

## XVI

### PRIDE AND PREJUDICE

MANY of the things which are most important to workers have never been attained for them by collective bargaining. Some of these essential satisfactions can be partially gained through the union contract, or through the organizational activities within the union. In some instances, reasonably satisfactory substitutes for the real desires can result from union action.

One of the most important satisfactions, which is necessary to the personality of every worker, is some measure of approbation, and a high degree of acceptance, on the part of his fellow workers. A substantial number of the employers of today have not shown recognition of the increased importance of this basic need, and the change in the form in which the employee must find it fulfilled.

There was a time when the approval and acceptance which was first in importance to the employee was his own approval and acceptance by the employer, the boss, or more exactly, the foreman. Many of the factors which contributed to this importance have been weakened by the changes of the past thirty years. In the earlier generation, the employer practically owned the job because he owned the plant and the tools. The worker had to win and hold the approval of such an employer. Today the management which hires the workers is not usually composed of the owners. The managers themselves are employees. They differ from other employees in that they are usually hired more directly by the owners, and given special responsibilities.

Neither the hired managers nor the stockholder owners control the jobs today in the sense that the owner-manager

controlled the jobs in the early years of the century. Some laws have directly taken over part of the control of wages. Others have indirectly limited the managerial control of jobs through the sponsorship and protection of collective bargaining. The union machinery which has been created and developed during recent years has further reduced this control. Various seniority provisions in union contracts have reduced the value of the foreman's opinion or friendship in awarding promotions or assigning layoffs. Social Security and various other devices have reduced the threat and the severity of unemployment. These and many other influences have decreased the importance to the worker of winning the approbation of the boss.

Some of these same changes have increased the importance to the worker of the approbation of his own group. In the particular field of the union itself, a new scale of social values has been created for him. Status can come to him through the indirect recognition of such characteristics as courage, aggressiveness, logical thinking and speaking, devotion to the interest and welfare of the group. The positive expressions of group approval may come through election to an office in the union local, or selection to serve on any one of many committees. These approvals by his associates may have no relation to his job status; it is not uncommon to find the janitor or the hand trucker serving as president of a union of production workers. Negative results of the disapproval of the group within the union are usually uncomfortable and undesirable, and in extreme cases, brutally severe.

Entirely outside the organized group which is the union, there is an inherent demand for acceptance and approval by neighbors, friends, and particularly by fellow workers. This demand has always existed but until recent years it has been obscured, partly by the effort to win the approval of the boss, and partly by the absence of the machinery which gives groups the power to be vocal. The protected opportunity to

speaking as an organized group, through the union, has been accompanied by an increase in the group expression within the smaller and more informal groups. The daily life of a worker on the job is unsatisfactory if he does not conduct himself in such a way as to win the approbation of the immediate group with which he works. He becomes subject to a dangerous frustration if he does not conform reasonably closely to the customs, attitudes, and opinions of the other members of his crew or gang.

Off the job, the worker is frequently a member of some other informal group whose approbation is important to him. It may be a fixed or a flexible poker game group for Friday nights. It may be the five men who share the ownership of the motor boat. It may be the three families who customarily drive out together for their Sunday picnics in summer. It may be just his own family. Their approbation is largely based on his behavior as a member of their particular group. But it also has some basis in what they know about his status in his working hours, not so much his earnings or his job title, but the fact that he is filling a job which symbolizes respect. It may be the job of a skilled mechanic, or of a strong freight handler, or of a trusted cashier or gate watchman, or of a group leader or foreman.

Another deep-seated need, which is closely related to the approval of the outside group, is the opportunity for the worker to be proud of his employer. This may seem to be a far-fetched statement, and to be in conflict with many of the actions and attitudes of organized workers. There is sufficient evidence available to convince the careful observer that the desire to be proud of the place where he works, the company for which he works, the boss for whom he works, is actually present to some degree in almost every employee. It is one of the factors which contributes to his status in the community. In his contacts with the neighbors, the beer-parlor club, the grocer, and the radio dealer, he stands a

little higher if he can be proud of the fact that he works for Company X. It is related to the fact that so many people welcome the chance to say "I work for the government."

In the union meeting, in the grievance committee, or as a member of the bargaining committee, an employee may denounce and malign the employing company and everyone connected with it. He may accuse the stockholders and directors of greed, the manager and superintendent of chiseling, and the foreman of incompetence, discrimination, and unfairness. More than one amateur orator has satisfied one of his appetites by such expressions, and later in the evening has angrily defended his company against the insults of some outsider. Workers who have been "blasting" the foreman and the superintendent and the manager at the committee meeting within the plant, will take the time and energy that night for an amazingly different "blast" at someone who works for a neighboring plant: "Sure, we got plenty of trouble with the higher-ups, but you don't catch any of us quitting our jobs to go to work in that flea-bitten, leaky-roofed joint where you work, with its heap of worn-out machinery and rusty tools. Why, listen, the trash that you turn out goes straight to the phoney second-hand stores, and you know it. When that outfit of yours is sold out by the sheriff, our joint will still be trying to catch up on orders from the finest hardware stores in every city east of the Mississippi."

Pride in the organization of which one is a member, pride in the establishment in which one works, are essential elements of self-respect. It may be the luncheon or service club, the college alumni, the professional society, the church, the union, the male chorus, the lodge, or the Red Front Department Store. No normal human being is willing to admit membership in a group which he himself does not respect, and which the community does not respect. When an employee denounces the management in his conversation with fellow workers or in his arguments with management representa-

tives, he is not humiliating himself. He can accuse the foreman of favoritism, he can charge the superintendent with ignorance and incompetence, he can denounce the president of the company as a blood-sucking capitalist. As long as he releases his diatribes inside the organization, he is likely to feed his vanity, and unlikely to depreciate his own importance. But when he talks to the man who works for another company, he needs a different support for his self-respect. When he is talking to anyone outside the group where he must fight his battle for some internal objective, he is likely to assume a different attitude.

Even outside the plant, he may display bitterness toward the employer and all the stooges of the employer in order to stiffen the backbone of the union business agent who is helping to fight his battle. His assertions to the mediator, the conciliator, the arbitrator, or the representative of the NLRB may approach unrestrained denunciation of the employer. But most of his contacts outside the plant and its personnel are contacts in which his own relative status is partly determined by the regard of his companions for his place of employment. In such conversations, he is likely to bolster his own sense of importance by defending his company or his plant or his store; perhaps likely to go a little beyond his honest day-time beliefs as to the virtues of "the outfit." Almost instinctively, he wants to be connected with a concern of which he can be proud.

The attitude of a community toward the industrial plants within its boundaries is a relatively new field for opinion research. Enough has already been done to justify some broad conclusions. One of the most definite is that the general population in a community forms its opinion of a local industry chiefly on the basis of what the employees of that industry say about it. The second apparent conclusion is that any particular opinion about an industrial establishment will be substantially the same in the minds of the employees and

of the general population, but more positive and probably more intense in the minds of the employees.

In one such study, it was found that 77 percent of the general population held the opinion that the local mill was a good place to work; 85 percent of the employees of the mill, and of their families, held this opinion. As another illustration, 58 percent of the "cross section" of the community thought that the local industries "offer workers a good chance to get ahead on the job"; 71 percent of the employees held this opinion.

If he has any reasonable basis for doing so, the average American worker will brag a little bit about the place where he works, when he is talking to outsiders. In so doing, he indirectly wins credit for himself, or at least bolsters his own respect for himself. If he thinks the plant is a good place to work, he wants his neighbors to think so.

A favorable union contract is a natural source of pride to the individual member whose delegated bargaining power was part of the strength which the union applied in getting the contract. Even when the contract has been won after long and difficult negotiations or an effective strike, the average worker is proud of the contract. It is a short step from this to the proud statement that "I work at Jones and Jones, where we've got the best darned union contract in the industry." He needs to be proud of something about the place where he works, in order to be proud of himself. Obviously, a pride which is based on a satisfactory union agreement forced upon the employer is of less value to the enterprise than pride which is based on other factors and conditions. Still, the employee wants to be proud of the place where he works.

What are some of the bases for pride which an intelligent employer can create? What are the things of which he can be proud, along with his employees?

It should be no disappointment to find that some of the important reasons for pride are within the scope of collective

bargaining, or closely related to it. In the same surveys mentioned above, it was found that a large majority of the people in a community thought that the local unions were truly representing the wishes of their members. They thought the unions and the managements of the local industries were getting along well together, and that management was entitled to part of the credit for this condition. (Here, again, the employees themselves were even more emphatic in expressing the same opinion.) These are conditions involved in collective bargaining, of which management can be proud. It can likewise be proud of the fact that it is paying good wages, that it has a liberal vacation policy, that it has provided the best possible working conditions, all based upon or reflected in the union contract.

But most of the factors which win community respect and goodwill for an industry are those which are not the result of a collective bargaining arrangement. For instance, one of the measurements by which the community almost always judges the "goodness" of an industrial establishment is the appearance of the plant. Another is the reputation of its products. Another is the interest which its management personnel takes in the general affairs of the community. The average citizen expresses himself quite freely as to the company's stability, progressiveness, prosperity, and general regard for the public interest.

The characteristics of an employing company which give it a good public reputation are largely outside the field of collective bargaining. The activities which win public approval are not usually those which are carried on because of a commitment in the union contract. A good reputation based on all-round good citizenship, good management, and good business conduct, is important to almost any business enterprise. It is important because of its effect on customers, suppliers, legislative bodies, and public officials. But perhaps we have underestimated its effect upon employees and prospec-

tive employees. The company which enjoys this kind of reputation normally has first choice among workers available for employment. The greatest value in its employee relations is that such a reputation makes it possible for the employee to be proud of his connection with the company.

This value is capable of being expressed in dollars and cents. For instance, it exerts a definite effect upon the labor-turnover figures; it is one of the many factors which help such a company to retain an employee who has been carefully selected, and whose "quit" would be a definite item of expense.

The ability of an employee to be proud of his employer is both a sign of good morale, and a very large factor in the creation of that morale. It should not be assumed that being proud of the company will make an employee complacent over any personal mistreatment, or over an inadequate wage, or unsafe working conditions. Normally the employer who tolerates or attempts to maintain such conditions will not enjoy a good reputation in the community, and will not be the kind of employer of whom employees can be proud. The banishing of justifiable causes for employee discontent within the plant is one of the first steps toward being worthy of a good reputation outside the plant, and being worthy of the pride of the employee-members of the team. As a matter of fact, most of these causes for discontent can be superficially removed through the process of collective bargaining, some of them basically removed. It is beyond this line, beyond the area of collective bargaining, that the employer has the opportunity and obligation to make his establishment genuinely worthy of the respect of the community and the pride of the employee.

The primary need for the creation of good labor relations, as distinguished from generally good employee relations, was emphasized by another opinion survey related to those mentioned previously. It was found that, regardless of



its other virtues, no company which had a record of "labor trouble" was rated as a good company in the cross-section opinion of the community.

It is probably incorrect to say that a good reputation, well-earned, may be destroyed by labor trouble. It is probably much safer to say that the elements which earn such a good reputation for any company will be built on a foundation of good labor relations. There is evidence that the general public in a community can usually distinguish between labor trouble which is caused by unwise or unfair attitudes of the employer, and the occasional subversive type of labor trouble which is caused by infiltration of radicals into the union itself. No employer can be sure of permanent freedom from an unjust strike, inspired by the emotional appeals or clever sabotage tactics of subversive leaders. But he can be reasonably sure that the character and good reputation which he has built, outside the area of collective bargaining, will go a long way toward winning a fair hearing at the bar of public opinion. They will also go a long way in restoring the goodwill and retaining the pride of his own employees.

It is possible that an actual majority of the wage earners in America, or at least a majority of the unionized wage earners, have accepted the emotional picture of Big Business, identified as the mortal enemy of the Working Class. Members of this probable majority are responsive to false and destructive propaganda against Capitalists, the Morgans and Rockefellers, the Sixty Families, the Employer Class. They are ready to believe that the Owners keep thirty, sixty, or even ninety cents out of every dollar they take in, and grow fatter and richer off the poorly paid Workers who produce all this wealth. Frequently this general and emotional enmity against employers as a class is crystallized in an enmity against the particular employer. There are hundreds of thousands of men and women on the payrolls of employers whom they despise and hate, partly because they have been taught

to despise and hate all employers, and partly because the foreman promoted his own nephew or the cafeteria served cold coffee.

Far more frequently there is a distinction in the mind of the worker between employers as a class and his own employer. Far more frequently he will say "If they were all like our company we wouldn't have these conditions." In millions of cases the employee, while he cannot trace his reasoning process, feels that it is a credit to him personally that *his* company is not like the rest of them. He gains some satisfaction in identifying himself with the downtrodden working class, and giving support to the movements which claim to serve their interests. He will contribute time, talk, money, and votes to the organization or the candidate having the most glowing promise for "full employment" or "labor's share of the wealth" or "driving the money changers out of the temple."

But in his own heart he does not want to be mistaken for one of the Downtrodden. He wants credit for having selected an employer who is different. He is unwilling to be classed with the millions to whom he gives his sympathy and support, the millions who are oppressed and exploited by heartless corporations and greedy employers. Admitting that Employers are the enemies of Workers, *his* particular employer is not *his* enemy. He, this individual employee, bowls with the foreman on Thursday night, and has talked to the manager a dozen times about the open-house program, and has met the president of the company. He definitely gains in self-respect by believing and saying that his own employer is different. For his own satisfaction, he wants to be proud of his employer.

Subversive propagandists working for a totalitarian cause have had considerable success in planting ideas of hate toward a legendary ruling class in America. Much of their success has been due to the volunteer alliance of a more

numerous group of propagandists who are simply demagogues, seeking personal benefit or political advancement. The whole effort has been characterized by falsehood and distorted facts, aimed at an unidentified group of conspirators, variously described as the Employers, the Capitalists, or Big Business. By comparison, the counterefforts of business men and industrialists have been feeble and futile. Perhaps we should abandon the attempt to defend such imaginary entities as the Employers, and concentrate on the task of earning understanding and respect for the Employer, the one employer whom each worker really knows, his own.

When we attempt to combat the subversive propaganda, we are running against the current of the wishes of the employee. He wants to believe that there is a conspiracy of wealthy and greedy employers, exploiting millions of downtrodden workers. He wants to build up his self-esteem by feeling that his money and his votes are important contributions to the crusade for the liberation of millions. But the same desire for self-respect makes him unwilling to be classed individually as one of the oppressed. He wants to believe that the conspiring employers "put over a Slave Labor Law," but he seldom undertakes to identify himself as the slave.

Spokesmen for the capitalistic system have worked hard at showing who really owns American industry. They have stressed the millions of small stockholders. The average worker is not impressed. He is even less impressed when subversive propaganda is answered in similar form. If he is faced with absolute contradictions in two pamphlets, two advertisements or two propaganda films, his choice of which to believe depends on attitudes and experiences entirely outside the subject matter. Technically, if one statement can be false, so can another. If one film can be deceptive, so can the opposing film. He will not give his acceptance to one story or its opposite on the basis of the quality of the printing or the photography. Actually the direct attempt to change his belief

implies a criticism of his intelligence and a suggestion of his gullibility. The attack on propaganda through similar propaganda is not likely to succeed even to the extent of creating a stalemated neutrality.

When a single employer or a single employing company conducts its daily life in such a way as to merit the respect of its employees, it has infinitely greater opportunity for success than when it tries to defend or glorify the nonexistent Employer Class. When five hundred thousand American employer corporations do the right kind of job, each in its own little province; when each of them wins the respect of its own employees; when each of them is removed, in the minds of its own employees, from the imaginary conspiracy of the Employer Class; then and only then will the American system have an invulnerable defense against the subversive propaganda of hate and distrust.

For the sake of the American system of freedom and profit, as well as for the sake of immediate good employee relations, it is the duty of every company and establishment to give its employees the chance—which they want—to be proud of their particular employer.