

FACTORY WORK IN AMERICA

Why Europeans Leave Home

By H. Dubreuil

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IN FRANCE, WHEN a new foreman is appointed, the first thing that is done is to assign him a glass cage to separate him from the men at whose side he worked only the day before. This is a symbolic act. It makes the foreman, as well as those who have to obey his orders, understand that now a barricade stands between them. In America, on the other hand, an overseer or foreman simply occupies a high kind of pulpit situated in the midst of the machinery. Moreover, it has always seemed to me that in America foremen have less power over the men under them than they do in France. Most of the time they have to consult with their chiefs, which is at least a small guarantee that an important decision will not be intrusted to the often malicious spirit of some petty chief who, blinded by foolish pride, would not be able to see the consequences that might befall the family of some worker whom he discharges. The simple fact that men are not fired as readily as they are in France is a matter of great importance from the worker's point of view.

So profoundly is the spirit of democratic equality anchored in the American mentality that it can often be discerned in the writings of Taylor himself, who, to be sure, has written many things not entirely devoid of rudeness. But even he recognized the great importance of the orderly arrangement of one's tools and recommended fining anyone who left his tools in the wrong place. But since he was also very pre-occupied and sometimes left a tool carelessly in the wrong place, he imposed on himself the same fine that he would have imposed on the workers under him. He totally lacked that disdain certain people show for men who perform what is known as 'inferior tasks' and used to say that all activity which contributed to the completion of a single piece of work was worthy of equal respect and that one man was as good as another so long as he played his rôle, however humble it might be, as satisfactorily as the man charged with a more important duty.

I have often pointed out that this principle is applied in the United States with great simplicity and I want to bear witness to that fact here, for it is one of the things that contribute so much to making the

atmosphere in American factories so different from the atmosphere prevailing in most of ours. For one can pick out a number of little things that may justly be called symbolic of the more cordial relations between the chief and the subordinate, between the worker and the employer.

One day when I was giving up a job in one factory to go to another, the cashier said to me as he gave me my wages, 'So you're leaving the company. You have not been with us long. Have you found something else better?' When I told him where I was going, he spoke to me most cordially and, although we had never exchanged any words before, said: 'Good-bye then. I wish you good luck.'

These words amazed me. In more than twenty years' experience in French factories I was never the object of such politeness on the part of a person I did not know, and, since I witnessed a number of similar scenes in America, I returned home much less convinced than I used to be that we are the politest people in the world.

The result of this general state of mind is that the average attitude of the workers toward their employer, as well as the attitude of the chiefs and of the whole white-collar personnel, is very different from the attitude we know in France. In our country, conceit on the one hand finds its counterpart in hatred on the other. In America, since the worker does not feel any disdain weighing upon him, he cherishes no rancor or envy. The best proof of this is to be found in the popular vocabulary, which contains no equivalents for all those hostile expressions we use toward our employer, such as '*singe*' (monkey). The word 'boss,' which is the most commonly used, contains no taint of malevolence. In the Ford plant I never heard the workers refer to their great chief as anything else but Mr. Ford, and in the street car I never heard workers alluding to the factory for which they worked with the spirit of bitterness which we French constantly reveal. As a result, the internal life of an American enterprise is such that one readily understands why an emigrant, once installed, no longer dreams of returning 'to the other side of the water.'

I STILL see in my mind's eye a hasty and striking little scene that I once witnessed in the Ford plant. My shift included a little Rumanian Jew whose usual attitude jarred considerably on the people with whom he worked. He was always occupied in trying to dodge difficult tasks or trying to gain some favor and made himself so insupportable that he often aroused the impatience of his placid companions. On one occasion he made a demand that our immediate foreman refused and he promptly stopped the head foreman, who was passing by, and began reiterating his demand as volubly as his poor English allowed him to. The foreman, whose hands were full of papers, revealed clearly by his expression that the man had interrupted his train of thought, but

without any gesture of impatience he bent his tall, slender body over the figure of the little Jew, obviously expecting to hear the most precise and rapid explanation possible before making any attempt to answer yes or no, and departing to the more important work in which he was engaged.

That scene symbolizes to me the easy, direct contact between chief and subordinate and the complete attention the Americans are suddenly able to devote to certain problems, as well as their capacity for analyzing and deciding such problems in the minimum amount of time.

Such aspects as these of American life seem to me much more important than the stories of spying on workers that are told as if they were only true in America. People who delight in such stories are too apt to forget that this shadow on American industrial life is unfortunately not confined to American soil.

Here is another significant incident. When I was on the night shift in the Ford plant, I noticed the chief superintendent approaching me holding a large list. Without any preamble he promptly asked me: 'Are you for Mr. Hoover?' To understand this question, it is necessary to know that the preparation for a presidential election is a very important thing in the United States, where, as we know, the president is chosen by universal suffrage. Long before the opening of the campaign the parties make their nominations by petitions. Names of prominent men are chosen and people try to obtain as many signatures as they can in their behalf so that these men will seem to be designated in advance by a considerable number of citizens.

It was one of these lists that he was presenting to me, and I naturally declined his invitation, stating that I was not an American citizen. Without insisting further, the man moved on to someone else and repeated his question.

I need not add that such a demand would seem utterly intolerable in France, where we should look upon it as a form of pressure. But in America I can fairly state that no person who refused to sign such a petition would get into trouble. No one paid the least attention to the whole matter in the factory except to discuss the respective merits of the men proposed. As for the petition, people signed it or refused to sign it as easily as if it were done in the street, where electoral agents solicit you.

IF I were to compare such scenes with certain others that I witnessed in French factories, the comparison would not be to our advantage. And, if I have not found any American equivalent for our word, '*singe*,' neither have I found one for that expression, '*mon brave*,' which so many of our employers use with a malicious nuance in speaking to their employees, as if the same affectionate feelings existed between them as exist between certain well-born individuals and the subordinates to

whom they customarily address these words. I myself have never heard those words spoken without wanting to hurl them back immediately, and I often think of a certain Parisian workman who, on being addressed in that way, repeated:—

‘Why do you call me “*mon brave*”?’

‘But I don’t know your name.’

‘When I address someone whose name I do not know, I call him Monsieur.’

America is much less familiar with these bitter-sweet contacts than we are, and it may be added that those democratic usages that do so much to change the atmosphere in which work is done reveal themselves further in the fact that Americans are more and more tending to do away with the different treatment accorded the personnel in the office and the personnel in the factory. Piece work and expert book-keeping and accounting are paid about the same, and those who perform these functions are beginning to enjoy about the same vacations.

When people in our country complain about a certain disaffection toward work, why do we not perceive that it is simply due to the perpetual divisions that we constantly make and that arouse so much ill-feeling on the part of those who are engaged in productive work, which is always considered somewhat ignoble? Although many forms of factory work involve more physical fatigue and even more intellectual quality than office work, nevertheless the latter form of work is always awarded regular vacations with pay.

If anyone were to undertake a general and honest investigation of the condition of factory workers, it would at once be obvious that in France the men who enjoy the fewest advantages are precisely the ones who are submitted most rigorously to the law of production. All who enjoy salaries, independent of the value of the work they do, reap benefits that the worker almost never experiences. The state of social abandonment in which a man of such primary usefulness as the laborer is left is symbolic of an injustice whose effects are all too evident.





BARCELONA BULLFIGHT

A British View of the Spanish National Pastime

By Newman Craig

From the *National Review*, London Tory Monthly

WHO HAS NOT BEEN to the "Toros" has not been to Spain,' runs an old saying, the truth of which becomes apparent to the most casual visitor.

So it was that, anxious to miss nothing of the life of the country in which I now found myself, I sallied forth at once to the Plaza to obtain a ticket for the bullfight (*corrida*) to be held that Sunday. The first surprise to a sun-starved Briton was to find that seats in the sun cost little, while those in the shade run up to over a £1 each, according to their height above the arena and location in respect to the President's box. Middle-priced seats get shade part of the time and sun the rest. Later that afternoon I was glad that I had thrown economy to the winds and paid 30 pesetas (18 shillings) for the right to a minute portion of a stone gallery seat close to the President's box and therefore well in the shade.

The *corrida* was to commence at 5 P.M., so, shortly before, I thought I would drive in an inexpensive bus to the neighboring arena, pride of the city. Never was there a more fatuous hope. Although the rival attractions of the Exhibition and an international 'futbol' match were taking crowds in the opposite direction, it seemed to me that almost all Barcelona wanted to go to the bullfight. A theatre-matinée queue had already formed for each bus, so I regretfully took a taxi.

In the train a Spaniard had vouchsafed the information that in Barcelona the taxi fare on the clock included the tip, and that one should, therefore, never give any more than the figure registered! Perhaps that is why, when I ventured to add a peseta (8 pence) to the fare on the clock, my driver apparently desired to spend the rest of the after-