

generation which, quite logically, tests its theories first and foremost by results, have been disillusioned as a consequence.

Most of those who departed are today in a wilderness of cynicism and disillusionment. They no longer influence the Left, and most of them influence no one at all. Yet I know enough about them to be certain that they are still seeking a philosophy and a faith. From their ranks, the ranks of the men who have proved in their lives the falsity of the wrong ideas of the past century, may well come the Church's next harvest.



CATHOLICS AND THE LABOUR PARTY

A Personal View

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FOR good or for ill there is every chance that the Labour Party will control the destiny of this country for perhaps fifty out of the next hundred years, and as it is a party that attracts strong support from a large proportion of the Catholics in this country it is important to think of the position of these Catholics within it. In the major industrial centres the majority of Catholics in the working class support Labour; indeed, it was once estimated in the columns of this review by Lord Pakenham that eighty per cent of the Catholic body voted Labour, and even if we agree that this figure is high, the percentage must still be very significant.

Unfortunately most of those Catholics with the ability to write and to project their ideas into the world of thought and of literature tend to be supporters of the Conservative Party, and they in no way represent the general opinion of the Catholic body. When one moves at what might be called the national level of Catholic action one finds that most of the leaders are also Conservative. No one can doubt the right of these writers or leaders to follow the politics they hold, nor can one doubt their ability to write and their ability to give time to the leadership of the Catholic body. They accomplish a magnificent job for the Catholic community, yet it is unfortunate that so one-sided an

impression is given of the Catholic attitude towards our political parties.

It may be held that this writer is exaggerating, perhaps for the sake of effect. The facts are not easily set out without an elaborate survey and are recorded here as a considered opinion by one who mixes considerably with these leaders. Further, when in such company the conversation turns to politics it is amazing how often the few Labour supporters present are placed on the defensive. The attitude is usually 'how can a decent chap like you belong to the Labour Party?' and at the same time it is regarded as something natural to support the Conservative Party. It must be added that there are probably more on the other side who cannot understand how a Catholic can support the Conservative Party, but few of these have anything like the influence of the groups referred to.

The attitude described is unfortunate because in the present stage of the development of the Labour Party there is ample evidence of the influence that Catholics can have inside the party, and it must be remembered that it is an influence on a party doctrine that is being re-thought out.

It is this re-thinking out of the Labour doctrine that offers such an opportunity to those with positive contributions based on sound principles. There was a time in Labour history when it tended to be taken for granted that the State was the ideal means of doing everything in the community. But this was not always so, and it is not so now. There is a strong tradition of distrust of the State that goes back to William Morris and to Proudhon, and this distrust is coming more and more to the fore today. Another tradition inside the Labour movement is the co-operative one going back to Robert Owen and to the Christian Socialists, while the syndicalist tradition is also far from being dead.

In the past year or so several books and pamphlets have appeared from the pens of Labour leaders, and taken together they show a remarkable change from the doctrinaire marxist attitude.¹ There is a marxist element inside the Labour Party, and many of Marx's ideas are common property not so much owing

¹ Among these publications are: *Restatement of Liberty*: Patrick Gordon-Walker, M.P. (Hutchinson, 1951); *Socialist Values in a Changing Civilisation*: R.H.S. Crossman, M.P. (Fabian Society, 1951); *Small Man: Big World*: Michael Young (Labour Party, 1949); *The Just Society*; John Strachey, M.P. (Labour Party, 1951).

to their obvious soundness but because they have circulated without the opposition of other ideas.

At the present time the Labour Party headquarters give every encouragement to all who wish to contribute to the working out of the traditional Labour outlook into concrete terms suitable to the present crisis. This has to be a continuous process if a Party is to maintain its democratic vitality. Because this re-thinking is going along all the time, and because of the vast opportunities for discussion and debate that can be used to propagate the traditional Christian outlook on social questions, there is a grave need for trained Catholics inside the Labour Party.

At one time the Labour Party drew its force from the nonconformist bodies. No one can pay adequate tribute to the contribution that these bodies, and in particular the Methodists, made to maintain British trade unionism and Labour politics free from doctrinaire marxism. Unfortunately for this country this source of Christian outlook is not as widespread as it used to be, and in many areas Labour parties exist without the great benefit of the idealism and contact with the gospels given to older parties by the lay preacher. This loss will mean a vacuum which will be filled by the marxist type, often a convert from Communism, unless we, who have so many assets in our Faith, in our social principles and in the large numbers of Labour supporters within our ranks, encourage those supporters to become active members of the Labour Party. It is a truism to state that Catholic Action is not concerned with party politics, but it is also a truism that is often overlooked that Catholic Action ought to be training Catholics and then encouraging them to go into other bodies, especially into political parties.

In the abstract all Catholics would agree with this attitude, but many will wonder if the Labour Party is a suitable party for young Catholics to join; after all, they will think, the Popes have condemned socialism and the Labour Party is socialist. Socialism is, I fear, not a word of exact meaning today; it means very much what the user of it chooses it to mean. When you mix with ordinary Labour supporters the term takes on a very practical meaning, at times meaning little more than security and at other times meaning nationalisation of some industries.

Security is in actual fact one of the main pre-occupations of the ordinary Labour supporter. He has memories of the bad years of

mass unemployment and dreads their return. It is no good telling him that no party would dare tolerate mass unemployment again; he remains unconvinced and indeed cannot see any reason why he should change his views. His fear may be illogical, it may be based on a false reading of history. Nevertheless, in the areas that suffered most from the mass unemployment of the 1930s the fear of its recurrence is very real and binds the workers closely to Labour.

Those Labour supporters who think more than the average realise that a full employment policy has snags and realise that it involves controls and state interference on a scale that our fathers and grandfathers would have called communist. Yet he cheerfully accepts those dangers in preference to the certain hardships of a deflationary policy that would certainly lower standards of living and produce considerable unemployment in order to make the balance-of-trade position better.

Our economists are not noted for their ability to place the facts of these problems before the people in understandable language. That is one reason to welcome the publication of an essay of the famous German economic thinker, Walter Eucken, in which the deflationary method of curing a faulty balance of trade is shown to be 'a considerable fall in the standard of living and increased unemployment'.²

The next problem that will be found to interest the ordinary person is that of the distribution of wealth. When a Catholic reads the statement of the Quebec bishops that: 'Above all it is necessary to favour a better distribution of riches' and recalls the present Holy Father saying that the redistribution of wealth is still a central point of Catholic social doctrine, he is encouraged in his support of the Labour Party because he feels that Labour policies, especially in taxation, are working in that direction. He feels that the quotations he takes from the Popes³ are the moral justification for the practical measures carried out by Labour and those advocated by it.⁴

Indeed, to judge from statistics, no other country can boast of so much achievement in the realm of the redistribution of wealth. Of course it has meant that some, in the middle and upper middle

² *The Unsuccessful Age*: Walter Eucken, with an introduction by Professor Jewkes (Hodge 1951).

³ e.g. Pius XII's broadcast to Spanish workers, March 1951.

⁴ cf. *Towards Equality*, E. Cooper Wallis (Fabian Society, 1951).

classes in particular, have had a lower standard of living than before. Unless we are to wait until the 'national cake' has grown a lot more and to tolerate injustice in the meantime, this is bound to happen and those who suffer can take consolation in the fact that the almost virtual abolition of extreme poverty, described in Rowntree's recent survey of York, has been possible because of the taxes they have paid.

Nationalisation is a vital question, and the extent to which nationalisation policies can go before becoming dangerous needs serious discussion with the aid of good thinkers who are free from a bias against any nationalisation. So often such a discussion is rendered useless because so many of those who ought to be helping those of us who are in the Labour Party begin by assuming that almost every act of nationalisation is immoral. But those who avoid this defect can be of great assistance, and among them must be named Father Lewis Watt, S.J., who reminds us that 'it will never be possible for moralists and social economists to write *finis* to the treatise on private ownership',⁵ recognising the full force of Pius XI's statement that the definition of private ownership has been left to man and to man's laws.

The industries that have been listed from time to time by Catholic thinkers as being lawful objects of nationalisation are many. The Code of Social Principles refers to 'industrial, commercial or agricultural undertakings'; Dr Lucy, Coadjutor Bishop of Cork, refers to transport, communications, hydro-electric plants, social insurance, central banks as being suitable for public ownership, and adds that a possession 'which places the public at the mercy of a single individual, joint stock company, ring or cartel is of its nature unsuited for full private ownership... indeed, one may go further and say that all private monopolies whatever are suspect'.⁶

Which is, of course, all in keeping with what Pius XI wrote in *Quadragesimo Anno*: 'It is rightly contended that certain forms of property must be reserved to the State'. Dr Lucy adds to that the comment: 'There is no reason to lament the passing of private monopoly in essential industries and services. Quite the contrary. Modern capitalism, with its restrictive practices and unconscionable profits, has no inviolable right to life from the Moral Law.'

⁵ *Nationalisation: What the Pope has said* (C.T.S., 1948).

⁶ *Christus Rex* (January 1947).

Such extension of State powers brings us to the problem of the State itself. To read some anti-Labour writings one would imagine that the Catholic view of the State is simply a canonised version of the old non-interfering State beloved by so many who never needed the helping hand of the State. It seldom occurs to these writers that the State has a duty, to quote one instance, to 'intervene in the sphere of labour, to regulate its division and distribution in the manner and to the extent required by the public welfare properly understood'.⁷

There is need for mutual understanding between Catholics of varied political beliefs. How real that need is can be shown from a letter received by the present writer, in his capacity as editor of the *Catholic Worker*, in which a man from a Midlands town asked for advice. He had been placed on the panel of municipal candidates by the local Labour Party and several leading figures in the parish had tackled him to show that a Catholic could not be a member of the Labour Party.

This blindness is very real, and the present writer met it personally when he stood as a candidate for the Lancashire County Council and his opponent brought in a Catholic to go round to prove that a Catholic could not be a member of the Labour Party and also be a good Catholic. Parish priests have stated the same fact when they told the present writer that they have had difficulty in convincing parishioners that Catholics standing for the local council as Labour candidates were not thereby proved to be communists. How much better would it have been if those leading parishioners had gone to the Catholic in the Midlands town and encouraged him in his new venture! It would be wrong, however, to transform this judgment into an universal one, because there are many Catholics, important in their own Conservative parties, who have encouraged the present writer at such times as he has been a Labour candidate.

We need Catholic influence in all parties, and there is a duty on those who lead the Catholic body to give every encouragement to those who are prepared to learn something of Catholic social principles and, thus equipped, to go and play an active part in one or other of the political parties.

Our influence in any party can only follow loyal and zealous service. Through such service we can win confidence and an

⁷ *Wealth, Work and Freedom*; Pius XII (C.T.S., 1942.)

opportunity to secure a respectful hearing for our views. On the whole Catholics are held in high esteem in the Labour Party; they are not discriminated against, as may be seen from the number who are Labour M.P.s and Labour councillors. They secure a hearing for their views, as may be realised from the energetic action of non-Catholic Labour M.P.s in tackling the schools question and in securing agreement from the late Labour Government to support an amending bill to give some relief, an agreement later incorporated in Labour's election pledges in November 1951.

We have a great opportunity to play the part of moral advisor to the Labour movement that the nonconformists played in the 1800s. It depends on our energy and our willingness to sacrifice our time and leisure if we seize this opportunity. If we fail we cannot complain if in the future Labour is dominated by the doctrinaire marxists.

THE UNIQUE QUALITY OF MANZONI'S NOVEL

ERNEST BEAUMONT

M FRANÇOIS MAURIAC has left us in no doubt that in his view a work of art and a work of spiritual edification are two quite different things, rarely if ever combined within the pages of one book. The artist must conform to truth, that perception of truth which is peculiar to himself, and M. Mauriac implies that this truth will not, generally speaking, be edifying. In the ultimate analysis he has made the aesthetic truth which the artist must express dependent on the spiritual condition of the author, in so far as the spiritual elevation of the work is concerned. It is a matter, he has said, of purifying the source, the source from which the creatures of the imagination spring, if the artist is to produce work which testifies to the enduring strength of the spirit. Only a saint could write a novel free from taint, a novel in which sinfulness was not a dominant characteristic, provided of course that he possessed the necessary artistic genius, but the writing of works of fiction does not appear as a form of activity consonant with saintliness. The novelist, then, who is cursed with the gift of artistic creation, must go on perpetuating