

Metric System

If you live in an area which is predominantly forest or bush, a survey is expensive and takes a long time. This requirement will create economic loss and eventually will make people resent tremendously attempts at metric conversion. Clearly, the provincial government blundered. It made people feel that governments do not care about people's feelings, that they will not consult people. In years to come this will be the root of tremendous antagonism. True, farmers think this is being done by the federal government, not the Saskatchewan government. The difficulty can be resolved if the minister does what he said on May 3. Answering the hon. member for Vegreville (Mr. Mazankowski), the Minister of State for Small Business (Mr. Marchand) said, as reported in *Hansard* for May 3, page 5226:

A decision has been made not to proclaim that section of the bill on metric conversion relating to the grain industry—

That comment concerns five statutes coming under this bill. He continued that remark by saying it would not be done "until after further consultation." He finished that part of his answer with these words:

It will not be until further consultations have been held with the grain industry, and especially the farmers.

That is a promise and a threat. In saying all this, I am thinking more of the farmers than of the heads of the grain industry who have spent several hundred thousand dollars converting their equipment and could use the new system immediately if it suits their operations. Members of parliament should think more of the plight of the farmers, because they make up 99 per cent of the people in the grain industry who could be adversely affected. We cannot consider the vested interests of the grain companies, companies which showed bad judgment in believing the representatives of the federal government who told them this law would be in force by February 1, 1977.

We do not want to harm the grain companies. At the same time, we should not proceed with metric conversion until we have removed some of the obstacles I have mentioned. One such obstacle or difficulty is the attack on the land measurement system. Mr. Speaker, we are not selling our lands on world markets. As the hon. member for Vegreville said, our land measurement system has its roots in antiquity and is part of our culture. If you think our western farmers are annoyed, just wait for the reaction of farmers in Ontario and Quebec where they use various systems of land measurement. In Quebec they measure land in the arpent and the acre. In Ontario they use many different systems of surveying. For instance, boundaries are described as running from this boulder to that oak tree, or to that bend in the river. They use leaps and bounds and jumps, and almost every measurement of which you can think.

From time to time in Ontario and rural Quebec townships set up what are known as fence viewing committees which are composed of leading citizens who settle boundary disputes between farmers. If you force the people of Ontario and Quebec to accept the metric system for measuring land not

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sold on world markets you will create an economic storm and eventually a political storm.

Not all metric measurements are to endure internationally. The pamphlet "The international system of units (SI), an outline of Canadian usage", published by the Canadian Standards Association, points out that seven units of metric measurement will be used a limited time only. Included among them are the nautical mile, the knot, a unit of speed measurement used at sea and in the air, the angström, the pronunciation of which escapes me but which ought to be printed in *Hansard*, the hectare and the are. A side note accompanying the table to which I referred reads: Although the are and hectare, by international agreement, have been shown as units to be used for a limited period of time, those units are not to be permanent parts of the international system of measurement.

What does this mean? It means that although the hectare will not be used internationally as a unit of measurement, we shall enforce it on our farmers, create a great political uproar for no reason, and force farmers to take an economic loss in connection with a measurement system nobody else will be using. As I told the minister privately, when he keeps the promise he made on May 3 he should tell officials of Saskatchewan, Alberta and other provinces contemplating metric conversion that the hectare is not to be a permanent unit of measurement. Therefore, we should do in Canada what is done in the United Kingdom and the United States. We should adhere to our traditional arpent or acre. True, final responsibility in this field rests on the provinces, not on the federal government. However, we must let the provincial governments working on metric conversion know that the hectare, part of the present metric system, will not be part of the international metric system in future.

In a moment I shall move an amendment which will bring this debate back on the rails, as it were. My proposed amendment will be consistent with the minister's promise. I say he ought to consult the farmers. We are not so greatly concerned about the heads of grain companies, and by grain companies I mean private as well as co-operative companies which are interested mainly in profit. Their interest in the farmer is secondary. We members of this federal parliament should bear in mind what is good for our farmers, their costs, their political feelings, and try to influence the provinces to eliminate hectares from provincial legislation and provincial orders in council.

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It would give the minister time, without wasting the time of parliament in useless debate. When we proposed, in committee, amendments to make the clauses dealing with the grain industry permissive, the Liberal members of the committee turned them down. Naturally, if we are going to vote party or partisan on this issue we have to realize that they can force it through. However, they force us to fight like tigers to stop them. If the government really wants to get this metric conversion back on the path again, it should co-operate in trying to do it properly. The grain companies do not want the govern-