

Articles

Socialism and Catholicism: The Left and the Right of the Labor Movement in the Gilded Age

By Bruce Winston,

The study of labor history allows the understanding of today's labor movement and assists in predicting the labor movement of the future. The ideologies that influence the thinking of men and women at any point in history have the ability to impact the future by influencing the present. This study looks at the labor movement in the Gilded Age through the view of two seemingly opposing ideologies.

Kazin (1991), in his response to Kimeldorf's (1991) implication that studies of labor history should move away from examining the role of unions, emphasizes the importance of the union as the means by which millions of workers made sense of their lives and reaffirms the importance of the study of the union and the worker. Kazin wrote:

. . . Ken Fones-Wolf's Trade Union Gospel: Christianity and Labor in Industrial Philadelphia, 1865 - 1915 directs our attention to an area of American working-class life -- the variation of religious experience -- which few labor historians have examined in any depth. Through discussing how both unions and employers used Christianity to promote their own secular purposes, Fones-Wolf intelligently refuses to reduce religiosity to its social or political functions. If uninformed by studies like these any synthesis of labor -- or American -- history is incomplete. (p. 105)

Following Kazin's advice, this paper looks at two opposing, yet similar, ideologies that mentally pulled on the worker and the labor movement during the Gilded Age. The thoughts of organized labor impact the political and social fabric of the United States' society and thus are important to understand (Misra & Hicks, 1994; Yard, 1993). This paper differs from other organized labor thought examinations in that it looks at the impact of the far-left and far-right to see how organized labor evolved as it entered the twentieth-century. The effect of the foci of this paper -- socialism and Catholicism -- on the labor movement and the subsequent effect of the labor movement on society is a dynamic relationship that must be viewed from the perspectives of: (a) politics, (b) society, (c) economy, and (d) technological changes during the Gilded Age. Welch and Leege (1991) state that ". . . scholars are paying closer attention to the measurement of religiosity and to the mechanisms by which religious values become politically relevant" (p. 28).

Proposition

This paper proposes that socialism and Catholicism pulled at the United States' working class and attempted to influence the masses' thinking toward work. If socialism and Catholicism were at the extremes of the labor ideology, then the labor movement would have sought to isolate itself from the influence of, while at the same time be vulnerable to infiltration by either, the left-wing or the right-wing ideology. This paper seeks to learn if this is true.

Literature Method

This paper results from a systematic review of the literature, both academic and practitioner articles and books, about: (a) the labor movement, (b) the effect of socialism, and (c) the impact of Catholicism in the Gilded Age. This paper offers a synthesis of the work of many authors on the three subject areas in search of support or negation of the research hypothesis. The paper does this by examining the literature of the Gilded age, socialism during the Gilded age and the: (a) economic conditions, (b) social conditions, (c) legal/political conditions, and (d) technological conditions which contributed to the thoughts and social values of the time. The paper follows with sections on: (a) union development and social change, (b) a deeper look at socialism, (c) the Catholic church, and ends with (d) a conclusion summarizing the main points of the paper.

The Gilded Age

The Gilded Age refers to the period from 1865 to 1900. So named by Mark Twain because it was a period of “quick riches” which left deep economic and social impressions on the United States (Bartlett, 1969). Although Twain referred to the Ulysses S. Grant years as the Gilded Age, the phrase soon became synonymous with the period which began at the close of the Civil War and ended with the election of Theodore Roosevelt (Bartlett).

The Gilded Age represents the formative years for the labor movement in the United States although the beginning of the labor movement began much earlier when in 1794 the cordwainers in Philadelphia organized and struck for wages and shorter hours. However, it wasn't until the Gilded Age, which Liberman (1986) referred to as the Second Industrial Revolution, that the labor movement developed into a major societal role (Rayback, 1966).

This gain in industrial and financial activity, coupled with a large labor pool, created conditions that encouraged the formation of labor unions. The early part of the Gilded Age was a difficult time for the laborer according to Powderly (1889/1967) who wrote that the conditions of the laborer did not allow him to suitably clothe himself or his family. Rather, that only the coarsest, cheapest materials were available to him.

Although the Civil War caused a decline in socialism, the ideology saw a resurgence in 1866 when a small group, founded by Ferdinand Lassale, formed the German Workingmen's Union in New York. The German worker played a significant role in the both the labor movement and the development of socialistic thought in the United States. The influx of German immigrants in the 1850s brought socialism to the factories since German immigrants did not leave their homeland to escape socialism, but rather to escape what they perceived as tyranny and threats from war. Three years later, the German Workingmen's Union reformed as the National Labor Union (Rayback, 1966). Socialists, during this period of history, actively sought to change the economic structure of the United States. Unlike the efforts of Robert Owen, the socialists of the Gilded Age wanted to take control of the United States economy and convert it from capitalism to socialism (Lause, 1992). Yet, Yard (1993) writes that the Knights of Labor “did not set out to do anything dramatically unconventional with political power” (p. 434).

Socialism

Socialism is a social system in which the whole community owns the means of producing and distributing goods as well as exercising political power. This is in contrast to capitalism which is an economic system where the means of production and distribution are privately or corporately owned and development is proportionate to the accumulation and reinvestment of profits gained in a free market (American Heritage Electronic Dictionary, 1994). Jaruzelski (1989) writes: “Socialism . . . embodies the fundamental principle of social justice, enables millions of people to become involved in the progress of civilization and of culture, and guarantees social protection to every conscientious worker” (p. 7)

A shift in religious affiliation occurred during the 1800s. During the early 1800s, the dominant form of Christianity was Protestantism (Gribble, 1993; Seaton, 1981). However, the late 1800’s immigration from Europe brought many Catholics to the United States (Powderly, 1889/1967) thus, shifting the balance of religious power. This is significant since the Catholic Church exerted more control over the lives of its parishioners than did the Protestant denominations. Powderly observed that the Catholic Church denounced rebellion against the employer and encouraged the parishioner to “grovel in the dust at the feet of a master in order to win his [parishioner’s] title deed to everlasting bliss in the hereafter” (p. 136). Powderly also wrote: “The . . . voice of many a minister of God rang out in denunciation of the workingman, who, in his poverty, in his agony, in his very despair, often struck against the systems which crushed him . . . and there were those in the ranks of toil, who, mistaking the false for the truth, railed against religion because some of those who preached it and professed failed most miserably in the practice of it” (p. 179).

Economic

The world watched the United States evolve through the second industrial age and amass great economical wealth as business adapted large-scale organization and mass-production (Wren, 1994). The great “Robber-Barons” built their empires during the Gilded Age (Wren). Expansion in production and mass-production drove prices down thus allowing more consumers to purchase goods and services (Wren). Kirkland (1956) and Jones (1968) cited in Wren (1994) describe the great industrialists as “pragmatic doers who worked out the rules as they met them; they read or heard little of Darwin or Adam Smith and cared little for abstract social and economic theories” (p. 95).

Economist Henry George (1879) cited by Cashman (1993) conceded that the Industrial Revolution had increased wealth and improved and distributed comfort, leisure, and refinement. But George believed that the improvements excluded the lowest class from these gains. The increase in economic activity was staggering. Cashman reports that between 1865 and 1900 manufacturing employment grew from 1.3 million to 4.5 million and the number of factories rose from 140,000 to 512,000 (p. 100).

Quite often, rapid economic growth results in rapid decline as a means of maintaining balance and the Gilded Age was no exception. The depressions of 1873 and 1893 created hardship for labor and business alike (Cashman, 1993; Morris, 1993; Rayback, 1966). Bartlett (1969) writes of the 1873 financial shock caused by the failure of Jay Cooke and Company. Cooke was the leading banker of the time. The bank tried to finance the Northern Pacific Railroad by selling \$100,000,000 worth of its bonds. Bond buyers were wary of the railroad since a gap of 1,000 miles still existed. Cooke could not sell the bonds as fast as needed and so the bank chose to finance the railroad with short-term borrowing presuming that bond sales would catch up. The bond sales did not meet expectations and the bank’s loans came due. The bank

closed its doors that began a nationwide slide into depression (p. 69). The economic swings of the Gilded Age affected society as people gained and lost whole fortunes.

Social

The emergence of a nouveau rich described by Bartlett (1969) and the rise of the Robber Barons described by Wren (1994) created a greater separation between the rich and poor than existed in antebellum times. This nouveau rich class coupled with the immigration of European ethnic groups created a heterogeneous, pluralistic society (Cashman, 1993). Cashman writes that this heterogeneity along with the plentifulness of immigrants glad to work at any opportunity, prevented labor from creating class consciousness. Kirk (1994) wrote that the increasing size of ethnic groups caused the native-born citizen to discriminate against the immigrants. The attitude that Kirk describes may have contributed to the anti-labor sentiment of the immigrants in the early Gilded Age period.

It would seem from the literature about the Civil War that the United States would have had its fill of violence as a means of settling disputes. Not so, for during the period of 1874 through 1876 union violence led to the Great Railroad Strike of 1877 (Cashman, 1993). The strike lasted just less than a month and resulted in the deaths of 25 people and more than \$10 million dollars (1877 dollars) in damage (Cashman, p. 111). At first public opinion sided with the strikers, then the popular attitude turned. The strike involved more people than any other labor revolt in United States' history. Cashman (1993) cites an August 2, 1877, article as expressing the public's sentiment toward the strikers:

The kindest thing which can be done for the great multitudes of untaught men . . . is to show them promptly that society as here organized, on individual freedom of thought and action, is impregnable, and can be no more shaken than the order of nature. The most cruel thing is to let them suppose, even for one week, that if they had only chosen their time better, or had been better led or better armed, that they would have succeeded in forcing it to capitulate. (p. 111)

Public sentiment regarding the month-long violent strike precluded further strikes. Labor decided to advance its cause by political activity.

Legal/Political

The legal/political conditions of the Gilded Age represent a stage of transition from the laissez-faire government of the early 1800s to the active presidencies of Grover Cleveland and Theodore Roosevelt (Wren, 1994). Although political activity increased, few people saw differences between the Democrats and Republicans (Bartlett, 1969). The political realm contributed to the problems of the era, and, at the same time, contributed to later growth and power for the United States. Toward the end of the Gilded Age, the United States took steps into the world arena as a major power (Bartlett, Introduction).

Technological

Technology is the term for the process by which human beings fashion tools and machines to increase their control and understanding of the material environment. The term, derived from the Greek words *tekhne*, which refers to an art or craft, and *logia*, meaning an area of study; means, literally, the study, or science, of crafting.

All the technological advancements from the European/British industrial revolution were available to

United States businesses. Advances in mining came about because of the pneumatic rock drill invented by Simon Ingersoll (Grun, 1982). Electricity was becoming the fuel of choice. The hydroelectric installation at Niagara Falls, New York, begun in 1886 and completed in 1896, provided much needed power. Nikola A. Tesla developed the electric motor, in 1888, later manufactured by George Westinghouse (Grun). Henry Ford built his first car in 1893 (Grun).

In 1869 at Promontory, Utah, the railroads joined the East and the West together by rail service. The inflation of money following the Civil War hampered railroad development for a year or two, but a spurt of extraordinarily rapid growth followed, chiefly in the Mid-West and West. Expansion virtually halted when the financial panic of 1873 caused the price of railroad stocks to drop to a small fraction of their original value. In the 1880s construction boomed again, and the railroads added mileage at an average rate of more than 7000 miles a year. Expansion at varying rates continued through 1910.

The technological developments from the mid 1800s and the expansion westward of the United States caused growth in industry and in the ranks of the workingman. It is this rapid growth that aided the growth of the labor movement.

Union Development and Social Change

The labor movement made significant impact on the social fabric of the United States. This paper examines the impact by looking at (a) demographic changes, (b) the Negro laborer, (c) female workers, (d) the Knights of Labor, (e) the leadership of Terrence Powderly, (f) the Haymarket Incident, and (g) the American Federation of Labor.

Leach (1994) writes that during the Gilded Age, the collective life of the working class grew steadily more organized and assertive. The labor movement of the Gilded Age had its immediate roots in the 1850s. An upswing in industry and the development of the railroad expanding the reach of commerce resulted in massive increases of working men. During the 1850s union membership attained a new high of 200,000. Unions locally organized every industrial center in the North and West (Rayback, 1966, p. 103). The recession of 1857 stemmed the tide of union activity and the membership ranks dwindled as unemployment swept the country. By the end of October, 200,000 men were unemployed in the United States. Panic broke out in New York, Newark, and Philadelphia. Crowds broke into shops of food merchants and stole flour and food (Rayback, p. 105).

Increases in population during the Gilded Age contributed to the increase in workingmen. Table 1 shows the United States population for all people -- white, Negro, and foreign-born (Bureau of the Census, 1991, 91-118, p. 14). The population more than doubles in the 40 years from 1860 to 1900. While the foreign-born category represents numbers already included in the other category, it reflects the immigration impact on the United States.

Table 1

United States' Population for Caucasian, Negro and Foreign-Born from 1860 to 1900

Year	Total	Caucasian	Negro	Foreign-born
1860	31,430,000	26,922,000	4,440,000	4,000,000
1870	38,550,000	33,590,000	4,880,000	5,566,000
1880	50,100,000	43,400,000	6,580,000	6,679,000
1890	62,947,000	55,100,000	7,488,000	9,249,000
1900	74,994,000	66,808,000	8,831,000	10,331,000

Note: Data rounded to nearest 1,000. The totals don't sum by the numbers because some of the foreign-born are included in the other numbers.

The Civil War did not destroy the labor movement, but rather, put it on hold. Union activity continued during the war, but on a lower scale. Locals still held meetings and in August 1866 a small delegation of 75 people -- from locals, city federations, leagues, and nationals -- came together in Baltimore to form the National Labor Congress.

They represented 60,000 working men in 13 states. The National Labor Congress formed the National Labor Union to represent the working men. While the Congress did not form a specific platform, its objectives were few: (a) insisted that public domain should be granted to settlers only, (b) demanded the abolition of the convict labor system, (c) gave its approval to cooperative stores and workshops, and (d) announced that its main aim would be the establishment of 8 hours as a legal day's work. (Rayback, 1966, p. 116)

The National Labor Congress was a strong political action group as well. The Congress became interested in currency and in banking reform in order to facilitate the availability of capital to consumers' and to producers' cooperatives (Lieberman, 1986). It is important to note that it was through the National Labor Union, created by the National Labor Congress, that socialist thought emerged into the United States labor movement. The emergence of socialistic thought occurred in two ways. First, socialist thought came from the German immigrants who believed in the teachings of Ferdinand Lasalle and, second, through the First International Labor Organization, founded in London, 1864. The International, which did not have sections in the United States, tried to influence labor through the National Labor Union. Then, in 1870, the International created its own sections in the United States (Lieberman, p. 236).

Friedrich Sorge, a German immigrant, founded a Communist club in New York in 1857. This club, while not expressly a labor organization, announced its affiliation with the International in 1867. Five years later, Friedrich Sorge became secretary of the Central Committee of the International in the United States. Lieberman (1986) writes:

Many trade unions, however, refused to join the International in America. Internal factionalism among Marxists and Lassalleans, German Socialists, and American radicals restricted expansion of the International. American radicals, influenced by Fourier and Swedenborg, supported cooperativism instead of revolution.(p.10)

Sorge, realizing that the American working class had not yet developed a strong class feeling advised American workers to fight for the passage of laws that would allow the immediate implementation of limited social and economic reforms, such as the abolition of child labor in factories, the responsibility of

employers for injuries suffered by workers in the course of the duties, the abolition of indirect taxes and so on. Even such a nonrevolutionary program failed to attract the interest of most trade unions.

Labor and Negroes

A developmental disorder in the labor movement of the Gilded Age, ironically, was the Northern states workers' acceptance of the freed Negro laborer. Free Negroes moved north during the recession of 1866 - 1868 and accepted jobs at lower pay and accepted the accompanying lower living standards. Violent clashes broke out between Whites and Negroes in the northern industrial centers (Rayback, 1966, p. 122).

In response, the Negroes formed separate labor organizations. In late 1869, Negroes formed the National Colored Labor Union. The platform focused on the problem of discrimination which the union described as "an insult to God, and injury to us and a disgrace to humanity," and recommend the formation of cooperative Negro workshops as a remedy against the exclusion "of our other people from other workshops on account of color" (as cited Rayback, 1966, p. 123).

The National Colored Labor Union sought admittance to the National Labor Union Congress and the privilege of joining the White labor effort. Isaac Myers traveled the South in an organization effort for the National Colored Labor Union during 1870. Myers was unsuccessful. The fifth congress of the National Labor Union Congress did not accept the National Colored Labor Union, and in addition to this action, decided to form an independent political labor party. The National Colored Labor Union, in retaliation, proclaimed allegiance to the Republican party (Rayback, 1966, p. 123)

Labor and Women

In 1868 the issue of women's exclusion from union leadership came before the National Labor Union. After great debate, the Congress admitted Susan B. Anthony, Mary Kellogg Putnam, and Mary MacDonald, all representing protective unions, as delegates, and thereby endorsed the Women's Labor Movement. But relations between the National Labor Union and the feminists remained cordial for only a short time. The union challenged the credentials of Susan B. Anthony at the fourth congress, on the ground that she used the Protective Union as a strike breaking organization. When Ms. Anthony admitted the charge, justifying her action on the ground that the only way the women's rights movement could advance was to give women experience in industry, the National Labor Union rejected her credentials. The incident soured relations between the National Labor Union and suffragers. It uncovered some of the hidden opposition to women's suffrage in the labor world and it increased the enmity of those already hostile to women in industry. Although the National Labor Union continued to:

- seek delegates from bonafide women's labor organizations,
- advocate equal pay for equal work
- demand an 8 hour day for women as well as men, its suspicion of the objectives of the Women's Right Movement remained obvious.

Male support for women's trade unions fell off and by 1872 most of the women's labor organizations had disappeared (Rayback 1966, p. 121).

The Knights of Labor

Uriah Stephens, a former Baptist minister, organized the first local of the Noble and Holy Order of the Knights of Labor. Lieberman (1986) states that Stephens sought to build a secret, international labor organization whose members' solidarity would be strengthened by a religious ritual. The Knights of Labor hold importance to this paper, not because Uriah Stephens advocated socialist idealism, but because his organization followed a parallel political path with different goals. The Knights adopted a platform in 1878 that called for: (a) equal pay for equal work for both genders; (b) the payment of wages in money once a week; (c) the prohibition of work in factories, mines, and workshops by children under the age of 14; (d) the substitution of arbitration for strikes; (e) the reservation of public lands for actual settlers; and (f) the development of consumers' and producers' cooperatives. The platform called for the overthrow of the existing economic system (Lieberman, p. 239). It is important to see that while the Knights were not expressly socialistic in ideology, much of what they sought fit the same aims as the socialists. The Knights would need to be sympathetic to socialism's requests. The San Francisco Harness Makers Union, affiliated with the Knights of Labor, created a constitution in opposition to the dictates of capital. Like other Gilded Age labor groups, the Harness Makers Union believe that industrial development, unchecked by unionization, would lead to a degraded position for the wage-earner (Lipin, 1994, p. 226).

Terence V. Powderly

Powderly succeeded Stephens as General Master Workman in 1879. Powderly was against the secrecy of the organization and against the religious underpinnings of the movement. It is important to understand the change in position of the church in the workings of organized labor. Powderly was a powerful influence to labor during the Gilded Age (Weir, 1993). Wier cites the work of many labor writers in his conclusion that, while there is disagreement to Powderly's skills, Powderly was a major influence in the labor movement.

Powderly (1889) wrote about religion and the workingman:

It was no wonder that to many workingmen, religion seemed to be but a parody when they contrasted their own conditions with that of the employers. Pastors [told them that they were all] children of the same Father, they could be wondered at that some of them rebelled against the decree which had rung in their ears for centuries: "Servants, obey your masters." "We are children of the one Father," and the Father has given to one brother all the good things, while to us He has given nothing. Can it be possible that Almighty God has ordained that some of His children are but step-children from birth? Are our souls as much consequence as those of our employers? Does the Almighty think more of them than of us? Does He give all the good things to them, and place within their power to take everything that we produce without a proper equivalent; and is it essential to the salvation of our souls that we grovel forever beneath the feet of wealth? (p. 136)

These questions began to loom up before the children of toil, and then their masters sought to fasten the screws still tighter upon them by bringing to their aid the powers of press and pulpit to convince the laborer that he should aspire to the good things of earth, but should be content to live in that sphere to which it had pleased his God to call him.

Powderly was instrumental in moving the labor movement away from the far-right of the church. Under

Powderly's direction, the Knights of Labor sought many reforms. The Knights of Labor introduced in 1884 a new article to the organization's constitution that sought to shorten the hours of the work day to eight. While Powderly did not support the article, he did not actively fight it. In the same year, the Federation of Organized Trades and Labor Unions, the predecessor of the American Federation of Labor, made a similar resolution. The Federation of Organized Trades and Labor called for an eight-hour strike on May 1, 1886 (Lieberman, 1986, p. 240). Many local assemblies of the Knights of Labor voted in favor of joining the strike. Powderly sent word to all locals to avoid the strike. The eight-hour strike failed to produce any results except in Chicago where 80,000 workers stopped working (Lieberman, p240).

The Haymarket Incident

The labor activity begun on May 1, 1886 continued until May 3, when the lumber shovelers at the McCormack Reaper Plant in Chicago, who struck on February 11, 1886 for reduced hours and higher wages, held a meeting to discuss the company's demand to keep employing the strikebreakers hired during the February strike. August Spies, the editor of the *Arbeiter Zeitung*, an anarchist paper and member of the Central Labor Union (the socialist political party) spoke throughout the meeting. While the meeting started peacefully, it ended in violence between workers and strikebreakers. Police intervened in the mayhem firing into the crowd of workers. The police killed and wounded several laborers (Lieberman, 1986, p 240)

Spies instigated a revenge meeting at the Haymarket Square in Chicago on May 4 to protest the shootings. Spies prepared a panel of speakers consisting of the socialist leaders in Chicago. Part way through the meeting, several workers left the meeting. The police, anticipating trouble had 180 officers stationed near the crowd. When the police saw the crowd beginning to thin, Captain Ward of the Chicago Police approached the speaker and ordered the rest of the crowd to disperse. The speaker protested, and at that moment, someone threw a bomb into the assembled police officers. Seven officers died from the explosion (Lieberman, 1986, p. 241).

The courts tried and convicted eight men (those who were speakers or promoters of the Haymarket incident) for murder, six of which died for their involvement. Lieberman (1986) writes:

Organized labor, and particularly the Knights of Labor, went on record as rejecting any sympathy for the indicted anarchists; indeed, the Chicago organ of the Knights Proclaimed: "Let it be understood by all the world that the Knights of Labor have no affiliation, association, sympathy or respect for the band of cowardly murders, cut-throats and robbers, known as anarchists." (p. 241)

Many outside the labor movement blamed members of the Knights of Labor for the bombing and the press picked up the belief. Organized labor activity declined through the remainder of the Gilded Age.

The American Federation of Labor

1886 was an eventful year for organized labor. Several labor interests met in Columbus, Ohio, in December 1886, to discuss the future of labor. The many unions represented at the meeting agreed to form a new organization, the Federation of Labor. The new organization reported membership of about 150,000. The new organization grew in size and, 5 years later, membership stood at 250,000 (Lieberman, 1986, p. 244). Although many leaders of the American Federation of Labor were supporters of socialist thought, and participated in earlier socialist conventions, the Federation chose not to support any socialist

platforms because of the Haymarket incident (Lieberman).

Socialists, having failed to infiltrate the leadership of the American Federation of Labor, tried to develop a labor organization in opposition to the American Federation of Labor called the Socialist Trade and Labor Alliance. While the socialist effort intended to create socialist trade unions, it only succeeded in creating a wider gap between socialists and unionists (Lieberman, 1986, p 244).

Socialism

Beard (1969) states that the socialistic theory of society is almost as old as civilization. Plato described the theory in his *Republic* written in the fourth century before Christ. Thomas More wrote of it in 1516 in his *Utopia* (Beard, 1969; Schwartz, 1989). Socialism refers to the common ownership or possession of property or goods. This approach developed early on in the evolution of society. In its purest form it probably never existed outside of some early Christian communities, but as an ideal, it captivated the imagination and the support of workmen and peasants in many periods of history (Oneal & Werner, 1947).

The class antagonism and struggles of the medieval period generally took the form of a religious movement. Time after time various sects appeared, questioning the status of property and law, demanding a re-organization of society on a basis of Christian socialism, often denouncing the ruling classes and occasionally becoming a menace to the established order. Open conflict with religious and secular authority sometimes followed, accompanied by bloodshed and often by the literal extermination of a rebellious sect. The formation of socialistic societies and communities in the United States during the 1800s represent another means living out an ideology. Although religious motive was prominent in the organization of these societies, force, however, played no part in the founding of these communities. History appeared to their founders as a series of blunders of which clever men took advantage, and they believed that they could change society by organizing miniature malls to the “perfect society” (Oneal & Werner, 1947).

Robert Owen

Robert Owen, perhaps the first industrial socialist, sought to create separate communities operating on socialistic principles. His first effort at New Harmony, Indiana, failed to bring about the intended harmonious life. Owen hoped to show the benefit of his cooperative community and then be able to convert the rich to change their lifestyle (Beard, 1969; Jones, 1890/1971; Leopold, 1969).

Similar in character to the Owen cooperative scheme was a plan of Fourier, a French socialist, advocated in America by Albert Brisbane, among others, in the 1930s and 1940s. As a result of Brisbane’s work, socialistic colonies sprang up in different parts of the country, and many leading men, especially in New England called themselves socialists (Beard, 1969).

Socialism was at odds with large industrial centers. Fourier saw the impersonal urban environment as a major source of the problem. The population should prefer living in small communities based solely on the agrarian foundation and leavened with a modicum of handicraft production. In this kind of small village environment, a social and cooperative attitude, fostered by the highly important educational system, could take root and flourish. Owen, Fourier, and many others felt distressed by the contemporary glorification of the competitive ethic, which they felt was hampering a proper appreciation of the true

communality of interest among mankind (Yunker, 1979).

Conflict

Socialism considered conflict beneficial. The concepts of conflict and change impressed the socialistic philosopher Hegel. He believed that these forces motivated all reality. According to Hegel, “Conflict causes change and change causes conflict. At any point in a given sphere, temporal or otherwise, there is a thesis, namely dominate truth or reality” (as cited in Yunker, 1979, p. 80). Conflict was evident throughout the labor movement of the Gilded Age, especially at the Thompkins Square incident (Leach, 1994) and Haymarket Square (Lieberman, 1986).

Socialism entered upon a new phase in America in the late 1940s and 1950s when radical German refugees, fleeing from the persecution of the government that followed the disastrous revolution of 1848, came to the United States in large numbers. About the same time, two Germans, Marx and Engels, issued the famous “Communist Manifesto,” setting forth a new a radical view of socialism. They declared that all history was the history of class struggles and that the modern struggle between the Catholics and the laborers would end in the triumph of the latter in the establishment of a socialistic society. Marx, in contrast to Robert Owen, did not propose to persuade people to work out the goodness of their hearts toward an ideal commonwealth. He prophesied that it would come out of the class conflict and urged working men to help in the process. From the point of view of Marx, there could be no final partnership between capital and labor (Beard, 1969; Hyman, 1987; Meyer, 1989).

Another tie between socialism and labor occurred in the life of Thomas W. “Old Beeswax” Taylor, a prominent leader in the Gilded Age Labor Movement. “Old Beeswax” was a leader of the Knights of Labor and at the end of his labor career stated that the only sure way out of the antagonism between labor and capital was cooperation. He advocated the ownership of companies by employees as the only logical means of ending the conflict because workers would be their own bosses. Krause (1992) described this as “a peculiarly American way of saying that workers should own the means of production” (p. 36).

Catholic Church

The Catholic Church is predominately wage earning and between one-third and one-half of all union membership is Catholic (Seaton, 1981, p.13). The early settlers to the United States were Protestant, but Industrial Revolution in the United States brought many immigrants from Europe who were Catholic. By the beginning of the Gilded Age, Catholicism found a strong place in the labor movement. Census data on Chatholic compared to protestant membership is limited. Table 2 shows membership in Catholic and Protestant churches reported by Roman Catholic, Presbyterian, Methodist, and Southern Babtist churches in 1891 and 1900. The Bureau of Census’ Historical Statistics of the United States: Colonial Times to 1970 (1975, p. 392) did not report Catholic membership prior to 1891. Table 2 shows similar growth rates for all denominations between 1891 and 1900.

Table 2

Membership in Roman Catholic and Selected Protestant Churches

Year	Roman Catholic	Presbyterian	Methodist	Southern Baptist
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1891	8,277,000	790,000	3,511,000	1,282,000
1900	10,130,000	983,000	4,226,000	1,658,000

The Church's position on working wages stood at odds with the capitalistic view of the prevailing free-market rate of pay and the socialist, or Marxist, view of labor claiming the entire product and the ownership of capital. The Catholic social theory looked on wages as providing the amount needed for decent human life. The definition of "decent human life" was never clear in the church and allowed local priests to define it (Seaton, 1981). The Catholic social theory did not tie wages to productivity or to the investment in capital. Since the working man could generate a subsistence-level wage from a fraction of the product produced using the machinery of the industrial revolution, the Church placed no interest on any amount over subsistence. While the Church advocated wealth as stewardship, that profit making is not the basic justification of business activity, and that there are such things as fair profits, fair interest, and fair prices, the Church held that no business owner deserved a profit until a fair wage was paid. After the payment of a fair wage, the Church had little interest in the remainder of the business' largess (Seaton, 1981). The church maintained this view of capital and labor until the end of the Gilded Age when the papal paper, *Rerum Novarum*, reversed the church's position.

Rerum Novarum

Pope Leo XIII, in 1891, issued an encyclical letter entitled *Rerum Novarum* (on the condition of the working classes). In *Rerum Novarum*, Pope Leo XIII tried to "plow out" middle ground between economic liberalism and socialism. To combat socialism, Pope Leo spoke of the inviolability of the concept of private property seeing it as a natural right of all people. Gribble (1993) lists three tenements of *Rerum Novarum*: (a) the church must seek popular rather than princely support for its actions, (b) the church must work for and assist in the maintenance of industrial peace, and (c) progressive Catholics must usher in a new organization of society based upon the conception of equality (p. 18).

In *Rerum Novarum* Pope Leo intervened in the realm of labor in order to pass judgment on the evil that he saw in the status of workers in the world. The Pope wrote:

We clearly see, and on this there is general agreement, that some opportune remedy must be found quickly for the misery and wretchedness pressing so unjustly on the majority of the working-class: for the ancient workingmen's guilds were abolished in the last century, and no other protective organization took their place. Hence, by degrees it has come to pass that workingmen have been surrendered, isolated, and [made] helpless to the hard heartedness of employers and the greed of unchecked competition-- To this end must be added that the hiring of labor and the conduct of trade are concentrated in the hands of comparatively few; so that a small number of very rich men had been able to lay upon the teeming masses of labor and poor a yoke, a little better than that of slavery itself. (Rerum Novarum p.18)

Gribble (1993) states that Pope Leo felt grave concern about the labor situation that was out of control world-wide (p. 18). *Rerum Novarum* gave official Catholic sanction to worker associations and unleashed the campaign against labor by capital. Labor organizations gained strength from the

publication of *Rerum Novarum*. The high percentage of Irish and German Catholics in these organizations gave added incentive to the work of pro-labor Catholic priests such as Peter York (Gribble, p. 21).

Rerum Novarum outlines the duties of both workers and employers. First, the Pope stated that by nature the two classes of labor and capital should live in harmony. Each group needed the other; capital can not do without labor, nor labor without capital. The encyclical outlines six specific duties for workers and six for employers. Workers were to: (a) perform work which is freely and equitably agreed upon, (b) never damage property, (c) never defend another person or employer, (d) never resort to violence, (e) never engage in riot or disorder, and (f) have nothing to do with the people of evil principles. Employers were to: (a) respect workers, (b) realize that labor is credible to a person, (c) never abuse an employee for gain, (d) allow employees time for religious duties, (e) not work people beyond their capability, and (f) give employees a fair wage (Gribble, 1993, p. 23).

The last major topic of *Rerum Novarum* and its teachings on the condition of the working classes is the relationship between church and labor. The general theme of Pope Leo's encyclical on this question describes the need for the church, as the only proper solution to the sad condition of labors.

Gribble (1993) includes this quote from the document:

We affirm without hesitation that all the striving of men will be vain if they leave out the church. It is the church that insists, on the authority of the gospel, upon those teachings whereby conflict can . . . end, or rendered, at least far less bitter . . . (p. 24)

In its role of labor the church has the additional function at working to unite the rich and poor classes of society. *Rerum Novarum* states, “. . . - if Christian principles prevail, the respective classes will not only be invited in the bonds of friendship, but also in those of brotherly love.” It was certain in the Pope's mind that only by applying the Christian doctrine of interdependence and harmony between labor and capital would a better order be established in society (Gribble, 1993, p. 24).

Conclusion

The depression of the 1890s had softened the public attitude towards organized labor. Between 1897 and 1904, union membership climbed from 447,000 to 2,072,700. In the same period, the number of internationals affiliated with the American Federation of Labor rose from 58 to 120. The American Federation of Labor came on the scene in the 1880s, created by the leaders of craft unions who sought to curb invasions of their jurisdictions by the Knights of Labor (Morris, 1983). This coupled with Pope Leo's *Rerum Novarum* opened the doors for organized labor activity.

This paper set out to examine the far-left and far-right ideology that affected the labor movement in the Gilded Age. The literature shows a strong pull on the labor thought of the day both from socialism and from the church. Of note is the change in the church's position with the release of Pope Leo's *Rerum Novarum*. The literature shows socialism as an opposing force to capitalism. Socialism supports the ideal in the populace owning property and the means of production as contrasted with capitalism placing ownership in the hands of a few. Christianity, as stated in Catholic church communication, advocated the need for the care of all workers at minimum subsistence and nothing beyond. This supported the capitalists more than it supported the view of labor that sought a share in the increases of productivity.

While socialism and Catholicism seem to be at odds with each other, it is interesting that both ideologies advocated a harmonious life where all shared in the largess of society and a communal lifestyle. It is also interesting that whenever socialists attempted to build a community based on these beliefs, the community failed.

The literature shows that the labor movement, while greatly affected, by socialism and the teaching of the church, sought to isolate itself from both extreme positions. It is this dual effect and isolation that moved the labor movement through the Gilded Age, much as iron filings move by the action of two opposing magnets.

This paper posits that the emergence of the labor movement in the 1900s came about as much by the opposing forces of socialism and Catholicism as by core labor values and teachings of the post-bellum period. The literature does not show any other ideologies having as broad an effect on the labor movement as socialism and Catholicism -- the left and the right of the labor movement in the Gilded Age.

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