

On Pilgrimage - June 1966

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Summary: Reflections on some Catholic Workers being jailed for civil disobedience, visiting the prisoner, and the folly of the cross. Recalls the death of the Rosenbergs and notes new evidence that is surfacing. Includes notes from a visit to her daughter and grandchildren in Vermont. Says the arms race is insanity. Keywords: anarchy, prison, civil rights (DDLW #840).

After finishing this column news comes to me by 'phone that Nicole d'Entremont (one of our editors), Terry Becker, Diane Feeley and Raona Millikin (who is engaged to Jim Wilson) are all in the Women's House of Detention, serving five-day sentences for their civil disobedience. Nicole and Diane, who refused to take bail, served an additional three days after their arrest. Whether or not our readers approve of the disobedience which brought about the arrest, which was a sit-down on Fifth Avenue in front of the Armed Forces Day parade, it is certain that visiting the prisoner is one of the works of mercy enjoined upon us by our Lord Jesus Christ. In several countries, Brazil, Belgium and Switzerland, the little Sisters of Jesus of Charles de Foucauld live in prisons for varying periods, to share the life of the prisoners, to lighten in some small way the heavy burden of misery. Just as the conscientious objectors who worked in mental hospitals during the war did something to improve the conditions of those hospitals, if only by their compassionate kindness, so these Catholic Worker prisoners who see in their brothers and sisters the suffering Christ, are helping to lighten the sum-total of anguish in the world. They are reminders, they are news, good news, of another world. They are the gospel in other words, and carrying it to its ultimate meaning, they are the Word, they are other Christs. They would be abashed to think of themselves in this way, but I am speaking in terms of the ideal, unashamedly and unafraid of ridicule saying what we would want to be.

Saul Alinsky spoke last month of how difficult it is to know what poverty is really like, even by going to jail to be a prisoner for a time. It is true that we must take ourselves as we are, and recognize that with our education, our families, our backgrounds, it is impossible for us to know what destitution really is. But by attempting at selfdiscipline, reducing our wants, curbing our constant selfindulgence, learning what it means to work by the sweat of our brow, and by enduring the contempt and insult only too often met with, we are learning a kind of poverty. When we do not recognize the importance ourselves as sons of

God, when we do not in faith esteem ourselves and recognize the importance of our work, no matter how small it may seem, we are likely to be crushed by the criticism of others and take refuge in the do-nothing attitude. I once heard a psychiatrist say, man craves recognition more than food or sex and that when he does not get it he feels poor indeed. This is a real poverty to be endured. But it is good to be considered a fool for Christ, as St. Paul said, remembering always the folly of the Cross.

I write these things, hoping still that in the next issue Nicole or Terry will write about their prison experience, the first for each of them.

Morton Sobell

It too often happens that our program of work and the energies that arise in a community of the poor like ours, keeps us from participating in all the meetings that are being held by groups to which we wish to give our support. One such meeting is the Morton Sobell meeting, to be held on Friday, June 17th, at 7 p.m. at the Hotel Sheraton-Atlantic, Broadway and 34th street, in New York.

This meeting marks the thirteenth year since the execution of Julius and Ethel Rosenberg. Before the rally there will be a Truth Exhibit, with a dramatic display of new evidence now before the courts pointing to the innocence of Morton Sobell and the Rosenbergs. Those who cannot get to the meeting can write or wire Attorney General Nicholas Katzenbach, Justice Department, Washington, D.C., asking him to free Sobell or agree to a hearing on the new court motion.

We have written about the case before, but to those who are new readers we recommend the recent book published by Doubleday, **Invitation to an Inquest**, by Walter and Miriam Schneir. The Rosenbergs were executed on the charge that they were engaged in a conspiracy to transmit information relating to national defense, to the Soviet Union. Sobell was illegally convicted on the same charge. The **New York Times** reviewer of the Schneirs' book concluded: "There was not enough evidence to condemn the Rosenbergs to death. And I wonder if a jury would find them guilty and a judge sentence them to death if they were tried today." The St. Louis **Post-Dispatch** said: "This book is disturbing reading for any American. . . Were the Rosenbergs victims of an era? This book at least establishes that the question needs to be answered." Sobell already spent sixteen years of a thirty-year sentence in prison, six of them in Alcatraz.

Prayer for Courage

I will never forget the evening the Rosenbergs were executed. There had been many appeals, and Pope Pius XII himself had asked for clemency. But it was the time of the Korean war hysteria, and feelings ran high. Picketing of the White House had led to counter-picketing by youths demanding their execution.

As the hour approached, it was unbearable to think of these young parents being put to death, notwithstanding the protests of the world. On their last day I thought often of Ethel's agony at being parted from her children, and as I bathed one of my own grandchildren I kept praying over and over again for fortitude and courage for her, virtues which both of them had maintained, but I was thinking especially of Ethel at this time. And believing in a personal God, who is our Father, I begged this strength for her, the one last thing I could do. The next day, when the unbearable story of the execution was published, one of the newspapers carried a story of her last gesture. She walked firmly and confidently to the electric chair, accompanied by the woman prison guard. Before she took her place in history and in the chair, she turned to the guard, kissed her, and thanked her for her kindness during her last days.

Personal Encounter

I am always being surprised at the readiness to respond evidenced by some of our public officials when we wrote them as we are always being urged to do. (We do not write often enough, illiterate and slothful generation that we are.) When Martin Sobell was in Alcatraz I wrote to James V. Bennett, Commissioner of Federal Prisons, and begged that Sobell at least be transferred to a prison in the East, so that his wife and children could visit him more often.

The reply was friendly enough. Mr. Bennett thanked me for the tone of my letter, complained of the abuse he usually received from people who wrote him in petition, and went on to say that Mrs. Sobell did not seem to have any difficulty in raising the money to visit her husband, and that as for the children visiting him, he questioned whether the children should visit such a father, convicted traitor as he was. I did not publish the letter at the time, not wishing to discourage people from writing their appeals to government officials, and I hope I am not misquoting him now. I am still surprised at the intimacy, not to say petulance, of the response. I speak of it now in order to encourage people to write to Attorney-General Katzenbach. We should continue to make our voices heard and attend any meetings we can in the cities in which we live. **The National Guardian** (a weekly published at 197 East 4th street, seven dollars a year) gives news and announcement of meetings all over the country and in general provides stimulating reading. For instance this week (June 4th) there is a long taped interview with Stokely Carmichael, who recently succeeded John Lewis as the head of the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee, about S.N.C.C.'s new policy, which has been decried by many as black nationalist, and as recommending a purge of the white workers in the organization. Carmichael answers all these charges, stating that he intends to intensify the program in terms of the political arena, (with this emphasis we disagree); he urges white workers to go into white communities and "start developing those moderate bases that people talk about that do now exist."

"The feeling that Negroes have now," he continued, "is that they psychologically

want something of their own, something to identify with. That is why you have groups like Afro-Americans, because they cannot identify with white society. Negroes certainly see that this is the wealthiest country in the world, and they want to share in the wealth. And the feeling—whether or not the white press likes this, whether or not the white liberal likes this, is that if Negroes cannot enjoy part of that dream, they are going to burn the country down.”

Carmichael says that the Negroes evicted from plantations are still living in tents, that the government had not kept its promises to them. He wants a Negro political party and would like to organize a white party too, but he goes on to say that the Negro wishes to build something of his own, “something that he builds with his own hands—and that is not being antiwhite. It does not mean that you tear down the house across the street. It just means that you are building your own house.”

The Congress of Racial Equality (CORE) and The Poor Peoples’ Corporation are both emphasizing small cooperatives in the deep South to handle the problems of poverty and unemployment resulting from automation.

A recent paperback, **Patterns of Anarchy**, by Leonard Krimmerman and Lewis Perry (Doubleday Anchor Original, \$1.98), contains this interesting comment on civil rights by the editors:

“The anarchist message is to reduce the operating room of government by laying claim to functions the movement can better perform by its own devices. What would it mean for the civil rights movement if its endowments of money and human energy were devoted to anarchist reconstruction? Instead of begrudged and sporadic protection by the federal government of the right to equal participation in second class educational facilities offered by the state governments, suppose the Negroes sought to develop new facilities of their own, with the finances and talent, now depleted by demonstrations against government, campaigns for its offices, appeals to its courts, a network of economically autonomous communities might be established which would have no place for government prejudice or oppression.”

More Reading Matter

Crippled with arthritis and sciatica as I have been this last month since my return from a Midwest trip, I have had more time to read the exchange publications this last week. We try to build up our library at the farm at Tivoli, New York, and we try to have the exchange copies sent there. Individuals also keep private files of the exchanges they are most interested in. For instance, Catherine Swann Miller has a file of **Peace News and Anarchy**, both sent to us from England. Another little sheet, modest in appearance and not very professional, but which interests me because it describes the kind of work we are doing also, is **Simon Star**. Subscriptions can be sent to 67 Barnsdale Road, Maida Vale W.9, London, England, stated price is ten shillings, but you might as well send a couple of

dollars because, as with us, everything is put in the same pot: money for printing, mailing, rents, food, utilities, but no salaries, to make up the strong stew which is **The Catholic Worker**.

City and Country

All of the foregoing was written in the city, at one of the five Kenmare Street apartments, which make up part of the house of hospitality in New York . Visitors from Spring Street, where there are five more apartments, kept coming in. Besides the noise of traffic outside the windows there was the noise of all the comings and goings in the house, not to speak of the boy upstairs, who has all his friends in with their band instruments to practice. We turn up the radio as loud as possible—a symphony of course, which we enjoy, but it does not help us to think.

The following pages were written Pentecost Tuesday, at ten o'clock of a very rainy evening on a Greyhound bus, on my way in to New York, where Pat Rusk was to meet me at eleven forty-five to help me carry my suitcase and typewriter to the house of hospitality. I always carry a stenographer's notebook with me for just such idle hours. My account begins:

I had to leave my car in Vermont because it broke down, badly, I am afraid. I always come away from Tamar's with gifts from one or another of the family. "Grannies are nice because they always bring presents," Kathy, who is five, comments, and it works the other way too. The presents I was bringing back to the community were a great wooden bowl, suitable for a community salad, and two little bowls, from the Bowl Shop at Weston, Vermont. There was also a soapstone griddle, which Eric, eighteen, gave me. He works after school and on Saturdays and holidays, in the only factory in Vermont where they make soapstone griddles and stoves and comes home looking as though he had been sprinkled with talcum powder from head to foot. When he works in the village garage he comes home looking black. There was also a pot of catnip for Peggy at the Tivoli farm, a present from Martha, who loves cats just as Peggy does. Martha, age ten, is going to be a veterinarian, she says.

This bus ride, which enables me to sleep for an hour before I started this, was good because I was sleepless last night, what with my sciatica. I had stayed awake reading Dickens' **Bleak House** and after three hours' sleep got up refreshed enough to drive to Bellows Falls with Tamar and Becky, who is home from college for a week now. We went to Bellows Falls to offer a Mass with Father Miller at the home of Mr. Norman Harty. Norman Harty, who lost a leg in World War II works in the post office from eleven p.m. until seven in the morning. He is a man of profound faith. Once, when the rosary was being discussed and its importance minimized, he said that it was something that he had held on to when he lay wounded. I thought of the many times I had held to it as to a lifeline, in times of misery or peril or in sudden crises. Abbot Marmion says that praying the Stations of the Cross give fortitude, so I use both devotions.

I was most happy with that simple and reverent Mass, with the beauty of the red vestments, the white linen cloth, the beeswax candles, which with the lilacs outside took the place of incense, so that sight, sound, smell, taste and gesture engaged all the senses, and body and soul both were engaged in worship.

We did not have music, of course, though I have been at similar Masses where both guitar and recorder were used and which added unutterable beauty. But Father Miller's enunciation was clear and distinct, his voice pleasing,—no gravelly or nasal tones to grate on the ear. (I remember Joan Overboss at the Grail saying once, "Everyone must sing and those who can't, just sing a little lower." The same would go for speech.)

Another neighbor at the Mass has two sons in the Merchant Marine, young officers on freighters and tankers bringing munitions and oil to Vietnam. After witnessing the famine victims in India during one of his trips, one of the sons went back on board ship and wept all night.

I could not help but think of Don Milani's statement in his defense against the charges made against him of advocating resistance to conscription for war. He said that even those who cooked for troops contributed to war. How involved we all are, what with the hidden taxes we pay for war, the high standard of living all of us enjoy, even when we refuse to pay income tax, so much of which goes for war, and when we build prisons for draft refusers.

We are all exploiters, as Orwell said in one of his essays. Workers who consider themselves exploited are the exploiters of others. The general strike in Belgium, when the workers revolted against the austerity regime that followed the loss of the Belgian Congo, was evidence of this.

One of the most stirring statements Pope Paul has ever made was his call for a new economic order, and new institutions. Who will rise up to work out a just and wise solution to the problem of the money holdings, the investments, the money power of the Church, which is an occasion of suspicion, mistrust and of actual scandal to the world.

Which reminds me to recommend the books of Seymour Melman, who is a professor of engineering at Columbia and has written on the problem of converting the war economy to a peacetime economy. As it is, communities fight for government contracts, even for the manufacture of napalm, gasoline jelly, for noxious gases, not to speak of bombs, planes, helicopters, trucks, and all the armaments that go into devastating wars. How many countries we arm—to keep the peace, as they say. What insanity!

If we keep coming back to this subject always in these pages, it is not only because Peace is the most important cause of our time, but because too, I have found on my travels so many people who not only do not question the morality of war (any more than an Eichmann questioned the morality of the extermination of a people) but do not even know that napalm is a fire that burns the flesh from the bone and that there is nothing that can put it out.

God did not forgive the sin of ignorance, as Father Paul Hanley Furrey pointed out once, calling the 25th chapter of St. Matthew.

Lord, when did we see you burned with napalm? Inasmuch as ye did it to one of these my littlest ones you did it unto me.

My only comfort sometimes is that saying of Our Lord's: **"God wills that all men be saved."** "Ask and ye shall receive." May His will be done.