

Coal Miners—Their Strike Not John L. Lewis's

By Dorothy Day

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Summary: Describes the conditions of striking coal miners who defy both the employers and their own unions. Affirms the need for human dignity in daily work that neither the communists nor the unions nor the employers are providing. Decries the dishonest expropriation of natural resources. Begs assistance for the striking miners. (DDLW #608).

Three hundred and forty thousand miners, in the soft coal fields in Illinois, Pennsylvania, West Virginia, Ohio, Colorado and Wyoming are at present on strike, and have been since Feb. 6. Ordered back to work on Feb. 11, both by court order and John L. Lewis obeying that court order, the miners refused. Whereupon the union, not Lewis, is cited for contempt. In 1946 in a similar situation the miners were fined \$700,000 and Lewis \$10,000. Two years later in similar situation, the court doubled these fines for refusing to obey a back to work order.

Talking to employers, operators, owners of steel mills, one hears great tales of high salaries, short hours, improved conditions of work. We all have seen the ads,, “which one of these beautiful little houses do the miners live in?” (in *Time* magazine) indicating that the miners live as good as anybody else.

Talking to folks who live near the miners (because they live a life apart, an esprit de corps among them, a pride in their work; also because they live in patches, though they hate the term) I have heard how on occasion they come down from the hills, from their settlements, and fling their money away riotously in the taverns on drink and slot machines. (Did you know that in these same taverns there are also slot machines selling contraceptives, like chewing gum or chocolate? It started with the war. But this perversion of the worker started long before in our industrial capitalist system. In the old days, when organizers came among the men the operatives put on a big show and party at the local saloons with burlesque and free drink, to lure the men from union meetings.)

What do the men care about fines? What is \$700,000 or \$1,400,000 in these days when the government is tossing about billions. The class war is on. It has always been on, and until the men get what they want money doesn't mean a thing. That is the way they act. What they want is ownership, even if it begins only with a share in the management, which the Popes have called for. That is probably why F.B.I. agents, as well as professional strike breakers as well as armed deputies are haunting the pits. It's all a Communist plot!

John Brophy, once vice-president of the Mine Workers and since then one of the top officials of the CIO, told me how Lewis' thugs had him beaten up in his hotel room during one of the conventions because he was advocating nationalization

of the mines. John Brophy is a Catholic, but he believed there could be such a thing as Christian socialism.

Now Lewis is going around beaming, waiting for President Truman to issue an order nationalizing the mines. It doesn't mean a thing as far as profits are concerned. It just means that the miners still respect their government (but do not respect the mine owners) and have been willing to cooperate with it. But they have also seen what it means by now and are hedging. This time, if the state takes over as an emergency measure, they want the mines to run without profit to the operators, but for the common good.

The operators on the other hand, the bosses, the owners, are terrified because in each case when the government took over, it was easy to see how utterly useless the "managers" as they might profess to call themselves, were. No one can run the mines but the miners. And amongst them there are men that can "manage" them. The goods of the earth belong to God, who made them for man's use, not to be expropriated by the dishonest few. The whole history of capital in this country is the story of the trickery and connivary by which the smart few got possession of our national resources, the railroads, the forests, the mines, and so on, down through gas and oil, in so many cases ousting the legal owners of the land wherein these resources were found.

The Robber Barons, Factories in the Fields – these books tell the story.

According to the teachings of the Church, "the rich must come by their riches honestly; and this applies alike to inheritance and current earnings. An heir to ill-gotten goods is bound by restitution as far as may be." – Walter Shewring – *The Rich and the Poor in Christian Tradition*.

No matter the gains made by the union, the coal strikers are *the poor* at this present writing and need help. Either their funds are tied up by Lewis, by the need to pay enormous law fees or by fines. Anyway, they are most of them on relief, and with the threat hanging over them of the withdrawing of that. Relief in most states is slim picking. So any of our readers who wish to help them . . . we beg their aid for them. They need money and food.

Send aid to the United Mine Workers' Bldg., Washington, D.C.