

The Ship is more than the crew

DOROTHY TENHAM

If you work in a theatre you are part of a company of people who should all be working together as a team in the sincere hope of producing perfection in order to satisfy the paying public and themselves. The team has many component parts. It always has had and probably always will have. When I first worked in the professional theatre thirty years ago, to my 'new' eyes there appeared to be three main sections to this team. Section 1 was the FOH staff including the House Management, stage door keeper and cleaners; Section 2 was the actors and director, including the MD who, in those days, still played the piano in the Pit; Section 3 was the Stage Management and backstage staff and the workshop staff. The latter usually became backstage staff by working as showmen during performances.

I knew nothing about a company becoming a team and due to my lack of experience in these matters, was quite ready to accept the 'us' and 'them' attitude which existed between Sections 2 and 3. I was an 'us' and took it for granted that 'them' were there for my benefit. Over the years, I have come to the conclusion that the only reason that any theatre could ever boast a good company or a well balanced team was because

Section 3 were so busy and fascinated with their work that they couldn't be bothered to waste time and energy asking for recognition and abolition of the 'caste' system. In time, I too became fascinated with what 'them' did as their contribution to the perfect whole. I joined 'them' and have been a rebellious member of Section 3 ever since.

Why rebel and what against? The fact that Section 1, 2 and 3 existed at all when we should all have been using our energy towards creating a perfect whole. Unfortunately, my rebellion is still in progress. Far too many managements and directors still consider it right that Stage Management should be willing martyrs to their lack of thought and preparation and require 'them' firstly to know their place and secondly to produce miracles on behalf of 'us'. The challenge is still enjoyable and the sting is slowly disappearing from the tail — hence the fact that Stage Management is still a most exciting and satisfying career. Unfortunately there is still a great danger ahead. The people who work backstage are in danger of creating their own sections, dividing technicians from stage managers. I am able to hope now that the sections will very soon become only divisions of labour

within an accepted team.

The first issue of 'Cue' seems an appropriate place to offer this warning as the fault is, as ever, two sided. I have every reason to believe that 'Cue' will not just fill the gap that was left when Tabs ceased publication, but that it will help to bridge a gap never recognised by Tabs. I hope that 'Cue' will not be just about the goods being marketed and how advanced technology can improve efficiency, speed and comfort in the field of theatre machinery in general and lighting in particular, but will also glance over its shoulder from time to time at the 'people'. Whether they are called 'technicians', 'technical ASM's' or 'operators', it is people who connect the goods with the production.

It is the Stage Management who are still the clearing house between the growth of the show in the rehearsal room and the preparation of the technical work in the workshop. Only if Stage Management is doing its job properly is it possible for the technicians to prepare their work with purpose. Only if the technicians understand that their goods are required to be used by people, is their work and preparation of real value. Working in isolation is a waste of effort. We cannot afford to create our own version of 'us' and 'them'. We need each others skills and understanding if the team is to arrive at perfection. I would like to hope that this feeling of unity is what we wish to pass to the next generation — not just a series of beautifully presented brochures, charts and price lists.

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