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Metric Changeover Battle Looms

THE more the metric system comes into use, the less the American people like it, says the Gallup Poll of public opinion.

This is not surprising, because when Congress was talking about adopting it, most people apparently did not take the talk seriously. Now it is the law of the land.

Writers tended to make light of the issue, turning out numerous articles about how "a miss is as good as 1.61 kilometers" or "he was wearing a 37.86-liter hat." The items were amusing then but now the public doesn't think metrics is so funny.

Abundant materials have been put out to help us learn to think in terms of centimeters rather than inches and in kilograms instead of pounds. There are handbooks, printed tables, plastic and cardboard slides, and one firm reportedly has marketed a pocket-sized computer

to make conversions.

But not many people have acquired the skill of thinking in amounts of bushels and miles, which they have always used, and then instantly expressing their thoughts in metric terms.

The duplicity is compounded by the fact that regulations do not require a complete changeover. Certain exemptions have been made, meaning that from now on, presumably, we will have to understand and utilize the dual systems of measurement.

The government discovered strong resistance to compulsory metrics last summer when the Department of Transportation brought forth a costly proposal to change highway speed limit signs to kilometers.

Public reaction was so strong on this issue that the government

backed down. Even if metric signs are used, speed limits also will be shown in miles per hour.

Home dressmakers are likely to have more trouble in adjusting from yards to meters than customers who buy ready-made garments that can be tried on for fitting.

Food consumers face difficulty. Is a liter of liquid food at 49 cents a better buy than a quart of the same at 50 cents? No, it is not. Or is a kilogram of meat at \$1.19 as good a buy as a pound at 79 cents? It is better.

But figuring out these differences at a busy counter when you are in a hurry could be a frustrating experience.

Implementation of the metric system might be an example of the irresistible force of the federal bureaucracy coming into contact with the immovable object of public opinion.