

vide some Government subsidies to cover the costs of conversion, the others would let the costs "lie where they fall." All the bills would set up a board to plan and oversee the conversion. The bills are an outgrowth of a study conducted under Congressional authorization by the National Bureau of Standards.

Federal officials talk as if the change-over were inevitable. They would like the debate to center on how rather than whether. By this they hope to finesse any possible traditionalist opposition.

In fact the change is already taking place. Electrical technology has always been on metric units; there never were any electric units in the traditional system. Many manufacturers now maintain double inventories, and more and more imported goods (for example, automobiles) are now designed on metric standards.

Public awareness and acceptance of metric units has also been growing. Some years ago the U.S. pharmaceutical industry switched to metric units without any protest from either the straight or the nonstraight drug cultures. The overthirties blandly accept five milligrams of Valium, and the underthirties talk glibly of kilos of grass. Apropos of another kind of cigarette, can there be anyone in the country who has not heard the song about "a silly millimeter longer?" (It would sound even sillier at a twenty-fifth of an inch.)

But glibly speaking of kilos of meat may come harder. It is here, in the nitty-gritty of the checkout counter, that a metrication board, if one is established, may find its work cut out for it (or maybe ground up). Even in the most metricated countries, acceptance of the new units in regard to homey things has come slowest. In France they still speak of une livre (a pound) of meat, although they mean half a kilo. □

## An international society for technology assessors

The movement to explore ways to assess the future impacts of new technologies is becoming institutionalized—albeit loosely and rather informally—at the international level. Last week in Washington a small group of scientists and scholars gathered to announce the establishment of the International Society for Technology Assessment.

The society hopes, through conferences and a quarterly journal, to provide a forum for persons and organizations interested in studying and controlling the unforeseen consequences of technological activities. It is not an



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*Chorus, Hahn, Toffler, Cunningham: ISTA's founders want it to be non-elitist.*

anti-technology group; its belief is that "technology must be controlled, but not arbitrarily." As its chairman, Donald E. Cunningham, special assistant to the director of the National Science Foundation, put it, the hope is that ISTA's efforts will help "guide us between the alternate utopias and alternate doomsdays we hear so much about."

Other ISTA officers include its president, Walter Hahn (senior specialist for science and technology at the Library of Congress's Congressional Research Service); its vice chairman, Fred L. Polak of the European Translations Centre, Delft, The Netherlands; and its executive director, Claudius A. Chorus of The Hague, The Netherlands. ISTA's administrative offices will be in The Hague, its scientific offices in Washington.

ISTA's spokesmen hope it will not become a professional society in the traditional sense. "We hope not to be a 19th century elitist group" with membership based "on credentials, publications and approval of peers," says Hahn. Membership is open to anyone, including housewives, businessmen, lawyers and students. (Write ISTA, Suite 5038, 1629 K St. N.W., Washington, D.C. 20036 for membership information.)

"We are interested in taking questions of technological possibility out of the hands of relatively small elites," stressed Alvin Toffler, author of *Future Shock* and a member of ISTA. "We would like to see broader public involvement."

Exactly what ISTA will do is still not totally clear, but what is clear is that it will emphasize the identification of consequences and alternatives of technologies rather than merely opposition to them. For example the first issue of its journal, *TECHNOLOGY ASSESSMENT*, will deal with the idea "that technology assessment does not imply technology arrestment." And on the supersonic transport, Cunningham says ISTA people might have testified on both sides of the issue. "We would have tried to look at the matter in a larger perspec-

tive, rather than that of just one of the pressure groups."

As one of its first large efforts, ISTA will sponsor the First International Congress on Technology Assessment in March 1973 in The Hague. Invitations will be extended throughout the world to persons representing a cross section of interests, specialties and social views. □

## Pollution abatement: Costs and benefits

New pollution-abatement controls—such as the 1975 air quality standards—will have their adverse effects on industrial employment over the next four years, but the benefits are likely to be large enough to offset the liabilities, says a new Council on Environmental Quality study.

Pollution controls are likely to result in a loss of 50,000 to 100,000 jobs in marginal industrial plants with old equipment, plants that probably would have closed a few years later anyway, CEQ says. Because jobs will also be created in pollution-abatement equipment industries, the net loss of jobs might be only 0.1 percent of current unemployment. At the same time, a major part of the estimated \$16 billion damage caused annually by air pollution would be halted and significant benefits would be gained in abatement of other kinds of pollution, more beautiful cities and reduced morbidity and mortality.

Hardest hit would be an estimated 50 to 150 one-industry small towns. There would also be price increases and a dampening of economic growth.

A CEQ spokesman said the plant closings would be distributed over the 14 industries studied and thus would not strike any one industry particularly hard. He added that programs of the Commerce and Labor Departments can aid displaced workers and companies—as well as localities—in economic redevelopment, but that no specific programs now exist for remedying environmental unemployment. □