

MN 1001B: COURSE ASSIGNMENT 1

Some Social and Psychological Consequences of The Longwall Method of Coal Getting

By Giacomo Bareato

The article discusses about the sociological and psychological structure within a mechanistic system: a coalmine. It's divided into sections that relate to various issues concerning mainly the humanistic development within a contained social structure and how it interrelates with a larger scale 'mass' organisation. In coal mines, the workers are interdependent for any part of the process needed to extract the coal meaning that each individual's job was strictly dependant on the job which previously needed to be done in order to carry out the process. Generally speaking, the work consists of a primary work-group that is then divided into the individual or pair, depending on the job. A vast distinction exists between the two phases of the structure: before mechanisation and after. Pre-mechanised structure mainly consisted in craftsmanship and was treated as such. Mechanised structures are similar to the nowadays assembly lines in which specific jobs are strictly assigned in order to minimize the costs on labour and maximise output. This article expresses views on both structures and how social and psychological characteristic differences in both interrelate with the output produced within the structure.

As noted above, this organisational structure can be divided into two structures, one of which is the succession of the other. The first one is the pre-mechanised structure, better known as 'hand got mining'. In this structure, the workers have full autonomy on their choices of work. This includes also the choice of workmanship that creates an ideal environment for everyone. The individuals are able to carry out different jobs in a rotational succession that eases the stress caused by a strict single job. Their autonomy clarifies the fact that there is no superior control, even given by the fact that supervision is virtually impossible in the mining area. The relationship between the workers expanded also externally from their job site; they were supportive in every way towards family members of their co-workers. Generally speaking this structure produced an ideal social structure that influenced positively their interaction with work. This was mainly induced by the fact that even under good conditions, the amount of work is adjusted depending on the individual. The disadvantages of this structure that the article argues about is the fact that psychologically, the small 'craftsmen' have difficulties in adapting to larger scale structures, which leads us to the mechanised structures.

The longwall structure can be best compared with an assembly line similarly practiced in car manufacturing. The process is broken down in a rigid succession of events that is precisely interrelated. This meaning that a cut on one single mechanised job would stop the whole process. This structure includes fewer workers, which decreases the cost in labour. Whenever a large job needs to be carried out, larger groups interact with individuals or pairs. This type of structure can also be compared to the Tayloristic theory that divides labour into specific and mono-skilled tasks. A deputy who however does not have the ability to supervise the workers manages the group; this ultimately sparks sociological and psychological problems. Although being a better structure production-wise, the structure encounters a series of problems that affect the whole environment. The workers who previously were involved with hand got mining have difficulties in adapting to a large-scale structure. This is due to the fact that the size in which a structure exists compromises tensions of small scale. Wages are not evenly distributed. Most workers are paid by cubic meters or by yard, which creates a tension between the workers given the fact that an individual is strictly dependent on the previous individual in the process line. This is also aggravated by existing bad

conditions that can be also provoked by the anxieties of the latter. The deputy, responsible for the processes, accumulates tension. The manager and the workers create hostility between each other since both don't support each other given that their goals are very different.

According to the article, the work environment needs to associate two distinct factors together. First of all, the production cycle and secondly, the interferences that are brought out from the first mentioned within the social structure as well as the straight hierarchical structure. The association is vital in order to create production efficiency, and according to the author, it can be gained only with years of experience. I believe that the facts explained in the article are a reality as a particular social environment difficultly finds ease in catapulting itself in a new larger environment, and this is true for everything. Mainly, I also believe that the article also deals with the fact that there is no best way to organise a structure. Many factors depend on it. In this case, theoretically, a combination of the two structures would bring about to maximum output and perfect working conditions.

Word Count: 804

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23/11/2001

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