

THE ARMY INDUSTRIAL COLLEGE
WASHINGTON, D. C.

Course 1933-1934

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SOME ASPECTS OF THE PROBLEM OF CIVILIAN MORALE

by

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February 6, 1934

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Gentlemen:

I want to talk to you this morning about things I have not thought through at all but things I am trying to do some thinking about because they may have a very considerable amount of significance as they affect both the peace-time and, it seems to me, the war-time morale of the civilian population. Of course, the aspect that has been interesting me particularly is the question of civilian morale in an emergency such as we are now going through, but in thinking about this talk this morning I thought the same problems might be equally significant in their bearing on the morale of the civilian population in a war emergency.

I got into this subject through some researches which our Industrial Research Department has been conducting, first in cooperation with the Western Electric Company and then later in Newburyport, Massachusetts. In our efforts to get an understanding of labor relations we decided that we must know more of how men behave under conditions of work. We were fortunate enough to make an alliance with the Western Electric Plant at Hawthorne for a long research study extending over a period of five or six years which gave us a continuous minute to minute record of production for a group of girls in the so-called "test-room" for this period. We also have a running history of the work. Thus we know as near as possible what happened. The records were made automatically so that they are subject to all kinds of mathematical measurements.

We have found some amazing things. We found that changing the position of five girls, that is, the seating arrangements, in a group as small as that, profoundly modified the social organization of the room. This resulted in a change in the production curves of each girl; and we are able to show that these changes are occasioned by the different manner in which the work attitudes of the girls reacted on each other as a result of their altered positions. We found that to be just one of many indications that the morale of a group of people goes back to the emotional content of their minds more than to any other one thing. We found things of this sort: the group being studied was put onto shorter hours, and simultaneously rate of output rose; the introduction of rest periods resulted in faster work; light refreshments during rest pauses had the same result. Then, one after another, these incentives were removed, and output rate continued at its high level. All of which proved conclusively that the importance of these changes lay not in their factual detail but in the sentiment which underlay those changes; and that by the better understanding of the emotional content of the minds of this group it was possible to control

their work morale, and overwhelm the traditional reactions to the incentives on which men have been relying to increase production - to overwhelm them to such an extent that they could be taken out, and still get increased production. This work has shown that the effectiveness of an incentive does not lie primarily in its form, but in the emotional and social situation it evokes.

That was a very surprising thing to me. I do not think any of us had any conception of the extent to which the elements affecting morale, as contrasted with the other incentives we had become accustomed to (such as wage incentives) stimulated production. In the course of this study of the morale of this small group, and by the way, while I speak of this small group the test was extended to many employees with similar results although not with mathematical measurements, we found that a good many problems of morale went back into the social background, into the home surroundings of the girls in this group and the home surroundings of the larger group on whom the experiments were later applied. We started in then with the feeling that we must know more about the organization of society in our communities and we have under way at the present time a study of the city of Newburyport, a city anthropologically and ethnologically suited for a study of this sort. The study is being conducted under the leadership of a man who has spent considerable time in Australia studying primitive tribes. He is using the same technique and is finding the same sort of factors at work in Newburyport that he found in the primitive tribes of Australia. We took a community in Mississippi, 70% colored and 30% white to get a different cross-section in the black belt in Mississippi, and the University has in process a similar study of a homogeneous Irish community.

All of these things interested me in primitive society. I do not pretend to be anything but a third hand student of this subject; it is not in my field; but I did become interested in these primitive societies because we had so many proofs that the key was emotional. I wanted to study these societies where the importance of the emotional side of ordinary organization is clear because the society is so much simpler and one can see things at work. Roughly speaking, it comes down to this: that all of these primitive societies have what one professor of anthropology calls an integration at three levels. First, the technological. Every primitive society, like every complex society, has to make its living out of the land in one form or

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another. Every society to survive has to make that particular type of adjustment to its environment. Then there are two other types of adjustments, all three run into each other, the social integration - the things that make it possible for men to live together, and the religious or magic integration - the higher sanctions that make men do things because they are the things to be done. To find in all of these primitive societies these three levels - the technological adjustment backed up by these social and religious methodologies and modes of living. They make possible complex technological community accomplishments where, because of magics and ceremonials, everybody fits into his particular job, such as building a ship or sailing a canoe, very elaborate things for a small native community to work out. Let me illustrate from Malinowski's Argonauts of the Western Pacific and the institution of the Kula. The Kula in the Trobriand Islands is a combination of technology, social ritual and magic. In this ring of islands covering several hundreds of miles, separated by long distances for sailing canoes, it is almost a religion that on dates fixed by negotiation with the next island the chief shall build a canoe and start out in it for that island. Each man in the crew takes for every man who is in the Kula with him (that is, with whom he has personal relations) a necklace made out of red shells. When the canoe arrives at the next island these necklaces of red shells are given in exchange for bracelets of white shells. This custom provides the principal reason for existence in these islands. These trinkets are passed around and they keep traveling, the white shells traveling anti-clockwise and the red clockwise. They travel in a circle and are never kept. They have no more value than crown jewels but underneath this ceremonial, which is the main reason for existence, there goes on a very elaborate trade involving thousands of people. Under cover of these necklaces they build ships and carry on international trade with the adjoining islands. The whole thing is supported by social and religious ceremonial.

The British Governor decided that polygamy was offensive and told the native chiefs that they could not have any more wives; that they need not fire their existing wives but they could not have any new ones. When the wives died out they could not be replaced. But the chief thereby lost his right to lay tribute on his wives' families and some of them could no longer support these elaborate ceremonials. The men working on shipbuilding or in the crews have to be fed and as the wives of the chiefs decreased in number they no longer had the required wealth and the ceremonial is breaking down. The whole institution is based on ceremonials and social customs. The significance of them seems to be to take men who are emotional and who would naturally behave in a great variety of ways and through these ceremonials to make them behave in a dependable way - to make them fit into community life. The

adjustment to environment is worked out by methods which cause the individual to behave in predictable manners.

We have in our society a great many similar rituals. The gold standard is one which we have just thrown into a state of flux. It is worshipped by groups in the same way these ceremonials are carried on by more primitive tribes. Crown jewels have little intrinsic difference from the red shell necklaces. I started thinking about these influences in Colonial times. All along the coast there were groups with strong religious sanctions and each group had to conquer a new technology - had to find out how to live in a new environment. In Plymouth a large number of pilgrims died the first winter but the intimately related religious sanctions and social customs kept the community together. So it was in all the communities along the coastline. The neighborhood was the unit both economically, socially and religiously. As contacts were slow and limited each neighborhood was self-sustaining. There were slight modifications, from sea borne traffic but they were very slight on the whole. Each community had to be self-supporting. The small technological activities of the time were carried on locally and there was a stable technology, a stable society and a stable religious situation, the same three things we have observed in these primitive societies.

Then the Industrial Revolution came along and threw technology into flux. It introduced through railroads and steamships a much greater mobility, but destroyed the fixed homogeneity of the group and made it easier for men to go from one place to another. West of the Allegheny mountains new frontiers developed and every one of them was a confused frontier. Technology was in flux and society was in flux. The Mississippi River district, west coast, and mountain states - all of them were disorganized communities while the force, the strength of the neighborhood in the east in no way suffered. Indeed these forces were able in the long run to spread Eastern sanctions and customs over the new frontier and to the west coast. In the San Francisco community the neighborhood sanctions became strong enough to make it perhaps the most conservative in the United States.

Before the Electrical Revolution came along the Power Revolution continued to develop, agriculture moved to the middle west, the stable way of living was turned into an uncertain business and great conditions of flux came in all along the line, while shortage of cheap labor developed to the point where we stimulated immigration to fill. These new immigrants built up a great variety of groups and our great cities - New York, Chicago, etc., developed, and the neighborhood could not get control. All of these great cities have the characteristics of the earlier frontiers and the neighborhood is no longer an effective unit because it is neither

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economically nor socially self-contained. The great cities have grown so fast they are not one neighborhood but a conglomeration of mixed people, no one of the groups keeping its social stability. We have the frontier type of disorganization all along the line. As a result, all types of social controls have become very much weaker. We no longer have one God, but a great variety of gods and because of this the influence of religion has become very much weaker. The ultimate sanctions are weaker. We see even in the smaller communities the disintegration of the neighborhood because the neighborhood is no longer socially homogeneous.

We face today the problems involved in getting a substitute for the social controls that were effective during the first two centuries of the history of this country. We have not solved that problem. Similar factors account, in large part, for the growth of nationalistic feeling not only here but all over the world. In Europe while the details are different, the same kind of analysis shows the same kind of disintegrating force. We find all over the world, - in Russia, Italy, Germany, France, Japan, India, China and America - a simultaneous great increase in centralization and a great growth in nationalism. I think it comes to this: that the old emotional ideas which everybody clung to have lost their strength, their effectiveness, and we are unconsciously struggling for something which will take the place of these ordinary controls.

Take the administration problems involved. In the primitive society administration virtually does not exist. Men fall into line without control on the part of the chief, because that is the thing to do. The selectmen and overseers in our Colonial New England had similar problems and handled them well. It did not require any particular administrative skill, just ordinary common sense and knowledge of the work at hand. As technology began to change rapidly administration became more important and more complex. We had factory management problems. We have solved those problems with extraordinary effectiveness on everything but the side of morale of labor relations. If a new product is invented tomorrow, there are many men in the United States who would know how to go to work to manufacture it skillfully and at somewhere near minimum cost except where they ran into labor difficulties, which is the weak point in our factory management.

In other words, we have worked out the solution of the technological problems which follow changes. All of these changes nevertheless constantly put new problems up to an already disintegrated people. For instance, we have absolute chaos in marketing. We have absolutely lost control of this field. We have great competing institutions driving each other in and out of business with

great rapidity and we do not know where the end will be in our marketing machinery. The constant offering of new choices to a community which, because it lacks ordinary controls, is susceptible to all kinds of mass influences through such approaches as advertising, for example, introduces an element of instability in our marketing which is extremely important, and justifies some of our faculty in referring to our present situation as a Marketing Revolution as compared to the Industrial Revolution - a Marketing Revolution following on and coming as a result of the Industrial Revolution.

Now, let us take the present situation and analyze the significance of what has happened. Mr. Roosevelt came in to office at a time when the community was pretty well down and out through disorganization. Everything was shot to pieces, including the morale of the nation, and he did a perfectly marvelous job in restoring morale. I think one of the most dramatic things that has happened in this country is the restoration of the morale of the nation brought about by Roosevelt last spring and summer. That job was so good that it will overcome a good many errors. It was so good that it was, in its effect on the people, strikingly like the situation that follows on a declaration of war. It brought the community together to a degree that was amazing. Now we come to the practical program with which that accomplishment was followed up. A great deal of action was necessary as a follow-up, quite as in war time. The chaos that existed in Washington this past summer was strangely like that existing when I spent the summer here after we went into the war. It was inevitable. Nevertheless we have the same lack of coordination that followed as the war developed in that summer. But beneath this inevitable administrative difficulty we can see that certain types of errors are being made. There is an insufficient appreciation of the importance of existing rituals and of existing modes of doing things. There is too great a desire on the part of many men who are on the firing line and doing jobs that have to be done to combine getting us out of this emergency with reforming the world. There is also insufficient realization of the importance of using social forms and methods that now exist as the basis for new activities.

One of the most striking instances is the Securities Act and the proposed Stock Exchange Act. These go so far into the regulation of the securities business that it may make them practically impossible and thereby destroy one of the things so necessary, namely, the mechanisms for the flow of private capital into industry, particularly into the capital goods industry where a great bulk of our unemployment exists. Our industrial unemployment is something over one half million in consumers' goods industries and five million in producers' goods industries. Roughly eight or ten times as much unemployment exists in producers' goods industries as in consumers'

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goods industries. When we destroy the mechanism for the flow of private capital from the private investor to the capital goods industries we make it very much more difficult to accomplish the result of getting that particular unemployment out of the way. We put a very much heavier burden on government finance because in so far as employment is dependent on the appropriation of government funds, if the government is going to undertake to supply the whole gap, it runs into so many billions of dollars that the task may be beyond the capacity of the government to accomplish. Private capital is needed in securing reemployment and private capital has ceased to flow, very largely because of the failure to maintain existing institutions and habits and build up those habits.

There is something in the situation which is distinctly analagous to war-time planning. You probably have carried out plans beyond the stage of civilian talk that I hear into the stage of actual planning - but there is a great deal of talk among civilians to the effect that if we had another war everything should be drafted - capital, labor, and so forth, and put to work on a plan. I believe that whole current of thought is fundamentally in error. I believe that it should be the basis of planning for war that just so far as it is possible to get along without disturbing the habits of the civilian population by using the mechanisms of peace-time, this should be done; that you can by proper tax laws accomplish all that you would accomplish by actual controls; that if an attempt is made to substitute actual controls the problem of maintaining morale will be found to be very much more difficult than it would have been if, in every way in which it is possible to do it, the normal working of the rituals of peace had been preserved. I refer to the methods by which in times of peace the distribution of products is carried out, making perfectly sure that profits are not excessive, by tax laws rather than by an attempt to do everything by centralized control from the military and civilian-military headquarters in the nation's capital. I think that the basis of all war-time planning, just as the basis of our effort to fight this depression should be the use of existing rituals, the use of the emotional habits of men in our community to the maximum extent possible. I believe such a basis is even more important to the future of our nation than it has ever been in the past because the strength of those sanctions and of those habits is less at the present time than it has ever been before. If you take a situation which is already rather critically weak in the way of established customs and break down the established customs that remain, I think you introduce a problem which might well be decided against you in any effort to maintain any civilian morale over a long period of time.

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Q. In regard to what you last said about utilization of the emotional sanctions in existence: how do you visualize that to apply to price control, for which there was some necessity in the last war. Do you expect something of that kind to be necessary again?

A. I do not think emergency price controls break down your existing habits very seriously. The housewife goes to the same place and buys the same things whether prices are controlled or not. Price controls should be simple because if they get too complex they cannot be administered. To a certain degree price control is perfectly possible without upsetting the habits of the people. It is when you begin to upset everybody's habits, make over the mode of living, make over their ways of getting supplies, take away their individual freedom of choice, that you complicate the task. I think these things are very vital. I do not know enough about your problem to know how they affect planning but if I were planning for civilian morale I think I should see that a considerable part of the group of students sent to the Harvard Business School took an interest in marketing. It is important that the Army understand methods of distribution. Production is simple compared with it.

Q. My question related to the other point of destroying civilian customs in regard to competition, which of course price fixing does.

A. Maximum price does not do so and that is the sort of price fixing that seems to be necessary in war rather than minimum price fixing.

Q. You spoke of a school of thought that is in favor of drafting money. I do not know anybody who is in favor of any such thing as that. I think we realize that it is practically impossible. To hear a lot about it, but I know no one who is in favor of it.

Colonel Voris: I want to say that I have enjoyed this talk very much and that, as Director of the Planning Branch, we have not been unmindful of the morale of the country in planning for procuring the munitions of war.

Q. I read a book sometime ago entitled "America, A Family Matter." The thesis of the book was that a mongrel people never attain prosperity and without any reference to the relative superiority or inferiority of this race or that, I wonder if our present troubles are not due to a great extent to the great millions of people coming here who have a different ethnic and anthropological background, different rituals and so forth. Is that one of

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the things the matter with us?

A. Unquestionably it is one of our greatest problems. We call it Americanization. It is one of the contributing factors to this exceedingly complex series of revolutions we have been going through which are constantly bringing us closer together and making us farther apart - closer together in the sense that we can get to San Francisco in no time and farther apart in the extent that we do not succeed in developing old neighborhood coherence. These are great problems in this country. I am convinced we must centralize our organization more in the future and that there must be a greater degree of government fixing of the framework because of the breakdown of the old sanctions. We have to set new rules to the game. I wish I were as sure that the group of men whose headquarters are in the Commerce Building were primarily interested in preserving existing customs as I am that your War Department planning intends to build on the existing structure. I think that the greatest danger of Mr. Roosevelt's failure comes from the mixture of revolutionary change and social reform into the effort to get us out of the most critical depression in the history of the world. I think we could get out of one if we did not attempt the difficult task of trying them both at the same time. A doctor would not think of amputating a man's arm when he had pneumonia. I think we are in danger of doing that because of the obvious evils in the world and in the nation which need to be corrected and the desire to use this present time to do it without consideration that the first and most important job we have is to get the nation out of the depression where ten million men are losing their self-respect because they cannot fit into the economical organization of the country. I believe the necessity for most of the reform would disappear if we found the solution to that problem.

I do not want to appear too critical, because I am not. I am in favor of the administration's effort to cure the depression and only desire to see it perfected rather than given up. I think there is one thing to be said in defense of the group that is trying to get us out of this depression, the thing said by Professor Copeland, head of the Economics Commission which helped pull Australia out of the depression and seems almost sure to get them into prosperous condition again. He had been talking to the boys in the second year and one youngster asked him this question: "What lessons do you see for us in Australia's experience?" Professor Copeland said: "I do not understand that situation enough to answer that, but I am reminded of the story about the man who found himself outside the city of Cincinnati and did not know which way to get there. He thought he was

headed right until he came to five roads roading out ahead of him. There was no sign board so he stopped a native and asked him if he could direct him on the right road. The native said: "Woll, stranger, I dunno, I dunno. You might take this right-hand road; that might got you to Cincinnati. But on the other hand, you might take that left-hand road and that might got you to Cincinnati, but to tell the truth, stranger, if I was going to Cincinnati I wouldn't start from here."