

### Welfare Work in Industry.

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**I**N dealing with any question of national importance, whether of health, morals, individual development, or any other, it is obviously essential to take into account those conditions under which is spent the greater part of the waking life of the people, viz., the industrial conditions of the country. No one can deny that in the past there has been a lamentable lack of responsibility on the part of the organisers of industry, towards the manhood and womanhood of the nation.

There is, however, the development of a new spirit in industry by which the human needs of a factory are receiving greater consideration. It is now beginning to be recognised that the management of industry is no longer chiefly concerned with the technical side of the business, as hitherto, but with the human element also.

Even if we regard the workers as part of the machinery of industry only we must, as a nation, plead guilty to extraordinary blindness and stupidity in the way in which we have allowed the workers to waste their energy, to have it inadequately renewed by unwholesome and insufficient food and rest, and to work for too long hours under uncomfortable and insanitary conditions. No one in their senses would expect good results from machinery treated in this way, and yet the most delicate and complicated of all motors—the human motor—has been allowed to suffer the most serious neglect.

If the problems of the human element in industry were only the study of how to make the workers into a more efficient part of the machinery of industry, it would be comparatively simple. But no one will deny the justice of the worker's claim for recognition as an individual with an existence distinct and separate from his function as a producer, and it is this dual capacity of the worker—as both individual and producer—which makes the study of the human element in industry so complicated.

As a matter of fact this study is becoming a matter of primary importance as the fact of the Welfare movement shows. This movement started from all sorts of angles and under all kinds of conditions, but in every case where it has been seriously undertaken it has converged towards this central point and is at last taking its place as one of the primary functions of management. This view of the Welfare movement makes its voluntary undertaking on the part of employers (or those

responsible for the organisation of industry) a matter of prime necessity. A Welfare Worker imposed on the firm by an outside authority might raise the level of material conditions, but the essence of the movement would be left out, this being the voluntary recognition on the part of the employer of the need to make a special study of the human factor.

This view of Welfare Work also makes it quite clear that it is a principle in industry equally applicable to all the persons engaged therein—men, women, boys and girls—and not to any particular section.

Having decided that Welfare Work is an integral part of factory organisation, it will depend on the size of the firm as to whether a special Welfare Officer need be appointed. In any case, it is absolutely essential that the spirit of Welfare should be carried out by the whole firm, the Welfare Worker only acting as the organiser and co-ordinator throughout.

Where a business concern is large enough to warrant the special appointment of a Welfare Worker, the careful selection of the right person fully equipped to organise this difficult work is a matter of extreme importance.

The duties of such a person will be determined by what concerns the *personnel* of the factory.

Thus he must obviously be responsible for the selection of the *personnel* in the first instance, establishing at the outset that personal and individual relationship so necessary for the success of the work. Having satisfied himself of the suitability of the various candidates as individuals, for the work in question, the Welfare Worker passes them on to the technical expert (manager or foreman as the case may be) for completion of the engagement. From this the following up, transfers (if necessary) and keeping of personal records will naturally follow. The question of discipline—obviously an important matter to the individual—will be dealt with through those already in authority, it being the business of the Welfare Worker to see that the system is a good one and applied uniformly and with strict impartiality.

With regard to wages the Welfare Worker must see that at least a living wage is paid to all, and that the system is not likely to lead to overstrain. Even among organised workers, where rates are fixed jointly, there are bound to be a number of individual adjustments to be made, while there will always be the sub-normal to look after.

Consideration of the health of the worker and working conditions generally necessarily form an important part of the duties of a Welfare Worker. Much valuable information can be obtained by keeping careful records on such matters as reasons for absence, first-aid treatment, etc., etc., whereby the healthiness (or otherwise) of a certain kind of employment may be recorded or the incidence of accidents may be indicated.

It is obviously the concern of the Welfare Worker to see that all working conditions are as favourable as possible—this being the irreducible minimum on which Welfare Work must be based. This will include such matters as the heating, lighting, ventilation and sanitation of the factory, and the arrangement of the work on hygienic lines, provision of suitable seating accommodation, where possible, and provision of rest and waiting rooms where necessary. Length of hours, frequency of breaks, provision of first aid equipment, guarding of machinery and provision of protective clothing, all form part of the duties of a Welfare Worker. Although Welfare Work originated chiefly through employers taking an interest in the social, educational and recreational life of the people, it has developed, as already shown, far beyond this. In fact, the success of Welfare Work nowadays may almost be reckoned in inverse ratio to the amount of managerial initiative and direct control held over these matters. The activities will be there and greatly in evidence, but will be almost entirely self-governing. There will not, therefore, be much danger of such activities becoming unsound because of undue centralisation of the interests of the workers round the factory.

Having briefly enumerated the main duties of the Welfare Worker, we must pass on to the all-important consideration of the *way* in which these duties will be carried out. It is common knowledge that only by doing things for oneself is there any hope of real development, and therefore the establishment of committees whereby the workers can take their share in the control of the conditions under which they work, is a necessary and important part of Welfare Work. Further, if the individuality of the worker is to receive effective recognition, it is essential that he be given some share in the control of industry. He is thereby at once lifted from the position of a mere cog in the machine of industry to take his place in its guidance and control. In this connection the establishment of Works Committees is one of the most hopeful signs of the times. Both management and workers are represented on this Committee, to which the Welfare Worker usually acts as the executive officer, carrying into effect the decisions made by it. These Committees give an opportunity for some plain talking, which will do more to clear the air in a few minutes than would months of negotiations on the old basis. The constructive powers of all concerned are being drawn upon, the brains of the workers being utilised as well as those of the management, with corresponding advantage to the organisation of the factory and ultimately to production and industry generally. Its educational value is enormous, each side being given an opportunity of hearing and realising the point of view of the other. The employer can explain his policy and get the criticisms of those most directly concerned, before it is too late

to profit by them. Incidentally, too, he is bound to have the co-operation of all concerned for the various projects submitted to and passed by this joint Committee. From the Workers' point of view it is an insight into what is meant by control of industry and gives them some idea of the difficulties involved. Also in no other way is the fact so forcibly brought home that employer and employed are really co-producers as when they are seated round the same table discussing their joint problems.

That there is a great future for Welfare Work carried out on these lines no one can doubt, but if it is to do anything at all towards the solution of the problems indicated it must be undertaken in the right spirit and with knowledge and understanding of all that it involves.

Practically every one is connected with industry in some form or other, and, as I have already said, most of our waking time is spent in its service. Our industrial conditions, therefore, will very largely determine the standard of our national life.

But even more important than this at the present moment is the real significance of the economic and industrial outlook of to-day. Events are clearly showing the rapid approach of a crisis. The issue already seems to be narrowing down to the alternatives of ultimate fusion of the classes or their violent disruption. It is very largely in the hands of those who have some part in the control of industry to decide which of these shall materialise. Surely the hope of the future lies in evolution from within rather than in revolution from without.

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