Introduction

CONFLICT and tension are inherent features of all dynamic societies. Resolving conflicts constructively, avoiding destructive disputes, and the creative use of tension thus become key requirements for social progress.

Events in recent years have made industry acutely aware of its failure to find real solutions to industrial strife. The relative optimism of the 1950's and early 1960's has largely disappeared. The pervasiveness and cost of many disputes reach levels that are both socially and economically unacceptable. Few today would deny the need for far-reaching and continuing investigation of the causes and remedies of industrial conflict.

The causes of conflict cannot easily be separated from the means of resolving them. A more educated and informed workforce, with a taste for freedom and a desire to shape and control its destiny, not only sets up new tensions in society, it compels a search for new solutions.

Many hold that a more democratic industrial community can only be created by involvement and participation. There is a great deal of evidence to support this view. Yet not all the forces in modern society press in the same direction. Increasingly sophisticated technologies and financial structures make certain forms of participation, except by the expert, a meaningless exercise. The growing scale of many organisations, of mergers and takeovers among both companies and trade unions, make the ideal of direct personal involvement more difficult to achieve.

A whole range of actual or potential conflict areas exist, from the interface between a man and his job, where the demands of the process may deny him the opportunity to express his full humanity and grow as a person, to the point where the needs of companies large and small come into conflict with community requirements and the wider socio-economic environment.

The dilemma facing leaders on both sides of industry is very real. More democratic decision-making will not necessarily maximise the satisfaction of the participants, nor even permit the resolution of certain patterns of disagreement. If the leader allows group members to have their way, he is not leading but abdicating, yet if he does not let them have their way, he is charged with coercion!
**Co-partnership**

The representative must use his best judgment on behalf of his constituents, but is not in fact obligated to do what they wish.

The essence of genuine conflict-resolving in industry is that a solution should benefit all parties and enable all concerned to move towards their goals. If the gain of one party to a dispute is a loss to the other there has been no real change, merely a shift in the relative power position of the parties. It is one of the tragedies of the present industrial scene that the pressures to achieve one’s objectives at the expense of the opposition, to fight win-lose battles, may often be irresistible.

These and many other questions provide the central theme of the Conference reported in the following pages. If more questions were asked than hard solutions offered, this merely reflects our present limited state of understanding and the difficulty of the problem. Nevertheless, practical solutions were offered and successful experiments were described. The evidence, and the message of this Conference, is that although conflicts in industry are inevitable they can be creatively resolved, and that mutual problem-solving by Management and Labour is possible.

**IAN GORDON-BROWN**

**INDUSTRIAL PARTICIPATION**

Commencing with the next issue, dated Spring 1972, the Journal of the Industrial Co-partnership Association will appear under a new title—*Industrial Participation*—and in a new format. In addition to feature articles, *Industrial Participation* will carry a series of practical guides to different forms of participation currently found in British industry; case studies of particular experiments and achievements in this field; and reviews of recent studies and research in industrial relations.

*Industrial Participation* will be sent to all members and subscribers to the Industrial Co-partnership Association who now receive the journal in its present form. It will also be available at an annual subscription rate of £2.