

Chapter 12

CONSTRUCTIVE WORK FOR ALL

Throughout almost the whole of today's world, the work scene is too often characterised by frustrations, tensions and friction.

The lack of job satisfaction is illustrated by absenteeism, high worker turnovers, drug-taking on the job, vandalism and poor quality work. Employers rarely offer their workers any involvement with decisions, or variety of tasks. Many workplaces resemble battlegrounds between demanding boss and reluctant worker. The constant threats of recession and unemployment further undermine the confidence of workers, and compromise their efforts for better wages and conditions.

Further uncertainty is caused by the practice of retaining workers in spurious occupations - such as manufacturing armaments - simply to bolster the employment figures for political purposes.

New concepts of work

With the advent of Alternative World, work of all kinds would become integrated with society, as a natural part of life as a whole. Above all, this would mean a basic re-orientation of attitudes to work. *It would no longer be 'employment', organised in every respect according to the whims of private employers, and without which breadwinners suffer. On the contrary, work would become a normal activity which everyone would expect - and be expected - to perform*, as their contribution to society (as referred to in Chapter 11). Instead of being carried on in independent units, all work, whether in agriculture, production industries, transport, the professions, service industries or elsewhere, would become the responsibility of the local or regional councils of representatives to plan and co-ordinate for optimum results.

Freed from the twin evils of profit-seeking and wasteful competition, work units of all types and sizes could cooperate with others locally, regionally or globally to share out resources and tasks in the most logical ways. Freedom from the pressures of the money system would enable decisions of all kinds to be taken more objectively, for there to be less tension leading to aggravations and accidents, and for installations of new buildings or machinery etc to be made as required, without being compromised by worries over funding.

Control of all workplaces by society would also facilitate movements of every kind of worker from one type of occupation to another. While it is likely that most individuals would prefer to remain in their chosen fields of work, many might well wish to change to, for instance, more intellectually demanding or responsible work as their self-confidence grew with further education and training. In such cases, or alternatively in cases of shorter term secondments, the resulting cross-fertilisation of ideas and experience would be beneficial both to the individuals involved, and to their new working environments. Such transfers or exchanges of personnel could be particularly helpful, for example, in the case of persons from other areas joining and assisting the departments of administrators attached to the representative councils (as suggested in Chapter 10).

The tasks ahead

The briefest consideration of the vast scale of the tasks ahead, awaiting fulfilment by the world's workers, makes a mockery of the very idea of unemployment for many decades to come. In respect of physical developments alone, it has taken the rich world several centuries to create its various existing environments, and a great many of those

need basic renewal.

Today's vastly bigger poor world has little that is comparable, which although in some respects not a disadvantage, represents a mammoth backlog for Alternative World to tackle. The release of resources, presently wasted on armaments and other features of the money system, would augment basic supplies sufficiently to permit commencing the creation of environments worthy of all its six billion or so inhabitants.

Railways, roads, health and education buildings, and a host of other infrastructure requirements would be needed. But the greatest task of all would be the construction, world-wide, of at least one billion good quality dwellings. And each of those billion houses or flats would require several hundred different items of fixed or loose equipment, ranging from sanitary and kitchen fittings, through furniture, crockery, radios, to books and innumerable other personal requirements. At the same time, there would need to be a vast increase in numbers of teachers, in particular, so as to guarantee the enhanced numbers also needed in the other professions such as engineering and medicine. Thus it can be seen that even starting to fulfil all the tasks would occupy every citizen of working age world-wide, and would present the planners and organisers of all the endeavours involved with unprecedented challenges.

Introductions to work

J K Galbraith has written: 'There is no greater modern illusion, even fraud, than the use of the single term "work" to cover what for some is dreary, painful and socially demeaning, and what for others is enjoyable, socially reputable and economically rewarding.'³ A whole range of sometimes dreary, often arduous jobs, such as waste collection and disposal, and 'general labouring' in almost every industry and occupation, will always need to be performed to keep the wheels of society turning. *Alternative World would introduce the practice that without exception all fit young people around age 18, having completed schooling, would undertake these tasks for one or two years, before commencing higher education or other forms of training for their chosen careers.*

This arrangement would have many advantages: it would enhance citizen equality; it would emphasise that such jobs, being essential, were no longer 'socially demeaning'; it would ensure that the inevitably heavy jobs were performed by those best fitted to undertake them, namely the young; with the presence of permanent foremen and forewomen as instructors, it would serve as an important introduction to work in general by teaching amicable discipline, cooperation over tasks, use and handling of basic tools and equipment, the importance of safety at work for oneself and comrades, and other useful forms of experience. Interchanging could be readily arranged, so that each young person obtained some understanding of perhaps four or five different industries. A further, fundamental advantage of the practice would be that it would promote the development of broad-minded, understanding young people, better equipped to contribute later to the successful running of society.

Workplace organisation

In Alternative World, real democracy would be as important in the workplace as in the rest of the community. In all workplaces, large or small, across the whole range of industries and occupations, people would be involved as much as possible, and encouraged to participate in decision-making regarding all aspects of production. This approach would be supported by the realisation of all concerned, that the whole production environment was their own, joint property, to be valued and cared for, and used for the speediest production consistent with good quality output.

A parallel principle of representation to that in the community as a whole would be

adopted for the establishment of job committees in all workplaces, namely random selection by computer to give everyone the opportunity to serve. These committees, representing either whole workplaces or sub-divisions of very large ones, would be reasonable in size, with a proportion of their number being replaced at intervals for continuity. Job committees would only meet as circumstances required, for example, to amend or endorse other than routine management proposals. These committees would arrange elections, from and by the whole personnel, of a manager and the minimum necessary number of assistant managers. They would serve for limited periods and could stand, if they wished, for re-election, with a maximum of perhaps two years. Managers would liaise regularly with local or regional councils, to maintain output in keeping with the accepted plan. Freed from the innumerable distractions of financial wheelings and dealings, managers would be able to devote their time solely to obtaining required materials, and organising the most efficient general arrangements.

In keeping with workforces as a whole, managers would contribute to the weekly obligatory working time, and then receive the same number of extra output points as those earned by their fellow workers. Managers and job committees would agree actual working days and hours, including for both the obligatory output stints and subsequent 'individual benefit' working hours. Night work, except in special circumstances, would be avoided. These timings would reflect suitable compromises between individual preferences, and factors pertaining to efficiency such as energy conservation.

Job managers in Alternative World would strive to *foster individual aptitudes and skills; make work as interesting and enjoyable as possible by maximising flexibility and avoiding boredom; listen to complaints and take account of preferences; encourage all concerned to suggest and design new tools, technologies or production layouts;* and put forward recommendations to councils for rewards to outstanding workers (as mentioned in Chapter 11). Further, job committees and managers, in agreement with the appropriate council, would need to agree on balances between labour and mechanisation, bearing in mind the desirability of minimising tedious operations. They would also make use of the experience of those who had been trade union organisers or shop stewards in relation to promoting good working conditions and welfare generally. Trade unions as such, like political parties, would no longer be required in a society where the need for protagonists of employees against grasping employers no longer persisted.

One of Alternative World's important objectives would be to give women every opportunity to lead as full and interesting lives of their own choice as their male counterparts, particularly by providing creches at workplaces, nursery schools and health care facilities for sick children. However, during periods when women, or fathers, had to remain at home for pre- or post-natal or other essential occasions, they would be counted not only as working the basic weekly stint, but would also receive individual benefit points in line with those of their colleagues at work. A further objective would be to make all possible efforts to compensate the permanently disabled for their predicaments by facilitating their joining whatever working environment appealed to them, through appropriate training, ease of access, adaptations to equipment and similar measures.

Finally, Alternative World would lay great emphasis on safety at all workplaces by encouraging workers to be alert for dangers, and arranging for regular inspections by safety teams, with the right to order instant closures until corrective steps were taken. If there were cases of workers wilfully or carelessly compromising safety, or causing any other distress to their colleagues, managers would be duty bound to impose penalties by withdrawing points earned by the wrongdoers.