

The
**ASSOCIATION of CATHOLIC
TRADE UNIONISTS**

O. I. P. S. P. ...
Holy Name ...



By

REV. JOSEPH OBERLE, C.S.S.R., M.A.

PRAYER OF THE WORKER

Lord Jesus, Carpenter of Nazareth, You were a worker as I am, give to me and all workers of the world the privilege to work as You did, so that everything we do may be to the benefit of our fellow men and the greater glory of God the Father. Thy Kingdom come into the factories and into the shops, into our homes and into our streets. Give us this day our daily bread. May we receive it without envy or injustice. To us who labor and are heavily burdened, send speedily the refreshment of Thy love. May we never sin against Thee. Show us Thy way to work, and when it is done, may we with all our fellow workers rest in peace. Amen.

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I. INTRODUCTION

It was Leo XIII who made it clear to the world that the working man has a right—an inborn right—to join in associations with his fellow workers. According to Leo XIII and his four successors, organizations of workers should be built up not only for “business unionism”—to get for the worker better wages, hours and working conditions—but should work, first of all, for that general structure of society in which the battle between economic groups can be brought to an end and their co-operation can be guaranteed—the New Social Order.

In the days when Leo wrote there was great danger for Catholics in the “neutral” or non-Catholic unions. Naturally, then, he and his successor, Pius X urged that Catholic unions be formed as a means to bring about justice and to preserve human rights. However, Pius X realized that it would be impossible to have every Catholic worker in a Catholic union and he left it to the bishops to approve (notice, not merely “to tolerate”), the non-Catholic unions which Catholics might join. Pius XI understood the conditions of our times and he developed the idea further. Since Catholic workers, he said, “have no choice but to enroll themselves in neutral unions” then:

It belongs to the Bishops to permit Catholic workingmen to join these unions where they judge that circumstances render it necessary and there appears no danger for religion, observing, however, the rules and precautions recommended by Our Predecessor of saintly memory, Pius X.

Among these precautions the first and most important is that, side by side with these trade unions, there must always be associations which aim at giving their members a thorough religious and moral training, that these in turn may impart to the labor unions to which they belong the upright spirit which should direct their entire conduct.

Adapted from materials presented to Catholic University in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts.

Thus will these unions exert a beneficent influence far beyond the ranks of their own members. (*Quadragesimo Anno*, p. 9, The Paulist Press.)

“There *must* always be—side by side with the trade unions—associations which aim at giving their members a thorough religious and moral training.” Now is there such an association in the United States,—this “first and most important precaution”—to safeguard the Catholic trade union member? The following pages may answer this question.

II. BEGINNINGS

While many shouted “Communism” and “Racketeering” at labor unions, Catholics have often said to themselves: “The Popes have said something about working men and about labor unions but what can an individual worker like myself do about it?” Many Catholic workers, members of unions, knowing that the charge of Communism or racketeering could not be pinned on their unions have wondered what they, as Catholics, could do to keep the unions at their best.

Martin Wersing felt that way. He had studied the encyclicals of the Popes on labor and on labor relations. He knew that justice and human rights had an important part to play in industry and in labor unions. But what could he, an individual Catholic—what could any one man do to bring the doctrines of the Popes into action. He worked the problem about in his mind for some time.

A. In New York City

In New York City, one day late in 1936, Martin Wersing accidentally picked up a copy of the paper, *The Catholic Worker*, which had been thrown aside in the subway. In that paper he read an article on the Christian labor program. Its author was a zealous young convert, John Cort, and Wersing decided to meet him, to talk over with him the possibility of a movement to put the Christian principles into action on the labor-front. The two men brought together their friends who had similar interests in a Christian labor program.

On February 27, 1937, the first formal meeting of the group was held. There were about twelve persons present, several of them young women. They decided to study the program contained in the papal encyclicals with a view to putting it into practice. As a Catholic group they felt the need of a priest-advisor and one of their first moves was to approach Father John P. Monaghan who became the chaplain of the group by the appointment of Cardinal Hayes. At first they called themselves: "The Catholic Association of Trade Unionists" but soon changed the name to the more exact name which the organization has used ever since—The Association of Catholic Trade Unionists. The use of the initials, A. C. T. U., has resulted in the abbreviated name: "The Actu" and in the name "Actists" sometimes applied to the members.

This group began immediately to hold regular classes on the social encyclicals of Pope Leo XIII and Pope Pius XI, together with classes in parliamentary procedure and public speaking. These weekly classes continued until the fall of 1937, when a labor school was begun.

Once a complete and democratic organization has been set up, the Actu devoted much of its energy to increasing its membership. The original small group grew slowly. As the principles of the Association were made known through rallies and bulletins, through its bi-weekly paper, and through contact with organizations on the labor-front, more and more members joined its ranks. In about a year after its birth the Actu established its own offices in Canal Street and less than a year after that, it was obliged to move into larger quarters at the present address on Lafayette Street. Here a full-time voluntary worker attends to callers during the day and numbers of volunteers meet in the evenings to handle the growing office work.

B. In Other Cities

It did not take long for news of the Actu to spread across the country. By means of personal contacts, by pamphlets, by leaflets and by publicity in Catholic papers and magazines the founding members tried to arouse the interest of Catholic trade unionists not only in New York but elsewhere.

In Pittsburgh, Fathers Charles Owen Rice and Carl P. Hensler, through their energetic interest in labor problems, had attracted a group of men around them. This group, called: "The Catholic Radical Alliance" offered its assistance to the workers in a number of strikes in 1937 and helped in the solution of labor disputes. Realizing that there were many others who were interested in applying the Christian labor principles, they looked for some kind of organization that would bring these people together and unify their activities. The Association of Catholic Trade Unionists seemed to be just such an organization. In the spring of 1938 a chapter of the A.C.T.U. was formed in Pittsburgh, using the same name and the same principles that had been adopted by the New York group.

From its very beginning, the Pittsburgh chapter has enjoyed the enthusiastic support of Bishop Boyle. Thus Pittsburgh became another center devoted to the spreading of Christian social principles through rallies and through labor schools. At the same time the chapter took an active part in applying these principles on the labor-front.

In Detroit a chapter of the Actu was organized by July, 1938. The Detroit chapter grew around the interest of Father Sebastian Erbacher, O.F.M., and a small group of zealous laymen in the problems of the working man. Detroit is a strong center of unionism because of its large-scale industries and great numbers of the union members are Catholics. Under the inspiration of this group and with the help of materials supplied by the New York Actu several influential union members gathered in the spring and organized a chapter of the Association and through their zeal and activity have made theirs one of the key chapters. Archbishop Mooney is greatly responsible for the success of the Actu in Detroit. He has made it the subject of many of his speeches and of pastoral letters. He has taken the organization of labor schools in parishes throughout the archdiocese as a special mission and he frequently takes part in Actu celebrations. The Detroit chapter is developing into a complete archdiocesan organization composed of branches in parishes throughout the archdiocese.

Next in order of establishment came the San Francisco group. A department-store strike in the fall of 1938 involved

a great number of Catholics among the strikers. The labor principles of the encyclicals were well known to some of the strikers, and they felt "that if Catholic people were informed of the Church's attitude towards Labor's right to organize, and if necessary, to strike, they would not go through the picket lines to work or to shop." These principles were outlined in a letter which was addressed to Catholics known to be crossing the picket lines. The letter was signed in the name of one of the workers, as representing the "Association of Catholic Workers." While there was technically no such organization (except in so far as the Catholics taking part in the strike worked together in advertising the strike), this action showed the same convictions about the papal encyclicals which had inspired the young Actu chapters in the east. It also showed that news of the eastern organization had reached the west coast.

Partly to justify the use of the word "association," some of the strikers decided to call a meeting to which Catholic union members were invited. At this meeting on October 17, 1938, plans were made for an organization of Catholic trade unionists and with the adoption of the constitution and other materials as supplied by the New York chapter, the San Francisco group became a chapter in the now nation-wide movement. By the appointment of Archbishop Mitty, Father Hugh Donohoe became chaplain of the new chapter.

In the spring a 1939 a chapter was begun in Chicago. Like the San Francisco group the Chicago chapter had its beginning in a strike, the strike of the American Newspaper Guild against the Hearst papers. Cardinal Mundelein's School of Social Action had not only inspired great numbers of the clergy but had insisted upon leadership among the laity, in social problems. A group of three priests, working with some Catholics of the American Newspaper Guild, formed a center which grew into a chapter of the Actu. Like Detroit, Chicago has a large union population which numbers a great many Catholics among its members. It was natural, then, that once the Chicago chapter had organized, the zeal of its members would have a large field in which to operate. The Chicago chapter has interested a great number of priests, a condition due partly to the organization of schools in parishes throughout the city.

C. Movement Towards National Organization

By the spring of 1939 the news of the Actu and its message had spread across the entire country. More and more priests and laymen considered it the ideal method for putting the Christian social principles into action. Besides the active chapters described, other centers had been formed in Cleveland, Oklahoma City, Ponca City, Akron, Glassport, Scranton, and Los Angeles. Because of the increasing number of groups, their various sizes and various degrees of efficiency, it was felt necessary to have some sort of organization on a national scale to unify and to stimulate the movement. The New York chapter had acted as the parent and advisor of many of the chapters. Therefore, in April, 1939, it sent out an invitation to all interested groups to attend a national convention in June of that year. However, the convention was indefinitely postponed because of the Social Action Congress in Cleveland in June of that year.

A good number of members of the various Actu chapters attended the Social Action Congress and they met and held two informal conferences concerning the aims and methods of the Association. This was the first attempt at national unity and the representatives of the various chapters showed that they were all working for the same high ideals. Two of these informal conferences were held and representatives of about ten chapters took part in them.

A temporary executive committee was elected to handle the national affairs of the Actu and to give it national publicity, until the committee could call a convention. Plans for this convention continued, with the hope that the date might be set for the fall of 1939, but the convention did not take place until a year later.

During that time new groups continued to spring up here and there. The group which had existed at Cleveland before the Social Action Congress developed into a well-knit chapter on July 15, 1939. The active membership of this group was small but it set out on a program of education through rallies and through a course of lectures on the papal encyclicals.

Another city to organize an affiliated group was Newark, N. J. The neighboring New York chapter and the activity of some of the members of that chapter in upper Jersey were the inspiration of some Catholic workers in Newark. They approached Father Lambert Dunne, O.S.B., and with his help an Actu chapter developed during 1939. Since that time the chapter has specialized in legislative proposals affecting social and labor conditions and has actively taken part in labor problems.

D. The First National Convention

During the spring and summer of 1940 the executive committee laid definite plans for a national convention. The various chapters helped in the selection of the place and of the business of the convention. This convention met at Cleveland on August 31st, and for three days occupied itself with a full schedule of business as well as a program of spiritual and social activities.

The most important result of the convention was the adoption of "Articles of Federation." These "Articles" set certain standards required of all chapters for affiliation in the national organization. The control of the chapters, however, was not made subject to a national authority because each chapter functions under the bishop of the diocese and has its own particular problems to meet in its own particular way. The Articles of Federation created the office of "National Director" whose duties are:

1. to establish and maintain liaison among the chapters, gathering information as to policies and problems of each chapter, and distributing the same to other chapters by means of regular memoranda.
2. to promote organizing activities towards the end of forming new chapters in the dioceses where no chapters now exist.

A "National Council" was also created. This council, composed of two members from each chapter (one of them, the chaplain), has the duty of reviewing and guiding the activity of the National Director. It also sits as a trial board in cases

of discipline or expulsion of members from any of the chapters. These two offices of "National Director" and "National Council" are the only national authority to which the individual chapters are subject.

Under the requirements set by the Articles of Federation and the rules and regulations made by the National Director, eight of the groups existing at the time of the First National Convention have become charter chapters and four new groups have been officially chartered since that time. Groups in about ten other cities are hoping to be affiliated in the near future.

The Second National Convention met in Pittsburgh, August 31st, to September 1, 1941. This convention continued the work of the First Convention in further unifying the Actu and in inspiring the delegates with a renewed apostolic spirit to carry back to their chapters.

This brief historical sketch shows that the various groups are the flowering of seed planted by the papal encyclicals. Across the country the ideas of the encyclicals had taken root and blossomed into the same type of activity and the same type of zeal among laymen and priests. This activity and zeal generated a nation-wide movement which has been unified and organized mostly through the energy of the founding members of the various chapters.

III. PRINCIPLES AND INTERNAL STRUCTURE

A. Principles

The Association of Catholic Trade Unionists is not a secret society. It has a definite code of principles that have been approved by many bishops and those principles can be easily appreciated and accepted by all workers regardless of creed.

The first requirement for membership in the Association is that one be a Catholic. It is not enough merely to be called a Catholic. To the Actu, Catholicity means a complete adherence to all the truths of the Catholic faith and a devotion to her social principles as well. While it is true that many non-Catholics would gladly join an association for working for industrial democracy, "the Actu does not permit non-Catholics

to join because its fundamental purpose is to spread the teachings of the Catholic Church and it could hardly expect persons who do not accept these teachings to aid in spreading them.” Moreover, the Catholicity demanded of members implies the automatic exclusion of those who believe in social doctrines or organizations which oppose Christian social teachings, such as Communism, Socialism or Fascism. Those whose faith grows cold or who give allegiance to any of these isms are liable to expulsion from the Actu.

A second qualification for Actu membership is membership in a *bona fide* trade union. This excludes members of company unions, but not members of independent unions, provided that these unions are real agencies for collective bargaining. Special consideration is made for those who hope to be union members or who hold withdrawal cards from unions.

There are two other groups welcomed into the ranks of the “Actists.” The first group is made up of priests. Each chapter has a chaplain appointed by the bishop in whose diocese the chapter functions. Besides the chaplain there are priest-members who teach in the schools, speak at rallies and strike meetings, arbitrate labor cases and attempt settlements. The second group is made up of lawyers who are willing to devote time and talent to the interests of Labor. For the lawyers there is a special department within the Association, known as the “Catholic Labor Defense League.” The League and its activities will be described in a later section.

While the application for membership varies slightly in some of the chapters the standard application blank contains a four-fold pledge:

1. to abide by the teachings and practices of the Catholic Faith;
2. to oppose Fascists, Communists, Nazis, racketeers and their philosophies;
3. to abide by the rules and regulations of the Actu and of the local chapters.
4. to be faithful to one’s union, maintaining dues and attending meetings regularly.

This application must be endorsed by two Actu members, and in some cases the applicant is recommended by his parish priest. The applicant is then admitted or denied admission by a membership committee or by the executive committee of the chapter, since it is not unknown that members of un-Christian or radical organizations have attempted to become members of the Actu for their own purposes.

In the words of one Constitution, it is the purpose of these organized Catholics:

to foster and spread in the American Labor Movement sound trade unionism based on Christian principles, first, by bringing to Catholic workers in particular, and all workers in general, a knowledge of these principles, and second, by supplying an organization to put these principles into practice.

This is in substance the purpose of each of the chapters though some of the constitutions explain the purpose in more detail.

Moreover, the members subscribe to a "creed" of rights and duties. This is a code of principles drawn from various sources. Some of the principles are taken directly from the papal encyclicals; some are conclusions drawn from principles of economics; others are a matter of justice demanded by common decency itself, apart from Christian teaching, and still others are based upon the long-range view of a moral economic order as Pope Pius XI planned it. There may be some disagreement about the duties or about their binding force but most of the great teachers of Christian social doctrines agree on the principles of this creed. Membership in the Actu requires a whole-hearted effort to put these principles into action. The following is a reproduction of the creed as contained in the *Actu Catechism*.

The Worker Has a Right to

Job security.

An income sufficient to support himself and his family in reasonable comfort.

Collective bargaining through union representatives freely chosen.

A share in the profits after just wages and return to capital
have been paid.
Strike and picket peacefully for a just cause.
A just price for the goods he buys.
Decent working hours.
Decent working conditions.

The Worker Has a Duty to

Perform an honest day's work for an honest day's pay.
Join a *bona fide* union.
Strike only for just cause and after all other legitimate
means have been exhausted.
Refrain from violence.
Respect property rights.
Abide by just agreements freely made.
Enforce strict honesty and democracy within his union.
Co-operate with honest employers who respect rights, to
bring about a peaceful solution of industrial war by
setting up guilds for the self-regulation of industry and
producer co-operatives, in which the worker shares as
a partner in the ownership, management and profits of
the business in which he works.

While most of the world is satisfied to carp and to criticize, the Actu has attempted to set up a positive and constructive code. While many shout "Communism" and "Racketeering" at the unions, the Actu has kept before its mind the call of Pius XI for associations: "which aim at giving their members a thorough religious and moral training, that these may impart to the labor unions to which they belong the upright spirit which should direct their entire conduct." (*Quadragesimo Anno*, p. 9, The Paulist Press.)

B. Internal Structure

1. Meetings

All of the chapters have at least one general membership meeting each month. These meetings are conducted in strict parliamentary form. This not only helps to carry on the business of the Association in a most democratic manner but it

also gives the members practice in the method of exercising intelligent democracy within their own unions.

The meetings are always opened with a special "Prayer of the Worker," first used by Actu-New York and approved by Cardinal Hayes, in December, 1937. The prayer will be found on the second cover page of pamphlet.

One portion of these meetings is devoted to organizational business and the other portion is devoted to education; this section is generally an exposition of Catholic social thought by a layman or priest. In this way the aims of the American Labor Movement and the ideals of Christian social teaching are harmonized and kept before the members.

2. Conferences

Within the chapters there are many members of the same industry and of the same unions. It is natural for these men to discuss their own peculiar problems. The Actu soon discovered this and as a result, several of the chapters have a "conference" policy, of some sort.

In New York (according to one description):

these conferences meet independently of the general membership to discuss their industry's particular problems in the light of Actu philosophy and to prepare long-range programs. When any urgent situation arises, the conference decides upon fundamentals and other workers (not necessarily Catholic), in the same industry are invited to the conference meeting to enter the discussions on technique.

In Detroit, however, the conference is composed of members of a particular local and no programs or policies are mapped out. Rather, the conference members with their chaplain merely discuss their problems in the light of Catholic teaching and follow an order of business described below.

Each conference has a special time for its meetings and conducts its discussions in the presence of its particular chaplain. When the idea of the conference was first suggested there was some opposition to it, "because of its similarity to

the communist cell.” There has been opposition from others outside of the Actu; some reaction has come from unions fearing factions within their ranks; some opposition has come from labor leaders who apparently fear the loss of dictatorial power. However, the working of these conferences for intelligent, far-sighted unionism has justified the Actu’s conviction that: “as people began to see how the conference worked, and that everything was done in the open, more and more unionists are coming to the meetings.”

As for “factions,” it is the avowed purpose of the Actu to prevent them within unions. As the *Actu Catechism* states:

The Actu will expose evil methods in a given union, and teach its members how to combat such methods. But it will leave all action relating to the internal affairs of a union to the members of that union.

The Actu does not wish to set the Catholic members of any union apart from their non-Catholic brothers. When an individual union falls into evil practices or becomes the tool of radical leaders, Actists within that union should certainly take determined constitutional action to remedy the trouble. But they should take action in common cause with their non-Catholic fellow members who agree with them on general policies. It is very important that the Catholic unionists join forces with those of their non-Catholic brethren who believe in God and who want a sound, peaceful solution of industrial strife.

The meetings of these conferences are not merely open forum discussions of labor problems. As described in a memorandum of the Detroit chapter, the meetings are as formal as the general membership meetings. The opening prayer is followed by a period of spiritual instruction. A second period of the meeting is devoted to educational matters, as for example, explanations of points in parliamentary law or of the principles of the Association. The third and final section of the meeting is devoted to the problems and affairs of the particular union or industry which the conference represents. However, it must be emphasized that it is left to the individual to make the conference policies effective.

Without doubt, the conferences form one of the strongest means of applying the Christian social principles and of reaching toward Actu ideals in the unions. The presence of a conference chaplain at the meetings guarantees the adherence to Catholic social traditions, principles which can be studied and practiced by all. As Pope Pius XI insisted, the Christian social principles are fundamental dictates of the natural law; they are not Catholic dogmas binding only Catholics. These principles are not a secret code; they are broadcast to the world at large and they depend not upon force, but upon the appeal of spiritual values which can be weighed by each man's conscience.

3. Catholic Labor Defense League

One of the most important means for achieving justice for the worker is legal aid. The worker must use the law to enforce many of his contractual rights as well as to defend himself against forces that invade his rights. But the expense of obtaining legal aid means that more often than not the worker suffers injustice without being able to hire a lawyer.

Among the founders of the Association was a lawyer who had devoted much of his interest to the cause of labor in its many relationships—to unions and to employers. It is natural then, that in the cause of justice, lawyers as well as priests, should find a special place within the Actu, side by side with union men.

Within the Association the lawyers have their own group known as the Catholic Labor Defense League. The activities of this department are described by the Actu as follows:

This group, composed of Catholic lawyers, offers its services without charge to all workers, of whatever creed, having a grievance in any case arising out of labor problems, such as discrimination, dismissals, demands for back pay, arrests for labor activities, etc., which either cannot or will not be taken up by their own unions. Only those cases are taken, naturally, where the complaining party is believed to be in the right. When the case is more than the routine legal problem, it is handled by a group of attorneys, who decide the course of the trial.

It advises on fair contracts and helps union groups or individuals, interprets clauses in the union's constitution, and generally instructs particular union groups on proper parliamentary procedure.

The Defense League has a definite role in the internal affairs of the Association. Its members conduct classes in the formal labor schools and take part in the informal educational meetings of the general membership and of the conferences; they take part in the mapping of policy and in disciplinary matters such as the trials of members.

Only two or three of the larger chapters have organized units of the Defense League but practically all chapters have individual lawyers among their members. It is to be expected that as the chapters expand they will each be able to organize this affiliate. As the Actu says: "The League has made more and more people realize that the Actu is interested in the workers without selfish motives."

IV. ACTIVITIES

A. Participation in Labor Problems

The Association of Catholic Trade Unionists was founded with the idea that the Christian social principles bearing on economic life were intended to be applied by groups as well as by individuals; by groups, because in modern industrial and economic society individuals are so helpless. As a consequence, the first group determined to be more than a study club, more than a labor school. It set out to be a society for activity in the field of labor and of labor relations—a society for smoothing the path of justice.

Pope Pius XI had said:

We believe, moreover, as a necessary consequence, that the end intended (the initiation of a better social order) will be the more certainly attained, the greater the contribution furnished by men of technical, commercial, and social competence, and, more still, by Catholic principles and their application. We look for this contribution, not

to Catholic Action (which has no intention of displaying any strictly syndical or political activities), but to our sons, whom Catholic Action imbues with these principles and trains for the Apostolate under the guidance and direction of the Church, of the Church, We say, which in the above-mentioned sphere, as in all others where moral questions are discussed and regulated cannot forget or neglect its mandate as custodian and teacher, given it by God. (*Quadragesimo Anno*, p. 26, The Paulist Press.)

Perhaps without realizing it the founders of the Actu organized a real branch of Catholic Action when they established their system for training trade unionists in the Christian doctrines. Each chapter functioning under a "mandate" from its bishop and under the guidance of its chaplain is a real organ in Catholic Action.

Pius XI, however, looked to men trained in Catholic Action, for a more extensive "apostolate" in their sphere of life. He placed a definite responsibility upon the shoulders of laymen, men of "technical, commercial and social competence." An association of such men, according to the laws of the Church, is subject to Church authority but its decisions and activities are the responsibility of the laymen who make up its membership.

Therefore, according to the teachings of Pius XI, the Association of Catholic Trade Unionists has a twofold character and mission—first, as a Catholic Action organization, and secondly, as an organization of men of "social competence," trained in Catholic Action, to carry these principles into the shops and into the labor unions.

During the first months of its existence the New York chapter entered the field of union-employer conflicts. Other chapters have followed this same policy; some of them, as indicated in the second section, owe their origin to the ideal of the individual Catholics working together in strikes. Discovering their natural unity when guided by Christian principles under these circumstances, they decided to organize for the purpose of further unifying their efforts and of giving them a solid and permanent foundation.

1. Conciliation and Arbitration

In many cases of strike or merely of threatened strike the Actú has been invited (sometimes even by employers), to investigate the labor situation and the justice of the stand taken by the opposing parties. The Actú frequently takes the initiative without being invited and interviews the union leaders and the employers or their representatives. Although the Actú is definitely a labor organization, employers have often recognized its zeal for justice and have used the Actú's services for conciliation and even for arbitration. The position of the priest members of the Actú has been especially appreciated, due to the justice which should mark a priest's decisions because of his vocation. Occasionally the Actú has used the services of non-member priests, especially in labor problems within their parishes or vicinity.

These same offices of conciliation and arbitration are offered after strikes have occurred, since it is frequently impossible to know of such threatened difficulties unless Actú members are involved, or unless labor or management approaches the Actú before they break out. Strikes are systematically investigated and both sides are studied. When the Actú is convinced of the justice of labor's cause or where it finds its own standards of employer-employee relationships are not met with, and where its efforts to bring about a settlement have proven fruitless, the Association often takes up the cause of the workers actively.

2. Picketing and Support of Strikes

To show their support of a strike, members of the Actú sometimes wear Association placards or carry the Association banner and take their place on the picket lines. It is difficult to judge the weight of this influence, but as the Actú has become better known and respected by both Catholics and the public at large, this influence has become considerable.

Furthermore, since this support is given only where Actú principles are at stake the Association attempts to supply speakers for union meetings to explain the principles on which this support is based. Priests and leaders of the Actú speak

regularly at strike meetings. The presence of Actu members at these meetings helps to prevent violence and abuse; Actu support is valuable and the public withdrawal of that support would be harmful so the unions make great efforts to conduct the strike in accordance with Actu standards.

At these strike meetings and on the picket lines Actu members usually distribute their own labor paper, especially when the particular strike is written up in recent editions. At times, special leaflets have been distributed explaining the stand of the Actu in the particular labor situation. It is not unknown that an Actu chapter should be asked for support by a distant union whose products are being distributed in a chapter city.

In spite of the poverty of the Actu, the chapters have been known to help strikes financially. They have also helped destitute strikers either directly or through the Catholic Charities.

3. Other Labor-Front Activities

The direct benefits of the Actu to the unions may be further seen in what may be called "union-organizing." Although the Actu as an organization does not act as an "organizer" for any particular union, it has adopted the principle that the worker has a duty to join a *bona fide* labor union. On the labor-front this doctrine is preached at rallies and at its open forum meetings. At times, the Actu has supported certain specific unions by organizational speeches at the time of Labor Board elections. The decision to give a particular union such support depends upon the Christian principles involved.

A word in explanation of this principle may be in place. The "obligation" of workers to join a union is still a debated point among the exponents of Christian social teaching. But the arguments drawn from the papal encyclicals and from the writings of authorities on Christian social teaching are strong enough to justify this principle of the Actu. What kind of an obligation it is, and what is its binding force may be hard to determine, but without doubt, justice or charity, or both, often make membership in a union a duty. A further necessity for union membership arises from the demands of social justice which places on the working man an obligation

to join his fellow workers in striving for the common good. Commenting on the words of Pope Pius XI: "Now it is the very essence of social justice to demand from each individual all that is necessary for the common good," Monsignor Haas writes:

The urgent need of our times is not simply more production capacity but also the proper distribution of the goods and services which existing equipment and resources can produce. . . . In the face of this problem the individual worker has a responsibility no less than others in the community, and the most potent means within his power to discharge it is to affiliate with the union of his occupation, whether craft or industrial. The chain of causes leading from the worker to public well-being is direct.—(*The Why and Whither of Labor Unions*, p. 15, Sunday Visitor Press.)

It must be remembered that the Christian social principles (and therefore, the Actu), take a broader view of labor unions than the American Labor Movement has taken of itself. While Samuel Gompers (and most labor leaders since his time) taught that: "Fair compensation is the chief concern," Pope Pius XI had other ideals for unionism. He saw clearly that social justice could not be reached in production and distribution without the co-operation of labor, capital, and consumer. "Clearly the structure and sinews of the papal program is organization rather than individualism or what is ambiguously called "private enterprise." (Monsignor Haas, *Jobs, Prices and Unions*, p. 22, The Paulist Press.)

The Actu, then, in telling laborers about their duty to organize is not endorsing all labor unions, nor is it building up a strong "business" unionism merely to fight for higher wages, shorter hours, and better working conditions. It is carrying out a long-term policy of organizing its own special group in society to work for that co-operative economy envisioned by Pope Pius XI.

Many Catholic workers have tried to excuse themselves from joining the American Labor Movement by saying that many unions harbor Communists and racketeers. In urging unionism the Actu uses Bishop Von Ketteler's argument, de-

manding that Catholics join labor unions for the very purpose of lending their strength to the job of weeding out these enemies of true unionism. The Actu believes that it is most necessary to broadcast the principles of justice and charity where there is opposition from Communists or other radical groups. The Actu quotes Bishop Von Ketteler, who, in 1864, said:

It would be a great folly on our part if we kept aloof from this movement (the trade union movement) merely because it happens at the present time to be promoted chiefly by men who are hostile to Christianity.

The air we breathe remains God's air though breathed by an atheist and the bread we eat is no less the nourishment provided for us by God though kneaded by an unbeliever. It is the same with unionism—it is an idea which rests upon the Divine order of things and is essentially Christian, though those who favor it most do not see the finger of God in it and often turn it to wicked use.

B. Publications

Second only to the labor-front activity in importance are the publications of the Association. A complete study of the ideals and activities of the Association can be made from these alone.

1. The "Labor Leader"

The newspaper, *The Labor Leader*, is the most important Actu publication. The New York chapter first printed its regular edition on April 30, 1938. For some months this chapter had published a mimeographed paper, which was, however, much more than a bulletin, because it reported and analyzed the labor news. The appearance of a printed paper, called *The Labor Leader* marked the birth of the first Catholic worker's paper devoted solely to trade unionism. It was (and is), a paper in tabloid size, consisting of four sheets and issued twice a month. As the organ of the original and parent chapter, the New York Actu's *Labor Leader* has been distributed by all the other chapters—especially by those who have no paper of their own. The *National Director's Report* states:

“The *Labor Leader* has been found to be the most effective medium for propagandizing the Actu philosophy and for organizing Actu chapters.”

Since the beginning of 1940 the New York *Labor Leader* has borne the sub-title “National Issue.” At the informal conferences held in Cleveland in 1939 the representatives of the various chapters decided that the publication of one chapter should be officially sent out for national distribution. The first National Convention in 1940 came to the same decision. The *Labor Leader* of Actu-New York was chosen as the national issue and is used by the chapters which have no paper of their own although each chapter is urged to add a supplement of local labor news.

Since September 8, 1939, the Detroit chapter has published its own bi-weekly paper, which is known as *The Michigan Labor Leader*. This paper has developed more rapidly than the original *Labor Leader*. It has grown to sixteen pages and contains illustrations and advertising. It also enjoys the services of a full-time staff which the *Labor Leader* of other chapters cannot afford at present.

The Chicago chapter began a monthly issue of its paper, in September, 1940. This paper is known as the *Chicago Labor Leader*. And finally, one of the youngest chapters, Milwaukee, began the publication of a *Labor Leader* only a few weeks after the chapter had been organized in the spring of 1941.

Because these four papers are the same in policy it is possible to consider all of them as one expression of the Actu and the following remarks describe the four papers.

There is no doubt that there is a great need for fair reporting of labor news. The rights of the working man and the activity of labor unions receive either little space or unfair treatment in the public press. The ownership and the business connections of our daily papers partly explains this. The best that can be expected of our public press is the policy of “balancing” the news—labor’s interests with business interests.

As a reaction to this policy of the public press, labor or-

ganizations have quite generally established their own press to spread their propaganda, a propaganda for the aims of the union. Since the Actu aims at the ideal of absolute justice, it feels bound to have its own paper to give the labor news and to be a method of education to offset the biased reporting or suppression of labor news in the general press. The most important task of the *Labor Leader* is to interpret the labor news in the light of Catholic social teaching. The Catholic papers of the country cannot perform this task because the labor problem is too big and too complex.

The Actu describes the purpose of the *Labor Leader* as follows:

To spread the social doctrines of the Church and to report on the labor scene fearlessly and without bias so that its readers soon become aware that the Church is interested in the welfare of the working classes and has a special program for them—the most comprehensive and the most practical of any group in the world.

The *Labor Leader's* only criterion being truth and justice in the light of Catholic social teachings, it favors neither the C. I. O. nor A. F. of L.; it exposes so-called "Catholics" who, not caring a whit for their brothers in the Mystical Body of Christ, either use a union for their own selfish ends, in the case of labor racketeers, or prevent unionization by un-Christian methods, in the case of certain employers.

After the Association has carefully investigated a threatening strike or disruption within a union, the *Labor Leader* gives the justified side its full supporting publicity.

Because it claims to represent a positive constructive program, the Actu gives greatest emphasis in the *Labor Leader* to positive principles. The encyclical letters of the popes and statements by members of the American hierarchy on labor are thoroughly reported and explained. Furthermore, these principles form the basis of many "feature" articles appearing either in serial form or singly. The activities of the Association itself are reported and explained not only to entertain and inspire its own members but to give the public the reason and explanation for the existence and activity of the Association.

For this reason great numbers of the *Labor Leader* are passed out at strikes, rallies, etc.

But the *Labor Leader* is not merely "Catholic." It is also "devoted to trade unionism." For this reason it reports labor union activity and general news of interest to working men, such as strikes, Labor Board elections, labor and social legislation, reviews of labor books, etc. After reporting a labor situation exactly as it sees it, the Actu will frequently comment upon it and in a section printed in italics will apply the principles for which it stands.

But while the Actu is a "labor" organization, it is just as quick to criticize unions and union leaders when principles of the Association are violated, as it is to censure those violations in others. In like manner much of the reporting and publicity in the *Labor Leader* is aimed directly at abuses by and within the unions. This policy came as a surprise to some labor groups in the beginning because they felt that a labor organization should criticize nothing in the Labor Movement. But this is not the policy of the Actu. Abuses of Christian social principles must be censured no matter where they occur. The division of the Labor Movement into two great federations, so often opposed to each other, has greatly complicated the problem for the Actu. But because the opposition between the two groups is not a rank-and-file warfare, the *Labor Leader* and the activity of the Actu have been unique in leading the way towards methods of co-operation and collaboration. The fact should be emphasized that because the membership of the Actu is divided among neutral priests and lawyers, members of the C. I. O., the A. F. of L., the Railroad Brotherhoods and other *bona fide* unions—the policies of the *Labor Leader* have little possibility of being biased in favor of one group and opposed to the other.

2. Pamphlets

Though the *Labor Leader* is the only regular publication of the Actu, the chapters have occasionally issued other printed materials. To make itself better known and to give its members a brief outline of its aims and activities the Actu has

published several pamphlets. The New York chapter has published two of these—both entitled *The Actu—A Catholic Apostolate for Labor*. The third pamphlet is the *Actu Catechism*, published by the Detroit chapter. This is an excellent statement of fundamental Christian principles and of the aims of the Actu.

3. Bulletins and Propoganda Material

Bulletins and leaflets are another method used to spread Actu ideas and policy. These are printed for special occasions, such as strikes, rallies and Labor Board elections. For example, the Chicago chapter distributed seventy-five thousand copies of a bulletin dealing with one of the major Chicago strikes. Similar bulletins have been distributed by most of the chapters. These bulletins are prepared as the general membership thinks they are needed and when funds are available for their publication. At times, conferences within the chapters have published bulletins concerning affairs of their union or industry.

Other publications, generally in mimeographed form, are directed to the membership of the Actu, such as organizational materials, constitutions, outlines of activities, etc.

C. Education

The Church has always insisted that a blind following of leadership is, at best, a form of slavery. She has urged education for everyone in order that men might exercise the greatest freedom in giving their allegiance to doctrines of which they are convinced in their own minds. Particularly in social matters, so complicated and so variable, the Church stresses education.

The Actu took as its primary aim: "To spread the social teachings of the Church among all working men." Each chapter has consistently followed this principle, devoting itself in the early days of existence exclusively to a study of the Christian social doctrines, and during its entire existence devoting at least one meeting a month to a study of these principles.

1. Labor Schools

Looking upon itself as an educational "apostolate" for the laborer, the Actu had devoted itself to the education of its own members and it has also carried education into the labor world at large. Less than eight months after its formation the New York chapter opened a labor school in the Woolworth Building. Since that time, more than one hundred and twenty such schools have been opened, many of them Actu schools in various sections of the country. Since that time Actu-New York has opened three other schools.

Some of the chapters of the Association have organized labor schools in parishes throughout the diocese in which the chapter functions. For example, in the archdiocese of Detroit the Archdiocesan Labor Institute has about forty-one schools. The Archdiocesan Labor Institute is not a branch of the Actu but is rather an allied organization directed by Father Raymond S. Clancy, the chaplain of Actu-Detroit, and three Actu members are on the board of the Institute. Similarly in Chicago, the schools are conducted in about twenty parishes throughout the city. Pittsburgh organizes its schools on a city-district basis.

The fundamental course in all of these schools is labor ethics, taught in every school by a priest. The purpose of the course is to give the workers "the spirit of Catholic social teachings in regard to his rights and duties in relation to their fellow workers, their employers, the State and society as a whole."

Another fundamental course taught in all the schools is parliamentary law. Too often the working man, for want of training, is unable to exercise his rights, unable to express himself in meetings of his union. Training in parliamentary procedure gives him the ability to "take the floor" and to maintain his rights in meetings of any kind. It is also necessary for the union man to be able to express his thoughts clearly and forcefully and for this reason most of the schools give a course outlining the fundamentals of public speaking. Another basic course is the history of labor, outlining the progress of unionism during the past century, its mistakes

and its successes and the influence of Catholic thought upon it. In some schools courses in labor relations and in labor economics are also given.

The Actu secures the services of all professors gratis. Among them are priests, lawyers, university and college professors and others qualified by their education or profession. The courses are generally divided into two ten-week periods, one evening each week being devoted to lectures and discussion periods. Generally the complete course requires two years.

The New York chapter invites all workers to attend the classes regardless of race or creed, and it charges a fee of fifty cents for each course taken. Most of the other schools are open only to Catholics and charge nothing for the courses or only a flat fee of one or two dollars.

When we consider the emphasis which the American Labor Movement has placed upon education in recent years the real importance of these Actu schools is evident. Unfortunately, many of the schools open to laborers today are conducted by radical groups. The ultimate ideal of these schools reaches beyond the field of labor and tends towards the destruction of both political and industrial democracy. The students of the Actu schools, on the contrary, beginning with the fundamental principles of the natural law, learn those permanent truths upon which good unionism and a good social order are built.

2. Speakers Bureaus

In order to extend its educational activity even beyond its schools the Actu has established in some of its chapters a "Speakers Bureau." The bureau is made up of priests and laymen prepared to give talks on various aspects of labor problems and on Christian principles concerning these problems. Union meetings and meetings under Church auspices, for example, Holy Name meetings and Communion breakfasts, are a part of the field in which a Speakers Bureau operates. The New York chapter has been exceptionally fortunate in being able to obtain free time on the radio. For more than

two years its Speakers Bureau has supplied a weekly discussion on the general subject of labor.

3. Rallies

Rallies are one of the chief means used by chapters all over the country for the purpose of spreading their membership. The Actu usually holds these rallies in some public place or parish hall and advertises them as much as possible. The speakers outline the work of the Actu and the obligation of working men to follow the social teachings of the popes, especially that "mandate" for associations side by side" with the "neutral" unions.

D. Spiritual Activities

As an organ of Catholic Action the Actu has a most important spiritual character. No doctrine is more clearly stated or more frequently repeated in the encyclicals than the fact that a better social order depends first of all on a re-birth of spiritual life. Applying this idea directly to labor, Pope Pius XI wrote:

The Encyclical *Rerum Novarum* declared most appropriately that "These workingmen's associations should be so organized and governed as to furnish the best and most suitable means for attaining what is aimed at, that is to say, for helping each member to better his condition to the utmost in body, soul and property"; yet that it is clear "that they must pay special attention to the duties of religion and morality, and that social betterment should have this chiefly in view," for the "foundation of social laws being thus laid in religion, it is not hard to establish the relations of members one to another, in order that they may live together in concord and achieve prosperity." (*Quadragesimo Anno*, p. 8, The Paulist Press.)

The spiritual ideals expressed in this quotation form the inspiration for all the activities of the Actu. The Association is not working for the achievement of a political or social "millenium." It desires only to answer the need expressed by Pope Pius XI, the

need of valiant soldiers of Christ, who strain every thew and sinew to preserve the human family from the dire havoc which would befall it were the teachings of the Gospel to be flaunted, and a social order permitted to prevail, which spurns no less the laws of nature than those of God. (*Quadragesimo Anno*, p. 40, The Paulist Press.)

It is not surprising then, to find that the Actu, under the guidance of its chaplains, all appointed by ecclesiastical superiors, devotes much of its time to the spiritual training of its members. Each of the chapters has a program of spiritual activities. The First National Convention proposed to the chapters the following list of spiritual exercises or requirements:

1. Corporate Communion quarterly if possible, but at least annually.
2. Annual retreats or missions.
3. Membership in the Holy Name Society.
4. Annual Actu Novenas to the Holy Ghost, to Christ the Worker.
5. City-wide monthly Holy Hours.
6. Personal devotion to the Holy Ghost daily.
7. Daily recitation of the prayer to Christ the Worker.
8. Prayer "Come Holy Ghost" to be said at the beginning of all Actu meetings, rallies and classes.

V. SOME ATTITUDES TOWARD A. C. T. U.

The Association of Catholic Trade Unionists must meet the scrutiny and criticism of various groups. As a Catholic association it is subject to the Catholic Church. Authoritative criticism may come from the bishops of the United States, and less officially, criticism may come from priests. On the other hand, the Association is open to the praise or blame of the Labor Movement and of those who claim to be labor's friends. As an organization of laboring men the Actu is likely to feel the criticism of all the opponents of organized labor.

A. The Bishops

The A. C. T. U. has never been censured by any bishop of the Catholic Church. In the files of the Association are letters of praise and records of favorable statements from approximately fifty bishops. The most cherished of these letters is a communication from the Cardinal Secretary of State, conveying the blessing of the Holy Father to the Second Annual Convention of the Association. Much more important than letters of praise have been the invitations received from bishops asking the Association to organize in their respective dioceses. Some of these bishops have addressed appeals to their people to foster the movement. Many of them have referred to the Actu as a fulfillment of the mandate of Pius XI for "associations of Catholics side by side with the trade unions." One or the other bishop has insisted that every trade union member has a duty to belong to the A. C. T. U.

Priests have been equally enthusiastic about the Association. Some of them have remarked the increase in Catholic spirit among the working people and the zeal of their activity. Many of these priests have been gratified by the zeal and prudence with which Catholic laymen have handled the difficult problems that have at times confronted the Actu. One of these remarked:

The leadership of the Actu has been a remarkable confirmation of the Holy Father's belief that Catholic workmen and women can be entrusted to carry out Catholic concepts of the position of the working man in our country.

B. The Labor Movement

Many of the great labor leaders of the country have praised the work of the Actu. Most of them have appreciated its ideals and have given it credit for a disinterested devotion to the cause of the working man.

There has been relatively little criticism of the Actu from labor leaders. Some, naturally, have felt the sting of occasional Actu criticism but the only consistent opposition has come from a few who are easily recognized as Communists or

union "bosses." It is a healthy sign that the Actu should worry such men who are so directly opposed to fundamental Christian principles.

The individual chapters have received many letters of appreciation from local unions for support received during strikes or in other times of stress.

C. The Public

Public opinion about the Actu is naturally hard to judge since the organization is young and its activity is limited to the field of labor. However, the public press has occasionally given the Actu some attention. Descriptive articles have at times appeared in newspapers and in some magazines; while the tone of most of these has been sympathetic, they find it difficult to explain the nature of the organization or the reason for its activities. All of these articles show an ignorance of the fact that the Church has a definite interest in and program for the worker.

The Catholic press, on the other hand, has been devoting more and more space to the Actu, and especially since the movement for national federation of the chapters the Catholic papers have realized the news value of the activities of the Association.

VI. CONCLUSION

The Association of Catholic Trade Unionists is essentially a movement by and for the Catholic laity. The idealism and self-sacrifice of the men and women who set out on this program of living the social teachings of the Church in the Labor Movement is something which cannot be measured. There is every reason to believe, however, that it springs from a well-instructed faith and from a love of their fellow men, for the Actu offers no economic rewards nor even the satisfaction of position or power. In its present condition the Actu demands of them a burdensome financial support and a great sacrifice of time and energy. While the movement so far has been a testimony of the zeal and intelligence of the Catholic laity, the future depends in great measure upon the continued encouragement of the bishops and the co-operation of the clergy.

Certainly there is no need for compromise on the Christian principles, but the application of those principles to the affairs of every day life demands great wisdom and prudence. Pius XI did not hesitate to place that responsibility upon the shoulders of the layman. The A. C. T. U. understands and accepts that responsibility. It realizes that its success depends ultimately upon a program of spiritual and social education. The weapons it uses to reach its ends are, and must always be, education and appeal to reason.

With a membership "renewed in Christian spirit" and well trained in Christian social doctrine what can the Actu hope to contribute to the American Labor Movement? It hopes to create an articulate rank-and-file eager to do away with conflict and to establish and preserve industrial democracy. This is a tremendous task in itself and yet the purpose which the Association sets for itself goes beyond that:

The purpose of this association shall be to foster sound trade unionism along Christian lines, so that the Labor Movement may be effective toward the establishment of a Christian Social Order as set forth in the papal encyclicals.

The Association of Catholic Trade Unionists hopes, then, to take a part in achieving that social order envisioned by Pope Pius XI. This is a huge task but the present organization and methods of the Association seem well adapted to both the realism of the present and the ideal of the future social order. This is the plan which Pope Pius XI had in mind for Catholic laborers, for in his letter on Atheistic Communism he said:

We are thinking likewise of those associations of workmen, farmers, technicians, doctors, employers, students and others of like character, groups of men and women who live in the same cultural atmosphere and share the same way of life. Precisely these groups and organizations are destined to introduce into society that order which We have envisaged in Our Encyclical *Quadragesimo Anno*, and thus to spread in the vast and various fields of culture and labor the recognition of the kingdom of Christ. (*Atheistic Communism*, par. 68, The Paulist Press.)

CHARTER CHAPTERS OF THE A. C. T. U.

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