

Bishop Potter and Cardinal Gibbons on Strikes

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NEW YORK, Jan. 18.—(Special Correspondence of The Bee.)—I give you today the views of two of the ablest divines of the country on the struggle which is now going on between labor and capital. The men are especially noted as thinkers and they are friends of the public. One is Bishop Henry C. Potter, the head of the Protestant Episcopal church of New York, and the other James Cardinal Gibbons, the chief of Roman Catholicism on the North American continent.

It was in his apartments on West Fortieth street that I met Bishop Potter. Going up the elevator, I was taken into a little reception room walled with books and furnished in blue as delicate as that of the Blue room of the White House. A sawed-off boy in buttons took my card to the bishop, and a moment later a tall, straight, broad-shouldered man in clerical dress stood before me. It was Bishop Potter. I should have known that he was a preacher had I met him in the midst of Broadway instead of there in his study. He looks the eminent divine. His head is big, his forehead high and broad; his side whiskers are cut in formal Episcopal style and the words drop from his lips so clean cut that they made me think of a copper-plate engraving. I had written him my desire for the interview, and in response to my questions he began at once.

"The struggle now going on between labor and capital is a serious one," said he, "but I have no doubt but that time and the forces at issue will bring it to a successful conclusion. Neither the labor unions nor the employers seem to regard the greatest factor in it. They forget that the majority of our people are neither laborers nor capitalists. The capital class is small, and it is estimated that there are 4,000,000 people dependent on the wages of organized labor. We have a population of 80,000,000, so that there are 76,000,000 outside. That 76,000,000 may allow organized labor to inconvenience them for a time, but they will never permit it to rule. As soon as the inconvenience becomes too great they will rise up in arms and put an end to it in one way or another. I don't think the labor unions realize this. They do not seem to appreciate the fact that they may raise a spirit of antagonism to their cause."

"You mean that they may make the people hate them?"

"Yes, I mean just that," said the bishop. "But, Bishop Potter," said I, "the laborer is certainly worthy of his hire. It is labor that creates the wealth of the country and it would seem to me that labor ought to fight for its rights."

"Yes," replied the bishop, "it should, provided it knows what its rights are. It is ridiculous, however, to say that the wealth of the United States has been created by mere muscular force, that is, by the work of the day laborer. Such work alone has created no considerable part of our wealth. The men who furnish it might toll a thousand years if they could live so long and have a product no greater than at the end of the first day or the first week. They have their everlasting daily wants to devour their daily production and it is only when foresight, extraordinary ability and the genius of invention come in that their work can be so directed and used as to create wealth."

"The relations of labor and capital," continued Bishop Potter, "are in some respects like those of the elephants and their masters in the lumber yards of the far east. As you enter the shipyard at Rangoon, Burma, you may see those huge unwieldy animals loading, unloading and stacking timbers. They seize great logs of oak, mahogany or teak wood with their tusks and trunks; they balance them carefully and carry them through winding pathways out of the ships to the wharves and place them just where they are needed. Their intelligence seems wonderful and their ability beyond conception. As you look closer, however, you see a little black figure upon the neck of the elephant. He has a stick in his hand, but he rarely raises it and never strikes. Watch him closely, however, and you will see that his bare heel rests with an intermittent pressure on the neck of the huge animal he rides and there you have the secret of the whole business. The brute obeys the man. The clever intelligence of the Burman's heel guides, directs, restrains, constrains and energizes the enormous living bulk beneath him and converts it from a destroying monster into a faithful and untiring servant. That is how the genius of capital uses labor—by invention, construction, organization and direction."

"But the elephant has the right to his feed," said I. "Does labor get its share of the profits?"

"It is getting more every year and capital less," was the reply. "This is especially so as to the real profits; that is, the commodities that can be bought with the money received from capital and labor. I don't think that it is generally considered that the great bulk of the capital of the country consists of an aggregation of small sums owned by people who are dependent upon them for their living. Take the widow



BISHOP POTTER IN 1904—From a Photo Copyright, 1904, by Bradley, New York.

whose all is the sum of \$5,000 which she has to safely invest.

"In 1890 that widow could put this sum into a safe bond which would bring her 7 per cent, or \$350 per year. At the same time suppose a man received a dollar a day for his work and that he worked 300 days in the year. His income would be \$300 a year, or \$50 less than the earnings of the widow's \$5,000. Now it is estimated that since 1890 wages have increased about 60 per cent, so that the \$1 a day man of 1890 would now get at least \$7.00 or \$1.80 more than he got in 1890. At the same time the widow's earnings have been reduced to 4 per cent instead of 7 and her income from the \$5,000 is only \$200, instead of \$350. She has lost \$150 and the workman has gained \$180. That is an example of how labor is annually getting a greater share of the profits."

"But what will be the end of it all?" I asked.

"It will come out all right," said the bishop. "The situation of today is merely an incident in our history. We are now in a transition state, but in the end matters like these regulate themselves. I have no fears for the future."

I met Cardinal Gibbons in the library of his residence at Baltimore. His house is a big gray stone building of many rooms, just back of the cathedral. It has a cold air about the interior, as though the hand of woman were absent. And so it is. A colored boy in livery meets you at the door and you find only priests and students within. The cardinal is now 68 years of age. He is tall and thin, with a face bearing the evidence of hard study. He is very dignified, but at the same time kindly, speaking freely and interestingly on every subject. I found that he had recently delivered a sermon on labor and his first words were on "The Sweatshops of Baltimore." He said:

"The sweating system is a disgrace to the country. We have a large class of persons here in Baltimore employed by the proprietors of the clothing establishments. Some of them work in the stores and others in their own homes, bringing their garments to the establishment. These people are overworked and underpaid. I find that they put in six days, of ten or twelve hours each, for from \$5 to \$3 per week. With this pittance they have to pay for house rent, food, clothing and all the expenses incident to family life. They have hardly enough to keep them from starving, and the result is that after a few years they are incapacitated for work. I find that many of them are compelled to toil in sweatshops contracted in space and poorly lighted."

"How can the matter be remedied, your eminence?" I asked.

"One way is to arouse public attention to the grievance and discriminate in favor of goods made in other establishments. We have in Baltimore a Consumers' league, the members of which agree to purchase only such goods as are made in sanitary quarters, with reasonable working hours and fair wages. The league has a label, which is put on all goods made in such places. I think it is a good thing and ought to be patronized."

"How about the labor organizations, your eminence. Do you approve of them?"



JAMES CARDINAL GIBBONS—From a Photo Copyright, 1904, by Bachrach, Baltimore.

"Yes," replied the cardinal. "I see no reason why our working men should not combine together for their own protection and benefit. This is an age of organization. We have syndicates, trusts and all sorts of combinations of capital, why should we not have organizations of labor? The labor union is an emblem of freedom. It is the legitimate child of the trade guilds of old England. It has nothing to conceal, and it takes from man the pretext for the formation of dangerous secret societies."

"That is so," said I, "but it also originates trouble. It causes strikes and boycotts."

"That is true," replied the cardinal, "but I think the day will come when such things will pass away, and when arbitration and conciliation will take the place of strikes. The disputes between capital and labor can be and should be amicably settled."

"As to strikes, I think they are at best a questionable remedy for labor troubles. They paralyze industry, foment passion and lead to the destruction of property. They keep the men in enforced idleness, during which their minds are clouded with discontent, and they often cause great suffering to the workman's family. I don't approve of the boycott. I regard it as an unwarrantable invasion of the commercial privileges guaranteed by the government to every business firm. A man has the right to select the place where he deals and you violate that right when you keep him from doing so by the order of any society. Such a prohibition assails the liberty of the purchaser and the right of the seller."

"Your eminence is looked upon as the paternal friend of both capital and labor. Can you not give me some advice to capitalists as to the treatment of their employes?"

"If I were to do that," was the reply, "I should merely ask them to keep in view the golden maxim of the gospel, 'Whatsoever ye would that men should do unto you, do ye even so unto them.' This is according to the teachings of Christ and also the dictates of reason. The employer should remember that 'the laborer is worthy of his hire,' that he is entitled to a fair and just compensation for his work and that he should have kind treatment."

"I think there should be a closer relation between employer and employe," continued Cardinal Gibbons. "We should put ourselves in the places of those who work for us and remember that they are men, with feelings like ours; that they can be repelled by an overbearing spirit, and that they are stung by injustice and softened by kindness. We should realize that it rests with us to a large extent whether their hearts and homes are to be clouded with sorrow or radiant with joy."

"But many capitalists do that, your eminence, do they not?"

"Some do, but many do not," was the reply. "Most of the trusts and monopolies are operated with regard to large dividends rather than for the claims of Christian charity. Like the car of Juggernaut, they crush every obstacle in their way. They try to corrupt our national and state legislatures and city councils. They cut wages and oppress their people. Such monopolies should be regulated by law and protection should be afforded to legitimate competing corporations."

"Now, take the workingmen, your eminence," said I, "can you not give me a few words of counsel for them?"

"There is little that I can say which I have not already said to my people. I would advise them to cultivate the spirit of industry, without which all the appliances of organized labor are unavailable. Activity is the law of all intellectual and animal life, and the man who works is the happy man and also the successful man. The majority of our rich men have become so through their own untiring industry."

"I would advise the workman to take a personal and conscientious interest in his employer. He is to a certain extent a partner in the business, and he should desire its prosperity. The sensible employer will reward such service with a generous hand."

"Again," continued Cardinal Gibbons, "I would advise the workman to foster habits of economy and self-denial; to live within his income and keep out of debt. Let him be not overeager to amass wealth. To desire to accumulate a fortune is our national distemper. Moderate means with content are worth more than millions without it, and the poor man has blessings which the rich man has not. There is a story of a peasant who was going over a man's farm hoping to catch some game for his family. He was suddenly met by the owner, and thereupon asked him how he happened to be out so early. 'I am trying to find an appetite for my breakfast,' replied his lordship. 'And I,' returned the man, 'am out hunting a breakfast for my appetite.' I leave it to you which man was the richer."

"In conclusion," said the cardinal, "I would advise the workman to be sober and above all religious. But that is not for the workman alone, but for all."

"It is said that the labor unions are moving toward socialism, your eminence. What do you think of that?"

"The better sentiment of the United States will never permit socialism to have a hold in this country," was the reply. "The Catholic church is opposed to it, as is everyone else. The socialist is a drone who wishes to feed on humanity. He says to working labor and working capital, 'Go ahead and labor; I will stand aside and loaf and enjoy the results.'"

"Speaking of the church, your eminence, is there any change in Catholicism from year to year. Have you a modern Catholicism?"

"The Catholic church never changes," replied Cardinal Gibbons. "It is the same now as it has always been. It may adopt new methods of treatment of certain things to correspond with certain conditions, but the church is ever and always the same."

"Tell me something about the pope, your eminence."

"I can tell you nothing about him that I have not said since I came back from Europe," replied Cardinal Gibbons. "He is a man of ability and of great spirituality. He has long been noted for his generosity and kindness and his name is idolized in Venice on account of his charities."

"Is he a broad-gauge man?" I asked.

"I think so," replied his eminence. "He has not been long in office, but his encyclicals have already shown that."

FRANK G. CARPENTER.