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## Liflong Education and General-Liberal Studies: A Fair Shake for Organized Labor?

By DEE LYONS

I want to thank the Association for this opportunity to speak to you, and I begin with the following quote:

“If we should ask, ‘Who are you?’—you would probably give your name. If we persist in asking, ‘Who are you?’—you would probably say, ‘I’m an accountant, an engineer, or machinist, or businessman, or educator.’ You would relate ‘Who you are’ with ‘What you are’—your job, your vocation . . . your career.

“Don’t you see that this is what career education is all about? Don’t you see that if we continue to allow the majority of our youth to complete public education without any career knowledge and preparation, then many of them may become nobodies—except for name?”

This quote came from the Michigan State Chamber of Commerce in September, 1973. This is a statement often taken as fact. So what is wrong with it? Nothing, except its implication that human beings are robots which come out of one kind of a mold or another.

It answers none of the individual’s questions about values apart

from a job. Let me emphasize here, that labor organizations do *not* relegate a job to low priority. We *do* hold individual human beings as a top priority. Is someone really a nobody unless he is related to a job? Conversely, does a job *guarantee* that he is somebody?

I am reminded of a speech by Sidney Harris in 1968 or '69 when he talked about morality as how a person treats another in his dealings, his relationships, with that other person. He went on to say that because we view people by their function, their job, we are inhibited in our relationships with them; they take on less the garbs of human beings, but more of the impersonalization of a machine.

We meet the new postman at a church supper and hardly recognize or know what to discuss without the familiarity of his uniform and the mail he carries.

Our child meets the kindergarten teacher in the grocery store and finds it incredulous that her teacher could actually buy groceries as her mother does. For her, the teacher did not exist outside the boundaries of school. And so it goes.

We develop a mind set about people in relation to their function in society, blocking out our consideration of them as unique individuals.

The correlation between a person's job and the rest of his nature is usually an assumption based on that function. Witness Congressman Mills, who suddenly did not seem to fit the long-held assumption.

Only recently, comparatively speaking, have teachers been allowed to talk-like, smoke-like, drink-like, and marry-or-not like, other human beings. The "Who are you" being "What are you" stunted their "process of becoming," as described by the German philosopher, Goethe. In fact, it stunted their process of plain, ordinary living.

Take my example. I hardly fit the description of the typical "SOB from the Union Hall," though I almost achieved that distinction. Guess which words were left out.

Let me go back to the Chamber of Commerce quote. Yes, we need to help people—of all ages—make good choices about jobs and to have a positive attitude about them. But is that all life is about?

We feel that career education and lifelong education are concepts we can support. We cannot say what the mechanics should be. We will say that organized labor makes up a significant part of American society and should be given, finally, a fair shake in the decision-making processes in education and elsewhere.

For instance, we do not wish to see more emphasis put on career education as a euphemism for vocational education or as a way to find an excuse for less federal support for higher education. Our members and working people in general, have less access to higher education because of the too prevalent attitude exemplified by our departed former vice president Agnew. He said in 1970 that there had been a rediscovery of the "natural aristocracy of intellect," and so colleges

and universities should admit only those who have demonstrated "superior intellectual qualifications." The others would be better off taking vocational education.

Now we do recognize the glut on the market of Ph.Ds who cannot find employment and would agree that some could be culled out. Especially those whose only avocation is to be a professor because "where else can you make this kind of money for working half the time."

Fortunately, this questionable attitude is not typical. We, as a nation, have many whose abilities and attitudes may never be allowed to surface, though they are eligible candidates for the "natural aristocracy." Their place in the social hierarchy pre-determined their place in the world of work. This becomes a circular problem because when we go back to my original quote about "who" and "what" you are, we find that their place in the world of work determines their place in society.

We realize that there is almost no free, flexible, self-determining individual. Even Rockefeller is finding a tough row to hoe.

It is especially frustrating when we consider that too often, education—contrary to being a continuing thing which focuses on helping an individual reach his maximization of human potential, is instead a brainwash job for the good of someone who is going to utilize that person. Again, to paraphrase the chamber of commerce at a career education seminar, "Since industry and business are the largest utilizers of the products of education, it is only logical that they be first in helping decide the curriculum in economics, etc., so that the free enterprise system will be protected."

Just last Tuesday, I attended parents' night at my daughter's junior high school. There was a marked difference from the school she attended last year.

From the orientation to the evening's program by the Principal, and on through most of the presentations by teachers, the concept which came through loud and clear was that of teaching children:

"What an employer expects."

"What industry wants."

"Values." Not how to help children develop values of their own which they can live by.

"What I want the children to do," as opposed to helping children define their own wants.

"What Oldsmobile looks for in an employee."

The attitude reminded me of what one hears about the propaganda of Communist China and its preponderant slogans: "Chairman Mao wants . . ." "For the good of the state, Chairman Mao wants . . ."

Do not dismiss this as a rude analogy; I used it precisely because it

is rude. Because it *does* say to teachers and institutions that it is wrong to perpetuate a class system of the exploiters and exploited in the late twentieth century.

Where in the curriculum anywhere do we see education for living which teaches avoidance of manipulation *as well as* duties and responsibilities which go along with being an employee?

Education for living implies that if innovations such as the shorter work week are implemented, that workers have adequate knowledge to make a decision based on their self-interest. They may get another job because of conditioning by the work ethic coupled with the conspicuous consumption ethic, or they may find value in increased leisure time. I did not say which should be chosen. I am talking about reasonably free and flexible choices which people can make only with adequate education.

Lifelong education must recognize that all aspects of living must be included in the process.

For instance, there is no teaching of any significance in the public schools, K through 12, about the structure and role of unions or about the process of collective bargaining, though teaching units for these grade levels have been developed.

This has been done by a few teachers in isolated instances, by certain school boards in cooperation with segments of the community, and by the Joint Council on Economic Education, which is comprised of industry, labor, educators, and other groups.

There is very little education which is adequate in colleges and universities. There are only a few graduate programs which go deeply into labor and industrial relations with equal treatment of labor. MSU is one of those which has a good program, but not, however, at the undergraduate level. What was developed as an area of concentration is a farce. In fact, the School of Labor and Industrial Relations knew nothing about it.

I spoke at a pre-employment class a couple of years ago and saw in the teacher's unit, that to enforce contract demands, "Unions go on strike . . . and most often do." There was complete ignorance of the fact that less than five percent of all contracts in the United States are settled by use of the strike.

Students at every level are taught to be dutiful, docile, non-uppity employees but are taught none of the rights, responsibilities and advantages of being a union member, even though many of them will go to work for the first time in a place where union membership is automatic, and then will be chastized when they make uninformed, adverse decisions.

This lack of education carries over into other occupations like those of journalists who cannot write an accurate portrayal of an impasse situation in collective bargaining.

There is a difference in the meaning of the sentences:

“The labor bosses called a strike.” and “A strike vote was taken and the majority of members voted in favor of striking.”

There is little knowledge about the arbitration process or the grievance procedure; or, I might add, the unique contribution the labor movement made to the creation of specialists in labor law and arbitration—high-paying specialities.

With the advent of PERA in 1965, we found city managers caving in to demands or resorting to arbitration without even going through the motions of trying to negotiate. They hadn't the foggiest notion of what bargaining was all about, and their understanding of unions seemed to be that whatever a union wanted, must be given. Unions almost had to do managements' jobs for them. There was none of the ritual, the finesse, the nuances of sophistication which have developed in the industrial sector, and in the old craft unions.

Some months ago, I went as a representative of our organization to an arbitration hearing to verify that our organization was, indeed, a union for purposes of time off with pay written into the local contract of a firefighters' union. The city attorney maintained that ours was not a union, not necessary to the firefighters' union, even when I pointed out that the compulsory arbitration act which governed those very proceedings could not have come about without the input and vote and participation of the firefighters' union.

There is no value in history if we cannot learn from it. If that history is not recorded and taught, the same mistakes must be repeated. We ask that unions be included in that education. We have made definite contributions in the fields of politics, economics, and legislation. We were among, in fact led, those who brought about free public education. We have managed to achieve a better standard of living for working people and for the poor non-working. We have worked for safety laws, layoff protection, consumer protection, health legislation, mass transportation, highway building. And we have lobbied for adequate funding for education, including universities like this one.

Education is a necessary condition for social change; it can also perpetuate outmoded attitudes to the point that we have social stagnation. I believe general studies can be the place to break the cycle. Though I pointed out earlier that broader education encompassing the role of unions was necessary at an early age, we must have teachers, writers of ads, newscasters, politicians, economists—every occupation—take us for granted and get us out of this quasi-legal status. We think it is time we got justice for our education dollar.

