

## GARRETT W. FOX

### *The Importance of Being Lazy*

I once knew two men, neighbors, with very different life styles; in good weather both could be seen in their back yards engaged in varying activities. The first prided himself on being a hard worker: painting the house, washing the car, mowing and watering the lawn, maintenance that once done had to be begun again. The second had natural siding on his house and took his car to an automatic wash; his yard was somewhat shabbier looking but he seemed to enjoy it more: lying in his hammock reading a book, playing croquet with the kids and tossing horseshoes with the neighbors.

Conventional wisdom would describe the first man as “hard working, industrious” and the second as “lazy,” as if there were some innate virtue in work no matter what it yields. Look closer: you may just find that work, far from having any intrinsic reward, is rather neutral, obtaining meaning only from its resultant product. Of value is the “work” that yields a useful object, creates something of beauty, thought or pleasure, or that benefits another. But what of the work most of us do, the routine of the conveyor belt or the mind-numbing cleaning, cooking, polishing of the housewife. True, we can never fully escape such chores but more creative use could be made of our lives with a radical rejection of the Protestant Ethic: hard work is not its own reward; laziness is.

Radical, right? But think about it; if you divide the world into the lazy people (LP) and the non-lazy people (NLP), who has contributed the most toward that mixed blessing we call progress? If you think it's the NLP's then read on; if you correctly said the LP's then open another beer, shift your body in the hammock and read on anyway — you have the time to spare.

Look at the history of the world, of thought and achievement; its best aspects are a product of the LP's. For example, that high priest of the sciences, yet most practical of tools, mathematics, is an LP achievement. Today most people can balance a check book, make change or calculate the best buy of two containers holding different amounts. If it had been left up to the NLP's we'd still be counting with our fingers and toes or, when the number became too great, counting pebbles or chipping marks on a stone (and forget about multiplying or dividing). Even the Roman system was that of an NLP; it was the Arabian LP, tired of making scratches and counting pebbles, who discovered the zero, the base of ten and founded mathematics.

And what about the elevator, automobile and typewriter—clearly all LP inventions; philosophy, literature, science, music and art are all LP achievements. True, some LP products, like the pop top can and aerosol spray, are examples of a good thing gone too far. But how would you live today if it had not been for the LP's: hunting your food on the hoof, cooking it over a fire (if you could find an LP to light one for you) and, yes, Virginia, indoor plumbing is yet another LP invention.

Further, NLP mentality fosters a dictatorial, restrictive society. If the pharaohs had toiled with the pyramids' stones they would have settled for a simple marker and the world would be no poorer. If the generals had to police the camp grounds by hand or if the bureaucrats had to deal with their own red tape, what then?

Moreover the NLP is a petty and rigid person whose favorite phrase is "it's always been done that way." They are comfortable with the tyranny of the time clock and the eight hour day. They find further comfort in the repetitious and meaningless, as in the scene from a Marx Brothers movie: Chico digging a hole but making no progress because Harpo is dumping the dirt from his own hole into his brother's.

Several years ago, on the first day of a new job, I discovered that it took me only one hour of paper pushing to finish my work. I asked my supervisor for more and he told me that each person had his own task and there was nothing else for me to do. I went back to my desk, propped up my feet and opened a magazine. Walking by and seeing me, the supervisor said that I must *look* like I was working. Naively, I asked why: "It's always been done that way."

Some progress is being made; a few LP's, well disguised, are slipping up the corporate ladder. In Denver, an insurance company's office workers are allowed to complete their assignments at any hour of the day and to work for any length of time they wish. Some still work the traditional day, some come in at night, some work three marathon days while others just come in when they feel like it. A little progress is being made in industry: several have given up the traditional assembly line in favor of letting an individual or small team assemble the product from beginning to end.

In business, bureaucracies and whole societies we can see the repressive forces of the NLP's at work (no pun intended) like Chico, shoveling and shoveling and not making any progress. And we can see that for most of what is good, both material and spiritual, we must thank the LP's. Christ, Ghandi, Thoreau and Edison, LP's all.

So let the dust accumulate, the grass grow; find a lazier way to do something, make love, play with your children, read a good book, enjoy!