

Metric System

system as it would apply to the grain trade is the best thing since sliced bread.

● (2010)

What is more revealing about this whole debate is the behaviour of the Minister without Portfolio (Mr. Horner) from Crowfoot. Where does he stand in this whole scenario? Hon. members may recall that he was supposed to take the metric system from the backs of the farmers when he joined the Liberal ranks. I think it is fair to point out that he has not made a speech in the House of Commons on this bill. He made a little noise in the committee—

Mr. McKinley: He is muzzled now.

Mr. Mazankowski:—but as my hon. colleague suggests, he is muzzled now. Where is he today? What is he doing about the progress which this government wants to make with this particular bill, without making any commitments or any changes? The Minister without Portfolio chooses to remain silent. We can only conclude that he does not have enough influence on the government to convince it to withdraw the bill, or to accept our amendment, or to let the bill die. Now that the government has the minister under control, it seems to take great satisfaction in the fact that the bill has been introduced and reintroduced. The government seems to be playing with the minister like a yo-yo. Last Thursday he was in the chamber. He listened, but he dared not participate in the debate. One can only wonder why he is so silent now and why he does not have the influence which we heard so much about when he crossed the floor to join the Liberal ranks. One has to wonder why he does not speak now; as we all know, it is not usual for the Minister without Portfolio to remain silent on an issue which affects western Canadians.

Mr. Andre: On any issue.

Mr. Mazankowski: Or any issue, for that matter. I am disappointed in the minister from Crowfoot because he has failed to deliver a promise to western Canadian producers. He has let western Canada down, and I am disappointed on his behalf that the government has pulled the rug from under him. I am sure this must cause him considerable embarrassment.

The government has run out of legislative items on the order paper, and so it has been trying to deal with the bits and pieces of legislation which remain. However, it is quite obvious now that the government is hell-bent on proceeding with this bill in spite of the widespread protest and the growing opposition across the country. I said in an earlier speech that this legislation is more like metric coercion than metric conversion, and as it passes and becomes effective in the grain industry and in other industries farmers will probably refer to it as "metric confusion". The fact of the matter is that conversion in the grain trade is totally unnecessary. It is expensive, and it is going to cause a great deal of inconvenience to the producers of western Canada.

What is very troublesome and what bothers me very deeply is the fact that we have here another example of the wishes of

[Mr. Mazankowski.]

the majority being ignored. Quite frankly, I am disappointed and saddened by that fact. I believe this measure is contrary to the best interests of our parliamentary democracy. I believe it is contrary to preserving and building a trust and a confidence in our system of parliamentary democracy. There can be absolutely no question that conversion in the grain trade as it would affect producers is clearly vigorously opposed.

I say this in spite of what farm organizations have said in the committee and publicly. I pointed out in my speech last week that one farm organization decided to canvass its membership some time in March 1977. The bill was to become law on February 1, 1977, and I think that simply illustrates the fact that farm organizations did not consult the producers they represent. They took it for granted.

It is no wonder, when we have an issue as important and as vital as this, that interest would be generated. Many comparisons and many observations have been made about the impact of metric conversion as it would apply to western Canada. Many have said that the system we now have is an inherent part of our western culture and that this change will be very disruptive to the land measurement system and to our way of life. It is no wonder, when a piece of legislation is thrust upon a very large segment of the population of Canada, that our parliamentary institutions come under attack. Many people say, "Well, so what; those guys sitting in Ottawa simply do what they want to do; they will not listen to anybody". That is what has happened with regard to metric conversion. Many producers across this country have resigned themselves to the fact that metric is coming, that it is a *fait accompli*, that there is nothing they can do about it and that they will have to grin and bear it.

At the very outset we on this side of the House took the position that the conversion process should be undertaken through legislation. I remind hon. members that this is one of the first pieces of legislation which has ever been proposed in the House to effect metric conversion, as the hon. member for Winnipeg South Centre (Mr. McKenzie) stated. Our position was clearly a responsible one, and if we are going to have a very major change thrust upon us, it should be in the form of legislation and not done by order in council.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Mazankowski: It is no wonder that there is widespread cynicism about parliament, about members of parliament and about our institutions.

Mr. Paproski: Particularly about this government.

Mr. Mazankowski: Much of this cynicism flows from the attitude of this government, from the way it carries on in its arrogant fashion and from the way it conducts the business of this nation. No wonder there is mistrust about how we do things here and about what we do here. It is no wonder that there is suspicion. We can ill afford that at this time. Parliamentary freedom is something we should treasure, preserve and fight for with all our might.