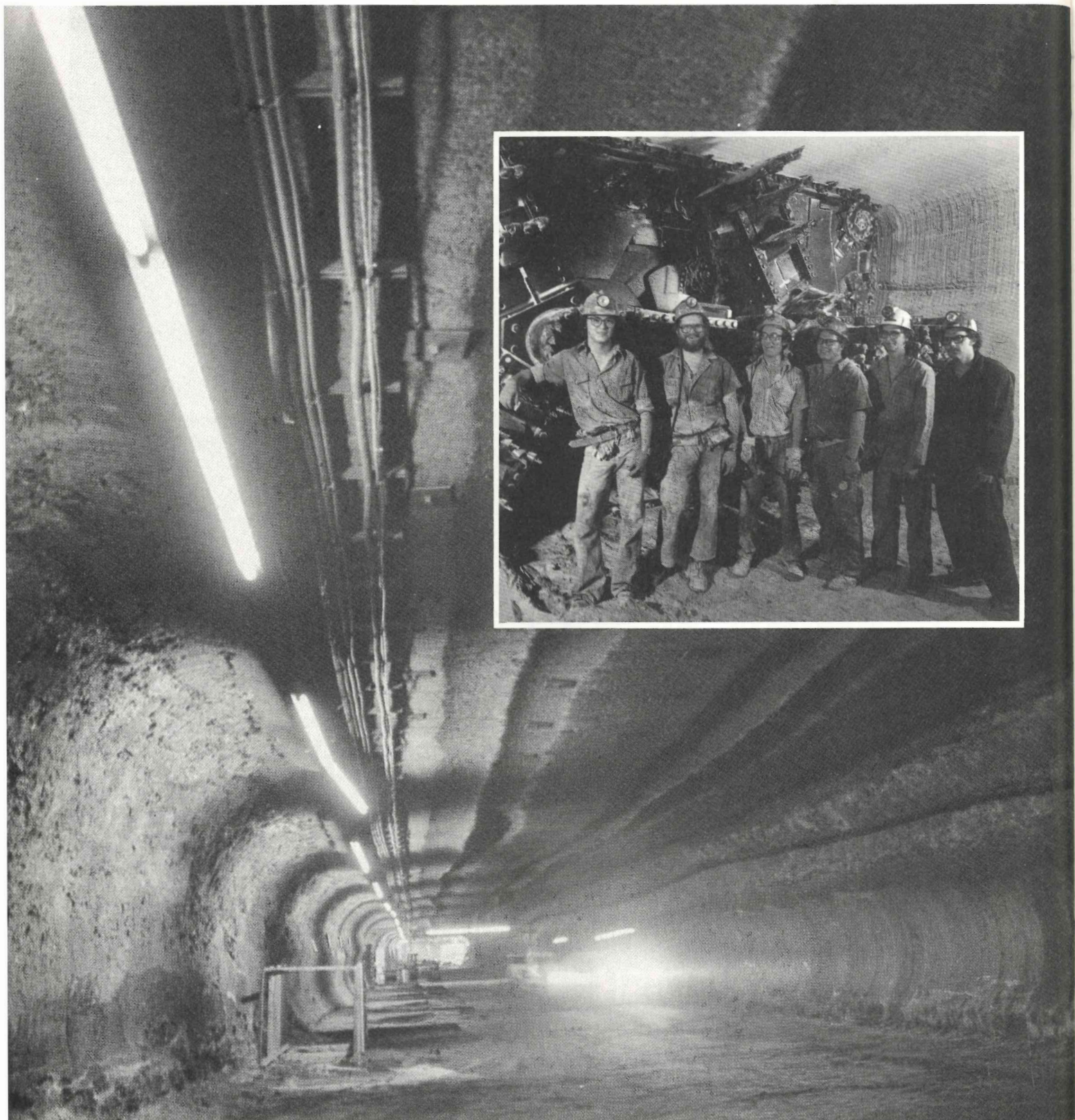


*Travelway at Rocanville Divison,
3 000 ft below the surface.
Production crew at Cory Division
(insert).*



Industrial democracy in the Canadian potash industry

By Donald Bobiash

This article examines attempts to promote industrial democracy in the state-owned Potash Corporation of Saskatchewan, North America's largest producer of potash. These attempts illustrate some of the barriers to industrial democracy within state-owned industries and the North American system of industrial relations, and suggest mechanisms that may overcome some of these barriers.

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Although industrial democracy has long been a topic of major interest in Western Europe, it has not attracted similar attention in North America. Ideas of worker control or influence on corporate decision-making have been greeted with hostility from management and suspicion by many union leaders in North America. This article will examine an intriguing exception of the North American bias against industrial democracy. The exception is found in a government-owned potash mining company in the western Canadian province of Saskatchewan.

In the early 1980s, a number of experiments were conducted to promote industrial democracy in the Potash Corporation of Saskatchewan. Perhaps what is most unique about these experiments is that they occurred at all. The Canadian mining industry has traditionally been dominated by conservative management attitudes and unions which have often showed more hostility than interest toward the concept of industrial democracy. The fact that major industrial democracy reforms were attempted in the Potash Corporation of Saskatchewan is of further interest in that the impetus for these reforms came from a variety of sources. Surprisingly, corporate management, rather than union leadership, were the early chief instigators of attempts at industrial democracy reforms. Also of significance is the fact that some of the industrial democracy initiatives undertaken in the Potash Corporation of Saskatchewan were innovative attempts to transfer Scandinavian approaches to work reform to a North American environment.

An examination of this unique attempt to promote industrial democracy provides a number of insights. First, it helps illustrate some of the specific barriers to industrial democracy inherent in the North American adversarial system of industrial relations. Second, an examination of innovative structures at the Potash Corporation of Saskatche-

wan established to promote industrial democracy illustrates mechanisms that may be able to surmount some of these barriers. The fact that much of the impetus for the industrial democracy initiatives came from key management officials underlines a third area of interest: the importance of managerial values as a prerequisite for the success of industrial democracy. A fourth area of concern, is the relationship between state ownership of an enterprise and the possibility of promoting industrial democracy in that enterprise. Finally, a continuing theme in the analysis is the significance of the larger socio-political context for the successful promotion of industrial democracy.

An analysis of the events surrounding the attempts to promote industrial democracy in the Potash Corporation of Saskatchewan suggest that, in a North American context, environmental conditions unique to Saskatchewan were key factors behind the industrial democracy initiatives. Saskatchewan's strong social democratic traditions and its government's emphasis on "Crown" (state-owned) enterprises for economic development created a context which enabled a small number of key management officials who maintained an interest in industrial democracy, along with willing union leadership and provincial Labour Department personalities, to attempt experiments in industrial democracy. However, it was precisely a change in this context, notably the electoral defeat of the Saskatchewan social democratic government and its replacement by a conservative one, that resulted in the demise of the industrial democracy initiatives. Before discussing in detail the industrial democracy initiatives undertaken at the Potash Corporation of Saskatchewan, a definition of the concept of industrial democracy is needed — a task to which we now turn.

The concept of industrial democracy

Industrial democracy is an enigma. A

wide range of obtuse definitions and differing theoretical perspectives make it a specially challenging concept. The variety of definitions is matched by a variety of goals for its implementation. A trade unionist might perceive of industrial democracy as an extension of worker power; a manager as a means to increase productivity; a psychologist as a path to self-fulfillment. Discussion of the topic of industrial democracy also overlaps with two other equally broad concepts in industrial relations, namely those of "Quality of Working Life (QWL)" and "worker participation". The fact that many managers and union leaders use all three of these labels almost interchangeably introduces further complications into analysis of industrial democracy.

To help avoid some of these complications it is useful to select a definition of industrial democracy that is broad enough to accommodate various conceptions of the term, yet maintain within it a yardstick that can be applied across a range of labour-management relationships.

One useful yardstick for measuring the effect of industrial democracy mechanisms is one centred on the concept of "control". David Marsden, in his incisive analysis of industrial democracy, states that the concept of control must be broad enough to embrace both undivided and shared aspects of control in the workplace.¹ Also, this concept must take into account aspects of interdependence between management and labour. For example, although management may have undivided, unilateral control over such areas as investment decisions, it might also have to share control over other areas of decision-making with its workforce, such as the establishment of wage rates through collective bargaining. Marsden summarized this situation through the use of the concept of "frontiers of control". He explains this concept, first developed by Carter Goodrich, as follows: "Workforce and management each have

areas where they can exercise unilateral regulations; these areas can be labelled as "areas of control".² The "frontier of control" is formed by the meeting of two areas of unilateral regulation. The overlap of the two areas of unilateral regulation can be either very narrow, such as when there is a nearly perfect demarcation between the two areas, or it can be very broad, such as when there is complete bilateral or joint regulation. Whatever form the frontier of control may take, "the stress on shifts in control over a wide range of matters . . . is central to the analysis of industrial democracy".³

Analyzing industrial democracy by attempting to gauge shifts in the frontier of control is also useful in that it can help measure the results of workplace reform in terms of control changes regardless of the motivations for these reforms. Whether the reforms were instigated by management as an effort to increase profits by increasing labour productivity, or by unions as an ideologically inspired attempt to increase worker control, it is the resulting shift in the "frontiers of control" which reflects whether there has been a move towards industrial democracy. Before applying this control-based definition of industrial democracy to our analysis of work reforms in the Saskatchewan potash industry, it is important to gain an understanding of the unique social, political, and economic environment of the province of Saskatchewan, and how that environment created the conditions resulting in attempts to promote industrial democracy.

The specifics of Saskatchewan

The province's unique political and economic environment is a marked contrast to the North American norm. The contrast is found in Saskatchewan's heritage of social democratic governments, state intervention in the economy, and of economic cooperation. These traits are manifest in the traditional domination

of the provincial political scene by social democratic parties, the strength of the province's cooperative movement, and the key economic role played by state-owned or "crown" corporations.

Since the mid-1940s, state-owned enterprises have been central to the economic policies of Saskatchewan's social democratic governments. The collective assets of the province's seventeen commercial holdings, of which the Potash Corporation of Saskatchewan is one, is over seven billion dollars (CAD).⁴ The province's "crown" corporations are especially important in the natural resource sector; besides owning the largest potash mining company in Canada, the Saskatchewan government also has major holdings in oil, uranium, and sodium sulphate. The Saskatchewan social democratic government, from the mid-1970s until its loss of office in 1982, saw increased state activity in the province's natural resource sector as an important move in promoting the province's economic growth. Greater public control over the economy, however, had long been a theme of the Saskatchewan social democratic movement. We now turn to a brief discussion of the philosophy and origins of that movement.

The Saskatchewan social democratic movement, unlike its European counterparts, had its principle origins in agrarian populism. This agrarian populism reflects the economic base of the province, which became part of the Canadian confederation in 1905. Since its early years Saskatchewan's economy has been based on agriculture, and its population dominated largely by farmers and residents of small, rural communities. A generally sparse population, a one-crop economy dependent on volatile world wheat markets, and a feeling of political and economic domination by the industrialized regions of central Canada were all factors that contributed to the formation of a series of populist parties of agrarian protest in the province. One such political party was the *Cooperative*

The PCS logo

Commonwealth Federation (CCF) which swept into office in Saskatchewan in 1944 to become the first democratically elected socialist government in North America. It held office for two decades. In the early 1960s the CCF and organized labour in Canada joined to create the *New Democratic Party* (NDP). The New Democratic Party came into office in Saskatchewan in June, 1971 and held power until April, 1982. While in office, the CCF and NDP instigated a range of pioneering social legislation, including the first state-run universal medical care system in North America.

Intertwined with the province's social democratic heritage is a strong tradition of economic cooperation. Sixty per cent of the population are members of co-operatives, which are major forces in Saskatchewan's consumer retailing and banking sectors and dominate key agricultural areas such as grain marketing. In most farming villages and towns in Saskatchewan there are numerous co-operatively run enterprises and small businesses. The cooperative ethos prevalent in Saskatchewan was also evident in the philosophy of the Cooperative Commonwealth Federation, which, as a political party, emphasized local "grass-roots" participation in party decision-making and in the government of the province. The small number of inhabitants who lived in the spread-out farming communities along with the presence of numerous local government bodies and cooperatives meant that almost all citizens participated at one time or another on the boards or committees of these organizations. Especially important was the farmer-owned grain marketing co-operative, the Wheat Pool. Over three decades ago Robert Lynd wrote about Saskatchewan that:

"Here exists as clear and clean a democratic base as yet remains on this continent; a pervasive web of organizations and participation. In wheat pools and other co-operatives and local services there is



one elective position for every two or three farmers in Saskatchewan. After nearly fifty years of agrarian organization, the CCF has succeeded in involving more people in direct political activities than any other party in American and Canadian history."⁵

Saskatchewan's tradition of the participation of its rural citizens in political and economic decision-making is highly relevant to our analysis of the industrial democracy reforms attempted in the province's potash mining industry. Many of the key figures who pushed for greater industrial democracy within the Potash Corporation of Saskatchewan emphasized that it was precisely this tradition of participation in local decision making they wished to see established in their industry. If Saskatchewan farmers could have a voice in decisions affecting their working life, why couldn't Saskatchewan miners? The attempt to promote industrial democracy in the Potash Corporation of Saskatchewan represents a unique case where many of the ideological roots of industrial workplace reform are found in agrarian political culture.

The theme of "participation", apparent in the province's political culture, was also emphasized in policy orientations in the Saskatchewan Department of Labour. (In Canada, labour relations fall largely under the jurisdiction of the provinces rather than the national government). The most important emphasis on participation was in the area of occupational health and safety. In the ear-

ly 1970s the Saskatchewan government passed legislation to promote the involvement of workers in the administration and enforcement of occupational health and safety through the creation of mandatory labour-management committees at most places of work in the province.⁶ The Saskatchewan emphasis on participation in its approach to occupational health and safety was later copied in other Canadian provinces.

Besides its interest in promoting worker participation in occupational health and safety, the Saskatchewan Department of Labour also displayed some general interest in the concept of industrial democracy, an interest which the political cabinet minister in charge of labour relations encouraged. During the mid-1970s, plans were made to experiment with forms of worker participation and industrial democracy in a government-owned sodium sulphate mine, but opposition from various union officials and some government sources prevented the experiment from getting off the ground. Nonetheless, interest in industrial democracy continued to exist within the department, as reflected in a publication of a Green Paper on the subject in 1978. Interest in the topic of industrial democracy by key officials within the Department of Labour is of relevance to our analysis of the attempts to promote industrial democracy in the Potash Corporation of Saskatchewan. One of the department's key proponents of industrial democracy, its Deputy Minister (highest ranking civil servant in the department, 1971-74), later moved to the Potash Corporation of Saskatchewan to become responsible for the corporation's industrial relations during its initial years. Having examined the province's political culture with its theme of "participation", and seen a degree of interest in industrial democracy within Saskatchewan's Department of Labour, we now turn to a brief description of the events surrounding the creation of the organization that was the

scene of the industrial democracy experiments: the Potash Corporation of Saskatchewan.

The potash industry and the Potash Corporation of Saskatchewan

The Province of Saskatchewan has approximately forty per cent of the world's known reserves of potash, a mineral used in the production of various types of agricultural fertilizer. There are presently ten mines in Saskatchewan, all of which were in operation by 1970, established by resource companies base outside of the province. In the mid-1970s, world prices of potash had begun to rise significantly, and the potash mining industry became increasingly profitable. When the provincial government attempted to modify the structure of resource taxation to tap a greater portion of this revenue, a long-running legal battle ensued involving the province, the resource companies, and the federal government. To avoid further possible legal difficulties over the issue of resource taxation and to ensure long-run economic benefits for the province from the rising resource revenues, the provincial New Democratic government in November, 1975, opted for the policy of "nationalization" — state ownership of a number of the province's mines.

"Nationalization" of a major part of the potash industry was a highly controversial step which resulted in a deep division within the province between those who supported the government's attempt to gain greater control over a key natural resource, and those who saw growing government economic intervention as an attack on free enterprise and detrimental to Saskatchewan's economic future. An expensive propaganda campaign against nationalization was launched by the potash industry, and in the legislature the opposition Liberal Party provided a record-breaking filibuster aimed at blocking the government's legislation. However, after legis-

lation was passed in 1976 establishing the framework for a government ownership role in the potash industry, a number of the privately-owned mines were purchased by the government and the "Potash Corporation of Saskatchewan" came into existence. The *Potash Corporation of Saskatchewan* (PCS), presently consists of five mining divisions, four of which are mines it operates and wholly or partially owns. Understanding the creation of the Potash Corporation of Saskatchewan is a necessary prerequisite to an understanding of the attempts to promote industrial democracy within that organization. In short, state ownership of part of the province's potash industry, a policy acceptable to the social democratic New Democratic Party but abhorrent to the opposition "free enterprise" parties, established the conditions whereby a number of key personalities could translate personal interest in industrial democracy into practical initiatives. These personalities also believed that industrial democracy was a logical extension of the CCF-NDP tradition of "participation".

Although the unique socio-political environment in Saskatchewan provided a number of conditions favourable to the promotion of industrial democracy in the Potash Corporation of Saskatchewan, it is important to underline that it was only a small group of PCS management officials and a key civil servant in the Department of Labour who were the chief catalysts of the industrial democracy initiatives. Although the CCF-NDP philosophy of "participation" was an important influence on these actors, it is clear that there was no great degree of widespread "grass roots" interest in industrial democracy within the New Democratic Party or the Saskatchewan Federation of Labour, the province's central labour organization.⁷

In summary, the importance of the unique environmental conditions in Saskatchewan that favoured certain attempts to promote industrial democracy in the Potash Corporation of Saskatche-

wan was clearly not due to "popular" pressure in the province for greater industrial democracy. Rather, the importance of the unique environment in Saskatchewan is on how it influenced the attitudes of a small number of key personalities toward industrial democracy; and how the creation of the Potash Corporation of Saskatchewan gave them an opportunity to translate an interest in industrial democracy into some practical initiatives, initiatives to which we now turn.

The initiatives undertaken at the Potash Corporation of Saskatchewan to promote industrial democracy took a variety of forms. Among them were informal internal study groups on industrial democracy, a study tour of European industrial democracy attempts by a group of management and union officials, and, most significantly, the creation of a new mechanism of labour-management interaction: the Work Environment Board. There are aspects of industrial relations unique to every corporate organization, and to better understand the industrial democracy attempts within the Potash Corporation of Saskatchewan it is useful to understand that corporation's pattern of industrial relations.

Workers at the Potash Corporation of Saskatchewan were organized into unions on the basis of mine sites. Representation at two of its mines was by the United Steelworkers of America; by the Energy and Chemical Workers Union at a third site, and by the Rocanville Potash Employees Association at its remaining site. Labour-management relations had varied at the different mines prior to state ownership. Generally speaking, however, industrial relations had significantly improved at some of the mine sites after the government take-over. PCS was also the scene of numerous industrial relations innovations in the potash industry. The company abolished "No Strike — No Lockout" clauses in its collective agreements, and instituted a number of new union privi-

leges, such as the payment of union negotiators during contract talks. It also introduced a novel system of "prior hearings" where minor dispute could be resolved through a joint labour-management committee without having to go through the official grievance and disciplinary channels. All in all, PCS provided numerous privileges for unions that had not existed under private ownership and many of which are still not offered by private mines.

Unlike the privately-owned potash mines in Saskatchewan, PCS had appointed a worker representative to its board of directors. However, it should be pointed out that the labour representative on the PCS board was not a potash worker nor associated with a union representing potash workers. Although PCS did receive a union proposal for the appointment of a potash worker to the board, the proposal was never acted upon. As well, worker representatives at the board level was not a phenomenon unique to the Potash Corporation of Saskatchewan, as they were also found on the boards of many other state-owned enterprises in the province. Although labour representatives on the board of directors was considered "useful" by both labour and management, neither side felt that labour representation on the board was in itself a major step towards industrial democracy.

One of the outstanding features of the attempts to promote industrial democracy within the Potash Corporation of Saskatchewan was that much of the early impetus came from top management who displayed a personal interest in the concept. This was manifest when the corporation's Vice-President of Administration, Donald Ching, who also had chief industrial relations responsibilities, created an industrial democracy study group. Ching believed that workers should have greater control over the decisions affecting their immediate working lives, and that the traditional management-labour power hierarchy

was a major obstacle to this. He saw the creation of an industrial democracy study group as a starting point for analyzing how industrial democracy might be applied to the corporation and possibly change the traditional labour-management relationship. The study group met monthly, and consisted of representatives of PCS head office, mine managers, and union officials. Academics with knowledge of industrial democracy addressed the group, and books and articles on the subject were circulated.

Out of the industrial democracy study group emerged the idea of a study tour to observe industrial democracy as it was practised in various European countries. In October, 1978, the two top industrial relations officials at PCS; various management representatives from the corporation's head office and mine sites, and a group of union officials completed a three-week European study tour. Yugoslavia, West Germany, and Sweden were the trip's focus, and in each of these countries the group toured numerous factories and work-sites and met with trade unionists, management officials and academics associated with industrial democracy in their country. However, there was a distinct lack of follow-up to the industrial democracy study group and the European tour. This seemed to be the result of numerous factors, among them being the departure from PCS of the Vice-President of Administration, the founder of the study group, and the dislocations caused by an internal corporate reorganization.

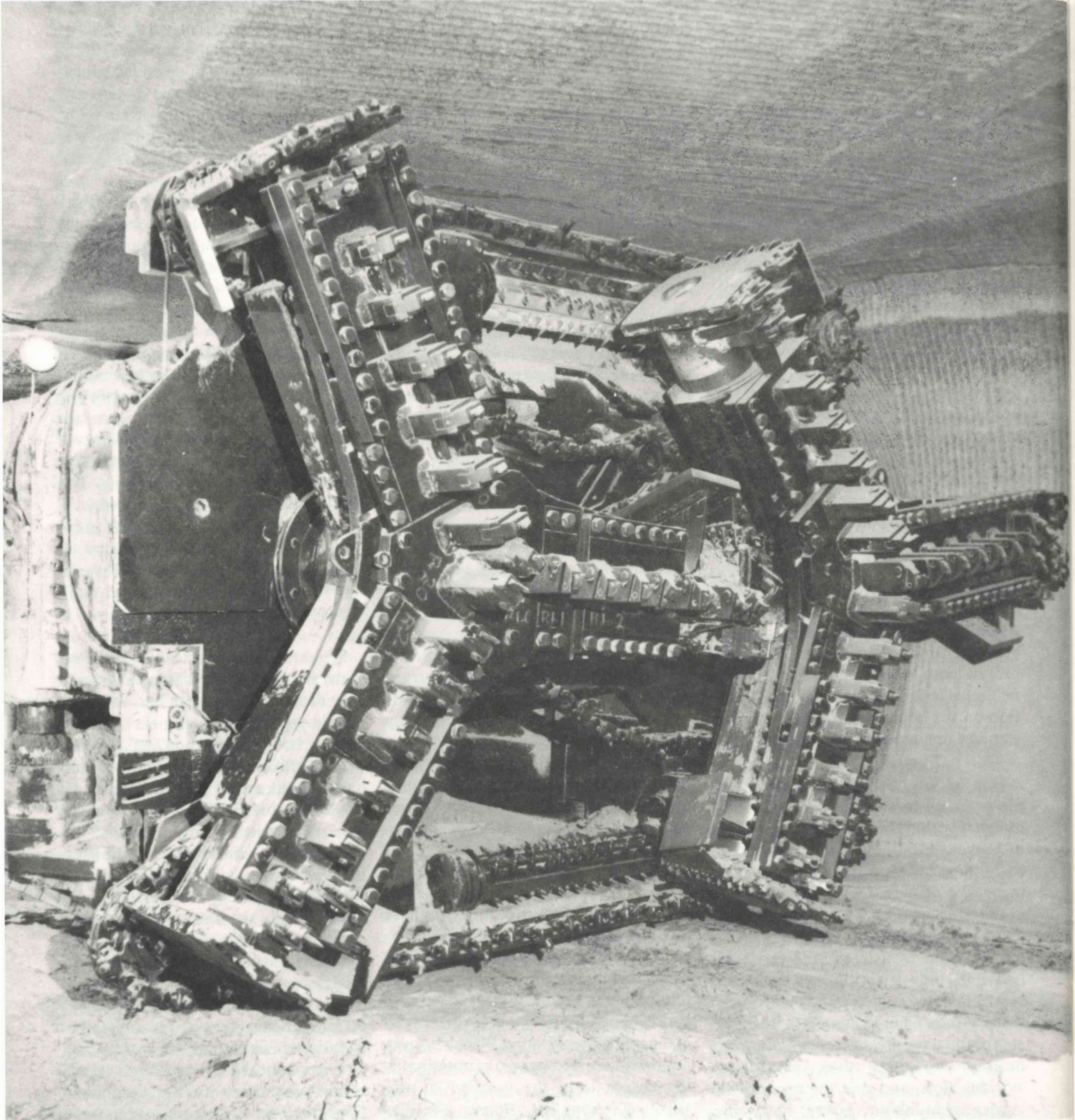
Although the industrial democracy study group and European trip helped disseminate industrial democracy concepts to some key management and union representatives, they did not result in any concrete industrial democracy experiments nor changes in labour-management relations at PCS. The next major industrial democracy initiative at the corporation, the creation of the *Work Environment Board*, (WEB),

which occurred over a year later, took a very different approach to the task of promoting industrial democracy. Rather than reflecting an open-ended educative approach to industrial democracy, the Work Environment Board is probably best seen as an attempt to bring in industrial democracy "through the back door".

The "back door" through which the Work Environment Board was seen as having the potential to promote industrial democracy was an expansion of worker influence and control over the work environment through a broadening and redefinition of the concept of occupational health and safety. Although this approach to industrial democracy has been important in Norway and Sweden, the use of such an approach to work reform at the Potash Corporation of Saskatchewan was probably unique in North America. The Work Environment Board was essentially a joint labour-management committee, with provincial Department of Labour participation, which was to direct research into improving the work environment of PCS workers.

The creation of the Work Environment Board emanated from a concern over occupational health and safety by certain key PCS management officials, such as the President and Director of Industrial Relations, and various union and Department of Labour officials. It was felt by these figures that more could be done within the corporation to improve working conditions, and the President was personally willing to allocate substantial funding for research in this area. Some of the union representatives and sympathetic PCS management, felt that workers should have input into how this research money should be spent. They also believed that providing workers with greater say over research in occupational health and safety could act as a springboard for greater worker's control over their work environment. Over the long term there was a strong

Underground mining equipment.



possibility, and a desire by many of the key personalities involved in the creation of the initiative, that this strategy could have resulted in a significant shift in managerial prerogative from management to the workforce. Such a shift in managerial prerogative would constitute a movement towards industrial democracy according to our "frontier of control" based definition. To better understand the relationship between occupational health and safety, the Work Environment Board, and industrial democracy, it is useful to briefly examine the work and ideas of the first chairman of the WEB, Robert Sass.

Sass, in his views on work reform, made a clear distinction between cosmetic management-directed employee participation schemes designed to increase productivity but that did not necessarily alter the "frontier of control", and those reforms that did provide workers with actual greater decision-making abilities. Work reform, to be genuine, needed to generate "democratisation"; that is, a gradual restructuring of power relationships in the workplace to offset the dominance of managerial authority. "I have no objection to quality of work life experiments . . ." Sass stated, but "the real issue is democratisation, which is quite different because it gets into the power relations in production."⁸

Sass, in his position as Director of Occupational Health and Safety in the Saskatchewan Department of Labour, had done extensive promotional work across Canada to put forward his ideas on occupation health and safety and work reform. He continually emphasized the importance of power relationships in the workplace, and the relevance of these relationships to the well-being of workers. Good occupational health and safety, according to Sass, meant workers participating in and having significant control over the work process. This interpretation went beyond the conventional approach to occupational health and safety emphasizing

ing quantitative measurements of the environment and a static conception of worker "safety". Sass utilized short-hand concepts, such as the "social in the technical" to underline his belief that in any question involving "technical" issues relevant to the work process, there were parallel "social" or political dimensions. That is to say that many decisions that affected working lives, such as choice of technology, place of work, work organization, etc were made not just on the grounds of technological constraints but, more importantly, on the basis of the power relationships in the workplace.⁹ The power relationships in the workplace, believed Sass, were weighted heavily in favour of management to the detriment of the workers.

Sass believed that this imbalance could be redressed in part by providing workers with more control over occupational health and safety. Also, greater worker participation in occupational health and safety could act as a bridge to greater worker control and industrial democracy. This could be done by stretching the definitions of occupational health and safety and "risks", from concepts emphasizing quantitative measurements of health hazards to one centred on qualitative factors in the work environment, such as choice of technology, work scheduling and job design. It was Sass's view that greater worker control over the work environment was a logical extension of worker participation in traditional health and safety issues and also an important step towards industrial democracy.

Sass's views on greater worker participation in work environment decisions had been especially influenced by the Norwegian and Swedish approaches to work reform. Legislation and research on work reform in these two countries had been studied closely by Sass; especially influential were the Norwegian and Swedish Work Environment Acts.¹⁰ The Scandinavian approach to work reform, with its emphasis on integrating scien-

tific research and worker participation, is reflected in the writings of Bertil Gardell, a prominent Swedish work-reform intellectual. Gardell writes that in Scandinavia there has been a merging of scientific outlooks that has focussed on concepts like worker well-being and worker control and that:

"These concepts constitute the core or the psychosocial aspect of the working environment which is now included in the legal frameworks in Scandinavia as well as in action programmes officially accepted by the central worker organizations. I think this approach is very powerful and will make it possible for research to play an even more important role both with respect to health aspects and to democratic aspects of future production systems, in industry and elsewhere."¹¹

The merging of work environment research with efforts to provide workers with greater control over their working environment is central to the contemporary Scandinavian approach to industrial democracy. This approach, which emerged in the mid-1970s, tried to provide more opportunities for worker input into decisions affecting working life. Amongst many Swedish and Norwegian trade unionists and work reform intellectuals, it had become increasingly clear that such approaches as worker representative on corporate boards had only limited effectiveness in promoting industrial democracy. The major disappointment with these industrial democracy mechanisms was their apparent irrelevance to workers' day to day working conditions. In contrast to indirect, "representational" approaches to industrial democracy, greater worker control over the working environment could provide workers with direct and immediate improvements in working conditions and life.

Sass essentially shared these views, and saw the WEB as a vehicle through

which workers could gain greater control over their working environment. His work in creating and directing the WEB can be seen, to an extent, as an attempt to transfer the Scandinavian approach to work reform to a North American context. He was provided an opportunity to attempt this, when in March, 1981, he was asked by the Potash Corporation of Saskatchewan to draw up an agreement between PCS management, unions, and the provincial Department of Labour to create the Work Environment Board.

The newly-created Work Environment Board had a number of unique features. First of all, it offered workers, through their union representatives, an opportunity to have a say in how the funds on research into occupational health and safety would be spent. Although potash miners face numerous potentially hazardous conditions, such as continual exposure to high concentrations of dust and diesel fumes, relatively little scientific or medical research had been done in this area. Furthermore, some of the management-initiated research that had been undertaken at the Potash Corporation of Saskatchewan had not been trusted by union representatives.¹² However, since there was union participation in the creation and operation of the Work Environment Board there was a much greater likelihood that the research results would be acceptable to the worker.

A further striking feature of the Work Environment Board was that not only was there official parity of union and management representatives; there was even potential union domination of the board through the fact that its Chairman, which was designated as the Province's Associate Deputy Minister of Labour, was Bob Sass. Sass was clearly identified as "pro-labour" and had a close rapport with many of the union figures on the WEB.¹³ Potential union domination of a corporate organ would be anathema to most North American

managers, but the President of PCS at the time of the creation of the Work Environment Board, did not see this situation in negative terms. In fact, he approved of Sass as Chairman and was the corporate official who asked him to draw up the initial WEB agreement.¹⁴

A third major innovation that the Work Environment Board represented was that it was mandated to research not only traditional areas of occupational health and safety but also a wider area labelled as the "psycho-social" aspects of the work environment. This was a key clause in the WEB agreement that was to provide, in the eyes of figures such as Sass and various union leaders, an evolutionary approach to providing workers greater control over their working environment. This would be done, by gradually providing workers with greater input into such issues that affected the "psycho-social" aspects of work, such as job design, scheduling, and the selection of new technology and equipment.¹⁵

However, it is important to point out that although Sass, some of the union representatives, and some of the PCS management representatives on the WEB, such as the PCS Executive Director of Personnel and Industrial Relations, saw the board as a vehicle for greater worker control over decisions related to the work environment; these views were by no means shared by all the PCS management representatives.¹⁶ Many management representatives who sat on the board, rather than interpreting the WEB as a vehicle for greater worker control, interpreted it as mainly a consultative organ. This more conservative view of the WEB and work reform is important in that after the change in the Saskatchewan government in April, 1982, many of these figures were given promotions within the corporation (one was to become president). In the view of these personalities, the WEB was certainly not a vehicle for industrial democracy.¹⁷

How did the operation of the Work

Environment Board compare with its initial objectives? First of all, it must be underlined that since many of its objectives, such as to conduct research into occupational health and safety, were of a long-term nature, caution must be used when making any judgements on its performance. During its life, however, the WEB did sponsor major research projects, such as a lung function survey of miners, blood testing and an audiometric test. During its first year of operation, the Potash Corporation of Saskatchewan had allocated 250 000 CAD for its operation, most of which was channeled into research; the amount of funds allocated represented an outstanding commitment to occupational health research by a single mining firm.¹⁸

The research into traditional areas of occupational health and safety that initiated during the first six months of the board's operation generated little controversy. However, when the question of the board moving into areas of the "psycho-social" and possible greater industrial democracy was raised by Sass during his first annual report as chairman, there was considerable dissension from some of the management representatives present. These figures countered Sass's report with a milder brief emphasizing worker participation and "Quality of Work Life" rather than industrial democracy as the most desirable route for the WEB to follow. To get around the deadlock of the different views on how the WEB should proceed on the psycho-social question, an outside consultant was invited to identify areas of labour-management concensus on possible future areas of cooperation. Dr Gerry Hunnius, a York University (Toronto) social scientist and Canadian worker control theoretician, completed the study. However, his report, which suggested a long-range approach to work environment reform, had little impact as it arrived in the final months of the WEB's life.

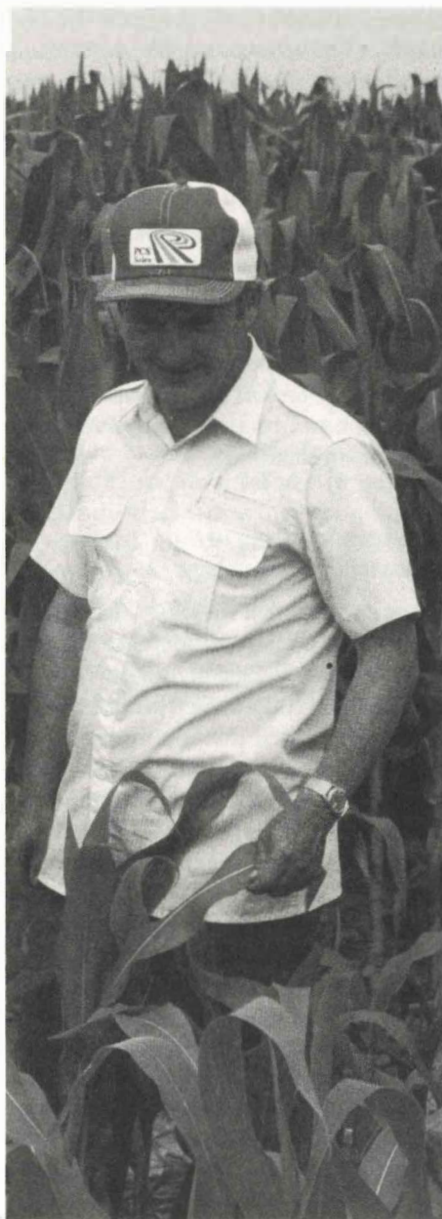
During the life of the WEB, there was

*Dr E Spratt, Head of Agronomy
PCS Sales, inspecting the results
of K fertilizers for no-till corn.*

an attempt by Sass, as chairman, to bring to the attention of the president of the corporation the WEB's interest in psycho-social aspect of its mandate. The theme of employee involvement in the selection of new equipment, as part of a WEB resolution passed earlier in 1981, was mentioned in a letter from Sass to the President of PCS.¹⁹ However, the President referred the question to a lower level of management, and there was no real follow-up in the matter.

The Work Environment Board had a short life (March, 1981 to November, 1982). Its demise can be closely linked to the defeat of the social democratic New Democratic government by the Progressive Conservative Party in the provincial election of April, 1982. Shortly after the election, the President of PCS who had overseen the creation of the Work Environment Board, was asked to resign by the government. Also removed by the new Conservative government was Bob Sass, Associate Deputy Minister and director of Occupational Health and Safety in the provincial Department of Labour. Sass's removal from his departmental post had serious consequences for the Work Environment Board.

The WEB agreement stated that its Chairman was to be the Associate Deputy Minister of Labour. Consequently, at the first WEB Executive meeting held after the dismissal of Sass from his departmental duties, PCS management officials demanded that he relinquish the chair. This started off a procedural wrangle with the union representatives present, who wanted to see Sass stay on as chairman. The union representatives then succeeded in passing a motion to amend the WEB agreement to allow Sass to continue on as chairman. However, management then stated that amending the basic WEB agreement was beyond the scope of the meeting and walked out. Shortly thereafter, on November 17, 1982, the Acting President of PCS mining wrote the WEB participants stating that: "the impasse has



made it impossible for the Board to continue its work" and that the Potash Corporation of Saskatchewan would not consider further funds for its work.²⁰

In analyzing the sudden demise of the WEB, there was clearly more at issue than whether Bob Sass remained as chairman. Sass represented a philosophical approach of increasing workers' control over the production process, a view that was simply not shared by

most of the PCS management.²¹ Although PCS management blamed the demise of the WEB on union intransigence over the issue of Bob Sass as chairman, it was clear that many of the union officials on the board saw the removal of Sass as an attack on the concept of the Work Environment Board as they perceived it. They were not willing to sit on an emasculated Work Environment Board.

The sudden demise of the WEB after the change in the provincial government also reflected a different makeup of top management in the Potash Corporation of Saskatchewan. Simply put, there were no longer any executives at top management levels who could be considered to be sympathetic to industrial democracy. (The former director of Personnel and Industrial Relations, who had been a chief proponent of the WEB concept had left the corporation over a year earlier.) The attitudes of most of the traditional managers was clear: management must retain the final authority in corporate decision-making, including decisions over the approach to occupational health research. Although the unions considered taking legal action against PCS for its termination of the WEB, and brought the issue up at its next collective bargaining rounds, the unions could give only minor emphasis to restarting the WEB. The termination of the Work Environment Board coincided with a major downturn in the potash industry and other issues such as job retention, pushed the WEB into the background of union priorities.²²

It is clear that during its short life span, the Work Environment Board did not develop into a significant industrial democracy mechanism as some of its founders had wished. Its demise revealed that although there was potential union dominance of its decision-making, the fact that it was funded by management meant that, in the end, management retained a final veto over its activities. Whatever its limitations, the WEB had clearly been popular

amongst the unions represented. Interest in the WEB concept also extended to other union representatives in the province; there was a proposal by the United Steelworkers of America to the Board of Directors of another state-owned corporation, the Saskatchewan Mining and Development Corporation, to establish a work environment board at one of its uranium mining sites. It is clear that the idea of work environment boards is still alive amongst union officials at PCS, and there remains a residual interest amongst some of the middle-management corporate personnel.

Although the WEB was not able to develop into a major organ for industrial democracy, had it existed long enough to be able to provide, for example, a degree of employee input into selection of new equipment and technology, it clearly would have shifted one aspect of the "frontier of control" from management to labour. The issue of employee input into the selection of new technology reveals that the WEB had some impact in this area, even if there were no experiments attempted. At least one of the PCS mine sites, there was union interest in the selection of some new equipment. and the fact that the WEB had passed a resolution urging an examination of the possibilities of worker input into new equipment selection decisions is not insignificant.²³

Whatever its limitations, the Work Environment Board's existence shows that there are mechanisms whereby an essentially Scandinavian approach to work reform can be integrated into a North American industrial relations system. The WEB experience also provides numerous starting points for further discussion of the concept as a major innovation in labour-management relations. Possible extension of the Work Environment Board concept includes having such boards funded by impartial government agencies, or a combination of government, labour and corporate funds. Such funding pro-

cedures would greatly mitigate the potential of a de facto corporate funding veto, as existed at PCS. A further possible dimension is the concept of legislation to establish the framework for the operations of Work Environment Boards.

Having examined in some detail the industrial democracy initiatives undertaken at the Potash Corporation of Saskatchewan, and having previously discussed the socio-political framework that was a factor behind these initiatives, we now turn to an analysis of some of their implications.

The implications of industrial democracy

It was suggested in the introduction that the unique social democratic political environment in Saskatchewan and the creation of a state-owned potash mining company created the conditions which enabled a small group of PCS management officials, union leadership and Department of Labour civil servants to attempt some initiatives to promote industrial democracy. As the demise of the Work Environment Board after the change in government would suggest, it was precisely a change in this larger political environment that led to the termination of some of these initiatives.

The change in the political environment was important in three major respects. First, it led to the removal from the Work Environment Board and the Potash Corporation of Saskatchewan of figures key to the industrial democracy initiatives. Secondly, it led to the promotion to top management ranks of personalities who were either hostile or indifferent to the concept of greater worker control over decision-making (in terms of reducing managerial prerogative and a shift in the "frontier of control"). Third, the change from a social democratic administration with links to the labour movement, to a conservative administration with ties to private business interests, and the subsequent

complete change in the government-appointed PCS Board of Directors, meant that any approval of or indirect pressure for moves toward industrial democracy from the government on the corporate board ended.

The larger political context is also relevant to efforts to promote industrial democracy when analyzed at the national level in Canada. The Saskatchewan social democratic traditions had a direct bearing on the PCS industrial democracy initiatives. In somewhat of a contrast, the Government of Ontario, Canada's most industrialized province, which has been led by a conservative party for over forty years, has followed a different path to work reform, through its promotion of voluntary "Quality of Work Life" programmes. At the federal level in Canada, tripartism, rather than industrial democracy, has been an ongoing focus of interest. The link between political orientations of governments in Canada and their attitudes toward work reform is an area relatively unexamined in Canada. However, it would not be unreasonable to suggest that a social democratic acceptance of participation and willingness to shift the "frontier of control" from management towards labour would provide a more fruitful ambience in which industrial democracy, according to our control-based definition, could be nurtured.

The PCS industrial democracy initiatives help underline the point that bringing an enterprise under state control does not necessarily entail a shift in the "frontier of control" within the organization. Indeed, unless the new state enterprise has a different approach to management and labour relations, and backs these approaches with new organizational structures, it would be difficult to see how, according to our frontier of control definition of industrial democracy, the control or power relations between management and labour would change. However, it should be pointed out that the promotion of industrial de-

mocracy was not an objective of the potash nationalization, nor was it ever an organizational priority.²⁴ Simply put, the newly created state enterprise was under immense pressure to prove itself as a viable economic entity to both the government, which needed to justify the tax dollars invested in the corporation, and to clients in the world potash trade. Corporate survival was the overriding objective of the Potash Corporation of Saskatchewan in its early years.

As well, it should again be emphasized that nationalization of part of the potash industry in Canada was in itself a highly radical and risky step. During the nationalization battle, the New Democratic politicians and their party had little time or resources to spend on the topic of industrial democracy.²⁵ Within the Potash Corporation of Saskatchewan, even though the Executive Director of Personnel and Industrial Relations was interested in pursuing industrial democracy initiatives, his clear priority was to establish "good" working industrial relations in a traditional sense (i.e. in terms of a low level of industrial strife and a high degree of labour-management trust). The promotion of industrial democracy was not a priority in this context.

The initiatives undertaken at the Potash Corporation of Saskatchewan illustrate some of the difficulties in promoting industrial democracy in a state-owned firm even when key management officials were willing to promote the concept. June Corman, in her analysis of the impact of state ownership on labour practices at the Potash Corporation of Saskatchewan observes:

"Working conditions at PCS mines demonstrate that improvements are possible under state ownership. Nevertheless, the limited extent of the improvements show that state corporations are limited in their ability to implement progressive change in essentially market economies. The

work process is legally controlled by PCS's management. Ultimate responsibility resides with the government. Production is organized to extract surplus value from the employees and the employees have no say over the disposition of surplus value. This raises the question: How much of the work process is open to change if the state corporation is operating in the context of a market economy?"²⁶

Corman thus implies that one of the limitations to work reform in nationalized industries is that their structure and operations mirror those of private industry, and that management retains control over the work process. It was outlined earlier how some members of PCS management acted as catalysts for industrial democracy initiatives; we now turn our attention to how management can act as a barrier to industrial democracy.

Although one of the most unique aspects of the industrial democracy initiatives at PCS was that much of the responsibility for their instigation rested with a few key top management officials who were not afraid to "role back the frontier of control", these views were very much the minority amongst PCS management. The divergence in views on industrial democracy between those managers who proposed the initiatives from those who were ambivalent or opposed to the concept illustrate one of the major limitations to the promotion of industrial democracy in nationalized industries: managerial attitudes. Simply put, most managers in North America do not see the desirability or need for greater worker participation in the work place. A recent survey of managerial attitudes toward the need for worker participation found that 64 per cent of respondents felt "more democracy in the organization" as "unimportant to organizational productivity".²⁷

During the course of interviews, it

was clear that many of the present top officials at the PCS Saskatchewan believed that the benefits of worker participation or input into decision-making should be measured in terms of increases in corporate productivity or performance. Organizational goals such as production and marketing were the dominant concern; the well being of the worker was clearly secondary. In *Changes in Working Life*, David Guest, when analyzing the objectives of management in "Quality of Working Life" schemes; notes that "In short, management cannot be relied upon to promote improvements in Quality of Working Life except as a contributory element to, or incidental factor in greater efficiency".²⁸ Guest goes on to point out that this should raise questions of power, of the economic environment, and of the inequality and lack of participation which allows managerial goals to dominate. It is clear that after the departure from the Potash Corporation of Saskatchewan of managerial advocates of industrial democracy, that conventional managerial goals were allowed to dominate. The desire to promote industrial democracy, as seen in a willingness to forego a degree of traditional managerial prerogative; or even to seek a degree of greater worker participation, was simply not among the managerial goals and orientations. It is this that seems to be one of the most significant barriers to industrial democracy in North America, as the PCS case might suggest.

The practical application of industrial democracy as a concept is intertwined with the theme of organizational change. This change may be manifest in new corporate structures or a change in values and orientations of management and workers within the corporation. A carefully thought-out strategy, accompanied by practical tactics, is no less relevant in attaining the goal of greater industrial democracy than it is in the attainment of most important corporate goals. Unfortunately, no such strategy or tactics were present in the Potash

Corporation of Saskatchewan. Nonetheless, had the corporation adopted specific programmes of education for both management and workers to follow through with such initiatives as the European study tour, industrial democracy orientations and values may have spread further within the organization and have been of greater permanence.

Some of the advocates of industrial democracy within the Potash Corporation of Saskatchewan regretted that not enough attention had been paid to the creation of a "corporate culture" unique to the corporation after it was created through nationalization. Simply put, after nationalization, most of the corporate managers saw little reason why the corporation should be run any differently than any of the privately-owned mines; there was no change in managerial values. In terms of promoting industrial democracy, the PCS case illustrates that the evolution of a corporate culture, by way of corporate objectives and managerial values, can be an important element in the success or failure of attempts to shift the frontier of control. This would seem to again underline the desirability of long-term educational efforts within an organization as an important component of efforts to promote industrial democracy.

Barriers to industrial democracy in North America

The PCS industrial democracy initiatives help illustrate ways in which the North American adversarial system of industrial relations is in itself a major barrier to industrial democracy.

In the North American industrial relations system, collective bargaining is identified as the focus of labour-management interaction. The adversarial nature of collective bargaining has ingrained values in both management and labour that makes attempts at cooperation seen as "foreign" to the system. The automatic distrust which seems to exist between labour and management makes

attempt at forms of industrial relations different from customary collective bargaining difficult for most on both sides to accept. For example, in the reports by the management and union officials upon the return of the industrial democracy tour, representatives from both sides mentioned that in countries such as Sweden there was a much greater trust between management and labour than existed in Canada, and that this had been an important basis for the progress and success of Swedish industrial democracy. Union officials on the industrial democracy European trip also remarked that in the mining industry in Canada, management still did not really accept the role unions played in the industry, and that there was still a deep undercurrent of anti-labour hostility. This deeply imbedded mistrust made talk of industrial democracy seem superfluous to some of the union leadership interviewed.

A further, specific barrier to the promotion of industrial democracy inherent within the North American industrial relations system is that cooperation between union and management officials can undermine the confidence of union members in their elected union leadership. One of the PCS local union presidents, a participant in the industrial democracy study group and tour of Europe, lost his position in union elections held after his return from Europe. One of the issues that seemed to have contributed to his defeat was an image amongst his union membership that he had been "in bed with management". Thus, even though union leadership may have expressed a willingness to become involved in industrial democracy initiatives, the union membership, wary of close contact with management, can act as a restraint.

One of the interesting aspects of the Work Environment Board is that it seemed to offer a possible mechanism for fruitful labour-management cooperation in an important area of working life, the work environment; yet it could

also act as a vehicle for greater industrial democracy. In its initial stages, the concept was accepted, (indeed, largely created) by PCS management, and it was also enthusiastically supported by union leadership. Most importantly, it provided a mechanism that went beyond collective bargaining yet did not undercut the collective bargaining that did exist in the firm. As well, the establishment of the Work Environment Board, seen by many of its initial advocates as a means to provide workers with greater control over their work environment in a North American mining company; would seem to suggest that aspects of the Norwegian and Swedish approach to work reform can have relevance and applicability to the North American industrial relations scene, despite radically different industrial relations contexts.

Conclusions

Earlier, it was suggested that the PCS industrial democracy initiatives were largely the result of the actions of a small group of corporate officials, who had the cooperation of a few key union and government figures. It is clear that the relevance of the PCS industrial democracy initiatives did not permeate to any significant extent to the general workforce or to lower-level management. The Work Environment Board, for example, consisted almost exclusively of top union and management officials. These figures were the "elites" both of management and the unions; they did not represent a "cross section" of the workforce. Had initiatives on worker participation in selection of new technology, or the creation of experimental autonomous work-groups (a job redesign approach to industrial democracy) been effected, the permeation of industrial democracy ideas in the organization might have been greater. A remark by J F Bolweg is relevant in this respect:

"Democracy at the shop floor through job redesign can only become effective if it emerges in a

democratic form, which seems to be a tautology but most democratic reforms and systems of participation have been imposed by managerial, intellectual or political elites."²⁹

One of the challenges in promoting industrial democracy is thus to transpose organizational change, instigated by organizational elites, into democratic reforms that positively affect the working life of individual workers. However, as Guest, Williams, and Dewe point out, worker's perception of changes affecting their working life do not always coincide with those who instigated that change.³⁰ Organizational elites contemplating democratic reforms in the workplace should thus keep in mind the desirability of using mechanisms of employee participation and feedback in the actual process of work place reforms, if these reforms are to have true relevance of the workers and if the reforming intentions of the elite are to have maximum impact.

Although the industrial democracy initiatives of the Potash Corporation of Saskatchewan did not result in any permanent or fundamental shift in the "frontier of control" within the organization as some of the key industrial relations actors within the organization had wished, the experience should not be looked upon as being without value. The fact that there was major interest in the concept of industrial democracy within a firm that operated in the context of the Canadian mining industry, an industry which has often been marked by bitter labour-management confrontation, is in itself of major significance.

Significant also, is the fact that much of the impetus for the initiatives came from top management officials who were prepared to surrender to labour a degree of managerial prerogative. What is especially striking about this is that they were willing to surrender a degree of managerial authority, not simply on

the grounds that this would increase profitability, but because they believed that workers should have the right to greater control over their working lives. In a North American industrial relations context, marked by growing managerial emphasis on blocking the organization of workers, this is indeed exceptional. Also exceptional in the PCS industrial democracy initiatives were the appearance of what, in North America is a novel approach to industrial democracy; that of expanding worker influence over the working environment.

The perceptions of industrial democracy as a concept, and the mechanisms that are introduced to promote it, whether it be through the Anglo-Saxon focus on collective bargaining or aspects of the Scandinavian "work environment" approach to work reform, are intertwined with larger political and societal values. Saskatchewan's agrarian values of participation, and how some officials at the Potash Corporation of Saskatchewan tried to extend these values to an industrial setting, provide a fascinating juxtaposition of pre-industrial values being relevant in an emerging "post-industrial" era.

Notes:

¹ David Marsden, *Industrial Democracy and Industrial Control in West Germany, France, and Great Britain*, London, United Kingdom Department of Employment, Research Paper No 4, September, 1978, p 5.

² Marsden, p 4.

³ Ibid, p 11.

⁴ *Saskatchewan Business*, Regina, Saskatchewan, August, 1984, p 35.

⁵ Robert Lynd, in Seymour Martin Lipsett's *Agrarian Socialism*, University of California and Oxford University Press, 1950, (foreword).

⁶ This act, along with other related legislation from 1973, was consolidated into the Saskatchewan Occupational Health and Safety Act, assented 1977-05-10.

⁷ A survey of resolutions passed at provincial conventions of the Saskatchewan New Democratic Party from 1970 to 1983 shows only one resolution related to industrial democracy, a weakly worded 1976 resolution that simply urged the convention to work with various groups in drawing up recommendations on industrial democracy to be submitted to the provincial government. The ambivalence of the central labour organization, the Saskatchewan Federation of Labour, towards industrial democracy was manifest at that organization's 1980 convention. A resolution that the labour federation "re-affirm its rejection of tripartism and industrial democracy as schemes designed to co-opt labour leaders and remove organizational autonomy and independent political action" was carried by its Executive Council. (Saskatchewan Federation of Labour Delegate's Workbook, 1980, p 23).

⁸ Bob Sass, School of Journalism and Communications, Regina, Saskatchewan, interview, March, 1983.

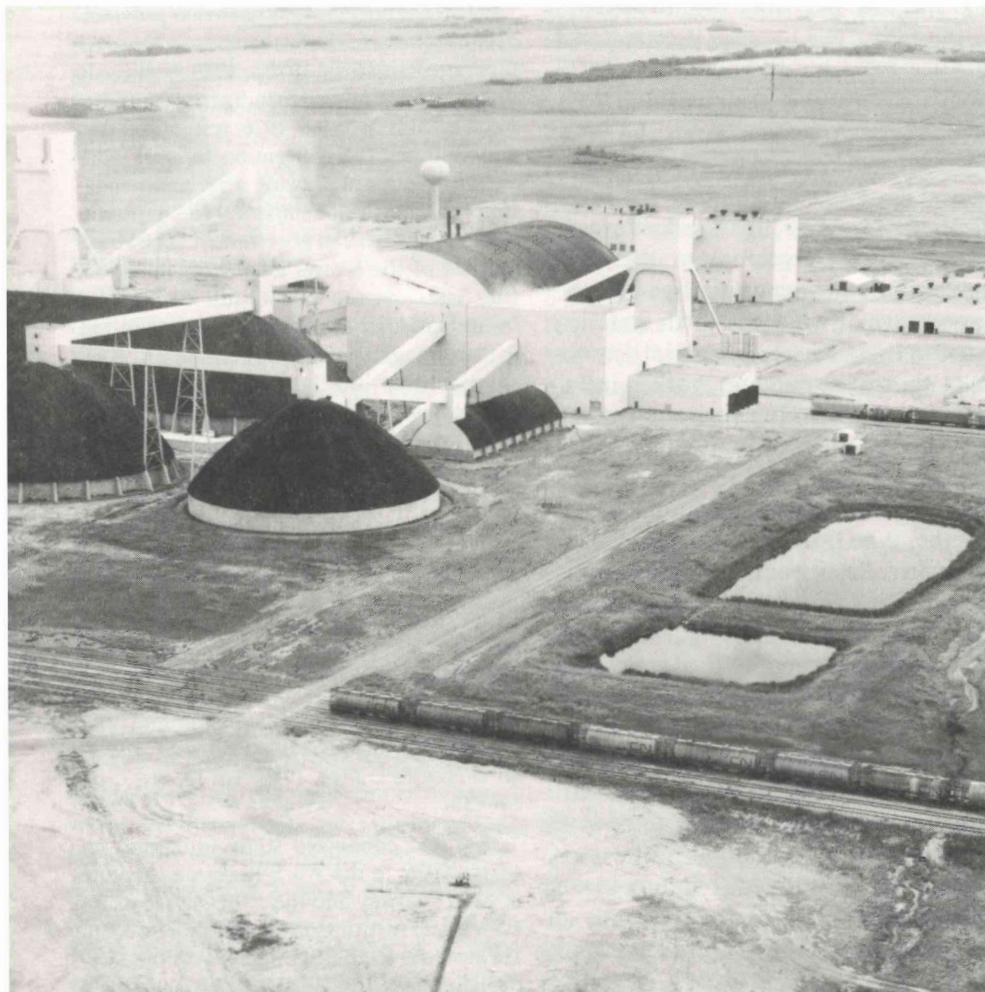
⁹ Robert Sass, "Work at the Centre", and "Stress: the Tolerated Bed Fellow", *Canadian Dimension*, June, 1980, Vol 14, No 7, pp 27-33.

¹⁰ Sass had conducted study tours and research visits to the Work Research Institute in Oslo, Norway and the Arbetslivscentrum (Work Life Institute) in Stockholm, Sweden. He also had ongoing contacts with the Swedish Embassy in Canada which acted as a conduit for information on latest Swedish developments on occupational health and safety and industrial democracy. During the course of interviews Sass underlined the great influence of such Scandinavian work reform intellectuals as Norway's Bjørn Gustavsen and Sweden's Bertil Gardell. Gardell, upon Sass's invitation, spoke at a conference attended by crown corporation management, trade union and Department of Labour officials in Saskatchewan.

¹¹ B Gardell, Strategies for Reform Programmes on Work Organization and Work Environment, in B Gardell and G Johanson, editors, *Working Life*, John Wiley and Sons, 1981, p 20.

¹² Interview, John Alderman, Associate Deputy Minister of Labour, Regina, Saskatchewan, July, 1984.

¹³ Interview, Terry Stevens, District Repre-



sentative, United Steelworkers of America, Saskatoon, Saskatchewan, July, 1984.

¹⁴ Interview, David Dombowsky, former President of the Potash Corporation of Saskatchewan, Saskatoon, Saskatchewan, August, 1984.

¹⁵ Interview, Robert Sass, former Chairman of the Work Environment Board, Saskatoon, Saskatchewan, July, 1984.

¹⁶ Telephone interview, Gary Simons, former Executive Director of Personnel and Industrial Relations, Potash Corporation of Saskatchewan, August, 1984.

¹⁷ Interviews with S Harapiuk, President, Potash Corporation of Saskatchewan and J Bubnick, Vice-President Personnel and Industrial Relations, Potash Corporation of Saskatchewan, August, 1984.

¹⁸ Interview, Robert Sass, Saskatoon, Sas-

katchewan, August, 1984.

¹⁹ Letter from Bob Sass to David Dombowsky, President, Potash Corporation of Saskatchewan, 1981-12-17.

²⁰ Letter from D Matheson, Acting President of PCS Mining, to Work Environment Board executive officers, 1982-11-17.

²¹ Canadian Occupational Health and Safety Review, 1983-02-07.

²² Interview, Terry Stevens, District Representative, United Steelworkers of America, Saskatoon, Saskatchewan, July, 1984.

²³ Interview, Gary Philips, President, Allan Local, United Steelworkers of America, Saskatoon, Saskatchewan, July, 1984.

²⁴ Interview, E Cowley, former Minister-in-Charge of the Potash Corporation of Saskatchewan, Saskatoon, Saskatchewan, July, 1984.

²⁵ However, since the defeat of the New Democratic Party in Saskatchewan in 1982, there has been growing interest in the party in what lies beyond nationalization in terms of social reforms. Industrial democracy is an area that has attracted some interest. See "Let Us Begin Again! A Labour Policy for the Eighties", Report to the New Democratic Party of Saskatchewan, 1984.

²⁶ June Corman, The Impact of State Ownership on a State Proprietary Corporation: The Potash corporation of Saskatchewan, Ph D Thesis, University of Toronto, 1982, p 335.

²⁷ Jacquie Mansell and Tom Rankin, *What is QWL?* Ontario Quality of Work Life Centre, Toronto, March, 1983.

²⁸ David Guest in Duncan, Gruneberg and Wallace, *Changes in Working Life*, (NATO Conference, Greece, 1979), p 351.

²⁹ J F Bolweg, *Job Design and Industrial Democracy*, Martinus Nijhoff Social Sciences Division, Leiden, 1976, p 47.

³⁰ D Guest, R Williams, and P Dewe, "Workers Perception of Changes Affecting the Quality of Work Life", Chapter 27 of Duncan et al, *Changes in Working Life*.

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