



SOLIDARITY

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of

The Catholic Workers' College

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NEWS AND VIEWS

WITH THIS ISSUE of *Solidarity*, you will receive a copy of Fr Edmond Kent's Report on the term which ended before Christmas. To us, the making out of such a Report is an important matter. It not only gives us a carefully worked-out assessment of the academic activities of the term. It also enables us to let you, our Associate Members, see how the College you are supporting is progressing.

It goes without saying that we hope you will read the Report. We would like you to note in particular the range of subjects which we were able to offer to our students of this year. That the range was appreciated is evidenced by the numbers who enrolled for lectures, by the remarkably high attendance figures and the fewness of those who abandoned the Course for which they enrolled. These "high" and "low" figures are indeed remarkable, when one takes into account the genuine difficulties—personal, family or industrial—which invariably prevent many students from being present on each lecture night, and the similar difficulties which cause some students, unwillingly, to leave us altogether.

Supervisors' Examination

The end of term examination in the Supervisors' Diploma Course, begun this year, was held on Monday, 9 December. The number of Supervisors who took the examination, a written one, was 175. Each candidate answered two papers, for each of which an hour was allowed. Before Easter next, a similar examination will be set, covering the matter dealt with in the Spring Term. Four papers in all will thus have been answered by each examinee, and Certificates or Diplomas will be awarded on the aggregate mark obtained in all four. The pass mark will be 40%.

Happy New Year

As *Solidarity* comes to you only every two months, six months of the year are non-publishing ones for us. One of these is December, so that annually we are deprived of the pleasure of wishing all our friends and supporters all the best blessings for Christmas. With the January issue it is possible to make amends, to some extent, by offering to all of you, from all of us, sincere good wishes for a New Year that will be abundantly blessed by God. May 1964 be a happy year for all.

THE WORK OF ONE YEAR

Desmond Reid, S.J.

FOR EVERY WORKER a year's work has just ended. For every worker the work of another year is beginning. We use the term "worker" here as referring to every man or woman who is engaged in industry, at whatever level, or who is working at home. What has the year's work meant to each? What should it have done for each? What will the year ahead do?

One way of stressing the importance of these questions is to review the amount of time a man spends at work. To avoid overstatement, we make a minimum estimate. A five-day week for fifty-two weeks gives a working period of 260 days. But from that we must subtract approximately 20 days to cover holiday time: summer, Christmas and Bank Holidays. We are left with 240 days. What about illness? Say ten days in the year. So, as a rough average, the working days of a year are 230, that is—for an eight-hour day—1,840 hours. This minimum but still enormous slab of time out of a man's year of life needs considering. Again, what has it accomplished or, more exactly, what has he or she accomplished by or through it?

Materially Speaking

A first answer is to point to what has been produced or to the services given. So much milk, butter, so many vegetables and fruits; so many loaves baked, shirts or dresses made, so many bottles, medicines, cigarettes, tablets of soap, cars, television sets, so many parts or articles turned out in hundreds, thousands, or hundreds of thousands; so many garments laundered, vehicles serviced, phone calls connected, customers attended to, travellers transported, letters typed and so on. Eyes would bulge if exact figures for all these products made or services rendered were set down on paper. To this prodigious output one could point, indicating what the year's work has accomplished. But this will not do. It is not enough. This is what our work has done in terms of production. What has it done for us, or to us? What of the persons, the men or women, who did the work? who planned, supervised or executed it? It is on these that the spotlight of our attention should shine and continue to shine. Not because it

is they who did the work, but because they are people, persons, humans. It is not their sole or primary function to improve the materials on which they work. They work or should work to improve themselves as well. Basically, the work is for them, not they for the work. Have the 1,840 hours been of benefit to them?

"Yes," one might say, "they have been paid for their work." This is the obvious point that springs to mind. The ordinary means through which a man is enabled to provide for himself and his family is his work. Granted a just wage, he and his can live a human life. Without it they cannot. They cannot survive; or they cannot avoid a desperate hand-to-mouth existence; or they cannot make provision for the future. This first purpose of work is enough to inspire a worker throughout his life. He sees that his work, whatever it be, has this personal value. It is the great material prop which supports him and his family. This much, at least, his work should give him. Here in Ireland today, we should ensure that all our workers receive through their work this first, minimum, material benefit.

Discontent

It is easy to understand the discontent of a man or woman who is underpaid. Where a fair wage is paid, it is still easy to understand the discontent of men and women whose conditions of work—air, light, heat, coolness, space, hours, etc.—are insufficiently attended to. Where these are, as they should be, adequately regulated, it is still easy to understand that discontent may spring from an absence of any enlightened human relations policy. But even when this in turn is present, there can be and is in the heart of many a worker a seething dissatisfaction. And it is not now the work or the wages or the conditions that are at fault. The trouble rests within the worker himself.

"I love work: I could sit looking at it for hours" expresses the attitude of a good many of us. Work is a discipline and an obligation. This we dislike. Work requires effort. This, too, we dislike, and quite a

few of us dream of pulling off a fat prize in the Sweep or the Pools, with a life of leisure and pleasure awaiting us to the end of our days. Or work involves acceptance of another's authority, obeying another's directives. To be an employee is still wrongly thought to be somehow demeaning. These, too, we dislike. And for these reasons, too often a man who is free to do so packs up a job after a while, after an altercation. Packs it up and goes to another. And packs that up in turn. Goes to England, may be, and packs up, or perhaps with more sense, stays on at a job no better or not much better than what he had before. And the man not free to leave? He stays on, frustrated.

It could be that a man sees himself a square peg in a round hole. For whatever reason, he started in or settled in a type of job that does not suit him. Now it is too late to change. He is "stuck" with it. This is not the restless, senseless, butterfly man of the last paragraph. But there is, nonetheless, a sense of frustration, and, seemingly, years of it ahead. It is true that it is good to be at the work one naturally likes or is suited for. But when this is not possible, it is unintelligent to go through life hating one's job. It is also stultifying, infuriating, giving rise to almost intolerable tensions. The only sane thing to do in a situation like this is to set about *trying* to develop a liking for the job. Instead of dreaming of what might have been, it is the part of a mature human being to face up to the realities of the situation. It can be bitterly hard to develop a liking for work for which one has no natural taste. But it can be done. The energy and emotion dispensed in hating the job can be re-channelled in the other direction, and the first to benefit from this is the worker himself. The work is for him, not he for the work, but he loses much and makes for himself a mountain of personal resentment by failing to attempt to come to terms with his unwelcome task.

Satisfaction at Work

1,840 hours of discontent, irritation, boredom, last year! It is a dreadful thought that it may be repeated for many people next year, too. Their work is giving them little of the benefits it could give and the fault can well lie in their own attitude to the job. How can that discontent be changed into satisfaction?

There are two main lines of approach. First, a man develops himself through his work. Whatever about a general reluctance to work at all or a particular aversion to the job he now has, this can be so. He helps himself to be more of a man by working. Work is a human activity. Animals do not work, neither do machines, though we loosely say that "that horse is a good worker" or that "the TV is working well tonight." They do not really work. Only a human being does that, because work is an intelligent activity. At work we apply our great human faculties of mind and will to the job in hand. Under the guidance of these we bring into play brain, muscles, hands, shoulders, all our physical endowments. We plan, arrange, decide; there is some scope for initiative in the vast majority of jobs; there is order; we apply ourselves to what is to be done; some concentration and attention are needed, some knowledge, some skill. These we have and these we use at work, and in so using them we develop ourselves as men or women. Our God-given talents are employed in a human way for our own betterment. It is natural to work and what is natural is to our advantage.

Take one particular: the man who is diligent at work will be diligent outside his work as well; if you can trust him at work, he will be reliable outside it, too. His honest effort rounds out his character. You can depend on him. He will not let you down. On the other hand, a man who is known to be a lead-slinger at work is not trustworthy in other matters either. By being a dodger on the job he is harming himself: he will become a general dodger, unreliable as a husband or as a friend. Because work is human and natural, we help or harm ourselves depending on how we face into it, on how we do it. Those long hours can be of great value to the man who spends them well.

You Are Needed

The second point worth thinking over is this. There is no such thing as a useless job today. If a man really thought his work was useless, he could not stick it for long . . . even if he was being well paid for it. Suppose his job was to dig holes in a field and fill them in again: dig, fill, dig, fill, dig, fill. Give him good wages, good conditions, good human relations,

he could not stick it for long. The sheer uselessness, the lack of point to it all, would tend to destroy him. There is no job like that nowadays. There are jobs that seem less important, that seem relatively insignificant, but they are useful jobs, every one of them. We need someone to do them. We could not manage unless someone did the job you are doing. Wipe out any single section of workers. How could we get on without them? shop assistants? plumbers? labourers? postal workers? corporation workers? transport workers? Fill in any trade that comes to mind. All are needed. Each man or woman in them is needed.

This is the social aspect of work, which is too often overlooked. In fact, when all is said and done, we do not work for ourselves (making a living) or for an employer. We work for our fellowmen. We have something which they need, and we give it to them through our work. They need us, and we need them. The work any man or woman does is a help to other people. A man who is idle is not only deprived of a means of earning money; he is not only deprived of a means of developing himself as a man; he is also deprived of a natural means of being of service to the community. Every hour, every year, a worker puts in at his job is a real service to others like him who are depending on him. No man who works can fail to add inches to his stature when he realizes, with pride and humility, that his fellow men and women are relying on him.

And no man has a right to look down on himself and the job he does. There is a lot more to it than the first purpose of earning a living for self and family. There is a real satisfaction to be had from work. The 1,840 hours need not be a murderous burden. For a great many they are not, thank God. But for others among us they have been. We need to do a bit of hard thinking and self-examination. We need to take a sane, mature look at the deeper implications of the work

we do, to see the real benefits that it can bring us and, through us, to other people. For, after all, work is our vocation; and by our strength or skill we take the things that God has made, we re-fashion them—continuing His creation—and put them to use for the benefit of mankind.

Love of God

Cardinal Wyszyński develops this last idea in his book, *Work* (Scepter Publishers Ltd, Dublin):

“Work, undertaken from love of God and carried out in that spirit, is the peak of an active working life. It is a participation in the act of creation, in the work of God’s Providence, that inconceivable work through which God by an act of his love keeps everything in existence.

“With human work, God brings his act of creation a step further. Man, in fact, creates nothing, for he is not omnipotent, but by his toil he causes the works that have been created by God to attain the perfection proper to them, the perfection to which they have been ordained. The co-operation of men with God’s works increases their effectiveness, because, as *Rerum Novarum* says, since man is, thanks to his reason, both ruler and providence in relation to himself, he therefore adapts the works of God to his own needs in life. Man’s co-operation helps to bring about the achievement of God’s purpose. God willed that a rational being should go in among all the riches of nature and order them according to his own needs.

“God has need of human hands and legs, that with their help creation may reach the perfection that is his aim. In our work we usually forget about this loving co-operation with God, we do not realize that we are performing an act of love towards him, that to some extent we are supplementing this—what I will be bold enough to call—‘insufficiency’ of God.”

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