

The Progress of Professional Organization

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THE PROGRESS OF PROFESSIONAL ORGANIZATION

One of the outstanding features of our present economic and social life is the development of trade-unionism. Formerly, trade-unions had to contend with vigorous opposition from all sides, and were tracked down; nowadays, labour legislation protects, promotes and encourages them. The wage-earners' right to organize is more than merely recognized, because the State compels the employers to negotiate *bona fide* collective labour agreements with trade-unions.

In the past, trade-unions were only tolerated, whereas to-day, they constitute a force, the manifestations and tendencies of which must be canalized. Having achieved its immediate purpose, trade-unionism must identify itself with the social and economic structure of the nation. It is to be noted that « identification with » does not mean assimilation nor subjection. The corporative experiments having political characteristics are there to show us the dangers we must avoid. Nevertheless, the failure of these systems does not leave us without a solution because we may have recourse to professional organization, the general principles of which are outlined in the Encyclicals.

It may be timely to point out that the social doctrine of the Church has never advocated any particular formula of professional organization. Referring to corporative groups, His Holiness Pope Pius XI makes the following statement in his Encyclical, *Quadragesimo Anno*: « The teaching of Leo XIII on the form of political government, namely, that men are free to choose whatever form they please, provided that proper regard is had for the requirements of justice and of the common good, is equally applicable in due proportion, it is hardly necessary to say, to the guilds of the various industries and professions. Moreover, just as inhabitants of a town are wont to found associations with the widest diversity of purposes, which each is quite free to join or not, so those engaged in the same industry or profession will combine with one another into associations equally free for purposes connected in some manner with the pursuit of the calling itself. Since these free associations are clearly and lucidly explained by Our Predecessor of illustrious memory, we consider it enough to emphasize this one point: People are quite free not only to found such associations, which are a matter of private order and private right, but also in respect to them « freely to adopt the organization and the rules which they judge most appropriate to achieve their purpose ».

The formula of Christian syndicalism (the free syndicate in the organized profession) is in accordance with

the foregoing outline of principles. This, in my opinion, must be the basis of the entire social structure of tomorrow if we want to maintain a certain degree of freedom which will be consistent with the legitimate aspirations of the working class and which may not become a hindrance to the requirements of the general well-being of society.

In practice, this implies the existence of free trade-unions and autonomous employers' associations. These two groups, both concerned with the same profession, convene and negotiate collective labour agreements that can be applied to all the undertakings of a given industry, and carry out such collective agreements through the agency of parity committees to which the State grants a very large professional autonomy as regards the supervision and enforcement of the provisions of the agreements. The State does not assimilate the professional associations but confers on them the power to adopt rules that can be legally enforced in the spheres falling within the competence of that power. Such are the general principles that must form the basis of a system of professional organization respectful of democracy.

Those who are familiar with the *Collective Agreement Act* have undoubtedly noticed that we have made a general outline of it in the above paragraph. Indeed, who could ever deny the fact that the juridical extension of a collective agreement and its enforcement by its respective parity committee constitutes a direct application of the general principles of professional organization advocated by the social teachings of the Church? Alas! many are quite reluctant to admit this point of view.

The same holds true in respect of *apprenticeship commissions*. As a matter of fact, what are these commissions if not an application of the principle of professional organization? Owing to the Apprenticeship Assistance Act, professional bodies (trade-unions, employers' associations or parity committees) may establish training centres, elaborate programmes, guide and place apprentices, etc. For those who claim that the State should assume the entire responsibility of apprenticeship, we offer the following quotation from His Holiness Pius XI's *Quadragesimo Anno*: « The supreme authority of the State ought, therefore, to let subordinate groups handle matters and concerns of lesser importance, which would otherwise dissipate its efforts greatly. Thereby it will more freely, powerfully and effectively do all those things that belong to it alone because it alone can do them: directing, watching, urging, restraining, as occa-

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Cette liste, forcément incomplète, indique, sans approuver pour autant leur contenu, certaines publications récentes où le lecteur pourra se renseigner sur l'évolution des idées et des faits dans le domaine des relations industrielles.

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sion requires and necessity demands ». No other advice could be more practical. For instance, is it possible for one to be better informed than the building trades parity committee as to the needs of the building industry as concerns labour, the qualifications workers must have, the most effective professional training methods, etc.? Plain common sense shows that the initiative of professional organizations constituted in this particular instance by apprenticeship commission, must be encouraged.

I have purposely summarized hereinabove the nature and functions of parity committees and apprenticeship commissions. Do the different social groups in our Province fully realize, as they should, that Quebec's labour legislation is soundly based upon the principles of professional organization recommended by the Encyclical? Nobody would ever refuse to admit that our present system could not improve. Nevertheless, would it not be more fitting to understand its general direction and tendencies, and to consider the results obtained, than to dwell exclusively upon its temporary and unavoidable deficiencies?

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