

NEWS AND NOTES

AUTOMATION AND ADULT EDUCATION

The subject of Automation, Atomic Energy and Adult Education was discussed at a conference organised by the European Bureau of Adult Education in Berger, Netherlands, in 1956.

It was stated in one of the thought-provoking talks, "One pressure is constant: man's discontent. 'We want more' is not only a trade union policy, it is also a human tendency." It was also revealed that four real social and human problems facing us today were: unemployment, displacement of labour, loss of pride in work and the use of greatest leisure time. In all these problems adult education has an important role to fulfil in smoothing social difficulties and preparing workers to adapt themselves to the changes which technical development will bring to their lives. Adult Education organisations must collaborate with trade unions and industry in this matter.

The relationship of adult education with man's need to find joy in work and satisfaction in being alive was placed before the Conference. Several matters to be discussed in this context were also presented before the Conference, for instance, the fluidity of labour and the necessity for speeding up training, the suitability of a person for a specific job, and a consciousness of the value of the individual in the doing of a job, the revision of many of the traditional methods of imparting knowledge and the possibility of utilising some of the "shock" tactics employed for teaching and training troops during the last war. Importance and the meaning of leisure were also discussed. It was stated that the only true dividing line between work and leisure was that the latter rested on the free choice of the

individual. It is the task of Adult Education to guide this choice.

During the past year, a team of American consultants have been working in eight European countries on a European Productivity Agency project "Training of Trainers in Human relations." One of these consultants attended the Conference for some time.

There has been a revolution in the United States in the field of cultural and social sciences. Anthropology, psychology and sociology have got together to try to fathom the problems of change. The emotional climate of any group affects the leadership and change makes a great difference to it and brings us face to face with the problems of co-operation, decision and authority. We cannot consider individuals only by themselves but should consider them in relation to their place in society. Adult education in the States is greatly concerned with group techniques and group development and, in a community, the university acts as a kind of consultation service.

The bases of any group programme are training, research, and action. There is a tendency to assume that people develop any how through training and education, but it is not always realised how much emotion and feelings are involved and how big a gap there is between schooling and real life experiences.

Discussion Groups.—These were three discussion groups and each chose subjects from a series of topics which had emerged from the speeches and discussion in the early part of the week. They fell under two main headings:

- A. Education within the Community.
- B. The Social Problems of Readjustment.
- A. As far as leisure is concerned, adult

education must watch over three aspects, the physical, the moral and intellectual, and the social. It also must seek to collaborate with and influence those responsible for the press, radio, films and television. Adult education must give workers possibilities of using their increased leisure so that they may enrich their lives and not merely pass the time.

From this arose the point that leisure time activities could be used to encourage people to accept responsibility more readily in their local community, their country and in Europe. Adult education should relate its activities as far as possible to the lives of people in industry and in the home.

It was not sufficient for adult educationalists to use the accepted mass media of communication in their work; they should make contact with film-makers, broadcasters and the press, and collaborate fully with them.

In the same way, adult education should play a greater part in industrial training centres in order to prevent too narrow a specialisation and to give the ordinary worker a more liberal training which will help him, if he has ability, to make his transfer later to management or administration.

A new attitude towards work and training for industry is necessary if people are to feel that enthusiasm and drive which is the only way to step up productivity. The worker must feel that he is an essential figure in the whole pattern of community life.

B. Some of the discussion on the social problems of readjustment could equally have come under category A., for example, the danger of too much uniformity which tends to be a feature of any highly technological society; the place of man in society also. It was shown that there must be a limitation to

self-interests within the community and an attempt to give a wider outlook to the ordinary man and woman so that they are conscious of their citizenship, not only in their own locality and within their national boundaries but also in the much wider community which will be formed by the opening up of the big market which will inevitably come about with automation.

One thing strongly emphasised was the need for preliminary consultation between management and labour before carrying out any large-scale technical changes in industry. Another was the difficult question of the displaced worker. The trade-union participants were particularly firm about safeguards for all workers likely to be affected by automation, together with adequate social security, retirement pension, family allowances, etc.

The political parties and trade unions must have a constructive policy which will see these technical developments on a long-term basis and not let themselves be carried away by short-sighted political manoeuvres.

We must control automation, nuclear energy and other sources of power, which are man's servants, acting for his good, and not his masters. But we must accept that there will be far-reaching changes in the structure of our society which will lead to new conceptions of leadership and authority.

The central problem of this whole question of automation and its relationship with adult education was felt to be the need to give understanding to all, and not merely to management and workers. In school, in industry and commerce and in the home, everyone should be shown what automation means in terms of living a whole life.