

been involved in the debate at the local community level. Delegations of concerned farmers have come to me and expressed their concerns. I travelled with the official opposition agricultural committee when we interviewed the grain industry some weeks ago. I was amazed at the intensity of the feeling of disillusionment of the Canadian Grain Metric Conversion Commission. They felt they had been led down the garden path by the government as well. They lashed out at the opposition as being responsible for the delay. In the course of the discussions we had that particular afternoon, it was revealed that they were not even aware that legislation was necessary, and the government had delayed action on it until it was impossible to get it through by the effective target date which was originally put before the people of Canada, and particularly the farmers.

When we had our meetings with the western representatives of the farmers in the grain industry, it was evident that they also felt they had been led down the garden path too. They said that they had already expended some \$300,000. I am referring to the Manitoba Pool in this instance, and the United Grain Growers. They have already expended some \$300,000 in preparing for metrication of the agricultural industry. This was just a drop in the bucket compared to the costs they anticipated spending.

There are various hidden costs which have given rise to the concerns and protests as the people who will be affected by this program become aware of the difficulties arising from the lack of consultation, the lack of planning, and the lack of suitable preparation by the Liberal government. They were not even aware that there was a legislative requirement necessary. It seems the government was not aware that it would have to go through the legislative gambit before this part of the metrication program could be approved. It came up at the annual meeting of the Canadian Federation of Agriculture and precipitated such acrimonious debate that the whole matter was unresolved and was left in abeyance until further information was made available.

The most violent and strongest reaction has come from the farmers themselves. They feel this is change for the sake of change. They are not convinced it will do anything to improve the efficiency of the grain industry or expand the market. As a matter of fact the grain industry in western Canada is one of the most productive and efficient operations in the country today. If they had not been able to increase productivity by initiative and innovation, they would not have been able to survive in the cost-price squeeze market which has been generated by the half-baked disastrous economic policies of the government.

It is said that the farming community is against change. This can be easily refuted by the progressive action with respect to mechanization, innovation and new ideas in the whole agricultural industry, which has made it possible for farmers to survive, even though their costs have increased astronomically and the prices they receive for their products have been increasing at a much slower rate.

Metric System

I will not read the many letters of protest I have received from farmers. This has been done by several spokesmen in this debate. The Minister of State for Small Business suggested there were no letters coming in. That has been well refuted by the previous speaker, the hon. member for Edmonton Centre (Mr. Paproski).

Mr. Marchand: We have received 50 or 60 letters in total.

Mr. Dinsdale: I hear the hon. minister admitting that he has received 50 or 60 letters in total.

Mr. Hnatyshyn: From Kamloops.

Mr. Dinsdale: Considering the problems of the Post Office, that is quite an interesting number of letters.

Mr. Hnatyshyn: How many have got lost in the mail?

Mr. Dinsdale: As we have been demonstrating from time to time in the House by specific experiments which have been conducted by various groups, including the members of the press gallery and the members of the city council of Toronto, not all the mail gets through which is placed in the trust of the Post Office.

With respect to the government's unseemly haste in implementing this legislation, I was amazed by the differences of opinion which arose between experts in the government of Manitoba and experts on the Wheat Board. The disagreement as to the terminology has been placed on the record by hon. members. It was a disagreement with the terminology which would be applied to the agricultural industry, if metrication were mutually acceptable.

The Manitoba government from the outset co-operated with the federal government in trying to meet the original deadline for implementing metrication. It was amazed to find that the Wheat Board, and particularly the commission under the Wheat Board with respect to metric conversion, had not decided specifically on the terminology that would be used in its application to the grain industry and in the lands survey system. The government finally made a belated response, and it was interesting that the information was conveyed by the Minister of State (Small Business) shortly after the transfer of allegiance of the Minister without Portfolio (Mr. Horner). It is obvious that at long last someone from western Canada managed to get the message through to the upper echelons of power in the Liberal cabinet.

● (1630)

If the government really wants to indicate that it has had a change of heart and recognizes what its new recruit has been saying, to the effect that this is violently opposed by western Canada, then it must go further than merely offering to delay implementation of the legislation. The legislation must go back to the drawing board. Farmers have to be given a chance to be heard if metrication is to be introduced smoothly, as it could have been had the government not run roughshod over the farming and small business community.