

● (1240)

During second reading of the bill I was amazed that the minister did not accept the reasoned amendments of the hon. member for Moose Jaw (Mr. Neil) who suggested that because conversion to the metric system is a painful process there should be a dual system for a period to allow the western farmer to get used to metric. We already have cans and boxes labelled in two languages, so it would not seem much of a problem to have them labelled in two forms of measurement as well until farmers converted to the metric system. The government's rejection of that suggestion reflected its inflexible approach to conversion. We hope they will look more seriously at the amendment proposed by the hon. member for Qu'Appelle-Moose Mountain.

The minister decided that rather than accept the amendments, certain clauses of the bill would not be proclaimed until the farmers had been consulted again. I see this as an admission that the metric commission did not consult all the farmers of western Canada in the first instance, but accepted the views of a few farm leaders as being the general view. The hon. member for Vegreville (Mr. Mazankowski) mentioned that he felt the farm organizations had not represented the wishes of their memberships in the way they should, and now the farmers are approaching those organizations saying they are opposed to metric conversion and that the organizations misrepresented them. The only option left to us was to have the hon. member for Qu'Appelle-Moose Mountain move an amendment to have clauses 2, 6, 8 and 10 reinstated in the bill so that farmers and farm organizations can be called before the committee again to ensure there is adequate consultation with the people affected.

We should not be asked to accept the promise of the Minister of State for Small Business (Mr. Marchand) that parts of the bill will not be proclaimed if we pass it. I think that is a lot to ask. The need for consultation is very clear. It became evident during committee hearings that the government had done little to ascertain the feelings of producer groups, despite the fact that the mandate of the metric commission in the first instance stated that the benefits of conversion to the metric system should be achieved at minimal cost and, second, that conversion to the metric system as a whole should be effected to the best advantage to Canada. It has been stated very clearly today that we have no objection to conversion as far as international trade is concerned. Many companies in this country and the United States have already converted. There seems to be no advantage to Canada to convert the acre and the mile, however, as these are part of our culture and the system we grew up with.

Consultation should not consist of *post facto* information sessions wherein the government instructs farmers on the benefits of metrication. Consultation is, by definition, a two-way process—a give and take dialogue whereby mutually acceptable solutions are arrived at. I do not think the government has the slightest intention of establishing this kind of constructive dialogue.

### Metric System

The government continually turned a deaf ear to any arguments for duality made by members in committee. The minister's recent commitment to meet groups which will be affected by any Wheat Board changes obliges him at least to listen to the arguments in favour of retaining the terms "acre" and "bushel". I think he will be astounded at the intensity of feeling in the prairies and the intensity of the argument western farmers will offer for retention of these two terms.

I should like to offer the government a taste of some of the reactions I have received from farmers in my constituency concerning the change to the metric system. Recently I sent a questionnaire to constituents and received a large return, chiefly from rural areas. The following comments were pretty standard: "Poor idea and too costly, conditions being such as they are. We need metric like a cat needs ten tails. It costs millions and confuses millions. It is the worst thing that could happen to agriculture. It will be a financial disaster to many persons. The movement to tonnes and hectares is too much". I could go on and on Mr. Speaker, but this is the gist of the replies I received. Farmers are not in favour of changing to the metric system of measurement at the present time. These people are angry that their opinions have been ignored, and they are bitter at the federal government's insensitivity to their special problems.

I do not understand the logic of arguments for wholesale conversion to the metric systems. It seems to boil down to consistency for consistency's sake. Surely it is time we moved beyond this closed-mind approach. One of the major principles of democratic governments is that they are responsive to the wishes of the people who elected them to govern. In this case the government seems a little slow to acknowledge the wishes of the people. All we are doing here is providing them with time to consult the people again. I know the minister is scratching his head, and I believe he is serious about attempting to meet these requirements.

The government of the United Kingdom should serve as a good example. It made major concessions to groups which sought the same thing western farmers are seeking, and agreed that the mile, the inch, the pint and the gallon would be exempt from statutory metrication. The governments of Sweden and the government of the United States have also indicated their willingness to have a mixed system of measurement in certain areas. If other nations can demonstrate this kind of flexibility, why not the government of Canada?

Judging by the outcry from farmers in my constituency the need to retain the acre is evident. These men and women are very upset about the change from acres to hectares. Since the first day on their land they have dealt in terms of acres, measured their pesticides, bought their seed and sown their crops all with reference to the unit of the acre. Now they are being asked to make their calculations in terms of hectares.

● (1250)

The farmers of this country are already in a precarious position. The spiralling cost of almost all major farm inputs, combined with inflation in other sectors, means the farmer is