

WHAT AMERICAN LABOR WANTS

By ELMO ROPER

THERE is always the risk of oversimplification in discussing the opinions of any major group in our population. We know that there are enormous variations within every group. American labor differs by region, racial origins, the extent of unionization and other factors. Nevertheless, in ten years of sampling the opinions of workmen — organized and unorganized, in all parts of the country and in all income brackets — we have discovered some remarkable common denominators of opinion. These enable us, in general terms, to answer the question: "What does American labor want?" It is a crucial question. Until we know better what these men and women *as individuals* want, there can be little hope of intelligent labor-management relations.

The material for analysis is, if anything, too ample. Many hundreds of questions have been an-

swered by thousands of workers on wages, hours, working conditions, seniority, compulsory union membership, paid vacations, pensions, foremen, democracy, socialism, communism, ambitions, frustrations; and on scores of subjects seemingly unrelated to specific problems of labor. Individual answers are illuminating and many of them stir one's pride in the fundamental soundness of the American people. But a recital of individual answers to specific questions would be more confusing than helpful.

In an effort to determine whether these myriad responses to countless questions form some basic pattern, I have just reexamined the entire material. I find that a pattern does emerge. It is possible to group hundreds of answers under a few general headings. They lend themselves to reasonably accurate summing-up.

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From the answers to a great variety of questions we have been asking almost continuously since 1933, it is fair to assert that the American workman wants, first of all, *security*. In using the word, however, I do not mean government-sponsored security. The right to work continuously at reasonably good wages would come closest to a definition of the security envisaged. Ownership of their own homes, possession of life insurance and savings accounts are other forms of security desired. Workers want the security for themselves, and especially for their children, that is implied by better education and other steppingstones to larger and more secure incomes. They are not against pensions, from their employers, the government or both, but these are secondary, additional guarantees, as compared with the others listed.

Three times as many workmen believe that guaranteed annual wages are "important" as those who believe that a voice for labor in management is "important." For a company to have a retirement and pension plan is regarded as important by twice as many as consider vacations with pay important. "Steady employment" is a paramount consideration to ten times as many workers as is high

pay, and to twenty-five times as many as is "short hours." A majority believes that the government should see to it that every man who wants to work and is able to work should have a job, *unless private industry can assure that*.

The security which appears as the first and foremost demand of American labor is not tied to any official scheme. It is a broad and comprehensive demand. The average American worker seems perfectly willing to buy his own security, without help from employer or the state, provided only that he has steady work at decent wages.

The second demand of labor is a chance to advance — just the good old American chance to get on in the world, to go from one job to the next higher job. Twice as many factory workers rate an opportunity for promotion as important as those that want to safeguard seniority rights; there are four times as many who want that chance to rise as there are who want compulsory union membership.

This over-all desire for advancement shows itself in a great variety of ways. It is implicit in the average worker's desire to preserve a democratic capitalism, where in peacetime there is no limit on what a man may earn. It shows itself in an

eagerness to rise from ordinary laborer to semi-skilled to skilled worker, to foreman, and even to president. There is no class humility in the expressions of ambition that appear all through the mountain of answers.

In many places where it is the custom of companies to bring in graduates from technical schools to take over jobs that would some day become key jobs, we find a certain resentment among older men who have bumped their heads on the ladder of progress for lack of technical preparation. There is understanding of the company's problem and an admission that they are not themselves qualified for the jobs in question. All the same there is a vague feeling of injustice, backed in many cases by the suggestion that their sons, at least, be given the technical training for rising to the top. In this connection it would not be surprising if industry seriously considered the idea of educating its employes and their children. Some day we may see a Bethlehem Steel Department in the Massachusetts Institute of Technology.

In the list of things desired by the vast majority of American labor, the third is rather an intangible one, but extremely important notwithstanding. It shows up in dozens

of specific complaints and demands, all of which may be summed up under the general head of "being treated like human beings."

It is manifest in an insistence that their fellow-citizens, and particularly their employers and managers, recognize that workers, too, have daily lives, personal problems, temptations, ambitions, loves and hates. The forms that this inner feeling takes often seem trivial: a desire for toilets as clean as the boss's, a decent period for eating lunch, foremen who don't swear at their men, a friendliness in the plant that preserves the identity of Jim or Charley and doesn't turn him into number 3098 on a cold-blooded payroll. Though hard to describe, and impossible to put into statistical terms, this desire to "be treated like people" is real and deeply human.

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Fourth on the list is a desire for simple, genuine human dignity. At first blush this might seem to belong in the preceding category, but there is a vital difference that merits separate consideration. This desire for human dignity, summed up, means that most workers want to feel that they are personally performing credibly in a job which

contributes something to the aggregate of human security, advancement or happiness.

Some people get this feeling by being presidents of universities, senators, the best copy writers in an advertising office, the editor of an important paper, etc. Some get it by being known as garage mechanics who can fix things in any motor car better than anyone else in town. It is a wish for dignity only remotely related to the gregarious demand to "be treated like people." It is an inner thing, something in the depths of man's nature, urging that the individual do something "worth while." It shows up in endless ways — in the fact, for instance, that 70 per cent of American workers say they feel a definite obligation to pass something on to the next generation. Usually they are able to name some tangible thing which they feel called upon to transmit to posterity, showing clearly that it is more than a pious expression.

Many observers have recently commented on the contrast between the young men now serving in our armed forces and equivalent groups of young men ten years ago. It is pointed out that they hold their heads higher, are more sure of themselves, have some feeling of where they are going. There is

among them no sense of being a "lost generation" such as the depression generation came perilously close to being. The reason is that the boys today have an awareness of being needed by the world, of something vital to do, and this alone gives them an inner dignity. It shines out of their very countenances. And that precisely is what so many American workers lack and wish for in their own lives — a feeling of importance that justifies them in their own eyes.

Having set down these four great basic desires of the people in America who work for a living, there seems very little left that cannot properly be included in one of these groupings. They transcend many of the things which have caused, or have seemed to cause, strikes and other troubles in the past decade: seniority rights, vacations with pay, participation in management, and even the right to unionize. To the extent that these four cardinal human desires can be met, the real causes for strife will be minimized.

The four desires are not in any sense mutually exclusive. I mean that not one of them needs to be enhanced at the expense of another. Yet it should be pointed out that in order to have some of each, the average workman seems willing to give up some of each.

If he were offered a package that contained 100 per cent security and nothing else he would of course accept it. But he would accept even more cheerfully a package which contained only 75 per cent security but a 25 per cent increase in the chance to advance. He would prefer an even more balanced package, which contained only 50 per cent security, 25 per cent chance to advance, and a 25 per cent increase in "being treated like people." The most desirable package, of course, would be one that offered 100 per cent of all of labor's clearly expressed desires, but the American workman wants other things seriously enough to give up some of the 100 per cent security in the original package to obtain them.

While the provision of postwar security for workers is the chief problem, we should be short-

sighted if we devoted all attention exclusively to that. We must also turn our thinking and planning to equitable opportunities for advancement from one level to another. We must rid ourselves of the last vestige of the feeling that labor is an inert, impersonal commodity and meet labor's demand for recognition as human beings, not as numbers on a payroll. Probably the toughest job facing the industrial world, committed to large corporations and mass production, is to find ways and means of letting men honestly feel that from their everyday job they can derive that degree of human dignity which is the surest support of a democratic society.

In describing what labor wants perhaps I have only been describing what everyone, everywhere, wants.



The Middle Class

THERE are three classes of citizens. The first are the rich, who are indolent and yet always crave more. The second are the poor, who have nothing, are full of envy, hate the rich, and are easily led by demagogues. Between the two extremes lie those who make the state secure and uphold the laws.

— EURIPIDES: *The Suppliant Women*.

CAMPUS REVOLUTION AT YALE

BY CHARLES RUMFORD WALKER

THE "Campus Revolution" began at Yale with what local newspapers described as a "riot" on December 7, 1942. Radio reports of Pearl Harbor acted as incendiary bombs and exploded into student demonstrations and oratory. The "riot" was followed by mass enlistments, but a lot of those enlistments didn't take. By the time the boys had written home for their birth certificates, "Washington was telling us to enlist in the reserves and win the war by getting high marks."

The period which followed was difficult and jittery. It was characterized by directives and counter-directives from Washington and a lot of oratory on the liberal arts. It was a tough period to take, tough for the student, tough for the faculty, and tough even, I suspect, for the "Washington bureaucrat."

For better or worse, the epoch came to an end when the Navy

created its new V-12 program and the Army chose some two hundred colleges for the specialized training of over a hundred thousand men. It's too early to appraise the long-term effect of the military revolution on American education. It's not too soon to tell what it feels like or to look over the main points of acute impact on our traditional college system.

The rough exterior of the revolution in New Haven, at least, is noisy, colorful, and exhilarating. Men in green, tan, and navy blue uniforms march and counter-march at all hours across Yale's campuses, singing everything from the *Air Corps Song* to *Alouette* at the top of their lungs. Yale's student population has jumped from around 5000 to 8000. Of these, between 6000 and 7000 are in uniform. It has been estimated that it costs an officer eighty-nine salutes to pass

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