

Small Business

in severe distress. This country is in serious condition, and a great many of us are well aware of it. And because of the calculated indifference of this government, things seem to be getting worse. There is no doubt that everything else is upside down, so why not the flag? Is the government waiting perhaps until the economic chaos it has created gets so bad that it will simply then hoist the white flag of surrender? A good many of us feel the government should do that already.

The government is forcing thousands of Canadians to surrender. Every day that passes, more and more Canadians have to surrender their homes, their farms, their businesses and their jobs. Pretty soon we will all be waving white flags because there will be nothing more to surrender. There are others on this side of the House who have repeatedly and urgently tried to get the government to take responsible action to eliminate the mess we are now in. They have spoken of the plight of thousands of Canadians. They have dealt with the general situation and with particular segments. I join in condemning this government and wish to draw attention to a particular community in this country which is among those most hard hit by this government's economic mismanagement. I am speaking of the thousands and thousands of small businessmen in all provinces and in every sector of this country.

This government has subjected the small business community to a number of financially punishing burdens. The relentless push to metric conversion is a perfect example of this. Converting to the metric system has been a monetary nightmare for the business community and consequently the consumer.

Conversion in the retail food sector, forcing grocers to switch meat and produce scales from ounces and pounds to grams and kilograms, could cost us as much as \$200 million. I noted the comments of the New Democratic critic, the hon. member for Kamloops-Shuswap (Mr. Riis). I also noted the comments of the Minister of State for Small Businesses and Tourism (Mr. Lapointe) who seemed to raise his eyebrows at that amount, implying he thought it was a ridiculous figure. I believe he quoted conversion costs as amounting to between \$45,000 and \$48,000. I presume he meant that \$45,000 to \$48,000 would apply to certain individual stores. He is shaking his head. But I am quite sure that for Eaton's, Simpsons, and the Bay the cost of conversion will be a lot higher than \$50,000. It was mentioned earlier by other speakers that the majority of the metric scales will have to be purchased abroad which, in turn, will provide jobs outside of the country instead of here in Canada. This relentless target date of January 1, 1982, is certainly unpopular.

One grocer in a metric conversion test area said that he had to pay \$900 to convert his scale, and the test cost him \$100,000 in lost sales when customers went elsewhere.

An overwhelming majority of businessmen and consumers are opposed to metric conversion. But this government has never shown the slightest inclination or willingness to respond to public opinion, and there is no indication that it ever will. The devastating impact of the fiscal ineptitude of this government is quickly and painfully destroying hundreds of small

businesses in this country every day. Because the small businessman and businesswoman live in the shadow of the giant corporations, the impact is harder for many to recognize.

There are over one million small businesses in Canada and they create two thirds of the jobs. Small businesses in this country generate at least 20 per cent of the value of all goods and services produced. The small business community is obviously a vital segment in our economy, a very important constituency that cannot and should not be treated in an offhand manner.

I am sure that the minister for small businesses understands this. I would suggest to him though that he ensure that his own aides realize it as well. It was disturbing to learn that a call to his office last week to obtain figures on the small businesses which I have just cited resulted in a reply that the office kept no such figures, and the suggestion was made that the caller try elsewhere. Surely the credibility of a minister is in question when people in the minister's own office plead ignorance when asked the most basic of questions. I heard the minister today give some indication as to the importance of small business. If people in his own office do not seem to have this information, I would suggest that he have his aides read his speech carefully so they will have it. If small businesses were to operate in the same manner as some of the people in the minister's office, they would soon be out of business. One would think, given the reams and reams of paperwork forced on small businesses by the government, that statistics would be crowding the minister right out of his office.

For years the small business community has been inundated with mandatory government forms. Some businessmen and women spend about as much time on government paper work as they do in operating their own businesses. This pile of paper, completed under duress, is both annoying and costly. It is frequently unnecessary. The small businessman and woman, not having the resources to hire high-priced lawyers or accountants like their multinational counterparts, must shoulder the paper work burden alone. A good many of them burn the midnight oil in order to complete these many forms. Some of the paper work these days involves government bankruptcy forms.

There are more bankruptcies in small businesses than in any other segment of the economy. We heard statistics and figures given showing just how many bankruptcies there are at the present time. Thanks to the government's acceptance of the policy of higher and higher interest rates, many small businesses have gone under, and there are reportedly hundreds more which are on the verge of bankruptcy.

Just this past weekend I spoke to two or three of the businessmen in my community. One in particular, a hardware merchant, mentioned the high interest rate he was paying on loans, I believe it was 21 per cent. This is a staggering amount. It is also a reason why so many small businesses are in such serious condition.

People all across the country, who have worked hard enough to save money to start their own businesses and who have put in long hours to make sure their business remains viable, are