

Labor Sunday Messages from National Churches of Christ, U.S.A.

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(Approved by the General Board of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the United States of America and issued through the Department of the Church and Economic Life.)

"You Are All Brothers . . . You Have One Father"

The health of any society depends upon the well-being of the members of all of its groups. Every segment of society is important. Efficient and honest work is necessary for our economy. But our common responsibility does not end there. In a highly industrialized society, it is not a luxury but a Christian and practical necessity to help the sick and the crippled, assist the needy aged, and care for the young. Neglect of large groups of people who cannot fully help themselves weakens the sense of community and violates a principle from which our society draws its strength.

We believe that Christianity provides sound and sure principles as guides to action; it gives a sense of direction and creates a will to work together. The American people have common basic aims. As productive efficiency increases, there are more goods and services to share and costs of production are lowered. As workers' purchasing power expands, management finds larger markets. And we all, as consumers, benefit by this cooperation.

Furthermore, if equitable solutions to the common problems of employers and their employees are mutually sought in good faith they can be found. Thousands of labor contracts are negotiated by union and management representatives each year without bitterness or strikes, and with regard for the public interest. Unfortunately these settlements are rarely featured in the newspapers, while strikes are headlined. Fair settlements arrived at through free and honest bargaining by men of good will open the way to a better economic and social life for all people. Leaders of labor and management know that the progress of American industry depends largely upon their ability to co-operate for the common good. This is the road for free men of enlightened consciences to follow. Christianity may ask for more, but can ask for no less. Since God is our Father, we must ever strive to work together as brothers.

Since the first Labor Sunday Message was issued nearly forty years ago, the economic status of workers has been raised, productivity increased, hours shortened, real wages increased, working conditions improved, the economic well being of the nation lifted, and the democratic way of life strengthened. During this period the atmosphere of public opinion has changed. Increasing numbers of workers have exercised the freedom to decide for themselves whether to organize and have dealt with employers through representatives of their own choice. This freedom of workers has been endorsed and the important social contribution of the labor movement recognized by almost every branch of the Christian Church. During the past years working men and women have made unprecedented gains; the years ahead offer new opportunities but also enlarged responsibility for labor to join with management, farmers, consumers, and other groups in working for the common good.

On this Labor Day it is fitting that the National Council of Churches recognize the many Christian laymen who have worked to achieve these benefits for themselves and their fellow men. We join in mourning the loss of William Green and Philip Murray, outstanding Christian laymen in organized labor. Leadership in the labor movement should be increasingly appreciated by the people of our churches as an important Christian vocation.

"Bear One Another's Burdens" We are grateful to God for the generally high level of well-being in the United States which has developed under conditions of freedom. But these favorable circumstances call for more than gratitude in word of feeling. They summon Christians to a deep sense of humility and an earnest commitment to share with people as worthy as ourselves who are less

fortunate. We know that some millions of the people even in this country are living below standards which we accept as important to the "good life"; but grim hunger is faced by nearly three out of four of the world's population. Our present position in the world places upon us the responsibility to help less fortunate people to help themselves. We must give with an understanding heart; the extent of our help can be measured only by

Today powerful and insidious forces threaten freedom. Enlightened men and women of labor were among the first to see the evil and danger of both fascism and Soviet communism and have long and effectively opposed them. Through the leadership which the American labor movement, together with that of many other important segments of our society, has given to the cause of world freedom, all our freedoms have been made more secure.

In working for civil rights, increased production, job opportunities, adequate wages, social responsibility, and a free world community we are working for each other, for ourselves, and for God who seeks to realize His purpose of justice and freedom in the affairs of men. Toward the achievement of these aims, all groups in our nation are interdependent, and we are bound together in the need and purpose to promote our common freedoms. Freedom to worship and to speak according to the dictates of one's conscience is inseparable from freedom of the mind and freedom to work under conditions which the worker has had a part in determining. A threat to one freedom is a threat to all freedoms.

Labor-Management Partnerships Are Desirable Goals

By REV. R. A. MCGOWAN, Director Social Action Department National Catholic Welfare Conference

Labor Day, 1953, is an occasion for qualified gratitude and for guarded and realistic optimism. Genuine, if limited progress has been registered in recent years. More people are gainfully employed than at any other time in the history of the United States. More employees than ever before are now organized into bona fide trade unions. The standard of living of most of the working people is relatively good in spite of the continuing problem of inflation. Significant progress has been made in recent years in the field of race relations, and there are many encouraging indications that even greater progress can be expected within the foreseeable future.

For these and other recent advances in the field of social justice we can be very thankful. Nevertheless, we are still faced with a number of serious economic problems, thoughtful consideration of which will serve to put us on our guard against the deadly virus of complacency.

Unsolved Problems

The first and by far the most serious of these problems has to do with our ability to avoid the chaos and disaster of another major depression if and when the cold war, through the mercy of God, eventually comes to an end. So long as this problem remains unsolved, our country cannot afford to be complacent about the condition of its economic health. At the present time we are operating, simultaneously, two fabulously successful systems of production—one for the implements of war and another for the necessities and luxuries of civilian life.

It would be presumptuous on the part of the American people and their elected representatives to minimize or underestimate the difficulty of maintaining full employment if and when war production is severely curtailed. This is not an insoluble problem, but its solution will require the greatest possible measure of intelligent and unselfish cooperation. There is every reason to anticipate that our national economy will continue to improve under peacetime conditions. The history of the United States clearly demonstrates that our people have a genius for adapting and applying the techniques of wartime production to peaceful purposes.

Neither can we afford to be complacent about the fact that so many families live so poorly in the wealthiest country in the history of the human race. Surely a nation which can do as much as ours is doing at the present time—and very properly so—to resist Communist aggression in the Far East and to prepare itself and other countries against possible Communist aggression in other parts of the world is

economically capable of supporting minimum standards of frugal comfort for all its citizens.

International Responsibilities

Closely related to this problem is our growing reluctance as a nation to come to the economic, as opposed to the purely military, assistance of less favored nations. Some of our impoverished allies in the cold war are beginning to suspect, perhaps with a certain degree of at least superficial justification, that we attach too much importance, relatively, to bombers and battle-ships, too little to tractors and hybrid corn and elementary sanitary improvements for the disadvantaged people of the so-called underdeveloped areas. Let us hope and pray that the American people will quickly dispel these ominous fears and suspicions by continuing to keep faith with our national tradition of charity and generosity. We owe it to ourselves and to the rest of the world to be as generous as possible in administering the abundant riches which Almighty God has temporarily placed in our trust as stewards of His possessions and almoners of His gracious bounty.

In view of these and other problems confronting our beloved country in this period of continuing crisis there is room today for gratitude, surely, but there is also room for humility and penitence and a firm resolve to change for the better with the ever-present and never-failing assistance of the grace of God.

Error of Individualism

There was a time in the history of this country when many property owners and workers regarded their personal rights as absolute. In economic life—as contrasted with domestic life, which at that time was more directly influenced by Christian morality—they acted as though they were alone in God's universe or as though they and their neighbors were meant to be enemies of one another. This was utterly false in theory and tragically harmful in practice.

Thanks be to God, we are slowly getting over that way of thinking and acting in the field of economics. The right to own property and the right to secure an adequate income from ownership, and the right to work and secure an adequate income from ownership, and the right to work and secure an adequate income from personal labor are genuine rights, necessary for the welfare of the individual as well as for the common good of society. It should have been obvious all along, however, to a Christian nation that these are qualified or limited rights—qualified and limited so that other people, too, may live from the bounty of the good earth over which God alone, as the Creator of the universe, can lay claim to an absolute right of ownership.

Change for the Better

The basic reason for gratitude and optimism on Labor Day, 1953, is the fact that more of us than ever before in the history of the United States are beginning to recognize the importance of the relationship between the personal dignity of the individual on the one hand and the brotherhood of man on the other. The basic reason for humility and penitence is that not enough of us have turned our backs once and for all on the theory of individualism which exaggerated personal rights and prerogatives beyond all reason, at the expense of human brotherhood.

This is a very serious matter. For several hundred years the dominant emphasis in the economic life of the so-called Western world was placed, exaggeratedly, on personal rights and personal strength at the expense of human brotherhood. Similarly, in the larger field of political and economic action, the dominant emphasis was placed on national rights and national strength at the expense of international brotherhood. One might legitimately substitute here for personal strength and national strength the more theologically accurate words personal pride and greed and national pride and greed.

The fearful crisis of this generation arises, on the one hand, from our own failure in the Western world to complete the urgent task of combining in practice personal and national rights with personal brotherhood and international brotherhood, and, on the other hand, from the ruthless and absolute rejection or denial of personal dignity and national worth by aggressive totalitarian governments. We are reaping the bitter fruits of the two great errors of our time. The one error magnifies and exaggerates the importance of the isolated individual without regard for the rights of others and without regard for the rights of the community. The other magnifies the group—the race, the class, or the nation—

without regard for the God-given dignity and rights of the individual person.

If we in the United States have not yet fully recanted and repented of the former error, we have done so in part. We have made a good beginning in our efforts to reconcile the rights of the individual in economic life with the corresponding rights of the community.

Increasingly as time goes on, we are coming to recognize the importance of human brotherhood, and we are honestly striving to give it practical expression in the economic institutions of our country.

As we pause on the occasion of Labor Day to express our gratitude for this salutary improvement in our national life, let us ask Almighty God for the grace to make even greater progress in the critical years that lie ahead. There hangs over us the ever-present threat of virtual annihilation by atomic warfare. Atomic war or so atomic war, let us place our trust in the mercy and goodness of God, and confidently go about putting our own house in order, asking Christ our Brother to show us the way to effect a more perfect reconciliation, in our economic life, between the respective claims of the individual and the community.

Labor-Management Cooperation

The most serious defect in the economic life of the United States is that some employers and employees, even when they have repented of the old error of exaggerated individualism, have yet to establish an adequate system of labor-management cooperation as a practical expression of their brotherly dependence upon one another and as a practical means of fulfilling their mutual responsibilities to society as a whole. The fault is on both sides. The chief fault of some in management has been that of opposing or hampering union organizing, opposing adequate legislation for the protection of the working people, and of not taking enough initiative in fostering new methods of labor-management cooperation. On the other hand, the fault of some in the labor movement has been one of apathy and indifference in face of the need for labor-management cooperation and the need for labor participation in management, profits and ownership.

Signs of Progress

Let it be emphasized, again, however, that in several important respects labor and management are doing a better job than ever before. Collective bargaining is becoming more mature, thanks to the more cooperative attitude of both parties. Joint production committees in individual plants or companies have proved effective, and their number is increasing. Profit sharing is rapidly expanding and is now considered to be compatible with bona fide trade unionism. These and similar developments at the plant or company level are very encouraging and deserve to be extended as widely and as rapidly as possible.

Industry-Wide Cooperation

In addition, however, labor and management must be encouraged to raise their sights beyond the plant or the company level to the industry level and to the level of the national economy. There is a natural community, a natural brotherhood, as it were, of all the people in any given industry, employers and employees alike, in addition to the natural brotherhood which exists in individual plants or companies. It

remains for labor and management, with the encouragement of government, to establish industry-wide organizations or associates through which this natural community can effectively carry out its functions and fulfill its responsibilities. The natural brotherhood of employers and employees at the industry level cannot be expected to sustain itself and express itself effectively without benefit of adequate industry-wide organization.

National Partnership

Furthermore, inasmuch as all industries, including agriculture, intimately depend upon one another in the common task of furnishing consumers with the proper quantity and quality of goods and services on fair terms to consumers and producers alike, it is necessary that these industry-wide councils or associations be extended across industry borders and federated into a national economic council which would be charged with the responsibility of coordinating the activities of the separate industry councils in such a way as to safeguard the interests of consumers and promote the general welfare.

Such an integrated pattern of organized economic partnership cannot be expected to develop overnight, nor should it be imposed from the top by government. It will have to be developed gradually by means of a connected series of voluntary agreements among the interested parties. On the other hand, however, the principle of gradualism should not be rationalized or perverted into an excuse for apathy or indifference. If it is advisable to make haste slowly, it is also imperative to keep moving uninterruptedly in the right direction.

Happily, we have already begun to advance towards the desired goal. There is already a greater degree of effective labor-management cooperation in the United States than is generally recognized. The process of growth is relatively slow and sometimes rather disheartening. Nevertheless there is no reason to be unduly pessimistic

about the future. The tide has unmistakably turned in the right direction. A self-organized and self-governing partnership, by industries and professions, is definitely in the making. Let us hope and pray that labor, management, agriculture, and the professions will do everything they possibly can to hasten its establishment, for the good of our own nation and, furthermore, as a shining example of Christian brotherhood to a world which is now being sorely tempted to sell itself into slavery of totalitarianism for generations or centuries to come.

Responsibilities of Labor and Management

As they continue to work towards the desired goal of a full-fledged partnership in the interest of the general welfare, labor and management are called upon to examine and appraise their current practices in the light of Christian social ethics. In spite of the encouraging progress of recent years, both groups have need of self-examination and could, with benefit to all, instruct their members on the harmful effects of dishonesty, selfishness, and avarice.

Heretofore, the efforts of labor have been concentrated, necessarily, on organizing the unorganized, achieving recognition of unions and establishing the basic procedures of collective bargaining. These objectives have yet to be attained in certain areas. In those areas, however, where employees are now protected by strong unions, these unions have an obligation to carry out faithfully certain responsibilities to their own members, to the employers with whom they bargain, and to the general public. Specifically, for example, they should do everything possible to make unionism the hallmark of honest, competent, and responsible workmanship and should effectively discipline those workers whose performance on the job falls short of the standards agreed to with their employer through the process of collective bargaining.

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