

Metric System

down the complete program of metric conversion to cover a ten-year period. However, we have not seen that.

The order in council to which I referred instructed the commission in item 7 as follows:

The Commission shall advise the Minister on the need for legislation or any other action that may be required to facilitate conversion to the metric system.

We talked to the commission about this when we had some of its members before our committee, but they were just blank on the question of legislation. As closely as I can calculate, there are at the present time about 92 statutes which will have to be amended to accommodate the metric system. I can only say to the minister responsible for this measure that he has had an indication in this debate of the difficulties with just a few of the items which are being dealt with in Bill C-23. There are 92 or so more statutes to be amended. If the minister wants to make some progress, I urge him to bring in a metric bill and lay the balance of the program out. Surely that is not too much to ask.

We have spent something in the order of \$20 million on metric conversion so far, and what have we got for it? We have a very confused picture. We have 1,500 people on the sectoral committees of the Metric Commission. These are mostly technical people. They are not market-oriented at all. There is no representation from small and medium sized businesses to speak of.

In other words, the corporate elite is engineering metric conversion. Those are the people who have financial base which enables them to send their people to Ottawa to sit on those sectoral committees and to help the government engineer this conversion. We have a bunch of technocrats who are using a critical path method, but they are adhering very rigidly to the dates set down by the commission.

The biggest problem I have discovered as a result of talking to people in industry who are working with the Metric Commission is that there is a tremendous lack of communication. What they are saying is that we should inform the informers, because there is only a handful of organizations which have the means to communicate with their various members. People in industry get together and form little industrial associations so that they can talk over their mutual problems; but let us remember that it takes money to run those organizations and to disseminate information, and there is only a handful of large organizations which have the means to communicate with all their members. Let us remember also that not everyone in industry belongs to one of those groups. The biggest problem is lack of communication, and the fact is that there is no representation from small and medium sized businesses to speak of. I know from talking with the Canadian Federation of Independent Businessmen that their constant complaint is that they have no representation or no input with regard to metric conversion.

Then there are mechanics and people who are concerned about buying tools. They wonder whether they are going to get some allowance for the special tools they have to buy. I have to concede that, after looking into the matter on my own and after talking with various tool manufacturers, I have found

[Mr. Kempling.]

that the cost is not as great as some would have us believe. We have heard figures of \$3,000 and \$1,500 as the cost of a mechanic's tools and so forth, but the cost is not that high. The tool manufacturers tell us that the cost is quite a bit less than that; \$150 or \$200 in many cases was all that was needed to convert. However, these people are looking for an allowance. After all, if you are running a business and buy tools, you can deduct the cost of those tools as an expense. However, the man who has to supply his own tools cannot do that. He does get an income tax allowance of so many dollars a year, but that is just for the replacement of existing tools which are broken. He is looking for something beyond that.

It is my understanding that the Metric Commission recommended a tax allowance and the income tax form, but that was rejected by the Department of Finance on the ground that it might set a precedent. That is a pretty flimsy way to look at it.

However, the Metric Commission went back in its bureaucratic way and came up with an alternative method. Hon. members will not believe this. The metric mafia says the alternative method of giving an allowance for tools would be this: first, the mechanic purchases a tool; he receives a sales slip describing the tool and designating it as a metric tool; he mails the sales slip to the Metric Commission, after completing, of course, the appropriate form in true government style; the Metric Commission investigates the claim and, if it approves it, it passes it along to the Department of Supply and Services. In due course the Department of Supply and Services issues a cheque to the mechanic and mails it out to Manpower, which distributes the cheque to the mechanic. Can hon. members imagine a more complicated way of reimbursing someone who buys a metric tool? Is it not incredible that all those steps should have to be taken?

● (2130)

One would think the government would make some accommodation for this matter on personal income tax forms, but no, it has not done this. There will be a proliferation of hundreds of thousands of pieces of paper. People will be running around checking catalogues and advertisements to see if it is being done according to the government's standard. The federal government has not even consulted all its departments to determine how they will be affected by the metric system. That does not show a strong commitment on the government's part. That is partly why we say this present legislation is inadequate.

What is the Metric Commission? Basically it is a bunch of misfits, and I say that with all due respect. It is my impression that if a department wants to get rid of someone, it sends him to the Metric Commission. That is why I said the commission is nothing but a bunch of misfits. It has not thought this question through. Some time ago I talked to people in the Canadian lumber industry from the west coast, one of whom had been on a sectoral committee. He said that the lumber industry could convert, but that cost was the important factor.

We are told that conversion to the metric system is to be complete by 1980, and I wondered if the lumber industry could