuals willing to volunteer their skills, to establish links with the federal consumer resource centre and regional consultants for the flow of information and feedback

between all centres.

- that such centres be linked to the federal consumer resource centre through toll-free government telephone lines.
- that the Minister seek the co-operation of other federal departments, other levels of government, and the private sector (merchants, banks, shopping centres, etc.) in making store-front facilities available. (A sign, a desk, a telephone and a consultant may occupy very little space and yet be very effective.)

V. With respect to the further development of this approach:

- that the operations of the federal consumer resource centre be subject to continuing review, and in particular, that a report on its operations be made public at the end of its first six months. (We are prepared to assist in this process of review and to report back to the Minister with our suggestions.)

These then are the details of our first broad recommendations to the Minister - that he focus his immediate efforts on consumer resource centres. Were this recommendation to be carried out, we believe that, for the first time in any country, consumers would have at their disposal adequate access to the tools for consumer education. The usefulness of such centres to governments, businesses educational institutions and other organizations has been demonstrated already by the operation of BOX 99.

CONSUMER EDUCATION AND EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS

With new and simplified routes of access to consumer information and expertise through consumer resource centres, consumer education courses within the educational system itself could be substantially improved and made more relevant. Teachers of consumer education would be able to draw upon a greatly expanded resource base. On the basis of their own assessments, and of a survey which we commissioned, such improvements in consumer education courses are greatly needed.

Our survey revealed that consumer education courses in Canada within the formal school system were often of dubious effectiveness.³ Course materials were frequently inadequate and in many instances courses were designed around the perceptions of teachers and administrators about what should be relevant to students, or, more precisely, what should be relevant to some mythical "standard student" in a particular grade. Only infrequently were courses designed around what participants themselves believed to be relevant to them as consumers.

The lessons that tend to be learned from experiences with consumer problems are not contained in the content of the courses. Students, even in elementary schools, experience consumer problems and need to learn to cope with them. When the particular needs of students are not met in courses purporting to offer practical help, (and this was frequently the opinion expressed in our survey), it is hardly surprising that their behaviour is marked by apathy and indifference. We are forced to conclude that consumer education within the educational system should become much more responsive to the self-defined concerns and interests of those participating in the courses.

To say this is not to deny that there are undoubtedly many places within the educational system where such a shift in focus has already occurred or where a participant-focus has always existed. Like consumer resource centres, the effectiveness of consumer education classes cannot be discerned by their visible characteristics. The sense of excitement, of relevance, of joint exploration and discovery, which infuse particular activities cannot always be conveyed in responding to questionnaires such as we commissioned in this field. It may well be that we underestimate the effectiveness of what is going on under the name of consumer education. Nonetheless, there is reason enough for concern in the visible negatives - teachers' evaluations, courses offered and cancelled for lack of enrolments,

poor attendance records. We believe a shift in focus towards a more responsive and more comprehensive approach is call for. We are convinced that courses offered under the level of consumer education must provide practical education for everyday living or run the risk of generating alienation among the students. Therefore, both teachers and students should be encouraged to move out of the classroom and conduct their research directly in the marketplace. This would involve working on problems relevant to those in the class and perhaps working with citizen groups. It would also involve students in becoming familiar with and contributing to the consumer resources in their community. The co-operation of provincial education authorities should be sought, especially in regard to making it possible for teachers to meet together to share their experiences with such consumer education sources. We believe such meetings, coupled with improved access to consumer resource centres, would be equally, if not more, useful to teachers than an extension of formal teacher training courses in consumer education.

By these routes, students and teachers alike can learn where to turn for consumer education. Perhaps most important of all, in "learning by doing" both can come to grips with the various techniques of problem-solving - from learning how to obtain redress in the event of dissatisfaction, to ways and means of bringing about improvements both in products and practices and in consumer laws and administration. They can, in short, develop their own capacities to be responsible while developing the capacity of the marketplace and of government to be responsive to them.

When plans for the development of resource centres are developed, the Minister, through consultation with ministers and other officials of the provinces, should seek provincial co-operation to improve consumer education courses via increased use of consumer resource centres.

We therefore recommend:

- that the Minister bring the study undertaken for us by the Canadian Association of Adult Education, as well as this report, to the attention of those engaged in consumer education

in the school system for the purpose of encouraging them to undertake a thorough review of their programs

- that officials of the Department of Consumer and Corporate Affairs be encouraged to respond to enquiries from both teachers and students about consumer resource centres and their possible use and how such centres might be fostered or established within their own communities.
- that the Minister stress to the media the importance of their responsiveness to consumer needs and make available to the National Resource Centre funds for national consumer T.V. programs.

These are our suggestions for direct action that the Minister can take.

CONSUMER EDUCATION IN A WIDER CONTEXT

Consumer education, as we said earlier, is not and cannot be confined solely to the classroom experience. In its most catholic concept, education involves every thing or emotion we experience. Accordingly, among the other of consumer education, the provision by business of information through labelling, etc., as to the characteristics, use or components of their product can itself serve as a major learning tool for consumers. The media represents another such tool, as does the information disseminated by governments and voluntary organizations in the consumer field. What appears to be needed in these areas and other areas is the continued and further disclosure of information for consumers.

We therefore recommend:

- that the Minister of Consumer and Corporate Affairs continue his efforts to encourage businesses to voluntarily disclose information useful to consumers as typified by the recent introduction of the fabric care labelling code.
- that the Minister support the efforts of advertisers and the media to improve on the information content of their consumer advertising.
- that the Minister continue to support the efforts of voluntary organizations to supply consumer information, as typified by the grants made to the Consumers' Association of Canada and the Association Coopérative d'Economie Familiale
- that the Minister support efforts within the government to secure wider public access to information in the government's possession which is relevant to consumers, e.g., product test results, automobile safety records, polluting effects of products, etc.

At a time when consumer information has never been so abundant, a perceived lack of responsiveness from business and government

to consumer demands for action itself teaches a lesson. And, regrettably it is a lesson which can only be corrected by a massive effort. The Council believes that the Minister can and should play an instrumental role in attempting to forestall a growth in consumer attitudes of alienation and disillusionment with both government and business.

Towards the end we recommend:

- that the Minister publicize the efforts of the business community, including the media, to respond voluntarily to remedying complaints directed to their attention by his officials or by consumers themselves,
- that the Minister support efforts of the business community to engage in self-regulation and to establish procedures for impartial and public audits of their effectiveness
- that the Minister urge consumers to draw to the attention of businesses and governments substantive complaints and specific suggestions about products and services and about consumer laws and their administration,
- that the Minister foster rising awareness within the government of the importance of their being responsive to consumers. In the same way and for the same reasons that we have urged consumer educators to heighten the relevance of their courses by increased student involvement, we believe that the Minister should urge the government to heighten the relevance of its programs by increased citizen involvement. IN PARTICULAR; WE URGE THE MINISTER TO EXTEND THE PARTICIPATORY POLICY BEGUN IN THE DEPARTMENT OF CONSUMER AND CORPORATE AFFAIRS WITH THE CREATION OF THIS COUNCIL AND INVITE CONSUMER PARTICIPATION IMMEDIATELY IN THE PROCESS OF CREATING A FEDERAL CONSUMER RESOURCE CENTRE.

These are the recommendations in this area which we would address to the Minister of Consumer and Corporate Affairs. But there is one final suggestion we wish to direct to all others interested in consumer education. We urge them to take the initiative immediately in approaching the Minister with respect to contributing their skills to consumer resource centres or to participating as citizens and consumers in the process of their creation.

REFERENCES

1. In response to this request, the Council commissioned a survey of developments in consumer education in Canada and an evaluation of this survey and others outlining consumer education activities in the United States and the United Kingdom. See:

A Study of Consumer Education in Canada, prepared by the Canadian Association for Adult Education, Ottawa 1971.

Survey and Evaluation of Consumer Education Programs in the United States, Purdue Research Foundation, Lafayette 1970.

Consumer Education - Conceptions and Resources, Research Institute for Consumer Affairs in association with the National Institute of Adult Education, London 1964.

2. A demonstration project approach to these centres, which was designed to develop a standard model, would in our view be highly undesirable. Given the diversity of the needs of individuals and groups within even our large metropolitan cities, between such cities and neighbouring towns and between one region and another, there can be no "standard model" for such centres.
3. Lack of information precludes more than a tentative assertion of this sort, but we believe such indications as are available from our review of studies in the field of consumer education, coupled with evidence of a similar nature from other sources (e.g., the study of self-help food stores) indicate a greater frequency of success when activities are the result of community efforts undertaken in the context of community needs. There is also evidence drawn from the educational field of the need for change in the school system as it is presently constructed. The following comment by Peter Spackmen, an editor of Cultural Affairs, summarizes converging criticisms:

"There is a very great deal wrong with our schools, of course, and it is now past argument that age-groupings, teacher-centered instruction, credentialling and compulsion are bad for young and old alike - as Charles Silberman, Herbert Kohl, John Holt, George Dennison and Joseph Featherstone have all pointed out in their different ways."

(See Spackman's critical review of Ivan Illich's book, Deschooling Society, The New York Times Book Review, July 11, 1971.)

It is also of interest that the Social Survey Research Centre's A Depth Study Report on Consumer Satisfaction in Canada, prepared for the Canadian Consumer Council, noted that Canadians seemed to prefer consumer information to consumer education narrowly defined. In this connection, the SSRC study noted that, in the opinion of those surveyed, the government has the responsibility to make a consumer agency designed to handle complaints and enquiries as easy and accessible to reach as possible.

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Consumer education for the future : a report to the Minister of Consumer and Corporate Affairs

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