

Rudolf Steiner on Picturing the Whole Work Process

Reminiscence by HERBERT HAHN

“...Rudolf Steiner went on to say that there is a method and a way whereby the foundations of social feeling may be laid. The abstractness of human thinking has led to far-reaching differentiation and specialization in the labor process; it alone has made possible the technique of modern industrialism. But at the same time it has also removed the worker from the wider relationships in which he originally felt healthy and whole. He can experience himself now only as a part of a part, and what he produces only as the splinter of the part of a part. Together with the narrowing of his field of work, his consciousness has narrowed. The former must be accepted as a fact bound up with modern industrial methods; the latter, as an evil that is *not* inevitable, must be overcome...”

“The essential thing — he said in effect — was to create for every worker and employee a picture of the *whole* of his work and also of its place and setting in the world. He started with the situation as it was in the Waldorf-Astoria factory. All the employees, male and female, should be told about all the work done in the other departments. They should also be given a picture of the tobacco plant itself, of the regions where it is cultivated, of the civilization in the countries concerned. Over and above this they should be told about the whole process of the distribution of the finished product and economic and financial factors involved. Similarly, the salesman should be made conversant with all the practical work that had gone into the finished product. When anyone who is engaged on some productive work has a picture of the whole process involved, his consciousness is widened and his human interest kindled. He may continue his work in the narrowest of sections, but he feels spiritually linked with all the others. The social connection then becomes real to him and the feeling of detachment is no longer there.

“Rudolf Steiner thought that this widening of consciousness might be achieved by means of lectures and introductory courses. Something like a syllabus of production should be worked out for each industrial firm. He also had in mind that the individual workers might be invited to visit other departments of a factory; they could go first as observers and later on be given opportunities for practical participation.”