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Aller au sommaire du numéro

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To Be Free Full-Time: The Challenge of Work

Tom Wayman

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I HAVE WRITTEN elsewhere of how an accurate examination of people's experiences in the contemporary workforce is, with few exceptions, missing from our cultural productions, our educational curriculums, our news and entertainment media, and advertising. This absence occurs despite how work, for a majority of us, is the central and governing experience of daily life — determining, for example, our standard of living, how much time and energy we have before and after going to our jobs, the place we live. Our employment has a major influence on who our friends are, and strongly affects our attitudes towards an enormous array of events, social movements, artifacts, environments, etc. And despite the silence in which our society wraps participation in the workforce, our jobs each day reconstruct society. Because of our efforts at work, the members of our community are fed, sheltered, clothed, educated, entertained, and much more.

I have written elsewhere, as well, about how the taboo surrounding a true insider's representation of everyday jobs is not a neutral fact, but a source of pain. As I argue in my 1993 collection of essays, *A Country Not Considered*:

For example, because work is not considered culturally important, school curriculums largely ignore the history, present form and possible future of daily employment. As a result, students frequently embark on years of training for a trade or profession with only the vaguest

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or glossiest notion of what a job is like and of how this employment affects the human beings who perform it. The absence in our culture of any accurate depiction of our work also leads to a profound sense of isolation. We are aware we have certain problems at the job, or problems that arise away from work because of our employment. But perhaps we are the only ones who feel this way? Left unsure and isolated, we are less likely to search for a collective answer to our difficulties, a collective means to improve our lives.

A further negative consequence of the taboo is a mystification of how products and services come to exist. One consequence of this mystification is that when we do not know much about each other's jobs, do not know much about how the goods and services we need or want are created, it becomes easier to believe negative reports about people who in reality are very much like ourselves. That is, we are willing to accept the received idea that postal workers are lazy, people on strike are greedy, etc.[1]

Other ways the taboo is hurtful include ignorance on the part of employees of their legal rights concerning the workplace or work-related programs such as unemployment insurance, or how to redress injustices concerning the job or job-related issues. Not least as a source of harm is the diminishment of our sense of personal contribution to society caused by the taboo-enforced silence about the value and importance of what most of us do for a living.

Since our society has adopted such a pervasive aversion to a clear portrayal of our jobs and their consequences, there must be a *reason* why this taboo is in place. The considerable hurt that the maintenance of this taboo causes indicates that there must be a powerful explanation why such a fundamental human experience as everyday employment, one so basic to the existence of individuals and the community, can be so completely ignored. Yet part of understanding the taboo is to consider fearlessly the cause or origin of it. What happens to us at work each day that makes us anxious to do nearly *anything* rather than examine this central dimension to our lives?

One frequent answer I hear is that work is a taboo subject simply because for much of the population work is boring. Gatekeepers of culture adopt this perspective, in my experience, in order to maintain that an accurate depiction of daily work is not a suitable topic for art. I find this response appears in some reviews of my collections of contemporary poems by Americans and Canadians about their jobs. In the introduction to *A Country Not Considered* I provide the following example:

Why should we have to read, asked one newspaper reviewer of my most recent (1991) anthology, *Paperwork*, "about a reality from which we try, vicariously or otherwise, to escape?" The reviewer quoted William Faulkner as stating that since work is the only activity people do for eight hours a day, no wonder people are so miserable.

Yet if the central experience of each day is so boring, and makes us so miserable, would it not follow that art would be the perfect place to assess what happens on the job? After all,

[1]Tom Wayman, "Laramie or Squamish: What Use is Canadian Culture?" in Tom Wayman, *A Country Not Considered: Canada, Culture, Work* (Toronto 1993), 24.

the arts are usually touted as humanity's way of exploring existence, of expressing what it means to be human. In fact, the new writing about work in no way describes work as simply boring or miserable. Instead, it depicts the workplace as a locale where the entire range of human emotions are found — not excluding boredom and misery, but also including accomplishment, danger, joy, humour, rage, romanticism, whimsy, inquisitiveness, and much, much more. How could it be otherwise, since the jobsite is a place where human beings gather each day to live, interact, produce, in fact re-create the entire society? The new work writing shows that the range of personalities at work, and responses to the job, are as wide as humanity itself. I am convinced that only somebody with a need to cling to a denial of what actually occurs on the job could attempt to reduce such a significant human experience to "boring" and "miserable."[2]

I have to add, too, that if work is so boring, why do people in conversation — even after a ritualistic disclaimer about the dullness of their jobs — talk about their work so animatedly once they know a listener is interested? Descriptions of personalities, events, tools, tasks, exceptional good days and bad days on the job and a great deal else pour out of people if the person to whom they are speaking displays any interest in breaking the officially-approved silence that wraps the everyday workplace. Thus I conclude that the boringly repetitive part of the work process on many jobs can not account for the existing taboo. Since work is so central to human life, I believe another factor besides the supposed one-dimensionality of employment experiences is the root of society's refusal to contenance a clear and honest examination of the job.

I believe the taboo against an accurate depiction of daily employment arises because we are not free at work. For most of us, democracy ceases the moment we cross the office door or the factory gate. Once we have clocked in, or otherwise have begun the working day, we are subject to authority which we have absolutely no voice in choosing. At our jobs, we are often ordered about like children. We usually have little or no control over the conditions of our employment, over the quality of the product or service our work creates, over the good or harm caused to other people by the product or service we make, and over how the wealth generated by our labour with muscle and brain will be used.

It is as though when we show up at work we cross through a time tunnel, back to the era when the majority of people did not have the vote in society and were expected to be dutifully obedient to their social "betters" — the representatives of various inherited authoritarian structures. The moment we appear at work, the democratic rights and privileges which as citizens we are assured continually by educators, politicians, and the media are the foundation of our society are all suspended. If in the midst of what we are told repeatedly is a political democracy we find such a lack of freedom at the heart of our day, at the heart of our lives, no wonder this glaring contradiction must be cloaked in silence and denial.

[2]Wayman, "Laramie or Squamish," 8.

I describe the situation on the job as follows, in the introduction to my 1993 selected poems, *Did I Miss Anything?*:

> Briefly, we live our productive lives — the majority of our waking hours — as free-lance serfs. We are free to chose and change the masters we will obey for money, free to be destitute or marginal, free to go into debt, free to purchase as many of life's necessities and/or drugs and toys as our rate of remuneration permits. We are even free to employ other serfs. But most of us at work have no significant control over what happens to us, over who gives us orders, over the organization of production, over the distribution of the wealth our labor produces, over the social uses of what we create. The alternative of self-employment often turns into self-exploitation as we strive to remain competitive with enterprises employing serfs.[3]

Our working life means we endure what I call in one essay "this bizarre existence, where we are expected to alternate every few hours between being freedom-loving, responsible citizens of a democratic community while off the job, and docile, unquestioning respecters of authority while at work."[4] I am convinced this schizoid existence accounts for many of our failures as effective members of the community — as parents, as citizens, as stewards of the planet. If we are treated as though we are half-witted or a child during the hours each day at our jobs, how can we suddenly transform ourselves into reasonable, rational adults the moment we climb into our car or board the bus after work? What attitudes toward ourselves do we take home from the job, after eight hours or more of being assured we lack the right or ability to make responsible decisions, to exercise control individually or with our peers over the manifold aspects of the work process?

Abraham Lincoln in June 1858, quoted St. Mark as maintaining that a house divided against itself cannot stand. Lincoln argued that, similarly, a government "cannot endure permanently half slave and half free."[5] Equally evident, I believe, is that the tensions caused in people by the endless shuttling between expectations of freedom and of serfdom, and between the behaviors demanded by such different social roles, are a contributing factor to a wide spectrum of personal dysfunction and collapse.

This unhealthy situation is compounded by the existing taboo. Therapists have tried to show how denial of a familial problem like alcoholism or child abuse vastly increases the damage such dysfunctions cause. Such a problem can not be healed as long as no one will admit the dysfunction exists. In addition, young people especially are affected because the child learns that what she or he knows to be true is regarded by everyone around the child as false, and what the child knows is

[3]Tom Wayman, "Introduction: Glad I Was Born," in Tom Wayman, *Did I Miss Anything? Selected Poems 1973-1993* (Madeira Park 1993), 14.

[4]Tom Wayman, "Sitting by the Grave of Literary Ambition: Where I Am Now in my Writing," in Wayman, *A Country*, 177.

[5]John Bartlett, ed., *Familiar Quotations*, 13th ed., (Boston 1955), 537.

untrue is considered by everyone around the child as real. Everyone in the family, of every age, has to adopt elaborately irrational behaviors to establish and maintain the denial.

Similarly, when nothing in the surrounding culture admits to the lack of freedom at work experienced by an individual, the dysfunctional behavior generated in the individual by experiencing such unfreedom is made worse by this blanket of denial. How can anyone discover and practice truthful and helpful social behavior, when society is united in not admitting to the core condition that adversely affects so many of its members?

In the introduction to *A Country Not Considered* I give an example of how this denial worsens the personal and social ill caused by the lack of freedom at work. My intent is to consider the current behavior of the citizens of the countries formerly under the sway of the USSR, and of the people of Québec in my own country.

> On the planet at present, the inhabitants of many nations are demanding independence for their ethnic, religious or language group. And that is well and good. But after the shouting or the shooting stops, on the morning after the victory celebrations whether deep in Eastern Europe or in Québec, most people will file back through the office door or factory gate to a condition of servitude. The person who controls them there may now be of the same ethnic or religious or linguistic background as themselves. But the humiliation will continue. To me it is no wonder that the citizens of newly independent states often quickly feel cheated, wronged, shortchanged, and turn on each other in civil wars or search out some scapegoat from among their fellow citizens on which to place the blame for the lack of freedom they still feel. This is the price of denial of the central fact of political and personal life.[6]

Because the absence of democracy at work is all we have known, the situation is conceived of by us as normal or organic, as though the state of unfreedom on the job is the result of some law of nature. But the hierarchical manner of organizing contemporary work is merely a continuation of the means by which jobs were structured during the Industrial Revolution in the second half of the 18th Century — a time when the majority of people had absolutely no vote in the affairs of their community or nation. Nor is there any Holy Commandment that decrees: "The workplace shalt not be organized democratically." To date the human race has substantially done away with such long-entrenched practices as the divine right of kings, slavery, and the restriction of democracy to property owners or other possessors of wealth. All these ideas, like the subjugation of women, once were regarded as natural and organic and approved by religious thought.

When we see the workplace not as an unchanging, naturally-occurring hierarchy, but instead regard the job as a social location not yet reached by the historical expansion of democracy, a vast range of possibilities for the organization of daily work can be considered. At present, if I have a job of work that I cannot do alone, I hire you. Both of us expect that because I give you money for your time and skills

[6]Wayman, "Introduction," 7.

you will unquestioningly obey my commands concerning the task I have assigned you. Yet a different way of regarding this scenario is that the moment I cannot complete a job alone, the moment I have to hire you to help me accomplish this work, then *two* people are engaged in completing the task. The money that I possess does not automatically endow me with dictatorial power over you. Instead, the two people who are working on this job decide together a wide range of matters connected with the work with which we are *both* involved. An analogy to this way of perceiving employment is that our society does not limit the exercise of the political franchise only to people who have acquired a certain level of personal wealth, skill, experience, or knowledge. In theory, every citizen has the vote regardless of his or her bank balance or what functions she or he performs (or doesn't perform) in the community.

Yet the taboo against a clear portrayal of employment perpetuates the idea that how we currently organize work is natural, and that no other possibilities are seriously open to consideration. As a result, we are prevented from beginning the protracted debate over a host of alternative arrangements, a debate that is absolutely essential if we are ever to democratize the hours we are employed. The belief that work naturally excludes democracy is as deeply and widely present in our society as the taboo. This belief in the organic nature of undemocratic jobs persists even though most of us have experienced non-hierarchically-organized work — a group of volunteers building an adventure playground on behalf of a community centre or church, or a group of friends constructing a dock at the summer cottage owned by one of them.

So established in our consciousness is the equation of employment with unfreedom that an awareness of the lack of democracy at work can change our political sense of the world. For me,

> I now see politics as authoritarian vs. anti-authoritarian, rather than in terms of left vs. right. And for me, the real test of the presence of democracy is what everyday work is like in a country, community or organization. I find this test more useful as a means of analysing what occurs in the world than some of my former ideas. Otherwise, how could I explain the odd coincidence that both a "right-wing" political group like B.C.'s Social Credit party and a "left-wing" political group like, say, any former East European communist party, both propose the *identical* program for labour? Both, if you scrape the rhetoric off what they say, want all strikes banned on pain of jail or worse, and unions either powerless or at the very least regulated by the government in order to exist.
>
> No political party or government in the world wants democracy extended to the workplace. I have come to see this fact as basic to the politics of our era.[7]

Yet the critique of the lack of democracy on the job I have outlined here is hardly unique to our time. As long as there have been human beings, there have

[7]Tom Wayman, "An Aspirin as Big as the Sun: Poetry and Politics," in Wayman, *A Country*, 136-7.

been voices that rejected the concept of the divine right of a privileged group to command others. The lack of freedom at work has been denounced almost from the inception of the hierarchical workplace. In North America, we have seen this century in the trade union movement a tension between two very different conceptions of unions — one of which incorporates the ideas I am discussing here. In one vision, a union's role is to barter for the greatest possible return to serfs for their labour — best wages and benefits, most protection from arbitrary authority, etc. In return, this form of union offers employers a policing of the workforce, an assurance to management of docile obedience overall to the job hierarchy established and maintained by the company and modified by contracts debated and eventually signed with the union. This is business unionism, which in its present form is represented by the AFL-CIO, or in my country by the CLC, the Canadian Labor Congress. In general, business unionism is content with the taboo against an accurate portrayal of contemporary jobs, because discussion of more democratic methods of organizing work would force the union into a more antagonistic position with regard to entrenched authority. Such a position would threaten the business union's ability to cut a deal with the boss, trading freedom for an orderly, regularly-paid, reasonably-protected serfdom.

But alongside this vision of unionism is one held by men and women whose analysis of the workplace includes a rejection of the lack of democracy there. So far this century, the most dramatic embodiment of this form of unionism in North America is the Industrial Workers of the World, whose founding principles include not only employee takeover and management of industry, but also the abolition of wages in favor of other means of controlling and distributing the wealth produced by an enterprise. The IWW flourished between 1905 and the 1920s, but was badly damaged by the attacks of government and employers against it due to the labour turmoil during and after World War I. The Russian Revolution of 1917 (whose implications for working people were not as evident immediately as they are now), the post-war employee unrest and civic general strikes such as that in Vancouver in 1918 and in Winnipeg and Seattle in 1919, all generated an intellectual and activist ferment among working men and women such that the ultimate victory of business unionism —and the preservation of undemocratic workplaces — was by no means assured. The IWW took the fall for the set of ideas which seemed so threatening to the existing hierarchies, although these ideas (and even a tiny rump version of the IWW) are found in the workforce today. But the taboo against an accurate depiction of daily work —a taboo which the IWW sought valiantly to break through its songs, art, literature and oral traditions — also has contributed to a reduction of the transformational form of unionism to a decidedly minority role at present. The effect on working people of the disappearance of revolutionary unionism may be illustrated most clearly by looking at changes in hours of work. Between the turn of the century and 1940, the four decades that encompass the heyday of an alternate vision for labour, average hours of employment per week

dropped from 80 to 40. During the next 40 years from 1940 to 1980, spanning the entrenching of business unionism, the work week remained constant at 40 hours.

The ideas represented by the emergent IWW appeared un-American to the power structure of its time. Yet the union itself did not think so. On 27 June 1905, in Brand's Hall in Chicago, Big Bill Haywood, General Secretary of the Western Federation of Miners, gavelled the meeting to order that would establish the IWW out of an amalgam of existing unions, union locals, and individuals. Haywood's opening words were:

> In calling this convention to order I do so with a sense of the responsibility that rests upon me and rests upon every delegate that is here assembled. This is the Continental Congress of the working class.[8]

The two hundred-odd delegates in Brand's Hall that June morning could make the connection between the goals of the founding fathers of American independence and their own intent in launching the new labour organization. Just as Congress was ultimately to reject the idea of British authority over the activities and resources of the colonists, so Haywood and the others opposed the undemocratic control of their working lives by the owners and managers of industry. As Haywood explained in a speech on the evening of July 7:

> While we are going to do everything that we can to improve and take advantage of every opportunity that is offered to us to improve the condition of the working class as we go along, the ultimate aim of this organization is to get control of the supervision of industry.[9]

In brief, the founders of the IWW saw themselves as applying to the government of *enterprises* what Thomas Jefferson and the other members of the Continental Congress had concluded about the government of *nations*:

> We hold these truths to be self-evident; that all men are created equal; that they are endowed by their creator with certain unalienable rights; that among these are life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness; that to secure these rights, governments are instituted among men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed; that whenever any form of government becomes destructive to these ends, it is the right of the people to alter or to abolish it, and to institute new government, laying its foundation on such principles, and organizing its powers in such form, as to them shall seem most likely to effect their safety and happiness.[10]

The members of the first Congress were opposed to taxation without representation. Similarly the delegates to the IWW's founding convention believed the

[8]*The Founding Convention of the I.W.W.* (New York 1969), 1.
[9]*Ibid.*, 579.
[10]Bartlett, *Familiar Quotations*, 373.

introduction of democracy to the workplace would end the exclusion of themselves from the decisions that divide up the wealth produced by the labour of all employees. These decisions determine how much of the enterprise's income goes for purchase of raw materials, how much is earmarked for research and development, how much is put aside for contingencies and for the eventual replacement of physical plant, how much is returned to investors, how much is allotted to the men and women who perform the work that results in the enterprise's income. The monopoly by management of the decision-making concerning this wealth means money is taken from employees and put to various uses by management without the employees' consent. If it was decreed unacceptable in 1776 for Britain to levy taxes and to allot tax revenue without the colonists' participation in the process, it seemed equally wrong to the unionists in Brand's Hall in 1905 to have the wealth they produced at their jobs taken from them and distributed without the involvement of their elected representatives.

Whatever the history of the advocates of the concept of the liberation of work, the future of the concept is at present uncertain. Even if democratization of our hours of employment were to become the focus of a movement as large as the present feminist movement, or as small but effective as the IWW in its first years, the specifics of such democratization are by no means settled.

Twice this century major attempts have been made to extend democracy to the workplace throughout a society as an integral part of a larger democratization of community life. Unfortunately, both of these attempts were undertaken in the midst of civil wars. In Ukraine, the insurgency of Nestor Mahkno and his compatriots —fighting against both the Whites and the Reds between 1918 and 1921 — included the establishment and protection of rural agricultural communes and urban workers' self-management of enterprises in areas under Mahknovist control.[11] And in Spain 15 years later, primarily in rural Aragon and more urbanized Catalonia (Barcelona in particular), between 1936 and 1939 rural agricultural communes and worker management of industries were instituted and thrived until the defeat of the Spanish Republic by Franco's armies.[12] On a different scale, the rise of the Polish free trade union Solidarity for fifteen months beginning in August of 1980 led to experimentation with self-management by city workers and farmers.[13] These developments took place in an atmosphere of intense hostility on the part of the ruling Communist Party of Poland. And once again, this social experimentation was crushed by the military when on 13 December 1981 Party head Gen. Wojciech Jaruzelski formally declared "a state of war" and imposed martial law.[14]

[11]Peter Arishov, *History of the Makhnovist Movement*, Translated by Lorraine and Fredy Perlman (Detroit 1974), passim.

[12]Sam Dolgoff, ed., *The Anarchist Collectives: Workers' Self-Management in the Spanish Resolution* (Montreal 1974), passim.

[13]Stan Persky, and Henry Flam, eds., *The Solidarity Sourcebook* (Vancouver 1982), *passim*, esp. 177-240.

[14]*Ibid.*, 14.

Civil war of course distorted such attempts this century to try out what democratization of daily work for a whole society might be like in practice. Anyone interested in a future for this concept, though, must carefully examine such earlier struggles. Even allowing for the problems of functioning in a wartime or police-state atmosphere, certain difficulties with implementing workplace freedom emerge.

First is the matter of investment: any new enterprise requires money up front to start, and enterprises that are already operating often require infusions of money in order to modernize or expand. Who controls a community's pool of investment money? How is such a pool accumulated, distributed, regulated, refilled by users? On a smaller scale, if I want to invest in an enterprise (whether on a face-to-face basis, or through purchase of stocks or shares), how can I be sure my investment is protected? Can I reasonably expect some return on my investment? What is an acceptable rate of return, and who or what determines this?

Related to this question of the formation and distribution of capital is the issue of innovation. How can a society be certain that new products and services and improvements to existing ones will be funded adequately to ensure their appearance? This problem is linked to the role of the marketplace, including the functions of advertising, consumer protection, environmental protection, prevention of monopolies.

Other questions include whether there is a place for trade unions in a self-managed enterprise. And who or what adjudicates competing needs, such as when the self-managed suppliers of a raw material require a price increase to stay economically viable, but a self-managed factory that uses the raw material cannot remain solvent if they pay the increase? Also, how does self-management of individual enterprises permit the implementation of community or regional or even national industrial strategies?

Speaking of nations, what is the relation between employee-controlled businesses and services, and governments at all levels? Here is how one group within Polish Solidarity tried to clarify roles in their own precarious — and ultimately doomed —situation:

> A socialized enterprise is one controlled by self-management. The central authority is a workers' council elected by the whole staff with the right to make decisions concerning the enterprise's most important business. A manager is appointed by the council in a contested election and is responsible to it alone. The enterprise is communal property managed by the workers' council. The influence of centralized state control on the enterprise's activities is exerted by means of economic instruments such as taxes, custom duties, credits and state agreements, as well as by general norms of law such as those concerning environmental protection, technological standards, industrial health and safety, etc.[15]

[15] *Ibid.*, 178-9.

When we move to consider the actual people who must implement workplace democracy, other difficulties emerge. Generations of unfreedom have damaged many of us. As a coping technique, we have adopted on- and off-the-job drug addiction (including alcohol and nicotine and caffeine), gambling, theft, fear of responsibility, victimhood and blaming as a response to crisis, suppression of curiosity, substitution of consumption for personal creativity. How can a beneficial new society be constructed if many of the builders are permanently injured in these ways by what they have already endured under the old regime? Besides the negative behaviorial legacies of the undemocratic workplace, there is the problem that my right to freedom on the job interferes with your freedom to start a company and do with it — and its employees — anything you want. Abraham Lincoln noted this apparent contradiction in April 1864, in connection with the issue of slavery.

> We all declare for liberty; but in using the same *word* we do not all mean the same *thing*. With some the word liberty may mean for each man to do as he pleases with himself, and the product of his labor; while with others the same may mean for some men to do as they please with other men, and the product of other men's labor. Here are two, not only different, but incompatible things, called by the same name — liberty. ... The shepherd drives the wolf from the sheep's throat, for which the sheep thanks the shepherd as a *liberator*, while the wolf denounces him for the same act as the destroyer of liberty. ... Hence we behold the processes by which thousands are daily passing from under the yoke of bondage, hailed by some as the advance of liberty, and bewailed by others as the destruction of all liberty.[16]

I do not believe these problems posed by workplace democracy are insurmountable. A similar list of problems posed by the lack of freedom at work would appear equally intimidating, and yet we have staggered along under this form of workplace organization for hundreds of years. I fear the silence around work more than I fear the difficulties raised by democracy on the job. That is why I am cheered by the appearance, even on a very small scale, of the new insider's writing about daily work, and by the albeit-few-and-far-between gatherings such as the present one at Sitka that are willing to critically examine what happens to us as a consequence of our employment. Since the general theme of the Sitka Symposiums is "human values and the written word," I want to close by considering briefly some implications of the existing taboo for writers especially.

I am convinced that literature which largely omits daily work and its effects offers a false portrait of an individual, a community, a nation, rather than presenting anything close to an accurate reflection of a person or a locale or an age. To preserve the taboo against the details of how our lives are shaped by our employment is to impose a limitation on the effectiveness of art to reveal and assesss human existence.

[16]James M. McPherson, "Liberating Lincoln," *The New York Review of Books*, 21 April 1994, 10.

To state my beliefs more optimistically, my opinion is that for writers to *include* the work experience as a central topic of literature is to commence the creation of truly adult art, of adult literature. I attempt to amplify this idea further in the introduction to my 1993 selected poems:

An imaginary world where we do not work to survive may be an adolescent dream, and may offer a picture of a more beautiful existence than is now an actual possibility for us. But sooner or later a functioning adult must face and make choices that involve work. The alternative is to remain dependent — on luck, chance, friends, relatives, the mercy of those with more power, the state. That is why I believe what I write is the literature of the future: an adult literature. As I stated in my 1983 book of essays, *Inside Job*:

> Just as a child or adolescent often does not understand work or money, so our literature mostly has ignored these and focussed instead on the unlikely lives of those whose day-to-day existence apparently is not governed by concerns of work or money: the rich, killers, outlaws, or fantastic representations of people doing certain real jobs (doctors, cowboys, policemen, and so on).
>
> The new work writing takes up the challenge of portraying the world an adult sees and attempts to understand and/or change. A grown person who constantly evades having to cope with reality, who lives in a world of dreams however beautiful, we consider immature if not mentally ill. The contemporary industrial writing provides maturity and a healthy balance to literature.
>
> ... This is not to say that an adult poetry must be dreary. ... To an adolescent, adulthood may seem a reduced state of being, as responsibilities and commitments limit the boundless possiblities of dream. But to a functioning adult, skills and knowledge gained make possible the creation of a life, not merely the response to it. This sense of strength, of efficacy, of potential power to solve problems that are encountered and thus to tangibly shape the world a better way, move the competent adult out of passiveness into life-enhancing activities that can benefit both the self and the surrounding community.
>
> In any case, every human emotion is part of adult life, that is, of work. Joy, wonder, laughter, games, rebellion, lust, love can be experienced at the jobsite, since work — however undemocratically structured today — is in its last analysis a place where human beings gather to remanufacture the world. Yet every activity found in the shop or office or factory is warped by its occurrence within a more-or-less authoritarian environment, just as our lives are warped by our and our neighbors' daily participation in this environment. We deny this, as a society, at our peril.[17]

Creation of an adult literature incorporating an accurate, insider's depiction of our jobs is an urgent necessity, I am convinced. A literary culture that describes and evaluates the core everyday experience of the members of a community would help provide us with a sense of our worth, would help instill self-confidence. In an

[17]Wayman, "Introduction," 13-5.

essay on Canadian culture, I explore why I feel self-confidence is so significant an attribute:

I believe self-confidence is the root of democracy. If I do not consider myself important, why would I think I have the right to participate in determining what happens to me and to my community? Self-confidence on the part of the majority is necessary for the maintenance and extension of democracy. Since I consider democracy to be the form of social organization that offers the best chance for creating a fair, equitable and happy society, I regard a culture that promotes self-confidence as a *requirement* for the preservation and enhancement of human dignity.

A culture that diminishes or retards people's self-confidence, either through what it proposes or omits, I believe is a threat to democracy. When what we do and who we are are not considered culturally significant, when our contribution to society is hidden behind "big names" (for example, when a corporate executive is said to "make" the product our labour and imagination help create, or an architect is described as having "built" the building we worked on), then the worth of our lives is diminished compared to the value of a comparatively few other people. It is only a step from this to thinking that a "name" person is more important than we are, and hence that his or her thoughts, activities, opinions, etc. are more worthy and should have more weight than our own. This last idea, of course, is counter to the very basis of democracy.

And if we do not consider our lives important, then it is unlikely we will do much to change our lives for the better. Most movements in history that lead to a deepening and broadening of democracy begin with a belief among the activists that they *deserve* the changes they are battling for. In short, people involved with achieving social change have self-confidence. The barons who confronted King John to obtain the Magna Carta, no less than the men and women who fought for and won the eight-hour day, no less than the women who successfully struggled for the right to vote all had the self-confidence that led them to demand changes that were considered radical, unnatural, impossible to the established wisdom of their day. If Canadian employees are to achieve an extension of democracy to that part of our lives where we do not yet have the right to vote — the workplace — we will need the self-confidence that we deserve *democracy* in every aspect of our social existence.[18]

To conclude on a personal note, I feel the creation and nurturing of a literature that speaks accurately about work, and the liberation of our working life, are both goals worth striving for because attainment of these aims would lead to a better existence for me. Grants, a supportive family and other lucky circumstances have occasionally accorded me a space to be free from selling my time and to pursue my art uninterrupted. But I know even during these blessed months that what happens in the workplace intrudes on my life. My observation is that

[a]rtists sometimes feel they have escaped the cage of daily waged or salaried employment if they can survive economically through selling their art or their artistic knowledge. But ... [e]ven if you and I succeed in finding or creating non-hierarchically-managed employment

[18]Wayman, "Laramie or Squamish," 25-6.

for ourselves, we live surrounded by women and men who do not enjoy this privilege. And it is among these people —including our relatives, children, friends — that we must spend our time on this planet. Not until all are free are any of us disentangled from the undemocratic chains and cables that contemporary work tightens around the members of our community. And we will never build Paradise with slave labor.[19]

I have a dream that we can make as central in literature as in life the details and effects and consequences of our daily jobs. I have a dream that we can articulate the need for, and act to achieve, democracy at the heart of our day. I have a dream that we will not pass on to our children the same conditions of servitude in employment that we and our ancestors have hated and grumbled about and cursed, and that have stunted and twisted our lives in ways that even now we fear to examine closely.

I believe that how daily work is organized at present is not good enough for the free citizens of a democracy. I believe that being free is not a part-time matter, a hobby or luxury we engage in during those hours left over from working or sleeping or getting ready to go to work or travelling to and back from our place of employment or recovering from the day's exertions.

I believe freedom is a full-time job.

[19]Wayman, "Sitting by the Grave," 177.