

EDITOR'S NOTES

The contrast between the religious matrix of preindustrial popular thought and the secularism of workers' movements has been a widely accepted premise of historical analysis, especially among interpreters of western European experience. Twenty-five years ago E. P. Thompson's *Making of the English Working Class* aroused intense controversy by arguing that religion played a decisive role in breaking working people's psychic resistance to industrial discipline, and thus helping shape those mind-sets we consider modern or urban. More recently E. J. Hobsbawm has noted that the secular, if not atheistic, character of working-class movements did not indicate the extinction of religiosity among workers, but rather challenged the historian to explain the appeal of those movements to their constituents. Despite these admonitions an emphasis on secularism has tended to limit historians' interest in working-class religious life to the study of recent migrants from the land, of the preservation of ethnic identities, and of the influence of plebeian sects on working-class organizations and struggles. This issue of *ILWCH* is devoted to enlarging our understanding of all those questions, but also to suggesting other dimensions of the role of Christian beliefs and institutions in the shaping of working-class life and movements. We hope its contents will stimulate both further research into questions posed here and future articles focusing as well on the roles of Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism, Judaism, and other beliefs in working-class experience.

Michael Jiménez has situated the flourishing of radical Christianity in Latin America in the crisis of post-World War II developmentalism. The authoritarian regimes of the 1970s linked earlier church sponsorship of structural economic change to advocacy of human rights that had been savagely repressed, while simultaneously stimulating the cultivation of Christian "base communities," designed both to empower the poor and to "reinvent" the church. The resulting quest to live as Christians within civil society reawakened in various ways among *campesinos*, workers, and middle-class activists a tradition of radical democratic politics that had flourished before the Great Depression, and later been eclipsed by Leninism.

John Bukowczyk's analysis of popular religion and the Catholic church among Polish immigrants in North America touches some similar themes (especially in its interpretation of the radical Christian democracy of the Polish National Catholic Church in the 1890s), but it focuses on quite a different problem: the syncretism of popular "superstitions" and institutional Catholicism. Bukowczyk reveals the tenacity of pagan customs, whether winked at or attacked by the clergy, and attributes the ultimate victory of institutional Catholicism to pervasive secularization of the immigrants' descendants, so that the paradoxical consequence of the church's victory was a dilution of the influence of religion itself in everyday belief and behavior.

Among Polish-Americans, unlike their relatives in the homeland, he argues, victorious Catholicism provided no ideological basis for working-class mobilization.

Anna Clark's essay also focuses on popular religious practices. Her concern, like that of E. P. Thompson, is with religious articulations of workers' personal responses to the social upheavals and political repression of early-nineteenth-century England. The question she addresses, however, is the reconstruction of gender roles, and she draws especially valuable insights from the radical sects, which found both their preachers and their parishioners among the working poor. Joanna Southcott exemplified the women preachers, whose very presence carried great symbolic freight and who portrayed male villainy and female defiance in apocalyptic rhetoric. Although antinomian preachers of universal forgiveness were all men, they too located sin and temptation amid family disruption and sexual conflict.

The role of Protestant institutions in the American Federation of Labor at the beginning of the twentieth century is the topic of Kenneth Fones-Wolf's contribution. He argues that the much-neglected intervention of Protestants in union struggles, especially during the Religion and Labor Forward movement after 1911, not only provided effective support for trade unionists who opposed socialism, but also forged an important link between the unions and middle-class progressivism. The intensity of the struggle for the minds of Protestant workers warns us against thinking that the American labor movement's religious legacy disappeared with the decline of the Knights of Labor.

The two review essays pursue themes introduced by Clark and Fones-Wolf. Carl Strikwerda surveys the literature about Catholic workers' movements in western Europe—a literature that at long last is substantial. Clarke Garrett juxtaposes early Methodist sects with late-nineteenth-century spiritualists and the persistent strength of Catholicism in various industrial regions of France. His observations lend support to the provocative argument of Strikwerda that the battle line diagonally traversing western Europe along which the Counter-Reformation had turned back Protestantism in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries provided the most favorable terrain for Catholic unionism to challenge socialism and communism in our own century. "The tradition of all the dead generations weighs like a nightmare on the brain of the living," Karl Marx wrote in 1852. By the late 1960s, however, Italian and French labor federations that had originated as Catholic unions had abandoned their confessional garb, while extracting from their own ideological roots a militant gospel of workers' empowerment through collective action.

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No Archives and Artifacts section appears in this issue of *ILWCH*. The editors wish to remind the readers that they are invited to submit reports on archives and historic artifacts that would be of interest to historians of the working class for publication in future issues of *ILWCH*.