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CURRENT SAFETY TOPICS

Volume 15

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LABOR SAFETY

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45th National Safety Congress

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NATIONAL SAFETY COUNCIL

425 N. MICHIGAN AVENUE, CHICAGO 11, ILLINOIS

1957 National Safety Congress

This is sheer gain, but these laws still focus on doing something for the man who has met with an accident, rather than on driving full steam into eliminating causes for accidents. When a ship is sinking, then the whole weight of responsibility rests on manning the life boats and getting the passengers and crew off the vessel. When an auto has gone hurtling off a thruway then the weight of moral responsibility is to rush medical care.

But neither life boats nor ambulances are the full measure of moral responsibility that rests upon us today when ships still sail the high seas and cars ride the highways. Our moral sense has grown up beyond that level of moral satisfaction. In its modern concept moral responsibility stresses preventing the worst from happening on the oceans and

on our roads rather than being content with picking up the pieces after the worst has happened.

Total security is a goal that is beyond our reach, but great progress can be made when men of competence and good will and devotion join together to help each other in every way possible to promote safety measures against accident hazards. The symbol of this step is, I suppose, the National Safety Congress itself. It stands for moral responsibility toward these hazards at its best, for our deepest responsibility toward the victim of accidents is to see to it that all is done to keep him from becoming a victim. And that is a worthy cause for all of us, wherever we are—in labor and in management, in education and in government. ▲

LABOR'S STAKE IN SAFETY

by A. J. HAYES

international president, International Association of Machinists; vice president, AFL-CIO, Washington, D. C.

I don't intend to stray within the limits of this title because I can't find little new information I could tell about Lerner's *Stroke in Safety*. I do say that because I could not find a better stake than his safety and the safety of others who are the direct victims of stroke.

To an employer, a worker's safety is a top priority. But when it comes to the safety of the nation's cash, the Federal Reserve Bank of New York is the one in charge. They are responsible for making sure the nation's cash is safe and secure. They are also responsible for making sure the nation's cash is available to the public. But there are all sorts of ways to make cash safer. Some are more obvious than others.

[illegible]

That is why I say that labor's stake in
 fact is pretty obvious. Therefore I will
 not dig up aspects of the subject that are
 not often discussed—aspects that are some-
 what controversial. Perhaps they are not
 means of becoming free, are contrary to social

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"Surely, my views and public statements can be interpreted in different ways. I have been frank and honest and I can make them more so, rather than be any less candid as stated in my views about matters of public interest. I assure you, however, that I am not a selfish egomaniac. For its own sake, because these are matters that concern all men and women who run the daily affairs of the country, I cannot be killed or die in vain."

San Francisco and London, representing the American as well as an European side. I think not of whether we represent labor or management, and disagree with certain basic ethical principles in the field of industrial relations. We would all agree, for ex-

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ample, that the objective of industrial safety should be the preservation of human life and the protection of human health. We would further agree that an employer has a moral responsibility to protect his workers against disease, accidents, mental stress and infections from the conditions of employment.

We all profess to agree that human life is not cheap; that man is something to be sacrificed to a machine. And yet, these ethical principles are not always applied in day to day life nor are they self-enforcing. In practical application they come in conflict with individual economic interests, and thus must be enforced either through group action, or by society as a whole through political action.

As a rule, society does not move as fast as the need would indicate. We all know, for example, that the first industrial revolution had run its course for more than 100 years before society got around to adopting and enforcing rules and regulations of industrial safety. For more than 100 years industrial workers were given no legal protection against the risks and hazards of industrial employment.

Here and there, a lone individual employer might attempt to provide decent and healthful working conditions for his workers. But on the whole, the story of factory employment in the 19th century—and through the early 20th century—was a pretty ghastly one.

I don't need to go into the details that are indicative of the cold indifference with which human life was held in American mines and factories. Suffice to say, it did not seem to matter how many men, women and children were killed or crippled in the course of a day. There were always more waiting at the gates the next morning—driven by raw poverty to plead for a chance to jeopardize their lives and limbs.

SOCIETY BROUGHT CHANGES

The point I am getting at, of course, is that change—when it came—was not the result of any regeneration of moral and ethical conviction on the part of employers. It came rather because society as a whole was thoroughly revolted. It came because the American people were finally shocked enough to correct a condition that had prevailed—and grown worse—for 100 years.

So we finally got factory laws—and workmen's compensation—and an organized effort to make mines, factories and mills safer places to work. But of all the legislation aimed at this objective, workmen's compensation was the key. For until employers were made directly and financially responsible for the results of workers' accidents, they had no economic reason to prevent accidents. The whole pattern and fabric of our industrial safety program throughout the nation rests entirely on how good and how effective our workmen's compensation and our occupational disease laws are.

ECONOMIC REASONS

Oh, of course, you can point to many other good economic rationalizations for industrial safety. You can say industrial accidents add all kinds of direct and indirect costs to production. You can point to the cost of hiring and training a new employee, of equipment damaged in a work accident, of the time lost by other employees when an accident occurs.

But I will throw them all right back to you and say that these considerations were present long before we had industrial accident programs—and that it wasn't until accident prevention was reinforced with workmen's compensation and occupational disease legislation that employers really became safety conscious.

So it seems that the thing that counts here is how good our workmen's compensation and occupational disease legislation really are.

And that's a good question! I've spent my whole adult life in the labor movement. As a matter of fact, I was projected into it by the very thing we are talking about here today—an industrial accident. I went to work at 17 years of age because my father was totally disabled by a work injury—an injury that eventually killed him.

In the course of many years of studying and dealing with the problems of my union—which are, of course, the problems of the members of my union, I realized that our present system of workmen's compensation and occupational disease legislation is completely and wholly inadequate to meet the needs of our complex industrial society.

I am not alone in that conclusion. There are, in fact, many men in the labor movement today who feel even more strongly

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than I do—men who are firmly convinced that workmen's compensation has been a gigantic swindle on the American worker.

This nation has tried to deal with a national problem by having 48 separate, conflicting—and in a sense—competing state statutes. And there is no doubt but that workmen's compensation is one kind of labor legislation that states use to compete with one another to attract industry.

In fact, whenever we go into the state legislatures to get improvement or expansion of existing laws, we invariably meet employer counter-arguments to the effect that any further improvement in coverage or benefit structure will shove industry into the waiting and sympathetic arms of states which are more concerned with payrolls—than with the people on those payrolls.

SAFETY INTEREST LACKING

Certainly the health and safety of the nation's work force should not be a pawn in any state's bid for new industry. But that is just what it is under a system that allows Mississippi or Arkansas or Georgia to compete for industry by offering low workmen's compensation benefits and a minimum of safety regulation at the plant level. Why should an employer pay \$40 a week for a temporary total disability in Illinois—when he can go to Arkansas and pay \$25 a week for the same injury?

The situation in workmen's compensation legislation is so bad, in fact, that the Secretary of Labor, Mr. Mitchell, although speaking for an administration that normally follows a hands-off policy in state legislation, has been constrained to speak out and to plead with the states to bring their laws into line with modern conditions.

But because employers can play off one state against another in this matter, the results have been somewhat negligible. There is no indication that the remedy will ever catch up with the need, until there is broader recognition that industrial accidents are a national problem—one that is truly solvable only on the national level.

The lack of a strong and equitable workmen's compensation system leads to a corresponding lack of interest in enforcement of safety codes and regulations. In many states the Bureau of Factory Inspection, by whatever name it goes under—is little more than a sop to the conscience of the

state legislature. In fact, the inspection service in such states is not only understaffed, but the staff is underpaid, untrained and technically unqualified to do a competent job in a field that needs a high degree of competency.

But as bad as the situation in workmen's compensation and factory inspection may be, the situation in occupational disease coverage verges on the criminal. And this is a matter of more than just poor legislation. It is incredible to think that in the second half of the 20th century 20 states still either have no coverage or limited coverage of occupational disease.

But the greater problem is that there is too little understanding of the nature and complexity of occupational disease. The range and source of occupational disease in modern industry is practically limitless. None of the ways by which man makes a living is completely free of some hazard to physical or mental health. The risk of occupational disease grows greater every day as industrial processes become more and more dependent upon and saturated with toxic dusts, fumes, vapors, gases, acids and alkalis.

Every day thousands of workers are exposed to everything from arsenic to mercury poisoning, from benzene compounds to magnesium poisoning, from sulphuric acid to chromium poisoning. Thousands have no physical or legal protection whatsoever against the chemicals and poisons that are slowly killing them.

UNAWARE OF RISKS

In fact, many are not even aware of the risk. They will find out when it is too late. In many states they will also find out that they have no right to compensation under the occupational disease law. I wonder how you feel a man who has contracted carbon tetrachloride poisoning. For example, that he isn't entitled to benefits under the occupational disease law because the legislature of his state has not seen fit to recognize that carbon tetrachloride poisoning is an occupational disease?

I recently said a statement to the effect that the scope of occupational disease is "just about beyond calculation" and "it comes in fact unpleasantly close to being the major public health problem of our time."

Labor Safety

If that is so—and I for one am inclined to believe it—it is tragic commentary on our time—on the ethics of a business community that has done so little about it. It is even more tragic in view of the fact that we are now entering a new phase in our industrial development—a phase of such sweeping change that some commentators have referred to it as a new industrial revolution. Think of that—we are entering a new industrial revolution without ever having fully solved the problems that attended the old one.

I wonder if it will again take us 100 years to make even a decent start on the health and safety problems that will arise out of automation and atomic energy. These problems are not a part of a distant tomorrow but are already a part of the world today. Now more than 1,500 industrial plants are using atomic materials in one form or another—in 1,500 establishments American workers are already exposed to the hazards of atomic radiation.

Can we say the state laws in existence today—indeed can we say that any system of state inspection and compensation—are adequate to care for the workers who will get leukemia or bone cancer because of exposure to atomic radiation?

DON'T KNOW PROTECTIONS

Personally, I feel somewhat discouraged about the prospects. How can the states protect and care for victims of industrial radiation when they haven't yet learned to protect and care for victims of occupational diseases that have been prevalent for generations? We need only look at silicosis and pneumoconiosis to see the failure. And failure to provide adequate treatment and compensation for these dreadful dust diseases is paralleled by the failure of industry to finance programs of research that would lead to their prevention at the source of exposure.

Related to the problems of occupational disease and radiation is another matter that has received almost no attention in industry, or in government. That is the matter of mental disease. We already know enough about automation to know that it will throw workers into a lonely and eerie world inhabited by monster mechanical devices.

We also know that our mental hospitals are already crowded with people who have

broken down under the stress of life in a complicated, impersonal and highly industrialized society. But we don't know how much more stress people can take, or what effect automation will have on a worker's nervous system. At what point does the human mind crack up from sheer loneliness, lack of contact with fellow workers, from uninterrupted repetition and brainwashing boredom?

I am not just tossing questions out at random here. All of the things I am talking about—from workmen's compensation and occupational disease to radiation and mental distress—have a valid relation to industrial health and safety—and are proper subjects of labor interest.

LOOK FOR DANGERS

For safety is a broad term. It is defined as: (1) the state or condition of being safe; (2) freedom from danger or risk; and (3) freedom from injury.

Safety means freedom from any kind of danger, risk or injury. When we apply that definition to industrial conditions we must think in terms of hidden dangers as well. We must change our attitude toward occupational diseases—go out looking for them instead of trying to pretend they don't exist, or implying if they do exist, that they have no relation to industrial causes.

I am not exaggerating when I say that industry has taken a "head-in-the-sand" attitude up to now. It has tried to cover up occupational diseases rather than to isolate, prevent and care for them.

There has been little research—either governmental or private—in the field. The Public Health Service spends less than one cent for each worker each year on the prevention of occupational diseases. The National Institute of Health, which has made hundreds of research grants during the past three or four years, has made less than half a dozen in the field of occupational health. There is an iron curtain of secrecy around this whole subject.

Not only does industry fail to support and subsidize research in occupational diseases, itself, but men who have tried to do independent research find that it is virtually impossible to get facts, information, or co-operation from the people in industry who are in a position to help. Worse still, if a

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research project does tend to show a correlation between employment and disease, the authors find it is almost impossible to get their work published or distributed.

The result is a deplorable lack of information about occupational disease. We are years behind other countries in this respect. One expert in this field said that research in pneumoconiosis in this country is 25 years behind that of Great Britain.

SECRETS PREVAIL IN INDUSTRY

Industry actively opposes objective research and free interchange of information on occupational diseases because it is more afraid of the possibility of paying compensation benefits than it is that workers will die from lack of proper information and adequate precaution.

Here are specific examples that will illustrate this point. There is some medical evidence that the chemicals used in the dye industry and in the manufacture of synthetic rubber cause or contribute to cancer of the bladder. In fact, one of these—amine—is so dangerous that it has been outlawed for all industrial uses in Britain since 1951. But efforts to prove, publicize and restrict the dangers of this deadly acid have hit stubborn resistance in this country. The large chemical companies have refused to find out if amine does contribute to cancer of the bladder and have strongly resisted independent research into this problem.

Much the same situation holds true in the asbestos industry. There appears to be decided after-effects on workers who produce asbestos in that there is a marked correlation between asbestos employment and lung cancer. Here again, the industry has been traditionally reluctant to cooperate in a full scale scientific study of this curious correlation. This reluctance to do research in health hazards recurs in industry after industry.

"DOCTORS OFTEN BIASED"

But even worse when workers do succumb to cancer of the bladder or the lung, or to some other equally horrible diseases, we are treated to the spectacle of company doctors who testify that the disease couldn't possibly have been caused by their employment. Doctors are supposed to be above reproach in our society. But as a labor official I have known of too many cases in which company

doctors have testified against workers and for management in occupational disease cases even though they knew their testimony was biased.

It should not surprise us that doctors can be unobjective in these cases where their testimony is bought and paid for. We have only to look at the wide-spread difference of opinion among doctors as to the effect of cigarette smoking to see that their testimony can sometimes be something less than truthful. Most doctors who are not in the pay of cigarette companies are convinced by all the scientific evidence on record that cigarettes undoubtedly contribute to lung cancer. But the doctors on the payrolls of the tobacco companies either deny that cigarettes contribute to lung cancer, or at best maintain that there is not yet enough proof.

As we contemplate these conflicting views among professional men—and as we thoughtfully study the reluctance of industry to be honest about this matter of occupational disease—we cannot help but wonder whether the lust for profits has made many men forget the real purpose of life. What is the real purpose of life? Is it production and profit—or the well-being of the individual? If there is conflict between the two, do we sacrifice production and profit or the well-being of the individual?

The ethical answer is obvious. But the practical methods of reaching the logical ethical conclusion are more difficult.

FEDERAL ACTS NEEDED

We could make a start by enacting comprehensive federal workmen's compensation and occupational disease legislation to take the place of the chaos that results from having 48 different state systems. But I have no hopes for such a constructive approach in the foreseeable future. I am afraid the insurance lobby, and the employer groups that profit from weak administration are too strong for us at this time. So we'll just have to make that one of our long range objectives.

But there are some things we can do right now. We can try to have programs set up in the National Institute of Health and in the Public Health Service which would recognize the importance of occupational disease—and which would put the research effort in this nation on a par with that of other civilized industrial nations.

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If we cannot get decent factory inspection from the state government, then we in the labor movement must resort to self-help. Many unions are thinking in terms of collective bargaining clauses which would require the employer to adopt the safety standards set by the American Standards Association as the minimum acceptable in the shop.

LABOR FIGHTS FOR SELF

We are also prepared to bargain for more supplemental injury benefits when the compensation provided by state laws is not adequate to sustain a worker and his family. Although our efforts will directly benefit only the 17 million organized workers, perhaps they will release new pressures that will eventually result in improved legislation benefiting all workers.

The American labor movement has but one purpose—one reason for existence in American life—to serve and protect American workers. There are times when we

make ourselves pretty unpopular because we keep looking for the things that are wrong with American industry and American society.

I may have offended industry men with this indictment of the ethics and morals of our business community. But I would be derelict in my duty and false to my trust as an elected officer of one of America's greatest unions if I did not say frankly and candidly that we in the labor movement are not satisfied with present legislation relating to industrial health and safety, workmen's compensation and occupational diseases.

In a sense this is a great challenge to the National Safety Council—a challenge that can be met only if all facts are squarely faced. If we in the labor movement could count on your assistance in the fight for better legislation and more research on both the state and federal levels we might, together, make this a far happier, healthier and safer nation in which to live and work. ▲

GOOD COMMUNICATIONS HELP SAFETY

by GEORGE SCRIVEN

public relations director, United Rubber, Cork, Linoleum & Plastic Workers of America, AFL-CIO, Akron, Ohio

Our organization has been safety minded for many years. The record on that score speaks for itself in a loud and clear manner. The results of our efforts, in cooperation with enlightened managements, tell the story of how we have seen the number of accidents reduced in the plants in which our members work. I shall not go into specific figures on frequency rates and such.

I don't suppose any of you would dispute the flat statement that good communications help safety. But I'd like to try and give you some of the techniques, the how and the why of that statement.

First, let's do a little word analyzing. I certainly don't want to sound like the pontifical professor lecturing his class on semantics. But when we say *good* in our topic, "Good Communications Help Safety," we immediately infer that there is another kind

besides good. And there certainly is. I think there is a lot of bad and fuzzy communications going on in all fields.

Within the subject matter at hand, I would say the word *good* means that type which gets some concrete reaction and results. In the United Rubber Workers, we think our communications have been good because we have the results to show for it.

MUST HAVE RECEIVER

Now for the word *communications* in the phrase. You can't have communications—the *good* type that is—unless someone is sending the message and someone is receiving it. I was in the Air Force in World War II, and I served as a radio operator in the Pacific aboard a B-29 Superfortress. When I sent a message and no one received it, I didn't have communications. I was

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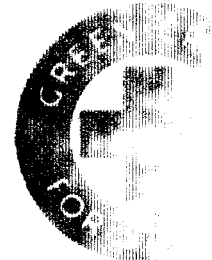
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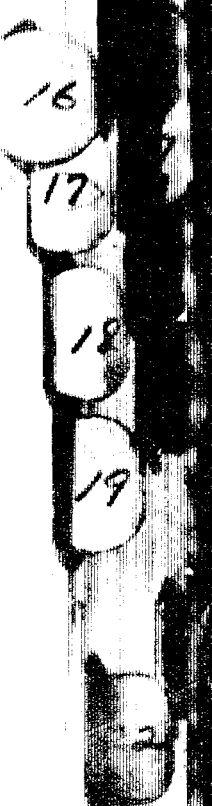
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