Poverty

So taken for granted has the idea of poverty consequent and attendant on the Industrial Revolution become that the outrage and unease of conscience to which it gave rise is largely forgotten. Its immediacy and enormity as witnessed at first hand by the founder Distributists require reiteration. That the poor could not be ignored was due in part to the fact that increasingly they and the better off or well to do were around the corner from one another. The poor also were in absolute terms more numerous, their ranks swollen not least by the massive influx of destitute Irish refugees, fleeing from famine and the exactions of the largely absentee landlords who were so brutally oppressing and dispossessing them. By the mid-century census, Irish expatriates accounted for some 733,866 of the overall population, living in conditions more abject even than those of the indigenous poor, and by their competition in the labour market further driving down wages and worsening the wider unemployment, underemployment, impoverishment and destitution.

Concurrently, great wealth and conspicuous consumption had rarely been flaunted in so brazen and blatant a manner. The upshot was a growing sense of the moral untenability of insufficiency in the presence of excess. Britain’s future
Conservative Party Prime Minister Benjamin Disraeli wrote famously in his novel *Sybil* in 1845 that Britain was:

Two nations between whom there is no intercourse and no sympathy; who are as ignorant of each other’s habits, thoughts and feelings, as if they were dwellers in different zones or inhabitants of different planets; who are formed by different breeding, are fed by different food, are ordered by different manners and are not governed by the same laws\(^1\).

An 1883 report on the living conditions of the London poor – Andrew Mearns’ passionate cry for working class housing and sanitation reform in his 1883 best-selling *The Bitter Cry of Outcast London: An Inquiry into the Conditions of the ABJECT POOR* – saw the situation as being of so unambiguous a gravity and urgency as to leave no room for doubt or procrastination:

While we have been building our churches and solacing ourselves with our religion and dreaming that the millennium was coming, the poor have been growing poorer, the wretched more miserable, and the immoral more corrupt; the gulf has been daily widening which separates the lowest classes of the community from our churches and chapels, and from decency and civilisation. THIS TERRIBLE FLOOD OF SIN AND MISERY IS GAINING UPON US\(^2\).

By the eighteen-eighties, inquiry and advocacy had been forcing the depth and prevalence of poverty on the attention of an increasingly receptive and aroused community for more

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than half a century. Notable – albeit far from exhaustive - milestones along the century’s progression to an informed and passionate social consciousness and conscience were marked by the 1827 Select Committee on Emigration, the investigative journalism and social research of Henry Mayhew’s mid-century 1843 *Morning Chronicle* articles and *London Labour and the London Poor*, Mearns’1883 inquiry into working class housing and sanitation and the definitive quantification of poverty at the close of the century by Charles Booth in London and Seebohm Rowntree in York.

The privation and destitution consequent on industrialisation and urbanisation was captured and encapsulated at the outset by the 1827 Select Committee on Emigration. A representative example from the Committee’s Minutes of Evidence reads:

Mrs Hulton and myself, in visiting the poor, were asked by a person almost starving to go into a house. We there found on one side of the fire a very old man, apparently dying, on the other side a young man about eighteen with a child on his knee, whose mother had just died and been buried. We were going away from that house, when the woman said, ‘Sir you have not seen all’. We went upstairs, and, under some rags, we found another young man, the widower; and on turning down the rags, which he was unable to remove himself, we found another man who was dying, and who did die in the course of the day. I have no doubt that the family were actually starving at the time^3.

Mayhew – in the view of some ‘incomparably the greatest social investigator in the mid-century’^4 – captured the impact on the lives of the labouring poor of insufficiencies and irregularities of

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^4 Thompson 1965 Op Cit, p. 250.
work. His *London Labour and the London Poor* reads ‘There is barely sufficient work for the regular employment of half our labourers, so that only 1,500,000 are fully and constantly employed, while 1,500,000 more are employed only half their time, and the remaining 1,500,000 wholly unemployed, obtaining a day’s work occasionally by the displacement of some of the others’\(^5\). The effect was devastating. In the depression years immediately preceding the appearance of Mayhew’s *Morning Chronicle* articles - arguably Britain’s worst ever depression - more than a million of the nation’s citizens are estimated to have died from starvation consequent squarely on the unavailability of work\(^6\). A key historian’s account of the period characterises it as one where two thirds of the labouring poor would ‘at some time or other in their lives – generally in old age – become actual paupers’\(^7\).

Housing and sanitation for the poor were in turn identified as soul-destroying, destructive of self-respect and morality and prejudicial to health and well-being. Mearns’ research painted a grim picture of ‘pestilential human rookeries … where tens of thousands are crowded together amidst horrors which call to mind what we have heard of the middle passage of the slave ship’:

> To get into them you have to penetrate courts reeking with poisonous and malodorous gases arising from accumulated sewage and refuse scattered in all directions and often flowing beneath your feet; many of them into which the sun never penetrates, which are never visited by a breath of fresh air, and which rarely know the virtue

of a drop of cleansing water. ... Every room in these rotten and reeking tenements houses a family, often two. In one cellar a sanitary inspector reports finding a father, mother three children and four pigs! In another room a missionary found a man ill with small-pox, his wife just recovering from her eighth confinement, and the children running about half naked and covered with dirt. Here are seven people living in one underground kitchen, and a dead child lying in the same room. Elsewhere is a poor widow, her three children and a child who has been dead thirteen days. Her husband, who was a cabman, had shortly before committed suicide. ... 8.

What protracted testimony and advocacy had so eloquently drawn to public attention, Charles Booth now definitively quantified. Research for his *The Life and Labour of the People in London* established conclusively – and concurrent research by Seebohm Rowntree in York confirmed – that upwards of a third of the population of Britain’s major cities were subsisting on poverty line incomes not exceeding a weekly 21/- . As Booth elaborated, ‘By the word “poor” I mean to describe those who have a sufficiently regular though bare income, such as 18/- to 21/- per week for a moderate family, and by “very poor” those who from any cause fall much below this standard’9. Calculations by Rowntree demonstrated that the minimum weekly cost of maintaining a couple and three children in 1899 was 21/810. He concluded that ‘The wages paid for unskilled labour in York are insufficient to provide food, shelter and clothing adequate to maintain a family of moderate size in a state of bare physical efficiency’11. As seen in summary in a

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notable study of the period, ‘One third of the nation, it appeared, was being starved by the other two-thirds’12.

Nor was it in moral or humanitarian terms alone that the high cost of poverty was perceived. As some had begun to appreciate, the all but total exclusion of the poor from other than minimal education, vocational training or even physical fitness was effectively a forfeiting by Britain of human capital that competitor nations such as Germany increasingly were accessing to greater effect.

In the eighteen-eighties, the height of public school boys aged eleven to twelve was on average five inches greater than of their industrial school counterparts13. Two out of three of the 12,000 volunteers for service against the Boers examined in Manchester had to be rejected as unfit, and fewer than one in ten was classified as fully fit.14 Ten per cent of the young men examined for compulsory service under the conspicuously relaxed standards of 1917 were totally unfit for service, 41.5 per cent had ‘marked disabilities’ and 22 per cent had ‘partial disabilities’. In all, only marginally more than a third of the potential conscripts were in sufficiently sound physical condition to be acceptable15. Prejudice to the national interest on so gross a scale could not but give rise to alarm, even in those quarters where compassion for the poor was least prevalent.

13 Hobsbawm 1968 Op Cit, p. 137.
15 Hobsbawm 1968 Op Cit, p. 137.
An Interventionist Consensus

The upshot was the emergence of a broadly interventionist consensus on the necessity – albeit if less the means - for reform. From modest beginnings, the new awakening of conscience rapidly assumed major proportions. As the US poverty studies scholar, Gertrude Himmelfarb, has noted:

In a massive surge of social consciousness, respectable middle-class people pronounced themselves socialists, and socialist organizations vied for membership and recognition with each other and with a multitude of other causes and societies – land reform leagues, charitable associations, settlement houses, model building projects, children’s homes, missions to the poor.16

What the often quoted declaration that ‘We are all socialists now’ by Sir William Harcourt – briefly the Leader of the Liberal Party and a onetime Liberal Chancellor of the Exchequer – signalled was in no sense a mass conversion across the political spectrum to socialist remedies for the elimination or alleviation of poverty, but an acknowledgement of the indefensibility of inaction with which even the Conservative Party Leader of the day, Lord Salisbury, also now concurred.17

To name only the more prominent socialist bodies, the Anglican Guild of St Matthew was formed in 1877, as were the Progressive Association and the Democratic Federation – later

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17 As witness Salisbury’s acknowledgement of the housing and sanitation crisis in his seminal article ‘Labourer’ and Artisans’ Dwellings’ in The National Review No 9, November, 1883, and his subsequent establishing of the 1884–85 Royal Commission on the Housing of the Working Classes, on which Manning served to such notable effect as to make him in the view of the Chairman, Sir Charles Dilke, its ‘greatest revolutionist’.
the Social-Democratic Federation – in 1881, the Land Nationalisation Society in 1882, the Land Reform Union – later the English Land Restoration League – in 1883, the Fellowship of the New Life, the Fabian Society and the Socialist League in 1884, the Christian Socialist Society in 1886, the Christian Social Union in 1889, the Independent Labour Party in 1893, the Christian Socialist League in 1894 and the Church Socialist League in 1906. A wide diversity of opinion was reflected, ranging from the overt Marxism of the Social-Democratic Federation through the gradualist statism of the Fabians to the communitarian, co-operativist and ultimately Guild Socialist doctrines with which Distributism was in key respects to have much in common.

The proliferation of socialist journals was no less remarkable. Harry Champion – a general’s son who was educated at Marlborough and Sandhurst and saw military service in India prior to becoming a leader of the land reform and single tax movements, perhaps the outstanding socialist agitator and organiser of the eighteen-eighties and ultimately an expatriate activist in Australia\(^\text{18}\) – was editor successively of *The Christian Socialist*, *Today*, *Common Sense* and *The Labour Elector*, as was the Reverend Stewart Headlam of *The Church Reformer*, H.M. Hyndman of *Justice*, William Morris and Belfort Bax of *Commonweal*, Charlotte Wilson of *Freedom*, Annie Besant of *Our Corner*, Thomas Bolam of *The Practical Socialist*, which preceded the exceptionally long-lived *Fabian News*, Robert Blatchford of *The Clarion* and A.R. Orage and Holbrook Jackson of *The New Age*.

It was unsurprising that the names of so high a proportion of the new socialist bodies should have included ‘Church’ or

\(^{18}\) For Champion, see Barnes J. 2006, *Socialist Champion: Portrait of the Gentleman as Crusader*, Melbourne, Australian Scholarly Publishing Pty Ltd.
‘Christian’. The new consciousness of the untenability of want in the midst of plenty stemmed overwhelmingly from an extension into the secular sphere of passions and energies previously reserved for religion. Its adherents mostly were motivated by their Christian faiths and retained their predominantly Anglican or non-conformist denominational affiliations and continuities. Clergymen comprised a higher proportion of the membership of nascent Fabian Society than any other occupational category. When the prominent Independent Labour Party activist Victor Grayson successfully contested Colne Valley as an independent socialist candidate at the 1906 general elections there were eleven clergymen, six Anglicans and five nonconformists, working beside him to secure his return 19.

The Anglican Guild of St Matthew was emblematic of them all. Its members were heirs to the producer co-operativism of the Society for Promoting Working Men’s Associations which the founder generation of Christian Socialists – the Reverend Frederick Maurice and the Reverend Charles Kingsley prominent among them – had launched in mid-century. Maurice and Kingsley in part anticipated Distributism, in that the society’s objectives envisaged the seeding of small ‘Working Associations’ – worker co-operatives – that were intended to become the basis for a new and explicitly Christian social order.

The founder and long-time Warden of the Guild, the Reverend Stewart Headlam, is seen by Kingsley’s biographer as being ‘a fine recruit, receptive to the outlook of the old-time Christian Socialists and full of energy’ 20. Further outspoken socialists among the Anglican clergymen of the day included – to name

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only the more conspicuous - the future Bishop of Oxford, Charles Gore, the future Canon at St. Paul's Cathedral and Regius Professor of Divinity at Oxford University, Henry Scott Holland, the future Archbishop of Canterbury, William Temple, the future ‘Red Dean of Canterbury’, Hewlett Johnson, the ‘Red Priest of Thaxted’ Conrad Noel, the Rev. Percy Dearmer who edited the *English Hymnal*, and the turbulent Rev. Charles Marson who was briefly a curate in Adelaide and founded Australia’s first Fabian Society in 1891\(^\text{21}\).

**Manning**

Catholics and the Catholic Church were relative latecomers to the struggle against poverty. The *recusant* old Catholic families who had maintained their traditional loyalties to the Church throughout the centuries of its persecution were members predominantly of a country-keeping squirearchy, with minimal exposure to the urban poor or sympathy for their predicament. The Irish priests who welcomed or accompanied their refugee parishioners to England were pre-occupied to the point of exhaustion with ministering to the spiritual needs of their explosively expanding congregations. The focus of the former High Church Anglicans – in the view of some ‘High Church malcontents’\(^\text{22}\) – who had followed John Henry Newman into the Church of Rome likewise was squarely on otherworldly rather than material concerns. Catholics were not necessarily immune to the conventional wisdom that, as the economic liberals of the day argued, poverty was the fault of the shiftlessness and other personal defects of the poor, or, as in the view of Malthus, to feed the poor was simply to increase their number, and thereby could not but be self-defeating.


Shortly before his death in 1892, Newman’s fellow convert, Manning, mourned an extensive inventory of omissions and inattention on the part of his co-religionists. It reads:

The abolition of the slave and of slavery, and the persevering protests of the Anti-Slavery Society were cases in point, but, as far as I know, not a Catholic name shared in this. The whole temperance movement did not gain widespread Catholic support and it was a Quaker that made Father Mathew a total abstainer. The Act of Parliament to protect animals from cruelty was carried by a non-Catholic Irishman, as was the Anti-Vivisection Act. Both are derided, to my knowledge, among Catholics. The Acts to protect children from cruelty were the work of Dissenters. On these societies there is hardly a Catholic name. On the last, mine was for long the only one. So again, the uprising against the horrible depravity which destroys young girls – multitudes of ours – was literally denounced by Catholics – not one came forward. If it was ill done, why did nobody try to mend it? I might go on. There are endless works for the protection of shop assistants, over-worked railway and tram men, women and children ground down by sweaters, and driven by starvation into the streets. Not one of the works in their behalf was started by us, hardly a Catholic name is to be found in their reports. Surely we are in the Sacristy?23.

It was to Manning that the task of bringing the Church to a passionate sympathy and positive engagement with the poor had largely fallen. He was born to wealthy parents in 1808, raised in the Anglican Church and educated at Harrow and

Oxford. His close friends at Oxford included the future Prime Minister, W.E. Gladstone. Manning’s father – a prominent sugar merchant and one-time governor of the Bank of England, Lord Mayor of London and MP for Eversham – failed in business in 1831, while Manning was still at university. Manning is reported as having ‘had the horrifying experience of watching his father handing over his gold watch, the symbolic last possession of the bankrupt’\textsuperscript{24}. It may be that the experience sensitised him to the essential fragility, transience and vulnerability of economic security and well-being that the poor also experienced, albeit in so exponentially greater a degree.

The family’s financial embarrassment obliged Manning to consider briefly giving up becoming an Anglican clergyman, as had originally been his intention, in favour of a career in politics. Contemporaries saw him as having the makings of a Prime Minister, and Gladstone those of an Archbishop of Canterbury. In the event, faith prevailed over politics. Having been ordained as a deacon in 1832, he was appointed to a curacy at Lavington in West Sussex in January 1833, and succeeded his then future father-in-law, the Reverend John Sargeant as rector there on Sargeant’s sudden death four months later\textsuperscript{25}.

At the time of his conversion to Catholicism in 1851, he was Archdeacon of Chichester, and a man marked out for preferment to the highest offices of the Established Church. It was not to be. Following Cardinal Wiseman’s reception of him into the Catholic Church, and his ordination as a priest three months later, he was sent to study at the Academia


\textsuperscript{25} On 7 November 1883, Manning married Caroline Sargeant, who died childless on 24 July 1837, long before his admission to the Catholic Church and ordination to the Catholic priesthood.
Ecclesiastica in Rome, and, on his return, became Wiseman’s personal assistant. He was appointed provost of the Westminster Chapter in 1857, Archbishop of Westminster in succession to Wiseman following Wiseman’s death in 1865, and a Cardinal in 1875.

As a Catholic, Manning was an ultra-montane conservative in matters of faith, who served as the majority whip for the adoption of the doctrine of papal infallibility at the First Vatican Council in 1870. He was also a social and political radical, whose passionate concern for the poor by far pre-dated his admission to the Church or the high office to which it elevated him. Neither attribute was contradictory of the other. In the view of the US Distributism and Social Catholicism studies scholar Dermott Quinn:

Manning’s ultramontanism and his Social Catholicism were not sequential but synchronous. He did not ‘become’ a friend of the poor, any more than he ceased being a friend of the pope. It was Manning’s achievement to combine the two into an integrated Catholic identity.

As a UK scholar’s assessment has concluded:

For him nothing, no matter how trivial or weighty, could be divested of its theological significance. His Christianity extended to and embraced all states and conditions of human nature and existence. The remedy for social evil

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26 Ultramontane ‗literally ‗beyond the mountains‘‘ – opinion within the Church upheld increasing Roman control and centralisation in policy and the appointment of bishops, as against those seeking to be wholly or in part free from papal direction. See Duncan B. 1991, ‘The Church’s Social Teachings From ‗Rerum Novarum‘ to 1931‘, North Blackburn (Vic), Collins Dove, pp 7-8.

was an application into practice of the principles of Christianity\textsuperscript{28}.

His empathy and sympathy for the poor were from the start a work in progress, dating from his seventeen-year incumbency at Lavington, and constantly increasing in their breadth, depth and passion throughout the subsequent stages of his life and ecclesiastic advancement. Of his initial exposure to rural poverty at Lavington, he wrote movingly in 1847:

By the census it would appear that the average number in a family is five persons. Therefore our labouring poor were living, on an average of five persons, the father, mother and three children, on ten shillings a week. But this is the weekly average of only one person in a moderate household ... the father who works has a pound of pork in the week, it may be. The wives and children live on vegetables and bread, they keep a perpetual Lent ... We need no famines afar off to work on our charity\textsuperscript{29}.

Championing the cause of the poor in Ireland in a letter to Lord Grey in 1868, he denounced the so-called Irish Land Question as ‘a somewhat heartless euphemism’ for ‘hunger, thirst, nakedness, notice to quit, labour spent in vain, the toil of years seized upon, the breaking up of homes; the miseries, sickness, deaths of parents, children, wives; the despair and wildness of the poor when legal force, like a sharp harrow, goes over the most sensitive and vital rights of mankind’\textsuperscript{30}. Rejecting the violence to which many among his Irish co-religionists were in

\textsuperscript{28} McClelland 1962 Op Cit, p 22
desperation turning, he was fortified in a growing commitment to gradualist reform by the example of the Irish Land Acts whose culmination he did not live to witness, but which between 1870 and 1903 largely freed Irish smallholder farmers from the exactions of landlordism, by enabling them to secure title to their land\textsuperscript{31}.

A letter that he addressed to Gladstone in 1872 exemplifies the increasingly practical and programmatic character of his concern and also his increasing impatience. It reads:

Why cannot you do these things for the labourer? 1. Prohibit the labour of children under a certain age. 2. Compel payment of wages in money. 3. Regulate the number of dwellings according to the population of parishes, unions, counties or what you will: and prescribe the sanitary and other conditions necessary to the moral life of men by building acts. 4. Establish tribunals of arbitration in counties for questions between labour and land; thereby creating a public opinion which will control the arbitrary acts and wills of employers of the poor\textsuperscript{32}.

In a lecture to the Leeds Mechanics Institute in 1874 he stated:

If the peace, the purity of homes, the education of children, the duties of wives and mothers, the duties of husbands and fathers, be written in the natural law of mankind, and if these things are sacred beyond anything that can be sold in the market – then, I say, if the hours


\textsuperscript{32} Gladstone Papers, British Library, Manning to Gladstone, 26 December, 1872. As quoted in Leslie1921, Op Cit, p. 349.
of labour resulting from the unregulated sale of man’s strength and skill shall lead to the destruction of domestic life, to the neglect of children, to turning wives and mothers into living machines, and husbands into ... creatures of burden ... who rise up before the sun, and come back when it is set, wearied and able only to take food and to lie down to rest – the domestic life of men exists no longer, and we dare not go on in this path. ... The accumulation of wealth in the land, the piling up of wealth like mountains, in the possession of classes or of individuals, cannot go on, if these moral conditions of our people are not healed. No commonwealth can rest on such foundations.\footnote{Manning H.E. 1874, ‘The Dignity and Rights of Labour: A lecture delivered at the Mechanics’ Institution, Leeds, on 2 January, 1874’, in Manning H.E. 1888, Miscellanies, (3 Volumes), London, Burns and Oates, Vol. II, pp 94-97.}

And again in a Pastoral Letter in1880:

The inequalities of our social state, and the chasms which separate classes, the abrupt and harsh changes of soft and suffering lots, unless they are redressed by humility and charity, sympathy and self-denial, are dangerous to society and to our spiritual welfare. In London all these inequalities and evils are before us.\footnote{Manning H.E. 1880, Lenten Pastoral Letter, (Westminster Diocesan Archives). As quoted in McClelland V.A. 1992, ‘Manning’s Work for Social Justice’ in The Chesterton Review, Vol XVIII No 4, November 1992, p. 532.}

His advocacy on behalf of the poor was at all times and stages matched by a comparable hands-on activism and preparedness to be stand up and be counted. As a key Newman biographer, Sheridan Gilley, has noted:
Well in advance of any Anglican bishop, he stepped forward to bless the Nonconformist, Joseph Arch, and his Agricultural Labourers’ Union. He publicly defended ‘The Dignity and Rights of Labour’. To the scandal of the respectable, including some of his own priests, he endorsed the journalist W.T. Stead’s campaign against the horrors of the white slave trade in young girls, christened in Apocalyptic fashion, ‘the maiden tribute of modern Babylon’; and, when Stead was goaled, he sent him his blessing. He moved the Mansion House against the pogroms against Russian Jews, and extolled General Booth of the Salvation Army. He combined with Cardinal Gibbons of Baltimore to save the Knights of Labour from ecclesiastical censure. He wrote witheringly of English cruelty to children. He invited the land reformer, Henry George, and the trade union leaders, Tom Mann and Ben Tillett, into the sacred precincts of Archbishop’s House. He resolved the London Dock strike of 1899. With the reservation that he did not wish to lose the Irish Catholic members of the House of Commons, he approved Home Rule for Ireland. He demanded a just price for goods and a just wage for labour.

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35 Gilley S. 1992, ‘Manning and Chesterton’, in The Chesterton Review, vol. XVIII, No 4, November, 1992, p. 491. Arch’s nascent National Agricultural Labourers’ Union was effectively brought to its knees when an eighteen-week lockout in Suffolk cost it nearly £25,000 and caused many of the 2400 of its members involved to emigrate or move to other parts of England. Stead – a crusading journalist – challenged the practice of trafficking in children for prostitution by openly committing the offence and writing an article, ‘The Maiden Tribute of Modern Babylon’, which documented and denounced it. His three-month prison sentence was instrumental in bringing about the Criminal Amendment Act of 1885. Efforts by the Catholic Archbishop of New York, Patrick Corrigan, to ban the Knights of Labour – a largely mutualist body of working people with a strong commitment to establishing co-operatives as a means of bringing about a more equitable social order – on the grounds of their socialist and Georgist sympathies were frustrated when Manning and Cardinal Gibbons of Baltimore convinced Leo XIII that to do so would be unjust and counter-productive. Gibbons and Manning were less successful in dissuading Leo from having George’s works placed in the Index of Forbidden Books, although it was decided that the decision should be kept secret.
And there was more. Manning’s 1874 Mechanics Institute lecture in Leeds – titled ‘The Dignity and Rights of Labour’ – claimed the same rights for labour as for property. The Lecture reads:

I claim for labour the rights of property. There is no personal property so strictly one’s own. The strength and skill that are in a man are as much his own as his life-blood; and that skill and strength which he has as his personal property no man can control. ... He can buy with it, and he can sell it. He can exchange it. He can set a price upon it. ... I claim for labour (and the skill which is always acquired by labour) the rights of capital. It is capital in the truest sense. ... Whatever rights. then, capital possesses, labour possesses.\(^{36}\)

It followed in Manning’s view that every labourer had a right to work or not to work, to determine for whom he would work, and where he would work, and to specify the wages upon which he could subsist. Labour collectively had a right not only to its own freedom, but to protect itself. He could conceive ‘nothing more entirely in accordance with natural right and with the higher jurisprudence, than that those who have a common interest should unite together for the protection of that interest’\(^{37}\). The right to strike was on this basis inviolate.

In the aftermath of the major industrial disputes in the late 1880s, he foreshadowed a new order of workplace relations, expressive of the same profit sharing and perhaps industrial democracy that Distributism was also shortly to adopt. He wrote:

\(^{36}\) Manning 1874 Op Cit, pp 81-85.

\(^{37}\) Manning 1874 Op Cit, pp 87-88.
I have been thinking over the strike matters, and the more I think the more I am on the side of Labour. Labour and skill are Capital as much as gold and silver. Gold and silver are dependent on Labour and skill, but Labour and skill are independent *in limine*. The union of the two Capitals demands participation in the product. Wages are a minimised money representation of shares in product – that is, in profits. Silvertown gives 15 per cent to its shareholders and denies halfpence and farthings to its workers. This is more or less the state of the market at large\(^3\).

Following representations from an 1887 London Co-operative Clothing Manufacturing Co deputation and advice from Lord Ripon who had linked Disraeli’s ‘Young England’ thrust for social reform in the 1840s with co-operatives and the co-operative movement, he embraced the movement and offered it every possible support\(^3\). In advance of most, he anticipated the impact of poverty on the national interest that was to loom increasingly in the minds of those whose sense of Empire and manifest Imperial destiny he applauded and shared. A prescient passage in 1890 reads:

> It is certain that the commercial prosperity of the country depends upon the manual skill and mental development of our workmen. And though our great productive supremacy has in times past been attained without systematic technical instruction, we can hardly hope to retain it in competition with foreign countries which are now systematically instructing their youth in the principles


and practices of arts and manufactures. It is of absolute necessity that we keep pace with them in this also\textsuperscript{40}.

Seminally for Distributism, Manning’s callers at Archbishop’s House included the twenty-year old Hilaire Belloc. The inspiration and instruction that energised and guided Belloc in his development of Distributism were gained at Manning’s feet. As he recalled in later life:

It was my custom during my first days in London, as a very young man, before I went to Oxford, to call upon the Cardinal as regularly as he would receive me; and during those brief interviews I heard from him many things which I have had later occasion to test by the experience of human life. I was, it may be said, too young to judge things so deep as sanctity and wisdom; but, on the other hand, youth has vision, especially on elemental things; and Manning did seem to me (and still seems to me) much the greatest Englishman of his time\textsuperscript{41}.

An evocative assessment of the significance of their meetings by Belloc’s early biographer, Robert Speaigh reads:

The Cardinal’s positive character and practical ability, his outspoken sympathy for the poor, his encouragement of Christian democracy, his crusade for social as well as political regeneration, met and influenced a mind stirred by radical theories of government. ... If he spoke of these things to Belloc, they must have sounded a tocsin to the boy’s adventurous spirit. How challenging and turbulent they sounded! How remote from the stuffy, conventional

\textsuperscript{40} Manning H.E. 1890, as quoted in Leslie 1921 Op Cit, p. 350.
round of the English Catholic families, so quiet and
tenacious in their country-houses, so well-intentioned and
so unaware!  

Advocacy and hands-on activity in the interests of the poor
apart, Manning was also alert to the need for definition of a
distinctive Social Catholicism. It was his good fortune in this
respect to be able to tap into social thought in Catholic circles
in Europe that was already well advanced. Like Socialism, Social
Catholicism initially assumed forms that differed radically from
one another. Disparate responses to poverty were forthcoming
from reformers such as in France Félicité de Lamennais (1782-
1854), Henri Dominique Lacordaire (1802-1861), Charles
Montalembert (1810-1870), Frederic Ozanam (1813-1853),
Léon Harmel (1829-1915), René de la Tour du Pin (1834-
1925) and Albert de Mun (1841-1914), in Germany
Archbishop Wilhelm von Ketteler (1811-1877) and Karl von
Vogelsang (1818-1890) and in Italy Guiseppe Toniolo (1845-
1918).

De Lamennais, Lacordaire and Montalembert advocated that,
far from the Church standing aside from politics, it should be
actively interventionist on behalf of the poor and in defence of
democracy. Their journal L’Avenir adopted as its masthead
‘God and Liberty’. The projects and propositions of later
reformers ranged from reconciliation of the poor to their
station in life subject only to such alleviation as charity and
alms-giving might provide, through the paternalistic and even
authoritarian vision of von Vogelsang’s ‘social kingdom’ and de
Mun and La Tour du Pin’s Working Men’s Clubs to the
authentically co-determinist industrial advisory councils,
worker-directed mutualist welfare bodies and unions made up
exclusively of worker members as favoured by the industrialist

Harmel. Consistent with Harmel’s advocacy, his factory at Val-des-Bois – seen by some as ‘a model of Catholic industrial co-operation’43 – featured, in addition to its industrial advisory council, wage supplements for large families, medical care, a savings bank and a co-operative society.

The times were ripe for radicalisation. De Mun and La Tour du Pin fought in the 1870 Franco-Prussian War, were interned as prisoners-of-war at Aix-la-Chapelle and subsequently were appointed by the military governor of Paris to inquire into the causes of the 1871 Paris Commune revolt. The social conditions that their inquiry uncovered and their first-hand observation of the brutality of the suppression of the Communards convinced them that it was to the excesses and arrogance of the wealthy and powerful that the insurrection had primarily been due. De Mun, released from his captivity and stationed back at Versailles where the Communards were being imprisoned and executed, ‘never forgot how one of them dying, cursed the defenders of order – “Les insurgés, c’est vous” (“You are the rebels”)’44.

Manning corresponded with Vogelsang, de Mun, von Ketteler, von Ketteler’s Swiss friend and follower Gaspard Descurtins and the like-minded Cardinals Mermillod in Geneva and Capecelatro in Capua45. He would have applauded Harmel’s example, but von Ketteler may well have had the greater influence on his thought. Von Ketteler – in the view of some, deserving of ‘the undying honour of having met the manifesto of the Communists with a program of Christian social form that stands

44 McManners J. 1972, Church and State in France 1870-1914, New York, Harper and Rowe, p 81, as quoted in Duncan 1991 Op Cit, p. 28. In all, some 28,000 Communards were executed, after having themselves shot seventy-four hostages including the Archbishop of Paris and twenty-three priests.
45 McClelland 1962 Op Cit, p. 149
unsurpassed to this day’ – was like Manning an outspoken advocate of trade unions, producer co-operatives and other mutualist bodies. His appointment as Bishop of Mainz in 1850 reflected the high standing that he enjoyed both locally and in Rome, for all that conservative Catholics on occasion denounced his sermons as ‘socialistic-communistic impeachments’.

Like Manning, von Ketteler arrived over time at acceptance of a role for the state in the bringing about of social reforms – notable among them higher wages, reduced working hours, Sunday as a day of rest and the prohibition of women and children from working in factories - which many among their co-religionists would have regarded as excessive. He was at one with Manning in his passionate conviction that ‘The new mission of Christianity is to free the world from this new slavery: pauperism’. He improved on the example of Manning’s membership of Sir Richard Cross’ Royal Commission on the Working of the Elementary Education Acts and the Sir Charles Dilke’s Royal Commission on the Housing of the Working Classes, through his active part in the foundation of Ludwig Windthorst’s Catholic Centre Party and drafting of the party’s policy, and his election as a member of the inaugural Reichstag in 1870, albeit in circumstances where discomfort consequent on incompatibilities between his role as a bishop and involvement in political disputes resulted in his resignation less than a year later. His contribution to Social Catholicism was gratefully recognised in a handsome reference to him by Pope Leo XIII as ‘my great predecessor’.

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47 Quoted in Duncan 1991 Op Cit, p. 32.
49 Quoted in Kohler 1993 Op Cit, p. 35.
The Union of Fribourg – a group of adherents of Social Catholicism from different countries convened by Descurtins and meeting at Fribourg in Switzerland between 1885 and 1891 – in turn drafted codes of social principles, declaring of them as it did: ‘The Church should recall the too-forgotten rules of her doctrine on the nature of property, the use of goods, and the respect due to the most precious of all goods, human life in the person of the poor’\(^{50}\). Cardinal Mermillod warned Leo in 1889 that ‘Labour is treated as a mere commodity, the existence of the workers is at the mercy of the free play of material forces and the workers are reduced to a state that recalls pagan slavery’\(^{51}\).

When the London dockworkers under the leadership of Ben Tillett went on strike later the same year for an increase in their hourly wage from 5d to 6d, Manning – described by Tillett in later life as ‘the kindliest and greatest man it has been my good fortune to meet’\(^{52}\) – mediated an acceptance of the increase between their leaders and the employers on terms that a meeting of the strike committee subsequently repudiated. Faced with a further deterioration in the long-running dispute which might well have resulted in widespread violence, he then arranged to speak personally at a subsequent committee meeting, with the effect that, as reported by one of those present, ‘his eloquence carried the day; and when the meeting broke up, the strike was over’\(^{53}\).

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\(^{50}\) Council of Fribourg 1886, Report to Pope Leo XIII, as quoted in Duncan 1991Op Cit, p. 54,


The gratitude of the embattled workers and their allies, for a settlement that yielded them their just demand for ‘the dockers’ tanner’, was expressed in an address that reads:

When we remember how your Eminence, unasked and unsolicited, under the weight of four score years and two, came forward to mediate between masters and men; when we remember your prudent and wise counsels not to let any heat or passion or unreasonable view of the situation beguile us or lead us away from a fair point of view to our employers and ourselves; and when in fine we recall your venerable figure in our midst for over four hours in Wade Street School, listening to our complaints and giving us advice in our doubts and difficulties, we seem to see a father in the midst of a loving and well-loved family, rather than the ordinary mediator in the thick of a trade dispute⁵⁴.

Manning subsequently told Archbishop William J. Walsh in Dublin: ‘We have been under the despotism of capital. The union of labourers is their only shelter’⁵⁵. A letter he sent to a friend in 1890 reads:

A clergyman said last week: The Dockers’ Strike succeeded because the police did not do their duty; the Gas Strike has failed because the police did their duty. The freedom of contract is maintained by the truncheon. There is no justice, mercy, or compassion in the Plutocracy. There is my creed⁵⁶.

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⁵⁴ As quoted in Hinsley 1936, Op Cit, p 624.
⁵⁵ Manning Papers, Manning to Walsh 1 March 1890, as quoted in Leslie 1921 Op Cit, p. 376.
⁵⁶ Manning Papers, Manning to Buxton 21 January 1890, as quoted in Leslie 1921 Op Cit, p 376.
Manning – now in the perhaps hyperbolic and overly Anglo-centric view of a recent biographer ‘the doyen of the Catholic social movement that flourished in France under the leadership of Count Alfred de Mun and Léon Harmel’ and even the ‘leading social guru of European Catholics’57 – affirmed in a letter to Bishop Doutreloux’s Liège Congress in 1890, that harmonious relations between employers and employees would never be ‘safely and solidly secured until the just and due proportion between profits and wages shall have been fixed, recognised, laid down, and publicly known to govern all free contracts between capital and labour’58. In the ensuing ‘veritable battle between the partisans and the opponents of the Cardinal on the subject of the living wage’, Manning’s correspondents de Mun, von Vogelsang and Descurtins sided with him, as did also their fellow Social Catholicists Père Pascal, Mgr Korum and Canon Winterer59.

Manning’s career as a social reformer and friend of the poor now climaxed and fully came into its own with the publication of Leo XIII’s great social encyclical letter Rerum Novarum in 1891. Authorities differ as to whether Manning’s contribution was simply to instigate the encyclical by sheer force of advocacy and example, or also to involve himself actively in its preparation60. Leo wrote to Manning in January 1891 that he

58 Manning H.E. Message to the Congress of Liège, 2 September 1890. As quoted in Gray 1985 Op Cit, p. 304. Manning was to have attended the Congress at the invitation of Liège’s Bishop, Mgr Doutreloux, but declined consequent on his advanced age and instead sent his message, advocating, among other things, Sunday rest, freedom of association and arbitration, the limiting of children’s and women’s labour and an eight-hour day,
was ‘engaged in the consideration of ... the care which touches you as to the condition of the working-men’. A letter to Manning from Walsh in Rome in March 1891 reported that ‘The Holy Father ... spoke at great length to me about the coming Encyclical ... I think I can trace your Eminence’s Influence in this as in many other things that I have noted here during this visit’. Bishop Hedley’s eulogy for Manning at his funeral in 1892 noted that the encyclical ‘owes something, beyond all doubt, to the counsels of Cardinal Manning’. Manning’s 1921 biographer, Shane Leslie, sees the encyclical as having shown signs of being based on the Manning’s Liège Congress letter and demonstrating parallels between their respective wordings. A 1962 study of Manning’s public life and significance concurs that Leo had read Manning’s Liège letter and been influenced by it. By the account of Cardinal Hinsley – a successor of Manning as Archbishop of Westminster, and thereby well-placed to know – ‘Pope Leo declared that one of his most famous encyclicals on the social question, *Rerum Novarum: On the Condition of Labour*, was really Manning’s’. What is beyond doubt is that the encyclical was effectively the bestowal by Leo of his official blessing on such key elements of Manning’s vision as affirmation of the right to productive property and its distribution on as wide a basis as possible, parity of esteem for labour and capital, condemnation of employers who exploited their workers, approval of trade

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61 Manning Papers, Leo XIII to Manning 17 January 1891, as quoted in McClelland 1962 Op Cit, p. 159.
62 Manning Papers, Walsh to Manning 24 March 1891, as quoted in McClelland 1962 Op Cit, p. 159.
63 Hedley J.C. 1892, as quoted in McClelland 1962 Op Cit, p. 160.
64 Leslie 1921 Op Cit, p. 380.
65 McClelland 1962 Op Cit, p. 159.
unions, protection of the right to strike, self-help through co-operatives and other mutualist bodies and denunciation of socialism in its Marxist or more extreme statist forms.

And *Rerum Novarum*’s foreshadowing of the doctrine of subsidiarity was shortly to endow a nascent Distributism with its guiding principle of ‘bottom-up’ development, and become a litmus test for the authenticity and viability of Distributist institutions and advocacy. With the encyclical’s addition of subsidiarity to the elements Manning had already embraced, the intellectual seedbed from which Distributism would stem were at last squarely in place.

Manning – assisted by Walsh – was delegated with responsibility for the encyclical’s translation into English. They were of the same mind as to the encyclical’s significance. Walsh had previously championed arbitration as a means of resolving both smallholder tenancy and industrial disputes, along with new measures for the housing of the working classes and the provision of open spaces and recreational grounds. As with Manning in the Dock Strike, his interventions in the 1890 Builders Labourers Strike and Great Southern Railway Strike were instrumental in securing arbitrated settlements favourable to the workers. His biographer concludes that he and Manning:

... shared the encyclical’s insistence that a chief duty of rulers was ‘to provide equally for every section of the community by acting with unshakeable impartiality towards all’, and the papal document might have almost had Walsh’s abiding conviction in mind when it insisted that ‘No one may outrage with impunity that human dignity which God himself treats with great reverence ... Man himself can never renounce his right to be treated
according to his nature or surrender himself to any form of slavery of spirit’.

Manning’s aim was to ensure that the encyclical’s message was fully understood and accepted by English Catholics, not least by lending the interpretation of it a distinctively English flavour. He was concerned that the encyclical’s condemnation of continental socialism in its revolutionary, Marxist and more extreme statist forms should not be misread as also referring to the distinctively mixed economy or mutualist models of socialism to which most British socialists so resolutely adhered. The explicit affirmation of the right to strike that he ascribed to the encyclical may have exceeded its authors’ intentions.

The task was undertaken with his customary vigour and disregard for opposition or obstacles. The account of the encyclical that he contributed to The Dublin Review in July, 1891, gave eloquent expression to its condemnation of asymmetrical workplace power and destitution in the presence of abundance:

By degrees, it has come to pass that working-men have been given over, isolated and defenceless, to the callousness of employers and the greed of unrestrained competition. The evil has been increased by rapacious usury, which though more than once condemned by the

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68 McEntree 1927 Op Cit, p 232 quotes a 1914 study of the opinions of eminent theologians, both English and Continental by Fr Plater as confirming that “historically Pius and Leo had intended to condemn only the irreligious radical Socialism rampant in their day, “that universal and absolute Socialist communism which seeks to suppress all private property as being wrong or at least anti-social in itself”’.
69 See for example Leslie 1921 Op Cit, p. 380: ‘Manning, for instance, insisted on using the word “strike” and not a euphemism’.
Church, is nevertheless, under a different form, but with the same guilt, still practised by avaricious and grasping men; and to this must be added the custom of working by contract; and the concentration of so many branches of trade in the hands of a few individuals, so that a very few rich men may have been able to lay upon the masses a yoke little better than slavery itself.

It concluded ‘For a century the Civil Powers in almost all the Christian world have been separating themselves from the Church. ... And now of a sudden they find that the millions of the world sympathise with the Church, which has compassion for the multitude rather than with the State or the plutocracy which has weighed so heavily upon them’\(^{70}\). It was an appropriate note with which to mark the culmination of a life that had been given over in so large a measure to the service of the dispossessed, and was now moving to its conclusion.

That Manning’s concern and compassion for the poor was appreciated and reciprocated was evident on his death in 1892. The crowds on the successive days of his lying in state and funeral – ‘the most striking, certainly the most spontaneous demonstration of mass emotion in the capital during the late Victorian period’\(^{71}\) – numbered more than one hundred thousand. The funeral procession was four miles long. Leo declared that ‘A great light of the Church has gone out. I feel my own hour is at hand’\(^{72}\). Cardinal Capecelatro wrote in a posthumous tribute:


\(^{72}\) Leslie 1921 Op Cit, p. 495.
I know none among Catholic Socialists (let the name be permitted me) braver than my late beloved friend Cardinal Manning, a social student fearless in speculation, effectual in enterprise ... Manning living as he did in the midst of the independent and tenacious English people, did not hesitate to put himself at the head of Christian ‘Socialism’73.

Sentiment within the English Church may have been less uniformly effusive. Manning’s concern for the material well-being of the poor and overt association with their leaders and champions had been widely misunderstood, misrepresented or maligned in both clerical and lay circles, as being indicative variously of an idiosyncratic distraction or departure from the saving of souls, unseemly radicalism, waste of priestly time and perhaps lapse of priestly dignity and decorum. A scholarly albeit perhaps not exhaustive stocktaking of his detractors among fellow Catholics includes ‘born Catholics who disliked the upstart convert, the Jesuits whom he had worsted in jurisdictional controversy, liberals and Anglo-Gallicans suspicious of his Ultramontanism, admirers of Cardinal Newman, and conservatives horrified by Manning’s crusades for social reform’74.

As an early account of British Social Catholicism so pertinently observes:

The pity is that such a man as Manning was not always greeted as a prophet by those who should have been his friends but became even an object of dislike as he preached his Social Catholicism, which has been called ‘the

73 Capecelatro 1909, Christ, the Church and Man, St Louis, pp 73-74, as quoted in McEntee 1927 Op Cit, p. 257
most hateful of new doctrines to those faithful who look
upon the Church as the guardian of their interests, and
upon religion as the best safeguard of property\textsuperscript{75}. Disquieted by what might be expected of them if they
took to heart the views that he expounded, such as these
went their way in sorrow - for they had great
possessions\textsuperscript{76}.

In the more acerbic view of some:

The ‘Old Catholics’ were determined to resist, and looking
for a rallying point for their cause they found it in John
Henry Newman. In sympathy, taste, feelings and insularity
Newman closely resembled the ‘Old Catholics’ and his
name was used unscrupulously to thwart Manning’s
policies. Any opportunity for causing pain to the
Archbishop was eagerly sought and used\textsuperscript{77}.

Manning’s friend and confidant in Rome George Talbot – a papal
chamberlain and major intermediary between the Church in
England and the Pope – remonstrated with him as early as
1865 that ‘Of course you must not neglect the poor, but many
can do that work; few have the influence you have – I may say
no one – on the upper classes of Protestants\textsuperscript{78}. The leading
Catholic journal of the day, \textit{The Tablet}, commented in an
editorial on the dock strike settlement in 1889 that ‘Even in
more sober quarters, there seems to be an uneasy feeling that
it would have been better if the peacemaker had been another’\textsuperscript{79}. Manning’s successor, Cardinal Vaughan, himself of

\textsuperscript{76} McEntree 1927 Op Cit, pp. 22-23.
\textsuperscript{77} McClelland 1962 Op Cit, p 216.
\textsuperscript{78} Talbot G. 1865, as quoted in Taylor I.A. 1908 \textit{The Cardinal Democrat}, London, p. 34.
\textsuperscript{79} \textit{Tablet} 14 September1889, as quoted in Gray 1985 Op Cit, p. 310.
recusant origin, so much disapproved of his dock strike and Temperance Movement involvements as to ascribe them after his death to an untimely onset of senile decay\textsuperscript{80}.

Manning would have been unimpressed, impenitent and unapologetic. While attempting from the outset of his ecclesiastical career to reconcile the ‘Old Catholics’ to his policies and priorities, he was adamant in resisting their efforts to deter him from his chosen course. In the face of the strictures and slanders of his critics, his 1891 \textit{Dublin Review} article threw down the gauntlet. The article reads:

If any man would protect the world of labour from the oppression of “free contracts” or “starvation wages” he is a Socialist. So obscure from want of thought, or so warped by interest or class feeling are the minds of men\textsuperscript{81}.

The apathy, inaction or opposition of those he saw as owing him their allegiance deeply disappointed and frustrated him, provoking as they did the rejoinder:

What are our people doing? Oh, I forgot, they have no time. They are examining their consciences, or praying for success in finding a really satisfactory maid\textsuperscript{82}.

Vaughan in his turn was chided that ‘He – Vaughan – was already a good Catholic and only needed to sit at the feet of General Booth to be a good Christian’\textsuperscript{83}. It is unlikely that Manning would have been wholly unsympathetic with the

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\textsuperscript{81} Manning 1891 Op Cit, p 162.
\textsuperscript{82} Leslie 1921 Op Cit, p 485.
\textsuperscript{83} McEntee 1927 Op Cit, p. 152.
characterisation of many among his fellow Catholics by one of their number in 1907 as being ‘as completely unable to realise the fundamental change that has taken place in political, social and economic questions as were the French noblesse on the eve of the Revolution’.

His mood as his life drew to its close was serene. A note taken in his last months provides a fitting epitaph. It reads: ‘For more than fifty years I have lived among the poor people ... I have seen and heard and known their wants, sufferings, hardships and the defeat of their petitions and hopes, and my whole soul is with them’. Unwanted, as may have been the mantle of his advocacy of the encyclical by his successor, it was now to be taken up with renewed vigour by a less prominent fellow Primate, in an obscure diocese on the far side of the world.

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