

order might be formed which meantime would seek to inculcate the Christian outlook in different branches of public life and which could act as the nucleus of the new party, if and when the need for such a party should arise.

It cannot, however, be expected that political and economic unity among Catholics should have other than a provisional and temporary character or that such unity would persist after the removal of the danger of external attack on the Faith. The ethical basis for a Christian social structure is a wide one and the variety of political-economic systems which might be erected on this basis is great. The Church holds out no promise of a temporal Utopia. Neither does she promise an end to the conflict of minds. But she does give us the framework within which we must remain if we are to lead full Christian lives and so fulfil the end for which we were made.

JAMES SCALLY

CATHOLIC SOCIAL ACTION

A BRAZILIAN CONFERENCE

THE Third Inter-American Conference of Catholic Social Action was opened at Rio de Janeiro on 22 August by His Eminence the Cardinal Archbishop, Dom Jaime de Barros Camara, in the presence of delegates from twenty-one countries of the western hemisphere, including Canada and British Guiana. Representatives of several national and international organisations in Europe and North America attended the meetings in the quality of observers. Among these were the Food and Agricultural Organisation of the United Nations, and the International Christian Social Association of Switzerland.

After referring briefly to the earlier meetings, held at Washington in 1942 and Havana in 1946, the leader of the American delegation, Bishop D. Karl Alter, of Toledo, Ohio, explained the objects of the present conference. These may be summed up as follows: 'To study the social problems common to all countries of the American continent, and apply to them in a practical manner the principles of social justice, as set forth in the Encyclicals of Popes Leo XIII, Pius XI and Pius XII'.

The first day's discussions were almost exclusively occupied with the situation in rural districts, where primitive conditions and a low standard of health call for action in the majority of Latin-American countries. Attention was directed especially to the asphyxiating effect of the big estates, relics of colonial times, which stifle initiative, restrict agricultural development and maintain the

inhabitants of the countryside in poverty. The Brazilian Constitution of 1946 authorises the expropriation of private properties in the interests of the community, and the authorisation has been invoked in recent schemes for improving conditions in the interior. Brazil's Four-Year Agrarian Plan of 1946 provides for the distribution of non-productive private estates, and State-owned lands, among small farmers, the majority of whom still cultivate the soil on a feudal basis, dividing the produce with the landlord, and enjoying no security of tenure. In the Dominican Republic the big plantations have been purchased by the Government and divided among small farmers under a law of 1934. The same law made provision for technical, social and religious assistance to farming communities, and created an Agricultural Bank to advance money against future crops in order to increase production. The Agrarian Plan made similar provisions in Brazil, but the project for a Rural Bank, therein contemplated, is still awaiting the approval of Congress. In Bolivia the ecclesiastical authorities, with the same object in view, are purchasing land for distribution among Catholics, and so far have benefited some three hundred families.

Suggestions were made at the Conference to limit the size of private properties, to encourage the cultivation of allotments near industrial centres, and to extend expropriation to fertile lands, kept vacant for speculative purposes, in the vicinity of towns. The resolutions finally adopted were: that each organisation should study the agrarian problem in its own territory in the light of Catholic principles and strive to secure legislation which would sanction the expropriation of big estates for division among Catholic families, extend technical, financial and other assistance to the new owners, and prevent subsequent dismemberment of these small properties. Farm labourers should be assured of adequate wages to enable them to lead a dignified existence. Catholic colonisation schemes should be organised, wherever possible, in conformity with national institutions and culture, and Catholic communities should be founded, in association with the country parishes, equipped with all services necessary to ensure their cultural, economic and physical well-being. In this connection the Dutch Association of Catholic Farmers is preparing to send a large number of emigrants to São Paulo where 12,000 acres of fertile land have been placed at their disposal, the State Government undertaking, in addition, to advance money for the purchase of machinery, seeds and cattle.

The Conference expressed the hope that every diocese in each American country would undertake to receive and assimilate 'Dis-

placed Persons' from the European Refugee Camps, provided they satisfied reasonable requirements as to education, health and national security. Several thousands of these unfortunates have arrived in Brazil and a great many more are expected in the near future. The rate of entry is somewhat slow, as special accommodation must be provided for those destined to the plantations inland. Throughout the discussion emphasis was also laid on the need to bring primary instruction within the reach of all, instil moral principles and industrial habits, and raise the standard of health.

The Conference expressed approval of the system of Industrial Councils as a step towards prosperity in peace-time, recommended the maximum industrialisation of the produce of the soil, and the participation of the people in the development of economic activities. During the course of the debates several delegates urged the advantages of decentralisation of industries, the creation of small industrial concerns, and the suppression of monopolies. Trusts are prohibited in many Latin-American countries, and the Brazilian Constitution of 1946 condemns all forms of abuse of economic power, including associations formed to control markets, eliminate competition and arbitrarily increase profits.

The discussion on the subject of Social Legislation covered a wide field. The Conference urged complete liberty for employers and employees to form and direct Professional Syndicates, or Trade Unions, without capitalist or State interference. This ideal has not yet been attained throughout Latin-America. In certain countries the Government exercises considerable influence in the choice of policy and leaders, although in theory the Syndicates are entirely free. This influence, usually regrettable, enabled the Brazilian Government to exclude Bolshevists from the Councils of Trade Unions, which they had come to control through misrepresentations and owing to members' ignorance of their real aims. The Brazilian extremists, although admittedly dominated by Moscow, have always proclaimed respect for religion and family life, in deference to the strong religious feeling in Brazil. In 1945 the Brazilian Communist Party posed as an advanced Socialist party in order to avoid provoking alarm and reaction.

The Conference approved a resolution affirming the workman's right to strike, subject to certain reservations in the public interest, and to participate in the direction and profits of the enterprise, precepts which are fully recognised in Brazilian labour legislation. Emphasis was laid on the need for social assurance of a private character, directed by the beneficiaries and located, as far as pos-

sible, in the district it is to serve, in order to avoid delay in the distribution of benefits. Wages, the Conference insisted, must be sufficient to enable the workman to live decently, satisfy the needs of his family, if married, and permit the wife to remain in the home. The organisation of Workers' Clubs and Christian Youth Associations was strongly recommended.

The Delegates were urged to develop the community spirit in urban and rural parishes, and to encourage the organisation of co-operative and mutual aid societies to free the working classes from capitalist domination. These societies should be of four categories, it was pointed out, in order (a) to supply the people's needs as regards foodstuffs, clothing and domestic utensils; (b) to assist agricultural and industrial production; (c) to extend credit facilities, particularly to farmers, and (d) to provide, through mutual aid societies, medical assistance and social assurance, which are coming increasingly under capitalist or State control. In Brazil private co-operative systems are of recent growth, and, with one or two notable exceptions, have not been very successful.

The guiding principles of Catholic Social Action and the objects to be aimed at were set forth at the Conference. These include the institution of 'Family Bonuses' and the suppression of abuses as regards payment for work done at home; the instruction of women in household management to ensure orderly homes; campaigns to direct opinion towards a fuller appreciation of the moral, economic and social value of woman's domestic work, and protection for the legitimately constituted family.

The Conference suggested that, in countries which have not yet adopted programmes of social education as recommended by the Pope, the delegates should appeal to their Bishops to institute such programmes in every parish. The scheme, they urged, should include instruction in all social aspects of Christianity, with a view to establishing a new social order; the formation of special groups among all classes to discuss and to put in practice the teachings of social doctrine as set forth in the Encyclicals and the selection and training of Priests for social work, especially in rural districts.

The recommendations of the Conference will have carried much weight in Brazil, where the present Government is even more closely associated than is usual with the authorities of the Church. The Cardinal Archbishops of Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo, and many Brazilian Bishops, attended the meetings, showing great interest in the proceedings.

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