

*Trade Policies*

of all parties, including his own, back in 1971. I can only say that he is afraid of allowing Canadians to bite the bullet, as his government is so willing to have them do in such areas as interest rates and oil prices, but they cannot bite the bullet when it comes to something like this.

● (1500)

We cannot afford to move back. If Canadians are not ready to tackle the metric system in the grocery stores within the next year, I ask: when will they be ready? It does not seem to matter to this government that the retail food packaging industry is 80 per cent metricated, that thousands of small businesses in Canada have already planned for metrication and are literally chomping at the bit to get it over with.

Let me at this time bring to the attention of the House the concerns of two key groups involved in metric conversion. One is the Retail Council of Canada which represents the larger retail chains which account for over 50 per cent of the Canadian retail business. The council is deeply concerned—and I understand that its feelings have been communicated to the minister—that delays in the program at this time threaten the entire conversion process and will create an additional financial burden on council members. The council has urged the minister to clarify his position and to provide assurances that the program for retail chain conversion will proceed as scheduled. I understand that the council has told the minister that if a decision on this matter is not taken immediately, the industry's plans for conversion on a large scale as of January 1 will be placed in severe jeopardy.

The other concern is that of the Canadian Federation of Retail Grocers which would account for most of the business not represented by the retail council. Let me read to the House a telegram sent by this group to the minister this week. The message reads as follows:

The directors of the Canadian Federation of Retail Grocers met today and passed a resolution that they strongly oppose any slowdown of the planned conversion to metric.

We realize the public may not be receptive to change and even though we will take the brunt of the opposition, the job must be done.

Let Canadians show the world we are up to it and get the job done as quickly as possible.

Our representation covers all provinces, Newfoundland to B.C., including the territories.

In light of the overwhelming opinion of those who have a lot at stake in metric conversion, the government must be informed of the danger that it has now posed to key sectors of the economy for no real reason other than the minister's apparent fear that Canadians are too stupid or too belligerent to accept the metric system. There can be no other explanation for his actions.

To be fair, I must recognize the minister's apparent awareness that the metric system is here to stay, a pretty fair conclusion considering that the process has reached far beyond the point of no return. The process has been a smooth one, a process lauded by those from the private sector, over 2,000 volunteers, who have participated in planning and implementing the conversion.

If the minister is so concerned about the effects that conversion to the metric system will have on Canadian sensibilities, why does he not ask those who have made the greatest commitment to metrication, the small businessmen? It is they who have accepted, some reluctantly, the necessity and the inherent simplicity of the program, and it is they who are the most ardent opponents of any move on the part of the government to meddle with the retail conversion program.

Let me quote some people to whom I have talked about this threat which the government is posing, who have said such things as "the uncertainty is ruinous", "to turn back now would be criminal", "damage has already been done", and "in the United Kingdom and Australia slowdowns were absolutely fatal".

[Translation]

These remarks confirm my opinion that the government does not really care for the interests of the Canadian industry and in fact has obviously ignored its efforts and concerns with regard to metric conversion. The evasive policy which has characterized this government up to now with regard to that conversion undermines the well orchestrated efforts and the total commitment of the Canadian industry toward adopting the metric system. This almost chaotic situation now prevails simply because of the whimsical attitude of a minister, who was granted a title but has few real responsibilities.

[English]

The government talks about how Canadians must accept hard choices and decisions now for a better future for the nation. It says this in regard to oil prices and interest rates. The slogan which the government is fond of using is "bite the bullet".

Thinking about the future is obviously one thing which the government is not doing so far as metrication is concerned. As a professional educator, it is with particular interest that I note that young Canadians are fast becoming familiar with the metric system. In a matter of a few short years our schools, from coast to coast, thanks to the unanimous agreement of the provincial educational systems that conversion to the metric system is a must, will be turning out consumers who know only the metric system.

Without minimizing the difficulty which some Canadians may find in adapting to the metric system, surely this government must recognize that it cannot turn back, it cannot undermine a system which future generations of Canadians will understand and from which they will benefit, and they will be thankful to the Liberal government for its foresight.

Nobody is saying that the adjustment to the metric system will be easy for all Canadians. There will, of course, be strong objections once the stores and businesses in Canada operate completely in metric. Nevertheless, whether it is tomorrow or further down the line, conversion has to be achieved, the bullet must be bitten, and for the sake of the businesses which have invested large amounts of money and many years of effort in planning, the bullet must be bitten now before the government, through its indecision, throws what has been a remarkably