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# Father Coughlin: The Progenitor of Social Reform in the Catholic Church

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# FATHER COUGHLIN:

# THE PROGENITOR OF SOCIAL REFORM IN THE CATHOLIC CHURCH

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CONTENTS

# CHAPTER I

## INTERNATIONAL BANKERS AND COMMUNISM: SOURCES OF DISCONTENT

In the 1930's Father Charles E. Coughlin promised all things to all men. Neither his beginning nor his origin was in any way auspicious. Like thousands of other boys he went to parochial schools, attended a Catholic college, and finally became a Catholic priest. The material to which he was exposed was as readily available to others as it was to him. The Papal encyclicals to which he would constantly allude were made known to every Catholic student that attended the same institution this priest did. But to this man alone they took on a different meaning. To Father Coughlin the papal words warranted action which apparently in his mind had not been taken as yet. How could a Catholic priest become so outspoken and continue to be heard? He was certainly not the only priest caught in the trough of the depression. Was he an irritant or did he truly and effectively influence the policies of the 1930's? Would history have turned out the same had he not existed? The rhetoric of the radio priest at times outdid the harangues of Hitler and Mussolini. He assailed "Red atheistic communism" and "godless capitalism". He berated all bankers and verbally

castigated the Jews. How Father Coughlin was permitted by his spiritual leaders to use the backdrop of the Roman Catholic church and how he attracted his huge following for his evangelism of monetary reform and intolerance is perhaps not easy to understand. His ambivalence perhaps will never be understood. It seems rather incongruous for a Catholic priest to have assumed the role of a preacher of intolerance when anti-Catholic feeling itself was very high. What was there in the make-up of the man that made him cloak himself with a cape of intolerance? Did he act with the sanction of the church or did he merely follow his own line of action? Were his actions sincere or were they the product of a restless, ambitious, irresponsible individual?

Father Coughlin's personal confidence, his ambition, and his ability to speak over the radio with the backing of his bishop along with his desire to bring about an end to the depression made him the progenitor of social reform in the Catholic church. He was certainly an irritant to both his church and the Roosevelt Administration at times but nevertheless he influenced the politics of the nation in the decade of the nineteen thirties. Unfortunately for Father Coughlin the reforms which he advocated and the good which might have been derived from them are overshadowed by his obsession with Communism which he too closely identified with Jewry. Throughout the decade, the church tried to separate itself from his work even

though he used papal encyclicals as a justification for his reforms. He was attacked by the church not so much for his reforms as he was for the manner in which he set out to make them known. In order to show him as the progenitor of social reform in the church, the negative attitude of the Papacy and the church in general and the work of other contemporary Catholic groups in the thirties must be brought out. He was a restless man but in no way irresponsible. He alone held himself responsible for his actions.

The encyclical of Pope Leo XIII, Rerum Novarum, to which Father Coughlin would constantly make reference during his career denounced the utter poverty of the masses and the enormous fortunes of some individuals. It dealt considerably with the idea of private property and how ownership was a natural right; it emphasized how important adequate wages were to the laborer and how capital and labor could not do without each other; and it favored trade unions with both the representation of capital and labor.[1]

Pius XI reaffirmed and enlarged upon the idea of Leo XIII. His encyclical Quadragesimo Anno called for a more just distribution of wealth and for wages to be raised to an adequate level. This encyclical contained a more

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[1]J. W. Poynter, The Popes and Social Problems, (London: Watts & Co., 1949), p. 6.

mature appreciation of the relationship between profits of the capitalist and economic growth; between economic growth and full employment; and between full employment and general prosperity. Pius XI recognized that charity was not something to be interchanged with social justice but that it was merely a help for those whose poverty had not come about because of exploitation. But unfortunately, he did not comprehend that such exploitation was not necessarily the only cause of the depression in the decade of the 1930's. Such factors as the greed of capitalists, the dictatorship of monopoly interest, and an overabundance of economic freedom were over-emphasized by him for the want in the midst of plenty. Moral evil rather than universal ignorance as to how to keep a complex, modern industrial economy functioning at top speed was blamed for the cause of the depression. He offered more regulation and more cooperation between social classes as solutions but full economic recovery was to require more.[2] It must be emphasized that Pius XI was only the second of two Popes who devoted any meaningful time to the idea of social justice until the depression of the 1930's. Both were steps, so to speak, in an evolutionary process within the Catholic Church. Father Coughlin was the next step in this evolutionary ladder of social reform. He, like Pius XI, laid much emphasis on the moral evil of

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[2]Richard L. Camp, The Papal Ideology of Social Reform, (Leiden, Netherlands: E. J. Brill, 1969), pp. 4-100.

greed as the cause of the depression. But without Father Coughlin none would have pushed the idea of social reform as he did.

The Reverend Charles E. Coughlin's rise to national prominence was nothing short of meteoric. In 1927 he was an obscurity living in the suburbs of Detroit, Michigan. By 1933, his name had almost become a household word throughout the United States. The controversial career of this Catholic priest started in Canada where he was born on October 25, 1891, in Hamilton, Ontario. Five months earlier on May 15, Pope Leo XIII in his fourteenth Pontifical year produced a manifesto of social justice for the working class, the encyclical Rerum Novarum, The Condition of Labor, a work which was to weigh heavily on the mind and shoulders of Charles E. Coughlin in later years.

His father, Thomas Coughlin, was an American, born in Indiana, and a member of an itinerant family of lumberjacks and steamboaters. Circumstances had brought him to Hamilton where he met an Irish seamstress, Amelia Mahoney, who was to become his wife. Their only surviving child was raised in lower middle class surroundings and filled with the Irish-Catholic culture of his parents. Mrs. Coughlin had given birth to a girl who was named Agnes when their son was a year and three months old, but who died three months after birth. His mother therefore concentrated her love on Charles. She doted on him constantly, and thus

possibly created a source for the confidence of his later years. Being a very religious woman, she wanted her son to become a priest and she must have ingrained this thought in her son's mind very strongly, for he finally wound up after his college years in the Basilian novitiate. His earlier years found him attending parochial schools in Hamilton.

His biographer of those early years, Ruth Mugglebee, stated that he loved people, always being one of a group. He was the kind of a boy that other boys naturally took to. He was a born leader for whom nothing was too hard to try or to do.[3] In September, 1903 he commenced classes at St. Michael's College in Toronto, where he maintained an outstanding academic record, excelling in dramatics, religion, and philosophy. He was dubbed "the orator" because of his abilities as an extemporaneous speaker. He seemed to like nothing better than the forensic activities of debate. In his senior year, he studied extensively and was greatly impressed by Pope Leo XIII's encyclical, Rerum Novarum, and other works of socially-minded church leaders, which condemned socialism, communism, nihilism, and extreme capitalism. But his education was lacking in the study of American history and politics, a fact which would prove an intellectual flaw in his later years.

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[3]Ruth Mugglebee, Father Coughlin of the Shrine of the Little Flower, (Garden City, N.Y.: Garden City Publishing Co., 1933), pp. 1-29.

After graduating valedictorian of his class in college and after a brief trip to Europe, Charles Coughlin entered St. Basil's Seminary in Toronto in order to become a priest. He applied himself to those subjects which appealed to him the most. From the Basilians he learned that usury was sin and that the Scriptures should govern economics, a subject in which medieval philosophy was very significant.[4] For a period of six months during his scholasticate, Coughlin was sent to Waco, Texas to St. Basil's College to teach and continue his studies.[5]

Father Coughlin's first assignment after being ordained in June, 1916, was as a teacher of English, Philosophy, Theology and Greek at Assumption College in Sandwich, Ontario, a suburb of Windsor across the river from Detroit. His speaking abilities reached the business men of Windsor. His presence was requested at luncheons and dinner meetings of the Chamber of Commerce, the Rotary Club and other such organizations. He applied religion to business affairs which appeared highly pleasing to all his listeners.[6] His confidence was constantly being fortified because of the demands for his personal appearances.

In 1918 when a new code of Canon law was promulgated,

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[4]David H. Bennett, Demagogues in the Depression, (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1969), p. 30.

[5]Mugglebee, Father Coughlin, pp. 87-88.

[6]Ibid., pp. 97-120.

all pious Sodalities of priests were disbanded. Now all priests had to belong to Congregations, such as the Redemptorists, or orders such as the Franciscans, Benedictines, Dominicansor Augustinians, the only four prime Orders in the Catholic Church. However, the choice of remaining a secular priest was also available to the members of the now defunct Sodalities. Father Coughlin chose to remain as a secular priest, a point which was to become most important only when he commenced his radio career, and he subsequently joined the Detroit diocese.[7]

After several parish assignments throughout Michigan, the Bishop of Detroit, Michael J. Gallagher, chose Father Coughlin to be the pastor of a new parish in Royal Oak, a suburb thirteen miles north of Detroit, mainly because of his ability to deliver a sermon. The site selected was a hotbed of Ku Klux Klanism at the time. The priest's funds were meager and in an effort to increase the membership of his parish, he got the idea of reading his sermons on the radio. Bishop Gallagher gave his approval and, as a result in September 1926 he sought out Mr. Leo Fitzpatrick, the manager of Station WJR in Detroit, Michigan, who was highly enthusiastic about the priest's ideas. In turn, Father Coughlin was given a few words of advice by the radio station manager, to beware of bigotry

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[7]Louis B. Ward, Father Charles E. Coughlin, (Detroit, Michigan: Tower Publications, Inc., 1933), p. 16.

and avoid commercialism. Later years would find him disregarding this advice. At the same time, Father Coughlin won a friend for life.[8]

As a result of his own efforts, Father Coughlin finally appeared before a radio microphone for the first time on October 17, 1926. His radio audience took to him almost immediately. After only a few weeks of broadcasting he was receiving as many as five hundred letters after each sermon. Because of the interest shown, Father Coughlin organized the Radio League of the Little Flower in order to solicit contributions. From 1926 through the summer of 1927 Father Coughlin's reputation was limited to the immediate Detroit area and his talks were limited to religious topics. He did not as yet make the headlines but he was beginning to acquire a following. It would not be until the stock market crash when he turned to political and economic questions that more attentive ears would turn to him.[9] Father Coughlin began to feel that religious stereotyped radio sermons of the kind he had been delivering before 1929 were not enough. He wanted to address his comments to moral particulars rather than moral generalities. As a result, late in 1929, he bought extra radio time from two additional broadcast stations, WLW in Cin-

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[8]Mugglebee, Father Coughlin, pp. 122-164.

[9]Bennett, Demagogues in the Depression, pp. 32-33.

cinnati and WMAQ in Chicago.[10] His ambition grew and in 1930 with the aid of Leo Fitzpatrick he signed a radio contract with the Columbia Broadcasting system for a twenty seven week series of radio sermons.[11] Father Coughlin's popularity in his initial radio years evidenced by the response of the public in terms of mail received by the priest must have convinced CBS that his talks might have a national appeal.

From November, 1929 to April, 1930 the major theme of his talks was an incessant attack on the dangers of Communism.[12] It seemed to be a logical conclusion on the part of Father Coughlin study that the abuses imposed on capitalism was leaving the door open for Communism. His reputation of Communism was not based on Karl Marx's analysis of the defects of capitalism but rather on its anti-Christian philosophy and its solutions for economic ills. He defined Communism as a lesson in irrationalism that the American people must learn to avoid. Father Coughlin asserted that social reconstruction should take place but Communism was not the answer to the failure of capitalism.[13]

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[10]"Father Coughlin", Fortune, February, 1934, p. 34.

[11]Bennett, Demagogues in the Depression, p. 33.

[12]Ward, Father Charles E. Coughlin, pp. 55-72.

[13]Charles E. Coughlin, "Internationalism", By the Sweat of Thy Brow, (Royal Oak, Michigan: Radio League of the Little Flower, 1931), pp. 46-47.

The philosophy of Communism, he stated was based on a denial of religious truth:

> What is this thing called Communism? According to its founder Adam Weishaupt, from whom Karl Marx drew his inspiration, Communism is necessarily identified with atheism... Following his master, Karl Marx emphasized the fact that religion is the opium of the people. This accounts for the fact that every form of religion has been practically banned in Russia.[14]

Father Coughlin must have felt that Communism as a social order would have much appeal among the unemployed even though the evidence to support a genuine Communist movement in the country was practically non-existent.

Yet in Detroit after the crash Father Coughlin could see thousands out of work and without any money to buy the necessities of life. The workers in the automobile plants were becoming so desperate that they were ready to heed anyone who would offer a solution to their ills, no matter how radical the solution might be. Mayor Frank Murphy, a member of Father Coughlin's parish, spent money for food to feed the hungry and opened warehouses so that homeless men could sleep. Outdoor mass meetings were held in downtown Detroit so that these disenchanted workers could express their ideas. The mayor was criticized for feeding idlers and encouraging the spread of Communism by permitting radicals to speak at these mass meetings.[15]

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[14] Ibid., p. 45.

[15] F. Clever Bald, Michigan In Four Centuries, (New York: Harper and Row, 1954), p. 405.

On March 6, 1930 the Communist party in Detroit called for a demonstration by the unemployed of the city and was overwhelmed at the turnout. Twenty-six unemployed councils were established by Communist workers whose purpose was to move evicted families back into their homes.[16] Thus the Communists took advantage of the situation and stirred up trouble and Father Coughlin took it all in.

As a result of his talks on Communism, Father Coughlin appeared before a Congressional Committee consisting of five Congressmen on July 25, 1930. What Father Coughlin said must have amazed the Committee. His opening statement named Henry Ford as the strongest force to unionize labor worldwide. He explained how Henry Ford had lured thirty thousand workers from the South to his plant in Detroit only to turn them away with a fire hose. This was the kind of action, contended the priest, that would drive a wedge between the workers and the capitalists and draw all workers closer to the ways of Communism. The priest admitted, however, that Ford's actions were all done through ignorance. He also intimated that Henry Ford was helping to spread Communism by signing a thirteen million dollar contract with representatives of the Soviet government, which allowed certain Russians to study Ford's industrial techniques.[17] It seems somewhat ironic

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[16]B. J. Widick, Detroit: City of Race and Class Violence, (Chicago: Quadrangle Books, 1972), pp. 46-47.

[17]New York Times, July 26, 1930, p. 14.

that Henry Ford would be teaching Communists his production methods inside his plant while outside his plant he turned fire hoses on workers in the "Ford Hunger March" of March 7, 1932 whose leaders were supposedly Communists.[18]

The theme of Father Coughlin's radio sermons which ran from October, 1930 through February, 1931 was "By the Sweat of Thy Brow" and in general the sermons touched upon subjects and ideas mentioned in the encyclicals of Leo XIII and Pius XI. In his first discourse of that broadcast season entitled "Machine Age and Labor", the first words he uttered seemed to identify the career he was to follow:

> In venturing upon this subject of labor and its relative questions of wages and unemployment I am not forgetful that the path of pilgrimage is both treacherous and narrow. On the one side there are quicksands of idealism, of radical socialism, in whose depths there are buried both the dreams of the poet and the ravings of the revolutionist.[19]

He presented statistics which he said were supplied by William Green, the president of the American Federation of Labor, which showed that various industries had increased their output while the number of laborers had actually decreased. These statistics showed that factories from 1920 to 1930 had produced 42 per cent more merchandise with

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[18]Widick, Detroit, pp. 49-51.

[19]Coughlin, "Machine Age and Labor", By the Sweat of Thy Brow, p. 7.

500,000 fewer workers than in the decade from 1910 to 1920. In the same period of time railroad business was up 7 per-cent while 250,000 workmen had been cut. Coal tonnage had been increased 23 per cent while 100,000 fewer miners were employed. Yet their wages had not been raised to compensate for the increased productivity.

Father Coughlin offered prospective solutions as well as problems in his first talk that year. He proposed curtailing all overtime work, preventing assembly line factories from working more than eight hours a day, and if at all possible, limiting them to four days a week. At the same time he recommended that the workers be paid so that they could live for seven days. He felt that this was a problem which could not be settled by any one member of any political party but by every American despite his political leanings.[20]

Sunday after Sunday he dwelt upon the existing problems of the depression. In his sermons he emphasized exactly what his audience wanted to hear. He told the people that mass production had far exceeded mass consumption and consequently millions of unemployed workers were walking the streets idle. Machinery had to become the servant of man. Man was not to become its slave. He suggested that this machinery of mass production be con-

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[20] Ibid., pp. 9-17.

trolled by limiting its output so that the number of unemployed would not multiply.[21]

Father Coughlin's advocation of the fact that mass production exceeded mass consumption preceded that revelation on the part of the Roosevelt's Brain Trust by almost two years. In 1932, R. G. Tugwell, a member of that Brain Trust, presented to the Presidential nominee a proposal for an Economic Council made up of economists and representatives whose duties in addition to others, would be to plan the production of the national output of agricultural and manufactured staple goods and to estimate the consumption of the American population.[22] But the proposal was not acted upon.

He emphasized the concentration of wealth in the United States and the amount of American money that was being invested in foreign countries. He brought out that there were 40,000 millionaires in the United States; that there were 3 men alone in the United States whose fortunes were estimated at 5 billion dollars; that there were many other millionaires who had $100,000,000 and upwards. He blamed mass production for this accumulation of wealth. According to Father Coughlin, those 40,000 millionaires had a combined wealth of $160,000,000,000 and one thirty-

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[21]Coughlin, "Where Money is King", By the Sweat of Thy Brow, pp. 19-22.

[22]R. G. Tugwell, The Brains Trust, (New York: Viking Press, 1968), p. 526.

third of one percent of the total American population was controlling over 50 percent of the total wealth of the United States.[23]

The priest attacked the fact that billions of American dollars made by American laborers were being used by international bankers in building factories and creating industries abroad. He described these international bankers as a profit seeking, selfish group "determined to rule the universe through the agency of wealth".[24] His identification of them was somewhat vague, referring to them most of the time simply as "The Rothschilds", "The Morgans", "Wall Street Bankers" or "The Federal Reserve bankers".

He claimed that billions of private dollars were "coaxed from the gullible American public by bond sellers and international bankers" and "found their way into the coffers of European governments".[25] This money was in addition to the billions of dollars from the United States Treasury that went to foreign countries. He saw no need for American dollars developing foreign nations. But he did see "the immense profits made by cheap foreign labor as the siren song which coaxed the flow of gold from our

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[23]Coughlin, "Where Money is King", By the Sweat of Thy Brow, pp. 23-25.

[24]Coughlin, "Internationalism", By the Sweat of Thy Brow, p. 45.

[25]Charles E. Coughlin, "Next War", Radio Discourses 1931-1932, (Royal Oak, Michigan: Radio League of The Little Flower, 1933), p. 136.

American institutions."[26]

Father Coughlin wanted the American dollar to stay in the United States. "Should there not be a high export tax on every American dollar sent outside of our nation? Money made in America by Americans must first be for the use of Americans, even though its ownership pertains to an individual."[27] Later President Roosevelt would take steps to keep the dollar in the United States by devaluating it.

Father Coughlin thought it was the duty of the American government to define the limitations both of profit and of use so that prevalent abuses would become non-existent. Money was being used against the interests of American citizens in the banking industry. In the textile industry, abnormal profits were being made by subnormal wages. This is what Father Coughlin wanted halted. He defended the right of private ownership as set forth in the encyclical of Leo XIII while insisting upon the principle which limited the owners of money and factories from using them for their own private profit when any such use is detrimental to the common good of citizens in general. He thought he spoke for the laboring class when he protested against the untaxed exportation of American

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[26]Coughlin, "Ballots - Not Bullets", Radio Discourses 1931-1932, p. 230.

[27]Coughlin, "Where Money is King", By the Sweat of Thy Brow, p. 25.

gold.[28] Father Coughlin found the laborer standing "in the hall of Pontius Pilate--his brow crowned with the thorns of worry, his body bruised with the stripes of misfortune and usury, and his hands tied by the manacles of disorganization.....more sinned against than sinning."[29]

Father Coughlin had much to say about private property but he seemed to give no specific recommendations. He advocated a wider distribution of property. He felt that there was a growing tendency to diminish the amount of private property in the United States because there was an increasing concentration of private ownership. Thus there existed a paradox. Private property must be limited and restricted if the right of private property was to be maintained. While he proclaimed that there was too little private property, he also maintained that there were some enterprises which, by their very nature, should be owned nationally or publicly. In order that there might be a wider distribution of private property, the power to coin and regulate the value of money must be given back to Congress. The power of bankers would thus be reduced and this in turn would promote a wider distribution of wealth and an increase in the number of people

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[28] Ibid., p. 29.

[29] Ibid., pp. 39-40.

owning private property.[30]

He assailed the government for not paying the Soldier's Bonus which was due on June 15, 1918 and which still had not been paid. The Secretary of State, Andrew Mellon, he stated, had said that the veteran did not know how to spend this money and that "these ex-soldiers are paying six percent interest for the privilege of borrowing on their own money for which the Government pays them four percent".[31] Very emphatically he pointed out that:

> They were not asked if they knew how to give their lives or their limbs nor if they would squander their blood on French soil. But there is danger of their squandering the money that is justly due them--money which is held on the basis of certificates, doled out to them in small quantities; and interest charged upon it.[32]

Money was not being paid to those who deserved it and he attacked the manner in which the government was spending money. He pointed out that $2,500,000 were appropriated for the study of bugs; $35,000,000 were loaned to large shipping interests so that they could build ships; $10,000,000 had been set aside for the great airline transportation companies; $160,000,000 had been taken out of the national treasury and used as tax rebates to the rich.[33]

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[30] Social Justice, March 13, 1936, p. 5.

[31] Coughlin, "Without Religion - What?", By the Sweat of Thy Brow, p. 63.

[32] Ibid., p. 64.

[33] Coughlin, "Prosperity", By the Sweat of Thy Brow, p. 87.

"Why," he asked, "do we squall and squirm and elevate bugs and hogs and tax refunds above the essentials of clothing and food for distressed human beings when 100,000 people in Arkansas tonight are starving to death?"[34]

In another Sunday sermon in that broadcast season, the radio priest charged that three large oil companies conspired to restrict production of American oil to allow the importation of cheaper Venezuelan oil.[35] "A fictitious over-production cry was raised to heaven to provide a market for Venezuelan oil in the United States,"[36] he declared. The priest named as one of the conspirators the Royal Dutch Shell Oil Company but he would not name the other two because "I would be charged indirectly attacking a plutocrat who is too close to our government and insinuating that he had something to do in keeping foreign oil exempt from tariff taxation."[37] He was concerned because these three companies were profiteering at the expense of Americans in the Southwestern United States.[38]

Father Coughlin's sermons were somewhat repetitious but Sunday after Sunday he gave the people exactly what they wanted to hear. He continuously stressed wages and

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[34] Ibid., p. 88.

[35] Coughlin, "Why Radicalism", By the Sweat of Thy Brow, pp. 112-113.

[36] Ibid., p. 113.

[37] Ibid.

[38] Ibid.

unemployment. He pointed out that 70,000 automobile workers were laid off in 1929 and 150,000 were jobless for two months. In the clothing industry he asserted that 11,000 workers were laid off for 3 months; the cotton textile industry had laid off up to 21,000 for 2 months. "How in the name of God", he asked, "can these workers maintain their standard of living about which we prate so much while their incomes are destroyed?"[39] With words such as these he was the spokesman of the laboring class. With his consideration for higher wages and unemployment his thinking preceded that of the Roosevelt Administration. During this broadcast season he had befriended the veteran and the laborer; he had become the foe of three oil companies and had attacked governmental policies.

Because he was becoming too controversial, the Columbia broadcasting system dropped Father Coughlin's Golden Hour. The National Broadcasting Company wasn't interested in putting the priest on the air,[40] so consequently at the priest's request, Leo Fitzpatrick arranged a nineteen station hookup which included stations in New Jersey, Illinois, Pennsylvania, New York, Ohio, Missouri, Minnesota, Maryland, Connecticut and Maine.[41]

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[39]Coughlin, "The Pact with the Past", By the Sweat of Thy Brow, p. 132.

[40]Bennett, Demagogues in the Depression, p. 37.

[41]Mugglebee, Father Coughlin, pp. 261-62.

In his 1931-1932 broadcast season Father Coughlin's major emphasis was attacks on Prohibition and President Hoover and his administration, but initially he repeated subjects of the previous broadcast season. Again as in the previous radio season, the radio priest used as his foundation the encyclicals of Leo XIII and Pius XI. He very clearly saw his license to speak as he did given to him by the two popes. His own words clearly indicate this:

> But insofar as a priest of the Roman Catholic Church dare avail himself of this opportunity, he can do nothing better to substantiate his position than to quote the leader of the church, Pius XI, who says: "Before proceeding...we lay down the principle long since established by Leo XIII that it is our right and our duty to deal authoritatively with social and economic problems."[42]

He continued to berate the international bankers and the concentration of wealth, upheld private ownership and emphasized again the need for work. "You cannot eat bread unless you work. You cannot have shelter unless you secure it by the sweat of your brow."[43]

But he saw that certain changes would have to be made before any significant change in the depression could take place.

> Before any progress can be made on this period of reconstruction first it is required that confidence be restored in the minds of the people and secondly

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[42] Charles E. Coughlin, "Come Follow Me", Father Coughlin's Discourses, 1931-32, pp. 18-19.

[43] Ibid., p. 19.

> that a change of attitude on the part of the rich towards the poor be evidenced.... It is the change of attitude in their public lives, in their commercial dealings, in their financial and industrial philosophy to which I refer.[44]

His vindictiveness did not forget Congress. His vehemence was brought out because of the apparently ridiculous bills that were proposed in Congress when the country was suffering the worst depression of its history. He pointed out that 4,500 bills of the 5,000 proposed that year had nothing to do with the domestic crisis. According to the priest a hall of fame had been proposed by one representative. "I suppose:, said the priest, "he wished to insure the future immortality of Mr. Mellon and those who served under him in constructing the new plutocratic government." One bill had been introduced for the purpose of destroying and eradicating predatory animals in the State of California; another bill wanted a fish cultural station at Montauk Point, Long Island; still another wanted a post office remodeled in colonial style. In this way did he belittle the efforts of the administration in attempting to solve the depression. He thought nothing of the Reconstruction Finance Corporation Bill which he felt was giving limited power and too much money to only a few men. It would not restore prosperity to the worker and farmer but it was an attempt to "refinance the finan-

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[44] Ibid., p. 24.

ciers" so that pre-1929 prosperity could be achieved.[45]

Father Coughlin felt that the financiers, the international bankers, were responsible for the depression and the social injustices it caused. They were the ones who had concentrated wealth with their mass production methods while at the same time paying the most minimum of wages. Their capitalistic greed had brought about the world situation and therefore capitalism would need rectification if it were to survive. He attacked Hoover and his administration because in the priest's eyes they took no remedial action to cure the depression. He saw a void developing and saw Communism filling that void and for that reason he tried to warn his radio audience of its dangers:

> Communism is the negation of God, of morality and of nationalism. It is a fester of negatives. One might describe it as a maggot which feeds on the ulcers of civilization.[46]

Thus from the malpractices of the international bankers and the fear of Communism would emerge his proposals for reform. In the years to come, Father Coughlin would combine his love of speaking with those proposals.

The year was 1932, an election year which brought a new President to the White House. Perhaps by the negative aspects of his oratory toward the incumbent admini-

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[45]Coughlin, "A Sandy Foundation", Father Coughlin's Discourses, 1931-32, pp.148-49.

[46]Coughlin, "Internationalism", By the Sweat of Thy Brow, p. 47.

stration, Father Coughlin to some extent aided the election of Roosevelt. But these votes were more than likely a negligible amount because the people wanted a change. The year 1932 was also to find the radio priest embarking on a crusade to rid the country of the depression via monetary reform. Until now he had concentrated on its ills. Father Coughlin wanted to return a certain dignity to the people and one way of doing it was by making money more abundant thus restoring their purchasing power and keeping Communism from making any inroads in the disenchanted laboring classes.

## CHAPTER II

## GOLD AND SILVER AND A CENTRAL BANK: THE REMEDIES FOR DISCONTENT

In early 1932, Father Coughlin met with two men whose ideas on money would greatly change the tone and subject of his radio talks. One was George L. LeBlanc and the other was Robert M. Harriss, both of whom were to become part of his Brain Trust. George LeBlanc was a man in his fifties, a native of Montreal, Canada, who had not lost his French-Canadian accent. In 1912, he had been the manager of the American Express Company in New York and later in 1914 he had become a Vice-President of the Equitable Trust, where he headed the Foreign Department. In 1929 when Equitable Trust merged with Seaboard National, he resigned his position and accepted the presidency of Interstate Bank and Trust. But then Interstate merged with Chase and Equitable in 1930 and he was soon without a job. He was considered a visionary and a blowhard by Wall Streeters and he in turn considered them so many stuffed shirts.

As a result, he opened an investment-counsel office and gave more attention to an idea which he had considered in 1930, the revaluation of the dollar. His idea won the

attention of Senator Thomas of Oklahoma and Professor Irving Fisher of Yale,[1] both of whom were interested in monetary reform.[2] LeBlanc's ideas also attracted Robert M. Harriss, a New York commodity broker, and possessor of numerous tracts of cotton land in the South. Consequently he was interested in the fate of the American dollar as well. The more LeBlanc talked about his idea of monetary reform the harder Harriss listened. Being a radio fan and therefore familiar with Father Coughlin's work in that media, he felt that Father Coughlin could be a momentous force in bringing about national support for LeBlanc's idea of dollar revaluation because of the priest's vast radio power and audience.

In early 1932 Father Coughlin delivered a lecture entitled "The God of Gold" and it seemed to indicate that he was totally in sympathy with the revaluation idea. Gold, according to the priest, was rather valueless. You could not eat it. You could not drink it. It would not protect you from the winter winds. It was not a medicine to be used in times of sickness. "In itself it is certainly not wealth but is only the ambassador of wealth."[3]

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[1]"Father Coughlin", Fortune, February, 1934, p. 38.

[2]Joseph E. Reeve, Monetary Reform Movements, (Washington, D.C.: American Council on Public Affairs, 1943), p. 132.

[3]Charles E. Coughlin, "The God of Gold", Father Coughlin's Radio Discourses 1931-32, pp. 164-65.

But nevertheless the financiers of the world had attempted to deify gold. His own words show what he thought of these international bankers.

> Thus following Rothschild's example the international banking system has so completely extended its compound loans throughout the entire world that today millions of borrowers find it impossible to pay their interest let alone their principle, because in many cases the compound interest has surpassed the original loan. ....Riding roughshod over the common people of the earth he has dispatched his lieutenants to accumulate the wealth of the world.[4]

Even earlier, in the 1930-31 broadcast season, Father Coughlin showed he favored the revaluation of gold and the remonetization of silver.[5] The idea of airing the revaluation of the dollar must have been music to his ears. The titles of some of his sermons for the 1932-33 broadcast season show the extent of his enthusiasm for the subject. He started with "Gold-Master or Servant" and continued with such titled as "Revaluation", "Gold, the Medium of Exchange", "Rubber Credit Money", and "Banks and Gold".[6] Apparently from the manner in which he interpreted "revaluation", Father Coughlin meant devaluation. In economics there is no term for the opposite of devaluation.

Thus at the outset of the 1932-33 season, after his

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[4] Ibid., pp. 166, 173.

[5] Charles E. Coughlin, "Gold and Silver and Child Welfare Bureau", By the Sweat of Thy Brow, pp. 90-95.

[5] Louis Ward, Charles E. Coughlin: An Authorized Biography, pp. 107-161.

conference with LeBlanc and Harriss, Father Coughlin apparently had a definite program in mind. His objectives were to revaluate the gold ounce thereby putting more currency in circulation and to reduce taxation and debts, both public and private. In order to accomplish his objectives he advocated confiscation of all commercial gold which was to be turned over to the government. This was eventually to be accomplished by President Roosevelt. Further all interest-bearing bonds were to be recalled and liquidated by issuing Federal currency for them. He wanted to prove that money was the medium of trade and not the medium of control.[7]

In his first sermon on the revaluation of the dollar on Sunday October 30, Father Coughlin started out by stating that under the capitalistic system there were three kinds of money, namely, basic money, currency money and credit or debt money. The United States could print or coin two and one-half paper or silver dollars for every gold dollar, but no more than twelve debt dollars should be issued for every gold dollar that the United States possessed. Both currency and debt money were valueless if they were not backed by basic money. Therefore, the standard of money meant the maintenance of the formula of

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[7]Ibid., pp. 110-11.

one basic unit to two and one-half currency units to twelve debt units. The trouble as Father Coughlin saw it was that this standard of money had been upset.

He pointed out that there were $4.5 billion of real commercial gold in the United States. At the same time there were $235 billion debt dollars payable in gold. But according to the formula Father Coughlin advocated the United States could have no more than $54 billion dollars of debt money. He insisted that prosperity could not return to the country until the standard of one to two and a half to twelve was restored.[8] Later, in 1935, he would drop this standard of money for no apparent reason. He said his formula was "taught in the primary grade of economics", and "elementary".[9] The exact source of the formula he never disclosed. It was based on the idea that bonds, checks, and promissory notes had to be paid in real currency or real gold. He justified it on two grounds. First he stated that the gold currency could be defended because "all men are not trading at the same time". Thus, not everyone would demand payment in gold at the same time, and a two and one half to one ratio was sound and safe. Secondly, the one to twelve gold debt ratio

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[8] Ibid., pp. 112-13.

[9] Charles E. Coughlin, "By Their Fruits They Shall Be Known", New Deal On Money, (Royal Oak, Michigan: Radio League of the Little Flower, 1933), p. 90.

was defended primarily on the basis that "debt cannot be liquidated with safety beyond the saving power which is over and above the earning power of a man in ratio of twelve to one."[10] Beyond this justification, Father Coughlin never elaborated his theory.

On April 15, 1933, the Roosevelt Administration took steps in accordance with what Father Coughlin had been advocating. On that date an executive order was promulgated which forbade the hoarding of gold and which required all gold possessors, including member banks, to deliver their gold coin, bullion, or certificates to Federal Reserve Banks on or before May 1, with the exception of rare coins, small amounts for use in industry and the arts, and a maximum of one hundred dollars per person in gold coin and gold certificates. The legal price of twenty-dollars and sixty-seven cents was paid for the gold turned in. On December 28, 1933, this nationalization of gold was completed by an order of the Secretary of the Treasury. The expiration date for the surrender of gold was set as January 17, 1934. The country had experienced a heavy outflow of gold at the beginning of the decade and in order to build up the gold reserve all gold was nationalized since in times of economic crisis people tend to hold on to "real money" such as gold because their

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[10]Charles E. Coughlin, Eight Discourses on the Gold Standard, (Royal Oak, Michigan: Radio League of the Little Flower, 1934), p. 17.

faith has not been lost in this "real money".

On January 30, 1934, the Gold Reserve Act was passed. The title to all gold coin and bullion was now vested in the United States. Furthermore, it removed all gold coins from circulation and melted them into bullion. No more gold coins were to be minted. The Secretary of the Treasury was not to control all gold dealings and finally, the President was empowered to fix the weight of the gold dollar at any level between fifty and sixty per cent of its prior legal weight. The next day, President Roosevelt under the authority of this act fixed the buying and selling price of thirty five dollars an ounce for gold and thus devaluing the gold dollar to fifty-nine and six hundredths per cent of its former weight. With this devaluation additional paper money to the value of three billion dollars could be printed without any additional gold acquisition.[11] This would make export goods cheaper with a tendency for foreign nations to buy while import goods would be made more expensive with less tendency on the part of the United States to buy foreign goods. Thus money would stay in the United States.

The concentration of wealth, mass production, gold worship, non-productive war bonds or "blood bonds" as he called them, and poverty were again the mainstays of his

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[11]Milton Friedman and Anna Jacobson Schwartz, A Monetary History of the United States 1867-1960, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1963), pp. 463-70.

talks during the fall of 1933. Perhaps the most important topic in that season was when Father Coughlin devoted an entire sermon to the restoration of silver in which he proposed to coin a new dollar which would contain approximately twenty-five cents in gold and seventy-five cents in silver. This remonetization of silver, according to the priest, would provide a sound and adequate currency; financial panics would be eliminated; it would serve as the practical revaluation of gold; debts could be payed more readily; foreclosures and bankruptcies could be lessened; discontent could be eliminated; unemployment would be ended; gold would no longer hold its preeminent position of control; and the world market would be opened up for American manufacturers.

The most significant revelation in a subsequent talk on silver was the explanation of why he as a Catholic priest interested himself in the remonetization of silver. "Bear with me if I confess!" he started out:

> Certainly, my interest is aroused in this subject because it is vitally associated with your welfare - your homes, your children, your employment, your peace and contentment..... For ages it has been a common accusation unjustly spoken against the church that has been arrogant towards the oppressed and subservient to the rich; that her chief material care was to get money out of men's pockets rather than money into their pockets.[12]

Father Coughlin did not feel that he was belittling

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[12]Charles E. Coughlin, "The Call to Arms", The New Deal In Money, p. 65.

his priestly garb by fighting for the physical well-being of his flock. He merely wanted employment for those who did not have it and a restoration of their purchasing power.

In the treatment of his talks on silver, Father Coughlin was somewhat prone to exaggeration. In his attempt to show how much of the world was still on the silver standard, Father Coughlin made the statement that eight hundred million people, four-fifths of the world's population were still using silver as their basic money.[13] Yet in fact in only three countries, namely China, Peru and Mexico, was there any semblance of a silver standard in the early nineteen thirties. There were other Silverites in the nation at the time sponsoring silver proposals. Four such organized groups of importance were the Bimetallic Association, headed by former Senators Charles S. Thomas and Frank J. Cannon, the annual Western Governor's Conference, the affiliated Western States Silver Committee and the Committee for the Nation. The combined influence of these silver groups became so strong that on December 29, 1933, twenty-seven Senators adopted a resolution in favor of bimetallism. Shortly thereafter, Secretary of the Treasury Morgenthau began to produce names of individuals and firms holding silver. In April, 1934, conspicuous among those listed were the names of George LeBlanc, Robert Harriss, both of

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[13]Charles E. Coughlin, "The New Temple", The New Deal in Money, p. 33.

whom had approached the radio priest on the revaluation of the dollar, and one Amy Collins of Royal Oak, Michigan, who happened to be the Treasurer of Father Coughlin's Radio League of the Little Flower.[14] Father Coughlin's secretary was reported to have 500,000 ounces of silver futures which Father Coughlin said did not belong to him but to the Radio League.

He denied that he would receive any personal compensation from the fact that his Radio League owned that much silver.[15] Later he announced that this investment yielded a profit of $12,000.[16] Despite this realized profit, profit was not his motive in pushing silver but in the case of Robert Harriss and George LeBlanc the profit motive seems very plausible since they were business men and profit was their business.

As far as silver was concerned, Father Coughlin had misjudged the President. In November, 1933, the priest predicted that the President would remonetize silver.[17] When in January, 1934, after he had paid a visit to the President, Father Coughlin was asked whether or not he had discussed monetary policy with the Chief Executive, he replied:

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[14]Reeve, Monetary Reform Movements, pp. 69-70, pp. 250-51.

[15]Raymond Gram Swing, "Father Coughlin: The Phase of Action", Nation, January 2, 1935, pp. 9-11.

[16]John Franklin Carter, American Messiahs. (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1935), p. 43.

[17]New York Times, November 6, 1933, p. 20.

> As the President has already expressed publicly, he regards silver as a precious metal to be used, and he is also very much aware that the present currency in the country is inadequate.[18]

Silver has never been completely remonetized. The Silver Purchase Act of June 19, 1934, directed the Secretary of the Treasury to purchase silver at home and abroad in order to increase the monetary value of silver. On August 9, 1934, one hundred and ten million ounces of silver was nationalized when President Roosevelt required that all silver be turned into the U.S. mint with the exception of silver being used in the arts and for silver coins. The Silver Purchase Act had adverse effects on the currencies of China, Peru and Mexico,[19] where the increased price of silver led to its outflow thus showing that Father Coughlin's efforts in the direction of silver were erroneous.

Throughout this broadcast season Father Coughlin discussed many subjects and maligned many personages in an inflammatory manner and he had during one of his sermons on the remonetization of silver given his reason as to why he felt confident in what he said. And yet it must be remembered that Father Coughlin was a Roman Catholic priest subject supposedly to a very strict hierarchy. How was he allowed to start and then continue his evangelism of monetary

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[18] Ibid., January 19, 1934.

[19] James D. Paris, Monetary Policies of the United States 1932-1938, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1938), pp. 61-70.

reform? The answer lies in his immediate superior, Bishop Gallagher, who approved the radio priest's orthodoxy, and in the organizational politics of the Catholic Church in the United States.[20] In general Bishop Gallagher found Father Coughlin's views conforming to the moral doctrine of the church. Normally he read Father Coughlin's sermons before they were given but when he wasn't able to read them, they were nevertheless delivered. Bishop Gallagher was the sole authority over the priests in his diocese under Canon Law.[21] Other clerical authorities could dispute his decision but they could do nothing about them.

This condition was brought about over a generation before when the bishops of America demanded of Rome virtual autonomy in all matters not connected with doctrine of the church. This American demand was debated over a number of years and the bishops of the United States finally had their way. The silencing and disciplining of a priest such as Father Coughlin in any country except the United States could have been done with one command. But since the radio priest was under the authority of an American bishop, the Vatican made no move nor exerted any pressure since any such action might have been resented by the American ecclesi-

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[20]"Washington Notes: Coughlin in the Papal Doghouse", New Republic, September 23, 1936, p. 182.

[21]Marquis W. Childs, "Father Coughlin, A Success Story of the Depression", New Republic, May 2, 1934, p. 327.

astical authorities of the Catholic Church. Thus the priest remained a problem for the American Catholic Church.

This meant handing it back to the four American cardinals at the time, all of whom appeared to have been opposed to the radio priest, but not for the same reasons. Cardinals O'Connell of Boston, Hayes of New York and Daugherty of Philadelphia were against Father Coughlin when he supported President Roosevelt since they were unsympathetic to the New Deal. The fourth cardinal, Cardinal Mundelein of Chicago, more interested in social problems than the other Cardinals, was pro-Roosevelt and began to dislike Father Coughlin only when the priest turned against the President.[22]

Taking into consideration the mood of the depression, the radio audience Father Coughlin was addressing and the subjects about which he chose to preach, it can be seen without too much imagination how he could attract quite a receptive following. And indeed such was the case. Father Coughlin certainly picked the right time to preach. Wall Street was attempting to explain the collapse of the Market and Father Coughlin made their task anything but easy.

At the end of his first two years of radio work his mail amounted to four thousand letters a week. In 1930, his first year on a national network, requests for copies of his discourses ran into thousands of copies. Contri-

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[22]"Washington Notes", New Republic, p. 182.

butions poured into his office from all parts of the country where his voice could be heard. After he paid for his radio time he put the surplus income into such Michigan firms as the Kelsey-Hayes Wheel Corporation for investment purposes. He constantly kept adding to his office force. Indeed the Radio League was getting rich and its founder was becoming the idol of a vast throng. He became a phenomenon in Royal Oak. The Shrine of the Little Flower bulged with visitors each Sunday. Consequently he made plans for a new and more spacious church. The row between CBS and Father Coughlin in 1931 only increased his following. Doubtlessly, his voice was what the people wanted to hear. After he berated President Hoover in a sermon entitled "Hoover Prosperity Breeds Another War", he received a million letters. He received six hundred thousand more after he castigated J. P. Morgan, Andrew Mellon, Ogden Mills, and Eugene Meyer who Father Coughlin termed the modern "Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse".[23] With the passage of time his mail began to average eighty-thousand letters a week.[24] People began to say, "You know this fellow Coughlin, he's getting pretty close to the truth".[25]

As a result of a poll conducted by New York radio

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[23]"Father Coughlin", Fortune, February, 1934. pp. 34-37.

[24]Raymond Gram Swing, "Father Coughlin: The Wonder of Self Discovery", Nation, December 26, 1934, p.732.

[25]Childs, "Father Coughlin", p. 326.

station WOR, Father Coughlin was voted the most useful citizen politically in 1933 with the exception of President Roosevelt. He led all other candidates for this honor by a margin of 50 per cent of the total of 22,000 votes cast. He led the runner-up by 8,000 votes. These votes had been extracted from 26 states and 600 cities and 90 per cent of the votes were from metropolitan areas. The poll gave no indication as to how many listeners he had at the time.

His victory in this poll was based on his support of President Roosevelt, his attack on bankers, his exposition of complicated economic problems and his loyal defense of the New Deal.[26]

The year 1933 was indeed a good year politically for the priest. In June of that year, ten Senators and seventy-five Congressmen petitioned President Roosevelt to appoint Father Coughlin as an economic advisor to the American delegation at the London Economic Conference. These eighty-five members of Congress jointly stated that:

> He is a student of world affairs, economics and finance; and has the confidence of millions of American citizens. We believe that his presence at the conference would instill confidence in the hearts of the average citizen of our country, and in no small manner contribute to success of this conference.[27]

But Father Coughlin never went.

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[26] New York Times, February 25, 1934, p. 11.

[27] Ibid., June 15, 1933, p. 5.

After the Gold Reserve Act and the Silver Purchase Act had become fact, Father Coughlin advocated a system he called state capitalism or "socialized capitalism". He wanted the banks to be nationalized and the government to issue its own money. Within his system credit was to be given to the idle worker as well as to the idle producer and controlled and allotted by the Government. He wanted the worker and the producer to be sustained in their leisure hours by the wealth of the nation.[28]

In summary, his program called for the nationalization and revaluation of gold, which had already been accomplished; the restoration and nationalization of silver; the establishment of a Government Bank of Control which would issue currency and credit; nationalization of all credit; legislation for the extension of credit to both producer and consumer, and the elimination of Government bonds.[29]

Father Coughlin would elaborate upon his Central Bank to a greater degree when he proposed his large lobby, the National Union for Social Justice, in the fall of 1934. His Central Bank would eventually wind up in the Nye-Sweeney Bill and his huge lobby would wind up sponsoring a political party.

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[28]Charles E. Coughlin, "The Problem of Unemployment", Eight Lectures on Labor, Capital and Justice, (Royal Oak, Michigan: Radio League of the Little Flower, 1934), pp. 76-80

[29]Charles E. Coughlin, "The Ultimate Aim", Eight Lectures on Labor, Capital and Justice, p. 114.

## CHAPTER III

## THE NATIONAL UNION FOR SOCIAL JUSTICE AND CATHOLIC REACTION

On Sunday, November 11, 1934, Father Coughlin announced his plans for the National Union for Social Justice with its sixteen governing principles. The National Union advocated nothing new. It seemed to be a culmination of all the points which Father Coughlin had stressed in earlier years, namely, a guaranteed annual living wage, control of private property for the public good, government control of currency, fair profits for the farmer, the right of labor to organize, and the acknowledgment of human rights over property rights. Father Coughlin felt he knew the tempo of the times when he said:

> I am not boasting when I say to you that I know the pulse of the people. I know it better than all you newspaper men. I know it better than do all you industrialists with your paid for advice. I am not exaggerating when I tell you of their demand for social justice which, like a tidal wave, is sweeping over this nation.[1]

Not only were his sixteen principles repetitive of his earlier sermons and drawn to a great degree from the Papal encyclicals of Popes Leo XIII and Pius XI but twelve

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[1]Charles E. Coughlin, "The National Union for Social Justice", A Series of Lectures on Social Justice, (Royal Oak, Michigan: Radio League of the Little Flower, 1935), p. 16.

of the sixteen principles were very similar to the 1932 platform of the Minnesota Farmer-Labor Party. In addition these same principles had been advocated by Wisconsin Progressives since 1922.[2] Since some of them will be discussed later they are quoted below as Father Coughlin delivered them.

1. I believe in the right of liberty of conscience and liberty of education, not permitting the state to dictate either my worship to my God or my chosen avocation in life.
2. I believe that every citizen willing to work and capable of working shall receive a just and living annual wage which will enable him to maintain and educate his family according to the standards of American decency.
3. I believe in nationalizing those public necessities which by their very nature are too important to be held in the control of private individuals.
4. I believe in private ownership of all other property.
5. I believe in upholding the right to private property yet of controlling it for the public good.
6. I believe in the abolition of the privately owned Federal Reserve Banking system and in establishing a Government owned Central Bank.
7. I believe in rescuing from the hands of private owners the right to coin and regulate the value of money which

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[2]Craig A. Newton, "Father Coughlin and his National Union for Social Justice", South Western Social Science Quarterly, December, 1960, p. 342.

right must be restored to Congress where it belongs.

8. I believe that one of the chief duties of this government owned Central Bank is to maintain the cost of living on an even keel and the repayment of dollar debts with equal value dollars.

9. I believe in the cost of production plus a fair profit for the farmer.

10. I believe not only in the right of the laboring man to organize in unions but also in the duty of the Government which that laboring man supports, to protect these organizations against the vested interests of wealth and of intellect.

11. I believe in the recall of all non-productive bonds and thereby in the alleviation of taxation.

12. I believe in the abolition of tax-exempt bonds.

13. I believe in the broadening of the base of taxation founded upon the ownership of wealth and the capacity to pay.

14. I believe in the simplification of government, and the further lifting of crushing taxation from the slender revenues of the laboring class.

15. I believe that in the event of a war for the defense of our nation and its liberties, if there shall be a conscription of men, there shall be a conscription of wealth.

16. I believe in preferring the sanctity of human rights to the sanctity of property rights. I believe that the chief concern of government shall be for the poor, because, as it is witnessed, the rich have ample means of their own to

care for themselves.[3]

Father Coughlin's National Union was intended for everyone in the nation, its young and old, its laborers and its farmers, its employed and unemployed, its rich and poor, independent of race, color or creed.[4] This organization was to serve as a lobby of the people and was not to be a political party. He wanted no part of professional politicians in his National Union. "There is not one professional politician in this nation who can conscientiously sign up with these sixteen points. Politicians are not going to use us. We plan to use them."[5] Those interested in Father Coughlin's proposals were asked to write him stating their desire to join his National Union. No fees of any kind were to be paid. Voluntary contributions were to take care of all the expenses.[6]

Successive Sunday oratories found the radio priest explaining the sixteen points of his National Union. On November 18, he divulged nine principles which he felt would clarify point two of his sixteen dealing with social justice around a living wage. In essence Father Coughlin wanted the

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[3]Coughlin, "The National Union for Social Justice", A Series of Lectures on Social Justice, pp. 11-12.

[4]Ibid., pp. 17-18.

[5]Coughlin, "More on the National Union", A Series of Lectures on Social Justice, p. 23.

[6]Ibid., pp. 23-24.

government to regulate industry so that there could be an equal distribution of wealth.[7] On November 25, he explained his stand against capitalism. He felt that capitalism "violated" right order by using business for its own advantage disregarding human dignity; it concentrated wealth and power; it fostered free competition and led to survival of the fittest; it abused public utilities; and finally it fostered excessive ambition and internationalism.[8] On December 2, Father Coughlin explained seven principles by which his National Union would combat the twin evils of capitalism and mass production. Six of the seven principles called for government action. Government was to limit profits made by any industry; it was to insure an equitable distribution of wealth and limit the output of factories. Vocational groups practicing the same trade were to be organized into independent elements; the Department of Labor was to become a guardian angel for labor; strikes and lockouts were to be abolished as contrary to the common good.[9] His explanations seemed to appear a pale imitation of Fascism and even seemed to indicate some laudatory praise for Mussolini.

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[7]Coughlin, "Social Justice and a Living Wage", A Series of Lectures on Social Justice, pp. 26-28.

[8]Coughlin, "What Prevents a Just and Living Wage", A Series of Lectures on Social Justice, pp. 43-44.

[9]Ibid., pp. 52-55.

On December 8, he announced his plan for a ten billion dollar public works project but first he devoted some time to Cardinal John O'Connell of Boston.

Cardinal O'Connell had attacked the radio priest on two other occasions and after the third time, Father Coughlin felt it was time to defend himself. He started out by stating his words had the approval of Bishop Gallagher and that the Cardinal from Boston had no jurisdiction over his actions. Father Coughlin rebutted that he was merely carrying out the commands of Pius XI and his predecessor Leo XIII - who were emphatic on the role each priest should play in preaching the principles of social justice and the teachings of the encyclicals. He attacked the Cardinal for his silence on social justice and for his unwarranted attack on him for doing exactly what the Cardinal should have been doing for many years. Then he proceeded with his public works program.

Father Coughlin's public works program called for vast reforestation; a new network of roads; harnessing the waters of the St. Lawrence River; reclamation of sixty million acres of agricultural land; and the construction of habitable homes, all of which would total ten billion dollars. According to the priest, whenever a man became unemployed he should be found a place in road building, in reforestation, in the construction of power plants, in the reclamation of agricultural lands or in the clearing of

slums for the construction of homes. The basic salary he proposed was not to be less than fifteen hundred dollars a year. Father Coughlin wanted this to be a permanent program. His efforts seemed to parallel those of the Roosevelt administration under the CCC, PWA, WPA, and the soil conservation program of the Agriculture Program. The only major difference between his proposal and what the Roosevelt administration did was that Father Coughlin wanted a permanent program while Roosevelt's public works were more or less of a temporary nature.[10] As he once felt that the revaluation of the dollar was the answer to the depression, so he felt that a "permanent program of public works operated by United States money is the only sound solution for unemployment."[11]

Later years would find his proposals bearing some fruit. The Employment Act of 1946 charged the Federal government with the responsibility for maintaining a high level of economic activity. It was a full employment bill which committed the government to use federal funds to assure "a full employment volume of production".

During the Eisenhower administration the St. Lawrence Seawy Bill was passed which authorized the construction and operation, in cooperation with Canada, of canals and locks

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[10] Coughlin, "The American Liberty League", A Series of Lectures on Social Justice, pp. 67-71.

[11] Coughlin, "Merchandises of Death", A Series of Lectures on Social Justice, p. 76.

in the International Islands section of the St. Lawrence and the dredging of the Thousand Islands section. The completion of this work in 1959 almost doubled the volume of cargo passing through the seaway. In addition the Federal Aid Highway Act of 1954 provided nearly $2 billion for the purpose of modernizing the American highway.

On Sunday, February 17, Father Coughlin devoted his sermon to his own monetary reform bill, "The Banking and Monetary Control Act of 1935". His bill called for a bank of the United States of America with a Board of Directors consisting of forty-eight members, one from each state in the union. Each member was to serve for a period of twelve years with one-sixth being elected every two years. No director during the term of his office was to hold any interest in any bank or financial institution of any sort, government or private nor was he able to hold any civil office or be a member of Congress. The head office of the bank was to be in Washington, D.C. with branch offices in all the States. All monetary business of the American government was to be handled by this bank including the issuance of currency. Within one year of the passage of Father Coughlin's Act, all notes were to be exchanged for the bank's currency. The bill also authorized the purchase of the stock of the Twelve Federal Reserve banks after which

these banks would become branch banks in the new system.[12]

Subsequently in March, 1935, Senator Gerald P. Nye of North Dakota and Representative Martin Sweeney of Ohio introduced into Congress a bill for the establishment of a central bank. After prolonged debate the Banking Act of 1935 was passed but it did not provide for a central bank; it did not provide for government control of credit and it did not change the composition of the Federal Reserve Bank as Father Coughlin had advocated. Thus the Nye-Sweeney Bill as such was defeated.

Sunday, February 24, Father Coughlin offered another solution to the distribution of wealth and that was a graduated tax on industrial profits. What he proposed was a tax of two per cent on the first million dollars annual profit, three per cent on the second million, four per cent on the third, and so forth. Above ten million dollars profits, the tax would be so large that it would not be profitable for any industry to operate beyond that point. The priest also suggested that capital wealth be taxed. The first five thousand dollars would be exempt from taxation but above that amount the tax rate would increase so rapidly that no industry would amass more than ten million dollars of capital. On the other hand sales taxes and excise taxes on tobacco and gasoline were to be abolished.[13] In this way he wanted to

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[12]Coughlin, "The Banking and Monetary Control Act of 1935", A Series of Lectures on Social Justice, pp. 166-78.

[13]Coughlin, "Prosperity and Taxation", A Series of Lectures on Social Justice, pp. 187-191.

decentralize monopolistic industry while preserving small business. Very noticeably he was on the side of the "small guy".

On Sunday, March 3, 1935, Father Coughlin, after spending two sermons on monetary reform, dedicated his talk to attacking the New Deal. He attacked the President for setting aside the Sherman Anti-trust laws and stated that:

> President Roosevelt not only compromised with the money changers and conciliated with monopolistic industry but he did not refrain from holding out the olive branch to those whose policies are crimsoned with the theories of sovietism and international socialism.[14]

Within two years of the New Deal, he stated that prices had risen far in excess of wages. Big business, he said, was still entrenched and so was private finance. The unemployment situation had not improved any. The NRA was labelled a farce despite its collective bargaining feature. He also labelled the AAA a failure because meats and other agricultural products were being imported from foreign countries. He simply did not want to "support a new deal which protects plutocrats and comforts communists".[15]

Immediately following Father Coughlin's denunciation of the President, General Hugh S. Johnson, speaking at a dinner given in his honor by Red Book magazine to announce the

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[14]Coughlin, "Two Years of the New Deal", A Series of Lectures on Social Justice, p. 194.

[15]Ibid., p. 196.

publication of his memoirs, assailed both Father Coughlin and Senator Huey Long as revolutionaries who were threatening the safety of the nation. Both men, he alleged, were trying to impede the administration's recovery plans and they could possibly establish a national chaos and eventually bring about a dictatorship.

General Johnson termed both Father Coughlin and Senator Long "two Pied Pipers", leaders of an emotional fringe. He warned that Father Coughlin was attempting to make something out of nothing and his efforts would amount to just that. The only kind words the General had for the radio priest was that he was sincere but unfortunately misguided. He attacked Father Coughlin and his Radio League of the Little Flower for their interest in silver because, as a priest, Father Coughlin had taken the vow of poverty. Judas Iscariot was "just a poor piker" next to the priest. The priest, he said, had become the head of an active political party by appealing to the envy of those who did not possess the riches of this earth as opposed to those who did. General Johnson was of the opinion that if Father Coughlin insisted in continuing his political endeavors, he should first remove his Roman cassock.[16]

The National Broadcasting System contributed time for Father Coughlin to make a rebuttal on Monday, March 11. The radio priest made it clear at the outset of his rebuttal

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[16]New York Times, March 5, 1935, p. 1.

that he had not given up any of his rights as a citizen in putting on his Roman collar. Thus as a citizen he was interested in working for improvement of the government. He stated that he had never taken the vow of poverty. The profit his Radio League had realized was only won because of the faith he had placed in Franklin D. Roosevelt.

He pleaded for the "charity" and "good judgment" and "sense of social justice" of his radio audience to forgive General Johnson for his remarks since they were only the thoughts of his master. "Thus as he appears before you on future occasions, remember that he is to be regarded as a cracked gramophone record squawking the message of his master's voice."[17]

Response to Father Coughlin's rebuttal was not long in coming. Monsignor John L. Belford of the Church of the Nativity in Brooklyn found himself in complete accord with the remarks of General Johnson concerning Father Coughlin's discourses on politics and economics while wearing the priestly garb. He was particularly in agreement with the General on his point of Father Coughlin leaving the priesthood as long as he was to engage in politics. Politics was not the province of priests according to the Monsignor. "Shoemakers should stick to their lasts,"[18] he asserted.

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[17]Coughlin, "A Reply to General Hugh Johnson". A Series of Lectures on Social Justice, pp. 219-25.

[18]New York Times, March 6, 1935, p. 7.

On the other hand, the Reverend Doctor Joseph A. Daly of the Church of St. Gregory, Professor of Psychology in the college of Mount St. Vincent speaking from the Paulist Father's station, WLWL, emphasized that in discussing subjects such as monetary reform his radio audience understood that Father Coughlin was uttering his own views and not those of the church. But at the same time he questioned Father Coughlin's qualification to make judgment on economic matters. He was of the opinion that General Johnson should have confined his remarks only to the merits of Father Coughlin's theories. Father Daly thought the General's speech was "most amazing", "bewildering", and also tacitly approved by the President. He felt that Father Coughlin's popularity and renown had grown so that it was only second to that of the President.

Father Daly also believed that Father Coughlin was at times far fetched in producing his analogies from religion, thus bringing about the accusation that he was using the merits of his priesthood to further strictly secular causes. The General's mistake, he felt, was in his thesis that a priest has no right to speak out on questions other than religious ones. He had used the wrong angle of attack.[19] Raymond Gram Swing saw the entire controversy as "ten days of stupidity" which would make both Huey Long and Father

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[19] Ibid.

Coughlin the "leaders of protesting America".[20] And so appeared to be the case. In Philadelphia, radio station WCAU was doubtful whether or not to put on the New York Philharmonic or Father Couchlin into the three o'clock Sunday afternoon hour slot. After four days of a plebiscite, the station had received 117,000 letters. By a vote of 110,000 votes to 7,000, Father Coughlin emerged the victor.[21]

After approximately six weeks of silence, Bishop Gallagher finally spoke up. His words were those of defense for the priest. He cemented the fact that until a lawful church superior ruled otherwise, he would stand behind Father Coughlin "encouraging him to do the will of God as he sees it and I see it". He intended to give Father Coughlin his Imprimatur on everything he wrote and his approval on everything he spoke and he hoped that they would be freely circulated throughout the country.

Bishop Gallagher reasserted that he was the only one ecclesiastically responsible for the addresses of Father Coughlin. He found nothing against faith and morals in his weekly addresses and approved their content. At the same time, the Bishop realized that there were those in the hierarchy of the church who disapproved of what Father Coughlin preached, his methods and the priest personally. But as for himself, he stated, "How can priests keep silent?

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[20]Raymond Gram Swing, "The Build-up of Long and Coughlin", Nation, March 20, 1935, p. 325.

[21]Ibid.

With wealth concentrated in the hands of a little group of selfish men, the teeming masses of the people are living in dire and abject poverty."[22]

The Coughlin-Johnson feud also brought an unexpected result. A New York Times editorial asserted that many politicians would not speak up against either Father Coughlin or Huey Long because it would be like political suicide to do so. General Johnson's speech changed all this. The General's boldness seems to have inspired a certain boldness in the average politician.[23] It also seemed to bring on more refutation from the Catholic Church. In May of 1935, one Father Wilfrid Parsons, a noted Catholic journalist, in the Jesuit weekly America criticized Father Coughlin's entire plan of monetary reform and social justice. His analysis appeared very fair, just and objective, and the only one made in the entire decade.

First of all Father Parsons stated that Father Coughlin as a priest had every right to speak as a citizen, although he disclaimed any justification for the priest attaching himself to any pressure group which would bring his economic and social proposals to realization by "direct action on Congress." He felt that Father Coughlin had succeeded in making the country social-minded but that he had not formulated any philosophy except to say that his was the

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[22]New York Times, April 22, 1935, p. 12.

[23]Ibid., March 6, 1935, p. 18.

philosophy of Pius XI.

Father Parsons took the radio priest to task in many areas which he advocated. The industrial order and not the monetary situation was seen by the journalist as the source of the depression; old age pensions and unemployment insurance were seen by him as positive goods rather than as plutocratic evils; close government supervision as he saw it meant only Fascism; the nationalization of public utility meant only more Fascism; the Nye-Sweeney Banking Bill had too many questionable areas; banking, credit and interest were not considered immoral.

The journalist emphasized that Father Coughlin's theories were those of an individual and not those of the church but did add that they were not contrary to the church. He recalled the radio priest's service in bringing to the surface the wrongs of the American economic system but felt that his untested monetary reforms would distract the attention of his audience from industry where Father Parsons felt the trouble really lay.[24]

Father Coughlin had but few words in rebuttal to this analysis of his program. On May 22, in New York at the Madison Square Gardens to sponsor the National Union for Social Justice, the radio priest attacked Father Parsons as "a fellow priest already notorious for playing into the

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[24]Wilfrid Parsons, "Father Coughlin's Ideas on Money", America, June 1, 1935, pp. 174-76.

hands of unclean motion picture producers".[25] The Royal Oak pastor did not explain his statement. He was probably not prepared to deliver an answer or perhaps he didn't want to. Perhaps he felt that more words would put him into a controversial quagmire from which it would be difficult to extricate himself. In return, Father Parsons was disappointed that nothing of more value was said because he felt that his appraisal had been impersonal and objective. The Jesuit magazine, he felt, had followed the thinking of the Pope as far as social justice was concerned.[26]

Father Parsons wasn't the only one who had something to say about Father Coughlin's New York appearance. Although not mentioning Father Coughlin by name, Cardinal O'Connell's remarks were certainly directed toward him. He referred to "hysterical", "shouting", "yelling", and "screaming" voices and the reference was only too clear. He warned against those who "talk with a voice that seems to ring with a sort of sham infallibility". The Cardinal's own words showed only too clearly how he at least, and the church perhaps, felt about social action for the underprivileged. They were not too indicative of any action whatsoever:

> The office of the priest and Bishop of the Catholic Church is to continue to love poverty, to love the poor, to respect the poor and to teach them, to help them and to guide them, not to ill-gotten wealth or anarchy or discontent in their lives, but to bring

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[25] New York Times, May 24, 1935, p. 5.

[26] Ibid.

> them, through the grace of God, the word of God and the sacraments, peace and happiness in whatever conditions of life they may happen to be.[27]

Following Father Parsons' attempt at explaining the inconsistencies of Father Coughlin and Cardinal O'Connell's attack, Father Edward V. Dargin writing in the Ecclesiastical Review emphatically declared that according to canon law, Father Coughlin's freedom to discuss publicly national policies and personalities as any other citizen was expressly limited. Doctor Dargin brought out that the encyclical only set forth principles and never commented on personalities or political methods. It also differentiated between the role of the priest and layman. It was Doctor Dargin's opinion that Father Coughlin went beyond the meaning of the encyclicals and that his activities constituted direct violations of existing canon law. Father Coughlin was violating legislation of the Third Plenary Council of Baltimore, which commanded "priests to abstain from the public discussion of political or secular matters, either in or outside of a church, and forbade clerics to inject themselves in judgment of the faithful in questions of a civil nature".[28] In his discussion of Father Coughlin, Doctor Dargin provided examples in which the Pontiff had warned the clergy to abstain from political activity. He felt that any priest who entered into the arena of politics left himself exposed to all the

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[27] Ibid., May 24, p. 1.

[28] Edward V. Dargin, "Father Coughlin and Canon Law", Ecclesiastical Review, July, 1935, pp. 29-31.

abuses which politicians experience. These abuses might not affect the priest as an individual but they tended to lessen the priestly office, the dignity of which the church very strongly guarded. In addition he went on, as soon as the priest discussed politics, his flock was free to disagree with him and this could lead to misunderstanding which in turn led to loss of good will, a very necessary element in the smooth functioning of a parish.[29]

A defense of Father Coughlin and a rebuttal to Doctor Dargin's accusation was not long in coming and it came via the same publication. According to Monsignor William F. Murphy of Detroit, in the present state of canonical legislation of the church, a Catholic priest observing "the prescription" of his Bishop in regard to political activities was acting within the law.

Monsignor Murphy's acticle was replete with Latin canonical text from which he concluded that neither the Code of Canon Law, the decrees of the Sacred Congregation of the Council, papal letters, nor legislation of the Third Plenary Council of Baltimore prohibited political activity on the part of clergy. More specifically, he stated that the legislation of the Third Plenary Council of Baltimore was repealed by non-observance and asserted that Bishops had never taken action against clergy who had spoken publicly concerning political or secular affairs. He cited examples of priests

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[29]Ibid., pp. 31-33.

in the Irish Question, Prohibition, the Single Tax and the Boer War.

Monsignor Murphy pointed out that it was "well to remember" that certain letters written by the Pontiff were specifically intended "to meet special conditions" and that the purpose of such letters was not to legislate but merely to advise because of extraordinary conditions existing in a country or diocese at a certain time. "On the contrary, their intent clearly is to show how they may engage in civic affairs without detriment to the interests of religion."[30] Here again a matter of interpretation on the part of two learned theologians added to the complex problem of Father Coughlin. With Bishop Gallagher and Monsignor Murphy taking the side of Father Coughlin, it seemed as if the Catholic Church of Detroit was taking on the Catholic Church of the United States.

Monsignor Murphy's arguments made no dent in the opinion of Doctor Dargin. In a wordy rejoinder to Monsignor Murphy's article, he was "still convinced that the principles of social justice must be separated from political activity and that a priest must preach the principles of social justice in season and out of season, but must leave political action to the laymen whom he has thoroughly trained in the principles."[31]

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[30]William F. Murphy, "Priests in Politics", Ecclesiastical Review, September, 1935, pp. 269-79.

[31]Ibid., p. 288.

In the last month of 1935, Father Coughlin received a last rebuke for the year from Cardinal Mundelein, the Archbishop of Chicago, at Notre Dame University, where President Roosevelt received an honorary degree of Doctor of Laws in recognition of his achievements as President and especially for his efforts for his part in granting independence to the Philippine Islands. As principal speaker at that event, the Cardinal paid tribute to the President and allowed himself a swipe at Father Coughlin when he said that "no individual has the right to speak politically for the twenty million Catholics in the United States."

The problem of Father Coughlin had been left to the Catholic American hierarchy but up to this point in time they had succeeded in doing very little. Most of them were all of one opinion and aimed their efforts in one direction. They wanted it known that his actions were not backed by the Catholic church. Granted his social reforms were for the most part untested but he did set into motion the vehicle which at least was an attempt to solve the ills of the depression. The difficulty he was having with his church showed that he was going one way and the church another. As the words of Father Parsons, Father Dargin, and Cardinal O'Connell quoted earlier point out, and they seem to portray the attitude of most of the church, the church was more interested in the spiritual and not the material and was paying just so much lip service to social justice. The year

1936 would find the radio priest in constant hot water with his church.

## CHAPTER IV

## THE 1936 ELECTION YEAR AND MORE CHURCH CONFLICT

The year 1936 would be another year in which controversy and speculation concerning Father Coughlin's position within the church would reign supreme. In his first controversy of the year Father Coughlin threw the first punch this time by accusing Representative John O'Connor of New York of intimidating House members into withdrawing their names from a petition intended to force a vote on the three billion dollar Frazier-Lemke Farm mortgage Refinancing Bill.[1] Father Coughlin had been interested in this particular bill because it would "enable our vast agriculturing population to extricate themselves from the shackles of an unbearable morgage debt and because it will necessitate this New Deal Congress legislating constitutional law for the alleviation of agriculture instead of attempting to legislate socialistic and unconstitutional law under the fictitious banner of the AAA...."[2]

This particular Frazier-Lemke Farm bill was the third

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[1] New York Times, February 19, 1936, p. 1.

[2] Charles E. Coughlin, "An Answer and a Challenge", A Series of Lectures on Social Justice 1935-36. (Royal Oak, Michigan: Radio League of the Little Flower), p. 169.

one bearing the name. The first one had been passed by Congress and signed by the President but subsequently declared unconstitutional by the Supreme Court. The second bill provided for government loans to farmers for the purpose of refinancing farm mortgages and was upheld. This third bill was an extension of the second one. As a result of Father Coughlin's talk on that February Sunday, Congressman O'Connor sent the radio priest a telegram which is quoted below so as to try to convey the bitterness the Congressman felt after Father Coughlin's speech:

> Just heard your libelous radio rambling. The truth is not in you. You are a disgrace to my church or any other church and especially to the citizenship of America which you recently embraced. You do not dare to print what you said about me. If you will please come to Washington I shall guarantee to kick you all the way from the Capitol to the White House, clerical garb and all the silver in your pockets which you got by speculating in Wall Street while I was voting for all farm bills. Come on --.[3]

In his next speech following the receipt of Congressman O'Connor's telegram, Father Coughlin produced the name of Congressman Moritz of the thirty-second District of Pennsylvania who stated that he had been persuaded by Congressman O'Connor, chairman of the Rules Committee, to remove his name from the Frazier-Lemke petition. Moritz was told that such an action would preclude any embarrassment on the part of the President. The radio priest felt that the failure to bring this bill to a vote was both un-American and undemo-

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[3]Ibid., pp. 164-65.

cratic" - that it smacks of Toryism and Bourbonism and of Fascistic dictatorship - to strangulate any bill of national importance for the sake of placing a party and its policies above the nation and its prosperity."[4]

Within days, Congressman O'Connor retracted his guarantee to kick Father Coughlin from the Capitol to the White House but brought out the point that Father Coughlin had raised in the minds of American Catholics the question of whether or not he was stepping out of his priestly robes to make "vituperative attacks on men in public life." But as almost always was to be the case, Father Coughlin found someone who would speak up for him. Congressman Martin Sweeney of Ohio defended the priest with these words:

> Is it politics for a man of Christ to rise on Sunday in a pulpit or by a microphone and beg to change an economic system that allows children to go to garbage cans for food? Thank God for men like him, who have the courage to stand up on Sunday and speak to unseeing millions, thirty, forty, or fifty million people about this situation.[5]

Because the administration opposed the bill, Father Coughlin turned more vehemently against the President and the Democratic party. He seemed very disheartened at this opposition. He believed that the Democratic party had erected a political platform in accordance with the sixteen points of his National Union for Social Justice but had failed to carry them out. What he meant was that the President had

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[4]Ibid., p. 172.

[5]New York Times, February 19, 1936, p. 2.

not brought about a guaranteed annual wage; his monetary policies still permitted the Federal Reserve system to exist and Congress was still not coining and regulating the value of money. This failure he attributed to the communistic tendencies in the policies of the administration. In evidence of his statement he listed five "radical" corporations, namely the Commodity Credit Corporation, the Public Works Emergency Housing Corporation, the Federal Surplus Relief Corporation, the Electric Home and Farm Authority and the Federal Subsistence Homesteads Corporation, whose intentions would produce "pure, unadulterated communism, leaving the way openly legalized for the destruction of private property", if they were carried out.

Other than objecting to certain paragraphs of the charter of the Public Works Emergency Housing Corporation which he felt would prepare the way for the "Commissars of Communism",[6] Father Coughlin did not explain why he labelled these corporations Communistic. In the past he had praised similar projects. One can only conjecture and say that once he decided to oppose the President and the New Deal he intended to criticize each and every bill, policy, or program that had been or would be enacted despite what he had said previously. He interpreted the opposition to the Frazier-Lemke

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[6]Charles E. Coughlin, "Reply to a Right Reverend Monsignor", Social Justice, October 19, 1936, p. 2.

bill as a sell out to the Wall Street interests.[7] The bill was eventually defeated in the House by a vote of 235 to 142.

As the year 1936 advanced, Father Coughlin became more convinced that neither the Democrats nor the Republicans were doing anything constructive to bring about an end to the depression. He emphatically stated that he could support neither Landon nor Roosevelt in the forthcoming Presidential campaign. He held a disdain for the "plutocratic" Republicans and the "communistic" Democrats which drew Father Coughlin into an alliance with William Lemke, Republican Congressman from North Dakota, for the purpose of forming a third party.[8] Feeling as he did toward the two major political parties, Father Coughlin must have known where his ambitions were leading him. Though he was later to regret his decision, he decided to follow it through. On June 19, the Union Party was founded based on his principles of social justice.

Father Coughlin dove into the work of the campaign with all his possible zest. He was nothing but enthusiastic about it even though at one time in his Social Justice it was mentioned that third political parties had had little success in the past. The radio priest felt that the time was most advantageous for a new party because the economic problems

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[7]Coughlin, "Taking Inventory of My Stewardship", A Series of Lectures on Social Justice, 1935-36, p. 41.

[8]New York Times, June 17, 1936, p. 1.

plaguing the country were not being solved by either major political party.[9] The most outstanding feature of the campaign was that it was all Father Coughlin and secondly, that it was all anti-Roosevelt. This very feature is what held the Union Party together.

The major effort of the campaign was exerted between July and August. At the Townsend Old Age Pension Convention in Cleveland in July 16, Father Coughlin let the heat of the summer get the best of him and he wound up calling the President "a liar" and a "betrayer" because he had not carried through on his platform promises. Bishop Gallagher disapproved of the language his priest chose to use but he did not rebuke him. However, it did not mean that he agreed with his subordinate. Father Coughlin kept linking the President with the Communists but the Bishop was of the opinion that the President was neither a Communist nor a Fascist as many seemed to claim. All this happened as Bishop Gallagher was making preparations to leave for Rome for a visit to the Pope. Probably to preclude any speculation, the Bishop stated that he did not plan to discuss Father Coughlin's activities at the Vatican unless he was specifically asked.[10]

Shortly after his Cleveland speech and perhaps realizing his absurdity, Father Coughlin apologized to the President for the names he had called him and later made

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[9]Social Justice, June 20, 1936, p. 2.

[10]New York Times, July 19, 1936, p. 1.

public his apology. But even in the apology, he seemed to apologize for having made it. In the letter, he told the President that he felt that he should be supplanted as the Chief Executive and he intended to work in that direction.[11]

Bishop Gallagher made his trip to Rome which turned out to be routine but strangely enough the day before Bishop Gallagher's return to the United States, the Roman newspaper Osservatore Romano severely criticized Father Coughlin's political activities and especially his attack on President Roosevelt. Vatican officials pointed out that the paper's comments did not mean that the Vatican disapproved entirely of the Detroit pastor. In fact, the Vatican approved the work he had done in interpreting the Pope's encyclicals in economic matters but it did not approve the priest's attack on the American President because it was an attack on a constituted authority. The Roman newspaper usually reflects the opinion of the Vatican[12] but in this case it seems to have allowed itself to provide a little sensationalism and magnified the entire situation beyond what it actually was.

Back on the campaign trail in September, Father Coughlin made a speech on the twenty-fourth of that month in Cincinnati in which he asserted that the policies of the Roosevelt administration calling for plowing under crops

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[11]Charles E. Coughlin, "An Open Letter of Apology to President Roosevelt", Social Justice, July 27, 1936, p. 2.

[12]New York Times, September 3, 1936, p. 1.

and killing pigs were "anti-God", because the Bible had commanded to increase and multiply while the President was destroying and devastating.[13] His choice of words brought about an immediate statement of condemnation from Archbishop John T. McNicholas of Cincinnati. In his speech, Father Coughlin advocated the use of bullets "when any upstart dictator in the United States succeeds in making a one party government and when the ballot is useless." Why he felt the ballot was useless was left unanswered. Perhaps he felt disgruntled because the Frazier-Lemke and the Patman Bonus Bills had been defeated or because the Roosevelt administration was making more headway than he. Later in his Social Justice, he said he had been misinterpreted and that he never advocated the use of bullets in "democratic America."[14] The Archbishop of Cincinnati felt that such a suggesting of revolution was most dangerous even in the heat of oratory and that the radio priest was morally wrong in appealing to force. Yet strangely enough, he had words of praise for Father Coughlin.

> No member of the church has ever presented so forcefully as Father Coughlin the exploitation of the poor, the injustice done to the laboring class, the evils of capitalism, the corruption of public officials, the dangers of communism and destructive radicalism.[15]

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[13] Ibid., September 26, 1936, p. 1.

[14] Charles E. Coughlin, "An Open Letter by Father Coughlin", Social Justice, November 23, p. 15.

[15] New York Times, September, 1936, p. 1.

Vatican officials felt that a strong warning would be forthcoming to Father Coughlin but Bishop Gallagher in his inimitable way stood out in defense of his subordinate. He agreed with his priest's advocacy of the "use of bullets" and felt that Father Coughlin was answering a hypothetical question concerning a Communist dictatorship. Bishop Gallagher had no comment on the other descriptive phrases his priest used concerning the President.[16]

In Philadelphia on the next stop of his campaign, Father Coughlin reiterated "his use of bullets" and reaffirmed his determination to continue his criticism of the President until he was "muzzled." He did say, however, that he would not call the President a "liar" again. His future attacks on the President would be "objective." If he was going to stop calling the President names, then he would thrust his name-calling elsewhere and he did. Still speaking about plowing under crops and killing pigs, he characterized Secretary of Agriculture Henry Wallace, Under-Secretary Tugwell and Mordecai Ezekiel, economic advisor to the Department of Agriculture as "the triplets of Triple A." Their program of destruction was un-Christian, one of the cornerstones of Communism and "downright asinine." It was un-Christian because God's best gifts were being thrown into his face.[17] Father Coughlin could not see why

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[16] Ibid., p. 3.

[17] Charles E. Coughlin, "Roosevelt and Ruin", Social Justice, June 22, 1936, p. 2.

this destruction was being permitted when in his words, "there was want in the midst of plenty." Bishop Schrembs of Cleveland, who had accompanied Bishop Gallagher on his trip to Rome, saw the President's policies as an economic measure and in no way anti-God. As Archbishop McNicholas had done, Bishop Schrembs condemned Father Coughlin's choice of words.[18]

Speculation concerning disciplinary action for the radio priest ran rampant again in October when Cardinal Eugenio Pacelli, the Papal Secretary of State paid a visit to the United States. Cardinal Pacelli's reasons for his visit were all diplomatic in nature and he refused to answer any questions concerning Father Coughlin. Thus for this election year of 1936, Father Coughlin succeeded in calling the President and his lieutenants a number of names and in bringing about a lot of speculation concerning possible disciplinary action which wasn't going to become a reality as long as Father Coughlin had Bishop Gallagher in back of him.

The next rebuttal of Father Coughlin came in a radio speech entitled "Roosevelt Safeguards America" on October 8, just three weeks prior to the 1936 election delivered by Monsignor John A. Ryan, defender of the New Deal and social reformer. Monsignor Ryan as younger Father Ryan had written a book entitled A Living Wage in 1905 which discussed the

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[18]New York Times, September 27, 1936, p. 28.

laborer's moral right to a living wage. This rebuttal which he delivered on October 8 had apparently been building up for a long time despite the fact that neither priest wanted to create the spectacle that would inevitably occur. Earlier in December 1933, Monsignor Ryan had looked upon the radio priest in a friendly light. When asked after a speech in Detroit what he thought of Father Coughlin, he remarked, "As between those who are fighting for social justice and those who are fighting against it, Father Coughlin is on the side of the angels."[19] Neither priest believed in the same course for recovery but at the time the matter seemed irrelevant to Father Ryan.

When Father Coughlin began attacking the New Deal, Father Ryan changed his mind about the radio priest and began to feel that Father Coughlin was proposing no constructive measure of social justice but was instead merely denouncing social injustice. This was not so as Father Coughlin pushed and proposed more than several pieces of legislation. But at the same time, Monsignor Ryan did not agree that the church should silence the radio priest because he felt that the freedom of speech was more important than his preaching.

From the inception of the New Deal, Father Ryan had become one of its staunchest supporters. In March, 1933, the Secretary of Labor had invited the priest to a conference

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[19]Francis L. Broderick, Right Reverend New Dealer: John A. Ryan, (New York: MacMillan Co., 1963), p. 223.

on labor problems at the request of the administration. In July of the same year he helped to prepare a letter for the President's signature which requested the support of clergymen for the NRA codes. Later in July he was asked by the Secretary of Labor to join the advisory council of the United States Employment service of which he later became the chairman. In September, he was appointed by the Secretary of the Interior to the National Advisory Committee of the Subsistence Homesteads Division. In November 1933, he was asked to submit an agenda of labor legislation by the Labor Department but was never known to reply to that request.

Father Ryan came very close to equating the "New Deal" and "Social Justice." He felt that the NRA and the heavy tax on large incomes were in accordance with Catholic social thinking. General Hugh S. Johnson appointed him to a three-man Industrial Appeals Board which heard the complaints of small manufacturers who felt that the NRA codes were a burden to them but his job came to an end in May, 1935, when the Supreme Court overturned the NRA. He began to lose faith with the New Deal when he felt it wasn't doing enough to combat the depression, but the Wagner-Connery Act, the Social Security Act and the Guffey Coal Act resurrected his fervor. He felt that each of the measures of the 1935 Congress was "in accordance with humanity, christianity and social justice."

Monsignor Ryan did not relish a confrontation between

priests but as the election came closer, the Democratic National Committee, fearful of losing votes to a third party and desirous of removing the "Communist" charges hurled at the President and his administration prodded him for his aid. The Monsignor finally consented and wrote a speech, the first draft of which contained a reference to Father Coughlin, edited out, and subsequently put back in reportedly at the direction of the President.[20]

In his speech, he asserted that all the Communist charges against President Roosevelt were untrue. If anything, the President had checked the use of communism in this country. "Indeed, the charge of Communism directed at President Roosevelt is the silliest, falsest, most cruel and most unjust accusation ever made against a President in all the years of American history."[21] According to Monsignor Ryan, all the policies of the Roosevelt administration were long overdue installments of social justice. He was of the opinion that Father Coughlin's explanation of the country's economic maladies were "at least 50% wrong" and that his monetary remedies were "at least 90% wrong." In addition, the Monsignor could find no support for Father Coughlin's monetary theories and proposals in either of the two encyclicals he was constantly expounding. He delivered his speech because as he put it, "I love truth and hate

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[20] Ibid., pp. 223-25.

[21] New York Times, October 9, 1936, p. 1.

lies."[22] With no need of even mentioning it, his speech urged strong support of Roosevelt. Strikingly contrary to Father Coughlin's thoughts was how Monsignor Ryan belittled the Communist danger in the United States.

In his answer to the charges of Monsignor Ryan, the radio priest seemed to be on the defensive. He made no personal attack on the Monsignor, said nothing about blood and bullets and said nothing about President Roosevelt being anti-God. He simply referred to Monsignor Ryan as the "Right Reverend New Dealer" and said that he "apparently was unfamiliar" with the encyclical of Pius XI.[23] An editorial in Nation was of the opinion that while the Vatican was not ready to silence Father Coughlin, "it would probably be tolerant of Father Ryan's liberalism. For the church's policies are calculated with an eye to its own ultimate advantage."[24] Thus the church seemed to be taking a "wait and see" policy. But what it was waiting to see seemed to be the crux of the entire program. Silencing Father Coughlin would have been more easily understood by both Catholics and non-Catholics than permitting him to continue with his tirade against the President. But in doing so, the church would have made a martyr of him and thus the

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[22] Ibid.

[23] Ibid., October 13, 1936, p. 24.

[24] "Father Coughlin denounced by Father Ryan", Nation, October 17, 1936, p. 434.

church more than likely wanted to avoid.

An editorial of the Catholic Review declared that if the two political priests "would retire for some time to the Carthusian order where perpetual silence is observed, they would do a great favor to the church and to the country at large." The article went on to say:

> There are 30,000 Catholic priests in the United States. Of that number 29,998 are attending to their business, which is that of their Heavenly Father....Ninety per cent of them, thank God, have never written a book. Few have ever spoken over the readio. Of the 29,998, we do not know one of them who is a national character.[25]

Thus the Catholic Review was expounding the same lack of concern for social justice here on earth as Cardinal O'Connell and Father Parsons and Dargin had done earlier. All were simply not as interested in social justice as Father Coughlin. They saw no need to lobby for it but were content to leave such tasks to the government. Their thinking seemed to be typical of Catholic thought.

Both priests interpreted the encyclicals differently and for that reason one supported the Roosevelt administration and the other didn't. Monsignor Ryan supported the NRA while Father Coughlin saw it as a "car with flat tires"; Monsignor Ryan lauded Social Security while Father Coughlin saw it as a crutch for the plutocrats, from which would result conspiracies on the part of employers to hold wages down because of the contribution they had to make in accor-

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[25]New York Times, October 16, 1936, p. 21.

dance with the provisions of the Act. Monsignor Ryan was disturbed at the possibility of fanning into flames latent anti-Catholic intolerance in the United States; not only because of the personal slander which had been directed against the President but also because a Catholic priest had taken part in a campaign to defeat a President who was very popular.[26] Father Coughlin was not so disturbed. What was most important was the fact that Father Coughlin saw many Communistic tendencies in the Roosevelt administration while Monsignor Ryan did not.

Monsignor Ryan was a quiet academician-type while the radio priest was much more bombastic. How many people outside a small number of Catholics who had attended Catholic University or who had experienced Catholic teaching had heard of Monsignor Ryan's early work in social reform? The words of Bishop Gallagher in praise of Father Coughlin are a good indication:

> If the priesthood all over the world had begun forty years ago to preach those principals of greater justice and opportunity for the common man, it might not today be subjected to such odium as it suffers in Spain.[27]

Thus even within the Catholic church the work of Monsignor Ryan was not that well established. Otherwise, the Bishop of Detroit might not have uttered the above words. Understandably, he had held several positions within the

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[26]John A. Ryan, "Reply" Commonweal, November 6, 1936, pp. 44-45.

[27]New York Times, August 6, 1936, p. 11.

Roosevelt administration but they seemed to be the part of a small bureaucrat.

After this controversy with Monsignor Ryan, Father Coughlin continued on with his campaign for the Union Party. On October 26, in Cleveland he made a speech in which he called President Roosevelt "the scab President" and the "greatest employer of scab labor in all history." At the suggestion of Bishop Gallagher, Father Coughlin again apologized for his language. The Vatican was again reported as being displeased for the radio priest's "attack upon constituted governmental authority."[28]

Two days prior to the election, Father Coughlin, forgetting his remorse, at a political rally in Scranton called President Roosevelt "the upstart President" and "the reviver of the heresy of the divine right of kings." Father Coughlin's flare for name calling seems to have no other explanation other than he was becoming desperate and panicky as he saw that his campaign might wind up as a failure or perhaps that he was the victim of an egomania which led him to believe that he could do no wrong and was beyond any kind of control. On the same day, in Detroit, Bishop Gallagher was reported to have stated that after the present political campaign had been concluded, no priest in his diocese would be allowed to take an active part in politics. However, he stated that the National Union would be allowed to stay in

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[28] Ibid., November 1, 1936, p. 48.

existence since he felt it was a great barrier to Communism. Two days later Father Coughlin displayed a telegram which he had received from Bishop Gallagher disavowing any intention on the part of the Bishop of silencing him. The press had apparently misinterpreted the Bishop's words. The telegram sent to Father Coughlin praised him personally:

> ....I consider you a national institution invaluable for the safeguarding of genuine Americanism and true Christianity, and I hope you will live long to carry out this sublime vocation.[29]

The results of the election on November 3, 1936, are only too well known. Franklin D. Roosevelt was elected by the largest electoral and popular vote in the history of the country. When the final results were counted, the Union Party mustered only 882,000 votes of a total of well over fifty million. The nine million votes Father Coughlin had promised for Lemke at Cleveland in August had never materialized.

After the turn of the year Father Coughlin would be dealt yet another blow. The defeat in the 1936 election had sent the priest to the canvas but he was definitely not out. When he started his crusade for reform he saw Communism replacing capitalism because of the abuse inflated on the system by the international bankers. When he thought he saw the Roosevelt administration showing signs of Communistic

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[29]Ibid., November 3, 1936, p. 8.

tendencies he turned against it. The result of the election revealed just how slight his influence had been at the polls. His later years would find him still fighting the threat of Communism.

# CHAPTER V

## FATHER COUGHLIN AND CONTEMPORARY SOCIAL REFORM: CONCLUSIONS

Father Coughlin was probably contemplating many decisions after the election and one of them came five days later when he announced that he would withdraw from all radio activity and that his NUSJ would cease to be active. In leaving the air he was thus keeping his promise he made in Cleveland the previous summer. Upon issuing his statement he wanted it known that neither Bishop Gallagher nor any Vatican official had pressured him into his decision. In fact, Bishop Gallagher's "stout heart was saddened" because of his decision.[1]

Almost a month after the election, Monsignor John A. Ryan broke his silence and issued a statement. Speaking about Father Coughlin he said:

> If he had confined himself strictly to the encyclicals he could have done a great deal of good. Instead he theorized on money in which there is no justification in the encyclicals. He spread a lot of bad ideas among uneducated people who took them as fact because of his persuasive eloquence and seeming authority.[2]

Thus even Monsignor Ryan still saw that perhaps a

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[1] New York Times, November 8, p. 1.

[2] Ibid., December 1, p. 28.

little part of Father Coughlin was "on the side of the angels." But both priests could never agree on the interpretation of the relevant encyclicals.

Next occurred an event which was definitely another step in the downfall of the radio priest. That event was the death on January 20, 1937, of Bishop Gallagher, his protector and benefactor. Upon hearing the news of the Bishop's death, Father Coughlin only commented, "I have lost the best friend outside of my family."[3]

Four days after the death of his ecclesiastical superior, Father Coughlin was back on the air. Earlier on January 1, 1937, after an absence of six weeks Father Coughlin had returned to the airwaves at the instigation of Bishop Gallagher on a one time basis but now he had decided to continue his broadcasting. He was definitely not the type of man to be easily silenced. His first radio speech was a tribute to Bishop Gallagher whom he described as "a stalwart citizen who loved liberty and hated oppression." "By virtue of his encouragement I pursued the path which he had blazed for me."[4]

Now Father Coughlin had to look forward to the appointment of a new bishop. With the number of Catholics growing in the state of Michigan, the diocese of Detroit was expanded to the Archdiocese of Michigan. As a result,

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[3] Ibid., January 21, 1937, p. 23.

[4] Ibid., January 25, 1937, p. 8.

an Archbishop would now fill the vacuum created by the death of Bishop Gallagher. In June, 1937, Archbishop Edward Mooney from Rochester, New York became the radio priest's new mentor. The new Archbishop was noted for having a reputation for diplomacy as well as being a student of economics and industrial problems. He was also noted for expounding the church's doctrines on social problems, which probably meant that he taught and advocated the encyclicals of Leo XIII and Pius XI. But as has already been seen, these two encyclicals have been subjected to more than one interpretation. Father Coughlin was reported to have been "very highly pleased" at the appointment of Archbishop Mooney and did not expect it to affect his broadcasting. Naturally speculation was rampant as to whether the new Archbishop would defend Father Coughlin's freedom of speech as had the late Bishop of Detroit.[5] Father Coughlin was not removed from his parish but it would not be until October when the radio priest learned just how much backing he would receive from Archbishop Mooney.

On October 4, 1937, Father Coughlin held an interview during the course of which he referred to the "personal stupidity" of the President for having appointed Hugo Black, a former member of the KKK, to the Supreme Court. Three days later, Archbishop Mooney made a statement in which he declared that his priest had used "unfortunate words" regar-

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[5] Ibid., June 6, 1937, IV, p. 9.

ding the appointment of Black. He also wanted it known that Father Coughlin's remarks had not been submitted to him for review or to someone appointed by him. He reaffirmed that the radio priest had a right to disagree with the President and even publicly express his disagreement but that at the same time, he should restrain his language in keeping with his "sacred calling." The Archbishop regretted that Father Coughlin had not availed himself the "prudent counsel of a friendly critic" before making his comments.

During the same interview, Father Coughlin stated that no Catholic could belong to the CIO (Committee of Industrial Organization) which he alleged was a Communist organization, as incompatible with Catholicism as Mohammedanism. Archbishop Mooney refused the remarks of his priest:

> But no Catholic authority has even asserted that the CIO is incompatible with Catholicism on the basis of its publicly stated principles - though it is undoubtedly true that there are Communists in the CIO who are making every endeavor to gain control of the organization for Communist purposes, and it is the conscientious duty of Catholics in the CIO to relentlessly oppose those efforts.[6]

Thus it took four months for Father Coughlin to find out that he would not have the same sort of support he had enjoyed while Bishop Gallagher was still living. Immediately following the Archbishop's statement, Father Coughlin prepared another statement for release to the press in rebuttal and submitted it to his Archbishop for approval. But he was

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[6]Ibid., October 8, 1937, p. 18.

denied any such approval because it went "beyond the specific point" on Archbishop Mooney's statement.

Father Coughlin's stand on the CIO seemed somewhat incompatible with his earlier thinking on unions. In June, 1935, he opened a state wide campaign to organize auto plant workers with the intent of assuring each worker an annual income of $2,150.00. Earlier he advocated an annual wage of $1,800.00. Part of the enlarged income he felt should come from manufacturers profits and part from the public "which buys cars too cheaply." How these profits were to come from the public he did not explain. His plan was not to be a "Share-the-Wealth" program but rather a "Share-the-Profit" program. Even in these efforts at unionization, he saw the bankers as the enemy of the working man:

> I am urging you men to unite and organize against the bankers who control the industry in the nation. There is an illegitimate marriage between finance and industry, when industry should be with its true wife - labor.[7]

The following September he proposed the organization of an independent union in the industry.[8] But when John L. Lewis began to organize the automobile workers and especially when the sit down strike hit General Motors, he opposed them because he thought Lewis was a "stooge of the Communist party."[9]

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[7] Ibid., July 1, 1935, p. 3.

[8] Ibid., September 2, 1935, p. 2.

[9] John L. Spivak, Shrine of the Little Flower, (New York: Modern Age Books, 1940), p. 111.

His idea of unions was not compatible with that of John L. Lewis. His words clearly indicate this point when in speaking to the workers he said:

> I ask you not to be misled by false leaders who seek not only a living annual wage but sow seeds in your souls of capturing factories and dictating to capital how it shall run its business.[10]

On January 11, just nine days before his death, Bishop Gallagher called the sit-down strike illegal and Communistic and saw Soviet planning in back of it.[11] Father Coughlin was not of the opinion that the CIO should be the sole bargaining agent for all labor. According to him, there was only one bargaining agent in the United States and that was the Federal government.[12] Here again he was on the other side of the fence with Monsignor Ryan who along with other priests in the Detroit area looked upon the organizing efforts of the CIO "with friendly eyes." Father Coughlin's ideas indicated how strongly he felt for the corporate state and fascism.

This was not the last Father Coughlin had to do with unionization. According to Charles L. Spivak in his Shrine of the Silver Dollar, in August, 1937, Father Coughlin attempted to split the CIO by persuading Homer Martin, who at the time was the president of the United Automobile

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[10] New York Times, January 2, 1937, p. 6.

[11] Saul D. Alinsky, John L. Lewis, (New York: Vintage Books, 1970), p. 113.

[12] New York Times, February 5, 1937, p. 13.

Workers, CIO, to leave the CIO and start his own union at the Ford Motor Company. Whether due to Father Coughlin's influence or not, Homer Martin eventually broke away from the CIO and formed his own union and supposedly received large sums of money from Harry Bennett, the head of Henry Ford's Personnel Division and also his chief labor spy.[13]

Denied a rebuttal by Archbishop Mooney concerning his remarks about the CIO and President Roosevelt, Father Coughlin decided to withdraw from the radio. Withdrawing from the radio was becoming habit-forming with the priest. He had just done it after the 1936 election and now he did it again. It seemed that the priest was doing it this time just to show Archbishop Mooney what a clamoring there would be for his return to the air. It was his way of showing his ecclesiastical superior just how much power he commanded. Father Coughlin got his anticipated results when telegrams and letters flooded the Archdiocesan offices in Detroit's Chancery building.[14]

Father Coughlin finally did return to the air but how this was decided is not exactly clear. He must have reached some sort of understanding with Archbishop Mooney whose words seem to indicate this. "I am confident that his series of radio addresses will bring to bear on a

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[13]Spivak, Shrine of the Silver Dollar, pp. 106-32.

[14]New York Times, October 17, 1937, IV, p. 7.

nation-wide audience his recognized power for good as an exponent of Catholic teaching."[15] Leo Fitzpatrick, who had arranged his first radio network, set up a twenty seven station network extending from Denver to Portland, Maine which was not quite as extensive as his earlier hookup.[16]

The Royal Oak pastor's first radio talk in 1938 was a plea for capital and labor to work together.[17] Later sermons found him pleading for a guaranteed annual wage, the regulation of money, and a new political idea, the adoption of a corporate state.

Father Coughlin devoted several broadcasts urging the American people to adopt a new system of government based on vocational representation. First of all he proposed abandoning the present party system and dividing all the voters into groups representing their vocations and professions, thereby adopting the corporate state election system. Automobile workers would form one class; steelworkers another; miners a third, and so on. Each group would thus have its own representative in Congress. Thus was Father Coughlin's praise for Mussolini being put into a parallel plan.

He further proposed doing away with the electoral

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[15] Ibid., December 7, 1937, p. 1.

[16] Ibid.

[17] Charles E. Coughlin, "Together We Stand", Sixteen Radio Lectures (Detroit: Condon Printing Co., 1938), pp. 5 - 11.

college and trasnferring the power of electing the President to the House of Representatives with its vocational representation. One senator from each state had to represent capital while the other represented labor. The Senate would be presided over by the Vice-President who would also be the Secretary of Corporations.

Father Coughlin's new form of government would impose taxes according to income and not according to property. He wanted Congress to declare a ten year moratorium on bond and interest payments in order to defeat the depression; Congress was also to have full control over the spending power of the Federal government and would henceforth issue and regulate money in the United States; Congress was to insure the functioning of the law of supply and demand; and finally Congress was to be the silent partner in settling all disputes between capital and labor, which could not be settled by their own arbitration.[18]

Father Coughlin's attempt at reorganizing the government was in opposition to President Roosevelt's Reorganization Bill to which he objected because he felt it had "little to do with removing the causes of depression." He felt so strongly against the bill that he made a broadcast sermon against it on a Thursday evening, which was contrary to his normal schedule of speaking. He strongly

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[18]Coughlin, "The Corporate State", Sixteen Radio Lectures, pp. 95-99.

opposed the abolishment of the office of the Comptroller General which would give the President control of the nation's purse strings but he more strongly opposed the control of education which would be placed in the hands of the newly created Secretary of Welfare when he said:

> By the injection of that one word "education" into the Reorganization Bill, they admit to the American citizenry and to all posterity their desire to standardize education under the Welfare Department; their desire to wipe out the legal right enjoyed by local parochial schools; their determination to abolish States rights governing our public schools.... I venture to forcast that if this bill passes - and it must not - it is farewell to free speech and free press, farewell to free education and free pulpit, farewell to the democratic traditions which have been bequeathed to us.[19]

Three days later Archbishop Mooney issued a statement which was in complete contradiction to what Father Coughlin said: "I see nothing in the bill to expand present functions of Federal educational agencies and therefore to arouse fears in regard to Carholic interests."[20] Nevertheless, Father Coughlin's followers flooded Congress with 80,000 letters and telegrams voicing their opposition to the bill. This time his plea produced more response than that received against the World Court and for the Patman Bonus Bill.[21]

Father Coughlin's proposal for a corporate state was the only and last positive program he was to advocate. After

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[19]Coughlin, "It Is What We Do Not What We Say", Sixteen Radio Lectures, pp. 122-27.

[20]New York Times, April 1, 1938, p.3.

[21]Ibid., April 3, 1938, IV, p. 7.

the 1936 election and Archbishop Mooney's disagreement with him on the President's Reorganization would be the last one he was to encounter before he was finally removed from the airwaves. From approximately this time on, Father Coughlin did not appear to be concerned with advocating reform legislation. Instead his social reform became negative in quality when it took on Anti-Semitic and isolationist qualities. In his 1937 radio series, he advocated an "American-Christian" program:

> For God and country; for Christ and the flag - that is our motto as we prepare for action - for Christian, American action which is neither anti-German, anti-Italian nor anti-Semitic. Any negative policy is destined to failure. Only a positive policy can hope to succeed.[22]

Unfortunately, the Royal Oak pastor was advocating a negative policy and it was destined for failure. "American" and "Christian" became a cover up for his anti-Semitism. As for his isolationist plank, he said:

> Why leave our own? Why occupy our minds with Europe's territorial boundaries and various "isms"? Today America is faced with the problem of providing her 10-million unemployed with profitable work; of removing from the Government relief rolls the 20-million wards who are forced to live below the American standard of life.[23]

Father Coughlin's desire for isolation may have contained the right intent but he blamed the Jews for the depression and people failed to pay attention to anything

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[22]Charles E. Coughlin, "An American Christian Program", Why Leave Our Own? (Detroit, Michigan: Inland Press, 1939), pp. 100 - 09.

[23]Ibid., p. 5.

positive he may have said. He still advocated liberty of conscience and education; a just, living, annual wage; the guarantee of private ownership of property; the right of labor to organize; alleviation of certain taxation; and efficiency of government.[24] With words very reminiscent of the situation in the United States in the 1970's, he said, "It is not our business to become the policeman of the world. We have plenty at home with which to engage our attention."[25]

It was during these later years of the 1930's that Father Coughlin was labeled "pro-fascist" and "pro-Nazi" and came under severe criticism. Newspapers, magazines, religious groups of all denomination, and Catholic Church authorities denounced him as being one of the most dangerous breeders of hatred in the United States. Governor Frank Murphy of Michigan, a member of Father Coughlin's parish, called him an impetuous person who "speaks off the top of his head." He told Harold Ickes that he considered Father Coughlin one of the most dangerous men in America.[26]

No Senator, Congressman, nor political leader attached themselves to Father Coughlin as they had done in the earlier

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[24] Ibid., pp. 104-108.

[25] Coughlin, "Bonds and Neutrality", Why Leave Our Own?, p. 135.

[26] Harold I. Ickes, The Secret Diary of Harold L. Ickes: The Inside Struggle 1936-1939, (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1954), p. 371.

part of the decade. He had become a social pariah. His attacks on the Jews, his castigation of John L. Lewis and the CIO as being Communist inspired, his continual criticism of the President and his administration had made him too controversial a personality. Denied any broadcasting contracts with his regular stations, Father Coughlin had to cancel his 1940-41 radio sermons. In May, 1942, Postmaster General Frank Walker, at the instigation of Attorney General Francis Biddle, revoked the second class mail license of Social Justice. Father Coughlin had been silenced.

The Royal Oak pastor was a product of the Catholic Church and it was with two Papal encyclicals as a backdrop from which he preached his social reforms. Despite the origins of his reforms, he was opposed by many of his ecclesiastical contemporaries. First of all, therefore, there existed much difficulty in interpreting these encyclicals. The London Catholic Times of June 14, 1935, stated that the Papal encyclicals in social questions were like the Bible in that they required an expert commentator. J. W. Poynter in The Popes and Social Problems, related that an ardent Protestant social student who was presented with a copy of Pope Leo's encyclical Rerum Novarum returned it to the author because he could not get through it claiming that it was a "heavy and technical as an Act of Parliament."[27]

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[27] J. W. Poynter, The Popes and Social Problems, (London: Watts and Co., 1949), p. 6.

At the same time it seems that the need for social reform had not filtered down from the two social reform minded Popes, Leo XIII and Pius XI. It was one thing for the formulation of policy and indeed a quite different one for its execution. These papal social pronouncements were not considered infallible and Catholics, clergy included, were not obliged to accept them. Many encyclicals were written in response to immediate situations and were not necessarily intended to be universal in application. Therefore many clergy in the church could reject these pronouncements without fear of violating church law or their own conscience.

Social reform in the church was a slow process. Father Coughlin kept using the encyclicals as his guidelines which might lead one to believe that the Popes were very social-reform minded but the history of the Papacy proves otherwise. The years before Leo XIII wrote his encyclical showed a negative attitude toward social reform as far as the church was concerned.

Lay Catholics began to realize before the Popes that the Church could not retain the loyalty of the working class unless it showed them some concern for their plight by proposing and working for social reforms which could give each worker a more comfortable and secure existence. Leo XIII saw a world wide economic depression followed by a rapid expansion of industrialism and the industrial pro-

letariat in Europe and the United States. As a result, socialist parties grew stronger.

Therefore in order to preserve the loyalty of the workers to the Church, Leo issued his encyclical Rerum Novarum whose main theme was the problems of the working class and how to solve them. Thus within the Catholic Church, social reform was only getting started and as a bulwark against Marxist Socialism.

The two Popes between Leo XIII and Pius XI, Pius X and Benedict XV, made no impressive contributions to Papal social thought. Pius X thought that social problems were primarily a matter for charity. Benedit XV as well seemed to retard any social reform since he was of the opinion that those in inferior stations had to be convinced that the diversity of classes was in the very nature of things and was part of the divine will.[28] This trend of thought persisted until Father Coughlin's time.

During the depression of the 1930's along with Father Coughlin, there were other Catholic social reform movements seeking social justice. Like their predecessors in Europe they understood that workingmen in vast numbers would leave the church if the church ignored their claims to economic justice. One of these social reform movements was the League of Social Justice, whose chief instigator was

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[28]Richard L. Camp, The Papal Ideology of Social Reform, (Leiden, Netherlands: E. J. Brill, 1967), pp. 4-100.

Michael O'Shaughnessy, oil executive and industrial publicist. The purpose of his League was to study and apply the economic teachings of Pius XI and his solution to the depression was in the Golden Rule, "practising self-restraint and doing to others as they would be done by." He saw the ills of the nation as the lack of the distribution of wealth and the lack of purchasing power on the part of the consumer but he did not see any legislation that would correct the situation since he felt that "citizens devoid of moral responsibility would not obey laws, be they ever so reasonable and necessary."[29] O'Shaughnessy disavowed state capitalism and Communism since he felt they both meant slavery to government but he did call for the reform of capitalism. He also advocated in all the major industries trade associations which would be controlled by management, labor, and the consuming public. All of his proposals were distributed to each cabinet member of the incoming Roosevelt Administration. His Catholic League for Social Justice was approved by Carinal Hayes of New York in October, 1932, but its membership never grew to enormous proportions. It never numbered more than ten thousand.[30]

Like Father Coughlin, O'Shaughnessy called for the reform of capitalism but unlike the radio priest he disa-

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[29]Aaron I. Abell, American Catholicism and Social Action: A Search for Social Justice 1865-1950 (Garden City, N.Y.: Hanover House, 1960), p. 243.

[30]Ibid., pp. 242-46.

vowed the state capitalism which Father Coughlin once advocated. The ideas of both men on unionization were similar in that they called for the participation of labor and management. But they differed greatly in the realm of legislation. His disregard for the importance of legislation negated any great contribution to the idea of social reform, since it is much too difficult to separate social reform and legislation.

Another such major Catholic movement which began in the early 1930's was the Catholic Worker movement headed by Dorothy Day, a Socialist in college, a Communist in the early twenties, and a Catholic since 1927, and no longer a Communist. Dorothy Day, like Michael O'Shaughnessy and Father Coughlin, stressed the encyclical of Pius XI. Along with Peter Maurin, French-born itinerant social philosopher, she founded the Catholic Worker, an eight page monthly tabloid. When Dorothy Day tried to explain the type of organization both she and Maurin had, she said:

> It's hard to answer that. We don't have any in the usual sense of the word. Certainly we are not a cooperative, not a settlement house, not a mission. We cannot be said to operate on a democratic basis.[31]

The newspaper they published together was intended for "clarification of though" between Communists, radicals,

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[31]Dorothy Day, Loaves and Fishes, (New York, N.Y.: Curtis Books, 1963), p. viii.

priests, and laity. A second step in their programs was houses of hospitality and a third was the organization of farming communes. The people, Maurin thought, would have to go back to the land because the machine had displaced labor and the cities were overcrowded. "My whole scheme is a Utopian, Christian Communism," Maurin said. His houses of hospitality and farming communes were the answer to the ills of the times: "Unemployment, delinquency, destitute old age, man's rootlessness, lack of room for growing families, and hunger."[32] The ideas were indeed Peter Maurin's and Dorothy Day acquiesced in them. Contrary to what she said, her work approached that of a mission. Her work was "works of mercy." Dorothy Day took part in strikes and like Father Coughlin did not deny that social legislation was needed but unlike the radio priest stressed "personal responsibility before state responsibility." Though her work still continues, and no one can doubt her motives, her goals did not seem to have any far reaching objectives.

Thus far the career of Father Coughlin has been examined in terms of what he determined to be the cause of the depression, namely, the international bankers and their greed; what would happen to the United States if its financial system of capitalism was not remedied and what he considered to be the solution to the ills of the country.

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[32] Ibid., pp. 1 - 42.

Certainly numerous conclusions can be drawn from his labors. But first a re-examination of the years before his rise to prominence is necessary, to determine why he did what he did. His Catholic education is perhaps the first reason for the action of his later years. Especially noteworthy is the importance which the Basilians, the sodality of priests to which Father Coughlin initially belonged, attached to the money question. The pronouncement of medieval Catholicism of the sin of usury was strongly stressed. The accumulation of superfluous wealth was considered evil. Many, if not most Catholic thinkers of the thirties, recognized that the simple business organization of the Middle Ages could not be compared with the complex industrial organization of their times. But this doctrine was taken very seriously in the Catholic college where Father Coughlin was educated, and he would be further subjected to its influence during his period of training for the priesthood.

Of at least equal importance was the influence of the labor encyclical of Leo XIII, with which Father Coughlin came in contact during his student days. This particular encyclical was a reply to the challenge of Karl Marx and scientific socialism, which was beginning to make considerable inroads into the Catholic laboring classes of Europe. In the encyclical was contained the admonition to capital that labor was not a commodity, that wealth was only a stewardship; that

labor and capital were expected to collaborate for the greater glory of the church. These same ideas were later reinforced by the encyclical of Pius XI in 1931.

In 1891, Father Coughlin's mentor, Bishop Gallagher, was a student of the Jesuits in the Austrian Tyrol and saw the encyclical translated into action. During his post war visits to Austria, Bishop Gallagher befriended Dolfuss, a fervent clerical who seized power in Austria in 1933 and promulgated a new constitution which he claimed had been outlined by God. "Bishop Gallagher was a good friend of Dolfuss... and was closely associated with the whole group of Christian Fascists, who claimed to rule according to the principles of the encyclicals."[33]

It would be difficult to say how great an influence Bishop Gallagher had upon Father Coughlin as a young priest. There were many who believed that he was the guiding power, both teacher and philosopher, who directed Father Coughlin in his early years at Royal Oak. Bishop Gallagher once said, in answer to criticism of Coughlin: "I made no mistake, and I have never doubted my judgment in putting him before the microphone."[34] There is no doubt that the two were closely associated and that he steadfastly shrugged off the critics of Coughlin for many years.

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[33]Forrest Davis, "Father Coughlin", Atlantic Monthly, December, 1935, pp. 659-668.

[34]Ibid., p. 663.

Without radio there probably would have been no Father Coughlin, at least not in the way he has been remembered. His love of oratory, the confidence he derived from his earlier years, the radio plus the unfortunate circumstances brought in by depression with its confusion and bewilderment seem to be the primary factors which triggered his prominence and influence in the thirties. His personal magnetism plus what seemed to be an intuitive leadership preyed on the emotions and fears of individuals. He seemed to sense the desires and needs of the American people and to realize that there was a wave of discontent in American politics. Yet for all the influence he seemed to possess, his theory that the international bankers and the Communists were the major threat to America's security was never accepted by the Roosevelt administration. But nevertheless he was successful in bringing pressure on Congress and the administration. His position against the World Court brought a flood of telegrams to Congress advocating non-participation. Even after the 1936 election when his popularity was on the decline his castigation of the President's Reorganization Bill added greatly to its defeat.

Father Coughlin's ideas on monetary reform preceded similar thoughts on the part of the Roosevelt administration. He proposed gold devaluation and a controlled inflation before the President's Brain Trust did and at a time when there was disagreement as to what type of monetary program to adopt.

But unfortunately, the priest oversimplified the money situation. The problem as he saw it was that there was simply a shortage of money brought about by bankers. All the government had to do was eliminate the banker's power and create more money. The revaluation of the gold ounce did not prove to be the answer nor were his silver proposals. He dropped his own formula for a new currency ratio. His idea for a Central Bank was never adopted. Father Coughlin's ability as a propagandist turned out to be far superior to his contributions as a monetary theorist.

The unions he opposed became stronger than ever. The type of union he advocated has never been adopted nor has a guaranteed annual wage which he led the field in advocating and for which the unions are still fighting. The increase in the hourly wage scale the priest denounced is still the way in which the automobile unions fight for more pay. His views of unionization were both forward and backward looking at the same time. He wanted unions, which were progressive, but of the type advocated by the Pope which was retrogressive.

Father Coughlin was certainly not a man to relent in the face of adversity. That was proven when most of the Catholic Church stood against him. His career seemed to prove that the church could not control its own priests because of its organization or perhaps did not want to for

fear of making a martyr out of him in his case. What was most important was that he saw that social reform could not be separated from political action. His ecclesiastical contemporaries of the thirties saw little or no connection between the two. His career proved that there was no one "correct" interpretation of the encyclicals. He was never admonished for questioning Catholic dogma but only for name calling.

The principle of Catholic action as defined by Pius XI meant the participation of the laity under the guidance and direction of the Church hierarchy. Yet what member of that hierarchy was being heard throughout the United States in the thirties discussing the social, economic, and national questions about which everyone was concerned and interested other than Father Coughlin? If Catholic action is supposedly under the direction of the hierarchy, where was the voice of the church hierarchy in the United States in interpreting Catholic principles in the situation and conditions that faced the country? It is little wonder that Father Coughlin had such a large following for his was the strongest Catholic voice heard throughout the nation. That much must be admitted whether one agreed with him or not.

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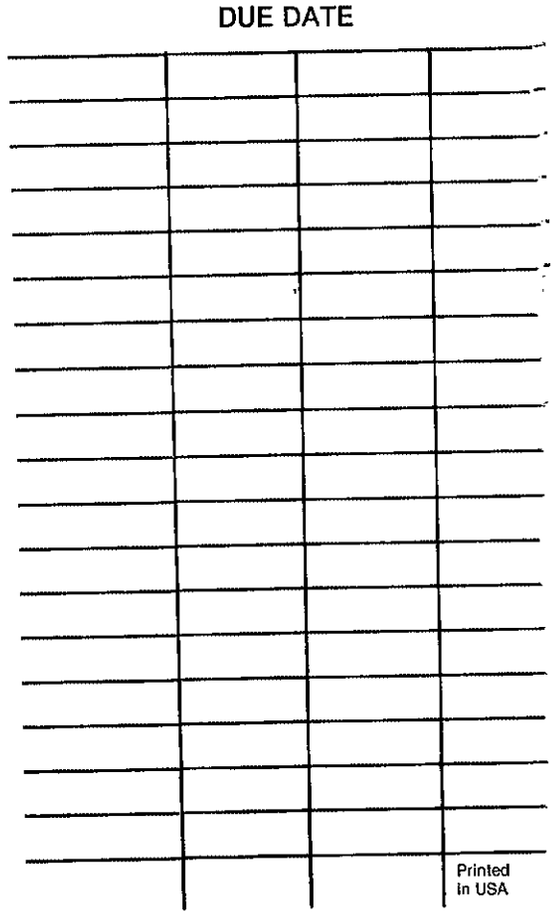
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