

ENLISTING REVOLUTION

II

LET us be clear. The vehemence of Conservative reaction to-day is evoked not by this particular *-ism* or that; nor has it anything to do with objective examination of the remedial theories proposed. Its critical faculties are limited strictly to the apprehension of a radical programme only *in so far as it is sufficiently practical, or not, to be feared.*

Capitalism reacts, then, to nothing more specific than effective Revolutionary impulse evoked by the exploitation of the masses. And to the effectiveness or probable effectiveness of the impulse, the vigour of Conservative reaction is strictly relative. For the powers of this world deal not in absolute value but effect. Let us suffer no illusion. We do not doubt that were Catholics sufficiently keen and sincere, sufficiently devoted to the leadership of the Pope to be feared in the world politic, the Social encyclicals of Pius XI would be in no time apprehended as heralding a revolution so complete (because so absolute and profoundly moral) that it would in effect surpass the wildest dreams of an oppressed proletariat (and the most fearful nightmares of the pocket-conscious). Once again, as before when it suited the mood and the expedients of the time, the Pope would be dubbed Anti-Christ. The World is ever wont to perceive heresy in its opponents.

We have spoken of dissent among the Elect. Of the alacrity with which the *Bien-pensant* perceive a heresy. By a diabolical ill-chance—and something more than chance—revolution in nine cases out of ten allies itself to a heresy. But it is our present business to urge that that heresy is not necessarily identifiable with the revolutionary impulse itself. But no matter to the pocket-conscious: it is their undeniable good-fortune that the enemy is an indictable heretic; the zeal of the pocket-conscious is elevated to the paradisaical complacency of the *Bien-pensant*. The 'Anti-God

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Front' of Bolshevism is veritably no less a blessing to present-day Capitalism than was the heresy of Lamennais to the advocates of *laissez-faire*.

As for Lamennais it is not the whole truth to say of him that his heresy lay in speaking too soon. It would be truer to say that had he spoken a century later he would have preached what he really wanted to preach with infinitely more effect, the effect (let us in charity hope) he really desired. In short he would have avoided his heresy. Let us examine a much-quoted passage of his—

' Descend ' (he says) ' to the bottom of things, and disengage from the wavering thoughts, vain and fleeting opinions, accidentally mingled with it, the powerful principle which, without interruption, ferments in the bosom of society, and what find you but Christianity itself? What is it the people wish, what is it they claim, with a perseverance that never tires, and an ardour that nothing can damp? Is it not the abolition of the reign of force, in order to substitute that of intelligence and right? Is it not the effective recognition and social realization of equality, inseparable from liberty, the necessary condition and essential form of which, in the organization of the state, is election, the first basis of the Christian community?

' What, again, do the people wish? What do they demand? The amelioration of the lot of the masses, everywhere so full of suffering; laws for the protection of labour, whence may result a more equitable distribution of the general wealth; that the few shall no longer exercise an exclusive influence for their own profit in the administration of the interests of all; that a legislation which has no bounds, the everlasting refuge of privilege which it in vain attempts to disguise under lying names, shall no longer, on every side, drive the poor back into their misery; that the goods, destined by the Heavenly Father for all his children, shall become accessible to all; that human fraternity shall cease to be a mockery, and a word without meaning. In short, suscitated by God to pronounce the final judgment upon the old social order, they have summoned it to appear, and recalling the ages which have crumbled away, they have said to it, ' I was hungry, and ye gave me not to eat; I was thirsty, and ye gave me not to drink; I was a stranger, and ye took me not in; naked, and ye clothed me not; sick and in prison, and ye did not visit me.' I interrogate you on the law. Respond. And the old social order is silent, for it has nothing to answer; and it raises its hand against the people whom God has appointed to judge it. But what can it do against the people, and against

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God? Its doom is registered on high, and it will not be able to efface it with the blood which, for a brief period, it is permitted to shed.

'We cannot, then, but recognize in what is passing under our eyes the action of *the Christian principle*, which, having for long ages presided almost exclusively over individual life, seeks now to produce itself under a more general and perfect form, to incarnate itself, so to speak, in social institutions—the second phase of its development, of which only the first labour as yet appears. *Something instinctive and irresistible pushes the people in this direction.* The few have taken possession of the earth; they have taken possession of it by wresting from all others even the smallest part of the common heritage; and the people will that men live as brothers according to the divine commandment. They battle for justice and charity; they battle for the doctrine which Jesus Christ came to preach to the world, and which will save it in spite of the powers of the world.'¹

Note primarily how the people are transformed into the Saints! Here is your index. For has not *this* always been the heresy of radical reform—an undue anticipation of the Kingdom of Heaven?

'Ciel ici-bas' to quote a Lamennais phrase, and the Kingdom of Men at that, rather than the Kingdom of God. But let us abandon the term heresy and speak simply of the *Sin of Socialists.*

For it has become a doctrine indistinguishable from Socialism that our good lies in the natural order and that our good is unattainable by individual effort. Exemption from Evil follows, not upon the rights of the human soul, made in the Image of the Father, redeemed by the sacrificial Christ, indwelt by the Holy Ghost, but upon Social organization, human co-operation, whereby we would compel nature to yield up her good to us. No good is sought beyond that which is to be found in nature. Or not to be found—for the Atheistic mastery of nature has led ironically enough to Man's utter subservience to nature. We are dominated more than ever by the principles of the physical economy, our lives more prone than ever to its ills.

¹ *Affaires de Rome*, pp. 319-321.

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Then (to return to Lamennais' mistake) when Socialism has sought to press Christianity into its service, heterodoxy has been hardly less apparent. Attempting to distinguish between Christianity and the Church, it has denounced Christianity in the name of Christianity, God in the name of God, discarded the Gospel in the name of the Gospel. And to what end? Penetrate the almost clerical unction of the apostate Lamennais, and in what does he differ from Saint-Simon, Proudhon, Fourier, and the rest? For if with them man was no more than the *homo economicus* and the whole of life a political economy, it is equally certain that the preaching of Lamennais (translating indeed democracy into Christianity) gave us a Christian who was no more than an *ens politicum* and a Christianity that was no more than a political economy. For the essence of his Socialism still lay in the notion that man's good is in the natural order. 'Christ came to found a new order of things, to give to renovated man a foretaste of heaven.' Who doubts it? But (here Socialism lies in the crucible) it is because of, precisely, that new order, and *within it*, not because of an independent design for living that the masses may start their heaven here below. The Christian Socialism of Lamennais, we must emphatically bear in mind, did no more (at our most charitable evaluation) than affirm the co-existence of Socialism and Christianity: an anaemic symbiosis that was no more Christianity than the ideology of certain modern Divines (for which material reality is the sole absolute existent, the soul a derivative, and the Deity a precarious subsistent) is a genuine teleology!

It is the simple truth that the Industrial Age has yet to experience the force of a *genuine* Christian Revolution.

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