

EDITORIAL

“ A POLITICAL situation of no small interest has been brought about by the elections which took place in Austria a fortnight ago. The strength of the parties in the new National Council stands as follows: Christian-Socialists, 82, as against 63 in the former Council; Social Democrats, 66, against 69; Pan-Germanists, 20, against 24; whilst the Farmers' League has 6 representatives and the Middle Class Party 1. This means that the Christian Socialists, the Catholic Party in the country, have gained nineteen seats by the appeal to the electorate, and will consequently have the lion's share in the composition of the new Ministry.” (*Tablet*, Oct. 30th, 1920.)

In this extract of quite startling interest we are told that the Catholic Party in Austria is known as the Christian Socialists. At the first superficial glance it affects us somewhat in the same bewildering way as might the news that the polls had been carried in Ireland by a new organization called “The Sinn Fein Unionists.” Especially are we perplexed when we read in *The Catholic Encyclopædia* (Vol. XIV, p. 68. *Socialism*), “no really instructed, loyal, and clear-thinking Catholic would now claim or accept the style of Christian Socialist.”

Obviously the discrepancy is one of words and only arises from the variety of meanings that are applied to the terms, not from any contradiction of thing and thing. One wonders whether human ingenuity could devise a combination of any two words that have been made to mean so many things as the word “Christian,” and the word “Socialist.” Is there any human genius who could give an accurate definition of each that would win the assent of all who are concerned with them? Christianity, for instance, originally

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meant quite simply Christ's Church. Till the Reformation it was co-terminous with the Catholic Church. Yet nowadays it is made to include many who are outside the body of the Church, and there are even some who claim the title of Christian yet do not believe in the fundamental truth of Christ's divinity.

The word "Socialism" is even more ambiguous. There is no definition comprehensive and elastic enough to fit all the meanings it has been made to serve. Pope Leo XIII identified the word Socialist with Communist and Nihilist. In his Encyclical *Quod Apostolici* (December, 1878), he said :

"We are alluding to that sect of men who under the motley and all but barbarous terms and titles of Socialists, Communists and Nihilists are spread abroad throughout the world, and bound intimately together in baneful alliance." This is one very definite meaning of the word. Yet surely the same term "Socialist," when applied to Pope Leo XIII himself, must mean something quite different! Henry George, in his book *The Conditions of Labour: An Open Letter to Pope Leo XIII*, writes, "The remedies (i.e. of Pope Leo XIII), so far as they go are Socialistic; and though the Encyclical is not without recognition of the individual character of man and of the priority of the individual and the family to the State, yet the whole tendency and spirit of its remedial suggestions lean unmistakably to Socialism—extremely moderate Socialism it is true; Socialism hampered and emasculated by a supreme respect for private possession; yet Socialism still" (pp. 107, 108). Again, "Your Encyclical will be seen by those who carefully analyse it to be directed not against Socialism" (p. 157).

St. Basil and St. Chrysostom, St. Ambrose and St. Jerome in their denunciations of avarice among the rich and oppression of the poor, are hailed as Socialists.

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St. Francis of Assisi, we are told, was one who preached Socialism by his example rather than by his word.

Cardinal Manning's biographer, Purcell, writes, "In France one or two Bishops and writers of distinction had expressed alarm at what they regarded as *Socialistic tendencies or sympathies* manifested by Cardinal Manning" (Vol. II, p. 651). In the same book (Purcell's *Life*) Manning is said to have written, "I am glad, therefore, that I said and wrote what is before the public, even though for a time some men have called me a *Socialist* and a Revolutionist; and have fastened upon a subordinate consequence and have neglected the substance of my contention on behalf of the natural rights of the poor" (Vol. II, p. 657).

The present Cardinal Archbishop of Westminster in a speech made some years back on occasion of an address by Bishop Keating, of Northampton, said, "There were some persons who would dub as Socialists those who made the most innocent assertions; *in fact, he himself had been called one.*"

In despair one may ask: What is this Socialism which includes such diverse elements as Karl Marx, Lassalle, Ramsay Macdonald, Bernard Shaw, H. G. Wells, Cardinal Manning, Cardinal Bourne and Leo XIII?

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These few quotations are not meant as an apologia for Socialism. They are in no sense a profession of faith in Socialism. They are rather a profession of agnosticism, an admission of our perplexity as to what Socialism really is. They may remind us not to use the term rashly and to ask ourselves what exactly we mean by it when we apply it to any person or system.

The "Christian Socialist" movement in Austria may well be a sign of the times. As long ago as 1913,

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at the National Catholic Congress held at Plymouth, Archbishop Whiteside said these remarkable words : " I do not know what is really the book of the day ; but I have just been reading Philip Snowden's book on *Socialism and Syndicalism*. That is a most remarkable book. Socialism is the enemy we all know. But Mr. Snowden advocates a new Socialism, and if that is going to prevail then, instead of being the enemy, we shall not be in a position to remain neutral ; in fact, I think we might almost grasp hands with them. Reading the book it seems to me that the Socialism which is going to prevail in England is a Socialism with which we can make friends. . . . I do not think we have much to fear from the future of Socialism in England."

Most of those who call themselves " Socialists " have always claimed to be a bulwark against anarchy. What then more natural than that the Catholics of Austria, faced by such perils as Bolshevism and anarchy, should join forces with those Socialists who, desiring not the destruction of Capital but of Capitalism, are prepared to co-operate in any effort to uphold the social fabric ?

THE EDITOR.

