

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Thursday, June 9, 1977

The House met at 11 a.m.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[English]

STATUTE LAW (METRIC CONVERSION) AMENDMENT ACT, 1976

AMENDMENTS TO WHEAT BOARD ACT TO FACILITATE CONVERSION TO METRIC SYSTEM

The House resumed, from Monday, June 6, consideration of the motion of Mr. Marchand (for Mr. Chrétien) that Bill C-23, to facilitate conversion to the metric system of measurement, be read the third time and do pass.

Mr. Gordon Towers (Red Deer): Mr. Speaker, rather than speak on the bill at this time I would like to raise a point of order with you, sir, that I believe you have already said you would consider. In view of the fact that in my opinion this House should not be asked to deal with the bill in its present form at this time, with your permission, sir, I would like to return to the discussion that has taken place in the House on the bill. I would refer, first of all, to *Hansard* of April 21, 1977, at page 4844 where the hon. member for Moose Jaw (Mr. Neil) asked the following question of the minister:

Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Minister of State for Small Business. In view of the great concern that still exists amongst people in western Canada regarding the changes from acres to hectares and bushels to tonnes, as evidenced by the many letters that are being received by the western members, and I assume by the minister himself, and in view of the importance of cabinet solidarity, I wonder if the hon. minister has any intention of withdrawing the metric bill?

The Minister of State for Small Business (Mr. Marchand) answered:

Mr. Speaker, at this stage we have no intention of withdrawing the bill. I know that the Minister without Portfolio has some concerns. I will be listening to them because he knows very well what the farmers want.

The point I want to make is that the minister said he would be listening. Further to that, as reported at page 5226 of *Hansard* of May 3, 1977, the hon. member for Vegreville (Mr. Mazankowski) posed the same question:

● (1110)

Mr. Speaker, I should like to direct a question to the Minister of State (Small Business). In view of the acceleration of widespread protest emanating from the producers of western Canada against the conversion to metric in the grains industry, is the minister giving any consideration whatsoever to the various representations he and other members have received and has he now reached the conclusion that the producer organizations upon which he relied when consider-

ing this particular piece of legislation did not actually reflect the wishes of the producers in western Canada?

The reply of the minister was this:

Mr. Speaker, without accepting all the premises of the question, I want to say to the hon. member that I have been listening to the representations members made to me and the government, and particularly more recently to the representations made to me by the Minister without Portfolio from Crowfoot and... other members of parliament on this side of the House from the prairie region. A decision has been made not to proclaim that section of the bill on metric conversion relating to the grains industry... until after further consultation... It will not be until further consultations have been held with the grain industry, and especially the farmers.

Then the hon. member for Vegreville said the following:

Can the minister outline to the House what form these consultations will take? What mechanism does the minister have in mind for ensuring that the views of the actual producers will be taken into consideration? Will he rely on the hon. member for Crowfoot, or will he consider as well representations made from my side of the House?

The minister replied:

Mr. Speaker, the exact mechanism has not yet been decided. I assure the hon. member opposite that I will be happy to receive suggestions from him on how he feels this matter ought to be dealt with.

Then as reported at page 5230 of *Hansard*, the hon. member for Grenville-Carleton (Mr. Baker) said:

Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. It relates to the business of the House. It arises out of the incredible answer that was given by the Minister of State responsible for Small Business with respect to the government's plans for the metric conversion bill.

On the same day I made a representation to the Chair as follows:

Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order related to the one raised earlier by my House leader. It has to do with the metric bill. It really concerns me that the President of the Privy Council should suggest that the bill is going to pass third reading and that the Minister of State in charge of small business should tell us that it will not be proclaimed until such time as negotiations have been carried on with the business and agricultural communities. Does this mean that the House of Commons will become so irrelevant that after third reading hon. members will not have the opportunity to participate in these discussions? Does it mean there will be changes made between the time of third reading and the time at which the bill is proclaimed? This is an important point. I believe it arose during the question period. It is one with regard to which Your Honour will be called upon to rule in order to ensure that the House is not completely emasculated.

You, sir, said the following:

If the issue arises in the way the hon. member has described, there may be some judgment which I shall be called upon to make, and I will make it at that time.

The point I am trying to make is that if this bill leaves this place, it has to go to the other place to be proclaimed, but the Minister of State for Small Business (Mr. Marchand) has suggested that there are going to be some changes made, and if this happens the House of Commons will be totally emas-