

Comment

One of the many benefits of liturgical renewal, (the increase of reception of communion under both kinds, say, or the giving and receiving of a sign of peace), is that we are offered a glimpse into the theological truth that when we celebrate the Eucharist we share in the Body of Christ, that new human community redeemed from sin and death; 'the bread which we break, is it not a participation in the body of Christ?' I Cor. 10:16. Precisely because the new future community we celebrate in the Eucharist is the *only* one of *genuinely* shared love, every other imaginable human community is exposed as deficient and in need of transformation. Clearly the degree of deficiency varies; one society, while always falling short of the kingdom of God nevertheless can be more human than others which are sham and bogus. Sham and bogus because they make a pretence of being a human community and call on the rhetoric of 'national interest' and 'common good' and 'common purpose' to mask the inequalities and to preserve and foster the sectional interests of those holding power and wealth, particularly when those sectional interests are threatened.

That our capitalist society is necessarily a bogus and sham community is the conviction held by christians on the political left. And it is for this reason that we cannot generate much enthusiasm for the pamphlet *The Right To Strike** prepared by the Working Party on Human Rights established by the Bishops' Conference. It seems to us that underlying the analysis of this pamphlet is the view that our society is a genuine human community, a partnership of shared interests, vision and goals, and that strikes are immoral, (the Working Party's conclusions seem to make almost *every* strike immoral), because they disturb and rupture the common good and the shared interests.

But surely the whole point about strikes is that they expose the lie about society in so far as they expose the already deep conflicting interests in that society. Consider the following, out of context quotations: "having the legal or economic power to do something does not alone give us any moral entitlement to do it". . . . "Industrial relations sometimes give the impression of being totally removed from the control of morality . . . Enormously harmful consequences are inflicted on the innocent in pursuit of

an industrial end, without compunction or remorse" . . . "If Christianity teaches us anything, it is that material wealth and possessions are not the only form of riches, and that eager pursuit of material wealth may in fact lead to something far worse, namely, *moral impoverishment*". All those quotations could appear in left wing attacks on Thatcherist Toryism, or the ruthless antics of the multinational companies, or the heartlessness of the asset-stripper. Instead they are all applied by this pamphlet to what it sees as the excesses of union power. We suggest the Working Party has got matters upside down.

It is nonsense to suggest (as this pamphlet does) that trades unions have a monopoly of power which they can exercise capriciously or arbitrarily, in a country whose unemployment figure is rapidly approaching two million, whose unemployed are being invited to price themselves down into a job, whose school-leavers are chasing a paltry few dead-end jobs, whose health service is being dismantled, whose nursery schools are being closed down and whose teachers are being made redundant. It is hypocritical nonsense to weep tears and wag moral fingers at firemen and health workers for involving innocent third parties in their strikes, when those innocent third parties have been used for years as moral blackmail to keep those workers' wages down. And while it may be uninformed silliness (not surprisingly if there are no trades unionists on your Working Party) to repeat (as this pamphlet does) the discredited *Daily Mail*, shock-horror story of pickets chasing lorry drivers down motorways, it is snide polemics to juxtapose (as this pamphlet does), those taking industrial action with terrorists who blow up trains filled with innocent fellow-citizens.

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