

Metric System

is happening with metric conversion, land measurement and so on, and if this bill is proclaimed they will be left behind the rest of society. Of course the government says it has no intention of proclaiming the bill.

The clauses in the bill that pertain to farmers have not been widely accepted in the farming community in western Canada. Both the farmers and the grain industry feel these measures are being imposed too quickly, without enough orientation or break-in time. In the northern parts of Manitoba because of the lack of adequate media outlets and possibly because they are not considered to be the more prosperous regions of Canada, the farmers have not had the opportunity to get abreast with the changes that are taking place. The government expected them to set their work aside and take a course in metric conversion, but of course farmers do not have the time for this.

Although some farmers in my area have adapted very well to other changes that have taken place, many are confused and frustrated by the fact that no one from the department has visited them to explain the program. Goodness knows there are enough federal civil servants running around northern Manitoba that some could have met with farm organizations and brought them up-to-date on what is happening, especially when the media are not available to carry the information.

● (2210)

The Minister of State responsible for Small Business issued a statement earlier this year which denied the charge that farmers are not being informed about metric conversion. I confirm that the farmers I represent have not been informed about metric conversion, or not informed in the way they should have been. I am thinking especially of small farmers, ranchers, and small grain producers.

The statement outlines several programs on which the government has embarked to inform farmers of progress being made in conversion. The main program is called the "Awareness Program." I am sure many farmers in the Interlake and Carrot River regions are not even aware of the "Awareness Program", which was implemented from Ottawa. Anyone wanting information on the program had better write to the Metric Commission on Elgin Street in Ottawa. It is up to the government to see that the program is well publicized before it is implemented.

I say that farmers and people in the grain handling industry should be given the opportunity to appear before the standing committee in order to discuss metric conversion. The "Awareness Program" as implemented by the Minister of State responsible for Small Business is not sufficient to bring people up to date on what is happening in metric conversion. In any event I feel this bill should be referred back to the committee for further study so that farmers, large and small, can give voice to their concerns relating to metric conversion. We ought to see a greater degree of consultation with the grain industry, especially with farmers, and such consultation ought to take place before we continue our discussions on metric conversion.

[Mr. Smith (Churchill).]

The Hall Commission report recommended a doubling of the capacity of the Churchill elevator within the next few years. That recommendation is of concern to the bulk grain handling industry which depends on the port of Churchill. I understand that the conversion of this grain handling capacity to the metric system has not taken place. That conversion at Churchill was supposed to take place during the winter, since the elevator does not operate then. However, I understand the conversion is to take place some time this summer. I suggest it should not take place then, for we are trying to ship at least 30 million bushels of grain through this terminal, and I feel that conversion during the summer months could affect the movement of grain, or the amount of grain shipped through that facility in the summer. Of course if this conversion must take place it should be done during the late fall or early winter months and so not disrupt the grain shipping season.

Let me mention what metric conversion will mean to the people living on the 30 Indian reservations in the constituency of Churchill in northern Manitoba. As I said previously, many of these reservations are not served by any form of communication. They have no radio, television or newspapers. There are schools run by the federal and provincial governments. When I visited one of these communities not long ago, I asked what was happening with regard to metric conversion. The people there had no idea what I was talking about.

I do not know how we are going to get this message across to people in outlying areas who do not have access to the media. How will we get the message of metric conversion to them when it is only a few short years that they have been attending schools in many communities? This is a completely different system. It will probably be easy to adapt to, but it will be a change that many isolated areas just will not be able to accept or adapt to at the same speed as other parts of Canada. We need to have a stepped up campaign in the media and the schools if we are going to meet any sort of commitment.

While some Canadians will be hurt more than others by the conversion, eventually all will be affected. Increased costs will be passed on to the consumer in the form of increased prices. Although the exact impact is unknown, the conversion is certain to contribute to an already serious inflation problem. I end my remarks by stating my support for the amendment proposed by the hon. member for Qu'Appelle-Moose Mountain.

Mr. Bert Cadieu (Meadow Lake): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to have the opportunity to make some remarks on this bill. Unfortunately I was absent from the committee and therefore not able to take the active part I would like to have taken when the bill was at committee stage. However, I did follow it very closely.

While in my constituency I was unable to find anyone in support of this bill. A few said that, no matter what they thought, it would come and they would have to accept it. However, no one stated that we should be accepting it at this time, jumping the gun before the country is ready for it.