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THE MAN BEHIND THE MACHINE

Psychology and the Production Problem

IF a man has a reasonably well-paid job in a factory and there is little risk that he will lose it (or, if he does, that he will be unable to find another equally good), what are the incentives most likely to persuade him to work harder and increase production, or even to keep him working at his normal rate of output? That is a question which is becoming increasingly important in industry. Employers as well as workers are showing more and more interest in efforts to find an answer and, since the problem directly involves the human factor—the man behind the machine—they are looking to the psychologists to help them.

At the recent congress of the Royal Society of New Zealand, a paper dealing with industrial incentives and the will to work was presented by L. S. Hearnshaw, director of the industrial psychology division of the Department of Scientific and Industrial Research, and senior lecturer in psychology at Victoria University College. Since the congress it has been announced that Mr. Hearnshaw has accepted a chair of Psychology at the University of Liverpool and will be leaving New Zealand about the end of September. *The Listener* took the opportunity of inviting him to discuss with us some of the points raised in his paper, as well as the progress made by industrial psychology during the five years in which he has been officially associated with the work in New Zealand.

Mr. Hearnshaw agrees that there has been progress, but thinks that only the surface has been scratched in this country. "The most noticeable thing in psychology now is not so much the discovery of new knowledge as the application of knowledge already existing to a variety of problems. Previously it was mostly academic knowledge, existing inside the walls of universities, but during the war it has been taken outside and applied in many directions. There is a great demand for psychologists now; there aren't enough to do the work. In the last four or five years I have noticed an awakening of interest in problems of management and labour, whereas before when you talked about such problems and about industrial psychology you would have difficulty in making yourself understood. However, I have had all the co-operation I have needed for my work with the Department."

"Does that include the co-operation of industrial executives—the heads of firms, managers of factories, and so on? They don't think you are just a nuisance?" we asked.

Managers Train Too

"Well, perhaps some do, but most don't. Certainly, when we first began giving lectures about industrial fatigue, some of them thought we would just put the idea of fatigue into the workers' minds and that they would all start drooping over their jobs. But that phase didn't last. Now the managers have their training-centre for learning the technique

of management—the Institute of Industrial Management—with headquarters in Wellington, branches in other centres, and a large membership."

We asked Mr. Hearnshaw what he thought about the "time and motion" technique for cutting out unnecessary movement by workers in industrial processes, and so increasing efficiency and speeding up production.

"That technique can reduce fatigue a little among workers," he replied. "But carried out narrowly, these efficiency ideas can be dangerous and cause trouble by increasing monotony. All the same, if a worker is repeating the same movement hundreds of times a day, it is often useful to save unnecessary effort. For instance, there was a case in a New Zealand biscuit factory where they had the tins sitting up on top of the bench while they were being filled. It was possible for us to save quite a lot of time and effort by suggesting that the tins should be sunk to the level of the packing-bench. But nobody has ever quite decided whether that sort of thing is psychology or not."

We instanced a device we had noticed in a magazine, for attaching to a typewriter to register the number of taps—something like 45,000 a day on an average—given to her machine by the typist. It clocked results in the manner of a car's mileage-meter. Would Mr. Hearnshaw approve of that sort of thing, or did it make the worker too much of an automaton?

"That rather depends on the nature of the work to be done. There are some jobs so monotonous that merely to have some kind of measure such as you mention gives the worker an interest and in itself introduces an incentive—that might be so if, for example, a girl had to type hundreds of addresses every day. On the other hand, a nervous type of individual might be badly affected. The trouble is that employers often tend to introduce new ideas like that without sufficient forethought; if the thing is done indiscreetly, nervous tension and worry among employees may be caused. Nothing of that sort should be introduced without a careful check on the human reactions to change. Experts need to be constantly watching the human factor in industry."

"Should that supervision be done by an outside authority like the State, or by someone on the staff of the firm?"

Worker Participation

"That's a difficult question to answer, because we've had no real experience of its being done except by welfare workers and experts employed by firms. But whoever does it, the most important thing in any production drive is consideration of the individual worker. What is needed to produce results now is not increased mechanisation, but more attention to the human background of industry."

"It is true that workers are, in effect, too often just parts of a machine," continued Mr. Hearnshaw. "They have no

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