



Prime Minister

Yes - firmly.  
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Agree that the sale of butter in imperial prepacks in N. Ireland should be prohibited?

Ans. 5/6

SMUGGLING OF BUTTER INTO NORTHERN IRELAND FROM THE REPUBLIC OF IRELAND

The Republic of Ireland has an EC dispensation with regard to the requirement that butter be packed in metric quantities and also has large EC and domestic subsidies on the sale of home-produced butter in the Republic. The smuggling of this butter in imperial prepacks into Northern Ireland is causing very serious problems for the dairy and farming industry in Northern Ireland and is increasing the local unemployment difficulties.

The problem of smuggling arises because, although the prepacking and importation of butter into Northern Ireland in imperial quantities is already prohibited, the retail sale of butter in imperial quantities is not. The Northern Ireland administration found itself half way through a procedure of catching up with the Great Britain legislation at the point when the Great Britain administration decided to follow the course of voluntary metrication.

We have no difficulty in enforcing the law with regard to prepacking in Northern Ireland but so far as the illegal importation of butter in imperial prepacks is concerned, this is an entirely different matter. With a land boundary of over 300 miles and profits of around £500 per tonne to be made from smuggling butter our enforcement record has not been good, although we have had a few successful prosecutions. The only way to end this trade would appear to be to prohibit the retail sale of imperial prepacks of butter. Such a prohibition could be easily enforced by our Trading Standards officers.

I believe a decision to legislate should not be seen as breaching our voluntary metrication policy. Indeed it is absolutely necessary to deal with an anomaly which is producing extremely harmful results in terms of both trade and employment. It would be virtually impossible to continue to justify a situation in which goods imported illegally are sold legally to the detriment of our own economy. This view is endorsed by Sally Oppenheim. The necessary legislation would be subordinate legislation laid at Westminster subject to negative resolution.



We are under very strong pressure from the trade and Northern Ireland MPs and it is felt that we must legislate on the matter as soon as possible.

I appreciate that this is a very local problem and would not have brought it to your attention except that I was aware of your special interest in matters involving metrication.

I am sending a copy of this minute to Peter Walker, Sally Oppenheim and Sir Robert Armstrong.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to be "H.A.", written over a horizontal line.

H A  
5 June 1981