

Labor and Leisure

By DR. MORTIMER ADLER
 Director of the Institute of Philosophical Research
 San Francisco

(Based on a talk presented to a meeting of the Northern California Training Directors' Association and reported by Miss Lucille Parker, Personnel Clerk, Machine Records Department, Naval Supply Center, Oakland.)

The things I am saying here tonight could not have been said 100 years ago—not even 50 years ago. Today the Industrial Revolution is here, and we can readily recognize that fact when we grasp the following historical figures. In 1850 almost 85% of the manufactured commodities were produced by human and animal muscle. Today the situation is reversed—15% of the use commodities is the product of man and animal muscle, the balance is the output of the machine.

One hundred years ago, Labor and Leisure referred to two classes in society. Labor and Leisure now refer to a way of life: all men labor, and all men have leisure. This is an absolute revolution.

WE have for the most part eliminated the distinction of labor and leisure as classes. Historically our nation was founded by a leisure class. Founded on republican precepts, it has come to the present age of democracy on the back of the Industrial Revolution. Our founding fathers were members of the leisure class—busy men, but men who were educated to a life of leisure.

When people are asked to tell how they spend their 24 hours each day, they usually break it down into three

parts: (1) work, (2) sleep, (3) leisure, play, or recreation. That is a poor statement to give as an accounting. The worker should see his life has having four distinct activities: (1) work, (2) sleep, (3) leisure, (4) play or recreation. Some play has utility—like sleep it washes away fatigues, tensions, distractions.

LEISURE does not mean play. In its Greek and Latin roots, leisure means learning. Leisure activities are all those things which are intrinsically worth while—not as a part of something else. Leisure is what educates or develops the individual. Leisure means the time to study and engage in the arts, sciences, to act as the governors of society and the opportunity to be civilized. The moral and social duties we perform as parents, or as citizens.

The Industrial Age has brought to all or most of the western (especially American) society the opportunity to participate in leisure of this type. That is, the opportunity is here but we are not necessarily aware of it. This is largely due to the fact that we look upon our work and the technological developments as the means to subsistence and play. When we spend our present 40 hours at work in a state of boredom, we



DR. MORTIMER ADLER

tend to seek relief through play, and opiates of that nature.

Time free from the slavery of work and required sleep, instead of being leisure, turns into time-killing pursuits. Time-killing is evidence of our poorly stated view of life and suggests the greatest of waste. The measure of life is time, and when we talk of killing time we are slowly committing suicide.

Work, in essence, is compulsory. Nothing is work unless you have to do it. Nothing is work unless you do it for compensation to cover those bare necessities of life which include food and lodging.

To distinguish between acts of leisure and acts of work, we can consider the life of Jefferson. Because of inherited wealth his was a life of leisure. His acts

were without compensation. He wrote books, built houses, governed and grew in stature thereby. It is the compulsory character of work that distinguishes it from leisure. The work of Jefferson was social, free from compulsion and therefore his work constituted leisure.

The nature of the Greek society of Plato and Aristotle was such that the free members of that society constituted the leisure class. The slave class, on which they existed, has a counterpart in our society when man is forced to work with a sense of compulsion. While earning one's living one can still carry a sense of fulfillment because the work seems worthy of the effort expended and where there is no sense of futility or boredom. Many teachers, professional people, the military and others engaged in social enterprises come into this category. The good professional educator evidences no line between work and leisure—it is the same activity, but for some of it he is compensated.

THERE are still some drudgery jobs to be done, but they become fewer and fewer. Jobs such as coal mining, timbering and manning ships may be drudgery. Manipulation of the new automatic machines should engender less drudgery in the lives of men. Yet, the stenographer, at the typewriter finds the work drudgery and seeks ways to escape boredom. Job changing, and the coffee hour are evidences of workers who see their jobs as just a little better than drudgery. Their hours are not intrinsically rewarding. They may be inspired by the man they work for, but certainly not by the job.

The machine tender in general has displayed evidences of boredom that plague employers and philosophers alike. These evidences are measurable against the interests of artists, physicians, nurses and others who could conceivably go on because they love doing what they are doing, even if they were relieved from the need to support themselves by inheriting wealth. Probably doctors, teachers, and professional people—except lawyers—top the list of those who couldn't and wouldn't draw a line between work time and leisure time.

OUR great problem at present is recognizing the great amount of drudgery we daily see about us in the downtown offices and in our manufacturing plants. People trying to shorten the work day by resorting to almost anything that comes under the heading of time killers. The situation does not seem to change because of our present methods of shortening work hours, increasing wages, and supplying incentives and awards. One example that seems indicative of the whole situation was the artistic endeavor of the olden day shoemaker the individual craftsman whose skill and art were not too different from the art of the painter.

America, in its Industrial Revolution, has not made all levels of workers capable of using leisure. We see workers who spend futile and desperate hours trying to use up the free time that the 40 hours week or less gives them—but what will they do when the 25 hours week comes?

In 1850 it was the leisure class that set the tone and contributed the civilizing influences in our society, but now that class has disappeared and our civilization must come from all the people contributing in their leisure hours.

Never to be solved by merely affording more wages and fewer hours, the problem will only be met by an effort to liberalize work, and at the same time allow the leisure aspects to evolve. The assembly line can't be liberalized like individual tasks can be, but there must be some way of restoring a sense of individual contribution, so that the individual sees that the task is worth doing for his own good and for the good of society.

The more men who can be relieved of drudgery and given jobs liberalized in terms of leisure, the better off we are. This is the challenge to our imagination and wits. We forget that there are two forms of slavery, the chattel slave and the wage slave. The office secretary's work can be a kind of slavery. As Aristotle defined it a slave is a man who is not his own man, and whose work is not his own work, but whose work rebounds to his owner. Lincoln pointed out in his debates with Douglas, the only difference between the southern slave and the northern slave in the factories of Massachusetts or New Hampshire was that the northern slave could strike.

THE last fifty years have been marked by national legislation, labor unions, and

(Continued on page 25)

Joseph H. Jackson Appointed S. A. M. Publications Director



The Society for Advancement of Management has named Dr. Joseph H. Jackson as Publications Director, it was announced in June by Harold R. Bixler, Executive Vice President of Society Operations. In recent years Dr. Jackson has been Personnel Manager of the American Gas and Electric Service Corporation and the Columbia Broadcasting System and Editor and Business Manager of the *Journal of Industrial Training*, now the *Journal of the ASTD*.

In his new post, Dr. Jackson will be editor of *Advanced Management*, the monthly magazine of the Society, and he will also prepare the Society's publicity and edit the *S.A.M. Newsletter* and other publications.

LABOR AND LEISURE

(Continued from page 12)

labor negotiations which have increased the sense of participation in the common good for the individual worker. The whole aim in our industrial society is to have a society of free men. Our effort is toward reorganizing the nature of freedom in human action so that life contributes to the dignity of man and to the dignity of labor. When we speak of the dignity of man we mean that man is always an end, never a means. When we speak of the dignity of labor we mean that work should have its end in the individual—be for his good.

These are hard and strict demands for survival of our democracy. The trend has been toward the emancipation of man from slavery to make him free in society and in industry. It should continue if the liberalization of work continues, if it becomes less servile, and if we adhere to the idea that we must never let the real significance of leisure escape us.

The training director's job must not only be to strive toward the liberalizing of work, but also to prepare people for the better use of the leisure time that will result.

The two most prevalent human ills of our society are discontent with work, occupational maladjustment, and those persons who have to kill time. The ideal is to be doing work which one enjoys with the result that there is no time to kill.