

The Church
and
State-Control

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SIXPENCE

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by

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DURING the last war, when England and America were engaged in a life-and-death struggle against totalitarian powers, two books on sociology appeared which rapidly became 'best-sellers'—*The Managerial Revolution* by James Burnham and *The Road to Serfdom* by F. A. Hayek. These two men—who were sociologists of acknowledged authority—wrote from widely separated viewpoints: Hayek from the extreme Right and Burnham from the Left. And yet both reached one identical judgment—that modern society is undergoing deep structural changes, that the social forces which produce these changes were already operating before the war in every country of the Western World, and that, unless they were checked, the natural outcome of these forces would be a *totalitarian form of society*. The countries of the Western World were in danger of becoming, in due course, the very thing they were then engaged in fighting.

The 'interlude' of World War II is over and no one doubts that the forces of which Burnham and Hayek spoke have resumed their onward movement. For the moment we need not ask ourselves whether this is a desirable thing to have happened or not. What is important to note is that it *has* happened, that we are in a period of social fluidity, comparable perhaps to the sixth century, when the social structure of the Roman Empire was changing into the feudal society of the Middle Ages, or to the sixteenth century in England and Holland, when feudal society was changing into what we now call capitalist society. Capitalist society, as we have known it, seems to be changing into something different. And one marked feature of the change is a progressive growth of the power of the State.

Let us examine this matter a little more closely.

WHAT ARE WE CHANGING FROM

The form of society which is now passing away has many names—'capitalist,' 'individualist,' 'liberal,' '*laissez-faire*.' For our purpose the last name is the most convenient because it refers to the role of the State and it is with that question that we shall be largely concerned in this article.⁽¹⁾

(1) It may be useful to emphasize here that we use the terms '*laissez-faire*' in a broad sense to denote the 'individualist' trend in European economic thought and society which manifested itself shortly after the Reformation and which became progressively more impatient with State interference in the economic field. Understood as a precisely formulated and accepted economic theory however, the period of *laissez-faire* was roughly the period 1830 to 1870.

Nihil Obstat:

Jacobus J. Conway,
Censor Deputatus.

Imprimatur

✠ THOMAS

Episcopus Davensis et Leighlinensis

The role of the State in laissez-faire society might be compared to the role of a referee at a football match—to see that the rules are observed but not to join in the game itself. The State's chief duty was to preserve law and order; thereafter it should leave the citizens to their own devices. In particular it must not intervene in the economic field; prices, wages, production—all these things must be governed exclusively by the free play of economic forces. Competition, "the law of the market," operated spontaneously, it was said, to keep the economic process healthy; it purged it of inefficient employers by making them bankrupt, it got the best out of labour by punishing idleness with want. Labour, in other words, was a 'commodity' to be competed for, like coal or raw cotton, without government interference. If the State were to give unemployment benefit, or even allow the workers to form unions for collective bargaining, it would be artificially forcing up the price of labour; it would be interfering with the automatic functioning of the law of supply and demand. "Everyone but an idiot knows," wrote Arthur Young, "that the lower classes must be kept poor, or they will never be industrious."

In point of fact these principles were not formulated in precise terms until rather late in the eighteenth century; nevertheless it is now recognised that they represent ideas which had been germinating, and powerfully operating, ever since the first appearance of individualist society in England and Holland after the Reformation.

THE INDUSTRIAL REVOLUTION

It was only in the nineteenth century, however, that the full impact of these ideas came to be felt.⁽¹⁾ During the first three centuries after the Reformation the wide distribution of property and property-rights which had developed during the Middle Ages had not been disastrously disturbed. But with the dramatic rise of industrialism and the factory-towns in England in the early 1800's, the whole situation was changed. Vast numbers of men and women were thrown into an economic whirlpool in which labour was a commodity to be bought in the cheapest market, in which conditions of work were determined solely by misguided

(1) One of the ironical facts of history is that Adam Smith's "Wealth of Nations" was written in the 1760's and was therefore relevant to the state of society in England before the industrial revolution, whereas his principles were applied in practice to the new situation created by that revolution. The influence of Bentham, who had also written for a simpler society, was more powerful at the time of his death in 1832.

views on the needs of maximum production and in which any interference by the State was excluded by economic dogma. The toll which all this exacted in human suffering and misery is too well known to need description here. The conditions under which children of seven and eight—cheap labour—were employed for fourteen hours a day (and longer) in factories and mines are characterized by Lord Shaftesbury's biographer as "too sickening for narration." These horrors were first felt in England, where the factory-system first appeared and developed most rapidly. But as industrialism spread to the continent of Europe, to Germany, Belgium and northern France, it brought with it the same system of ideas and the same terrible results.

This state of affairs soon bred its own reaction. As the century progressed laissez-faire found itself in conflict with the growing political and industrial power of labour, with emerging socialist theories, with humanitarian movements like that led by Lord Shaftesbury. It also found itself in direct conflict with the teaching authority of the Catholic Church. It was part of the traditional teaching of the Church that the State had not merely the right but the duty to intervene in economic affairs when the common good demanded it. Even such apparently modern devices as price-control had been discussed and commended for certain contingencies by Catholic theologians. Indeed the laissez-faire concept of complete freedom from State intervention is now regarded by most economic historians to have been itself a by-product of the spirit of 'freedom from authority' introduced into European thought by the Reformation.

"Catholicism has the advantage of having in many respects maintained the pre-capitalist and pre-individualist interpretation of Christianity . . . Protestantism, in its genuine forms, is handicapped in that it itself helped to produce the modern individualist mind and to develop those psychological attitudes which keep the system of capitalism, competition and free enterprise going."⁽¹⁾

The Catholic reaction was first manifested in those European countries where the rapid growth of industrialism had reproduced the social evils already familiar in England. All over Germany, Austria and the Low Countries a Catholic social movement arose

(1) Karl Mannheim, "Diagnosis of Our Time" London, 1943, p. 106.

to challenge the current theories in the name of justice and morality. In Mainz Bishop Kettler declared that it was

“ a crime against humanity to have abolished all means of protection, abandoning mankind with all its natural and social inequalities to the daily struggle of competition.”

Later Pope Leo XIII, in the Encyclical *Rerum Novarum* was to formally affirm the Church's position in precise terms. It was false, said the Pope, to hold that the State was a mere guardian of law and order; on the contrary its duty was to protect the community and its various elements and in protecting private rights it must have special regard for the weak and the needy.

“ For the richer classes have many ways of shielding themselves, and stand less in need of help from the State; whereas the poorer classes have no resources of their own to fall back upon . . .”

It was false to hold that wages were a mere commodity in the economic process; on the contrary the worker has a moral right in justice, antecedently to any contract, to a living wage.

“ To defraud anyone of the wages that are his due is a crime which cries to the avenging anger of heaven.”

It was false to hold that the workers have not a natural right to form associations for the defence of their common interests.

“ For to enter into a society of this kind is the natural right of man; and the State is bound to protect natural rights, not to destroy them . . .”

Above all the Pope pleaded for a wider distribution of property and deplored that concentration of wealth in the hands of a few as a result of which

“ a small number of very rich men have been able to lay upon the teeming masses of the labouring poor a yoke little better than that of slavery itself.”

It is difficult for us, for whom laissez-faire society has already receded somewhat into the distance, to appreciate the significance of this teaching at the time it was promulgated. Other powerful forces were, of course, directed against laissez-faire, as we have seen. But it would be a serious historical error to fail to realize that, in a Europe populated largely by millions of sincere Catholics, the teaching of the Pope had a profound

influence on the current of opinion. It thereby accelerated the departure of a system of ideas which at one time had dominated the minds of almost all economic thinkers and which in the words of Pope Pius XI, “ had long hampered effective interference by the government.”

WHAT ARE WE CHANGING TO

Such was laissez-faire society. If it is now ‘ on its way out,’ the Church herself was one of the first to ask it to go. Let us now turn to the present day and ask ourselves: what kind of society appears to be taking its place ?

We are still in a period of transition, of course, and it is notoriously difficult to interpret facts and events in which one is involved oneself. But one feature of the present change stands out so clearly that there can be no mistaking it—the ‘ new society ’ appears to involve an enormous increase in the power of the State.

On that all are agreed. During the past thirty years or so, in almost every country of the Western World, the power of the State over daily life has increased to an extent which would have seemed incredible to many people at the beginning of the century. Broadly speaking we may say that the State is advancing into private life on three fronts. Firstly, it now exercises a considerable direction and control over the economic life of the nation as a whole. By an elaborate system of tariffs, quotas, licences, price-controls, wage-checks, subsidies, etc., it can stimulate production in one direction, lessen consumption in another, take up ‘ slack ’ in manpower here, encourage investment there. The price you pay for your children's boots and clothes, for your bread and butter, for your wholesale goods if you are a shop-keeper, can be notably affected by a series of decisions taken by a group of your political leaders.

Secondly, the State is more and more entering into the industrial field as a producer in its own right. At the present time in Ireland, for example—and we are not the most notable in this respect by any means—State-controlled bodies are producers and employers on a very large scale: in road and rail transport, the production of electric power, turf-production, air-services, shipping, sugar-production, industrial alcohol production—and the list is tending to grow.

Thirdly, the State enters daily life through the social services.

Each year the Government and public authorities collect some £40 million from all classes of the community and redistribute it in the form of social services and subsidies, equipped with appropriate sets of controls which are designed to ensure that the money is devoted to the purposes for which it was intended. Once again the list is tending to grow.

Taken together the advances made in these three directions represent an enormous extension of the power of the State over private life. Various causes have contributed to bring this about, some of them psychological in character, others more strictly 'economic.' Among the psychological causes we might mention, for example, the strong emotional reaction against the misery and suffering produced by the recurring 'slumps' and mass unemployment in the uncontrolled economies. During the 1930's, for example—when millions went hungry while vast quantities of food were deliberately destroyed—there was a very widespread, and very natural, demand for 'something drastic' to put an end to such insanities. It was during this period, indeed, that Great Britain, accepting the economic doctrine of Lord Keynes, took the first significant steps towards what we now call a 'planned' economy.

Closely allied with this is the psychological fact that people nowadays are anxious to achieve quick results, and State action can often produce such results more easily than private enterprise. When the State embarks on a vast programme of public works the effect on the unemployment figures will be seen almost immediately; a general revival of production in the existing enterprises will be much more difficult to achieve and will take effect much more slowly.

Then there is the undeniable fact that State intervention—like most things which produce quick results—has a certain drug-like quality which makes the patient demand more and more and tends to weaken his capacity to take action himself. When the public sees the State erect magnificent and well-equipped buildings and services, like Aer Lingus, for example, it may be inclined to be impatient with the suggestion that the new industries, such as those now proposed for the West of Ireland, should be left to private enterprise. When it sees the money for Childrens' Allowances come flowing from the Post Office as soon as legislation is passed, it finds it difficult to understand why a further increase in income should have to wait on a general increase in production.

ECONOMIC FACTORS

Beneath these psychological factors, however, there are certain economic factors which have tended to favour the growth of State control. With the coming of the industrial age the economic life of all countries has become much more complex and, so-to-speak, 'interlocked.' When a nation consisted largely of families each of which produced the things it needed for everyday life—grew its own food, made its own clothes and household equipment and often its own house—there was not much need for State intervention. There was little indeed that the State could do even if it wanted; the volume of wealth depended largely on such factors as the weather and the skill and industry of the individual families. Today, however, no family produces most of the things it needs. Particularly in the towns, the goods it uses are mostly produced by others; they come to the bricklayer's home in Dublin from the four corners of Ireland and, indeed from the ends of the earth. Given the fact that our economic life is now knit together by nerves and sinews extending all over the country—so that an increase in the Tipperary farmer's prices may mean a decline in revenue for the Dublin tobacconist—many economists feel that a considerable measure of over-all State control is necessary to keep the whole national economy balanced and steady, or at least to moderate the social distress which its natural fluctuations would cause.⁽¹⁾

The fact that economic life has become world-wide in its ramifications has a similar effect. In the adjustments and movements that are part of the life of any economy, creaks and jolts are bound to occur here and there. But when the economic process is on a world scale the creaks and jolts are correspondingly magnified and what might be a small jolt in the world process may actually involve economic disaster for a single nation. The fact that America is now buying less wool and tin than she did last year may be a small thing in the total picture of world economy—but it is one of the major causes of the present financial crisis in Great Britain. Some degree of central control can obviously help to cushion, in so far as that is possible, the shocks caused by such movements of world trade.

Then there is the fact that property is nowadays much less widely distributed than it was. For millions of people the only

(1) It is not denied that the economy has within itself—to a certain degree—the means of maintaining a balance. But the argument is that the flexibility necessary can often be achieved only at the expense of great social distress and that State intervention is necessary to moderate the fluctuations in the economic conditions which cause such distress.

source of wealth is the wage-packet or the salary-cheque; they have no economic holding, such as a small farm or shop, which would give them something to grip in a storm. If unemployment supervenes they are often helpless; their only source of wealth has suddenly dried up. The growth of the social services has undoubtedly been stimulated in a very direct way by the need to counteract the evil effects of this modern maldistribution of property.

It would be impossible to estimate precisely how far these changing factors in the economic situation have rendered an extension of State control necessary in the interests of the common good. The economists themselves are sharply divided on the economic issue involved and since the last war there has been a strong reaction against the planning mentality in economic thinking in many European countries. This issue, indeed, was hotly disputed all through the various stages of the Marshal Plan. Nevertheless even in those countries where the anti-control views are strongest—Belgium, Germany, Italy and particularly the U.S.A.—some considerable measure of State control has been admitted. Broadly speaking we may say that the changing factors of the economic situation has rendered some measure of central control necessary and, as we shall see, the social teaching of the Church readily accepts this fact.⁽¹⁾

EXPANDING CONTROL

Nevertheless the increase of State control which has actually taken place in giving rise to some uneasiness. What is disquieting is not so much the great advance made so far as the fact that it shows no sign of coming to a halt—on the contrary, it is increasing in speed. There appears, in fact, to be an inherent law in State intervention by which it tends to gather momentum as it goes along. Each new intervention seems to demand further interventions “to make it work.” The State takes over the railways and then takes over the buses to make the railways pay—and then takes over the road-freight services to make both the railways and the buses pay. Or let us say the State exercises some control over the cattle industry; this eventually spreads to the hide industry and to the boot and shoe industry. It subsidizes certain foods and then has to control the consumption of these

(1) “Or, en juste ondonnement de la production ne peut faire abstraction du principe de l'intervention de l'Etat mis en lumiere par Notre grand predeceseur Leon XIII; il ne peut moins que jamais les circonstances actuelles.” Pius XII, “Lettre a M. Charles Florey,” 19th July, 1947.

foods and eventually may have to control their production. And so the circles widen. Meanwhile the ‘narcotic’ effect of State intervention begins to operate. The more efficiently the State runs certain industries the more difficult it becomes to see why it should not run others, even though—as would be the case with the road-freight services, for example—thousands of small property owners would be thereby swallowed up. The more social services the State provides the more singular do those services appear which the individual has to provide for himself.

This expanding character of State intervention constitutes, in fact, one of the gravest problems of our time. It is causing a grave degree of concern among thinking men everywhere. This concern is not simply a longing on the part of capitalists and liberals for the old days of *laissez-faire*; it is a very real sense of danger, which is shared by many of those who have themselves helped to produce the Welfare State and who would even welcome a further cautious advance. The growth of the power of the State has been so sudden and so rapid that men of almost all shades of political and economic thought are beginning to wonder whether we have not loosed something which is getting out of control. Mr. de Valera, for example, who is certainly not a *doctrinaire* opponent of State control, stated this time last year:

“If you do not watch closely the Welfare State could well degenerate into the Slave State.”

Professor Burnham of New York, speaking from the Left, regards it as inevitable that our present social trends will lead to a series of totalitarian dictatorships

“in which nearly every side of life and business and art and science and education and religion and recreation and morality, are not merely influenced but directly subjected to the totalitarian regime.”⁽¹⁾

Professor D. W. Brogan, of Cambridge, writes:

“The concentration of all power, economic, political, cultural, in the same small group, is one of the prospects before us. We shall come to that in America and in Britain if we continue to trust big government and forget that people can be cozened out of their self-respect and if they get it back will find that they are getting it back too late. They have had it.”⁽²⁾

(1) “The Managerial Revolution,” London, 1942, Chapter XI.
(2) “Sunday Times,” 16th September, 1951.

Professor Hayek, of London, speaking from the Right, says of this same danger of State absolutism:

"It is necessary now to state the unpalatable truth that it is Germany whose fate we are in some danger of repeating. The danger is not immediate, it is true, and conditions in this country are still (Great Britain, 1944) so remote from those witnessed in Germany in recent years as to make it difficult to believe that we are moving in the same direction. Yet, though the road be long, it is one on which it becomes more difficult to turn back as one advances . . . Only if we recognize the danger in time can we hope to avert it."⁽¹⁾

Professor T. H. Marshall of London, an enthusiast for the Welfare State and one of the leading exponents of current sociological thought in England, says of "the threat of individual liberty" from "direct action and intervention in social life," says:

"We are all aware of this threat and should be prepared to admit that it constitutes one of the gravest problems which confronts a modern democratic State which takes its duties seriously."⁽²⁾

These are all men of established reputation and it would be unwise to dismiss their fears as unfounded nervousness. The fact is that the danger of which they speak is very real and there is nothing to be gained by shutting our eyes to it. It is not simply the danger that the widening circles of State intervention will eventually merge to cover the entire economic field. It is the much greater danger that such control will eventually spill over into the political and cultural fields and begin to flood them as well. That, too, may become necessary "to make it work." And the terrible thought is that it *may*. There are very serious grounds for thinking that a completely State-controlled economy needs State-controlled public opinion and State-controlled elections to make it work.

PUBLIC OPINION

Here it is important to remember that we are still a long way off a complete State-economy in Ireland; even in Britain more than three quarters of total production comes from private

(1) "The Road to Serfdom," London, 1944, p. 1.

(2) Address delivered to the Annual Meeting of the London Council of Social Service, 9th July, 1951.

enterprise. The merging of economic control into control of public opinion and control of elections is likely to take place as a natural development only when economic control is reaching saturation point. It is therefore inconceivable under present conditions in either Ireland or Britain. But though saturation point in the economic field may still be a long way off it is undeniable that we are moving steadily in that direction. The roots of State-control always extend much farther beneath the surface than a mere list of State-directed industries would indicate. A State-controlled industry, for example, it often not merely a producer; it may be a consumer on a huge scale of certain forms of equipment and raw materials, and, as their chief customer, it may exercise a very powerful influence on the privately owned industries which produce these things.

Moreover the experience of other countries shows that the final stage in the process may develop very quickly and unexpectedly. There comes a point when the State has advanced so far into the closely-woven economy that free enterprise is paralysed; at that stage the State must either retreat or take over complete control at once. That point was reached in Germany in 1935; the vessel had been sinking slowly for some time but the end came very quickly.

Moreover this final stage need not necessarily come with a series of drastic Nationalization Acts; it may be reached when the various sectors of partial control meet and fuse into one. When the State assigns the quota of raw materials, fixes their price, decides what shall be produced and in what quantities, fixes the selling price, allocates distribution at home and abroad, determines what proportion of the profits may be retained as wages and dividends and what proportion is to go back to the State in the form of insurance stamps or taxes on consumer goods and other taxes, directs the worker as to what job he is to take—when this stage is reached you are already very near saturation point even though the facade of free enterprise and free choice of work may be retained. At this stage the dozen or so men at the top are in virtually complete control of the economic system; they must operate it as a centrally controlled machine towards a pre-selected target. The whole national economy must be run on the lines of a single factory.

It is when this situation is reached that some measure of State-control over public opinion appears to become necessary. It is well known that a factory in which there is a general spirit

of dissatisfaction and insubordination will soon find its production figures falling. When the factory is the whole nation the same thing is true—only now it is not simply 'feeling in the factory' but 'feeling in the nation.' 'Public opinion' thus enters the economic process as a vital factor in national production; eventually the men who control the one feel that they have a right to some control over the other. They have the right they may feel, to make sure that the whole national economy be not endangered by unfair criticism spreading dissatisfaction and unrest throughout the whole national factory. In the economies we know, unfair criticism may bring the government down but the national economy, being still largely independent of the government, can weather the shock of such changes. But in a State-economy the whole economic life of the nation is geared to the policies of the men in power; general dissatisfaction with these policies can then have disastrous consequences. A parallel situation exists when a nation is at war and then criticism damaging to the 'war-effort' becomes punishable by law. It is no accident that absenteeism in the State-controlled economies becomes 'sabotage,' that slackers become 'traitors' or that in Russian enterprises, as the Webbs have told us,

"any public expression of doubt, or even fear that the plan will not be successful, is an act of disloyalty and even of treachery because of its possible effects on the will and on the efforts of the rest of the staff."⁽¹⁾

The step from State-influenced public opinion to State-controlled politics is easily taken and there may be equally practical reasons for it. When economic power is scattered among hundreds of thousands of individuals, an incompetent government may do harm but it can scarcely produce sudden disaster. But when the whole nation is being run on the lines of a single factory it becomes vitally important to have the 'right men' in charge. It would be fatal if the controls were to get into the hands of incompetent demagogues who managed to get themselves elected by clever propaganda. Politicians are human beings and you cannot blame them if the group in power is convinced that it has the right men for the job, that it would produce sudden disaster if the other fellows got into control. It is they who have 'set the sights' of the whole economy; they must see 'the plan' through to the end—you cannot go chopping and changing with a thing like this every few years.

(1) S. and B. Webb. "Soviet Communism," London, p. 1038.

ELECTIONS

One of the strangest popular illusions in this matter is that political freedom is safe so long as you have periodic elections. People do not seem to realize that a group of politicians who have complete control over economic life and public opinion can face any polling day with equanimity. Everyone knows that people are not influenced in their vote merely by rational considerations; they can be influenced very profoundly by playing on their emotions, by fear, envy, class-hatred, self-aggrandizement and so on. And modern science has produced some terrifying weapons for influencing people in this way; the art of propaganda, when conducted by experts in applied psychology and advertising technique, and backed by State resources, has few equals in this field. The fact that the Nazis overdid it (and even they were remarkably successful with their own people) should not make us think that the art cannot be more successfully employed by others. And if the Russian efforts seem crude to us it does not follow that they seem so to their own people; those Westerners who have had contact with Russian soldiers and officers in Berlin have often expressed amazement at the success with which State propaganda had sealed their minds against any idea but the official one.

This entry of the power of the State into the fields of public opinion and politics may begin in quite a modest way—by flooding the country with elaborately-produced brochures, by using the State radio for 'fire-side talks' by Ministers, by buying up huge advertisements in the newspapers, and so on.⁽¹⁾ But as control in the economic field progresses the necessity for control over public opinion increases with it. And the government may feel that it would be useless to try to put the complicated economic issues of modern politics fairly and fully before the people; they are too complex and too difficult for the average person to understand. They may feel that the only thing to do is to 'sell' their policy to the people, playing on their emotions and prejudices and eventually impugning the motives and loyalty of those who criticize them. They must beat the demagogues at their own game.

We would be foolish indeed to underestimate the power of modern propaganda, skilfully conducted, to influence our minds. We are influenced by it as it is. But whereas now these methods

(1) Needless to say I am not here referring to the existing normal procedure by which Ministers occasionally explain Departmental policy in broadcasts, or issue White Papers, or publish advertisements urging the farmer to "grow more wheat" or the public to buy saving certificates. There is a world of difference between this kind of thing and propaganda designed to beat down opposition.

are being used by different people with different views, *then* they would be in the hands of one small group at the top. The whole barrage is turned on the people to sell them one idea, that the group views are the best and that anyone who criticizes them is a self-interested saboteur. That has happened everywhere where the State has taken over complete management of economic life, in pre-war Germany and Italy and in the countries of Eastern Europe today. And it has not happened accidentally. It has not yet happened in England because despite the remarkable growth of State control there in recent years, their economy is still largely one of private enterprise. But it is well to remember that German economists were advocating in 1915 a measure of State-control comparable to what is being advocated by many in England today.

"It is significant," writes Professor E. H. Carr, "that the nationalization of thought has everywhere proceeded *pari passu* with the nationalization of industry."⁽¹⁾

If that is the warning of one of the foremost advocates of the Welfare State in modern England we may well concede that there may be something in it.

I have no desire to exaggerate this danger of totalitarianism. I would emphasize that while the expansion of State control in the economic field is a fact before our eyes, its further development and extension lie in the future and therefore involve some element of conjecture. We must frame our social policy as best we can, taking account of all the evidence. What I am anxious to stress is that a great deal of the evidence points in the direction I have indicated. When Mr. de Valera speaks of the danger of the Slave State, or Burnham of the totalitarianisms of tomorrow, or Brogan of the concentration of all power in the hands of the one small group, they seem to me to be expressing a sober judgment on that evidence. I am impressed by the fact that this view is shared by sociologists of very varied shades of political and economic thought. I do not think we can dismiss it as a mere scare.

THE CHURCH AND SOCIETY

That then, in rough outline, is the changing pattern of modern society—a steady advance of the State into private life, gathering momentum and power as it goes along, showing no

(1) E. H. Carr, "Twenty Years Crisis." London, 1941. p. 172.

sign of coming to a halt and threatening to produce a form of society not far removed from servitude.

What has the Church to say of this situation? It is indicative of how deeply laissez-faire still permeates our minds that it should be necessary to begin this section by justifying the right of the Church to say anything at all. For to the laissez-faireist not merely the State but also the Church must 'keep out' of the economic field. "Trade in one thing; religion is another." The Church's sphere of interest was the individual soul; the wider spheres of social organization and economics she should "leave to the men of business and the devil."

This idea, of course, was something entirely new in European thought when it was first propounded after the Reformation. Traditionally the Church had always maintained that there are certain broad principles of the moral law which apply to society as such and that men are bound to respect these principles when they seek to re-mould the shape of society. These principles, as we shall see, are broad and elastic in character; they lack the rigidity and precision of many principles of the moral law respecting individual conduct. But they are moral principles none the less and the Church has always maintained that public authority must have due regard for them.

"The criticism which dismisses the concern of Churches with economic relations or social organization as a modern innovation finds little support in past history," writes Professor Tawney. "What requires explanation is not the view that these matters are part of the province of religion, but the view that they are not."⁽¹⁾

And indeed common sense indicates that there must be at least some broad principles of morality which govern social organization. It is a trite phrase that "the State exists for man, not man for the State." But our ready acceptance of this principle must carry with it an acceptance of its immediate consequences. If the State is a natural society, willed by God to be the servant of the individual person, to help him to earn his daily bread and to live in peace and security, it follows that it is wrong, immoral, for it to assume a form in which it is no longer man's servant but his master. And it follows that it is wrong and immoral to put no brake on social and economic tendencies which may bring that situation about if they are not checked. "The perfect and fitting

(1) R. H. Tawney, "Religion and the Rise of Capitalism" (1938 edition), p. 246.

development of each individual" says Sydney Webb, "is . . . the filling, in the best possible way, of his humble function in the great social machine." That, says the Catholic Church is a fundamentally false concept of the relations between man and society.

When we ask what in fact the Church has to say of the advance of the State in modern society, we may well be surprised at the moderate character of the answer. The Church gives no exhaustive list of functions in the temporal sphere which may, or may not, be assumed by the State. She says quite simply that the role of the State should primarily be one of co-ordination and assistance and that it should not assume immediate control in the social and economic spheres except when this is demanded by the common good.

In other words there should be a bias against State control in the balance of social forces and a corresponding bias in favour of the discharge of functions by the smaller units, by the individual, by the family, by voluntary associations. Direct assumption of responsibility by the State should be the exception and should be resorted to only when the common good would otherwise suffer injury.

THE COMMON GOOD

Here it may be well to point out that the 'common good,' as the Church understands it, is not simply economic well-being.⁽¹⁾ If the end of all human activity were simply the production of material wealth then there might be a great deal to be said for very extended State control. But not on bread alone doth man live. A sufficient and fairly distributed supply of wealth is, as St. Thomas teaches, a necessary condition for a healthy society and the Church ardently desires and calls for this. But it would be materialism of a rather crude kind to regard the volume of wealth as the primary yard-stick by which social well-being is to be measured. In estimating whether a particular measure would further the common good one must look beyond its immediate economic effects. One must have regard to its effects in the wider spheres of personal liberty, family life, private initiative and responsibility. A measure of social security which transfers responsibility from the individual or the family to the State may produce quick results, but if it notably weakens the fibre of family life the cost will be too high.

(1) Cf. "Lettre de SS. Pie XII à M. Charles Flory," 19 Juillet, 1947

A State monopoly may help to co-ordinate some section of the national economy, but it may also tragically narrow the area of freedom of choice for the individual and the area of initiative for the small man. These are all relevant considerations which must be included in the final reckoning of the common good.

It is no part of the Church's teaching, however, that State intervention is wrong in principle and therefore to be opposed in all cases. Such a view would identify the teaching of the Church with the laissez-faire doctrine which Leo XIII so strenuously opposed. Catholic teaching recognizes that the State has a right and duty to exercise a general supervision over the economic life of the nation as a whole.

"Free competition and still more economic domination must be kept within just and definite limits and must be brought under the effective control of the public authority, in matters appertaining to this latter's competence."⁽¹⁾

It also recognizes that there are certain economic enterprises in every society which, because of their special character, are properly vested in the State.

"For it is rightly contended that certain forms of property must be reserved to the State, since they carry with them a power too great to be left to private individuals without injury to the community at large."⁽²⁾

The Church also recognizes that in a modern society there will inevitably be a number of people who will be unable to provide for themselves, either permanently, such as many of the old or permanently infirm, or temporarily, such as the unemployed or the sick—and it recognizes the right of the State to come to the assistance of such persons. In this country the call for State action to provide such social services as family allowances, came, in many cases from Catholic sociologists.

It would be inaccurate and unjust, therefore, to regard the Church as having a doctrinaire attitude of unqualified opposition to State intervention in social and economic life. What is true is that the Church has an acute realization of the dangers of such intervention getting out of control and of the unnatural, and

(1) Pius XI., "Quadragesimo Anno," par. 110.

(2) Pius XI., "Quadragesimo Anno," par. 114.

therefore immoral, form of society which would inevitably result if that should happen. She has a clear realization of the beneficial effect of responsibility and initiative on the individual, on the family and on the smaller units in society. She recognizes the importance of weighting these smaller units with responsibility and power, so that they may act as a counterbalance to the overall power of the State. To the socialist concept of society as a centrally controlled machine she opposes the natural concept of society as a living organism, having life and the power of self-movement and self-adjustment in every part. Above all she insists that the fundamental test of social structure is human nature. A society which constricts the individual in a straight-jacket of absolute control is not a society which respects human nature and its essential freedom. Freedom is something we all desire, but the reality of freedom may be very elusive. In *laissez-faire* society great masses of the people lived under the tyranny of poverty; in driving out the tyranny of circumstances we are in danger of replacing it by the tyranny of men. The old woman who preferred the freedom of her cottage to the comfort of the spotless, well-heated "Home for the Aged" is in danger of becoming a cliché, but she may well stand as a symbol of much that is deep and enduring in human nature which we shall ignore at our peril.

It may be said that these principles are somewhat general in character and that it will be very difficult to apply them in practice. In a sense that is so. Indeed it is often impossible to say whether a particular measure involves an unjustified extension of State-control or not. Certainly it is impossible, in the changing circumstances of modern society, to draw a precise line covering the whole field of human activity and to say to the State "thus far and no farther." And the Church does not seek to do this. What she seeks to do is to influence the climate of public opinion, to make it aware of the deep issues involved, so that when particular decisions come to be taken they will be appraised by a public with a balanced outlook on the proper structure of society. More than that the Church cannot do as a general rule, more than that she scarcely ever seeks to do. Only when a particular measure *manifestly* involves an unwarranted extension of State-control will the Church express an opinion on a particular situation. She did so in this country last Spring and it may be well to comment briefly here on the circumstances attending that exceptional step.

MOTHER AND CHILD

In this matter we must try to see clearly both the nature of the proposed scheme and the nature of the social evil it was designed to meet.

The social evil may be said to be broadly represented by the infant and maternal mortality rates. In any country these rates will be conditioned by a number of factors: the availability of hospital-beds for maternity cases, the state of general public knowledge on matters of infant-welfare, the economic position of the average family and so on. With us the infant mortality rate is slightly higher than in the Six Counties (which is the closest parallel from the point of view of general conditions); it is considerably higher than the corresponding rate for England and Wales and considerably lower than that for, say, Belgium. Also, with us the rate is falling very rapidly; six times more rapidly than before the war, and more rapidly, if anything, than the corresponding rate in the Six Counties.⁽¹⁾

To seek to make our rates fall still faster is obviously a very commendable and desirable objective for public action. And there is little doubt that much could be done to achieve this; a vigorous policy directed towards improving and supplementing existing institutions and services would almost certainly have a very tangible effect; so also, very probably, would the provision of economic benefits such as maternity grants.

What was actually proposed was a scheme whereby practically the entire mother and child health services would have been converted into a State monopoly.

I think there can be no reasonable doubt that that was what the scheme involved. It was to be completely free of charge, but there was to be no compulsion to use it. If C.I.E. were to introduce a nation-wide lorry-service, on which no charge whatever would be made for the transport of goods, I think most people would smile at an official announcement that the public could still use the lorries of private hauliers if they wished. Not many would be disposed to avail of the offer. Eventually private lorry-services would virtually disappear. If a government were to introduce a vast net-work of hospitals, clinics, obstetricians, mid-wives, etc., backed by State resources and extending

(1) From 1946 to 1950 (the latest year for which figures are available), the infant mortality rate for the Republic of Ireland fell from 65 to 45, per thousand births. The corresponding fall for the Six Counties for the same period was from 54 to 39. From 1946 to 1949 the maternal mortality rates were—2.01, 1.89, 1.58, 1.81 for the Republic of Ireland and 2.32, 1.85, 1.52, 1.27 for the Six Counties.

all over the country—and offer that service absolutely free to everybody, I suggest that the result would be precisely the same. A number of people might continue to avail of the non-State services but they would be so few that they would have to be charged extremely high fees to keep these services going. For the working classes and the middle classes it would eventually be the State service or nothing. One way of getting a monopoly is to suppress alternative services; another way is to starve them out. While the second method may be slower it will be no less effective in the long run.

I think it is fair to say that a health service of this kind would have involved a very marked leap forward by the State into a particularly delicate and intimate sphere of private life. To be limited in your choice of transport is one thing; to be restricted in your choice of a doctor or hospital when your wife is expecting a baby, is a different matter. To have your electricity cut off by a State official may be irksome; to have a State official refuse to “authorize the release” of a drug which your wife’s doctor thinks she should have, is much more than that. It is hard to be told by an official of a State which controls all the supplies that no matter what the doctor says she can’t have it because it would do her no good and drugs purchased with public money must not be wasted.

To discuss the full effects of such a monopoly on human freedom and on family life would take us far outside the limits of this article. But the nature of the scheme itself, the dimensions of the social evil it was designed to meet, the fact that the mortality rates are falling just as fast here as they are in the Six Counties—where they have a State service—are all important factors to be considered.

HIERARCHY’S STATEMENT

The Bishops of Ireland considered this scheme and they came to the conclusion that it involved an unwarranted extension of State control.

“The Hierarchy cannot approve of any scheme which, in its general tendency, must foster undue control by the State in a sphere so delicate and so intimately concerned with morals as that which deals with gynaecology or obstetrics and with the relations between doctor and patient.

Neither can the Bishops approve of any scheme which must have for practical results the undue lessening of the proper initiative of individuals and associations and the undermining of self-reliance.”

The Bishops also objected to the character of that part of the scheme which would provide for “health education” for mothers. They pointed out that this broad term might be taken to include instruction on many *moral* questions affecting conjugal relations and pregnancy. Such a service would not merely involve an unwarranted extension of State power in the social sphere; it would involve an intrusion by the State into a sphere in which it has no valid title whatever. An assurance had been given that the scheme would incorporate such safeguards in this respect as might be desired. But safeguards merely embodied in the scheme—like the other details of the service—would be changeable by any Minister of Health. The Bishops asked that the safeguards be embodied in legislation so that they could be modified only by parliament.

Actually the issues in this matter were clouded from the outset by a strong publicity campaign designed to show that what the Bishops essentially objected to was the absence of a humiliating Means Test from the scheme. It is difficult to believe that such a version of the main issue could gain acceptance. In one passage the Bishops had referred to “the so-called indignity of the Means Test.” What they obviously meant by this was to deny the contention—which had frequently been put forward—that every test of means is necessarily humiliating. Everyone knows that that is not so; whether a particular test of means is humiliating or not will depend largely on the income-level at which it operates. The socialist government in England some time ago introduced a Legal Aid scheme based on a means test in which the line is drawn fairly high; it has been described as “a Means Test for the middle classes.” The same thing is true of many grants for secondary and higher education in Britain. Workmen’s Compensation for non-manual workers in this country is based on a means test; the operative income level is £500 per annum. It can scarcely be seriously contended that the only alternative to a humiliating Means Test is a completely free service. And *that* was what the Bishops objected to, to the fact that by making the scheme absolutely free the State would inevitably render it compulsory. To construe this vital point as a

plea for the retention of the Red Ticket Means Test is to completely misunderstand it.

CONCLUSION

I have discussed this particular episode here because I think that it can only be properly understood against the background of the startling and continuing growth of the power of the State in modern times. But my main concern has been with the wider issue. I have attempted to set the teaching of the Church on the role of the State in society against the background of the existing tendencies and trends. I have tried to show that the general principles outlined earlier in the article are nothing more than the principles of common sense—'right reason' in the theologians' phrase. They are principles which would readily occur to the mind of any man of balanced judgment who looks intelligently at the changing pattern of modern society and who looks forward into the future and asks what it has in store for us. I have emphasized that it is often impossible to say whether this or that intervention is unwarranted but that what is important is to see the general tendency clearly and to appreciate what is the only sane attitude to approach it. In the course of the article I have frequently used particular examples of State intervention in Ireland to illustrate various points. I have done so simply because these examples are likely to be the most familiar to my readers; it has not been my purpose to discuss whether in any or all of the interventions which have actually taken place the State here has gone too far. Such a purpose would be altogether outside the scope of the article.

History is a stage on which forces which are within our control contend and co-operate with forces that are not. In seeking to control the powerful forces now operating in society, we cannot afford to neglect the guidance of the custodian of divine truth, the truth given to her by the Author of human nature and of human society.