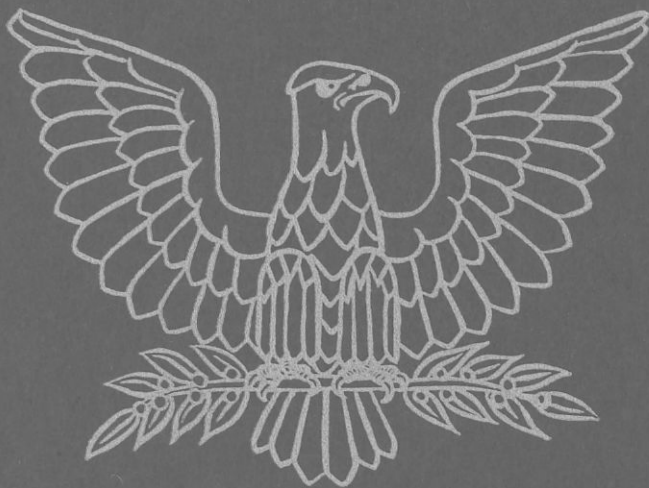


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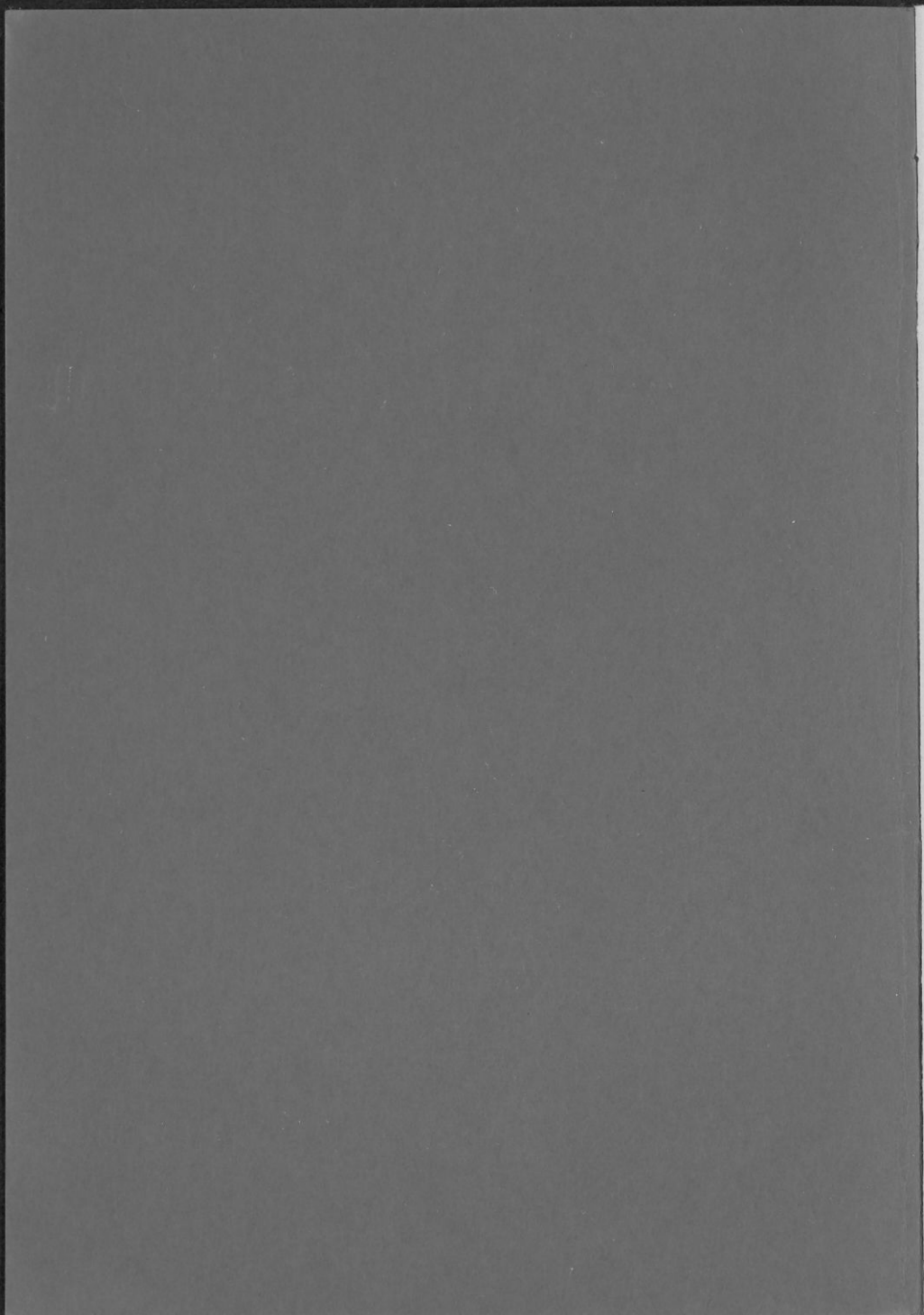
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# The Social Crisis and Christian Patriotism

JOHN F. CRONIN



The Catholic Hour



# THE SOCIAL CRISIS AND CHRISTIAN PATRIOTISM

by

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Three addresses delivered in the nationwide Catholic Hour  
(produced by the National Council of Catholic Men, in  
cooperation with the National Broadcasting Company)  
on Sundays from September 1 through 15, 1940.

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National Council of Catholic Men  
1312 Massachusetts Avenue, N. W.,  
Washington, D. C.

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Printed and distributed by Our Sunday Visitor  
Huntington, Indiana



Imprimatur:

✠ JOHN FRANCIS NOLL, D. D.,  
Bishop of Fort Wayne

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## LABOR TRIUMPHANT

Address delivered on September 1, 1940

My friends, it is fitting that we begin our treatment of the social crisis and Christian patriotism with a discussion of labor and the modern world. Tomorrow the entire nation does honor to the strength and courage and intelligence that has made our land great. In solemn ceremony in every city and state of the land, we tell of our thankfulness to those who have worked so faithfully for their God, their country, and their families. We pledge to them an even greater and higher position in the world of tomorrow, for we are striving for justice for the weak and security for the strong.

It was not always thus. There are pages in the history of labor which are red with the shame of exploitation and degradation. There were days which were sordid with greed and bitter with cruelty. We speak of these tragic years, not from a vindictive desire to open wounds so recently healed, but only to obtain understanding of the strife and struggle which remained with us for so many years, if they have yet gone. To understand labor today one must look back to the seed from which this great oak sprung. The soil in which that seed was nourished was not healthy. Less than a century ago children of eight years or even younger worked twelve to sixteen hours a day in the factories of England and France. Women were harnessed like beasts to the cars in the mines, forced to struggle to the surface with heavy loads of coal, and this in a great and prosperous empire. Faced with these facts, Pope Leo XIII was impelled to cry out against

“the misery and wretchedness . . . of the very poor . . . the callousness of employers and the greed of unrestrained competition . . . [the fact that] . . . a small number of very rich men have been able to lay upon the masses of the poor a yoke little better than slavery itself” (*Rerum Novarum*, NCWC, p. 4).

In our own land naked class warfare was too often the custom. Less than a century ago one group of working men even practiced systematic murder in reprisal for the abuses of the day. Nor can we yet say that violence has entirely left the scene. Men have testified under oath in recent years that they were paid well to kidnap and maim, and even to kill, those who would lead labor. Great industries had made it a settled policy that their employees were to be denied the freedom of assembly written into the Bill of Rights. Mockingly they called this “the American way,” asserting that by stripping the worker of his only line of defense, they were restoring his freedom. These were the barren days, and their memory brings to all decent citizens a sense of regret and shame. We feel that we have merited the retribution visited on us in these dark days of depression.

But labor has since marched upward. Hardly had the first factories darkened the air of the great industrial cities of France, when questioning voices asked, in the words used later by Pope Pius XI, if the great monuments which were ennobling and perfecting dead matter, were not at the same time degrading human souls (*Quadragesimo Anno*, NCWC, p. 43). Some of these voices were those of dreamers, building their castles in the clouds, seeing only the utopias of socialism. But others were men

of action, and we are proud to say that in Continental Europe most were members of an ancient Church which had not forgotten earlier pages of history where men did not starve in a land of plenty. In the parliament of France, Count de Mun, by the sheer eloquence of his oratory, hammered through reform after reform, while socialists steamed and conservatives talked of liberty—the empty liberty of the exploited and the unemployed. In Germany, a fighting bishop nobleman, Baron von Ketteler, began a movement which was to place his nation first in the world at that time for its treatment of labor. In England, Cardinal Manning went down to the docks to plead the cause of the long-shoreman, while our own Cardinal Gibbons insisted upon labor's sacred right to organize, even when many were suspicious of the secret oaths of the organization of that day, the Knights of Labor. Yet all those activities paled in comparison with the great document on the rights of labor issued by Pope Leo XIII and its companion masterpiece given forty years later by Pope Pius XI. Such was the activity of the ancient Church during the years when Marx wrote that religion was invented by exploiters to dull the pain of that great injustice.

Today the picture has changed. In a certain sense the period of struggle has passed. Only a few employers think of their workers as tools, to be given rights merely to the extent that their superior wisdom sees fit. Struggles today are largely over conflicts of interest, not over the denial of fundamental rights. The right of labor to organize, which Pope Leo championed so vigorously nearly fifty years ago, is now written into the basic law of the land. The leaders of labor are consulted by public

officials; their just demands are treated with respect. Of course, many problems still remain. There are still great islands of oppression and injustice. Yet the trend is upward! In a true sense we no longer speak of workmen as *labor exploited*, or even as *labor militant*. Today, rather, the phrase is *labor triumphant*. But this very triumph evokes a new phrase, *labor at the crossroads*. The labor movement in America is reaching maturity. It feels within its veins the surging fire of full manhood. But with power goes responsibility, and for this reason labor today faces its hour of decision, yes, even of destiny. It has many choices to make and upon its wisdom and insight in setting its course will depend the future of a great nation.

In the first place, labor today must decide its future attitude towards the employer. It approaches this choice with many emotions in its heart. In some cases, let us hope that they are few, there is a deep and bitter resentment smouldering beneath the surface rough with the scars of class conflict. Labor in this case comprises those who have seen the horror of industrial warfare. They have mourned with the widows of those whose only crime was that they loved too much their fellow men. Years filled with calloused cruelty have placed an almost impenetrable armor over their more gentle emotions. One has but to meet these men, their eyes burning with a steady, low fever, their hearts hardened like cold, silent steel, to know what the labor conflict has done in the United States. It will not do for us who have not suffered to mock at their wounds, or to hide our heads from this appalling indictment of national blindness. The easy dismissal of the armchair dictator who waves off the

spectre of evil and injustice with the flippant remark that "There is always something to be said for both sides", betrays a lack of moral indignation that is most unhealthy. Informed persons who know well the labor history of America, be their sympathies where they may, do not boast of certain things that have been done in the Land of the Free.

Yet to such laborers the religion of Christ makes a courageous challenge: Be bigger than revenge; show yourselves to be men of such greatness that you can rise above hatred. Revenge lowers a man to the same level as his oppressor. Hatred is a poison which hurts to a far greater degree him who nourishes it in his heart than it does its intended victim. A generous peace is a sign of greatness and an assurance of a tranquil future. Those who open wounds long since healed, by preaching the fatal message of class hatred, are no friends of labor. They seek to divide a nation in times of peace so that it will be helpless before its enemies from without.

But we Americans know better than to accept the poison of hatred. We have confidence in one another, knowing that an overwhelming percentage of our fellow citizens, be they owners of our factories or workers in them, are honest, God-fearing, decent men and women. They are not cruel, nor are they heartless, or even grossly selfish. Even where they oppress, it is often because of the great impersonal veil of the corporation which hides human misery beneath the golden mask of profits, or because of the relentless, crushing drive of competition. In some instances the sufferings of labor come from men mad with the craving for power, but in most cases one finds pressure from without, or ignorance, or



misunderstanding—all too human failings, from which none of us is exempt. If the innocent Saviour could exclaim from the Cross, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do" (*Luke*, 23: 24), we sinful men can well practice tolerance towards our fellows.

Surely labor will decide wisely at the first crossroad, for the road to the left into the valley of revenge goes on into the unhealthy swamps of national discord to emerge into the burning desert of civil war; but the road ahead passes through the green fields and smiling forests of national unity, to emerge into a vision of peace and prosperity. United we are invincible.

There is a second choice facing the great organized groups of workers today, a decision to be made which vitally affects the welfare of all within this nation. Bluntly, it concerns the Communists and Bundists within the movement. Here we must be mercifully harsh, like the doctor who removes a festering limb, lest life itself be snuffed away by its contagion. There is communism in parts of the labor movement. By boring-in tactics, representatives of this great enemy have reached positions of authority. In these positions they are a menace alike to labor and to the nation. This fact cannot be ignored. We know, of course, that some use the "red scare" as a means of fighting all unions. We know this and we discount it. We are not ignorant of the conditions which have fostered resentment and bitterness in the hearts of many workers. We are told that it is seeking heroic, saintly virtue to ask men beaten and bruised for nothing more criminal than handing out pamphlets, to put down the banner of revolution. In the name of God and coun-



try, we ask that heroic virtue. As God-fearing Americans we must put aside a movement which is threatening our national peace and unity. This is not the time to be fooled by a false cry for freedom of speech and the rights of minorities—traitors and agents of our enemies do not have the rights of children of the household. They should be purged from positions of authority and if possible expelled from the labor movement. They are not difficult to discover, for by their fruits you can know them. Their zeal is for the party line; their tactics the sowing of distrust, disunity, and defeatism. They are a minority, zealous, united, unprincipled. They will strike hard against those who attack them. But the American workman is no coward. We are confident that he will accept the challenge.

There now remains the third and final decision to be made. It is the choice between the path of narrow selfishness and the broad highway of national welfare. There are times when the pursuit of our interests, lawful and proper as they may be, may lead to great harm to the public at large and, by reaction, to the very interests which we are defending. Sometimes this inconvenience is gladly borne by informed persons, since they realize that through it alone can justice triumph. Thus, for example, in society as it is organized today the economic pressure of a strike may be the only means of winning claims which no fair judge would deny. The strike for union recognition, for reasonable improvements in wages, hours, and working conditions, for protection against extortion, arbitrary discharges, or similar abuses, may be entirely proper. But it is another and a different matter when the public is made to suffer because of disputes between

conflicting unions, claiming the same work. The multitude of petty claims, in some instances verging on outright extortion, can cumulate into a grievous burden. Behind these claims there is, of course, a long history. In some cases they are desperate if short-sighted efforts to prolong employment in industries where work is all too scarce. In others they are the tragic blight which has followed the civil war of labor, the heavy cross of fratricidal strife which needlessly crushes brothers in toil. But in any case they are occasions of public hardship and disunity in times of crisis.

There may be more than this. It is written in the cold, bleak pages of history that groups which sought private aims in an unreasonable manner, to the great detriment of the public welfare, soon felt the swift strong hand of reaction and retribution. Not long ago in Italy labor was strong enough to take over factories. Today labor disputes in that land are handled by the courts; there are no unions in the American sense of the word. But ten years ago in Germany and five years ago in France, labor dictated its own terms. Today it no longer *gives* dictation in either land. Even in the United States several states have recently enacted laws which definitely limit the right to strike. These lessons of history are so clear that they must be blind indeed who pass them by. Surely the God-fearing mass of American workmen, who revere their native land, who realize that the welfare of the community must be promoted by all, surely they do not welcome this unnecessary, dangerous quarrel with those whose hands are no less hardened by years of toil than their own. They must realize that labor unity is not a luxury, it is an imperative necessity. A nation

divided from within is easy prey to an enemy without. Liberty and all that it means to the heart of man cannot long survive where a nation is torn by factions and bitterly disputing groups. Our present Holy Father expressed this thought in his message to the American people: "Let the unions in question . . . act in such a manner that in their care for the interests of their class they violate no one's rights; let them continue to strive for harmony and respect the common weal of civil society" (*Sertum Laetitia*, NCWC, pp. 19-20). For this reason the voice of all patriotic citizens calls for a new type of sit-down strike, passive resistance by the rank and file against leaders who incite disunity. At all costs and at whatever sacrifice we must become one nation, united and free.

One word of explanation is needed before we finish. We have spoken today of duties and obligations, not of rights. This does not imply any blindness on our part to the rights of labor, all too imperfectly realized in the modern world. We gladly support the claims so brilliantly enunciated by Pope Pius XI: "But social justice cannot be said to have been satisfied as long as workingmen are denied a salary that will enable them to secure proper sustenance for themselves and for their families; as long as they are denied the opportunity of acquiring a modest fortune and forestalling the plague of universal pauperism; as long as they cannot make suitable provision through public or private insurance for old age, for periods of illness and unemployment" (*Atheistic Communism*, NCWC, pp. 36-37). We support these rights, and rights to decent working conditions, and to the organization and legislation which they imply.

In other times and circumstances we would dwell upon these claims. But the temper of the nation is different this Labor Day. In the sobering light of the great international crisis we speak of duties, not rights. We ask: How can we serve? not, What can we get? We wish to know our share of the common burden, trusting that others equally conscious of their duties will not infringe upon our rights. It is for this reason that we have endeavored to translate the age-old moral law, with its clear demands for civic duty and devotion to one general welfare, into the concrete terms of present events. We do this with the full consciousness that once we are convinced of the right way, we will not hesitate to follow it manfully and heroically. As crusaders of old, under the cry "God wills it", we press forward, inspired by that great master drive: For God and Country.

## LEADERS OF THE BLIND

Address delivered on September 8, 1940

We face a great social crisis in the United States today. No man endowed with the instincts of common humanity can ignore the fateful message written upon the wall of history in recent years. In a nation blessed by God with fertility of soil and abundance of natural resources, we have broad festering sores of farm and city poverty, which have brought to the body politic the disease of sickness, crime, and vice. It has been only too often noted that for youth today the dawn of maturity is overcast with the gray clouds of insecurity and despair, while the golden sunset of declining years is sometimes tarnished with want and misery. Anxiety over the future and the driving race for gain have stolen the joy and gladness even from those who for the moment seem secure. At times ours seems to be the curse of the ancient king whose touch turned all into gold, while he starved in the midst of undreamed-of wealth.

In these days of crisis there have arisen leaders who have promised to cure this gnawing cancer, if only we will take the simple remedy they prescribe. Each has a medicine, one wrapped in the red of communism, another in the green of an utopian, overnight change in our economic system, another in the black of some magic apathy, a supine submission to the forces of evil with the hope that somehow things will be better. These are the blind leaders of the blind, who grope and stumble on the brink of the abyss, crying in their absurd confidence that all will be well, if only men will follow them. What tragic



blindness, thus to deceive a nation in its hour of suffering!

In contrast to these easy paths leading to doom are the proposals, sane, balanced, founded on the bedrock of sound Christian morals and profound insight into human nature, which we have had from the pen of such men of God as the late Holy Father, Pope Pius XI. His careful studies of the world crisis have largely been overlooked by a world eager for a painless, easy way out of the depths. Yet the failure of these simple medicines and the growing tempo of world revolution have made many more humble and more thoughtful. It is to these inquiring souls that we dedicate these two talks, our discourse today devoted to the necessary task of clearing the ground of approaches which are shallow and incomplete, and our discourse next week where we discuss the Christian way to peace and unity.

Our first task today is to ask ourselves: What is the social crisis of the modern world? Is it merely another depression or do we face a turning point in world history? The answer of thoughtful men makes us pause. They insist that it is more than a mere depression. There is more here than the periodic lengthening of the breadlines and the cycles of shrinking profits. Because the obvious trend of recent years was so devastating, so painfully charged with disaster to all classes of society, we have overlooked another current far more dangerous. We do not lightly pass by the problem of depression. It is a reality which strikes fear into the heart of mankind, a fifth horseman of doom as terrible as the ancient four of conquest, war, famine, and death. Dreadful as it is, however, we have become hardened to its visitations, knowing from history that



sooner or later the scourge will pass on. Thus the days, bleak and barren, which began the last decade, were followed by years of relative prosperity. The average of industrial production and profits in the last five years differed but little from any five years in the Twenties. We hardly expect such activity and profits from business sick unto death. This assertion that the depression has passed may seem to be the bold statement of a dreaming optimist or of a calloused individualist who blinds himself to the misery of the great army of the unemployed. But such is not the case. Rather, the very contrast between the smoking chimneys of our factories and the ever deepening lines of care on the faces of the jobless tells of this new current of destiny which we overlooked in the wreckage of the penitent Thirties.

This current of death is the ever-increasing efficiency of our economic system, the fact that fewer and fewer workmen are needed to supply the wants of a nation. From the very beginning of modern capitalism new processes and new machines have snatched jobs from the hands of workers. But through these centuries there was one safety-valve which kept in check the dynamite of unemployment, for as men lost their jobs, the growth of the economic system gave them new and greater opportunities. To the confusion of Marx and the Communists, industry offered the common man luxuries unknown a century ago. Economic expansion was the remedy which cured our ills. There were many elements in this safety-valve of expansion. One was the increase of population—more men to till the soil and absorb the products of industry. Another was the colonization of new lands—the march of strong men into the unknown to wrest a fortune from re-

luctant nature. Still another was the fertile race springing from the minds of men of genius—the inventions that have changed the face of the world, the machines which harnessed the giants of power, steam, electricity, gasoline, to give us the great factory, the railroad, and the automobile. Faster and faster roared the turbines. Power, speed, wealth, prosperity—all grew in a raging flood until the world was dizzy with its pace. It could not stop; it must not stop; but it did stop!

Today what is the story? Let us look at the wreck of this safety-valve which had meant salvation to the worker displaced by efficiency. We were told that a growing population meant ever more hands to receive the output of the sleek, silvery machines. But today with the blight of city crowding and farm poverty, population is no longer growing, while the crowded boats at Ellis Island are but a fading memory. Then there was the development of young, vigorous nations with our surplus billions. We tried that in the hypnotic years of the Twenties, only to find that our billions had built us new competitors and to learn that debt can be repaid only by accepting goods of other lands which may compete with the products of our farmers and our laborers. But what of inventions, we ask? There is no answer today. There are no world-stirring discoveries, save those of war, which would bind a continent with ribbons of steel as did the railroads, or cords of concrete as did the automobile. No, with few exceptions, inventions today are of a different type, they are the type which sentences hundreds of thousands to that doom of industrial death which we call unemployment; and today there is no frontier for the dispossessed. Industry

has lowered costs, but it has not always lowered prices, and the great expansions of earlier days are no more.

It is hard to say these things. Impulsive men dismiss them as the pessimism of the academic dreamer. Yet one asks with monotonous persistence, where is the safety-valve of old which gave hope once again to those who were idle because no man would hire them? It is no answer to say that millions lack automobiles, radios, and decent houses, and that the supplying of these needs would leave our factories begging for new workers. Their need is not a demand, it is a longing, a hope, a mere wish. The underprivileged have nothing to offer in exchange for this wealth. Their labor is not wanted. What else can they give? Painfully we must confess that we have not yet learned the rules for making customers of these men and women. Our set of rules is simple, but it is out of date. The old rules call for saving and investing, hoping that this would mean new factories and new jobs. But we do not invest to build new factories when our present ones rarely run at full speed. The result is direct and tragic, idle men and idle billions. The rules of a growing capitalism will not work today. We face new problems and we need new thoughts. We have reached the end of an era; we must plan consciously for the future. The machine we have built up over the centuries has now reached the age when it will no longer run by itself.

With the world groaning in the throes of a new birth, we need the gift of wisdom and understanding. Naturally we turn to the complete solution offered by the popes of the social apostolate in preference to the over-simple answer of the medicine

men, be they found in the ranks of labor, or capital, or government. Simple solutions often solve nothing. Consider, for example, those who think only in terms of labor. To them there is but one answer, that of raising wages and shortening hours until the grim army of the unemployed becomes a battalion of happy, grimy workmen. In a nutshell, theirs is a national share-the-work program. Sometimes they add to this an indictment of capital for its greed and selfishness. There are even a few, rarely found among the responsible friends of labor, who go so far as to charge that the whole sickening chaos of today is a plot on the part of malevolent conspirators, men of a certain class, or race, or profession, who deliberately drain the life-blood of industry so that vampire-like they may fatten on its expiring body. Certainly in other lands silver-tongued orators have not hesitated to preach the doctrine of class hatred to the distressed millions who blindly followed their leadership.

But the American who loves the land of his birth will have no part with the demagogue. His common sense will tell him that no economic group profits from a depression. Labor suffers, it is true, and so does the farmer; but business men have also joined the breadlines, banks have failed by the thousands, and the values of stocks and bonds have dropped to fractions of their former levels. No, the grip of fear in these days spares none, not even the mightiest. Nor can we say that the simple program of raising wages and shortening hours, desirable as it is in many industries, is an all-sufficient answer. Pope Pius XI shows shrewd insight into the workings of economic laws when he cautions that even a good remedy may be taken to excess: "It is unjust

to demand wages so high that an employer cannot pay them without ruin, and with consequent distress amongst the working people themselves . . . To lower or raise wages unduly, with a view to private profit, and with no consideration for the common good, is contrary to social justice . . . ." (*Quadragesimo Anno*, NCWC, pp. 24-25). This fact is evident in many industries today. Thus higher wages for coal miners and higher costs of coal might mean more oil burners and fewer jobs in the mines. High costs of building have not made the industry prosperous. Sharing of work today might well be sharing poverty, for we do not make and distribute enough food, clothing, or housing for the needs of our people. Our real problem is that of drafting idle billions to make them work at new factories, which would speed ahead to bring prosperity to every home in the land. Reluctantly we are compelled to say to those who teach only in terms of labor: Your program is good, but it is not everything. Social reformers for the last century have bettered the condition of labor, and for this we praise them (*Quadragesimo Anno*, NCWC, pp. 7-12); but the great critical problem that leaves strong men rotting in idleness, is worse, not better. Their knife has cut away much that was festering and ugly—without it freedom would have long since yielded to bloody revolution—but they must cut even deeper to reach the root of this evil. Labor reform is a first step upward, but a weary road ahead still faces the pilgrim. The remedy of labor reform alone is not enough.

No less shortsighted is the program of some men of business. There are those who are only too willing to solve quickly problems which have



baffled the wisest. Their program too is simple: Let business run the country and all will be well; repeal the laws that have endeavored to put morality and decency into economic life; remove the barriers that protect the weak, be they consumers or laborers or investors, be they farmers or bank depositors, and then we will have prosperity. Leave us free even to exploit and defraud as we did in the past, and for this price we will release our idle billions. Blind leaders of the blind! Forgetful of the terrible price that was paid for the frenzied finance of the Twenties, of their own utter helplessness to emerge of their own strength from the wreckage which their freedom brought down upon their heads! It is not a healthy symptom for the future of America when the news and editorial columns of our papers carry dirges about business languishing in chains and capital fearful of its shadow, while the financial pages of these same papers tell of business activity and profits and the grasping of new stocks and bonds by hungry investors. It was such narrow blindness which was condemned by Pope Pius XI: ". . . immense power and despotic economic domination is concentrated in the hands of a few . . . Unbridled ambition for domination has succeeded the desire for gain; the whole economic life has become hard, cruel and relentless in a ghastly measure" (*Quadragesimo Anno*, NCWC, pp. 32-33). These are strong words. Let us hope that in America they apply to the exceptional few. But in all candor we must admit that the leaders of business are no more far-seeing than the leaders of labor or of government. Too often we have blamed individual men for events which were dictated by the broad, onrushing sweep of history. If only we



could open our eyes to the truth that we face a new era, where our saved billions will no longer march forth of themselves to be changed into new factories or railroads or mines to absorb our idle workers, then we could enter upon the task of building a new and better America. May God give us the humility to put aside the blinders of class thinking and class prejudice. May He give us the strength manfully to renounce the childish habit of seeking a scapegoat, an object of blame—so that we may face the future a united nation, honest, courageous, resolute.

Our final word is to those who think that salvation is by way of government alone. Reformers there are who would have a law for every evil and for every problem. There are fanatics who would abolish the stock exchange, or jail bankers for refusing to make loans against their better judgment, or make harsh language by striking workers a federal offense, to receive its proper reward in Atlanta or Alcatraz. Of course we must not confuse these excessive demands with proper social legislation, enacted by the State for the common good. Certainly Pope Pius XI made no compromise with that false impartiality by which a government allows millions of its citizens to be exploited and oppressed by the strong and the unprincipled. He quoted with approval Pope Leo's statement that government must take special care of the poor and the working classes, as they often are unable to help themselves (*Quadragesimo Anno*, NCWC, pp. 9-10). He insisted that the state should regulate the use of property so that it serves the common good as well as particular interests (*ibid*, p. 17). The Holy Father warned that it was the special duty of a sovereign

“to create those material conditions of life without which an orderly society cannot exist. The State must take every measure necessary to supply employment, particularly for the heads of families and for the young” (*Atheistic Communism*, NCWC, p. 50). The general welfare is the supreme law and its reasonable pursuit is not an interference with the rights of any man.

What we fear is something different; it is the building up of crushing powers which leave the individual submerged and helpless. Today we see the growth of such power, on the one hand corporation law permitting the control of billions in economic wealth to be in the hands of a few, and on the other the efforts of government to regulate this giant in the interests of the common weal. The second grant of power is made necessary by the first, but we would be better off if neither had to exist to this degree and we had something of the freedom enjoyed by the laborer and the small business man centuries ago. In one sense a powerful government is a guarantee of freedom, since other economic groups are so strong as to challenge any but the sovereign. But this is only a concession to an unhealthy state of affairs. Our ultimate aim is an even diffusion of power, with the individual stronger in relation to the group, be it a corporation, a union, or government, than he is today. Freedom is too precious for us to lose it without a struggle.

We have reviewed the divided counsel which confronts us today. Our social problems are great and they are critical. The rapid march of revolution in other lands tells us of the urgency of the modern crisis. We cannot afford the luxury of narrow partisanship. There is much valuable truth in

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the solutions proposed by the spokesmen of labor, capital, and political reform. But singly none of them is the whole truth and we cannot afford anything less than the whole truth. It is *our* destiny to forge once again the bonds of national unity. This picture of a nation united will be the final step towards the goal of Christian patriotism in the national crisis.

## A NATION UNITED

Address delivered on September 15, 1940

Thus far in this series of talks we have considered the social crisis of our day. We saw the partial answers and half truths, the fatal blindness of men who regard national tragedy in the narrow perspective of class interest or partisan welfare. We saw some truth in each of these limited programs, but truth poisoned with terrible errors, not the majestic plan of salvation which we seek so earnestly in these days of darkness. To reach this kernel of truth, it was necessary to attack the hard shell of error which encased it. As a result our remarks were in a sense destructive, as an architect must first tear down the slums to replace them with beautiful homes, or as a surgeon must first cut away the diseased tissue that the healing powers of nature may be released. But it is not enough to destroy evil; we must replace it with something better. Thus our task this evening is to examine the blueprints for a united America, that we may work together unto victory.

We are suggesting a program which should not be new to the American people. It has been presented in the writings of the Popes; it was analysed in a letter issued this year by leaders of the Catholic Church in the United States; it has been explained in countless articles and talks given throughout the land. Yet in all honesty we cannot claim that it has been widely received. Our press showed polite interest and then all but the most thoughtful forgot it. Yes, in a sense it was a failure. But it was a failure, not of the master plan worked out

by these wise and holy men, experienced in history and all too well acquainted with the frailty of human nature, but a failure on our part to grasp a truth deeper than the superficial promises of the medicine men and broader than the narrow catchwords of class warfare. In the past we have ignored these telling truths because they were broad moral principles, when we wanted something definite and concrete, what we would call a streamlined practical approach. We passed them by because they demanded sacrifice of us, and we were interested only in the easy ways of solving our greatest crisis. We rejected them because they appealed to periods of history which we call dark, barbaric days, unworthy of consideration by us who have succeeded so well in solving the social problems of our day. Yes, in the past we were unprepared for the message given by these men, and we were disappointed in it, just as years ago men turned away from a Teacher from Galilee who taught hard sayings rather than brilliant sophisms. But today perhaps we are better prepared. We have seen too many sparkling plans fail simply because men did not have the good will to accept them. We have tried the easy ways and found them paths of disillusionment. Now we are not so sure that the surging current of events in recent centuries has followed the best direction. With humble hearts we are more willing to listen to those who have studied history and the heart of man. Given this spirit of open-minded willingness to learn, we can better examine the plan so ardently advocated by the late sovereign pontiff.

Pope Pius XI proposed one all-embracing solution to the social problem of today. Simply stated,



it is a policy of planned cooperation among the great forces which constitute our social order, that is, capital, labor, and government. It calls for an organic unity in society, to replace the viciously competing groups which today make economic and political life a warfare instead of a rational solution of a common problem. This unity would not be something accidental and temporary, such as we achieve under the emotional fervor of war. It would be as permanent and definite as the union of the cells and tissues and nerves which make up the human body. The component parts of our economic society would work in harmony as brain, muscle, and heart unite to foster the welfare of the entire body.

There would be organization throughout the system. Not eight million but fifty million workers would belong to groups which could meet with their employers. Among the representatives of capital, none would draw apart in isolation or self-sufficient egoism, but rather all would meet in proper groups to discuss among themselves, and with labor and government, their mutual problems. In these meetings a different attitude would prevail from that too common today. Instead of hostility and assumed antagonism among the classes, there would be mutual consultation and cooperation. As in a well-ordered home, there would be a rational planning of tasks, not the bickering, suspicion, and distrust fostered over many long years in the past. Where decisions could not be made by mutual consent, or where the general welfare demanded it, then the hand of government would enter, as a father must at times overrule the shortsighted wishes of his children.



This permanent organization of industry, capital, and government would decide the technical policies needed to make our economic system function smoothly. In each field and with due regard for other industries, questions of prices and wages, of investment and employment, could be answered. With the good will and common sense we all show in our own family affairs we would say: We have the material resources, the technical knowledge, and the manpower to produce what our nation needs. One thing we have lacked in the past is teamwork. We will now unite and in a sensible manner go about the business of making a living. We never come home from work and find our children hungry and our wives in tears because there is too much food, too many cooking utensils, and too many willing helpers anxious to do their share. That sort of thing could happen only in a fantasy as strange as Alice in Wonderland. Yet our attitude towards economic life has been no less fantastic. Scientists and social students tell us that a sensible use of our human and material resources would soon abolish poverty. But we have persisted blindly in following rules which have failed. We insisted upon the clenched fist as the rule of business life and not the open palm of friendship. Is it any wonder that we did not succeed? Is it too much now to ask for another method, that of cooperation and harmony?

Such is the simple but revolutionary idea advocated by the Popes. It merely calls for bringing to the business day the decencies and consideration which we all show at home. This is a program of basic humanity, acceptable to all men of good will. A few, it is true, may reject it through misunder-

standing, perhaps because of certain phrases used in describing it, such as "guild" or "corporative". Yet in context these words offer no difficulty. In praising the medieval guild, the Popes are advocating order, and planning, and harmony in economic life. The guild of the thirteenth century was a stable union of capital and labor which ensured justice to both, at the same time protecting the consumer from fraud and exploitation. Here was a period in which limited resources were used sensibly, with little luxury and no unemployment; in contrast to the anarchy and jungle-law of later years. This organic union of economic society may also be called corporative. It is a far cry from such order and purpose to the almighty state which would usurp the place of God Himself. Simple sanity is all that is meant by these phrases which have at times occasioned regrettable interpretations of the great papal encyclicals.

In connection with the ideal of the Popes, we do not ignore the many obstacles which it faces. It calls for national self-discipline and self-sacrifice, just as peace within the walls of the home is possible only where selfishness and pride are curbed. The principle of absolute freedom, fostered by centuries of lawless individualism, would have to yield to a more restrained spirit of initiative, tempered by the demands of the general welfare. Under this system neither business, nor labor, nor government would be absolute dictator in the economic sphere. All would sacrifice some of their present powers. These sacrifices would not be something entirely new, for even at the present time these groups find their whims and fancies curbed by conflicts of interests. In any case, the results of a peaceful work-

ing out of national problems would far outweigh the sacrifices involved. Some, of course, would try to gain special advantages by following a selfish and independent path, but the privileges given to those who conform to wise rules and, if necessary, the force of law, could keep them in harmony with public policy and the common good. Our traffic laws discourage unwise individualism; our business laws could do the same.

It will take patriotism and idealism to follow a program such as the one just outlined. But it would take the blindness of a madman not to follow it. Let us look at the alternatives offered to us and see whether or not economic decency is not at the same time common sense. Apart from the middle way of Christian cooperation, or the fearful extremes of dictatorship, red or black, there are two really possible solutions of the social crisis. One would be a step backward to the law of the jungle, in which every man would be for himself and no one would care for the unfortunate. The other would be the effort to obtain reform, but to impose this on social groups which were hostile to one another, seeking only their own interests, with no concern for the common welfare. Yet either of these methods would be a tragic, fatal mistake.

Let us picture the nation taking the path of pure individualism, undiluted by Christian pity or Christian love. Logically our government would then stand before the people, Pilate-like, and wash its hands of responsibility towards the weak and helpless. The pitiful mass of the unemployed would be cut off from public help and left to shift for itself. Millions of families would then be shielded from starvation only by the thin wall of private

charity, which today, with all the aid of government, can answer only some of the heart-rending appeals made by the destitute. We would close our eyes to that terrible litany of judgment: "For I was hungry, and you gave me not to eat" (*Matt. 25: 42*), and leave Christ's poor to waste away in misery and loneliness. Such a government would repeal the laws which protect the investor, the consumer, the farmer, the laborer, and abandon these groups to naked exploitation and terrible injustices in the pattern of the robber barons of the last century. The sheer logic of such a system would array every man against his brother. The edifice of industry would then be like the cities of ancient Assyria, built upon the bleaching bones of the conquered. A ghastly picture is this, more like a caricature, yet it is nothing less than a faithful deduction from the premises of individualism. Clearly this could not happen here. The flames of revolution would redden the skyline of our cities before American citizens would submit to this mockery of freedom. The insolence of the proud and the callousness of the selfish would be expiated in blood, were our nation asked to bow its head to such tyranny. No, the day of untamed individualism is over. That page of history is turned and sealed.

In contrast today we have reform by force and decency under duress. The economic power of the labor union and the political power of pressure groups have given strength to the weak and security to the oppressed. The unemployed are aided by the funds of government, even when this means a growing public debt. Moreover, the probing knife of inquiry has reached to the more basic causes of economic distress. Thus the shocking abuses of

finance and of corporate power which sickened the public conscience not many years past have been investigated and punished, and their causes have been at least in part removed by law. We have begun to break the strangling grip of excessively high prices so that the idle billions which now glut our financial system might be invested in new factories and new jobs. In these years we have shared more evenly the common burden of taxation. The farmer has seen the vision of a new freedom; he is no longer haunted by the fear that ours might be an enslaved, tenant peasantry. This has been our preface to social reform; perhaps in the historical setting in which it originated it was the only alternative to social revolution. In our day of crisis drastic means were necessary; but today we pause and ask ourselves honestly and openly, is such reform by pressure groups a permanent solution to the problems of America?

In answer we are forced to confess that this is hardly the way of enduring peace. In the few years devoted to the trial of this method, there has arisen in the nation a tremendous wave of bitterness and rebellion on the part of those forced to submit to changes which they did not approve. There has appeared definite and open political warfare between the upper and the lower classes of society. An unceasing barrage of newspaper and radio propaganda leaves the thinking citizen in utter confusion and bewilderment. As a result it is not uncommon to hear from the same lips the espousal of high social principles and the acceptance of reactionary policies which would completely nullify those principles. Even more ominous signs are visible to those who would but see. For example, there have been cam-



paigns against public debt in which the question is treated as a purely technical problem, without mention of the plight of the unemployed. In some quarters, this whole explosive problem of human misery is treated as if it were merely a political matter, to be solved simply by voting for or against a candidate for public office. The question is made even more confusing by apostles of starry utopias and painless remedies for every problem that arose since the angel of the flaming sword barred men from earthly paradise. As if this were not enough, there is the noisy agitation by groups which owe allegiance to foreign powers; there is the veto power of protest on the part of special interests affected by adjustment to the world crisis; and there is the clamor of pressure groups for favors from a government already overburdened with crushing problems. All these factors have led to stresses and strains which have stretched national unity and solvency to the breaking point; and these forces increase in violence every day that a basic solution is postponed. As they grow, one is bound to fear internal upheaval and class strife which would leave scars far deeper than those of our regrettable War between the States. And finally, to reach the depths of pessimism, we note that these same symptoms preceded the breakdown of democracy in that long litany of nations shackled in recent years with the chains of dictatorship. It is all too easy to see the blindness of the democratic leaders of these nations, but in the midst of our own banquet the fateful fingers are writing on the wall a message of warning and prophecy.

It is painful thus to recite a dirge of doom, but it would be treason to be silent when the fate of a

nation is at stake. The road of class strife no less than the way of individualist exploitation leads to the precipice—there is but one path left. The only practical route is that of cooperation. The so-called dreamy idealism of Christianity is more wideawake than the worldly wisdom of the reactionary or the class-hating reformer. The demands of kindness and brotherhood are more than the wishful thinking of medieval monks, they are the tonic which will revive a sick and aging democracy. We may no longer say: “*If* we only could unite to solve these problems”—we *must* unite or perish. The high patriotism of today finds expression not merely on the military but primarily on the social battlefield. Ours is a glorious past, the tradition of Washington, and Lincoln, and Lee, the memories of Valley Forge and Manassas. Ours too is the duty and destiny to keep alive that tradition, lest our flag be trodden in the dust by a conqueror. Before us there must be the vision of the unquenched light of Gettysburg and beneath it the motto which should inspire our future: To a nation united in peace eternal.

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