

## STUDENT CHRISTIAN MOVEMENT.

Week-end Conference at Strines Guest House, High Flatts,  
near Huddersfield, March 7th-8th, 1936.

### Synopsis of three talks by

Dr. Karl Polanyi.

#### INTRODUCTION.

The original general title for this week-end conference was "Is there a moral standard?" but Dr. Polanyi has decided slightly to alter the emphasis and method of approach, and to give it the general title of

#### SOCIAL VALUES IN THE POST-WAR WORLD

He is not concerned with the narrower questions of personal conduct, and as "Ought I to be 'good'?" or "Why should I tell the truth?" or "Should I do this or that when I am earning my living in industry or commerce?" He is asking instead, "What kind of social life should I want myself and my fellow men to live?" I am not an isolated individual, but all the time I am meeting and doing things with other people - in short I am a member of a community. What kind of community life should I work for? This is my great moral problem, for I cannot wish and work for conditions of life for myself alone, but only for what it is possible for all my fellow members of the community to enjoy. Why can't I? Because in the Christian religion there are great assertions about the Fatherhood of God and the Brotherhood of Man which I feel are right, and which I must try to follow; here is my moral standard.

Therefore, all the time Dr. Polanyi will be emphasising the social values which lie at the heart of Christianity. In the first talk he will give an account from his great knowledge of Central Europe, of how the community life of the working class of post-war Vienna was transformed after the war until the attack of Dollfuss in February 1934. In the second talk he will examine what has been happening to the world in the last decade, and in the third he will ask what extensions of community life are possible and necessary now in the light of his previous analysis of the world situation, and in what ways an individual can prepare himself to exercise the right influence.

R.H.P.

I. An example of a change in life values - Post-War Vienna.

A. The typical Central European pre-war working class conditions of life.

Drink, low amusements, gambling, racing, week-end crime roll.

B. The post-war change in habits, standards, tastes, recreations, outlook and responsibilities.

e.g. drop in alcohol content of liquor consumed of over 50% between 1928 and 1932, following upon a previous reduction between 1923 and 1927.

C. The change came through the young. The so-called "Youth Movement" completely transformed in Austria and extended to include (a) all age grades up to 40 and 50.  
(b) many aspects of life.  
(c) the working class population.

D. The significance of the new type of life.

The emphasis shifted from the urban, industrial and artificial background of life to that of a more natural existence. Natural enjoyments are bound up with the idea of common human equality - all can enjoy them, and "what is not possible for every member of society to enjoy is not worth enjoying". "Privileged" enjoyments were rejected. The respect felt for natural surroundings was shown in behaviour - no litter, no despoiling of flowering trees and bushes.

E. "To be, not to have". This "open air life" emphasised human equality.

Personal values emerged. The working classes were physically reconditioned. A new idea of sports arose - the record replaced by the team spirit, and this in turn widened to include the mass. Individual achievements were low, but large numbers took an active part - mass mountaineering, skiing, swimming, cross country relay races. Towns practically emptied over the week-end.

- F. The change was not due to "preaching" (the pre-war teetotal movement almost ceased after the war) but to deeper underlying reasons.
1. The organisation of life in the city was based on the idea that the poor man is the normal man. The wealthy had to fend for themselves and a "social inferiority complex" was aroused in them.
  2. High standards/were maintained in spite of low /of culture incomes. The real needs of the wage-earning class were brought to their consciousness. There was no encouragement of imaginary needs (no imitation of the leisured classes) and all the activities of the Vienna County Council were directed towards the furtherance of the life of the poor.
  3. Political power provided the working classes with a sense of social importance; the setting up of the post-war Austrian state was their achievement; they felt it to be their mission to lead society towards a new order, and this gave them a moral backbone.
- G. Three conclusions can be drawn from all this:
1. A rapid change in the life values of the mass of the population is possible in our time.
  2. But such changes require a previous change in the background in which life is set.
  3. Then we see Christian values and standards of morals asserting themselves

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## II. The outlook of the World in the 1930's.

We must now try to define the world situation in objective terms.

1. We are living in a time of vast, radical, almost unprecedented change.

2. The War and the Peace Treaties are matters of the past - their historical importance is reduced when compared with the events of the period 1925-35. These are:

(a) The movement towards a Co-operative State in Italy, which really got going early in 1925.

(b) The Five-Year Plan in Russia (1928).

(c) The World Economic Crisis (1929) leading to the abandonment of the Gold Standard by Great Britain and U.S.A. in 1931 and 1933 respectively, and eventually to the destruction of the international system of trade, currency and capital investment.

(d) Emergence of National Socialist Germany (Jan. 1933).

(e) The New Deal regime in U.S.A. (1933)

3. The social organisation of big countries is changing to a degree which only a short time ago would have been considered impossible.

The main moral problem of our time consists in facing the responsibilities of a rapidly and unexpectedly changing social world.

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III. The essential problems facing the individual in the changing industrial civilisation of the 1930's.

A. Our political order has become incompatible with our economic order.

1. In politics there is a drive towards increasing self-determination and responsibility for each individual.
2. In economic life the private ownership of the means of production makes it impossible for the individual to share in the responsibility for the production of material goods.

B. The results of this are--

1. Nationally. A conflict between Democracy in political life and Capitalism in economic life, through which neither functions properly and the community as a whole suffers.
2. Internationally. Wars are inevitable; they can be avoided only if nations adjust their economic life to international co-operation, and this means serious dislocations from time to time in each country - which is just what is impossible at the moment, for the national communities lack the moral unity which is needed to share the burdens which such economic dislocations inevitably throw on important sections of the population.
3. We have therefore reached a stage at which the lack of real community inside the national system destroys the working of both the national and the international systems.
4. Thus the Christian conviction about the Brotherhood of Man is confirmed.

C. The fundamental need of our time is, therefore, for a higher degree of community - and because of this objective situation the transformation of our economic system is a necessity.

1. Thus the problem is set - but the solutions may be different.
2. We cannot limit the possibilities beforehand; "higher" and "lower" solutions are possible, and the actual solution will depend on the strength of the moral forces available.
3. Here the individual comes in - it may depend on him whether the "higher" or "lower" solution is realised.

D. Three points on which individual preparedness is all important to secure the "higher" solution.

1. The profit motive in industry.

The individual is often prepared to "sacrifice" his own private monetary interest, but sincerely doubts whether others would follow suit; the expression of such a doubt involves great moral responsibility.

2. The interference of government in industry.

This is morally inevitable in spite of economic disadvantages often attached to it. Yet unless it is wholeheartedly supported by those in responsible positions in industry, the intervention is practically sabotaged. Constraint then becomes inevitable and "higher" solutions are excluded.

3. Social strife and class issues.

The wages system makes periodical labour disputes inevitable; indeed it is part of the classic method of fixing wages at present. These signs of social strife are only symptoms of the underlying lack of community in society as a whole

E. The value of the Christian witness.

KARL POLANYI.