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Human Engineering in Columbus

By R. L. DICKINSON

Industrial Secretary Y. M. C. A.

Not long ago the Superintendent of one of the largest industrial plants in Columbus, in conference with the writer made the following statement: "Our problem in industry today is not a mechanical one. It is rather a problem of human engineering, the task of securing satisfactory relationship between foremen and workmen, and between workman and workman. In the past decade we have given attention to the technical points rather to the neglect of the human side, but now we must awake to the fact that the human element is after all the one that makes the wheels go 'round."

Every industrial plant, no matter what it makes, has three distinct problems to handle: Raw material, machines, and men. The big investment in most cases, is in materials and machines, with the labor cost comparatively small. This means that our low cost item is responsible for handling our large cost items. It can be readily seen that with poor handling this large

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cost item may be greatly increased. Poor labor conditions not only makes the cost of labor high, but by careless handling of materials and machines, expenses are increased and profits lowered. Naturally then manufacturers are turning their attention to some means that will aid them in solving this human problem.

A few years ago the Y. M. C. A. awakened to the fact that such a problem was confronting the industries, and with the usual willingness to help, offered its service to the industries. This resulted in a so-called Industrial Y. M. C. A. movement which differs from the regular work only in that it seeks to serve industrial men. Since the term engineering has been applied to the industries, and the Y. M. C. A. work deals with human-beings, the name "human engineering" was applied to this particular branch of the Y. M. C. A. Its object may be stated briefly in one word: Service.

About a year ago in South Columbus, the heads of the industries there decided that something should be done to remedy conditions in the community, and to aid them in their problems in the plant itself. They decided to find what the Y. M. C. A. offered in work of that kind, and to invite it to make a survey of the conditions there and make proper recommendations. Doctor Peter Roberts, International Secretary, from New York City, was brought to Columbus, and after a ten

days survey of the extreme south section of the city, recommended to the manufacturers that an Industrial Y. M. C. A. be established, which would call for a modern building involving an outlay of from \$70,000 to \$100,000. Doctor Roberts further recommended that an Industrial Secretary be added to the Secretarial force of the Columbus Association, to devote his time exclusively to the South End Industries to carry on an extension work until such time as a building would be a possibility. Following this advice eleven industrial concerns assumed the financial burden of the extension work, and secured a secretary for that purpose. The writer came to Columbus on July 15, 1917, to assume the duties of Industrial Secretary and started an extension program in the shops.

The first big event of the work was a "Foremen's Banquet" at the Central Y. M. C. A., which was attended by one hundred foremen from seven different industries. Mr. N. C. Schlichter, International Y. M. C. A. Secretary, of Chicago, addressed the gathering. His talk on "Modern Industry and the Y. M. C. A." pleased the men and made them willing to cooperate in the work in their shops. Soon after this an Educational Campaign was put on in the various shops to secure students for the Night School work in technical subjects. These were enrolled in the Y. M. C. A. Night School and in various other schools over

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the city. The increase of students over normal times was something over one thousand percent. During the "Wet and Dry Campaign" in October and November, the Y. M. C. A. pushed the work of the Dry forces in the shops by means of Shop Talks, Posters, and personal work among the men. In October a Night School was organized to teach English to foreigners. For teachers of the classes, students of the University were used for the most part, although men from the industries were used also. The classes started out very successfully, but owing to difficulties did not flourish as well as expected. A movement is to be started the first of the new year for new classes and new interest in the work.

Along physical lines, gymnasium classes have been carried on for the men of the different industries, using different gymnasium's in the city. An athletic league, involving indoor base ball, volley-ball, basket ball and bowling will be started. These will be carried on until the warmer weather will permit out door sports. Shop meetings are being planned in different industries to bring speakers into the different shops before the shop men. Patriotic meetings, religious meetings, safety meetings and health meetings will be carried on during the coming year. It is also planned to carry on special campaigns, such as

Thrift Campaigns, Health Week, Clean-up Days, etc.

In the community outside the shops there is organized a Welfare association, which will carry on a program in the community in cooperation with the churches, the homes and the schools. Quite a number of the men and women interested in the welfare of the community have joined the Association and have started to do a constructive work. There are big possibilities for them along religious, social, physical and educational lines. They also endeavor to see that the laws, especially concerning child life are enforced, and that living conditions are made satisfactory to the people.

This work, while very new, has a real place in the community and will undoubtedly prove of real value in spite of the adverse conditions which come from the war. This field is typical of a large number of industrial fields in the United States which have begun operations within the last three or four years. Greater interest is being shown now than ever before, because employers of labor are coming to realize the need of bettering and conserving their man-power. There is great promise in the future. The work is of such nature that it will challenge any man who is interested in industrial fields, and it should especially enlist the sympathy and cooperation of the college man who intends, some day to deal with labor conditions, either as an employer or an employee.