

Eight-inch Pipe

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TO RUB SHOULDERS with a part of the American people who are frankly underprivileged, and to feel rather normally the tensions which pull them has great value. Such problems as trying to get clean, to get enough sleep, to kill time, and to secure companionship are accepted as awfully simple when you don't face them day after day. Putting them down on paper coherently is difficult, but I think essential if one is to realize the implications of their living for education. This is then no scientific investigation of a social organism. There's too much chance, uncontrolled observation. Yet while no one individual can be a precision instrument for measuring pressures, I have very often in the job of pipe-fitter's helper had the chance to live with men who work, talk, eat, and wash in a different pattern. There is a great deal of good in that.

Rand's Shipyards in Brooklyn, is one of the largest ship-repair yards on the East Coast. Their neat advertisement appeared each Sunday in the *Times* and *Tribune*. During the war, it employed 15,000 men, in two ten-hour shifts from 7 to 6 each day. Saturday was a time-and-a-half day, Sunday a doubletime day.

Ship reconversion and repair involves a great variety of construction—the largest departments are welders, burners, joiners, plumbers, pipe-fitters, electricians, firemen,

riggers, machinists. While Rand's is an open shop, most of these trades are organized, although the unions are not particularly active. The more highly skilled trades are AF of L; what is left are the unskilled, usually CIO. It is interesting to note that electricians are predominantly Jewish, the firemen and plasterers, Irish, the joiners, Scandinavian. In other words, this organization has not only job distinctions of exact nature but it is regimented into nationality groups, union groups. Negroes are many and cluster in the jobs which are the least skilled. Moreover, each department is subdivided aristocratically into A, B, C, and D class workers. There is a slight wage differential but largely it is a division of ability rating. The means of arriving in one of these groups is obscure, although the personnel department makes these distinctions presumably on experience and training. Pay ranges from \$55 for the unskilled worker to \$95 for the top-flight mechanics. This is on the basis of a 70-hour week; so wages are not high.

The "Super"-"Snapper" Plan and How It Doesn't Work

The line and staff of the organization (so far as the day's work is concerned) run from the yard superintendent to the department head or ship's "super" to the "snapper" to the mechanic. Each one of these men has an assistant.

Authority from above is very real. Certain behavior is conventional in the presence of each superior. For the "snapper" it is necessary to be standing at the job. Failure to be standing is a challenge to his authority and he will suggest that "at least you ought to show respect for his job." The "super," who wears a helmet with a gold crown, receives all privileges accorded to the "snapper," a prompt butting of cigarettes and intense activity. The activity may be (and often is) quite pointless but one "grabs a hammer and pounds the bulkhead." For the night superintendent, the entire working crew suffers acute anxiety. The ship vibrates with activity

This account by Victor Johnson, principal, Punahou School, Hawaii, of his experiences in a shipyard is not merely entertaining. There are parts of it which the reader may not like, and may wonder at its place in the pages of this issue devoted to the theme of General Education. Because we believe that no educator can fail to see the importance of its implications, we publish it. Because we believe that, in these implications he will find the necessity for a critical evaluation of general education which is defined as "education of all youth for constructive participation in the common activities of living," we include it in the May issue.

until he steps off the gangway when it returns to the degree of normalcy appropriate to the superior at hand. Let it be said definitely that external authority is the motivating force, internal authority except in isolated cases (of which more later as a dynamism) is nonexistent.

The total structure is most reminiscent of the traditional school in which no one could be trusted except the superintendent whose shortcomings were discovered about every five years. I believe that, in this connection, industry is facing the same acute problem as education in employer-employee, superintendent-teacher, teacher-student relationship. Obviously, the shipyard relation is most inefficient, even if it gives a sense of personal satisfaction to the superior who sees jumping up out of respect. While it may be true that men can be coerced by a situation when jobs are less plentiful (and even now there is the expressed insecurity that construction jobs are hard to get outside the yard), there is little reason to believe that it affects production. Obviously, too, if the external authority of management were subtracted from the business without a thoughtful program of education (either by management or union), the structure would be even more chaotic than now. The habits of doing as little as possible as a gesture of independence and defiance,—the eternal hope of getting something for nothing—are deep-seated. Change would be difficult.

Men Strive Desperately for Status

The workers are supposed (and understood by the men themselves) to be the dregs of the labor pool. In spite of this I am constantly impressed with the basic intelligence of these men. There are very few who are so unintelligent as to be uneducatable in the school sense of the word. Their background—home life, schooling, work experience—has been pretty well stunted, misguided. Very few have finished grammar school, most have come from immigrant families or are themselves from "the old country," and their work has been always manual and insecure. As a result, their base values are intensely centripetal. Passing in a narrow passageway is a challenge to their ego; rummy and crap are opportunities to show their mettle; hardness, loudness, all those patterns of aggressive behavior reveal this

fierce, desperate desire for personal status. It is such a tremendous potential that it seems calamitous that it hasn't a social orientation so that life could be more favorable for all.

Take, for instance, the time that a young machinist went down alone into a tank to investigate a fire. He stepped on a scaffold that went out from under him and he fell on the steel beams and coils below, just about cutting himself in two. There were two strong reactions to his death. The first was the question whether the time-keeper had known exactly when it had happened so that he had stopped his time. The second response was that the fellow was a "damn fool" for having been concerned with what didn't concern him, for which he wasn't getting paid. There was behind their words, too, the conspicuous fear that this might very well have been they.

It might also be noted that the shipyard hushed the affair. The fellow literally dropped out of existence. There was no indication that anything had been done for the family, no announcement that the accident was covered by insurance, that the yard shared somewhat in responsibility. No collection was taken up by the workers themselves. Frankly, while these men are free with their money in the sense they spend all of it on their families, liquor, or gambling—they are allergic to charity. Perhaps, as they say, the funds are too often stolen. It's true that in the short space of four months, two shop stewards have departed with union dues, so that their argument appears valid, yet this hot desire to have more than the next man, to enjoy in a sense the misfortune of one even less fortunate than himself seems to be a prevailing attitude. I think it is strategic to know that a charitable or generous attitude can be felt only if there is an essential security somewhere. It is, I think, impossible to be tolerant and understanding when you don't feel that security.

The core of the problem of human relations seems to be in this business of status. While income has some relation to status, and is the quick estimate of the worth of an individual, yet the men who are steadiest, who are most normally adjusted, have competence in their work. While the company, perhaps because of the war work involved, puts no premium on the quality of the work done, the men who do a difficult piece of work find a kind

of naive satisfaction in its accomplishment. When these men are skillful enough to meet a challenge, or when they experience a bit of their own competence, they take on a real personal stature. Or if the "snapper" takes them into his confidence (and it is the exceptional "snapper" who is secure enough to do this), explains the job or gives them a blueprint to work from (an indication of real responsibility and a tribute to a man's ability to follow specifications), the assignment takes on real meaning to the fitter. He enjoys a sense of power (often misused), but the work is clearly much more efficiently done even when mistakes are made.

If this shipyard in war time is any example of business management, the old authoritarian technique of handling labor is on the way out. I think school men have generally been rather convinced of the efficiency of big business and generally have been on the defensive, patterning their school administration along business lines. They shouldn't. Psychology would appear far more instructive, and a concern for the mental hygiene far more productive. It is my feeling that Rand's, within the wide range of employer-employee relations, must be far down the scale, just as Bell Laboratories and General Electric are far up. Until management can provide a more desirable kind of leadership these tensions and frustrations will jeopardize productive capacity.

Narrow Experiences Limit Vision

The intellectual life of my fellow-workers is narrow. Their vision has no perspective. For instance, labor problems, racial problems, political problems are devoid of a setting. They occur only as they affect them individually. Whatever concepts they develop are based upon first-hand experience. If there was ever any doubt in my mind of the efficacy of primary experience as against vicarious, it has been dispelled. The former is strategic but also misleadingly partial. These men have worked beside Negroes and yet they are intolerant of them. They have enjoyed first-hand the over-all benefits of unions, yet they suspect them. They have worked as ward-healers and have a cynical understanding of American political life. Yet the unfortunate fact is that they never see the forest because of the proximity to the nearest tree. Their generalizations are always de-

scriptive but seldom scientific. Reasons, causes, results, relationships, points of view seldom enter their convictions. All of them suffer from wholesome acceptance of the stereotype. For instance, the Negro is "lazy." They have accepted that notion from the beginning and in their contact with the Negro everything reinforces it. That there are obvious causative conditions—some of them their own making—they don't see.

It is important in our intercultural problems for us to give something more than direct experience with representatives of other cultures. We are apt to stick to our convictions of Jews and Negroes, setting down the favorable contacts as exceptions to the general rule if there isn't a conscious and direct study of the reasons for seclusiveness, laziness, or whatever generalization we have built up about the stereotype. There is too much evidence in first-hand experience of these men to become tolerant of Negroes, Jews, Catholics, or Italians. They know better!

I should say, too, that there is a direct correlation between expressed opinion and lack of information. No one is so positive as the man who doesn't know what he's talking about. The negative position and the disillusioned appraisal of things are the popular themes. Reactionary newspaper editorials nourish so well their intellectual discontent.

There is little root to the ideas which they absorb. Since they think without principle, it gives a constant incoherence to their thinking and doing. Moreover, their essential self-concern makes cooperative thinking difficult.

Their whole philosophy, which emerges from their living experience, is intensely individualistic. I should say that there is more reactionary thought in this group than in the N.A.M. Change for them means a threat to the small measure of assurance they already possess. That is possibly why liberal thought is not popular with them.

Consider Mac or Ted or Eddie

There is Mac, a seventy-year-old plumber, whose family has lived in Brooklyn since the Revolution and whose four sons are in the Army. His teeth are gone so that when he talks his face collapses laterally like rubber if pressure were applied top and bottom. There is always gray stubble on his face, a pint in his pocket. His stories of the past are inex-

haustible—stories of papier maché toilet bowls purchased from Germany after the last war, of a dead wife who was afraid of ghosts, of his son's tipsy mother-in-law. When the war is over, he plans to retire, to live by himself. His thinking about life, as it appears in his stories, is highly sensitive to social criticism. He lives up to a rigid code of respectability. About training children, he doesn't believe in "battering children" (not around the ears at least) and has what his son and daughter-in-law believe is a tendency to spoil his grandchildren. Actually, he approves of the devilry in children, perhaps as Rousseau did. He believes that you've got to let Nature take its course.

There is Ted, a middle-aged Jew, who chews cigars, plays expert rummy, and comes to and from his job dressed like a white-collar worker. He has a daughter of high-school age. She enjoys school and gets good marks. Ted states that education has one function—that of increasing one's economic potential. In rather a long discussion he indicated that education short-circuits lengthy mental processes involved in business, that it permits you therefore to save time and money. That education has other implications such as character development is open to belief. One of the problems that he faces is that his child is apt to correct him or his wife "who don't speak so good" before his people. He is sensitive on this score and believes that kindness is more important than education. The relationship between the two is, to him, obscure.

Eddie always has a worried look on a thin face. He is most outspoken in condemning the Yard, the "super," the "snappers," the job he draws. He is negative to the union, to communism, to dictatorship. None of them does he understand. His daughter is in the eighth grade and she is having difficulty with algebra. Both his wife and he have tried to help her with time-rate-distance problems. "Isn't there some way of doing them by algebra?" He wants a formula that will solve them. There is no question of the importance of these problems. "She can't get in high school if she doesn't pass them. We want her to finish high school."

Joe is under thirty, wiry, aggressive, and sickly. He has a nervous twitch about the mouth and suffers from diseased tonsils and adenoids. He has a wife and five children. His

life is tied up to "gin mills," extra-marital sex, and his car. Of all the men, he is the most uninformed, the most intolerant, the most intemperate. "This country is nothin' but a dictatorship." He went up to the high school, hated it, and went to work.

There is Andy, a fifty-year-old Negro who manages to get along without antagonizing anyone. He has learned "not to work too hard because if you don't, they jus' don't expect you to." He laughs easily, accepts the stereotype of the lazy Negro, conforms.

Frank Costa has been trying to save money for a trip to Arizona. Uneducated beyond grammar school, he reads more than most. At the base of his thinking is a book called *The Way of the Transgressor*. From it, he has learned that a man's first responsibility is to do the things in life that he really wants to do. Frank, in spite of hospital expenses that have drained his \$400 bank account, is going to start life over in Arizona when the war is concluded. He has a trade and a willingness to work, but I doubt that he will get to Arizona.

These types of personalities could be extended endlessly. All of them have their essential uniqueness and yet most of them seem held by similar ideas that have grown out of similar pressures. It is easy to sentimentalize them, or to moralize about their behavior. One can see them from the point of view of a Steinbeck or Saroyan, but it's difficult to see them as they are, and almost impossible to bring cause and effect relationships into focus except in very general terms.

Poor Health Is General

In the physical realm, these men do not fare well. Teeth are invariably bad. Bodies are curved, bent, marked by the work that they do. Casual disorders are ignored. Dirt and grease are a constant fight. Shaving is not easy. Their looks are not appealing, therefore, and they are aware of the disapproval felt by those outside the working group. On the subways, in taxis, in elevators, there is a noticeable shrinking away from them. "People don't respect us mechanics." There is then a constant need for defense in their contact with "office workers." No doubt this appears an obvious thing, but it is significant. Appearance means a great deal to these men. They do not accept it as in the nature of things. It rankles. As one result, their appraisal of people is one of "what does his

job pay?" They gain no security, unfortunately, from the dignity of work.

If conservation of human resources is consistent with democratic principle, health is a very real problem. Sickness is a very real threat to these men whose sick-benefit insurance is not enough to cover living expenses. Moreover, for people whose margin of savings is meager, it becomes well nigh impossible to ask that they be reasonable about going for care until damage is done. Education can do a great deal toward speeding up understanding but the facilities must be available. Education ought, I think, to give these people the skill or technique for articulation and securing a fulfillment of needs through cooperative effort.

Life Is Basically "How Far Will the Money Go"

It is noticeable that their attitudes, convictions are built up from a number of pressures converging upon them. Economics is the basic concern. Almost every experience they have is a weighing of whether they have the money. They must consider whether they can afford to be sick, have another child, buy a car. While this kind of decision affects all of us to a degree, most of us can make minor decisions without counting our money or exhausting the supply. I am not implying that their concern for money makes them provident or thrifty. In most cases it works in reverse.

School?—Merely a Nodding Acquaintance

Their experience at school seems to have been limited to the fundamental processes. It extends into their present life by giving them literacy, but their reading is laborious and fragmentary. Their facility with numbers, since arithmetical combinations of mixed numbers is part of the job, is much greater; gambling, too, gives practice. Their spelling doesn't keep pace with their vocabulary; their writing is remarkably legible.

Government Is a Hostile Outsider

Attitude to government is a disheartening thing. They believe with assurance that government is an outside entity that curbs their freedom. It is expensive, full of corruption. If there is any lining up in the camps of business and government, they are all for business. No doubt business pays their salary

and government extracts their taxes. This is the solid foundation to their understanding of government.

Perhaps they have a more realistic understanding of government in practice than we, for most of them have been ward workers and receivers of political patronage. Yet they have no sense of the over-all policy.

To a large extent, these men are isolationist. The war was engaged in when FDR had promised explicitly that we would not send troops overseas. The British and the Russians have maintained and exploited their power at our lend-lease expense. We are "suckers" of the grandiose sort. Uncle Joe knows how to outsmart us, how to take care of his own.

What Is the Meaning for Education?

For the general design of living on the part of these workers, the school is only partly to blame. Economic shortages felt in the family at a very early age seem to have conditioned them to value an immediate job more than anything else. As a result their brief stay with education has been a kind of frustration to this basic need. This is not to say that education ever came to grips with this problem—that it provided an opportunity for these boys to work and study at the same time in a meaningful, complementary way. Apparently, it lectured about the value of an education as a mysterious key to success (for most of these men regret in a vocal way their lack of education), but the school which they attended moralized about the problem and actually did nothing about it.

For these people's children, who live with the wolf halfway in the door, the school must have strong vocational opportunity. The whole idea of placement at the end of the school span is an important service. Moreover, their children need to develop a deep social awareness. The very real loyalty and affection toward members of their immediate family which is fairly general ought to be expanded by cooperative living experiences within the curriculum of the school.

One is so constantly aware of the poverty of democratic experiences within the lives of these men. They have their unions but they operate them very much within the arbitrary framework of their experience with management. The union, in a sense, is their play at being "boss" and becomes just about as un-

representative and high-handed as management. I have tried to think where these men could learn anything about freedom and democracy. First-hand experience is denied them. Their reading skill is so clumsy, so arduous that they can hardly share the thoughts of others. In a way, I am amazed that their sons, so many of them, fought so well in the war. No doubt fighting is less difficult than thinking when you've had more experience with fighting.

What I am saying is that education must be full of satisfying democratic experiences in solving social problems, full of varied and rewarding experiences in vocational fields. It must be "solid stuff," eight-inch pipe, if you will. Education must prove itself to these men and their children, not in the gaudy terms of what a college training could do for one's life but within the frame of their day-to-day problems. Their random, disorganized

style of living—their drinking, gambling, whoring, working, raising kids—needs directive and guiding experience that is not morally better but just plain downright more satisfying. If there is a better way of living, let's allow them to discover it in school, and let's open up to them the means of accomplishing the change outside. Surely we can do no less than this.

In school, let's not confuse them. Let's not indicate even with the best intention that there are certain jobs that are considered more refined. If it's to be a choice of silk purse or sow's ear, let's show that a sow's ear has its function, too. Frankly, we build up needless frustrations. We talk glibly of raising standards that have no relation to the living condition of people, to their probable occupation. As a group we help them to lose confidence in themselves. Perhaps, we are too insecure to help them. I hope not.



IN AN EFFORT to enable those veterans whose pre-service education was limited, to take full advantage of the educational opportunities for which they are now eligible, the Advisement and Guidance Service of the Veterans Administration is compiling a descriptive list of schools and colleges which provide basic instruction for adult students at any elementary or secondary school level at which they are prepared to continue. Included will be schools which enroll only white students, those which enroll only Negroes, and those to which both races are admitted. Adult education departments of public-school systems which serve only local communities will not be included.

If readers of this publication have information concerning such schools it will be much appreciated if they will communicate with the Chief of Educational Counseling, Advisement and Guidance Service for Vocational Rehabilitation and Education, Veterans Administration, Washington, D. C.

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