

Social Unrest



Statement Adopted by
the General Assembly
of the Presbyterian
Church in Canada on
the Social Unrest.



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THE General Assembly recognizes that the prevailing unrest is a sign of the vital effort of the nation to adjust itself to new and changing conditions. It also recognizes that this unrest is a belated protest against injustices that have been tolerated in our social system—the alienation of our natural resources, the tying up of land for the unearned increment in value, profiteering, especially during the war, the public indifference toward the conditions in which many of our people live and toward the wrongs they suffer—and calls earnestly for extensive reforms of the abuses complained of, by parliamentary action.

The General Assembly draws attention to the fact that selfish and vulgar parade of wealth at a time when all our resources are required to meet the needs of the world is one of the chief causes of discontent, and calls on our people for the self-sacrifice and earnest service that was shown by all classes during the war.

The General Assembly draws the church's attention to this truth—that service to the point of sacrifice was the ruling principle of the life of Jesus Christ, and that He requires His followers similarly to invest

their lives in the service of their fellows. This principle has received new emphasis in the war, and must now be applied to every department of our social life.

Industry, which includes both Capital and Labour, exists primarily for service. In order to serve it must pay, but the object of its existence is service. All parties in industry have their obligations to meet, as well as their rights to secure, and the emphasis of the hour should be on the service rather than on its reward.

The Assembly desires to emphasize the truth that the interests of Capital and Labour are fundamentally harmonious, and therefore that any antagonism between them, instead of arising from the nature of things, indicates that something is wrong on the one side or the other, or, perhaps, on both.

The General Assembly would therefore remind both Capital and Labour that their first obligation is jointly to **serve the people** as a whole, and to give them the best service possible. Any attempt to lower the grade of the service rendered, or to take advantage of the public need, or in any other way to make gain their first consideration, forfeits the public confidence on which their standing in the community depends.

The General Assembly would remind the management of our industries of their obli-

gation to promote in every way open to them the welfare and the interests of those who serve with them. The Assembly warmly commends movements now afoot in many of our industries toward the following ends:

Toward giving the workers a voice in determining the conditions under which their work is to be done, and a proper share in the control of industry;

Toward giving the workers an equitable share in the wealth jointly produced;

Toward co-operating with the State and with the workers themselves in providing insurance against unemployment, accident and illness, and in providing pensions for old age and widowed mothers;

Toward securing for workers such hours of labour as will afford leisure for self improvement and for service to their families and the community;

Toward providing in every office and factory those comforts and conveniences that will safeguard the health and brighten the lives of employees while at their work.

In the interests of efficiency, as well as of industrial peace, the Assembly would urge that such efforts be continued and extended.

The General Assembly affirms the sacredness of human personality, and would point out that such conditions of work must be

secured as will afford to each worker the opportunity of the highest personal development.

In view of the tenseness of the present situation and of the perplexities that face men in every branch of industry, the General Assembly urges all parties to be conciliatory in spirit as they approach their problems, and suggests that the representatives of Capital and Labour confer carefully about all outstanding questions, in order that strife, with its attendant losses, may be averted at a time when the situation can be saved only by mutual good will and production to the full measure of our capacity.

The General Assembly sympathizes profoundly with the efforts of organized Labour to secure conditions for a more abundant life for the great mass of our people, and are anxious to co-operate with all interested bodies to that end. At the same time the Assembly would point out that organized Labour is now and must continue to be only a part of the world's workers, and that the success of their cause depends on their winning the sympathy and confidence of the people, as a whole. The Assembly holds strongly that the following measures are necessary to this end:

Organized Capital and Labour should stand for each man rendering the fullest service of which he is capable.

Organized Capital and Labour should maintain the inviolability of agreements, both in spirit and in letter. Good faith is the foundation of all social stability, and when the representatives of Capital and Labour enter into agreements on the collective basis for which both parties contend, such covenants should be observed.

The General Assembly affirms its conviction that the right of the workers to organize is fundamental in the present state of society, and that the right of the members of each craft to deal through their chosen representatives with the management of the industries in which they are working should be recognized at once by their employers and by the State.

In view of the fact that the rights of the entire community are imperilled by general sympathetic combinations, whether of Capital or workers, the General Assembly urges the Government at once to provide machinery for the adjustment of the differences and misunderstandings between employers and employed, and for the maintenance of the rights of all classes in the community.

The General Assembly commends the Government for the appointment of the Mathers Commission, and urges further investigation into the causes of the present unrest, and immediate action to remove them as far as they can be reached by the

powers vested in Parliament, especially in preventing profiteering, and removing other artificial causes of the high cost of living.

• The General Assembly would point out the danger in the present tendency to organize in groups and classes, each for the furtherance of its own interests. While such organization may be necessary to each class to protect itself against exploitation, still the spirit of faction and mutual suspicion can be avoided only by the different classes subordinating their particular aims in devotion to the common good. In the grave difficulties and dangers of the period of readjustment and reconstruction, the Assembly would call on all our people to unite in the service of the nation as a whole, and to establish firmly those principles of justice and brotherhood which alone can bring us enduring peace.

Above all else, the Assembly, without attempting to dogmatize at length in regard to economic details, would affirm its belief that the only permanent cure for the evils of our time, is the practical application of Christian principles to the whole conduct of life.

NOTE—Extra copies to be had free by applying to Rev. J. H. Edmison, Secretary, Presbyterian Board of Home Missions and Social Service, 434 Confederation Life Building, Toronto.