

Metric System

What I want to do is put an historical perspective on metric conversion. This is not the first metric conversion Conservatives in this country have opposed. As the hon. member began to mention, 120 years ago this country abandoned farthings, shillings, pence, crowns, pounds and guineas. That was done in the face of a tremendous amount of opposition by Conservatives in this country. Many arguments were made. It was argued that if we were to go to metric money, that would be the end of this country; there would never be an adjustment to it, it would be a festering sore and it would adversely affect commerce. Let us not have the argument of the Conservatives of those days. They said we should not have decimal currency. That was the hue and cry of Conservatives of those days.

I tried to find in the library this evening some of the fabulous arguments which were made in those days about Canada's metric conversion of 1858 because I know 100 years from now, when students of the subject look back at this debate, and particularly at the remarks of the hon. member for Calgary North, they will put his argument in the same box with the arguments which were made about Canada's conversion to metric money 120 years ago. I cannot document facts because the archives part of the library is locked up, but there were three main arguments. Only one of them had any merit. The first argument was that if we convert to decimal currency we will be eaten up by the United States because they have decimal money.

● (2220)

Mr. Knowles (Winnipeg North Centre): Well?

Mr. Kaplan: The hon. member says, well? I say, 120 proud years of independence since that critically monumental decision speak for themselves. We were not eaten up by the United States. Argument number one was baloney.

Argument number two was this: If we convert to decimal money, we will alienate the United Kingdom and our relations with the United Kingdom will be disturbed. Actually, the legislation we sent to Britain was overruled. The British lords of the treasury would not accept Canadian decimal currency conversion. They wanted us to preserve the glorious British tradition of money, ranging from pence to guineas. Mr. Speaker, we have maintained warm relations with the United Kingdom. We belong to the great Commonwealth of Nations. Therefore, argument number two also turned out to be baloney.

Argument number three, which was repeated in editorials from one end of the country to the other, letters to the editor, and speeches in this country's legislatures, was this: We cannot adopt the decimal currency, because you cannot divide the dollar evenly by seven. That is true, you cannot. You can divide the guinea evenly by seven. There was tremendous hue and cry about the damage we could cause this country's commerce if we were to adopt a decimal currency which you could not divide evenly by seven. After all, the week has seven days. It was inferred from that fact that if our unit of currency could not be readily divisible by seven, the commerce of this country would end. The arithmetic is right, but history has

again proved the tremendous advantage of adopting a simple, universal, decimal currency.

Without doubt, events will soon prove, as we adopt the metric system and so integrate our measuring system with that of many other countries of the world, that this government's approach was correct. Its approach has taken a great deal of courage. Actually, I am surprised to note that in some parts of the country courage is necessary in order to bring about conversion. I suggest that in a few years all the arguments which have been made by the opposition will end up on the same shelf of comic history to which has been relegated all the arguments against the adoption of a decimal currency.

Mr. Doug Neil (Moose Jaw): Mr. Speaker, I listened with interest to the hon. member for York Centre (Mr. Kaplan) who apparently went to the library to do some research.

Mr. Guay (St. Boniface): It was closed.

Mr. Baker (Grenville-Carleton): So is his mind.

Mr. Neil: Apparently he was able to gather some information although, obviously, he does not understand what we are debating this evening. I do not think he has been in the House listening to the debate. He suggests the Official Opposition opposes the metric system, and has gone back some 100 years to support his argument. He will see if he reads *Hansard* that we, on my side of the House, do not oppose metric conversion, per se, but we do oppose metric conversion as it affects the farmer of western Canada.

An hon. Member: We oppose conversion without consultation.

Mr. Baker (Grenville-Carleton): That is why I say the hon. member's speech was all distortion.

Mr. Neil: Obviously, he has not been to western Canada and neither he nor other members on his side have talked to farmers; otherwise, he would have heard what the farmers had to say and we would not be here tonight debating this bill. Because I suggest the government would have withdrawn the offending clauses of the bill.

I have lost count of how many times I have spoken in this House on the metric system and on this metric bill, but it is important to each and every individual residing on the prairies. They are concerned about acres, quarter sections, half sections and sections. When the hon. member for Calgary North (Mr. Woolliams) was speaking, the minister responsible for piloting this bill through the House asked "What's an acre?". I could not understand what he meant when he said that.

Mr. Marchand: Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. I asked the hon. member for Calgary North (Mr. Woolliams) a very open kind of question. If you read Webster's dictionary and look at the definition of an acre, you will see that an acre is really 43,560 feet. It started out as the amount of land a person could plough in a day with a team of oxen.

Mr. Neil: That is very interesting.