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BISHOP OF GALWAY

BULWARK
of
FREEDOM

VOCATIONAL
ORGANISATION

*Democracy
in Action*

BULWARK OF FREEDOM

VOCATIONAL ORGANISATION

PART I.

THE MEANING OF VOCATIONAL ORGANIZATION.

MANY people find a difficulty in understanding what precisely vocational organisation means; these are two long abstract words which have a rather frightening effect upon the ordinary citizen; they are strange and unfamiliar words which do not remind him of anything that belongs to his ordinary life.

The simplest way to explain their meaning is to take each word separately.

Vocation is a general word for any kind of job, occupation or means of livelihood.

According to the 1936 census, of the three million inhabitants of this country, 1,339,085 were described as occupied. The census recognised 262 different occupations. (In England the census recognises 35,000 occupations).

It is a surprise to most people that there are so many and such diverse occupations. The census classifies them into eight main groups, viz., Professions, Agriculture, Industry, Commerce, Transport, Finance, Public Administration, Personal Service. To give one example from each class you have a doctor, farmer, shoemaker, grocer, engineer, driver, banker, civil servant, hotel-keeper.

Now the word vocation is very useful as it covers them all without offending any; for some of them are very touchy and would resent being called a trade or business. What for instance would you call civil service, banking or farming—not a trade, nor a profession? But you are safe



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in describing them as a vocation or calling. Furthermore, the word suggests that there is dignity in each—that in some inscrutable way God gives to different men a liking and a fitness for different jobs in which they serve God and their fellowmen and are happy.

The second big word, "organisation," means simply a union or association of men for some purpose. Now nothing is more familiar to us than this, that men join together for different objects, for religion, sport, charitable activities, for promotion of peace, social order, science and so on. It is a universal tendency, deeply implanted in man's nature, that he joins with his fellows to form unions, bodies, societies of different kinds and for different purposes. Now one of the most important purposes that men join together for is to promote the welfare of their trade or calling. This form of association for defence of a vocation is vocational organisation. If you wish to make the term more concrete you may translate it as "Trade Unionism," but that is misleading and tendentious because most people associate trade unions with manual workers alone, and doctors, farmers, bankers may object to describing their vocational associations as trade unions. Hence it is better to keep to the longer word as it offends nobody and it reminds us that every vocation or calling has its organisation.

Now if we pass from the realm of ideas and definitions to the world of realities in which we live, the first great fact that we discover and must take stock of is that every class of occupation has its organisation.

I. Let us take first the Professions. There are 17 or 18 recognised in this country and of these we take the Medical Profession as an example familiar to all. Has it vocational organisation? Since when? What does it do?

In Ireland and England the medical profession was unorganised in 1830. Anyone could call himself, and practise as, a medical doctor: there were no requisite qualifications. As a result there were many unqualified practitioners or quacks: the standard of knowledge and practice was low. In 1839 a Medical Association was

formed and as a result of its efforts a law was made in 1859 which set up the General Medical Council representing medical schools and practitioners. This body was given power to keep a register of qualified men. This means that it decides the qualifications necessary for being put *on* the register and it lays down a code of professional conduct the violation of which involves being put *off* the register.

In 1922 when the Irish Free State was established it was felt that it should have its own Registration Council which now consists of seven representatives of medical schools, two of practitioners and two of Government. In addition to this statutory body there are many voluntary organisations—the Medical Association, various medical Academies, societies and Research Councils.

What are the objects of vocational organisation in this profession? They are (a) the defence of economic rights, (b) the maintenance of academic qualifications, (c) of professional ethics, (d) of scientific progress, (e) of mutual charitable aid for members or their widows and orphans.

Is vocational organisation a good thing, not merely for the profession but for the client and the public at large? Recently criticism has been pointed at its faults by a particular novelist-doctor but the profession as a body maintains that with all its faults (which can be corrected by wise measures) it is vastly preferable to a state of unorganisation or State control, for it has raised standards of knowledge and eliminated quacks, it has raised standards of conduct and eliminated cads, it has promoted research and development, it is an inexpensive self-governing body, it is an independent impartial source of technical information on public medical questions. Hence the profession insists that its vocational organisation is much better for a sound social and political system than any form of bureaucratic State control.

You may proceed and submit each of the other 17 professions—lawyers, barristers, engineers, and so on—to the same careful examination and you will find that in

every one of them you have some form of vocational association, with the same general objects and that each profession is most determined on the maintenance and development of it.

You will also find cases where several professions join together to form councils or bodies for joint action on some common or public question.

Now let us pass on to consider some of the other larger or more numerous groups of occupations.

II. Agriculture provides an occupation for 643,965 persons, about half of our population. It is the most important occupational group both socially and economically.

Notwithstanding the difficulties of farming life, we find that more than 50 per cent. of farmers belong to some form or other of vocational organisation, i.e., of union or association of farmers for the defence of farmers' interests. There are many different kinds of organisations as might naturally be expected from the many differences in function and circumstances between farmers. There are co-operative producer and consumer societies: organisations for the production of particular commodities such as beet or shorthorn cattle; societies local in scope such as Muintir na Tire and County Farmers' Unions: statutory bodies such as the County Committees of Agriculture and voluntary bodies such as the Royal Dublin Society.

The objects of these bodies are one or other of the following: (1) to defend the social and economic interests of farmers, (2) to promote the progress of agriculture, (3) to represent the views of farmers about farming.

Here again you may ask the question: Are these bodies useful and sound, and if not, what should be put in their place?

III. Next we pass to the Industry Group of occupations. It includes 200,000 persons and over 100 occupations or trades. Each of these has an individuality. Even with the extension of machinery there are many skilled trades—millers, bakers, brewers, weavers, tailors, shoemakers,

masons, plumbers, printers. Each of these is very jealous of its rights and standing, proud of its skill and anxious to maintain its individuality. Within each there is a strong spirit of comradeship or solidarity.

In Industry we find a phenomenon which was absent in the Professions and almost so in Agriculture—the division between employer and worker.

Among workers the vocational organisation is a trade union. The history of trade unions and how they were built up against great difficulties; the complicated legal position they have attained or had thrust upon them; the different forms of organisation they follow, craft industry or general: the efforts that have been made to bring them together in Federations, Trade Councils or Congresses; the effects of competition, strife and externally controlled unions—these are some of the questions included under vocational organisation. They are very live and important questions nowadays and it is most desirable that the public be rightly informed on the facts and principles involved.

The objects of trade unions are to defend the rights of workers, to provide mutual benefits and to represent workers in their dealings with employers or with the State.

Employers also have their unions—they are of more recent growth and of different types: there are some federations but no single supreme body. The purposes of employers' unions are (1) to defend their economic interests, (2) to represent their views with workers and the State, (3) to develop fair conditions of trade.

Then there are Joint Bodies. In England in 1916 during World War I Joint Industrial Councils were set up consisting of representatives of employers and workers for the purpose of avoiding strikes by means of negotiation and conciliation and of promoting the general interests of the industry. They have been found very valuable. Similar joint boards have been established to deal with apprenticeship.

IV. So far for the Professions, Agriculture and Industry. I need not describe in detail the situation in the

other groups — Commerce, Transport, Finance, Public Administration and Personal Services.

In each of these the pattern is the same. There is a great variety of trades or vocations; each has its own organisation for workers and for employers where the distinction exists: there are some joint bodies.

But organisation is very unequal; in some trades good, in others defective. Thus Bankers have a very compact and powerful organisation, the Irish Banks' Standing Committee; but workers in small shops and garages are almost entirely unorganised. Vocational organisation exists and is very strong among civil servants and municipal employees; but it is deficient among domestic servants.

Conclusion. From a survey of actual conditions in Ireland, it is evident that vocational organisation exists—has existed for some time—in almost every branch of occupation, and that while it has attained strength of membership and of structure in some branches, it has not done so in others. It is therefore nothing alien or foreign, it is not something that has yet to be introduced. It has been operating in our midst for years in perfect harmony with parliamentary government and with democracy. In fact, it claims to be democracy applied to economic life.

When we compare Ireland with other countries we find that vocational organisation has been better developed in England, Sweden and New Zealand. We find that it exists in every country, democratic, socialist or totalitarian, but with this difference, that in free countries it is free, in totalitarian it is controlled. It is in much the same position as schools or newspapers. These are to be found in every country that claims any degree of civilisation, but in free countries they are free—in totalitarian countries they are controlled and in chains. •

What should be the attitude of Catholics and good citizens to Vocational Organisation? The Popes have already answered this question. They have pointed out that the right to form voluntary associations for lawful purposes is a natural right and that the purposes of voca-

tional associations are lawful—they are: the defence of justice, the establishment of decent standards of economic life, the progress of professional skill and service, the provision of mutual help and the preservation of freedom.

Freedom means not merely the right to vote once in five years, but also the right to some voice in the affairs of one's livelihood and trade.

The alternative to vocational self-government is State control. But Pius XI has pointed out the great danger of this and has laid down the principle that "the State should leave to smaller groups the settlement of business of minor importance which would otherwise distract it: it will thus carry out with greater freedom, power and success its proper tasks." When Government interferes in the smallest details of industry, commerce and agriculture: when the Dáil delegates to officials the power to legislate by orders, we should remember what the International Labour Office, an unprejudiced authority, has put on record, that "the fundamental problem of modern democracy is to prevent State intervention from degenerating into dictatorship."

The theory of vocational organisation is this—that men should be allowed to administer the affairs of their own profession, trade or business; that when the State makes regulations for these economic spheres they should be at least consulted. Where the State is wise enough to leave vocational organisations their proper functions and to listen to their considered opinions, it will in return obtain the maximum of co-operation in peace as well as in war.

PART II.

THE COMMISSION ON VOCATIONAL
ORGANISATION IN IRELAND.

THE Irish Government in 1939 appointed a number of persons as a Commission to report on the practicability of developing functional or vocational organisation in this country, the means best calculated to promote such development and the rights, powers and duties of vocational bodies.

The twenty-five persons appointed were of different classes, occupations, political views and religious convictions. There were four identified with trade unions; two with the co-operative movement; two with women's organisations; six engaged in industry; one in commerce; one in agriculture; three in professions or universities: five clergymen of different denominations and one former civil servant. The majority were in no sense committed to vocational organisation and approached the subject with an open mind.

The Commission took evidence from a large number of bodies and surveyed the existing position of vocational organisation in Ireland. It examined the status, powers and development of vocational bodies in a number of countries of different political and economic environment. The results of these surveys, as well as a short discussion of the theory and history of vocational organisation are set forth in the first three parts of the Commission's report. The fourth part of the Report contains the detailed recommendations or answers to the questions put to the Commission on the practical means of development, rights, powers, duties of vocational bodies and their relation to the Legislature and Executive. The Report was signed in November, 1943, and it was the only report presented: some addenda, notes or reservations on particular points were made by some members, but there was no minority report or reports.

The recommendations of the Commission are given separately for each of the occupational groups, professions, agriculture, industry, etc. We shall summarise them briefly, following the same order.

I. PROFESSIONS.

In the case of the Professions the needs which have to be filled are, firstly, to provide each profession with an effective, self-governing authority which would represent the profession and also the public interest, maintain qualifications and discipline and adjudicate on complaints: secondly, to provide a body which would represent all the professions together as a whole, and thirdly, to devise functional councils which would enable professions to co-operate with one another and with public authorities in the public service.

Hence the Commission suggests for each profession a Board as its domestic authority: the system of vocational self-government is so mature, strong and flexible in the case of many professions that there is need only of extension and adaptation.

But the professions taken together have certain common interests, and to deal with these the Professional Commission, consisting of representatives of each profession, is suggested. It will represent the Professions as a whole, deal with disputes between them, decide what vocations are professions and in the case of those seeking statutory registration, will decide on the composition and powers of the Boards.

There are many subjects pertaining to the public welfare with which the professions are intimately concerned: generally they are subjects in which two or more professions are involved, e.g., public health, legal reform, education. It is desirable that the professions be encouraged to think of themselves not merely as serving individual clients or patients, but also as serving the community as a whole in its public needs and as giving expert, disinterested, impartial advice and service for the solution

of the many technical questions involved in such subjects as public health, legal reform or education. But to secure this there must be some body which brings accredited representatives of the professions together for discussion and collaboration among themselves and with public authorities. The Commission therefore suggested Councils of Public Health, Law and Education, and worked out tentative constitutions which show how feasible they are. The ideal inspiring the Commission in suggesting such bodies is to give the professions the opportunity for public service, to place their knowledge at the disposal of public authorities and to encourage the spirit of impartial technical examination of public questions without political bias.

II. AGRICULTURE.

The Commission recommends that in each Catholic parish there be a guild to bring together all adult rural dwellers for dealing with all the questions on which their health and happiness depend, such as recreations in a parish hall or play-ground, better roads and sanitary services and local improvements in general. But in regard to farming questions proper, it suggests that these be dealt with by a parish group of farmers, farmers' sons and labourers. This group will co-operate in other matters with the Parish Guild.

The farmers' group in each parish will elect the County Committee of Agriculture. Formerly this was not necessarily composed of farmers. It is suggested that its functions be enlarged so as to form an effective County Board which will take charge of agricultural education and development in the county.

From representatives of County Boards, of commodity organisations such as the Sugar Beet Growers, of Co-operative societies and other nation-wide agricultural organisations, it is possible to form a National Agricultural Conference which will represent the views of farmers on farming and their needs as felt by themselves. If the workers of Ireland can have a Trade Union Congress which speaks for them as workers and carries weight, there is

surely no reason why farmers could not have their national body with an office and standing executive. The difficulties and divisions of farmers are not greater; their standard of intelligence and public spirit is not lower, and their needs are not less vital to them.

III. INDUSTRY.

The main problems of vocational organisation in Manufacture or Industry are the lack of organisation among many classes of workers and employers; disputes and competition between trade unions of workers: lack of means to prevent stoppages of work by negotiation and conciliation: the need of co-operation of workers and employers to protect the existence of their own trades or industries, to solve unemployment and to promote the industrial welfare of the whole nation. How are we to get workers and employers to drop the selfish view, to think not always of war but of their joint interests and to think of the whole community and nation on which they both depend? The difficulties are very great; but those who try to devise a practical solution such as has worked in democratic countries deserve at least a fair hearing.

The Commission suggests that employers' and workers' unions should be encouraged and that in each distinct trade there be a union to represent employers and workers respectively. Membership should not be compulsory, but when certain conditions have been fulfilled these unions should be recognised by the State as representing employers or workers respectively.

To prevent inter-union disputes it is suggested that unions belonging to the same general industry group should form some kind of federation, so that there would be some eight or ten federations covering *all* organised workers. These would preserve as far as possible the independence and autonomy of craft-unions, but would secure sufficient unified authority to prevent inter-union conflict and competition.

The Report next recommends that in each industry there be a joint industrial Board consisting of equal numbers of representatives of employers and workers' unions. All disputes will be notified to them and they will by negotiation, conciliation and arbitration endeavour to settle all disputes. They will also work for the defence and progress of the industry and represent its needs in relation to the State and other industries. These joint Boards have worked very successfully since 1916. In England during the recent war they were universally adopted to secure the maximum efficiency of industry. Surely patriotism and good-will can be evoked, not merely for war and destruction, but also for peace and construction, and in our Catholic land as well as in others!

In some cases it will be advantageous to bring several industries together where they are concerned in various stages of a single line of production. Thus for the production of boots and shoes the co-operation of farmers, skin-merchants, tanners, boot-manufacturers and retailers is required. At present there is no means of securing such co-operation. The report suggests that representatives of the Boards of each industry or trade could come together to form Functional Councils; and several examples are given of how such councils could operate advantageously in the case of cereals, textiles, footwear, bacon and building.

Finally the Report suggests a National Industrial Conference where representatives of employers and workers from every branch of industry could meet together, to smooth out their frictions and difficulties about materials, markets and prices, to concert plans for industrial development and to discuss questions of common interest such as international agreements or unemployment. That there is work for such a conference can hardly be denied. The fact that we have a Parliament should not prohibit industrialists from discussing their own problems and needs. It does not in England or other free countries. Such discussion among reasonable men makes eventually for union and co-operation. So it is that the Church favours synods.

IV. COMMERCE, TRANSPORT, FINANCE.

In each of the remaining branches of vocational life, the Report suggests the same general framework: The development of unions for workers and employers to represent and defend their separate interests; the formation of joint Boards to secure peace and to defend their joint interests; and of Functional Councils to promote the efficiency of their service to the public and to the nation as a whole. These three bodies correspond to the abiding realities of the modern economic system. There is first the reality that workers and employers must earn a livelihood for themselves and their families: secondly, that each industry must defend itself from competitors for materials and markets or it will disappear and bring masters and men with it. Thirdly, there is the fact that all industries and trades, including banking, are primarily meant for the service of the public and depend on the national welfare. If they do not evolve some means of securing that they do really render service, either they or the public, or both will suffer.

V. VOCATIONAL ASSEMBLY.

The Report having given to each branch of vocational life an organ to express and defend itself proposes that Professions, Agriculture, Industry, Finance, Commerce and Transport should not remain isolated in their separate tents, but should come together in a national assembly to deal with their common interests and settle their differences.

We hear Agriculture complain that the new industries are exorbitant in their prices, that Finance does not help the farmer and that transport charges are too high, while the prices that the consumer will give for farm products are too low. In a national vocational assembly such questions could be put to the representatives of the interests concerned; the facts could be demanded and the truth brought to light. The value of such an assembly is that it provides a check or safeguard in the interests of the con-

sumer. If at present some industry is exploiting a sheltered position, there are charges and counter-charges in the Press. But there is no competent tribunal where accredited representatives can appear before a jury of their peers. The Assembly should have the right to review wage-agreements, price-agreements and group regulations to see that consumers are not victimised. And in relation to any trade or industry, all the others are consumers ! The Assembly should deal with the problems of industrial peace, social security and unemployment which concern all. It should endeavour to make the maximum use of the national resources of men and material. Planning is easy in a totalitarian state where one man can formulate a plan and compel all to obey. In a free country the only way of securing maximum use of national resources is by discussion and agreement of the representatives of employers and workers. That is economic democracy and it needs a national assembly.

It may be said that there is no need of such an assembly as we have the Dáil and Seanad and in fact the Assembly would diminish their rights and sovereignty. These objections are baseless, because in the first place the Assembly will not make laws, it will investigate, report and advise.

Secondly, it is hypocrisy to talk to-day as if the Dáil makes all the laws. It has delegated its sovereignty to Ministers and their anonymous officials. The regulations which nowadays govern economic life are made by officials in the form of statutory orders which are issued in profusion and are constantly changed. They are drawn up by men who are not in contact with economic reality and whose livelihood is not dependent on it: hence they are not always well advised.

Is it not in the public interest that there should be some check upon this and that the men who have spent their lives in the business and know it should also have the right to offer advice ? If this is a free country, the farmers, industrialists and business men have a right to come

together and discuss their own affairs and offer advice and criticism freely.

One of the principal reasons why the Popes favour the development of vocational organisation is that it is a bulwark of freedom—of the right to have a voice in matters concerning one's own livelihood. When Government resents criticism and does not encourage free discussion of economic affairs by the men best entitled to discuss them, then the danger of totalitarianism is coming closer.

But vocational organisation also serves other great purposes. They are Justice, Order, Efficiency and Brotherhood. It secures for each man working with hand or brain the material, social and personal rights to which his work entitles him. It strives for decent conditions, discipline and fair dealing in every sphere. It encourages the progress of science, skill and workmanship. It produces innumerable forms of practical assistance to one's brothers and their dependents.

Justice, Order, Efficiency, Brotherhood and Freedom—these are the moral and spiritual values which raise human life above the animal level and prepare men for their true destiny. Vocational Organisation is the means by which men can secure and establish these values in permanent institutions and by which they can train themselves in the spirit and practice of union, co-operation and brotherhood.

CALLING PLAIN CHRISTIANS

By FATHER OLIVER, O.Cist.
(Mount St. Joseph's Roscrea).

This little book (Cr. 8vo., 68pp., paper cover) is, according to the author, "a very ordinary one," addressed to what, for want of a better phrase are called "ordinary souls." The definition of "Ordinary souls" is "ordinary people"—not those who have devoted their lives to the service of God in the priesthood or religion. In short, the book is addressed to the laity; the ordinary laity, not the tertiary (though many tertiaries will benefit by it): its purpose is to tell them how to pray in the midst of the tear and toil of existence.

Father Oliver's breezy, sympathetic style will be appreciated by those whom he is addressing.

The book is uniform in format with "The Science of Love," and is sold at 1/-.

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