

COUNTERSPY

compiled by Arthur Townley



Metrication!

That's the name of the next game

We all know what decimalisation has meant in terms of higher prices. Few people have heard of the next bumper size consumer con: Metrication.

Do-it-yourself enthusiasts will have noticed this already when buying timber and construction materials. The changeover to a unified metric system will be complete by 1975.

As Co-operative News revealed recently:-

There will be attempts to make us spend more. Take paint, for example. The half pint tin, useful for small jobs and touching up, will disappear. In its place will be the half litre (500 ml) containing 38% more paint.

In some cases there will be no equivalent of pint cans - the nearest will be the litre tin (approx 1 3/4 pints). In the words of a circular to retailers "your customer will trade up to the larger size."

One once bought biscuits in half pound packets. Gradually these biscuits lost weight. Now they are any weight from 6oz upwards. The price didn't fall. There was a concealed price increase.

With about 28 1/2 grams to the ounce in Metric system, this game will be easier. Rather than 2oz becoming 57 grams or the pound 454 grams, it will be much neater if the weight is 55 or 450 grams. A gram isn't much. In a jar or a tin it wouldn't be noticed. But to the manufacturer the saving could be substantial.

(In a small food processing factory known to the Free Press a one per cent reduction in can content leads to an extra £109 a day profit, a profit increase of about 16%)

With decimal money it makes sense and is easy to multiply and divide by ten. However, we seem determined to perpetuate the use of the clumsy 12 times table by selling and packing in dozens. With metrication it is even more absurd.

Some suppliers are even selling metric rulers and metric tape measures in dozens and there are other anomalies to be found - like plaster board labelled "Length imperial, width metric".

DAVE MOORE

Staff away - prices stray

Keep a look-out for the staff of your local supermarket going on holiday. Because that's the time when prices may go haywire.

At the Maypole supermarket in Allport Lane, Bromborough, recently the manager and a shop assistant both went on holiday and the shelves were stocked up by someone new to the job.

As a result some packets of soap powder marked '2 1/2p off recommended price' were sold at the normal price of 19p instead of the special price - 16 1/2p.

Fortunately the weights and measures inspectors weren't on holiday at the same time and Maypole was fined £50 - not a very heavy penalty for a big firm.

Could it happen again? Maypole's district manager has said that it is not the company's policy to send relief managers to the branches when the permanent managers go on holiday, because he considers the stores are adequately staffed. This incident suggests that they are not adequately staffed. It is time Maypole had second thoughts.

Give a healthy toy to a child for Christmas

You may not have given it a thought, but there are less than 100 shopping days to Christmas. Already the shops are filling up with Santa's stocking fodder.

Last Christmas the Echo ran a 'Give a toy for a sick child' campaign. So this year we at the Free Press have decided to concentrate on the healthy children - and see that they stay that way by getting healthy toys. So far one particularly unpleasant toy has come to our notice:

A doll for the child with no friends. It can play snakes and ladders or ludo with you. It has a mechanical arm that can throw dice.

And there are others about which are just plain dangerous.

If you find any nasty toys drop us a line to say where they are on sale and what you don't like about them.

We'll see what we can do about it. Looking further ahead, January is the month when the shops try and get rid of things people wouldn't buy even in the mad rush of Christmas shopping. The Free Press intends to help them. Any useless articles can be sent to us. They will be put on display for a week then returned to Santa Claus the way they came. Up the chimney.

Kill Ulster pigs, say housewives



It's an ill wind... The Ulster Bacon Agency claims that the trouble in Northern Ireland has been good for business.

"It's publicised Ulster as a name," says Alastair Mackay, the agency's promotions adviser.

In fact, the agency has just changed the marking on its bacon to read: "Ulster Bacon is British Bacon," - but insists that this is merely "a continuation of the marketing strategy of the agency and not a political move."

Hair raising experience

If you use a portable electric hair dryer check the make - or you could be electrocuted.

The dangerous dryer comes from Italy in a box marked: "Gift Pack Hair Dryer ref MC-901 Matic." About a thousand are believed to have been sold in this country at about £2.75.

All that separates the nozzle from the live heater element is a thin tube of asbestos paper. If the element sagged or broke, the nozzle would almost certainly become live - and the dryer is not earthed.

If you have one of these dryers you should stop using it immediately and write to the Free Press saying where you bought it and when. By doing so you may help to trace other customers who don't know the danger they are in.

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Where to get it

NEWS STANDS AND SHOPS

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Bob's Newsbox, University. Progressive Books, Upper Duke St. Parry's, Hardman St. Probe Records, Clarence St. Tommy's (formerly Munch Gaff) Upper Duke St. Entwistles, 34 Berry Street. Open Design, 24 Wapping.

Suburbs: Grands, 88 Prescott Rd. Dukes, 46 Prescott Rd. Dobsons Rathbone Rd. Also Lodge Lane and Granby St newsagents. Holmes, Green Lane, L 13. Mr Manley, Rathbone Rd. Browns, Wavertree High St. Mr Lowe Rathbone Rd.

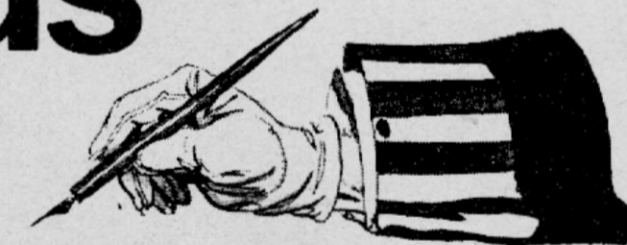
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Realmdeal

Next to your story "Why the old folk are worried about Realmdeal" in your August/September issue, your print part of a letter which Realmdeal Investments Ltd. have circulated to their tenants in Princes Road.

While it may be true that "the company has been approached by various groups of students at the university", it is certainly not true, as some have taken the latter to imply, that the Guild of Undergraduates approached Realmdeal asking that the flats on Princes Road should be made available to students. On the contrary, I should like to make it quite clear that Realmdeal first approached the Guild.

Yours faithfully,

Christopher Graham,
(President of the Guild of Undergraduates)

African liberation

I am going to Algiers in three months, then to Paris and Europe to initiate a book of guerilla groups in exile and a monthly newspaper in English and French.

I would like to co-ordinate with the European Left/Revolutionaries and radical groups and the European underground in support of the armed African liberation groups.

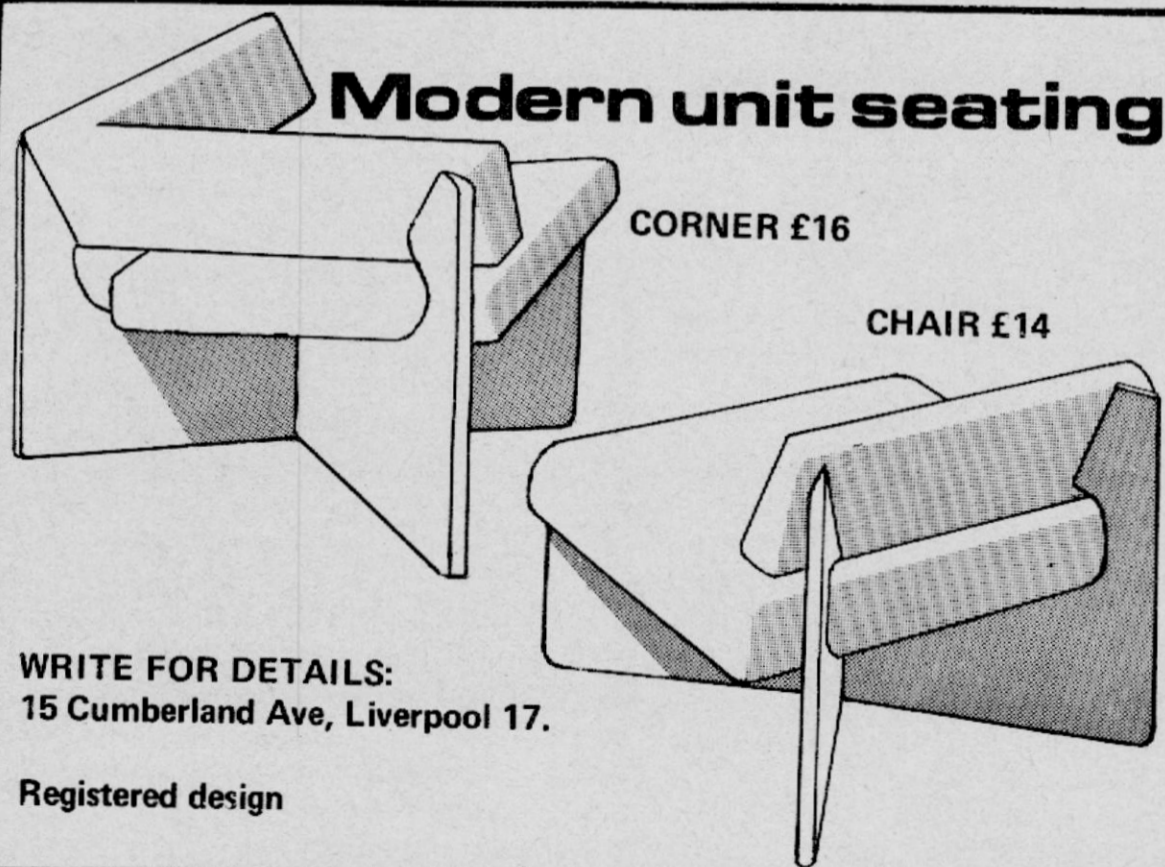
I would appreciate any information, North African and European contacts, addresses, accommodation, suggestions, advice, offers and outlets for distribution.

Perhaps your readers could help or contribute.

- NASSO MAVRAKIS, 5 Lyall Mews, London S W 1.

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