

CAPITALISM IN CANADA

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ON 4th February of this year a remarkable joint pastoral letter was published in Quebec, signed by all the bishops of the Province of Quebec, with the title *The Workers' Problem in the light of the Social Teaching of the Church*. Second only to the United States, Canada has prospered from the application of liberal capitalism to an expanding economy. The encyclical is the more remarkable in that in some respects it is an indictment of liberal capitalism. As such it was interpreted and has provoked a number of reactions from big business. It has been understood as support for the stand taken by Archbishop Charbonneau of Montreal and Bishop Desranleau of Sherbrooke in the 'asbestos strike' of last year. Moreover it foreshadows a period of increasing strife between the Church in the Province of Quebec and the forces of capitalism which are allied with a corrupt though *soi-disant* Christian government.

At the outset the bishops state quite bluntly that, though their country has been endowed by Providence with greater wealth than most parts of the world, there are many areas and professions where the pay is insufficient. In fact, the national wealth is far from equitably distributed and the economic system does not provide 'for all the members of society in a stable way the material conditions that they need for their spiritual and cultural development'. This latter was declared by Pope Pius XII in 1948 to be the purpose of an economic system. Further than that, the fundamental problem of the worker in Canada has not been solved: economic and social security for himself and for his family. He is a member of a propertyless proletariat, having neither the wealth of a capitalist, the land of a farmer nor the assured income of a civil servant. This instability is accentuated, the bishops point out, by the fact that Canada lives largely by exports and is in the midst of its industrial evolution.

In the last decade the balance of population in the Province of Quebec has moved from the country to the town. This was accelerated during the war by the numerous families who left their holdings in the country to work in the war industries and,

after the war was over, did not return to their farms. The result: 'the majority of our people does not live in the country, nor from agriculture'. The results of this have been most unhappy because, apart from the over-crowding, there is the very difficult problem of the adaptation of a rural people to an urban civilisation. The problem is aggravated by heavy taxation, a constantly rising cost of living and rents that are often excessive. The bishops might have added that the situation has further deteriorated because of the policy of the Provincial government of M. Duplessis. The voting scales are weighted against the urban dweller, as the division of constituencies has not changed since the aspect of the Province was mostly rural. The result is that while five thousand farmers are represented by a seat in Parliament, in Montreal the figure may be fifty thousand or over. Consequently the city-dwellers are taxed for the benefit of the farmers; they are made to pay, through taxes, for roads which by securing the farmers' vote effectively disfranchise themselves at the same time.

The Pastoral is particularly strong in its condemnation of modern methods of industrial production and is worth quoting in full on the subject. The influx of a vast number of unskilled workers into industry has further complicated the problems of industrial life and made more widespread 'the deplorable effects which can be blamed on the economic regime'. 'The place of the assembly-line in modern industry is well known. In its present state it does not satisfy the cultural and psychological needs of the worker. He has not sufficient contact with the organisation nor with the product of his work. His only concern is with his own machine on which he performs the same restricted operation, repeating it unceasingly. He has no sense of the whole enterprise. As a result he is not interested in his work. So, more often than not, he comes to work only to wait impatiently for the moment when he can get out and find something, somewhere else, which will satisfy his need for development.' The consequence of this is a loss of a sense of responsibility. But the bishops do not blame this wholly on the worker. In fact they suggest that the employers are as much, or more, to blame; and in so doing they put a number of disquieting questions to employers.

The reaction against this is the same in Canada as in the rest of the world: the rise of the workers' movement. The reaction of the

employers against this is twofold. Some are 'disturbed, even terrified; while others are confident in the future'. Of the former the bishops say that 'while a good number of employers are trying to understand the social evolution that is in progress and are trying to work with the working class which is better organised, there are others, far too many, who know too little of the social teaching of the Church and are filled with a nostalgia for the old days of the unlimited power of the employer. They set their faces against this development, or at least hope in secret for a return to former conditions, with the workers once again brought to heel, when the supply of workers exceeds the demand'. It is interesting to note that the bishops suggest that this lack of sympathy and understanding on the part of the employers for the aspirations of the workers plays its part in driving the workers to exaggerated demands, violence of language and even to an attitude of war.

In looking for a solution to these problems the Pastoral is at pains to point out, and to prove, that religion is *not* the opium of a people oppressed by capitalism. 'It must not be thought that the Church, by her appeal to Christian principles, wishes to support any economic regime or political regime. Instead, she has denounced and will continue to denounce the abuses of capitalism and the materialist tendencies of the regime which has come out of economic liberalism, because this regime does not respect the dignity of the human person and because it has brought into being a materialist world in which man, and particularly the working man, finds it difficult to live a life worthy of himself and of God.' At the same time the Church has always denounced Socialism and Communism—for 'the Church knows the miseries that are inflicted on mankind by a dictatorship, whether of capitalism or of the proletariat'.

Any uplifting of the place of the worker is directly linked with the kind of work he does. 'A system which does not allow the worker to develop his human personality through his work, and which suppresses in a great number of men their desire to do a good job because in the finished object they will find a legitimate sense of pride because they have put their best into it, such a system compromises every effort at raising the position of the worker because it leads to a most abject materialism.' The two guiding lights in any work of reconstruction must be the nobility

of work itself and the supremacy of man over matter. In this connection the Pastoral quotes the words of Pope Pius XII that it will be found that 'the complex structure of the whole society is in need of reorganisation and improvement'.

The first effect of this is that technical progress must always be subordinated to the primacy of the human person—every effort must be used to diminish the evil effects of the intensive mechanisation of certain industries. But in the structure of the enterprise itself there are certain reforms which are urgent, and which would make it into a 'community of activities and of interests'. 'It is clear that a system which treats the worker as a mere wage-earner in an economy which is impregnated with economic liberalism tends to favour the class-war and to increase the gap which separates capital from labour. It leads the capitalist to seek excessive profit, while it diminishes in the worker any care for competent and good work.'

The conclusion from this is that the workers must be gradually given a share in management, in the profits and in the assets of an enterprise. While the bishops rightly disclaim any competence in the purely technical spheres of industry and commerce, they stress the fact that these essential reforms must be accomplished, step by step, with a 'prudent boldness'. This calls for an understanding sympathy on the part of the employers. They are counselled not to shout 'communism' every time the workers make any claim against them. 'Papal documents make it clear to everybody that capitalism is guilty of social injustices and that there are many workers' demands which are just and reasonable.' Pope Pius XII had said in 1944 that 'where "capitalism" is based on erroneous ideas and arrogates to itself unlimited powers over property without any regard to the supremacy of the common good, the Church has always condemned it as contrary to the natural law'. As a gloss on this the bishops add that 'this economic regime is very strong in the countries of North America and has implanted these "erroneous ideas", in differing degrees, in every kind of enterprise'.

The pastoral letter, which is over eighty pages long, constitutes a real workers' charter for the Province of Quebec, and deals at length with the part to be played in the solution of the workers' problem by the workers themselves, by the employers, by all citizens, by the State, and finally by the clergy. It is not our

concern here to analyse in detail the solution propounded, but merely to show that the capitalist system in the New World, offered to us by some people as a Utopia, is severely criticised by the Church.

MAKING CAPITAL IN COMMUNIST CHINA

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FOR the best part of this century, the exploitation of the East by the West has been a favourite theme with pamphleteers; and as the sincerity of the pamphleteers has grown, so has the interest of the public declined. The subject, it is argued, has been flogged to death and, taking an Epicurean stand, Englishmen have added—let sleeping dogs lie. In the common mind China appears a far distant continent—another world.

The attitude is typical of Englishmen as a whole, but it is also typical of many Europeans. In America the orientation is different, because Chinese *émigrés* make up a considerable part of the population of the United States. Often enough Hollywood may depict the Chinaman as either a pirate or opium eater, but to the American he is a person of distinct characteristics; he may run a successful chop-suey restaurant in Greenwich Village or he may be an astute lawyer. They are not deluded by the romantic notion of film directors that he is a man capable of saying little else other than 'Me muchee-muchee sad'.¹ They are well aware that he may as yet prove a powerful business rival, although his methods of business will not necessarily be those of the American businessman. For part of Congress's dilemma over recognising the 'People's Republic of China' is a fear of admitting to a certain national failure. The Americans, despite their vast propaganda machine, have failed to impress the Chinese with their way of life; the Chinese have remained impervious, philosophically isolationist. This was made quite clear by Mao Tze-tung's victory last October which, seen in perspective, was but a further assertion of Chinese independence from Western infiltration. Yet before developing this point it is worth pausing to note the way in which American policy re-orientated its attitude to the

¹See *People of Freedom*, No. 117; February-March, 1950.