

An Independent State Of Mind

Written by Ken Bannister, Contributing Editor
Sunday, 01 July 2007 00:00



Ken Bannister, Contributing Editor As this July 4th rolled around, my thoughts drifted back to 1776 and the excitement that must have surrounded America's independence from British rule. Yet, as the British lamented their loss of the Americas, they too were on the cusp of celebrating a unique revolution of their own— *the Industrial Revolution.*

Seven years earlier, James Watt had successfully delivered the world's first viable steam engine capable of powering an entire factory of machines. Improving on the crude design of the original Savery-Newcomen engine used primarily to draw water, Watt's design converted reciprocating motion into rotary motion. The rotary motion of the driven shaft could now be slaved into driving multiple line shafts simultaneously. Fourteen years later, in 1783, North England inventor James Arkwright was credited as the first industrialist to use a Watt steam engine to power his entire textile mill.

The rotary motion of crank bearings and leatherbelt- driven line shafts introduced a constant need for lubrication. Petroleum-based lubricating oils as we know them today would not be discovered for another 70+ years, requiring the use of animal/ vegetable based lubricants such as olive oil for the rotary bearings and tallow (animal grease derived from cattle and sheep) for the drive belts.

The drawback with animal/vegetable oils is their lack of chemical inertness that results in acid formation after short periods of use, requiring constant cleaning and reapplication of lubricant. This important job became the responsibility of children. Because of their small stature and dexterity, they were able to scurry around quickly on all fours, on severely height-restricted fabricated gantries above the line shafts, applying lubricant as and when required.

An Independent State Of Mind

Written by Ken Bannister, Contributing Editor
Sunday, 01 July 2007 00:00

Countless youngsters worked 18-20 hours per day in appalling conditions—*and many of them were maimed and killed in the lubrication process*

. These little children, scampering across the gantries in a stooped manner, were said to resemble monkeys, which is how the term "grease monkey" is thought to have originated.

While children no longer take care of the lubrication in our facilities, have times really changed? Today, as I work with companies to implement engineered lubrication management programs, I am constantly amazed by the number of organizations that still treat lubrication as a "necessary evil," and their lubrication personnel as second-class citizens, referring to them as "grease monkeys," "grease jockeys" and "oilers." Many have low expectations for their lubrication personnel, providing little or no training for the job, using the position as preretirement staging positions, etc. Sound familiar?

I submit that it's time to lead an independent charge of our own to elevate the status of lubrication in the minds of all industrial personnel!

Although we may not be able to strike a unilateral declaration of independence, we all can work toward seriously legitimizing the science of lubrication in the minds of our co-workers. This can be achieved by taking responsibility for reducing machine downtime and reducing energy costs through the use of improved lubricants and lubrication practices. We also need to implement defined roles and responsibilities for all lubrication personnel, insist on quality training and accreditation for them and strongly support their being recognized as an integral part of an equipment reliability program/initiative/approach/team.

Are you and your company ready to take on this challenge? Good Luck!

Ken Bannister is lead partner & principal consultant for Engtech Industries, Inc. Phone: (519) 469-9173; e-mail: kbannister@engtechindustries.com