

Consumer Packaging and Labelling Act

just resumed his seat asked about the metric system. May I say that, of course, we can go into this in great detail in the committee. The bill before the House provides for the use of both systems, the customary foot-pound system and the metric system. The latter is already coming into vogue in some industries in this country.

The position of the government was clearly stated in a white paper that my colleague the Minister of Industry, Trade and Commerce (Mr. Pepin) tabled in this House last February. This is a very important statement relative to conversion from the foot-pound system to the metric system, and I think we are finally beginning to make progress on this. Let me make it very clear, Mr. Speaker, that there is no doubt in my mind that we should convert to the metric system, and the sooner the better. We should not be debating the question; the discussion should be on how we can convert with the least possible expense and inconvenience. Undoubtedly, there will be expense but we should endeavour to minimize it. It is obvious, however, that because we are a trading nation and a great deal of our market is in the United States—and I make this as a general statement—we are going to move to some extent hand in hand with the United States. I detect a growing sentiment for conversion to the metric system in many of the consumer groups in that country. I understand that the United States Congress has a committee which is examining the matter. When I was in Washington last fall and met with the Secretary of Commerce, The Honourable Maurice H. Stans, he was enthusiastic and thought that we should convert. My personal view is that we should convert as fast as we can and that we should be debating how we convert, not whether we should convert.

I think conversion to the metric system would greatly benefit Canadian industry and trade and, from the point of view of my own portfolio, it has great potential for benefiting the consumer, once it is understood in terms of comparison with competing products and the packaging and measurement of products. There are great advantages, Mr. Speaker, and I make that statement in answer to the questions that were asked. I know we will go into it in much more detail in the committee.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Is the House ready for the question?

Some hon. Members: Question.

Motion agreed to, bill read the second time and referred to the Standing Committee on Health, Welfare and Social Affairs.

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CONSUMER PACKAGING AND LABELLING ACT

PROVISIONS RESPECTING PROHIBITIONS, LABELS
STANDARDIZATION, INSPECTION, ETC.

[Translation]

The House resumed from Tuesday, November 3, consideration of the motion of Mr. Basford that Bill C-180, respecting the packaging, labelling, sale, importation and

[Mr. Basford.]

advertising of pre-packaged and certain other products, be read the second time and referred to the Standing Committee on Health, Welfare and Social Affairs.

[English]

Hon. Ron Basford (Minister of Consumer and Corporate Affairs): Mr. Speaker, on November 3, I began to move the second reading of Bill C-180, the consumer packaging and labelling bill. I got half way through my remarks so I should like to finish them now. I regard this bill as one of the most important pieces of consumer protective legislation which I have had the honour to present to this House. I think it represents a fundamental principle to the consumer movement, and it represents great advances in the whole field of consumer packaging and labelling.

When I was speaking on November 3, I drew to the attention of hon. members the great significance of obtaining full, accurate and relevant information about the product from its package and its label. At that time, I reminded the House of what had been said on the subject of packaging and labelling by consumer groups, and by the parliamentary committee mentioned by the hon. member for Peace River (Mr. Baldwin), which Senator Croll and I had the honour of chairing and on which many members of this House served. I reminded the House of the recommendations of that committee and of the recommendations of the Royal Commission under Judge Mary Batten, appointed by the three prairie provinces.

All of these groups made recommendations about the need for change in the laws governing packaging and labelling. In so far as those recommendations can be dealt with by federal legislative or regulatory authority and action, and to the extent that they have not already been attended to in other consumer legislation which I have introduced, the present bill before us reflects the preoccupation and recommendations of those groups. The bill is also in line with proposed or existing legislation in most advanced countries of the world and indeed is ahead of some.

● (4:40 p.m.)

Having given this background, I should like to turn very quickly, because I appreciate what hon. members are endeavouring to do this afternoon, to the basic principles or basic thrust of the bill. I will leave unsaid a number of things I had wanted to say in order that we may be speedy. If I need to say them, I shall do so when I close the debate and have an opportunity of speaking again. I want to outline very quickly the five basic principles of the consumer packaging and labelling bill. First, this bill is designed to be a comprehensive, omnibus kind of bill. It is designed to provide, over a period of time, a reasonable degree of uniformity with respect to the method of labelling and packaging consumer goods and to overcome the confusing array of labelling requirements which now exist under a whole host of different packaging and labelling regulations and laws.

The second principle of the bill is the provision of full and factual information on labels. This is a fundamental