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## THE SILLON: AN EXPERIMENT IN POPULAR EDUCATION

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MARC SANGNIER's "Sillon," famous as a precursor of the Christian Democratic parties of today, is remembered for its political significance, but its importance as an educational movement has been almost completely ignored. Sangnier's basic aim was, of course, political: he wanted to make of France a new democracy in the Roman Catholic tradition. He believed, however, that he could reach his goal only by educating the workers of the nation. He founded the Sillon as a mass organization in 1899; for the next several years he repeatedly asserted that although the movement was committed to democracy, it was in no way political. Later he changed his mind, and practical politics supplanted education as the chief activity of the Sillon.<sup>1</sup> Nevertheless, the Sillon of the early

<sup>1</sup> Charles Breunig's unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, "The *Sillon* of Marc Sangnier: Christian-Democracy in France (1894-1910)" (Harvard University, 1953), is the only monographic study of the Sillon. The best published accounts of the movement are found in Adrien Dansette, *Histoire religieuse de la France contemporaine* (Paris, 1951), II, 406-31; Georges Hoog, *Histoire du Catholicisme social en France, 1871-1931* (Paris, 1946); and Henri Rollet, *L'Action sociale des catholiques en France, 1871-1914*, II (Paris, 1958), 18-32. I should like to express my appreciation for the help of the Inter-library Loan service of the Reference Department of the Rutgers University Library, whose efforts made it possible for me to see the Breunig dissertation and other scarce works not available locally.

years was primarily an experiment in education. Its aims differed from those of earlier educational efforts, and its methods were original and unusually effective.<sup>2</sup>

Sangnier's movement stirred thousands of young Frenchmen to devote themselves passionately to church and democracy. In their midst he stood as unquestioned leader—he was profoundly Roman Catholic and fiercely democratic. The combination was fairly unusual in *fin de siècle* France, for most republicans believed that Catholicism was a mask for tyranny, and most Catholics believed that republican was a synonym for atheist or Jew. Sangnier disliked his country's government as much as his reactionary co-religionists did, but he was fired by a vision of a Christian democracy, a nation of brothers in Christ who worked together for the good of all. His passion and his sincerity were contagious. From his earliest youth, in the mid-1890's, his arresting personality made itself felt.

He took first prize in philosophy when he left the Collège Stanislas in 1894. He seems to have been influenced most by Bossuet, Pascal, and Père Gratry, the famous liberal opponent of papal infallibility, rather than by the prophets of scientific "realism" then so popular in France.<sup>3</sup> Like many other young Catholics, he was enormously impressed by the encyclical *Rerum Novarum*, in which Pope Leo XIII dramatically outlined the position of his church on the problems of the modern industrial proletariat. While he was at Stanislas, he and some of his fellow students, all burning to "do something" for the faith, began meeting regularly in a basement room to hold discussions on religion in the modern age.<sup>4</sup> From these meetings came an organization known as the "Crypte." Sangnier was its moving spirit, but it lived on after he was graduated.

Sangnier appears to have become interested in workers' education during 1898, when, after finishing his studies at the École Polytechnique, he served for a year as an officer in an army engineer regiment. Since the early 1890's, the army had begun to place a new emphasis on indoctrination. Hubert Lyautey, a young captain in the early nineties and later the hero of French Morocco, had pointed

<sup>2</sup> Breunig, pp. 134-151, summarizes the educational aspects of the Sillon without going into detail.

<sup>3</sup> Breunig, pp. 118-25; Gaston Lestrat, *Les Beaux temps du Sillon* (Paris, 1926), p. 153.

<sup>4</sup> Marc Sangnier, *Autrefois . . .* (Paris [1936]), pp. 17-29 and note on pp. 147-49.

out in a famous article that army officers, in close contact with conscripted workers and not separated from them by the "class war," could set an example of brotherhood and citizenship that would revitalize the nation.<sup>5</sup> Lyautey later became part of a circle of Parisian "Social Catholics" that influenced Sangnier. Religious, patriotic, and dedicated, Sangnier was an ideal instrument for the task Lyautey had proposed. Assigned to take over the "moral training" of his battalion, he organized a system of courses given by volunteer instructors and himself spoke weekly to the troops on "The Army and Democracy."<sup>6</sup> One of his later disciples reported that Sangnier had found "future collaborators" among the Parisian workers then serving out their military obligations in the ranks of the battalion.<sup>7</sup> But Sangnier did not find army life satisfying; apparently he wanted to make contact with the masses on a basis of equality not to be found in a military organization.

Late in 1898 he resigned from the army and plunged into his life work. By merging two other small reviews with a Catholic literary magazine called *Le Sillon*, he created a center for the movement he hoped to organize and gave it a name. The Rutgers University Library has recently added to its periodical collections a long run of this journal, in which the history of Sangnier's movement can be traced from its hopeful beginnings to its tragic end.<sup>8</sup>

At the same time as he took control of *Le Sillon*, Sangnier gathered a committee of sponsors that included, along with several students who were to become important figures in the organization, three priests, two officers of the Association Catholique de Jeunesse française, and one of the chiefs of the declining Christian Democratic movement. This committee, though useful, was no board of directors;

<sup>5</sup> Lyautey's article, "Du Rôle social de l'officier," *Revue des deux mondes*, CIV (March 15, 1891), 443-59, was unsigned; see Georges Hardy, *Portrait de Lyautey* (Paris, 1949), pp. 192-93, for a discussion of Lyautey's relations with the Social Catholics.

<sup>6</sup> *Autrefois*, p. 148, n.

<sup>7</sup> *Lestrat*, pp. 23-24.

<sup>8</sup> *Autrefois*, pp. 148-49, n. *Le Sillon* is a vital source for study not only of the Sillon, but also of French catholicism, politics, and society during the period in which it was published. The Library's holdings, purchased late in 1962 with ordinary acquisition funds, are complete for the years 1902 and 1906-1908; many issues from 1901, 1903-1905, and 1908-1910 are also in the collection. A survey made by the Union Catalogue Division of the Library of Congress at the request of the Rutgers Library Reference Department located no other copies of *Le Sillon* available to scholars in the United States.

Sangnier was from start to finish the unrivalled commander of the Sillon.

Potential recruits for his experiment were easy to find, but not so easy to enlist. For nearly a century, since the 1820's and 1830's brought the beginnings of industrialization to France, thoughtful churchmen had been seeking ways to maintain contact with the masses. One of the first results of that search was the establishment of church-sponsored youth groups called *patronages*.<sup>9</sup> By the 1840's, many *patronages* had evolved into formal youth organizations that provided rooms in which young workers—twelve years of age and older—met for instruction in reading and writing as well as religion, and some had begun sponsoring games and sports. The *patronages* succeeded, however, only with adolescents. By the time the boys involved reached the age of fifteen or sixteen, they found more intriguing ways of spending their leisure time. Two major efforts to develop means of holding them had shown great promise, only to fail in the end. Count Albert de Mun's *Œuvre des cercles catholiques d'ouvriers*, combining religious and social activities, flourished during the 1880's but began to decline toward the end of the century.<sup>10</sup> Another movement, the *Cercles chrétiens d'Études sociales*, founded in 1891 by the manufacturer Léon Harmel, gradually developed into a Christian Democratic political party, but political failure ruined the movement.<sup>11</sup> In 1899 the problem still existed: how could the church keep the loyalty of the young worker when he began to lose interest in the *patronage*? Sangnier thought he knew the answer.

"I have always been fascinated," he wrote, "by the pronounced taste of popular circles for general ideas."<sup>12</sup> He had noticed this taste for the abstract in the soldiers he instructed, and he found it also among the young men he met when he began to associate with workers' groups. In meetings of the *patronages*, however, he found the members interested only in horseplay.<sup>13</sup> When he tried to speak

<sup>9</sup> For details on the *patronage* movement see J.-B. Duroselle, *Les Débuts du catholicisme social en France (1822-1870)* (Paris, 1951), pp. 183-97, 553-60.

<sup>10</sup> Miriam Lynch, *The Organized Social Apostolate of Albert de Mun* (Washington, D.C., 1952), pp. 82-83.

<sup>11</sup> Henri Rollet, *L'Action sociale des catholiques en France (1871-1901)* (Paris, 1947), pp. 339-41, 442-43.

<sup>12</sup> *Autrefois*, p. 131.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 135.

to the young men of one *patronage* on a serious subject, he felt that he failed completely to make any contact with them. All he saw around him were feet twitching and heads bobbing. Spoken to separately, however, they responded—and Sangnier believed that their earlier recalcitrance stemmed from shyness. Each youth had to be shown that someone was interested not in keeping him off the streets, but in making friends with him as an individual. By helping these young men prove that they were intelligent, by giving them courage to use their talents, he could bring them to take a serious role in society.<sup>14</sup>

Once released from their feelings of inadequacy and loneliness, young workers could use their minds; they could learn, and act. For Sangnier believed that education was above all preparation for action. "To form men capable of employing themselves at a task, prepared to render specific services: such is obviously," he said, "the aim of education."<sup>15</sup> In his day, he believed, France needed citizens who were "free, aware, and enlightened," who not only knew a trade but could work, as he put it, "to free our country from the prejudices that blind it, to deliver it from the occult or open slavery of *bad shepherds*, and to realize finally that fruitful and pacific harmony which would permit each man to bring his energy to the common task and join, at once sovereign and responsible, in the government of the commonwealth." Sangnier knew that he could not organize all the workers of France, but he argued that he could build an élite that would lead democracy toward the idealism it lacked.

That élite would not be political in the ordinary sense, for Sangnier saw the politics of his day as a sordid business of compromising election combinations and unkept campaign pledges.<sup>16</sup> Instead of running for office, his newly-awakened leaders would set an example of probity and morality that would in itself reform the nation's whole political climate.

To build that élite, Sangnier revitalized an old institution, the "cercle d'études." The "study circle" had existed among French

<sup>14</sup> Sangnier tells how he "awakened" one young man, *ibid.*, pp. 137-39.

<sup>15</sup> Sangnier, *Une Méthode d'éducation démocratique: Cercles d'études et Instituts populaires* (Paris [1906]), p. 1.

<sup>16</sup> A typical expression of the early Sillonist attitude toward politics is Paul Bureau's "La Vanité de la politique," *Le Sillon*, May 25, 1902, pp. 374-82.

Catholics since early in the nineteenth century; the idea may have been taken over from the generally anti-clerical "sociétés de pensée" of the pre-revolutionary period. Sangnier's conception of the circle differed radically, however, from earlier forms. De Mun's *Œuvre des cercles* had been based on the idea that the "directing classes" should accept their responsibility to guide their inferiors, and within the organization class distinctions were purposely emphasized and carefully preserved.<sup>17</sup> The circles De Mun established were primarily social clubs.<sup>18</sup> The "study circles" that formed the basis of Harmel's Christian Democratic movement also were class-oriented—they were almost completely restricted to workers—and they were politically active from the start. Their studies were narrowly social and economic.<sup>19</sup> Sangnier wanted to obliterate class distinctions, and to fuse from disparate elements a new "directing class" that was based not on wealth but on dedication to duty. He wanted to have nothing to do with practical politics. His circles were to be seriously educational, but the men who made them up were to choose the subjects they would study.

Using his position as guiding spirit of the *Crypte* as a lever, Sangnier won invitations to speak at meetings of *patronages*, church-sponsored workers' clubs, the Association Catholique de la Jeunesse Française, and, later, such important organizations as the Société d'Éducation et d'Enseignement.<sup>20</sup> From the young he demanded action; from their elders he asked understanding and support. At a meeting of the Société d'Éducation chaired by the Cardinal Archbishop of Paris, he told his listeners that he could bring them very little knowledge, but that he brought a great deal of hope.

We have not wanted [he said] to withhold our little store from the great edifice of national reconstruction on which we all must work. . . .<sup>21</sup>

He praised the Catholic schools and the *patronages*, and spoke of the need to preserve the piety developed there.

<sup>17</sup> Lynch, pp. 43-47.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 53.

<sup>19</sup> Rollet, 1871-1901, pp. 442-43.

<sup>20</sup> Sangnier, *Discours*, Vol. I: 1891-1906 (Paris, 1910), includes a number of speeches from this early period and indicates where they were delivered.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 65.

It is not enough, however, to preserve; we must continue to form. Let us therefore persuade the young man that he has no right to be good only for himself, but that he must be good for others as well; let us engrave deeply in his soul this thought of a Father of the Church: "Let us remember, Christians, that we are responsible for the salvation of the human race."<sup>22</sup>

Pious young men should do more than merely learn, work, and preserve their own virtue; they must have initiative. They must be turned into apostles. That the Sillon could do. Critics who believed that workers need only be respectable and be good Christians might oppose an educational movement, but, Sangnier argued, since Catholics were accustomed "to give bread to those who are hungry and clothes to those who are naked," should they then "hesitate to furnish bread of the mind to those who perish from the want of that food, or to clothe in the truth those who have been so deplorably robbed of it?"<sup>23</sup> At another meeting, he spoke of the selfless endeavor shared by members of the circles of the Sillon:

There are no longer either masters or students, but each man giving and receiving in turn, no one wishing to give himself to anything but the triumph of the cause that belongs to us all. And thus a very fertile, very active comradeship, showing itself not in words but in acts, comes from the labor of all; thus is developed, strong and beneficent, what we at the Sillon have for a long time called "the Common Soul."<sup>24</sup>

The Sillon was an educational movement, but as Sangnier's words showed, it was also a fraternity of idealists.

The circles of the Sillon generally included ten to twenty young men who met regularly to study "religious, historical or social questions."<sup>25</sup> Each candidate for membership had to be a practicing Catholic. Once organized, each circle established its first year's program, usually choosing subjects that reflected the makeup of the particular circle: circles sponsored by *patronages* tended to emphasize religious questions, neighborhood circles discussed trade unions and economic matters, rural groups studied problems that interested peasants.<sup>26</sup> Members volunteered or were assigned to prepare reports on chosen subjects, and the full circle discussed each report. A counsellor,

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 70.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 78.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 89.

<sup>25</sup> Henry du Roure, "Réunion des Œuvres d'Éducation populaire," *Le Sillon*, Dec. 25, 1901, p. 311.

<sup>26</sup> Du Roure, "Un Congrès national," *Le Sillon*, Mar. 10, 1902, p. 166.

often the director of a sponsoring *patronage*, lent whatever intellectual aid was needed, though he was supposed to avoid any attempt to rule the circle or to indoctrinate the members.<sup>27</sup> Sangnier constantly reiterated his belief that priests, students, or "intellectuals" were not to *direct* the worker-members, but to join them in study.

The work of a typical circle, formed in Amiens, was reported in some detail to the central office of the Sillon in October, 1901.<sup>28</sup> Charles Quénet, who wrote the report, said that the circle was born after a local meeting at which "the Catholics, gripped by commendable zeal, decided 'to do something.'" Whether to admit only workers, only intellectuals, or both, was the first problem the organizers faced. They finally decided to take in "each Catholic who promised at least the support of his good will." A member of the circle offered a room for a meeting place. The twelve original members took as the basis of their studies the encyclical *Rerum Novarum*; each member was furnished a copy of the document and required to bring it to meetings. The group met from 8:30 to 10 p.m. every Thursday, opening its session with a prayer and then talking informally over coffee for a short while. A few months after the circle was formed, the report continues, a review of the week's lectures and social events was added to the proceedings. Progress was far from steady. Bad weather cut attendance in the winter, and the members got tired of studying the encyclical, which led the group "to talk a little about everything." Most of the members, timid and ignorant, only listened, without speaking themselves. The circle therefore instituted a system under which each member in turn prepared a question to be explained and discussed on a fixed date. This plan worked well—timidity, Quénet said, disappeared with the winter. "In the discussion," he wrote, "it was easy to try to support [the speaker] or to present an objection; that made an excellent preparation for study and for public speaking." Gradually what Quénet called "practical" matters came into the discussions. "*Co-operatives* and *unions* were carefully studied; we informed ourselves about those that existed at Amiens." They also studied the

<sup>27</sup> *Discours*, p. 87.

<sup>28</sup> Letter from Charles Quénet, Amiens, *Echo des Cercles d'études et des Instituts populaires*, no. 20 supplement to *Le Sillon*, Oct. 25, 1901, 302-305.



origins of the Revolution of 1789, a proposed law on workers' benefits, the encyclical on Christian Democracy,<sup>29</sup> the constitution of the Republic, family labor, socialism, the Franciscan Third Order, and other things that Quénet said he had forgotten about. As a result, the members learned. "More than one who some months before would not have asked an explanation revealed himself to be a distinguished but courteous polemicist." As Quénet wrote, the circle had almost thirty members and was holding mock parliamentary sessions. At the one he described, they "overthrew the ministry"—an action that fellow Catholics in the Chamber of Deputies had signally failed to accomplish in recent years.

Other circles used similar methods, but studied other subjects. One circle at Rouen, for example, reported in 1901 that it had discussed *Le Cid*, Madagascar (recently conquered by France), strikes, workers' housing, how to become a property owner, the *Index*, the *Budget des cultes* (the government's financing of religious activity under the Concordat), and alcoholism.<sup>30</sup> Another Rouen circle, reporting at the same time, showed a warm interest in scientific subjects; along with the Crusades, its members studied such things as the sun, photography, paper, and cotton.<sup>31</sup>

To discuss such subjects, members of the circles needed information. Some of the circles, like the Amiens group described above, developed their own libraries. (Early in 1902 *Le Sillon* began publishing bibliographies listing works useful for such collections.<sup>32</sup>) Those libraries could not, however, be very extensive, and even when books were available, many ill-educated members of the circles could hardly make use of them. Toward the end of 1899, Sangnier therefore established *salles de travail* at which workers preparing talks could get help.<sup>33</sup> The idea, he said, came from the workers themselves.<sup>34</sup> On two evenings a week students who had volunteered to be counsellors ("not masters, but friends"<sup>35</sup>) made themselves available in a library at the Sillon's Paris headquarters, ready to answer questions or to deliver informal talks on popular

<sup>29</sup> *Graves de communi*, issued by Pope Leo XIII on Jan. 18, 1901.

<sup>30</sup> *Echo*, 23 (Dec. 10, 1901), 355 (report from *Cercle de Saint-Victoire*).

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.* (report from *Cercle de Saint-Vivien*).

<sup>32</sup> "Notes bibliographiques à l'usage des Cercles d'études," *Le Sillon*, Jan. 25, 1902, p. 77.

<sup>33</sup> *Autrefois*, p. 153, n. 1.

<sup>34</sup> *Une Méthode*, p. 9.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*

subjects.<sup>36</sup> Young "apprentice counsellors" also worked there, preparing tracts, answering questions mailed in from the provinces, and preparing bibliographies requested by circles.<sup>37</sup> The *salles de travail* were patronized heavily: in 1902, *Le Sillon* listed 290 "principal questions" studied there since the rooms were opened.<sup>38</sup> Thus the circles were provided with resources otherwise unobtainable.

The circles, however, were meant to include only an infinitesimal proportion of the population Sangnier hoped to influence. Men of the circles were, in his view, those who would lead the rest of France in the way of duty.<sup>39</sup> The circle could be open only to a few, he wrote, for "it requires moral qualities, a courage of the mind and the heart, which are not, alas, very common."<sup>40</sup> To accomplish their task of leadership, the circles were to serve as the directing committees for *instituts populaires*, "open to all, even to adversaries, where, protected by guarantees of free and serious discussion, one can manifest his certitudes and his beliefs without fearing to submit them to controversy, begin to bear witness to that which one believes to be true without being afraid to put it in contact with adverse opinions: in a word, to perform a true work of intellectual and moral expansion."<sup>41</sup>

The *instituts populaires* developed by the Sillon were far less original in their methods than were the circles. Various schemes for mass education of adults had been in use in France for many years; though they were organized by groups with widely different aims, they usually operated in about the same way—lecturers spoke, debates were held, and social events served to attract recruits. Moreover, the most successful attempt along these lines, the famous *université populaire* movement, was booming just as the Sillon came into existence. Dozens of these workers' night schools, founded by socialist and liberal intellectuals and supported by such literary lights as Émile Zola and Anatole France, were formed soon after the first one was organized in 1897.<sup>42</sup> Sangnier and his colleagues

<sup>36</sup> "Les Salles de travail," *Le Sillon*, Jan. 25, 1902, p. 74.

<sup>37</sup> Du Roure, "Avant le congrès national," *Le Sillon*, Jan. 25, 1903, p. 50.

<sup>38</sup> "Les Salles de travail," pp. 75-77.

<sup>39</sup> In a speech reported by J. Lucel, "La Réunion trimestrielle des cercles d'études," *Le Sillon*, Feb. 10, 1902, p. 113.

<sup>40</sup> *Une Méthode*, p. 6.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 6-7.

<sup>42</sup> No detailed study of the *universités populaires* has been made, but a short account

hotly denied that their *instituts* were in any way founded as a reaction against the *universités*, but members of various study circles frankly admitted that they hoped the *instituts* they planned to establish would offset the influence of the *universités* "founded by the Free-masons and the socialists."<sup>43</sup> Sangnier contended that the *instituts* were a natural outgrowth of the study circles; in any case, he used the idea as if it were his own.

The first of these new establishments, the *Institut populaire du V<sup>e</sup> arrondissement*, opened in Paris on February 3, 1901.<sup>44</sup> Others followed as the Sillon grew. Like the circles, the I. P.'s were dedicated primarily to education for action, but the method differed; in the I. P.'s, lecture, not discussion, was the standard form of instruction. The subject matter was varied, as it was in the circles. A typical three-week program for the *I. P. du V<sup>e</sup>*, printed in *Le Sillon*, included the following lectures: "The Trade Union Question," "Raphaël, his Life and Work" (with slides), "Dirigible Balloons," "Freedom of Education," "The Hague Court," and "Morocco." Highly qualified lecturers, including at least one future academician, the literary critic René Doumic, appeared on the platform.<sup>45</sup> Every Sunday the I. P. presented a concert and a "popular reading," and on two Sundays a month it organized field trips to such places as museums or the Observatory. Its rooms were open every night from 8:30 to 10 p.m.; lectures were given twice a week, and on other days "study groups" requested by workers met there. Counsellors were available to the study groups. Regular courses in singing, mathematics, fencing, and English were underway in November, 1901.<sup>46</sup> Occasionally the I. P.'s sponsored mass meetings at which leaders of the Sillon debated current questions with members of other groups, for the Sillon was never neutral. Not only socialists and free-think-

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of the movement is included in D. W. Brogan, *The Development of Modern France (1870-1939)* (London, 1940), pp. 371-72.

<sup>43</sup> For the denials, see *Une Méthode*, p. 15, and Louis Rolland, quoted in "Le Congrès national des Cercles d'études et des Instituts populaires," *Le Sillon*, Feb. 25, 1903, p. 150; for opposing evidence, see the report by Jules Boussicot reprinted from *Chronique du Sud-Est* in *Echo*, 20 (Oct. 25, 1901), 305, and (for the quotation) the report on *Cercle de Saint-Benoît*, *Echo*, 21 (Nov. 10, 1901), 317.

<sup>44</sup> L. Rolland, "L'Institut populaire du V<sup>e</sup> arrondissement," *Le Sillon*, Feb. 25, 1902 [*sic*], p. 142.

<sup>45</sup> "Convocations," *Le Sillon*, Jan. 25, 1903, p. 80.

<sup>46</sup> *Echo*, 21 (Nov. 10, 1901), 328.

ers, but also conservatives, Catholic and otherwise, considered the Sillon dangerous; it had to defend itself as well as to take a part in the general defense of the church.<sup>47</sup>

Not all the I. P.'s were open to "adversaries." Some of them required that any new members be introduced by someone who already belonged to the *institut*. On the other hand, some were very much open. Louis Rolland, who became the first director of the National Federation of I. P.'s when it was formed in 1903, recalled on that occasion that when only Catholics were invited to the opening of an I. P. in the IV<sup>e</sup> arrondissement, exactly four people appeared. At a second meeting, the public was invited, and a hundred anticlericals attended. But the *institut* prospered.<sup>48</sup>

Almost as soon as Sangnier began to found the study circles, he began to tie them together. The first inter-circle meetings were local. Circles in Paris sent delegates to meet each other three times a year, beginning in July, 1900; other areas soon followed suit. The first national congress met in Paris in February, 1902, and similar meetings were held each February for the next three years. The reports of these conferences indicate that their main function was inspirational, although at each congress the delegates compared notes on their progress and prepared new attacks on the apathy and ignorance of their fellow Frenchmen. They heard speakers (notably Sangnier), held discussions, and closed each congress with a "punch" — "a meeting of cordial and noisy gaiety at which toasts succeeded one another, joyous, alert, eloquent, or elevated in turn, all equally enthusiastic. . . ."<sup>49</sup>

The movement grew rapidly. The central office had to move to larger quarters in January, 1902.<sup>50</sup> Sangnier traveled over the country speaking at *patronages* and inspiring the foundation of new

<sup>47</sup> For remarks on the "jealousy" of other Catholic groups see Jean Lefort, "Le Mouvement des Cercles d'études," *Le Sillon*, Jan. 25, 1902, p. 62. The most famous of the "confrontations" was the so-called *meeting sanglant* of June 10, 1903, which became an important part of the *Sillon* legend; reports of such meetings are scattered through the pages of *Le Sillon*.

<sup>48</sup> "Le Congrès national," Feb. 25, 1903, pp. 150-51.

<sup>49</sup> Du Roure, "Un Congrès national," Mar. 10, 1902, p. 173; short reports of each of these meetings appear in *Le Sillon* in the number following the date of the meeting in question.

<sup>50</sup> A. de Ribes, "L'Inauguration des nouvelles salles du Sillon," *Le Sillon*, Feb. 10, 1902, pp. 86-89.

circles and I. P.'s.<sup>51</sup> His effectiveness is universally acknowledged: wherever he passed, study circles grew in profusion. As the Sillon grew, old circles, survivors of defunct enthusiasms, joined the new movement. Georges Delavenne, who had come to the Sillon from the Christian Democratic movement, helped bring in many of the circles he had helped to found as a leader in Harmel's organization.<sup>52</sup> Marius Gonin, leader of the strong Social Catholic movement associated with the *Chronique du Sud-Est*, quickly brought in his entire group, which by January, 1902, included seventy-eight circles.<sup>53</sup>

At the first trimester conference of the circles of Paris in July, 1900, nineteen circles were represented. A year later there were twenty-eight, and on November 15, 1901, at the sixth local congress, twenty-nine were represented.<sup>54</sup> By January, 1903, five to six hundred circles were electing delegates to the second national congress; there were then twenty-eight in Paris.<sup>55</sup> In February, 1905, at the fourth and last national congress of study circles and *instituts*, about a thousand circles were represented.<sup>56</sup> In February, 1903, the National Federation of I. P.'s was founded with fifteen *instituts* participating;<sup>57</sup> the number was doubled by 1905.<sup>58</sup>

All this cost money. Sangnier, scion of a wealthy and pious family, gave his own time and part of his fortune, as did others in the movement. Those who had little contributed what they could spare. *Le Sillon* made a profit, and small membership fees helped to finance the I. P.'s. Delegates to Congresses paid their own expenses and were assessed a registration fee to offset the rental and other costs absorbed by the organization.<sup>59</sup>

As the movement grew, its character changed. Sangnier's program was vague from its earliest days. In December, 1901, when the Sillon was still in its early stages, he flatly excluded political activity from its plans. In announcing a new format for *Le Sillon*, Louis Meyer,

<sup>51</sup> For reports of one trip, see *Echo*, 21 (Nov. 10, 1901), 321-34.

<sup>52</sup> Rollet, 1870-1901, p. 446.

<sup>53</sup> Lefort, "Le Mouvement des Cercles d'études," Jan. 25, 1902, p. 62.

<sup>54</sup> Du Roure, "Réunion des Œuvres," Dec. 25, 1901, p. 325.

<sup>55</sup> Du Roure, "Avant le congrès national," Jan. 25, 1903, p. 47.

<sup>56</sup> *Autrefois*, p. 153, n. 3.

<sup>57</sup> "Le Congrès national," Feb. 25, 1903, p. 151.

<sup>58</sup> *Autrefois*, p. 155, n. 1.

<sup>59</sup> Du Roure, "Comment vit le Sillon," *Le Sillon*, Sept. 25, 1906, pp. 201-210; Rolland, "L'Institut populaire du V<sup>e</sup>," Feb. 25, 1902, pp. 142-43.

in charge of working with the study circles, began his comments on the future of the review by saying that "more than ever we shall exclude politics."<sup>60</sup> By 1905, however, Sangnier was clearly changing his ideas about the nature of education and the duty of young Christians, even though he still protested that the Sillon was not a political group.<sup>61</sup>

In the early national congresses more or less purely educational problems absorbed the delegates. As the years went by, however, the Sillon began founding such institutions as a workers' restaurant and a grocery consumers' cooperative, and its members began to ask what they ought to do about joining unions.<sup>62</sup> Events at the 1905 congress of study circles and I. P.'s presaged a serious change in outlook. As that meeting opened, one of Sangnier's closest collaborators, backed by the leader himself, suggested that in the future the congresses should not be meetings of delegates from the educational groups alone, but congresses of the Sillon pure and simple, with representatives of all sorts of Sillon projects. Marius Gonin was absent (he was ill), but his representative, obviously suspicious of the new course, simply took the *Chronique du Sud-Est* federation, which by then included more than 200 study circles, out of the movement.<sup>63</sup> In the course of the year *Le Sillon* began to carry in its pages discussions of the political future of the groups.<sup>64</sup> Sangnier began to emphasize the fact that the Sillon was a *mouvement*, with the implication that it should move.<sup>65</sup> Finally, Sangnier established a bi-weekly newspaper that was designed to spread the gospel of the Sillon far and wide.<sup>66</sup> In less than three years the study circles and I.P.'s had become nothing more than centers of practical political prop-

<sup>60</sup> "La Chronique de l'Echo," *Echo*, 23 (Dec. 10, 1901), 346.

<sup>61</sup> Breunig, pp. 271-73.

<sup>62</sup> On the first co-operative, see Louis Grangy, "La Vie du Sillon: En pleine bataille," *Le Sillon*, Feb. 25, 1905, pp. 152-55; on the restaurant, Pierre Fabre, "La Vie du Sillon: Un Restaurant coopératif," *Le Sillon*, Oct. 25, 1905, pp. 314-15. Articles on trade unions are plentiful; what matters is their gradual increase in number and importance.

<sup>63</sup> Fabre, "Le Congrès," Mar. 10, 1905, p. 172.

<sup>64</sup> E.g., Georges Renard, "Le Sillon et la politique," *Le Sillon*, July 25, 1905, pp. 60-63.

<sup>65</sup> E.g., in "Le Sillon est-il un mouvement personnel?" *Le Sillon*, July 25, 1905, pp. 40-49.

<sup>66</sup> Publication began Oct. 1, 1905; see "La Vie du Sillon: l'Eveil démocratique," *Le Sillon*, Sept. 25, 1905, pp. 229-30.

aganda.<sup>67</sup> Eventually Sangnier ran for a seat in the Chamber of Deputies, and the Sillon was political through and through. Pope Pius X condemned the movement for doctrinal reasons in 1910, but it had ceased long before to be an educational venture. This development was gradual; given the position of French Catholics as they lost their battle to prevent the separation of church and state (finally accomplished in 1905), such a change was hardly surprising.

As long as the Sillon remained an educational movement, it was a complete success. That success was significant, for French workers had little time, energy, or inclination for self-improvement. In the first place, the Sillon's phenomenal growth was Sangnier's personal triumph; even his enemies always called him a great orator and a great organizer. Though the area of his action was relatively small, he ranks with Jaurès and Clemenceau as one of the great popular leaders of early twentieth-century France.

Sangnier's novel methods, as well as his personality, contributed to the Sillon's appeal. Teachers know that discussions in which students take part are far more popular than any but the most extraordinary lectures. The sympathetic methods of the counsellors at the *Salles de travail* also must have made study pleasant for workers unused to courteous treatment of any kind. Rotating assignments among members in the circles, giving each of the members implicit recognition as a potential scholar and speaker, and letting the circles choose their subjects for study gave the Sillon an air of the "democracy" that workers then sought so enthusiastically. All these ideas were new in mass education, and all of them were valuable in attracting and holding students. They also were undoubtedly effective methods of instruction.

Nevertheless, neither a great personality nor new and effective teaching methods can guarantee success to an educational movement, for oratorical impressions wear off, and most teachers know capable students who refuse to study even under the best conditions. The real secret of the Sillon's triumph may well have been its politico-religious underpinning. Education for self-improvement attracts some people, and education for "citizenship" seems to interest a few earnest souls, but the Sillon was selling education for a new society. Democracy without religion was impossible, Sangnier believed—and in France

<sup>67</sup> Breunig, pp. 224-25.

both religion and democracy were, then probably far more than now, powerful motivating forces. The Sillon took the very men whose plight inspired Durkheim to coin the word *anomie* and gave them not only a "circle" of friends, but a national network of unknown comrades who shared with them "a common soul" and a common vision of a glorious future. They were studying not so they could earn more money or find "a place in society," but so they could change the world.

In the end, politics and religion completely replaced education in the program of the Sillon, but in the beginning, when politics and religion were still in the background providing the bases for a stirring ideal, they may have been the catalysts that inspired Sangnier's legions to give themselves wholeheartedly to study and to action. The history of the Sillon suggests that perhaps the surest key to the educator's success is, just as in so many other areas of life, the age-old appeal for selfless dedication to the common good.