

Industrial Democracy and Employee Participation: A Policy Discussion Paper, by *Department of Employment and Industrial Relations*.

(AGPS, Canberra, 1986) pp. 207, no price indicated, ISBN 0-644-05619-3.

Diversity, Change and Tradition. The Environment for Industrial Democracy in Australia, edited by *Bill Ford and Lorna Tilley*.

(AGPS, Canberra, 1986) pp. vi + 221, no price indicated, ISBN 86-0651-1.

Industrial democracy means many different things to many different people. For a substantial section of the far Left and of the Green movement, workers' self-management offers a radical, decentralised alternative to both capitalism and state socialism. On the right, advocates of 'people's capitalism' see the massive extension of workers' shareholdings in the companies for which they work as a means of protecting the foundations of capitalist society by reducing class conflict, increasing productivity and combating inflation. Trade union activists seek negotiating rights (and/or access to the arbitration system) on a much wider range of issues than is currently subject to the influence of organised labour. For many managers, obtaining the participation of their workers in day-to-day production decisions holds out the prospect of significant improvements in productivity and product quality. Other employers, however, regard even such very limited inroads on their managerial prerogatives as anathema.

Political, social and economic theory has much to say about all these issues. Unfortunately both the publications under review are resolutely untheoretical, in the case of *Industrial Democracy and Employee Participation* almost grimly so. It is certainly possible to make out a detailed case for taking the Hawke Government's new corporatism into the workplace, on the grounds that the three middle options listed above — people's capitalism, increased union power, and enlightened management — are ultimately reconcilable, and beneficial to all parties. *Industrial Democracy and Employee Participation*, however, simply assumes that this is true, ignoring all the anti-corporatist arguments from both left and right and providing — in Chapter 5 — only the flimsiest account of international experience. There is no reference to Yugoslavia, Israel or Mondragon; and is Dynavac really the only workers' cooperative in Australia? 'Industrial democracy' is nowhere satisfactorily defined; Chapter 2, with the title 'Industrial Democracy and Employee Participation: What Do They Mean?', is confused and evasive. The proposals of this 'policy discussion paper' are vague and hedged with qualifications. Bland, repetitive, colourless, *Industrial Democracy and Employee Participation* will neither enlighten nor offend.

Diversity, Change and Tradition is an altogether more interesting, if uneven, volume, containing the research papers which are supposed to have inspired *Industrial Democracy and Employee Participation*. There are six informative industry studies, covering printing, food manufacturing, engineering and metals, mining, finance, and retail trade, together with useful papers on the implications of industrial democracy for women, migrants, managers, first-line supervisors, unions and employers' associations. Again, however, the absence of a theoretical framework makes for incoherence in the book as a whole. Crucial questions concerning the distribution of wealth and power in capitalist societies are addressed, more or less adequately, in individual papers. (The best are Cummings on sub-contracting and outwork,