

**THE SOCIAL PROBLEMS OF AN
INDUSTRIAL CIVILIZATION**

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ELTON MAYO

Professor of Industrial Research



DIVISION OF RESEARCH
GRADUATE SCHOOL OF BUSINESS ADMINISTRATION
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This book is dedicated to

M. L. PUTNAM

H. A. WRIGHT

W. J. DICKSON

A. C. MOORE

D. D. DAVISSON

H. HIBARGER

*the team that worked through the Hawthorne
experiment to its interesting conclusion.
They will understand if I add the name of*

GEORGE A. PENNOCK

Foreword

This is the second in a series of books by Professor Elton Mayo, now planned to be three in number. Jointly they will present selected aspects of over a quarter century of clinical research in industry. This research has been carried on in an effort to get a better and more fundamental understanding of human relations—that most neglected of subjects—and how to improve them. These books present also Mayo's mature reflections based on long self-training and clinical experience with individuals in a great variety of social environments before he began the study of men and women in industry. As a result of his earlier work, when he turned his attention to industry he brought to his studies, "...first, intimate, habitual, intuitive familiarity with things; secondly, systematic knowledge of things; and thirdly, a useful way of thinking about things," which the late Lawrence J. Henderson considered the basic necessities for objective clinical study of a new field.

For about twenty years Mayo has been senior professor in the Department of Industrial Research in the Harvard Business School. The research conducted by this Department, by him and his co-workers in industry and in the School, has always been firsthand, clinical studies of concrete industrial situations. The history of this twenty-year program has been a history of steadily increasing insight.

In his first comprehensive report on this industrial research, *The Human Problems of an Industrial Civilization*, published in 1933, now unfortunately out of print, Mayo broke new ground in methods of studying and securing better understanding of individual workers in relation to their industrial jobs and of ways to improve their sense of well-being on the job. This report was followed by more detailed accounts¹ of a five-year experiment conducted at and by the Western Electric Company, with the advice and collaboration of Mayo and his asso-

¹T. North Whitehead, of the Business School Faculty, in *The Industrial Worker*, (Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 1938), and F. J. Roethlisberger, of the Business School Faculty, and William J. Dickson, of the Western Electric Company, in *Management and the Worker* (Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 1939).

The Social Problems of an Industrial Civilization

ciates. All these accounts involved recognition of the importance of social groupings and of teamwork as well as of the individual worker; Whitehead's studies, based on a careful statistical analysis of unique records of the experiment kept by the Western Electric Company, threw strong light on the significance of the social factors which affected the experimental group. Roethlisberger's and Dickson's book brought out the importance of the same factors. Nevertheless, the net result of the three reports, as they came to the interested reader, was emphasis on the individual, including of course emphasis on him in his social surroundings.

In the current report, published twelve years later, Mayo's emphasis changes, not to exclude the individual, but to stress the importance of groups and methods of understanding the behavior of groups, whether formally organized and recognized by management or self-constituted, informal organizations. The significance and even the existence of the latter are generally overlooked by management and often even by workers themselves. The report brings to the fore the problem of securing group collaboration in the essential activities of industry. It also points out the increasing significance of this problem, which results from rapid technological progress and the ensuing frequent changes in the human associations of the worker while he is at work. This progressive destruction of old, technical skills receives inadequate attention by management. The difficulties are, of course, intensified by the progressive destruction of neighborhood life and by the constant loosening of the stabilizing influences which surround us in what Mayo refers to as an *established* society. These again result in large part from the impact of applied science on the lives men lead in industry and of significant developments such as the automobile on their lives when they are not at work.

Here also Mayo gives us instances where industrial administrators have succeeded in making factory groups so stable in their attitudes of group cooperation that men in the groups explicitly recognized that the factory had become for them the stabilizing force around which they developed satisfying lives. This accomplishment was achieved in spite of technological changes within the plant and social chaos in the community

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outside. Thus Mayo shows us for the first time in the form of specific instances that it is within the power of industrial administrators to create within industry itself a partially effective substitute for the old stabilizing effect of the neighborhood. Given stable employment, it might make of industry (as of the small town during most of our national life) a socially satisfying way of life as well as a way of making a living.

This seems a far cry from the existing warfare between labor and management and the growing hatreds and prejudices which distress us. Yet unless we can regain in this heterogeneous industrial civilization the capacity to live our daily lives in something like mutual understanding that provides for individual differences, unless we can learn how to adapt our civilization to constant change, we shall not maintain essential stability in the domestic scene, nor become an effective force for peace in the international field. Surely our current situation at home can hardly impress Mr. Stalin as an indication that we will be a lasting influence for peace abroad. We show few signs of having solved the problems of an *adaptive* civilization competent to deal with constant technological and social change.

Mayo has a job of study and interpretation yet to do. We need the more complete development of his tantalizing suggested study, *The Political Problems of an [Adaptive] Industrial Civilization*. When it comes, I hope it will involve not only the problems of a democratic state and effective collaboration within it, but more attention to similar problems which exist in securing collaboration in the huge aggregations of men and things inherent in mass production industries where high technological efficiency is struggling constantly against increasing social disintegration, both within and without the industries involved.

And there is an educational job to be done both within industry and in our schools and colleges, a job on which Mayo himself and his associates at the Harvard Business School under his leadership have already gone far to prove that important accomplishments are possible.

WALLACE B. DONHAM

APPENDIX

LIST OF LEGAL AND DOCUMENTARY SOURCES

1. *Raccolta ufficiale delle leggi e dei decreti del Regno d'Italia*. Rome. Istituto Poligrafico dello Stato. Annually from 1861. The official collection of Italian legislation.

2. *Lex, Legislazione Italiana, raccolta cronologica con richiami alle leggi attinenti e ricchi indici semestriali e annuali*. Turin. Unione Tipografico-Editrice Torinese. Annually from 1915. A privately published collection of Italian legislation, often superior to the official edition in cross-references to statutes amended or repealed.

3. *Gazzetta Ufficiale del Regno d'Italia*. Rome. Istituto Poligrafico dello Stato. The official serial publication of laws, decrees, and other official documents.

4. Istituto Nazionale Fascista di Cultura, *Legislazione e Ordinamento Sindacale Corporativo*. Rome, 1934. Useful collection of selected documents relating to the "corporative state."

5. Ministero delle Corporazioni, *Sindacato e Corporazione*. Rome. Monthly. Official bulletin of Ministry of Corporations.

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7. Segretaria del Senato, Segretaria della Camera dei Deputati. *Bollettino Parlamentare*. Rome. Irregularly from 1927. Collections of speeches, statistics, Italian and foreign documents issued by the two chambers.

8. Istituto Centrale di Statistica. *Annuario Statistico*. Rome. In annual volumes. The official Italian statistical compendium.

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VITA

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