

Some Observations on Workers' Organizations¹

Presidential Address Before the Fifteenth Annual Meeting of the Taylor Society

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The interests of society, including those of the workers, suggest some measure of collective bargaining in industry to the end that the weaker side may be represented in negotiations as to hours, wages, status and working conditions. Collective bargaining implies the organization of the workers on a basis extensive enough—say nation-wide—as to make this bargaining power effective. But a bargaining position which implies division into two camps, fundamental as it now is admitted to be, must in a world abandoning competition for co-operation, gradually give way, so that if the group cohesion of the workers is to be continued it will be through giving to labor organizations that functional status in the industrial process which is now denied. This can only be done through the discovery of elements of the work which can be as well, or better, done by the group than by individuals.

If labor organizations are in fact desirable social agencies and essential to the orderly conduct of industry, they logically come within the field of management and industrial engineering. It therefore becomes a part of our task to discover all necessary outlets for the energy and spirit of the grouped workers and to aid in the cultivation on the part both of management and labor of those newer disciplines which will effect the maximum co-operative effort.

PERHAPS the amenities of this occasion permit a word of thanks to this Society and its co-operating members for the pleasure of two terms as president and an equally warm word of welcome, tinged with friendly envy, to the incoming president, a distinguished American executive whose consistent following of the star of Scientific Management has added lustre to the movement and yielded rich returns alike to owner, manager and worker.

The Taylor Society has up to the present time ignored what is an accepted practice in other similar organizations, that of expecting from its

outgoing president some more or less formal discussion of a topic coming within the range of his professional experience. Such presidential addresses have been useful both as informative and discussion-provoking agencies. With the hope that it may lead my successors thus to share with ~~few~~ both their thinking and their experience, I will attempt to summarize for you my speculations about an important subject which has thus far figured but little in our transactions.

Assuming that the management movement, in this country at least, acquired its technique and philosophy from Taylor, we must admit that it ranged, at least during the first two or three decades, over rather narrow even if fundamental problems. Management as practised by those who followed it as a definite vocation prior to 1910 had to do almost exclusively with operations within single plants, in rare instances getting beyond the operations of single departments of those plants. Only within the last year or two have we had from the pen of our president-elect a paper on the application of the principles and philosophy of Scientific Management to the integration of widely separated plants, the story of a development which has continued now for over twenty years and yielded rich returns to owner, manager and worker alike.

We must look forward to a continued widening of the field of management in a world interested in uniform cost systems, national trade organizations; national and even international standards, and sales syndicates; the vertical and horizontal integration of widely different industries, inter-industry research organizations² and "combinations" of one sort or another operating in national and worldwide fields, and in some cases not publicly, legally or usefully. That the management movement is accepting this wider point of view has been illustrated recently in the organization of the

²Tweedy, Raymond L., "The Manufacturers' Research Association," *Bulletin of the Taylor Society*, Vol. XI, No. 6, December, 1926, pp. 275-283.

¹Paper presented before a meeting of the Taylor Society, New York, December 6, 1928.

International Management Institute, with headquarters in Geneva, through the success of a series of biennial Scientific Management Congresses and by the representation of this Society and foreign management organizations at the 1927 International Economic Conference.

These wide departures from the areas of our original interest arouse one's curiosity as to why it is that we have all but ignored one of the most vital factors in the whole industrial domain—the organizations of the workers. It is to a discussion of this subject that I now invite your attention. For I am more and more of the opinion that we must consider it as coming within our professional field quite as much as any other factor in industry. If we have failed adequately to recognize this subject, I think that it has been accidental rather than studied. Perhaps it has been because our income has been so largely from the employer group, for where the treasure is, there the heart is also. Mr. Average Employer has tried to ignore the subject of labor organization insofar as the actualities at any given time and place have permitted such an attitude.

A far sighted member of this Society recently wrote me that he had never considered it his duty as a manager of factories belonging to other people to devote any part of his time or energy to promoting or helping in the organization or operation of any union. But this may not necessarily be a defensible policy for enlightened employers in the future. The record of this industrial manager, I feel quite sure, has been as entirely "satisfactory to the unions" as he claims it has been. But again I am not sure that in the days to come simply to satisfy the unions will constitute any more valid test of professional conduct than to satisfy employers now implies such a test.

If the organization of the workers on an effective basis is a desirable end from the standpoint of the best conduct of industry, can it be made wholly the responsibility of the workers to effect it? Will conduct on the part of the employer which prevents such organization continue to be desirable no matter how otherwise desirable such conduct may be? Is it not possible that the workers have the same right to expect co-operation in their organizations on the part of capital and management as capital and management have always invited—in some cases demanded—something akin

to co-operation from labor? If we should come to look upon some organization of the workers, such as labor unions, as a deep social need, might it not develop that practices, however otherwise enlightened they may be, which withdraw any group of employes from the support of such organizations, may become anti-social? If such proves to be the case, any employer setting up working standards, even *above* those demanded by labor organizations, and resisting the effective organization of his employes, may in fact be acting without a due regard for this deep social need.

I have every desire not to be dogmatic. But also I desire to be reasonably realistic and rational as well as forward looking in the matter of the attitude which should govern the relations between an industrial enterprise and its grouped employes. The question involves a complex of loyalties which is not likely to be quite the same for any two people, so that even if I could fully state my own faith with respect to the scientific approach to a subject so charged with conflict, I should not suggest that my formulae might fit anyone else. I have in mind to raise the question of the relation of industry to each individual employe, not in his or her capacity as an individual pure and simple, but rather as a member of the group of employes, whether that group is formally recognized as a company union, a standard union or some other group formation yet to be worked out. I want primarily to evaluate the group idea and only incidentally to discuss the way in which company unions, or standard unions or any other form of group organization may give the idea vitality.

I am now asking myself as a professional management engineer just how much responsibility I have for forwarding movements which have for their object the grouping of employes as contrasted with their isolated individualization. And frankly what has, on my part been a somewhat studied attitude does not now seem to me to represent a tenable position. For while I look upon a virile labor union movement as a social necessity, I have not only felt no personal responsibility in regard to it but have rather studiously avoided even giving advice to my friends in the labor unions, except when specifically requested to do so. The fact that labor unions and their leaders are easy to criticize, need new goals, and are all but unconscious of