

Can high technology gain real foothold in UK?

THE BBC Horizon programme dealing with the impact of micros, demanded urgent action by the government or, at the very least, a strategy for the computer industry. There followed some brave words by Tim Wickes "... the UK virtually stands still, almost totally lacking direction and positive plans for building a sound and strong

industry — and most terrifying of all is the ominous silence from our government." (CW, April 13). Later he said that we lack the venture capital to exploit innovation.

I am in the unusual situation of having seen a major British electronics company refuse to exploit what they admitted was an innovation of major potential

even though they were offered 100% government financial backing. I shall be happy to give details to any inquirer.

Although refusal to develop new products, even at no risk does mean that that particular company will slowly decline, I am convinced that that course of action gives the best short and medium term career prospects

to middle and upper management in the company.

It is time that we faced up to discussing the career and security threat that a major innovation with major profit potential presents to a manager in a typical British company. In all the companies that I have studied, I do not believe that the existing management would

... existing management would survive a tenfold increase in profitability of the company.

Technology and product advance at anything above minimal speed necessarily implies loss of control of the company to the technocrats by the ruling technology-free management.

It is not accidental that there is no case on record of the British government giving significant support to any industry less than 25 years old; that government support for an industry is proportional to its age.

The British people are deeply conservative, and seem most partial to a return to the pre-industrial, feudal social structure. Spain is our model for behaviour in the immediate post-colonial era.

Accidents sometimes happen, and it is possible that high technology will gain a real foothold in Britain, just as it would have been possible for new methods of creating wealth to have been allowed to develop in Spain by the rump which ruled and then lost their empire.

It seems clear that what the British people will permit is cosmetic support for high technology; products and developments can be supported, but support must stop well before there is the possibility of them creating profit and thence a new power base.

What I see, in both private industry and in government, is money being burnt up in the vicinity of major high technology potentials, as a cosmetic to hide the unwillingness to allow a threat to our society's stability. That way, high technology can be discredited, and its sting drawn.

Admittedly our society will then decline, but at least it will decline in an orderly, decorous manner, or so it is hoped.

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