

On Pilgrimage - February 1974

By Dorothy Day

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Summary: Reflects on a number of economic themes: the building of churches; problems with the IRS; why they are not tax-exempt; personalist/anarchist writers and projects; Ade Bethune's Community Corporation in Rhode Island. Extols all forms of mutual aid. (DDLW #538).

Midwinter now and yet a January thaw during the last week of that usually bitter month makes one think of planting. I spent the last week in January traveling in New England, speaking at the Boston Paulist Church on the Common; the Trappist Monastery at Spencer; spent a night at Haley House of Hospitality in Boston; visited Ade Bethune and her mother at Newport; went on to Owen and Pat McGowan at Fall River; spoke at Bridgewater State Library where Owen is a librarian; and then home again by bus.

I recover from my fatigue as I rest in bed this first Sunday in February, writing, reviewing the past month for this column. It is a letter to all our readers whose letters I neglect to answer.

New England

Everyone loves New England in all its seasons. It truly is the culture center of our country. It contains the good and the bad of our country, the idealism of those who came here for religious and political freedom, and the constant reminder of the tragic failure of our country to be faithful to either.

After they had taught the Colonists how to survive, the Colonists drove the Indians out, those Indians whose hospitality had introduced us to the varieties of food our country is rich in. (Now we are confronted by the Wounded Knee trials about to begin in St. Paul, Minnesota.)

On my trip I saw the neat garden vineyards of the Portuguese of Fall River on their bits of property, as well as the "decaying" tenements (a term used for our de Peyster Mansion at Tivoli Farm). I saw, too, the enormous mills where small children as well as their elders worked long hours for a pittance. They are now half occupied by many small factories and industrial concerns. I saw, too, the great and ornate churches built by these poor people, rectories, schools and convents, and hospitals set up by hard working religious orders. I remember at the same time not to be too critical. John Cogley said the only beauty he knew when he was a child in Westside Chicago was the ornate churches. I know, too, that workers with every skill built the great cathedrals over the centuries. I must remember these things when I visit a 1500 acre (untilled) monastery, and think of the unused riches in stocks and bonds, interest-drawing "investments", perhaps part of our wartime economy, part of the exploitation of South Africa,

Rhodesia and Mozambique, and the Portuguese colonies. Those parishes in New England made up of Portuguese rejoice in Our Lady appearing at Fatima in Portugal, but seem to know nothing of the colonialism still so much a part of that once great empire. We have not yet begun to build a new world. Wars and budgeting for future wars go on. This year's Defense Budget is larger than last year's.

I come back to the present and comfort myself with the timelessness of God – a thousand years in His sight are as one day, the Psalmist sang. He also cried out “Now I have begun!” A good motto for us all.

War Taxes

Abandonment to Divine Providence was a favorite book of Isaac Hecker, founder of the Paulist Fathers, whose award I received when I spoke in Boston. The award was a beautiful little desk statue of St. Francis and reminded me of our attempts to practice voluntary poverty, both as penance and a most fertile means of reaping a crop. “Sow sparingly and you will reap sparingly.” We practice a paradoxical kind of poverty. The Lord keeps putting into our hands the means to carry on our work and the people to do it.

We assure our readers that we try to get rid of our gifts as fast as they are given to us. But the threat still hangs over us of prosecution for not paying income tax. We are not tax-exempt. On principle we refuse to pay income tax, because so great a portion goes for wars, preparation for wars (defense, it is termed), and providing other countries with billion of dollars to buy our instruments of war and material and plants to make their own. There is a sizable movement truly the foundation of the peace movement which is based on tax refusal. (Contact Robert Calvert, War Tax Resistance, 912 E. 31st St., Kansas City, Mo. 64109.)

Our refusal goes deep. Our motivation is fundamentally religious. We are told by Jesus Christ to practice the works of mercy, not the works of war. And we do not see why it is necessary to ask the government for permission to practice the works of mercy which are the opposite of the works of war. To ask that permission to obey Christ by applying for exemption, a costly and lengthy process, is against our religious principles. It is an interference of the state which we must call attention to again and again. A father who educates a young man or woman other than a blood relative is taxed for his generosity. A poor family who takes in another poor family (as many of them do in time of unemployment or crisis), cannot count that as tax deductible. Of course the poor suffer from the withholding tax which is taken from their weekly pay. To understand their rights, they must plough through booklets and forms put out by the government (which I am sure I could not manage to do) before they are able to collect money at the end of the year which is owing to them due to some change of circumstance. To get the advice of the Internal Revenue Department means standing in lines, paying excessive fares by bus or subway, with generally little redress of their grievances.

(A cheering note for us, with our very large family, which seems to increase day after day, is that when confronted by the government forces not long ago, Washington representatives from the Department of Justice were willing to concede that we were not making profits out of the poor, that we were motivated by religious principles, and that they would so notify the New York offices of the Internal Revenue Dept. which had handed us a awful bill for taxes due, along with penalties and fines, over a space of four or five years. The New York office then sent us a brief notice concluding that our income did not obligate us to file returns.)

I am stating again this situation because we have recently been given large gifts to enable us to get a new headquarters, large enough to take care of a great many more needy and helpless old women than we have up to this time. We are getting a former music settlement house which, with the help of Ruth Collins, our house manager and real estate expert, and Harry Simmons, our architect, we will change from a school into a residence. It is only a few blocks from where we are now, and we ask our readers to start praying that we may overcome with dispatch the many problems involved in dealing with building codes, health departments and fire departments, not to speak of the neighborhood itself. We have become used to First Street and they have become used to us—to a certain extent.

Philosophy of Work

A good teacher repeats, Peter Maurin used to say, and I have already written about this tax situation before. But we get letters from readers who do not wish to be penalized for helping us. Also, on my trip this month there were those listeners who came and asked how they could get rid of stocks and bonds, drawing interest from God alone (and Wall Street) knows what investments. Housing, small industries providing jobs, producing useful things like shoes, building materials, tools, etc. are good. But what greater torture than to do useless work like one of my granddaughters who stood before an assembly line in a small factory in Vermont where Timex watch boxes were made. Her job was to dip one half of the box in glue and attach it to the other half. When one remembers that the same box is discarded right after one purchases and removes the watch, it can only be regarded as utterly useless work. Most packaging—more and more elaborate—falls into this category. In **The House of the Dead**, Dostoevsky called attention to the torture of useless works. He had suffered it himself during his imprisonment in Siberia.

Peter Maurin used to say the great need of the time was to study and meditate upon a philosophy of work. St. Benedict in his rule emphasized the need of a balance of spiritual, mental and manual labor. The spiritual was also physical in that prayers were chanted, at fixed hours during the day.

Small Is Beautiful

Graham Carey and Ade Bethune (of Vermont and Rhode Island respectively) are two of our friends who exemplify a philosophy of work. Graham sent me a Harper Torch Book last week entitled **Small Is Beautiful—Economics as if People Mattered** by E. F. Schumacher, with an introduction by Theodore Roszak (\$3.95). Schumacher's work, "which we have been long following," belongs to that tradition of organic and decentralist economics whose major spokesmen include Kropotkin, Gustave Landauer, Tolstoi, William Morris, Gandhi, Lewis Mumford, etc.

Graham is an old friend of the Catholic Worker since 1934, a fellow worker of the late Eric Gill, and of Ananda Comeraswamy and R. H. Tawney. The blurb on the back of the book **Small Is Beautiful** lists fellow spokesmen for the ideas expressed, including "Alex Comfort, Paul Goodman and Murray Bookchin. 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!

A highlight of my New England trip was my visit with Ade Bethune and her mother, now over ninety and a vigorous woman still, knitting and doing cross-stitch.

(Yesterday's **Daily World** tells of peasants in the high mountain land of Azerbaijan who live to be well over a hundred years old: "Medjid Agayer, 139 worked as a shepherd, and three years ago the collective farm transferred him to the less strenuous job of herding cows. . . . Small and lean, his menu includes milk, wheatbread, honey, fruit and vegetables. He can ride a horse and has a good memory.

"The State awarded an honorary title "Mother Heroine" to one of his daughters who brought up eleven children.

"Seven other villagers in Tukyaband are more than 100 years old. Five are women.")

Ade used to take "apprentices," and a half dozen of the women in the CW (including my own daughter, Dorothy Gauchat, who runs Our Lady of the Wayside hospital in Avon, Ohio, Mary Paulson of the Upton farm, Betty and Mary Katherine Finnegan of the Rochester house, who married scholars and artist and live in Minnesota near St. John's Abbey, and Julia Porcelli) studied under her. Mothers of many children and valiant women, all of them.

Ade's work is familiar to our readers (she puts all the saints to work in her wood cuts and line drawings). Once she did a row of murals in our Mott Street headquarters depicting Benedictine monks at work, families cultivating their gardens, St. Joseph at his carpenter's bench, Martin de Porres (who is venerated by the Mexicans living around our San Francisco Martin de Porres House of Hospitality) serving the sick and so on. Our Italian neighbors who grew pots

of basil and cuttings from fig trees, and tomato plants on their fire escapes, appreciated her art. But after five years, an overzealous worker cleaned the walls and the murals were washed away. "Cleanliness is next to godliness," they say. I'm afraid we'll never be considered godly. Ade however has the patience of a saint, and continued her work for us.

Bulletin No. 6 of Ade's "St. Leo's bulletin" (Box 177, Newport, R.I. 02840) is all about the beauty of a simple funeral. The monks of Blue Cloud Abbey in South Dakota loaned her three pictures of the funeral of one of the brothers in a simple wood coffin with rope handles. You can write for directions as to how to make your own.

Community Corporation

But what interests me most in Ade's many activities is the Church Community Corporation to provide "decent housing and home ownership for families of low and moderate income in Newport." The Navy has pulled out of the town and slum conditions are spreading. There are twenty directors of the Corporation, black and white, men and women. The annual report of 1973 is well worth reading. Thirty families have their own homes, good little, New England homes that would have been demolished had not a highway been deflected. Vacant lots have been obtained to build on or move houses onto. And high school students have been involved in the building program. The plan allows for a very small down payment. Thirty-three houses already have tenants who for the first time own their own home. Only three staff members have salaries (Ade is not one of them of course), and the high school students have had the satisfaction of building one entire house.

I don't know whether the paragraphs headed "What can you do?" apply only to Newport, but they are interesting for others to read and perhaps apply to other areas: "Join the C.C.S. No dues or fees. Send a donation. A ten dollar gift purchases \$100 worth of housing. A \$100 gift produces \$1,000 worth. Sell us your unused land at a reasonable price or give it to us as a tax deduction to yourself. Sell us any run-down property we can fix up. Tell us about a hardship family we can serve. Tell us about available land or housing. Offer to do volunteer work.

Here is certainly an example of mutual aid. The address of the Church Community corporation is 40 Dearborn St., Newport, R.I. 02480.

Thinking of the (at least) \$100 a month rents on East First Street for four-room dark, slum apartments, the sight of these modern working class homes, architecturally conforming to the New England "fisherman's cottage," brings joy to the heart. St. Gertrude said: "Property, the more common it becomes, the more holy it becomes."

Once when I was talking to Cesar Chavez about farming communes and the kibbutzim of Israel so well described by Martin Buber in **Paths in Utopia**, he

said, “I prefer the moshavim,” which have, as I understand it, private homes for the families, near to or part of the cooperative farms. I know that in the new country housing I saw in Cuba in 1962 there was room for vegetable gardens and an animal or two, as well as good housing.

Farmworkers

Speaking of Cesar and the farm workers, we continue to urge our readers to send money to the United Farm Workers Welfare Fund (tax deductible) and to keep up the boycott of all grapes and Gallo wines and iceberg lettuce.

A memorial service was held here in New York recently for the 19 migrant workers crushed and drowned in an old bus in which they were being transported from Mexico to the High and Mighty Farms (what a name!). This corporation had signed contracts with the Western Conference of Teamsters. With these union raiders there is no strict enforcement of safety standards for the bus or hours of work for the bus driver. The bus went off the road into deep drainage ditch. Some of the riders were drowned. The driver was crushed to death by the seats not firmly fastened to the floor. There are many such accidents in this long distance transportation of workers. May God wipe away all tears from their eyes. May they rest in peace.