

The Democratization of Industry I

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No Date¹

First in a series of sermons upon the general subject,
"Making Democracy Safe in America."

I propose to set forth this morning what seems to me to be a most important consideration in making democracy safe in America. And democracy must be made safe in America, or all efforts by America in making it safe elsewhere are worse than vain.

The principles upon which democratic development rests in that great upheaval of feudalism which centered around the Protestant Reformation. To be sure the application of these principles in the Protestant reformation itself was limited to the questions concerned with the [sic] religion and the Church. But the protestant reformation was intimately connected with the great social uprisings of the peasants, and the beginnings of that movement in the social order which we group around the word democracy. Out of this great uprising in due process of time has developed those republican and democratic institutions that are characteristic of portions of the modern world.

I cannot treat this subject adequately, but I want to pass on to you for your consideration a few ideas that have helped me to see the way through the present into the future.

Under medieval society all control was vested, according to their theory of government, in some supernatural

¹ While there is no date on the sermon proper, on the back of the sheets on which the sermon is typed there is a stamp, "Apr 30 1912." This was a Friday, so probably not the date of the sermon. But the sermon very likely was given at some point after this date. Given the references to the European war, the sermon must have come after 1914, but yet before 1918, and certainly while Earl Davis was the minister of the Unity Church in Pittsfield, MA.

institution. In matters of religion it was vested in the Church, which both in thought and conduct all must obey. In matters of state the same relation obtained. The right of temporal government was vested in the King, prince etc. He ruled, not by consent of the governed, but by the will of the divine right ruler, by the grace of God. That was the basic idea of that institution of government and religion by which our Germanic ancestors were conquered when they conquered the decaying Roman Empire.

But in their untutored days when they lived in the forests of Europe, before the Roman Empire institutions became their master, there existed among these people a natural democracy, the product of their long struggle for survival against the forces of nature in the wilds of Europe. They were governed by their natural leaders, men of power and ability, who lead because of their power and ability, and consequently ruled with the consent of the governed. When the leader no longer satisfied, he was replaced by one who could meet the situation. They were a strong, virile, and as Tacitus says the most moral of people of the world. These institutions that they lived under had become a part of the very fiber of their nature. Democracy develops a different morality, a different religion, a different spirituality than does the monarchy or any form of autocracy.

That great upheaval of the middle ages of which the Protestant Reformation was the religious expression, was the reassertion of those democratic principles that belonged to the various people of Europe by virtue of long centuries of evolution.

The two great principles of this reformation were the Sovereignty of God, and the Universal Priesthood of man. In the relation of the individual to the unseen world of truth, goodness and beauty, there obtains a direct relationship. There is no mediator between God and man. Man comes into direct contact with God, is directly responsible to God and God is the sovereign ruler. The dictum of neither Church, State, nor any other institution or person shall stand between God and man. So in those [sic] matter of the spiritual life.

But it did not take long to see that the same principle which applied to man's relation to the unseen world, should apply to the seen world also. The background of this medieval institution was that of the land ownership. The land belonged to the prince, the king, and the Bishop. The peasant went with the land, but he had no right of access to the land except by the permission of the divine owner. The divine owner exacted from him a tax. In other words the possibility of living depended upon the permission of access to the land. Therefore the peasants belonged to the land. In return for the privilege of working the land they supported the whole superstructure of society, its courts, its armies, its luxury and its vices. The ruler had no occupation except that of private warfare. Doing nothing, he lived in luxury, because he claimed ownership to all the land of [his] dominion, and exacted from the peasants food, service, obedience, and homage. Once seen that this relationship was the basis of medieval society, and we see the explanation of many peculiar features and ideas of those days, and their survival in modern times. Witness the rush of the Russian peasant to the land in the present revolution. What he is after is the private ownership of the land, based upon his need, ability and disposition to work that land for his own support. In other words in the visible world the same principle holds, that no institution, no person shall stand between man and the soil. That which he needs and can use, he shall have. The universal priesthood of the land, the sovereign of physical life.

One of the great contributions to the thought of the last century, the contribution of an idea upon the basis of which History is being rewritten and reinterpreted, is that in order to understand the various institutions that make up the fabric of social effort in any period of history, we must understand how the people as [a] whole provided themselves with the necessities of life, how they produced and distributed what they ate, wore, and used. We cannot understand the religion, the political movements, the literature, the customs, the pleasures, even of the middle ages, until we see clearly that by this feudal, ownership of land, and production of the necessities of life by the serfs was the skeleton of the social organism of that day. It gave it its shape, its characteristics, its outline.

It is no less important today in order to understand the great tendencies of thought, not only in politics, but in religion, literature and social life as well, that the skeleton fact of our modern civilization is what we have come to call industrialism. It is a great complicated machinery by which we provide and distribute for ourselves the necessities and luxuries of modern life. Trace the threads of religious thought, of political strife, of social endeavor, of literary achievement during the past hundred years, and you will see how clearly the line of development in each one of these aspects of life has been influenced by the effort to adapt each one to the facts of life as created by our growing industrial system with its great factories, its great cities, its great arteries of communications and distribution, and withal its great shifting population. The Y.M.C.A. with its great recreation centers, its dormitories, its railroad houses are all witness of the influence of our industrial system upon the institutions of religious and moral effort. The institutional church, the social settlement, the salvation army, bear the same evidence. The prominence of social questions as themes in the pulpit, and ameliorative work of church, the preaching of social justice, social revolution etc. point in the same direction. In order to understand the reason for all these tendencies, it is necessary to understand the great skeleton fact of our industrial system.

That is why, in this attempt to set forth some of the important aspects of present day development, I find it necessary to begin with this theme of democracy and industrialism. To see the general structure and the nature of our present industrial system is to have in hand a power that gives insight into the great questions of social organization, and thought of today.

When this country was established, except for slavery in the south, the population was composed of small tradesmen, farmers, and artisans. Without [sic] comparatively little of the European Feudalism involved, a political democracy, or political republic was established here upon the basis of substantial equality of opportunity, and no class privileges. But soon thereafter there began to develop with

this political republic a new social order. Its beginnings were small, but through invention and the application of power and machinery, its growth has been one of the marvels of history.

For the past twenty-five years or more, especially, we have heard a great deal about the power of the invisible government in the United States. It is hardly necessary now to do more than to suggest the fact of this power. It has appeared in every municipality, in every state, and covered the whole nation. Everyone has recognized [it]. Even the courts have felt its pressure. Books have been written about it. Political parties have been organized to fight it. At every turn, the citizen, the believer in the principles and institutions of political democracy has come in contact with this invisible power, operating, now here, now there, in the interests of some other end than that of the state or the citizens thereof. The political history for the last half century has been a conflict between the invisible power with its special interests on the one hand and the welfare of the nation as a democratic institution seeking to develop its own future and well-being.

As years have past and this invisible power has become more open and insistent in its demands, we have come to see that right in our midst there has been developing an industrial Empire of such power and such scope and influence as to dispute with our political democratic institutions as to the right of supreme sovereignty in our land. The history of the Sherman Antitrust Law is a good illustration both of the conflict itself and of the power of the industrial Empire. For a great many years the political democracy has been struggling with the industrial Empire and today the result of the struggle has been most clearly expressed by the single phrase, "You cannot unscramble the eggs."

Some of us were distinctly shocked when the United States declared war to find that the first response was not by political units, but by industrial units. Great industrial concerns offered their services, offered to recruit men not from towns, states etc., but from industries. Had this first impulse been carried out the regiments would have carried the insignia of industrial units instead of state.

We should have seen "The Boot and Shoe Makers Volunteers" and perhaps the "General Electric Regiment." Even our political democracy made use of these industrial institutions in getting its first estimates of military strength. Another illustration of the extent to which this industrial empire has usurped the functions of political democratic units is seen in the fact that in this city when the project of putting through the increase of garden produce was organized, the political units of the city were entirely ignored, and we have the General Electric Gardens, the E.D. Jones Gardens etc.; instead of the Morningside gardens, the ward four gardens, etc. These illustrations may be multiplied almost without limit. The Empire exists, and it has power.

But of what does it consist? Like the states of feudal Europe, it has many units. Some are large and some are small. They are in conflict one with another for the fields of actions. Some like the Standard Oil Company have overcome practically all competitors, and with their excess power are reaching out into weaker fields for still greater conquests. Like Alexander, this company will soon be lamenting that there are no fields left to conquer, unless a check comes. The General Electric Company is a good illustration of an industrial unit of the Empire of Industry. It has plants in several states, it employs thousands of men, and its ties reach out into many subsidiary industries. Its ties, as the ties of many of its employees, are not political, or geographical, but industrial.

By a very natural process, following the law of mutual aid more beneficent [than] that of competition, these various units tend to become more centrally organized. Especially when in competition with political democracy with which it contends for sovereignty, are these industrial units held together in a central empire. Witness the National Association of Manufacturers organized to oppose democratic legislation and further her purposes. So the net result is that by the process of the stronger absorbing the weaker, by purchase, by interlocking directorates, and associations, these units have become what is probably the most powerful industrial Empire in history. Not only are its influences interstate in scope,

but international. Just as the Holy Catholic Church in the Middle Ages claimed dominion over many states and races, so does this Empire of Industry exercise its power.

There is another angle from which to view this Empire. It is from the point of view of its citizens. In a political democracy there are no recognized class distinctions. All stand on a basis of theoretical equality before the law. Many have been disturbed to see developing in our midst a class consciousness. The development of that is another registration of the subtle workings of this industrial Empire. In the citizenship of this industrial empire there are class divisions.

There is first of all the owners of the equipment, rights, and privileges. These owners for the most part, do not operate these plants. They live upon the profits thereof, a payment made in return for capital invested, or rights secured. These interests of this class in the industrial citizenship as a whole in the operation of any unit of this Empire, is measured by the return which they receive for their investment or rights.

The second class in the citizenship in the industrial Empire are those who administer the affairs of the Empire, the directors, the officers, the managers etc. They are paid employees, the middle class of industry.

Finally there are the workmen, the men who do the productive work, both mental and hand work, the tillers of the soil in the feudal lands of industry.

Such then in rough outline is the history, the nature and the citizenship of this great Empire that has grown up in the midst of our republic.

It is the habit of many to regard this great Empire of Industry as [a] veritable beast of a devil, and everyone who is connected with one class of its citizens as a saint or a near saint, and all the rest rogues or culprits. That is far from the case. Neither has a monopoly of saints, nor has either a monopoly of rogues. They are all human beings and very much alike under the skins. The question involved is not one of good people, and bad people, not one of

selfish people and unselfish ones, but rather the question of the nature of the institution, its value to human life, its influences on human life and its limitations. At the present moment we are concerned with the influence of this institution upon the principles and practices of democracy.

First be it noted that in this institution we have the greatest machine ever devised for developing the resources of nature, and adapting them to human needs, and distributing them. Never before in history has there existed so great a control over the forces of nature for the purpose of protecting man from the harsh rugged demands of existence. We have in this industrial Empire a machine of such potential capacity for producing and distributing the necessities and luxuries of life that under normal conditions all our needs could be met by less than half a day's work by each one if all able to work did their share. With all due respect to the tremendous and awful forces that are manifest in nature, the past hundred and fifty years of industrial development has seen labor invention, and organization achieve a most wonderful control of the destinies of human life. In spite of the very pressing limitations which I shall refer to later, the demands made upon this industrial system by the present war, have demonstrated its great power for production. Its ingenuity, its resourcefulness, its intricacy, its capacity for meeting demands are the wonder of these terrible times.

So let us first and foremost recognize fully and completely the great constructive achievement of this industrial Empire, one of the greatest achievements in all history.

But the pressure of the war demands have revealed also its great limitation, and the source of its danger as a real evil in society. At the bottom, every institution rests upon a great social need. This institution rests upon a great social need. Its real function in the social order is to satisfy that need. But every institution as it develops in society tends to become an end in itself, and to forget its social function. This is what has happened in the development of this industrial Empire. Resting upon the needs of society as its foundation, it has come to look upon those needs not as its master, but as its servant.

Instead of being operated for the purpose of meeting the needs of human society, it has exploited those needs in the interests of profits for owners. This great perversion of function has been so conspicuously forced home by this war. It was the conflict between units of this perverted institution that brought the war upon us. When the war was well under way, that very perversion of thinking that all society existed for the sake of paying dividends to the owners of this Industrial Empire became so glaring that the empire fell down and under pressure of circumstances, society at large was represented by governments has swept away and is sweeping away from men's minds, and from practice the ancient fetish that the nation exists for the sake of industry. It has laid bare before us the naked truth of the relationship which has existed between the growing empire of industry and the demands of society as a whole. Was ever a more perfect nemesis staged in history? This failure of the institution made plain before our very eyes grew out of the fact that it had become an institution exploiting the needs of society for the very antisocial purpose of enriching the owners at the expense both of the users of its system and the consumers of its products. At the present moment that same glaring and basic perversion of the function of an institution is being pressed home by a relentless logic of history. The point no longer has to be argued. It is a visible fact.

So far then as the needs of society as a whole are concerned this institution has been a great achievement as a potential power of man's control over the necessities of life. By its failure to recognize that its prime purpose is to aid society as a whole, rather than to exploit society as a whole in the special interests of a few, or in the special interests of its own imperial expansion, it stands condemned by the moving stream of human progress, and more particularly does it stand condemned by those principles of democracy by which with some success we have been striving to organize society in this nation.

So with increasing intensity have we been attacking this great Empire for the purpose of recalling it to its prime function of an industrial system created by the people, out of the resources of the people, for the benefit of the people. Or to put the issue more plainly, we have come to

see that this nation cannot remain democratic or become democratic so long as this great autocratic Empire exists in our midst. A political democracy and an industrial autocracy cannot exist together in the same nation. We cannot have two masters. We must have either one or the other master, either man must be master of the institutions, or the institution will become master of men; we cannot be political freemen, and industrial serfs; we cannot worship God and Mammon; political democracy and industrial autocracy.

For more than a century the conflict between these two forces of industrial autocracy, and political democracy has been going on. Within the past twenty-five years the conflict has been very intense, coming at times to an intensity bordering on a civil war. At the present moment the conflict is more intense than it has ever been before, temporarily quiet, its intensity is not the less severe.

In the large, this conflict has centered around two points. One center has been the internal conflict, within the citizenship of the industrial Empire itself, between the owners of this empire and the operators. This center of conflict is what we commonly mean by the labor problem. It is a conflict similar in character to that carried on for decades between the agricultural serfs and their landlords. It is a conflict over the division of the products of their combined efforts, and over the conditions and regulations under which that work is performed. It has expressed itself in the trade union movement, the strike, etc. on the one hand, and the organization of employers, the lock out, strike breakers etc. on the other. For twenty-five years it has been a guerilla warfare.

From another point of view this conflict has been pushed in society at large. In politics we have had the fight between what is known as vested interests and the people; the rights of property as against the rights of human life. The political struggle has been between the people as a political democracy interested in the welfare of human life, and the demands of this great empire, its influence upon society, upon social institutions, upon human life. This conflict has touched every aspect of life. It has found its way into the question of education. In this state

today there is a practical deadlock between the interests of industrial empire who want a trade school based upon the idea of developing skilled workmen whose technical education is about all that they get, and the interests of a political republic who want a craft education that will foster thinking, intelligent alert self-respecting citizens. The issue has found its way into the life of the church, and divides all religious bodies over the difference between the conception of practical religion as ameliorative charity, on the one hand, or a social justice on the other. Into every aspect of human life the question finds its way. Into the life, the thought, the moral and spiritual values of every individual this question finds its way. It is to our age what feudalism was to the middle ages. Through a hundred years this conflict has gone on until now, and through yet longer years will it go on until either the principles of democracy overcome the aspirations of this industrial Empire, or the aspirations of this industrial Empire conquer and democracy becomes but has [sic] a dream that is past.

Greater even in importance than the war in Europe as between nation and nation is the issue of this conflict in all the states of Europe and in America between the principles of democracy and this growing worldwide industrial Empire. Vain were all our efforts at crushing political autocracy in any part of the globe if in the process the industrial empire triumphs as an established institution. It is not merely an economic question. It is a social question, a political question, and intellectual question, a moral, a religious question. All the values of life are tied up in it.

Listen, let me paint the issue in sharp contrast. Suppose the extreme pretensions of this industrial Empire triumph, and you and I become loyal citizens in that empire, accepting its standards, and living our life accordingly, what would it mean to us? It would mean if by chance we happened to be workmen in that Empire that we must subordinate our own personal interests to the demands of that empire. Goodness would be serving its interest right loyally, bringing our children up to serve its interests right loyally, teaching them to be obedient servants of the institution, always zealous for its success, educated so as

to best serve that institution, recognizing that in whatever place that institution might place us, there we should be content to live, labor, and, if necessary die. Morality would be that conduct that would best fit us, and adapt society to its ends. Religion would be the acceptance of those values of life that the best interests of that institution demands. The same sort of argument would obtain for the owner. He would accept what the institution gave. He could not regard those who labored for his comfort in any other light than the master regarded the slave, or the feudal lord the serf. The whole thing is inimical to the principles that in this country we have been taught to cherish, those principles demand of the citizens thereof self-respect, power and ability to think, judgement, initiative, that quality that at its best calls no man master, and no man slave.

But on the other hand, supposing that this becomes democratized so that it shall become an institution through which we human beings living on the plane, provide ourselves with the necessities of life, and secure that dominion over nature that shall make life reasonably secure from cold, famine, and pestilence, and secure leisure for the higher values of life, then we are living in a world of greater opportunity. Then morality means the development of that greatest self-control, both of body and mind and will that shall enable us, without injury to the same development of another, to become as strong, as intelligent, as educated, as constructive a member of society as we have it in us to become. We could meet on the level and part on the square, conscious that we are making some fair return for what we get out of life, and getting a fair return for what we put into life. In the achievement of such an end, or in the effort to achieve such an end, there is a call for every man who believes in democracy.

It is not merely a question of economics, or a question of politics, or a social question. It is a great issue in the values of human life, involving the very nature of our conception of life, its moral and spiritual character, its significance, its worth. It is not a conflict between men, and classes of men, but a conflict between great basic principles of social organization, between the principles of autocratic organization of society and the principles of

democratic organization of society as related to the machinery by which we provide ourselves with the material necessities of life. As Paul said in speaking of the conflict between Christianity with the established social order of the Roman Empire, "For our wrestling is not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the world rulers of this darkness, against the spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places."²

² Ephesians 6:12