

Metric Conversion

who manufacture and distribute wholesale and retail hazardous and poisonous products accompany metric labels with imperial labels to reduce any possibility of misunderstanding or error. Surely that only makes sense in the process of converting completely to metric, something to which the next generation will be attuned. There are many hundreds of thousands of people today—and I am one of them—who are still struggling with the metric system. I do not have much trouble with kilometres, but I still have a little trouble with Celsius and I am totally lost with kilograms. My children know it 100 per cent; the next generation will have little or no difficulty.

The Standing Committee on Transport visited the Bombardier plant at La Pocatière, Quebec. It was proud that it had received three contracts with one State and two cities in the United States. The plant was successful in its tenders for transit equipment and railway equipment, and the tenders called for them to be submitted in metric, not imperial.

I noticed the other day when looking at the commodity exchange in Chicago that the U.S. Department of Agriculture announced some sales of specialty products all in metric, not in imperial. That is fine, but they were not dangerous, hazardous or poisonous products. It is part of the international picture. In reality, both the United States and Canada have no choice if they are to export and import internationally with other countries. The two of us cannot deal only with each other. That is the reality.

If the Government will not accept the Hon. Member's motion as is, I urge it to ensure, particularly in the case of agriculture but in the case of other industries as well, that dual labelling of hazardous and poisonous products continue for a few more years. Not only should there be dual labels, but there should be accompanying literature so that there can be no misunderstanding in the use and application of the products. Surely that makes good sense. It is better to be safe than sorry.

Mr. Stan Schellenberger (Wetaskiwin): Mr. Speaker, I rise to support the motion of the Hon. Member for Vegreville (Mr. Mazankowski) that the Government should permit dual labelling on a voluntary basis of farm sprays, chemicals and fertilizers in both the metric and imperial systems.

The constant argument of the Government is that back in 1970 there was an agreement that we would move to metric conversion. That was a couple of years before I arrived in the House, but in looking at the *Debates*, I find that that was not the case at all. At that time we agreed to allow the establishment of the Metric Commission to look into whether it was sound to move toward metric conversion.

In fact, the gentleman who responded for our Party, Mr. Ged Baldwin, stated some reservations at that time while agreeing to the establishment of the commission. He said:

We should think particularly of our trading relations with the United States, which of course is and has for some years been examining its position with regard to adoption of the metric system. Whether we like it or not, what we must do to a considerable extent is keep pace with what is being done in the United States. I think it might well be suicidal for us to adopt the metric system without considering what is being done in the United States.

He had reservations at the time the commission was set up, but the Government then took that as its guiding light and said that there was no need to bring it back to the House of Commons for Members of Parliament to agree or disagree. From that point to this time, except for one piece of legislation from which Hon. Members in fact removed hectares and included acres, there has never been a bill dealing with metric in the House.

Therein lies the problem. People will accept a policy which is in their best interest, if they feel that they are a part of it. If they feel that it is in their interest and agree with it, they will take the time to learn the changes. However, if the best policy in the world is implemented improperly, people will reject it. That has been the case with metric. There is a feeling in the country that it is being shoved at people, particularly those who are beyond the educational system and do not understand it. We all know about mental blocks. It is very difficult, if one does not want to sit down and study, to learn it.

I know of many cases in my constituency where farmers have indicated—and I have the same difficulty—that they will not trade in their sprayers which are in gallons because they have many years of use left. In the last few years the label on chemical spray containers has indicated so many litres per hectare. I do not carry a calculator in my shirt pocket when I am measuring spray on the farm. It is impossible to do so. It would not last very long in the dust. Often you scratch in the dirt. Sometimes there is a layer of dirt on the machine. I have seen that done often. Calculations are being done on something of great significance to a farmer's livelihood, the number of ounces per acre or litres per hectare of chemical to be put on his or her crop.

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Efforts have been made. Nothing is worse, and I know this from experience, than having put effort and your life savings into a crop only to find that you have made an error in spraying because the nation's Government will not allow the can of spray to have dual labelling. That is absolutely ridiculous. It does not cost the manufacturer anything more once the machinery is set up. Why are we doing this? Is it because the bureaucrats feel that everything has to be put on its convenient little shelf, or because it is not acceptable? Is that the reason?

Surely we as Members who are here to provide leadership and guidance ought to be able to suggest that in the areas of pesticide sprays and fertilizer, which are so important to the production of food, because the average age of our farmer is still over 50 years dual labelling should continue for a number of years. It should continue until younger farmers who are familiar with the measurement system take over or until the older farmers with computers are able to comprehend the changes in measurement. It does not cost this Government anything. It is not a matter of pride to say that we have metric and therefore no one will ever use the imperial system again. That is ridiculous. Members should seriously look at this motion going forward.