

There is another issue here, as I see it. How do we approach this whole question? Are we looking at it with the future in mind or simply in a reactionary way?

Mr. Mazankowski: In a realistic way.

Mr. MacLellan: In a realistic way. The Hon. Member referred to Wayne Gretzky and hoped to be able to score here today. I think the House would agree with me when I say that I think the Hon. Member has fanned his shot.

Mr. Mazankowski: He uses an imperial hockey stick.

Mr. MacLellan: We must remind ourselves that we are living in a metric world.

Today, 90 per cent of the world's population use metric measurements, and by the end of the decade 90 per cent of the world's standards will be metric only.

Mr. Flis: The Tories are back in the Dark Ages.

Mr. MacLellan: As a nation dependent on trade, we would be foolish to ignore this. Even now, 85 per cent of our agricultural exports are to countries using the metric system. As well, the U.S. is continuing its program of metric conversion, and metric conversion in our own agri-food industry now is 95 per cent completed.

This is the fourth spring that Canadian farmers will be buying agricultural chemicals with metric-only labels. It would be improper to turn back the clock with dual labelling and tempt some farmers to return to imperial calculations. It would only mean continued controversy and debate and another painful round of conversion sometime in the future.

Much of the pain of conversion is behind us. Experience has shown Canadian farmers have adapted to metric and, in fact, have found it simpler to understand and apply. Admittedly, most Canadians have grown up with the imperial system, but we cannot let this influence our ability to look to the future. A new generation of Canadians today are growing up with metric. Metric has been in our educational system for a decade now, and these young Canadians will soon be entering professions, including farming.

Such actions as dual labelling are not forward thinking. Farmers are accepting metric. Our young farmers have grown up with metric. The only responsible course for us as the Government to take is to use metric measurements only. It is in the best interests of our farmers and of all Canadians in general.

Mr. Les Benjamin (Regina West): Mr. Speaker I sympathize with the intent of the motion of the Hon. Member for Vegreville (Mr. Mazankowski). I suspect that he and I and others like us are of the age where it is pretty well too late for us to learn the intricacies of metric. I find that students, young small-businessmen and young farmers have learned metric well in school and at their places of work and can handle it very well. But I want to remind you, Sir, and other Members of this House that from 1969 to 1974 I sat on a committee on

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a number of occasions with a former colleague from Vancouver-Kingsway, Mrs. MacInnis, dealing with amendments to the Weights and Measures Act and other pieces of legislation. We heard from numerous witnesses. They were almost unanimous in supporting a systematic, intelligent conversion to metric over a period of years. At first, 5 years was talked about, then 10 years, and then 25 years, but then a consensus was reached that we would need a period of 15 years. That is about the time that it will take before it is all in place.

I think the Hon. Member for Vegreville is correct when he talks about dual labelling in the case of any product that is poisonous or hazardous and that in those circumstances extra precaution has to be taken so that the user of that product is fully aware of how to use it. If it requires an additional label or an additional pamphlet, whether it is a farmer or anyone else using the poisonous or hazardous product, it is better to be safe than sorry. In those circumstances it should be incumbent upon the packaging and labelling industry and upon the chemical industry to make certain that the extra information is available for every user of any dangerous, hazardous or poisonous product.

● (1630)

I was somewhat amused by some of the matters raised in the House by Hon. Members such as the hon. gas pumper from Peterborough. When metric legislation was introduced, I recall how the Hon. Member for Yukon (Mr. Nielsen) and the Hon. Member for Burlington (Mr. Kempling) castigated the Government for taking so long to do it. I appreciate that there is something of an intellectual and sometimes physical trauma when making a change in people's minds concerning measurement, but there is no turning back the clock. I think of what it would cost farmers and their organizations if we reverted to imperial. We must remember the millions of dollars which elevator companies have invested in scales alone.

Mr. Mazankowski: I am not saying that.

Mr. Benjamin: I appreciate that, but the Hon. Member for Vegreville has a point about the dual description of measurements, particularly in the case of hazardous and poisonous products.

In committee we heard from representatives of the Canadian Manufacturers' Association, the Food and Labelling Association, the Chamber of Commerce and all farm organizations. We heard from various transportation companies and all kinds of witnesses, from consumers to scores of individuals with expertise in the area of measurements, be they national or international. As I said earlier, there was overwhelming agreement to make the conversion.

The question is not whether or not we make the conversion. The question is how intelligently and how safely we do it. Surely that is a question any government of any political stripe has to be concerned about on a day to day basis. If the Government cannot accept totally what the Hon. Member for Vegreville wants, at least it could look at instructing the Metric Commission by Order in Council to ensure that those