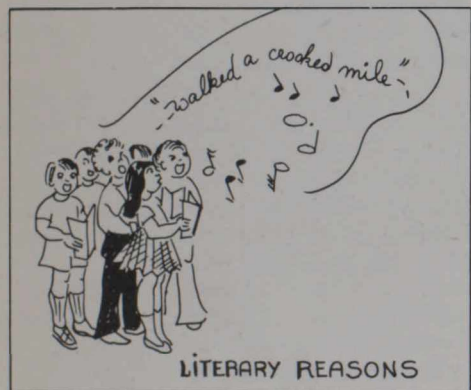


make it look old-fashioned. It is a practice familiar enough among fashion columnists and advertising copy-writers. In the same way, the Government publications pour mild ridicule on the antiquated ways they are trying to push out. A Consumers' Guide to metrication remarks that "The present system for sizing footwear was, believe it or not, originally based on the length of the foot in barleycorns." Other pamphlets begin with historical reminiscence harking back to the beginning of measurement, like "In England the Saxon yard is traditionally reported to have been based on the distance from the tip of King Edgar's nose to the end of his fingers with arm outstretched. A nose such as Pinocchio's would obviously result in serious short measure!" Clearly the reaction expected of the reader is, "How quaint, how droll, how old fashioned and UNRELIABLE! What a good thing we are getting nice, simple, modern metrication instead!"



To bring it about, the Government have set up an extremely large and complex hierarchy leading from the Metric Commission in Ottawa right down into the roots of the life of the nation – to study every aspect of the change and report back, then to help and advise as it is made. More than 200 national associations – industrial, professional and educational – are working with the Commission to establish a geometric timetable for all sectors of the economy.

In some areas the big step has already been taken. Toronto primary schools are ahead of the rest of the country in teaching metric, and other areas are being urged to follow their example. Pupils in the lower grades in Toronto are being taught metric exclusively – which, as English schools have already discovered, is much easier than learning to convert from the old system. A Toronto headmaster, Mr. Ron Wright, said recently, "Our kids don't run the 100-yard dash any more – it's 100 metres."

The principle of "Think metric!" is rife throughout the public education campaign. Prof. Fred Rimrott of Toronto University's engineering faculty has proclaimed that the easiest way to forget the old system is to plunge into metrics all at once. Learn what a kilo of sugar looks like and you will be able to decide how many kilos you want without having to think that a kilo weighs about 2.205 pounds.



It is rather like urging people to dive off the deep end when they aren't sure if they can swim. So the publicity people, at their end, are out to convince people that they *can* swim. It's easy. The pamphlets abound with illustrations of familiar objects accompanied by metric statistics. The Peace Tower at Ottawa is 89 m. high. A newborn baby weighs about 3 kg. A personal size tube of toothpaste holds 25 ml. Casanova's Dancer, a statue in the National Gallery of Canada, measures 89–61–91.

The tentative "first phase" of conversion is already apparent in the supermarkets, where the weights of some products are printed in ounces alongside their metric equivalents: an eight-ounce package, for example, is marked 8 oz. (226.8 g). However, critics have been quick to point out that decimal fractions of a metric measure do *not* help people to "Think metric" – indeed, they argue, the metric figures will probably have little impact on the average shopper until the actual measure is altered and given in rounded figures on the package. At that point the old measurement will become an unappealing fraction.

Some industries are already reported to have gone over to metric measurement. So have hospitals. Metric weather reports are to be introduced by the federal Government next year, with rain and snowfall accumulations given in millimetres and wind speeds and visibility in kilometres. Provincial highways departments plan to change all

Left
The Peace Tower in Ottawa is 89m high

Far left
Literary reasons

road signs to metric between 1975 and 1979. General Motors of Canada have announced that they will start producing cars with metric specifications by 1977.

Industry is the real heavyweight in the field. Here it is not merely a question of changing attitudes and signs, but of major alterations in plant and equipment which cannot be lightly undertaken. Computers, for instance, must undergo radical and expensive alterations. So the most careful study and preparation is urged in order that the changeover may be phased to keep down costs and at the same time bring the maximum benefits through use of the new, simplified units.

Conversion, as the Canadian Standards Council explains, can take several forms. The most elementary involves a change of measurement language, but no change in value. The most complex, and the best, is accompanied by a rationalizing process to simplify production and inventory problems – and to eliminate unnecessary sizes.

It is all very go-ahead and rational. But even a Government commission can allow itself moments of nostalgia for the bad old ways. "Old habits die hard," as Stevenson Gossage remarks in one of the pamphlets. "Our old measures will stay around in corners for a long time. Today we order a pint of beer, although it isn't actually a pint; tomorrow, when it is measured in millilitres we are still likely to speak of a pint. Our phrases of measurement are deeply entrenched in our language; however successful and complete our conversion to the metric system, a miss will still be as good as a mile, if you give some people an inch they will take an ell; and we still won't be able to put a quart in a pint bottle."

He adds that, while there may be some residual use of the old units after the changeover, "it is not anticipated that there will be a necessity to teach the present Canadian units other than for historical or literary reasons." A cartoon illustration shows a group of schoolchildren singing the old nursery rhyme about a crooked man who walked a crooked mile – "literary reasons!"

A touch of humour leavens the diet of metric explanation and even when it is a bit malicious at Britain's expense it can help the eye along the page. Take the little pamphlet that goes under the exciting title "METRICATION a guide for producers of packaged goods." It ends with a warning against "pseudo-metrication".

"A few years ago British florists reduced the number of daffodils in a bunch from 12 to 10 and claimed that this was metrication. It was significant that the price of a bunch remained the same. Another (unsubstantiated) example of British pseudo-metrication was the furniture manufacturer who announced that his new (metric) range of chairs would have five legs."