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Maurin, Day, the Catholic Worker Group, and Anarcho-Distributism

Nicholas Evans

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Peter Maurin, Dorothy Day, and the Catholic Worker group are Christian Anarchists.

What sort of economy do they advocate?

Day who is one of the founders of the Catholic Worker group discussed a sort of Anarcho-Distributism.(also known as Anarcho-Distributivism) In actuality Anarcho-Distributism is very similar to the economics of Proudhon's Mutualism.

As stated in the book On Pilgrimage:

“Distributism calls for a just distribution of wealth and participation in ownership and adequate wages so that workers can buy homes of their own. Advocates of Distributism believe in private property-but private property for everyone, not just the few.”¹

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¹ Day, Dorothy. On Pilgrimage. Wiliam B. Eerdman's Publishing Company, Michigan. 1999. pp 40

Distributism believed everyone should have the right to “...a home, a bit of land, and the tools which to work, part ownership in workshops and stores and factories.”²

In other words, they believed like Proudhon that society should be organized around self employed individuals, co-operative workshops, co-op factories, and co-op stores based on a competitive market.³ They also believed everyone had a right to live on land they personally lived on and no more. This is called ‘occupancy and use’ by the Individualist Anarchists like Tucker. (Unlike the Social Mutualists of Catholic Worker and Proudhon, Tucker’s American Mutualism or Individualist Anarchism retains employers but the employers pay their employees the full value of their labor and hence Individualist Anarchism of Tucker is still a form of Market Socialism or Mutualism)⁴

Like Proudhon, the anarcho-distributism of Day, Maurin, and the Catholic Worker wanted a voluntary anarcho-distributist society rather than a society built on a state. As stated:

“We are Personalists because we believe that man, a person, a creature of body and soul, is greater than the State, of which as an individual he is part. We are Personalists because we oppose the vesting of all authority in the hands of the state instead of in the hands of Christ the King. We are personalists because we believe in free will, and not in the economic determinism of the Communist philosophy.”⁵

² *ibid.*

³ Proudhon, Pierre-Joseph. *General Idea of Revolution in the Nineteenth Century* Cosmo Classics, New York. 2007.

⁴ Tucker, Benjamin. *Instead of a Book*. Forgotten Books: San Bernardino. 2017.

⁵ Day, Dorothy. *On Pilgrimage*. William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, Michigan. 1999. pp 22

Also like Proudhon the Anarcho-Distributists are critical of state communism and instead advocated a voluntary society based on self-employed and co-operative businesses.⁶

It should also be noted Maurin, Day, and the Catholic Worker used the term Personalism interchangeably with the term Anarchism.

As stated:

“It is the tradition we might call anarchism. We ourselves have never hesitated to use the word. Some prefer personalism. But Peter Maurin came to me with Kropotkin in one pocket and St. Francis in the other!”⁷

It should also be acknowledged that while both Proudhon and Maurin, Day, and the Catholic Worker are Anarchists, Proudhon did not believe in God while Maurin, Day, did and the Catholic Worker obviously does.

Dorothy Day regularly attended and was very active within the Catholic Church.⁸ and has been officially recognized as a ‘Servant of God’ by the Catholic Church and has been considered for sainthood by US Bishops.⁹

Peter Maurin was active within the Catholic Church and was invited to give many talks to the Knights of Columbus Catholic Organization whom he was friendly with.¹⁰

⁶ Ibid. Proudhon, Pierre-Joseph. What is Property?. Cosmo Classics, New York. 2007

⁷ Day, Dorothy. ‘February 1974: Small is Beautiful.’ Retrieved 7-11-2018 from: dorothyday.catholicworker.org

⁸ Day, Dorothy. On Pilgrimage. Wiliam B. Eerdman’s Publishing Company, Michigan. 1999. pp 12

⁹ Pattison, Mark. ‘US bishops endorse sainthood cause of Catholic Worker’s Dorothy Day’. www.catholicnews.com. Retrieved 7-11-2018 from: web.archive.loc.gov

¹⁰ Sheehan, Arthur T. Gay Believer. Hanover House, New York. pp 103, 150 retrieved 7-11-2018 from: babel.hathitrust.org

The Catholic Worker, Maurin, and Day believe that their society can be achieved through peaceful, gradual change by sharing their social and economic views with others and encouraging others to do the same. The author of this article has found their Catholic views helpful.