

Metric System

who has done a superb job of representing the needs and wishes of those he was elected to serve. The hon. member for Edmonton Centre (Mr. Paproski) spoke today on behalf of constituents whom he has not yet been elected to serve when he put on record a letter from a rural resident in his prospective constituency of Edmonton North.

Mr. Paproski: And the minister still has not answered that letter.

• (2050)

Mr. Elzinga: This says something for participatory democracy. I am pleased to see there are many members on this side of the House who wish to continue with this debate.

Let me close by stating my disappointment at the manner in which so many members opposite withhold their true feelings. I am not only referring to the hon. member for Crowfoot (Mr. Horner) when he crossed the floor and stated that he would hope to see changes to this legislation. I have had the opportunity to talk to various other individuals on that side who have stated that they are in disagreement with this legislation. They are muzzled by their own people, much the same way as they were muzzled in the capital punishment debate. This is the third time I have had an opportunity to participate in this debate.

Even though I realize it is somewhat futile, I hope the minister will reconsider some of the positions he has taken and will see fit to give in to some of the positive suggestions made by the hon. member for Qu'Appelle-Moose Mountain (Mr. Hamilton), the hon. member for Vegreville (Mr. Mazankowski), the hon. member for Hamilton-Wentworth (Mr. O'Sullivan) and the hon. member for Edmonton Centre (Mr. Paproski).

Hon. Alvin Hamilton (Qu'Appelle-Moose Mountain): Mr. Speaker, since we have discussed the metric conversion bill from approximately December 23 until the present time, this House has witnessed more a devastating attack on the fundamental principles of this institution of parliament and the democracy of our country than on this bill. It was a simple matter which all parties had agreed to—how would Canada move into metric conversion? This government bungled it on the basis that they did not understand parliament or this country. It was their party which went up and down this country in that great, bare, red-assed demonstration of a baboon in heat. Participatory democracy was a great thing. Everyone was going to participate in decision-making. Where are these bare, red-assed baboons today? They are sitting there as docile as alley cats. They will not face up to the fact that they do not run the government. It is run by a series of people who are described as second class mandarins.

The Official Opposition, through the leadership of the hon. member for Halton-Wentworth (Mr. Kempling), supported metric conversion in principle. On behalf of the party, he asked the government to bring forward legislation which would show the responsibility each would have in the conversion.

[Mr. Elzinga.]

Mr. Marchand: You should read his speech, Alvin, it was good. It supported metric conversion.

Mr. Hamilton (Qu'Appelle-Moose Mountain): I am glad to see the minister has awakened. The hon. member for Halton-Wentworth asked the government to show where the responsibilities lay and if there was any great harm economically to any group or individual, what was the compensation parliament was willing to provide? That was the stand on behalf of the party. This member is a manufacturer by trade and is knowledgeable of the advantages and the disadvantages of the metric system. The hon. member put his entire belief behind this conversion to the metric system. What turned him off? The fact is that as a businessman he saw second class public servants not knowing whether they were punched, countersunk or out by a steam shovel. He also saw that some of the ministers were weak and could not stand up for themselves. I remember that day in committee when he said, "If I were the boss and you were my employees, I would fire the whole bunch of you". That is exactly how the people of Canada feel.

On January 26, when this matter came up, on behalf of the Official Opposition I said that this bill was supposed to be law five days later on February 1. On behalf of my party, I offered to pass this bill that afternoon and legitimize what these grain companies had done and what other companies had done. They had been told by government officials that this was going to be law on February 1. That compromise was a simple one, namely, that we get rid of the word "hectares". We do not need hectares because we are not selling land on the world market. I thought the minister had accepted that compromise. I was prepared to go across the country helping to explain to farmers, businessmen, consumers and housewives the advantages of the metric system. When I thought the minister had agreed, we stopped talking in the House, went into committee, and the first thing that happened to us in committee was that the minister got up and repudiated what he had indicated he was willing to do. He read out a statement which was prepared by public servants, which can be described by the elegant word "crap", and that is all it was. No person could write a statement like that for the minister and be anything above the level of a moron to make the arguments put forward in that statement.

We made a compromise offer to the government on second reading that we would support the thing even though it was going to be tough. We knew people would be opposed to the bill even if they took out that word "hectare". When we heard the evidence of the representatives of the so-called farm organizations, we knew they had not consulted with their farmers. We knew some hon. members on the government side were just as depressed about the metric conversion bill as we were. Yet we presented our second compromise in committee, namely that we should not ask consumers to have available only the metric system under the law, that we should give them three more years to change over. This is what the consumers association asked for, and this is what we moved. They wanted these people to have three more years of seeing both the imperial measurement and the metric measurement