

# BLACK FRIARS

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### A PAPAL STATEMENT

**I**N this issue we print the short discourse given by His Holiness Pius XII to a group of business men last May. The text has appeared elsewhere in the Catholic press, but it has not been given the prominence it would seem to deserve. As a rule we hail every papal pronouncement on social matters with an enthusiasm which is none the less almost entirely lacking in the initiative needed for acting on the Pope's recommendations. It is strange that in this instance even the first burst of applause is lacking—perhaps we have at last tired of playing the double game of enthusiasm and sloth.

The Pope touched, for one thing, on a point which is a burning question in this country today, namely that of nationalisation. There are apparently a number of Catholics who believe that a sensible distributism is opposed to this sort of nationalisation, indeed they seem to regard it as morally reprehensible. The difficulties which the British Government is experiencing in its present schemes are regarded as the natural outcome of breaking the law of private ownership. Many are under the impression that it has been condemned. Their opponents, however, seem to identify it with 'democracy' itself and fondly imagine that by nationalising coal they are giving the coalminer a share in the business. The gardener, Mr Cunningham, who puts the case for the worker in the Trades

Union in the present issue of BLACKFRIARS, is at least well advised to seize on this main point: it is fallacious to regard the method of nationalisation as a means which mechanically brings a share in national goods to all the people. The upholders of nationalisation regard it as one of those necessary means which may so easily become ends, as an ideology which must be planted on society whatever the cost because desirable for its own sake. England has already had its share of this doctrinaire attitude.

The Pope in sound and well-measured phrases, worthy of *Quadragesimo Anno*, which he is in fact here explicitly applying, indicates the errors in both these views. Everything which has to do with methods of government and better ordering of society must be judged in relation to the common good. Perhaps it may seem unnecessary to harp once again on this subject, but among the Holy Father's words the single word 'common' appears very frequently — 'common interest', 'common responsibility', 'common expression'. This idea of community, of the sharing of goods, has been rendered completely foreign to the modern mentality. Whatever the cause — and undoubtedly one cause is to be found in the general misconceptions arising out of communism — certainly the conception of society as a whole, and of all the persons making the whole as being sharers in the same nature and in the same material goods has so far disappeared as to make the meaning of common service and common responsibility generally unknown. This gives rise to an easy abuse of the powers of governing and a consequent suspicion of all those who have power. The common good of the nation is served by the hierarchy of men who share the rights and responsibilities of the others but who are required to give more service and accept a greater share of responsibility. If there are employees there must also be employers and these latter have the greater responsibility and owe the greater service. Unfortunately the employers have in the past shown little appreciation of this fact. But they are not the only ones to lose the fundamental sense of society. It has become endemic in the age in which we live to think of self-interest before common interest. Hence the expedient of making the State into the employer by means of nationalisation is shown to be open to exactly the same dangers, to be more readily open to the same type of but graver abuse on account of the concentration of power.

Centralisation of power is, of course, always dangerous to fallen nature. And this is naturally recognised by the ordinary man. That is why so many are instinctively suspicious of the Church, for they can understand only human societies and they mistake the nature of the Church's power, which is divine, and the manner in which

it is concentrated in the Holy See. But once these misapprehensions are recognised their suspicions and antipathy are very understandable. What is so much harder to understand is the ready way in which at the same time they go forward to put as much human power in the hands of one or a few men whose responsibility is thereby increased to a superhuman extent.

The Holy Father therefore recalls the need for hierarchy in the common life of the State, in order that this centralisation of power should not absorb the private life of the citizen, that nationalisation may not become a normal rule, a part of the structure of the State, but should only be introduced where necessary in order in the long run to support the private rights of the individual, not to absorb them. Common responsibility should of its nature lead to this hierarchy among men and the right ordering of all to the common end—the perfection of human nature individually and together.

At first sight the papal discourse may seem to hand back to the capitalists their power in private enterprise and capital-building which they had lost through the progressive socialisation of many European countries. But there are some interesting facts connected with the pronouncement which should be taken into account before we leap to conclusions as to its interpretation. The day before the Holy Father spoke to the Catholic association of business men the Editor of the *Osservatore Romano*, Count della Torre, who undoubtedly enjoys the confidence of the Pope in these matters, published an initialled article on 'The Catholic Church and Capitalism' (May 8). In this, after referring to the words of Leo XIII, Pius XI and Pius XII on the question of capitalism, the Count insists that though it was approved in theory as a possible way of prosecuting the common good, in practice it has proved itself worse than Communism. Capitalism, he says, is more antithetical to Christianity than Communism. And if you object that Communism is atheistical, whereas Capitalism can recognise God, he answers that atheism enters into the very structure of capitalism in practice, for its God is not the one who has given all the gold and all good things to every one, but gold itself. 'Atheism is the same as capitalism, not in a philosophy which it does not possess, but in its practice which is in fact the whole of its philosophy; the practice of insatiable greed, of gain, of avarice, of domination.' With chapter and verse the Editor of the *Osservatore Romano* goes on to show that the Church has not been the ally or the accomplice of capitalism, and he concludes the article: 'There is no reason to regard the pages of Catholic sociology as comprising a manual of alliance with plutocracy, and still less for creating the fantasy of a marriage between the

Church and Capitalism; according to the treatise *De Matrimonio*, such persons would be prevented from marrying by the impediment of *disparitas cultus*.'

Perhaps some might like to regard the Pope's words as in some way answering, or at least qualifying and moderating those of his editor, for he spoke the next day. But it is more probable that both the Pope and the Editor of the *Osservatore Romano* were looking in the same direction. Certainly a week later (May 16-17) Count della Torre had to reply to critics of his article, but not from Catholic sources. A critic had asserted that the Catholic Church, as distinct from Christianity and the Gospel, has in fact throughout this century spent its energies in attacking Communism. The editor answered that it had been his purpose to show that although in the concrete the Church has had to face a violent and world-wide persecution from this type of atheism, the Church had not in consequence become allied to capitalism nor ceased to condemn the latter's evil practice.

The Holy Father's words should surely be read in the light of these articles in the *Osservatore*. The evil of unrestricted power and domination of capital is as bad, or rather worse, than the power exercised by a few men on behalf of the State. The great difficulty however is to disentangle the true theories and principles from these factual realities. The Church must needs sort out the principles first—and this the Holy Father does in the present discourse—and then comes the question of practice which can be neither Capitalist nor Communist, neither private enterprise on the basis of capital levy nor socialisation as the final end for man. The greatest importance therefore attaches to the penultimate paragraph of the discourse in which the Pope speaks of the situation in the concrete. The Church herself has now more than ever before the duty of blazing the trail through the jungle of present social confusion—'only the social teaching of the Church can provide the elements necessary for a solution of the social problem'. And it is only the *Christian* virtues of justice and charity which can overcome the evil inclinations of fallen human nature towards self-seeking and abandonment of responsibility in regard to the common good. 'It requires a disinterestedness such as *only* true Christian virtue maintained by God's help and grace, can inspire.'

What further excuse can we therefore discover for holding back from participating primarily as Christians rather than as Conservatives or as Socialists, in the present needs of the world?

THE EDITOR.