

Higgins, George G.
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ADR 3811

Labor—Management Cooperation



by

Very Rev. Msgr. George G. Higgins

Director

Social Action Department

National Catholic Welfare Conference

Social Action Sunday — January 25, 1959

Archdiocese of Hartford

What do you mean by labor-management cooperation? Isn't that the same thing as collective bargaining?

Not quite. Collective bargaining can be, should be, and frequently is a good preparation for labor-management cooperation. Normally, as a matter of fact, you have to have the one before you can have the other. Collective bargaining, then, is a step in the right direction. Nevertheless there are some important differences between collective bargaining and labor-management cooperation as the two terms are generally understood.

Can you be more specific? What are some of these differences?

(a) In the first place, *collective bargaining* frequently — though not always, of course — involves a test of strength between labor and management. It might be described as an economic tug-of-war, with each side trying to win, if not to force, concessions from the other.

Labor-management cooperation, on the other hand, puts a premium on team work between the two parties. Starting, as it were, where collective bargaining ends, it brings labor and management together — around instead of across the table from one another — for the purpose of jointly and cooperatively discussing and, if possible, solving common problems.

(b) *Collective bargaining* is rather limited in scope. It is usually confined to fairly controversial items — e.g., wages, hours, working conditions, and a variety of so-called fringe benefits — which all too often tend to divide rather than unite labor and management.

Labor-management cooperation, to the contrary, lends itself to the free and friendly discussion of all sorts of problems which go beyond the usual scope of collective bargaining — problems which are of mutual interest and concern to both parties and which both are equally anxious to solve.

(c) *Collective bargaining*, as often as not, is carried on in an atmosphere of tenseness and controversy, with each side using every available means to line up public support for its own position.

Labor-management cooperation, on the other hand, presupposes an atmosphere of harmony and mutual respect.

Are you suggesting, then, that collective bargaining should be discarded and replaced by new forms of labor-management cooperation?

Not at all. Collective bargaining between unions and employers is not only desirable but necessary. We need more of it rather than less.

That, of course, is why the Church insists so emphatically on the right of labor to organize and on the obligation of employers and government to respect and facilitate the exercise of this right. But collective bargaining is not enough. While it is an important step in the right direction, it should be supplemented, wherever possible, by new forms of labor-management cooperation fitted to the particular needs of individual companies and industries.

Are you proposing something brand new, or do we already have some successful programs of labor-management cooperation in the United States?

Happily there are many successful programs of labor-management cooperation in the United States, some of which were started many years ago and have greatly benefited not only the parties concerned but the economy as a whole. But there is still a great deal of room for improvement. For one thing, we need to set up organized programs of labor-management cooperation in many more individual companies. Secondly we ought to be thinking more about industry-wide cooperation between labor and management. We badly need cooperation between labor and management at the national level to promote the welfare of the economy as a whole and to solve economic problems of a national scope (inflation, for example) which are largely beyond the control of individual companies and industries. At the present time, unfortunately, the top leaders of labor and management seldom if ever meet, even informally, to exchange information and ideas on the condition of the national economy, much less to plan for its future stability and prosperity.

What do you recommend with regard to the last idea?

I recommend that representative national leaders of labor and management come together as soon as possible in a series of exploratory meetings. These meetings should frankly discuss the hotly debated question as to whether or not wages are currently exceeding productivity and are thus, as is sometimes stated, contributing to inflation. They should also discuss prices and profit levels and industry's ability to pay.

Is there any guarantee that meetings of this type would be successful?

Not necessarily. Economics is not yet an exact science. Nevertheless there is little reason to believe that experts on both sides would disagree on these and similar matters of fact if they approached them with an open mind, and while disagreements on the

interpretation of facts and on matters of policy would not be automatically resolved by joint discussion, they might be gradually reduced to manageable proportions.

Is there any public support for such a national program of labor-management cooperation?

There is a great deal of support for such a program. Within recent weeks at least two prominent representatives of the American labor movement, a number of Catholic and secular newspapers and magazines, and a scattering of influential government officials have more or less simultaneously and independently of one another discussed the advisability of holding a national labor-management conference. Some industrialists are also sympathetic to the idea. This is very encouraging. Let us hope that within the near future practical steps will be taken to call such a conference. There is no time to lose, for, in spite of the progress we have made in collective bargaining and, to a lesser extent, in labor-management cooperation during the past few decades, there are some discouraging indications at the present time that labor-management attitudes may be getting worse rather than better.

Finally, has the Church said anything officially about the need for new forms of labor-management cooperation?

The Church has spoken on this subject frequently and emphatically. As a matter of fact, labor-management cooperation is one of the principal themes of Catholic social teaching in general and of the social encyclicals of recent Popes in particular. The American bishops, applying the teaching of the social encyclicals to conditions in the United States, have also stressed the need for new forms of labor-management cooperation. We shall conclude this brief discussion with a pertinent quotation from their annual statement of 1948 entitled "The Christian in Action":

Christian social principles, rooted in the moral law, call insistently for co-operation, not conflict, for freedom not repression in the development of economic activity. Co-operation must be organized — organized for the common good; freedom must be ordered — ordered for the common good. Today we have labor partly organized, but chiefly for its own interests. We have capital or management organized, possibly on a larger scale, but again chiefly for its own interests. What we urgently need, in the Christian view of social order, is the free organization of capital and labor in permanent agencies of co-operation for the common good.

of Christ's moral teachings into the labor movement, into management, into business, into social work, into the professions and into all other fields of human endeavor.

On Social Action Sunday we again emphasize the urgent duty which rests on all Catholics to actively participate in those efforts being made to resolve the problems of our society. It is my earnest hope that our Catholic people will not only study the social doctrine of the Church, but that they will join with all men of good will who give practical application to this doctrine in building a more Christian social order.

MOST REV. HENRY J. O'BRIEN, D.D.
Archbishop of Hartford

Social Action Sunday
January 25, 1959

Published with the approval of

HIS EXCELLENCY HENRY J. O'BRIEN, D.D.
Archbishop of Hartford

by the

DIOCESAN LABOR INSTITUTE
RT. REV. MSGR. JOSEPH F. DONNELLY, LL.D.
Director

P. O. Box 2967

New Haven 15, Conn.

EPISCOPAL RESIDENCE

140 Farmington Avenue

Hartford, Connecticut

For almost a hundred years the Popes of the Church have been urgently encouraging Catholics to take an active part in resolving the social, political and economic problems of our society. In the papal encyclicals of modern times the Holy Fathers have made it abundantly clear that our interest in resolving these problems is not a voluntary thing with which we may, or may not, concern ourselves. To the contrary, they have emphasized that the social apostolate is today's offensive for Christ. It is an offensive that can move the world closer to the standards of Christ's teachings, an offensive which can win the battle for souls.

The principal objective of the observance of Social Action Sunday is to give emphasis to this social apostolate which is so urgently needed in our day. The role of the Christian in today's world is not to stand by and utter eloquent condemnations of social evils which exist in the world which must go on in any event. Rather it is the duty of the Christian to plunge into the task of changing evil into good, wrong into right, and disorder into the order decreed by the moral law.

Perhaps never has the Church had a greater need for an informed and zealous laity, a laity who will be concerned not only with the responsibility of their own personal sanctification, but who will be equally anxious to accept their responsibilities in resolving the social problems which harass mankind. In the theology of the Church the first responsibility cannot be separated from the second. To be fervent in personal prayer, but to be unwilling to lift a finger to relieve the miseries of mankind is a travesty of religion.

Yet the offensive lags. Relatively few have carried it on. To reach the vigor needed to conquer for Christ it must have new blood, new resources, new strength. From the ranks of the professions, the workers, the employers and the students must come the generous apostles who will bring the guidance

