

*Small Businesses Loans Act*

country—showed me a scale which cost \$150. The only thing in the store that he needed to weigh on that scale was fruit and vegetables. Now he has to convert to metric and a metric scale will cost \$300. Mr. Speaker, that may not sound much to rich MPs—if there are any rich MPs—but \$300 is a lot of money to someone operating a small business. When I was in business there were occasions when I was happy to have a \$50 net profit at the end of some periods, although other periods were much better. To this man \$300 was a tremendous amount of money, and he felt that he would just have to stop selling fruit and vegetables. His customers would then have to use gasoline to drive the four miles to Drumheller or the eight miles to East Coulee.

I suggest that the metric system is not helping the economy of this country at all, Mr. Speaker. I urge hon. members to slow it down. I hope it will stop, but I do think at least we should slow it down.

Recently I was invited to attend a meeting of businessmen and farmers which was called an "anti-metric" meeting. One farmer, who was not a wonderful speaker, said, "This metric system—I don't understand it. I don't know what it is all about." He looked at me and said, "Don't make me a foreigner in my own country. I was born in this country." Incidentally, he was born in Quebec. He said, "I have lived in western Canada most of my life. Don't make me a foreigner in my own country by bringing in a system of weights that I cannot understand."

If there is merit in metric, Mr. Speaker, let us do it properly—through the schools so that our boys and girls may become acquainted with it and not become foreigners in their own country. I am speaking now of metric from the point of view of business, Mr. Speaker, the economic aspect. I think it is a factor in the destruction of some of our businesses.

● (1640)

There is one other point I would like to mention to the minister. I know that it is not his responsibility, possibly it is that of the Postmaster General (Mr. Ouellet). It concerns the mail service. An insurance agent in the town of Turner Valley, Alberta, told me that the Post Office was ruining his business. Why? Because the agent is not a self-issuing agent. Instead she has to take the application for a policy and mail it to Calgary or Edmonton, or in one or two cases mail it to companies which have offices in Regina or Winnipeg. She told me that it was taking her three or four weeks to get a policy back. I would suggest to the minister that the government take a real look at this situation and carry out corrections in order to give us a mail service that will get the mail to the people. We do not expect it to be a press-a-button solution but we think steps can be taken to improve the situation so that businesses are not being hurt by mail that does not arrive on time.

I agree with the bill. I wish the bill would cover inventories. I wish it would go beyond the \$100,000 limit because I have one or two businesses in my constituency that want to expand

beyond that point. But it does not matter what figure is used, there will always be someone who wants to go beyond it.

I want to express to the minister that in administering this act we hope we can prevent bankruptcies and bring back the buoyancy to the economy of our country.

**Mr. Scott Fennell (Ontario):** Mr. Speaker, I would like to congratulate you and your colleagues on your appointments, and I particularly want to congratulate Madam Speaker.

Yesterday in this House we had a debate on Bill C-19 which had to do with the employment tax credit. Today we are debating Bill C-17, an act to amend the Small Businesses Loans Act. All I can make of this is a whole bunch of patchwork solutions created by the administration on the other side. All this administration does is create problems for the small businessman, and for the industry of this country, without facing up to the reality of what the problem is today. We hear it stated that this is a marvellous situation, that there will be an increase of \$25,000, that is, up to \$100,000. What would the rate have been last week for the poor businessman borrowing that money? It was one per cent over prime which is one per cent over 17 per cent. That is 18 per cent. No businessman can stand that type of interest cost.

We are talking about small business. What is small business? It is not what we knew it was 20 and 30 years ago. We are talking about micro-business. In the United States, SBA addresses small business based on the industry and based on the number of employees in different industries. You are not looking after anything but storekeepers, which is great. But in this country we are forgetting the medium-sized industry, we are forgetting about the micro-business, the mini-business, the small business and the medium business. But I am really annoyed that we are forgetting about Canadian business and Canadian production.

Why will the government not bring in one composite package to give us a total overview of where this country is going? Instead of businessmen having to go through books and consult lawyers in order to determine what kind of grants they can get, let us get one package together so that business—not small, not mini, not micro—can exist in this country.

Returning to the subject of interest rates, which members on the other side are trying to overcome with the \$500,000 bond that our government put in—

**Mr. Evans:** It is Bill C-17, please.

**Mr. Fennell:** I am talking about the interest which the small businessman has to pay, and the small business loans. I have said it before a man cannot pay an 18.5 per cent interest rate. The interest rate has been compounded by this government. It has been compounded because it keeps spending money. As it spends money, it costs us more to borrow money. We cannot borrow money at lower rates today. This government is now asking small business to compound the same problem. We have no control on our interest rates. We are completely dependent on American corporations and people who sponsor us going into debt.