

1911

The relation of the church to organized labor

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"The Relation of the Church
to organized Labor".

This is an age of social awakening and reconstruction. Rich and poor, wise and simple, young and old are concerning themselves as never before with social amelioration. This unparalleled ^{awakening is} ~~(awakening)~~ to the idealist, "A call of God"; to the atheistic pessimist, a signal for despair. The believer in God and humanity, recognizes in modern social movements and struggles, the gradual, yet inevitable realization of Gods purpose concerning mankind. That purpose, as read in history and revelation, is the establishment of a kingdom, in which Democracy is regnant. Democracy is Christian brotherhood in action. To read aright the "signs of the times" we must be informed as to some of the forces and factors that are giving power and direction to the Democratic movements of our day.

Perhaps the most conspicuous, representatives of the modern Democratic movement are Organized Labor and the Church. Our subject implies their ^{ca} existence in society, and a certain recognition of mutual ideals and interests. By Organized Labor we mean more than simply a trade, industrial or labor union, or even a socialistic propagan-da. These have characteristics all their own, and are ^{our} ~~least~~

single strains "in a greater symphony". By Organized Labor we mean all the unions of workmen in general, and, we may also include a host of unorganized workers, who for one reason or another find it impossible to form an organization. For the most part they are in accord with, and receive benefits from, the sacrifices and struggles of the Organized body.

By the Church we mean something greater than mere denominationalism, and ^{something} less than the kingdom of God. The church is but one department of many departments of the kingdom, and its gospel is but one of the many gospels. Shailer Matthews defines the Church as "institutionalized Christianity". On the basis of this definition, and for the purpose of this discussion, we will include in the term Church, all organized forces bearing the Christian name.

Fundamentally, the ideals and aims of both Organized Labor and the Church are strangely harmonious and complementary. Mr. Gompers tells us in his "Open Letter to Ministers" that Organized Labor stands upon the broad platform of "Human Brotherhood". Mr. John Mitchell expresses the same thought when he declares the ideal of Organized Labor to be "Social and industrial Democracy". Democracy and Brotherhood are identical. It means "a square deal", or as Henry Van Dyke puts it "it is the spirit of fair play speaking gravely of the deepest interests of man. In the

game of life penalties and prizes shall be the same for all so far as we can make it so, and let the best man win". The cardinal principles of Democracy are liberty, equality, and fraternity, and for the actualization of these in social and industrial relations, Organized Labor is struggling.

The Church ideal is not only identical with, but comprehends the ideal of Organized Labor. The Church dare not be satisfied with anything less than the regnancy of Democracy, the spirit of brotherly love in all relations of life. This was in the mind of the Great Teacher, and for this end ^{He} came to live, suffer, and die. This part of His gospel the Church is just begining to rediscover. The Kingdom of God is not to remain remote in place and time, something strangely vague and unreal, but ~~shockingly~~ ^{strikingly} human and present. In that day "His will is to be done upon the earth, even as it is in Heaven". This is the ideal of the Church, and with nothing less dare it be content.

Thus we see that both Organized Labor and the Church are looking toward the same day when Democracy shall be enthroned in the social and industrial world. This difference in ideals may be noted, while Organized Labor is particularly concerned with the industrial aspect of the Kingdom, the Church includes all aspects of the Kingdom. The former is partial and narrow, the latter as compre-

hensive and varied as life itself. Regardless of the narrowness of Organized Labor, this much remains ~~sure~~^{certain} that when once Democracy becomes a fact in industry, it will be a mighty stride in the direction of the Kingdom of God on the earth. The ideal of the Church will forever remain a dream unless that day does come. Hence the interest of the one is the interest of the other.

We may note another difference. Organized Labor finds the source of Democracy largely in the voluntary actions of men; the church finds it in the God who operates in and through men. The Godward bearing, it must be admitted, is conspicuously lacking in most labor organizations, nevertheless, where there is a keen sense ^{of} social self-consciousness, the religious element is by no means absent. This, the rank and file of the workingmen possess to an almost abnormal degree, and to this extent they are, and have absorbed, the spirit of the Kingdom whose maker is God. Whether they admit it or not, God is the source of their aspirations, their hopes, and their ideals.

At this juncture an objection is offered to the lofty ideals attributed to both Organized Labor and the Church, especially the former. We confess strikes, boycotts, religious wars, and factional strifes do not savour of genuine Democracy. Let us remember however, that institutions, like individuals, are not all good, all-wise, nor all-power-

ful. They have generous virtues, and enthusiastic faults as well. After due process of elimination, it can be justly maintained that the ideals, achievements, and efforts in behalf of the human good (and these are the best measures of judgement), amply justify the sublime ideal attributed to them.

By what methods do these beneficent institutions hope to attain to their ideals? Organization of course is a necessary precondition to forceful action and realization. Laborers organize, ask for what they want, and if asking proves futile, more drastic measures are instituted.

Workingmen have not always been organized. It was not until about the middle of the 18th century that conditions were brought about which rendered organization imperative. As a result of the awakening in science, invention and discovery, and the rapid growth of industries, a condition of unemployment, low wages, and a consequent poverty was born, which drove thousands into a species of submission, only equalled by conditions prior to the Civil War. Organized Labor was a protest against these unjust and unholy conditions, and nothing but organization could possibly have stood between the workers and that killing pace of industrialism.

We boast of the present status of the laboring men, in wages, working conditions, and opportunities, but we so often forget that every inch of progress they have made, has been made by sheer force, and that, in opposition to the

powers that be in the world of finance. The fight has just begun, and only God Almighty can know "the things that are to be". The workingman is coming to his own, but his coming will be in the "teeth of many battles". A David, single handed with sling and pebbles, will stand a poor show in this modern warfare. A whole regiment of Davids, with like hopes and fears, and ideals, can alone prevail. Ex President Roosevelt said, "until we advance much farther than at present along lines of genuine altruism, there must be effective and organized collective action by the wage workers in great industrial enterprises. They must act jointly through the process of collective bargaining. Only thus can they be put upon a plane of economic equality with their corporate employers".

Human progress is contingent upon proper economic conditions. Whenever wages have been raised, humanity has been elevated, whenever lowered, men have degraded. Hence Organized Labor regards economic advantage as necessary to the realization of their ideal. We know it is necessary to the enthronement of social justice. Conditions are not just, when the few riot in luxury, while the many are scarcely able to keep soul and body together. Discontent is as inevitable as gravitation, so long as the dog kennels and the stables of the rich have comforts which the ordinary man cannot enjoy. Wages should be high enough to

insure a decent living, and preserve self respect.

It is also unjust to compel men to compete with machinery. If an idle man is a curse to society, so also is the man exhausted by excessive toil a hindrance to citizenship. Men owe themselves duties of self improvement. If a shorter work day will grant the leisure necessary for higher mental, moral and spiritual development, then it is right that workingmen should have it. Some say more leisure, more time for dissipation. This is untrue in most cases. At any rate "if workmen can be entrusted with suffrage, surely then with a few hours of leisure".

Improved conditions of labor are also necessary to the hastening of Democracy. Humid, unsanitary working places conduce neither to health of the body nor longevity. Unnecessary exposure, over exertion, under nutrition, etc., swell beyond computation, the death rate of this age of peace. If employers lack the sense of justice necessary to the protection of their employees, they should be compelled so to do, by legislative statutes.

Higher wages, shorter hours, and better conditions of labor are advantages Organized Labor asks for, and for these they are organized. Back of these demands there is a splendid idealism. It is not a cry for bread, but for the recognition of "suppressed and defeated personality". It is the cry for a larger and more reasonable life; for

social justice; for the brotherhood relation. They desire to live in a manner conformable to American standards, educate their children, and elevate themselves. Every demand that they make, every sacrifice that they bring, is a step toward Democracy.

The destructive methods of Organized Labor are the most severely criticized, because the least understood. The right to strike, or boycott for that matter, is not disputed. Abraham Lincoln referring to the strike of the New England Shoeworkers in a speech delivered in Hartford, Conn. in 1860 said, "thank God, we have a system of labor where there can be a strike. Whatever the pressure, there is a point where the workmen may stop". The speaker of the Massachusetts House declared some months ago "that the strike must not be used in violation of the law, but with wisdom, self restraint, and in the spirit of fairness". We admit that labor has not always been wise, self restrained, and fair, but eliminating these instances, we must remember that the great majority of the strikes have been prosecuted either against an unjust lowering of wages, or for the purpose of securing higher wages, or a necessary improvement in the conditions under which work is performed. It is equally significant that 62.49 per cent of strikes for the above reasons have been conspicuously successful. The sympathetic strikes and those against the employment

of non-union men have been for the most part unsuccessful. Public opinion has approved of the former causes, and disapproved in the majority of cases of the latter.

Does a strike pay? That depends upon our point of view. From the monetary standpoint it may be a miserable failure, but from the moral viewpoint, a colossal gain. Take for instance the strike of the Cloakmakers in New York, and the Steel workers in Bethlehem, Pa. It is said that no less than ten millions of dollars were lost to the Cloakmakers, while manufactures, jobbers, and retailers lost ten times that much. The Steel workers also lost millions to themselves and their employers. In spite of financial losses however, distinct moral advances were made in both instances, which defy reckoning in dollars and cents. When sweatshops are exterminated; when tired bodies gain more hours of leisure, hence opportunities for improvement; when the Sabbath day is given recognition, and when toilers receive a decidedly improved wage, the strike "hath not been in vain".

We are not in sympathy with violence. Lawlessness deserves the most condign penalty of the law. We do oppose the carping critic, who sees no good in the most legitimate use of this weapon, but condemns all strikes alike. Justice must prevail, and if drastic measures are necessary to secure it, why condemn their use? Just so soon as

men get to be "genuinely altruistic," strikes will become useless relics of barbarism, but so long as men are selfish and grasping, they will have their place in the process of wresting from unwilling hands, a just share in the products of labor. Friends of conciliation and arbitration must remember that these measures are rarely effective until men are thoroly organized and ready to strike at a moments notice.

Boycotts are more liable to abuse. Innocent parties are frequently those injured, while the real offenders escape. Very few boycotts are ever successful, perhaps because public opinion is so strongly opposed to them. The Anthracite Coal commission speaks of the boycott as "a conspiracy at common law, and merits and should receive, the punishment due to such a crime". When labor uses this weapon, criticism is swift to follow, while we continue our political, social, or religious boycott with utmost candor and freedom. I am of the opinion that the boycott should not be indulged in, save in necessitous cases and then only with due self restraint and wisdom.

What shall we say of the constructive methods of Organized Labor? In practical efforts and achievements, along educational lines, moral crusades, and general relief work, these men fairly glow with a radiant Democracy. Thousands of union halls are educational centers. Here matters of vital importance to them are discussed pro and con; able addresses are delivered by men from their own

ranks or by outside friends; indeed some of the labor leaders, for organizing and executing skill, are second to none. They are developing their own industrial schools, calculated to make them more skilled in their crafts, and thus to serve the world better, and more largely. It may be interesting to note that a committee of these Labor Leaders headed by John Mitchell succeeded in placing a bill before congress recently, providing an appropriation of "ten million dollars as a cooperative fund to be used by the various states in placing courses of study in agriculture, the trades, and home economics in the secondary and high schools of the entire country, the states being required to supply all lands and buildings, and to pay for all general educational purposes."

Organized Labor had also been largely responsible for the widespread interest, in Church and state, in economic subjects. The resolutions of Church councils on social problems are the echoes of Organized Labor's persistent propaganda along these lines. Labor unions have done little Psalm singing but have "begun where that leaves off," by putting into practice what the Church has long been trying to preach. "If you were to remove from statute books of the civilized world, the laws suggested and championed by Organized Labor, nearly every vestige of humane legislation will be gone". They have safeguarded life and

limb; taken children from hard labor and sent them to school; made tolerable unsanitary shops; abolished indecent factory conditions; protected women; diminished sweat shops; urged free text books and free schools for children freed from the mills; these and many other similiar benefits have come from its hand. Surely Oganized Labor deserves to be called a "moral crusader".

I might also mention their great relief work. The National Typographical union has a home for consumptives in Colorado, valued at a million dollars, and supported exclusively by them for the benefit of the sick and incapacitated. The Cigar workers union with only a membership of 45,000, disbursed during a period of twenty eight years, over eight millions in sick and other benefits. Beside this, local unions bestow benefits according to their own desires and ability. Heads of charitable institutions have declared, that rarely if ever do they receive requests for aid from trade unionists.

Organized Labor has proven itself to be a mighty force for temperance. Many of their leaders are conspicuous champions of all no-license, and anti-saloon measures. They are also doing much to Americanize the immigrant. Carrol D. Wright says "they have done more to Americanize the immigrant than is being done by any other agency, not excepting the Church". Unions break down nationality lines; teach the foreigner his first lessons in citizenship by

warning him against the ward heeler and boss politician; they convince him that he is a part of the government, and that the government is not inimical to his safety, but his friend and defender; he is drawn into the associations of union halls where he hears so much about "better wages, better conditions, better homes and opportunities, until there is created what Chas. Stelzle calls "a psychological atmosphere of "better" in all his thought and life."

These are a few of the constructive achievements and efforts of Organized Labor. In all they have, and are manifesting a supremely unselfish spirit. There are millions today, within and without the ranks of Organized workingmen, who are enjoying the fruits of their toil and sacrifice. In that day when Democracy becomes a fact, it will be seen what a mighty force Organized labor has been toward its realization.

The methods of the Church in behalf of Democracy in human relations, do not differ materially from those of Organized Labor. The Church is pre-eminently an organized body composed of men, with common experiences of sin and salvation, common hopes and ideals. The corporate life of the Church is the strength and hope of Christianity, without it, efforts to establish upon the earth a Kingdom of righteousness and justice, of love and good will, ^{will} be for naught. Like the mariners compass the church is pointing

men to light and life. It is the illuminator of pathways to eternal verities such as God, and human worth; it is the school of religion, and the treasury of moral aspirations. The Churches mission is, to conserve the Kingdom ideal, hold it up, clear, distinct, beautiful, imperative, before the eyes of men. It will persuade men to be loyal to that ideal, and induce them to put into actual service, the lofty principles and visions of the Kingdom.

Some one has truthfully said, that there can be no complete Kingdom of God without the ideal man in society. This is true. It is the business of the Church to save men from sin and its consequences. Christ mission to the world was "to seek and to save that which was lost". Mans first duty is still to love God with all his heart and soul, and to keep His commandments. "A large barn and more oats" may make a horse content, but not man, because man "doth not live by bread alone". Nothing save God's forgiving grace can satisfy heart and soul hunger. The Church must remain the center of spiritual dynamics, from whence come heavenly manna, and springs of living water.

It is said that the Church has over emphasised individual regeneration, thereby neglecting the larger interests of society. That this has been too often true cannot be gain said. Too few individual religious experiences have been socialized, ^{and} thus made real in common walks of

life. The Kingdom of God is a collective conception, involving the whole social life of man. The Church must see to it that the "social organism" is saved as well as the "social atom". The earth will not "shine with the Glory of the Lord" until the Church gets the "Lords" point of view, namely, the individual in vital relation to society. Rauschenbusch says, "The human soul is to seek righteousness and eternal life; the race is to seek righteousness and the Kingdom of God", while it is impossible to evangelize the individual, without making the aggregate of individuals better, yet it is equally true, that no revival of religion will settle the ~~social~~ social problem. The individual Will, by itself, rectified and invigorated, is not enough. Religion must deal with the environment that ^{that} Will creates, and then in turn with the fruits of the Environment.

A Christian Society is the goal of the Church, and, to achieve it, "Things" as well as men must be changed. Chrysostom declared, "Christianity conquered the world and was amazed, not at the vastness of the victory, but at the pettiness of the results attained. Every thing was ^{to} subjugated, and yet nothing was changed". Ministers are frequently advised to leave "things" alone; sin is said to be the root of all moral disease, social and individual, hence to change the individual, necessarily the Environment.

~~We are then reminded that Jesus did not bother himself~~

about heredity, environment, social machinery, civic revivals, etc, hence we are urged to keep these matters out of the sanctuary. True, Jesus was silent on these subjects because the need for plain speaking on them had not yet arisen. But these same people will not deny Jesus' practical ministrations, such as healing the sick, curing the blind, feeding the poor, clothing the naked, etc., yet these are precisely the problems challenging the Church and demanding solution. The Church is none the less loyal to the great Teacher because it utilizes modern means to accomplish these practical results. To plead for humane legislation, on the matter of sweat shops, child labor, workmens compensation acts; to seek the transformation of moral miasmatic swamps into Gods flower gardens, whether from pulpit or platform, is the imperative business of the ministry, all the "preach the old gospel" arguments notwithstanding! Those who are constantly saying "we dont want sociology, give us the old gospel" not infrequently make it necessary for a preacher to apologize for the conduct of Church officials and members. We dare not talk about sin in the abstract, when it is parading our streets in unmistakable fashion. If Jesus were to come to Boston today, I have a suspicion that He, like the prophets of old, would become a mighty meddler in politics, in business, and social life. The church must stand for the right as

it sees the right, and condemn the wrong as it understands the wrong. To save the individual, and to save him in relation to society, is the business of the Church, first, last, and all the time.

Inasmuch as both Organized Labor and the Church are fundamentally ethical, and both have to do primarily with humanity, the relation of one to the other should not, nay more, dare not be anything less than that of mutual helpfulness. The moral crusades of labor may well become the crusades of the Church. The march of the former toward Democracy is as certain as life. Workingmen are going to win. What the Church must do, is, get into the parade or be left far behind. Such Terms as "The Temple of Labor", "Socialized Church", "Church association for the Improvements of the conditions of Labor" etc, all indicate the rapid recognition of mutuality of interests. History shows that industrial upliftings usually accompany great spiritual or moral evolutions. John Wesley gives impulse and direction to the Trade union movement in England; Wycliffe stands side by side with the workingmen while leading a religious revolution; Martin Luther nailed theses on the door at Wittenburg, thereby precipitating a condition which finds deepest response not in the hearts of the well-to-do and rich, but in the hearts of the oppressed workers. John Mitchell recognized the vital relation of labor and religion, when at the commencement of the Anthra-

cite troubles, sought to ward off impending difficulties by proposing that a committee composed of two prominent religious leaders, Archbishop Ireland and Bishop Potter, and one other person whom these two may select, to make preliminary investigations as to wages and conditions of the miners, and to decide as to the justice or injustice of the demands that were being made. At the time of this very strike, President Baer, the coal Baron, said to Mr. Mitchell with reference to the personnel of the investigating committee, that "mining is a business, and not a religion," to which Mr. Mitchell replied "that it is distinctively religious".

The only logical attitude of the Church to Organized Labor is that of profoundest sympathy and helpfulness. But sympathy is a worthless asset unless reinforced by an intelligent understanding of the sympathy provoking problem. Mere theorizing will accomplish nothing. As Swivel chair philosophers we may solve a problem in the abstract, but find our solution woefully inadequate in the concrete. Prof. Peabody says "neither ethical passion nor rhetorical genius equips a preacher for economic judgements; there is danger in immature and unintelligent pronouncement". To this danger most of us younger ministers are exposed. In our zeal to "do things", we too often tilt against some social evil, and break our lances because we were so innocently ignorant of the evil itself, and of

the proper time andpoint of attack.

We need to study the workingmans problems at close range. We must look him in the eye; know his habits; think his thought; stand on his mountain for awhile, and behold the struggle and from his angle of vision. This will save us from unjust criticism of Organized labors ideals and methods of realization. The student who enters into the passions and struggles, ideas and ideals of the workingmen, without bias or prejudice, will soon recognize in the faltering steps and blundering speech of the masses, no mean force, making for the brotherhood relation in the industrial world, and also for that larger Democracy of the Kingdom.

The Church must create and direct this Democratic movement, by furnishing leadership for the Organization. Single-handed, Labor Organizations have reached their limit. These men need to know of the religious content of their impulses and feelings, their desires and passions, for betterment. Thus only will their aspirations and ideals be rescued from becoming "iridescent dreams of a worthless idealism".

Of course the Church dare not secularize, nor commit itself to any definite social or industrial program. It is ^{The Church's} ~~the~~ business however, to utilize every institution which tends to hasten the arrival of that day when

"Man to man, the world o'er
Shall brithers be, and a'that."

Organized labors ethical reason for being at all, lies in its practical justification toward that end.

Centuries ago, a heathen declared "nothing human was foreign to him". The Church must embrace within its loving sympathy and support all that is human and humane, and all that helps to better man. It must stand for men as men, regardless of any accidental or superficial distinctions of race, class, color, or creed. This is the spirit of the "Kingdom of right relations", and this must be the spirit of the Christian Church. It must join forces with that other great humanitarian agency, Organized Labor, and endeavor by one way and another to establish upon earth that city of God where there is no sorrow, and no crying, where crime, curse, and oppression, will be no more. "In that city there is no Temple. The Church has blotted itself out by making the whole city the dwelling place of the God of light. In its own disappearance it finds its labors fulfilled".

FINIS.
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