

Standards Council of Canada

I hope that when he closes this debate the minister will tell us precisely what has influenced his thinking because we have been inundated with briefs, letters and verbal representations from all across the country expressing concern at the government's interference in this legitimate Canadian enterprise.

I find it difficult to quarrel with the many concerns that have been expressed. As the hon. member for Wellington (Mr. Hales) just indicated, I too find it difficult to understand why it should be necessary for us to undertake this added financial burden during a period of austerity, why it should be necessary to add to the already substantial bureaucratic machine that has been built up since the government took power.

The Canadian Standards Association is a useful Canadian enterprise, formed in a uniquely Canadian way, and fulfilling a very useful function in our society. The minister would be well advised to take a long, hard look at this before he decides to interfere in this legitimate Canadian enterprise.

Hon. J. A. MacLean (Malpeque): Mr. Speaker, I would like to participate in this debate for a short period of time. I do not wish to reiterate the points that have been made by my colleague, the hon. member for St. John's East (Mr. McGrath), but that is not to say that they are not extremely important. I believe that the minister and the government should be interested in acting in such a manner as to accommodate the valid objections and desires of industry, and of others who are interested in the subject matter of Bill C-163. After all, the establishment of standards, both of measurement, of quality and of other things, is an extremely important matter in trade and industry. Up to now, it has been done on a voluntary basis. I have no very strong objection to the establishment of an official board if it also has new duties to perform, provided that the voluntary organizations that have been doing this work are reasonably accommodated.

Having said that, Mr. Speaker, I hope that when he closes this debate the minister will have something to say to indicate that the government is not rigid in its position, that it will consider sympathetically the valid and conscientious suggestions put forward whether by other parties in the committee, by industry, and by those specially concerned with this question. If the minister sees fit to do that, I am sure it will expedite this debate, and also greatly expedite consideration of the bill and its passage through the committee. If

[Mr. McGrath.]

the minister indicates this kind of constructive attitude he will be doing Canadian industry and Canadian consumers a service. I am not suggesting that the minister is digging in his heels, but to dig in his heels on some particular principle I think would not be in the interests of Canadians generally.

One of the duties of the proposed council will be, and I quote, to:

—review the need for and make recommendations with respect to the use of, or conversion to, the international system of units, known as the metric system, in Canadian industry, trade and commerce.

Although this idea is expressed in but a small sentence, it will be one of the most important duties of the new council if the bill is passed. We in Canada are in a very special position with regard to the usage of, and conversion to, the metric system. Most of the world has already converted to the metric system. Its advantages are obvious, but the conversion should be a carefully considered procedure. I believe that the conversion should be done gradually, perhaps in certain segments at a time. There may indeed be segments in which the metric system need not be introduced at all.

On the other hand, there are parts of our industry and commerce in which the metric system has already been introduced. The pharmaceutical industry is one. For years the metric system has been used in science, and in some other fields. But we in Canada are in a peculiarly difficult situation. We belong to the English speaking world which uses the English system of weights and measures in most cases, or some modification of it. I believe that Britain herself and Australia are in the first stages of conversion to the metric system. However, in Canada we are next door neighbours to the great United States, a country which is still using the foot-pound system, and either we will have to act in concert with the United States in the change-over, or at least act in a way which will disturb our trade relations with the United States as little as possible while at the same time making us more competitive in other world markets where the metric system is already in use.

The more one thinks about the many complications of the change-over the more one is impressed with the vast number of fields of activity in which it would be an advantage to use the metric system, and the longer we delay the transfer the more difficult it will become. For example, the problem of converting building products to the metric system