

### *Metric Conversion*

Forced metrication is an obvious violation of the rights of Canadians to freely transact with one another on any commercial basis they choose. Although the Canadian Civil Liberties Association has been silent about this issue, metrication is a clear and present danger to our civil liberties, which encompass far more than rights to speech, drugs, sex, criminal procedures, and so on. Our civil liberties include, as well, the right to engage in 'capitalist acts' between consenting adults, whether measured in pounds or grams, inches or centimetres. People should have the right to sell by the hatful, if they can attract any customers that way. In the words of Howard Bradfield, metric protester, 'Your freedom to measure is a measure of your freedom.'

I think this whole exercise demonstrates another classic example of the Government's penchant for intervening in the lives of Canadians. It is part and parcel of its whole approach that it alone knows what is best for Canadians, collectively and individually. It refuses to submit this issue to the proper legislative process and it refuses to be held accountable. I repeat that this situation is a product of the bureaucrats and politicians who have remained in their ivory towers and failed to recognize the difficulties and consequences that have arisen therefrom.

I say that we have an opportunity here to correct a wrong, to provide a mechanism that would ensure that the producers of food in this country would be blessed with some measure of convenience simply by allowing dual labelling on these very important commodities which they use in the production of agricultural products. It is practical, sensible and will give Canadian producers an opportunity to go through a transition period without facing the prospect of suffering losses.

Quite frankly, I think that this is a small issue but one that has a far reaching impact that could provide benefits to agriculture, individual farmers and indeed rewards to the Canadian economy.

**Mr. Russell MacLellan (Parliamentary Secretary to Minister of National Health and Welfare):** Mr. Speaker, I wish to rise on the motion but forward by the Hon. Member for Vegreville (Mr. Mazankowski) concerning the dual labelling of farm input products. The Hon. Member is certainly aware of the support given by all Parties to metric conversion in January, 1970, when the Government introduced its white paper on this subject. He is also aware that the Government met with more than 2,000 representatives from provincial governments, business and agricultural organizations to plan metric conversion in the agri-food sector. That program was unanimously supported by the provincial governments both in 1973 and again at the Federal-Provincial Conference on Metric Conversion on July 26, 1976.

● (1620)

I believe the metric question has been well explored and extensively debated both in this House and by Canadian society generally. Now the Hon. Member wishes to raise again the issue of dual labelling on all goods and products used in the production of agricultural commodities. I do not see how we can support this.

Metric amendments and conversion dates for feeds, seeds, fertilizers and agricultural chemicals were all established in consultation with the agri-food sector. Bulk grains were con-

verted to metric in February 1977. Feeds, seeds and fertilizers were all converted during 1979-80. Agricultural chemicals were to be converted to metric measurements during 1978.

However, a review of the program showed extra time was required for farmers to become more familiar with metric measurements. So, Mr. Speaker, we agreed on a new date, that of January 1, 1981, for metric conversion in the agricultural chemicals industry. We have always been flexible in the matter of metric conversion.

At that time, there was also agreement that any form of dual labelling was inappropriate. That is because there are many calculations involved in the application of agricultural chemicals including not only package size, but tank capacity, nozzle rating, the speed of the spraying equipment and so on. The Hon. Member is well aware of the many calculations involved, I am sure.

I am sure he can appreciate also the dangers of switching, either intentionally or not, from one system of measurement to the other during these calculations. Consider, Mr. Speaker, the danger of attempting to switch to imperial units for spraying rates after making the correct dilution and mixing the required quantity for application in metric units. An error could destroy one's crop, and the chance of making such an error in this case is high.

**Mr. Mazankowski:** That is exactly what is happening now.

**Mr. MacLellan:** It was felt that this could lead to real and serious problems in this important sector.

Of course, the Government recognized there were risks in having metric-only labels. We concede that, but it was agreed that fewer risks were involved than with dual labelling.

I should also point out to the Hon. Member the results of a series of tests run at evening classes in Manitoba in February, 1981 to determine whether farmers were adapting to metric. It was found that the error rate was much higher when calculations were done in imperial units compared to calculations presently done in metric units.

Metric is a much easier system of measurement with much less chance of error if it is used throughout. And when it comes to agricultural chemicals, simple calculations are crucial to the safe use of pesticides.

Both the federal and provincial governments have been working with agricultural organizations and the Canadian Agricultural Chemicals Association in an ongoing educational and public awareness program for farmers and food processors to minimize calculation errors.

Safety must be the primary issue here and not convenience of the procedure. Certainly it would be convenient to have dual labelling.

**Mr. Mazankowski:** Let's do it then.

**Mr. MacLellan:** But it could lead to more cases of improper mixing and application that would threaten the health of the producers themselves and of our entire food industry.