

# Employee Relations and the Quaker Employers Conference of 1918: The Cadbury Company

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## Abstract

This article considers the part Quaker employers played in promoting new and different ways of practising employee relations early in the twentieth century. After providing background information to the events leading up to the first Quaker Employers Conference of 1918, attention shifts to the Conference itself. The Conference provided a platform for Labour movement activists to state their case before Quaker employers went on to discuss their pressing concerns. The final section of the paper uses the Cadbury company as a case study to examine the ways in which one Quaker company was prepared to 'experiment' with new and different ways of conducting employee relations. The article concludes by arguing that the Cadbury company was being used as a model of good practice to which other Quaker employers might aspire.

## Keywords

War and Social Order Committee, Quaker Employers Conference 1918, employee relations, the Labour movement, industrial democracy, the Cadbury company

## Introduction

This article will focus on the extent to which Quaker employers were prepared to listen to the 'Voice of Labour' when introducing labour reforms in the early twentieth century. The early part of the article will make reference to the beginnings of Quakerism, noting that early Quaker employers were already putting forward suggestions and ideas that would help improve the working lives of their employees. This is followed by reference to the first Quaker Employers Conference of 1918, and its particular focus on the relationship between employer and employee. All of the Conference could be characterised as focusing on the

relationship between employer and employee, but for our purposes the focus will be more specific. After noting the comments of the Conference Chair, Arthur Rowntree, maximum attention will be given to the 'Voice of Labour', and the way in which the Conference replied to that voice through its session on the 'The Status of the Worker'. The final section of the paper will use the Cadbury company to illustrate how one Quaker company set about creating a platform for the voice of labour within its organisation. This example of industrial democracy in the workplace confirms the Cadbury company as being at the forefront of innovative industrial relations practice in the early twentieth century.

My analysis and overall argument suggests that Quaker employers, and the Cadbury company in particular, were early examples of the pluralist approach to employee relations. Pluralist employers recognise competing interests in the workplace, but that those competing interests rest alongside common interests too. Where competing interests come to the fore, such employers believe they can be overcome or resolved through developing appropriate mechanisms for decision-making. An example of this would be collective bargaining, where trade unions represent employees and negotiations take place with the employer to reach agreement. This pluralist approach is in contrast to alternatives such as unitarism, where such employers believe the interests of employer and employee are similar, and therefore any conflict in the workplace is viewed as failure, even pathological. At the other extreme is the more radical approach. This approach views workplace relationships as being in a permanent state of conflict and the resulting divisions as providing the vehicle for radical and sustained change in the workplace. Throughout this article reference will be made to the ways in which Quaker employers were approaching their responsibilities in the early twentieth century, as well as the workplace practices implemented by Cadbury, which suggest that, overall, they were early examples of employers with a pluralist perspective.

### Events Leading up to the 1918 Conference

Individual Quaker employers have long attempted to run their businesses on the basis of their religious faith. Consequently, over the centuries we can find insightful comments that Quakers have made relating to the world of work and employment. As early as the seventeenth century, Thomas Lawson, who was a Monthly Meeting clerk as well as being employed by Margaret Fell, addressed parliament on the matter. In his 1660 *Appeal to the Parliament concerning the Poor that there may be not a beggar in England*, he set out a platform of labour offices or exchanges in each parish so as to help provide employment for those unemployed (Fell Smith 1892). Later in the century, the better-known Yorkshire Friend John Bellers put forward the idea of 'Colleges of Industry', self-sufficient working communities. Demonstrating his understanding of the link between the social and the economic, Bellers suggested a reasonable standard of living

should be provided for all, including education and health care. Welfare would be provided where necessary, and seasonal and structural employment would become more manageable as a result (Clarke 1987). Bellers was sufficiently forward-thinking to attract the plaudits of Karl Marx, who mentions him several times in *Capital* and describes him as ‘a veritable phenomenon in the history of political economy’ (Anderson 2019: 154). Bellers can also be found in the current issue of *Quaker Faith and Practice*: ‘The poor without employment are like rough diamonds, their worth is unknown’ (*Quaker Faith and Practice* 2013: 23.68). The evidence suggests that, since the seventeenth century, a number of other Quaker employers also implemented progressive workplace practices (Windsor 1980; Bradley 1987).

However, these attempts at providing something of a Quaker approach to commercial and industrial matters were never brought together in anything like a collective programme. This was to change during the First World War. There had been a great deal of dissent and disruption in industry in the period leading up to the First World War. Trade union membership had increased significantly, and strike action had become quite widespread (Callaghan 2012). Although war brought about something of a temporary truce, the war itself seemed to be a catalyst that provoked a change in thinking of both employer and employee. Relationships needed to change from that of ‘master’ and ‘servant’<sup>1</sup> to one of joint effort and common endeavour, just as they had during the war. It was obvious that a period of revaluation and reconstruction would need to take place after the war, but preparations needed to begin early. This kind of thinking influenced the world of Quakerism, including Quaker employers in the areas of industry and commerce (Grant and Muers 2017: 22).

The beginning of post-war reconstruction thinking in the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers) can be traced back to the decision by Yearly Meeting in 1915 to appoint a Committee

To investigate what connection there is between war and the social order, to encourage the study of the question, and to consult with those Friends who have been led, owing to the war, to feel the need of a personal adjustment of their way of life. (Hodgkin 1918: 10 [hereafter referred to as ‘*Report*’])

This War and Social Order Committee, as it became known, produced a great deal of interesting information on relationships between people and ways of living, and it was out of this Committee that the Quaker Employer Conferences emerged. One employer who had participated in the discussions of the War and Social Order Committee was John C. Morland of Clark, Son and Morland,

1 The Master and Servant laws were a series of acts of parliament that regulated the relationship between employer and employee during the nineteenth century, but were seen by employees as heavily biased towards the employer. The Master and Servant Act 1823 and subsequent updates stipulated that all workmen were subject to criminal penalties for disobedience, and calling for strikes was punished as an ‘aggravated’ breach of contract.

a Glastonbury tannery. He had felt a need for Quaker employers to meet as a separate group and discuss those matters of common concern (*Report*: 11). Out of these meetings emerged the first Quaker Employers Conference in 1918.

### The 1918 Conference of Quaker Employers

For some years a number of employers belonging to the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers) had felt a need to examine the way in which their faith could be given fuller expression in business life. This resulted in a conference being called to which were invited all members of the Society employing upwards of fifty employees: 375 invitations in total. The numbers present at one or more sittings was ninety, representing in total seventy-five firms. Overall, they employed about 44,000 employees, out of a total of no fewer than 100,000 employees in Friends' firms (*Report*: 129). A great variety of industries were represented, including coal and iron, railways, textiles, several branches of engineering, flour and sugar milling, chemicals, starch, food products such as biscuits, chocolate, cocoa and tea, laundries, builders and contractors. For the most part Quaker employers came from the manufacturing trades, from small to medium-sized enterprises, and from family firms. Some firms that were not large were nevertheless notable in their respective industries, such as W. & R. Jacob (biscuits) and C. & J. Clark (shoes) (Jeremy 1990).

As already noted, Quaker employers had been questioning for some time how their religious faith might be given fuller expression in business life (*Report*: 11, 14). It was one thing to say that Quakers were committed to the 'brotherhood of man', but of course business practice could easily (and sometimes did) fall short of such high ideals (Corley 1998). It was clear that the period of reconstruction after the war would offer the opportunity to encourage and support a general improvement in industrial standards, and Quaker employers were committed to making use of this Conference to promote that purpose (*Report*: 11). Discussion at the Conference was to focus on discovering and defining the duties of employers within the economic system as it presently existed. Although abroad there were those at this time who were prepared to challenge the very idea of a capitalist economic system, this was not the case among Quaker employers. For the most part they felt they could work to improve relationships in the workplace under the existing economic arrangements (*Report*: 134). Even so, they were prepared to work for change in those economic arrangements, if they felt the arrangements clashed with their faith. For the most part this meant that they were prepared to use the economic system as a field to apply their understanding of Christian ethics. As employers, they saw this as their duty. This was not a responsibility to be offloaded on to the state or elsewhere.

While they approached the issues and matters of concern as employers, they saw those responsibilities as being shared with the employees and shareholders. Indeed, this 'stakeholder' approach is something of a forerunner of the corporate

social responsibility (CSR) approach typical of some employers today. Alongside this, references were made to notions of ‘character’ (*Report*: 20). This appears to be not untypical of the thinking of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, where ‘character’ was deemed to be of importance and was often cited by those in positions of power and authority as a central tenet of a successful nation (Collini 1993).

John Child, in his early paper on Quaker employers and industrial relations, identified four characteristics of the Quaker social conscience in the workplace: opposition to exploitation, co-operation and peacemaking, equal and democratic relationships, and the ‘stewardship of talents’—that is, hard work, discipline, the careful use of resources and service to others (Child 1964: 294). It was this emphasis on service to others that found its way into the conclusions of the Conference:

We believe it is only in so far as those engaged in industry are inspired by the true spirit which regards industry as a national service, to be carried on for the benefit of the community, that any general improvement in industrial relations is possible. (*Report*: 131)

Child suggests that these ideals of the Quaker employers were somewhat idealistic, which is perhaps correct, but he then places too heavy an emphasis on the restrictive nature of social systems (Child 1964: 294). Certainly, the social structure of British society could have a restraining influence on working-class ambition and creativity, but this was not universally the case. Indeed, the emphasis placed at this time by Quaker employers and others on the importance of individual ‘character’ highlighted the importance of the Quaker belief that ‘there is that of God in everyone’. It is this belief that demonstrates the importance of the individualistic tenet in the Quaker belief system, while still allowing for a collective design in Quaker decision-making.

The Conference emphasised true fellowship as the basis of Quakerism and its attitude to all human relationships, including those in the workplace. Ultimately, the Quaker belief in the divine worth of life provided a feeling and mood of hope. While the challenges of industry were considerable, they were challenges the Quaker employers felt they could confront with a spirit of optimism.

### *The Chairman’s Opening Address*

The Conference began on Thursday 11 April at 8.30 p.m. with an address by the Conference Chair, Arnold S. Rowntree, MP. Although a Liberal MP, Rowntree remained a member of the Board of the family company, and was at the Conference with his brother, Seebohm (*Report*: 127). His address was entitled ‘The Industrial Outlook: With special reference to the responsibility of Quaker employers’, and he began by suggesting that the conference had a similar objective to the original purpose that led to the setting up of Woodbrooke – to help and prepare Friends for facing the contemporary world, including ‘the stewardship of wealth’ (*Report*: 9).

In his opening address, Rowntree drew attention to some of the statements that Friends had made in connection with conduct in the workplace. In the *Book of Christian Discipline*,<sup>2</sup> under the section related to the 'Responsibility of Employers', 'Friends are exhorted to watch over their young employees for good, and to be willing in various ways to show an affectionate interest in their comfort and welfare' (*Report*: 12). In the section on 'The Stewardship of Wealth' reference is made to the spirit of greed, which, 'when unchecked by a sense of social responsibility [results in] a fierce industrial strife, in which the weak suffer'. Another section reminds Friends: 'Nor is it sufficient that we should be kind and liberal to the poor, for the poverty we seek to relieve is due in part to unjust conditions.' (*Report*: 12) Another part urged Quaker employers 'to pay a living wage, with reasonably permanent conditions of employment, and ... not simply take advantage of the Labour market'. Finally, mention was made of Query 9a, which asked:

Do you, as a Disciple of the Lord Jesus, take a loving interest in the social condition of those around you? ... Do you seek to understand the causes of social unrest, and to take your right share in the endeavour to remove them? (*Report*: 12)

Most importantly, in terms of the voice of labour, is Rowntree's reference to democracy. He acknowledges and welcomes the growing democratisation that was taking place in civil and public society. Indeed, he noted the political appeal of 'making the world safe for democracy' during the war years. How odd, then, he poses the rhetorical question, that this growth in political democracy should be unaccompanied by a similar development in the workplace? 'Here', he stated, 'we have broken away from our democratic ideal. We live in an age of political democracy and industrial autocracy' (*Report*: 15). Although this comment applauding political democracy may have been a little premature, given that British women were to wait another decade before receiving the vote at the same age as men,<sup>3</sup> it nevertheless demonstrated a commitment to a form of industrial

2 From 1861 the *Book of Discipline* was divided into three sections:

- Christian Doctrine—concerning the Christian theology and beliefs of Friends;
- Christian Practice—concerning the lives and testimonies of Friends;
- Church Government—concerning the organisation, structure and government of the Religious Society of Friends.

This was revised in 1883, when it took the name *Book of Christian Discipline*. Subsequently, the three chapters became three separate books, revised at various points over the next fifty years.

3 In 1918 a coalition government passed the Representation of the People Act 1918, enfranchising all men, as well as all women over the age of thirty who met minimum property qualifications. This act was the first to include practically all men in the political system and began the inclusion of women, extending the franchise by 5.6 million men and 8.4 million women. In 1928 the Conservative government passed the Representation of the People (Equal Franchise) Act, giving the vote to all women over the age of twenty-one on equal terms with men.

democracy in the workplace, and was an example of a Quaker employer with pluralist credentials.

Rowntree made reference to the Whitley Report as a move in the right direction, but only one of the moves necessary to bring about a significant shift in workplace relationships (*Interim Report on Joint Standing Industrial Councils* 1917). The Whitley Commission had been set up by the government during the war to find ways of dealing with the serious industrial unrest that had occurred in the years leading up to the war (Lyddon 2012). But further work was needed to generate the right climate within the workplace, and this was perhaps the field in which Quaker employers had a particular role to play (*Report*: 19). Suspicion and mistrust in the workplace needed to be replaced by goodwill and conciliation. While Rowntree went on to make the extravagant claim that democracy rests on a Christian foundation, his faith nevertheless informed his thinking, and the belief that fellowship in the workplace provided a special, if not sacred, bond, provided his democratic ideal. Rowntree's support for the Whitley Report, and its promotion of Joint Employer/Employee Industrial Councils, was a further indication of a major Quaker employer pursuing a co-operative approach that sat within the pluralist paradigm.

### *The Voice of Labour*

The second session was particularly interesting in that it was given over to 'The Claims of Labour'. Giving a full session over to 'the voice of labour' sent a signal to the Labour movement that their claims were being taken seriously. Harold Clay, formerly chairman of Leeds Labour Party, Tom Hackett, a Labour councillor and activist within the Birmingham labour movement, and Nellie Scruton, an official of the Workers Educational Association (WEA), all spoke to the Conference. The purpose of this session was to provide the employers with an informed set of opinions that were broadly representative of the wider Labour movement, as well as a set of voices that were bound to challenge Quaker employers on a range of issues. This willingness to engage with 'the voice of labour' in a spirit of co-operation and collaboration provides further evidence that Quaker employers sat firmly within the pluralist tradition.

First up was Harold Clay. When he spoke in 1918 he was in the early stages of what was to become an impressive career in the Labour movement. He had originally been involved in the Social Democratic Federation, the first organised socialist party in Britain. He was a tram driver, and became involved in the United Vehicle Workers Union. In 1922 the Vehicle Workers merged into the new Transport and General Workers Union (TGWU), and Clay then served as the TGWU's first area secretary for Yorkshire. He went on to become national secretary of the Passenger Services Group in the union from 1925 to 1946, and was also assistant general secretary of the TGWU from 1940 to 1948. He was chair of the London Labour Party from 1933 to 1948, and succeeded R. H. Tawney in becoming president of the WEA in 1943, serving until 1958 (*The Guardian* 22 September 1961).

Clay began by acknowledging that the war had created problems for the Labour movement, in that there appeared to be some confusion as to the claims and ideals of Labour. Even so, he felt that there was an idealism running through the Labour movement, suggesting that it stood for something more than higher wages and better working conditions. For Clay, it was about workers receiving an improved 'status' within the workplace. Status is probably not a term that would be used today, but essentially Clay was talking about dignity in the workplace and the notion of 'the dignity of labour'. Although Clay made no reference to the idea of equality in the workplace, he made it clear that workers had not made the sacrifices they had as part of the war effort simply to return to subservient 'master' and 'servant'-type relationships after the war (*Report*: 22).

A fundamental problem raised by Clay was that of the 'wages' system. He was of the view that the present arrangements effectively separated the worker from his or her work. This is an interesting notion, in that it suggests something akin to the Marxist idea of alienation, one facet being the separation of the worker from his or her work. This separation of the producer from the product or service induces a sense of isolation or estrangement from one's own humanity. While it would be unwise to claim Clay as something of a Marxist, he nevertheless noted the worker experiencing something similar to the feelings noted by Marx in his *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts* of 1844 (Marx 1974).

Clay did, however, refer to *Co-operation or Chaos*, written by Maurice Rowntree, a Quaker and member of the chocolatier family (Rowntree 1917). This book was a handbook that had been requested by the War and Social Order Committee and dealt with the subject of reconstruction after the war (Quaker Strongrooms 2013). It advocated something along the lines of 'Guild Socialism', an idea that had received widespread publicity within the wider Labour movement at this time. Its main protagonist was G. D. H. Cole, who had written on the idea in a number of books and pamphlets, of which *Self-Government in Industry* was perhaps the most well known (Cole 1917). Guild socialism was a form of workers' control of industry based upon the medieval idea of trade guilds, and was a socialist alternative to state control of industry. Clay clearly felt considerable sympathy with the general ideas promoted in *Co-operation or Chaos*.

These views were reinforced later, when he reiterated the importance of raising the status of the worker in the workplace. A greater say for workers in industry was an important element in this process, and he preferred going down the route of shop stewards rather than the Whitley proposals (Goodman and Whittingham 1973). He believed that this would help workers retain their independence from the employer and be in a better position to represent the worker and his or her demands. For Clay, going down the route of employee participation in a Works Council ran the risk of sharing some responsibility for the running of the company with the managers and/or directors, and there was a danger that this would compromise the employee representative (*Report*: 25).



Discipline was another thorny problem for workers. Clay emphasised the need for labour to have some say in the appointment of foremen, as well as some control over the work process. Together these two principles would help reduce the inclination, not uncommon among foremen, to 'drive' their workers. This was an indirect reference to the scientific management processes that had been gaining in popularity over the previous decade. Scientific management was the workplace practice formulated by the American engineer Frederick W. Taylor (Taylor 1911). The idea was to organise and structure the production of work as efficiently as possible. While this appears a laudable aim, unfortunately it often resulted in dehumanising the worker, reducing him or her to the status of a robot. Clay believed that if Labour had some say in the appointment of foremen it would go some way towards ensuring that the worker would be treated with dignity and respect.

In conclusion, the overriding impulse of Clay was towards more democratisation in the workplace. In particular, he maintained that the worker was opposed to the 'capitalist with a conscience':

Labour was not particularly favourable towards benevolent despotism, or despotism of any kind, but rather desired to work out its own destiny. The assistance given by the better type of employer would be readily accepted, but the workers did not want employers to do too many things for them. (*Report*: 26)

This demonstrates that, despite the idea of worker independence advocated by Clay, he believed that the Labour movement remained a co-operative movement, was not isolationist, and was not looking to move towards some kind of workers' control of industry.

Harold Clay was followed by Tom Hackett. Hackett worked for the Cadbury company, had joined the Labour Party and was elected to Birmingham City Council in 1913. He registered as a conscientious objector during World War I, which his opponents focused on when he stood in the 1918 general election. He contested Birmingham King's Norton for the Birmingham and District Co-operative Representation Council, with the support of the Labour Party. He finished in second place, with a 35.8 per cent share of the vote. The council subsequently became the Birmingham branch of the Co-operative Party, and Hackett chaired the branch for four years from 1919. In 1920 he was re-elected to the council, eventually being made an alderman in 1941. He finally lost his seat in 1949. In his spare time he was a tutor for the WEA (Martin 1978).

Hackett also went on to become heavily involved with the Works Councils introduced by the Cadbury company in 1918/19. He began by emphasising what he believed to be the change that had come about within the Labour movement, and that change was a moral and spiritual development rather than an economic one. This suggested to him that trade unionism had moved beyond being a merely protective body towards a movement that was more positive and constructive. He felt that this more wholesome and widely embracing approach was similar to that

of Christian brotherhood. This emphasis upon the spiritual was interesting, in that this is an area rarely explored within the field of industrial relations (Mayor 1967). Some reference to this by a leading Labour movement activist of the day such as Hackett goes some way towards countering the often implied contention that the industrial struggles at this time were between a politically radical workforce and the capitalist employers (Lyddon 2012). Despite Hackett's allusions to the spiritual in his address, there is no evidence to suggest he was a Quaker.

Hackett made similar points to Clay, in that he demanded the right of workers to control their own destinies, including appointing their own foremen and administering discipline in the workplace. He maintained that workers had the right to good-quality working conditions that covered wages, health and welfare. 'No man should be expected to work under conditions that were dehumanising' (*Report*: 26). He felt that capital had acted badly during the war, and this had resulted in workers having little confidence in the Whitley Report and its proposals. This criticism he shared with Clay, along with the belief that the gap in conditions between skilled and unskilled labour was too large. This latter belief was not typical of all workers. The skilled sections of the workforce were often defensive of the premium they received for their skill, and were usually unwilling to share it with the unskilled and semi-skilled workers. Here Hackett makes the case for some levelling of pay between the skills:

It was perfectly true that there was a solidarity in Labour that was increasing with every passing month. This was brought about because they recognised that they were human beings and that everyone had a right to live, and they were prepared to take up the part of the men in not quite such good circumstances as themselves. (*Report*: 31)

Hackett's final point was a demonstration of his commitment to the co-operative movement, which had recently formed its own political party. Established in 1917, the Co-operative Party was founded by co-operative societies to campaign politically for the fairer treatment of co-operative enterprise and to elect 'co-operators' to parliament (Carbery 1969). For Hackett, the ideal of labour was a co-operative relationship between labour and capital. But not at any cost! In a concluding comment, Hackett had harsh words for the inefficient company:

Finally, some might say that it was impossible to pay a living wage. It was obvious no business ought to exist which could not pay a man a living wage, and if that business, because it could not organise itself and adapt itself to the changing methods of the time, was unable to allow men to enjoy a minimum standard of life, he contended the nation and individuals would be better without such a business at all. (*Report*: 32)

The final voice for Labour was that of Nellie Scruton. In a self-effacing introduction she claimed that she was unable to speak for organised labour, or indeed articulate labour. Instead, she believed she spoke for unorganised and inarticulate labour. This was because she was there in her capacity as a

representative of the WEA. Nellie Scruton had been at the inaugural meeting of the Bradford WEA in 1909, attending the first class tutored by Arthur Greenwood, who went on to become the deputy leader of the Labour Party under Clement Attlee. Over the years Scruton served the branch as secretary, treasurer and president, and lived a long and active life as a supporter of working-class education (The Bradford Historical and Antiquarian Society 1987).

Scruton was quite clear in her view that the same educational opportunities for all would bring about equality for all. She rejected the one-sided view of some employers that employees alone needed to adopt a wider outlook, sounder judgement and a deeper sense of social obligation. Instead, Scruton suggested that these views were not peculiar to the working classes, but were common among all classes. Adequate wages were needed, so as to enable workers to live a reasonable and decent life, one free from the worries of the workhouse. She concluded by noting that, while the WEA tutorial classes were a valuable ally for workers, they needed to have the energy to make good use of them, not be constantly tired as a result of long working hours. Hence, Scruton was a keen advocate of a shorter working week (*Report: 35, 38*).

The Quaker employers asked the three representatives of 'Labour' a series of questions that were both interesting and informative. Arthur Sisson wanted to know if workers were keen to develop the future on a moral and spiritual basis, as had been suggested (*Report: 36*). Jon E. Hodgkin was hopeful that the Joint Committees proposed would have a wider role than that of merely settling disputes (*Report: 36*). Amy C. Morland wanted to know how women might continue their education, so that they could take a full role on the Industrial Councils (*Report: 36*), and Wilfred H. Brown was curious to know how the notion of a basic wage would affect higher pay for those with higher levels of skill (*Report: 37*). These provide further examples of the Quaker employers' willingness to engage with 'labour' on their own terms, discussing and debating in a spirit of co-operation and goodwill – all good examples of pluralist principles.

Hackett, replying to Arthur Sisson, asserted that workers were indeed demanding better pay and conditions on moral and spiritual grounds. For him, it was about encouraging and supporting workers to cultivate their higher instincts, and this was a spiritual aim that could be progressed only through co-operation between the employer and employee (*Report: 39*). Despite this reference to the spiritual, Hackett accused the Church of being reactionary, usually taking the side of the employer against the worker. In doing so, he believed, workers would remain sceptical of the Church until it became more aware of its moral and social responsibility towards them. But Hackett retained hope alongside these criticisms. He believed that the availability of more education for the workers would make matters better. Some trade unions had organised study circles that did much good work, and ultimately these arrangements would provide greater and better opportunities. Reference was also made to Fircroft College, the adult residential college set up by George Cadbury Junior, which provided more of an all-round

education (*Report: 40*). Hackett recommended the setting up of more 'Fircroft's' after the war (*Report: 40*).

Before concluding his replies, Hackett returned to the question of the bullying foreman. Noting that this approach was unlikely to get the best out of the worker, he believed the only way to avoid this happening was to give workers some say in the appointment of the foremen. This was clearly a worker aspiration of the time, but remained something of an unrealistic demand. One questioner had asked whether workers should be paid the same regardless of skill. Hackett's reply seemed naive. He believed the best way forward was to ensure each worker did the job for which he or she was best fitted. Paying the same wage would then be about greater efficiency rather than the question simply being one of pay (*Report: 41*). But this ignored the premium placed on skill by workers. The fundamental purpose of the craft trade unions was to negotiate a differential in pay for their members over and above that of unskilled and semi-skilled workers. Why else serve a lengthy apprenticeship?

Scruton added more comment to the question on 'education'. As regards women's further education, she believed there was no better education to be had than the tutorial classes provided by the WEA. This was no surprise given Scruton's association with the WEA. Nevertheless, the WEA was gaining widespread support during this period, and many well-known politicians had been or would be associated with the organisation. Further, Scruton reinforced the political point that the working day was too long for women, and that the only way that they would be able to take full advantage of the educational opportunities like those supplied by the WEA was if their working day was reduced to eight hours or less (*Report: 38–39*).

Clay's replies were perhaps the most sharp, as befits a man who was to go on to have something of a prestigious career in the trade union and Labour movements. He made it clear that he was opposed to benevolent employers and acts of patronage. It was far better that the workers assert their own rights and demands. Joint Industrial Councils were unlikely to work, as there was a fundamental antagonism between labour and capital. The Whitley Councils needed to be more than simply an attempt at bringing about industrial peace (*Report: 42*). As regards education, Clay was enthusiastic about more education for workers, but reminded the Quaker employers that, when it came to social matters, employers were in need of more education too (Corley 1988). Clay went on to make a prescient comment about the shop stewards movement. As a relatively recent innovation, shop stewards created anxiety among employers. They were outside the official framework of their trade unions, and usually numbered among their membership the more radical elements within the trade union movement. Clay suggested that shop stewards had emerged as a result of war-time legislation, and were likely to become an official part of the trade union movement once they gained in profile and strength. This, of course, is precisely what happened.

### *The Status of the Worker*

On Friday 12 April at 8 p.m., J. Bernard Shewell introduced the fourth session on the status of the worker. The 'voice of Labour' had made it clear at the outset of the Conference that the notion of 'status' was the most pressing concern of the worker. This would perhaps surprise many unfamiliar with the world of industrial relations; yet it is often the foundation stone of harmonious working relationships. The assumption of many, not least some established commentators on the world of work, is that the overriding motivating factor is pay. But this is rarely the case (*Report*: 21–22), and it says something about Quaker employers that they were aware of this, making the status of the worker a key session at the Conference. Bernard Shewell set the tone in his comments at the beginning of his address:

We have met together to consider our responsibilities, as employers of labour, not only to the worker, but also to the community at large, towards the great efforts that must be made after the War, to close the long-open breach between master and men, and bring about an industrial unity which shall meet the new era of intense production necessitated by the wastage of war. (*Report*: 55)

The importance of unity was emphasised, but the benevolent employer, along with a sympathetic state, was not the answer. In order to bring about an improvement in the status of the worker Shewell invoked the notion of an 'all-embracing human brotherhood'. He noted that in the past employers had exploited the excess of available labour, using it to drive down pay and conditions. Now, however, the war had changed the working environment. The demand for labour now exceeded supply, and the worker was beginning to have the upper hand. The only way the employers would really understand their employees was to place themselves in their position. Only then would they understand the thoughts and aspirations of the workers. Those Friends who had connections with the Adult School movement had a better understanding, as their work had involved close contact and communication with the working classes and their particular needs (Rowntree and Binns 1985).

Shewell covered a number of different problems in his paper, including short time working, shift system arrangements and the new levels of automation that were dehumanising the worker. More positive aspects were also covered, including industrial councils and works committees, education and better ways of dealing with issues of discipline in the workplace (*Report*: 58–64). These latter three elements are all worthy of further elaboration, as they were attempts at creating those more co-operative and participative sets of workplace arrangements wanted and valued by all.

It was noted that the idea of Works Councils and Works Committees were not new, but it was emphasised that they should be both democratic and equally representative of both employers and employees. This intimates that such arrangements were not necessarily the case in the past, probably suggesting that employers had either done much of the appointing on such bodies or, alternatively,

had not allowed for equal representation of both employer and employee (*Report: 59*). Alongside his firm understanding of representation on such bodies, Shewell also clearly defined what he thought should be the areas of debate and discussion:

Among the questions that may be discussed at these Committees are the following:- works rules, methods of pay, bonus rates, alterations in working hours, matters affecting health, safety and conditions of work, cases of theft and misconduct, canteens, means of getting to work, dismissal of employees, thrift schemes, holidays, etc., etc. (*Report: 59*)

These very wide-ranging areas of decision-making go some way towards displaying the extent to which Quaker employers were prepared to share their roles and responsibilities with their employees, once again demonstrating classic examples of a pluralist approach to industrial relations. Shewell was equally clear regarding the way in which these Councils and Committees could retain their freshness and vitality (*Report: 59–60*). Elections should be by secret ballot, and employer and employee representation should be equal. The term of office ought to be in the range of one and a half to two years, and retiring members should not be eligible for re-election for at least six months after retiring. Equal representation for women should be ensured, and Councils and Committees should meet regularly, probably monthly, and minutes should be kept, approved and signed.

Education received enthusiastic support too. Quaker employers believed in an all-round education, rather than too narrow a technical or vocational training. A half-day a week was suggested by Shewell (*Report: 61*). This was mainly addressed to young people up to the age of eighteen. It is perhaps worth reminding ourselves that young people left school at the age of fourteen or earlier, so some form of further education supported by the employer up to the age of eighteen usually involved at least four years' further education. The education and training was to be of a good quality, and was expected to make the young people professionals in their chosen crafts and trades.

Finally, a few words about discipline. This was the cause of deep feeling among both employers and employees, but for different reasons. Employers were generally very defensive about their right to discipline employees. For employers, some employees could be described as lazy, feckless and disruptive, and often in need of discipline. For employees, employers were usually more concerned with achieving high levels of production whatever the cost to employees in terms of their health and well-being. Shewell thought that Quaker employers were better than this, and put forward several ideas (*Report: 63*). But first he opposed the relatively new idea of 'guild socialism', the idea principally associated with G. D. H. Cole (*Report: 63*). Guild socialism advocated workers' control, in which self-government by the workers would be the norm and foremen and managers would be elected by the employees.

Shewell dismissed this idea as one that would lead to a loss of discipline in the workplace, and as likely to lead to an increase rather than a reduction in

clashes between employee and employer (*Report*: 63). On the contrary, suggested Shewell, discipline is not harmful as long as it is not overdone. Further, it usually meant that employees worked better and more happily when they had a clear understanding of the rules. Shewell noted that, while there are lazy employees, they are rarely held in high esteem by their fellow employees (*Report*: 64). If employers display trust in their workers, this often results in a return of that trust. Inevitably, this mutual goodwill tends to bring together labour and capital, which ultimately fosters the idea of an all-embracing human brotherhood, encouraged and supported by Quaker employers. These views demonstrated the parameters within which Quaker employers were prepared to move. Shewell probably places too much confidence in levels of mutual trust and goodwill, but it remains a good example of Quaker employer willingness to explore new and different ways of dealing with employee relationships.

Shewell's address and the subsequent discussions and conclusions of the Conference went some way towards engaging with the issues of most concern to employees. There remained issues of difference, but this was a sincere (and quite unique) attempt at discussing with the representatives of labour their concerns. Although a Labour movement stalwart such as Clay had reservations about Works Councils, the very fact that he was prepared to attend the Conference and engage in discussion and debate indicated his willingness to co-operate with employers. Similarly, Hackett, a Cadbury employee, was quite firm in asserting the right of workers to determine their own destinies, resisting the commonly held view among some commentators that Quaker employers such as Cadbury were merely paternalists (Bradley 1987). Finally, Scruton emphasised the importance of education to the worker, particularly women workers. There was little for the Quaker employers to disagree with here, and her views were received with enthusiasm and support by the Quaker audience (*Report*: 138–39).

### The Cadbury Company, 1899–1919

In order to make some kind of judgement of the extent to which the ideas being discussed at the first Quaker employers conference were *more* than merely ideas, the Cadbury company will be used as something of a model by which to assess their utility. Perhaps more than any other company with Quaker roots, the Cadbury company is often used as the exemplar of Quaker business in the UK. In the early years of the twentieth century it engaged in plenty of 'experiments' to find the best way to run an expanding industrial organisation. This involved introducing initiatives of various kinds to ensure that their company was both efficient as well as caring. They seemed to have managed this very well, as there is little dissent from the general view that the Cadbury company was a good company to work for (Chinn 1998). The way in which Quaker employers treated their employees was the overriding theme throughout the Conference. Topics covered included 'Wages', 'Working Conditions', 'Security of Employment'

and 'Profit-Sharing', as well as that focussed on in the early part of this paper, 'The Status of the Worker' (*Report*: 3–6). Together, these provide a very public statement of the views of Quaker employers at this time. Taking note of those views, to what extent could the Cadbury company be seen as something of an exemplar of the Quaker employer?

Until 1899 Cadbury's had been a partnership between George and Richard Cadbury. While in Jerusalem that year, Richard died (Crosfield 1985). The business was then organised into a private limited company with George Cadbury as chairman and a board of four directors: Barrow and William, sons of Richard Cadbury, and Edward and George Junior, the sons of George Cadbury (Gardiner 1923). All five members of the board were committed Quakers, and remained so throughout their lives. Edward Cadbury, some years later, described this period as the beginning of the company moving from purely personal control to associated control. By this he meant something of a shift towards giving the employees a 'voice' within the workplace (*BWM* March 1924: 73). It is interesting that the first Quaker Conference had begun its proceedings by inviting the voice of organised labour to have its say. At an early board meeting in 1899 Edward himself put forward the idea of an 'innovation' scheme for young workers (*Board Minutes* May 1899). Although this wasn't acted on at the time, Suggestion Committees were introduced in June 1902, and these were seen by the company as the first business committees that involved giving the employees a 'voice' (*BWM* March 1924).

These committees were seen as highly successful, and were followed in January and February 1905 by the formation of Men's and Girl's Works Committees (Crosfield 1985: 489–90). Although these were further examples of the company introducing some form of employee representation in company decision-making, they were not independent bodies in the normal sense of the word. Of the ten members of the Men's Works Committee, eight were appointed by the directors and two foremen were elected by the foremen themselves. Similar arrangements existed for the Girl's Works Committee, except that forewomen were represented, rather than foremen. The Men's Works Committee was chaired by George Cadbury Junior and the Girl's Works Committee by Edward Cadbury. The Suggestions Committees had three employees on them, elected by ballot (Williams 1931).

These arrangements continued until towards the end of the First World War, when further developments took place. When the Men's and Women's Works Councils were introduced in 1918–19 electing by ballot became the norm, with equal representation of employer and employee (*BWM* March 1918: 71–72). Alongside these attempts at giving employees a voice, a range of welfare benefits were introduced that effectively changed relationships out of all recognition. A works doctor had been appointed in 1902 and a dental department was started in 1905. Educational work in the company had been centralised by the summer of 1906, and by 1910 attendance at evening classes was compulsory for all employees



up to the age of eighteen. The men's pension scheme began in 1906, as did a convalescent home for women. In 1911 the first female doctor was appointed and a women's pension scheme was introduced (Cadbury 2009).

This range of employee provision was quite remarkable for the time (Crosfield 1985: 483–94). Nor should it be thought that these benefits were introduced haphazardly or without much thought. The approach to change was clear, sustained and systematic, and continued over a twenty-year period between 1899 and 1919. There was a clear principle underlying all of these developments, and this is best expressed by Edward Cadbury himself:

The supreme principle has been the belief that business efficiency and the welfare of the employees are but different sides of the same problem. Character is an economic asset; and business efficiency depends not merely on the physical condition of employees, but on their general attitude and feeling towards the employer. The test of any scheme of factory organization is the extent to which it creates and fosters the atmosphere and spirit of co-operation and goodwill, without lessening the loyalty of the worker to his own class and its organizations. (Cadbury 1912: xvii)

It is fair to say that the Quaker Employers Conference of 1918 echoed many of the issues that had already been considered by the Cadbury company over the previous twenty years. Whereas the Conference had sessions on topics such as 'Wages', 'The Status of the Worker', 'Working Conditions', 'Profit-sharing' and 'Security of Employment', Cadbury's book outlining the organisation of the company had chapters on 'Methods of Remuneration', 'Education of Employees', 'Industrial Conditions' and 'Organization' (forms of employee representation in the workplace) (Cadbury 1912). It is also noteworthy that the Conference took place on the Bournville site in Birmingham, the home of the Cadbury company, and the event took place at Woodbrooke, the former home of George Cadbury. During the Saturday afternoon of the Conference there was even a visit to the Bournville works for all delegates. The conclusion has to be that the Cadbury company was being used as something of a 'model' to which other Quaker employers might aspire (but not the only one: Rowntree were doing similar things, as were other Quaker employers, such as Fry). It follows that the Cadbury company was the most obvious Quaker company to use for this brief case study.

### Conclusion

It seems clear that the kinds of issue that were being discussed at the first Quaker Employers Conference were already being acted upon in the Cadbury company (Cadbury 1912). Cadbury's were not alone, however, as intimated above. Rowntree's almost paralleled the Cadbury company in having a similar range of employee benefits and services (Rowntree 1921). Other Quaker companies appear to have had less well-developed systems in their workplaces, but seem nevertheless to have been ahead of most firms for their time (Emden 1939). These examples

seem to counter the more pessimistic conclusions reached in a recent paper on the 1918 Quaker Employers Conference (Tibballs 2019). It seems reasonable to assume that the religious practices of Quaker employers such as Cadbury and Rowntree influenced the ways in which they ran their companies. This influence was instrumental to the way in which they conducted themselves and ran their businesses. There was no overt demonstration of their Quaker faith. Instead, the family members that ran the businesses demonstrated this in their lifelong membership of the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers), and the many Quaker roles and responsibilities they assumed. They also provided much funding for the Society and for its work (Emden 1939; Windsor 1980).

The late nineteenth century had seen Quakerism in Britain shift from being of the predominantly evangelical type to a type incorporating the more modernist thinking of the times (Dandelion 1995). This more open, liberal approach to a person's faith seemed to chime with the times, and Quakers incorporated this new thinking into their daily lives (Kennedy 2001: 157–210). Biblical criticism and scientific methodologies were not restricted to religious matters, but were used in their business lives too, hence their willingness to 'experiment' with new and different ways of running their businesses. By and large this produced new and better ways of running workplaces, which included a more co-operative and participative approach to employee relations. These managerial approaches provided something of a critique of the scientific management school of thinking current at the time.

This willingness to 'experiment' and openness to alternative ways of running their businesses can find no better expression than Quaker employers' willingness to engage with the 'Voice of Labour' at their first Conference. As the Conference Report shows, the Quaker employers were willing to listen to, as well as question, the labour representation and its vision of how the future might look. The overall exchange of views appeared to be healthy and constructive. There were disagreements, but overall there appeared to be a willingness to search for co-operation and compromise, providing a further example of how the mainstream Quaker employer thinking of the time fitted within the pluralist framework.

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