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Psychology in Industry: Origins and Sociopolitical Implications

Isaac Prilleltensky

ABSTRACT: In spite of the numerous sociopolitical implications involved in the practice of industrial/organizational (I/O) psychology, social scientists working in industries have been operating under the erroneous assumption that they are merely providing an *apolitical* service that will impact favorably on employers and employees alike. The main argument advanced in this paper is that while I/O psychology is potentially capable of serving the needs of workers, it is used primarily to protect the interests of managers and owners. This article exposes the ideological underpinnings of I/O psychology and the practical ways whereby it contributes to uphold the industrial status quo. Ethical dilemmas facing social scientists in the workplace and methods whereby they can challenge — rather than ratify — the industrial status quo are also discussed.

Both as a theoretical endeavor and as an applied profession psychology can serve as a vehicle for promulgating the reigning capitalist ideology (Ingleby, 1981; Jacoby, 1975; Nahem, 1981; Prilleltensky, 1989, 1990a; Sedgwick, 1974). Cognizant of this distinct possibility, psychologists have begun to analyze the mechanisms whereby humanistic (Buss, 1986; Shaw and Colimore, 1988); cognitive (Anderson and Travis, 1983; Prilleltensky, 1990b; Sampson, 1981); behavioral (Holland, 1978; Geiser, 1976; Woolfolk and Richardson, 1984); and clinical (Albee, 1981; 1986; Beit-Hallahmi, 1974, Prilleltensky, 1990c) psychology reaffirm the current state of affairs in society. The purpose of this paper is to expose the ideological underpinnings of industrial/organizational (I/O) psychology and the practical ways whereby it contributes to uphold the industrial status quo.

As an applied field, I/O psychology affects the life of thousands, if not millions, of workers around the world (see, for example, Bass and

Child Guidance Clinic, 700 Elgin Avenue, Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada, R3E 1B2. This article is based on a chapter of a doctoral dissertation submitted by the author to the Department of Psychology of the University of Manitoba. I wish to thank F. L. Marcuse for his many valuable suggestions on an early version of this paper.

Drenth, 1987; Catano and Tivendell, 1988; Wells, 1987). As such, it plays an important role in the promotion or containment of change, not only in business but in society as a whole.

The main argument to be advanced in this article is that the social sciences in general and psychology in particular have been typically used *by and for* those interested in preserving the industrial status quo (Baritz, 1974; Ralph, 1983; Shore, 1982; Wells, 1987). Interestingly enough, it was not until very recently that psychologists began to question the moral and ideological implications of this state of affairs (Bramel and Friend, 1981; Huszco et al., 1984; Warwick, 1978).

Historically, social scientists were brought into business for the purpose of increasing productivity. Baritz (1974:196) stated it rather bluntly when he wrote that "managers, as managers, are in business to make money. Only to the extent that social scientists can help in the realization of this goal will management make use of them." As a result, organized labor has been traditionally apprehensive of psychological "services." In this regard Huszco et al. (1984:432) commented that "unions have perceived the contributions of psychologists, at best, to be unrelated to their needs and, at worst, to be antithetical to their interests." In reviewing the literature describing the relationship between psychology and unions, they identified the following reasons for labor's distrust of psychologists (Huszco et al., 1984:434):

- A. Because of their association with management.
- B. Because of their association with F. W. Taylor's Scientific Management (i.e., emphasis on efficiency, time and motion studies). . . .
- C. Because unions are ignored in textbooks and journals of I/O psychology.
- D. Because methods (e.g., attitude surveys) have been used to avoid or bust union organizing attempts or lower pay demands. . . .
- E. Because methods of psychological testing emphasize differentiation among workers (thus antisolidarity and antiseniority principles). . . .
- F. Because "talking cure" methods probe the past and emphasize internal rather than external sources of mental stress and relief.

Despite the pseudo-neutral language of "Organizational Development" and the humanistic flavor of numerous "Human Relations" courses, "Quality of Working Life" projects and "Industrial Democracy" programs, the fact remains that these innovations were merely instrumental in improving business and as such had a clear pro-management bias (Alvesson, 1985; Hollway, 1984; Warwick, 1978; Wells, 1987). This point was made very clear by Brown (1954). Commenting on the pro-management bias of Mayo's research, he correctly argued that "no industrial psychologist has ever shown anything else, and . . . under the circum-

stances in which all industrial research is carried out, such bias is inevitable" (Brown, 1954:92-93).

It is my objective to examine in more detail the argument outlined above; namely, that I/O psychology is highly instrumental in preserving the status quo. Simply put, this article will ask why and how I/O psychology helps in the maintenance of the present conditions in industry and in society. To do that I will (1) briefly review the history of I/O psychology, (2) present its basic premises, (3) analyze the techniques used in I/O psychology to affirm the existing state of affairs, (4) consider some ethical conflicts and, finally, (5) elaborate on how I/O psychology can be used to challenge, rather than ratify, the status quo.

Origins of I/O Psychology

Broadly defined, I/O psychology is "a branch of applied psychology covering applications of psychology in the industrial field" (Babington Smith, 1988:418). Traditionally, the primary goal of mainstream I/O psychology has been to increase efficiency, productivity, and profitability (Maier, 1946). Achieving these objectives necessitated applying psychology in a wide range of industrial areas, such as personnel selection, performance appraisal, motivation, mental health of workers, interpersonal relations in the workplace, environmental variables, etc. The variety of these tasks called for a variety of professionals specializing in the different aspects of workers' behavior. The following discussion will focus on the contributions made by experts in human relations, occupational mental health and psychological testing, given their prominent role in what may be called the politics of I/O psychology.

Mayo, regarded by Whyte (1957) as the father of the "Human Relations" school in industry, was undoubtedly one of the pioneers in the field of I/O psychology (see also Bramel and Friend, 1981). In the late 1920s Mayo, a professor of industrial research at Harvard, became involved in the "Hawthorne" experiments being conducted at the Chicago Western Electric Plant (Bramel and Friend, 1981). This study, initially concerned with the effects of illumination on workers' output, evolved into a monumental industrial research project which included interviewing 20,000 employees (Brown, 1954).

Early in the study, researchers were surprised to find an increase in output in the experimental as well as in the control group. The investigators arrived at the conclusion that "output shot up in both groups because in both groups the workers' participation had been solicited and this involvement, clearly, was more important than physical perquisites" (Whyte, 1957:38). In other words, the productivity of workers went up not as a result of better illumination but rather as a result of the attention paid to them by supervisors and managers. Presently, the Hawthorne effect is the name usually associated with the

“observation that the output of the workers seemed to be responding to the transformed interpersonal relationship to the ‘boss’ . . . rather than to the explicitly introduced variations in physical conditions of work” (Bramel and Friend, 1981:870).

The Hawthorne experiments were said to have confirmed Mayo's convictions that cooperative human relations between labor and management is the key for both industrial productivity and tranquility. Following this principle of cooperation, Mayo promoted a technique so that managers would be able to gain workers' trust and avert industrial unrest. This technique, referred to as the “non-directive interview,” assumed that any problems employees may have can be “talked out.” Thus, counselors were trained to conduct non-directive interviews to provide workers with an opportunity to express their feelings about whatever problems they might have. Whyte (1957:41) described the philosophy of that technique:

He (the worker) is to adjust to the group rather than vice versa; and the alternative of actually changing reality is hardly considered. If a worker is sore at his foreman the chances are good that he is not really sore at his foreman because of some rational gripe but is merely venting on the foreman certain repressed feelings. By listening patiently, like a psychiatrist, the counselors help such persons understand that what they are really sore about flows from inner, subjective conflict.

The implication of this technique for industrial or social change are rather obvious: if workers have problems, they should change something within themselves, not in the working conditions. This implication is entirely congruent with the well-known “blame the victim” ideology (Ryan, 1971).

Based on the high regard acquired by the Hawthorne experiments and the work of Mayo on human relations, it would be safe to argue that they have shaped, to a large extent, the field of I/O psychology (Bramel and Friend, 1981; Ralph, 1983). Moreover, they may have provided the basis for the relatively recent emergence of the sub-specialty called “Organizational Development” (Hollway, 1984). This branch of I/O psychology is concerned with “training managers in interpersonal skills such as expressing feelings honestly and learning how to listen and empathize. Such managerial styles would produce . . . less conflictual relations with subordinates who would thus experience commitment to the organization and become more highly motivated” (Hollway, 1984:32).

Another important point of departure for I/O psychology was occupational mental health. The origins of occupational mental health in North America can be traced roughly to the 1920s, the same decade the Hawthorne experiments began (McLean, 1985). In 1919 Southard, once a director of the Boston Psychopathic Hospital and professor of

neuropathology at Harvard, was invited to conduct a study on the possible psychiatric problems of discharged workers. In 1920 he reported that "60 percent of more than 4,000 cases reached discharge status through traits of social incompetence rather than occupational incompetence" (McLean, 1985:32). The same year he stated that "industrial psychiatry ought to exist. . . . I think that we will have a place in the routine of industrial management, not as permanent staff, . . . but as consultants. The function of this occasional consultant would be preventive rather than curative of the general conditions of unrest" (McLean, 1985:33). McLean noted that the first full time psychiatrist in an American company was hired in 1922. This was Dr. Lydia Giberson, who worked for Metropolitan Life Insurance most of her life. In 1924 Macy's department store also introduced a team of mental health workers that included a psychiatrist, a social worker and a psychologist. McLean's (1985) review of the field attests to the steady expansion and ramification of occupational mental health since the early 1920s. At present, many companies offer mental health help in the form of Employee Assistance Programs to their employees. These programs are becoming increasingly popular in large corporations. This is largely because "the most conservative figures indicate that comprehensive employee assistance programs return \$2.00 or \$3.00 in increased productivity for every \$1.00 spent" (Wells, 1987:7).

The field of psychological testing also furnished considerable impetus to I/O psychology. Maier (1946:151) wrote: "That psychological testing has an obvious application to employee selection has been recognized by many large industries, which have not only welcomed the application of existing tests, but have cooperated in the development of new ones." More recently, Hollway (1984), Shackleton and Anderson (1987), and Kavanagh et al. (1987) have demonstrated the vitality and utility of testing, not only in personnel selection but also in job performance, training and vocational guidance.

Though different in their foci, the fields of human relations, occupational mental health, and psychological testing converge in their ultimate objective: increased profitability for management (Baritz, 1974; Ralph, 1983; Wells, 1987). This is not to say that I/O psychology cannot offer concrete help to workers, but that it has typically shown a distinct preference for working with management rather than with unions (Huszczco et al., 1984). Such bias has been attributed mainly to psychologists' class interests and financial considerations (Baritz, 1974; Bramel and Friend, 1981; Huszczco et al., 1984). In my view, another set of factors should be emphasized: the social and cultural presuppositions upon which I/O psychology is based. These assumptions simply elude the conflictual nature of labor-management relations and operate under the premise that what is good for business is necessarily good for workers.

Two Basic Premises of I/O Psychology

The pro-management bias ascribed to I/O psychology derives, in large part, from two intimately related basic premises. The first is that industry is an enterprise free of class conflict. The second is that I/O psychology is social science, and science is good for society; therefore I/O psychology is good for society. If one takes both assumptions for granted, one is likely to arrive at the conclusion that I/O psychology is good for both parties concerned: employers and employees. A completely different conclusion is drawn when these fundamental premises are challenged.

Premise #1: Industry is an enterprise free of class conflict.

Premise #1 is a recurring theme in I/O psychology. Critical organizational theory (Alvesson, 1985) suggests that management can obtain tangible benefits by advancing the tacit assumption that they and the employees are all working towards the same goals. Such a view is intended to eliminate notions of fundamental contradictions between the interests of employers or their representatives and employees. Yet, to the extent that employers' profits are increased by controlling wages, serious differences do exist and will continue to exist. As Ralph (1983) argues, an increase in profit is frequently accompanied by a reduction of wages or deterioration in the working conditions. This situation "creates an implicit and irreconcilable conflict between management and labor. . . . This conflict of interests between employers and employees is an inherent characteristic of capitalism" (Ralph, 1983:60-61). If not for profit, wages and/or the conditions of labor are sometimes adversely impacted upon simply because businesses are having a hard time surviving. Wells (1987:13) explains:

The adversarial relationship between labor and management does not derive from some historical accident or from a colossal misunderstanding that "better communications" or a "more mature approach" can resolve. It stems from the fact that businesses survive by beating their competitors and, other things being equal, this means squeezing as much as possible out of workers. Unions did not cause this conflict; they arose as a response to it.

Despite these arguments, which point to the conflictual nature of labor-management relationship, I/O psychology has nonetheless operated as though business were a "cooperative" enterprise whereby all parties benefit equally and conflicts are the result of either mismanagement or misunderstandings.

Bramel and Friend (1981:867) contend that Mayo and his associates were instrumental in promoting a portrayal of "the capitalist factory as non-exploitative and free of class conflict. This view, which is clearly

identified with the defense of the capitalist mode of production, persists to the present time in discussions of the psychology of industry." Two examples of this classic attitude in I/O psychology are provided by Stagner and Rosen (1965) and by Maier (1946).

Stagner and Rosen's *Psychology of Union-Management Relations* (1965) is quite oblivious to the fundamental political and economic differences between both parties. When they speak of conflict, they do so in a psychological, as opposed to a class, language. Conflict is viewed as the result of psychological misunderstandings, not as a result of unequally distributed power.

The following quote is an illustrative example of their general approach: "In the long run . . . every manager and union leader who *honestly* wants to reduce the frequency of conflict in industry must take account of the perceptions, goals, frustrations, and aggressions of *workers* (Stagner and Rosen, 1965:117, emphasis added). Three points are of interest here. First, if disputes are to be averted, psychological — as opposed to material — variables are to be taken into account. Second, though they are careful to state in the introduction that their treatment is "neutral toward the values of managers and unionists" (Stagner and Rosen, 1965:7), one has to question the neutrality of their treatment when they selectively talk about the aggression of workers and fail to mention the aggression of managers. Third, another significant implication of that quote is that disputes are undesirable. While disputes affect workers as well as employers, Stagner and Rosen fail to recognize that strikes and conflict, albeit painful in their short term effects, are some of the few tools labor has to advance its long-term interests. In my opinion, their book is a good illustration of how a new, "class-free" interpretation of conflict is introduced by I/O psychology into business with the purpose of keeping fundamental structures unchallenged, for as they clearly wrote: "power need not be taken away from management" (Stagner and Rosen, 1965:131).

Similarly, Maier's *Psychology in Industry* (1946) also reduces conflicts between labor and management to inter- or intrapsychological variables. Workers' frustrations are almost always accounted for by personal problems. The class dimension is noticeable in its absence. Needless to say, by presenting employees' frustrations as the manifestation of "psychological maladjustment," Maier helps vindicate current practices of management and the distribution of power.

The last chapter of Maier's book serves as a brief guide for supervisors, counselors and managers on how to increase productivity. In that chapter he differentiates between two types of unions: one that goes along with management and another that challenges it. While he condones the former, he condemns the latter for its political aspirations. Thus, Maier approves of those unions that see conflict only as "classless." In that context, Maier warns management against the risks of frustration. It is

important to appreciate, Maier wrote, "the role which frustration plays in labor and political movements. Frustrated individuals are readily organized and led, and their activities are militant in nature. . . . Poorly adjusted individuals are inclined to be militant and seek the union which suits their inclinations" (Maier, 1946:419). Maier's dislike of militant unions derives mainly from the basic assumption that industry is a cooperative enterprise between owners and workers. In this view, whatever problems there may be can always be solved by constructive dialogue. Militant workers are not perceived as politically conscious, but rather discredited as misguided and maladjusted individuals. Such a stand has been quite common in I/O psychology (Bramel and Friend, 1981).

The failure of I/O psychology to deal with power differentials in industry has been recently brought into sharp focus by Barling (1988). In an empirical investigation of the teaching, research and practice of I/O psychology, Barling arrived at the conclusion that "industrial relations" is the "blind spot" of the field. Barling studied the extent to which I/O psychology pays attention to unions. A review of all the articles on the subject from the 1980-1986 issues of the *Journal of Applied Psychology*, *Journal of Occupational Psychology*, *Organizational Behavior and Human Performance*, and *Academy of Management Journal* led him to conclude that "union membership is ignored almost invariably" (Barling, 1988:105). Addressing the question of "how much coverage is devoted to industrial relations issues in frequently-used I/O textbooks" (Barling, 1988:105), he reviewed 39 such introductory texts as well as three advanced texts. Results showed that "15 of these texts make no mention of unions . . . [and] 29 suggest that less than 1 percent of their contents consider union issues" (Barling, 1988:105). He also asked a sample of Canadian I/O psychology teachers to what extent their courses dealt with industrial relations issues. Responses were received for 22 courses: "Ten of the 18 undergraduate courses, and three of the four graduate courses did not deal with industrial relations at all" (Barling, 1988:106). Furthermore, seven of the 15 texts used in these courses make no reference to union issues whatsoever.

One cannot help but wonder just what leads I/O psychologists to ignore the topic of industrial relations. Two plausible explanations may be considered. The first would indicate that it is in their economic and political interest not to disturb the industrial status quo. Social scientists employed by management realize that treatment of issues such as industrial relations is an open invitation to include politics in a field they would prefer to keep "neutral." For as long as industrial unrest can be prevented or minimized by the presence of "objective scientists," both management and scientists alike are said to benefit: the former by keeping politics out of industry, the latter by lucrative contracts.

An alternative explanation to account for the omission of class and power issues in I/O psychology is simply that social scientists believe in

technical, as opposed to political, solutions. Consequently, unions — identified as political forces — are not even considered to be part of their occupational endeavor. This argument cannot be easily discarded, for the pervasive character of the *technical rationality* of our times has hardly left an area of social inquiry without its imprint (Alvesson, 1985; Benson, 1977; Wilson, 1977).

Whether because of a partisan interest in preserving things the way they are, or because of a sincere belief in the solubility of all social problems by technical means, the situation remains that I/O psychology has paid negligible attention to the class and political nature of labor-management conflicts. And inasmuch as politics is a potent tool for the transformation of power arrangements in society, the clear beneficiaries of that situation are those who would like to see things in the future stay the way they are in the present.

If I/O psychologists are interested in serving all sectors of industry, it is imperative that the working assumption that industry is a class conflict-free enterprise be challenged. I would concur with Barling (1988:108) in that "I/O psychologists must accept the inevitability . . . of union-management conflict in its many manifestations in organizations, and discard their attitudinal indifference toward, or ideological bias against labour unions."

Premise #2: I/O psychology is science and science is good for society.

"Social science is science; science contributes to human welfare; therefore social science contributes to human welfare" (Warwick, 1980:31). This syllogism, based on a great deal of naivete, protected the moral conscience of many social scientists for a long time. I/O psychologists, as social scientists, found in it an elegant way to amalgamate their pursuit of scientific knowledge with what they termed a contribution to society as a whole.

It is not my intent here to challenge the scientific status of I/O psychology but rather its supposed contribution to "human welfare." As Steininger et al. (1984:196) succinctly put it: "psychology can be used to serve the interests of the powerful or the interests of the powerless." I/O psychologists may have intended to serve all classes, but the actual results of their efforts have benefited, almost exclusively, the powerful (Baritz, 1974; Huszco et al, 1984; Ralph, 1983; Shore, 1982; Wells, 1987).

I/O psychologists, as is the case with many other social science practitioners, endorse a technical rationality according to which social problems will, eventually, be solved by scientific and technical means (to the exclusion of political solutions). This approach to human dilemmas has been termed by Anderson and Travis (1983) the "liberal consensus," the belief that society will be bettered by "neutral" scientists and professionals. The spirit and the political implications of this techno-

cratic philosophy, so much a part of I/O psychology, are well summarized by Alvesson (1985:127):

In the technological-capitalist society, there is a general tendency to re-define problems concerning purposes, aims, and values so as either to make them appear to be technical issues, or to make them seem irrelevant. Questions involving such matters as alienation, and the content and value of work, are defined as problems which socio-technical and other organizational principles should solve within the framework of prevailing conditions. . . . In the technocratic consciousness, the distinction between communication concerning political frameworks and social norms on the one hand and technical problem-solving on the other has been erased at the expense of the former. This consciousness . . . contributes to the blocking of a dialectic where the negation of prevailing conditions is envisaged as a possibility. In this way, a world picture which supports the predominant rationality is transmitted.

This technocratic doctrine treats all human problems as technical ones. Inequality, power, discrimination, and the like are not the result of injustice but of lack of scientific progress. Thus, I/O psychology, which embraced this *weltanschauung* since its inception became oblivious to the politics of production. Mayo was absolutely convinced that "scientific management," equipped with the newest techniques of human relations would advance the welfare of employers and employees alike. "Mayo argued with passion that social and clinical psychological approaches could be incorporated into an enlightened management in such a way that the social-emotional needs of workers would be met" (Bramel and Friend, 1981:868). This would in effect prevent workers from organizing to protest unfavorable working conditions or low wages.

Indisputable faith in the assumption that science is good for human welfare might have precluded posing the simple question: Good for whom in society? If I/O psychologists had asked that question, the sociopolitical repercussions of the field might have been radically different. As it turned out, however,

in seeming disregard for (the) American Psychological Association's vision of psychology "as a means of promoting human welfare," the mainstream of industrial psychology has traditionally labored to promote employer welfare as its principal goal. While the single-minded quest for efficiency / productivity / profitability inevitably encounters the obstruction of unions, it also results in a regard for workers — all workers, not just union members — as little more than instrumentalities for achieving management objectives (Shore, 1982:334).

Thus far I have examined the basic premises that have led I/O practitioners to side with management and thereby support the status quo. The actual ways whereby these premises are translated into actions will now be discussed.

How I/O Psychology Upholds the Industrial Status Quo

I/O psychology contributes to the maintenance of the industrial status quo through three different, yet related mechanisms: (1) the personalization of conflict, (2) the "cooperative" approach, and (3) the professionalization of managerial decisions.

The personalization of conflict

The attribution of workers' problems to internal causes has been pioneered by Mayo in the interview phase of the Hawthorne research (Bramel and Friend, 1981; Brown, 1954), and is exemplified in the books by Maier (1946) and Stagner and Rosen (1965). In essence, employees are guided to view their lack of satisfaction in life as a product of their own personal inadequacies. While managers — as the administrators of capital — are doing "all they can to help" by providing counselors, the internal nature of the workers' predicaments demand corrections of an intra- or interpsychical character. Quoting Whyte again: "the alternative of actually changing reality is hardly considered" (1957:41).

This method of counseling not only leads to an inadvertent self-blame attitude in its clients, but also exculpates management for whatever role it might have played in the workers' difficulties in the first place. An additional bonus that the personalization of conflict furnishes to owners is that the latter comes across as caring and personally interested in the welfare of the employees, thus strengthening loyalty and commitment to the firm. As Wells (1987:6) has recently put it, counseling programs

are aimed at helping workers deal with their (productivity-reducing) problems of anxiety, alcohol use, depression, drug dependency, and so on. Workers are persuaded that these problems are "personal" problems not related to the workplace, but problems that management nevertheless cares enough about to lend a hand.

It should be remembered that counseling services are part of comprehensive employee assistance programs that result in increased productivity for every dollar invested in it by management (Wells, 1987). But increased productivity is not the only benefit for managers. In addition, psychological expertise has been able to pacify troublemakers and diffuse resentment against owners and supervisors (Baritz, 1974; Ralph, 1983).

With time, unions began to realize that counseling provided by employers had an undesirable side effect. It was conducive to workers' passivity and conformity. It helped "workers and their dependents adjust to increasingly alienated, degraded, and pressured conditions, in order to prevent labour unrest" (Ralph, 1983:47). Haverman (1957:52) wrote that unionists started referring to this kind of psychological help as "cow psychology." They saw it as "an attempt to get more production out of the worker by keeping him placid and uncomplaining . . . on the ground that any advice paid for by the company is almost bound to favor the company's desires over the worker's psychological needs." The increased awareness of these side effects led unions to oppose such "benefits." Although "employers often have been able to slip mental health 'services' into a broad occupational health package . . . many unions have managed to see through this stratagem" (Ralph, 1983:141). This situation forced the introduction of innovative methods to gain workers' compliance and prevent industrial unrest. A suitable term for this new technology of human relations may be the "cooperative" approach.

The "cooperative" approach

The argument has been made that the most efficacious method of social control is that which does not elicit resistance (Skinner, 1976; Zimbardo, 1984). Schacht (1985) has called this type of controlling influence "softened power."

Softened power decreases individuals' experience of political impact on their lives and thought, promoting uncritical internalization of prevailing ideologies and anesthetizing persons to the ways in which they are being led, influenced, or controlled. Softened power circumscribes their consciousness, allowing illusions of free choice to persist while available choices are curtailed through a subtle foreshortening of their imagination (Schacht, 1985:513).

Fully aware that the times require "softened power," industrialists enlisted the assistance of social scientists in designing programs of worker control that would not elicit the latter's resistance. In response to that demand, two innovative approaches to human relations have been introduced. These are Organizational Development (OD), and Quality of Working Life (QWL).

The concept of OD refers to interventions based on behavioral science intended to increase the effectiveness of an organization (Hollway, 1984; Walton, 1978). "Specifically," Walton (1978:124) wrote, "OD attends to the use and development of human capacities and social integration in the work place." Sensitivity training programs designed to enhance interpersonal understanding, team building, and reward systems for employees are key features of its methodology.

Despite its apparent humanistic aspirations of improved cooperation and quality of working life for everybody concerned (Hollway, 1984; Walton, 1978), OD faces criticisms similar to those leveled against employee counseling. Namely, it may not be as benevolent and neutral as it purports to be. Its very name *Organization Development* is somewhat misleading, for the word development usually has a positive connotation and implies unfolding towards a desired goal, a state of maturity. Yet, as Warwick (1978:148) has argued, development and health for "the manager or owner may well be disease for the worker." Pseudo-neutral terms such as "team building," "problem solving," and "effectiveness" are very common in OD. To the extent that this vocabulary ignores the power structure of companies and promotes a so-called conflict-free language, one has to question the purity of the motives behind OD interventions.

"Effective OD intervention," Warwick (1978:149) noted, "will almost always change or reinforce the balance of power, influence and authority in a system. Some individuals and groups will gain in the ability to pursue their interests and intentions, while others will lose." If that indeed is the case, and OD practitioners "most often enter the system as management consultants" (Warwick, 1978:149), it would not be unreasonable to conclude that in the majority of instances OD lends its "scientific support" to keeping or even reinforcing the prevailing distribution of power in industry. It could probably be argued that if that were not the case, managers would think twice before hiring OD experts. After all, they are brought into business with the purpose of increasing output.

Probably the single most important feature of OD is its impartial and humanistic facade. These specialists are portrayed as neutral third parties merely interested in "improving the effectiveness of organizations that produce useful goods and services and in enhancing the quality of human experience in the workplace" (Walton, 1978:124). Their "impartial" and "caring" approach is reinforced by the emphasis placed on the "collaborative" model. If you want to increase productivity, you don't fight with your workers; you collaborate with them. You don't force them; you talk them into doing it. Owners and workers dialogue "as if" they were equal, thus gaining the latter's cooperation and subtly dissuading them from organizing politically to fulfill their aspirations.

Similar allegations have been made against Quality of Working Life (QWL) projects. These programs, which are typically carried out by "someone who is well versed in the social psychology of small groups" are intended to bring labor and management together in an effort to make use of workers' full physical and mental abilities in a more creative and productive fashion (Wells, 1987:3). In addition to the job redesign involved, "QWL programs are always characterized by their focus on greater participation by workers, usually through labor-management committees" (Wells, 1987:2). The main thrust of these committees is to foster a purely psychological orientation to conflict in the workplace.

When conflict is defined along these lines, cooperation is much easier to attain than when it is conceptualized in political terms. "The cooperation between workers and managers in these meetings is supposed to foster a more general cooperation outside the meetings: the whole point of QWL is to create a new kind of cooperation on the job" (Wells, 1987:3-4). Wells (1987:69) concluded that in effect, the principal objective of management in implementing QWL is to "undermine the main form of power that workers and their unions normally resort to — the negative power of resistance or refusal to obey."

Promises made to workers by QWL advocates depict these programs as very attractive. They offer "opportunities to fulfill one's potential," "pride," "enjoyment," "decision-making power," etc. But over and above these pronouncements, the elemental question for unions remains: Do these projects ultimately benefit workers? Wells' (1987) response is a categorical no. His study of such enterprises revealed that the cooperation advertised by QWL exponents is a highly selective, management-biased kind of cooperation which, in the final analysis, "reduces the quality of working life" (Wells, 1987:5).

Wells' (1987) investigation of two QWL large projects in North America led him to claim that, contrary to the expectations created by QWL proponents, "the programs were clearly designed to adjust workers to jobs, not jobs to workers. More broadly, they were designed to adjust workers to their own continuing subordination in the workplace" (Wells, 1987:68). As to the decision-making power promised to employees, "the only participation that either workers or union leaders were involved in was strictly consultative, involving them, at best, in minor modifications to decisions that had already been made by management" (Wells, 1987:69).

In the end, QWL is simply a softer, subtler management-control strategy, yet one that is more ambitious and all-embracing than anything seen before. Management is no longer satisfied with making workers obey: it now wants them to *want* to obey (Wells, 1987:5-6, emphasis in original).

In sum, both OD and QWL interventions have promoted an approach whereby worker control is gained through cooperation. These techniques are refined versions of human manipulation, congruous with the spirit of our age.

The professionalization of managerial decisions

The professionalization of managerial decisions can be of assistance to those with a vested interest in upholding the industrial status quo. As in the cases of "the personalization of problems" and the "cooperative approach," in professionalizing its decision-making process, management

benefits by diverting attention from the political arena. When, for example, detrimental working conditions, delayed promotions and the lay off of workers can be at least partially based on "expert advice," the owners do not have to take all the responsibility for worker discontent. Ascribing these decisions to organizational and psychological science helps management deal with the frustrations elicited by some of these measures . . . not only because it wasn't strictly their own doing, but also because science is supposed to be impartial and fair.

The belief that "psychology is a science and that psychological assessment is therefore objective" (Hollway, 1984:35), is being continuously promoted in organizations, both by I/O psychologists and by management (Hollway, 1984). Occupational assessment is rarely perceived as a tool that can be used to rationalize decisions whose impact on workers is negative. For the most part, psychological testing in industry is viewed as "fair" (see Hollway, 1984:35-36). "The role of the assessor is seen . . . as neutral and external, and as one of fact gathering" (Hollway, 1984:54).

A similar role may be performed by OD. Changes in organizations with unfavorable consequences for part of the staff can always be justified on the basis of professional, scientific expertise. Warwick (1978:151-152), who has carefully analyzed the ethical and political implications of OD, contends that these

may be obscured when OD is cloaked in the garb of science. The introduction of the OD practitioner as "Dr. Smith, a social scientist who is an expert on organizations" may create an image of impartiality and scientific neutrality that is not justified by the circumstances. Union leaders and employees in the organization would be well advised to look beyond such professional camouflage to the gritty realities of sponsorship and latent agendas.

Ethics in the Practice of I/O Psychology

Human manipulation has been a constitutive part of I/O psychology. Its ability to overcome workers' resistance, prevent industrial unrest, discredit discontented employees as maladjusted and subtly control labor are some of the features that made the field indispensable for some companies. In the past, attempts to control workers were more in the open. Each party knew, more or less, where the other stood. But with the advent of psychology, control strategies became much more refined and covert.

Time was when a man knew that his freedoms were being curtailed. Social scientists, however, are too sophisticated for that. The fires of pressure and control on a man are now kindled in his own thinking. Control need no longer to be imposed. It can be encouraged from within . . . A major characteristic of the twentieth century

has been the fact that it blinds the victim to the fact of manipulation (Baritz, 1974:209-210).

The witting or unwitting use of I/O psychology to manipulate workers, as described in the previous section and summarized by Baritz in the above quotation, raises an important ethical dilemma. It follows from the basic premises of the field that I/O practitioners should remain neutral (e.g., Stagner and Rosen, 1965). Interestingly enough, when I/O psychologists have expressed values, these have been typically humanistic — the kind that are supposed to benefit everyone involved (Alvesson, 1985; Hollway, 1984; Walton, 1978). Yet, the assumption that the practice of I/O psychology is neutral or equally advantageous to all sides has been refuted numerous times and rather persuasively (Baritz, 1974; Ralph 1983; Warwick, 1978; Wells, 1987). The latter have eloquently argued that I/O interventions have significant political repercussions, and, as a rule, owners gain and workers lose.

I/O psychologists face a difficult decision. On one hand, they may feel pressured to acknowledge the political implications of their work to avoid the ethical dilemma of duplicity, i.e., creating expectations that cannot be fulfilled. On the other hand, acknowledgment of their pro-management bias will decrease considerably their attractiveness. It is the very “neutral” facade of social science that business find so appealing. Given that situation, an admission of partisanship on the part of I/O professionals would be a somewhat self-defeating move, at least in a financial sense.

Personal distress and financial loss notwithstanding, the ethical issue will not be resolved until I/O psychologists fully realize and articulate the political reverberations of their occupation. Instead of trying to be “more” impartial, they ought to come to grips with the political nature of industrial relations and accept the responsibility implied in siding with one party. In doing so they would, at the very least, take care of the duplicity involved in promising to be apolitical and serving power at the same time.

The political and ethical responsibility ascribed to psychologists working for management applies as well to those willing to collaborate with labor. The idea is simply to overcome the naivete implicit in aspiring to be apolitical and to disclose the inevitable presence of a sociopolitical bias.

Conclusion

The purpose of this article has been to identify some sociopolitical implications in the practice of I/O psychology. The evolution of the field, it was claimed, has been characterized by an unreflective stance on the political nature of industrial relations (Babington Smith, 1988; Barling,

1988). Operating under the assumption that they are merely offering an apolitical service that will impact favorably on owners and workers alike, I/O practitioners have often acted as "servants of power" (Baritz, 1974). A remarkable disregard for the political repercussions of their occupation has placed I/O psychologists in a difficult situation whereby their promise of neutrality is simply untenable.

A number of recent developments in the literature, however, lead one to believe that I/O psychologists may have begun to face some of the criticisms that have been advanced. Huszyczko and his associates (1984), for instance, made a strong case for psychologists to admit and express their attitudinal bias in working for management. At the same time, they urged those psychologists with a pro-labor bias to identify and avail themselves to unions, thereby counteracting the long-standing pro-owner bias in psychology and discarding the neutrality myth.

The historical predilection favoring management and upholding the basic status quo does not preclude the prospect of I/O psychologists challenging it. Though few in number, some psychologists have already started collaborating with labor in advancing workers' interests (Huszyczko et al., 1984). Several roles can be envisioned for a psychology devoted to helping unions: training in bargaining techniques, assistance in establishing educational programs for workers, teaching skills to counteract manipulation methods employed by managers, etc. Psychologists willing to contribute their expertise to labor will be well advised not to commit the same error as those who have typically served employers, that is, to pretend to be apolitical in a field where the distribution of power is the salient issue.

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