

Metric System

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I hope the House will allow me to consider the amendment. The first part corresponds to the normal practice of asking that a bill be referred back to committee, with a special instruction to reconsider certain clauses. What concerns me are other conditions attached to the amendment: I am not sure they meet the requirements of a third reading amendment. If the House agrees, I will recognize the hon. member for Moose Jaw (Mr. Neil) and put the amendment, if need be, at a later time.

Some hon. Members: Agreed.

Mr. Doug Neil (Moose Jaw): Mr. Speaker, it was my intention to speak in support of the amendment of the hon. member for Qu'Appelle-Moose Mountain (Mr. Hamilton). I was very optimistic back on May 3 when the minister who is piloting this bill through the House indicated that he intended to have further consultation with interested parties. As recorded at page 5227 of *Hansard*, he said:

The mechanism has not been decided. I assure the hon. member I shall be happy to receive suggestions from him as to how he feels this matter ought to be dealt with.

Our party's recommendation has gone forward to the minister. It is incorporated in the amendment proposed a few moments ago by my hon. friend, namely, that certain clauses of the bill be referred back to committee for consideration. Frankly, I can see no other way in which consultation can take place with the grain companies and with the farmers in the west. The farmers are extremely upset about this bill. The hon. member for Qu'Appelle-Moose Mountain said that in his opinion 95 per cent of the farm population was opposed to it, specifically to the change from bushels to tonnes and from acres to hectares.

I would agree with that figure, because of all the letters I have received on the subject—and I have received many—I think only one of them indicates support for the bill. If one reads the western press, the *Western Producer* and some of the other papers, one finds that week after week, month after month, contributors have been sending letter after letter to the editors opposing the metric system as it relates to the farm. Initially, members opposite said that the majority of the farm population was in favour of the bill. I recall the hon. member for Assiniboia (Mr. Goodale) saying that all his farmers were in favour—

Mr. Goodale: I said "farm organizations".

Mr. Neil: I would have to look up *Hansard* and reread what the hon. member said, but my recollection is that he said "the majority of my farmers". It makes sense to me, if there is such a backlash, that a committee of the House of Commons should reconsider the matter. After all, that is the logical forum to hear evidence from the interested parties. If the minister would look back through the committee hearings held in Ottawa when the bill was before the finance committee, he would find it was the farm organizations and the grain trade which were represented. The only two individuals who attended represent-

[Mr. Hamilton (Qu'Appelle-Moose Mountain).]

ing the farmer were from the Association of Rural Municipalities and the Association of Urban Municipalities, and their reading was that the majority of the farmers were opposed to this bill.

If the clauses to which objection is taken are not referred back to the committee for consideration, what other procedure could be followed? Does the minister feel he could send around western Canada a group from the metric conversion committee to meet with the farmers? I suggest that if he did that he would be sending out a group of biased individuals who have only one thought in mind, and that is to force their point of view upon the farmers. I presume that Mr. Earl Baxter might be a member of such a group. It was with interest that I read a news report in the *Western Producer* of May 26 about a meeting held in Winnipeg at which Mr. Baxter was present. An account in that paper of an interview with him reads in part as follows:

He said in an interview the \$300,000 figure is what industry spokesmen estimate they have spent preparing for the metric conversion they thought would happen last February 1.

Later in the report Mr. Baxter is quoted as saying that in his view the legislation should have been introduced early. He said:

I don't know why the government decided to wait so long with it.

That is the attitude of the civil servants. He says that politicians in Ottawa are playing politics. I should like to point out that we on this side are not playing politics. What we are doing is attempting to express the views of 90 per cent of our constituents. We are speaking here in the House of Commons on behalf of our constituents. If the members on the government side read the correspondence they are getting from the farmers of western Canada, they will understand that the farmers do not accept this bill. Mr. Baxter will probably be one of those appointed, if the amendment is not accepted, to go out to western Canada to meet the farmers. But he is biased. He has made up his mind. He is accusing parliamentarians of playing politics. He does not understand the democratic system. To say that because members of parliament debate a bill they are playing politics is a disgraceful statement for a member of the civil service of this country to make.

● (1200)

I will not prolong my remarks, Mr. Speaker, but I do want to say this. An attempt has been made by people such as Mr. Baxter and some members of the grain trade to give the impression that because this bill has not been passed it has cost the grain trade and the grain companies money. For many years we have sold grain on the international market using the metric system. The minister in charge of the Wheat Board, during the time that the bill was before the committee and subsequent to the amendments put forth by this party asking for a dual system, issued a news release, a copy of which I have before me. It is undated, but basically it states that the minister has instructed the board to use a dual system for permit books and quotas when making announcements, and in every other facet of the trade. Those instructions were issued