The London Strike and Political Economy

NOTES: The Cardinal starts with a vivid eye-witness account of the famous 1889 London Dock Strike. Not until page 3 does Cardinal Manning define his understanding of Political Economy by stating: “I am afraid that I have ventured to speak invariably not so much of Political Economy as of Political Economics.”; & once he defines the difference between the old & new Political Economics, we can better comprehend his position. Quote #2 below once again confirms how little has changed on this subject. It is reminiscent of the recent town hall meeting where a woman asked President Obama if the current economy was in fact her “new reality”. In Quote #3, Cardinal Manning offers his most concise definition & opinion of England’s Poor Law. In quote #4, The Cardinal identifies workers with the unique term: “live capital”. As in many of his other writings, he points out the devastation massive unemployment brings to any nation.

“It is a metaphor to speak of Political Economy. The State or City or Commonwealth is a family or household because it is the aggregate of the homes & domestic life of a people. But it is also an aggregate of the duties & obligations of the domestic life of a people. But it is also the aggregate of the duties and obligations of the domestic life of the people. Political Economy therefore comprises the safety, the physical & moral needs, the public order, the defence of the State, [and] the administration of Justice civil & criminal, distributive & communicative, and under this last will come the exchange of values.”

“A leading Political Economist, whom I knew well, when I pressed him by asking what is to become of men, women & children while the abstract economical laws are slowly reaching their realizations, answered[,] ‘They must leave the country or cease to be.’”

“The English Poor Law is a law of natural justice having a divine sanction, creating rights in the poor, & duties in the rich. I have always looked upon the Poor Law as a rent charge upon the inheritance of England in behalf of the younger children.”

“Now it is to be remembered that labour & skill are as true capital, as land & money. But for the investment of this live capital, work is necessary. To refuse work is to deprive a man of his labour & skill by suspending its exercise, thereby treating him as a culprit unworthy of help & [. . .]ing him with loafers, and idlers & vagabonds.”
In the month of [August] 1889, London was disturbed for weeks by tumult in Trafalgar Square, Processions growing continually in number and in violence came from the East End by various routes to this point of concentration in Trafalgar Square. The full force of the Police was gathered both in the Square & the surrounding streets. Many conflicts between them & the crowd followed; many were seriously injured. Finally the Guards were called out and the Life Guards patrolled the square. All these precautions did not protect the shops in Oxford Street and South Avalon Street from the breaking of windows, & the robbing or destruction of property. And yet all this began in the herding of a few houseless & homeless creatures by night in Trafalgar Square. It began in the want & misery of paupers & outcasts; it grew into a political strife led by popular [. . .] & members of Parliament and such an exhibition of Police & Soldering as London has never seen since the London riots. Who would have foreseen such a growth from an outset so contemptible[?] Who can say what might not have been its end[?] The show of armed force was happily enough; but what if the show had ended in its actual use? Any madmen or malefactor might have rendered the employment of force a duty. We were told indeed that these tumult mongers were only loafers, striplings, and boys; but they were met by military forces with horse & foot. And they may have brought on a public conflict ending in bloodshed.

In the month of September 1889, 30,000 men, not striplings, loafers or vagabonds, but the bone & sinew of our manhood were for four weeks on strike. Their wives & children were hungry and suffering from all kinds of privation. The Port of London was stagnant, there was no movement on the river Thames, but only the tides. Ships laden with cargos could unload nothing. The river was crowded by items but not a barge or a hand moved: the traders on either bank of the Thames had no sale for their goods. Processions filled the streets day by day; on Sundays a procession of thousands marched to Hyde Park. Meeting on the Tower Hill & elsewhere men excited by their leaders with all the force of natural oratory. The excitement grew greater every day. And yet not a pane of glass was broken. The Recorder of London, when the Great Strike ended, spoke as follows.

[Man leaves a blank space without including the Recorder’s words.]

And yet at any moment a madman or a malefactor or a reckless fool by some act of destruction might have kindled a fire that would have been hard to extinguish. If thirty thousand hungry men, initiated by the refusal of what they believed to be just & right[,] had broken out into violence, police & soldiers might have cut them down, but it would have been a black [. . .] in the history not of London only but of England. And—yet—we were on the eve of such a disaster.

While this anxiety was weighing on the least reflecting and the most self-confident minds[,] there was a great silence about political economy. Public opinion, & popular sympathy at home & abroad were resolutely on the side of the men. We heard little of freedom of contract which teaches that between masters or men, even when the safety of London is at stake, no one may intervene. Capital is the supreme factor of human Society: & labour is its servant. The will of Capital is sovereign; labour has no will of its own. Labour is bound to work for what it can

1 [Man leaves blank the month and the exact year, providing only the decade. The missing information has thus been supplied.]
get, and Capital is free to buy labour in the cheapest market. "The Labourer is worthy of his hire," that is of the minimum left after conflict. Labour has no right to a human life but only to an economic life. All this which before was so loud & dominant during four or five weeks was silent. The strike ended: peace returned, fear passed away. Soon the old voices were heard again. The modern Political Economy refuses all arbitration. There are only two parties, it tells us, in labour disputes, the masters & the men; they forget that outside on a Dock or a Wharf there is a third party of some right & authority that is the whole of the Commonwealth waiting anxiously for the solution [for] these disastrous & dangerous contentions. This third party is in number, freedom, & authority able to make itself felt. It has no need of leave or permission from any man. It has a right & power to make its voice heard in the disputes which threaten the peace & safety of the country. It is absolutely independent, & impartial. It does not assume to be an Arbiter; but if possible to be a Peacemaker or failing this to protect the public welfare from disasters which the disputants may at any moment bring upon it.

1. Politic Life
   1. Human
   2. Domestic
2. Society
3. Remedy

I am afraid that I have ventured to speak irreverently not so much of Political Economy as of Political Economists. I have believed myself all my life to be a Free Trader & Political Economists. Sixty years ago when another future was before me, I not only read the older Political Economists; but also I knew personally some of the leaders of the School. I remember dining at the Political Economy Club where I saw & heard [. . .], Sir Henry Parnell, Archbishop Whately and many more of that date. At that moment heaven was working in Political Economy, which has now gained the Ascendant. Between the Old Political Economy, and the New there is equal interest. The old was broad, sympathetic & humane. For the present I will only say that the modern does not seem to me broad, or sympathetic, or humane. These are s[. . .]y words but I will justify them. Economy in its true & primary sense is essentially domestic. It is the Law of the household on the administration of the house & home. It embraces all the members of the family and all their needs[,] that is their safety[,] wants & welfare in its fullest sense; the feeding, clothing, instruction, all useful provisions for care in health & in sickness. The first intention & meaning of economy is essentially the administration of a home.

It is a metaphor to speak of Political Economy. The State or City or Commonwealth is a family or household because it is the aggregate of the homes & domestic life of a people. But it is also an aggregate of the duties & obligations of the domestic life of a people. But it is also the aggregate of the duties and obligations of the domestic life of the people. Political Economy therefore comprises the safety, the physical & moral needs, the public order, the defence of the State, [and] the administration of Justice civil & criminal, distributive & communicative, and under this last will come the exchange of values. As domestic economy is coextensive with the obligations of the household, so political economy is coextensive with the obligations of the Commonwealth. It was in this sense that the older Political Economists understood their subject.

2 [A mistaken second “may” has been omitted here.]
3 [A mistaken second “and” has been omitted here.]
The modern Political Economists occupy themselves chiefly if not wholly with the exchange of values, the most & least sympathetic & humane functions of economy, namely the management of money and the payment of liabilities, the bills of the households. It was in this wider & more humane sense that the older Political Economists wrote. This has been briefly but well thought out by Mr Rue in the two articles of the Contemporary Review for [blank space] and still more elaborately by Dr Ingram in his very able and complete work “The History of Political Economy”.

But we are told that whatever be the distress of the deserving unemployed men[,] the only remedy is to be found in the progressive law of commercial prosperity which must employ its surplus capital in the employment of hands, whereby extinguishing distress, and bringing in the golden age, when no man shall be without work. How long it will take to accomplish this paradiesical change when every man shall sit down under his own vine and under his own fig tree we are not told. Since Adam Smith, we have had a hundred years of Political Economy but three generations of men have passed away before the dawn of universal wages. It is difficult to write gravely without writing sharply of such heartless treatment of human suffering. A leading Political Economist, whom I knew well, when I pressed him by asking what is to become of men, women & children while the abstract economical laws are slowly reaching their realizations, answered[,] “They must leave the country or cease to be.”

[Here Manning leaves a large blank space, as if he might add something later.]

1.4 But this compels me to enter upon the moral foundation of the Droit au travail, or the right to work or sustenance without work as recognized in the Poor Law of Elisabeth. This is the “popular delusion” which I have countenanced. We have already seen that Mr. Mill declares this right to be founded in the law of nature and to be a moral axiom. Lest his opinion should be regarded as singular, or merely speculative, I will quote the teaching of one of our most moderate and careful Professors of Political Economy[,] the late Henry Fawcett. His teaching has a double weight because he was not only a Professor of excellence, but a Statesman of mature judgment.

In his manual of Political Economy he says[,] “Any person upon application has a right to demand maintenance from poor rules.” He adds: [“]England alone recognizes this legal right” to be supported by the State. Perhaps he did not refer to the Droit au Travail in France because[,] the “[. . .]” having ceased to exist, the principle on which they rested had passed out of right. It may indeed be true that this right is affirmed in England only by a legal enactment. Until charity failed 300 years ago, it did not become a legal & compulsory enactment by the 5 of Elizabeth c. 3. But it is denied in no Christian land, because it is founded in the universal Christian law: as well as the law of nature.

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4 [Manning numbers this paragraph but doesn’t continue the number scheme.]
5 Book IV. Ch V. Fourth Edition.
6 [Manning wrote this section here, but marked it later with “omit.”] And here it seems necessary to enter fully into this delicate question, delicate because liable to abuse by the m[ ] especially in times of distress when the unsympathetic language and acts of the wealthy & the well to do drive them to resentment.

The laws of property are founded upon a higher and anterior law, the law of nature. It is the law of nature that sanction &[. ] I may say[,] consecrate the positive laws of property.
The poor who possess neither land nor capital have them for no right but the right of nature to life & the sustenance of life. The able bodied possess the power & shire of labour. The impotent cannot work. The law of nature gives them[,] as Mr Mill says[,] a right to work, or to sustenance without work. Whether this be right[,] be only natural, or also legal, as it happily is in England, it binds all who possess the property which human law recognizes & protects. The English Poor Law is a law of natural justice having a divine sanction, creating rights in the poor, & duties in the rich. I have always looked upon the Poor Law as a rent charge upon the inheritance of England in behalf of the younger children. Some possess the real property in law, & the personally [sic] in capital. The poor possess nothing but their inheritance of natural right. If the Poor Law of Elizabeth had not been passed, the English Land Laws would not have survived till now. From Henry VIII to Charles II the possession of land has been passing from the many to the few. In proportion to the population it was never held in so few hands as at this day. The Statesman, & the Yeoman & the Forty Shilling Freeholders are gone[,] and the land of England & Scotland is held by.

[Here Manning leaves a large blank space, as if he might add something later.]

The following will, I believe, be found to be an accurate statement of the Christian law of property as it bears upon the question before us.

1. By the law of nature all men have a common right to the use of things which were created for them & for that see sentence 1. [a summary of Thomas Aquinas’ *Summa Theologiae* II-II.66.1, response]

2. But this common right does not exclude the possession of any thing [sic] as proper to each. But the common right is by natural law, [and] the right of property is by human & positive law: and the positive law of property is expedient for three reasons[:] 1) what is our own is more carefully used than what is in common [and] 2) human affairs are better ordered by recognized rights of each man. 3) Human society is more peaceful when each has his own: protected by the law of justice: *suum cuique.* [a summary of *ST* II-II.66.2, response]

3. Theft is therefore always a sin for two reasons[:] first it is contrary to justice. Secondly because it is done either by stealth or by violence. [a summary of *ST* II-II.66.5, response]

4. But the human & positive law cannot derogate from the natural & divine law: bending to the divine law all things[,] all things are ordered to sustain the necessity of man. And therefore the division & appropriation of things cannot hinder the sustenance of man in case of necessity. Therefore the possessions of those who have superabundantly by the natural law are due to the sustenance of the poor. St Ambrose[,] quoted in the *Decretals[,]* says[,] “It is the bread of the famishing that you keep back: & the clothing of the naked[,] that you lay by; the money you bury in the earth[,] is release and liberation of the miserable.” [a summary of *ST* II-II.66.7, response]

But this is said of extreme & urgent necessity when life is at stake. This interpretation of the commandment “Thou shalt not steal” is in the universal law of Christendom from the beginning.

7 [There might be some other words after the ampersand. It is not clear if they are fully crossed out or not.]

8 [The sentence remains unfinished.]
Mr Fawcett says that the Poor Law Amendment Act of 1834 put the first restraint upon the right to demand work & support. It did so by refusing outdoor relief to men able to work. That is by refusing all relief except in the work house.

Now it is to be remembered that labour & skill are as true capital, as land & money. But for the investment of this live capital, work is necessary. To refuse work is to deprive a man of his labour & skill by suspending its exercise, thereby treating him as a culprit unworthy of help & [ . . . ]ing him with loafers, and idlers & vagabonds. It is wonderful that our working men of independent spirit [and] manhood would rather starve than be degraded as paupers and loafers; and still more they refuse to be made paupers by breaking up their homes and sacrificing all the dearest hands & charities in life, more dear it is to them, perhaps than to others, because they are their only possessions on which happiness & home depend. This is to refuse a natural right except upon a condition which renders it intolerable. No man has a right to attach such conditions.

Mr. Fawcett is wisely & finally opposed to the theory that the State should guarantee employment. But he discusses the question whether transiently & to meet a special & urgent emergency, some intervention of the State becomes expedient. His answer is as follows[:]

“Some who agree with the observations which have first been made may be inclined to think that the Government ought to find employment in times of occasional depression. Few would presume to assert that in no case could such a policy be justifiable: our object is rather to show that the cases which warrant such Government interference are much less frequent than is usually supposed.”

He then gives the instance of the Cotton Famine in Lancashire during the American War. He adds that it must be remembered that trade was improved in Leeds, Bradford, Dundee, & Belfast. But why should the vast manufacturing power of Lancashire with its immense plant of mills, machinery, & hands be broken up? No momentary profits of Bradford & Dundee would compensate the capitalists, and the workers of Lancashire for breaking up of house & home with all the aggravations of poverty and ruin. A wise interference saved Lancashire and all its industries.

Mr Fawcett sums up his opinion in these words[:] “When any extra strain is put upon our poor law system, it absolutely breaks down. When the Lancashire operations were thrown out of employment during the American War all the resources of parochial relief were exhausted in a few months: loans of money had to be obtained from the Government, & earnest appeals were made to the whole nation.”

What semblance of [ . . .] was there in all this? And yet the other day nobody asked for loans from the Government for the unemployed in London.

[Transcription developed by Paul DeGeorge]  
[Transcription edited by Jared Beverly]

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