

Catholic Syndicalism in « Trade Unions in Canada »

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CATHOLIC SYNDICALISM

in

« TRADE UNIONS IN CANADA »

Some remarks on the latest book of H. A. Logan

ALFRED CHARPENTIER

This volume, which appeared a year ago, deals with the development and functioning of trade unions in Canada. Twenty years earlier the author had treated the same subject but mainly from the legislative angle. The present work reports on the different phases of local unions in all the country up to their integration into national or international professional groups and finally into such interprofessional federations as the Trades and Labor Congress of Canada, the Canadian Congress of Labor and the Canadian and Catholic Confederation of Labor. Then the author devotes several chapters to dealing thoroughly with the origin, development and activities of more than thirty central organizations in the industries of building, printing, pulp and paper, metallurgy, railway, mines, clothing and textiles, automobile, iron-smelting, rubber, curing, electricity, forest exploitation, navigation and civil service. Finally, while not forgetting to mention revolutionary and communistic unionism, Logan in turn sets forth the origin, the developments, the characteristics and the program of activities of each of the union movements specified above.

It is not our intention to make a complete report on this work of Logan's but only to show how he speaks of catholic unionism in our country.

Commendable as was his effort to show the progress and the successes of the Canadian and Catholic Confederation of Labor in these last twenty years, he has nevertheless omitted a number of important facts concerning the C.C.C.L. He has followed more closely the respective progress of the two rival workers' movements. The preface of his volume is the proof of this. There he claims to have been present at the last annual conventions of the T.L.C. and the C.C.L. and to have consulted with the heads of each of them, while he refrains, and for a very good reason, from making the same confession regarding the C.C.C.L. and its heads.

The first omission which strikes one is that of the part played by the C.C.C.L. in its relations

with the Federal Government during the War, its sharing in the work of the Superior Labor Council and of the National Labor Relations Board, its attitude regarding the decrees relative to wages and the negotiation of collective agreements and finally, its program of Post-War Reconstruction. In all this no mention of the C.C.C.L.

Mr. Logan, nonetheless, treated suitably the development and the expansion of the National Catholic Syndicates where it concerned the industries he had studied. He shows well also the inevitable reaction of the entrenched unions against the infiltration of the Catholic Syndicates into the same or connected industries.

In « Trades Unions in Canada » as in his work of 1928, Mr. Logan writes two chapters on the Catholic union movement. In the first, he studies the milieu where it originated, its beginnings, its structure, its trade and legislative activities. In the second, he analyses the aims, the principles and the methods, he recounts its battle for the right to representation before the public Powers and he studies the problems which the growth of Catholic Unionism presents.

These two chapters, particularly the second, are little more than a repetition of those of the author's first work. But he has observed, in the interval, that with the Province's growing industrialisation and urbanization, the working class, rapidly augmented by thousands of workers from the land, has been variously influenced by the spreading of the new currents of thought as well as by the new social and political movements. The Church, he remarks, continues to protect Her flock against the surrounding protestantism and against encroaching atheism. On the other hand, he sees appearing among the laity some anti-clerical spirits, and even within the bosom of the Church itself he perceives certain indications along the line of free thinking. The mentality of the Province of Quebec has been much changed also by the influence of the radio and the moving pictures. To Mr. Logan it appears that it was in the course of this important evolution that national and international unionism appeared in Quebec whereas it is necessary rather to state that it was during this recent period and above all during the War

and since, that these two branches of neuter unionism expanded most considerably here.

In the opinion of the author, the trade union is an « excellent agent of assimilation » among adults but, he adds, « it has been turned from this role by the launching of a separate French-Canadian Catholic organization knowingly sought after by the Church ».¹ Here is a strange statement ! What does he mean by « assimilating agent » ? Could it be that if the international unions had remained the only ones to enroll the French-Canadian workers of the Province these last twenty-five years these latter would have continued exactly like the generation before to be easily influenced by the materialistic, opportunist and Americanizing spirit of the neuter international unions ? Or does he mean that as assimilating agent with adults, the trade union permits its members to assimilate ideas and knowledges peculiar to its own industry or of general interest ? It is necessary to recall here that the mission of Catholic unionism in our Province has been precisely to fight against the first form of assimilation and to offer to the workers in the growing industrial centres of the Province the professional bounds responding to their ethnic, social and religious preferences. Through the doctrine which inspires it, the National Catholic Syndicate achieves quicker and more effectively than another one its educating role from the professional, social and national points of view.

Discussing the structure of the National Catholic Syndicate movement, Mr. Logan mentions only four regional Councils of our movement — those of Ottawa, of Montreal, of Sherbrooke and of Quebec — while there are a total of fifteen. He indicates, however, the important part taken by our syndicates and federations in the negotiation of collective agreements. He rightly attributes to the Collective Agreement Act and the Labor Relations Act the considerable increase of collective agreements in the Province during the last ten years and that, underlines the author, as much to the benefit of the international unions as for the National Catholic Syndicates.² He omits, nevertheless, to emphasize that the first of these two laws was obtained exclusively through the efforts continued during two years by the Catholic Syndicates in spite of the opposition of the « internationals ».

A brief analysis of the two above-mentioned laws and the results of their application leads him

to state that these two laws have given rise to a new need of meeting and co-operating between Catholic Syndicates and international unions. He observes justly that in a large sector of these two types of organization distrust and prejudices have given place to more rational arguments in the propaganda of their respective aims and merits.

Mr. Logan cannot accept the idea that in a like industry as, for example, in textiles and pulp and paper, a group factories should be under contract to a federation of the C.C.C.L. and that another group should be under contract with a union of the A.F. of L. Quite disconcerted, he wonders if advantages are obtained in this way worth the losses resulting from a divided house. Mr. Logan has yet to learn that there are higher values not comparable to the economic force of big numbers: moral, ethnic and philosophic values and others which the Catholic Syndicates have also as their mission besides economic values, to protect, to spread and at need to conquer.

Of the legislative role of the C.C.C.L. assembled in annual convention or by the intermediary of its « Bureau confédéral » the author finds nothing else to say but that this role is of benefit in influencing the legislation. But what about the adopting or the winning of important legislation to which the C.C.C.L. has contributed, or the particular orientation of its political action ? We know that in many fields of social lawmaking the C.C.C.L. since the outbreak of the last War tends more and more to ask for a decentralizing legislation contrary to the demands of international unionism. This aspect of the legislative action of the C.C.C.L. has not even merited a mention on the part of Mr. Logan.

The author closes his book with a chapter where he describes and interpretes the aims, the principles and the methods of the « National Catholic Movement ». Nowhere in his work does the author call our movement by its official English title « The Canadian and Catholic Confederation of Labor ».

In all which differentiates Catholic Syndicalism from other union movements, he notices latterly the signs of an important change. He summarizes these signs, partly, in the desire of the movement for a more circumscribed sharing of the union activity of the clergy and partly in the lesser importance attached to its confessional character.³

It seems, nevertheless, that Mr. Logan has disposed rather summarily of the action program of the Canadian and Catholic Confederation of

(1) p. 569.

(2) Cf. p. 579.

(3) Cf. p. 780.

Labor. He is silent on its more recent points of view, at least as far as 1946, in the field of wages, conciliation and arbitration, the strike, union security, etc.

Of the nationalistic character of the Catholic Syndicate movement the author does nothing but repeat the basic grounds on which this movement has depended, from its origin, to justify its existence, but he cites no new argument put forward in the Catholic Syndicate press in more recent times.

Concerning Canadian worker representation at the annual meeting of the International Labor Organization in Geneva, Mr. Logan allows his readers to think that the representative of the C.C.C.L. at this conference acted only as technical advisor to the government delegate while in reality since 1945 he has been one of the technical counselors of the Canadian labor delegate.

Lastly, the author devotes several pages to a criticism of many controversial questions brought forward by Catholic syndicalism. This part is the same as in 1928. He also points out the different points of view that he finds even to the right of existence of this movement. He quotes parti-

cularly the evidence of those who, like himself, have never viewed Catholic Syndicalism in Canada with a too-sympathetic eye.

In the measure where its demands differs from that of rival movements, Mr. Logan says that Catholic Syndicalism in Canada throws its weight on the side of the forces which divide English and French Canada. But his prejudices prevent him from understanding the social philosophy, the ethnical reasons and the deep inspiration at the bottom of the movement. His last thought, however, is less pessimistic than twenty years ago as to the actual situation of organized labor in Canada, in short, he thinks that the ideal to seek should be a frank admission of the differences which distinguish each union movement in Canada in order to arrive at a *modus vivendi* permitting in its wake the efficient administration of laws once adopted.

In this he is perfectly right. The national interest demands that this *modus vivendi* between the Canadian and Catholic Confederation of Labor, the Trades and Labor Congress and the Canadian Congress of Labor be established.

BOOKS

LA PARTICIPATION DES TRAVAILLEURS A LA VIE DE L'ENTREPRISE ⁽¹⁾ (THE PARTICIPATION OF WORKERS IN THE LIFE OF THE ENTERPRISE)

GASTON CHOLETTE

If in a generation or two the chief fabricators of social reform in the Province of Quebec are asked what they think of the role of the Church in this domain they certainly will not be apt to respond, « Nothing », as did a French union leader recently to a group of American journalists.

As a matter of fact, in workers' as in employers' associations, and in all spheres of activity common to both these groups, we find the discreet yet decisive influence of the social doctrine of the Church. In the Province of Quebec the clergy, after having played a valuable part in the formation and development of professional organizations, are in the fore front where it concerns the theory of reform.

The Sacerdotal Commission of Social Studies merits, in this regard, a very special mention. Formed recently by the Episcopate of this Province in order to respond more adequately to the needs of the present time, specially where the explanation of the doctrine shown in its broad lines in the encyclicals and its application to

the Quebec milieu are concerned, this body has not waited long before distinguishing itself in the eyes of all by the boldness of its concepts and the firm prudence of its point of view. It will be a long time, for example, before its intervention on the Labour Code project and in the famous Asbestos strike will be forgotten.

In its short existence, it has many times proved its willingness to draw from the social doctrine of the Church its maximum of effect and significance. While supporting steadily the great principles at the base of the traditional doctrine of the Church, and placing itself faithfully in the perspective of the encyclicals and other pontifical texts, it has taken upon itself the mission of formulating for the Province of Quebec the interpretations and applications which are pertinent and opportune.

After having published « Professional Organization in Quebec », it presents to the public a second study on « The Participation of Workers in the Life of the Enterprise ». This is in the form of a booklet of a hundred pages, about half of which contains the opinion of the members of the Commission, while the rest is devoted to citing pontifical texts.

The subject treated, a thorny and controversial one, is of extreme importance since it constitutes the Gordian

(1) *La participation des travailleurs à la vie de l'entreprise*, a booklet of 100 pages by the Commission sacerdotale d'études sociales, for sale at fifty cents at the secretariat of the Sacerdotal Commission of Social Studies, Bishopric of Saint Hyacinthe.