

Review

Reviewed Work(s): James P. Cannon As We Knew Him by Jack Barnes

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argues that what is usually called Catholic social doctrine is better understood as teaching on social questions by successive Popes. He illustrates this by a review of such teaching up to the present, including John Paul II's strictures on liberation theology, and he has interesting things to say about what he considers to be the proper role for the Church in the domain of social thought. Paul Furlong's 'Introduction' makes the point that *Rerum Novarum* 'presupposed a Church confident in its ability to teach its faithful and to have the message listened to'. O'Connell's paper reminds us of the various positions taken up by popes, including a delightful footnote recalling Pius X's confident social vision.

'It is conformable to the order established by God that in human society there should be princes and subjects, masters and men, rich and poor, learned and ignorant, nobles and plebeians, who, united by a bond of love, should help one another to attain their final end in Heaven and their material and moral well-being on earth.'

Jonathan Boswell's excellent chapter offers a review of what he calls 'non-official' and 'middle-level' Catholic thinking about social and economic matters since 1891. Distributivism, corporatism, personalism, forms of social contractualism and social federalism all gain mention. Curiously, despite the fact that the chapter contains an overview of such thinking right up to the present, there is an absence of reference to the way in which some Catholic social theorists flirted with fascism and the extent to which some forms of Catholic social thinking had an obvious affinity to fascism. Sheed and Ward published in the mid 1930s a book entitled *Fascism And Providence*, arguing that the fascist movement represented a providential intervention in twentieth century society.

Indeed, this is an obvious gap in a collection of articles claiming to analyse the development of Catholic social policy in the twentieth century. How the Catholic Church and Catholic social theorists dealt with fascism in all its forms – British, German, Italian, Spanish and so on – is a contentious issue but one that needs confronting and it is strange that there is almost no mention of this theme. Another papal encyclical *Quadragesimo Anno* in 1931 devoted fifteen paragraphs to an attack on socialism, with one particularly virulent paragraph entitled 'Catholic deserters to socialism'. The same encyclical devoted five paragraphs to the fascist corporative organisation of society, which was seen as having certain general advantages – 'peaceful collaboration of various classes, repression of socialist organisations and efforts (and) the moderating efforts of a special magistracy'. Perhaps it is simply depressing to recall that there was a text in use in Maynooth Seminary in the mid-1960s, a two volume *History Of The Catholic Church* by a Benedictine monk Charles Poulet published in 1935, which reviewed the contemporary scene in the following way:

'There is no denying the efficiency of Hitler. He has apparently changed Germany from top to bottom. Some of his leaders are avowedly bullies whose only power lies in the alliance of ignorance with brutality. But all are not such. Dr. Goebbels for example is a Catholic and a scholar.'

Terry O'Keefe

Jack Barnes (ed), **James P. Cannon As We Knew Him**, (Pathfinder, New York, 1976), pp. 200 np

James P. Cannon (1890-1974) was one of the key figures in the foundation and early development of the American Community Party (CP). He later went on to found the American Trotskyist movement. His father was born in Ireland, but emigrated young enough to have been an activist in the Knights Of Labor, one of the early trade unions in America. James P. Cannon was born in Rosebud, Kansas in 1890. As a young man he joined the Industrial Workers Of The World (IWW). In the IWW Cannon was a protégé of Vincent St. John and a friend of both Big Bill Haywood and Frank Little, who was later lynched in Butte, Montana.

It is hard to visualise now, but in the period before the First World War there was explicit class warfare waged in America, as the capitalist class tried to crush the nascent workers' movement represented by the IWW and the Socialist Party. The big strikes and lockouts of Lawrence, Paterson, and Butte in 1912 and 1913 rivalled and even exceeded those of Dublin in 1913 in intensity. The employers were ruthless in defence of their interests. When the workers lost they paid an enormous price; in some cases the entire workforce was replaced, and the militants run out of town. The state forces made no pretence of neutrality.¹ Faced with the First World War the Left in America, as elsewhere, split. The news of the Russian Revolution galvanised many, Cannon amongst them, into an attempt to form a new party based on Marxism. In the confusion of rival groups which proliferated, Cannon supported the more Americanised group around John Reed.² Eventually this group was accepted as the model for the new party rather than the main rival, which was based on federations of non English speaking national groupings.

In the CP, Cannon and William Z. Foster emerged as the leaders of the more practical wing which orientated toward the trade unions and American born workers. Cannon set up the International Labour Defence to defend class war prisoners whatever their political persuasion. These included Sacco and Vanzetti, Mooney and many others. Cannon's prestige among IWW members was a major asset to him. He worked closely with Elizabeth Gurley Flynn, who at this stage was outside the CP. His allies and friends included Williams F. Dunne, who had led a general strike in Butte, and Tom O'Flaherty, older brother of the novelist Liam O'Flaherty.

In 1929, at a Comintern conference, Cannon read Trotsky's critique of the direction which the USSR was

taking under Stalin's influence. Reading this brought together all Cannon's reservations about the Comintern line and he became a supporter of Trotsky. On his return to America he organised a secret faction before his inevitable expulsion from the CP. Tom O'Flaherty, Max Shachtman and Martin Abern of the Party leadership followed him, as did the younger Dunne brothers. Many of Cannon's closest friends remained in the CP, where they then tried to save their own Party positions by denouncing Cannon. The CP tried to eliminate Cannon's group – which initially still regarded itself as a faction of the CP rather than as a separate organisation – through the use of goon squads and violence. Cannon, however, had friends from all parts of the left milieu who were willing to defend his democratic rights even when they disagreed with his views. Over the next decade Cannon built the most efficient Trotskyist organisation in the world. The Dunnes led the great strike in Minneapolis which ushered in the rise of the Congress Of Industrial Organisations (CIO). Their success here enabled them to merge with A. J. Muste's American Workers' Party, a group which had led the Toledo Strike in 1934. In 1938, after a period of steady growth the Socialist Workers' Party was formed.

The movement split in 1940, essentially over the question of whether the USSR was still a worker's state to be defended by the left despite its shortcomings. Cannon and orthodox Trotskyists (including Trotsky himself) held that this was so. It is a debate which has now been overtaken by history. Cannon was gaoled with a number of his comrades in 1944 under the Smith Act which was designed for use against all those who could be described as subversives in an attempt to destroy the group's influence in the working class. The CP applauded this measure, but was less enthusiastic when the same tactic was later used against the CP in the McCarthy era.

Cannon's Socialist Workers' Party (SWP) survived the 1950s, as did the CP. The rest of the American left effectively disappeared. The SWP played a major role in the civil rights and anti-war movement during the 1960s. Cannon assisted T. Draper in his classic history of the CP, earning a reputation for honesty and accuracy in his memoirs. This prompted Draper to say that for Cannon, unlike many of the other CP leaders, the memories were still fresh, and he was not ashamed of them.

This book is a collection of anecdotes and memoirs of Cannon by friends and associates. It is, therefore, somewhat episodic. It should appeal to those with an interest in American politics and has a relevance broader than merely for those with Trotskyist sympathies. It is often forgotten that many of the inspirations of the Irish Labour movement come from the west rather than the east. Larkin and Connolly and their ideas were influenced by American experiences and debates, as was the concept of the OBU (One Big Union). Interesting in its own right, this work should also whet the appetite for the forthcoming biography of Cannon by Bryan Palmer, the Canadian Marxist historian. The books by Cannon I strongly recommend are *Socialism On Trial* (1942) and *Notebook Of An Agitator* (1958).

Jim Monaghan

Notes

1. Samuel Yellen, *American Labor Struggles*. (Manor, 1974)
2. Reed was author of *Ten Days That Shook The World* and was the central character in Warren Beatty's film 'Reds'.

William Nolan & Thomas G. McGrath (eds). **Tipperary**, (Geography Publications, Dublin, 1985), pp. 493, £40

Kevin Whelan (ed). **Wexford**, (Geography Publications, Dublin, 1987), pp. 564, £40

William Nolan & Kevin Whelan (eds), **Kilkenny**, (Geography Publications, Dublin, 1990), pp. 715, £40

William Nolan & Thomas P. Power (eds). **Waterford**, (Geography Publications, Dublin, 1992), pp. 450, £40

F.H.A. Aalen & Kevin Whelan (eds), **Dublin**, (Geography Publications, Dublin, 1992), pp. 450, £40

Patrick O'Flanagan & Cornelius G. Buttimer (eds), **Cork**, (Geography Publications, Dublin 1993), pp. 1000, £40

Ken Hannigan & William Nolan (eds), **Wicklow**, (Geography Publications, Dublin 1994), pp. 1005,

William Nolan, Liam Ronayne & Máiread Dunlevy (eds), **Donegal**, (Geography Publications, Dublin, 1995) pp. 920, £40

Gerard Moran (ed), **Galway**, (Geography Publications, Dublin, 1996), pp. 848, £40

This series, subtitled 'Interdisciplinary essays on the history of an Irish county', is an enormous enterprise, mainly the initiative of Willie Nolan whose intention is to provide a range of research essays for every county in Ireland. Down, Derry, Laois and Offaly are due for publication in 1996-1997, with Carlow, Mayo, Kerry, Kildare and Armagh expected in 1998-1999. The articles range from prehistory to the present and, of course, there is no particular focus on labour history.

One article directly relating to labour history in *Tipperary* is entitled 'County Tipperary: class struggle and national struggle, 1916-1924' by D. R. O'Connor Lysaght. The theme reflects the title, showing how the two were generally intermixed over this period. The point is made that there was a lack of any philosophically based ideology whether from Irish Transport And General Workers' Union (ITGWU) officials or from the more radical 'sovietees' in 1922. They are shown to be merely reacting to events of the early 1920s. For example, the various strikers, sovietees and picketers in the agriculture based industries (milk-processing particularly being cited) achieved nothing and many of those who supported Labour in 1922 seemingly voted for the Farmers' Party in 1923. O'Connor Lysaght uses the sub-heading 'counter-revolutionary' to explain the decline of the radical potential that existed in the county. From the evidence he provides, however, it seems more like an organic reversion. In *Waterford* at least four articles provide contexts for labour history, notably Martin Hearne's 'Trade and industry in Waterford 1932-1962'. Of direct relevance is Emmet O'Connor's 'Trade Councils in Waterford City'. He uses reportage of such Councils as an index of labour organisation and aspiration. An advertisement by the Waterford Trade Guardians' Association in 1864 for 'A'