

**He's a shop steward...he eats in a pub...he won't accept his church pay**

# THE KIND OF

# PARSON

# WE LIKE!

**THE Reverend John Strong has done it again. And pale-faced parsons all over Britain will wince when they hear this today.**

**For John Strong is one man that the prim and the pompous and the lazier clergymen of the Church of England would like to forget.**

Every time he makes news they are reminded of the sacrifice he is making—a sacrifice that grows greater every year.

When I tell you that John, curate-in-charge of Harlington, a neat village seven miles from Luton, has refused to accept any "pay" for his services, you will understand why so many of his self-satisfied fellow priests are shocked.

They have been shocked ever since 1951, when, with another priest who is now abroad, John went to work as a pitman in the Kent village of Eythorne.

## EXHAUSTED

While one was doing his shift the other looked after the church duties.

After three years, however, they were forced to give up. They were beaten by sheer exhaustion.

Clergymen who had been watching the experiment

with some alarm sighed with relief. Now they are in for a shock again.

For the past three years the Reverend John Strong has been working quietly but industriously in a factory at Luton.

And he has made such a good job of it that his work-

mates have just elected him a SHOP STEWARD of the Amalgamated Engineering Union.

During the whole period he has refused to touch any of the £750 stipend allotted

to him each year.

Instead, he has lived on his factory wages of £10 10s. a week—plus bonuses for piecework.

That part of his "pay" provided by the Church—£525—is being spent by the diocese. The £225 which should be provided by the parish has not had to be raised.

This remarkable man, who lives with his wife and two children in a rambling grey stone vicarage, rises every morning about six.



**JOHN STRONG—the parson who shocks the stuffed shirts.**

He has to, because his train leaves at 6.50 and gets him into Luton just in time to clock in at 7.30.

There he sweats at a work

bench until 5.30, when he sets off for the vicarage again and gets on with the business of running a parish.

His lunchtimes, I dis-

covered, were spent visiting patients in local hospitals.

I met him when he called at a pub after one such visit.

"I'm afraid I can afford to buy you only half a pint," said Mr. Strong.

"It's getting near the end of the week. And I'm a bit hard up."

### RELIABLE

We drank our beer and ate beef sandwiches in a public bar where workmen were playing cards and darts.

"I can't imagine why my colleagues made me a shop steward," said Mr. Strong, "unless it's because they think I'm reliable!"

"Sometimes I have to negotiate with the management and chargehands. I am asked to take up any number of grievances.

"Only the other day we had discussions with the management about the price of canteen tea.

"We lost the argument, I'm afraid, and the tea has gone up a halfpenny a cup."

Why does Mr. Strong think that cups of tea are his business?

"Look at it this way," he said. "Many people regard the Church as something apart. In my own small way I am trying to dispel that attitude.

"I want to be with ordinary people, share their lives and be one of them. By working among them and suffering the same problems and worries I feel I am doing that."

As for the question of his refusing his stipend, or pay?

"The Church Commissioners made vast sums of money by investing in industrial shares," said Mr. Strong, "and I don't agree with that."

"When a working-class man is sacked he knows immediately that he is facing a crisis.

### CUT SHORT

"Churches are empty now, but that doesn't affect the Church because it still has its income from investments.

"If empty churches meant hard times for vicars then they would see to something about it."

The sound of the factory hooter calling the men back to work cut short Mr.

Strong. He drank up and returned to his work bench.

But he left me thinking. For many reasons not all parsons can be expected to go into factories and mines. Many of them are simply not physically strong enough.

There are, however, plenty of strong young priests who can set a similar example.

Five other clergymen, at Carlisle, Oxford, Warrington and London, have already taken up ordinary jobs.

One is a fitter, another is employed in a brewery.

Not only do many of the gaitered big-wigs in the Church disapprove of these worker-priests.

A lot of parishioners, including some of Mr. Strong's, feel their vicar ought to devote his full time to running the parish, with tea at the vicarage, garden parties, etc.

They do not seem to have learned the lesson that Mr. Strong is teaching.

That they must rely on themselves to imitate Christian activities and not on the priest.

For Churchmen the lesson is even easier. They must learn to work for a living and to preach for love.

—BRIAN STRINGER

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# Worker-priest takes over as shop steward

Five Church of England clergymen who work in factories and refuse to draw their stipends have formed the country's first worker-priest movement. At the beginning of August they will hold a conference at Harlington, Beds, the parish of the Rev. John Strong, who puts in a 44-hour week as a bench-hand at a Luton

engineering works.

Also in the movement are the Reverend John Rowe, of St. Paul's Church, Stepney, the Reverend Martin Grubb, of Southall, and two clergymen at Warrington and Carlisle. All do manual work.

Mr. Strong, who is 43, explained: "None of us believes it is right to accept any church income because the money for paying clergy is obtained from investment. It is a point on which industrial workers often criticise the church.

"We feel it ought to be shown how the church can live independently of that financial backing."

### £10 a week

Mr. Strong works at checking oil meters. He does not wear a clerical collar with his overalls. He draws just over £10 a week, which is less than the stipend would be, and is shop steward of his department.

"I suppose our movement is still in the experimental stage," he said. "We take these jobs to be identified with workers in industry, not

to preach to them.

"Instead of standing outside life the church should be part of it. Representatives of the church, clergy and laymen should be closely involved in the life of industry."

### No overtime

Mr. Strong is against overtime and never works it. He does not want promotion and would resist going beyond charge-hand. So would the others in the movement.

At Harlington (population 750) his parochial duties have

to be fitted into evenings and weekends. He visits only the sick and infirm, writes two sermons a week, and often conducts Holy Communion in his small 14th-century church before going to work in the mornings.

He finds reaction to him in the village is mixed. "I have my supporters, but the majority probably object to me because I am different," he said. "It will probably be five years before even those who are sitting on the fence come on to my side."

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