New Haven Teachers' Journal

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EDITORIAL

The opening meeting of the teachers this year was, to judge by the sentiments voiced at its conclusion, the most gratifying gathering of recent years. There was a spontaneity and heartiness in the greetings expressed that was genuinely and unmistakably sincere. The messages brought by the Superintendent and the Mayor were dignified and forthright, and struck a responsive chord in the expectant audience. If well begun is half done, the year 1936 and 1937 will stand out in New Haven school history for satisfactory and memorable achievement.

The comments of Mayor Murphy upon the value of organization for workers, professional or industrial, are of double-edged value. He knows from practical experience by reason of his work as an organizer. On the other hand it was incumbent upon him, as the executive of a large city, in an era of great public and private distress, to steer a path of policy that would take into consideration the interests of all groups, organized and unorganized. That he would clash in some of his policies with the organized
Work

By Nicholas Roerich

“He who does not work, 
Has no right to eat”.

Very often the East and West—all over the world—have repeated this wise saying and yet how often has it been misinterpreted! Everyone tried to explain the meaning of work in his own way. The bootmaker understood that real work is bootmaking; the smith was convinced that true labour is contained in his hammer. The reaper extolled the sickle as the only tool of labour. The scientist naturally understood that work takes places in his laboratory, and the warrior insisted that military experience is the only work. Of course from their point of view one could not contradict them, but judging from their ego they always preferred to think of themselves and not of others.

The work of the neighbor always has been regarded through belittling glasses. No one has wanted to understand that all kinds of labour are honourable and that each co-operates with the other. Co-operation, at any rate, has been neglected.

Is it not simple? No doubt, it is. Is it not known to everybody? Yes, to all, from young to old. Is it applied in life? — No, it is not!

There has resulted a self-imposed division of labour into the higher and the lower. And no one wants to ponder over the boundaries and evaluations of work. Nowadays people often judge very peculiarly about the quality of work. In view of the development of mechanical output, people rely entirely upon machinery. But even at the base of every machine there will lie the quality of work, according to whether the machine is skilfully used or otherwise.

It has been stated more than once that even machines work differently in the hands of various people. More than that, it is known that some workmen act beneficially upon the machines, whereas others have a destructive influence. From ancient times people have understood the significance of rhythm in labour. We have witnessed how for certain public works local orchestras were engaged to increase the tempo of labour. Even in the remote Himalayan forests timbercarriers carry beams under the rhythmical beating of drums. Many such useful examples can be cited, and still the conscious synchronisation of labour is neglected by the multitude.

It is not superfluous to repeat that some aspects of labour, which are very difficult and require great experience, are often completely ignored. Let us take for example the difficult task of the school teacher.

The school teacher has been always unjustly underpaid and has always remained under suspicion from all sides. Yet everybody easily understands that the education of his children can be entrusted only to a person who is really educated, and who has a basic knowledge of the fundamentals of science. Everybody also understands that such a person must be sufficiently provided for, in order that he shall not be distracted by looking for additional necessary income. No doubt everyone will agree with these primary conditions demanded by life. Yet in public and governmental budgets the school teacher remains as before in pitiful circumstances. More than that, if in the
treasury there is a lack of funds, it will be the school teacher, the physician, the scientist who will be excluded from the budget in the first order. We do not mention here the writers, artists and similar independent professions who are most needed for public education and yet are least taken care of by the state. Is it not so?

At the basis of all such lamentable misunderstandings, there lies ignorance in appreciation of labour. Only recently experimental psychologists came to the conclusion that intellectual work uses up three times as much energy as manual labour. Of course we do not want by this statement to belittle any form of labour but mention this statement in the cause of justice. Naturally everyone desires that his country should prosper. Everyone is happy when some public enterprise is extolled. And yet it is only as an exception that people understand the entire real value of labour, spent on these achievements. It has been correctly said that 'he who does not work has no right to eat'. No idlers and parasites have a right to live. Untiringly one must educate public opinion as to what labour for common good means. Hélas, this is not yet a truism!

The many instructive historical examples were given to humanity not in vain. The great example of the shoemaker, Boehme; or of the manufacturer of lenses, Spinoza; of priests who were master weavers; and finally the illustrious example of the Master-Carpenter were, it should seem, sufficient to indicate the quality of labour. And we also remember how the great educator of Russia, St. Sergius of Radonega, starved, rather than accept a piece of bread, unless it was earned by labour.

Such striking and appealing examples should be persuasively taught in all schools. Thereby an equilibrium in the evaluation of various kinds of labour would be reached. Much vanity would then disappear but on the other hand there would arise a sincere joy at every labour which has been carried out beautifully. If all this is merely a truism then why is it not applied everywhere?

Why is it that up to now the Ministry of Public Education, of Labour and Agriculture — in other words everything connected with peaceful prosperity is treated as being third and fourth rate? And very often such important departments of life are altogether absorbed in some far less peaceful considerations. This is so and no one can insist that this anguish of the heart is exaggerated.

What has been said is not only true, but it is never sufficiently underlined. One unfortunately sees that many people avoid thinking of humanitarian questions, of cultural values, neglect them and do not place them in the proper place as befits a civilized country. Hélas, one sees so often, that people reject precisely that which lies at the foundation of peaceful constructiveness.

Apostles of Good sternly condemned those ignoramuses who did not revere the high significance of labour. Such people need not eat, they are not wanted for evolution, they are the scum of the earth. Apostles of Good thus justly censured the criminal neglect of labour. For both in the East and West it is equally well known that ignorance is the mother of all vices.

Nowadays, during this reign of mechanisation an especially attentive attitude towards labour is required and justice towards workers in all manifold fields of life is imperative. People have already guessed that a mania for robots is not a sign of accomplishment. Therefore, a qualitative creative basis of every labour should be established.
Look and see how true workers are untiringly at their desk. Every day, in diligence and patience they are creating not for themselves but for the general benefit. In these anonymous efforts and sacrifices is contained a true grandeur. The hieroglyph of labour becomes a collective concept. When one hears 'Edison', one thinks no longer of Thomas Edison but of a powerful collective conception of inventiveness for the benefit of humanity. In the same way, when the names Raphael or Rubens are pronounced, they are not so much personal as characteristic of an entire epoch.

On ancient Chinese works of art there are imprinted certain marks. They also represent nothing personal. They have come as if the seals of their age. May the seal of our age be a broad, just realization of labour. Let no useful creative worker be forgotten. May in all countries the question of education, enlightenment, and labour stand foremost!

Nicholas Roerich.

The Committee on the Reorganization of the Constitution was set up at our Annual Meeting in March. This committee, according to the resolution that brought it into being, was ordered to make its report at the June meeting. The task involved much work and it was impossible to complete the revision within the time assigned. The committee will continue its work and a future issue of the Journal will print its report.

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