

Weekly Notes

Metric Weights from the 1st

WITH the change-over to metric weights from the 1st of this month, India enters the final stages of the metric system. Considering the enormous difficulties involved, the change-over has proceeded fairly smoothly so far, and the time schedule set and the graduation of the stages reflect in retrospect good judgment and an adequate appreciation of the difficulties involved. The process has been greatly helped by the adoption of the metric system by a number of Government departments and industries well ahead of the D-Day. The Commercial Departments of the Railways, for example, changed over in April this year; petrol pumps have been selling oil by the litre for quite some time and the jute industry changed over from July. The wholesale trade in cloth has had two sets of prices side by side — one in metric and the other in the old measure — for a year.

Metric weights have now been made compulsory in notified municipal areas and regulated markets which come under the Agricultural Produce Market Act as also in the following industries :

Cotton textiles, iron and steel, engineering, heavy chemicals, cement, salt, paper, pulp and paperboard, refractories, non-ferrous metals, alloys and their products, vanaspati, soap and wool, both raw and manufactured.

Besides, trade in coffee, cotton and raw rubber is also to be in metric units only. This means that buyers and sellers of these products and commodities outside notified area! also will have to transact business in metric weights and measures.

It will be noticed that the list includes cotton textiles, salt, soap and woollens — all catering to the daily necessities of life — which should serve as an excellent medium for familiarising metric weights to the entire public. Incidentally, the thin end of the wedge has been introduced for linear measures, e.g., cloth or woollens. People have already started thinking in terms of metric weights. They have to, for when they buy any of the products of the listed industries, or shops in

notified areas, the bills are made out in metric "weights and the prices they pay are based on the new and unfamiliar set of weights.

Weights Fall Short

CONVERSION tables for prices according to the metric system are now very much in demand everywhere and fairly adequate preparation has been made to meet this demand. One cannot say the same about the new set of weights which every trader, large and small, has to buy and equip himself with. Many small traders have not yet been able to purchase the new weights. The inevitable last moment rush to buy has created a temporary dislocation, despite preparations long in advance of licensing manufacturers so that standard weights could be supplied to all traders in time. Compulsion in the case of weights and measures, however, stands in a slightly different category in that its enforcement comes under the Weights and Measures Act, and the violation of this Act is an offence, for the detection of which there are Inspectors of Weights and Measures. So despite a heroic resolve, widely advertised in advance, that no extension of time would be allowed for the introduction of metric weights, the State Government had to relax and give a very limited extension of time — a week to ten days — to enable everyone in the trade to get a new set of weights.

With the adoption of metric weights, the transition to the decimal system also enters the hardest stage. For adoption of decimal coinage, the public did not have to depend on a large number of manufacturers, big and small, for the physical supply of decimal coinage. For the weights, the public has to do that. Even psychologically, the centre was still there — the rupee. For weights, that centre, too, is gone.

Gap in Machine Tools

THE demand for machine tools is expected to expand from the current level of Rs 20 crores to about Rs 50 crores by the end of Third Five-Year Plan. This could be taken as a measure of the contemplated expansion of all sorts of industries. To meet this increase in demand, machine tool factories in

the public sector will substantially increase their production and plant capacity and a new plant will be set up in this sector for the manufacture of heavy machine tools. Nevertheless, the combined output of these, including the expected contribution from the proto-type factory at Ambemath, will not come up (0 more than half of the estimated demand and a gap of Rs 30 crores worth of machine tools per year would be left to be covered by expansion of machine tool production in the private sector.

How the gap is to be filled, however, still remains to be worked out. The decision just taken that the Government of India will freely license manufacture of different types of machine tools is, therefore; to be welcomed as a constructive step to fill this gap. A press note announcing this relaxation of policy mentions the particular types of machine tools which the private sector is invited to take up — lathes like bench lathes, cone pulley lathes, all geared lathes, etc; capstans and turrets; automatics; milling machines; drilling machines, including bench and pillar drills and radial drills; and grinding machines like grinders, surface grinders, tool and cutter grinders and wood working machines.

A condition has been imposed, however, that only those schemes will be approved for setting up new units which contemplate manufacture of machine tools including production of (all?) components and not merely for assembling machine tools from imported parts. Proposals involving investments of more than Rs 10 lakhs in fixed assets or for employment of more than 100 persons will, as usual, require license under the Industries (Development) Regulation Act. Schemes for smaller units have also been invited. These will have to be submitted to the Senior Industrial Adviser (Engineering), Development Wing, Ministry of Commerce and Industry. Considering the enterprise shown by small scale producers, especially in the Punjab, in the production of small machine tools of all sorts, some more attention paid to this very promising sector should be highly rewarding.