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Prosecute and be damned!

1st January did not mark the end of the war that BWMA has waged against the menace of compulsory metrication for the last five years. It marks the beginning of the real battle. The test of resolve, as well as legality, comes with enforcement by the authorities – the trading standards officers employed by local councils under direction from the Department of Trade and Industry – and with the response to enforcement from traders, consumers and the media.

The requirement for measuring and pricing of fresh foods and other loose goods by metric units, which has just come into force, could not even remotely affect the Single European Market – for the ostensible sake of which this whole metrication policy was imposed on us. Likewise, the policy never had anything to do with commerce or the economy, but was initiated and driven by the Foreign Office, to demonstrate that we were good Europeans.

Having now satisfied the EU that officially Britain has gone completely metric, there is no great incentive, on the domestic front, for the authorities to prosecute recalcitrant traders. Local councillors are well aware, too, that prosecuting popular honest traders would attract unfavourable media attention and lose electoral support.

Besides, the only situations in which prosecutions may be unavoidable is where traders who *have* converted complain of a trader who has *not* and who consequently has gained more customers at their expense. The policy of compulsion is founded on the absurd notion that businesses must be forced by criminal law to do what is (supposedly) for their own benefit, and this glaring contradiction is bound to come out in court. So is the doubtful legality of the Statutory Instrument no. 2867 (enforcing The Units of Measurements Regulations 1994), which derives solely from the European Communities Act 1972 rather than the Weights and Measures Act 1985. So will any unreasonable preceding behaviour by the trading standards officers.

So let battle commence – let's call the authorities' bluff! Once they have lost a test case, the whole policy will unravel. Most private retailers dare not defy the regulations out of fear of the consequences. Remember Roosevelt: "The only thing we have to fear is fear itself."

Betrayed by our politicians and government

A programme of deception

From 1 January it is the law in Britain that everything - repeat, everything - that requires measuring in some form for the purpose of sale must be measured and priced in metric units. This is bad enough. The fact that any honest traders who continue to satisfy their customers by weighing and pricing in customary measures risk criminal penalties is worse.

The fact that this oppressive measure has been imposed without opposition from any of our political parties in Parliament is worse still. The fact that the last Conservative administration suppressed public awareness of this proposed law and the present Government continued to do so, creating maximum inconvenience to traders and public confusion, is at least as bad.

But worst of all by far is the fact that Ministers and other leading politicians, who are collectively responsible for this surreptitious regime, are now shamelessly scrambling to claim credit for having secured a major "concession" which is entirely fictitious and a gross deception.

To boast of having preserved the imperial system and postponed metrication for ten years on the strength of the EC's permitting the continued use of customary measures as "supplementary indications," i.e. alongside but subordinate to the metric measures, is a contemptible confidence trick.

For such use amounts to no more than the provision of additional information, that is purely discretionary and of no concern to the authorities. Neither Brussels nor Westminster has the right to grant or withhold "permission" to supply any additional information, since the only legal requirement is the display of the metric measures.

Yet Tory MEPs headed by Giles Chichester put out a press release on 16 December which is no more than a huge hoax, bearing the headline "Euro-MPs Save the Pound and Stop Millennium Crisis." Mr Chichester concluded: "The chaos we would have seen on New Year's Day is unimaginable as shops across Britain would have been forced to go exclusively metric. This would have meant a completely new Millennium crisis with shoppers across the UK thrown into confusion. British Conservative MEPs have spotted this loophole in EU law and today's vote means that Britain's imperial system of measurements is safe for another ten years."

Actually, the chaos was all too easily imaginable and this gang succeeded in adding to it. Otherwise, all they achieved was to strengthen the false assumption that the EC possesses the power to grant permission for provision of

additional information, thereby making it easier for the withdrawal of such permission in ten years time. The truth of the metric law is entirely concealed. So is the fact that these fraudsters made no attempt to secure a ten-year extension to the existing real concession which permitted pricing of fresh foods and other loose goods in the measures the great majority of us prefer.

To increase the confusion among consumers and the damage to traders, while posing as the people's champions yet betraying their interests, is utterly disgraceful.

The political process of metrication has always been based on systematic lying to the public. Just as we were being reassured by our own Ministers that the process was already virtually complete, whilst at the same time they were spending huge sums of public money at both national and local levels to warn traders throughout the country of the penalties for failure to convert, likewise they have always told contradictory stories to MPs, constituents and the media as to whether Britain or Europe is to blame for the whole affair.

Whenever it suits, they support the Big Lie of the former Commissioner Bangemann (supremo of Trade and Industry until forced to resign on grounds of corruption) who in 1998 told the EC in a written answer to an MEP's question: "For more than twenty-five years measures have been adopted at Community level with the full support of the UK on the phasing out of units of the imperial system. In fact, as far back as 1965, before its accession to the Community, the UK had announced its support for the adoption of the metric system. In Community legislation the long transition phase, still ongoing, demonstrates the sensitivity and understanding with which this subject was treated."

This fantasy is naturally supported by most MEPs and other apologists for compulsion. Glenys Kinnock, for example, brazenly stated in a letter to John Colgate: "However, it was not a decree from the European Parliament that the UK Government impose regulations, but their own decision, and so I would therefore suggest it might be prudent to speak with your MP ..."

Yet it was Glenys Kinnock who advised Mr Colgate by letter in March 1995 (barely six months before compulsory metrication came into force) that there were *no* proposals in the pipeline for enforcement of metrication (see *The Yardstick*, no. 8, page 12).

But if you follow her advice and do contact your MP, you learn, as did Michael Smith last September from Richard Livsey CBE MP: "However, there is little that we in Parliament can

do to prevent metrication as the decision has been taken at European level and cannot be overtaken by Westminster."

Or you receive well-meaning but ineffectual letters such as that from Mrs Ann Winterton MP (also September) to John Gardner: "I agree totally with what you say about the restricted use of imperial measurements as a result of the interference of the European Union in our domestic affairs. I believe that such regulations illustrate much of what is wrong with the pernicious and interfering nature of the European Union and why the British people are saying ever more forcefully that 'enough is enough'... it is shocking that this Government has not even attempted to obtain from Brussels an extension of the derogation relating to the use of lb/oz on weighing machines... I am today writing to Dr Kim Howells... I shall, of course, be in touch just as soon as I have received a response to the representations which I am now making on your behalf."

But the only response MPs ever receive from the DTI is the stock letter full of misleading metric propaganda. When will MPs realise that what is required is *not* endlessly futile "representations," whether on behalf of BWMA or their constituents, but some positive initiative on their own account? For, as we are constantly telling Members on all sides of the House, there is a wide range of measures that they could easily promote.

Why, for instance, did not sympathetic MPs from every party compel the Government to secure another extension for a further period of ten years to the derogation permitting sole use of traditional units for sale of fresh foods and other loose goods, in line with the extension already granted for their continued use as "supplementary indications" on pre-packed goods? This could well have been readily available from Brussels, but not one MP even raised the question - so much for all the fervent assurances of support that we are all forever receiving from Westminster!

Why, furthermore, did no Opposition leader, despite the undertakings given by Paddy Ashdown and John Redwood, in 1998-9, do anything about promoting a Deregulation Order under the Deregulation Act as BWMA has been advocating since 1996?

Why, yet again, did no MP protest at the capitulation of the Better Regulation Task Force and Regulatory Impact Unit, which have served merely as mouth-pieces to justify compulsory metrication instead of insisting that enforcement pass the three tests of the 1992 Principles of Good Regulation, all of which it fails?

And why has no MP or MEP pointed out that the EC Directives make no mention of criminal

sanctions but merely require that each Member State introduce appropriate regulations to ensure compliance, which all thirteen Member States in mainland Europe did by regulations under civil law (consumer protection and minor fraud), in contrast to the UK and the Irish Republic which alone saw fit to screw down the regulations by imposing criminal penalties?

It is because the people - traders and consumers alike - have been so shamefully betrayed by Parliament that BWMA now sees the only remedy to be delivered by a court of law, arising from a successful test case challenging either (at one extreme) the legality of the whole metrication process and/or (at the other) the patent unreasonableness of petty prosecutions.

The usurpation of power by which metrication was foisted on Britain

The earlier history of metrication is similar. In his biography of Enoch Powell Simon Heffer writes: "[Powell] said that in 1965 the President of the Board of Trade had expressed merely the 'hope' that the country would have adopted the metric system within ten years. This hope had, without reference to Parliament, become an assumption when the Board had been founded in 1969. It had stated on its foundation - somewhat optimistically, as it turned out - that 'Britain will be a metric country before 1975.' What had especially provoked Powell was the statement by the chairman of the Board, the Labour peer Lord Ritchie-Calder, that 'going metric is no longer a question of whether but when. We in Britain have made our decision.'

Powell commented: 'I am very much concerned with usurpation of power, and Lord Ritchie-Calder and the Metrication Board are engaged in just that.' Metrication had not been a general election issue, and Parliament had not been consulted; the Government had taken no such 'decision', and had only the previous month said that 1975 would not be the date of British metrication.

'Yet', he continued, 'here is Lord Ritchie-Calder telling us that 'we' have decided. And his Board, masquerading as Government and spending public money, goes ahead pushing, cajoling, brow-beating, presuming, and all the time allowing no-one to suspect that there is no true authority behind it. This, I say, is usurpation. This is government by assumption. It is not to be tolerated in a country which still claims to live under the rule of law and the authority of parliament. Moreover, it is an insult to Government itself that Lord Ritchie-Calder should announce and implement decisions which the cabinet have not taken.'

Thirty years later, nothing has really changed. The wretched Metrication Board was scrapped in 1980. But the duplicity on which the metrication process was founded continued to characterise it to the present day, while the Board's role in bullying and threatening commerce and consumers has been taken over by the DTI as agents for the EC, once it was realised that Britain would never go metric unless compelled to do so by force of criminal law.

The great gram scam

A new BWMA pamphlet, *The Great Gram Scam*, was recently published. It cannot be better described than by reproducing the generous review, for which we are most grateful, in the Winter number of *The Salisbury Review*, as follows.

"Not many people realise that after 31 December it will be a criminal offence for anything sold by size or weight to be measured and priced in imperial measures. The report from the DTI announcing this was released at the end of the parliamentary year (1999) without even a press release. Previous government announcements had promised a 'complete reappraisal' and had given the erroneous impression that imperial units had won a ten-year reprieve. The EC had allowed the sale of fresh foods and other loose goods in non-metric. That concession expires as well on 31 December because the DTI has not bothered to obtain a ten-year extension.

"This useful pamphlet charts the processes by which successive governments have sought to make metrication compulsory and is a glaring example of how directives from Brussels are foisted on an unsuspecting public without any consultation, and seized upon by our own meddling bureaucracy. Four Prime Ministers promised that metrication would be a voluntary process. It has nothing to do with [international] trade or the economy - indeed it will help to destroy some of it. The difficulties of small traders are ignored while the government boasts of the supermarket groups embracing metric wholeheartedly. The whole débacle will be another nail in the coffin of the small trader. No prosecution has proceeded to a conviction since metrication of pre-packed goods came into force in 1995, and it would be useful to have one after January 1 to test these unworkable regulations in a court of law. However, Trading Standards Officers will be reluctant to pursue shopkeepers, to avoid unpopularity as well as costs. The BWMA is to be much commended for its tireless efforts to challenge the destruction of yet another plank in the British way of life."

A copy of *The Great Gram Scam* has been posted to all 89 MPs who signed the Early Day Motion last year, as well as other known

supporters in the House of Commons, and also to all 87 British MEPs. We look forward to reporting on responses in our next issue.

Dr Andy Fear has very kindly put the full text of *The Great Gram Scam* on his Internet site at <http://www.keele.ac.uk/socs/ks40/gram.htm>.

"We will never go metric"

Looking back to what we were told not so long ago, an article under this heading in the *Daily Mail* of 14 May 1998 quoted the head of the consumer group of the government's Better Regulation Task Force, Peter Salsbury, saying that metric measurements will never kill off Britain's pounds, pints, feet and inches.

The then Consumer Affairs Minister, Nigel Griffiths, said after the release of the BRTF's report that he was "very sympathetic" to its view. He added that the EU was "aware of our concerns".

Was all this genuine, or was it designed to lull us into thinking that our rulers really do care and that we can trust them to sort things out satisfactorily?

Federation of Small Businesses

Dr Bernard Juby, former Chairman of the FSB's Trade and Industry Committee and now a member of its policy group, wrote last August to the responsible DTI official:

"I have just returned from an extended period abroad to discover, to my dismay, that the long-promised "complete reappraisal of metrication policy" turns out to have been no such thing. Indeed, it is a pity that the Trades Description Act does not apply since this pathetic effort would readily contravene it. Its introduction late on the final Friday on the eve of the Parliamentary Recess and without benefit of a press release is indicative of the fact that it was a pathetic mouse rather than the expected elephant and that it was being slipped in via the back door. Perhaps its misleading comments (intentional or otherwise) had something to do with it? How disappointed you must be that having laboured so mightily for two years the final effort was so puny.

Irrespective of European Directives, the impact on small traders will be severe. The British public do not want this implementation and already Trading Standards Officers are flexing their muscles in anticipation of crashing down on small shop-keepers who are trying to give their customers what they want and not what our Lords and Masters of Brussels dictate.

Sorry, but it just smacks of a 'roll over and give up' mentality. I trust that you will show your Minister this letter. I am copying it to the BWMA to do with as they wish.

Yours, both sorrowfully and in anger."

Trading standards spokesman acknowledges the law is ludicrous

Among those interviewed on BBC Radio 4 on 6 January was Chris Howell, lead officer in weights and measures at the Institute of Trading Standards.

Asked, "So is it the end, then, of the pint of whelks? Is it the end of the quarter-pounder in the burger restaurant?" Mr Howell replied:

"Well, there's an interesting issue here. It's the end of the pint of whelks, I would say. The issue of the quarter-pounder is an interesting one because there is some debate as to how well the government have actually implemented the EC Units of Measurement directive.

Descriptions of items such as 6-foot beds and 54-inch widths of curtains are not at the moment caught by this legislation. So you have

the ludicrous situation where you buy a metre of curtain 54 inches wide."

(According to the Byzantine regulations, while descriptive uses of traditional measures are not banned, their use in pricing is. So goods may be *described* using traditional measures but not *priced* using traditional measures!)

Asked, "Do you have sympathy with the shops that haven't switched?", Mr Howell replied:

"Well, indeed I do. One of the whole problems here is that government – and I'm not talking about the present government but governments over about 30 years – simply have not prepared the way for this sort of change, and I'm not surprised that customers are still unable to come to terms with the metric system."

Resistance to metrication gets publicity

A growing band of fighters

Several doughty champions have reaffirmed their earlier vows to continue trading in customary measures. The three West Country heroes mentioned in our August issue (page 9) are all standing firm.

Terry Cooke of Ark Wood Apiaries in Calne, Wiltshire, sold all his honey in traditional jars simply labelled 1lb and ½lb, without buzzing from Trading Standards Officers, and will continue to do so.

The case of Tony Howard's three classic 1950s Shell petrol pumps beside his Village Shop at Withypool on Exmoor was featured by Christopher Booker in *The Sunday Telegraph* on 19 December.

Two more champions have come to the fore. One is José O'Ware, trading as 4th Avenue Blinds at Enfield. She has displayed a notice in her shop window, announcing that all material is sold in yards, feet and inches. The local newspaper gave her campaign a big spread and Dr Richard North devoted a full-page article to it in *First Voice*, the journal of the Federation of Small Businesses (with a circulation of some 120,000). Being close to London, this story will attract increasing attention.

The other is David Stephens, the butcher of Mandy's Chop Shop in Leigh-on-Sea near Southend, who has sworn to go to jail rather than waste £2,000 on metric weighing equipment. He is appealing for all Southend retailers to defy the regulations. He recently gave a powerful interview on Carlton TV and enthusiastically hands out BWMA leaflets to customers, from whom he has

collected 3,000 signatures to a petition against metrication.

Will Members and friends *please* put us in touch with other patriotic traders? There must be many more, most of whom won't know us until you tell them, and many of whom will be feeling isolated and fearful until we reassure them that they belong to a growing army! So please find them and tell us!

But what a sad contrast are cases such as that of another butcher, Bob Steward, whose family had run the business from the same shop in the Millfield area of Peterborough since 1906, but who has closed down because changing their weighing equipment to metric was financially unjustifiable, on top of the costs of complying with all the EU's other bureaucratic regulations. Hundreds of other family-owned shops are closing for the same reasons. As David Stephens points out: "When I started work there were 65,000 independent butchers, but now there are only 2,000." Metrication is killing most of what have survived the onslaught of supermarkets. The same applies to fishmongers and fruiterers and greengrocers. So more villages and older suburban centres die, while the supermarket bosses – the politicians' friends – rejoice.

The distinguished political biographer, Andrew Roberts – one of our Honorary Members – whose magisterial life of Lord Salisbury appeared recently, wrote to tell us: "I'm all in favour of defying, or better still ignoring, the law on the issue of our customary British weights and measures. But it *has* to be done on an issue which

will guarantee overwhelming public and media support for the brave retailers involved."

More good publicity

The new number of *The Salisbury Review* contains two items of great interest besides that mentioned already. One is a long article on metrication by our colleague William Peters, entitled "Let's choose our own rulers". The other is a magnificent tribute to Dr Nirad Chaudhuri CBE, an Honorary Member of BWMA, who died recently at the age of 101, in which it is suggested that perhaps he was "the most extraordinary and in many respects the most impressive man of our age." A copy of the Winter 1999 issue of *The Salisbury Review* can be obtained for £4.00 postage-free from Claridge Press, 33 Canonbury Park South, London, N1 2JW.

The founder and editor of *The Salisbury Review*, Professor Roger Scruton, had an excellent article in *The Times* on 9 December, entitled "Stupidity beyond measure", ridiculing compulsory metrication. Listing the merits of our customary measures, he commented: "The idea that we should be committing a crime by using them, and just because some foreign bureaucrat has said so, is such an offence to the sense of law and justice that we are surely under a moral obligation to go on using them nevertheless. If ever there were a case for civil disobedience, this is it."

On 15 December *The Times* published three letters in response. Jeffrey Titford MEP (UKIP), committed his party to financing the defence of any traders prosecuted for selling in customary measures and also to appealing against any conviction to the European Court of Human Rights (under Article 10 of the Convention which guarantees freedom of expression).

Mr C E A Cheesman commented: "What is really disturbing is the fact that Europe sees this as a suitable area for legislation. In Britain the approach would be that if metric measures and that unity with Europe is desirable in business, then business will adapt itself, while the stick-in-the-muds suffer economically. In Europe the argument seems to be that as metric measures are good they must be enforced and - incredibly - the alternative outlawed. Any opposition is deflected by the decision-makers on the grounds that the point is trivial. It is not: it is merely, by its nature, not a suitable area for political or bureaucratic decision-making and thus seems trivial to politicians and bureaucrats."

Rev Norton Giddings wrote: "Our milkman has left us an order form for dairy products over the Christmas period. It is the perfect illustration of the irrationality of the use of units of measurement that need to be multiplied by hundreds to arrive at a reasonable scale for

everyday use. The list includes milk in 568ml bottles, clotted cream in 907g, 454g, 227g and 113g cartons, and double cream in 142ml, 284ml and 568ml cartons. Is there any way that those most serviceable units of pint, pound and foot can be used instead?"

The renowned political commentator Simon Heffer was sent a copy of our pamphlet, *The Great Gram Scam*, and in the *Daily Mail* on 17 December we were gratified to see he gave the subject a double-page spread. This headlined "Say 'Non' to Kilograms!" and featured David Stephens, the Leigh-on-Sea butcher, among several rebel traders.

Bill Peters had a splendid letter in *The Sunday Telegraph* on 17 October, prominently displayed across five columns under the headline "Back Booker's battle of the ounces". Then *The Daily Telegraph* on 11 November published three letters; one again from Jeffrey Titford MEP, in which he said that "My party's fund to help victims of EU legislation and directives, together with numerous pledges to pay the fines of would-be 'martyrs', will ensure that, this time, the Government has gone too far in attempting to eradicate British culture", one from Vivian Linacre and - at the top of the page under the headline 'Ban on imperial measures is illegal' - one from our friend Michael Shrimpton, the eminent barrister, in which he reiterated the argument presented in his address to the BWMA Conference last March and published in *The Yardstick* (No. 8 page 6).

It is so important that Mr Shrimpton has publicly reaffirmed his view on this vital issue that we are reproducing his latest letter here:

"The Government's threats against traders who continue to sell in imperial measures after Jan. 1 are mere bluster. The purported Weights and Measures (Units of Measurement) Regulations 1994 are *ultra vires*, null and void. This is because they were mistakenly introduced under the s.2(2) of the European Communities Act 1972, but purport to amend, *inter alia*, the Weights and Measures Act 1985.

"It is a fundamental doctrine of the constitution that Parliament cannot bind its successors. An Act passed in 1985 cannot be amended by regulations made under a 1972 Act. The European Communities Act is an ordinary statute, as much subject to repeal, both express and implied, as any other. The point was not argued in the infamous "Factortame case", which is not authority.

"There is, however, high authority for the doctrine of implied repeal, which would bind any magistrate's court considering a prosecution for using imperial measures. Any such prosecution would amount to an unconstitutional defiance of the authority of Parliament."

Shrimpton's full legal opinion has been obtained by Jeffrey Titford MEP, and is available by post (send 6 first-class stamps to: Office of Jeffrey Titford, Rochester House, 145 New London Road, Chelmsford, Essex CM2 0QT) and on the Internet (<http://www.silentmajority.co.uk>).

Meanwhile, Lord Shore, one of our Patrons, has kindly described *The Great Gram Scam* as "a well argued and documented case against." His comment on metrication was: "What a disgrace! I hope your campaign goes well and generates the anger and ridicule that the new legislation so richly deserves."

He also enclosed copies of the Question he had put down in the House of Lords and of the amazing Reply (24 November) from the Minister, Lord Sainsbury of Turville, in which he said: "The UK Weighing Federation estimate that at least ninety-nine per cent of traders will have converted to metric units by 31 December"; as if that were an official national body rather than merely a group of suppliers of weighing machines who are now enjoying a bonanza, largely at the expense of small shop-keepers. But their "estimate" of *at least* 99% – i.e. *practically* 100% – must mean there should be no complaints from Trading Standards Officers, which would be very comforting!

Unfortunately, however, that claim must relate solely to supermarkets, whose interests are forever being promoted by Government, to the exclusion of private retailers who are of little account to the authorities. The large supermarket companies welcome metrication as another nail in the coffin of the private retailer, as well as a wonderful opportunity to bamboozle the public.

That "estimate" is indeed nonsense, having regard to (a) the mass-mailing of retailers by many Councils from September onwards, along with road-shows and advertising campaigns, to warn thousands of traders of possible penalties for failure to convert, (b) a widely publicised report from the Association of Chartered Certified Accountants (published in November) expressing concern at the proportion of "unmetricated" businesses and stating that "conversion will take time and careful planning", and (c) the dozens of 'phone calls we received from bewildered traders who have only just heard of the new regulations or were too busy throughout the Christmas season to do anything about their scales, or who have no intention of complying.

Bill Peters sent a copy of *The Great Gram Scam* with a Christmas card to each of our Honorary Members, many of whom kindly responded enthusiastically. Typically, Jilly Cooper sent us seasonal greetings in return, with the hand-written message: "Darling British Weights and Measures –

Thank you for your lovely book. Keep up the great work. Happy Christmas. Love from Jilly Cooper."

Stop press!

Until close to the deadline of 31 December, compulsory metrication did not attract much attention in the press or on radio or television. Besides, the media had been misled, as had the rest of the country, by the government's strategy of delaying, concealing and misrepresenting the truth about the metric imposition.

But once they realised the impact on shopkeepers and the public of the regulations now coming into force, and the extent to which they had allowed themselves to be deceived by the authorities for so long, the media took a sudden and sympathetic interest in the subject.

This realisation had been stimulated by the early declarations of defiance from several brave retailers (as reported elsewhere in this issue) and then was made abundantly clear by a letter from our Chairman, Bruce Robertson – but written as Chairman of Trago Mills – on 22 December. This was addressed to the Cornwall County Trading Standards Officer, and served notice that, "the Trago Mills stores will continue to use customary measures after 1 January and for as long as the overwhelming majority of our shoppers wish us to do so."

He sent copies of this letter to Kim Howells MP (the responsible Minister), William Hague MP, Patrick Nicholls MP, Nigel Farage MEP, Michael Shrimpton (barrister), Christopher Booker, Simon Heffer, The Western Morning News, Devon County Director of Trading Standards, Chief Executives of Devon and Cornwall County Councils, local County Councillors, and BWMA.

The effect on the media was gratifying. On 28 December *The Times* carried a full story – "Retailer risks prison to defy metrication" – with a further article refuting the USA's mythical metrication programme. On 30 December the *Financial Times* devoted a quarter of a page to the Tony Howard saga, with a photograph of him beside his petrol pumps (still in gallons), and including references to Bruce Robertson's announcement. On the same day *The Sun* covered Bruce's story – "I'll never give an inch". All these three included references to BWMA.

On 31 December the *Daily Mail* contained a general survey – "The metric martyrs: shopkeepers are ready to risk jail as final changeover deadline approaches". The *Daily Telegraph* reported at length on Jeffrey Titford MEP's offer to pay for any prosecuted trader's defence. The *Daily Express* reported on the whole issue: "Traders angry as UK goes metric", with extensive BWMA quotes. On 2 January the *Mail on Sunday* filled most of a page

with an article by Bruce Robertson – “Go metric? I’d rather go to prison.”

On 4 January a dozen or more local newspapers published a letter from Vivian Linacre – among hundreds distributed by e-mail (thanks to our member, Brian Mooney) on these “Unjust and unnecessary regulations.”

This coverage by the press in turn generated a huge demand for interviews, not only from local newspapers throughout the country but also from regional radio stations and foreign broadcasting studios as well as several television channels.

The plans of Jeffrey Titford MEP and colleagues to visit a butcher’s shop in Leigh-on-Sea on 11 January, to make several purchases in pounds and ounces, have already received wide publicity.

On 4 January the *Daily Mail* ran a story (“Metric martyr” to run shop) which revealed plans to open a special trading outlet in the Trago Mills shopping centre at Newton Abbot on 16 January for the sole purpose of selling miscellaneous goods in traditional measures so as to provoke a prosecution.

Trading under the name “Pound of Flesh,” the unit will be operated by a volunteer who insists on

assuming legal liability, with the intention of challenging in court the legality of metrication regulations.

It will be necessary to continue trading during all the preliminaries to a prosecution. Help will be sought from those willing to work on the premises or to donate merchandise. This venture is not connected with BWMA, but it is gratifying to see that others are also taking up the cudgels on this issue, albeit sometimes in ways that are outside BWMA’s remit.

On 9 January Christopher Booker devoted almost half a page in the *Sunday Telegraph* under the heading, “Butcher defies the metric weight watchers,” in which he reports a wave of local support for Dave Stephens and his wife Mandy, of Mandy’s Chop Shop in Leigh-on-Sea.

Two separate barristers have advised that rebels have a powerful legal case – not least that the regulations introduced by Michael Heseltine in 1994 to bring the 1985 Weights and Measures Act in line with EU law were so sloppily drafted that they omitted to amend key passages of the old legislation, leaving it still legal to sell in imperial measures.

Yet more metric muddle

Our rulers’ rulers

To show commitment to metric measures, the House of Commons has produced an official ruler. It is marked on both edges with centimetres, although the centimetre is an old metric unit not favoured in the reformed metric system, known as SI, that the UK is supposed to be adopting.

Moreover, the ruler is 30cm long. Why have they chosen this odd length? Upon enquiry, we were informed that 30cm was chosen because it equals 11.81 inches. In other words, it is as close as possible to 1 foot!

So here we have the House of Commons, which is responsible for making use of the foot as a trading unit a criminal offence, producing an official ruler and using a practical and convenient length – effectively the foot – that does not belong to the metric system! Have they no shame?

This ruler also demonstrates the limited utility of the metric system, being restricted to the decimal base. So the 30cm divisions, each divided into 10mm, are simply repeated on the two edges of one side, and the other side is completely blank because the metric system has nothing else to offer.

In contrast to this, BWMA’s 12-inch ruler shows the flexibility and versatility of the imperial system, using all four edges and providing useful options decimal scales cannot match.

Highway signs

Conflicting advice on metrication continues to pour out from government bodies. For example, the Environmental Service Dept of Brighton & Hove Council wrote to Paul Ripplingham: “I wish to assure you that all signs erected by the Highways Authority are required to conform to the Traffic Signs Regulations and General Directions 1994. These permit only imperial measurements except in a few limited cases where both metric and imperial may be shown; e.g. Low Bridge signs on major roads.”

This is confirmed in a letter received by Rosemary Wickenden from Oxfordshire County Council, stating that “As far as I am aware, the only road signs that should display metric units are those relating to height restrictions.”

Yet that view is contradicted by a letter to Mr R P Turner from the Highways Agency: “I have been advised that regulation 5(2) of the Units of Measurement Regulations 1995 (S.I. 1995/1804) gives an exemption which allows continued use of imperial units for road signs, distance and speed measurement. The legal view is that although this exemption exists, it is not obligatory.”

So one says that metric is permitted only in a few instances while the other says precisely the opposite. It may be the 1995 Statutory Instrument enforcing an EC Directive superseded the 1994 Regulations; but, if that were so, then Brighton & Hove would have been aware of the fact. If local government cannot even

interpret metric regulations relating to road signs, etc, affecting millions of people every day, then these regulations are clearly unworkable.

Increasingly, zealous local authorities and public environmental bodies waste public money by erecting new finger-posts for pedestrians and traffic signs with distances in kilometres to one or even two decimal places, so that what was 3 miles becomes 4.83km and 7½ miles becomes 12.07km. The old distances were only approximations, so to convert them with such precision is stupid, but in character.

Confusion in space

Accounts in the British press of the USA's Mars space disaster on 1 October were brief and confusing.

The following extract from the original press release put out by the Kennedy Space Center on 11 September 1998, soon after the launch, should, however, have warned NASA that it could all end in tears: "At liftoff, the spacecraft will weigh 1,418 pounds (3,120 kilograms). It is 7.6 feet (25 meters) high, 6.4 feet (21 meters) deep, and 5.4 feet (18 meters) wide. Power is provided by a single large solar array which is 18.6 feet (61 meters) long and 6.8 feet (22 meters) across. After cruising in space for 286 days, the spacecraft will be captured in an elliptical orbit around Mars."

This daft press release is preserved on many Web sites, but the archives on the Space Center's own Web site show only the amended version, *with all the metric measurements removed*. Note that in order to ensure a correct record it was only the "English" measurements that were retained. Clearly, not even the Space Center can understand metric units.

Bill Holdorf from Woodridge, Illinois, has kindly sent cuttings which explain more fully what caused the crash. Lockheed Martin Corp., the builder of Mars Climate Orbiter, provided data in pounds to the Jet Propulsion Laboratory which assumed the figures were in newtons. It would seem that such an error would be readily detectable, but that was not so because the thrusters contributed very little to the orbit. (The craft had three reaction wheels, similar to flywheels, to help maintain its orientation during flight, and twice a day tiny thrusters were fired briefly to counter the effects of solar wind and other forces on the spinning of the flywheels.) The discrepancies actually put the craft off course by only 60 miles on a journey of about 416 million miles.

Even so, some of the experts' reported statements betray an alarming ignorance of the metric system. For example, Mr John Pike, director of space policy at the Federation of American Scientists, commented: "Last time I checked, I could sort of visually detect the difference between a foot and a metre. This is kind of the very first thing in Physics or Engineering." That is a quotation to cherish!

The astronomer Dr Patrick Moore, one of our Patrons, remarked: "This was an awful blunder... It just shows the dangers of creeping metrication. Why can't we stick to good old imperial measurements?"

The Mars fiasco was followed by several letters in *The Daily Telegraph*. Mr Brian Cashman wrote:

"... next time you are stacked over Heathrow ... spare a thought for the overworked pilot. Distances are measured in nautical miles, while visibility is measured in metres, except when it exceeds 9,999 metres, in which case it is measured in kilometres. Heights are measured in feet, unless you are a Russian Open Sky inspection flight, when they are measured in metres. Altimeter air pressure settings are in hectopascals (Eurospeak for millimetres of mercury) - unless you are American, when they are inches of mercury. Happy landings!"

On the Continent

Examples still come to light of the continued use of non-metric measures on the Continent at the same time as we in the British isles are told that we have to prove our European credentials by abandoning such measures!

In the *Daily Telegraph*, Mr Peter Langdon wrote (24 October). "The BWMA will be encouraged to know that every outside garden tap in Europe is fitted with a British Standard pipe thread, known as ¾ inch gas - in France *trois-quarts gaz*, in Germany *drei viertel Gaz* ... More serious is the fact that when you order *un demi* in a French bar you receive not a half but a quarter litre. I think I am owed millions of French francs because of this anomaly."

Italian bureaucracy in action

However, news from Italy is that the new year saw, in theory, the demise of a number of common Italian words indicating measures, namely "chilo", "etto" (short for "ettogrammo", 100g), and "chilometro". These are replaced by "kilogrammo", "ettogrammo" and "kilometro". Strictly speaking, from now on people asking for "un etto di prosciutto" (3½oz of ham) could be prosecuted, though it's the everyday word. The ch- spelling is now illegal in all official and formal texts. The old measure "quintale" (100kg) also got the push.

We may doubt that ordinary Italians will take much notice of the new rules, which anyway allow one non-SI old-metric measure (the hectogram)!

Which metric system are we to use?

Brian Mooney points out that DTI press releases refer to Britain's adoption of the official 'SI' (*Système International*) units, which is based on the metre, the kilogram and the second; in which case a measurement such as 500ml will be illegal - for it should be expressed as 0.0005 cubic metre! Labels advising "Cook for 15 minutes at 200 celsius" should read "Cook for 0.9 kiloseconds at 473 kelvin". That's easy, convenient metric for you!

Confused thinking abounds

Likewise, estate agents' boards outside shops and offices idiotically advertise equivalents such as "approx. 2,000 sq.ft / approx. 185.81 sq.m." Surveyors universally recognise that a calculation of

floor space or a valuation taken to the nearest whole square foot is almost always accurate enough, but obviously to the nearest whole square metre is not, so expressions in sq.m. generally have to be taken down to decimal fractions, with all the awkwardness and risk of gross errors which that incurs. What on earth is the point of having to use a decimal point!

During the recent Rugby World Cup, Vivian Linacre referred to the "10-yard line", the "25-yard line", etc, in conversation with a South African supporter, who interrupted with "No, no, you mean metres – we're all metric now!" Whereupon Vivian asked: "What do you call your player in the no. 9 position?" and the Springbok had to answer, "scrum-half, of course", to which the rejoinder was "No, no, you mean scrum 0.5 – you're all metric now! And what about your numbers 11 and 14?" "Wing three-

quarters, of course" to which again the counter was "No, no, you mean wing 0.75 – you're all metric now!" What use are decimals when the human mind prefers fractions, using factors that tie in with customary measures?

The Times published the following "correction" on 11 December: "A report yesterday on St John's Wort (Herb "better" for mild depression) should have referred to a dose of 350mg three times a day, not 350g, as incorrectly stated." Indeed, a dose of over three-quarters of a pound would cause rather more than a mild depression. These dangerous mistakes with medical prescriptions – confusing grams with centigrams or milligrams, millilitres with centilitres, and misplacing decimal points – seem increasingly common. Such errors, of course, are much less likely using customary measures.

More good news

Food writers

Gillian Riley, the distinguished author of several books on European gastronomy, kindly sent a very thoughtful letter in response to our *New Guidelines for Food Writers*, from which we quote:

"I am a food historian and so am used to disentangling the sometimes strange specifications in historic recipes, where weights, measures and money might change (e.g.) from one region to another in mediaeval and renaissance Italy. When adjusting them to use in my books, I prefer to use anthropomorphic terms – pinch, lump, handful, or spoons and cups – in recipes where exact precision is not all that critical (about 90% of most recipes, let's face it!).

We all know how to chuck a lump of butter the size of an egg into a sauce, or add a slurp of olive oil (not a 'drizzle', which is a meteorological and gastronomic impossibility). ... I hope your leaflet and tables will encourage a more laid-back, easy-going, flexible approach to food writing, recognising the realities of most domestic cooking processes which involve a sort of cheerful pragmatism and imaginative sensibility towards ingredients rather than a craven respect for authority.

I'd like to see the BWMA think back to our gastronomic links with pre-Napoleonic Europe, and the rich varieties of measurements we all seemed to be able to take on board without stress, and I hope that your efforts will help to create a more healthy atmosphere for creative writing about food."

American views

Bill Holdorf sent us a letter from the famous economist (and Nobel Prize winner) Professor

Milton Friedman, writing from the Hoover Institution at Stanford University, saying: "Under our voluntary system so far, almost all scientists have chosen to use the metric system, but these same scientists when they go home shift over to inches, feet, yards, etc. There is no conflict between having both systems in operation at the same time, and that is undoubtedly the way it will be for a very long time."

He sent also sent us a letter from an eminent US structural engineer, Robert R. Koons, of Tempe, Arizona, who wrote: "I have followed the metric movement since the early 1970s. I am convinced that there has never been any real momentum to convert. The 1976 law told us that we will *voluntarily* convert. (Law is force: how do you *force* people to convert?) They set up a metric commission to travel through the country twisting arms and trying to coerce people to convert – no luck! Then they slipped a metric conversion measure into the 1988 Omnibus Trade Act. My own Congressmen admitted they did not know that they had voted on this thing. The law said that the *government* must convert. The idea was to force conversion through the horrendous economic power of Federal Agencies. Through the Federal Highway Administration, funds allocated to the states were tied to metric conversion ... Recently, our legislature said they had enough of this crap and passed another law directing the Department of Transportation to go back to the English system." [See also "United States abandons metrication" in our previous issue, page 8.]

National Trust makes sense

Joseph Robotham sent a copy of The National Trust's 'Neptune' leaflet, launching the appeal for funds to preserve Britain's coastline. It opens out to a

length of exactly 36 inches which are boldly marked, and carries text beginning: "How can you measure its beauty? How can you measure the importance of its wildlife? How can you measure the enjoyment it can bring? You just have. Imagine you have one yard of beautiful coastline in your hands. Over 394,000 yards of it - 580 miles - are in ours..." and so on. The campaign's newsletter (*Neptune News*) is likewise full of information about cliffs, with heights in feet, and coastal walks, with distances in miles. Not a mention of metric. Only inches, yards and miles can match the sentiments. Yet these are the measures that our masters in Westminster and Brussels wish to abolish.

If you want copies, or wish to compliment them on using only customary measures, write to Neptune Coastline Campaign, Attingham Park Shrewsbury, SY4 4TP (tel. 01743 708 103/4).

Furlongs and acres

A lovely article in *The Times Weekend* on 23 October by John Cherry included the following: "An acre is a wonderful thing. Historically, as a unit of measurement it has varied considerably, but in modern, post mediaeval usage it is to be taken as a furlong by a chain. In other words what one man could plough with a one-furrow plough and two horses in a day. A furlong (furrow long) at 220 yards (an eighth of a mile) being a sensible length that the horses could pull before they needed a breather ... an acre is roughly the size of a football pitch. A sensible, human-scale unit; it even has God's blessing with mentions in the Bible. ... A hectare comprises 2.471 acres or 100 *ares*, one *are* being 100 metres squared or 10,000 square metres. I know of no-one who can visualise a hectare; we all still think in acres. Yet every form we fill in requires answers in hectares, ..."

Leaves in the breeze

Mr Lacy-Hulbert, a chartered engineer, pointed out that the new "London Eye" - the giant wheel in front of County Hall - is always described, very properly, as 450 ft high, and never as 137.16m high!

Rosemary Wickenden kindly wrote, enclosing a leaflet illustrating the Salter "Little Samson" spring balance, calibrated in pounds and ounces, which she intends to take when shopping (at only 4½ inches long it goes easily into a basket, bag or fair-sized coat pocket) and "ostentatiously re-weigh and label anything which is sold to me in metric." This handy instrument costs only £4.85 and is available from Salter Weigh-Tronix, George Street, West Bromwich, West Midlands, B70 6AD (tel. 0121 553 1855). Don't forget to specify pounds and ounces!

Mrs B Sykes sent a large advertisement from the *Isle of Man Courier*, published by The National Lottery, inviting applications from retailers to operate outlets, stipulating that shops must be of a size "greater than 750 sq.ft." She also sent a handsome leaflet from the Isle of Man Creameries, advertising recipes using their products, all exclusively in customary measures.

"Gold Star Awards" to the following, whose mail order catalogues use imperial units exclusively: Windrush Mill, of Witney, Oxfordshire, OX8 6BH and House of Bath, 1 Bartlett Street, Bath, BA1 2QZ.

Congratulations, too, to J D Wetherspoon, for introducing a 16oz glass as a measure for soft drinks. The exemption under the regulations is specifically for the pint measure and only for beer and cider, but Wetherspoon's venture does not conform on either size (at 4/5ths of a pint) or on product. Roger Tye, who supplied this story, has undertaken to see whether the glasses remain free of "ml".

Walter Ablett kindly pointed out that "With remote control TV, one can ring up BBC Ceefax - 145 and ITV Teletext - 327 for their 'letters pages'. Each day they publish 10 letters on any subject (not more than 60 words), giving national publicity at the cost of a stamp or a fax. I have had many published. José O'Ware frequently gets letters published." So come on, all you letter-writers, don't just watch the telly - tell the millions who are watching it about BWMA!

ITV Teletext 326 holds daily telephone polls on different subjects - viewers ring a number at a cost of only 12p - and on 29 September a poll was held on preferences for weighing in metric/imperial, with the result that out of 2,426 votes cast, 93% favoured imperial and 7% metric.

Fraternal greetings from USA

We were most pleased to hear at last from Seaver Leslie, founder of *Americans for Customary Weight and Measure*. He writes: "My sincere apology for not writing sooner to you. I have had a chaotic few years... But I have been watching your progress with great pleasure.... I am so impressed with what you all have accomplished in Britain. ..."

Metric has always been enforced by government bullies. No one has ever volunteered to convert to it. On the other hand, all the countries about the globe developed their own customary system hundreds (or more) years ago. They almost all have a 'foot' similar to the one that built the Parthenon and Stonehenge before that. They all have a 'cup' of about eight ounces (the amount of spring water that you can draw with your cupped hands) and they all have a measure that is about a pound. ... the spacing for the rungs of a ladder are universally 12 inches apart, ... even the ladders archaeologists have found in the dry sand of the ancient pre-Columbian kivas of the southwest American cliff dwellings have 12-inch spacing, established long before Europeans touched this soil. So there you have it. These units of measure were standardized not by government decree but by practical, continuous use. The same happened in ancient Asian culture.

Below I list a few units of linear measure corresponding to the English/ customary foot, showing length in inches and division used.

Country	Name	Length (in.)	Division
China	chih	14.10	10ths
Turkey	½ pik	13.5	12ths
Portugal	pe	12.96	12ths
France	pied	12.79	12ths
Austria	fuss	12.44	12ths
Germany	fuss	12.36	12ths
Norway & Denmark	fod	12.36	12ths
Babylonia		12.24	12ths
Greece	pous	12.08	12ths
Russia	foute	12.00	12ths
Japan	shaku	11.93	10ths
Belgium	pied	11.81	12ths
Roman	pes	11.60	12ths
Holland	voet	11.15	12ths

While it is important to recognize that universal standards evolved in all four corners of the earth, it is also wonderful to celebrate the differences in language and unit that characterize the measurement traditions of different nations. ... In the age of the computer, one has only to press a button to get an immediate conversion to a foreign measurement system if needed, without abandoning one's everyday use of familiar units.

Unlike our customary system, metric seems 'alien' to everything human. Metric units don't relate in scale or name to ordinary daily tasks. A carpenter glances down a metric measuring tape and the subdivisions of the meter and the decimeter are a blur of tiny little 'mm' hatchmarks that can't be seen quickly or easily to determine a length for a saw cut. The inch is clearly broken down into 1/2s, 1/4s, 1/8s and 1/16s, making these distinctions easily discernible at a glance. The construction industry in the USA refuses to use metric in spite of the pressure from various government bureaucrats.

Americans for Customary Weight and Measure ... was incorporated in 1978 as a non-profit. ... We are winning this fight thanks to people like you and your hardworking group. A metric conversion push has fizzled over here for the third time in our history. People are happy and enjoying their freedom."

We replied to this letter, undertaking to maintain a close liaison. We can help, encourage and learn from one another. Furthermore, we can each inform the other as to the true position in our own country, contrary to metric propoganda, which tells Americans that Britain went completely metric in the 1970s and tells us that US metrication is imminent.

So Canada is now metric?

Metric propogandists have long claimed that virtually the whole world is metric apart from the UK and – but not for much longer – the USA.

In previous issues we have reported on the reverse trend in the USA, and on other countries where, despite being officially metric, traditional weights and measures are still preferred and used for various purposes.

Thanks to Sam Malin for the following excellent information about Canada, where considerable freedom of choice has been restored.

In 1983 a moratorium was placed on the enforcement of metric units used in the marketplace. At the time, in the Ontario Court of Appeal, a court decision was being appealed that allowed two gas station owners to continue the sale of gasoline by the gallon. Earlier, the two gas station owners were charged under the Weights and Measures Act for failure to convert their prices to metric units. The Ontario government won their case, but the moratorium was to stay in place until new provisions could be introduced. The new provisions included the permanent display of Canadian (Imperial) units as long as metric units were shown equally prominent. But the new provisions were never introduced or enforced. The Liberal federal government was facing an election year and did not want to upset voters.

Soon after the new Conservative government took power they completed the termination of the Metric Commission Canada by 1985. It is the current policy of Measurement Canada, the agency responsible for "fair measurement for all", not to enforce the Weights and Measures Act and Regulations with regard to the use of metric units by grocers. ... So, 29 years after the White Paper on metric conversion, the marketplace is free to use Imperial units of measure.

This was confirmed by a recent letter from Alan E. Johnston, President of Measurement Canada, stating: "The mandatory implementation of the metric system in [the retail sale of gasoline, individually measured foods and home furnishings] sectors raised the possibility that freedom of choice for Canadians would be unduly restricted. For this reason, a moratorium on the enforcement of these regulations was declared in 1983 by the then Minister of Consumer and Corporate Affairs. Since then, the policy has been to let the market place set the pace of conversion rather than force its use by regulation."

He also stated in a separate letter: "While I agree that one of the driving factors for retailers maintaining the advertising of prices in imperial units of measure is the fact that prices may appear less costly, it is not the only factor. ... In many

instances, retailers are maintaining the advertising of prices per pound for fear of alienating those customers who are unfamiliar with the metric system."

Since the UK experience is so similar to theirs, we devoutly hope that, some sixteen years later, we follow their eminently sensible example.

The sequence of events in this process of relaxation was as follows:

Nov 84 – Consumer & Corporate Affairs announced that it would not prosecute violators of metric laws.

Jan 85 – Consumer and Corporate Affairs Minister, Michel Cote, announced that regulations requiring use of metric measurements alone will be revoked and replaced by new provisions.

Mar 85 – Metric Commission disbanded and replaced by a small metric office in the Bureau of Policy Coordination of the Department of Consumer & Corporate Affairs. Proposed new provisions were not introduced and implementation of metric regulations deferred.

Oct 85 – Metric Office became the Measurement Information Division of Industry Canada [equivalent to our DTI] with a much reduced staff.

Apr 88 – Measurement Information Division abolished. Proposed new provisions abandoned.

David Delaney obtained a copy of the latest amendments, dated 2 June 1993, to the Canadian Weights and Measures Act, listing (alongside the authorised metric units) the following authorised "Canadian Units of Measurement":

Measurement of length – Unit of Measurement Definition:
 mile 1,760 yards; furlong 220 yards;
 rod, pole or perch 5½ yards; yard 9,144/10,000 metre;
 foot 1/3 yard; inch 1/36 yard; chain 22 yards;
 link 1/100 chain.

Measurement of area – Unit of Measurement Definition:
 sq. mile 640 acres; acre 4,840 sq. yard;
 sq. rod 30¼ sq. yards; sq. foot 1/9 sq. yard;
 sq. inch 1/144 sq. ft.

Note particularly that Canadians still employ so many of our ancient and useful measures such as the acre, chain, link and rod, which we have shamefully abandoned – which are, indeed, derided as obsolete by our government bureaucrats.

We have been sent many photographs of retail advertisements in Canada for foods, supermarket posters, etc, all of which show weights and prices boldly in convenient customary measures, with the metric equivalent in small type. For example, 2lb for \$4 in bold with "works out to \$4.41/kg" in small lettering.

Roger Dykes and other of our members have sent accounts of recent visits to Canada, from which we quote:

"Official signs may display metric information, but it is very evident, the farther West one travels, that there is a switch to dual marking, on and through to almost Imperial only. By the time one is in Alberta, Imperial appears to be the people's choice for conveying information. As we rose in the Calgary Tower lift, the heights were shown in feet until reaching the viewing platform at 525ft to get our first view of the Rockies indicated as a distance of 40 miles. On a visit to a rodeo, all the animals were weighed in lb, the farms described in acres, distances in miles.

The captain of the ferry to Vancouver Island announced our speed in mph, and in the city every hotel car-park and swimming-pool sign is in ft & in. All the shops, restaurants, etc, advertisements and price tickets are in imperial, with or without corresponding metric quantities in small type.

On our train journey, the young engineer gave out details of power rating in ft-lb, horse-power and tonnages. During a visit to an ice field, the young tour guide gave out the facts in degrees F, and all measurements in feet. Our tour guide in Victoria, aged 18/19, educated solely in metric and assuming that we Brits were completely metricated (because that's what they are taught), nevertheless delivered her monologues exclusively in imperial."

Cultural heritage and the double standards of government

The value of diversity

Enthusiasts for threatened languages and cultures express views such as that "diversity of languages is a value in itself, similar to biodiversity," that "each language has value in itself, and it should be preserved, perhaps like a work of art," and that "languages are essential to peoples and nations. Language is related to identity, culture, and memory. Language erosion is cultural genocide."¹ These views have gained ground in recent years.

Even Paris, long hostile towards minority languages (a minister in a former government asserted that for the sake of French unity the Breton language must disappear), has, albeit rather

grudgingly, more or less accepted their right to exist.

Taking this chauvinist attitude further, the author of a French book on the metric system went so far as to claim that the twin pillars of civilisation are the French language and the metric system!

The double standards in relation to the cultural heritage of Britain can increasingly be seen from the attitude on the one hand to the minority languages as a precious heritage to be protected, and on the other to our traditional weights and measures as something to be derided and abandoned.

Not long ago it was a common practice to punish children who spoke Welsh or Gaelic at school in the classroom or the playground. The

same attitude often resulted in forcing left-handed children to write with the right hand, however unhappily. Both prejudices have since been very largely abandoned.

Yet officialdom's view is that our weights and measures are culturally and practically of little worth, and that the widespread preference in Britain for them is something we must be forced to get over.

Government initiatives fostering Europe's linguistic cultures are in stark contrast to the attitude shown towards Britain's measurement heritage. Why is there no respect for our popular, practical, traditional weights and measures, which have long been part of our language and culture?

Compulsory abandonment of traditional means of measurement is in remarkable contrast with the totally different attitude now adopted by European governments towards minority languages.

The Council of Europe

The Council of Ministers Convention of the Council of Europe approved in 1992 the European Charter of Regional and Minority Languages.

This stated that, "Considering that the protection of the historical regional or minority languages of Europe, some of which are in danger of eventual extinction, contributes to the maintenance and development of Europe's cultural wealth and traditions;

Considering that the right to use a regional or minority language in private and public life is an inalienable right conforming to the principles embodied in the United Nations International Covenant on Civil and Political rights, and according to the spirit of the Council of Europe Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms;" etc, various objectives and principles were agreed. Among these were the following:

the recognition of the regional or minority languages as an expression of cultural wealth;

the need for resolute action to promote regional or minority languages in order to safeguard them;

the facilitation and/or encouragement of the use of regional or minority languages, in speech and writing, in public and private life;

the provision of appropriate forms and means for the teaching and study of regional or minority languages at all appropriate stages;

the promotion of study and research on regional or minority languages at universities or equivalent institutions.

Also, "In determining their policy with regard to regional or minority languages, the Parties shall take into consideration the needs and wishes expressed by the groups which use such languages."²

The Council of Europe adopted the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages in 1992. After five ratifications the Charter came into force on March 1st, 1998. In 1994, the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe adopted the Framework

Convention for the Protection of National Minorities. After twelve ratifications the Convention came into effect on February 1st, 1998.³

The European Union

The EU claims a deep interest in Europe's diverse heritage. The Treaty on European Union, signed in 1992 (the Maastricht Treaty) states that, "The Union shall respect the national identities of its Member States".

We are told that, "The Treaty on the European Union ... mentions the cultural and linguistic diversity of the Member States in its Article 126 (Education, Vocational Training and Youth) and pledges respect to their national and regional diversity in Article 128 (Culture).

The European Commission has "subsidized initiatives for the promotion and defence of the minority languages of the European Union, both at European level – like the European Bureau for Lesser Used Languages and the Mercator Information Network – and specific projects of the various linguistic communities." The European Parliament "has had an Intergroup for Minority Languages since 1983. The Intergroup is made up of members of nearly all the political groups within the Parliament and meets regularly each month".⁴

European Bureau for Lesser Used Languages

EBLUL speaks for about 50 million EU citizens who speak a language other than the official language of the State in which they live.

The Bureau promotes and defends the autochthonous regional or minority languages of the countries of the European Union and the linguistic rights of those who speak these languages.

Since 1984 EBLUL "has thus been uncovering Europe's hidden linguistic heritage and offering speakers of regional and minority languages a voice at European level, a voice that represents an integral part of our common European culture and which enriches the present and future of the Union, in whose shape all citizens have a role to play", so ensuring the future of "Europe's linguistic mosaic".

In 1981 the European Parliament adopted the Arfé Resolution. A second resolution was adopted two years later in which the Commission of the European Communities was asked to continue to intensify its activities to promote these languages. One of the ways to do this was to set up an organisation to represent minority or regional language speakers at European level.

In 1987 the European Parliament's Kuijpers Resolution pointed out that EC Member State Governments and the European Commission should propose some concrete directives for the conservation and the promotion of the regional or minority languages and cultures of the European Community.

In 1994 the European Parliament – with an almost unanimous vote – adopted the Killilea Resolution on linguistic and cultural minorities. This text endorses the previous Resolutions and urges the

Member States to support the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages of the Council of Europe; it also calls on the European Council and the European Commission to continue their support and encouragement for European organisations representing linguistic communities.⁵

The following Internet sites provide the relevant texts:

1. <http://web.inter.nl.net/users/Paul.Treanor/eulang.html>
2. <http://www.troc.es/ciemen/mercator/CE2-GB.HTM>
3. <http://www.eblul.org/i-gb.htm>
4. <http://europa.eu.int/abc/obj/treaties/en/entr2b.htm>
5. <http://www.eblul.org/WHAT2-GB.HTM>

Bureaucratic confusion and obfuscation

Public consultation or secretive regulation?

Some local authorities are now boasting that they have “signed the Central/Local Government Concordat on Good Enforcement”. Thanks to Gerald Stancey, we have obtained a copy of this intriguing document from Rutland County Council. It solemnly records that it was formally adopted by the Environmental Services Committee whose decision was ratified by the full Council and was accordingly signed in London.

Why use such a pretentious term as “concordat” – whose historical meaning is an agreement between the Papacy and a State – except, of course, to make it sound more important than it really is? In fact, it is simply a guide to the Council’s policy for enforcement of environmental laws, and should have been clearly expressed as such.

But even at that practical level, it is useless, for two reasons. In the first place, it lists the areas of responsibility covered, with no mention of weights and measures, let alone metrication, yet enquiries confirm that this subject is indeed included. Presumably, reflecting central government’s long-standing policy, the Council wants to attract as little attention to this as possible.

In the second place, it consists of nothing more than a series of platitudes about standards of service and quality of performance and rudimentary guidelines to normal business practice, i.e. the very minimum that Council tax-payers are entitled to expect from their councillors and officials. Certainly, if the pledges about consultation and caring for the community mean anything at all, Councils could not possibly decide to enforce metrication without a local referendum!

The Essex County Council Trading Standards Prosecution Policy document is likewise full of sanctimonious rhetoric, with no mention at all of metrication (it is becoming the law that dare not speak its name!), but the pill inside all the sugar, with reference to the TSOs, is that “ultimately it is their responsibility to comply with the law.”

None of their specific grounds for prosecution – fraudulence or negligence, substantial loss or prejudice to others, serious risk to safety, well-being or health of the public, etc – would justify proceeding against an honest trader for the offence of continuing to sell in customary measures to customers who understand them better than metric.

Most letters of enquiry to Council TSOs receive detailed replies whose effect is largely spoiled by a final paragraph such as: “Advice is given gratuitously and

without liability on the part of the XYZ Council or any of its officers. Advice is based on the information supplied by you and is based on this Department’s interpretation of the law. It is subject to review in the light of new legislation or new interpretation of the law by the Courts.”

Perhaps those responsible for enforcing metrication are as confused as the public. We look forward eagerly, however, to the prospect of “new interpretation of the law by the Courts”!

Greengrocers harassed by bureaucrats

David Delaney received a copy of an astonishing official circular issued to the fruit and vegetable trade, stating: “Alternatively, if you sell certain fruit or vegetables you may sell them by the number or by the bunch instead of by weight. The produce that this is permissible for is as follows.”

Produce which may be sold by the number rather than net weight: apples, apricots, artichokes, aubergines, avocados, bananas, beetroots, cabbage, cauliflower, capsicum, celery, coconuts, corn on the cob, cucumber, fennel, figs (fresh), garlic, grapefruit, guavas, kiwi fruit, kohlrabi, lemons, lettuce, limes, mangoes, marrows, melons, nectarines, onions (other than spring), oranges, passion fruit, pawpaw, peaches, pears, pineapple, plums, pomegranites, pomelo, pumpkins, radishes, shaddock, soft citrus fruits, tomatoes, ugli.

Vegetables which may be sold by the bunch rather than net weight: asparagus, beetroots, carrots, chives, endives, garlic, mint, mustard and cress, onions (including spring), parsley, radishes, salad cress, turnips, watercress.

What a pity that Brussels sprouts don’t appear anywhere here! But doesn’t it make you feel grateful to the bureaucrats to learn that, after many months of arduous research and deliberation, they have graciously decided that it is permitted to sell marrows – irrespective of size – by number rather than by weight? To think that, but for the wisdom of government officials, some foolish greengrocers might have been trying to sell marrows and coconuts by the bunch or watercress by number!

But why is it legal to sell peaches by number but not dates? And what about all the other, chiefly exotic but increasingly fashionable, varieties of fruit and vegetable – why don’t any of them qualify for exemption from the weighing machine?

The joke is that neither ‘number’ nor ‘bunch’ is an authorised metric unit, since these terms do not appear on the Annex to the EC Directive. It is therefore possible that this circular is illegal, in which case all that bureaucratic labour may yet end in tears!

Campaign against compulsory metrication

Criminal to be British? The government says it is illegal to sell goods priced by the pound. If so, it is a criminal offence to use our own weights and measures for trade in our own country!

Compulsory metrication is undemocratic. The edict already making metric units compulsory for pre-packaged goods, and those sold by length, was rubber-stamped by Parliament without proper consultation or debate, against the public's wishes.

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largest economy, uses our feet and inches, pounds and ounces, and intends to continue doing so. Why shouldn't we?

Ending compulsory metrication. Many trade associations and chambers of commerce back our call to end compulsory metrication. So do over 90 MPs of all parties.

Helping to defend freedom. You can help to restore freedom of choice and to save part of our heritage by joining the British Weights and Measures Association. Tell others about the campaign – copies of our leaflet are available on request. Write to your MP and to your local newspaper. **The time to speak up is now.**

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The list of members is kept on computer but not disclosed to commercial organisations

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Views expressed in *The Footrule* are not necessarily those of the Association.