

FEDERATION OF BRITISH INDUSTRIES

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CONFIDENTIAL

TO THE GRAND COUNCIL

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METRIC SYSTEM

In October 1963 the British Standards Institution published a statement which concluded that there was a substantial majority view in industry that the introduction of the metric system as the primary system of weights and measures in the U.K. should be effected within the shortest practicable period, although the timing of the change must clearly vary from industry to industry.

This statement was considered at a meeting of interested Trade Associations convened by the FBI in January 1964 when it was generally agreed that the sense of urgency expressed by the BSI was correct for manufacturers of goods sold to trade customers. It was recognised, however, that for some industries a change would present formidable difficulties and these required further investigation. The meeting also agreed that a change to metric cannot be made in isolation although some industries which can move independently were already taking steps in this direction. There was a general feeling that there was no need for the U.K. to wait for the U.S.A. and the Commonwealth before taking action.

These findings were reported to the Technical Legislation Committee who decided that further enquiries were necessary in certain sections of industry and also with the BSI and the Board of Trade.

These enquiries took place during the year and finally Trade Associations were asked to confirm their views. It was now clear that the nearly unanimous feelings expressed at the January meeting had become modified in some cases. Some industries showed themselves definitely opposed to any early change - in particular, industries who were closely associated with the U.S.A. were reluctant to change over until the U.S.A. moved. On the other hand it was generally agreed that certain standards of measurement of purely domestic application in the U.K. could, and should, be abandoned. The majority view still favoured the idea of changing to metric but there was some divergence of opinion as to the urgency of such a change.

A Working Party was therefore convened in December 1964 to review the situation and recommend the best means of achieving progress. The Working Party came to the conclusion that not much progress could be made unless it was piecemeal and gradual and steps were taken to promote co-operation; there could be no question of a simultaneous moment of change. It was clear that in some spheres progress could be made by agreement, while at the other end of the scale there was resistance. In between there were areas where some progress would be possible if the FBI and BSI could bring the interests together for mutual discussion of practical problems arising. It had become clear that the present state of uncertainty was against the best interests of trade and particularly export trade, and that therefore a declaration of intent was needed from the Government.

These conclusions were discussed subsequently with the BSI and were broadly agreed.

The Technical Legislation Committee met again on 18th January and decided that the Grand Council should be asked to agree that a statement on the following lines should be put to the Government:

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"Industry is showing interest in changing over to the metric system and thinks this must come in time to the United Kingdom. Whilst it is recognised that the complete adoption of the metric system would have to be preceded by extensive measures of education of the public as well as adjustments on the part of industry, it is suggested that the Government could help to this end by a general declaration of intent. This declaration should then be followed by particular instructions to Government Departments, especially those concerned with the placing of contracts with industry".

At the same time the Working Party considers it should continue, in conjunction with the BSI, to study the problem with a view to identifying areas in industry where action is needed and encouraging co-operation and progress. The Grand Council is asked to agree that this should be done.
