



Federation of British Industries
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FROM THE OFFICE OF
THE PRESIDENT

17th February 1965

(Handwritten signature)

Dear President.

THE METRIC SYSTEM AND INDUSTRY

As you may know, the F.B.I., with other bodies, has been keeping under review the attitudes and requirements of industry in relation to the adoption of the metric system as the primary, and ultimately the only, method of mensuration to be used in this country. During the last two years we have observed a significant change in outlook and an increase in the desire both for a decision of broad future principle and for an acceleration of progress by agreement in appropriate parts of British industry. We think the situation can be summarized as follows:

1. A majority, both in numbers and total size, of British industry now favours the adoption of the metric system as the primary system of mensuration for British industry, as soon as that can be brought about by general agreement. This majority includes the chemical industry and the major part, though not the whole, of the engineering industry.
2. There are some important exceptions, but for the most part these are industries which can for the time being at any rate, continue more or less in isolation. Examples are: the oil industry, which must keep in step with American practice; the brewing industry, which is subject to special consideration; and the motor car industry, which was requested by the Government to fall in with American practice.
3. Whilst some industries find little difficulty in packing in different containers for the export and for the home market, others would be able to effect substantial economies if they were called upon to manufacture to only one set of standards.

4. Considerable unobtrusive progress has already been made in some industries where the adoption of metric standards is a matter for agreement between a limited number of manufacturers and customers. This is particularly the case in industries supplying goods and equipment to manufacturing customers, rather than to the general public.
5. There is also a substantial area where the complexity of the problem and the number of interests involved has so far inhibited progress in the absence of any strong impetus. We think there is scope in this field for us to promote agreement by bringing the parties together and by discussion and study of mutual problems. Whilst it is essential to eliminate any suggestion of compulsion, we feel that a general declaration of support on the part of Her Majesty's Government may provide the necessary impetus and we think that once started such a movement towards agreement will generate its own momentum.
6. It is not necessary for all industries to move forward in step. We are of opinion that much more progress is likely to be made on a piece-meal and empirical basis.
7. The ultimate adoption of the metric system as the primary system of measurement for all purposes in this country must of course be preceded by a period of education of the general public. We feel that a start could be made in the schools, at once.

Taking all these factors into account we suggest that the time is now appropriate for a general statement of policy on the part of Her Majesty's Government, expressing support for the principle and giving some indication of the timing envisaged.

We also suggest that Government Departments, in placing contracts, might do much to promote the adoption of the metric system in appropriate sectors of industry, provided this is only done after consultation with the suppliers concerned. As I have said, we feel that early and rapid progress can be made in a number of areas by agreement and that this would be prejudiced by any appearance of dictation.

We should be pleased to discuss this whole matter with you at your convenience

I have written in similar terms to the First Minister of State and the Minister of Technology.

Yours sincerely

Peter Raven

The Rt. Hon. Douglas Jay, M.P.,
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