

northern parts of Canada where there is some farming and some ranching. They are the ones who are not up to date on what is happening with regard to the metric conversion for the simple reason that the news media are lacking in that part of the country so that most of them do not even know what is happening with the bill which is at present before us, nor do they know the fact that the bill will not be proclaimed. As the hon. member who spoke before me said, this is just a waste of time of the House.

The Canadian program for metric conversion has been implemented in a different manner than similar programs in the U.S. For example, in the U.S. they are making greater headway in terms of the conversion, but at the same time they have introduced subsidies to help small business in the conversion. This is one way in which metric conversion will certainly harm the industry of our country, and especially small businessmen.

I have to relate this directly to the northern part of the provinces where at present the cost of living is higher than in any other part of Canada. Conversion to the metric system will cost every taxpayer in the country, whether he pays for it with goods that will cost more from the main industry or from suppliers or whether he pays for it directly, and it is the people in the north who will be the ones to suffer most. Canadian industry views metrication favourably, and Canada's progress towards SI measurement is more advanced than in the United States, although U.S. industry is moving toward metrication at a faster pace than industry in Canada. It is unfortunate, however, that the Canadian manufacturing industry will be so hard hit by metrication. Some small firms will be harnessed with undue expenses in adapting to metric which will result in added costs. This will affect their competitive status and disrupt profits, with the added possibility of business failure in many cases.

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Large corporations will be able to absorb the added costs incurred by conversion, and it is estimated that their competitiveness and market status should remain the same. It is small business about which I am most concerned.

Besides the adverse affect on small business, automobile dealerships, service stations, garages and especially mechanics will bear the brunt of metric conversion. This is of particular importance to the riding of Churchill, where service costs and the price of gasoline and automobile parts are higher than they are in the south. The people of the north, especially those in the Churchill constituency, can ill afford the increased costs which may be passed on to them as a result of increased operating costs due to the conversion of equipment and so forth to metric.

I am sure that farmers in the Churchill constituency are not up to date or even aware of what is happening with regard to metric conversion. They are not ready for it. They really do not want it at this time because they are just now completing their seeding, and they have not had an opportunity to be brought up to date on just how the metric system is going to

Metric System

affect them. It might be different where there is mass media, but many locations in the north have no television, no newspaper, and very limited radio service. If they depend on the mail service to carry any information, they might as well scrap that because our mail service is worse now than it was when we had to depend on dog teams to carry the mail in the north.

Lack of communications has a bad effect on small businessmen, small ranchers and small farmers in the north. Many of them have heard metric conversion mentioned, but that is about the extent of it. Metric conversion is certainly being pushed down the throats of farmers, and at this time they are not ready for it. Farmers and grain handling people should have another opportunity to come before the standing committee to discuss this bill more thoroughly.

The general economy of the north, where the cost of living is astronomically high compared with other settled parts of Canada, is being adversely affected. Most municipalities in the north have resigned themselves to the fact that equipment will have to be converted to metric and that there is going to be a tough transition period. Many town councils are still unwilling to acknowledge that metric measurement is on the way. Many municipalities are lost in the confusion of metric conversion, and many are afraid of the effect such a transition will have on unsophisticated small communities with small budgets. These communities are faced with having to convert to the metric system without any help from the government in the transition period.

When I speak of the economy, I refer to the effects metric conversion will have on prices. I am afraid increased costs will be passed on to consumers in the form of increased prices, and this will contribute to already serious inflation problems. As many hon. members can imagine, inflation is very serious in the northern parts of Canada. The effects of this legislation to facilitate conversion on agriculture are as important as they are on industry.

In the interlake region of Manitoba which is an area between Lake Winnipeg and Lake Manitoba, there is mixed farming, while the area around The Pas in the region known as the Carrot River Valley, is also an important agricultural region. I am not talking about farmers who own many, many sections of land but about those on small farms. They have had numerous crop failures in the last few years due to flood or drought. This year there has been substantial rain, and as a result they have been so busy they have not had the opportunity to find out much about the metric system.

The Minister of State (Small Business) (Mr. Marchand) issued a circular to farmers which carried a lot of information. Although the same information was shown on television and was in the newspapers it does not reach them all. There must be more sophisticated means to train and teach farmers about metric conversion. Farmers are not ready to accept it at this time; they are more interested in trying to make ends meet and getting their crops planted. This metric conversion should have been introduced at a future date and not now.

In both the regions I mentioned farmers complain that they have not had an opportunity to be brought up to date on what