

# BRITAIN'S Worker Priests Clock In . . .

By RICHARD COX

**Y**OUNG, short and stocky, one of the factory crowd in his blue jeans, short khaki coat and flat cap, the worker priest looked far removed from Sunday sermons and the pulpit in which he attacked Lord Fisher's remark that strikes are "unrighteous." But the Rev. Martyn Grubb, who preached last Sunday at Holy Trinity, Southall, that the strike weapon is the only thing which gives workers the freedom that employers and shareholders enjoy, is both experienced in industry and forthright. Grubb is one of a small group of Christians who, in his words, "have chosen to become industrial workers as the expression of our faith."

Their shared aim is to counter the overwhelming apathy to the Church among working people, though not normally by shock tactics. Forming the group are six worker priests, two laymen and six wives of the members. Of the priests, other than Grubb, John Rowe works in an East End brewery, Kenneth Ramsey in a Battersea engineering firm, John Strong as an assembly hand, Tony Williamson works a fork-lift at Oxford, and Tom Quigley works in a factory at Carlisle.

All have widely differing views within the Anglican Communion, and on politics. However, nearly all are Socialists ("the Church ought to be involved in politics, because it is concerned with the whole life of man"), and agree with Grubb on strikes.

Rowe explained his view further. "Workers' organisations and the Labour movement are an inheritance of Christendom as much as the Church, both are dedicated to peace and brotherhood. If we can't remarry the two we won't get anywhere."

As a whole, the group hope that by committing themselves to working lives, and living only on what they earn, they may be the seed from which will germinate a Christian answer to the acute problem of industrial life—how to make

a life in industry worthwhile. Grubb says: "What the workers need most of all is spiritual help. I couldn't bring that from outside, from any position of authority. I had to throw my life in."

Is it easy to get accepted? Managements may be alarmed. To workers "either he's a decent bloke to work with or not." Ken Ramsey says "the news that you're a priest doesn't make any impact, it's not a talking point." Initially some assume the priest must have been in trouble, initially some ask about religion, like the foreman who spent three-quarters of an hour catechising Ramsey on the likelihood of going to heaven and then never mentioned religion again. Interest dies quickly.

It also requires courage, not least from the wives. Ann Grubb has her children at the local school in the smog-shrouded shade of a gasometer, "but I can't imagine them growing up just to perform an industrial push-button routine."

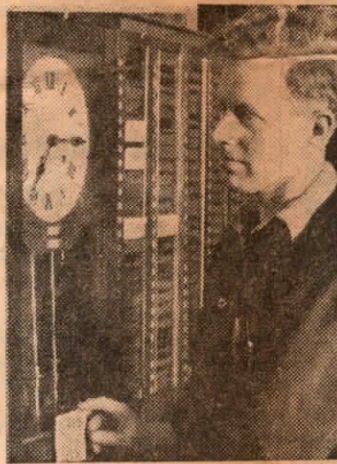
The term "worker priest" originates from a group of French priests who, after fighting in the ranks

in the war and finding a completely new relationship with the soldiers, carried the experiment into manual work in slum areas. But the experiment earned the Vatican's disapproval.

One danger, which was recognised in France, is of the priest getting a personal following which still rejects the Church. John Strong feels the answer is for worker priests to have their own parishes as he does, but still fears it won't be easy to get over his workmates' distrust of the parish church, but at least he is in a position to try.

Happily, too, every encouragement is being given to the experiment here by several Bishops.

For the priests themselves the last thing they want is an achievement measured in conversions. For the moment it is progress enough to be living, working and feeling their way in what John Rowe calls "an authentic situation."



The Rev. T. Williamson starts at 7.15