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Paul Misner, *Catholic Labor Movements in Europe. Social Thought and Action, 1914-1965*. Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 2015. xi + 341 pp. Notes, bibliography, and index. \$65.00 U.S. (cl). ISBN 978-0-8132-2753-5.

Review by Gerd-Rainer Horn, Institut d'Études Politiques de Paris.

One only all-too-rarely gets the chance to read the work of accomplished scholars in which they summarize the issues on which they have worked for two decades or more. In 1991, Paul Misner published his seminal *Social Catholicism in Europe*. The book under review here, *From the Onset of Industrialization to the First World War. Catholic Labor Movements in Europe*, is the sequel to Misner's landmark 1991 work.

Let me begin, however, with a word of caution. Despite the chronology clearly stated in the subtitle, *Social Thought and Action, 1914-1965*, this book's actual target years are, truth be told, the years 1914-1939. There are, of course, important observations on the years 1939-1965 included in this study, but they serve more as intelligent afterthoughts than as central chapters of an unfolding story. Yet this somewhat misleading subtitle is one of the very few criticisms of the book this reviewer is able to proffer. The book as such is a treasure trove of observations on a crucial set of decades in which Catholicism underwent important modifications.

Paul Misner, it must be stated up front, is one of preciously few social scientists thoroughly familiar with the intricate details of history in a great number of continental Western European states. The Netherlands, Belgium, Germany, France, Austria and Italy are intimately familiar to this scholar. And thus the reader learns an amazing series of facts and figures about these often rather disparate states with sometimes widely varying Catholic traditions. Moreover, Misner not only points out what was unique about each individual case, but he also draws important connections between those national cases where certain similarities allow the historian to point out transnational parallels.

All of this is linked to a nearly encyclopaedic knowledge of the various changes occurring at the level of the papacy and the Vatican. Moreover, the particular contributions of Catholic intellectuals--Heinrich Pesch or Joseph Cardijn come to mind, amongst many others--are ably dissected and placed in a supranational, European context of evolving ideas and rapidly shifting politics. This much may be said immediately: the volume under review is a pleasure to read.

The peculiar difficulty of analyzing Catholic labor movements in Europe in the interwar time period is in part the result of the indisputable fact that Catholic organizations linked to the world of labor--as well as Catholicism more generally--became increasingly pluralist. Catholic trade unions came into their own; Catholic Action took off like wildfire; and important intellectual schools--solidarism, for instance--took on great prominence in the Catholic public sphere. To portray this increasingly dense and variegated network of Catholic associations and intellectual strands is one of the lasting contributions of *Catholic Labor Movements in Europe*.

Moreover, the volatility of the European economy and society in these decades—Misner essentially covers a quarter century in which the Kondratieff cycle experienced a pronounced downswing phase—led to equally unpredictable political unrest and controversies, ranging from post-World War One left-wing radicalism to the post-1929 forward march of fascism (with Italy serving as vanguard in this respect as early as the mid-1920s) and associated right-wing dictatorships across Europe. Catholicism had a difficult time to position itself in such turbulent waters. As Misner puts it in a brilliant footnote: “The connections between the dignity of the human person and certain human rights, such as religious freedom for all, and participation in government through democratic processes was not yet made in magisterial declarations. Catholics in positions of authority still tended to assume that there was a peculiarly Christian economic and political system that was necessary for the health of society. Democracy was a possible trait, but not a necessary one, of this restored Christendom” (p. 199, n. 59).

It is impossible to do justice to the rich content of the three hundred pages of small-print text. It should be left up to the interested reader to discover the full range of what Paul Misner has to offer. A few tidbits may suffice to whet the appetite. Whoever wants to learn more about solidarism, corporatism and substitutionism will not be disappointed in this volume. The fascination of the Italian Catholic *popolari* for German—rather than French, for instance—organizational models in that brief space between the end of World War One and the King’s appointment of Benito Mussolini as Prime Minister is ably explained. Some choice pages on the tremendous wave of activism Guido Miglioli spawned amongst agricultural laborers in the area around Cremona in the Po Valley in the early 1920s make for fascinating reading. And the story of Guido Miglioli may, in part, help to explain the later emergence of such indefatigable activist priests, such as Don Primo Mazzolari or Don Zeno Saltini, in neighboring areas of the Po Valley and, by implication, eventually even the literary successes of another native of the Po Valley, the enlightened conservative Giovanni Guareschi, the creator of *Don Camillo and Peppone*.

Likewise, readers interested in the difference between Catholic trade unions, Catholic “milieu” organisations based on occupational groups (*standen* in Dutch), and Catholic “milieu” organisations based on generation and gender will find this book a treasure trove. The complex and often controversial relationship between Pope Pius XI and Mussolini is ably depicted in ample detail. Last but not least, the brilliant contribution to Catholic social policy by Joseph Cardijn, who created yet another kind of Catholic “milieu” organization, combining occupational categories side-by-side with gender and generation as organizing principles into what eventually came to be called Specialized Catholic Action, is given ample space as well.

In sum, *Catholic Labor Movements in Europe* should become mandatory reading for anyone wishing to study interwar European Catholicism and, in fact, for anyone wishing to familiarize themselves with interwar European politics and social action *tout court*. A modern classic has seen the light of day.

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