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CONTINUOUS PRODUCTION IS THE ANSWER TO ECONOMIC DISTRESS.

BY
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All political parties agree that if we are to maintain and increase our standard of life we must have increased production. Some exhort the workers: some admonish the managements: others castigate the employers but rarely do the speeches, articles or letters to the Press cut down to the bone - the basic facts of the matter. This is a pity, for correct diagnosis of the cause of under-productivity should lead to that action which speaks so much louder than words.

Where do we find the highest productivity and where the lowest? The highest is in the automobile and similar manufacturing plants - the lowest in the building industry and particularly in building repairs. Why? Because the flow production factories, through organisation, provide continuity in production whereas the other is un-organised, haphazard and discontinuous.

Continuity is the "blessed word". In plants making motor cars, bicycles, radio sets, refrigerators, toys, type-writers and vacuum cleaners to name but a few, the endeavours of management are all bent on securing an even flow of material and components throughout all operations. The assembly lines become metronomes - beating out time for all

contributory processes. The management watch the input and the output of the factory and, providing the latter is up to schedule, all is well. If the output fails or falters, management goes back to trace the break in continuity: the block is cleared and the flow proceeds evenly once again.

To this end management have scheme~~d~~ and invented. They have introduced 'belt assembly' - so much belaboured by those whose emotions get the better of their judgement. They have - by slides, roller track and pendulum conveyors - linked a heterogenous collection of machines into single productive units. They have introduced automatic transfer machines which pass the components through a series of diverse operations, without human intervention. These transfer machines, the latest expression of flow production, will load, clamp, machine, release and transfer the workpiece automatically. They can even inspect and gauge the work during these automatic sequences.

Thus it will be seen that an enormous ^{amount} of thought, ingenuity and even anxiety have gone into these mechanisms with the one objective - the provision of continuous operation.

Continuous operation ensures great savings in labour cost and large economies in the inventory, that is the stock in stores and the work in progress. The inventory has in many instances been reduced by as much as 75%, while the automatic transfer machine has been known to increase production by as much as five

times that of older methods with a nett saving in cost of 50% to 75%.

Managements of the more advanced industries are prepared to spend vast sums to obtain continuity in operation; yet that lesson has not been taken to heart by the community at large. It is not generally recognised that continuity is the key to high productivity, yet if all the energy that has been expended in exhortation and admonition had been applied in a practical manner to secure the necessary conditions for continuous operation there would be no need to worry about our position in the world today.

What happens in practice is a sad commentary on our ability to organise for production. Over and over again a new line of operations has been commenced and frustrated. The foreman has been given his briefing; the tools and fixtures have been provided; the workmen have been trained in their operations and have, in due course, achieved the set target. For a few weeks the output is high - it probably exceeds anticipation. The men are happy with their higher earnings - the charge hands and foremen can take their time to remove snags and to improve local conditions. The drawing office and the toolroom can tackle that back-log of work which has been hampering them ever since the change-over from war conditions. Then the continuity is broken - something goes wrong - material supplies are not forthcoming -

there are power cuts - a tariff concession is withdrawn- a local strike upsets conditions - government intervention breaks the slender thread. The full flow of work becomes a dribble or stops altogether. The operators become discontented - the wise man in the gang (and not necessarily a communist) says; "Well mates I told yer. Yerss! Work like hell 'n be merry and yer work yerselves out of a job. I've seen it 'appen afore an' it'll 'appen again". The goodwill has evaporated - everyone feels frustrated - let down, and can you be surprised ?

Something like the foregoing is continually happening and all the admonition in the world cannot put it right - only action can do that, and the required action is not so easy as talk. Today we must study how to secure continuity in all our manufacturing establishments. This is the crux of the matter and the key to the situation. To obtain continuity is admittedly difficult but not impossible. It needs co-operation, it requires thought, dispassionate analysis and diagnosticians worthy of the name.

Every section of the community can and must contribute. All manufacturing establishments - small and large must aim at continuous production. This means flow line lay-outs and a policy that will enable the flow line to operate. Such a policy indicates specialisation in products and an adoption of standardisation and simplification to a greater degree than at present obtains. It means resisting the tendency to look over neighbours' fences and a

determination to 'follow through' with one's own products. The Trade Unions must continue to forego sectional disturbances and must co-operate in procuring the larger cake from which their members will have an appropriately larger slice. The Government must see that their influence is used to keep our markets open and to ensure that materials and power are available for without a full pipe-line neither manufacturer nor management nor operator can secure continuous operation.

If we are to lift ourselves up to a higher plane of existence. If we are to face the world with a stable currency, we must produce more and more - and much more economically. The way to do this without hurt or harm to any section of the community is by widening the area and increasing the scope of operations based on the simple idea of 'Continuous Production'.

Frank G. Woollard
