OVER THE EDITOR'S DESK

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FRONTLASH AND BACKLASH— WE SEE THEM

By the time this is read the national elections will be the topic of the hour. The terms "backlash" and "frontlash" will still be fresh in the national conscience and the reactions they describe can be applied to more than politics. For the past ten years we have noticed in the metalworking industry the phenomenon of what could be described as both a frontlash and backlash concerning metalworking's new machining and forming techniques. By frontlash we mean those who forcefully advocate a development and backlash those who see no advantage in its offering.

Inevitably we find the viewpoints cancel each other out and settle down to a middle of the road in which the valid portions of each viewpoint gain their due recognition. Taking strong partisan side and then finding the working area in between is an old and well established American custom.

Specifically we are thinking of two machining techniques that have been part of the revolution that has been taking place in the metalworking industry in the past decade. Very recently we have listened to some very pertinent thoughts about them which we feel tend to realistically assess their final place in the ultimate scheme of metalworking practice.

The first is Numerical Control. At first N/C had only a few vocal and partisan proponents to voice its advantages and many detracters who were writing it off as a

curious novelty or at best a device for those with fat government contracts. The pendulum then switched and some now predict that within a few years virtually all production will be accomplished with a tape and that half of the shops will be eliminated. This we think is false. There is no substitute for either the man or his simple machine where he can produce the spare part, the variation, the modification, the one of a kind, the experimental piece, the parts not applicable to the tape machine, the shop that stresses flexibility and ingenuity with all types of equipment, and so on ad infinitum. We recently spent two hours with a man who was expounding this thesis and who is doing all right by selling the simple machine oriented toward the reasonably skilled operator or machinist. The machine is relatively inexpensive, easy to operate, and turns out good work in the hands of a reasonably skilled person. Even the strongest proponents of N/C are no longer advocating the total obsolesence of the operator. He can become a wonderful source of feedback information and a process monitor as well as a pusher of buttons and a threader of tape.

The second new process recently drawn to our attention is Abrasive Machining. Back in 1951 Kenneth Lewis wrote a book called "The Grinding Wheel" which we believe is a classic in its field. The last chapter was devoted to the idea that a grinding wheel could be used as a metal removal tool as well as a finishing tool and that someday industry would wake up to that fact. He went on to predict that designers would even design their products to take advantage of the grinding wheel as a metal removing tool.

Mr. Lewis had more than a little foresight. In the last few years the term Abrasive Machining has been made popular, and the idea of machining with a grinding wheel came on faster than a pack of cowpokes roaring across the television tube during the late late show. Soon it was felt the milling machine, planer, and shaper would become museum pieces like the steam engines that used to pound over the nation's railroads.

Now a machine tool builder, who by the way manufactures grinding machines, is pointing out that the grinding wheel does make a wonderful metal removing tool—but not in all situations. The traditional machines, like the four door sedan, are going to be with us into the indefinite future and no comprehensive shop will be without them.

We feel it all goes back to what we have been saying all along. There is the likelihood of a bleak future for the shop that fails to investigate the possible benefits found in the new developments. After all they came about to meet critical and pressing needs. And likewise it would be foolhardy to quickly discard those processes that have proven themselves for the past century and enjoy many inherent advantages. There is a real need for both the new and traditional, and the wise production man will coolly evaluate each situation and make his choice based on facts and not emotion . . . KMG.