

CORRESPONDENCE

DISTRIBUTISM AND PRIMITIVISM

To the Editor of **BLACKFRIARS**.

SIR,—I am afraid I have been too busy with the 'curious' experiment of getting Catholics back to the sanity of the land—an adjective which for some reason appears to delight a few of your contributors—to follow closely the discussion on Distributism in your columns. Mr. Eric Gill appears to me to have said the last word on the subject in February. Industrialism *does* demand a Communist—to which may I add its blood-brother Fascist—setting for survival.

But **you** will perhaps allow me a word on another point. Mr. Michael Derrick and his critics share an inability to realize that hostility to mechanisation does not arise from a love of the past or the primitive, but from a love of liberty and personality. They are not emancipated from the dogma of progress, and I have yet to **see** an argument (compatible with liberty and personality) which puts **up** a reasoned case for the retention of machine production. There is only a general appeal for the dynamic as against the static, or for a modern as against a primitive **outlook**. And within these terms it is essential for pro-machinists to prove compatibility, as we have purported to prove incompatibility.

We may be wrong, but at least we have worked out the argument over many years, and with a working knowledge of all the terms.

It is remarkable, on the other hand, that pro-machinists show on the whole a certain gap in their knowledge. By training, by status and, by geography they seem out of touch with the realities of industrialism. They think that when they have urged that a peasant may well use a small Tractor or Power-Pump they have said the last word. But that is only one aspect which need not detain us here. There remains the world of the men who *make* the Tractor and the Power-Pump, and this seems a world unknown to them. It is a world which actually involves degradation, and necessarily involves depression of Personality in the workman.

I sympathize sincerely with both Mr. Derrick and his critics on this point, and it is far from my intention to pick a quarrel. But it must be said that there *is* **reason** against mechanisation, which has nothing whatever to do with primitivism, and if writers with the time to spare are to work out the problem, it must be with a fuller appreciation of what it means to work in Cowley or Birmingham. The former is not **one** generation old.

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The latter is five, and its streets are full of **an** inarticulate **Luddism** which would probably surprise the fortunate inhabitants of Oxford and the South, who have, on the whole, **had** the advantages of mechanization without any real contact with its disadvantages.

The remedies before Birmingham are Communism, Fascism and Social Credit, which purport to remove the *degradations* of mechanized production. Only the Church can remind them of *Personality*, which is as nearly as possible drowned in the factory system. Personality by all means, since that is the very point of the Church's teaching; but is it only a *word*, like *Family*, with which we have played too long?

Yours faithfully,

H. ROBBINS.

THE POLITICS OF INDUSTRIALISM.

To the Editor of **BLACKFRIARS**.

SIR,—The constructive quality of Mr. Eric Gill's letter in your April number commands respect, but not agreement on every point.

I must, for instance, disagree with him when he says that it is impossible to imagine a machine that can better perform the drudgery of tightening bolts than a **man** can. It is precisely such drudgery that mechanization can obviate. I would refer him on this point and upon the effect of mechanical processes on the mind of the worker to Professor John Hilton's articles on Industrial Britain in recent issues of *The Listener*, especially to the article of March 21st.

I think, also, that 'a sub-human condition of intellectual irresponsibility' is, unfortunately, the characteristic not only of the industrial workers. I would attribute it far more to the influence of their Press, environment, and education, than to the influence of mass-production upon the workers who operate it.

But, in conclusion, I would heartily agree with Mr. Gill that financial reform is essential—as *Quadragesimo Anno* diagnoses. His suggestion for Industrial Conscription to alleviate the lot of industrial workers until then also commands sympathy. But when we have achieved the reform, will not the Age of Leisure have arrived?—Yours, &c.,

P. D. FOSTER.