Mathematics Skit

By JOHN CURTIS GOWAN
Culver Military Academy, Culver, Ind.*

TIME: The present. SCENE: The office of Mr. Strumpelbein, third vice president of the Consolidated Construction Corporation, who has just risen to greet an inspector from the U. S. Government.

INSPECTOR: Good Morning, Mr. Stumble-in, I'm a special inspector from the luxury tax division of the Bureau of Internal Revenue, and they told me you were the third vice president in charge of planning and so the gentleman I want to see.

STRUMPELBEIN: (Affably) Inspector from the Internal Revenue Department, eh? Well, glad to meet you inspector. (Pointedly) My name is Strumpelbein. I'm sorry, but we have no luxuries here. This is the place where we figure out how to do all the different jobs that the many activities of our corporation require.

I: I'm sorry, Mr. Stumble-bum (here, Mr. Strumpelbein corrects him, and continues to do so when necessary throughout the action), but you're wrong about luxuries. The Supreme Court has just decided that higher mathematics is a luxury, and therefore taxable as such under the recent luxury tax law.

S: (Stupefied) You mean to say we have to pay to use mathematics?

I: Anything higher than arithmetic you do. The Supreme Court said so in the case of ..... (insert some appropriate teacher's name) versus the state of ..... Want to see the ruling, eh? (Strumpelbein shakes head) Well then, here's the list of assessments (Hands over paper)

S: (Reads haltingly, with mounting indignation): Factoring, 3 dollars and a half a hundred. Quadratics, 4.50 a quad. Binomial theorem, 6.75 an expansion. Logarithms, 50 cents for the first log and 10 cents for each additional log thereafter. Radicals, 80 cents per square root. Calculus, 9.50 a derivative. Probability, 10 cents a chance, three chances for a quarter. Statistics, taxed by the yard. Infinitesimals, tax free.—Why are infinitesimals tax free, inspector?

I: Well you see the tax is also infinitesimal.

S: Oh, (Continues) Permutations and combinations, 12 dollars a ton, h'm, almost as expensive as coal. Arithmetic series, 14 dollars each. Simultaneous quadratic equations, 198.50 (good riddance, never did like them anyway). Percentage problems, 10% of the answer. Work problems, except defense work, 25% of the salary. Mixture problems, 50 cents unless you get the right answer.—What happens, inspector, if you get the right answer?

I: Who does?

S: Oh. (Continues) Simple equations, 3 dollars apiece. Graphs, taxed on a sliding scale according to the slope, and long division, the government gets the quotient, and you get the remainder,—(ANGRILY) why this is the most preposterous thing I ever heard of in my whole life!

I: (Suavely) It may be preposterous Mr. Bumble-stem, but that doesn't mean the government can't do it. In fact they HAVE done it (SHOWS ENORMOUS BADGE) and I'm here to check up on your outfit and to collect on all the mathematics you've been using around this place. (He advances toward Mr. Strumpelbein, who, cowed by this display of power, has cringed down behind his desk.)

S: (Depreciatingly) Why we use very little mathematics in our business, inspector. It's hardly necessary at all.

I: (Still belligerent) Well, we'll see about that, Mr. Rumble-seat. Now let's have a list of your projects for the past year.

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(Gets papers). H'm, what's this first item I see here, "Best shape and size for cans and containers?"

S: Well, we did do a little work figuring out how we could save money by using a better shaped tin can for our product which would make it hold more and at the same time use less tin.

I: Oh you did, eh, and just how did you manage that, by differential calculus, or did you use an ouija board?

S: Well, I'm afraid we couldn't afford to guess on that one, so we used calculus. (Hurriedly) But that was just a lonely example.

I: Not so lonely if my eyes serve me right. Says here that you've been doing some research on the cooling and annealing of metals and glass. (SARCASTICALLY) I suppose that didn't take any differential equations?

S: Well that was pretty technical, but now our usual line of work—

I: (INTERRUPTS) Uses mathematics even more often. How about this report that your big machine tools were turning out 8% defective parts?

S: Well, we did use some statistics there.

I: Yeah, and you used some more in weighing variables for these index numbers I see in this cost study.

S: Yes, but that just comes once a year.

I: So do taxes, Mr. Stroople-bean. I guess I came to the right place all right. Now how about these blueprints. Here's one involving factoring and quadratic equations, all in the same wheelbase problem.

S: What a spendthrift our draftsman must be!

I: And look at this report on this new alloy you're making, 10% iron, 15% phosphate, 50% alcohol, 12% nicotine, and 3% Alka-seltzer! What the devil is that,—a rat poison, a new vitamin, rayon for girls' stockings, or a pick-me-up for the morning after?

S: (AT LAST A TRIUMPH) I can't tell you. It's a military secret!

I: Well it's no secret it will cost you a pretty penny for all the mixture problems and formulas, I see there. Now I suppose you amortize your depreciation, by establishing a sinking fund, and every year charging off a certain portion. (S NODS) Well, that's mathematics of finance. And do you have an insurance plan for employees? (ANOTHER NOD) Well, that lets you in for the tax on probability. Now for a quick look around the office. Say, this place is lousy with mathematics! What's this chart over here?

S: Now you can't jump on us for that. That's just a plain chart of our past growth and estimated future expansion.

I: Well, expansions come under series, so it may be a plain chart to you, but it's ten dollars to us. Well, here's your bill, Mr. Stinckel-boom, two hundred and fifty five dollars and forty seven cents!

S: Gad! but you can't do this to us! We'll fight it tooth and nail. Suppose we won't pay?

I: Then you'll have to stop using mathematics in your business, Good day Mr. Bumble-bean! (EXIT)

S: (MAD CLEAN THROUGH) But we can't stop using mathematics in our business, we or anybody else. Mathematics is at the very foundation of business,—its a prime necessity, I tell you, not a luxury, a necessity. (HE IS STILL HOLLERING OUT THE DOOR AT THE DEPARTED INSPECTOR WHEN SUDDENLY THE IMPORT OF HIS WORDS STRIKES HOME) By George It *IS* a *NECESSITY!!* THAT'S what we'll tell the Court! That's what we'll tell the Congress! That's what we'll tell the world!! (HE STRIDES DECISIVELY BACK TO HIS DESK) Gimme that phone! Gimme Washington!! Gimme the Supreme Court!!! GIMME FRANKFURTER!!!!——(BUT THE CURTAIN HAS CLOSED.)