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BY

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WESTON COLLEGE, WESTON, MASS.



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IMPRIMI POTEST

James H. Dolan, S.J.
Chestnut Hill, Mass., d. 25. Augusti, 1937

NIHIL OBSTAT

F. J. Holweck
Censor Librorum
Sti. Ludovici, d. 20. Octobris, 1937

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† John J. Glennon
Archieppus Sti. Ludovici
Sti. Ludovici, d. 23. Octobris, 1937

The Reformation of Institutions

The Christian Social Program does not pretend to be a cure for all the ailments of social life. There will be social evils to eradicate and social problems to solve as long as men live in this world. But in the Encyclical Letter "On Reforming the Social Order," Pope Pius XI has proposed a set of principles which, if put into practice, can attain the maintenance of peace, progress, justice and social stability. This program is founded, not in class-conflict, but in harmonious human co-operation. It will build a natural social structure, using as materials the occupational and vocational activities of persons and groups who participate in social life. And it is our contention that this orderly arrangement of the members of society may be effected in conformity with American principles of self-government.

Pick up any newspaper today, and there before you is the reason for economic instability. Men are being separated into "Classes with contradictory interests, and hence opposed to each other, and consequently prone to enmity and strife." The partial success of those who would intensify class consciousness is inducing a strained and un-

stable condition of society in which citizens, even of the same community, are sometimes led to the extremes of violence. There are men, and women too, who would rescue humanity from misery by continuing the conflict and struggle for power and domination, this time in a class warfare that would be all the more horrible because of the ruthless destruction by citizens of neighbors, relatives and of all who may be in an opposing class.

The Christian Social Program

Surely there must be a way of solving social and economic problems without paying, as the price of victory, this human holocaust which not even the most enthusiastic Collectivist can estimate. In all sections of the nation, honest citizens, be they employers or laborers, are hoping that this struggle for power and domination may not end in civil strife. But there can be no certainty of avoiding this calamity, unless the antagonism and struggle between classes is eliminated. The theory and practice of social progress through conflict or class warfare has demonstrated itself as the most devastating force in human history. We must have progress. But if social progress is to be attained only through constant conflict, we never can have peace. Therefore, "the primary

duty of the State and of all good citizens is to abolish conflict between classes with divergent interests, and thus foster and promote harmony between the various ranks of society."

The Christian Social program would have the members of society well organized in harmonious vocational grouping. This vocational arrangement of social life demands that men be united, "not according to the position they occupy in the labor market, but according to the diverse functions which they exercise in society." Humanly speaking, there always will remain in society, orders, ranks, classes if you will. But in view of the goal to be attained by united human effort, it will be the occupational and social functions of citizens that must be emphasized, rather than any opposition of interests between these ranks in society. Nature prompts men to unite in civil society; a consequent impulse of nature would induce those who practice the same trade or profession, economic or otherwise, to combine in vocational groups for mutual assistance and for public welfare. If these vocational or occupational groups become thoroughly organized and officially recognized public institutions, self-governed and harmoniously co-ordinated for the common good, then will be realized, in part at least, the reformation of Social institutions.

The Professional Groups

Minds prone to skepticism look upon this social program of the Pope as the dream of an idealist. Nothing could be further from the truth. Suppose we consider the professional groups. They constitute no insignificant section of the populace. Among them we find a realization of what is called the functional aspect of human activity. Doctors, lawyers, scientists, educators—all are actuated naturally with the desire to make a living, and to excel in one's chosen profession. And in these various groups exists a natural unifying force which tends towards mutual assistance of members. Far from acting as a hindrance to individual expression, such professional groupings act as a stimulus to personal efficiency. But at the same time there should be and there is a desire to render public service. The service to the community of the family doctor, the skilled surgeon and the true scientist is unquestionable. And every professional group properly organized for harmonious co-operation becomes an asset to civilization and to national culture.

The Farmers' Associations

But can this same principle of vocational organizations be put into practice in the economic ordering of production and distribution? It will

not suffice to show that this has been done by some European nations. Our American economic and social fabric of life is of a different pattern from that of nations in Continental Europe. Is the occupational organization of economic affairs un-American? We might consider the farming group. Simple enough, it might be objected, in a country like Austria where the farmers constitute a homogeneous group, but impossible in a vast country like the United States where the interests of various sections of farming are divergent, and in some respects antagonistic. How can there be unity of purpose between the cotton grower of the South, the fruit producer of the Pacific Coast, and the potato farmer of Maine? The fact is that under Secretary Wallace some unification of farming interests actually has been evolved.

No doubt the assistance to the farmers of \$400,000,000.00 has something to do with effecting this union of farming groups. But it would be false to say that government assistance, in the form of money, is the only unifying cause. The farmers "are pretty well convinced that the only permanent way out for their particular region is by unity of planning and of action with all the other regions." And as to the objection that occupational grouping may be un-American, we quote Dr. Stanley High in the *Saturday Evening*

Post of July 3rd, 1933. "Mr. Wallace has referred to the county associations as a 'genuine revival of the old New England town-meeting idea.' He has described how they have 're-awakened the countryside to the possibilities of economic self-government, and to the potentialities of the democratic process.'"

The association of farmers may be criticized because it is government born and government nurtured, that it is too closely linked with political possibilities, that at the present time, many farmers are not in sympathy with parts of its program. But the fact remains that the farmers have been helped by this vocational grouping. They have a voluntary organization, "built from the ground up, with some 70% of the nation's farmers at the base of it." And the individual farmer is expected to be a functioning member. It is this principle of personal responsibility in an institution organized from the ground up, rather than from the top down, that is most essential to democratic self-government. And the application is of special importance in the organization of labor.

Labor Organization

So much attention is given now-a-days to class consciousness, class antagonism, class warfare, that one might be led to believe the opposition be-

tween employers and workers demands constant conflict. Now all this is not in accordance with facts. Capital and labor do co-operate in production; both industrialists and laborers recognize this economic necessity. And in the majority of cases, when labor is properly represented through responsible persons, labor disputes today are settled peaceably. Despite newspaper headlines of violence and bloodshed, the average American citizen is a peace-loving individual. The National Labor Relations Board may have its shortcomings, it may need reform, but it has been successful in arbitrating between employers and workers. According to the President's report, the board handled in May, 1,900 cases involving 925,000 workers, and in June settled 450 controversies. This same success has attended the efforts of State Boards of Arbitration. Statistics are on the side of co-operation between capital and labor, rather than of antagonism between two struggling enemies. In our country the labor situation is not hopeless.

To labor unions is due well-earned praise for efforts to free the individual workingman from the evils of competitions in an unrestricted labor market. There is something in the principle of the individual laborer's right to bargain independently. But individual laborers working for large

corporations are not in a position to demand fair treatment either from stockholders or employers. An honest workingman striving to raise a family in a decent home, should not be at the mercy of an unscrupulous foreman. In collective bargaining the labor unions have led the way to the attainment of fair wages.

Most certainly the time has come in the evolution of industry, when laborers are being united in ever greater numbers. Unification of these workingmen should have as a purpose, not merely a power of bargaining collectively, but a united dependability in co-operating with other groups for production, distribution and the progress of the nation. To organize labor in units of responsible citizens is a laudable undertaking; to unite workers for the purpose of class conflict is quite another thing. If labor units are loosely organized, if they are not solidly founded from the bottom up, there is grave danger of selfish domination from the top and dictatorship. Thus would be established regimentation, mass activity, with very little exercise of personal liberty.

The members of a labor union should not be mere mechanical parts, but human persons with consciousness of free co-operation in social responsibility. Men and women in the ranks of labor have a vocational service to render to so-

ciety. Society, in turn, has the obligation of seeing to it that they receive fair wages.

Business Conduct

It is a sound principle of social life that the institutions of the nations be in keeping with the progress of science, invention and culture. The conduct of business must conform to changing conditions of economic needs. It may be true that in times past, especially in a vast undeveloped country like the United States, progress was hastened by a free play of economic forces. Yet the excuse of individualism, unrestrained by any power, moral, social or legal, has been the cause of unpardonable injustice, both to individuals and to the community. In the words of James Truslow Adams: "Had it not been for this raising of money-making to the moral plane as a virtue in itself, its delinquencies could never have been measured with crimes against other parts of the moral code."¹) In industry, farming, commerce and finance, this free play of economic forces frequently has been a struggle for wealth and domination with not much regard for the rights of the social unit. Now let it be clearly understood that personal initiative and honest

1) "The Epic of America," p. 192.

competition, both of them, are helps to true progress. But from experience we know the results of unrestrained individualism. Stock watering and shady business have brought misery to millions, and lack of foresight in farm and lumber production has caused the disaster of the "dust bowl." Economic endeavor must have some restrictions.

In the depths of the depression, when business was at a standstill and banks in a precarious condition, the leaders of industry and banking recognized the necessity of getting together, and with the public authority, help to bring some order into economic life. But now, with a certain degree of prosperity restored, it would seem that some of these business-men are clamoring for unrestricted economic freedom; that they long for a restoration of their position of domination in industry, and of mastery over the labor market. These so-called economic liberalists are as much out of harmony with present day American social conditions as would be a man who might wish to abolish traffic regulations at busy street-crossings. The ordinary American citizen, whether business-man or work-ing-man, realizes the necessity of harmonizing rights and obligations. But the extremists, both among employers and among workers, are so intent upon fighting for rights that they give little attention to their obligation of participating in the

maintenance of justice and social stability. We must have restrictions in our laws and institutions to safeguard the community and its members from selfish capitalists and laborers.

Voluntary Co-operation

The well-being of the community may be safeguarded in two different ways. One method is by an increase of government participation in economic affairs, of government domination. When carried to great extent and in minute detail, such an organization of society approaches State absolutism. It is organization from the top with a tendency towards military regimentation. The other way is by a voluntary planning, ordering and collaborating of the various branches of economic enterprise on the part of all those who participate. Of these two ways of social economic reconstruction, the more acceptable to Americans who have a consciousness of democratic participation in community life, is that of voluntary co-operation. Establishment of such an organization of occupational groups will help to realize for individuals, institutions and for the community that fundamental principle of social life, the functional participation of the individual citizen in social progress. "Now this union will become power-

ful and efficacious in proportion to the fidelity with which the individuals and the groups strive to discharge their professional duties and to excel in them." It makes no difference whether a man be a great industrial leader or a day laborer, he does exert an influence either for good or for evil in the life of a nation.

Industrial Occupational Groups

It is in the sphere of industrial activity that conflict of opposing interests is so harmful to social welfare. Consequently, voluntary organization of industrial ranks through occupational grouping must be strongly emphasized. If the employers and workers of the same industry are united in co-operation, thoroughly organized and officially recognized as functioning for the benefit of one and all and for service to society, there will be constituted a real industrial occupational group. And if diversified industrial groups are united in collaboration of activities for mutual assistance and for the progress of the nation, then there will be realized in industrial life the new social order envisaged by Pope Pius XI. Differences of conflicting interests will be solved from the standpoint of mutual co-operation. Class antagonism will be eliminated. Thus will be confirmed har-

mony between the various orders and ranks of industrial life.

Banking Institutions

Of all social-economic groups the one most in need of harmonious collaboration with all other institutions is that of banking and finance. Money and credit play so important a part in modern economic endeavor that unrestricted private control of finance by any group would constitute a grave danger to economic and social stability. Pope Pius XI speaks most emphatically against such "Immense power and despotic economic domination concentrated in the hands of a few." "This power becomes particularly irresistible when exercised by those who, because they hold and control money, are able also to govern credit and determine its allotment, for that reason supplying, so to speak, the life blood to the entire economic body, and grasping, as it were, in their hands the very soul of production, so that no one dare breathe against their will." Just as in any other profession, the skilled specialists are best able to plan profitably and execute prudently, so also in banking the trained experts and experienced financiers are most capable of serving both individual and social needs. But to ensure the

harmonious co-operation of all occupational groups, "economic domination must be brought under the effective control of the public authority in matters pertaining to this latter's competence."

Not Socialism

Is this organization of society according to occupational activities a socialistic concept? Far from it. The socialistic program of reform begins with property, with a reform in the possession of productive property. Through public ownership of productive property, the Socialists would proceed to reforms in the social order itself. Of necessity there will result a rigid regimentation of vocational activities and government management of economics. Occupation, production and distribution will become government business. The natural order of social re-formation proposed by Pope Pius XI, begins with the correction of a false theory and practice regarding social rights and obligations. It would emphasize first the need of a sound, healthy and moral economic life. It would demand of all occupational groups the fulfillment of true occupational functions. It would insist upon the mutual obligations of employers and workers and upon the proper use of property. Economic affairs would be made to harmonize

with social demands. Thus, for example, even a labor saving device in the economic order would have to be considered from the standpoint not merely of economic efficiency but of public welfare.

Human Liberty

What about personal liberty? Would not the application of these Christian social principles result in a restriction of the free exercise of human liberty? The answer is that liberty is not license. How ridiculous it would be to assert personal liberty as a reason for violating ordinances that safeguard the health of the community. Reason makes clear the moral necessity of conforming one's actions to the just demands of public welfare. In the defense of true human liberty no institution of this world is more outspoken than is the Catholic Church. Liberty of conscience, liberty of family life, of religious life, liberty of free associations, liberty to possess private property, for the defense of these rights of human personality, the Catholic Church is persecuted today in many lands. Liberty of personal initiative is due to man as an intellectual and moral being. And any social system in which the individual exists merely for the community is the worst kind of despotism. But the Church will not, and cannot confuse

human liberty with license to unrestrained activity in opposition to the common good. In social life there must be a harmonious balancing of rights and obligations.

Political Freedom

Pope Pius XI does not go into detail as to the specific development of the social order. He has no intention of dictating any specific form of social control. This right of freedom of choice, even as to specific structural form, cannot be too strongly emphasized. Speaking very plainly, the Pope has no intention of wishing upon the American people, or any other people, a specific set-up in social or political life. He is not dictating in matters where the natural rights of nations are involved. In his own words: "Even in the sphere of social economics, although the Church has never proposed a definite technical system, since this is not her field, she has, nevertheless, clearly outlined the guiding principles which, while susceptible of varied concrete application according to the diversified conditions of times and places and peoples, indicate the safe way of securing the happy progress of society."²)

²) Cf. "On Atheistic Communism," p. 34.

Cultural Institutions

Distinct from occupational group organizations, there exist in all countries numerous associations and societies not of themselves directly connected with economic endeavor. The absolutism of the public authority in some countries induces a mastery over the activities of the citizens, to such an extent that all social institutions are closely linked with government domination. As a consequence, whether it be an athletic club, a literary circle, fraternal organization, or a religious society, all are considered by the political power as operating through a direct dependence upon civil government. In America cultural and religious institutions enjoy a measure of freedom fully in accord with Christian social principles. According to the World Almanac more than 800 such organizations are of national extent in the United States.

From the standpoint of liberty of activity, we have no need of reforming these free institutions. They constitute a powerful influence for good in private and public service. But modern social conditions demand that some of our cultural and religious institutions shall take upon themselves the duty of properly assisting their members in learning the principles and practice of economic organization. Upon the Catholic clergy and laity

rests the serious obligation of participating in this new demand for social reconstruction. For example, a priest complains of the fact that many members of his parish are on strike against their will. Surely if Catholic workers understand and practice their duty as members of labor organizations, domination of any labor union from the top will be rendered at least more difficult.

Natural Autonomous Institutions

All that is said by Pope Pius XI concerning the reformation of institutions is based upon the natural growth and development of social life. To believe that social reformation can be accomplished by an act of Congress or any other legislative assembly is to misunderstand the meaning of social institutions. No sound social system can be planned, plotted and put in practice overnight. The public authority may help social reformation by the enactment of just and prudent laws, but human society and its institutions depend for stability upon the members of society. Consequently a true reform of social institutions should be founded in the moral and political principles of the community of men. Reformation of institutions to be practically operative should be the result of a natural social growth and develop-

ment rather than of a suddenly devised economic or political proposal.

In the reformation of institutions, vocational groups should be granted a certain measure of autonomy, of self-government, if they are to fulfill their proper function in the social order. True it is, the public authority always has the duty of assisting, stimulating, watching and restraining these associations, that in themselves they may be made more perfect instruments of public service, and that in relationship to other institutions they may be linked harmoniously into a unit of social progress. But in the administration of these social units, the less there is of government interference, the more secure will be their foundation, and the more courageously will they strive to co-operate in a self-regulated social and economic order. To transfer all responsibility for social unity and co-operation to the State alone, is to restrict personal initiative unjustly.

Democratic Occupational Groups

The extent of domination on the part of the public authority must depend very much upon the culture of a nation, and upon the practical experience of the citizens in the art of self-government. Reasonably the best form for society in the United

States would seem to be a graded or ascending construction of occupational institutions, local, regional and national, all democratically constituted. In industrial activity, for example, freely elected representatives of the workers' group would meet with employers' representatives to settle economic affairs in which both are interested parties. By this is meant that, insofar as local units are capable of caring for their own affairs, the settlement of questions should be made locally. The same would hold for regional requirements. Finally national representatives would take council in matters only of general concern. Such a voluntary system of co-operation would be in perfect accord with the occupational functioning of the members of society, advocated by Pope Pius XI. "Let employers, therefore, and employed join in their plans and efforts to overcome all difficulties and obstacles, and let them be aided in this wholesome endeavor by the wise measures of public authority."

According to American principles of democracy the discussions and decisions of social economic institutions should be as free from government domination, as is consonant with promoting private and public welfare. But experience has proven that, at times, the power of public authority must be exercised to protect both individual

and public welfare. The States and Federal Government have as their purpose peace, prosperity and the common good. Consequently, in case of need, the civil power has the right and the obligation of formulating and executing laws that will foresee and prevent injustice, and that will promote the prosperity of the nation. "This task it will perform the more readily if it is free from those burdens which are not properly its own." Municipal and State Governments, to say nothing of Federal Government, should not have offices cluttered and activities obstructed by an infinity of small business.

Guild Class Control

In the Middle Ages, under the system of guilds, men were conscious of vocational activity and of the social function of the different members of the community. There existed, for a time, harmonious co-operation. But looking in retrospect upon the development of social life in that era, we find, not the good old days, but two fundamental faults: The guilds became class-conscious, and in selfishness refused to extend their organization to meet new demands in social unity. Worthy members of society were thus prevented from participation in the burdens and benefits of social progress. Secondly, the State was guilty of

disregarding the common good in failing to formulate new laws which would make economic practice conform to expanding demands for social organization.

Unrestrained Individualism

With the coming of the machine age and industrial revolution, these same two errors were permitted to hamper and obstruct true reforms in keeping with new conditions in economic and social life. As a reaction against craft control, individualism dominated economic life. In selfishness the individualists of industry disregarded the rights of the community and its members to a fair participation in the benefits of increased economic productivity. It was all too common, not only to have men forced into excessive working hours, but to draft into service women and children, with little regard for healthy working conditions, proper food and housing. Progress to the industrialist was synonymous with increased productivity and wealth; his selfish individualism made him unmindful of unjust social conditions. And the State, in tolerating such an ordering of economic life, failed in its duty to curb selfish interests. It should have legislated against the merciless greed of Economic Liberalists.

Harmonious Co-operation

There is no reason for being discouraged either about present conditions or about the future. We are making progress. Living conditions in the United States are far better than those of fifty years ago. But if we would continue to go forward in peace and prosperity, men must realize the fact that social organization is, in very truth, unity of a variety of activities for the good of the community and its members. One and all must share, both as regards benefits and responsibilities. Human beings differ so much in natural and acquired abilities, that it would be unjust and impossible to reduce members of the community to an equality that even approaches an economic dead-level. But justice and the common good must be safeguarded, and the public authority should see to it that either willingly or by legal restraint, the members of the community and the various ranks in society be brought to harmonious co-operation in productivity, prosperity, and culture.

In plain simple language the Christian Social Program is an appeal to the nations for progress and peace through harmonious co-operation. If the various economic groups, bankers, industrialists, farmers, laborers, professional men insist upon antagonism, conflict and class-warfare, the

struggle for mastery and domination will be intensified. But the path to progress does not lie in that direction. If the American citizen is willing to get together with his neighbor and with his fellow-citizens in an honest effort at co-operation of the various occupational groups that should participate in economic endeavor, then will be established a sound foundation for peace, progress and social stability, the attainment of which, most assuredly, is the hope and the prayer of everyone concerned with the problem of social reconstruction.

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