

MOBILIZING HUMAN RESOURCES IN THE VALLEY FRED EMERY JUNE 1977

My concern here is to consider how the human resources of the Murray Valley may be mobilized to transform the Valley as a human settlement.

The usual way to mobilize human resources is to set up an organization. The organization decides what has to be done and then proceeds to boss, bully or bribe people into doing what the organization wants. In the twentieth century this has become the standard way of doing everything, whether it be waging war, building cars, teaching people or delivering social services. Even when agricultural producers set-up a so-called co-operative to package and market their produce they find in no time that they are individually powerless: the Co-op is laying down the law and bossing and bullying like any other organization.

Since 1956, throughout the western world, there has been a growing unwillingness of people to be mobilized in this way. They do not accept that they as individuals are just pawns to be mucked around with by any organization be it a company, school, a church, a sporting body or a government.

I am not denying that we, all of us, are still having our lives mucked about with by organizations claiming that they know best. What I am pointing to is the widespread erosion of their legitimacy. They now find it very difficult to pull people into line by appealing to their loyalty, to their dedication, to their devotion or to their faithfulness. The loyal company employee, the dedicated civil servant, the devoted party follower, the faithful servant – where have all these gone? What plague is it that has so decimated their ranks? More important for our considerations, is whether the plague will abate and as their ranks fill out again will we see a return to the old stable order where there was a place for everyone, and everyone was in their place?

These are vital questions for our times.

Our societies are wracked by turbulence; inflation is rampant and in few countries are the people prepared to give governments a stable majority. Given the erosion of institutional legitimacy this should not surprise us. Employers. In general, do not know how to maintain productivity when they do not command the loyalty of their employees and governments can do little to contain the effects of inflation when their appeals for a patriotic gesture of self-restraint fall on deaf ears. Similarly, no party is going to retain the unswerving loyalty of even the old die-hards if in government turbulence forces it to veer from one policy to another in unforeseeable ways. Any claim that there is a firm hand on the tiller of the ship-of-state becomes farcical. Little wonder that both LBJ and Harold Wilson opted out and both Olaf Palme and Whitlam deliberately courted political suicide.

I am suggesting that the erosion of institutional legitimacy not only induced the turbulence but that the turbulence further added to the erosion by undermining people's faith in the ability of their institutions to do what they proclaimed, let alone to reform and adapt themselves to the new challenges.

Left to itself such a system is in a runaway state.

This is why it is so important to ask what led to the erosion of legitimate authority. If we can see what contributed we might be able make some corrective adjustments.

Among the suggested answers to this question are that young people were given too much education; that parents and schools were too permissive; that affluent living had made youth too soft to carry out their military duties to the state and that full employment had under-mined the protestant ethic.

These notions are all at the simple-minded level of the idea that Women's Lib was caused by women going into the work-force.

If they were the answer then we could for instance correct the situation by cutting back on higher education. We would be simple minded indeed if we thought that that would drive the youth to accept the petty dictatorships in the work-force. We would be better advised to remember the old adage about taking a horse to water. We might also recall that in the past decade a great many youth have found opting out of higher education to be a solutions to the opposite problem i.e. growing up to have a mind that is free of the old hang-ups about religion, patriotism, work ethic etc.

It also seems too late to return to the other solutions. Re-introduction of big-stick policies can only further exacerbate the very problem they are supposed to solve, the disillusionment with institutions.

The causes of the erosion must lie deeper.

We know that the causes must lie in events fairly close in time to 1956 because that is when things started to go mad with a vengeance. When, as Christopher Booker put it in social history of England in those decades:

“a new spirit was unleashed – a new wind of essentially youthful hostility to every kind of established convention and traditional authority, a wind of moral freedom and rebellion” (Christopher Booker, 1969, 36)

The Beat Generation emerged on the stage.

I think two things led up to 1956.

First, the rationale, or justification for the work ethic was destroyed in the last two years of the war 1944-45 when industrial production had grown to such vast proportions that “armies were provided with far more that they could possibly need, or use effectively.” (Thompson RW 1973, 224). It was obvious to most people that there was no longer any justification for the lash of unemployment, the dole queues the slums. The Welfare State was to be just the first step.

This heady atmosphere lasted only a couple of years. By 1949 we were well and truly into the Cold War and Orwell's 1984 scenario. The need to organize for war became the rationale for diverting wealth into weapon systems and forcing individuals to subordinate themselves to the State and its institutions. There seemed to be no future for mankind other than that predicted by Orwell or an unprecedentedly bloody WW 3.

However, events were still moving fast.

In 1952-53 the USA and the USSR both exploded thermo-nuclear devices. From that time on there was no conceivable rationality in a third world war, and hence no conceivable rationale for the major states commanding their people to the role of loyal, obedient cannon-fodder.

With these two sets of events the rationale for the individual to sacrifice himself to the survival of the group, or to insist that others sacrifice themselves, effectively disappeared. No other generally effective rationale existed to take their place. Thus, there was no way in which a new theocracy could emerge based on people's fear of hell-fire

and an after-life; and no way in which a Meritocracy could replace the divine right to rule of the old aristocracies. Those possibilities were buried by earlier events of this century.

What ended in 1953 was the age-old rationale, not the historically evolved structures of power and discrimination.

In 1952-3 there was no Bastille Day and 'November 1917' because there were no masses who knew what they were doing. It is very doubtful whether the agents of those events, the scientists, soldiers and politicians thought they were doing more than releasing frightful packages of destructive physical energy.

George Orwell, if he had been alive, would undoubtedly have recognized the irony of the situation. In designing to wage a successful nuclear war they had made any such war impossible to pursue. In knocking out the last rationale for the subordination of the individual to dominating hierarchical institutions they were unleashing social forces with which the physicists were enraptured. It was only in 1949 that Orwell had pointed out that "...the consciousness of being at war, and therefore in danger, makes the handing-over of all power to a small caste seem the natural unavoidable condition of survival."

But, and I return to the point, the events that set off the rot, the erosion, were produced by the one-eyed determination of the military to destroy those human beings whom the politicians defined as enemies. They were not events produced by any ideological conversions whatsoever; nor by the storming of any Bastilles.

Nor do any symbolic Bastilles seem to have presented themselves to this day, despite all efforts to make such a thing out of the Paris student's revolt, the Democratic party Convention, Chicago 1968, and the March on the Pentagon.

Little wonder. Unlike preceding revolutions in modern history had no preceding ideology or organization for this one instead it replacing one set of historical rulers by another, questions the very principle of mobilizing human resources through the master-servant relation. There is no one institution, which, if struck down, would demolish this principle. This principle is at the roots of our culture and only a cultural revolution will bring our ways of living and working together in line with the new realities. A cultural revolution of this sort would have to reach into all of the nooks and crannies of our societies. Not, as in 1984 and Cromwell's England, to enforce observance to institutional norms, but to raise the question of whether it is any longer necessary to be so callous to what the other individual needs or wants.

The notion that this erosion of the authority of our institutions was pre-mediated and deliberately fostered has died hard. Even in the first week of June 1968 a gathering of the Western intelligence agencies in Washington could decide, on an admittedly narrow majority, that it was a communist plot. Those experts, on the public pay-roll for the continued prosecution of the Cold War, were not about to see that their *raison d'être* was at stake.

How then did this erosion of authority take place when there was no ideology, no party, no KGB or CIA funds to back them?

The erosion of authority took place because those who read the writing on the sub-way wall copied it in ways their peers could understand and conveyed that message, with conviction, in all the crummy joints they and their peers could afford to gather. Eventually those crummy joints were as big as Woodstock.

Whilst the loyal, the committed and the resigned supporters of the old system sought bliss in front of their new television sets the old media of the coffee place, the gramophone and steam radio were taken over by a generation who looked back in anger and were determined to do their own thing, whatever the hell that new thing was. For the old folk adage of 'better the devil you know' they had substituted the adage that 'now, anything would have to be better than the past', 'nothing new could be worse than what we have had' (Reflecting on Belsen and the Gulag Archipelago they may not have been wrong).

The first unambiguous and strident messages came from the Beatniks and the rock-and-roll musicians, starting 1956. From there the message grew in precision and in stridency to Acid Rock, through the Beatles and Dylan to the up-and-out movement of youth, starting 1967. That was another 'Children of Crusade'; the middle-aged drop-out followed.

No one had pre-programmed Dylan and the Beatles anymore than they had pre-programmed Jack Kerouac or Allen Ginsburgh in 1956. Many of the oldies in folk music were undoubtedly pre-programmed but what these young musicians were saying was what no party east or west, would wish to propagate.

I am stating that what they were singing out about is what is here; what we can grasp if only we stop thinking that the system runs us and realize that we are the system.

With a message like this I do not doubt that John Lennon was justified in 1966 to claim that the Beatles were better known than Jesus Christ. I am sure that he meant that they had a more relevant message. I do not doubt that Bob Dylan was more aware of where we were at than any of our sociologists or futurologists.

Not only that. These new style ideologists had a mastery of a media that enabled them to get to millions across the world in a matter of months. Theirs was not the tailored demagoguery of the nineteen thirties radio. They made their own music and made manifest their honesty.

Let me sum up my thoughts to this point.

I have stated that certain facts of life have destroyed any rationale for pretending that the survival of humanity depends upon the principle of dominant hierarchies. Briefly, we no longer have a commitment to the principle of 'the survival of the fittest' nor to the principle of patriotism.

More than that. I have recorded that people like the Beatles and Bob Dylan have already conveyed this message to the young. They came from nowhere and did it in ways we could not even suspect when they were doing it. Are the musical messages to Fernando and from Evita doing just the same thing today. Or is punk rock ringing out another message for the changes we are now in. Is it in another musical code we cannot read?

Whatever else, these new messages can only deepen and extend awareness of the irrationality of social domination. No facts have negated the world the beatniks first saw in 1956 and hence with each passing moment we must expect more of what we have been getting. We cannot gain time by shutting-up our professors or the professional futurologists from our establishment think-tanks. They would in any case probably think that Dylan was a Welsh poet.

No reduction in education, no amount of 'uncontrollable unemployment', - in fact no amount of institutionalized hardship for the deviant individuals will wipe out

awareness of the real possibilities inherent in the facts of 1944-5 and 1952-3. The productive possibilities have grown beyond all measure since 1944 so there is no way in which the work ethic will be re-established short of a war that destroys our industrial base. The war threat wears thinner and thinner. There is no way in which world war three will occur unless one party achieves a phantastic scientific break-through. That must always be a possibility but it has not been a probability for many decades and is increasingly less likely with the greater international scientific interchange. And, I must add, because when you can kill everyone in the world three times over there is not much else for the militarist to aim at.

I am well aware that this is a very broad canvas to paint in such a short time and that the brevity of treatment must strain the credibility of those who have not already done their own thinking and study along such lines. You have chosen to spend the day scanning issues as broad and contentious as "energy and limits to growth". In the social field the issues I have raised for discussion are as broad in their implications as any you are likely to find, and as contentious.

However, the very broad issues are not necessarily without their practical implications in the immediate present.

I want to touch on just four matters that could concern the development of the Murray Valley:

- a) youth involvement in community affairs
- b) emergence of more participative forms of local and regional self-government
- c) more humane and productive use of human resources
- d) emergence of new life styles

We have had more than a decade in which there has been a profound generation gap, marked by distrust and hostility. As I read the signs this phase seems to be passing and some dialogue about common interests seems feasible. We do not have to look far to find common interests. If the youth have to migrate to find decent jobs it is not only them losing their roots but the communities in the Valley losing their futures. The conference of Murray Valley youth organized for this Thursday should give us some better feeling for where things are at.

Few would dispute the desirability of broader participation in local-self-government. Few would contend that our present system of the occasional vote for aspiring office has done much to activate the women, the migrants or the poor. I think we must move toward regarding some services as simply part and parcel of being a citizen, as we do for jury service. It would mean a return to the traditions of Athenian democracy for which our civilization has given such lip-service. Some of the offices would be filled by lot not ballot. By the method of lots minorities would come into those offices in approximately the same proportion as they are present in the community. Tentative steps in this direction may not be as far away as it seems.

On the third matter, use of human resources, I think there is room for taking a new hard look at what is happening in the Valley. For those of us who grew up in the towns of Australia it is too easy to be complacent about the quality of working relations they offer compared with the big factories, stores and offices of the cities. The survey of the urban work force that Chris Phillips and I did for the Federal Government in 1973 gives us no room for complacency. Small and medium sized enterprises, of the kind that dominate

life in the Valley, certainly have the potential for being less impersonal and more human places to work. The fact that they were not, suggest that their managements have a lot to learn about managing people. I would suggest that they have allowed too much of the boss syndrome to creep into the daily running of their enterprises. This can be seen when a small employer feels that the outside demands on his time compels him to appoint a foreman or supervisor. From this point on one can start to see the signs of employees withdrawing their commitment to getting a good job done and the emergence of the attitude of 'why should I worry, that's the foreman's problem' Workers who once felt that they should work a bit extra to meet a customer's deadline, to meet the special quality requirements of a particular customer or that they should try to be nice and friendly to a customer no longer feel that way. We can bemoan the fact that this happens so frequently but we cannot escape the fact that it is the owner or manager who has created this inherently undignified relation of foreman to worker. In this relation the responsibility for good, creative and conscientious work, and the credit for same, is transferred from the worker to the foreman. The worker is put into a childlike relationship. The foreman is put in the position of meeting the demands of a boss who is increasingly out of touch with the realities of the work-face. I have done a lot of work showing the remarkable improvements that follow when the role of foreman is discarded and management and workers forced to work our direct relations between their contributions. A lot of this is published but you could well do a lot for yourselves by just considering the little case of Dynavac that lately got wide press coverage in Victoria - most of the lessons are there.

This is on today's agenda for the valley. It is the major way in which you can quickly affect the values you get in results and on-the-job training from grants money coming in; the major way in which you can effectively compete in providing services that otherwise drain money from the Valley; the major way in which you can give the low cost – high quality services needed for the growth of tourism. Last, but not least, an improvement in the quality of work life in the Valley cannot but make a significant change in the quality of life generally i.e. make the valley a more attractive place to stay in or come to.

It may seem premature to comment on the fourth point, life styles. Maybe it is. Valley systems like the Murray have always attracted a wide variety of life styles from those who have made a great living to those who have eked out a living but had a pretty good life. In the past this has been a source of embarrassment because the latter were usually also patches of rural poverty, sloth and ignorance. The scene is changing. With it has come a concern for conservation and an opening up of river-banks and other such areas to more public useage. There is a fair probability that the Valley will attract many more of those looking for a rural retreat. The matter does not stop there. If the youth and other minority groups are drawn more fully into community life, and if tourism is to be more than a commercial exploitation then something of a cultural change can be expected in community life. In the past community life in our country town has been highly stylized and stereotypical. Big words but I can remember in the forties and fifties when one Australian wheat town was just like the rest of them, even when separated by a thousand and more miles. The most important and pressing consideration about styles of life centers around the proposals for Albury-Wodonga. Up till now the Murray Valley Development League has grown around the alliance of interests of towns along the more

or less East-west axis of the river. What reality will remain in this concept if Albury-Wodonga emerges as a major metropolitan area astride the head waters of the Murray? Such a metropolis will surely orient itself on a north-south axis with Melbourne and Sydney. That is where its business will lie. I suspect that all that is downstream from this complex will be backwater and sewerage drain.

This is an unhappy note on which to end but the Valley was once before torn into isolated segments when the rail-heads came in. The longer term interests of Australia certainly seem to demand that the ecological unity of the Murray Valley be reflected in our social and political organization. Short term considerations seem once again to threaten the unity of the Valley. Not much can be done about this unless the people of the Valley produce more viable plans and give evidence that they are their plans which they are going to carry out to the best of their ability. Not, mind you, fancy plans prepared by internationally reputable experts with Valley representatives sticking their hands out to central government.

I think that people can raise themselves to greater efforts when they think there is a threat to the habitat in which they have grown up, and they feel that the co-habitants share the same sense of threat. It is important, however, that they have some sense of common or shared gains and losses. For this reason we suggested a design for Thursday's conference of Murray valley youth that would focus on what is in it for us, not what is in it for me. It is not just the youth who should be searching for such a shared focus on the future of the Valley.