

Metric System

government and would protect them against this evil thing, the metric system. Just the other night I warned the government that if they rammed this metric conversion legislation through they would destroy the Minister without Portfolio (Mr. Horner).

Mr. Knowles (Winnipeg North Centre): Maybe that is the reason.

Mr. Hamilton (Qu'Appelle-Moose Mountain): That is possible. The hon. member, who has been here many years, says that may be the reason. Perhaps it is a question of having the Prime Minister do to the new minister what he has done to so many ministers in the last three years. What other Prime Minister in the history of Canada has got rid of 14 cabinet ministers in four years?

An hon. Member: Not even Idi Amin can do that.

Mr. Hamilton (Qu'Appelle-Moose Mountain): Idi Amin is an amateur compared to the cynicism of the Prime Minister if he destroys the new minister so quickly. The Minister without Portfolio is in the west now. He spoke in my constituency for an hour and told the people why he had made the great conversion from a person who had always—

Mr. Woolliams: Little Jack Horner sits in his corner playing with his metric system.

Mr. Hamilton (Qu'Appelle-Moose Mountain): —been opposed to this government. He told the people in my constituency why he joined the cabinet. They naturally believe he is going to be able to persuade the government and the Prime Minister that the ways he is so strongly opposed to should be changed.

Why does the government bring this legislation forward in his absence, Mr. Speaker? Why are they pushing it through? Is the hon. member for Winnipeg North Centre (Mr. Knowles) right when he suggests it is a deliberate plan to destroy the minister? What a cynical thing to do. No matter how simple a country boy he might have been, he is a human being.

Mr. Woolliams: I would question that.

Mr. Kempling: You can take the boy out of the country but you can't take the country out of the boy.

Mr. Hamilton (Qu'Appelle-Moose Mountain): Canada is supposed to be a democratic country. Let us assume for a moment that the metric system is a good system and that once you have learned all the terms and you think in decimals, it is possible to calculate things fairly quickly and accurately. But decimals are dangerous.

● (2110)

This is the story that Quebec farmers are telling me. Two or three years ago they punched a lot of information into a computer to find out how much milk was needed in Quebec. The computer went clickety-clack and clunkety-clunk and out.

[Mr. Hamilton (Qu'Appelle-Moose Mountain).]

came the print-out. It was meant to read that 50 million pounds of milk was needed from producers in Quebec, but what did the fellow who read the print-out see? The decimal was shifted over and the figure that came out was 500 million pounds. The fellow at the end of the computer is not the guy who fed the computer at the beginning. Since the computer came out with a figure, he thought that is the truth. So our Canadian Dairy Commission told all the Quebec farmers to boost their production, to borrow money, to get cows that produce 20,000 pounds of milk a year instead of 10,000. The Quebec farmers did that. They had visions of an increase of 15 per cent in their quota.

You know what happened in the year 1976, Mr. Speaker. The cows were bred, they had calves, they were fresh, the milk was pouring out, the rains came, the grass grew, the cows ate it, the milk came out faster. The milk was pouring all over the place. Then the minister had to stand up and say that somebody made a mistake, the Quebec farmers were producing too much milk, their quota would have to be cut down by 15 per cent and if they did not start reducing that milk, the government would fine them \$8 for every 100 pounds they delivered over the quota. So the poor little farmer says to me, "Look, in one three months period I get \$12,000 worth of milk produced, but the fines are \$9,000. I am broke".

Last June the Quebec farmers had a meeting in front of the parliament buildings. The poor minister had not been told by the civil servant that somebody had goofed with the decimal point. He went out to say "Mes amis, I am your Minister of Agriculture". You know what happened. He thought the world war had broken out, with all that milk and butter. Why should a minister have to endure that because somebody made a mistake with a decimal point? I am simply saying that in Canada, even though the metric system is a good system, it is dangerous if you have to move decimal points around.

My remarks can be summed up in this way, Mr. Speaker. Canada, like the United States, the United Kingdom, Sweden and other countries, has a democratic tradition. You cannot force a Canadian to do anything; you can only lead him. We have demonstrated that in the war and we have shown it in peacetime. You do not force Canadians. Of course, occasionally you can scare them and they do irrational things, but generally speaking you do not fool Canadians for too long. I am simply saying that the government is not using democratic procedures in this matter. What is wrong with asking farmers face to face what they have against the metric system and whether they would accept it and give a little here and take a little there? The farmer would back you up if he saw that it was in his interest and that of his country to do so. But we are not giving him this opportunity. The government is attacking our democratic ways. Participatory democracy is gone.

I just came from a reception tonight which was in honour of a delegation from the People's Republic of China. The first thing I did when I arrived was to ask them whether they are still using their land measurements. They said, "Oh yes, we still use the mu". I asked them whether they are still using their weight measurements, and they said, "Oh yes, we still