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Religion
and
Labor



INTRODUCTION

The religious organizations of our country—Protestant, Catholic and Jewish—and their leaders, have repeatedly shown a vital concern about the social, economic, cultural and spiritual aspects of American community life.

They have stood for the abatement and prevention of poverty everywhere, for reasonable hours of labor, for just wages, for fair working conditions, and for an equitable division of the product of industry.

They have joined with other groups in our American society such as trade unions in supporting workmen's compensation, unemployment insurance, minimum wage and social security legislation and for recognition of labor's right to organize and bargain collectively.

The AFL-CIO, recognizing the tremendous role that religion and religious organizations play in American national, state and community life, seeks through its Office for Religious Relations to interpret the labor movement, its ideals, aims, practices and achievements to the members and leaders of the various religious bodies in our country and to provide a channel of communication, friendship and cooperation between religious and labor groups.

Since December 1955, Charles C. Webber, the AFL-CIO's representative for religious relations, has worked closely with all the religious organizations of our country to continue the excellent relationship that exists between religion and labor.

This pamphlet by Mr. Webber traces briefly the development of the relationship between the trade unions and the churches and synagogues. It is dedicated to the hope that these relationships will continue and that the forces of religion and labor that have so many common aims and objectives will work for greater material, cultural and spiritual fulfillment for all Americans.

IN THIS ATOMIC AGE it is exceedingly important that the forces of religion and labor that have so many common aims and objectives should understand one another and work for greater material, cultural and spiritual fulfillment for everyone.

Religious leaders from almost the dawn of history have demonstrated their belief that God wants mankind "to do justly and to have mercy."

The Hebrew Prophets and Jesus the Carpenter of Nazareth and their disciples—believing in a God of love and justice—have shown time and time again, down through the centuries, a vital concern for the poor and needy and for the victims of social and economic injustice.

St. Francis of Assisi, the founder of the Franciscan Order of the Catholic Church, devoted his life to aiding the poverty-stricken in the Middle Ages.

Wycliff, a medieval English clergyman, organized the "Poor Priests" who went up and down the countryside in England alleviating the suffering of the agricultural workers.

John Wesley, the founder of Methodism in the late Eighteenth Century, supported "a living wage and honest, healthy employment for all."

During the early years of the Industrial Revolution, when women and children as well as men were compelled to work long hours under conditions which imperiled health, religious leaders reached the conclusion that if there was to be even "approximate justice" in the relationships of labor and management, the workers had to be organized into unions.

They were then both "doers of the word" as well as speakers. For example, several English Methodist "local preachers" were arrested in 1834 and sent as prisoners to Australia simply because they dared to organize a union of "farm hands" and in the process had administered a "secret oath."

During the middle of the Nineteenth Century, Roman Catholic Bishop Von Ketteler of Germany declaimed against unfair treatment of the workingmen and their families.

He urged the workers to organize for social reform and was a pioneer in this field. His work influenced social legislation in Germany and the building up of voluntary self-help associations among the workers.

In Britain, Cardinal Manning, during the great London dock strike in 1888, threw his influence and support to the striking dock workers. He loaned his prestige to the effort to find a basis of settlement.

A public conciliation committee was set up to work with the strike leaders and the directors of the dock corporations, and after five weeks of strike the directors, through the effort of Cardinal Manning and his committee, granted all the workers' demands.

IN THE UNITED STATES, Cardinal Gibbons of Baltimore, "the most influential man in the American hierarchy" in the 1880s, conferred with the Grand Master Workman of the Knights of Labor, Terence V. Powderly, and then went to Rome where, with the support of England's Cardinal Manning, he pleaded the cause of the Knights of Labor at the Vatican and won his case. Whereupon, as a Catholic trade unionist puts it, "Pope Leo XIII found no objection to the U.S. Knights of Labor."

In 1891 Pope Leo XIII, undoubtedly influenced by Bishop Von Ketteler and Cardinals Manning and Gibbons, issued his justly famous social encyclical, "Rerum Novarum."

In it the Pope declared for a program of social reform (not simply individual reform), with state intervention to protect the worker against the abuses of capital, the right of the worker to organize and the doctrine of the worker's right to a living wage as a minimum.

In regard to workmen's associations, Pope Leo XIII stated:

“It is truly to be desired that they grow in number and in active vigor.”

From 1891 down to this day, Catholic clergy and laity have been outspoken in their advocacy of trade unionism.

In 1931 Pope Pius XI in his encyclical, “On Reconstructing the Social Order,” asserted that “associations of this kind (unions) have molded truly Christian workers who, in combining harmoniously the diligent practice of their occupation with the salutary precepts of religion, protect effectively and resolutely their own temporal interests and rights, keeping a due respect for justice and a genuine desire to work together with other classes of society for the Christian renewal of all social life.”

On February 7, 1940, the Catholic Bishops of the United States declared:

“Labor can have no effective voice as long as it is unorganized. To protect its rights it must be free to bargain collectively through its own chosen representatives. If labor when unorganized is dissatisfied, the only alternative is to cease work and thus undergo the great hardships which follow unemployment.”

In recent decades the Social Action Department of the National Catholic Welfare Conference, under the leadership of Msgr. John Ryan, Father Raymond A. McGowan, Father John Cronin and Msgr. George G. Higgins, has made outstanding contributions to the cause of economic justice through its publications, through its conferences on economic problems and especially by the effective counseling these leaders have given in tense industrial situations.

PROTESTANTISM'S OUTSTANDING prophet of the social gospel was Walter Rauschenbusch, who served for eleven years in the early 1900s as pastor of a Baptist church on the edge of Hell's Kitchen in New York City.

He was forthright in his defense of the aspirations and aims of the labor unions. For example, in his “Christianizing the Social Order,” published in 1912, the year the Federal Council of the Churches of Christ in America came into being, he asserted:

“When the unions demand a fixed minimum wage, a maximum working day and certain reasonable conditions of labor as a security for health, safety and continued efficiency, they are standing for human life against profits. . . .

“They are standing for the growth of democracy, for earned against unearned income, for the protection of human weakness against the pressure of profit, for the right of recreation, education and love, and for the solidarity of the workers. . . . The seed of a new social order is in them. They, too, belong to ‘the powers of the coming age’.”

The Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A. was the first Protestant denomination to show a formal interest in the labor problem. In 1905 it authorized the setting up of a Department of Church and Labor and appointed the Rev. Charles Stelzle, an ordained minister and a member of the International Association of Machinists, to be its director.

THE AMERICAN FEDERATION OF LABOR seated him as a fraternal delegate at the 1905, 1906, 1907 and 1908 conventions. In his addresses he pleaded for better understanding between the church and organized labor.

Dr. Stelzle made a profound impression upon the delegates—an impression that undoubtedly played a significant role later in getting the A. F. of L. to ask the Federal Council of Churches to recommend to the churches of America that the Sunday before Labor Day or another as near Labor Day as possible be observed as Labor Sunday with appropriate sermons and exercises.

On December 3, 1907, at a national conference of socially minded Methodists in Washington, the unofficial Methodist Federation for Social Service was born. The clergy and laity at this conference drew up a document relating Christianity to such problems as child labor, low wages, exploitation of women in industry, industrial accidents, disease and unemployment.

The following year the General Conference of the Meth-

odist Episcopal Church formally adopted the statement prepared by the Methodist Federation for Social Service and ordered it printed in the Discipline under the title of "The Social Creed of the Methodist Episcopal Church."

In 1912 the newly organized Federal Council of the Churches of Christ in America took this Methodist social creed and expanded it into a social creed for nearly all of the American Protestant churches.

IN THIS SOCIAL CREED the recognition of "the right of employes and employers alike to organize" was set forth in no uncertain terms.

In 1932 this position was expanded to include "the right of employes and employers alike to organize for collective bargaining and social action, protection of both in the exercise of this right, the obligation of both to work for the public good."

In 1940 this same body said:

"That the Federal Council record its conviction that not only has labor a right to organize but also that it is socially desirable that it do so because of the need for collective action in the maintenance of standards of living."

In February, 1958, notwithstanding the bitter attacks made upon the labor movement during the last two years, the General Board of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the U.S.A., a fellowship of thirty-four nationwide churches with more than 34,000,000 members, the successor of the Federal Council of Churches, issued a "Statement on Basic Principles Relating to Collective Bargaining."

This statement declared:

"We recognize the right of both employers and employes to organize for collective bargaining, and in connection with employes we believe that it is generally desirable to do so."

Both labor and management, the General Board's statement held, should exercise "a compelling sense of responsibility for the public interest and for what is mutually fair

and just" in their relationships with each other, should bargain in good faith and refrain from violence, and should respect "the right of each other to exist."

It also called for "fidelity" in observing contracts, with adherence to agreed upon procedures for settling disputes, avoidance of pressures to break contracts, and protection of the interests of consumers and the public against possible collusion in matters of prices and trade practices.

The Department of the Church and Economic Life of the National Council of Churches and of its predecessor, the Federal Council of Churches, under leadership of the Rev. James Myers, F. Ernest Johnson, A. Dudley Ward and Dr. Cameron Hall, has made most significant contributions to the development of a more Christian social and economic order.

This has been done in part through its series of published volumes and also through its annual Labor Sunday messages and its conferences on economic problems.

Its leaders, along with the leaders of the corresponding Catholic and Jewish organizations, have served repeatedly as mediators in labor-management disputes, on "public review boards" and as advisers to individual clergymen and laymen involved in complex economic situations.

RABBI EUGENE LIPMAN and Albert Vorspan, in their book "Justice and Judaism," point out that the early prophets and rabbis were workers and artisans. They further assert:

"The Mosaic Law is solicitous for the rights of the laborer. The hired servant must not be mistreated. He must be given rest on the Sabbath. * * * The employer had a right to the work of the laborer but could not presume to control his body or soul."

"In modern times," they note, "individual Jews and the organized Jewish labor movement have played significant roles in the building of a strong American labor movement."

In 1918 the Central Conference of American Rabbis (Reform Judaism) made one of the earliest comprehensive Jewish pronouncements on economic justice in the United States. In this document the rabbis urged adoption of a minimum wage, the eight-hour day, one day of rest in seven and the right of workers to bargain collectively.

In 1928 the Central Conference of American Rabbis amplified the pronouncement of ten years before by a statement which read as follows:

“The same rights of organization which rest with employers rest also with those whom they employ. Modern life has permitted wealth to consolidate itself through organization into corporations. Workers have the same inalienable right to organize according to their plan for their common good and to bargain collectively with their employers through such honorable means as they may choose.”

IN 1934 THE RABBINICAL ASSEMBLY of America, representing the Conservative rabbinate, declared:

“We believe that the denial of the right of workers to organize and form group associations so that they may treat as economic equals with their employers is tantamount to a curtailment of human freedom. For that reason we favor the unionization of all who labor.

“We demand legislation to protect labor in its right to bargain collectively with its employers through representatives of its own choice without any pressure or influence to be exerted by the employers on the organization of the workmen for such purposes or on the choice of their representatives.

“We therefore, oppose the organization of labor in company unions since such a form of labor organization vests in the employer a power of control inconsistent with full freedom of collective bargaining.

“We likewise oppose all arbitrary efforts to prohibit strikes, either by legislation or by judicial injunction or by the denial of the right to peaceful picketing, and any

attempt to restrict, by 'yellow dog' contracts or any other way, the freedom of labor to organize in defense of its interests.

"Recognizing that the power inherent in organized labor is possible of its employment to the ends of oppression and injustice, we urge upon organized labor to establish and enforce a standard of corporate conduct which will make impossible racketeering, the use of violence, sabotage and exploitation."

IN 1956 THE SYNAGOGUE COUNCIL of America, representing the Orthodox, Conservative and Reform national rabbinic and congregational bodies of Judaism, in its Labor Day statement rejoiced "in the remarkable progress of organized labor in this country, recently climaxed by the merger of the American Federation of Labor and the Congress of Industrial Organizations."

The statement said further:

"The development of a strong, unified and effective labor movement, cooperating with forward-looking business leadership in programs for providing working men and women with safe working conditions, guaranteed annual wages and adequate social security plans, have given living force to those remarkable liberal and humane labor policies adumbrated by Jewish sages more than two millenia ago."

The Commission on Social Action, which is made up of rabbis representing the Central Conference of American Rabbis and lay men and women representing the Union of American Hebrew Congregations (Reform), under the leadership of Albert Vorspan and Rabbi Eugene Lipman, seeks through publications and personal contacts to persuade affiliated congregations to set up social action committees.

The work of such committees is "to examine current problems in accordance with Jewish ethical principles" and then to take action in such fields as economic affairs, civil rights, civil liberties, housing, civic reform and international relations.

AN ANALYSIS OF THE WORDS and deeds of the leaders and members of the Catholic, Protestant and Jewish social action organizations over the past half century demonstrates that they have evidenced concern about equal rights and justice for all men, for adequate housing, for the abolition of injurious child labor, for regulation of working conditions for women and for wholesome recreation for every child.

They have stood for the abatement and prevention of poverty everywhere, for reasonable hours of labor, for just wages, for fair working conditions, for security in old age, for insurance against injury to the worker and for an equitable division of the products of industry.

They have joined with other groups in our American society, such as trade unions, in supporting workmen's compensation, unemployment insurance, minimum wage and adequate social security legislation and for the legal recognition of labor's right to organize and bargain collectively.

They have opposed the adoption of the so-called "right-to-work" laws, and have declared that union membership as a basis of continued employment should be neither required nor forbidden by law; that the decision should be left to agreement by management and labor through the process of collective bargaining.

Philip Murray, one of the world's great labor leaders, shortly before his death made the following statement:

"We live in this world through the grace of God. His teachings are our religion, brought to us through our churches. Churches, synagogues and labor unions should work hand in hand because of their common concern for the family life—the unit of all nations.

"What our churches do for the spiritual life of the family our labor unions are trying to do in the workaday world, because the sole reason for the existence of labor unions is to bring to the family life those better things in life which God in His infinite wisdom has decreed they should have."



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