

THE CENTRALITY OF WORK IN PERSONAL IDENTITY

Wilfred H. Auld

Until very recently, no modern society could consider the possibility of providing all its members with the goods and services required. One might say that our experience produced a philosophy of scarcity which profoundly affected our concept of work and our attitude to the worker and the non-worker. As work, in a production sense, was so central to our society, uncritically we accepted work as necessary, work as desirable, work as good and non-work as bad.

The Changing Society

In the 1960's understanding of the realities of the technological revolution has increased rapidly. There now is an awareness of the change in our socio-economic system and concern about both future changes and the stepped-up rate of change. No longer is the central concern that of production. As U. Thant, Secretary General of the United Nations remarked; "The truth, the central stupendous truth, about developed countries to-day is that they can have in anything but the shortest run - the kind and scale of resources they decide to have ... It is no longer resources that limit decisions. It is the decision that makes the resources. This is the fundamental revolutionary change perhaps the most revolutionary mankind has ever known." Societal concern is shifting from production of essential consumer goods necessary for existence to the distribution of these goods and to services necessary for maintenance of life with dignity. However, if

Information on author

Wilfred H. Auld is Director of Summer Session and Professor of Guidance and Counseling in the Faculty of Education, University of British Columbia, Vancouver, British Columbia.

cybernation forces man's mind out of the productive system it challenges one of the basic tenets of our society and introduces a situation foreign to our experience and threatening to our security.

The Search for Solutions

Robert Theobald, the economist, in an address to the International Association of Personnel in Employment Security meeting in San Francisco in 1964 stated that, "Two per cent of the population will in the discernible future be able to produce all the goods, and services needed to feed, clothe and run our society with the aid of machines." Yet Dr. J. J. Deutsch, Chairman of the Economic Council of Canada, in an address to the Canadian Education Association, in Vancouver in September 1966 stated as economic and social goals: "full employment, a high rate of economic growth, reasonable stability of prices, a viable balance of payments and an equitable distribution of rising incomes." Theobald suggests a guaranteed annual income for those whose toil is not needed in the productive system while Deutsch recommends ninety-seven per cent labour force employment with an equitable distribution of rising income. These diametrically opposed points of view have been deliberately chosen to indicate individual reaction to a most challenging situation. They also point up the need for assisting adolescents in schools and youth entering the labour force to clarify their thinking in respect to the nature of work in a changing society.

It is evident from Dr. Deutsch's statement of Canadian aims that work is to remain a central concern in this nation. This is re-inforced by the creation of the Department of Manpower and Immigration in 1966 through which a concerted effort will be made by Canada to utilize to the maximum the potential of the labour force. Thus Canadians are committed to a course of action emphasizing human resources and of exploiting our resources for human use and betterment. In short, Canadians intend to retain work in a primary position in the life of an individual.

The Meaning of Work

That men work in the mid-twentieth century, just to make a

living is obviously not true. Surely, for most, more satisfaction than picking up a pay cheque must exist, otherwise work would cease. Hendrick postulated in 1943 that man finds primary pleasure in the efficient use of minds, hands and tools in controlling or altering his environment. Certainly in a relatively new underdeveloped country the efficient use of muscular and intellectual powers would provide powerful motivation for work. Earlier in our history few were left in doubt as to their importance as contributing members of society.

To-day when emphasis has shifted out of production for a large portion of the labour force and into service and distribution a different problem is posed. Specialization of function further removes the individual from total involvement in the process or the service and the end product may be so far removed as to isolate the worker from the satisfactions heretofore reaped from intimate and recognizable association with the process or product. The problem facing us seems to be to reassure adolescents and youth that the occupational role will remain central in the life of Canadians and despite shifts and changes important satisfactions and need-fulfilment will continue to result from work and in fact technological progress enlarges the scope of meaningful opportunities for the individual.

The Basic Needs

Anne Roe's work in the psychology of occupations has been used by many since 1956 as a basis for studying and understanding the importance of a career in the total behaviour of the individual. She used A. H. Maslow's hierarchy of the basic needs as the cornerstone of her work realizing that such a hierarchical concept is useful, if not essential, in understanding behaviour both on and off the job. These basic needs as listed in her Psychology of Occupations are:

1. The physiological needs
2. The safety needs
3. The need for belongingness and love
4. The need for importance, respect, self-esteem, independence
5. The need for information
6. The need for understanding
7. The need for beauty
8. The need for self-actualization

As Roe points out, this is a hierarchy of prepotency, thus the lower needs have to be gratified at least in degree before life at a higher level can be developed. It should also be pointed out that drive for a higher need, understanding or beauty for example, will vary with individuals, being much stronger in some than others, therefore, the strength of the need will be extremely important in career planning and obviously a determinant in job satisfaction. It must be understood that as technological advances replace man's muscles in the provision of those goods and services required to gratify the basic needs, focus shifts up the hierarchy. In order to utilize human potential, Canadian concern must be with occupational structure that allows for increased gratification of higher needs. This is the only way in which potential will be utilized; a key issue in survival of Canada as a major competitor in to-day's world. Although relatively few will realize self-actualization in totality, increased cybernation must be used to allow more Canadians to move toward this level of self-realization.

Roe, Super and Wilensky all support the opinion that work is a necessity in the life of an individual. Wilensky believes that work is a necessary condition for drawing the individual into the mainstream of life. It gives life purpose, it provides the opportunity for need gratification, it gives the individual status and thus identity and it provides the best possibility for personal self-realization. Person to person contacts and relationships are the most powerful factors in personality growth and development. It is through the institution of work, the contacts it offers and the challenge it provides that most people find fulfilment.

The Problem of Leisure

Frequent reference to the Department of Manpower and Immigration and to the Labour Force may have contributed to a narrow interpretation of the word 'work'. Apart from those actively engaged in gainful employment or seeking such, there is a growing segment of our population whose work must be found within the context of leisure. For this group work might be defined as worthy use of leisure time; a commitment to a worthwhile task, a dedication to challenging activity or high level development of an avocation. A tremendous opportunity for human potential will in the future lie in the service-

to-others category within the local, national and world communities. This self-other relationship may well take up the slack caused by increased automation for those no longer needed in production or distribution. As G. B. Childs has said, "We must be concerned that society accept the new leisure as a good in itself." (1)

The Role of Women

This paper would be incomplete without special reference to the changing role of women in Canadian society. Most married women, before reaching forty years of age have their last child in school. This frees a tremendous potential which can be utilized as a Canadian resource. At least fifteen and often twenty years of productive employment should be available to many married women. This segment of our population is rapidly being recognized as a prime source of mature, well-motivated and reliable manpower. Apart from the contribution to society this group can make, married women's re-entry into the labour force after major child rearing responsibilities are met, will allow many to enhance their self-concept without detracting from other key roles of mother and wife.

The Social Theorists' Views

There are fears that technological change will threaten man by destroying his feeling of worth and removing the cornerstone of his existence by denying him the right to gainful employment. Yet many social theorists have opposing views. Sir Julian Huxley postulates that it is possible unless technology is controlled, to produce a two-class nation; the employed - the satisfied few and the unemployed - the frustrated many. This he feels would be socially disastrous and politically intolerable. David Reisman perceives automation as a positive force which can on the one hand reduce brute labour and meaningless repetitive tasks to a minimum and on the other hand produce factories and offices which offer workers complex and more challenging responsibilities. Erich Fromm does not see the necessity for a society that stifles individual creativity.

The Spotlight on Education

Education appropriate to the changed and changing Canadian society may well be the key to maximum use of human potential and thus to personal satisfaction. Doors must be left open to allow easy

re-entry into the educational stream. Retraining and up-grading will have to be available to all Canadians who can profit from it and a close working relationship between business and industry on the one hand and educational authority on the other is imperative. In order that personal identity in work can be preserved workers will have to be educated to participate in decision making affecting their own working lives. A narrow, highly specialized educational system is not envisioned. The problem of satisfying work is intimately associated with fruitful leisure. Education must concentrate on training for leisure as well as preparation for work - a new concept many traditionalists are reluctant to accept.

Work, defined either as gainful employment or dedication to a useful task, will remain central to the healthy personality. Education, in a far broader sense than accepted in Canada to-day will have to be provided throughout the lifetime of the individual. Information on the nature of societal change will have to be made available continuously and people assisted in understanding the impact of this change on their lives. It would be a sorry day indeed for Canada and Canadians should it ever come about that the larger share of the population arose with no aims for that day, no challenge in sight for the future and no feeling that they were important, contributing individuals in our society.

REFERENCES

1. Childs, G.B. "Is the Work Ethic Realistic in an Age of Automation?" Phi Delta Kappan, 1965, 46,8.
2. Deutsch, J.J. Economic and Social Planning and Education, Address to the CEA Annual Convention, Vancouver, September 22, 1966.
3. Hendrick, I. "Work and the Pleasure Principle", Psycho-An. Quart., 12, 311-329.
4. Lipsett, Laurence. "Social Factors in Vocational Development", Personnel and Guidance Journal, 1962, 40, 432-437.
5. Roe, Anne. The Psychology of Occupations, New York, John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 1956.
6. Swados, Harvey. "Work as a Public Issue", Saturday Review, December 12, 1959.

Une des craintes les plus fréquentes de notre société sort de la conviction que le changement technologique menace l'individu parce qu'il détruit son sens de valeur personnelle et lui ôte le coeur de son existence en lui refusant le droit à un travail rémunéré. Pourtant les théoriciens sociaux tels que Riesman et Fromm envisagent l'automation comme une force positive qui puisse réduire le nombre de tâches sans signification et en même temps offre à l'ouvrier des responsabilités plus complexes et plus intéressantes. M. le Docteur Deutsch, président du Conseil Economique du Canada, croit qu'une société où tout le monde est employé, où l'économie augmente, où il y a une certaine stabilité de prix et une juste distribution de revenus est un but raisonnable.

Une éducation convenable à la société canadienne pendant cette époque de changement rapide sera le moyen pour arriver à la meilleure utilisation de la puissance latente humaine, et ainsi au sens de satisfaction personnelle. Le travail, ou comme moyen de gagner la vie, ou comme consécration à une tâche utile, restera le centre de la personnalité.