Recollections of a former editor

During 22 years as MLR editor-in-chief, the author changed the magazine from a staid, sober, reliable journal to an innovative, exciting, sober, reliable journal

Lawrence R. Klein

Lawrence R. Klein became something of a BLS *legend during his 22 years as editor-in-chief of the* Monthly Labor Review *and director of publications in the Bureau of Labor Statistics. When he retired in 1968, he established an annual award to recognize good writing in the* MLR. *To do this, he matched the funds his friends collected to buy him a retirement gift and donated the total — the latter matched by his friend, then Assistant Labor Secretary John W. Gibson. As a trustee of the Lawrence R. Klein Award Fund, Klein not only participates annually in selecting the best articles published in the* MLR, *but also continues to contribute to the fund each year.*

To help mark the Review's *75th year, the current editor invited Klein, now 82, a resident of Tucson, Arizona, and still engaged in teaching writing, to reminisce about his 22 years at* BLS.

The day I left the *Monthly Labor Review* is fuzzy, lost behind a turn in the road, but the events of that first chilly day in March 1946 when I came to the *Review* are frozen in time. I had come to town very early in the morning, by train, a stranger, and carried my luggage to the BLS offices, which then were in the old and ornate Labor Department building at 14th and Constitution, a latter-day Horatio Alger character carrying his possessions, only this time not as a bundle on a stick.

Charles D. "Chuck" Stewart, a friend from college days at The University of Michigan, was the only staff member I knew, and so it was with a feeling of insecurity that I reported at the Commissioner's office. Isador Lubin was the Commissioner, but he hadn't been around the Bureau in almost 6 years because President Roosevelt had dragooned him for defense and war work at the White House. A. Ford Hinrichs was the acting commissioner. As he wasn't in, Aryness Joy Wickens, his deputy, received me. After a briefing, I was taken to my office, which consisted of three rooms: A reception room where my secretary and a typist sat, a connecting office for a leading editorial staff member, and another connecting office for me. Leading off the reception room was a huge bathroom, tiled from floor to ceiling, complete with glassed-in shower. This suite had been used by Hugh S. Hanna, my predecessor, who had retired 2 years previously. When the building was designed, the suite had been intended as the Commissioner's office. But Commissioner Lubin wanted a corner office, so one was assigned to him with a newly-installed bath. An ironical footnote: My stay in the royal suite lasted only about 2 years. I was ousted to make room for the departmental information director who insisted on a private bath. *Sic transit gloria mundi.*

The first staff meeting

After I greeted the new secretary (who was a jewel), I asked her to call a staff meeting. To my amazement and no little consternation, my new office was bare—not a stick of furniture.

The telephone on the floor bore the extension 327, which I had for 22 years and which still is the number of the publications office, except that the prefix 1 has been added.

The staff trooped in. Another surprise: There were 23 members—all women. Except for a couple of youthful clerk-typists, they were all middle-aged or older, and all—I could tell from their expressions which ranged from skepticism to apprehension—wanted to size up the new kid on the block. There was no question of equal rights: they had no place to sit, nor did I.

After a few conventional remarks—"cooperation . . . open door . . . part of a renowned venture"—they told me what they did. The division consisted of 3 units: The *Monthly Labor Review* (5 staff members), Bulletins (12), and Inquiries and Correspondence (4). My immediate staff numbered two. The *Review* was headed by a very competent person who had been the acting editor-in-chief; she was an expert on cooperatives and a national figure in that movement. Another senior *MLR* staffer was a longtime employee, scholarly and wise. There was a book review editor, and I listened to her remarks carefully because I thought a reorganized book review section was high on the list of new projects. I noted with some surprise that even in 1946 she wore high-button shoes. Proofreading for the *MLR* apparently was shared with the Bulletin staff. The Bulletin series had begun almost with the establishment of the Bureau under Carroll D. Wright. The Correspondence group handled routine requests for information and reviewed all letters from around the Bureau requiring the Commissioner's signature.

I learned that none of the staff had previous editorial experience. Some were close to the then compulsory retirement age of 70. There were the usual feuds and jealousies and an attitude of "do-not-encroach-on-my-territory." I asked each person's opinion on what the office needed, and some responses suggested good thinking. Later in a session with my top staff, I sounded them out on a few specific plans. They were enthusiastically supportive and promised to help guide me through the mine fields.

I ended the day with trepidation, much as I had begun it. I was tired, I had not yet found a place to stay, my family had remained in Michigan, and after becoming acquainted, during afternoon interviews, with the professional competence of all the top Bureau staff members and the unquestionable brilliance of many, I began to have a quavering doubt about my own ability to accomplish what the Commissioner and the Secretary's office had in mind for the development of the BLS publications program.

But when day two dawned, I awoke with restored energy and fresh enthusiasm. But breakers lay ahead.

New goals

Although somewhat lacking in specificity, a general goal for BLS publications was made known to me. The *Review* should be brightened up, in substance, writing, and appearance. Refurbished, the *Review* was to become a sparkling window on the Bureau and the Department. Other publications also were to be spruced up. We were to make a determined effort at a press and public relations program.

It all seems like fun now; at the time, the first couple of years exuded agony—frustrations, opposition, a search for talent. Our first step, while apparently superficial, was very important psychologically: it was to start work on a new format for the *Review*. I sidestepped the Government Printing Office's Typography and Design section because of its reputation for stodginess, and engaged the late Charles Pollock, professor of design at Michigan State University and the brother of the famed artist Jackson Pollock. While this innovation was in progress, we set about drafting three BLS administrative orders. One—written by Charles Stewart, later to become a deputy assistant secretary—formally established the *Review* as a Bureau program, set the boundaries of the editor's prerogatives, created a *Monthly Labor Review* Planning Advisory Committee, and explicated *Review* standards. The second created a Special Publications Division within the Office of Publications and gave it a role in planning as well as editing the Bulletin series and other publishing ventures. The third order placed authority within the Office of Publications to administer press and public relations.

There is no better teacher than a bloody nose.

After some difficulty, the three orders were approved. The major objections were to the proposals for more autonomy for the *Monthly Labor Review* and to the authority given to the Director of Publications for press release clearance. I was green when it came to coping with internecine warfare. Around the Bureau and Department a frequent question was: "Upon what meat doth this our Caesar feed?" In retrospect, I recognize I was pretty brash. But one learns. And there is no better teacher than a bloody nose.

But there was also support from both the Secretary (former Federal Judge Lewis B. Schwellenbach) and Assistant Secretary John W. Gibson, from newly-appointed Commissioner Ewan Clague, and from Aryness Wickens. Hugh Hanna, cognizant of the prob-

lems with the *Review*, was helpful from the beginning. When plans became known, there was growing support from a number of influential staff members, both newcomers and veterans—Edward Hollander, Witt Bowden, Duane Evans, Dorothy Brady, Henry Fitzgerald, Max Kossoris, Wendell MacDonald, Phil Arnow, and other resourceful and creative people. It was all going to take time and patience to achieve the goals, and I had little of the latter.

Editorial problems

The manuscripts I reviewed and the galley proofs of a current issue revealed some of the problems that had to be solved, but only the superficial problems. Apparently, there was no real concept that editing went beyond copy reading. The editing staff needed training and a blood transfusion. Though not an issue of gender, it was emblematic of the inertia that abounded that I was still the lone male in residence.

The MLR *had been virtually unchanged for more than three decades.*

The editorial problems were embedded in the *Review's* history. The journal had been virtually unchanged for more than three decades, in content and style, in its kind of bland, stilted, and even monotonous way of dealing with material—the "good, gray *Monthly Labor Review*." It had a paid ($3.50 per year) circulation of about 3,000. It was laid out in a 6 x 9-inch page format that didn't lend itself to good layout and design. More important, its contents were organized with no set scheme. Statistical series were scattered helter-skelter. The books section consisted of a listing of Government documents and volumes recently received by the Labor Department Library. The only continuing indication of emerging events was a Chronology of Recent Labor Events and brief summaries of significant court decisions in labor-related cases. For example, in the issues published from 1929 to 1940, there had been no serious examination of that personal and public tragedy known as The Great Depression and little more than passing mention of the crisis engendered by mass unemployment or of the dramatic new concepts of government relief programs.

In all candor, the *Review* little resembled a professional journal circulating almost without competition in a vital part of the social sciences.

But wait, there was a positive side: The *Review* enjoyed a nationwide reputation for integrity and reliability. The desideratum of the whole Department was to enhance these qualities, to broaden their influence, and to make them more useful. The rub was, how to go about achieving all this.

I could see in the offing the grail, But I was no Galahad. Many a lance was broken and many a rule of chivalry was ignored by me in the pursuit.

Lights, camera, renewal

First we changed the page size to the present format. Our first cover design was rejected by GPO because of a ukase against two-color printing. So we settled for a cover design in one color of ink, using Century Bold, a clean assertive type face, in up to 60-point size. Interior page heads used the same face with a compatible body type. Great care was taken with page layout. We tried mightily, but for many years did not succeed, to spruce up, simplify, and make more meaningful our chart work.

How well was the *Review* serving the needs of readers? No one really knew. Yet here we were, a part of one of the world's greatest survey institutions—BLS—with superb skills in devising questionnaires and selecting samples for surveys. The *Review* staff enlisted the best talent BLS had on tap to create a reader survey. Aesthetically, the survey form was beautiful—a colorful four-page fold, with a brief letter comprising the first page, promising the respondent that the nine or so questions could be "check-mark answered" in "less than four minutes." To encourage readers to respond, the questions were in large type with lots of white space. The back of the form contained only a block for the address and a note "To Library or Mail Room," pointing to a facsimile of the *MLR* cover, asking that the form be given to "the usual first reader" of the magazine. By this, we discovered who read the *MLR*, what they read first, what they liked best, which of their interests weren't covered, what was in it that they didn't like, how long they had been subscribers, and so on. In the end, we had an amazing 83-percent response rate.

Blood transfusion

Meanwhile, the publications staff received a blood transfusion in the form of some new staff members and reorganized operations. A managing editor and an executive editor for the *Review* were appointed. Three staff writers were hired to write articles based on their own investigations of subjects that were not the province of the operating divisions. A superb staff addition was acquired by opportunism on my part. Mary S. Bedell, administrative assistant to the Deputy Commissioner, was a good writer and alert to faults in writing and reasoning. She was conversant with all the operational facets of BLS. She

was sharp as an eagle in her knowledge of economic analysis. In short, she had all the attributes of a *Review* editor. The deputy commissioner happened to be away for a few weeks. I offered Bedell a better job. She accepted. The Personnel Office was in a tizzy, bracing itself (as did I) for the inevitable wrath and cry of "foul" from the deputy commissioner. We won, and thus achieved the greatest assist the staff ever had. Within a half dozen years, she was executive editor.

John Thurber, who held a doctorate in labor economics from Cornell, headed up the special publications branch (succeeded by Marjorie Egloff). Mead Smith, Phyllis Groom, George Kotrosios, and Robert Fisher (currently executive editor) served as staff writers.

There was other great staff support. The *Monthly Labor Review* Planning Advisory Committee did what its name suggested. It consisted of about a dozen members representing BLS, the Department, and a couple of other Departments—all chosen for imagination and planning acumen. (The committee also had other talents: It may still be remembered by oldtimers for the rather reclusive and exclusive and raucous Christmas parties it put together.)

A flurry of persons (and their talents) come to mind as I think back to the publications staff members of yesteryear: Margaret Schoenfeld (fighter for high standards), Jack Strickland (innovator with high-voltage energy), Elizabeth Black, my first managing editor, Gladys Wash and Marie Pryor (invaluable connections with the Government Printing Office), Olivia Amiss (still aboard and now engaged in general editing as well as handling book reviews), Glenn Tibbott (who ruled the Inquiries and Correspondence Section with a brook-no-nonsense approach and terrorized many an operating-division chief), Irene Reedy (she worked her heart out on the *MLR*), Gene Skotzko (the fiery-tempered Ukrainian emigre), and Ago Ambre. Two of the best were Alma St. Clair and Vivian Hogans (my first and last secretaries), and surely a score of others, performing importantly, loyally, and competently.

I dwell on these persons to thwart any notions that the progress of the *Review* and of other programs of the Publications Office was the work of a one-man gang.

The payoff

After all these preparatory moves—format and design, reader survey, planning committee, augmented staff, reorganized contents—what was accomplished? By the 1950's, all things were in place. I recall how astounded the Bureau was—and proud—when the American Institute of Graphic Arts at its magazine show of 1950 gave the *MLR* a Certificate of Excellence award, the first ever to a Government magazine. The award was repeated in 1952.

Paid circulation went up fast, due partly to some persistent promotion by circular, exhibits at meetings, and a lot of publicity. *Business Week,* in a two-page spread in its December 11, 1954 issue, gave the *Review* a kind of rave review, reported our paid circulation at 8,000, and noted our readers' survey response rate, most of it from top management.

I have vivid memories of the struggle to build a solid, professional-journal type book review section which the planning advisory committee and the division chiefs approved. After we convinced publishing houses that we had an affluent and quality-conscious readership and expert reviewers from the Bureau, the Department, and throughout the country, the books poured in. Each month, we ran seven or eight full-scale signed reviews, a page or so of brief notes, and up to four pages of listings. I believe the improvement in this section gave me more satisfaction than anything else we did in the whole constellation of changes.

Regular promotional meetings with potential authors in each area were held in the regional offices, with enthusiastic help from regional directors.

The special issues

Beginning in 1947, and throughout the years, the *MLR* has published specialized issues based on regions or specific themes. A disclaimer is in order here. I have been credited with conceiving the idea. Not true. The first one was fortuitous. We had a New England employment article. Later a second New England article on wage patterns came in, scheduled to be published at a later date. On request, the regional director dug up or contrived to have written two more. And lo, the first special issue was born—published in July 1946.

We did, however, do serious planning for subsequent special issues, close to a dozen of them through 1968. My favorites were *Fifty Years' Progress of American Labor* (July 1950, celebrating the *Review*'s 35th birthday); *Seventy Years of Service, the Story of BLS* (January 1955); *Fifty Years of the MLR* (July 1965); and *Labor in the South* (March 1968).

The 1950 issue celebrated two anniversaries: the 35th of the *Review* and the 100th of Samuel Gompers' birth. There were 24 special pieces representing the best possible authors from BLS, and from outside notables, fashioning a broad

The Monthly Labor Review *Planning Advisory Committee lived up to its name.*

spectrum of thought and expertise "to plot those currents of American development upon which our labor progress has been borne and to measure some of labor's aspirations against the results. . . ."

The book review section of that issue proved to be particularly well-received. It was developed by Merlyn S. Pitzele, then labor editor of *Business Week*, and contained evaluations by 10 experts of 13 books (published since the turn of the century) to interpret "what meaningful things do these books tell us today." Taken as a whole, the issue was a painstaking endeavor that involved almost a year of effort from conception to birth.

Memorable moments can relate to pride, apprehension, and shame.

Almost as arduous a task was the conception and development of the 50th anniversary issue of the *MLR* (July 1965). The plan was to sum up accomplishments and to invoke, through a special section called "Future Assignments," in the form of essay-letters from highly-respected users of the *Review* (ominously 13 in number), a mandate as to the form in which the *Review* should endure in the face of faster and more complex social changes. There were widely (and wildly) differing admonitions, from George Shultz to George Brooks to George Taylor, and from John Dunlop to John Post. Even today, people who have more than a passing interest in the *Review* might do well to reread them. The institutional setting of the *Review* and the manner in which it is flexible enough to adapt to changing social conditions and needs was admirably and perceptively delineated by H. M. Douty, then a BLS associate commissioner.

I recall the work and devotion to purpose that resulted in major articles by two of our staff writers. One by Phyllis Groom, called "From Model-T to Medicare—Paragraphs from History," attempted to show, by means of extensive quotes and ample commentary, how the *Review* had, over the years, covered, analyzed, and anticipated emerging problems and events. The other, by Marjorie C. Egloff, titled "From the Best of the *Review*," was based on a selection of nine articles from among the scores published over the 50 years. Brief notes explained the reasons for each choice, although the main criteria were excellence of writing and relevance.

Other changes, other publications

Life picked up for the Special Publications Branch as well. We started a monthly catalogue of all BLS publications and press releases and initiated a continuing series of the *Handbook of Labor Statistics*. Notable in my recollection was *The Gift of Freedom*, produced in 1949 under the supervision of Witt Bowden, one of the all-time great BLS analysts and authors. Nearly a million copies of this volume were distributed in this country and in a German edition by the U.S. State Department. It had a large propaganda slant, designed to counter Communist activity among workers in postwar Germany, but it was an accurate report on labor conditions in America through statistics and well-written commentary.

A grimly amusing footnote to the publication of *The Gift of Freedom*, can be related after 40 years: I wrote an introduction to the book that interspersed quotations from Walt Whitman on the first page. The monitors of the book in the U.S. State Department objected to Whitman—they called him a radical—and wondered out loud who in Europe had ever heard of him? After a somewhat lengthy and spirited exchange, some scholars finally convinced them that Whitman today is more widely read in Europe than in this country.

I also recall the report, *How American Buying Habits Change*, written 10 years later by various Bureau authors (mainly from the Price Division, with major substantive editing and rewriting by Mary Bedell). It was a masterful and beautifully integrated cooperative effort. I was proud to have contributed a chapter.

You would have to be well into your seventies to remember the debut of these two volumes, but to contemporaries they were scintillating examples of old-time BLS imagination and consummate professional skill.

Treasured memories

Memorable moments can relate to pride, apprehension, and shame. During my years at BLS, I experienced all three types but happily not in equal proportions. In this memoir, we show mostly the silver lining: Like the time Secretary Maurice Tobin personally threatened to fire me for refusing to write a speech for him, until he first checked with Commissioner Ewan Clague; in counterpoint, the time when Secretary Arthur Goldberg presented me with the Career Service Award, permitting me to go to England to explore ways to improve Government writing—it didn't improve; working on the report of that study, called *High Symmetry*, and relishing its editorial notices; receiving permission to work full time for about a year on the Department's monumental work on *Collective Bargaining in the Basic Steel Industry*; having the *MLR* become the first publication to really analyze the role of the National Education Association as a true collective bargaining organization; recalling the interview with Lord Robens, Chairman of the

National Coal Board in England, in which he said that the only two professional journals he looked at were the London *Economist* and the *Monthly Labor Review*; the fun I had in 1967 doing interviews around the country with professional baseball, football, basketball, and hockey players, coaches, and managers preparatory to a series of four articles for the *MLR* to be called "The Bargaining Practices of Professional Athletes"—alas, to my shame, I retired before I wrote the series; the sale of about 12,000 single copies of the July 1950 special issue of the *MLR*.

These and many more treasured memories pale before the golden memory of simply being part of that stately, tireless, resourceful, incorruptible institution known as the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics.

When I left in 1968, I made the point in a farewell editorial statement that editors develop an increasingly persistent sense of proprietorship in their publications. Now, after 22 years in absentia, I am glad to report this is no longer the case. Publications change and editors should but usually don't. I left because editorial senility had set in, and despite some mawkish comment in that same statement about how much good the *MLR* had done for me, I had reached the point at which I was no longer much good for the *MLR*.

Those who know me recall that I have a penchant for quotations, so it is meet that I end this swan song with one. In the much-referred-to July 1950 issue, I wrote about integrity and usefulness, and that these qualities always have been and always should be the watchwords of the Bureau and the *Review*, and then I stuck in this quotation from Maeterlinck:

> I have steadfastly resisted the temptation to enhance the marvel of reality by adding marvels that may be attractive but are not true. Being older, I have found the temptation less: for little by little, the years teach every man that truth alone is marvelous. Another thing they teach an author is that embellishments are the first of all to fade, and they age more quickly than he; and that only facts, strictly set forth, and reflections that are precise and sincere, will present the same appearance tomorrow as they do today.

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Migration from the South

Perhaps the most striking aspect of the labor-supply situation in the South is that the region not only provides labor for its own factories and farms, but it also contributes substantially to the labor supply of other regions of the Nation. The natural rate of population increase is considerably greater in the South than in the remainder of the country, owing to the higher fertility in the predominantly rural South than in the North and West. The pressure of population on economic opportunities in the South had been such, however, that large outward migration has taken place. During the 1920–30 decade, the number of migrants leaving the South exceeded the number entering by an average of 130,000 a year. During the depression of the 1930's, when job opportunities in northern and western cities were at low levels, the net out-migration continued but reached only 100,000 a year. With the growth of the defense program, and then of the war production program, the annual rate stepped up to the unprecedented figure of 300,000.

—Sophia C. Mendelsohn and Lester M. Pearlman

"Labor Supply in the South,"
Monthly Labor Review, October 1946, p. 484.