

## The Motivations of Industrial Man\*

By PAUL MEADOWS

### I

THE PATTERN of industrial motivations is an historical product. It emerged with the technics of a commercial culture and it was brought to full bloom with the successive industrial revolutions. Motivations adapted to the drifts and the demands of a machine civilization had to be developed; like the gods, they had to be invented. As industrialism appeared, a new set of human controls, expressive of and geared to the technics and techniques of the machine, had to be fashioned.

For this process what was most necessary was a new kind of human discipline. This discipline, to be industrially effective, must not be imposed but immanent; it should not be collective but individual; and it ought not to be external but internal. Such a regimentation of the human spirit must be austere, in order to command respect; this-worldly, so that the daily task will not go untended; empirical, so that new learnings will issue; and exacting, so that obedient self-sacrifice will be generously forthcoming. The pattern must rest on the self-interested and omniscient individual who has status and is legitimate because he has been "called" to the job—the sacredness of industrial work. The industrial man is justifiably acquisitive and industrious because he is, after all, a steward of the great Manager-Mathematician. He must be rational and efficient, like the machine itself: his techniques must match industrial technics! He must be leisure-less, for his time is hired: unhired time is indulged only in so far as it increases the productivity of the working hours; unfortunately and unlike the machine, he must be re-created. He must be restless, looking toward the future, for which his

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acquisitions are made: otherwise how can the machine come into existence or multiply? He must be money-minded, for how else can he be related to the machine, his products disposed of, machined commodities secured, the imponderables of his existence "controlled"? A society of self-acting human beings to balance the growing aggregation of self-acting machines: such was the utopia of the pattern-makers of early industrialism.

Culturally, the industrial motivation pattern is a freak. Never before in human history have human actions been so divided into watertight compartments, and never have all the goals and interests of the human being been so subjected to this hegemony of specialized labor and unsocialized attitudes. Rather than a set of meanings in which the needs of the whole man are served by interpenetrating and reciprocal life values, the industrial man had a value world modelled after his own factory with its line and staff obedience, mechanical simplicity, bookkeeping exactness, mathematical precision, and segmental operations. He became isolated, revolving around the sun of his own selfishness, following the orbit of his own legitimized acquisitiveness. A human atom in a world of other such atoms, he became an egotist, pursuing his own designs, limited only by the confines of accounting austerities and mechanical imperfections. His security lay in his own pecuniary cleverness and in the assumption that other human beings were as eager and disciplined as he—or at least that they should be.

It hardly needs to be said that such an army of zealots, with no high loyalties except to the job, could be held together only by the provision of certain basic conditions. The pecuniary nexus must be relatively stable. The technical complex must be relatively expansive. The commodity stream must be relatively abundant. For, in the industrial culture, these

values are the ties that bind. When they lose their tensile strength, a new pattern must be found, or else the industrial giant becomes a weak creature with feet of clay. It has been the tragic experience of industrial man in the twentieth century to discover how real his dependence is on these imperatives.

This unhappy development has grown as much from the inner weaknesses of the industrial motivation pattern as from anything else. Some of these weaknesses represent contradictions, some illusions; in both cases they set up reactions which agitate our generation with ever greater violence.

## II

THE INDUSTRIAL MOTIVATION PATTERN placed a high premium on industriousness, on the earnest attention to the job. On the other hand, acquisitiveness and its twin, pecuniary values, run counter to the habits of the job, for they glorify industrially functionless "leisure time" and its large family—honorific display, pecuniary emulation, invidious comparison, conspicuous consumption. The social organization of property in production has promoted the pursuit of goals which have little bearing on the job, and it has made possible leisured individuals who, though functionless in the sense of a job relationship to the machine, can exploit, through their property in production technics, the commodity flow from the machine. Moreover, the pecuniary complex has become a corrupt thing with its interest in goods rather than in the productive process, with its unscrupulous mismanagement of goods and jobs in terms of purely pecuniary abstractions, with its hardened disregard of the property and feelings of others, and particularly with its facile subjection of industrial institutions to speculative considerations which transcend the job. Here, then, is the core of the contradictions which have developed in the motivational pattern of industrial man. The

pattern is no longer technologically expansive, except by "accident" (new lands, war, inventions); it is not stable, except by intervention of an authority of a higher order (such as the State); and it produces the most wretched freezings and floodings of the commodity stream, euphoniously known as "business cycles."

Another set of contradictions in the pattern of industrial motivations arises out of the terrible gap between promise and delivery, between technological abundance and commodity scarcity. The discipline of the industrial way of life is acceptable so long as it produces and shares goods. This expectation it is repeatedly failing to fulfill: panics and poverty may be offered in proof. A good many apologies have been evolved to describe and explain the disruptions and inequalities of the income structure of industrial peoples. Although they do not agree with one another, they do not gainsay the so-called paradoxes of plenty. Perhaps differentials of incomes and goods can never be eliminated; perhaps it is true that a large part of humanity has never been and never will be more than a jump from the "wolf point." But industrial man has been led to believe that he can be and will be. The horrible realization that he cannot, and may never be, can only spell the end of industrial man. This awareness lies behind the spiritual and moral bankruptcy of Europe during the 'thirties. Perhaps in a younger country, such as the United States, it takes a longer time to reach that awakening. But there is no mistaking the name of it: we call it demoralization. Has the second World War really changed this prospect? Or has it only postponed a realistic examination of it?

Perhaps the beginnings of an answer may be found in the fact that the pattern of industrial motivations has become overlain with an illusion, the illusion of security. An expanding economy, such as characterized industrialism in the

days of its growth or in wartime, had security without illusion: frontiers, new industries, new markets, rapidly increasing jobs, commodity abundance, low prices were the hallmarks of economic confidence. A maturing economy, such as has characterized industrialism in our generation, desperately needs the illusion of security. For the ruptures in its structure of promise and realization—brought on by wars, depressions, unemployment, relief, made-work—have given the lie to the doctrines of abundance.

The shift in mood during 1944 and early 1945, as the end of the second war came in sight, a shift from unexamined presuppositions of post-war abundance to uneasy speculations about returning veterans and agriculture and world trade, gave the lie to the chants of the post-war optimists. Even their preference for the term "reconversion" rather than "reconstruction" was food for thought. "Full employment" became a battle-cry, in politics and out, alluring to the marginal, suspiciously empty to the experienced and to the captious. The successive waves of social reforms in twentieth-century industrialism tell a story not so much of humanitarianism as of concessions made in the belief that the disgruntled and the disenfranchised have been bought off for yet a little while. Every group in industrial society holds an embattled position, besieged by unmanageable markets and importunate claimants on their incomes. Huge fissions split industrial society, and the group cleavages are bridged by momentary compromises through the intervention of an ever more powerful State.

An "epoch of contraction," as Harold Laski would say, has brought vast unsettlement to the pattern of industrial motivation. No longer does hard work mean security in old age, and acquisition goes on in an atmosphere inimical to its spirit and unfavorable to its growth. Income, because it is more

important than goods, skyrockets in significance as its instability and uncertainty increase. The divine "calling" to a job becomes a shallow pretence as millions grasp at any source of livelihood. Unemployment makes a mockery of leisure, and the declining number of industrial opportunities renders pointless the urge toward thrift. A "liquidity preference," as Keynes would say, appeals to a people who have become fearful of the soundness of the industrial future. No amount of individual self-interest seems adequate for meeting the unforeseeable moves and machinations of massive enterprises and world markets. The elements of the pattern of industrial motivations have become weak reeds to lean upon, impoverished inspirations.

### III

EVERYWHERE INDUSTRIAL MEN turn to "the Great Association," the State, for the organization of their existence, for the support of the falling timbers of their economic structures, and for the provision of the power to act. The disciplines of political society become infinitely more attractive than the undependable regimentations of economic society. As long as the State can command income, it will command the faith and allegiance of its citizens. A new absolutism is being born: a centralized, powerful, industrialized State. The self-acting Nation-State becomes cognate with the self-acting machine. A new pattern of motivations is emerging which gives form and dynamic to this new medievalism. Fascism and Communism are only its heralds, not its final forms. The fear of freedom, as Erich Fromm has shown, is being driven out by the courage of a State-mediated security, while new myths—international peace, national sovereignty, class aggrandizement, beaten and butchered scapegoats, election slogans—supply rationalizations and sacred scriptures.

This new turn is all very dramatic, even melodramatic, but it is a drama which menaces and silences the little theaters of individual life, the highly personalized self-expressions and self-determinations which industrial peoples have nurtured and matured as their rightful claims on an industrial technology. It is drama done in mass terms, and it is transitional, traditionless, and filled with forebodings. One has the feeling that it has too much façade, panoply, pageantry. The sense of mastery is not there.

Lest these words be thought of as mere arm-chair speculation, one must hurriedly point to the impact which this systematic re-valuation of industrial motivations has had on the body of day-to-day anticipations of industrial peoples. Most noteworthy is the decline of birth-rates. Every industrial society has faced, once it has reached the maturity of its industrialism, the falling rates of birth and replacement. Indeed, the higher the degree of industrialization, as Raymond Pearl, the biologist, has shown, the lower is that population's fertility and growth rate. Industrial peoples are not reproducing themselves, especially in their large urban centers. If it were not for the excessive fertility of their remaining agricultural areas, most industrial nations would suffer a catastrophic collapse of their vital rates. It is not easy to explain this phenomenon, but it seems to have some relationship to a fear of the future, to the fact that children are an economic liability, to the interferences which the home and family life bring to the rituals and prestige patterns of industrialism.

Nor is a net replacement rate which is going down the only instance of confusion and weakness in industrial man's motivations. One can point to the resistances offered to technological change. A moratorium on invention was a warmly received idea in the early part of the depression of the last

decade. The atomic age which looms ahead baffles and bewilders while challenging the imagination. A fear of technological innovation is a recurring theme in the history of industrial society, but at no time has it reached the mass proportions of the present. Nor is it confined to the masses. A generation ago Thorstein Veblen found the same fear among the managerial élite. New technics mean for them the shattering of business or market equilibria which a person or a corporation has achieved. Resistance is a defense reaction, and it is the flowering earth of all those miserable defense mechanisms—subsidies, trade agreements, trade restrictions, price controls, tariffs—which find their way into the literature and practises of a decadent industrialism.

But whatever the form the resistance to technological change may initially or eventually take, its utter denial of the inner structure of industrialism is patent. Massed mechanized technics must be expansive or they perish: this is the rule by which machine technology lives or dies. Perhaps a recognition of this fact underlies the frenetic post-war planning which characterized both World Wars. Perhaps the present is in all truth a last chance to establish a moving equilibrium which can reassure and realize the pattern of motivations on which industrial peoples have come to depend so desperately.

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