

Adjournment Debate

Members of the Opposition, and others, would he discuss with the Minister in charge of metric the feasibility of changing the regulations to allow labelling in both metric and imperial. I received a very convoluted answer to the first question. I received a similar convoluted answer to the question I asked last Friday. This is not uncommon of the Minister of Agriculture who maintains he is a friend of the farmers, but certainly does not display his friendliness to the farmers when he ignores such a simple matter as a change in regulations to allow dual labelling. The Minister ended up by saying that the Hon. Member would like to drag us back to the 18th century, or something like that. That is quite an answer from the Minister to such a very serious question.

I would like the Minister to tell me what is wrong with dual labelling, metric and imperial? What harm would it do? It is a simple matter, and it is what the farmers want. It is causing damage because of errors in calculations. The chemical companies are very happy to label in both metric and imperial, but the Minister says no. He is the Minister of Agriculture, the Minister who is charged with looking after the farmers' interests. There is nothing wrong with bilingual labelling but apparently there is something wrong with dual labelling in metric and Imperial.

● (1815)

I would be interested to hear the Parliamentary Secretary explain to me and not only the farmers of Ontario, but of Canada, what is wrong or what damage could be caused by dual labelling. With dual labelling those young people who understand metric could use metric, and those older people who do not understand metric and have used Imperial for many years could continue to use Imperial without having to use a calculator to go through the complicated procedure of converting metric measurement to Imperial. It is as simple as that. I would like to hear an answer to that question from the Member who is responding.

Mr. Maurice Bossy (Parliamentary Secretary to Secretary of State): Mr. Speaker, it is a pleasure to respond to the Hon. Member for Moose Jaw (Mr. Neil). I must say that I am sure the Hon. Member recognizes that the Hon. Minister of Agriculture (Mr. Whelan) is likely the most sensitive man to the needs of the farmer of anyone in Canada.

The conversion of pesticides to metric was undertaken only after broad consultation and discussion. All industries and representatives of the various agricultural and food system organizations involved in the National Metric Conversion Program stressed that once the metric system was adopted only metric terms should be used.

The Government cannot support any initiative that will undermine metric conversion. Favourable experience in other parts of the world supported the decision to pursue a hard conversion, an approach that has received broad support in many conversion programs.

In order to bring about uniform conversion with minimum disruption, the Department of Agriculture has produced a

standard set of metric conversion tables for pesticides and a series of pamphlets dealing with the particular metric terminology used in various crop production programs.

Mr. Neil: They were wrong last year.

Mr. Bossy: The Minister and his Department believe that this effort has been successful and feel that any disruption is now largely behind us.

Provincial agricultural departments and agricultural pesticide companies also have extensive programs to assist the farmer in dealing with the use of metric labelled pesticides.

Since 1979, federal and provincial Governments have been involved in an ongoing educational and public awareness program. These efforts seem to be producing results. A case in point is that a series of tests were run at evening classes in Manitoba in February of 1981 to determine whether farmers could undertake the calculations required for spraying, using both Imperial and metric systems. Interestingly enough, the rate of error was much higher when calculations were done in Imperial units.

The Government appreciates that any change-over period and learning process is trying, perhaps particularly for farmers who use a varied range of measurements in their daily lives. Farmers in Britain, Australia and New Zealand have found that the advantages of metric far outweigh any temporary irritation. I think the same is true of our Canadian producers.

I hope I have been able to explain why continued use of only metric terminology is a must. Indeed, if we were to revert to a system of dual labelling, I would have to view it as a backward step.

● (1820)

RAILWAYS—CROWSNEST PASS RATE—RESOLUTIONS OF
LEGISLATURES OPPOSING PROPOSED CHANGES. (B)
JUSTIFICATION FOR MINISTER'S POSITION. (C) RAIL LINE
ABANDONMENT POLICY

Mr. Laverne Lewycky (Dauphin-Swan River): Mr. Speaker, on April 27 I asked the Minister some questions concerning the consensus in the West with regard to changing the Crow rate which the Prime Minister (Mr. Trudeau) had said would be essential before he would touch the Crow rate. I received a rather cryptic response from the Minister, indicating that he was aware of it. But his awareness did not seem to translate into any kind of action. There seems to be a dichotomy between his head knowledge and his ability to respond to it.

I wish to draw the attention of the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Transport (Mr. Flis) to the fact that there were two resolutions passed in provincial legislatures. One was passed on March 15, 1983, by the Manitoba legislature, which consists of Conservative and New Democratic Party Members. A similar resolution was passed on February 22, 1983 by the Saskatchewan legislature, which consists of Conservative Party and New Democratic Party Members.

There have also been hearings in the Province of Manitoba; the agricultural committee, which consists of Members of all