

guaranteed to improve its performance steadily by way of feedback till it was pretty well infallible. Needless to say, mathematics can no more guarantee any such thing than mathematics can show the truth of astrology. And some astronomer claimed he had a machine that would predict the Sun's temperature for millions of years—nobody seems to have asked if it would predict it *right*!

I can call spirits from the vasty deep—  
 Why, so can I, and so can any man,  
 But will they come when you do call for them?

Another form of credulity relates to alleged *sight* of the future by some paranormal means. But *seeing* the future—seeing as actuality what exists only in the potentiality of Divine intentions thus far unrevealed and human intentions perhaps not even formed—can be nothing but a delusion. As F. H. Bradley said, 'If we dally with superstition, if we leave the honourable daylight . . . the Sun has gone back on the dial of humanity'. In the words the Douai translators used to translate the Deuteronomic prohibition on fortunetelling fooleries, we are otherwise instructed by the LORD our God.

## Religion, Politics and the Catholic Working Class

by Patrick J. Doyle

Most studies of the British electorate agree that Catholics tend to support Labour. Indeed, Robert McKenzie and Allan Silver argue that Roman Catholics are the group least likely to vote Conservative.<sup>1</sup> However, with a few notable exceptions Catholics have not made a great contribution to Labour politics. This failure can be explained by a variety of factors, primarily the insistence by Church leaders in the past that, as a minority, Catholics ought to organize defensively to protect their own interests, particularly the schools. Hence the formation of the Catholic Federations as a response to the educational policies of the Campbell-Bannerman and Asquith Governments. Some Catholics in this period were also mesmerized by the chimera of a Catholic party similar to the German Centre Party, and it is highly significant that the Salford Diocesan Federation received

<sup>1</sup>Robert McKenzie and Allan Silver, *Angels in Marble: Working-Class Conservatives in Urban England*, 1968, p. 100. See also: A. H. Birch, *Small Town Politics: A Study of Political Life in Glossop*, 1959, p. 87.

overtures from the right-wing British Labour Party in 1911, which had been formed 'to promote by constitutional methods the welfare of the working class, and to secure real Labour representation'.<sup>1</sup> Ecclesiastics were suspicious of state socialism and ideological politics in general and hostile to the secularists and anarchists on the fringe of the Left. Bishop Vaughan declared in 1883 that the doctrines of socialism were the outcome of Satan's teaching, and that 'terrorism, incendiarism, violence, and murder are lawful weapons whenever it is judged that this will advance the cause of socialism'.<sup>2</sup> Finally, most of the Catholic working class were Irish, or of Irish extraction, abjectly poor, and unlikely to possess the necessary property or residential franchise qualification, so consequently Catholics were under-registered until after the implementation of the 1918 Representation of the People Act.<sup>3</sup> Moreover, the Irish were un-unionized and had earned a reputation as strike breakers: this, plus the religious and language barriers, retarded their assimilation into the political working class.<sup>4</sup> Besides, the Irish through the Home Rule Federation and its successors, the Irish National League and the United Irish League, were organized in support of the national cause, and it was not until 1921, when at last the Irish question seemed to have been removed from the British political arena, that they entered the mainstream of British politics.

The main tasks facing the pioneer Catholic socialists were to develop a social Catholicism compatible with both their religious and political beliefs, to combat the forces of secularism and rationalism inside the Labour movement, to overcome the prejudices of the influential Nonconformists, and to wean the Irish from their attachment to the Liberals and the local Nationalist leaders. They were not entirely devoid of clerical support, for even in the nineteenth century some priests, notably Cardinal Manning and Bishop Bagshawe, had taken a progressive stand on social questions, while in Ireland Bishop Nulty of Meath was a convert to land nationalization, and Duggan of Clonfert was a saintly utopian Communist.<sup>5</sup> But there was no Catholic equivalent to the Anglican Guild of St Matthew and the Christian Social Union, which interestingly enough were mainly supported by the Anglo-Catholics.<sup>6</sup> nor was there a priest to parallel the work of the German Father Wilhelm Hohoff, who was

<sup>1</sup>File 208, Salford Diocesan Curial Office, 67/68 Newton Chambers, Cannon Street, Birmingham, February 15, 1911, Arthur Beck, President of the British Labour Party, to Bishop Casartelli; Bishop's House, Salford, February 20, 1911, Thomas F. Burns to Bishop Casartelli.

<sup>2</sup>Bishop Herbert Vaughan, *The True Basis of Catholic Politics*, Manchester, 1883.

<sup>3</sup>See Neal Blewitt, 'The Franchise in the United Kingdom, 1885-1918', *Past and Present*, number 32, December 1965.

<sup>4</sup>*Essays in Labour History*, ed. Asa Briggs and John Saville, 1967, p. 331.

<sup>5</sup>Vincent Alan McClelland, *Cardinal Manning: His Public Life and Influence, 1865-1892*, 1962; Francesco Nitti, *Catholic Socialism*, 1911, pp. 325-330; Owen Dudley-Edwards, *The Sins of Our Fathers: Roots of Conflict in Northern Ireland*, Dublin, p. 141.

<sup>6</sup>K. S. Inglis, *Churches and the Working Classes in Victorian England*, second edition, 1964, chapter 7.

endeavouring to reconcile religion and socialism.<sup>1</sup> Nevertheless, the attractions of Guild Socialism, the Catholic Social Guild, and the influence of Bishop Keating of Northampton (later Archbishop of Liverpool), Monsignor Parkinson, Rector of Oscott, the Dominican, Father McNabb, and the Jesuit, Father Charles Plater, helped to make Labour, if not socialism, acceptable. Likewise, a number of Catholics played important rôles in the early history of the Independent Labour Party and the Social Democratic Federation. John Lister of Shibden Hall, Halifax, was the first treasurer of the I.L.P., and J. J. Jones, a union organizer and West Ham councillor, James Sexton and James O'Grady, who both consistently opposed secularist education policies at Trades Union and Labour conferences, all eventually became Labour M.P.s.<sup>2</sup> Some Irish members, like Michael Davitt and J. P. Nanetti, were known as 'Irish Labour men', and Lord Emly represented 'Labour and Nationalist' interests on the Limerick County Council. Pete Curran, J. R. Clynes, John Scurr, Stephen Walsh, Tom Maguire, Jack Fitzgerald, Jim Connell, Tom McCarthy and James Toomey, all of Irish background, made significant contributions to the Labour and Trade Union movements, and although some were merely nominal Catholics they performed a useful service in removing prejudice, and prepared the way for future Catholic and Irish politicians to enter the Labour movement. On the other hand, Paul Thompson in *Socialists, Liberals, and Labour: The Struggle for London, 1885-1914*, suggests that it is significant that many of the best-known London Marxists came from the religious minorities, such as the Irish and the Jews, and that Catholicism often provided a preparation for doctrinal Marxist socialism.<sup>3</sup>

The Irish Labour leaders, Larkin and Connolly, born in Liverpool and Edinburgh respectively, were the forerunners of Catholic Marxism in Britain. Larkin, who has been described by his biographer and namesake, Emmet Larkin, as 'essentially a Catholic', asserted in 1913 that 'a man can pray to Jesus and be a better militant Socialist for it. There is no conflict between the religion of the Catholic Church and Marxism. I stand by the Cross and Marx.'<sup>4</sup> He saw nothing inconsistent in claiming to be at once a Socialist, a Nationalist and a Catholic. He even sent his sons to Padraic Pearse's school, St Enda's. Connolly, the 1916 'martyr', was much more of a theorist, and had little sympathy with those on both sides of the divide who regarded religion and socialism as irreconcilable.

<sup>1</sup>Owen Dudley-Edwards, *The Mind of an Activist—James Connolly*, Dublin, 1971, pp. 59-62.

<sup>2</sup>Henry Pelling, *The Origins of the Labour Party, 1880-1900*, second edition, Oxford, 1965, p. 121; Philip Poirer, *The Advent of the Labour Party*, 1958, pp. 124 and 256; Sir James Sexton, *James Sexton, Agitator, the Life of the Dockers' M.P.: an autobiography*, 1936, pp. 196-199; Paul Thompson, *Socialists, Liberals and Labour: the Struggle for London, 1885-1914*, 1967, pp. 27 and 209; *The Catholic Who's Who and Yearbook*, 1909, ed. Sir F. C. Burnand, pp. 163 and 357.

<sup>3</sup>Thompson, *op. cit.*, pp. 114 and 237.

<sup>4</sup>Emmet Larkin, *James Larkin, Irish Labour Leader, 1876-1947*, Mentor edition, 1968, pp. 19 and 174.

Connolly tried to marry the apparent opposites in his review of Patrick J. Cooney's *Roman Catholicism and Socialism* in *The Harp* (1908), and in his essay, *Labour, Nationality and Religion* (1910), which was a response to the Lenten discourses of the Jesuit Father Kane.<sup>1</sup> Owen Dudley-Edwards, in *The Mind of an Activist—James Connolly*, states that Connolly perceived, 'as few men by his time had done, an essential interdependence of Catholicism and Socialism. From this he went on to put forward positive reflections which make him, in my view, one of the best and most enlightened apologists the Catholic Church has seen since the Industrial Revolution.'<sup>2</sup>

Connolly was a frequent visitor to the home of the Wheatley brothers and forms a direct link with the Glasgow Catholic Socialist Society, a circle of ardent reformists, who strove to find a working basis for Socialism within Catholicism. Prominent members included John and Patrick Wheatley, William Regan, and Stephen Pullman, and among their associates were Patrick Dollan, the Communist Willie Gallacher, and the Reverend F. C. Young, an Episcopalian Minister. Beginning with a nucleus of only fifteen, the group was soon able to draw audiences of up to two hundred to meetings at the Templeton Hall, but it was bitterly denounced by the Catholic *Glasgow Observer*, the Catholic Truth Society, Hilaire Belloc, the Jesuit Fathers Ashton and Puissant, and John Wheatley's parish priest, Father O'Brien. The society refused to be cowed, and John Wheatley in particular counter-attacked, so that by 1909, when he published his pamphlet, *The Catholic Working Man*, his case was almost won. Certainly, the Wheatleys and their organization helped to win over the Irish of the West of Scotland to the Labour cause.<sup>3</sup> But Wheatley, although avowedly 'left wing', was not a Marxist. Willie Gallacher described him as 'an honest, earnest socialist, but without any understanding of Marxism', and Trotsky wrote: 'Wheatley is not only a Socialist, but also a Catholic, and only afterwards a Socialist. To this "left winger" Socialist policy is directed by personal morality and personal morality by religion.'<sup>4</sup>

Another Catholic Socialist Society was formed in Leeds by Henry Somerville, a Catholic student of economics, who, believing that socialism would ultimately triumph, thought that the Church ought to line up with the winning side. Although the economic aspect of socialism made little appeal to Somerville, he could not see how it was incompatible with Catholic teaching. Like its Glasgow counterpart, the Leeds society soon came under fire from many

<sup>1</sup>*The Best of Connolly*, ed. Proinias MacAonghusa and Liam O'Reagain, Cork, pp. 11, 29-33 and 92-100.

<sup>2</sup>Dudley-Edwards, 'Mind of an Activist', *op. cit.*, pp. 29 and 57.

<sup>3</sup>C. Desmond Greaves, *The Life and Times of James Connolly*, 1961, p. 191; Robert Keith Middlemas, *The Clydesiders: A Left-Wing Struggle for Parliamentary Power*, 1965, pp. 36-40.

<sup>4</sup>William Gallacher, *Last Memoirs*, 1966, p. 200; Georgiana Putnam McEntee, *The Social Catholic Movement*, New York, 1927, p. 97.

directions.<sup>1</sup> Early in 1909 the chairman of the Leeds Catholic Federation objected to the Catholic socialists distributing leaflets at the Federation's A.G.M. and a Leeds postman, Mr Hogan, warned a meeting of Hull Catholics of 'so-called Catholic socialists'.<sup>2</sup> Clerical condemnation followed; Father Shine, the administrator of St Anne's Cathedral, spoke of those well-intentioned Catholics who refused to acknowledge that socialism had irreligious tendencies, and advised his congregation that all Catholic societies should be formed 'with due regard to episcopal authority and absolutely under episcopal guidance'. One of Shine's specific charges was that socialism would abrogate parental rights, which emphasizes the harm done to the socialist cause by the rationalist fringe. However, the debate was carried over to the columns of the *Catholic Herald*: B. Sullivan, a member of the Leeds Society, replied to the suggestion that the society should change its name by asking, 'what social reform would permanently benefit the worker?' and in reply to his rhetorical question he stated, 'social reform that leaves the means of production in the hands of a small class that tends to grow smaller each year will not remedy the evil'. Inevitably Bishop Gordon of Leeds issued a pastoral on 20th June, 1909, warning the Society that they held opinions contrary to papal teaching, and accusing them of lacking loyalty, of giving scandal, and of endangering their immortal souls. His Lordship ordered the Catholic socialists to desist from what he termed their 'unchristian and uncatholic work', declaring that, if they persisted, he must solemnly, publicly and emphatically repudiate the society'.<sup>3</sup>

Although the society did disband, the Catholic Socialist tradition survived in Leeds. When the first National Catholic Congress was held in the city in 1910, Miss Bertha Quinn, a suffragette and Trades Unionist, addressing a Federation section meeting, informed the visitors that 25,000 tailoresses in Leeds earned less than five shillings a week, and accused Catholics of indifference to social questions.<sup>4</sup> Somerville sustained his interest, writing that he saw little to be gained by painting socialism as conducive to atheism, and congenial to free love.<sup>5</sup> In 1918 Thomas F. Burns, the organizing secretary of the Salford Federation, came to Leeds to open a branch of his Catholic Trades Unionist Conference, and campaign against the socialist constitution of the Labour Party. Only thirty people attended the meeting, and twenty of these led by Miss Quinn, now Secretary of the Tailoresses' Union, declared that they were Catholic socialists and could accept the formula, i.e. clause iv, and left the meeting. The despondent Burns wrote to Bishop Casartelli of Salford,

<sup>1</sup>McEntee, *op. cit.*, p. 109.

<sup>2</sup>*Catholic Times*, February 5, 1909, and February 20, 1909; *Hull Daily Mail*, February 15, 1909.

<sup>3</sup>*Catholic Herald*, February 13, 1909, and February 20, 1909; Letter of the Bishop of Leeds, June 10, 1909, to be read on June 20.

<sup>4</sup>*Yorkshire Post*, August 2, 1910.

<sup>5</sup>McEntee, *op. cit.*, pp. 109 and 111.

'it is the worst experience I have had . . . we are now reaping the full benefit of the loose talking of the [Catholic Social] Guild, Prior McNabb, and the remainder, and I am afraid that things will become much worse.'<sup>1</sup>

This rift between Burns' organization and the Guild widened when the former, at its annual conference in the autumn of 1918, not only condemned the 'permeation' policy, but also called upon Catholics to refuse to pay the political levy. It also debated the formation of a Catholic party. Burns finally acted independently and launched his Centre Labour Party, which claimed to accept members 'irrespective of creed, sex or class'. The party was supposedly equally opposed to 'capitalistic and socialistic excesses', and sought to 'give expression to the workers' demands on the lines of a Christian Democracy'.<sup>2</sup> Burns seriously considered standing for Parliament, but his movement soon collapsed. However, the temporary success of the right-wing British Workers Party, later the National Democratic Party, which returned fifteen M.P.s in 1918, and the pre-war British Labour Party are reminders that the concept of a non-socialist Trades Union Party was not peculiar to Catholic circles.<sup>3</sup> Burns seems to have learned his lesson. At a Confederation Meeting in Birmingham in 1923, he dismissed the idea of a Catholic, or Christian Democratic Party, as 'impractical at the moment'. At the same conference Mrs Harford Hewitt of the Catholic Women's League, in a major speech, said: 'Here I would strongly advise you to forgo the dream of a Catholic Party. In England it is impossible, and not to be desired.'<sup>4</sup> However, a resolution recommending the formation of a Catholic Party was put to the C.Y.M.S. conference at Chester in 1924.<sup>5</sup>

Gradually the essentially moderate and reformist Labour Party won clerical approval. As early as 1913 Archbishop Whiteside of Liverpool had given his blessing to Philip Snowden's brand of socialism, and during the furore in 1918 over Labour's new constitution he said of Labour: 'We must wait until Rome speaks, and then we will know what to do. The Church has left them with liberty; until the Church deprives them of it, let them stick to their liberty.'<sup>6</sup> Bishop Keating suggested in 1919 that, even if Labour was under the control of a socialist executive, Catholics should purge rather than leave the party. While in 1924, during the lifetime of the first Labour Government, in which John Wheatley served as Minister of Health, Cardinal Bourne in an interview with a Dutch paper

<sup>1</sup>File 208, Bishop's House, Salford, September 23, 1918, Thomas Burns to Bishop Casartelli.

<sup>2</sup>File 208, Printed leaflet headed, The Centre Labour Party, H.Q. the Manchester Social Club, Lower Mosley Street, Manchester, secretary, Thomas F. Burns.

<sup>3</sup>David Butler and Jennie Freeman, *British Political Facts, 1900-1967*, 1968, pp. 118-119; Trevor Wilson, *The Downfall of the Liberal Party, 1914-1935*, Fontana edition, 1968, pp. 29 and 168.

<sup>4</sup>File 208, Report of the Conference of the Catholic Confederation of England and Wales held at Birmingham August 4 and 6, 1923; McEntee, *op. cit.*, p. 141.

<sup>5</sup>McEntee, *op. cit.*, p. 142.



observed that 'our Labour Party has nothing in its programme which threatens religion. Certainly there are some extremists among its members, but as a party it has nothing in common with the Socialists of the continent. Mr MacDonalld is neither materialist nor Marxist: one can say as much of the principal Labour men.' The Cardinal added that in some respects the party approached Catholic social doctrine.<sup>1</sup> Labour at last had become acceptable, and respectable, precisely because, as the Left always knew, it was basically reformist, and not revolutionary.

Meanwhile, in the aftermath of the Great War, Catholics increasingly voted Labour, and a few were elected to public office: by 1929 there were eighteen Catholic Labour M.P.s.<sup>2</sup> The Irish vote was gradually won over. Even before the war Wheatley and Sexton had left the U.I.L., and in some parts of London the League had been in close contact with Labour. It is significant that in 1905 John Redmond had urged the Irish in Britain to support Labour, except where friends of the cause were standing in other interests.<sup>3</sup> After the signing of the Treaty, T. P. O'Connor, Nationalist Member for Liverpool Scotland from 1885 to 1929, was determined that the Irish should become a force in British politics by allying with Labour, and Catholics have ever since played an important, moderating rôle in the left wing politics of Merseyside.<sup>4</sup> Similarly, Catholic Irishmen in Bermondsey and Stepney became influential in the Labour movement, while Dr Robert Ambrose, a London medical practitioner, and a former Nationalist M.P. for West Mayo, stood as Labour candidate in Whitechapel at the General Election in 1918.<sup>5</sup> This transfer of allegiance from Liberal to Labour would appear to have been inevitable, the Catholic Irish were mainly unskilled manual workers, and regardless of national or religious interests Labour's programme was likely to appeal to them. Besides, the Conservatives were identified with Unionism, and the issue of partition still kept the national cause alive. There is also a possibility that some Catholics were attracted to Labour's programme *per se*, i.e. that despite clerical condemnation the Labour Party seemed to them to reflect Catholic social teaching. J. A. Jackson, in his more recent study *The Irish in Britain*, suggests that the Connolly Association has helped later immigrants to identify with Labour, which is most probably an exaggeration of the Association's influence. Jackson also declares that the Irish tend to vote Labour because Catholics vote Labour, which is hardly an explanation of Irish voting behaviour, as the evidence would suggest that Catholics vote

<sup>1</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 133-136.

<sup>2</sup>E. F. Hobsbawm, *Primitive Rebels*, Manchester, 1959, pp. 141-142.

<sup>3</sup>F. S. L. Lyons, *John Dillon, a biography*, 1968, p. 279.

<sup>4</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 460, 473-475.

<sup>5</sup>George Thayer, *The British Political Fringe*, 1965, pp. 230-235; Reginald Bevins, *The Greasy Pole, A Personal Account of British Politics*, 1965, pp. 13 and 18; Noreen Branson and Margot Heineman, *Britain in the Nineteen Thirties*, 1971, p. 294; *Who Was Who, 1929-1940*, 1941, p. 23.

Labour because they are Irish.<sup>1</sup> More research is required on a constituency basis of Irish organizations, as the breakdown on the Liberal alliance will clearly differ from area to area. As early as 1907, during a by-election in West Hull, some Irish Trades Unionist members of the local Nationalist organization urged support for the Labour candidate, if there was a chance of his being elected.<sup>2</sup> In Liverpool the turning point was the death of T. P. O'Connor, when David Logan won Scotland for Labour. In Walsall the Liberals, by shrewdly selecting Pat Collins, the Catholic Irishman 'showman king', as their candidate, held the Irish vote, until J. J. McShane, a Scots-Irishman and headmaster of the local Catholic school, won the Irish vote, and the seat, for Labour in 1929.<sup>3</sup> There remain a number of unanswered questions: How well organized were the Irish? Were many local branches of the U.I.L. in alliance with Labour before 1914? Did the split between Sinn Fein and the Nationalists disrupt Irish organizations in Britain? Did the U.I.L. collapse, and so create a vacuum in the Irish working class districts which was filled by Labour? Had the Liberal educational policies accelerated this change of allegiance? Is the most important change the emergence of general trades unions catering for manual workers, such as dockers, which involved the Irish in union activities? In thus becoming unionized, did the Irish become more political?

In conclusion it would seem that Catholics have as yet not played a creative role in Labour politics; they have rather exerted a moderating or negative influence, which is a pity as social Catholicism might have strengthened the Cooperative,<sup>4</sup> Guild Socialist and European forces within the Labour Party.

<sup>1</sup>J. A. Jackson, *The Irish in Britain*, 1963, p. 127.

<sup>2</sup>*Hull Daily Mail*, November 25, 1907.

<sup>3</sup>*Who Was Who, 1941-1950*, 1952, p. 238; and K. R. Dean, Birmingham University M.A. thesis, 1969, Walsall Parliamentary Elections.

<sup>4</sup>*Dictionary of Labour Biography*, vol. I, ed. Joyce M. Bellamy and John Saville, 1972, entries for Francis Ciappesioni, Patrick Gallagher and Thomas Killon.