

Letters to the Editor

OBJECTIVITY AND POLITICAL ENDS

I SHOULD like to reply to the last paragraph of your editorial in the December issue.

Scientific objectivity can be, and all too frequently is, carried to an extreme. If an operations research staff is to give effective advice to their principal, they must take adequate account of all relevant factors, including politics and labour relations. Of course, if they object strongly to the political or labour views of the principal, they must refuse the assignment. But it is misleading and unethical for a competent staff to profess to give good advice on inventory control, or on any other subject, if they do not recognize the aims of the organization.

Line management must take the consequences, as responsible agents of the owners, for all decision and actions. If they deem it in the owners' interest to build up stocks in advance of a contract negotiation, to put the company in a stronger bargaining position, the operations research team should show them how to do it most effectively.

The true scientific objectivity occurs when the staff man can recognize his own emotions and political tastes, and eliminate them from the effective work he does as a staff adviser to responsible management.

You are correct that the successful implementation of an inventory control system does usually require the active co-operation of men at every level. But the system is a tool for management, bought and paid for by them. If they choose to use it, occasionally, to come to more reasonable terms with the union, they have the right to expect competent advice on the most effective way to do so.

ROBERT G. BROWN

Arthur D. Little, Inc.
Massachusetts

O.R. IN DEFENCE

IN THE Defence White Paper this year the Government stated that they intended to examine closely the machinery used to determine new defence requirements and the progress of research and development, with a view to improving the control of costs involved. In furtherance of these aims they had decided to create an Establishment at Byfleet (using the Army Operational Research Establishment as a nucleus) "which, among other tasks, will participate in cost-effectiveness studies for all three services". The statement went on: "These improvements in the machinery for judging the cost-effectiveness of alternative