N.Z. BAPTISTS AND THE "LABOUR QUESTION"

In the 140 years of their existence in this country Baptists can scarcely claim to have been a political people. With values largely individualistic, moralistic and middle class, Baptists have exhibited no great passion for social justice, or desire to change the structures of society. One issue alone has excited the Baptist political soul, that of drink. From the 1880s through to 1919 when the Gospel Temperance movement almost grasped its holy grail of "National Prohibition", Baptist voices were loud in the land and Baptist hands and feet vigorous in the cause. On more fundamental social issues such as employment, and what the late 19th century called the "Labour Question", Baptists with few exceptions have been noticeably quiet. Some Baptist concern about work and working conditions can however, be traced from the 1860s. This concern lasted through to the 1950s when, with the rising prosperity of the nation following World War II, the "Labour Question" fell below the horizon of Baptist interest.

Early voices

An early Baptist voice to be heard on the question of working conditions was that of J. Langdon Parsons, the first minister of the Hanover Street church. Parsons was a keen supporter of the early closing movement in Dunedin. On 14 April 1867 he took as his text Psalm 104.23: "Man goeth forth unto his work and to his labour until the evening." While work is God's good gift, argued Parsons, it has its limits. It is only "until evening".

Excessive labour is evil, and the "white slavery" of intolerably long hours should not be supinely accepted. Shop employees must take action.

> Work and work hard, till you get your right. Agitate! Agitate! Agitate! Endeavour by every proper means to obtain remedy and redress. The prayers and hearty sympathy of every philanthropist are with you.[1]

A successor of Parsons at Hanover Street, J. Upton Davis also tackled the closing hours question in one of a series of "Plain Talks" given in 1880. He had available a survey to show the extent of late closing on a Monday evening after half past six. Of a total of 278 businesses between the Octagon and the Water-of-Leith, 242 were open and 36 closed. The argument that hours were longer "when we were lads at home" Davis summarily dismissed. New Zealand was to be a better place than England.[2]

By 1887 concern over closing hours had reached the legislative stage. In September that year the *New Zealand Baptist* published details of a Shop Hours Bill which proposed to limit the opening of retail shops to the period between 6.00am and 6.00pm Monday and Friday, and 6.00am to 10.00pm on Saturday. An editorial in the same issue wished the advocates of early closing success, and suggested that if only customers would apply the golden rule to shopkeepers and their assistants the evil of unnecessarily long hours would be ended.[3]

The question of the hour

In the late 1880s the New Zealand economy encountered severe difficulty. The deteriorating economic situation was

1 From notes supplied by Dr Peter Lineham, Massey University.

2 J. Upton Davis, *Plain talks,* Dunedin: James Horsburgh, 1880, p. 9.

3 *N.Z. Baptist*, September 1887, p.137.

noted by the Rev Lewis Shackleton of Greendale. At the annual meetings of the Union in 1887 he presented a paper entitled "The unemployed in our churches" in which he acknowledged the melancholy refrain "We have no work to do" coming from artisans and labourers. This told, he said, of "starving wives and children, and of homes bare and comfortless". But the "unemployed" of Shackleton's paper were not the jobless. Rather they were the spiritually unemployed, who, in his view, should have been workers in the harvest field and vineyard of the Lord.[4]

Comfortably placed churchmen might indulge in this kind of pietism, but the social reality of depression could not be avoided. In his presidential address of November 1888 entitled "Headwinds", Thomas Spurgeon noted that one of the winds into which the Union was heading was economic depression. "The churches" he said, "have suffered severely.... Many of our members have been out of work for weeks and months, and others have been seriously retrenched.[5]

In May 1890 the leading article in the *Baptist* was headed "The Question of the Hour." This was the "Labour Question" which was described as the relation between capital and labour, employers and the employed, the wage paying and the wage earning classes. Acknowledging that the claims of the socialist, the trade unionist, and those who would nationalize the land must be carefully listened to, the editorial finished robustly:

> It may be asked what has such a question to do with a religious newspaper? Is it not going beyond its province to discuss such a matter? Our reply is decidedly no! The gospel of our Lord is a gospel for this life as well as the next. Too long it has been taken for granted that such subjects as these are beyond its scope.[6]

4 *N.Z. Baptist*, December 1887, pp. 2-3.

5 *N.Z. Baptist*, December 1888, p. 178.

6 *N.Z. Baptist*, May 1890, p. 65.

A book to keep the rich in order

In August 1890 New Zealand was plunged into its first crisis in the relations between labour and capital. A maritime strike broke out that was to last two months. The scale and bitterness of the conflict so surprised and alarmed most observers, that even a reluctant Alfred North felt called upon to offer comment in the Hanover Street pulpit. On 7 September he preached on a typical Baptist theme, freedom of conscience. While admitting the justice of the first principles and aims of the trade unions, North abhorred their attempts to coerce men against their judgment, if not their conscience. True, he said, there was a tyranny of capital, but two wrongs did not make a right. It was blindness to suppose that the true interests of the people could be furthered by an era of persecution.[6] By coming out as he did against the strike it is unlikely that North risked the disapproval of the greater part of his congregation.

The decade of the 1890s marked a watershed in New Zealand political and social history. The depressed conditions of the '80s had encouraged the growth of trade unionism, and now there were widespread demands for higher wages and better working conditions. A strong Baptist voice in this period was that of the Rev A. H. Collins, minister of the Ponsonby church from 1893 to 1902. Collins had come to the colony from Birmingham in England where he had been a supporter of Joseph Chamberlain's Reform Party.[7] A pungent preacher with an outspoken sympathy for the poor, Collins was an advocate of trade unionism and a vigorous critic of the competitive system and exploitative capitalism.

Collins was convinced that the social gospel was an inalienable part of Bible teaching. In promoting such causes as

6 *N.Z. Baptist*, October 1890, pp. 145-146.

7 M.A. Davidson, *Ponsonby Baptist Church, 1880-1980*, Auckland, 1980, p. 6.

land reform and the payment of a living wage to working men, he claimed that he did not need to travel outside the Book. In this regard he noted that one of the most popular delusions of religious people is that they know their Bible.

> We who are preachers are partly to blame for this...We have told you that the Bible preached the rights of property and the duties of labour, when God knows for once it does that it preaches ten times over the duties of property and the rights of labour. Instead of being a book to keep the poor in order, it is a book from beginning to end to keep the rich in order. It is the true Radical's guide, God's everlasting witness against oppression, cruelty and idleness.[8]

It was Collins' view that many so-called sins were the direct fruit of the anti-social system of private ownership of socially created wealth.[9] The answer to this was Christian Socialism. This meant neither a mere nebulous pietistic philanthropy, nor an absolute committal to every detail of the collectivists.[10] Rather it was the extension of the good results already achieved by collective ownership in education, the postal system, railways, and public utilities.

> The time will come when the capitalist, as such will cease out of the land. The skilled manager, the talented organiser, will remain at the head of the industrial army; but the capitalist who lives only on the fruit of other men's toil, will be as extinct as the dodo.[11]

8 The 48th monthly address delivered to men at the Parkside Baptist church, Adelaide on 12 May 1911. Collins left Ponsonby in 1902 for Adelaid. Unfortunately the records we have for his preaching come largely from his Adelaide ministry rather than his time at Ponsonby. These records, which consist of newspaper cuttigs are held by the New Zealand Baptist Historical Society.

9 The 49th monthly address by A. H. Collins.

10 "Christian Socialism", a paper read at the joint meetings of the Flinders Street and Parkside

11 "Capital and Labour", a sermon preached at the Parkside Baptist church, Adelaide.

The 1907 Baptist Conference

Following the Industrial Conciliation and Arbitration Act of 1894, and the establishment of the Court of Arbitration, New Zealand entered a period of unprecedented industrial peace. Economically too, the country prospered as it started out on the new century. But the "Labour Question" would not go away. For more than a decade the majority of trade union leaders had remained content with an alliance with the Liberal Party, but that party's growing conservatism and the rigidity of the arbitration system in practice began to arouse widespread dissatisfaction. By 1905 the Trades and Labour Councils had resolved to form an independent political party. In this growing rift between the forces of political moderation and the labour movement, the 1907 annual Baptist Conference decided to devote its "Open Parliament" session to the relationship between labour and capital. In a *Baptist* editorial before the conference H. H. Driver noted the complexity of the problem. Labour had the not wholly unfounded suspicion that the Church ranged itself on the side of the wealthier members of the community. The Church on the other hand was, by her very nature, on the side of the just demands and worthy aspirations of labour. The forthcoming meeting, hoped Driver, would "serve to remove some of the misunderstanding that prevails and draw into closer fellowship the disciples of Jesus Christ and the great army of toilers in our fair Dominion, who now look askance at the Church which bears His holy name."[12]

The form of the Open Parliament at the Conference was a mass meeting of men in the Auckland Tabernacle. There were three speakers, Revs J. J. North, Arthur Dewdney, and J. C. Martin. A lively time of questions followed with a wide range of opinions being aired. In the estimation of the *Baptist* reporter:

> Socialism, avowedly agnostic, was most in evidence, but Christian Socialism also found expression. Contempt of

12 *N.Z. Baptist*, October 1907, p. 252.

> 'Churchianity' as distinguished from the simple human brotherhood which Jesus Christ founded, was frankly exhibited. Our champions displayed a familiarity with the social problems of our times, a sympathy for the aspirations of Labour, and a hostility towards the iniquities which selfish Capitalism inflicts upon the toiler, which won the warm approval of the great majority of the audience.[13]

Outside opinion saw the meeting rather differently. The *New Zealand Observer* in a full page cartoon lampooned what it called "The Baptist Conference Socialistic Church Parade". The cartoon showed North, Dewdney, and Martin on stage each holding placards exhibiting phrases from their speeches as evidence of their socialistic credentials. "We are with the Socialists", declares North, "I knew a good millionaire once," states Dewdney, while "I worked once" is Martin's claim to a labour pedigree.[14]

John Kendrick Archer

At this point there enters into the history of the "Labour Question" the most prominent Baptist name, that of John Kendrick Archer. Archer was born in Leicestershire in 1865. At the age of 23 he entered the Baptist College in Nottingham to train for the ministry. Along with theology he studied economics at the Nottingham University College. From the Baptist past Archer was influenced by men like the Chartist Thomas Cooper, and the champion of the frame-worker knitters of Leceister, Robert Hall. On the contemporary Victorian scene Archer greatly admired the Baptist prophet of social righteousness John Clifford, and the Labour leader Keir Hardie.[15]

13 *N.Z. Baptist*, November 1907, p. 262.

14 *New Zealand Observer*, 19 October, 1919, p. 13.

15 N.R. Wood, "John Kendrick Archer", *Bulletin of the New Zealand Baptist Historical Society*, No.7, October, 1970, p. 2. Much of the following information on Archer comes from this source.

Following two politically active pastorates in England, Archer came to New Zealand in 1908 as minister of the Napier Baptist Church. Almost immediately he began to stir the economic waters. At the Men's mass meeting at the 1909 Conference he spoke on "The Church and Economic Problems".[16] In 1912 he became editor of the *United Labour Leader* and announced his intention to air labour's claims. "Labour's wrongs, labour's ideals, labour's claims, and labour's resolves will dominate all our thought".[17] But labour, Archer explained, was to be understood in no narrow sense. A "labourer" was anyone who rendered useful service to society. The enemy of labour was the parasite or sponger. On all such Archer declared war, a commitment which saw the Baptist minister in Napier serving behind the counter to help break an alleged bakers' ring.

When in 1913 Archer left Napier for Invercargill both the Trades and Labour Council and the strongly militant Social Democrat Party thanked him for his efforts on behalf of workers. These efforts did not diminish with his move south. Besides being minister of the Esk Street Church, Archer was president of the Workers Educational Association which had just begun in the city, and a member of the Borough Council.

In 1916 Archer was called to the Vivian Street church in Wellington. The following year he resigned his pastorate to become a military chaplain at the Tauherenikau camp near Featherston. In October 1918 Archer was installed as president of the Baptist Union. His presidential address was perhaps the finest oration ever given by a Baptist in this country. Archer's title was "Covetousness", his text Colossians 3.5: "If ye then be risen with Christ....kill COVETOUSNESS, which is idolatry". Everybody, according to Archer, was guilty of covetousness; Britain as much as Germany, Protestant as much as Catholic, the

16 *N.Z. Baptist*, Nov. 1909, p. 447.

17 *N.Z. Baptist*, April 1913, p. 67.

wealthy at home, as much as the colonial exploiters of India and Africa. "Men and women everywhere have been worshipping a trinity of evil....Mechanism, Imperialism, Mammonism". The remedy? True Christian discipleship and citizenship. The real Christian desires no privileges, no favours, no monopolies. But, urged Archer, this must be translated into political action. Politicians laugh at prayers, but they tremble at votes. Christians in general, and Baptist in particular, should lead a movement for the consecration of the ballot box to Christ and humanity.[18]

Baptist minister, Labour leader, and Mayor

Following the war Archer accepted a call to the Baptist Church in Sydenham, a working class suburb of Christchurch. The Church agreed that Archer should be free to do work on local bodies. Sir Robert Stout, Chief Justice and Chancellor of the University of New Zealand branded Archer a "Marxian revolutionary communist", but the people of Christchurch thought otherwise. Archer topped the 1923 poll for both the Hospital Board and the City Council. In 1925 he became mayor of Christchurch. "This innovation," commented J. J. North, editorially in the *Baptist* "will be watched with much interest. Under one hat may be found Baptist minister, Labour leader and Mayor." While North supported Archer, he also felt that his fellow ministers might be tempted to mimic an exceptional individual. "Don't do likewise", he exhorted his colleagues.[19] Among the many social concerns of his six years as mayor Archer took a special interest in the unemployed. He was chairman of a Citizens Unemployment Committee.[20]

18 The full text of Archer's address is given in the *N.Z. Baptist*, December 1918, pp. 184-189.

19 *N.Z. Baptist*, June 1923, p. 123.

20 Wood (p. 19) claimed that Archer's courage and tact meant that Christchurch alone, of the four major cities, avoided the riots that plagued Dunedin, Wellington and Auckland.

All his working life Archer was deeply involved in Labour politics. A member of the Labour Party in England, he was a member of the New Zealand Labour Party from its inception in 1916. He was vice-resident of the Party for several years, and president (by one vote) in 1928. His was a moderate voice within the Party over against the views of more radical members such as M. J. Savage, P. C. Webb, and H. E. Holland. When he stood as the Labour Party candidate for Invercargill in 1919 Archer was reported as saying that Labour "was not defending such men as Semple, Webb and Holland.[21] Despite his moderation Archer was a radical when it came to principle. The Labour Party stood for public ownership of land. But when M. J. Savage presented the Land Policy Report to the 1927 Party conference, clause 2 conceded "Full recognition of owners' interests in all land including tenure, the right of sale, transfer, and bequest." Archer protested. Principle, he felt, was being sacrificed to expediency. Savage in reply maintained that the recognition of the rights of owners would not preclude the State from acquiring land. "Last time we were asked to show where we drive every nail, and we were silly enough to try to do it, and our opponents hung their hats on them."[22]

After failing to gain the Invercargill parliamentary seat in 1919, Archer made two further unsuccessful attempts to enter the House of Representatives. In 1921 he stood for Christchurch North, and in 1931 for Kaiapoi. In 1937 he was nominated to the Upper House, the Legislative Council, and was an active member of it until shortly before his death in 1949.

Archer was a Baptist minister who involved himself in Labour politics. His lay counterpart was Andrew Walker, for

21 Bruce Brown, *The rise of New Zealand Labour: A history of the New Zealand Labour Party from 1916 to 1940* (Wellington, Price Milburn, 1962) p. 40.

22 The President: "Our scalps also." Clause 2 was then adopted. Brown pp. 90-92.

many years a deacon and treasurer of the Hanover Street church. A printer by trade, Walker was secretary of the Dunedin Typographical Union for more than 20 years. He also served as President of the Otago Trades and Labour Council. In 1914 he was elected to Parliament for Dunedin North, but lost the seat in 1919. Walker played a significant role in the formation of the Labour Party in 1916, and was its President 1917-18. He was also secretary of the Labour caucus.

Prophet to the nation

The most prominent Baptist in the first part of this century was undoubtedly Rev J. J. North. An outspoken individualist and unafraid of controversy, North was a radical voice on the edge of politics, recalling church and nation to fundamental Christian principles. His pulpit was the *New Zealand Baptist*, of which he was editor from 1916 to 1948. As the people's conscience North did not overlook economic conditions. In December 1918 he not only printed Archer's "Covetousness" address in full, but felt stirred to add, under the title "Shall the blood cry?", his own call for economic change.

> Are we going to consent to the wicked conditions of the past? Are we going to see the men who stormed the Hindenburg line sweated? Are we going to allow Capital to take it out of labour, and keep wages down and prices up in the barbarous old way?[23]

A year later North followed this up with an editorial on what he called the one solution of the labour problem. The modern world, he said, has forgotten the glory of service. Our business in life is not to make money, but to serve. In bold type North presented his own social programme.

> To all true service a full reward. To all snatchings at reward without service, whether through legal fictions, luck, or worn-out customs, a sharp rebuff.[24]

23 *N.Z. Baptist*, December 1918, p. 178.

24 *N.Z. Baptist*, December 1919, pp. 184-185.

The eve of the great Depression found J. J. North still chipping away at the economic problem. In September 1927 he noted in connection with the parable of the workers in the vineyard (Matt 20) the loss of self-respect on the part of those who are willing to work, but have to confess "no man has hired us".[25] The following year he published an article "by one of the poor men at your gate" in which an anonymous writer described from personal experience the anguish of being unemployed. North commended the article, and encouraged churches, and especially ministers, to be urgent in meeting the needs of "Christ's poor men".[26]

As the worldwide economic depression began to bite North continued his exhortations to social action. Biblical phrases became his headings; in August 1930 "All day idle", the following month "Dives and his doom, in April 1932 "I know how to be poor". The editorial under this last caption was read aloud in some churches.[27]

While it was North's deep conviction that the fundamental cause of the slump was the world's bankruptcy of faith and love,[28] he was also aware that Christian compassion and charity were not enough. In 1932 he was one of a number of churchmen who helped draft an appeal to the nation on behalf of youth threatened with unemployment. A deputation waited on George Forbes and Gordon Coates, the leaders of the coalition government. The hostility of the two politicians and their failure to show any appreciation of the tragedy confronting youth left the delegation "hot under the collar". J. J. North was shocked. He confessed to "feeling round mentally for adequate words",

25 *N.Z. Baptist*, September 1927, p. 258.

26 *N.Z. Baptist*, March 1928, pp. 67-68, 71.

27 *N.Z. Baptist*, May 1932, p. 130.

28 *N.Z. Baptist*, August 1932, p. 234.

and was sure that the rebuff was not the end of the matter. More must be heard of it.[29]

The Baptist Union and the Great Depression

Not until November 1933 did the Baptist Assembly take official notice of the depression. Earlier in the year the Central Auxilary[30] had passed a resolution on unemployment urging the government to develop a national scheme that would progressively absorb all unemployed citizens into the ranks of productive industry.[31] A similar resolution was adopted by the Assembly, which also moved to set up what it was pleased to call a National Reconstruction Committee to report to the Assembly a year later.[32]

Feeling itself powerless to effect much by way of "national reconstruction" the Committee decided that the way forward was to elucidate principles and create a moral conscience in the denomination. Consequently in October 1934 it recommended, among other things, that:

(a) Members of the churches should play a greater part in public life.

(b) Unemployed finance should be used to create productive and useful employment at standard rates of pay, thus increasing the purchasing power of the nation.

29 *N.Z. Baptist*, July 1932, p. 198.

30 The Term "Auxiliary" denoted a regional organisation of churches. In 1957 the Assembly decided to replace "Auxiliary" with the more Baptist term "Association". The Central Auxiliary in 1931 comprised churches in the area covered today by the Central Districts, Wellington, and Top of the South Associations.

31 *N.Z. Baptist*, July 1933, p . 201.

32 *N.Z. Baptist*, Nov. 1933, p. 334 and G.T. Beilby, *A Handful of Grain: The centenary history of the Baptist Union of New Zealand*, (Wellington: N.Z. Baptist Historical Society, 1984), vol. 3, p. 89.

(c) There should be a more equitable scale of taxation, an improved currency system, the removal of barriers to international trade, and the freeing of hoarded wealth.[33]

In 1935 the Assembly passed a further resolution on unemployment. In view of the forthcoming general election, it stated its conviction that "no candidate should be voted for who does not give adequate undertakings in respect of this urgent national issue."[34] A year later the Assembly debated the economic question yet again, although this was still at the level of principle. With a few dissenting voices it was resolved to set up study groups in the various centres to discuss the Christian attitude to such matters as currency, land use, and relationships within industry.[35] Whether these groups were ever formed and what they did is unrecorded.

The call for a new economic order

In all this debate and flurry of resolutions one name in particular stands out, that of Rev W. S. Rollings. In February 1934 Rollings reported for the *Baptist* on the question of unemployment relief. He was scandalized at the pittance the government provided. To call it "sustenance" was a lying label. Pressure should be brought on the government, urged Rollings, not to give money power the right of way above human need.[36]

Later in 1934 Rollings submitted to the National Reconstruction Committee a report on the churches and the economic situation. His analysis was similar to that of Archer in 1918. The almost universal worship of money meant that money power had secured a stronghold on the world's science,

33 Beilby p. 89. See also the *N.Z. Baptist*, Nov. 1934, pp. 336-337.

34 *N.Z. Baptist*, Nov. 1935, p. 354.

35 *N.Z. Baptist*, Nov. 1936, p. 338.

36 *N.Z. Baptist*, Feb. 1934, p. 35.

invention, industry, commerce, and primary products. Particular targets for Rolling's castigation were land speculators whom he accused of "land gambling", and banks and finance companies whose operations he described as "glorified pawnbroking". The answer was a new economic order that represented Christian ideals. But Rollings was no Marxist. Any proposals for change, he declared, must be based on evolutionary processes that would avoid the perils of violent revolution.[37]

The call for a new economic order was the mood of the times. Many voices were heard on this theme, among them that of a Baptist layman, A. D. Mead. In February 1933 Mead introduced himself to the correspondence columns of the Baptist with an admonition to the editor, J. J. North, for an article written the previous month. It contained, said Mead, three matters of "unsound economics".[38] North quickly admitted that he was no economist, and agreed that expert knowledge was essential. The result was a series of four articles by Mead under the title "The economic teaching of Jesus". Although not a professional economist,[39] Mead essayed to deal with the principles of a new economic order. Basing himself on the English economists J. M. Keynes, Edwin Cannan, and Henry Clay, he expressed his belief that the root cause of the 1930s slump was the desire to accumulate wealth rather than use it. The question then became not the equality of the socialist, but of distribution in proportion to the ability to use wealth wisely in the service of humanity. In Mead's view the government was not necessarily the best body to do this, but it could devise legislation to restrict the power of concentrations of wealth to add to themselves by "mere snowball like agglutination."[40]

37 *N.Z. Baptist*, Oct. 1934, p. 299.

38 *N.Z. Baptist*, Feb. 1933, p. 42.

39 Mead was, as he admitted, a civil engineer.

40 *N.Z. Baptist*, May 1933, p. 152.

The "Labour Question" fades from view

With the gradual recovery of the economy in the late 1930s and the emergence of World War II as the new crisis, the "Labour Question" faded from the pages of the *Baptist.* It was briefly revived in 1947 when J. J. North felt constrained to offer comment on some recent industrial action. "What democracy wants," he asserted, "is not the Marxian lie of the essential hostility of capital and labour, but the Christian doctrine of mutual service." The Biblical model for this is to be found in the towel and basin of John 13.[41]

How much the "Labour Question" had faded from view is indicated by a resolution of the 1950 Assembly. It exhorted Baptists who were members of trade unions to take an active interest in the activities of their unions. This, however, was not to further the interests of the working class, but to witness to the principles of toleration and free speech, and frustrate "the forces of Atheistic Communism and Catholic Action".[42] Even the socially bruising three month waterside strike of 1951 received nothing more than a passing mention in the *Baptist*, and that only to underline the responsibility towards the community of those who had power, whether business men or trade unions.[43]

Beyond the poor fund?

In attempting to evaluate the Baptist response to the "Labour Question" we may begin with the debate on social questions at the 1926 Conference. E. S. Tuckwell, the new minister at Hanover Street, argued that whatever the Church needed to do in relation to economic and industrial problems, it had to be remembered that man *(sic)* was fundamentally a spiritual

41 *N.Z. Baptist*, Feb. 1947, p. 1.

42 *N.Z. Baptist*, Dec. 1950, p. 363.

43 *N.Z. Baptist*, March 1951, p . 99.

phenomenon. Material possessions could never finally satisfy. Jesus Christ only could meet the deepest needs of the human heart. J. J. North, in response, affirmed with Tuckwell the adequacy of Jesus Christ for all human need. The solution to the problems of the day was, in his view, the saint. "At the close of this fine speech" reported the *Baptist* laconically, "a collection was appropriately made in aid of the local Unemployment Fund".[44]

The gospel of Jesus Christ and the "collection" - here we have the two great evangelical responses to the world's ills. And Baptists were not slow with the latter. In the face of human need, their soup kitchens, Sunday meals for the unemployed, poor funds and Dorcas Societies[45] proliferated. But these touched only the edge of the problem. Charity was not enough. More was required. In the face of desperate human need there came the realisation that the social system had to be changed. Two responses resulted. One was to pressure the government of the day for legislation to treat the weeping sores of society. The other, and more difficult response, was to do some hard thinking about how a new social order might be constructed. For Baptists, this meant "back to the Bible" and the elucidation of first principles. The next step, however, was one that most Baptists hesitated to take - politics. Almost alone among the leaders, J. K. Archer was prepared to get his hands dirty here. His Christian Socialism was active and open.

It also has to be admitted that with their strong tradition of emphasising the responsibility of the individual, Baptists were, and still are, ill-prepared to recognise and deal with systemic evil. For such a people, reasonably comfortable on the whole, it has been all too easy to imagine that deprivation and the response to it are essentially matters for the individual. Thus it

44 *N.Z. Baptist*, Nov. 1926, p. 302.

45 So called after Dorcas in Acts 9, who made clothes for the poor and was known for her charity.

was that, three years into the Great Depression with human wretchedness staring from the eyes of its fellow citizens, the 1932 Assembly passed no resolution on the economic situation. Rather it saw the reduction in incomes in terms of a falling-off of revenue to the Union, and noted with satisfaction that, with one exception, all financial statements were recording a credit balance.[46]

Brian Smith

46 Beilby p. 88.