

*Weights and Measures Act*

some very substantial and salutary precautions which can be taken, including a proposal in a bill and the establishment of a committee of this House. Right at the beginning of this session a bill was brought in, namely, the Statutory Instruments Act. It was defective in that it did not go anything like the distance which the committee recommended, but at least it was a modest start. The bill has been shelved, packaged and put away out of sight. Here we are having ministerial grants of authority brought forward in legislation of this kind and put in the hands of this government. I say it is a dangerous situation. We will not hold up the bill on that account, but let me tell the minister that I will seize every opportunity which comes up to point this out in the hope the media of this country will take into consideration the dangerous trend which is developing.

The tragedy is that it is only when we have lost these very important rights that we find out about them and start to complain. By then, it is way beyond the time for complaining; it is far too late. It may well be that before we are finished, we may take a stand. I say to the minister, and to his colleagues, that if the government persists in bringing forward enabling legislation which will operate mainly through the regulatory device, one of these days we in this party will take a stand and say, "you will not pass the bill until the House is given an opportunity to debate in an effective way the statutory regulations Act and to establish a parliamentary committee". We will not do it this time, however.

I am glad to see the Government House Leader is here. I hope he will listen to what I have to say and will take note that there will be an occasion, when a bill is brought forward by this government which, in our opinion, gives far too much power to the government to act by order in council, when we will say "no, you will not pass the bill". I want to make it quite plain that this warning is being given in good faith.

I also want to draw attention to the number of inspectors who are needed for the implementation of the bill. When he replies now, or if he replies in committee that will do just as well, I want the minister to answer one question. Perhaps a Parliamentary Secretary could reply for him, and we know that a Parliamentary Secretary can be most effective in giving replies. Are the inspectors who will operate under this legislation the same inspectors as those who will operate under the companion bill, the packaging and labelling bill?

• (4:20 p.m.)

**Mr. Basford:** Yes.

**Mr. Baldwin:** Now, I wish to make some comment on the wide power of inspectors to freeze a business for 60 days or more, as stipulated in clause 39 of the bill. There is no question that an inspector has the right under that clause to put a business effectively out of operation for 60 days, and this is something at which we must take a good look. There will be an onus on the minister to justify that clause.

[Mr. Baldwin.]

I also point out that the bill purports to create a very substantial number of new offences. I quite agree that if you are going to have an effective piece of legislation you must have sanctions in it, but every time a bill purports to create ten, 12 or 15 new offences for which people may be summonsed, may be convicted, and may be put in jail, it is our duty in this House to examine it closely. I hope that when we get into the committee the minister will seize the opportunity to justify the need for all these provisions. The same remarks apply to the way in which the evidence is going to be introduced.

I will not take up any more of the time of the House, except to tell the minister that we are not going to object to the principle of the bill. We do not think the bill is going to be a great improvement. We think it does validate and bring up to date a number of ideas which probably are needed in legislation of this kind. We have no great objection to it, but we will examine the details with some care in committee. I hope that there the minister will have all the answers. He usually gives some answers in this House, but not the kind of answers with which we are happy. I hope he does better when we get into committee.

**Mrs. Grace MacInnis (Vancouver-Kingsway):** Mr. Speaker, we in this party are in complete agreement with the principle of the bill as outlined by the minister. He indicated that its main purpose is to make it an offence for a person to give short weights and measures. Putting it more positively, its purpose is to ensure that the consumer receives just measure for what he or she pays. I think this is an excellent objective.

As the hon. member for Peace River (Mr. Baldwin) has said, I do not think we need to say a great deal about the bill at this stage because obviously it is a very detailed and technical piece of legislation. It is essentially the kind of legislation that we must send to a committee where we can have an across-the-table discussion and get down to the details. However, there are just a few points I would like to raise in connection with it in a general way at this time.

I think the minister has said that this is really a companion piece of legislation, in the sense of being in the same context, to the packaging and labelling bill. In a way, its purpose is also to prepare for the introduction of the metric system in Canada. The minister pointed out the history of our weights and measures legislation, dating from a long time ago, all of which indicates that we are quite a long way behind many other countries in adopting the use of the metric system. I feel that Canada has been at a considerable disadvantage in many ways as a result of being so slow to adopt the metric system. Perhaps, as in so many other cases, our slowness has been because of the reluctance of the United States to adopt the metric system. As a result, we have been lazy in moving toward adoption of it.

This bill really includes three systems, both the metric system and the customary Canadian system of weights and measures, to say nothing of one part which includes land measurements from the old days of seigniorial tenure in the province of Quebec, with pied, arpent,