HE LABOR PROBLEM AND THE SOCIAL CATHOLIC MOVEMENT IN FRANCE
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A Study in the History of Social Politics

BY

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TO
MY MOTHER
Not until quite recently, in the United States, has anything like general public attention been directed to one of the most powerful and interesting of contemporary movements toward the solution of the insistent problem of labor unrest. There is a real need for an impartial historical study of this movement and a critical analysis of the forces which lie behind it. Such a need the present narrative does not pretend to satisfy completely; but it is hoped that even a preliminary survey, such as this, will be of interest to those who concern themselves with the grave social and economic problems now confronting political democracy.

The movement in question,—generally known as the Social Catholic movement,—has expanded so rapidly in the last few decades that it may now be regarded as a force comparable in magnitude and in power to international Socialism, or to Syndicalism, or to the coöperative movement. On the eve of the Great War, Social Catholicism was represented by organizations in every civilized country where there was any considerable Catholic population. Its adherents were numbered by tens of millions; a host of journals, reviews, year-books, economic treatises, manuals, and millions of tracts were preaching its doctrines; it had apologists in the universities and representatives in the legislatures of many European and several American states; its propaganda was growing by leaps and bounds. It had already taken its place as second or third among the great international movements for social reform. Moreover, thanks to authoritative endorsements by papal encyclicals, and thanks to the energetic efforts of its patrons in the hierarchy, it has resumed its progress since the conclusion of peace and bids fair to command the substantial support of the great body of Catholic Christians throughout the world.
The program of reforms advocated by the leaders of this movement presents an elaborate and far-reaching scheme of economic reconstruction. One might call it a rival of the other "Proposed Roads to Freedom" described by Mr. Bertrand Russell. The program is all the more significant because several of its basic principles, which once appeared somewhat visionary, are gaining widespread popularity at the present time. For instance, the idea that a modernized guild system, with industrial democracy, was the true alternative to State Socialism, had little vogue a generation ago, except among Social Catholics, whereas today it is making remarkable headway among British labor leaders, in the form of "Guildism" or "Guild Socialism." The conservative wing of the British Guild Socialist movement, one might add, is Social Catholic. The scheme of Joint Standing Industrial Councils put forward by the Whitley Committee1 and incorporated in the British Government's reconstruction policy provides another indication of the same trend of thought, and the Whitley plan bears an astonishing resemblance to the scheme of industrial organization formulated many years previously by French Social Catholics. Again, the Social Catholics have insisted, from the beginning, that labor must not be regarded as a commodity, the price of which could be determined by the law of supply and demand. This principle is now officially recognized by a clause in the Treaty of Versailles. International labor legislation is a third principle of which the Social Catholics were among the earliest and most determined advocates. Yet another of the reforms of which Social Catholics, particularly in France, have long been supporters, is the establishment of an industrial, or, rather, a vocational senate as a complement to the existing parliament based on purely numerical or geographical representation. Under the name of "functional representation," this idea is coming to be more and more widely debated.

A genuine practical interest attaches to the question whether the Social Catholic movement is inherently antagonistic to other schools of social reform, or disposed to coöperate with them. In general, the Social Catholics have been opposed to
State Socialism, Bolshevism, and the anarchistic wing of Syndicalism. On the other hand, in promoting trade-unionism, in legislating against child labor, in protecting women from injurious industrial exploitation, in establishing social insurance, and in similar matters, there has been much coöperation between Social Catholics and other friends of labor legislation.

In the United States, there has been less of such coöperation than in Europe, principally because the Social Catholic movement was more backward in the New World. Very striking, however, is the manifesto on social reconstruction recently issued by four American bishops, in the name of the National Catholic War Council, championing in principle a minimum wage law; social insurance against sickness, invalidity, unemployment, and old age; shop committees and labor participation in industrial management; coöperative selling and marketing; coöperation in production; regulation of public service monopolies; heavy taxation of incomes, excess profits, and inheritances. While this "Bishops' Program" contains several distinctive features, it nevertheless explicitly approves many of the practical reform measures urged by American liberals, by labor leaders, and by Socialists.

In France, Social Catholics helped to enact the law of 1884, the charter of French trade-unionism, and have rivalled the Socialists in urging factory and labor legislation, workingmen's insurance, and other reforms. In Germany, the early establishment of workingmen's compensation and of social insurance was in no small part due to the influence of the Center or Catholic Party. In Switzerland, the Social Catholic leader, Decurtins, coöperated with Radicals and moderate Socialists to secure workingmen's compensation, to fix a maximum working day, to pass factory legislation, and to establish a Secretariat of Labor; he also obtained the support of the Radicals, and ultimately the approval of the Swiss Federal Council, for his proposal that Switzerland convoke the first international conference on labor legislation. In England, Cardinal Manning became so conspicuous a champion of workingmen's demands that his portrait was borne on a banner in the great eight-hour-
day demonstration of May 4, 1890. Instances need not be mul-
tiplied. No one familiar with the recent history of France, 
Italy, Belgium, Germany, Austria, Switzerland, or Spain can 
be ignorant of the active participation of Social Catholics in 
Continental social politics.

In the light of the facts just stated, it is clear that this move-
ment is important enough to repay a more thorough analysis 
than it has yet received at the hands of Anglo-American his-
torians, economists, and students of public policy. Among 
European publicists and scholars, Social Catholicism has been 
much debated. Unfortunately, most of the voluminous litera-
ture on the subject has been controversial or apologetic, and 
no adequate general history of the Social Catholic movement 
has yet been published, in any language. Professor Nitti's 
history of Catholic Socialism, written in the Italian language, 
three years ago (1890), and subsequently translated into Eng-
lish, is admirable, so far as it goes, but it covers only the in-
fancy of the movement. Turmann, de Clercq, Calippe, Goyau, 
Eblé, and Monicat,—to mention only a few,—have written 
scholarly and readable books on various special aspects of Social 
Catholicism; their works, however, have not been translated, 
nor do they provide the general and impartial account that the 
ordinary reader would desire. There remains, therefore, an at-
tractive field, still open, for historical investigation.

To compress the whole history of the international Social 
Catholic movement within the two covers of the present mono-
graph would be obviously impossible. It has appeared wise 
to focus attention principally upon the development of the 
movement in a single country. France is selected, because the 
Social Catholic program has there been elaborated in great 
detail and formally incorporated in the platform of a political 
party, the Action Libérale Populaire. Consequently, Social 
Catholicism has played a most interesting rôle in French politics.

Unfamiliar though its name may appear to the eyes of Amer-
ican readers, the Action Libérale Populaire or, as we may call 
it, the Popular Liberal Party, is quite as interesting, in point 
of political theory and social doctrine, as the Socialist and
Syndicalist movements in France. Nor is it insignificant in numerical strength. Before the war, Revolutionary Syndicalism in France could boast, at the maximum, only two or three hundred thousands of adherents, since the national Syndicalist organization, the Confédération Générale du Travail, embraced at most 600,000 members, many of whom were not Syndicalists at all, but merely trade-unionists or Socialists. The Popular Liberal Party at that time had a dues-paying membership of over 250,000 and a voting strength of three-quarters of a million. The Unified Socialist Party had only one fourth as many dues-paying members, although its dues were eighty per cent smaller than those of the Popular Liberal Party. From the war the Popular Liberal Party has emerged unquestionably more powerful than the Unified Socialist Party, both in parliamentary representation and in membership. In the elections of November, 1919, the Unified Socialists obtained only 68 seats in the Chamber of Deputies, whilst the Liberals won a hundred.

As an important political organization pledged to the social program of the French Social Catholic movement, the Popular Liberal Party will necessarily figure largely in the present narrative. The party, however, is not the movement; it is only a part, and not even the most important part, of the movement. In all probability, the Social Catholic vote, like the general Catholic vote, will remain scattered, and the influence of French Social Catholicism will be discernible not so much in the growth of a single party as in the penetration of several political parties by Social Catholic ideas. For this reason, the author has endeavored to sketch not only the activities of the Popular Liberal Party, but also the development of the Social Catholic movement prior to the formation of the party, and the work of various non-political organizations.

In this attempt to reconstruct from scattered and all too fugitive sources the story of a comparatively recent political and social movement,—to analyze the factors that gave birth to the movement and then to portray the movement as a living force in practical politics,—the difficulties were so formidable
that the author more than once lost courage and was held to
the task only by a lively consciousness of the inherently inter-
esting and significant character of the subject. Finality is not
claimed for the narrative as it is given here. It will betray
some of the errors of judgment that are well-nigh inevitable
in any endeavor to bring a puzzling array of facts into a com-
prehensive synthesis for the first time; it is certainly and un-
avoidably incomplete. If it provides an objective and sub-
stantially accurate picture of the movement, intelligible to the
general reader as well as to the specialist, the author will con-
sider his purpose achieved.

For courteous replies to inquiries which often must have
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or in content, but also patient assistance in the wearisome task
of revising the proofs.

Parker Thomas Moon.

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