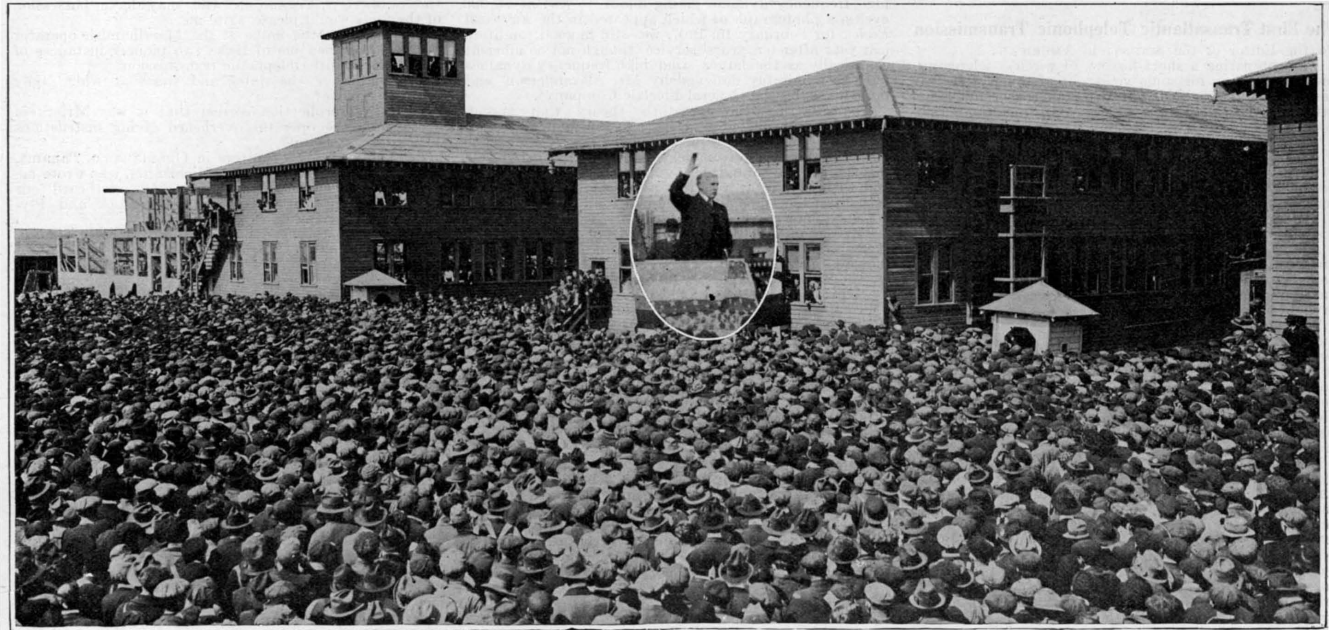


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Teaching the Worker to Feel the War: How the man in the shipyards are responding to the spur of patriotism

by Dr. Charles Aubrey Eaton, head of the national service section of the United States shipping board - 1918-1919



A crowd of workmen at Hog Island gathered to hear Dr. Eaton speak. Dr. Eaton may be seen in the insert

On a November evening in 1917, the naval architects and marine engineers of America were holding their annual meeting in the great banquet hall of the Waldorf Astoria. The leading men of the shipbuilding industry of America were there. Among the guests was the Honorable Josephus Daniels and Admiral Capps, at that time General Manager of the Emergency Fleet Corporation.

The meeting was marked by a spirit of seriousness amounting almost to depression. Sudden and tremendous calls had been made upon the shipbuilding resources of our nation and these calls could not be met. The reason understood by the men there gathered was that the workers in the shipyards of America do not understand the gravity of the situation and we're not producing to the full extent of their ability.

I was the last speaker on the program. I had prepared an address dealing with what I thought ought to be the solution of this most difficult situation. To my

astonishment the entire company welcomed what I had to say as a possible answer to the problem. Before the meeting had ended, Admiral Capps had commandeered me to go into the shipyards of the country and put into practice the theory which I had outlined.

The next morning I met Admiral Capps by appointment, and together with other officers of the Emergency Fleet Corporation we went to Staten Island. On one of the new ways of the Downey Shipbuilding Corporation we held our first meeting. Mr. Downey and Admiral Capps agreed after the meeting that we had found the solution of the problem.

It was after the first of the year before we could take up the matter in any organized and efficient way. Then there was organized, under the direction of Mr. Charles Piez, Vice President and General Manager of the Emergency Fleet Corporation, The National Service Section of which I was appointed head and which has ever since been carrying out the program as outlined in the November meeting of the shipboard builders in New York.

This bare recital of facts contains within it an extraordinary departure from the established principles and methods of industry. For the first time in the history of the world, a great commercial undertaking was frankly founded upon spiritual forces. It was and still it is still the opinion of Mr. Piez, as it is still my own, that the measure of a man's productive power is the quality of spirit which he brings to the task. If a man comes to the shipyards as a mere machine he cannot produce either in quality or quantity as much as he ought to do. If he is working simply for money he's a hireling, and takes his place among the other machines of the shipyard. If on the other hand he goes to the shipyard as a patriot taking into his hands the implement of his toil, as a soldier takes his rifle, and build ships for the purpose of saving his beloved country from the invader, then the man's efficiency approaches its maximum. He has ceased to be an industrial machine. He is no longer a hireling. He's a free man. His work has become not a task but a sacrament; a ministry; a patriotic service. Spirit is kindled by large principles of freedom and manhood. His mind is alert. His moral force is strengthened and this inner transformation affects favorably every movement of his body.

These ideas I have seen I have seen demonstrated beyond doubt a hundred times in the last six months. In the great Fore River plant at Quincy Mass., we held a meeting in February attended by eight or ten thousand men. The thermometer registered 17 below zero. In spite of that it was a warm meeting. At the close of the meeting a fine specimen of shipworker barred my pathway as I came down from the platform. He looked belligerent.

"Who do you think you were looking at here and he inquired.

I answered him, "I am looking at a very fair specimen of a New England shipbuilder."

“You are not, he replied. “you are looking at a plain ordinary garden-variety of a damn fool!”

I was interested. Most of us achieve this at some time, and some of us achieve it often, but we hate to admit it. This gentleman at least was honest with himself. I waited with curiosity to discover what he had to say further. He began to cry, and then he said: “I have been a ship worker for 24 years. “I have only two boys. I love them. Both of them are at the moment in the trenches in France. What a fool I have been! I was away last week three days for my work.

“Why sir,” and a great sob welled up from his throat, “the work which I failed to do with those three days might have saved my boys life. Without realizing it, I might have killed my own sons.”

He turned and walked away, and as he went, he looked back over his shoulder and said, “You just watch your uncle Dudley from now on.”

This gentleman has suddenly become a rational moral agent. He was getting down to brass tacks. The intoxication of Bolshevism, which looks upon work as the devil is supposed to look upon holy water was suddenly blown out of his system. He had become an American citizen again, a free man, and he discovered that no man has a right to be free unless he's prepared to pay the price of freedom. In this man's case, that price was work. In the case of his two sons that was fighting with weapons. In both cases they were soldiers; over there in the first line here in the second line of defense.

My first round of the shipyards was one of the most encouraging experiences of my life. I found the men to be simply a cross-section out of American life. All of them were selfish just like the rest of us. Some of them were slackers, but we have an abundance of slackers in any walk of life. Few of them had given any serious thought to their citizenship. It never occurred to the majority of them that being an American citizen laid any moral decay obligation upon a man almost equal to that involved in the kingdom of God. We had been drifting down stream with our eyes shut; sidestepping hard things had become the great national sport.

The unique characteristic of the Christian religion lies in its power of self regeneration and this is my this to my mind is the chief glory of democratic citizenship. At the very moment when we seem to be approaching the abyss there emerges those hidden energies which all the while have been at work underneath the surface preparing us for a new era of greatness, efficiency, and labor. I found all the man in the shipyards needed was to know. They they responded to our appeal with remarkable enthusiasm.

I have personally spoken to three-quarters of a million of men all over this nation in the shipyard and industrial plants during the first six months of this year. During the months of July the National Service Section through its corps of speakers addressed 1,100,000 men. We have yet to record the first instance of discourtesy on

the part of the workingman towards one of our speakers. This speaks well for the speakers and it speaks well for the men.

The psychology of the shipyards changes almost from day today. We found at first the men did not know what Germany was doing. Like all the rest of us they had been duped by German propaganda and even after we had been in the war ourselves for months German spies and propagandists were at work among them. Wounded soldiers from the trenches representing representing Canadian, British, French and Italians came and told her stories. We placed these men on the stand as witnesses for the plaintiff. Their statements of actual fact was always followed by an interpretive address given by some civilian.

In the Standard Shipbuilding Yards on Shudder Island a little New York boy of meager education and no oratorical gifts stood facing 3000 ship workers. He had gone to Canada from the city and enlisted in one of those wonderful Canadian regiments. Three times he had been desperately wounded. Invalidated home, he he wore up on his sleeve the stripes which showed the number of his wounds. He stood before that great crowd of ship workers and told them his story. As he finished an aged labor work leaped upon the platform and clasped him into his arms. Speaking in broken English, he said "I am French. My son is in the trenches today fighting for France. You make me think of him."

Then stooping, the old man lifted the sleeve of the young uniform and kissed the three stripes which signified honorable wounds.

Not a man in the crowd of hard-handed workers but knew what they were looking at as he witnessed this touching scene and the results of the thought and feeling were manifest almost instantly in increased output.

I have recently returned from the Pacific coast where during the month of July in company with Mr. Charles M Schwab, Director General of the Emergency Fleet Corporation, Mr. Charles Piez, Vice President and General Manager, Mr. C W Castle, General Counsel, we visited the shipyards of the three pacific states. Everywhere the reception was the same. Shipyard bands met us at all hours of the day and night at railway stations to escort our leaders to and from the train. Everywhere when Mr. Schwab appeared in the shipyards the men welcomed him with a great shout of friendship. Everywhere they pledged without reservation to stand by our government and our country as good soldiers until the war is won. That these were no idle words is shown by the fact that on San Francisco Bay alone, on the Fourth of July, they were launched 17 great ships.

In the Alameda yard the *Defiance* a ship of 12,000 tons went down the ways having been built in 38 days. As the great hulk slipped towards the bay she was followed by an immense crane lowering the hull of her successor. Then and there the men pledged Mr. Schwab that it would build his successor in 28 days.

As the head of the National Service Section, I visited the shipyards of this

nation, north, south, east, and west. I have come into contact with great numbers of citizens in every section of the land and I am convinced that at this moment there is flowing like a great Niagara, a flood of dedication that will bear upon its bosom our Government until this war is won. The masses of American men and women are determined that Germany shall be beaten. They will keep nothing back and sacrifice or service until this is accomplished. This attitude is not emotional; there is no hysteria. It is the calm deadly reasoned attitude of free moral beings who see a murderous, brutal tyranny threatening to ruin the world; and who are determined to take hold of this hated thing and break it.

There are certain facts about the ship building program which every American ought to know. First as to the quality of leadership which the government has been fortunate to secure in the beginning of this greatest of all programs. At the head of the shipping board stands Mr. Edward N. Hurley who throughout the strain and vicissitudes since he assumed the position has held on his way braving public opinion, inspiring shipbuilders by his appeals, straightening out labor difficulties and with an unswerving loyalty backing up the President of the United States to the full of his power. With Mr. Hurley stands Mr. Charles Piez Vice President and General Manager of the Emergency Fleet Corporation – the five the \$50,000,000 corporation which is charged with the task of producing the ships we need. Mr. Piez is doing a work which entitles him to the ungrudging gratitude and affection of the American people. A great engineer and executive, he enjoys the confidence of the employers and the workingmen alike. Calm, logical, and absolutely just, he does not hesitate to tell the truth as he sees it, and this habit of mind has earned for him the confidence of the nation to a remarkable degree.

When a few months ago Mr. Hurley and Mr. Piez decided we must have a supreme leader in ship production there was only one choice, Mr. Charles M Schwab, who is equipped for the position of Director General as is no other man in America or for that matter in the world. With the unerring judgment of men trained in self government the whole nation accepted the appointment of Mr. Schwab as the greatest event of a personal nature which has happened since we entered the war. From the greatest to the least, all are convinced that in Mr. Schwab we have a leader of sufficient courage, vision, experience, and resource to bring us safely through.

This attitude of confidence and affection on the part of the masses of our citizenship towards those three leaders in our ship program is in itself a striking comment upon the dignity and value of democracy.

When one undertakes to visualize the vastness of this enterprise the imagination falters. We have undertaken to expend \$3,800,000,000 in the production of ships. This is as much as the government of the United States ever expended in the three most expensive years of its history.

This vast program is being carried forward in nearly 150 shipyards dotted

around the entire coast line of the United States. Scores of these shipyards a year ago did not exist. The three great fabricating plants, the Submarine Boat Corporation, the Bristol yard and the Hog Island yard have all come into existence within the last 12 months. Not only have these those plants being built but they have already begun to produce ships. A few months more and these 3 yards alone will eclipse in their output the entire energy of the nation before the war. In the group Fore River Plant in Quincy, Mass. an naval construction program of unparalleled magnitude is going forward. Mr. Wakeman the general manager of this vast enterprise seldom sees his name heralded abroad but he stands there amidst the mighty machinery of the mighty shipyard, a great leader of the hosts of freedom. No general, no admiral can possibly outrank such men in our contribution to the winning of the war.

At Squantum, a few miles away despite the unspeakable weather conditions of the winter there grew out of the frozen muck the great Victory Plant which has already within a few months of its beginning produced ships of the highest grade.

We could mention a number of others of equal worth and magnitude in the Atlantic seaboard if space permitted.

In the Great Lakes district, which is an old shipbuilding center, the tide of efficiency and service keeps pace with the general movement throughout the nation. On the Fourth of July at the Ecorse Plant of the Great Lakes Engineering Company, a ship was launched which had been built in 14 days.

On the Pacific coast, the great card shipyard in Tacoma has grown in 12 months out of the sea. Where these towering buildings and great hulks now stand with thousands of busy workmen swarming to and fro, 12 months ago the blue waters of the Puget Sound rippled with the eddying tides.

A year ago their doubtless were men who wanted to build ships for money. Today the ship contractor stand forth, publicly and privately, dedicated to the winning of this war regardless of their gain or loss. I have heard more than one great shipmaster place his entire facilities at the disposal of the government, simply as a patriotic service, without regard as to whether they were a dollar profit or not

The National Service Section received almost daily inquiries as to the method and results of its work, We are organized as a branch of the Emergency Fleet Corporation and as such we represent the United States government. We exist for the purpose of helping to win the war by a campaign of education and inspiration not only not only among the men who build ships or who supply the accessories for ships but also among the masses of the people. Our religion is to beat the Kaiser. This is our politics. We know neither party and respect. We have nothing to do with class distinctions or class consciousness. We speak to men simply as American citizens whose country is in danger and who are therefore under obligation do either work or fight to save it.

Slowly but surely the workingmen are passing out of the era of class

consciousness. The larger ideas of nationhood and community interest are finding a welcome in their minds. Here and there are leaders who have not yet caught the new spirit but as a rule the labor leaders are showing themselves patriotic to a high degree and are leading their men by example of precept to serve the nation. We have been the means of averting a large number of threatened strikes and other troubles. Almost invariably when these difficulties arise we present to the men and management the situation as we see it from a national point of view and almost without exception the men agree to postpone consideration of their grievances until they can be adjudicated upon by the war labor board which is an official instrument of the government for such purposes; and furthermore they agree to abide by this decision. In many cases great throngs of workmen voluntarily pledged themselves not to strike no matter what grievances may arise until the war is won.

We have not reached a condition which even approaches perfection but we are infinitely better off than we were a year ago. All classes including the workingman are beginning to think in terms of the nation rather than of the class. This alone is an achievement which amounts almost to a revolution.

Because of the high wages and other conditions which need not be mentioned here, there has been an immense turnover of labor not only in the shipyards but in industrial plants auxiliary to ship building. In some sections this turnover has reached the unbelievable total of 500%. **The great thing that is needed now is a national wage scale which will remove from the restless floating portion of labor its incentive to move.** We are nearer achieving this today than we were even a few weeks ago.

It has been my personal belief and hope from the beginning of the war that labor and capital both in this country would so organize themselves that they could place the entire resources at the disposal of our government, not in sections, in groups, or in classes, but nationally. I believe the facts warrant the statement that we are fast approaching such a consummation. The Labor Department, with its new program for labor enlistment and apportionment has made a tremendous step in this direction. Wage equalization and adjustment must keep pace. Governmental control of housing and transportation will help. Continuous education in the principles of citizenship is absolutely essential not only in shipbuilding but in every department of our life.

I cannot close this fragmentary statement without sounding a note of warning. We're going to win this war; but after we won the war and peace comes our nation and all the nations are going to face conditions of appalling difficulty and complexity. The soldier and the sailor will have to be provided for in accordance with their just claims upon the gratitude of the nation. The share of labor in the national wealth will have to be settled on permanent and just principles. Labor in its organized form here as in England will have to develop a program worthy of new age. It will no longer be a matter of hours and conditions of labor and rates of pay. The problem will gather

around this question: Can we find away by which labor will cease the hireling relationship and become consciously a partner and become consciously a participator in the common wealth.

What is true of labor will be equally truth true of capital. The age of capitalistic lawlessness is gone forever. But in the new age capital must have just as square deal as labor. No democracy can everybody which turns from its strong men and looks for leadership to the weakling, the ignorant, or the inefficient. Bolshevism is as bad as Prussianism. America will have nothing to do with either except to fight them to the finish.

Our whole social structure will have to be rebuilt. Religion itself must find a new medium of expression. Politics must in someways seek and find rehabilitation and regeneration. Our whole educational system will have to be rebuilt to meet the new needs.

It will be a time to try men's souls, but because of the magnificent girding of our nation for the winning of the war, we may look forward hopefully and believe with an unwavering faith that the common sense love of liberty, and innate justice of the American people will, under the good guidance of God, find an answer to all questions affecting our life, and that our people will go forward through the difficult years to the establishment of a new age in which brotherhood, opportunity, and above all, the spiritual, shall find full and real recognition.