

# BLACKFRIARS

VOL. XXI

FEBRUARY 1940

No. 239

## MAN GROWS UP

GROUP action is the keynote to our modern society. No longer are men working as individuals, be it in business, in politics, or in religion. This group action is largely instinctive, but there is a desire for it and a realisation that through it something can be achieved, though unfortunately the 'something' is rather uncertain.

This desire for group action, this longing to be with and work with others, can be found in many spheres: Hitler and his mass regimentation, Mussolini's fascist spirit, our own youth movements, in big business, and among Catholics.

Never before in the story of the Church has there been such interest in the doctrine of the Mystical Body of Christ. In all parts of the Church theologians and other thinkers are writing about and discussing the doctrine and working out its implications.

It is not a new doctrine, but men were not ready for it in its fulness, and so it was not fully appreciated. It is a difficult doctrine to accept and to live, and it is not a doctrine that one can accept without trying to live its implications. It is the source of action among many groups, and when it is studied it invariably produces a changed existence. Mankind is growing up and is almost ready for the implications of this tremendous doctrine, implications that go far beyond the boundaries of religion.

In politics the day of the individualist is over. Parties of the right chant about national unity, and those of the left chant about brotherhood. However the chant is formed, its essence is the same: that to-day we have groups, we have people conscious of the ties that bind them to their neighbours and who desire to act with others

and not on their own. Thus instead of the old loosely-bound Liberals and Tories we have the regimented (in varying degrees) Socialists, Communists, Fascists, and even Conservatives.

In business we have seen the end of the individualism of the last century. The bigness of big business grows in leaps and bounds. Once it was possible for the errand boy to become a Lipton or a Carnegie or a Nuffield. To-day it is almost impossible. To-day is the day of combines, of cartels and multiple shops. Among the workers it is the same, for here the tendency is also to amalgamate, to want groups, and large groups rather than individuals and small groups.

More and more professional men realise the importance of uniting themselves with their colleagues, and the growth of trade unionism among the black-coated workers and of various forms of trade and professional associations among merchants, shop-keepers, doctors, legal men, and so on, is merely an illustration of the desire, oftentimes subconscious, for groups rather than individuals.

Group action is not necessarily wrong, but it is difficult. States found how difficult it was to keep the League of Nations alive even as long as they did. Group action demands a well understood co-ordination, and this co-ordination is not easily achieved. Men have to be fully grown to achieve such co-ordination.

We may not like this group action, we may hanker for the easy days of individualism, but we should not disguise from ourselves the fact that group action is almost with us. This war is being waged by countries that either were 'grouped' before it started, such as Germany, or hastened to 'group' immediately war opened, as in France and England.

In the economic field the tragedy is that the workers long ago defaulted, allowing ownership to be taken from them. The result is the present propertyless wage earners who are a constant source of disturbance in our society.

Much of the disturbance is justified, for the majority of the proletarians live under unjust conditions. They know poverty and slums and low wages and constant worry and insecurity. This is obviously wrong, for no State could be prosperous and happy unless the people are prosperous and happy.

For many years the workers have been kept quiet by 'doles' and promises, and hopes of something better in the future. The more active, pushful and intelligent of them have not worried about their fellow proletarians, for they had outlets. Scholarship took their children from poverty, and the opportunities of individualistic capitalism allowed the alert to climb out of menialdom and become 'middle-class,' or even to become capitalists. While this was possible it buoyed up the poor and kept them from seeking other avenues of escape. Through these opportunities the workers were continually robbed of their best members, robbed of their natural leaders.

But to-day a sense of unity is growing. Many workers who might escape into the comfort and security of the middle-classes are staying with their comrades, are training and educating them, and leading them to a mass escape from poverty.

Unfortunately we Catholics failed to use this opportunity. It is easy to understand why. The Church, *Deo gratias*, has seldom allowed lack of money, lack of breeding or class, to stop a promising boy from becoming a priest. Thus many of the best workers were taken out of their own group.

When these returned as priests to their friends the latter found that the boys they formerly knew had a new accent, a new background and a new outlook, which tended to place a barrier between the priest and the people. Canon Cardjin, founder of the Young Christian Workers, has often described the barrier he found between his school friends and himself once he began to study for the priesthood.

Of all people it should have been Catholics who were ready to sacrifice the prospect of better positions and higher wages to stay with the workers and to help them to find an avenue by which to escape poverty. It is an undoubted fact that it was Marxists and other materialistic or at least non-Catholic groups who seemed to realise most vividly the awfulness of a large class being kept poor because their poverty gave others profits, with little hope of saving themselves because their natural leaders were bribed to become capitalists.

At first the people did not respond. Gradually the group sense with its slogans of the 'brotherhood of man' and of 'united we stand, divided we fall,' grew, and the masses found that they could improve their own economic conditions by acting as a body instead of each man looking after himself.

The people were growing up.

From these early days of the growth of the group-sense have come Communism and Totalitarianism, virile forces, even if in their life and energy they do bring death. They bring hope to crushed people, even if the people find later that the hope is empty of fulfilment.

But none of these groups can meet the needs of the people. The great evil to-day is the lack of ownership and with it the irresponsibility of not having to decide what has to be done. Without responsibility and without ownership in any form the people are robots, merely part of the machinery of production.

This robot-condition is unhuman, for it prevents the mind thinking. Because it prevents men thinking it also prevents them finding a way out of the mess.

To end this state of affairs we must somehow start the people thinking, and somehow give them ownership and responsibility. The problem is how to do this. Some Catholics argue that the only way out of this evil is by returning to small ownership. This is returning to indi-

vidualism that has been left behind with its keen competition as men have grown into the 'group era.'

The land question is important, for we must grow food, and without any doubt the land has been neglected in this country, and without any doubt this neglect has been due to the desire of the export trades to make profits. Somehow this must be changed, and the land must be helped back to prosperity. Town folk do not want to go back to the land, and they often enough have nothing of the 'land spirit.' This spirit must be given them. They must be shown that a fair living can be found on the land. They must be given security. They must be given, as theirs, sufficient land for their family. In the early stages they must be helped in many ways—or rather they must be encouraged to help themselves, for if they are helped by the Government they will continue to depend on doles and subsidies, and will become soft.

As to the other side of the problem, the small ownership of shops, of business firms, of industry, will the people take to this? Or ought they to do so? Obviously there is nothing wrong in small ownership. But is it the best organisation of the social order, and even is it an organisation that can be achieved?

We have the fact that business to-day is in the hands of big combines. They employ hundreds of thousands of workers and they have a large proportion of the trade of this country in their hands. To end them suddenly would be to produce chaos; and how can one work out a fair scheme gradually to kill combines and to split up their trade into the hands of small owners, small merchants, traders, manufacturers, craftsmen and shopkeepers? These small men would have to produce capital to start their businesses, or to buy them; or are the shareholders of the big combines to receive no compensation for the confiscation of their property?

If we are to support a 'distributive' scheme of social justice, all these and very many more practical questions must be answered.

Or, again, are we to secure social justice by some modified form of capitalism? This will not solve the root problems, for these cannot be solved by higher wages and more leisure. The fact that men are becoming dehumanised in modern industry, and that they receive every encouragement not to think, both at work, through the monotony, and at play, through various forms of dope, will not be met by giving them seven hours of monotony instead of eight, or by giving them double wages so that they can go to the pictures more frequently. Capitalism, even if modified by some profit-sharing scheme, does not offer the propertyless proletarians any opportunity of acquiring real property, productive property.

Even without considering this point, it is as well to realise that we cannot hope for social justice through capitalism. The first charge on industry is a just wage for the workers, and that just wage is a family one, sufficient to maintain a man and his family adequately to provide for holidays and to allow them to save for old age or to acquire property. Such a wage is at least six pounds a week at present price levels. With a minimum wage level of five or six pounds a week, and skilled men receiving much higher, capitalism would collapse. Very many business concerns could not face such a wage bill without forgoing payment of dividends. If capitalists cannot get dividends, or can only get very low ones, they would rather have the security of government stock. This is a mere matter of mathematics. Mr. A. has £1,000 in Woolworth's,<sup>1</sup> from which he receives nearly £800 a year, which means that he has no need to work and his capital is fairly safe for his old age or for his children. But suppose (a) the wages

---

<sup>1</sup> For information about Woolworth's profits and methods see 'Woolworth's' by J. L. Benvenisti (G.K.'s Weekly).

mount rapidly until Woolworth's are paying a full just wage, and (b) the cost of the goods sold by Woolworth's mount very rapidly because the manufacturers have to pay a full family living wage. The net profit instead of being some £6,000,000 might well be only £1,000,000, and Mr. A. would receive £130 instead of £800, and probably the safety of his capital would be more doubtful. In less prosperous companies there might be no dividend. Mr. A. would in those cases rush to change his investments to Government stock, low interest but safe.

With modified capitalism it seems as if we have to be satisfied with less than a full, just family living wage or run the risk of smashing capitalism.

What other choice is there for us? Nationalisation of industry? That is no solution, for it gives no real ownership to the masses and does not extend democracy beyond the 'political democracy' that we have to-day. Socialism in any form, even if it does not conflict with Catholic principles, cannot be looked to as a satisfactory solution. Socialisation of some industries is undoubtedly a necessity. But though socialisation of all industries will provide food for all, it will not provide liberty, and it will not give the masses responsibility and ownership.

There is another possible solution, and the key to it lies in a statement made earlier that the people had defaulted, allowing ownership to be taken from them. Go back into history and picture an England of many years ago. Most men would be working hard producing real wealth. Some men, perhaps through dislike of hard work, thought of another way of living. They provided services for their fellow men, opened a shop, a bank, a money-lender's, and soon the workers, the men who were producing real wealth, found themselves surrounded by a host of agencies eager to do for him things he had hitherto done for himself or had managed without. These services were rendered for a price, and the price was fixed by the man providing the service (or was so to a large extent). To let the first shop

be opened without making an agreement with the owner, so that prices might be fair and the owner receive a fair return for his services, was much the same as engaging a man to paint one's house and telling him to charge whatever he likes.

By this indifference to their consumer rights the people handed them over to a small group. While the system was on a small scale the results were equitable. Prior to the Industrial Revolution in the days when almost everything was produced at home, the blacksmith, the miller, the carpenter did not impose on their neighbours. But when the inventors came and production became centred in large factories and ownership passed to fewer and fewer people, the people providing services did impose on others. With the Industrial Revolution, people lost ownership of the means of production and by default they also lost control of consumption.

In the last hundred and fifty years a new world has been built up, and the worker has had no say in the building. He is 'provided for' wherever he goes or whatever he wants. He is not allowed to cater for his own needs.

Rather, let us say, *was* not allowed, for he is beginning to cater for them, and every further difficulty in which capitalism finds itself, every new slump or wage drop or rise in the unemployment figures encourages him to cater for his own needs. This 'catering for his own needs' is co-operation. The world created by the Industrial Revolution is crashing round our feet, and

'New times demand new measures and new men,  
The world advances and in time outgrows  
The laws that in our father's day were best,  
And doubtless after us, some purer scheme  
Will be shaped out by wiser men than we,  
Made wiser by the steady growth of truth.'<sup>2</sup>

---

<sup>2</sup> James Russell Lowell.



Some time ago BLACKFRIARS<sup>3</sup> told in an article something of the Nova Scotia co-operative movement. A recent issue of the *Catholic Worker* told of a co-operative movement in the West of Ireland. In the mission fields, in Canada, in the United States, in the Scandinavian countries, in England and in many other parts of Europe co-operation is securing success after success. People, the people, the masses, are finding their own feet. They have found that they can control their own destinies. They have found that business, commerce and finance are not mysteries beyond their ken. They have found that they are capable of controlling their own countries. They have found that they can provide for themselves all those services which they have had to pay so dearly for in the past. They have found that they can have ownership and that they have responsibility—not the ownership and responsibility of personal small business men and producers in the days before the Industrial Revolution, yet some real ownership of the means of production. The fact that it is owned in common with very many others does not detract from the fact that it is ownership, and is an ownership perfectly in keeping with the instinct for groups that is so common to-day.

A co-operative order is an organic society. Men are social animals, men are brothers, are members of one body, are bound to help each other. A co-operative order is a united society, a practical application of the doctrines of the brotherhood of man. It is a society that has no place for greed and strife, for there is a place for all in it, and the material returns are in proportion to what any one puts into the movement.

Such ideals, and they can be found in many books on Co-operation, ought to make Catholics interested in the study of this movement as a possible cure for many of our

---

<sup>3</sup> March 1939.

social ills. Unfortunately Catholics have neglected it, yet it has been growing strong throughout the world, and the surprising thing is how close it has kept to Christian ideals even though in many countries Catholics ignore it.<sup>4</sup> Yet a definite lead has been given them by the highest authority in the Church, and both principles and practice have been set forth vigorously in such Encyclicals as *Rerum Novarum* and *Quadragesimo Anno*. Should not a united effort be made before the golden opportunity is lost to us?

R. P. WALSH.

---

<sup>4</sup> Some idea of the extent to which co-operation has grown may be given in the following details. In Great Britain some seven million families support the movement. In Finland a third of the retail business of the country was done through co-operatives. In Denmark co-operatives have reduced farm tenancy from 42 per cent. to 3 per cent. of the farms. Over one-third of the tea drunk in Great Britain is grown on plantations owned by the British co-operative movement and brought on their own ships to be sold through co-operative owned shops.

The possibility of co-operation under Catholic leadership can be seen in three books, two describing the famous Nova Scotia movement, which is led by the Catholic University at Antigonish, and the third describes an Irish Co-operative Society. They are *The Lord Helps Those . . .* by B. Fowler (Co-operative League, New York), *Masters of their Own Destiny* by Fr. Coady (Harper Bros., New York), and *My Story* by Paddy the Cope (Jonathan Cape, 7/6).