

Metric System

was not here earlier. He was the one who said we had not received letters from western Canada. One of the letters to which I referred was addressed to the minister, dated February 7, 1977, and apparently he has not yet received it. Maybe that is the fault of the Postmaster General (Mr. Blais).

Since the metric change-over is a federal policy initiative, we would think that the federal government would be responsible for the resulting problems and costs. However, the provinces may wish to be involved in assisting in the change-over process and the division of responsibility must be made clear. Small business must know where to go for information and financial assistance.

Governments and the business community are waiting for the federal government to establish and announce their metric conversion policies and programs. It is difficult to expect provincial governments and business to begin metric change-over planning so long as there has been no bill or joint resolution before parliament. We are concerned that parliament has never passed metrication-enabling legislation. This means that the Metric Commission, which is essentially an advisory body for one government department, is now in practice implementing a program for the entire nation before the policy decisions have been fully approved at the parliamentary level. While we commend the initiative of those who recognize that metrication requires a great deal of lead time and effort, we are concerned that decisions are being made by administrators before the legislators have done their homework. The work of the Commission should receive parliamentary examination and sanction or approval, immediately.

At the moment, metric conversion will take place on a "costs will lie where they fall" basis. Many small businessmen will find that the costs are prohibitive and will be unable to accept this approach. A mood of co-operation could turn to one of political confrontation if there is not a strong leadership initiative shown by those concerned in planning, scheduling and implementing the metric conversion program for Canada.

The joint resolution or bill which is to be introduced in parliament must contain a statement to the effect that appropriate means, financial and otherwise, will be found to help small business absorb the impact of metric change-over. Change-over dates are now being set. Committees are springing up all over the country. The metrication train has left the station. We must ensure that small business is on the train and that the cost of its ticket is not prohibitive.

Our members have approved the change-over to metrication, in principle. The Federation will attempt to be flexible in its approach. We will study metrication on a continuing basis to reflect the reaction of the small business community as the problems and costs become clarified. Pre-planning and involvement are necessary. A well defined, co-ordinated conversion program is essential. Financial and technical assistance must be provided to the small firms that will need it.

That is my contribution to this debate, Mr. Speaker. I should just like to add that the reaction we are getting to the government's "hard sell" approach in connection with metrication reminds me of what happened back in 1968 when bilingualism was such a beautiful thing in western Canada. They sent out a former minister by the name of Mr. Pelletier, I think it was, to sell the program to our people, instead of sending out someone like Jean-Luc Pépin, a man with some knowledge of selling. He would not have attempted such a "hard-sell" of a beautiful language like French. It was not needed. Similarly, the government is trying to shove this down our throats and, one day, it will regret what it is doing.

Hon. W. G. Dinsdale (Brandon-Souris): Mr. Speaker, I have not taken part in the debate up to this point—directly, that is—but I can assure Your Honour that, like other members of parliament, I have been deeply involved in seeking to interpret what the government is trying to do in its posthaste flight to metrication. It is an approach which has raised a great deal of controversy because the government has failed to

[Mr. Paproski.]

consult with the people and give the grass roots farmer a chance to be heard on the subject.

At the outset, therefore, I want to say that I support the amendment which is before the House at this third reading stage to refer the bill back to committee. I do not think there is any better way of getting the purport of legislation across to the people when controversy has arisen. The hon. member for Edmonton Centre (Mr. Paproski), who preceded me in the debate, read a series of letters showing that substantial and thoughtful controversy has arisen because of the government's failure to relate to the people. Referring this bill back to committee would provide an opportunity to convey necessary information and allay the fears which are in the minds of the farming community. It would allow time for the completion of the educational process which was neglected in the initial stages of the debate.

I am sure members will agree with me that this is not the only controversial measure which has been brought forward by the government. There has been more controversy in the past ten years than in all the previous 16 years during which I have been a member of the House of Commons. I am just completing 26 years here and I think I have had to deal with more letters of complaint, more protests expressing the unhappiness of the Canadian people, particularly in western Canada, of course, because that covers the area I represent, in the past five years than in all my previous time as a member of the House. This is because the government is bureaucratic, even authoritarian in so many of its activities.

As a matter of fact, this tendency was well described in a book which was published some years ago under the title "Trudeaucracy". What this implies is initiative in government action, legislative or otherwise, which has no consideration for the impact of changes on people or institutions, of increased costs to the small business community and so on. It is significant that the Minister of State (Small Business) (Mr. Marchand) should be in charge of the legislation. He is aware there is great protest with regard to it in the small business community.

● (1620)

As desirable as the process of metrication may be in the long run, it is not going to be achieved overnight. The agricultural industry, which is of basic importance to the well-being of the western community, is based on the Torrens system of land survey and farmers will not allow this to pass without considerable protest. The government and the minister are looking for an opportunity to save face. The Minister of State for Small Business (Mr. Marchand), stood up in this House and said that they were going to delay the proclamation of this legislation even though it is going to be passed. That was a belated attempt to save face on the part of the government, arising from the strong waves of protest. Even so insensitive a group as the present government has begun to appreciate it.

While I have not taken part in the debate hitherto, I have heard excellent speeches which have brought the points home on all the previous stages of the discussion. However, I have