

the future of work

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A SPECTRUM BOOK

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introduction

Today, as in the past, our relationship to work activity is a fundamental determinant of the way we live. Our relation to work has determined and influenced our status, the kind of food available to us, our ability to buy goods, our use of time and leisure, the nature of our family and sexual relations, the state of our mental health, and an endless host of other conditions. To put it succinctly, the importance of work is and has been most pervasive; it determines what we produce, what we consume, how we live, and what type of society we create and perpetuate.

In the future the effects of work activities upon our lives will be equally as important as they are today. But added to this importance will be the dynamics of change. Tomorrow's work will be different and constantly changing. It will not only determine the routines and goals of our lives, but it will also increasingly alter these routines and goals. Indeed, the nature of these changes may be so basic as to cause a historic departure of importance equal to or greater than the Industrial Revolution.

Everywhere we look, the changes of our times and their relevance to work appear to be triggering the sensitivities of all kinds of people. Discussions between father and son about the values and importance of work are common everyday events in many families. Newspapers headline political speeches about "welfare chiselers," who are criticized for not doing their fair share of work. Everyday conversations note the need for shifting human efforts toward "new priorities," such as our inner cities, ecology, and education. Yet college graduates who are specifically trained for work in such fields find that their education does not lead to job opportunities. Women's Liberation groups demand equal occupational opportunities and socioeconomic parity for housework. Many of today's youth and growing numbers of adults attempt to "drop-out" in order to

escape the "daily humdrum of the work routine." At the same time, businessmen talk with concern about declining work discipline and performance. Questions and discontents phrased in different words and based on different perspectives, are growing in the minds of increasing numbers of people. Many signs point to a steadily emerging societywide debate on the future of work.

This anthology addresses itself to some of the major issues concerning the evolving nature of work within advanced technological and affluent societies. It is important to realize that the future of work is more than a matter of work hours, occupational projections, and income levels. Ultimately, it is a matter of how men and women of the future will seek to define and express their existence. In this sense the future of work is an important question for us all. For as the opportunities and choices of our times expand at ever-increasing rates, we find ourselves increasingly forced to ask fundamental questions. What are we? What do we really need? For what goals should we work? What is the meaning of work?

Throughout most of history the reason for work has been simple—men and women worked to survive. Work was seen as an unquestioned necessity. Parents, teachers, and wise elders of the past cautioned the young that the two most important decisions of their lives would be who they would marry and what type of work they would pursue. The yoke of work was accepted by most with fatalistic resignation. In turn, a chosen field of work gave form and meaning to the lives of most people.

But people have labored for reasons other than necessity. Leonardo da Vinci and Marie Curie are graphic examples of those who have worked for purposes beyond their immediate survival. They suggest some possibilities for the goals and conditions of work in the future.

Ultimately, the evolving goals and nature of work must be seen within the context of human existence itself. For work is purposeful *human* activity directed toward the satisfaction of *human* needs and desires. During the past few years there has been considerable discussion about the revolutionary effects of technology and automation upon work. Without a doubt, the advance of technology is a critical determinant of the evolving nature of work. Yet, despite the tremendous effects of technology, it is not the sole determinant of our futures. While technology may decide inertia, constraints, and opportunities, work is still a human activity, and it will be the actions stemming from our individual and aggregate human needs which ultimately determine the use of technology and the future of work.

It is becoming increasingly obvious today that human needs are not limited exclusively to the acquisition of material wealth. We are not the one-dimensional "economic men" that classical economists envisioned. Rather, contemporary psychology is showing us that we have strong and complex "higher needs" toward social belongingness, self-esteem, and personal growth. We have needs for self-expression, the satisfaction of our curiosity, and the pursuit of beauty and balance. As technology and stored affluence enlarge the options of human choice, it is likely that we will use those options to pursue the satisfaction of these nonmaterial higher needs rather than to continue the production and acquisition of traditional economic wealth.

The transition of work as productive human activity from material to nonmaterial goals promises changes in the work of the future which are of far greater significance than the simple development of a "service economy." As larger and larger portions of our population move toward basic security and affluence, we can expect not only a widespread tendency to give up additional material goods in favor of nonmaterial goals but also a desire to integrate and balance our lives. Whether we call this orientation the pursuit of "quality of life," "self-actualization," or by any of a number of other labels, the net effect will be a growing effort to avoid the compartmentalization of our lives evidenced by today's dichotomy between work and free time. As our social, self-esteem, and growth needs become more important to us, we will be less likely to endure interpersonal alienation, repression of our individual dignity, and the absence of growth opportunities in our work situations. In a nutshell, it seems highly probable that this increasing priority of higher needs will change the products of our work efforts—and the conditions of work as well. Undoubtedly we can expect strong efforts to make the activity of work itself a positive and valued part of the human experience.

Predicting the future in any area is a hazardous undertaking. There are countless determining factors, many of which are yet undefined, and the future of work covers a scope almost as wide as the future of humanity itself. It is doubtful that any volume, no matter how large, could adequately discuss all the contingencies. Certainly an anthology of this length cannot offer a definitive study and conclusion. Nevertheless, some of the most essential issues have been emphasized to provide a basic framework for viewing the possibilities of work's evolving nature.

It is the contention of this book that work's evolution will be

determined by the priorities of human needs as they are felt and acted upon within the constraints and opportunities of the times. Part One presents an essay by C. Wright Mills which briefly reviews the evolutionary history of work. Part Two seeks to define human needs as the goals of work and evaluate changing need priorities under conditions of affluence. Part Three provides speculations about the specific daily conditions and goals of work in the future, touching upon the issues of technology and jobs, organizational conditions, work and leisure, education, and income. The fourth and final part presents four overall visions of alternative possible conditions of work in the future.

At root, this book is based upon the belief that human motivations range far beyond the drive for satisfaction of essential and discretionary materialistic needs. It is assumed that there are higher needs which must be satisfied in order to approach the fullest potentials of human existence. The predictions of this volume are based upon a faith in our human need to seek fulfillment of our total capacities through the activity of work.