

The Metric Despotism

three years left to save democracy

by Vivian Linacre

(President)

No Queen's Speech, outlining a forthcoming legislative programme, ever mentioned proposals to criminalize customary weights and measures, nor did any political party's election manifesto. No question of a popular referendum on the subject has ever arisen, for the same reason that promises of a referendum on the euro and on the EU constitution have both been broken, because the government knows that it would lose.

Nor have Members of Parliament thought of doing their duty to the people by compelling government to hold a referendum on any of these issues. In all three, Parliament is the enemy of the exploited electorate. So much for democracy!

In regard to the euro and the EU constitution, Parliament is wholly culpable, but in the case of compulsory metrication Parliament itself has no control, as the directives are issued to our government by a non-elected European Commission, on which the UK is represented solely by one Commissioner whom nobody elected and who is accountable exclusively to his fellow non-elected colleagues, and whose only qualification for the job was having twice been forced to resign from Blair's cabinet in disgrace. Compulsory metrication is therefore the extreme tyranny, where the EU is the enemy of an impotent Parliament which in turn is the enemy of a hapless people.

When campaigning for re-election, MPs always ensured that the local press photograph them shaking hands with the popular owners of shops that continue trading in imperial measures, before returning to Westminster to vote for their abolition. Their contempt for the electorate is such that, not content with consistently defying its will, they also deceive it with this masquerade of democracy - thereby deepening public disillusionment - while, of course, blaming the electorate's 'apathy' for plummeting polls.

Just as politicians pretend that the collapse of democracy hasn't happened, they likewise pretended, long after the event, that imperial measures were *not* about to be abolished. Glenys Kinnock, the prominent MEP (and wife of a then EU Commissioner) wrote to a constituent on 13 March 1995, signing the letter personally: "I have contacted the European Commission to check whether there are any proposals in the pipeline which would mean enforced metrication in Britain and have been informed that there are no such proposals afoot. Unfortunately, from time to time such stories about Europe tend to circulate and I understand that a number of people have been in touch with the Commission recently on this matter. I apologize again for the delay in replying and I hope that this information is helpful to you."

That was written more than two months *after* enforcement (by the Metric Regulations of 1994 in compliance with Directive 80/181/EEC as amended by 89/617/EEC) of the first set of regulations, governing the sale of wines and spirits (e.g. millilitres instead of gills) as from 1 January 1995 and barely six months *before* enforcement of the major second set, imposing metrication on the sale of all pre-packed goods as from 1 October that year! So the Commission was systematically lying to MEPS so that they could relay those lies to the idiot British electorate - although that is no excuse for the MEPs' appalling ignorance of (or indifference to) what their masters were doing to their own country.

Similarly, on 2 August 1994, Paul Flynn MP (a senior backbencher and future Minister) had responded to a constituent's enquiry about the threat of compulsory metrication: "I do not know of any such proposal. If you come across any written reports I would be very glad to see them. It is not wise to comment on 'rumours' as so many of them turn out to be baseless." No attempt to verify, even

when presented with the facts! Yet this was only three months before the Regulations were 'nodded through' Parliament. Meanwhile, he had to ask an ordinary constituent to keep him informed, because obviously, like almost every other MP, he hadn't a clue and - what's even worse -he preferred to remain in denial.

As the immortal Bernard Levin (an Honorary Member of the BWMA) wrote in an article entitled '*Metrication Madness*' in *The Times* on 15 August 1995:

"We all knew that this government lies to us, that it has always lied to us and that it will continue to lie to us...We also knew that this government ignores our wishes, has always ignored our wishes and will continue to ignore our wishes. Nor is that all...for we all knew that this government has cheated us out of our heritage, has always cheated us out of our heritage and will continue to cheat us out of our heritage. In short, this government is based on nothing but mendacity, cowardice, arrogance, bluster and desperation. But the worst is yet to come. And it comes in the form of metrication...When did the British people give permission to change - and overnight - from their age-old imperial measures to the metric ones? When did the British people accept the criminalization of half a pound of cheese? When did the British people allow themselves, by the total loss of any kind of guard, to be entirely open to crooks and scoundrels? When did the British people deny their Britishness?"

"Do you seriously believe that if this government had come out and told the truth about what was imminent we would have allowed it to happen? But the deeply rooted culture of lying by which this government lives has so sprouted that it towers over everything. If you think that I am making it up, let me tell you that when the secret, the hidden agenda upon which the British people are now impaled, was revealed and our rulers were asked why they had not come out with the truth at once, they said it was not necessary because the British people had already agreed - in 1965. Please understand that I am not trying to call down lightning upon the heads of the European Union. But what would anyone deduce from the lying and cheating and hiding that the British government is so prone to? There could only be one answer: that the British government is doing something dirty, and the dirt is inevitably going to be found on the British people. For otherwise why would there be any need for secrecy? Only, of course, because if there were no secrecy the truth would be heard."

The object of his vilification was John Major's government of 1992-1997, the last Conservative administration. But all its mendacity was amateurish compared to the professionalism of its successors. The two great advantages enjoyed by Labour when in power are that (a) they can pursue a policy of expanding the public sector in order to build up their vote-bank, the armies of docile dependants on State salaries and pensions which have to be paid for by the dwindling private sector, and (b) they can always - when confronted with proof of their brazen duplicity and betrayal of the electorate's and the nation's interests - dismiss any protester as at best an antiquated eccentric or at worst as a xenophobe or right-wing extremist.

Compulsory metrication is such a gross deception, moreover, because it is never presented as such. Its champions always appear so reasonable because they never actually mention compulsory metrication but concentrate instead on the alleged merits of metric units, while avoiding any admission that what they are advocating is not, as they pretend, the introduction of something new but merely the abolition of something old - that theirs is not a positive but a negative policy - that metrication is a euphemism for criminal suppression of customary units.

Compulsory metrication is an even greater deception still, because it has nothing to do with weights and measures but is purely political. During my correspondence in 1997-98 with Martin Bangemann, EU Commissioner for Industry (then the most powerful man in Europe, although not one percent of the UK electorate had heard of him, until he had to resign in disgrace at the end of '99) and discussions with his lieutenants in charge of the Metrology Unit in Brussels, I was told: "Mr Linacre, you have to understand, Britain is in an anomalous position, being a full partner in the EU, yet using a common system of weights and measures with the USA, thereby gaining an unfair advantage in transatlantic trade". There you have it!

The sole reason for compulsory metrication and hence for the late Steve Thoburn's criminal conviction for selling a pound of bananas is the EU's visceral loathing and envy of the cultural bond between Britain and the world's superpower - which was vital to the Allies' victory over the Axis powers in 1918 and again in 1945. Westminster's response, of course, has been to agree that we must abandon the huge commercial and cultural benefits that we have enjoyed in the past by virtue of a shared system of weights and measures with the USA. There is nothing the EU can do to forbid us from speaking the same language as North Americans, but the metrological bond was one that they could try to break.

How did this come about? It was, again, purely political. After first Macmillan and then Wilson had applied for membership of the EEC and been rebuffed by De Gaulle," Heath was determined to succeed at any price. In 1970 he became Prime Minister and De Gaulle died. So Heath and his henchman Geoffrey Rippon were free to 'negotiate the terms of entry' - i.e. to surrender unconditionally to Franco-German demands, including the sacrifice of Britain's fishing grounds, an undertaking to abolish imperial weights and measures, and much besides. All of this, naturally, was concealed from the electorate.

Only one year previously, in 1969, man had traveled to the Moon and explored its surface using 'English' units of measurement (the 'inch-pound' system). Buzz Aldrin thanked Sir Patrick Moore (a Patron of the British Weights and Measures Association) for his indispensable, customarily measured Moon-maps. Brussels must be equally sickened that, because of the USA's dominance, all three modern mega-industries are largely based on those customary units: oil (42-gallon barrels); aviation (feet, pounds, gallons, mph); computers and film (inches). So the EU's strategy is to isolate the UK by force of metrication, severing its special relationship with the USA, which would then be isolated and compelled eventually by global pressure to follow suit.

In any economic union, the first imperative must be a common currency, compared to which a common system of weights and measures is a low priority. There can be no economic union without monetary union. Yet our government, having secured an opt-out from the euro, demonstrating Britain's lukewarm attitude towards EMU, is nevertheless enforcing compulsory metrication as if that were essential to our membership of the EU. We are permitted to keep the pound sterling but not the pound *avoir-du-pois*. Devoted though I am to the imperial system of weights and measures, I would never have realized, if Brussels had not insisted, that it is actually more important to the European economy than sterling!

During the Sunderland Magistrates Court proceedings, Steve Thoburn (who died a fortnight short of his fortieth birthday) remarked that, in the course of his twenty-odd years' trading in Southwick Market, he must have personally served a million customers, of whom he could recall only two foreign tourists ordering in kilos - which means that, according to the Magistrate (a District Judge who was specially parachuted in from Shropshire as Whitehall feared that, if left to the local lay bench, the case might be dismissed or the accused acquitted), those two were right while the other 999,998 were all wrong. What price democracy!

Following the appeal to the High Court - which was rejected on grounds that made a nonsense of the grounds for the original conviction - an appeal to the House of Lords was rejected. It was *not* the case, as metricsters claim, that this appeal was lost, but simply that he was denied the right of appeal to the highest court in the land. Eikewise, finally, it was *not* the case that his appeal to the European Court of Human Rights failed, but simply that once again permission was refused - the application was dismissed as 'incompetent'. As with the Lords, the authorities feared that, if it had been allowed to proceed, it might have succeeded.

The metrication offensives by successive governments have been loyally reinforced by the BBC. A friend once wrote to a BBC pre-school programme 'Education Adviser', pointing out that her three year-old daughter was a devotee of their magazine *'Playdays'* and particularly enjoyed learning to cook, but could do nothing with a recipe for biscuits because the list of ingredients contained only metric measurements. "Sophie can count reliably to fourteen, and make it to twenty on a good day, but 250 (as in grammes of flour) might as well be a zillion! It is totally meaningless to her. In our usual biscuit recipe, we weigh out four ounces of flour, two ounces of butter and so on; numbers

which are meaningful to her, and therefore help her learn what's going on. This wonderful educational opportunity will be totally lost if I tried to use metric measurements: instead of learning she would become confused and frustrated by the weighing process...Imperial measurements are so much more ergonomic and user-friendly. I don't need to tell you that it is so much more natural in cooking to double and halve quantities rather than multiply and divide by ten!"

The reply exemplified the BBC's arrogance and commitment to Britain's 'dumbing down'. "We always use the current, educationally correct, metric measures. That is what children are taught in school today and the way in which they will see all weights and measures written down, as we become more and more Europeanized...I think it will help you, as you and your daughter have fun cooking together, to realize that as long as she is aware that you are doing an accurate measuring exercise...she doesn't need to know the exact amounts used at her age...When you are cooking with Sophie just show her how you are measuring, without mentioning the exact amounts." No attempt to refute my friend's case for retaining imperial measures; no denial that metric can't be learnt until much older...Parents shouldn't worry their silly heads: never mind if children learn nothing, so long as they are being properly 'Europeanized' and having lots *offun!*

While the EU cannot tolerate more than one system of weights and measures, it produces a torrent of regulations - and the European Parliament conducts proceedings - in twenty different languages, at an annual cost of €billions - expenditure which Brussels justifies in deference to national cultures. Our masters do not consider British culture worth preserving. So '*Vive la difference*' for languages but '*Vive l'uniformite*' for weights and measures! Compulsory metrication was imposed shortly after the Treaty on European Union 1992 (Maastricht) which declared: "The Union shall respect the national identities of its Member States", referring specifically to national cultural and linguistic diversity in its Article 126 (Education, Vocational Training and Youth) and pledging respect for national and regional diversity again in Article 128 (Culture). The buzz-words are 'diversity' and 'inclusiveness', while a metric monopoly is forced upon us.

English is the EU's indispensable *lingua franca*. If interpreters are unavailable to translate directly from one minor language to another (e.g. Swedish to Greek or Polish to Portuguese), translation is first effected from one into English and then from English into the other, losing much in the process. Yet compulsory metrication prohibits the use of vital parts of our common speech. For the names of customary weights and measures - inch, foot, yard, rod/pole/perch, chain, furlong, mile, fathom, knot, acre, ounce, pound, stone, hundredweight, ton, pint, quart, gallon, etc. - are integral to the English language. They are beautiful as well as practical - historic as well as valuable. The Bible and Shakespeare are full of them. But now their use is becoming a criminal offence.

For well over five centuries, from (say) 1066 to 1603, England was essentially bilingual. The upper classes spoke a formal English, a written language heavily influenced by Norman French, while the masses adhered to a largely Anglo-Saxon vernacular - for all the miraculous mediaeval mixtures of the two that were wrought by Chaucer and the early poets. Continual influences were exerted by the authorities to convert the masses.

Yet, even after half a millennium of ecclesiastic education and socio-commercial pressures, in the greatest book ever printed in the English language - the sublime King James Bible of 1611 - the first thirty-five words of the Lord's Prayer ("Our Father, which art in Heaven...") are all purely Anglo-Saxon, just as - to take another random example - are all of the first sixty-three words of the Book of St John ("In the beginning was the word..."). The Norman French/Anglo-Saxon dualism is analogous to the metric/imperial. The imperial system will likewise emerge reinvigorated from its present ordeal of compulsory metrication, and thereafter customary measures will retain their vernacular usage for several centuries to come.

For the names of metric units have a cultural value of nil. They are technical terms rather than natural words; therefore distracting and obtrusive in any ordinary speech or prose. Nobody will ever compose a poem referring to a kilogram of love or a deciliter of blood. That is why the world's most popular children's authors of the present and previous generations - Roald Dahl and J K Rowling - use imperial for references to weights and measures. Compulsory metrication is totalitarian because it dehumanizes as well as oppresses.

As the great scientist and humanist Jacob Bronowski remarked in *'The Ascent of Man'*, discussing crystalline facets: "...the only rotations that are possible go twice or four times for a full turn, or three times or six times - not more. And not five times. You cannot make an assembly of atoms to make triangles which fit into space regularly five at a time." And as John Quincy Adams (when Secretary of State in 1821, prior to his election as President in 1825) commented in his Report to Congress: "Decimal arithmetic is a contrivance of man for computing numbers, and not a property of time, space or matter. Nature has no partialities for the number ten; and the attempt to shackle her freedom with it will forever prove abortive."

For the fundamental difference is that metric units were *invented by man* whereas customary measures, being inherent in nature, always existed until they were eventually *discovered*. The whole of modern technology is based on computer science which is based on binary arithmetic which deals in the numbers 1 and 2. Music, like time, is measured in ratios of 2 and 3, which are the elements of customary measures and incompatible with the metric system. These eternal laws of nature and number can never be abolished.

Demonstrating its progressiveness, the Palace of Westminster produced a ruler, as a memento for visitors. It is marked in cm/mm extending to 30cm - the same on both edges of one side, with the other side blank - for that's all that metric linear measures can offer. When asked how 30cm is divisible into 1m (the key unit of the entire system) the responsible official answered "Er, well, actually it isn't" — 3.33333 *for ever!* And when asked why a length of 30cm he replied "It's as close as we could get to a foot" - 11.81 inches. Whereas the BWMA foot-rule has on one edge inches divided into halves/ quarters/eighths/sixteenths (base 2) and the opposite edge into thirds/sixths/twelfths/ twenty-fourths (base 3), with the other face on one edge into tenths (which is just another fraction), and on the fourth edge the mapping scale of 1 1/4 inches to the mile (1:50,000).

As a leader of the largest school-teachers' union in the USA enthused, "With the metric system you don't have to teach fractions or mental arithmetic!" No more thinking - and if the decimal point on a medical dosage label is in the wrong place that's just too bad. *'The Economist'* reported on 27 July 2001 that US prisons were crammed with offenders thanks to metric ignorance, following a Bill rushed through Congress in 1986 in a fit of hysteria about crack cocaine, which imposed a mandatory minimum sentence of five to ten years for possession of a few grams - absurdly minute quantities - because the legislators didn't know grams from kilos.

Yet the EU and UK Ministers are forever peddling the cynical lie that "The USA's metrication programme is well under way". *'The Spectator'* on 26 May 2001 commented: "These days, no matter how sheltered a life you lead, chances are you're familiar with the basics of the drug trade...the Ziploc bags with white powder, exotically weighed by the kilo, the only metrically-based product on the US market." (How fitting, that the only metrically measured product in the US is something so evil!) And after the Mars Orbiter crashed on 1 October 1999, owing to confusion between pounds and newtons, John Pike, Director of Space Policy at the Federation of American Scientists, admitted: "Last time I checked, I could sort of visually detect the difference between a foot and a metre." In 1989 Shell Oil had spent tens of millions of dollars converting their gas stations to metric, only to find their customers deserting in droves, whereupon they have had to spend tens of millions more changing back to gallons. But none of this will deter the liars in London and Brussels: they are so desperate for the USA to capitulate.

It seems that the EU's primary purpose is the destruction of the aesthetic and traditional connotations of weights and measures rather than their actual use in trade. After all, the invention of the metric system was an accident of history and quite unnecessary. All France needed was to eliminate the chaotic multiplicity of measures throughout the cities and regions, which could have been achieved simply - as several *savants* and *philosophes* advocated - by adopting the existing Parisian system of units nationally. But no; the metric system was devised and introduced as an instrument of the French Revolution, to overthrow not only the monarchy and the church but the whole of the nation's former culture. It is a relic of the Reign of Terror. A decimal clock and calendar were also imposed, but they lasted only a year or two because they couldn't work, so all we're left with is this wretched system of weights and measures that relate to nothing whatever. Britain at the beginning of the 21st century is undergoing a modern Reign of Terror now, just as tyrannical and barbaric as that across the

Channel at the end of the 18th, but even more damaging, because it is being waged mendaciously, insidiously, almost imperceptibly, and is consequently so much more protracted and far-reaching.

In 1897 an Act of Parliament made metric units for all trade purposes perfectly legal. For almost a century the two systems co-existed harmoniously - one or other being preferred according to popular usage, convention, custom of the trade or profession, demands of the market-place. This dual regime caused not the slightest difficulty. Britain enjoyed the best of both worlds. Children studying for the 11-plus examination were taught both the metric and imperial systems, just as they learnt French or Latin as well as English.

Since every trade and profession that wanted to go metric did so long ago - medicine, architecture and engineering, etc. - compulsion applies only to those who for some good reason do not wish to do so. It is precisely that 'best of both worlds' which the EU could not tolerate. Nor can it bear the fact that it is still enjoyed by the USA, where an Act of Congress in 1866, corresponding with our 1897 Act, still prevails. But there they believe in, and practice, freedom of choice and local democracy: that's why the USA is the world's superpower - just as Britain has declined ever since we ceased to do so.

So the confusion, conflict and controversy are entirely due to this attempt to impose a metric monopoly. But because Britain is still, 33 years after Heath's furtive commitment, only half-metricated, the metricksters are frantically frustrated, urging the government to mount a fresh offensive against recalcitrants (ranging from Tesco to the popular media and estate agents, most of whom use feet and acres), in order to clear up this "Very British Mess" - to quote Lord Howe of the UK Metric Association. It is as if, having lived by ourselves for hundreds of years in a nice big house, we took in lodgers a century ago and happily shared with them, until they started throwing out our belongings and started treating us as squatters in *their* house and are now complaining because we haven't quit! It is, in truth, a wholly 'EUish Mess'.

Why is the situation suddenly so critical? Because, as politicians and the press appear to have forgotten, in less than four years' time - as from 1 January 2010 - the whole imperial system of weights and measures is due, for all practical purposes, to disappear. For that is the expiry-date of the 'derogation' which for the time being permits use of customary units as 'supplementary indications' - the display of the imperial equivalent alongside but subordinate to the primary metric label. It will then become illegal to mention traditional units, even for the sole purpose of providing additional information to assist customers. From that date, if the customer doesn't know the difference between 'dm' and 'dam', 'ml' and 'cP', 'kg' and 't', 'mm' and 'ha', well that's tough!

When that deadline was fixed, it was assumed that by 2009 the country would be very largely metricated, but now the authorities reluctantly realize that the people won't be nearly ready by then to submit to a metric-only regime. Arbitrary enforcement of that expiry-date would cause a huge outcry, and the electoral damage would be devastating. However, if yet another extension is granted (say to 2020), the whole metrication policy would lose momentum and credibility. Hence the metricksters' desperation; for their only hope is a massive acceleration of the enforcement process over the next two or three years, to strengthen the next administration's confidence in proceeding as planned.

They cannot succeed, if Britain's democracy and culture are to survive. MPs and MEPs must be roused from their torpor, the media rebriefed, and trading organizations mobilized. Instead of merely defending customary weights and measures, we must go onto the attack against this totalitarian menace - or lose our very identity on 01.01.2010.

Foot, pint and pound are perfectly sound!

We have the measure of the metricksters!