

not only in the general analysis of the book but also because Ballance's example industries (computers, semiconductors, consumer electronics, automatic capital machinery, automobiles, steel and textiles) are 'dominated' by such corporations. One might argue that the term 'dominated', much used by Ballance, is better or more accurately replaced by the term 'controlled' in referring to global manufacturing patterns. Some types of relevant topics that do not appear in any detail, because of this omission, include the internationalisation of capital, transfer pricing and the use of international headquarters and tax havens.

Another nomenclature problem in this text is that the terms 'business', 'manufacturing', and 'industry' all appear to be used in virtually synonymous ways, particularly if prefaced by the word 'international'. Consequently it is not clear what the concern of the book is except in the most general terms. It would appear to be the global patterning of manufacturing, judging from his example industries. However, these example manufacturing industries are dealt with in a perfunctory manner, and it could be concluded that non-manufacturing industries such as international banking or software production might have served just as well.

The audience claimed is that of students who have a first year of economics and are studying industrial economics, international business or economic development. It is also argued that the text is intended as complementary to core texts rather than being a substitute for them. The attempt is for broad appeal and, consequently, the book seems to serve no intended segment of its audience either well or in any depth.

Most appropriately the book might be described as an introductory international economic history of the post-war manufacturing sector with a strong empirical bias. At \$45 it does not appear to be particularly expensive but it most certainly does not appear value for that price.

John Forster
Griffith University.

Democracy in Australian Unions: A Comparative Study of Six Unions by
E.M. Davis
(Allen & Unwin, Sydney, 1987) pp. xvi + 243. ISBN 00-4-320205-5. \$19.95.

The popular Australian mythology concerning trade unions is epitomised in the proposition that they are oligarchic organisations designed and operated by secretive elite cliques offering little or no opportunity for democratic involvement or decision-making for the membership. Academic models of trade unions, e.g. Ashenfelter, often follow suit.

Davis adduces considerable evidence to refute the shallow conventional wisdom with its hidden agenda of antagonism. The study of six unions of considerably different social and economic background and function amply demonstrates the avenues for, and wide utilisation of, the membership participation in a variety of basic decision-making. Avenues for consultation, information and referenda are highlighted and the evidence points convincingly in the direction of a great rebuttal of the conventional wisdom of suspicion and elite manipulation.

However, recent history in my own backyard bailiwick of Queensland, concerning several large unions (SDA and FCU) raises the old issues once again. In the building industry of the sinful south (BLF) there has been ample evidence of control and manipulation by an oligarchy over a long period. Like it or not, elite squabbles and power plays are highly evident. This produces a mass of membership which is ignorant, uninformed, confused and therefore detached and cynical about the issues. Such is far from the rose garden of free information and representative democracy purported to be more the rule by Davis. Does Dr Davis have an equal and opposite hidden agenda?

I do not detect, in Davis' evaluation, a distinction between representative government and participatory democracy. Obviously the size of trade unions and the dispersion of members does not lend itself to easy participatory processes. Yet to dispel the shadows and policy implications of the popular view, satisfactory evidence of effective participation would have to be produced. Davis does not report widespread participation. Meeting attendance (while high in some cases) and paper propaganda flowing down the line ('literature services') are not indicative of participation. Flows of information, other than meeting resolutions and occasional referenda, up the line are conspicuous by their absence. The author, I feel, has not seen the wood for the trees in his search for evidence of democratic forms of behaviour. If trade unions were not governed by elites with their elite strategies and squabbles they would be entirely atypical institutions in this society, really worthy of fundamental analysis.

If the high levels of detachment from, and in excess of ten per cent antagonism towards, trade unions disclosed by Ruth Johnson some years ago are accepted as generally applicable, a major inference is that the representative democracy at present practised is far from effective in serving the representational and protective needs of the members. Meetings may be held, resolutions passed, decisions publicised, votes taken, officers balloted for, as Dr Davis describes, but none of that prevents dominance by cliques or elites. In this, trade unions share a common characteristic with the churches, the racing industry, and the conventional corporation.

The democracy described by Dr Davis does indeed exist, contrary to popular cliché. But the general absence of a participatory process is an unexplored reason for the high level of cynicism and apathy towards trade union matters shown by the majority of members.

On the other hand, Davis has done us a considerable service in documenting the extent to which representative government is effective in at least the sample of unions he studied. Possibly a further investigation of the politicisation of the elites' strategies would provide the reasons for the poor development of real consultative and participatory processes. It is also instructive, from Davis' evidence, to see the extent to which the elites' time is oriented to 'organisational' matters rather than industrial strategy and research. Such concern points not in the direction of democratic practice but rather to the separation of strategists from the troops.

The real value of Dr Davis' work lies not in completely refuting the conventional media wisdom but in exposing the positives that really do exist, however imperfectly, and in asking the eminently sensible and necessary question: what are the criteria on which the conventional judgements are made?

H. Richards
University of Queensland.