

Opinion/Commentary/Letters

Democratizing British industry

By RUDOLF KLEIN

LONDON — An angry debate is currently raging here over the latest attempt to prescribe a cure for Britain's chronic economic ills. The debate goes to the heart of British democracy, focusing as it does on the structure of power in the management of the nation's industrial enterprises.

The furor was triggered some weeks ago when, after a year of study, an official committee recommended that workers should share authority with their bosses in running major British industries — including the subsidiaries of U.S. and other foreign corporations here.

Headed by Lord Bullock, a distinguished Oxford historian, the committee said that the innovation would "tap the unused potential" of Britain's labor force. But dissenting members of the 10-man group issued a minority report denouncing the plan as a move calculated to strengthen the already influential British trade unions.

The prospect now is for a long and bitter confrontation between the Labor government and its union allies on the one hand, and the Conservative party opposition and its business backers on the other. Thus the lines are drawn between Britain's traditional protagonists — those who have struggled to win a greater voice for labor, and those who believe in the rights of capital.

The battle will be significant,

since it threatens to polarize the contending elements on the British political scene and thereby impede the quest for solutions to the country's economic difficulties.

Partisans of the reform claim that the Bullock recommendations merely bury the obsolete business theory that held that management's role was only to maximize profits and dividends. Now, they argue, management has a responsibility to workers as well as to stockholders, and this can be achieved by making company directors accountable to both.

Moreover, this thesis continues, such a change would transform Britain's troubled industrial relations, since labor representatives sitting on a board of directors would identify with the firm and therefore encourage worker cooperation rather than tolerate strikes, slowdowns and resistance to new technology.

Management would, of course, have to learn to rule by consent and consensus. But, supporters of the scheme submit, the advantages to be gained through the collaboration of labor are worth the sacrifice.

In addition, say proponents of the program, the idea has already made a good deal of headway throughout Western Europe. Sweden and West Germany, for example, long have had workers serving as directors of industry. And the European Economic Community Commission,

which is hardly a leftwing body, has favored increased labor participation in management for years.

The ferment here in Britain, however, stems from two particularly radical features of the Bullock committee report. It suggests, first, that the trade unions control the selection of labor representatives to boards of directors. Secondly, it recommends that workers and stockholders share managerial authority on an equal basis.

These proposals reflect the fact that trade union leaders and Labor party sympathizers comprised the majority of the Bullock committee, which probably should have produced an acceptable plan rather than accentuating the obvious differences between labor and management.

The question at present, consequently, is whether the government can come up with a compromise that satisfies labor aspirations without alienating management.

One possibility would be to modify the procedure for selecting labor representatives so that the trade unions play a less predominant part in the process. Another would be to adopt the West German model, a two-tier system under which workers sit on a supervisory board that deals with broad policy issues while the managers handle the company's day-to-day affairs.

So far, most of the trade unions have indicated that they will reject any dilution of the Bullock committee recommendations. The business community, meanwhile, has made it clear that it does not consider the Bullock proposals to be a foundation for negotiations.

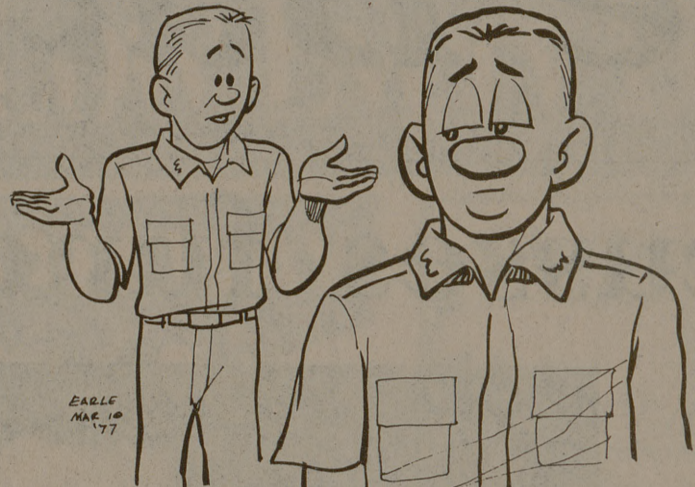
These positions have put the Labor government on the spot. It needs the unions, not only for political survival but for help in keeping down wages in the war against inflation. At the same time, it needs larger investments by industry in order to stimulate the economy.

So the government cannot afford to antagonize either side — and yet, at this writing, it is hard to see how it can placate one without irritating the other.

In a deeper sense, though, this debate over "industrial democracy" mirrors the more profound stresses and strains in British society today. For the fight between labor and capital is a variation of the class conflict that has been going on in Britain for a century — and that is far from finished.

Klein, a senior fellow at London's Center for Studies in Social Policy, writes on social issues in Britain.

Slouch by Jim Earle



"THIS IS HIGHLY EMBARRASSING TO ME. I'VE GOT TO LEAVE EARLY BECAUSE MY GRANDMOTHER REALLY IS SICK! I MEAN REALLY!"

Degree requirement — is there an alternative?

Editor: Jeanne Graham's letter in the March 3 Battalion expresses the widespread student view that college grades have little bearing on a student's knowledge of a subject or upon general intelligence.

I fully agree with Ms. Graham's position and would take it even one step further—a college degree itself is no unerring guide to an individual's general knowledge or intellectual horsepower.

A person not enrolled in college, but highly motivated toward learning, could read every college text in any chosen field in years less than the four allotted. But how does such a person in this situation demonstrate or prove he has done the work?

The institutional setting of a uni-

versity merely provides a "test" that certain minimum standards of exposure to learning have been met and passed by graduates. The receipt is a state-embossed diploma.

And so it is with coursework. A 50-question objective test administered to a section of 100 students can even come close to probing the student's depth of understanding. A passing score, however, is the professor's measure that a certain minimum standard of work—exposure—has been met.

It is a system, and not a satisfactory system, to determine who has done the work to qualify for a degree and who has not. If Graham can suggest a better system, I would be anxious to hear about it.

— Peter Akle

Resident supports park site

Editor: I am responding to your article published March 1, 1977 regarding the park site in the Holik tract. I felt Councilman Halter's remarks were sarcastic and misleading.

The fact is, there are no useable parks in this district, within an accessible service area, and none in town that offer the unique factors this land possesses. Additionally, Dexter and Bee Creek Parks are accessible only by crossing major thoroughfares without traffic lights. Anderson Street "park" is a vacant, overgrown lot, on a creekbed, left as unsuitable for development. It is unusable to the public in its present state. As to school grounds, the high school is over two miles round-trip and, again, can only be reached by crossing Southwest Parkway. South Knoll School is the only area nearby and offers nothing more than open space, dirt and stickers; recently, children playing there after school hours have been told to leave.

The area in question may not be an "ecological wonder" to Mr. Halter, but it is a wonder there are such areas left to enjoy, with public officials who would share his apparent "love of nature." The area contains an abundance of various forms of wildlife and many beautiful wildflowers, including our native Bluebonnet.

It should be pointed out that five years ago, the residents in this area first petitioned the city to follow through with its original plans to locate a park here. It is regrettable that such action was not taken at that time; with subsequent increases in development and population in this area there is a definite need for a park.

Councilman Jim Gardner's views also seemed to be misrepresented in the article; he has, in fact, supported the development of a park on this site consistently and with determination.

Lynn Le Vine

Grades relative, no absolute measure of knowledge

Editor: I would like to express my disagreement with Thursday's (March 3) letter to the Battalion editor entitled "Grades do Not Gauge Knowledge." The text of the letter disagreed with the concept expressed in the professor's quotation: "Most of you are average students, and average students should receive an average grade." I agree with this statement completely.

The reason why so many of us are dissatisfied with an average grade of C is because we have been conditioned (in our first twelve years of education) to think anything less than an A was "below average." Accordingly, average students like myself have been unfairly receiving A's and B's all our lives.

I firmly believe that one produces more when more is asked of him.

— Jerry James

And isn't that what college is about? Certainly we are here to gain education but education also includes learning about ourselves, our productive capabilities. Education is being tested against the standards of the grades we receive. It is a system based on individual initiative and competition. We already proven ourselves "average" by being here. Now best are being separated from better.

The point to be made here is that grades in fact do not gauge knowledge but rather allow us to know where we stand with respect to our fellow students. The next time you beat your brains to be in the 75 per cent of those who get C's don't be dissatisfied. . . . you are pretty good. Be here in the first place.

The Battalion

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Any freshman in any field of study that is interested in the above areas is urged to apply. Talented people are needed in all areas, so don't be afraid to drop this application by Room 216, Student Programs Office, MSC. Applications close Friday, March 11, 1977, at 5:00 p.m.

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