

The Servile State

By Dorothy Day

The Catholic Worker, July August 1945, 1, 3.

*Summary: Inveighs against social security legislation in Britain and America noting that Hillaire Belloc prophesized it in his 1912 book *The Servile State*. Proposes a Catholic solution based on distributism, ownership, and “the little way.” Recalls Belloc’s visit to the Catholic Worker. (DDLW #412).*

On the eve of Hilaire Belloc’s seventy-fifth birthday, the Servile State was ushered into Great Britain with Prime Minister Attlee taking the place of Churchill. Contrary to the opinion of most conservatives, the new government is not a step toward collectivism, but a solidifying of capitalism, with the sop thrown to the proletariat of social *security*, health laws, education laws, etc. The State has taken possession of the masses, with their approval. Most people look upon the new regime as the lesser of two evils, and a step forward in progress.

Hilaire Belloc wrote the book, “The Servile State,” back in 1912, and since then there have been three editions, the last in 1927. This Great Catholic book has never been printed in America. It can be read now in the reference room of the New York Public Library. Belloc foretold the Beveridge plan, the “womb-to-tomb” plan as it has been termed.

Beveridge, a henchman of Lloyd George and Churchill, put over the compulsory insurance law in 1910 and this brought Belloc to write “The Servile State.” In our own country the New Deal grew out of such social legislation. And Catholics throughout the country are again accepting “the lesser of two evils” and trying to apply Christian principles to it. They fail to see the body of Catholic social teaching of such men as Fr. Vincent McNabb, G. K. Chesterton, Belloc, Eric Gill and other distributists, as they came to call themselves, and lose all sight of *the little way*, which the great modern Saint Therese has pointed out. They go with the crowd and try to sanctify the pagan teaching of modern economists. During the Spanish war they saw no other way than that of Franco in opposition to the Loyalists. They fail to see that there can be such a thing as a Catholic position. Our Communist brothers are not so lacking in faith. They continue hammering away at their platform when they have only one or two representatives in the government. They do not say, “choose the lesser of two evils, accept the present social order and sanctify it.” They present their positive Marxist program. The recent upset in the ranks of the Communist party of America is over just such an issue. Earl Browder is accused of trying to go along with capitalism, of seeking concordances instead of upholding the pure Marxist teaching.

Belloc’s Visit

Hilaire Belloc, who foresaw the present shape of things so clearly, is now living in retirement in Sussex, England. The last time he visited London it was to

see Fr. Vincent McNabb. The last time he came to America he lectured at Fordham and came one evening to visit The Catholic Worker, we are happy to say. John Cort and I were invited to dinner with him by Harry McNeil, then teaching at Fordham, and in honor of our distinguished guest. Professor McNeil took us to some famous restaurant to dine, and the meal was of many courses. I hope Hilaire Belloc did not notice how John Cort, used to the slim meals of the Catholic Worker (we were feeding 1,500 a day then), reached over to my plate after every course and finished what I had left. It was an enormous dinner and I was too stimulated to eat, but John ate automatically, and quite unconsciously, all of his own and a good part of mine.

A Suggestion

Why does not Mr. Bruce, the Catholic publisher of Milwaukee, who achieves so outstanding a success in the circulation of his publications, bring out "The Servile State" for the benefit of that great body of Catholics interested in post-war economics?

Security for the worker, not ownership; *security* for the industrialist, the owner, not confiscation—that is what Beveridge plans and Wallace plans of permanent employment lead to.

There is more vision, more Catholicity in that plan of the Auto Workers Union, CIO, to buy one of the Ford plants for reconversion and make prefabricated homes for workers. At least this is a step in the right direction toward ownership and responsibility.