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to the editor

The shift to metric

Sir:

In response to your invitation to discuss Mr. Roohr's proposal ("Shift to Metric." Letters, SN: 5/25):

After Japan, more recently England has embarked on a change-over to the metric system. With very few exceptions we are the only holdouts.

Japan's example shows that it can be done without disaster or disruption and is certainly beneficial.

It is also worth noting that in this country, in the short time span from 1955 to 1960, the pharmaceutical industry has accomplished a switch from grains, drams and ounces to milligrams and milliliters without causing any dislocations or difficulties. I would feel that a well thought-out gradual change-over would not only be beneficial but is actually a necessity.

As to Mr. Roohr's suggestion I can only agree with it.

I would like to take this opportunity to express my appreciation for your magazine which allows me to keep in-

formed about what goes on in fields which are not directly my own.

George S. Fischmann, M.D.
Ann Arbor, Mich.

On Mr. Roohr's proposal to shift to the metric system: I think it is an excellent idea and very fitting for SCIENCE NEWS to take the initiative. I wish to encourage you to take this very necessary step, thinking it is not only fitting and proper, but vital.

A. A. Faulkner
Director, Nova Laboratories
West Conshohocken, Pa.

I would certainly prefer the metric system used everywhere. There is also a socioeconomic issue, namely, the isolation of the U.S. from the human community which will result from the nonuse of the metric system now that

(see Letters, p. 18)

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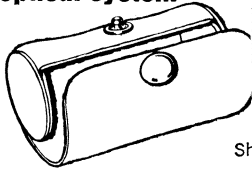
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4/science news/vol. 94/6 july 1968

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(Letters, from p. 4)

even Great Britain (and other long holdouts) are adopting it.

*Prof. Walter M. Elsasser
Institute for Fluid Dynamics
University of Maryland
College Park, Md.*

Aye for Roohr's proposal.

*Peter Fenner
American Geological Institute
Washington, D.C.*

I wish heartily to second Mr. Roohr's letter. This would greatly strengthen our competitive position in trade with Latin America and Europe, where the metric system is universally in use, and avoid interminable confusion there. I think the use of metric units, not only in scientific literature, but in the popular press as well, with the English equivalents printed in parentheses, would help to create the public opinion which would enable the Congress to pass the legislation required, and reduce the strength of the lobby working against such legislation.

*Howard E. Jensen
Professor Emeritus of Sociology
Duke University*

I think that many scientists and instructors would welcome this change.

*Grover J. Norwood
Advanced Biology Department
Senior High School
Granite City, Ill.*

I should like to endorse this suggestion fully; as a matter of fact I have been corresponding with other scientific journals and those presenting scientific subjects to lay readers, to advocate just this suggestion. The metric system is the language of science, used throughout the world.

*Rainer Fried, Ph.D.
The Metric Association
Omaha, Neb.*

Man never seems to tire of making things difficult for himself. I agree with Peter Roohr; use the metric system as much as possible. Do your part to help simplify our complicated way of life.

*Dr. Robert Berger
Grove City, Pa.*

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(see Letters, p. 21)

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(Letters, from p. 18)

label their products in metric units.

Why not do as Mr. Roohr suggests? If the few objections you receive are convincing enough, then revert to the policy of denying the rest of us the pleasure of reading measurements based on a logically sound system, metric.

Arthur G. Ehrlich
Buffalo, N.Y.

I should like to second Mr. Roohr's proposal. I've just completed a manuscript revision of my book in which I have changed the British equivalents to the metric system, using parentheses including the British equivalents the first time a measure was introduced. I agree that this change would be very helpful.

Leonard A. Maynard
Graduate School of Nutrition
Cornell University
Ithaca, N.Y.

Mr. Peter E. Roohr's proposal (SN: 5/25, p. 492) to use both the metric system and its British equivalent in *Science News* is an excellent idea.

It was not until starting to take physics courses in college that I became familiar with the metric system. According to your reader survey last year, *Science News* is subscribed to by many adult professionals and read by many young people; use of the metric system would give them a great advantage on undertaking high school or college programs in science related fields.

Wayne H. Warren Jr.
Bell Telephone Laboratories
Murray Hill, N.J.

The conversion to a metric system should be as smooth as possible. Our youngsters, being exposed to both graduations for as long as practical, will be better able to cope with the metric standards as well as giving the old timers a chance to absorb a "feel" for the new system.

R. W. Gilson
Sherwood Medical Industries, Inc.
St. Louis, Mo.

Mr. Roohr advocates that *SCIENCE NEWS* adopt the use of both metric and British units. I support that position which is essentially the editorial policy adopted by NASA several years ago. NASA reports use measurements taken in the U.S. Customary Units and parenthetically give the equivalents in the International System of Units (SI). Details concerning the use of SI units are given in NASA report SP-7012, 1964, which would make a very convenient reference for your readers.

Charles H. Fox Jr.
National Aeronautics and
Space Administration
Langley Research Center

I think this is a great idea! Please do everything you can do to promote the use of the metric system in this country.

William H. Seaton
Tennessee Eastman Co.
Kingsport, Tennessee

The sooner we all convert, the better. The use of footnotes for the British equivalents (instead of parentheses) might make reading an article easier for those who are already familiar with the metric system.

John R. Vig
Piscataway, N.J.

Such a change could be an important factor in the effort to get rid of the present intolerable amalgam.

Louis Baldwin
Sandia Laboratory
Albuquerque, N. Mex.

(We received more letters on this subject than we have on any in the short history of our letters column. We were unable to print all we received, and mean no slight by the omission of some. These are more than a sample. They are an exact representation of the unanimous accord on the issue and are a valuable contribution to our constant effort to refine and improve *SCIENCE NEWS*. Ed.)

films OF THE WEEK

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GIFT OF LIFE/RIGHT TO DIE. 16mm, b&w, sound, 15 min. A filmed essay on medical ethics which covers four types of decisions involving the life or death of a patient. Moral decisions involved in making organ transplants are discussed, and physicians describe occasions which a choice must be made to revive one patient rather than another. Audience: general. Purchase \$100 or rental \$4.15 from NET Film Service, Indiana University, Audio-Visual Center, Bloomington, Ind. 47401.

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