

*Weights and Measures Act*

federal and provincial levels not be in conflict. There are other areas in which the same situation holds true.

We certainly do not want to find ourselves in a situation where there is a conflict in jurisdiction, where the legislation passed by one level of government may be made null and void by another level of government. This is quite possible. Nothing less than a fully co-ordinated attack on the problem will suffice. I feel that the bill put forward by the hon. member for Winnipeg North is valuable because it does direct public attention to a particular problem, perhaps even to the problem as a whole. I believe it could be a very useful tool for stimulating public debate in this area.

A little earlier I mentioned the problem of quality in connection with weights and measures. I believe I should also come to the point of how you can find out just what the ingredients are that are going into many of these packaged products, particularly foods, which we are using now. Unless one is a chemist, it is almost impossible to tell what is in these packages. In most cases the ingredients are listed under their technical names and not in terms that we can understand. I do not have any examples to give at the moment. However, I am sure if you go down to your friendly grocer and look at any of the food packages, you will find it is almost impossible to say what has been added to the original product.

I really do not have any suggestions as to how this problem can be eliminated, or as to how the doubt many people have about the quality of the product going into these packages can be relieved. This problem of protecting the consumer is not peculiar to Canada, it is a world wide problem. Perhaps we feel it more because increasingly the products we buy are coming to us in a highly developed form. In other words, we are not buying raw fish, we are buying processed fish. We are not buying the ingredients for a cake mix; we are buying ingredients that have been combined so that very little labour on our part is required. Because of the complexity of this process, we have not educated ourselves to know precisely what we are buying. In other, less developed countries where people go to market on a daily basis, they see and buy precisely what they want. It is on view for them. However, we are buying highly processed products, and we are not all aware of the precise methods of processing, nor are we aware of what has been put into the product.

[Mr. Reid.]

One criticism which can be levelled against this bill is based on the legislation which it seeks to amend, and that is that the Weights and Measures Act does not, in itself, provide a framework which is adequate to meet current practices in packaging. In many cases we are told the very requirements which the act has already laid down produce inflexibilities, prevent experimentation and improvements. This not only hampers the producer of the product but also the packager. It hampers as well any new, meaningful weights and measures reservations.

It is my information that the Department of Trade and Commerce, weights and measures branch, has had this matter under consideration for some time and is seeking, in concert with the provinces and in concert with the new Department of Consumer and Corporate Affairs, to evolve new standards which will be effective nationally. They are seeking to co-operate with provincial standards which have applicability in this area. I am further informed that it is hoped within the next year the government will be able to recommend to parliament a new approach covering the whole area, with provincial approval. It is hoped this new approach will prove to be a flexible and equitable means of providing this type of measurement protection which is desired and needed by all.

● (5:30 p.m.)

One aspect that has to be borne in mind is that there is no sense in changing the present regulations unless you are certain the new legislation will work. We have seen examples in this house of new legislation being proposed, but with obvious flaws in it because it had not been cleared with the people who had a vital interest in the subject. In the case of measurement regulation, we are dealing with a highly technical aspect of a very limited subject. If the new measurements which are presented are not workable, or have not been properly thought out, then their impact will be to throw the whole situation into chaos. If you adopt new regulations which do not work or do the job for which they are designed, then it will be almost impossible to revert to the former ones which, despite their limitations, some of which I have mentioned, did provide a useful measure of control. I am sure that the investigations undertaken by Senator Hart and the United States senate, as embodied in the bill of the hon. member for Winnipeg North, will be given consideration by the appropriate