

tions? How many? How many were serious? The short answer is that we don't know. Entero-Vioform was marketed in Canada before 1963 and was therefore

drew Tanderil from the market. Tanderil remained on the Canadian market right up until its global withdrawal. About 10 per cent of the known

"Slow-release potassium tablets such as Slow K... are dangerous and should not be used. Supplementation of the regular diet with potassium-rich foods is the safe

of side effects such as stomach and intestinal ulceration from Slow K are compared to those caused by other types of potassium tablets not to those caused by

Dr. Joel Laxchin is an emergency room physician in downtown Toronto. He is the author of *The Real Pushers: A Critical Analysis Of The Canadian Drug Industry*.

Critics play into Tories' tax strategy

OTTAWA — They have criticized its size, its shape and its packaging. They have ridiculed its foibles and railed at its inconsistencies. They have pummeled it, pulled it apart and put it back together. But there is one thing that none of the groups appearing before the Commons committee studying Ottawa's proposed goods and services tax has done: Dismissed the whole concept of a consumption tax as unthinkable. And therein lies the government's strategic opening. As long as the committee does not become a forum for a kill-the-tax movement, it is smart politics to keep it in the spotlight. The reason is simple: It propagates the idea that some sort of broadly-based consumption tax is inevitable. Once Canadians have accepted that, the rest is just a matter of negotiation.



National Affairs
Carol Goar

The Canadian Chamber of Commerce told the committee it was withholding its support for the tax, but made it clear that it was prepared to reverse its stand if Ottawa would lower the rate, apply it to a wider range of goods and services, and redouble its efforts to reduce government spending. And John Bulloch, the vociferous president of the Canadian Federation of Independent Business, called the proposed tax "a triumph of greed and politics over reason and sound tax planning." But even he admitted that the tax could be salvaged, with provincial co-operation.

Almost no one had anything good to say about the tax. But, more importantly from Finance Minister Michael Wilson's point of view, no one delivered a lethal blow.

Meanwhile, the finance department was busy preparing glossy information kits to help MPs sell the tax to their constituents. And Prime Minister Brian Mulroney was assuring Canadians that, in spite of the discontent, the government intended to go ahead with the tax as planned. "I have already indicated we have a package deal," he said.

Getting this statement on the record was necessary to set the stage for the next phase of the

process: the Great Compromise. This will come in late December, after the committee delivers its report. Wilson will pore over the list of recommendations made by his colleagues and, in deference to the wishes of Canadians, adopt a number of them.

It is not hard to guess what concessions he might make:
 □ He would have no great difficulty reducing the rate and eliminating some of his proposed exemptions. This was the route he wanted to go in the first place, but some of his cabinet colleagues feared a consumer backlash;
 □ Nor would it disturb him greatly to undertake one last round of negotiations with the provinces. A joint federal-provincial tax was always his preferred option;

□ He may be able to juggle the numbers to enrich the tax credit for low-income families while eliminating the income tax breaks for upper middle-class households; or he might find a way to simplify the paperwork for small business.

Having established at the outset that the government had no intention of changing the tax, these will look like major amendments. And Mulroney and his ministers will spare no effort to point out how flexible, and open to constructive criticism, Wilson was.

If all goes according to plan, Canadians will grudgingly admit that the revised tax, though hardly welcome, is a vast improvement over the original version.

There is a weakness in the strategy: The government has to make sure that no one capable of sparking a grass roots tax revolt comes to prominence between

now and Christmas. It is fairly easy to keep potential troublemakers off the floor of the parliamentary committee. It has received hundreds of briefs (620 at last count) from groups and individuals and it is up to the members to pick who makes oral submissions. Since eight of those members are Conservatives, the government can effectively screen the witness list.

Controlling the House of Commons is more problematical. Both opposition parties are vowing to fight the tax single-mindedly this fall. If either the Liberals or the New Democrats can ignite a populist anti-tax crusade, similar to the seniors' revolt that greeted Wilson's 1985 plan to de-index old age pensions, the Tories would have a real problem on their hands. All they can hope is that the opposition parties are too preoccupied with their own leadership battles to organize such a protest.

And, of course, there is always an outside chance that some zealot will emerge out of nowhere to act as lightning rod for the latent anti-tax sentiment in the land. But that is not a major concern. It has been seven weeks since Wilson released the details of the tax plan, and no one has surfaced yet.

The watchword, for the moment, is vigilance.

The sales tax hearings can generate as much noise and controversy and publicity as they like.

The economists can nitpick, the businessmen can threaten, the politicians can condemn and the special interest groups can complain.

All the government really has to fear is a public mutiny

Poverty can still kill in city of the dome

WHEN MY daughter's November baby is born, it will likely be healthy. She takes expensive prenatal vitamins; she charts her daily intake of milk, cheese, eggs, meat, fruit, vegetables and bread. She knows the healthy development of her baby depends, among other things, on her good eating habits before it is born.



Bruce McLeod

Many expectant Toronto mothers don't have her choices. Some are single, with below-poverty incomes, either from work or social assistance. One woman can't work because of pregnancy complications; in August a welfare worker cut off support because her husband earns \$900 a month. They pay \$650 to rent one room. After other expenses, nothing is left for extra pre-natal nutrition.

The outrageous truth is that in the city of the dome, infant mortality remains almost twice higher among poor people than rich. Children surviving birth from badly nourished mothers suffer life-long disabilities.

Forced to stretch meagre supplies among other family members, poor women often go dangerously hungry themselves. Swallowing dignity instead of food, they join 80,000 others every month in Metro foodbank lines to beg for bread. Sometimes, no wonder, abortion seems a responsible alternative.

Last March, in an unusual collaboration between the city health department, FoodShare (the city-sponsored food advocacy group), and Stop 103 (the foodbank whose feisty director, Rick Myer, believes that in a world-class city he shouldn't have a job), a wonderful new option appeared.

Every Wednesday morning, Stop 103's crowded basement at 1120 Ossington Ave. comes alive with expectant mothers, babies, volunteers, and three city-funded professionals — dietitian Sarah Lynch and public health nurses Shirley Eto and Cindy Moorecroft. The program is called Healthy Beginnings.

Mothers come at any stage of pregnancy: they continue up to six months after birth. Last week, I saw 20 women bursting with new life — "my prize pack-

age," smiles one. A birth control display, beneath a week-by-week pregnancy wall chart, draws two or three. Shirley Eto approaches unobtrusively. Cindy chats with someone behind a screen. Seven or eight sit round a table, eating cheese. Sarah, using an electric fry-pan, teaches women without eye-level ovens how to stretch basic foods and make them taste better. A woman in the corner reads The Star Food Section.

"Watch your protein level," Shirley tells a young woman; "your baby must grow now." Dietary supplements are provided, enough for a week. Fresh fruit is purchased with donations. Pre-natal sample pills are scrounged from a co-operative doctor. One woman gave birth to twins in July; they weighed a healthy five pounds each.

The young women's varied culture and languages find a common denominator in babies; communication takes care of itself.

The program is hassle-free: there are few forms and no qualifying home visits by welfare workers. The women are not talked at; they set the agenda themselves. They ask Sarah how to make noodles, cheese and a can of soup into a nourishing casserole. That knowledge is more empowering than being handed a box of Kraft Dinner; it builds dignity and self worth — commodities in short supply at most foodbanks.

Conversational buzz runs high. Sarah kneels, whispering, to a woman who clasps her hand. "Wednesdays are my favorite day," she says later. Healthy Beginnings provides a glimpse of a healthier city, where people have as much right to food as to air, and where the community secures its future by feeding children who are not yet born.

□ Bruce McLeod is a minister at Toronto's Bellefair United Church.

Doonesbury

