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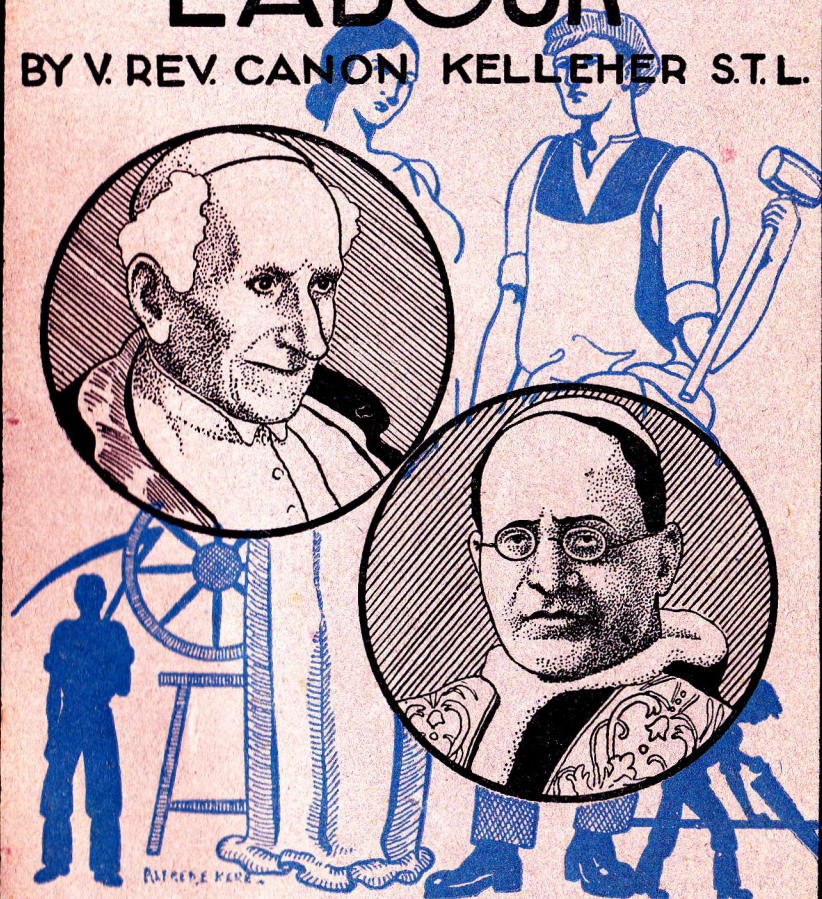
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THE
RIGHTS AND DUTIES

... OF ...

LABOUR

BY V. REV. CANON KELLEHER S.T.L.



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The Rights and Duties of Labour.

By V. REV. J. CANON KELLEHER, S.T.L.

“In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread.” Very frequently these words are understood as conveying one of the baneful consequences of man’s first disobedience. In reality they should be regarded as the antidote providentially arranged for the curse which that disobedience brought on the earth itself. “Cursed is the earth in thy work.” Not so hopelessly cursed, however, that man shall not be able to overcome its barrenness. “In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread.” When all seemed lost, and ere anything had been done to bring the hostile earth into subjection God Himself solemnly pronounced labour to be man’s natural means of providing his material sustenance. With the capacity to labour, man has received a natural and universal means of providing for himself and an inalienable right to the reasonable exercise of that capacity.

To understand the claims of labour in the complicated conditions of highly organised modern society, it is essential that we grasp and retain the meaning and implication of this fundamental right attached to labour. On the one hand man as an individual has not a right to maintenance simply from his labour. His labour is the God-given means of maintaining himself, and his right is that no one, individual or community, prevent him from a reasonable opportunity of labouring fruitfully. If he chooses to expend his labour uselessly, or if through ill luck or the act of Providence, as famine or other natural catastrophe, his labour prove unproductive, that is simply his own fault or misfortune, for which no one else can be held responsible.

AN IMPORTANT POINT. On the other hand this right of man to labour for his sustenance is not satisfied by a mere gratuitous provision by anyone or any community which may deny him the opportunity of providing for himself. No individual or group can be justified in appropriating all available material resources and denying to others all reasonable opportunity of exercising their labour on them, although

prepared to maintain these others in enforced idleness. But man even from the beginning was never a mere isolated individual, he is equally by his very nature a member of society. He must live and labour as a member of society. His right to live by his labour must be enjoyed in accordance with the reasonable conditions and restraints of organised society.

It would be impossible for mankind to maintain even a barbaric existence if everyone were to be at liberty to take and use any part of the world's material goods as his fancy might suggest. Much less, of course, would it be possible to rise to the most elementary conditions of civilisation. Hence, not from choice or free convention but by natural necessity have men been led to combine and continue in social organisation, which implies social authority with reciprocal rights and duties amongst the members. Moreover, the goods of the earth are not intended to serve merely this individual or that, but all, and all in an orderly way according to the needs of their social nature. This implies, as has been often abundantly proved, the necessity of private ownership in material goods.

THE HUMAN ELEMENT. But while nature prescribes social organisation and private ownership, it has been left to men themselves to fix the form of the organisation and to determine the distribution of property. Here, indeed, our human passions—notably ambition and selfishness—have wrought havoc with natural justice and equity. Social authority and distribution of property were intended by nature equally for all, that all might be able to participate in the advantages of social life and enjoy the goods of the world in an orderly and peaceful manner. Up to the coming of Our Divine Lord, social virtues in the true sense of justice and charity were practically unknown. **Might held universal sway. Nation dominated nation, and within the same nation class tyrannised over class.** Social authority was exercised in the interests of individuals and groups; property was utilised solely for the advantage of the owners. The right of labour was absolutely unsuspected and the labourer, as a rule, was cruelly oppressed.

THE NEW DISPENSATION. To some extent the Jewish Law was able to mitigate the inhumanity of unregenerated man: at least on the whole its workers appear to have received more consideration than their peers in Gentile countries.

With the advent of Christianity there entered the world a spiritual force calculated to transform social life and social relations. It is true that the Kingdom of Christ is not of this world; nor did He directly concern Himself with social or economic conditions. But He laid down principles—the principles of justice and charity in particular—which went to the very roots of the world's social disorder.

Justice teaches us to honour the dignity of our neighbour and respect his independence as a man; charity teaches us to accept him as a brother in Christ. These principles soon began to influence social life and relations. We see them becoming operative in the Epistle of St. Paul to Philemon, where the saint pleads for the slave who had absconded: "That thou mightest receive him again for ever, not now as a slave, but instead of a slave a most devoted brother." The early Fathers of the Church strove to apply the Christian principles to the Pagan society of their age. They were not concerned about social or economic science. It was sufficient for them that men and women, heirs to the Kingdom of Heaven and their own brothers in Christ, were being oppressed and degraded. They considered only the oppression and the oppressed. In language which to us may appear unrestrained, they denounced the oppression and pleaded the cause of the victims. The charity of Christ urged them: they voiced the spirit of their religion. And their words bore fruit; not only did individuals begin to show humanity to their fellows, but gradually Pagan conditions were modified and ultimately transformed. The influence of moral right began to make itself felt. Slavery disappeared and the laws became more humane. The process although slow and chequered was continual. By the 13th century the authority of moral law was recognised in every department of social life, at least in theory. Social life itself, however, was yet far from perfect; for religious and moral principles, however

powerful as an inspiration and indispensable for guidance in social relations, cannot be an adequate substitute for social and economic science. Such changes as Christian influence had brought about were due entirely to the uncalculated modifications it was able to produce rather than to any conscious scheme of reformation.

It was long the fashion to sneer at the artificial, rigid regulations which hampered economic life in the Middle Ages. Yet if we are to contrast the 13th century system of moral and religious sanction without science with the system of science, without morality or religion which succeeded it, we shall find on evidence supplied by the most authoritative historians that even from the point of view of happiness in this life the balance of advantages lay altogether with the older system. **There is no necessary opposition between morality and science,** and it would be interesting to speculate on what might have happened in the world if religion and morality had retained their influence in the era of scientific methods. Such, however, was not to be. A new spirit had grown up, in part good and in part evil, which could not conform to the old restraints. A change was inevitable. The pity was that the change came not as a development, but as a reversal.

RAMPANT INDIVIDUALISM. At all times selfish men of exceptional ability and enterprise had been chafing against the restraints which moral authority imposed on their self-seeking ambition. **When the opportunity offered they discarded moral authority altogether.** The era of unrestrained Individualism commenced and circumstances favoured its inception and development. The intense exploitation of resources hitherto more or less neglected, the power of multiplying material wealth by new processes and by the aid of epoch-making inventions were able to conceal for a long time its inherent weakness and viciousness. From the commencement of the new era and all through its course, numerous human victims of its ruthless struggle for existence were never wanting. These were conveniently lost sight of in the general spectacle of expanding prosperity. But the awakening came as it was bound to come. As Pope Leo expressed it: "The ancient workingmen's guilds were

abolished in the last (18th) century and no other protective organisation took their place. Public institutions and the laws set aside the ancient religion. Hence by degrees it came to pass that workingmen have been surrendered, isolated and helpless to the hard-heartedness of employers and the greed of unchecked competition. The mischief has been increased by rapacious usury, which, although more than once condemned by the Church, is nevertheless under a different guise, but with the like injustice still practised by covetous and grasping men. To this must be added that the hiring of labour and the conduct of trade are concentrated in the hands of comparatively few; so that a small number of very rich men have been able to lay upon the teeming masses of the labouring poor a yoke little better than that of slavery itself."

Through the heroic struggles of the Trades Unions workers succeeded in some countries at least, in regaining a certain measure of recognised rights, although they still remained in the anomalous and menacing condition of outsiders in their own land, now commonly known as the Proletariat.

COMING OF SOCIALISM. Soon appeared the Socialist movement, materialistic and at its inception positively anti-religious. By skilfully exploiting the grievances, real and imaginary, of the Proletariat, as well as by alluring promises of a veritable workers' paradise on earth, it was succeeding in fostering among workers hostility not only to the Capitalist system but to the very Christian religion.

Such was the situation when Leo XIII felt compelled to intervene with the immortal Encyclical, "Rerum Navarum," on the Condition of the Working Classes. This was the first authoritative pronouncement of his Church on the question of labour as such. The Medieval Theologians and Jurists dealt with the moral aspect of all the social and economic questions of their day, property, trade, prices, etc., very exhaustively, and sometimes in language which would be considered advanced even in our own day. They did not treat formally of Labour, for the reason that no question of formal labour existed. Whatever may have been the

grievances of the medieval workers, and they were by no means few or inconsiderable, the modern concept of proletarian labour, cut off from all rights on the sources of production, was unknown; every worker was secured in his status however humble it might be, or hedged round with exasperating conditions, through his rights in the soil or in the guild of his trade.

It is a comparatively easy moral problem to determine the rights of labour in the abstract. What in the concrete these rights entitle the worker to depends on the actual conditions of the social organisation itself. That is the real practical problem, a different and altogether more difficult problem. And that is the problem which Leo XIII undertook to deal with in 1891. In every country there existed a sharp division between Capitalists and Socialists on the just claims of labour. But neither side made the slightest attempt to discover the actual rights of labour in the existing circumstances. Capitalists on the one hand insisting on all the prerogatives of property and ignoring some of its essential obligations, denied to labour any right beyond that of selling itself on whatever terms it could command. On the other hand, Socialists, condemning the existing Capitalistic order as essentially unjust, scorned to speak of or consider any rights of the workers under it beyond that of destroying or transforming it. Between them there was no possibility of agreement on the question of right. In fact, the only thing they did agree about was that there was really no such right beyond what either side could extort from the other, which, of course, opened up a prospect of interminable conflicts with the possibility of ultimate disaster.

THE GREAT REALIST. Leo proved himself the one great realist of the occasion. No one appreciated more accurately than he the abuses of capitalism, nor the material and spiritual disasters with which they were threatening the world. Nor was anyone more keenly alive to the hardships and injustices these abuses were inflicting on the working classes, who had been "surrendered, isolated and helpless, to the hard-heartedness of employers and the greed of unchecked competition," and on whom had been laid "a yoke little better than that of slavery itself." Unlike so many of

our clever and eloquent social critics, he was not content simply to lay bare the evils and preach a policy of blank despair about the present, with the suggestion that the claims of justice could not be considered until the conflict of human passions should have ushered in the era of perfect justice. He took the conditions, bad and inequitable, as he found them, and set himself to discover what principles of morality could be applied to them. Nor was he merely voicing his private opinion, nor as it was crystallising the conclusions of Catholic Moralists in these economic matters. He spoke with the full authority of Supreme Teacher of Christian Morals. In regard to Labour which alone directly concerns us at present, his teaching is briefly expressed in clear and simple terms.

In the first place it is competent for man to dispose of his labour to another by free agreement, as he could dispose of any goods or personal service. In other words he is free to sell his labour and if the contract is valid he is bound in justice to carry out its terms; i.e., to give his labour in the sense understood in the contract. Of course, even under that aspect the contract by which labour is bought and sold may be unjust or even invalid, precisely as any other contract might be, as for instance, if fraud or unjust pressure were exercised on either side.

THE PRICE OF LABOUR. But there is another aspect of the labour contract to be considered. Labour is not only a commodity to be freely disposed of in the manner described. It is also necessary to maintain the workers' life; it is the means which nature itself has given him for that end. As he is not supreme master of his own life he is bound to maintain himself, and accordingly unless he has some other means of providing for himself, **he is not free to dispose of his labour for less than will reasonably maintain him.** This equality in justice between labour and maintenance has been fixed by nature itself. In the Pope's own words: "The preservation of life is the bounden duty of one and all, and to be wanting therein is a crime. It necessarily follows that each one has a natural right to procure what is required in order to live; and the poor can procure that in no other way than by what they earn through their work. Let the

workingman and employer make free agreements, and in particular let them freely agree as to the wages; nevertheless, there underlies a dictate of the natural law more imperious and ancient than any bargain between man and man, namely, that wages ought not to be insufficient to support a frugal and well-behaved wage-earner. If through necessity or fear of a worse evil the workman accepts harder conditions because an employer or contractor will afford him no better, he is made the victim of force and injustice." This is the great Catholic doctrine of the workers' right to a minimum living wage.

Although it is not directly concerned with my subject it may not be out of place to remark on the social and economic possibilities contained in this simple moral principle. If the living wage were adopted in practice it would not only remove a crying injustice against the workers; it would also get close to the root of our gravest social and economic disorder. It would eliminate one of the most dangerous causes of discontent amongst the masses of the people in every industrialised country, which in our day is so skilfully exploited for the purpose of attracting them into revolutionary, anti-social organisations.

ROOSEVELT'S GIGANTIC TASK. By diffusing purchasing power more widely and equitably as well as by preventing the excessive accumulation of wealth in few hands, it would go far to provide a solution for the financial deadlock which now appears to be threatening everywhere. **To-day we see the President of the United States, that land of enormous wealth and unbounded resources, attempting to establish from motives of economic policy, what over 40 years ago Leo proposed as a measure of strict justice.**

The worker's right to a living wage is directly and primarily against the employer to whom he contracts his labour. As long, therefore, as the employer can afford from the products of his industry to pay the living wage, he is bound in justice to do so. If the business cannot afford the living wage to workers, then economies should be effected in the expenses of management and profits to owners and shareholders so far as may be necessary to allow the living wage. There is

obviously a limit beyond which managerial expenses cannot be reduced without entailing the entire collapse of a business, but as regards **profits and dividends**, it appears to be clearly implied in Leo's teaching that these **must yield to the more fundamental right of the living wage.**

OWNER'S RIGHT TO PROFIT. It may seem hard that owners and investors who may have built up a business by their industry and savings should have to forego their reasonable rewards in favour of workers who perhaps did nothing towards establishing the industry and who had no rights in it, not even to be employed at all except on terms acceptable to both parties. That is true; the workers as such have no right in the business, no claims on it, except in virtue of the contract freely entered into between the employers and themselves. But when that contract is made the natural price of labour—the living wage—becomes a necessary and primary expense on the business. The owners have a right to profits, no doubt—that is to just profits, but there can be no just profits until just expenses have been paid. No matter what a business may have cost to establish, its commercial value to its owner is what it earns beyond what it costs to run. The most expensively established business may lose value because its profit-producing capacity disappears, and that is to be regarded simply as the misfortune of the owners. As they cannot justly maintain profits by fraudulently deceiving their customers on the plea that they are rendering service to these customers, and are therefore entitled to a reasonable return for the expenses involved in that service, neither can they maintain profits which in themselves might not be unreasonable, by paying a rate of wages which nature itself condemns as unjust.

Sometimes, too, it is said of dividends that, at least in certain cases, they should be regarded as primary expenses in a business inasmuch as the owners or directors accepted capital from investors on that understanding. **Such dividends should indeed be a first charge, not however on the gross, but on the net income, i.e., on what remains after necessary expenses have been paid.** The understanding between investors and owners or directors essentially regards

dividends out of just profits, and there can be no just profits until just expenses, including the just price of labour have been satisfied.

Again the case is put for dividends of this class that very frequently they are made on investment of earnings, that in fact they are only the continuation of the workers' wages and are just as much a necessary means of maintenance as wages directly given for labour. This class of investors do certainly suffer severe hardships and are often in a position of most pitiable helplessness—more pitiable even than that of the underpaid workers themselves—when dividends fail them. But sympathy with their plight must not be allowed to obscure the claims of justice. Nature has not given them the right to live on dividends as it has given workers the right to live through labour. They are perfectly entitled to make provision for themselves as far as they prudently can from dividends, subject of course to the conditions that the dividends are justly earned; if the business they invested in cannot justly earn the profits required to pay the dividends, that means simply that their property has depreciated.

A more serious difficulty against the practical application of the principle of the living wage arises from the system of free competition which governs modern economic life. Under free competition, producers cannot afford to allow any handicap to competitors; if they do they are liable to be driven out of the competition altogether. Should, therefore, the standard wage in any particular line of industry be less than the minimum living wage, what is the obligation of particular firms or individual employers? To attempt to pay higher than current wages would be to court disaster. Almost of a certainty those who attempted it would fail. In effect they would be making a present of their business to less conscientious rivals. And no appreciable good would be done to the workers; in fact, these would be left more than ever at the mercy of the more hard-hearted employers. In such circumstances, also, employers of labour, no matter how right-minded, will find a genuine difficulty in deciding what should be regarded as a just living wage.

DECENT LIVING STANDARD. What should be taken as the standard of decent and frugal comfort? Many, no doubt, will be inclined to take the standard as that actually prevailing amongst the particular class of workers which may be in question, and to satisfy themselves that unless in altogether exceptional cases the current wage may be taken as meeting the demands of justice.

Besides, the ordinary Catholic employer will consider that as he has to conduct his business in competitive conditions, and as it is difficult enough for him to succeed while attending to the clear obligations of justice, it would be unreasonable to expect him to work out a special scale of wages to be paid by himself. How could he decide what would be decent comfort for his workers? How could he satisfy himself as to the wages necessary to maintain that status which would depend on many factors—rents, food and clothes prices, etc., which for him would be practically impossible to calculate? This also appears to be the attitude of the general public and even of the labour bodies themselves. Individual employers are not attacked on the score of wages, so long as they conform to the current rate. If the current rate is judged to be unjust, the agitation is to have the current rate increased not to make individuals pay more. From these considerations it appears to follow that where unjust conditions prevail it may be practically impossible for individuals to conform to what strict justice would demand if the conditions were otherwise.

SHARERS IN INJUSTICE. In practice, therefore, we may take it that while individuals are bound to pay a living wage as long as the state of their business allows, still unless the current wage is obviously unjust they are at liberty to conform to it, because of the moral impossibility of finding any other practicable scale. That may appear to be going far to minimise the practical effect of the principle of the living wage. Really it only shows how difficult it is for individuals, no matter how conscientious, to rise above the level of their surroundings so as to be able to apply Christian principles in Pagan setting.

The individual employers, however, cannot be held to be entirely relieved of responsibility for a current wage lower

than the living wage. After all, what is done generally is the outcome of what is done individually. So long as the current wage remains fixed, it may not be practicable for a particular employer to pay more, but it is his duty as one of the body who are determining the current price to do all he reasonably can to raise that current rate at least to the minimum just standard. What any individual may be able to accomplish may be slight, but in varying degrees everyone can do something if only by suggesting to one or more of his fellow-employers that wages were not satisfactory in their line of business and that by joint action amongst the employers themselves it might be possible to increase them. Individual responsibility may be very slight in this matter, but if everyone—even of those who would not wilfully shirk responsibilities—were faithful even to his slight responsibility, a remedy would be found. The real tragic weakness is that bodies of this kind appear incapable of being influenced by moral motives; they will make concessions only under compulsion and frequently after incalculable harm has been done.

Human nature being what it is and economics having been so long divorced from moral control, it cannot be hoped that the right to the living wage will be given practical effect merely by negotiations between employers and workers. Collective bargaining has been gradually superseding private compacts in this matter, and all the time the tendency is to rely on force in one form or another rather than on moral right as the arbiter. Invariably each side claims to have the moral right, but relies for success on its fighting strength. Such strife cannot be compatible with social equity or harmony. Outside the contending parties there must be some authority entitled to vindicate the right. The Church can decide what the right is but who is to decide how the right shall be made effective? That is manifestly the duty of the State, which is divinely constituted to promote social well-being on just and equitable conditions. It is to be noted that it is in the section of the Encyclical treating of the right and duty of State interference that Leo has chosen to deal with the question of the living wage. When social conditions are such that employers will not or cannot pay the minimum just wage to which according to the natural law

workers are strictly entitled, the civil authority is bound to take all measures necessary and possible to bring about suitable changes in those conditions. In practice, therefore, it is on the civil authority that the obligation of securing the living wage for workers principally devolves.

Not even the civil authority, however, can secure for workers a living wage in all cases. The primary duty of civil rulers is to consult for the general well-being of the community, impartially and according to their lights and abilities in the circumstances in which they find themselves. Hasty or ill-considered action in enforcing the living wage, so far from improving conditions, may by dislocating industrial life make them worse—worse even for the workers themselves. It is very easy to work up righteous indignation against employers and rulers, because workers are not receiving what must be admitted to be their just rights, irrespective of the obstacles against which the employers and rulers may have to contend. Most frequently the indignation is justified, not because the just wage is not paid, but because the employers and rulers are not doing their duty to make its payment possible.

Surely, it will be said, if workers have from nature a right to a living wage, someone must be guilty of injustice when these are compelled to work for less. Undoubtedly; sometimes it is the employer, when being able he does not pay the living wage, sometimes it is the civil rulers, who having it in their power to do so, do not effect the changes necessary to enforce the living wage, but always it is the community as a whole, including you and me, rulers and subjects, employers and workers. Always when the living wage is not paid injustice is done, and we are all in our several degrees participators in the injustice, to the extent namely to which we are positively or negatively responsible for the existence or continuance of the unjust conditions. **The tragedy of the whole thing is that this obligation is so widely diffused that it is seldom that any of us brings home to ourselves our individual responsibilities in respect to it.** Yet we may take it that employers and rulers can effect little real reform in this matter until a sufficient number of us wake up to our

individual responsibilities to be able to create a healthy public opinion.

Even in Catholic quarters the Encyclical, "Rerum Novarum," was not received with unqualified approval. Some went so far as to suggest a tinge of Socialism in the Papal pronouncement. But Leo stuck to what he had said emphasising and strengthening his championship of the workers' cause. In spite of all the criticism and in spite of all the practical difficulties in the way of effect being given to the principle of the living wage, the doctrine itself gradually wore down all opposition until it came to be universally recognised as the great charter of the workingman, and is to-day his most effective moral weapon in his struggle for social justice.

FORTY YEARS AFTER. Forty years after *Rerum Novarum*, Pope Pius XI in the Encyclical *Quadragesimo Anno* was able to point with legitimate pride to the many-sided happy results of his predecessor's teaching on the living wage which the new Encyclical approved in all its fulness and clarified on a few minor points, besides giving practical suggestions as to its application in certain difficult situations.

Perhaps I should apologise for having dwelt at what may appear to be disproportionate length on this right of the living wage. I have done so because this is really the kernel of the rights of labour as distinct from those of property. It will be sufficient for our present purpose to touch on the other rights very briefly. Of course the right to the living wage does not represent the full claims of labour. As members of the body corporate, workers are entitled in equity to a fair opportunity of sharing in all the advantages available in the community to which they belong. They are entitled moreover to humane conditions of labour. They should not be ground down by excessively hard work or exhausted by unreasonably long hours. In this age of machinery it is only equitable that as the world's needs can be more easily met, the toil of labour should be lightened and its hours reduced. Neither is it lawful that workers should be forced to serve in conditions dangerous to health or morals.

nor that they should be denied facilities for satisfying their religious obligations.

The rights of labour have corresponding responsibilities. The worker is bound to maintain himself by labour, so long as it is within his power to do so. He is not only false to his own human dignity but guilty of injustice against the community, whenever having the opportunity of earning his own livelihood, he elects to live in idleness at the community's expense. "If," says St. Paul, "a man will not work, neither let him eat." It cannot be too frequently nor too emphatically insisted on that the worker's right against the community is not to be provided for but to a reasonable opportunity of providing for himself. The worker is bound also to carry out the terms of his agreement with his employer in general and give reasonable service and to discharge with fidelity the offices committed to him. If he should consider that he is not being justly rewarded for his labour, he is not free to retaliate by slackness or indifference in his work. He may be a victim of injustice and entitled to restitution for the amount of wages he is defrauded of. He may give up the service, or continuing it he may refuse to do anything more than his strict duty. He is under no obligation of rendering generous service to a harsh or over-exacting employer. But he cannot claim to compensate himself by lowering the amount or quality of his service below what was understood in his agreement. That would not restore to him anything of which he was unjustly deprived. It would be nothing more than an act of revenge against the employer. It would, moreover, be destructive of all confidence in agreements if one of the parties to an agreement were to be considered free to refuse to carry out his side of the compact, simply because he considered that he had been harshly or unjustly treated.

As members of society workers have obligations which correspond very closely with their social rights. As they are entitled to share in the community's well-being, they are equally bound to promote the community's well-being; much more are they bound to abstain from everything which would militate against the public good. It is of supreme importance for the well-being of society in general that workers

should realise this responsibility, and at the same time it is extremely difficult for them to do so in the existing conditions of corrupt capitalism. We need not go beyond the great social Encyclicals of Leo and Pius for an exposition of the corruptions of capitalism or of the injustices to which workers are subjected under it. Modern history also shows us that it is mainly through their own efforts that workers have been able to win a partial relaxation of their most crying grievances. They are perfectly entitled to use their combined strength in defence of the rights they have already secured, and in a further struggle for the rights which are still denied them.

WHAT THE END MUST BE. The general interests of the community may suffer through these conflicts but provided the end for which workers are striving is legitimate, equitable remuneration or equitable working conditions, provided the means they employ are not themselves unjust and provided the end cannot be attained by peaceful negotiations, then the loss inflicted on the community is not to be ascribed to the workers but rather to the employers or the community itself, for failing to remove the social injustices. That the end be legitimate, it should be not merely just but considerable, that is, it should be proportionate to the injury which the conflicts inflict on the community. **For a trivial consideration workers would not be justified in causing grave loss or disorder in the community to which they belong and which as members they are bound to serve.** In such cases workers may say and believe that the loss to community should be attributed to the employers or the community rather than to themselves. That may be, the employers may be more guilty in forcing the dispute to the issue. **But two wrongs do not make a right, and if the employers are really more guilty that does not prove that the workers may not be guilty also.** However, it is only when one comes in actual contact with industrial disputes that one can properly realize how difficult it may be to avoid a conflict. When the point in dispute may be trivial in itself an important principle may be involved, and it is always easy for the irreconcilables on either side to make it appear that there is.

Many grow indignant whenever the public is put to loss or inconvenience by industrial disputes which directly concern only the workers and employers. Such indignation is not always justifiable. Even though not directly concerned the public may not be altogether innocent in the matter in dispute. The community as a whole should be vitally interested in its own industrial processes, and may be criminally indifferent to the conditions under which these processes are carried on. It may well be that the public loss and inconveniences arising from industrial conflicts may serve a useful social purpose in waking up the general community to the existence of abuses and injustices which otherwise they might be content to ignore.

It is more difficult to find justification for workers when the injury which their industrial conflicts inflict on the public is not merely tolerated as incidental to the conflicts, but directly intended as a means of winning their cause. The workers may be convinced that the public is not showing them justice in complacently accepting the unjust conditions of labour. That may be true; *ex hypothesi* it is the view of the workers, but equally it is not the considered view of the community. The workers then are simply trying to force their own view on the community, and for that it cannot be lawful to exert industrial pressure. That would mean that a part of the community is attacking the whole, injuring it in order to impose its own ideas. It would be a clear step towards anarchy. Workers are justly incensed when employers attempt—as sometimes they do—to control public policy by the exercise of financial or economic pressure. What is wrong for employers cannot be right for workers.

The rights and duties of workers may be summarised:—Simply as an independent human being the worker who has no other means has a right to a reasonable opportunity of maintaining himself by his labour. When employed he has a strict right to a living wage as a remuneration for his labour. When unable to obtain employment he has a right to decent maintenance at the expense of the community in which all available resources have been appropriated and which through inability or indifference does not afford him an opportunity of working.

JUST COMBINATION. As a member of society he is entitled in equity to a reasonable opportunity of participating in all the advantages, material and social; available in the community to which he belongs. He is entitled also to human conditions of labour, as to the nature of work, length of hours and facilities for recreation and attention to domestic and religious duties. And he is justified in striving by his own individual efforts and by combination with others, for anything to which he has a just or equitable claim provided the means he uses are not in themselves unjust and do not inflict disproportionate loss on the general community.

As regards his duties: He is bound to labour for his support whenever he can obtain equitable employment, and has no independent means of maintenance. He is bound to carry out the terms of his agreement with his employer. In striving to better his position he is bound to see that his means are legitimate and do not inflict disproportionate loss on the public; especially he is bound to refrain from direct attack on the security and welfare of the general community.

Few Christians, I imagine, whether employers or workers, would question these rights and duties. Unfortunately, however, we all appear to be disposed to accept the principles in the abstract and leave them at that. We are content to be hearers of the word and not doers thereof. We all pay formal tribute to moral principles; everyone is ready to speak of rights and duties—his own rights and his neighbours' duties. And all the time might is made the arbiter in practice. Employers concede what they must, and workers get what they can. In this fluctuating conflict workers on the whole may be gaining slightly from the point of view of collective strength, remuneration for labour and public provision for the helpless and needy. But the gains, such as they are, are illusory from the point of view of the real welfare of the workers and more still of the welfare and stability of the community. The Proletarian character of labour is being emphasised, more and more it tends to regard itself and to be regarded as a class apart. Its class consciousness is intensified by its struggles and its ambitions expand with its successes. A class conscious Proletariat fighting for rights

and prerogatives is apt to be impressed by visions of a Proletariat Dictatorship. There can be, in fact, no real security against the menace of a Proletariat Dictatorship, except a servile status for labour which none of us, I am sure, would desire, or the abolition of its Proletariat character.

I do not mean to suggest that it is by any means an easy or a simple matter to get moral principles applied in practice to the corrupt conditions of present day capitalism, functioning as it does through the inter-play of contending interests; and less easy still because of the deplorable social psychology which incessant contention has generated. Yet the principles I have summarised apply even to the existing unsatisfactory and disquieting conditions. All efforts should be made to reduce them to practice. But it should be made evident that they are not intended to prop up the conditions themselves. The Communist menace may be provoking a reaction towards Capitalism, and a distrust of criticism of its abuses and injustices as if such criticism were strengthening the Communist movement—the implacable enemy of Capitalism. In truth these very abuses and injustices under Capitalism form the most serviceable ally of Communism; these constitute its main strength and supply its most effective propaganda. We are putting ourselves in a false and most dangerous position if we allow the impression to prevail that as Catholics we are championing or even condoning the corruptions of Capitalism.

We should be prepared to follow the lead set us by the two great Popes of social reform. These have not minced words in speaking of the abuses of Capitalism, nor hesitated to call for suitable reforms. "Some opportune remedy must be found quickly for the misery and wretchedness pressing so unjustly on the majority of the working class." Thus wrote Leo in 1891. Forty years after, Pius: "Unless serious attempts be made to put them (viz., Leo's suggestions for overcoming the proletarian conditions of labour) into practice, let no one persuade himself that the peace and tranquillity of human society can be defended against the forces of revolution." Better, perhaps, than anything else the title of the Encyclical *Quadragesimo Anno* "On Reconstructing the

Social Order and Perfecting it in Conformity to the Precepts of the Gospel," shows that it was prepared with a view to practical application. Society, according to the Pope, must be reorganised, because "social life has lost its organic form." "The demand and supply of labour divides men on the labour market into two classes, as into two camps, and the bargaining between these parties transforms the labour market into an arena where the two armies are engaged in combat. To this grave disorder which is leading society to ruin, a remedy must evidently be applied as soon as possible. But there cannot be question of any perfect cure, except this opposition be done away with, and well ordered members of the social body come into being anew." We must work towards social reconstruction, therefore, but it can be achieved only gradually and in the light of Christian teaching and under the active inspiration of the Christian virtues. As the Pope remarks: "To attain this lofty purpose for the true and permanent advantage of the commonwealth, there is need before and above all else of the blessing of God, and in the second place of the co-operation of all men of good will. We believe, moreover, as a necessary consequence, that the end intended will be the more certainly attained, the greater the contribution furnished by men of technical, commercial and social competence, and more still, by Catholic principles and their application. We look for this contribution, not to Catholic Action (which has no intention of displaying any strictly synodical or political activities) but to our sons, whom Catholic Action imbues with these principles and trains for the apostolate under the guidance and direction of the Church."

WHERE IS THE RESPONSE? The Holy Father has certainly done all a teacher and leader can do. Where is the co-operation he calls for? Where even is the scheme in which men of good will can co-operate? Where are the sons whom Catholic Action imbues and trains for the apostolate of social regeneration?

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