

ECONOMIC AFFAIRS

A Social Document from the
Augustana Lutheran Church



Evangelical Lutheran Church in America
God's work. Our hands.

A Series of Statements of the Augustana Lutheran Church, 1939, 1952, 1954, 1958

1939 Minutes, p. 264

We endorse the stand taken by the Oxford Conference on Life and Work, that "Labor has intrinsic worth and dignity, since it is designed by God for man's welfare. The duty and right of men to work should therefore alike be emphasized. In the industrial process labor should never be considered a mere commodity. In their daily work men should be able to recognize and fulfill a Christian vocation. The working man..., is entitled to a living wage, wholesome surroundings and a recognized voice in the decisions which affect his welfare as a worker" (The Church and The Economic Order.)

That the Synod stands for the right of employee and employer to organize for collective bargaining; the safeguarding of all workers from harmful conditions of labor and occupational injury and disease; insurance (without diminishing personal responsibility) against sickness, accident, want in old age, and unemployment; and the abolition of child labor, by which we understand the work of children under conditions that interfere with their physical development, education, opportunities for recreation, and spiritual growth.

That we stand for release from work at least one day in seven and a reasonable work week commensurate with the productivity of industry and the physical and spiritual well-being of the laborer, to the end that labor may increasingly share in the cultural, educational, wholesome recreational and religious opportunities available. Conditions of work for women should be regulated so as to safeguard their personal welfare and that of the family and the community.

That we also emphasize that it is the responsibility of the worker and the employer to work for the public good and not to abuse their power by trespassing upon the legitimate rights of others. If they are to achieve permanent blessings, both laborer and employer must build upon a spiritual rather than a materialistic basis, and to this end both stand in need of the continued ministrations of the Christian Church.

1952 Minutes, p. 379

The church urged members of the Congress of the United States to amend further the Social Security Act of 1935 so as to make citizens who are ministers of religion eligible, without reservation, as beneficiaries of Social Security Provisions.

1954 Minutes, p. 229

Whereas, according to study and statistics there is a failure of adequate ministry to the industrial workers, be it resolved:

- a. That local churches, districts and conferences be urged to set up study conferences, to consider the matter of a more adequate ministry to industrial workers, and
- b. That pastors in such areas be urged to support and attend such conferences, and
- c. That local churches, districts and conferences cooperate in such endeavors that may be carried on by city and state councils. It is especially recommended that pastoral conferences..., consider this ministry.

1958 Minutes, p.216

In recent months we have been confronted with revelations of appalling corruption in certain important areas in trade unionism and more recently in some management practices. These revelations have shocked and revolted decent citizens. To corrupt the practices of either labor or management is to sin against God and cheat all men.

In the commendable investigations conducted thus far by the Senate Select Committee on Improper Activities in the Labor or Management Field the labor unions have been in the spotlight of exposure. The corruption uncovered can neither be explained away nor condoned. On the other hand what has been revealed as malpractices by some in management suggests that equally thorough inquiry should be made in that field. Actually, what has been exposed has been the moral poverty of our society.

Three dangers to the nation's moral foundations growing out of these widely publicized practices are profoundly disturbing. The first is the danger of expecting too much of those in positions of prominence. Moral leadership at the top levels to be effective must have loyal support coming up from the local group or community. Likewise, corruption and misuse of power of the kind recently demonstrated can thrive only on moral indifference and callousness at the lower levels.

The second is the danger that the dramatic exposure of the evil deeds of some leaders may blind us to the valiant efforts of others in responsible positions who are trying to remedy these menacing conditions. We commend their high moral courage. We pray they may be strengthened by God who seeks integrity and justice in the affairs of man.

The third danger is that of self-righteousness. To point one's finger at another's faults leads many to feel holier than others. Labor and management may thus become blind to merited judgment upon their own activity. At the same time, widespread

violations of ethical standards in the daily economic activities of individuals corrode personal integrity and national life as do the more dramatically revealed evils in labor and industry. The wrongs that have been committed cannot be redeemed by the self-righteousness of anyone.

We believe the labor unions are responsible for the situation that has been revealed; but so is management; so also is the Christian Church.

The degree and kind of responsibility may differ but we all share in the responsibility for what exists and also for what is done to correct it.

This is the time for all citizens in every sphere of activity to examine the methods they employ in gaining wealth and in using power. We call upon Christians in meeting their responsibility as citizens to strengthen the moral character of our society through more effective participation in labor, management, and government.

The situation also calls for legislation to correct the specific abuses revealed. Such legislation should be drawn in a spirit of fairness, with neither hostility nor favor to labor or management. Care should be taken not to impair the essential needs for the continued functioning and growth of a strong democratic labor movement.

We believe the time has come for a new dedication to high moral purposes and practices by the American people as a whole.