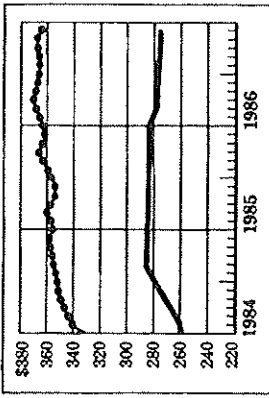


Inventories and Backlogs

In billions of dollars. • Unfilled - Inventories



INVENTORIES of manufacturers in November rose to \$276.59 billion from a revised \$276.01 billion in October. Unfilled orders decreased to \$364.9 billion, after seasonal adjustments, from a revised \$367.09 billion a month earlier, the Commerce Department reports.

Life of a Drover:

Rigorous, Slow Paced And Very Isolated

* * *
 But Bruce McTaggart Finds Rewards Guiding Cattle Across Australian Plains

By GERALDINE BROOKS

Staff Reporter of THE WALL STREET JOURNAL
TAMBO, Australia — Harold "Snowy" Weir, an outback ranger, slides off his horse and draws a map in the orange dust of this western Queensland town. "Just along here there's a gate," he says, scratching a line in the dirt. "That's where the drover should be. You'll see the cattle, anyway."

Or hear them. A thousand lowing, bellowing cattle on the move sound like the whine and groan of a great machine. Wielding a whip that cracks like a pistol, Bruce McTaggart canters behind a rippling brown tide of cattle edging slowly across the plain.

Mr. McTaggart, 41 years old, is a drover. His job is moving stock from outback stations, or ranches, to sale yards or fresh pastures. This time he has charge of a mob of skinny cattle from a station in northern Queensland where the ground is baked hard and bare as concrete. He has brought them south, where rain has fallen, and for three months he will walk them around a 435-mile circle of public stock routes, trying to get them fat.

Lean, Lonely Figure

Before roads linked outback stations, drovers like Mr. McTaggart were commonplace. But 20 years ago, station owners started moving their stock on wheels rather than on foot. The lean, hard, lonely figure of the drover seemed destined to ride only in quaint old bush ballads. In a book of verse published in 1895, the poet A.B. "Banjo" Paterson romanticized the drover in a ballad titled "Clancy of the Overflow." The poem, about a city office worker trying to get in touch with an old friend who has gone droving, became a classic that almost every Australian child still learns by heart.

... And an answer came directed in a writing unexpected

(And I think the same was written with a thumbnail dipped in tar);

'Twas his shearing mate who wrote it and verbatim I will quote it:

'Clancy's gone to Queensland droving

Labor Letter

A Special News Report on People And Their Jobs in Offices, Fields and Factories

KING'S BIRTHDAY seems more honored in the breach than the observance. Few companies will be closing next Monday to mark Martin Luther King Jr. Day, which became a national holiday last year. At General Electric Co., where workers get to pick a floating holiday for each plant, not a single facility has chosen the Rev. King's birthday. Southern Co. says "less than 5%" of its 1,500 headquarter workers in Atlanta took the day off last year. Coca-Cola Co., though, closes its Atlanta headquarters in observance of the day.

At Black Agenda, a black business group, a spokesman senses racist overtones in the cool response. New York Urban League, a rights organization with business ties, acknowledges that many employers have resisted adding a holiday. Still, the day "is national recognition of a black American, and for that I'm pleased," a spokesman says.

Coretta Scott King, the slain leader's widow, warns against those who would make the day a "black holiday."

CAR PHONES are one perk some executives don't like to brag about.

"It looks like another wretched excess," says an airline executive who pleads anonymity. Besides, he adds, his boss doesn't have one and "I'm not sure he knows he pays for this one on my expense account." But Michael Holmstrom, executive vice president of CP National Corp. in San Francisco, defends their use. "I can leave the house at 6 a.m. and meet people on the East Coast as they enter their office," the manager says.

But don't give out your number. "The worst thing is to have it ring when you want to listen to the radio," cautions Houston lawyer Joe Jamali. Ronald Gidwitz, president of Helene Curtis Industries, says only his wife and secretary know how to reach him. But even car phones can get wrong numbers. "Some lady called and asked if I was Marshall Fields," says Alan Anixter, chairman of Anixter Brothers in Chicago.

PROFILE OF A WARNING: Despite a seemingly-lame hazard, few workers switch.

Digital Equipment Corp. sounded the alarm two months ago. It said a study found that women working with acids and gases in fabricating semiconductors suffered significantly more miscarriages than the statistical norm. Since DEC has long "strongly encouraged" pregnant women to transfer to safer environments without loss of pay, the change may have been done before the women knew they were pregnant, and any women planning children could be at risk.

Yet, even after DEC informed workers of the study, there's been "no perceptible movement" among women of child-bearing age to seek transfers from semiconductor assembly, a spokesman says. And the reaction has been the same at Intel Corp. and National Semiconductor Corp., which also have told their workers of the research.

"They're not panicking. They've seen a lot of studies," National Semiconductor says.

THOSE RAISES are too big. So says Lance Berger, executive vice president of Hay Management Consultants. "With inflation virtually nonexistent and GNP growth hovering between 2% and 3%, there is little economic justification for the average increases (including 4.7% to 6.1% for man-

Family Feud

IBM Dissidents Hope For Increased Support As Work Force Is Cut

Although Unionizing Is Still Unlikely, Worker Groups Seek Access to Pay Scales

Feeling Big Blue Turning Red

By HANK GILMAN

Staff Reporter of THE WALL STREET JOURNAL
ENDICOTT, N.Y.—Lee Conrad works on a job isolated from most other employees in a room with frosted windows. He believes this is because he has been openly discussing workers' problems.

The 37-year-old assembler of printing devices also says that he is unfairly scrutinized and that his coffee breaks are closely timed by his bosses. His performance rating was lowered recently, he adds, and he could lose his job if his appraisal is dropped again. Speaking out, Mr. Conrad laments, "is like putting a red flag on your chest, because the bull comes right at you."

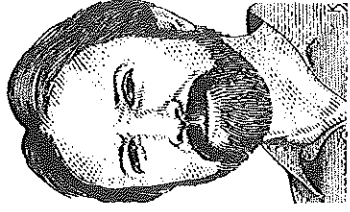
Mr. Conrad's employer is International Business Machines Corp., considered a model of exemplary employee relations. IBM, in fact, is known for its good benefits and its tradition of not laying off workers—practices that have helped to keep workers happy and keep the company free of unions.

But IBM, dealing with an extended downturn in its business, is now faced with a determined group of dissident workers. Like Mr. Conrad, they insist that many of the company's 238,000 U.S. employees could be better off protecting their interests rather than trusting IBM to do it. While the dissidents are few in number, they keep in close contact, publish newsletters from their homes, and even travel to meetings with IBM workers in other countries. In some countries, IBM is required by law to work with unions.

A look at two of these dissident groups—Mr. Conrad's IBM Workers United and the Black Workers Alliance—discloses another side of Big Blue: IBM isn't always the happy family it appears to outsiders, and it can be a harsh parent to mavericks in the family.

At least four dissident groups have formed. Mr. Conrad's group has almost 40 members in Endicott and maintains contacts with workers in six other IBM plants. The Black Workers Alliance, based in Washington, D.C., claims about 300 members. The International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers says the union is holding talks with 40 disgruntled IBM field technicians in the Philadelphia area. A group called "The Workers Voice" been formed at IBM's San Jose

The groups' complaints are similar. They claim workers the dark by IBM's concealing of job



Lee Conrad

Family Feud: IBM Dissidents Seek More Support As Firm Cuts Work Force, but a Union Is Unlikely

Continued From First Page
family spirit at picnics and intramural sports events. Employees who disagree with their managers' appraisals of their work can appeal to the chairman and as heard in a grievance process known as "Open Door."

But any form of organized labor is an anathema to IBM. "IBM is a total-control company," says Ulrich Weil, a stock analyst and a former IBM employee. "IBM's management style is from the top down. It's quasi-military. That management style doesn't want to get involved with a union, because it's contradictory."

IBM is careful not to violate laws protecting workers' rights to organize, and it instructs managers on labor law during annual training sessions. But the company also carefully monitors its work force for any hint of labor activity. IBM has told its information-services staff managers to "report all sensitive employee-relations incidents immediately." In a memo, which provided round-the-clock phone contacts, sensitive episodes were described as "any indication of group activity, even without apparent organized influence, when the group's purpose appears to be to improve compensation or any aspect of working conditions."

Under IBM's strict policies, employees aren't allowed, for instance, to sell Girl Scout cookies at work. "If you allow that to happen, you set a precedent," explains a former manager now in IBM's sales force. "If we allow them to solicit, anyone can solicit, i.e., unions."

In one case last spring, an employee left magazines like Newsweek for visitors in the lobby of an IBM building in Kingston, N.Y. "You wouldn't believe the grief that went on," the former manager says. A security manager called employee-relations staffers, he says, "and they came in like a SWAT team and cleaned out the magazines."

If employees do such things without approval, he adds, "it leaves the door open for any other kind of literature to be left there," possibly by union organizers. IBM would neither confirm nor deny that its rules prohibiting solicitation are designed to thwart labor unions.

IBM's vigilance hasn't dissuaded its renegades, in any case. The Black Workers Alliance, or BWA, was organized in 1983 at a secret meeting in the basement of a Washington home by 30 salesmen and systems engineers from IBM's data-processing division. The black workers realized they may have been risking their jobs by organizing. "I can recall a black in a relatively high-level position saying, 'You ought to go home, this will never work.' He was booed and left the meeting," recalls Kenneth Branch, BWA's president.

What initially emerged was a support group for black workers that frequently met for "afternoon" sessions," says Mr. Branch, 46, a salesman with IBM in Gaithersburg, Md. "For many of us, including myself," he says, "we were not only the first of our families to work in IBM but the

first to work in corporate administrative or professional jobs. We were the foundation, so there was a need for blacks to get together."

The group became bolder, however, as its membership soared fivefold to about 1,700 people from 1978 to 1980. In its newsletters, the BWA frequently assailed IBM for doing business in South Africa, warned workers that the company planned to cut costs by firing employees, and held grievance meetings to recruit other workers. IBM is currently selling its IBM South Africa to an employee trust; IBM computers will continue to be sold there.)

Firings of Dissidents

Eventually, within about a one-year span, IBM fired four of the BWA's eight top officers, one of whom distributed confidential IBM salary scales in early 1980. Mr. Branch recalls, "I looked around, and I was alone. It was like a domino game, and the group's membership plunged by the end of 1980. "Once the purges came, that was it. There was more fear out there than we anticipated." Mr. Branch says he was also threatened with dismissal.

The firings were "a strong message" from IBM to the BWA, and the company's black workers, says Johnnie Landon, the BWA's lawyer. "If you get out of line, we'll come down on you and this is the way we'll come down." The BWA says IBM in the firings used such reasons as insubordination and refusals of transfers.

The BWA's charges are "absolutely wrong," an IBM spokeswoman says. She adds that the four BWA members who were fired later unsuccessfully filed charges against IBM with regulators. In one case a lawsuit was filed, which was later settled.

Job on the Line

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Although Mr. Conrad concedes the short-term prospects for organizing IBM are dim, he and other dissidents say the company's current slump could help their cause. IBM is expected to report that earnings fell in 1986 for the second consecutive year. Under pressure to cut costs, the company has already taken steps that affect thousands of employees, including the unusual move to close a parts-distribution facility in Greenacres, Ind.

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Organized labor also seems to be paying more attention to IBM. In addition to the Communications Workers' interest, the electrical workers' union has held talks with a group of about 40 IBM field technicians, says Michael Lucas, the union's chief organizer. "Let's face it, these guys aren't a majority," he says. But, he adds, "they've gone shopping. They've gotten together to seek a union."

Dissidents and union officials say IBM may provide the opening they need if the company is forced by the industry's slump to abandon its no-layoff tradition. "That would take the veil right off," Mr. Conrad says. "We'd get more people than we'd know what to do with."

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Union Workers To

Staff Reporter
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That's the beginning. Systems engineers stay involved in each project as a key team member, through



Feud: IBM Dissidents Seek More Support Union Cuts Work Force, but a Union Is Unlikely

From First Page
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Union Leaders Map World-Wide Drive To Organize IBM

By RICHARD L. HUSSON
Staff Reporter of THE WALL STREET JOURNAL
LONDON—International labor leaders began laying plans for a world-wide campaign to unionize workers of International Business Machines Corp.

Any rise in union recruitment at IBM, the biggest computer company in the world, would boost union efforts to organize workers in the computer industry as a whole. Hitherto, union recruiters have made slim progress at most big computer companies, especially IBM.

"Getting union representation at IBM is the labor equivalent of putting a man on the moon," said Herman Rebohan, general secretary of the Geneva, Switzerland-based International Metalworkers' Federation, one of three international union federations sponsoring a two-day conference here to try to formulate a common strategy for tackling IBM. The union leaders, from 24 countries, claim to represent some 26.5 million organized workers around the world.

The proposed measures include setting up toll-free telephone lines in Britain and other countries for IBM employees to contact union organizers, forming an international clearing house for the unions to swap information about IBM, stepping up recruitment advertising and publicizing instances of what labor leaders call IBM's "union-busting" actions.

Nevertheless, most industry analysts consider the unions' chances of significantly boosting recruitment at IBM to be remote. "It's whistling in the dark," said one London analyst, Timothy Hazell, of the Phillips & Drew stock-brokerage unit of Union Bank of Switzerland.

"IBM has the reputation as being one of the most generous employers around," with a generally contented work force, he said. "I'd be surprised if the unions got any foothold at all."

In Paris, a spokesman for IBM Europe declined to comment on the union plans but he denied that the company opposes courage union membership. "The spokesman said, 'It's a personal decision of the employee.'"

The unions estimate that no more than 10,000 of IBM's 405,000 employees in 1985 belonged to unions—a far lower recruitment percentage than at most non-computer multinational corporations. The IBM Europe spokesman said he couldn't frame a direct comment on the accuracy of the union figures.

Union organizers are counting for success in part on what they think are growing job-security fears among many IBM workers, prompted by the company's early-retirement program and other cost-cutting measures.

Labor leaders also are hoping that cooperation among the various unions, which sometimes get into turf battles about which has first rights to sign up IBM

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