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## THE CHURCH AND INDUSTRIAL PROBLEMS.<sup>1</sup>

BY SIR GEORGE B. HUNTER, K.B.E., D.Sc.

I HAVE accepted the invitation to give one of the addresses at York on the Church and Industrial Problems because it is a duty to express some truths which are being ignored or denied, and to assist in withstanding tendencies and claims which I believe to be wrong and harmful. I cannot claim any special ability to express what I believe to be truth, but I know my subject better than most of those who speak on labour subjects.

I approach the subject as one who desires to apply the teaching of Christ to Industrial and Social questions and to all others. We must also take into account common sense, experience, psychology and economic science.

I claim and believe that every man and woman and every child has an equal right to happiness and freedom, that it is the duty not only of the wage earners, but of every man and every woman, whether poor or rich, to work for the common good. It is the Commandment of God, "Six days shalt thou labour." St. Paul commanded, "If any man will not work neither let him eat." We ought to approve and support and labour for all that will promote the greatest good of the greatest number. The man who only works five days a week is breaking the commandments, and is not playing the game or doing his duty to his brothers.

I believe in the stewardship of wealth and also in the stewardship of the capacity to work.

I have again gone through the Archbishops' "Report on Christianity and Industrial Problems." Much as I sympathize with it and admire it, and greatly as I regret to have to say so, I cannot regard it as in all respects wise and well informed. With its claim that the spirit and teaching of the Lord Jesus Christ must be applied to labour questions, I entirely agree. That Christianity teaches that all men are brothers and should labour for the community, that "every soul is of infinite and equal value," that what is wrong for an individual cannot be right for any company or collective body, that

<sup>1</sup> The substance of a paper read at a Conference at York.

no one should suffer want while others have more than they need, is quite true. I would add, if it is wrong for an individual to seize another's possessions it is wrong for the State.

But the Report contains statements made, if not lightly, yet without full knowledge, which are not sound, and some of which I think are quite misleading and mischievous. I cannot discuss these at length in this short address.

It is not true that our industrial system is inconsistent with the teaching of Christ. It is not true that a competitive system is anti-Christian or wrong, or that the effects on the whole are evil. They are, on the whole, more healthy and good than any other that is possible. It is not true that there is any conflict between economic science and the teaching of Christ or Saint Paul. It is not true that the introduction of labour-saving machinery causes unemployment. It is not true that any of the evils that we most deplore are caused by or incurable under our social or industrial system. The Socialism that appears to be suggested in the Report would bring in new and greater evils. The development of the modern factory system has been not harmful but very beneficial. Under present conditions Labour does receive in Britain, in all the great trades, not less than a fair share of the products of Industry.

There is no reference in the Report to the enormous improvement that has been made in the living conditions of the people during the last century or to the truth that that improvement will go on unless prevented by erroneous teaching or revolutionary changes. It amounted, before the war, to not less than 100 per cent advance, in almost every direction, attained since the beginning of the nineteenth century. How strange that the Archbishops' Committee seems unaware of this. It is in no way due to Trade Unions or legislation. It has been achieved by the use of Capital.

The names of the members of the Committee inspire respect; but they are not, so far as I can see, names which command confidence for their freedom from bias or their full knowledge of all aspects of the modern industrial system. It would be very desirable for the conclusions of the Report to be examined by a more really representative Committee.

In thinking of "Our Contribution towards the Labour Problem," what is to be our aim? For the moment only, let us confine ourselves to physical and material considerations and to the more

urgent of these. I feel very strongly that our aim should be, not the claims of the Labour Party or Parties, but what are quite different objects, the relief and the elimination of extreme poverty and its causes, the care and support of the sick and weak and the wageless unemployed, the care of the widow and the child, of the friendless woman and of the aged. The ordinary strong man in good health can take care of himself, and does. His wife works harder—often very much harder—than he does. The average artizan in good health (or indeed in bad health) suffers no wrongs, but benefits greatly, under our present industrial system. All his just claims—and I might add, some that are not just—are willingly conceded. The married man with many children, though much less so than the married woman with children and perhaps weak health, should command our sympathy and may need our help. The Trade Union and the Labour Party do not help but hinder him. They limit his earnings and reduce his “real wages.” They deprive him of his freedom and opportunities, in many ways. Some labour men insult their brothers by talking nonsense about “wage slavery.” It is an insult. The British working man is a free man, except so far as the Trade Unions limit his freedom. Under a communistic or socialistic system he would not be free but a slave to the state.

We talk much of a “better England,” but what does that mean? It means, or it should mean, more regard to “the two great commandments,” more of the spirit of Christ. Better living. Less regard for rights and more regard for our duties. Better houses and better food and better clothes and better education—yes. But not necessarily bigger wages and shorter hours of work. Not these at all, if they increase, as they are increasing, the cost of living, and the hardships of life for the poor, or if they are a cause of trade depression and unemployment, as they may well be—and as indeed they are now. It is not the employers but the workmen who are delaying the coming of a better England. That is my deep conviction based on long and deep experience.

As a practical proposal for alleviating poverty and promoting the good of the greatest number, may I say I do not know anything that would do so much good as Mr. Dennis Milner’s “Scheme for a State Bonus,” because it would benefit those who really need it. I bespeak for it your consideration and sympathy. It would give the widow and the children a better chance. It would abolish

extreme poverty. I might almost say it would abolish all poverty.

When we talk of a better England in the sense of better conditions for the people to live in ; and of the attitude and the contribution of the Church towards these questions ; where are the means for providing this materially better England to come from ? Who is to pay for them, and how ? These questions are of the very essence of the labour problem. Neither pious sentiment nor any change in the attitude of the Church or of the employers can provide the means. Neither can Trade Unions, nor the State. Confiscation or conscription of wealth and any violent changes in our industrial system, would not supply the means, but would deprive us of them. They have to be created by Capital and Labour. They are not now being created, because at present we are working too little and spending too much.

The means are perhaps now being partly and temporarily provided (and I think rightly) by taxing the rich. I do not believe that it is possible to do more in that way. I know many so-called rich men who, by income taxes, super taxes, excess profits duties, local rates, provision for death duties, and voluntary gifts, are contributing four-fifths of their income or more than that. But their obligations are not less and their cost to live is increased. The poor have nobly given for their country their sons and their own lives. The rich have equally and as nobly given their sons and their own lives, and they have also given in addition their wealth. Without their capital the war would have been quickly lost. The lives lost would have been given in vain. In five years of war, nearly half of the accumulated wealth of generations past has been spent. How long will the remainder last ? Wealth has been, and is being, conscripted.

It is a delusion to suppose that any large contribution can be permanently obtained by reducing the rate of interest or profit on the employment of savings and capital. Capital is so necessary, that if it is killed or driven away by bad legislation, or if a fair payment for its use is made more uncertain, the rate of interest will increase. On an average and in ordinary times, it is very low in England, and cannot be reduced without injury to the workmen and the community. If all the average profits of industrial undertakings were received by the wage earners, that would only increase their wages by about 10 per cent or less and for a short time; and

then after that time their earnings would be greatly reduced, and their work and their wages, in many trades at least, would cease altogether. Some profits and dividends are too high and some are too low, but the average over a course of years and taking into account business losses, is low and cannot be reduced. Losses instead of profit are common and must be, and ought to be, balanced by occasional high profits. The claims of the Labour Party that others should bear the losses but the workers take the profits is unreasonable and absurd. In one of my own associated businesses the whole capital was lost three times over. In another not one farthing of profit was made during ten years.

So far as high wages are now being paid, as they are, out of borrowed money, that cannot go on much longer without bankruptcy, which will cause poverty, distress and unemployment. Poverty can be relieved and some of the labour problems solved by a more equitable distribution of wages rather than of profits. Some wage earners are receiving too much and some too little. Too much because they do little work.

There is only one healthy and effective way to provide for the materially better England that labour seeks, and that is by increasing the production of wealth. That is the one thing that is needed now more than ever before, after the enormous waste of wealth during the terrible war; and it is the one thing that is being neglected, and which "Labour" in Great Britain is unfortunately not aiming at, but is obstructing. That is largely no doubt due to misunderstanding. Miners are causing unemployment by providing less coal, bricklayers are laying fewer bricks. An experienced builder has assured me that only half as much work is being done now in the building trades at 1s. 6d. per hour, as used to be done at 9d. per hour. That, which means increasing the cost fourfold, is one chief cause of the shortage of houses. Yet nobody mentions it. That is a great cause of unemployment as well as of the housing difficulty.

The Archbishops' Report speaks of the loss of wages due to fluctuations in demand for labour during a period of ten years, as amounting to a total of £40,000,000; but ignores an expenditure on drink during the five years of war, amounting (it is estimated) to £975,000,000! What colossal waste—even after allowing for taxation—and how small are most of the social evils dealt with in

the Report compared to it. Double that amount to allow for the consequential losses, and you still have not got nearly the total of the bill. Our own Church, by shaking off its apathy and awakening the national conscience, can save us from this enormous waste. That reform would solve the housing problem and almost all our social and economic problems.

Why do I talk in the foregoing strain? It is because of the present national peril and the imperative present need of plain speaking. Because there is a serious danger of the Churches being misled. I believe we are, because of false teaching by politicians and the Labour Party, and exaggerated expectations, and less work, drifting towards a time of greater poverty, of greater unemployment, of greater discontent, of greater unrest; which through disappointed hopes and unfulfilled (because impossible) promises, may result in revolution, and a time of Bolshevism, anarchy, bloodshed and ruin; before we return again to sanity and sound industrial ideas and methods. It is not nice to be Micaiah, the son of Imlah. How much pleasanter it would be to speak only pleasant and popular things! Unless we spend less and do more work we are within sight of national bankruptcy and disaster.

I can claim to speak of industrial problems with intimate and sympathetic knowledge, having been closely engaged in industry and a student of its problems, during sixty years, as apprentice, foreman, manager and employer. I am not prejudiced or extreme, and my sympathies are equally with employers and employed. I sympathize most with the poor and with the bottom dog. The artizan, the miner, the railwayman, is now the top dog. I do not sympathize much with "the idle rich" (if they are really idle) or with some of the more highly paid but discontented and aggressive Trade Unionists and labour men. The changes that have taken place during the war, by which the majority of the people have benefited, have made life better for them, but much harder for men and women with small incomes, and for the really poor and distressed. I greatly doubt whether a compulsory 48-hours week and a legally fixed minimum wage will benefit these or indeed any class. I believe they are serious mistakes which unnecessarily and indeed tyrannically restrict the liberty of the workers and will be injurious to the poor. The present legal minimum wages for coal miners is one of the chief causes of the fall in the output of the mines.

The Claim of the Labour Party is that the Church should take sides with it in enforcing its policy and its demands. But is that claim reasonable? Labour has a right to the sympathy and support of the Church, as far as its demands are wise and right, and if granted would be conducive to the material, moral and religious well-being of the whole people. It has no claim to the support of the Church for the promotion of its class interests, class warfare and class gains. It is the duty of the Church to fight against everything that is wrong and evil, and it is the duty of the Church to examine for itself and not to accept, as many are ready to do, the decision of the Labour Party or any other as to what is wrong and what is evil. It is the duty of the Church to work for a better England, but the Church must be very careful in deciding what it means by a better England, and it must be very careful—more careful than it sometimes is—to think over in what way that better England can and in what way it cannot be realized.

The predominant aim of the Trade Unions, which like the Labour Parties, represent a small though important minority of the nation, is to further increase the wages and reduce the working hours of their own members. They are not, so far as I can see, seriously concerned with the relief of the poor or about the elevation of the poorer and unskilled labourer. They now incidentally advocate a legal minimum wage for all, but a wage much lower than for themselves. Trade Unions are not only warring against employers and other classes but against other wage earners. Among the worst strikes are "demarcation strikes" by one Trade Union against another. When their own trade is prosperous and other trades are depressed, they will not allow those engaged in the latter to participate in their prosperity. That is a very great cause of unemployment and consequent suffering. While the unskilled worker is suffering from low wages and high costs of living, they—the Trade Unions—do not allow him to fit himself, by learning a trade, to earn better wages, nor when so fitted will they allow him to enter their Union and share their prosperity. I have been all my life and am still a friend of the Trade Unions and of many of their leaders, but I am being driven to the conclusion that, excepting the drink, they are now the greatest cause of poverty.

At a meeting last month of the Tyne District Committee of the Federation of Shipbuilding and Engineering Trades, at which a pro-

posal that a small number of disabled sailors and soldiers, to the extent of merely 3 per cent of the numbers employed in the industries, might be admitted to share the benefits and privileges of the members of the Trade Unions, the proposal was not accepted.

While the Labour Party is insisting on higher and higher wages, with shorter and shorter hours of work, we find no wide and general recognition of the obligation on their part to do in return their honest best to give labour of equal value to the wages they ask, or to do their part in increasing the wealth of the community on which alone they must depend for any real improvement in their living conditions. It is well known that in almost all trades the workers restrict the efficiency of their labour. They resist and obstruct the introduction of new labour-saving appliances. They adopt the policy of "ca' canny." They act unfortunately on the fallacious and destructive theory that the less work they do the higher their wages may be and the better it will be for themselves. That can only be true from a very narrow and selfish consideration and with an utter disregard of the welfare of the whole community. It will maintain the high cost of living, and in consequence reduce what is known as "real wages." It will not diminish but increase unemployment. The plea that it is done as a protection against employers cutting down their wages is not true. If it were true, it would be insufficient. Nothing can prevent the workers reaping the chief benefit from an increase in the production of wealth.

The Labour Party in England has not recognized, nor does the Archbishops' Committee's Report, that the progress in material well-being of the wage earners, which has been so very great, has been due in the past to the steam engine and to improvements in labour-saving machinery and tools, and that future progress can only be attained in the same way, by an increase of production and of wealth and not by the aggressiveness of labour.

The real ultimate aim of those who control the Labour Party machine is admittedly revolutionary, as revealed in a Memorandum on the Causes of and Remedies for Labour Unrest, signed on their behalf by Mr. Arthur Henderson, and dated February 27, 1919. This memorandum expresses a vehement determination to challenge and destroy "the whole existing structure of capitalist industry." Their expressed object is not so much to redress any evils or introduce

reforms as to overturn the present social system. That means socialism, syndicalism, and, in the end, chaos, communism, anarchy. To quote a recent review in *The Record*, "The real leaders of labour are bent not on reform—they do not even wish for reform—but on the complete reversal of the old order, and the establishment on its ruin of a completely socialized (and possibly atheistic) world communism." They would substitute for the present order that which would be much worse. The duty of the Church is to expose and oppose such aims. They are founded on ignorance, covetousness and malice.

That teaching and the teaching of Christ are as wide as the poles asunder. Yet, unfortunately, there are statements in the Report on Christianity and Industrial Problems of the Archbishops' Committee of Enquiry which will be quoted and used to support such teaching.

It is not the capitalist and industrial system that is wrong. The failure, if it is a failure, is in the men who do not use it rightly, whether the employers or the workmen, or both. The system works well when it is allowed to work well. The workers have now more than an equal voice with the employers in the disposal of their labour. In the trades that I know, the failures are (I believe, after fifty years' experience) not on the part of the employers but of the Trade Unions. I believe—indeed I know, and it applies to my class as well as to myself—Labour owes more to me than I owe to Labour. The great majority of large employers have been generous and ready to deal with any grievances or to submit alleged grievances to arbitration. The employers have kept their agreements, but employes have refused to abide by arbitration awards. There have been no lock-outs during the war, but there have been many strikes—and none necessary.

We find nothing in the Bible to countenance the extreme Labour Party's aggressive and menacing attitude, but much to condemn it. The possession of riches is not condemned, if a right use is made of them. The command, "Sell that thou hast and give to the poor," was to only one individual. Dives was not condemned because he was rich, but because he was selfish. Without the large capitalists, the condition of the people would be much worse than it is and there would be more poverty.

The Lord Jesus Christ held Himself aloof from and took no part

in political disputes. His aim was higher and so should His Churches be. He did not seek to overturn or change the social and political conditions of the times in which He lived. When asked to take a part in dealing with disputes about property and the ownership of wealth, He said, "Who made Me a divider over you?" Instead of inciting to any class warfare or to the assertion of individual or class interests and rights, He exhorted to meekness and peacefulness. "Blessed are the Peacemakers for they shall be called sons of God." Not those who stir up discontent and strife.

Christ taught us by precept and example, to protect and assist the poor, the sick and the unfortunate. He taught that all men are (not equal, but) of equal value in the sight of God. He spoke against the Pharisee and the hypocrite, but against only the idle, self-indulgent or dishonest rich. He did not advocate an equal division of wealth or property or that the poor should covet and under the form of law seize the property of the rich or those better off than themselves. His appeal to men was "Seek ye first the Kingdom of God and His Righteousness." "Blessed are they that hunger and thirst after righteousness for they shall be filled." "Live high and pure Lives." "He that humbleth himself shall be exalted." That was not addressed to employers only. The prayer He taught was "Thy Kingdom come, Thy will be done on earth."

We cannot do better than to follow His example. We cannot improve upon His appeal. Only by accepting it can men live the truest and best lives, and only by accepting it can their deepest needs be satisfied. Only by accepting it can we have "a better England." The duty and the privilege and the work of the Churches, is to bring the people, rich and poor, to Christ as their Lord. To labour and aim, not at the assertion of our own rights and theories but at doing His will and working for the coming of His Kingdom on earth. That way only lies a really better England. It is not another social system that is needed, but better and wiser men. With better men and women the evils of our present conditions will disappear. They are gradually and not slowly being diminished. Without better men and women, a socialist system would be a change for the worse and a threefold worse failure. It would exchange liberty, progress and opportunity, for tyranny, servitude, dreary monotony and stagnation. It would greatly reduce the production of wealth, and would decrease the happiness as well as

the freedom of the people. It has been tried and has always failed. It was abandoned by the early Church. It is a frightful failure in Russia.

I have spoken, and somewhat strongly, but not unfairly or half so strongly as some of the Labour men. Some will resent plain truths, but it is a pressing and patriotic duty to speak plainly, and especially when few are doing so. Many of the labour spokesmen are men of high character and high aims. Some of them are now pointing out the need of more work, and the wrongfulness and folly of the selfish, reckless strikes. But many are afraid or unwilling to say unpopular things. I hold that our British workmen are mainly quite as good as the men of other classes. There are no better or higher characters in this world than the best of our wage earners and trade unionists. It is not the men but their mistakes and errors that I would oppose. If they disagree I hope that they will pardon me for my sincerity.

Labour has no right to say that the Churches in our days have opposed any of their just claims or aspirations, and Labour cannot rightly accuse the Churches of any want of sympathy with poverty and distress. It would be more correct to claim that only the Churches have cared for the poor.

If I venture in a few last words to criticize the Church, it is not from the Labour Party's standpoint, which I am not sure is not fair or reasonable. If my criticism is in any way mistaken, it will do no harm to the Church and again I hope for pardon. Where the Church fails is that it so often and so usually makes no appeal—no great spiritual appeal. It is too secular, and it would be a vital mistake to allow itself to be drawn still more aside from its true work into secular, political, or social disputes, ambitions and controversies. It occupies itself in Organization, in forming Committees, and laying down plans and theories. Its preaching is not inspired nor inspiring. Its sermons are (with exceptions) little theological essays of no importance and of no interest to the hearers, or are concerned with some social and secular subject. They do not aim at "conversion" to a new life. They are not inspired by the Holy Ghost. If they were, and if they always conveyed the appeal of Christ to the individual, to turn from life aimless or devoted to self to the acceptance of Christ as his and her personal Saviour, and the real, earnest acceptance of His service, the people, rich and poor,

would respond, and we should reach a better England. That should be the Church's contribution to the Labour Problem.

"We shall not get a country fit for heroes to live in until our heroes are heroic all round, until Englishmen add to their physical courage and strong political opinions, moral courage and moral convictions of equal strength—until they are capable of conquering not only Germany but themselves."

"All thoughtful sensible people throughout the nation are agreed that if one fine morning the nation should wake up to find itself Christian, it would find that all these problems were solved, and solved in a permanent and satisfactory way in the course of the following week."

G. B. HUNTER.

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#### SHORT NOTICES OF BOOKS.

THE GREEK ORTHODOX CHURCH. By Rev. Constantine Callinicos, B.D.,  
Protospresbyter of the Church of the Annunciation in Manchester.  
London: Longmans, Green & Co. 3s. 6d. net.

In about sixty pages, the author of this essay gives us a bird's-eye view of the Greek Orthodox Church, its Patriarchate, doctrine, worship and organization. We learn that when the Turks captured Constantinople in 1453, they did not only turn St. Sophia into a Mohammedan mosque, but they also cut the tongues of thousands of Christians in order that they might prevent the transmission of the Greek language from parents to their children.

Doctrinally the Greek Orthodox Church accepts the seven sacraments, but rejects purgatory, indulgences and superabundant personal merits and "the other products of Roman casuistry."

Its worship is gorgeous and ritualistic. Clergy and laity alike communicate in both kinds. Baptism is by immersion and is followed immediately by Confirmation. Statues are prohibited, but icons or holy images are permitted. No organs are used in their services. This booklet is both informing and interesting. Bishop Welldon contributes a Preface.

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THE SECOND CENTURY. Being a series of Readings in Church History for Lent and other times. By J. P. Whitney, B.D. London: S.P.C.K. 3s. 6d. net.

Mr. Whitney tries to give his readers "some information about the greater characters, the Christian literature, and the Church life of the second century." The task is very difficult, but on the whole Mr. Whitney has succeeded in giving a general idea of some of the Fathers and Apologists of the second century.