

Supervisory Training in Belgium

by

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The importance of training personnel for the functions of supervision in industry has been duly recognised by the International Labour Organisation, which has included the question in its manpower programme.¹ In pursuance of this programme a European meeting of experts on supervisory training was held at Geneva from 30 March to 2 April 1949, which examined training schemes already in operation, among them, that of the Belgian Committee for the Guidance and Training of Supervisors in Industry described below.

The theoretical aspects and general principles of supervisory training have been discussed in earlier articles in the Review.² Here, an account is given of the practical action taken or contemplated in Belgium with a view to ensuring that all grades of supervisors, from the head of the undertaking to the foreman, receive adequate and efficient training. Reference is also made to the position of the factory doctor.

THE TEACHING of familiar subjects provides us with a network of highways striking deep through the jungle of ignorance and stopping only at the frontier of accepted science. Thence, pioneers move onwards, sometimes at random,

¹ Cf. *International Labour Review*, Vol. LIX, No. 4, April 1949: "The I.L.O. Manpower Programme", pp. 381-382.

² *Idem*, Vol. LIV, Nos. 3-4, September-October 1946: "Training Within Industry in the United States", by C. R. DOOLEY, pp. 167 *et seq.*; and Vol. LIX, No. 5, May 1949: "Psychological and Human Aspects of Vocational Training", by F. BILLON, pp. 494-501 in particular.

blazing trails which others confirm or follow until the highway of certain knowledge has been carried a stage further. These roads save the ordinary individual an incalculable labour of personal clearance and exploration; without them, without the mass of accumulated and recorded experience which organised instruction represents, we should still today be hacking at the edge of the jungle, unable to contribute to the progress of mankind.

But one great branch of knowledge yet remains in which the roads of progress are narrow and obstructed; it relates, strangely enough, to the everyday life of millions: knowledge of their daily work. Countless men and women in industry and business must still learn, without help from the experience of others, but by patient personal observation, by constant analysis, by a synthesis open only to the persevering, how to become masters of their trade, whether it be that of carpenter, manufacturer or Minister of State.

Admittedly, modern industrial life is complex, for the worker is a man first of all, with his own brain, nerves and muscles, his own character, religion and background; next, in the workshop, he comes into contact with other men—his bosses, his subordinates, his comrades—and is subject to the direct or indirect influence of his trade union; at the end of the day he rejoins his family, in his own city or village, where the social, political and economic questions of the time reach and affect him; and this whole body of facts and ideas, though not directly related to his occupational skill and knowledge, may easily influence his work, whether he will or no, even subconsciously. Numbers of medical, psychological and social problems thus arise in connection with employment and output, which are distinct from specifically technical problems and cannot be solved by the merely technical training of supervisory personnel. The trend of thought today appears to be towards acceptance of the view that anyone in a responsible position, at whatever stage of the industrial scale, besides having technical knowledge of his job, must be able to lead men, to instruct them if necessary, and must have general training conceived in an enlightened social spirit, and fitted to the task in prospect.

Hitherto, in Belgium, the programmes of vocational and technical schools and of universities have as a rule been confined

to purely technical subjects. Pending reform of the curricula of the schools which now train supervisors for industry (managers, heads of administrative services, qualified engineers and technicians, foremen and factory doctors), the problem arises of providing the senior personnel now in employment with additional training which will supplement the technical knowledge they already possess, increase their efficiency and develop their personality in the desired directions. The work which has been accomplished in this field in Belgium, and of future intentions, is reviewed below.

EMPLOYERS AND MANAGERS

In Belgium, employers of labour are organised in a number of federations and associations, such as the Federation of Belgian Employers, the Chemical Industries Federation, the Metal Trades Federation, the Association of Catholic Employers and Engineers, the Royal Society of Engineers and Manufacturers, etc. These bodies provide a forum every year for large numbers of lecturers, thus enabling their members to keep up to date on current questions of employment, training and management. But this cannot be described as methodical training for heads of establishments, since the subjects of the lectures are seldom chosen according to any definite plan.

Employers' associations also set up committees for research or investigation on specified questions, and publish authoritative reports of which instances are given in the course of the following survey.

The Belgian National Committee on Management has established an Employers' and Managers' Information Centre, and this has for four years been organising study courses on specified subjects in accordance with a well-defined programme, aimed at completing the training of managerial personnel and giving them basic ideas on certain matters which they did not study at the university, or which they wish to re-examine in the light of practical experience. These subjects include the organisation of establishments, economic, financial and social problems, and lastly a number of questions belonging to the general field of training (applied psychology, psycho-technics).

Thus, early in 1949 the Centre arranged two days of lectures on the training of managerial staff, which were attended with great interest by a number of managing directors, directors, heads of establishments and heads of personnel services of many Belgian undertakings. More recently these study courses have been reorganised in accordance with the Swiss methods for employers' training courses organised by Dr. Carrard at Ouchy; two sessions of a week each have already been held.

Furthermore, some companies themselves arrange for their heads of services to attend courses of lectures on management, personnel relations, etc.

SENIOR TECHNICAL PERSONNEL

The training of university graduates in engineering for this type of post has been and still is the subject of much exposition and study.

As long ago as 1921, the King drew the attention of the relevant graduates' federations to the social function of the university-trained industrial supervisor. The Federation of Belgian Engineers' Associations subsequently appointed a committee to study the social function and appropriate training of this group, and a report was submitted in 1946. The following were among its conclusions:

(1) The primary function of the university-trained supervisor is a technical one.

(2) His social function is an essential part of his duties.

(3) He is responsible for conditions of work.

(4) He should not set himself up as general adviser to subordinates; he will influence them only to the extent to which he wins their confidence.

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(10) The curricula of the various polytechnical faculties should be co-ordinated. The following should be regarded as particularly useful: scientific psychology, *i.e.*, psychology based on experience; mathematical elements of statistics, supplementing the teaching of the theory of probability, to be linked to the teaching of economics, which might thus be given a more scientific character; social legislation and organisation; general and industrial book-keeping;

study of the value of physical tests for purposes of vocational guidance to workshops, laboratories and offices.

.....

(14) The social training of present and future technical supervisors should be completed by reading, lectures and classes; employers should enable them to attend the latter.

(15) If the aptitudes of an individual technical supervisor suggest his fitness to act as head of the personnel service, including the welfare service, of a large undertaking, he should be allowed to attend classes at a school issuing diplomas in vocational guidance.¹

A step forward has already been taken at the University of Liège, where a Joint Centre for Labour Studies (instruction and research regarding labour and social progress) was established by a Regental Order of 16 December 1947.

The object of this new institution is "to supplement, as regards labour questions, the training of graduates in law, chemistry, medicine, surgery and midwifery, pharmacy, engineering and, in general, all university graduates". It was considered indispensable to introduce post-graduate teaching on labour questions, organised in such a way that the courses could be attended without interfering with the pupils' professional work (the courses are held as a rule between 4 and 7 p.m.). The guiding idea of the curriculum is to bring together teachers from the various faculties and to recommend them to give the fundamental instruction on each aspect of labour—medical, technical, psychological, legal, economic and social.

The second object of the Joint Centre is to stimulate research work. The operation of the centre as a research institute starts with the practical exercises given during instruction. The research teams are composed of graduates of various faculties. Persons attending the courses may be registered. Those attending without registration may receive certificates of attendance, while regular members obtain the diploma of the Joint Centre for Labour Studies after passing an examination.

Supplementary training courses for technical supervisors and chiefs of service, and courses for university engineers taking up such work, have also been given for the last three

¹ At present the State universities (Ghent and Liège), the Catholic University of Louvain and the Free University of Brussels give courses in applied psychology.

years by the Committee for the Guidance and Training of Supervisors in Industry (C.O.F.C.E.). Many large undertakings have sent members of their staff to these courses. In the Liège industrial area, supplementary courses are also arranged by the Institute of Social Studies and are attended by technical supervisory personnel.

Thus the idea that the duties of technical supervisory personnel must include a social function is making rapid headway in Belgium. Further evidence may be seen in the "specifications" laid down by a number of industries (metal trades, textiles, chemicals, mining) to define what they require of establishments for the training of supervisors.

These "specifications" were prepared at the suggestion of the Committee for Vocational and Technical Education of the Federation of Belgian Industries, with the aid of the Belgian employers concerned. In each case, and particularly in the report of the chemical trades committee, the employers, in defining the functions of supervisors, point out that these fall into two main groups—the technical and the psychological and social. They ask that provision should be made for supervisory training in the schools, so that future leaders may be made fully aware of the dignity of manual labour and the respect due to every human being.

FOREMEN

Although some undertakings already had arrangements for training foremen in their own plants, the general question of the training of foremen was first raised in Belgium in 1942, during a one-day study course arranged by the Belgian National Committee on Management. At about the same time the working parties established by the Committee for the Guidance and Training of Supervisors were examining the question, and they submitted their report in 1943. But the principal wave of study and achievement in this field did not begin until after the liberation of the country.

The Vocational and Technical Education Committee of the Federation of Belgian Industries, assisted by representatives of industry and of the vocational schools, has examined the various methods recommended or already applied, so that employers may be in a position to choose, with a full knowledge

of the facts, those most likely to meet the needs of their particular business or trade.

A number of interesting achievements in the field of instruction deserve note. The Paul Pastur Labour University at Charleroi has established an advanced course for supervisors in the metal trades ; this is given for a year, in the evenings, at the rate of two hours a week. The Cardinal Mercier Technical Institute at Brussels has organised classes for persons employed or likely to be employed as industrial supervisors, which are intended to develop qualities that will enable them to realise their responsibilities as leaders ; these classes are given on the first Sunday of each month. The School of Labour Chaplains at Antwerp gives similar classes on Saturday afternoons and Wednesday evenings.

Various large undertakings, including the Fabelta Co. Ltd., Solvay and Co., and the Belgian Chemical Union, have organised training courses in their works for their own foremen. This training is complete in the sense that it includes, besides the scientific and technical subjects required, the principles of management, leadership, book-keeping, etc.

The Committee for the Guidance and Training of Supervisors has for some years been arranging supplementary training courses in many of the country's industrial districts ; these are held once a month, in the evening or at the weekend, for three years, and may be attended by foremen, or candidates for foremen's jobs, sent by their employers. Nearly 4,000 persons have already completed these courses.

In 1949, a scheme was worked out on the lines of the Training Within Industry (T.W.I.) system originating in the United States and was put into operation. Officially the Guidance and Training Committee, by arrangement with the T.W.I. Organisation of Great Britain, has trained the T.W.I. instructors sent by several undertakings and has organised the courses given by these instructors in the factories. The Committee also sent two persons to the instructors' training course organised by the I.L.O. in Paris in May 1949.

After only a few months of operation over 800 foremen in employment have attended the " job instruction " classes run by six instructors from the Committee and 36 instructors belonging to undertakings. Special instructors for " job methods " training were to go through a course in November.

The Committee's programme for the training of foremen now includes : (1) training within industry ; (2) training in the behaviour and obligations of a foreman ; (3) teaching of subjects to supplement technical training.

FACTORY DOCTORS

In Belgium many industrial establishments, banks, etc., have for some time had organised medical services which examine personnel on engagement and during their work in the light of the aptitudes required for the job and the dangers involved. These services are independent of the arrangements for the medical examination of juvenile workers which have been required since 1920 for the protection of their health.

A Regental Order of 18 October 1945 confirmed the above-mentioned practice, regulated it and made it compulsory for all undertakings. The Order requires "a general medical check on all workers, and medical examinations to discover occupational diseases. It places the scheme under Government supervision, but leaves its practical operation to the medical profession. Medical practitioners may be called in at the employers' choice, and will thus play a large part in the proposed preventive scheme, which they will operate in the assurance that they are thereby protecting the health and increasing the prosperity of the working class and so serving the interest of the whole community."

The essential objects of these medical examinations are as follows :

(a) to inform workers regarding any affections or deficiencies which may cause weakness, and to indicate the institutes which will provide treatment ;

(b) to aid employers in securing a just and reasonable allocation of workers to the various jobs in the undertaking, having regard not only to technical qualifications but also to physical aptitude ;

(c) not to declare any person generally unfit for work, but rather to aim at using each person, despite his deficiencies, for work which he can do ;

(d) to search for the first symptoms of occupational disease among workers exposed thereto, that is to say, to discover these diseases at a stage when, broadly speaking, they may still easily be cured.

The work of the factory doctor has thus a statutory basis in Belgium. Furthermore, the doctor belongs to the safety, health and amenities committee which—under a Regental Order of 3 December 1946—every undertaking employing over fifty persons must set up.

Although the duties of the factory doctor are thus clearly defined by law, his place in the personnel organisation of the undertaking is left unregulated. It will be realised that, if his work is to be efficient, he must have permanent contact, in the undertaking, with the technical management, the psychotechnical experts and the nurses. This necessary contact and collaboration has been secured, for some years past, in a number of industrial, commercial and banking establishments, by means of a manpower service.

It is interesting to note that the functions assigned to these services, though first established when Belgium was entirely cut off from contact with the Allies, correspond exactly with those recommended by the United Kingdom Ministry of Labour and National Service for personnel managers.¹ They may be summarised as follows :

(a) relations with the trade union organisations and employers' federations, and with Government authorities ; and at the factory level, relations with shop stewards and the works council ;

(b) welfare : the personnel manager, factory doctor, psychotechnician and nurse form the working party responsible for engagements, transfers, improvement in conditions of work and grading ;

(c) safety, health and amenities service ;

(d) vocational training of apprentices, skilled and semi-skilled workers, and training of prospective foremen.

¹ A Personnel Management Section was set up in the Factory Department of the Ministry in 1945. Cf. *International Labour Review*, Vol. LIII, Nos. 5-6. May-June 1946, p. 393.

It should, however, be pointed out that in Belgium there is as yet no official provision at the universities for the specialised training of factory doctors, although some have arranged voluntary courses in industrial medicine and occupational diseases. This gap in university curricula might well be filled. The above-mentioned Joint Centre at the University of Liège would appear to provide no more than an imperfect solution.

The foregoing brief review will suffice to show the attention with which the question of supervisory training is followed in Belgium. The number of achievements already recorded—and the list given here is far from complete—shows that the country has understood that, besides the technical training which the manager's industrial duties require, recognition of the dignity of labour calls for supplementary training of a different sort.
