

Why Write About Strife and Violence?

By Dorothy Day

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Summary: Calls attention to the social crisis, class warfare, and numerous strikes. Notes how Communists practice the corporal works of mercy while lukewarm, comfortable, and indifferent Catholics turn their backs on strikers and their families. (DDLW #279).

If our stories this month regarding the Weirton decision, the strike and riot wave, and the threats of approaching general strikes are ominous in tone; and if our friends would wish that we concentrated more on the joy of the love of God and less on the class strife which prevails in industry we remind them of the purpose of this paper *The Catholic Worker*.

It is addressed to the worker, and what is of interest to them is the condition of labor, and the attitude of the church in regard to it.

If we attempt with undue optimism to minimize the crisis, if we do not recognize the crisis, if we do not recognize their plight, we are forcing them to turn to sheets such as the *Daily Worker* which does take cognizance of their condition. At the scene of every strike the *Daily Worker* is sold, and the workers read it because it deals with their problems. We, too, must deal with the problems which confront them, and show the attitude and the recognition of the church of those problems.

Help the Workers

Those comfortable people too, who do not realize the unfairness of this existing order, need to be told of existing conditions. They are too apt to see things from the side of the employer, since the radio, the newspapers, and public interest is usually on the side of wealth and influence. If they cooperated with the worker instead of arranging themselves on the side of the employer, justice would prevail.

We wish to arouse, too, those indifferent Catholics to the crying need of the day – the need of a return to the spirit of Franciscan poverty and charity.

Father Cuthbert

of England in a pamphlet entitled *St. Francis and you*, published in 1905, wrote: St. Francis laid the foundation of a new social order of things within the church. This was his special work, and the work of his order – to induce Christian society to live by Christian principles; to be Christians in very deed as well as by profession. . . St. Francis. . . by laying upon his Tertiaries the precept never to bear arms except in defense of the Church, struck a fatal blow at the

entire (feudal) system. Today then, Catholics have need to be strong and perfect Christians, willing to sacrifice themselves – their ease and their personal interests, their prejudices and smaller ideals – to the larger interest of winning the modern world to Christ and His Church; men who will not shrink from battle, nor fear hardship and toil. This is a time when the Church needs apostles to convert the new world of thought and action that has sprung up in these days; and she calls upon her children to do their part, each according to his ability and opportunity, in the work that lies before her.

These words are as true now as they were in 1905. We call upon the comfortable people to recognize and to fight the industrial evils that are dragging the people down and making them in their blind and perverse human hopelessness to turn from their Mother the Church.

No Help from Red Cross

We recall to our comfortable readers, to whom these tales of strike and riot are something outside their ken, that the Red Cross has in many cases refused to give help to starving women and children when a strike was on. That it was the Communists who collected food and clothes for the families of miners waging their industrial battles down in Kentucky, for the families of the textile strikers in North Carolina.

Again major strikes threaten, steel strikes, cotton textile strikes, longshoremen strikes, truck drivers strikes, and many of these strikes are taking place now.

Is it to be left to the Communists to succor the oppressed, to fight for the unemployed, to collect funds for hungry women and children? It is true that in a big city like New York relief is given to many who do not need it and that graft is rampant. But that does not mean that in industrial sections the people are being properly cared for, and fed. Statistics show that the children of miners in unorganized sections never knew what it was to drink milk, never saw an orange. We know of a Communist child who collected money from among her school friends to add to the relief fund for these children.

To Win the Worker

To feed the hungry, clothe the naked, shelter the shelterless – these corporal works of mercy are too often being done by the opposition, and to what purpose? To win to the banners of communism the workers and their children.

These workers do not realize those words of St. Paul, “If I should distribute all my goods to feed the poor, and if I should deliver my body to be burned and have not charity (the love of God) it profiteth me nothing.”

Most Catholics speak of Communists with the bated breath of horror. And yet those poor unfortunate ones who have not the faith to guide them are apt to

stand more chance in the eyes of God than those indifferent Catholics who stand by and do nothing for “the least of them” of whom Christ spoke.