RELIGION AND THE WORKERS

There are several theories that explain the origin of religious ideas. Whatever merit one may have over another, however, it is safe to say that supernatural beliefs were influenced, generally, by the material environment of those who conceived them. The truth of this statement can be seen when one examines the various concepts of a life after death. What is usually found here is a glorification of the surroundings of the believers. The American Indians, for example, were hunters and hunting influenced their outlook and their beliefs. Thus, in their afterlife the Indians went to a "Happy Hunting Ground" which was largely a continuation of their material surroundings but with the defects found in real life removed; it was the life they would liked to have lived on earth.

Our remote ancestors did not have an elaborate belief in gods. They must have been too busy getting enough to eat and staying alive to be able to concoct such theories. But they did believe in a double, or "soul," which survived the death of the body. Several material factors must have contributed to this belief. One was man's seeing his reflection in water or his shadow, but the greatest factor, no doubt, was his dreams. How could a primitive explain a dream in which appeared an individual whom he knew no longer lived? It seems natural for him to assume that he had visited with the "soul," or double of the departed. And from such primitive religious beliefs the greatly involved religions of the modern day evolved. In other words, the religions of today — regardless of how modern or "progressive" they regard themselves — evolved from ideas which represented primitive man's ignorance of natural phenomena.

But there is more than one reason why religious beliefs are of no benefit —even detrimental — to the working class. The future of the working class, and indeed of the entire population, rests on a scientific understanding of the world in which we live rather than an understanding based upon metaphysical or supernatural ideas. The socialist case rests upon historical materialism. Scientific socialism has no place for outmoded religious beliefs. Even many non-socialist and anti-socialists are (bourgeois) materialists; they are not influenced by religious theories today because they are not reconcilable with modern science.

Religion is a valuable prop to the system of capitalism as it has been to previous systems of exploitation. Even in modern, 20th century America large numbers of workers are subjected to a continual barrage of propaganda calculated to focus their attention on a hereafter rather than on the exploitation that is their lot in the here. Consider, for example, the Catholic Church and its many avenues of thought control from the widespread use of television and radio to the more limited circulation of magazines. In a pamphlet published by "America," a well-known Roman Catholic periodical, entitled "The Catholic and His Trade Union." the following observations are made:

"We might well ask ourselves what God has in mind...when He... directs us to spend so much of our lives on the job. The answer is simple enough. He expects us to sanctify ourselves through our work as well as through our prayers. That's the Divine Plan." "Our job... feeds, clothes and shelters us."

Here is the well-worn capitalist propaganda that the capitalists support the workers rather than vice-versa. And the anti-working class attitude is underscored with the following:

"A fair day's wage for a fair day's work" has been the slogan of labor...The time has come for labor to devote more attention to a fair day's work."

The pamphlet bears the "Imprimatur" of Francis Cardinal Spellman, meaning that it is "free of doctrinal or moral error." M. G.

GEMS FROM AMERICAN HISTORY

THE LAWRENCE STRIKE (1912)

America's first big industry, textiles, was established in the Merrimack River Valley area of New England in the early 1830s. Water power provided an economical mode of operating the automatic machinery which had been developed in England and this factor, together with the availability of cheap labor, enabled a sizable number of families to reap vast profits and live conspicuously. These textile magnates encouraged the settlement in such cities as Lawrence, Lowell, and Haverhill in Massachusetts of thousands of working class newcomers to the "Land of Liberty." They provided plenty of work for men, women, and even children from the age of 14 years — plenty of work, indeed! 58 hours per week of it and they paid wages which seemed to average, according to the findings of a Congressional Committee as late as 1912, some $8.76 per week.

Could these empire builders peer into the future and see how the concentration of their plants within short distances of one another would facilitate the eventual organization of the workers into labor unions? Perhaps they could, for they did take one precaution which seemed to inhibit much cooperation among the workers, the precaution of bringing to the cities and the mills a population of diverse national backgrounds, languages, and religions. How could Italian, Syrians, Lithuanians, Poles, Irish, French Canadians, and a host of other workers of conflicting cultures ever get together in a labor union? The thought was all but incredible, and remained unbelievable until January 11, 1912.

THE "EXPLOSION" IN LAWRENCE

The front page of the Boston Daily Globe for January 12, 1912, was dominated by two stories. On the left hand column was the eye-catching headlines: "Mob Runs Riot In Mills At Lawrence." — "Foreign Employes Drive Men And Women Out Of Four Plants." — "Finally Quelled By Police..." And the story opens:

"Striking Italian and Syrian textile workers, angry because the English-speaking operatives would not join in the protest against the reduction of the wages incident to the decrease in the hours of labor to 54 a week, stormed four mills today, and by driving the peaceable employees out compelled the suspension of two of the plants.

"...within an hour after the trouble began about 12,000 men and women had forsaken the works, most of them under compulsion."

A news photo showed a large group of workers, bundled in some sort of fashion, in winter overcoats.

The right hand column was headed by a picture of a fishing vessel at Boston's T Wharf, the deck and dories of which were encased in thick ice. Beneath it the headlines informed: "Whole Country in Grip of Cold Wave" with "Arctic Storm in New England."

Whatever it was that upset the Lawrence workers was certainly of some magnitude to cause them to strike and stay out in sub freezing and even sub zero weather. And the strike headlines in the subsequent editions cried out in ever-increasing intensity until the crescendo of the evening editions of the Globe of January 15. In wartime type it screamed across the entire page:

"Armed Camp Holds Lawrence" — "Troops and Police Hurried To City" —"Bayonets Used Upon Riotous Strikers, Many Hurt In Attack On Mills"—"Two Years For One Of Mob." And a news picture showed heavily bundled soldiers standing by, guns in readiness. Subheadings gave further insight into the textile battle and into the tactics of newspaper editors in slanting public opinion in the "right" direction. It must have been difficult, indeed, for newspaper read-