

The Delight Of Working

How good were "the good old days"? You can have a long discussion about this question. But one outstanding fact is that the working men had, generally speaking, a hard time in "the good old days." In England, in the days of Queen Victoria, children at ten years of age worked in factories six days a week; at twelve they were in the coal mines.

Almost sixteen million workers lived below the poverty line; three million white-collar people lived at a slightly better level. Servants of elegant homes slept in cellars and attics without fresh air and good facilities. Matthew Arnold, essayist and poet, wrote that England was "on the verge of anarchy." In Canada girls as young as nine were paid as little as a dollar a week. During the depression years of the Thirties, thousands were living on less than subsistence pay. One of the worst cases ever discovered was of a girl factory worker in Montreal getting a dollar and a half for a seventy-five-hour work week. Able men, some were heads of families, got as little as six dollars a week.

In Saskatchewan a family of five could expect ten dollars a month from Relief plus a ninety-eight pound sack of flour, In those days there was no job so miserable or ill-paid or you could find somebody to do it. In a Quebec factory a family of six collected total wages of twenty dollars a week. These were not very good days for the working people.

Older workers can still vividly remember the hardships and the widespread unemployment of the Depression that made a job precious, and to some extent these difficult experiences still shape their attitude towards work. The younger generation who entered the job market at a relatively affluent time doesn't share the same attitude towards work. Lewis Carliner, professor of labour studies at Rutgers University, says about youth, "To them, a job is something they can always get, or even if they can't, one form or another of welfare will take care of them."

Working conditions and wages have been greatly improved. Yet so many are not very happy with their work. A job survey undertaken by the Survey Research Center, University of Michigan, with support from the department of labour, says that what the workers want most, as more than one hundred studies in the past twenty years show, is to have control over their immediate environments and to feel that their work and they themselves are important. Automation has also become a real problem. Many workers feel de-humanized. A repair man in the G.M. assembly plant in Baltimore, twenty-nine years old, said, "Management tries to get more than a man is capable of. It cares only about production." Many experts foresee more labour conflict and bitterness.

How do we give job satisfaction to workers and overcome injustices? Daniel Zwerdling, in his article *Beyond Boredom: A Look at What's New on the Assembly Line* suggests, "Money is what counts. If the management really wants a happy work force, let them put their money where their mouth is and hand over some of the profits." I suggest that money does not solve all the problems. Sin is the root of every problem, and has

manifested itself in personal and social life in many forms. There has never been a golden age and there never will be one in this world.

But into every age God has come with His redeeming power. The gospel of Jesus Christ has also a message for labour. Problems cannot be solved without God in Christ. Only at the foot of the cross can the present conflict between labour and management be truly healed and overcome. When we find the grace of God at work in our hearts by the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, we will recover our God-given creativity and work receives new meaning and we find it good. Work, according to the Bible, is not a necessary evil, but a way of life in which a person should be able to have his delight. When we see work in the Biblical way we will also realize the need for a just reward.

The Bible calls upon employers to treat their workmen justly because the Lord is just, and because they who believe and worship Him must be just, and each worker must be seen as a person created in the image of God and needs to be treated as such. The true meaning in work and healing of labour conflicts can only be found in the Christ of the Scriptures.

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