



At the November 1st Open House of Packaging Industries, to which all Town Meeting Members were invited, we witnessed a demonstration of the machines producing plastic packaging materials and were served a buffet luncheon in the huge new plant promising 300 jobs for people on Cape Cod.

In a conversation with a young man who's collecting unemployment at present he told me he'd turned down a job offer that day because he could collect more from unemployment than he could earn, so why work? Besides, he didn't want to pump gas.

At Packaging Industries I watched the women operating the machines. The machine did 99 per cent of the work. The women picked up the completed products as they spewed out and stacked them in cartons for shipment.

Eight hours a day of bending over, picking up featherlight plastic envelopes, stacking them in cartons. Minimum wage. Not difficult work; not work that requires any thought; little or no opportunity for advancement.

It's a chance to work, though, for 300 people who may now or may soon be collecting unemployment. If they want a job.

Those of us who were brought up in the "work ethic" era feel any job is better than a hand-out. Nevertheless, even if I were jobless, I wouldn't want to stand at one of those machines and pick up pieces of plastic and pile them in boxes all day, every day, week in week out.

It's a difficult situation. People who work, even for less than they could collect from unemployment, have respect for themselves and earn the respect of society in general. They are viewed as taking responsibility for supporting themselves.

Climbing unemployment rates, stories of large lay-offs and long unemployment lines engender sympathy for people who want to work but can find no jobs. Talking with young people who turn down job-offers dilutes sympathy considerably.

Watching a woman bending-twisting-stacking, bending-twisting-stacking, hour-after-hour, engenders sympathy for her. Such work would send me up-the-wall in less than eight hours. The noise of the machines is deafening. The clatter and racket in that huge building full of machinery chattering-rattling-snapping would drive me to drink.

Young folks talk about the importance of "love"; they say they know "Someone, up there, is looking out for them." May be. I try to be patient and understanding. They are good kids; I know they are.

But what are they good FOR? What are they contributing? Are they not expecting to be cared for, like little children? Employers seeking people who will give a bit more than is expected, who will add a small percentage to the margin of profit.

What's to become of the youngones who feel "Someone" will take care of them? Some of them COULD be working now, be establishing themselves, be building some security.

Or could they? Is a job like standing at a machine earning a minimum

wage of value? Could it produce even a recommendation for being more than dependable and prompt about coming to work? Is that worth anything?

When industry comes into communities like ours, is that good? Does it provide good jobs for people here? Or does it attract people to such jobs, people who can do nothing better than bend-twist-stack?

What kind of people will be hired to run the machines? Are there enough of those, here, now, or will more like them, who can qualify for nothing better, drift down this way, work for a while, and then either go on welfare or get themselves fired, so they can collect unemployment?

If you expect me to provide the answers to such questions, your expectations are too high. I don't know the answers.

If you have youngsters, though, try to show them why it's important they prepare themselves to be self-supporting in some way requiring a little more of them than stoop labor.

If they aren't intellectually inclined, encourage them to use the vocational training available to them, so they'll have something to offer a prospective employer besides a strong back and a weak mind.

If they have average intelligence, point out the advantages of learning some sort of trade. The ability to operate a typewriter, an adding machine, a comptometer, a computer, is saleable.

The ability to take shorthand, keep books, fix cars, do plumbing, carpentry, painting, build boats, tell weeds from cultivated plants, dress hair or barber, is worth something.

It's a better future than collecting the output of a machine that does everything else without assistance. That sort of work requires no thought, no planning, is robot-like and devastates intellect.

You who are raising children and hoping they will become contributing members of society have a responsibility to help them appreciate the importance of being more than just good. To compete today, you have to be "good for something".

It's disturbing to realize present-day attitudes of indifference must either change or millions of young people will, at middle age, be stuck doing work that suffocates them.

The will to become worthwhile, to use body and mind to the fullest, to achieve the most that capability enables is missing in many young people today.

The idea of offering opportunities for people to work at employment that's more than deadly monotonously also seems lacking. Between the two lacks, we're being destroyed.

The farmer, though he works from dawn to dark, has satisfactions. He is close to the earth. He knows plowing time by the feel of the soil squeezed in his fist. He knows planting time by the look of the rising moon. He knows watering time by the cricket's chirp and the dry grit of dust under his fingernails. At harvest time he sees his fruits and vegetables ripen, ready for gathering.

The fisherman, though he faces broiling days under the hot sun, stormy waters rain-lashed and wind-whipped, icy blasts and freezing nets, finds his harvest studying clouds in the sky, birds dipping to the sea's surface, the set of his sails, and the length of the wave under his boat's prow. When his silvery holdfull slips into port, he has tales to tell of his voyage. His life may be hard, but it's satisfying.

When all you do is bend-twist-stack, hour after hour, and nothing changes -- when all you hear is the roar of machinery day after day, and your only harvest is your Friday paycheck -- what does it do to your mind?

What do you say to your family at the dinner table? You don't even know if the weather was fair or foul that day.

I don't blame people for not wanting that kind of work. I do blame them for not wanting, enough, to make certain they are prepared to do something more stimulating.

I don't blame industrialists for offering monotonous jobs. It's not their purpose to be concerned about social welfare. Their responsibility is to the corporation and their stockholders.

They hire the least expensive labor capable of doing the job at hand to produce an item that will compete in the marketplace and give them a profit. In this way they help some people, who would otherwise have to be supported by the rest of us, earn enough to feed, clothe and house themselves, after a fashion.

Many young people growing up right here and now will end up in bend-twist-stack jobs even though they could have done better if they'd prepared themselves to realize their full potential.

It takes more than "Someone, up there" to do that!