

The Plough and the Cross: Peasant Unions in South-Western France

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RURAL society in late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century France was faced with the consequences of a fundamental shift in the demographic and economic balance of the nation. The dominant rural and agricultural civilization was giving way to one based on the factory and the town. Between 1882 and 1931 the proportion of the population earning its living from agriculture fell from 48 to 30 per cent.¹ Paris, accommodating some 2 per cent of the French populace in 1851, had by the end of the century increased this proportion to 10 per cent.² The implications of such a decline were to prove particularly disquieting for those who saw in the 'eternal order of the fields' the key to the social, moral and political stability of the nation.

Recent studies of peasant protest in nineteenth- and twentieth-century Europe have emphasized the important role of social groups external to the peasantry in the development of protest movements.³ Faced with the declining importance of rural society in the rapidly industrializing nation, it has been argued that it was largely those social groups whose power base lay in the countryside — the rural bourgeoisie, the *notables*, and the Church — who were the driving forces behind movements aimed at redressing the balance between town and country. In France, the agricultural union or *syndicat*, legalized at the end of the nineteenth century, was created with such objectives in mind. It is the intention of this paper to examine the early history of the agricultural

union in a rural *département* of south-western France, the Aveyron, and to seek to outline the importance of the Catholic Church in the development of that movement.

I

If the roots of co-operation and mutual aid in French agriculture stretch back well into the past, the legal institution of the agricultural union dates from only 1884, when the Chamber of Deputies approved the passage of a law permitting the formation of unions for the defence of industrial, commercial and agricultural interests.⁴ National patronage of agricultural unions was quickly taken up both by Republicans, anxious to win over the supposedly conservative peasantry to the Third Republic, and by *notables* of the right for whom the agricultural union was to unite landowner, peasant and labourer in order to stem the tide of socialism flowing from the towns, and preserve *la paix sociale* in the countryside. By the end of the nineteenth century some 500,000 peasants were enrolled in such unions, a membership which, just prior to the Great War increased to over 1,000,000.⁵

The activity of these unions was wide-ranging. According to one theorist, they were to be the 'co-ordinating body for all those institutions of mutual aid which are vital to the economic and social well being of the village community', a veritable school of moral and social education to

¹M Faure, *Les Paysans dans la Société Française*, Paris, 1956, p 40.

²G. Dupeux, *French Society 1789-1970*, 1976, p 4.

³P Barral, 'Les mouvements agrariens de l'ère industrielle', *Revue Historique*, 3, 1964, pp 299-330; 'Les Mouvements Paysans dans le monde contemporain', *Cahiers Internationaux d'Histoire Economique et Sociale*, Geneva, 1973.

⁴On the *syndicat* see: M Augé-Laribé, *Syndicats et Coopératives agricoles*, Paris, 1926; P Barral, *Les Agrariens Français de Méline à Pisani*, Paris, 1968; G Wright, *Rural Revolution in France*, Stanford, 1964.

⁵Faure, *op cit*, p 52.

help the peasant face up to the problems of his *milieu*. The provision of fertilizers and seeds, the pooling of resources to buy machinery, the diffusion of technical knowledge, and the creation of mutual insurance and credit groups were among the practical benefits of membership.⁶

The attitude of the Catholic Church in France to these unions would seem to be of particular interest. The Catholic Church was an especially powerful force in many parts of the French countryside, and in a society increasingly demoralized by the rural exodus, its role was to become increasingly important.⁷ One might anticipate two attitudes on the part of the Church hierarchy. On the one hand they may have been opposed to any involvement in temporal organizations, such as agricultural unions, because of their desire to avoid overt political involvement at a particularly delicate time for the Church.⁸ On the other hand, the encyclical of Pope Leo XIII (*Rerum Novarum* 1891), had encouraged the development of 'social Catholicism' in France. The creation of agricultural unions might be considered an important aspect of the role of the Church in the countryside.⁹ Studies from Ireland, Belgium and Germany would seem to lend support to the second hypothesis.¹⁰

The desire for a more 'active' and 'social' form of Catholicism, better adapted to a particular *milieu*, was to prove a powerful influence in the early history of the agricultural union, not only within the *département* of Aveyron but in many other parts of France as well.¹¹ It was a desire that embraced not only many priests and Bishops

but also many Catholic intellectuals (for example de Mun, le Play, de la Tour du Pin) and *notables*. The merging of these diverse interests, the spiritual, intellectual and political, was to prove particularly fertile in the expansion of peasant unionism.

II

'Can there be', asked one traveller at the beginning of the nineteenth century, 'a wilder and rougher country than this Aveyron?'¹² The *département* is a large one, the fifth largest in France, and covers some 4000 square miles. It is located on the south-western flanks of the *Massif Central* approximately midway between Montpellier and Clermont-Ferrand. The *département* is mountainous in character. The hills of the *Aubrac* in the north form a high pasture area, between 3000 and 4000 feet in height. To the south and east of Rodez, the capital of the *département*, is the *Ségala*, a plateau country of between 1000 and 1500 feet, while to the south of the *département*, the limestone plateaux of the *Grandes Causses*, deeply cut by the Tarn and Jonte rivers, dominate the landscape.¹³

At the end of the nineteenth century the economy of the region was overwhelmingly agricultural; 65 per cent of the active population depended on agriculture for a living in 1896.¹⁴ According to the Agricultural Census of 1892, farms under 10 hectares accounted for over 70 per cent of all farms in the *département*.¹⁵ However, large farms were far from absent. In the same year, 44 per cent of the land surface was held in units of over 40 hectares, so

⁶Cte de Rocquigny, *Les syndicats agricoles et leur oeuvre*, Paris, 1900.

⁷H Rollet, *L'Action Sociale des Catholiques en France, 1871-1901*, Paris, 1958, pp 145-90.

⁸J-M Mayeur, *La Séparation de l'Eglise et de l'Etat*, Paris, 1966.

⁹B Hervieu and J Vial, 'L'Eglise Catholique et les paysans', in M Gervais, C Servolin, Y Tavernier, *L'Univers Politique des Paysans dans la France contemporaine*, Paris, 1972.

¹⁰Barral, 1964, op cit. L Kennedy, 'The early response of the Irish Catholic clergy to the co-operative movement', *Irish Historical Studies*, March 1978, pp 55-74.

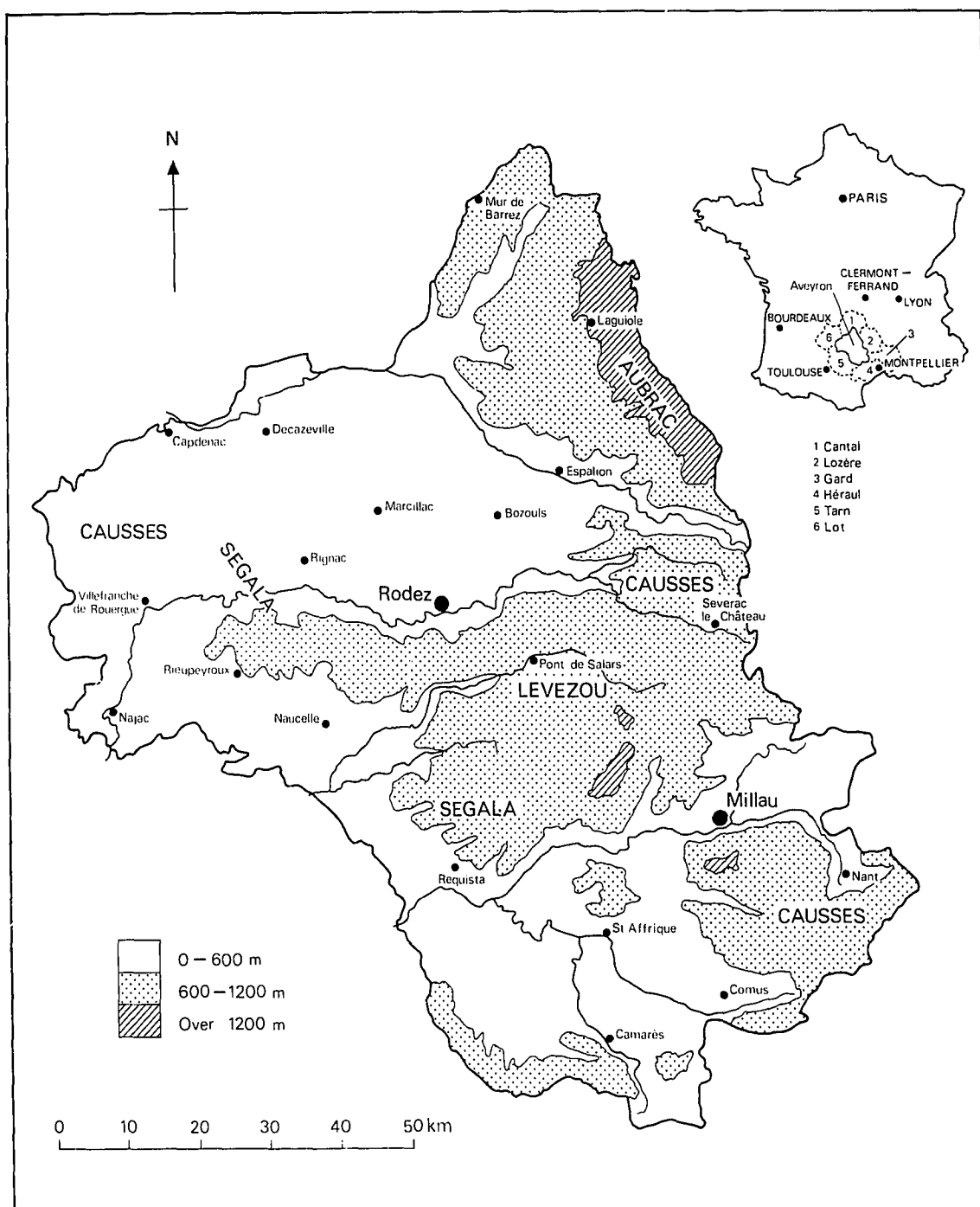
¹¹Association Catholique de la Jeunesse Française, *Le Problème de la Terre*, Paris, 1908.

¹²A Montéil, *Description de département de l'Aveyron*, Rodez, 1802.

¹³Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique, *L'Aubrac — Etude ethnologique, linguistique, agronomique, et économique d'un établissement humain*, Paris, 1971-79; A Ginisty, *L'Aveyron — le sol, les travaux, les hommes*, Rodez, 1957; P Marres, *Les Grandes Causses*, Tours, 1935; A Meynier, *Ségala, Lézou, Châtaigneraie*, Aurillac, 1931.

¹⁴*Aveyron d'Aujourd'hui*, Rodez, 1964, p 12.

¹⁵Ministère de l'Agriculture, *Statistique Agricole de la France; résultats généraux de l'enquête décennale de 1892*, Paris, 1897.



The Département of the Aveyron

that land distribution, while permitting a large proportion of the agricultural population to live a relatively independent existence, was nonetheless far from equal.¹⁶

The character of farming reflected, first and foremost, natural constraints. Polyculture generally predominated in this difficult region, with agricultural specialization slow to develop given the difficulty of transporting and marketing produce.¹⁷ Only on the *Grandes Causses* were large, capitalistic farms in evidence, producing wheat in large quantities and employing a considerable labouring population.¹⁸ On the *Aubrac* some pastoral specialization was evident at the end of the nineteenth century although polyculture, especially on the smaller farms, remained important until well into the 1950s.¹⁹ The *Ségala*, the most densely populated of the natural regions of Aveyron at the turn of the century, was characterized by chronic overcrowding, excessive farm fragmentation, and a heavy reliance on rye and chestnuts for its food supply. The transformation of the agriculture of the region through the widespread application of chalk and fertilizers was as yet in its infancy.²⁰

The population of the *département* reached its highest point in 1882. From a total of 415,000 in that year, it declined to 389,000 at the turn of the century, and to 360,000 in 1911.²¹ Between those two dates then, the *département* was to lose some 2000 to 3000 persons every year, mostly to Paris and the towns of the Midi, but also to the United States, North Africa and Argentina.²² This alarming population decline took place despite a natural increase in the population of

some 15,000, for birth-rates in the *département* remained high.

A conservative social structure centred on the family was combined with a strong Catholic tradition and a politically conservative ethos. Socialist ideas were given short shrift in this 'Vendée of the South'.²³ Except for a few Protestant communities in the south of the *département* bordering the Cevennes, Catholicism dominated throughout. A diocesan survey carried out in 1892, indicated that 90 per cent of all women and 73 per cent of all men made their Easter devotions. The *département* was a veritable pepperpot of priests and nuns. In 1902 there was an average of 145 ordinations per 10,000 people in Aveyron, compared with a national average of only 52. A deep respect for Church and clergy was reinforced by a dense network of priests, *écoles libres* and Christian lay fraternities.²⁴

III

In Aveyron the rural exodus was soon to alarm Church leaders and laymen alike. The local Society of Agriculture was quick to point out the growing costs of hired labour, local politicians were alarmed by the steady desertion of villages, and Church leaders highlighted the moral and social dangers faced by migrants to the towns. It was to be through the collaboration of Church leaders and the conservative notables of the *département* that the first major efforts at unionization of the peasantry were to be made.²⁵ It was through a Catholic fraternity, the *Association Catholi-*

¹⁶Ibid.

¹⁷R Bêteille, *La vie quotidienne en Rouergue avant 1914*, Paris, 1973.

¹⁸Marres, op cit, pp 230-70.

¹⁹R Bousquet, *Enquête Socio-Economique — L'Aubrac*, Rodez, 1962.

²⁰Meynier, op cit; H Enjalbert, *A travers le Ségala*, Rodez, 1950.

²¹R Bêteille, *Manuel des Statistiques Aveyronnaises*, Rodez, 1970.

²²R Bêteille, *Les Aveyronnais*, Poitiers 1974; R. Bêteille, *Rouergue — Terre d'Exode*, Paris, 1978.

²³H Assier, R Boyer, A Bulcholz, *L'implantation du socialisme et du communisme dans l'Aveyron 1870-1958*, Mémoire de l'Université de Toulouse-le-Mirail, 1973.

²⁴G Cholvy, 'Le Catholicisme en Rouergue au XIX et XXème siècles: première approche', *Etudes sur le Rouergue*, Rodez, 1974; G Cholvy, 'Cetle Bretagne du Midi' in H Enjalbert, *Histoire du Rouergue*, Toulouse, 1979, pp 393-424.

²⁵The major sources for the history of social catholicism and the union movement in Aveyron are: *Archives of the Bishopric of Rodez*. (AB): Fonds Bonnafé; Fonds Touzery; Diocesan Visits (1908-1914). *Departmental Archives*. (AD): 7 m 37-45 (Mutuelles Agricoles); 35 M 3, 1-6 (Syndicats Agricoles).

que de la Jeunesse Française, that these efforts were co-ordinated.

The *Association Catholique de la Jeunesse Française* (ACJF) was founded by Albert de Mun and Robert de Roquefeuil in 1886 under the inspiration of social Catholic doctrines. A national movement, designed to encourage the application of Christian principles to the concrete problems of everyday life, it had achieved a certain amount of success in the industrial milieu of northern France through the creation of *Cercles Ouvriers*.²⁶ From the early years of the twentieth century, the ACJF became increasingly concerned at the amplification of the rural exodus in France.²⁷ Its argument that the agricultural union might prove especially effective in curbing the exodus was to be particularly well received in Aveyron.

Early in 1904, the Diocesan authorities in Aveyron created the *Conférence St Louis*, a body of priests and lay activists, with the intention of publicizing the work of the ACJF.²⁸ Its first President was a local lawyer, Henri Bonnafé, and he together with his collaborators, Philip de las Cases, son of the conservative Senator of the neighbouring *département* of Lozère, and Maurice Anglade, an Inspector for the *Société Générale*, gave a series of conferences throughout the *département* in 1904 aimed at encouraging the creation of local ACJF groups. These groups, the speakers argued, were to provide a base for the creation of agricultural unions and mutual aid groups among the peasantry. The origins of the union movement in Aveyron are to be found in these Catholic lay fraternities.²⁹

The Catholic Congress, held at Rodez in 1904, and attended by over 2000 delegates from all over France, included a series of discussions on the means of founding

unions, agricultural co-operatives and mutual insurance groups. The union and co-operative of Laguiole in the *Aubrac* was cited as an important example of the practical value of the 'social Catholic' ethos in improving the lot of the peasantry and thereby slowing down the rural exodus. Founded under the influence of a local priest, Canon Touzery, and a local *notable*, the Count of Armagnac, its co-operative caves for stocking cheese, the provision of technical and marketing advice, and the annual competitions, the report to the Congress concluded, had rendered sterling service to the cause of peasant and Church alike. The notes that the Prefect of the *département*, a staunch Republican and anti-clerical, collected on the Congress displayed his disquiet at the growing interest of the Church in agricultural unions. A Police Report sent to him a little later alluded to the dangers of the 'Christian socialism' that the clergy and certain *notables* were spreading through the nascent union movement.³⁰

By the start of 1906, a new impetus was given to Church involvement in lay organizations such as agricultural unions. The separation of Church and State, and the inventories which had to be made of all Church property in France were fiercely resented in the most Catholic parts of France. In many parishes in Aveyron the churches were barricaded and, in at least one case, the local teacher and the Justice of the Peace were beaten off with bricks and cow dung when they tried to carry out the inventory. The Justice of the Peace was fortunate enough to escape. The hapless teacher was not so lucky. He was unceremoniously debagged, kicked, and paraded round the village on the back of a donkey.³¹ The arrival in the same year of a new Bishop at Rodez, Mgr Ligonnes, gave

²⁶Rollet. *op cit*.

²⁷Association Catholique. *op cit*.

²⁸A B Fonds Bonnafé.

²⁹Ibid.

³⁰A D 35 M 3. (Rapport sur le Syndicat Agricole et Fromager de Laguiole); A D 3 V 10. (Congrès Catholique, 1904).

³¹P L'Habitant, *La Séparation de l'Eglise et de l'Etat dans l'Aveyron*, Diplôme d'Etudes Supérieures, Paris, 1971-72.

further strength to the policy of active involvement in lay organizations. Appointed directly by the Pope, he was to prove implacably hostile to the Republic and its policy of laicization, and was an enthusiastic supporter of the ACJF.³²

It is from the beginning of 1907 that the Church Archives and the Catholic Press begin to reveal the activity of the ACJF in agricultural circles. At St Côme, for example, the press revealed that 'the local group is working tirelessly to found an agricultural union and further anticipates the creation of a number of mutual aid groups', and at Luc in the summer of 1907, the local ACJF was to devote four discussions to the question of founding a mutual insurance group for the peasants of the commune. In February of the next year their efforts bore fruit and a fire-insurance association on mutualist lines was formed. Four of the seven administrators were activists in the ACJF. In February 1908 an agricultural union was formed at St Jean d'Elnous, thanks to the efforts of the local Catholic youth, and at later meetings we are told 'the practical question of founding a mutual insurance association was discussed'.³³ At la Salvétat-Péyrales the ACJF in co-operation with the local *curé* convened a meeting of local landowners to discuss the creation of an agricultural union and a number of mutual aid groups. When a union was created in March 1908 the *curé* was chosen as President. At Bournazel in June 1908, at Naucelle in the same month, and at Rignac a month later, a similar pattern recurred. The local Catholic youth and the *curé* would provide the initial interest in founding a union and, on its creation, help with administrative matters. It was a pattern repeated in many other parishes in the *département*.³⁴

These efforts at establishing a network of

'social Catholic' unions were not confined to the local level; from an early stage they were co-ordinated from the Bishopric at Rodez. The creation of a Committee of Social Works in July 1907, 'to be concerned specifically with the creation and functioning of agricultural unions, mutual aid groups of all kinds and rural credit banks', ensured that a close watch was kept on the growth of the union movement, and that no opportunities were missed to extend the influence of the Church in the agricultural milieu.³⁵

It was to be through the work of an activist in social Catholic circles, Maurice Anglade, that the major agricultural union in the *Massif Central* in the first three decades of the twentieth century, the *Union des Associations Agricoles du Plateau Central* was created. This organization, founded in 1909, was to be a major force in the agricultural life of Aveyron for almost 30 years. It was also to make its influence felt in a number of neighbouring *départements*, most notably, Lozère, Cantal and the Puy de Dôme.³⁶ Its ideology drew heavily upon the conservative ethos of social Catholicism. One of the collaborators of the movement in its early years argued that the *Plateau Central* was a 'grouping of the greatest value in ensuring the religious and social fidelity of our peasants, in helping the peasant to improve his lot through his own efforts, and in keeping them cleansed from the corrupting filth and decay of socialism'. 'Under the benevolent eye of the Lord', the report continued, 'let us continue to create these agricultural associations . . . our future and the future of the *pays* depends on them.'³⁷

Anglade, the founder of the *Plateau Central*, and a native of Aveyron, had spent much of his early years working in Paris. There, as President of a society of influen-

³²P Nègre, *Charles de Ligonnes*, Paray le Menial, nd.

³³Bulletin de l'Union Catholique Aveyronnais, 2, 1908; Circulaire Trimestrielle de l'Union de la Jeunesse Catholique de l'Aveyron, 2, 1908.

³⁴Ibid, 6, 1908; ibid, 8, 1908.

³⁵AB Fonds Bonnafé.

³⁶AD 35 M 3 (3). P Jouve. *Un mouvement professionnel agricole: le 'Plateau Central'*, Aurillac, 1921. *Livre d'Or de la Société d'Encouragement aux Institutions Rurales du Plateau Central*, Rodez, 1914.

³⁷Bulletin de l'Union Catholique Aveyronnaise, 35, 1910.

tial natives of the *département*, he had become alarmed at the rapidity of the exodus and its serious effects in the countryside. Returning from Paris, he quickly seized on the agricultural union as a means of improving conditions in the country and of persuading the peasantry that migration was not the panacea for all ills. With the help of influential members of the clergy, and of the Society of which he had been President, the *Solidarité Aveyronnaise*,³⁸ Anglade embarked on the creation of a network of local unions to foster peasant solidarity.

He had founded an agricultural union in his native Gabriac in 1905, and this union was to prove the model type for the *département*. The union was the centre for a whole range of associations. Mutual Insurance groups against fire, accident and animal sickness were set up, as well as a co-operative to supply seeds and fertilizers at special prices to union members.³⁹ As the *Cultivateur du Sud-Centre* noted, 'the union at Gabriac, founded by M. Anglade, has proved eminently successful and has served as a splendid example to many other communal unions'.⁴⁰ In 1909, Anglade, with the support of the administrators of the ACJF created the first of the *Plateau Central* groups, an association uniting all the mutual insurance groups in the *département*. The *Plateau Central* soon expanded. By 1914 the organization embraced local agricultural unions, co-operatives and various insurance groups. At that date the *Plateau Central* had over 10,000 members in its various constituent groups in Aveyron as well as a considerable membership in Lozère, Cantal, and the Puy de Dôme. It was in the words of one admirer, 'the nerve-centre for a whole range of groups of benefit to the peasants

of the region . . . a marvellous school of social and moral education'.⁴¹

As noted above, ardent Catholics were at the heart of the *Plateau Central*. Not only was the organization fully supported by the Catholic lay organizations of the *département*, but noted social Catholics formed the bulk of the organization's administrators. An examination of the founder members list of the organization in 1914 reveals the importance of the link. Out of 88 members 24 were members of the departmental *Union de la Défense Catholique*, a body of influential Catholics in Paris and Aveyron. A further 5 were priests. The aristocratic flavour of the organization is revealed in the titles of some of its administrators. They included Maurice Fenaille at the Château of Montrozier, Charles de Rodat at the Château of Druelle, and Philip de las Cases at the Château of Labaume in Lozère. Lawyers, doctors and politicians filled most of the remaining places. Such a membership structure seems to bear out the importance of the link between the Catholic Church and conservative *notables* in the formulation of reactions to the rural exodus.⁴²

At the local level, many unions and mutual aid groups were dominated by single large landowners, often a lawyer, merchant or notable, with the rest of the membership consisting of much smaller landowners. The mutual insurance grouping at Ste Radegonde, near Rodez, was dominated by two merchants, Lucien Mignonac and Marcellin Blancher, both holding over 150 hectares of land and both activists in social Catholic circles. The union at Salmiech, in the heart of the *Ségala* was run by a staunch Catholic, Emile Vernhes, with the help of a local teacher at the *école libre*. Both held over 60 hectares of prime land. Three other members of the union held between 20 and 30 hectares, the remaining members holding

³⁸Béteille, 1974, op cit, pp 505-29.

³⁹*La Fête Paysanne: les Associations Agricoles de Gabriac, Rodez, 1931. Le Syndicat Agricole de Gabriac et ses filiales, Rodez, 1941.*

⁴⁰*Cultivateur du Sud-Centre*, Feb 1908.

⁴¹*Livre d'Or*, op cit.

⁴²*Ibid*; AB Fonds Bonnafé.

less than 5 hectares. A similar pattern occurred in at least 20 other groups.⁴³

IV

It is perhaps not surprising, in view of the tension between Church and State in France at this period, that the administration should seek to set up rival organizations, both locally and on a departmental scale, to prevent the Church exercising a monopoly in the creation and control of agricultural unions and their associated mutual aid groups. When Anglade created the *Plateau Central* in October 1909 his initiative was quickly copied by the Republicans of the *département* who set up a State funded organization, the *Régional-Aveyron* to compete for members.⁴⁴ The *Régional-Aveyron* received the full support of the Prefect and the Professor of Agriculture in the *département*. The guiding lights of the movement were two staunch Republicans, M. Andrieu and Dr Cannac.

In the years leading up to the Great War the *Plateau Central* and the *Régional-Aveyron* were engaged in a continuous battle for members. By and large the former was the more successful, chiefly because it could rely on the support of the local clergy, extending in one case to a homily preached on behalf of the unions of the *Plateau Central*. Certainly in terms of agricultural unions the *Plateau Central* was far more successful. The Republicans were unable to create a regional grouping to rival the *Plateau Central* until well into the 1930s.⁴⁵

In terms of mutual aid groups, the position was less one-sided. In 1914, out of the 307 *communes* in the *département*, 120 had groups affiliated to the *Plateau Central*, 69 had groups affiliated to the *Régional-Aveyron*, and 23 had duplicate groups affiliated to both. According to a Prefectural Report in the same year, there were

3741 members in the mutual-aid groups of the *Plateau Central*, and 1185 in the *Régional-Aveyron*.⁴⁶

It is evident from the Prefectural correspondence on the functioning of the various unions and mutual aid groups of the *département*, that the role of the clergy was a crucial one. Perhaps one should be wary of attaching too much credence to the comments of local administrators, but the sheer volume of references to the clergy is impressive. At Cruejols the Prefect was informed that 'the members of the clergy play an active role in the functioning of the mutual aid group and play an important part in their reunions'.⁴⁷ The group at St Sever, we are informed, was founded on the initiative of the local priest in conjunction with the 'reactionary mayor' of the *commune*.⁴⁸ At Rignac the President of the local union, Emile Acquier, came in for special attention from the Prefect. As well as being an activist in the ACJF, and founding a number of mutual aid groups in his *commune*, he had given a series of conferences which had led to the creation of 13 unions and mutual aid groups in other *communes*. For the Prefect, worse was to come. The Good Shepherd, the Catholic Press keenly reported, was intent on further enlarging his flock, for he was continuing a campaign to 'found other groups — unions, credit banks and co-operatives — which are more than ever necessary in the countryside'.⁴⁹

The political beliefs of the Prefect naturally led him to make favourable comments on those groups free from clerical influence. A large grant from the Ministry of Agriculture was recommended for the mutual aid group at Colombies, on the grounds that the 'members of the clergy play no part in the running of the society'.⁵⁰ An application for aid from a similar group

⁴³AD 7 m 37-41. (Mutuelles Agricoles); *Matrices Cadastreales*.

⁴⁴*Cultivateur du Sud-Centre*, 4, 1909.

⁴⁵*Annuaire de l'Aveyron*, Rodez, 1914; AD 7 M 43.

⁴⁶AD 7 M 43.

⁴⁷AD 7 M 44.

⁴⁸AD 7 M 44.

⁴⁹*Le Jeune Rouergue*, Feb 1913.

⁵⁰AD 7 M 45.

at Balaguier was likewise welcomed for 'it is administered by a council composed almost entirely of fervent Republicans'.⁵¹

V

It is apparent then, that the Catholic Church in Aveyron gave wholehearted support to the creation and development of agricultural unions. The ideology and policy of many of these unions, underpinned as they were by the conservative *notables* of the Catholic right, responded to a desire on the part of the Church to promote an active, practical form of Christianity at a time when their established position appeared threatened. The mixed, patronal agricultural union was an ideal means of fostering the spirit of co-operation in the village, and of preserving the integrity of *la profession agricole* and the continuity of *la paix sociale*.

A number of general conclusions may be advanced from this albeit limited study. Firstly, it would seem that the development of the agricultural union in Aveyron, in particular their socially conservative ethos, supports the general conclusions of Barral.⁵² Protest movements, he has argued, whether agricultural unions in France, the *Boerenbond* in Belgium, or the *Bund der Landwirte* in Germany, sought above all else to preserve the unity of the peasantry, however mythical that unity in fact was. The notion of class struggle was anathema to the bourgeois and *notable* leaders of these movements. The unity of all country-dwellers in the face of the supposed threat from the towns had to be preserved at all costs.

A second characteristic of rural protest at this period, according to Barral, was a general opposition to the spread of capitalism into the countryside. In particular the rural *élite* feared the open class struggle which might result from a polarization of

capital and labour in the countryside. The stress on co-operation and mutual aid in the ideology of the union movement can be seen as an attempt to ensure the survival of an artisanal, rather than openly capitalistic, form of agriculture. Such an objective was of particular appeal in a *département* such as Aveyron where a large population depended on essentially small-scale agriculture. Conflicts in Languedoc, among the woodcutters of Central France, and among the sharecroppers of the Allier provided the rural *élite* in Aveyron with timely reminders of the growing threat of open class relations emerging in the countryside.⁵³ The patronal agricultural *syndicat* sought to eliminate this threat.

Thirdly, in common with the conclusions of Barral, most of the unions were led not by the peasants themselves but by their representatives. Doctors, lawyers and large landowners provided the inspiration for a majority of agricultural unions in France at this time. A similar pattern, argues Barral, characterized rural protest movements in other countries in Western Europe at this time.

Such characteristics help to explain some of the contradictions of the agricultural union movement in France, contradictions which have lingered obstinately through to the present day. It is apparent, for example, that in their obsessive fear of the rural exodus, both the Church and the *notables* were ignoring the beneficial effects which the exodus could have in overpopulated regions. Furthermore, the concern of the leaders of the union movements to stress the unity of the countryside should not blind one to an awareness of the existence of class conflict in all rural communities. As Gratton and Judt have stressed, authentic movements of peasants and agricultural labourers in France did develop, based not on the supposed unity of the rural world, but on the class differences within the community.⁵⁴

⁵¹AD 7 M 44.

⁵²Barral, 1964, op. cit.

⁵³P Gratton. *Les luttes de classes dans les campagnes 1870-1921*, Paris, 1971; P Gratton. *Les Paysans contre l'agrarisme*, Paris, 1973.

⁵⁴Ibid. T Judt. *Socialism in Provence 1871-1914*, Cambridge, 1979.

An examination of the agricultural union in Aveyron it is hoped, has provided some insight into the way in which different social groups in the rural community interacted in the creation of a movement characterized then, as now, with the desire for

survival in the modern world. Such an examination can be no more than a preliminary to a wider evaluation of the nature of peasant protest in the recent history of Western Europe.

Notes and Comments

ANNUAL CONFERENCE AND AGM, 1982

The thirty-first Conference of the Society was held at David Russell Hall, the University of St Andrews, 5-7 April 1982. Papers were presented by Mr Bruce Walker, 'The Development of the Agricultural Buildings of the Tay Estuary'; Dr Michael L Ryder, 'Medieval Sheep and Wool Types'; Dr Ian Whyte, 'Geographical and Social Mobility among Tenant Farmers in early modern Scotland'; Ms Sarah Banks, 'A mid-Victorian scandal: the Open and Close Parish System in nineteenth-century England'; Ms Lisa Bud-Frierman, 'The Agricultural Statistics Movement in mid-nineteenth-century Scotland'; and Dr Ronald Weir, 'Distilling and Agriculture, 1870-1939'. An excursion into north Fife was led by Dr Graeme Whittington.

The thirty-first AGM was held on 6 April 1982. Professor Chaloner, Professor Mingay, Dr Collins, and Dr Chartres were re-elected as the officers of the Society. Four vacancies on the Executive Committee were filled by the re-election of Mr Byford, Professor Minchinton, Dr Thirsk, and Dr Turner.

In presenting the report of the Executive Committee the Chairman, Professor Thompson, commented on the satisfactory level of membership, which had fallen only marginally during the year. The year had seen the publication of a bibliography, compiled by Dr Raine Morgan, *Dissertations on British Agrarian History*, as a joint venture with the Institute of Agricultural History, the University of Reading. Sales had been excellent, with over 300 copies sold in the first year. The Winter Conference had again been successful, having been held again in conjunction with the Institute of British Geographers on the theme 'Government Policy and Agriculture'. The Society was again indebted to Drs Baker and Phillips for all their work in making the conference a success. A student occupation had forced a change of venue for the Winter Conference, and after the success of meeting in the Institute of Historical Research, the

next Winter Conference, on Saturday 4 December 1982, would also be held there. The Spring Conference was to be held at Christ Church College, Canterbury, 11-13 April 1983.

The Treasurer reported on another satisfactory year in which, despite a slight fall in membership, from 828 to 823, balances of funds remained substantial, and were earning a significant income for the Society. The Society had now the chance to consider new publication ventures, and a project was now under consideration. He reported that ill-health sadly meant that Mr Harold Casey, for seventeen years the Society's Honorary Auditor, would no longer be able to act for the Society, and that in recognition of his services the Executive Committee had agreed to make a small presentation. The Treasurer was authorized to appoint a new auditor. Thanks were also expressed to Miss Gillian Beazley for all her work in handling membership enquiries and subscriptions.

The Editor's report drew attention to an exceptional rate of refusal for articles submitted during the year. This had considerably reduced the backlog of articles awaiting publication, and, after the appearance of Part II of volume 30, no article older than March 1981 will be left. Book reviews were up to date, and were being published within six months of receipt. The current issue of the *Review* contained an innovation in the form of Professor Allan Bogue's article 'Farming in the North American Grasslands', the first of a series of survey articles on farming in the USA. It was hoped to include a supplement to Dr Morgan's bibliography of theses in Part II of volume 30. The Chairman drew particular attention to the need for an increased flow of articles of good quality, and urged members to write for a good harvest in the following year.

Members expressed thanks to the staff of the Hall, and particularly to Dr Christopher Schmitz for all his local work to make the conference a success.

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