

Papal Encyclicals Anniversary Marks Social Gains

(Continued from Page 2)

...adequately the Holy Father's proposals for the remaking of industrial society.

The term "reconstruction," in other words, rebuilding, is the only adequate expression. What the Pope demands is a new kind of society, a new social order, an industrial organization which will differ radically from the economic arrangements which have existed for the last 150 years.

We have made a great deal of progress in carrying out the specific "reforms" of the encyclicals, but considerably less in promoting this long-range "reconstruction" of the social order.

THE PRINCIPAL measure of "reform" advocated by Leo XIII and Pius XI are legislation and organization. Progress has been made in both fields, although certain gaps remain to be filled.

Since 1901, and more particularly since 1931, the Federal Government, reversing a very bad tradition of laissez faire, or "hands off," has gradually come to meet the pleas that Pius XI vented upon those nations in which a new branch of law, wholly unknown to the earlier times, has arisen from the continuous and unwarred labor to protect vigorously the sacred rights of the workers that flow from their dignity as men and as Christians.

These new types of law, the Holy Father continues, "undertake the protection of life, health,

strength, family, homes, work-shops, wages and labor hazards, in fine, everything which pertains to the condition of wage-workers with special concern for women and children.

IN ALL OF THESE fields and in others left unspecified in this particular passage of the encyclical, the Federal Government, however belatedly and experimentally, has enacted legislation more or less in harmony with the teaching of Leo and Pius. In 1919, long before the Federal Government has seriously begun to "protect . . . the sacred rights of workers," the American Bishops recommended eleven major types of governmental action which in their opinion were badly needed at the time.

This "Bishops' Program of Social Reconstruction" was more or less ignored during the twenties, but happily the preface to the 20th anniversary edition of the "Program" was able to report that by 1930, of eleven proposals, all but one had been either wholly or partially translated into fact. And additional progress has been made since then.

There are still some serious gaps in Federal legislation and even more serious deficiencies in the social legislation of the individual states, some of which have been scandalously recast in their duty to "protect the sacred rights of the workers." In general, however, we may conclude

in 1951 that considerable progress has been made since, and to a certain extent because of, the influence of the two great encyclicals.

THESE TWO TYPES of "reform"—legislation and organization, including of course the organization of farmers, employers and professional people—are aimed at implementing what might be called the central principle of the two encyclicals, namely, that ownership and work are both individual and social in character and therefore must be made to serve the interests not only of individuals but of society as well. Legislation and organization have done much to bring about this necessary balance between the individual and social aspects of economic life, but they are not the final answer. They are—or should be—merely steps in the right direction.

What is needed, if we are to avoid the dictatorship of wealth on the one hand or the dictatorship of government on the other, is an overall reconstruction of the social order along the lines of the so-called Industry Council system. It is "most necessary," as Pius XI tells us, that there be established "a juridical and social order which will, as it were, give form and shape to all economic life"—an order "which public authority ought to be ever ready effectively to protect and defend."

PROTECTIVE AND "reform" legislation is necessary; so is organization. But legislation, if relied upon too heavily, can innocently lead us into statism; and organization alone—along class

lines—can easily result in an all-out struggle for domination between or among contending economic power groups.

Our task for the future, while continuing to fill in the gaps in federal and state legislation, and while continuing to organize the unorganized, is to encourage existing organizations of labor, management, agriculture and the professions to cooperate as much as possible—under government supervision, but free from government domination—in a federated system of industrial and professional councils specifically designed to facilitate the practice of social justice by consciously promoting the general welfare of the common good. And even as we are working towards the establishment of the Industry Council system, it is most necessary that there be the fullest possible cooperation between government and private organizations. Otherwise we may become totalitarian ourselves in opposing totalitarianism in other parts of the world.

It should not be necessary to add, in conclusion, that neither the Industry Council system nor any specific proposal leading up to it will be effective unless, as Pius XI reminds us more than once, "men return openly and sincerely to the teaching of the Gospel, to the precepts of Him Who alone has the words of everlasting life . . ."

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