

On Pilgrimage - June 1972

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Summary: Reaffirms their refusal to become a “corporation” in the face of a huge Internal Revenue Service tax penalty. Points to Peter Maurin’s insistence on personal responsibility and turns to scripture and the Eucharist for solace and faith. (Also see document #523) (DDLW #522).

In the May issue of **The Catholic Worker** I wrote of the crisis The Catholic Worker found itself in when we received a letter from the Internal Revenue Service stating that we owe them \$296,359 in fines and penalties and unpaid income tax for the tax years, 1966 through 1970. This was a very impressive bill, and we wondered what it would be if they started figuring out what they thought we owed them from the years 1933, when we began, up to 1966!

The **New York Times**, in a story signed by Max Seigel, with a four column head and a picture of a few of us at lunch in our headquarters at 36 East First Street, brought our situation to the attention of a vaster group of readers, and followed up the story with an editorial. The New York evening **Post** also editorialized on our situation. The **National Catholic Reporter** and the **Commonweal** editors also registered their protest and other papers followed suit. Letters come in daily from our friends, reassuring, comforting, indignant at the government, a few of them indignant at us, that we cause them so much worry. We certainly are grateful and must apologize that we cannot keep up with the mail and get them all answered.

There is not any real news for them at the moment, nor will be until our July-August edition of **The Catholic Worker**. I will have to appear before a Federal Judge on July 3 to explain why the CW refuses to pay taxes, or to “structure itself” so as to be exempt from taxes. We are afraid of that word “structure.” We refuse to become a “corporation.”

Perhaps it is structure which makes for such a scandal as the story which appeared in the press all over the country, of a famous charity for children which had millions of dollars in reserve, money which could have been used either for expansions in the work, or in working to bring about conditions in housing and education which would make so much “charity” unnecessary. Charity becomes a word which sticks in the gullet and makes one cry out for justice.

We repeat—we do not intend to “incorporate” the Catholic Worker movement. We

intend to continue our emphasis on personal responsibility, an emphasis which we were taught from the beginning by Peter Maurin who used to quote Emmanuel Mounier's **Personalist Manifesto**, and his **Personal and Communitarian Revolution**, Peter was our teacher, and being a Frenchman, a peasant, he emphasized decentralization, manual labor, voluntary poverty.

Voluntary poverty meant that everyone at the CW worked without salary, and contributions came from them, and from our readers, which kept the work going.

Rumblings first came from the Internal Revenue service after many on the CW staff, together with other peace groups, demonstrated against war in the Fifties and Sixties and were jailed for Civil Disobedience. Writing about jails and courtrooms resulted in much publicity. But it was Ammon Hennacy and Karl Meyer who wrote most consistently on Tax Refusal, and its importance. "Wars will cease when men refuse to pay for them."

Ralph Nader

When I write "men" I mean people. And I rejoice to note that Ralph Nader has now established The Tax Reform Research group. **People and Taxes** is published by this group and the first issue arrived yesterday. The purpose of the group is to work for income tax reform and property tax reform, and the lead article is by Mr. Nader. The paper is an extension of the **Property Tax News Letter** which we have not seen yet. Write to **Tax Reform Research Group, P.O. Box 14198, Ben Franklin Station, Washington, D.C. 20036**. And while you are at it, write to **TAX Talk**, published by **War Tax Resistance, 339 Lafayette St., N.Y., N.Y. 10012** which contains letters from all over the country from individual tax resisters, telling what is happening to them. Stimulating and invigorating. Good make up and good format. First Rate.

Spot News

While I write, Arthur J. Lacey comes in to hand me my mail and it contains a notice from one of our two lawyers. "Please be advised that I have been contacted by the Conference Section of the Internal Revenue Service and we have arranged for the hearing on September 7, 1972." **The** hearing sounds more decisive and final than **A** hearing. This has to do with the almost \$300,000 (I am tired of spelling it out). The July hearing has to do with the Will, and how complicated we have made it for the other four recipients and the lawyers, and why. As far as I see and hear, the other four recipients, Good Shepherd Order, Little Sisters of the Poor, Sacred Heart Free Home for Incurable Cancer and Maryknoll, are saying nothing.

I would like to be able to say to our readers, our family (as I like to think of them), that I am not at all worried about all this mishmash and the outcome. But of course one becomes intimidated in the awesome presence of a judge. Not

to speak of stenographers and swearing to tell the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth, so help me, God, and maybe not being allowed to finish a sentence, or to explain. Anyone who writes as much as I do is not a “woman of few words.” The older I get the more I have to study and learn—there is no end to it. Of course the Gospel tells us that when we are called before judges not to worry about how to answer, what to say. I’ll have to do a good deal of praying, doing what in the quaint terminology of the Church was formerly called “making acts of adoration, contrition, thanksgiving and supplication.” A.C.T.S. Easy to remember. Easy to do in those crises which every family without exception finds itself into. Oh, God, make haste to help me. Take not they Holy Spirit from me. Hear my prayer. Let my cry come unto Thee.

Besides praying, it is also good to distract the mind. In Tolstoi’s **War and Peace**, read again recently (part of the distraction), Nikolai advised the fearful sixteen-year-old soldier never to think of the battle ahead, or of previous fears. So besides my reading I have had the opportunity this summer of seeing two first rate movies, **Fiddler on the Roof** and **Uncle Vanya**. I had been reading Elie Wiesel’s **Souls on Fire**, his tales of the Hasidim, and the movie led me back to Martin Buber and Rabbi Heschel’s writing. **Uncle Vanya** led me to Chekhov’s plays again, his short stories, and his book about Sakhalin Prison island. Both removed me for a time from present troubles.

Actually our Tax situation and the threats which hang over us involve nowhere near as much suffering and heartbreak as the moral, physical and mental illnesses of many of those around us which involve so many who are dear to us.

It is then that I turn most truly for solace, for strength to endure, to the psalms. I may read them without understanding, and mechanically at first, but I do believe they are the Word, and that Scripture on the one hand and the Eucharist, the Word made Flesh, on the other, have in them that strength which no power on earth can withstand. One of Amon Hennacy’s favorite quotations was, “All things work together for good to those who love God.”

As Sonya said at the end of **Uncle Vanya**, “I have faith, Uncle, I have fervent, passionate faith.”