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ORGANIZATIONAL DEVELOPMENT AND INDUSTRIAL DEMOCRACY: A CURRENT CASE-STUDY

Eric J. Miller

INTRODUCTION

'What do rural development in Mexico and studies of health care systems have in common with organizational change and development in industry?' The person who asked that question was looking at a list of Tavistock Institute projects. One thing they have in common is that they are all fields in which for some time I have been personally committed in a consultancy-research role. Beyond that, I brought to this work, partly from a background in social anthropology, and more specifically through the influence of other Tavistock colleagues, a set of concepts, values and methods, which in turn have been developed and modified in the course of my experience. Indeed, I have been struck by the extent to which insights gained in one field illuminate another situation that on the face of it may seem quite dissimilar. How far, however, is the similarity something imposed by me? It is inevitable that to some extent I must be re-defining 'reality' in order to defend myself from more dissonance than I can cope with. For that reason, I propose in the first part of this paper to describe briefly some of the thinking I brought to, and have derived from, certain of these experiences, especially those outside industry, so that the reader may form his own judgments about the preconceptions and biases that may be structuring my picture of reality. This will set the scene for an account, in the second part, of an ongoing piece of work in a manufacturing company.

Still by way of introduction, however, I want first to say a few words about the title of this paper. Neither 'organizational development' nor 'industrial democracy' has a single, widely accepted definition, though both terms are very much in vogue. In Britain, the Government recently set up the Bullock Committee to make recommendations on mechanisms for a narrowly defined version of industrial democracy: the appointment of trade union members to boards of directors. But the term also has a wide extension, which includes, at one end of the spectrum, devices for employee participation (another term that is heavily used and quite im-