

# The Listener

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*Summary: Commentary on social conditions of the wealthy J.P. Morgan, of working men and women, and the increasing evictions. Describes the reactions of Communists and others to the initial issue of The Catholic Worker on May 1st. (DDLW #267).*

The Listener

News

A READING of the one day's newspapers on this, the last day before going to press, gives a general indication of the events of the month

It is not a cheerful survey.

J. P. Morgan holds the public eye all over the nation with his nonchalant though forced disclosures of how he did not pay his income tax for the last three years, how his partners paid no taxes for the last two, and of how perfectly legal it all is, how they gave favored persons the opportunity to make profits without risk, how Mr. John J. Raskob hoped he could reciprocate some day, how J. P. has a grip on the railroads, and on public utilities which serve 55,272,000 people (and overcharge them), etc., etc., etc.

Mr. Morgan in a written statement to the committee said that he did not think private bankers ought to be regulated by National or State authorities; that private bankers in the years since the Middle Ages had developed a code of ethics which seemed to be more effective in protecting their customers than banking laws.

The *World Telegram* shows some very amusing cartoons of Mr. Morgan sailing along in his limousine, Mr. Morgan eating a luscious meal and Mr. Morgan sitting in a deck chair on his yacht, philosophically taking his losses, capital losses which enabled him legally to evade payment of income tax.

For some reason or other, largely personal it seems, Senator Carter Glass of Virginia is waging such a fight with Ferdinand Pecora for the Senate Investigation Council that the interest of the nation is divided between Morgan's testimony and Senator Glass's squabbles with Pecora.

There is a lot more talk of driving money changers out of the temple, Woodin, Senator McAdoo, John J. Raskob, Norman H. Davis and former Secretary of the Navy Charles Francis Adams being amongst them.

It happened this month that a friend of the editors, who is Chief Engineer on a freighter, had just come in from India and was docked over in Brooklyn right next to Mr. Morgan's yacht which cost I don't know how many millions to build and which costs a quarter of a million a year to run. Or some such figures. When it comes to dealing in millions and billions, one becomes vague.

One of the editors of the CATHOLIC WORKER enjoyed the privilege of surveying the yacht at close quarters. It was in dry dock and its bottom was being scraped by some score of men and all about them red rust filtered down through the May sunlight, and the handles of their long brushes and scrapers moved rhythmically and steadily up and down the sleek sides of the bottom of the vessel. It was a sight which reminded one of a stage setting of a modern play. The boat was a thing of such beauty that it lifted one's heart to see it. All about little boats bobbed at the docks. There was Vincent Astor's yacht, and a strange black boat which belonged to another millionaire. There was a funny old boat being fitted up to go treasure hunting.

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The Corsair, which is Mr. Morgan's boat, was empty and barren and beautiful within. But it was unused. There it was standing useless, and poor Mr. Morgan, hailed down to Washington by the Senate Committee, was forced to sit, day by day, and be interrogated. There is some consolation in the thought.

And we thought, too, in respect to Morgan's utility holdings, of poor Mrs. Cutler who lived next door to us a year ago down on Twelfth Street, and how she had her electricity and her gas shut off, and how her husband, a house painter, was and had been out of work for two years. And how that afternoon when we dropped in to see her little girl who was sick, we found that there was nothing to eat in the house, neither cereal nor milk for the child, nor an orange to quench her thirst. . . .

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To go back to the daily paper, we have to report that evictions in New York have increased from 9,500 to 12,000 for the month of April, and with talk of increased evictions during the month of May. And how many apartments in the city are standing empty!

At Public Service Commission hearings during the month, statements of large dividends paid by the nine electric light companies of the metropolitan division show that there should be no difficulty made over reducing rates temporarily,

Corporation Council Arthur J. W. Hilly said. Mr. Hilly promised to demand reduction by July 1. That is a note of cheer. We don't like the word temporarily, however.

To the surprise of everyone, the manufacturer's sales tax as a method of raising Federal revenue was rejected by the House of Representatives.

By a vote of 324 to 76 the House passed the Industrial Recovery Bill, which provides for Federal regulation of industry, hours of work and wages, and provides for \$3,000,000,000 in public works and \$220,000,000 in new taxes to amortize the work project.

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## GAS COMPANY

LAST week I talked to a boy who had been working with the Brooklyn Union Gas Company for the last winter. One of the gas house gang. Now he was looking for work on a ship – any kind of work.

“After cleaning clinkers out of generators—red hot ones— and chipping paint, and cleaning and trimming scows, I've got the muscle to work,” he said. “I'm over age for the reforestation camps, and beside that you've got to get in through the Home Relief Bureau, and we haven't had to apply for that yet. I'm strong on the shovel, so I ought to be able to do work on a ship. The hardest job connected with work in the gas house gang was cleaning the purifying boxes. The vats are full of iron oxide and sticky with a tar-like deposit, and you have to get in there and shovel and clean out. You work with the smell of gas in your nose and throat all day. You feel continually sick from it. There is a putrid smell, like a bunch of rotting carcasses all around you. Several of the new guys who had come in on the job fainted dead away and had to be hauled out. I stuck with the old guys and did what they did and kept away from the pipes where the smell was strongest. One way to combat the taste in your mouth and the smell in your nose is to drink milk with raw onions chopped up in it and eat a lot of onions for lunch.

“The company is all right, and the pay—twenty-three a week wasn't bad,” he continued. “It was an eight-hour day and a five-day week, and if it was pouring rain they didn't make you go out in it. But what is really the trouble is laying off guys all the time. Machines continually replacing the old fellows. In the new boiler room at Greenpoint there are five boilers with one man to take care of them. There is one man to four generators. At the time I got fired a few weeks ago there was an old Pole working with me and he was fired too after being with the company fifteen years. He kept saying that he couldn't go home. ‘The wife

keeps crying all the time,' he says. 'Then I cry too. All the time she cries in the house so last night I didn't go home, but slept at a pool room on one of the tables. I don't want to go home tonight either.'

The boy who was talking to me (he has Communist leanings) had not yet got to the point of hating and execrating the bosses. He said, "The pay was all right." But he ignored the fact that the men were not being paid according to responsibilities. For instance, the old Pole had a wife and family and was working for a comparatively lower wage than the boy, who had no ties and no one to look after but himself. The old Pole was performing a duty to the State by raising a family and he was even more entitled to a living wage than the boy.

"The girl I am going with is an Italian," the boy went on. "She works in a factory making seamless hat linings at fifteen cents a hundred. The seamless hat linings are intended for twenty-five and thirty-five dollar hats. She has a hard time getting along. Nobody dares to organize and nobody dares to strike because they need what money they can get."

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## RACK TENDING

PEOPLE are reading pamphlets on social doctrine now," the girl who is the rack tender at a large church uptown said. "I ordered a bunch of pamphlets from the N. C. W. C. down in Washington and they have gone very well. People ask for *The Rights and Duties of Citizenship*, the *Civics Catechism*, and this last month or so they've called for *The Ethics of War* I\*\*have to order more of those. I have the two encyclicals on labor, by Popes Leo XIII and Pius XI too. There is one man comes in and gets the encyclical *On the Reconstruction of the Social Order*, by the dozen, every week or so."

The rack tender at this church is a guide and adviser to all the strangers who drop into the church during the afternoon. She is there from four to six, checking up the pamphlets, of which she sells thousands, and answering the queries of the people going in and out of the church. The other afternoon when I saw her she was busily engaged in looking through a newspaper to find out what was a good play or movie for a visitor to New York to see. One woman who said she did not know what to do with her time and that she was on a verge of a nervous breakdown, and that she was very lonely and miserable, etc., was referred to a priest, given a list of things she might do to occupy her time in visiting the city to which she was a stranger, supplied with some helpful pamphlets and sent on her way much cheered.

## IS WORK A PRIVILEGE OR A RIGHT?

DOWN on lower Broadway there is the restaurant called Stanley's. From the outside it appears to be a small restaurant, but when you go in you find that it stretches out over a whole floor. There is an upstairs restaurant too.

Some one had told me, "Don't eat in there, they don't pay their waitresses anything." And I wanted to find out more about it so I went in, and after the bright and clean young girl had served me I told her what I had heard.

"Yes, it's perfectly true," she said. "I've been working here quite some time. At first I worked for six a week, then they lowered it last year to three. And now for the last eight months we have been working for nothing. They mark it on their income tax, too, the fact that they hire forty-eight employees and that the employees serve gratis. And the Government doesn't do anything about it so probably there is nothing to be done.

"But of course the income tax department has nothing to do with the Labor Department. That's true. But if you complained to the State Department of Labor you'd have to give your name, and the other girls would have to make statements, and you'd be getting yourself and them into trouble. You'd just end up by losing your job.

"We go to work at ten thirty in the morning and we work until eight thirty, a good many of us, though some are laid off earlier. Of course we try to work as long as we can so that we'll get more tips. When we work from ten-thirty to eight-thirty, we take two hours off in the afternoon, but what can you do with those two hours? You can't go home. You can only walk around."

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First issue of *Catholic Worker* Distributed May Day in Union Square

The crowds in Union Square stopped to gaze on May 1, not only at the massed parades, blary bands, and various red banners, but also at the caption, THE CATHOLIC WORKER, being displayed and distributed everywhere. Communists who make soap-box speeches were frankly shocked at its appearance, refuting as it did their claim that the Church is interested only in squeezing money from the people to send to Rome. Even more surprising to them was the revelation that Catholicism has a definite social program to aid the worker.

One old Italian, turned Communist because of unemployment and near starvation, remarked after reading a copy of our paper, "Ya know, da Church, she wanta help us after all. I t'ink I drop da red flag an' take up da ross again."

Some comments, of course, were not favorable. A young fellow, unshaven, his hair almost to his shoulder, and wearing a variety of red ribbons on his coat, reminded the writer of a scotch terrier that had won a half dozen second prizes

at some kennel show. Glancing at our title, he muttered, "Aw, ya can't fool us . . . you're just tryin' to put the comrades we've liberated under the yoke of capitalism again."

If only he had taken the trouble to look over our program he would have realized that that is exactly what we are not trying to do. We are entirely in sympathy with demands for better labor conditions, decent wages, and unprejudiced justice. We who edit and contribute to this sheet are unemployed ourselves, barely eking out an existence. Yet because of our desire for better conditions we see no reason for renouncing Christianity-the religion that has helped and elevated mankind for nearly 2,000 years.

Although the Communists may not as yet be aware of it, they witnessed in Union Square on May Day the inception of a new struggle for social justice. A germ of more than mere passive interest was planted in the minds of many who either read The CATHOLIC WORKER or saw its headlines displayed.

As soon as the worker realizes that the Church Militant is interested in man's welfare as well as his soul, he will stop to consider before embracing Communism and its atheistic ideas. The Scriptures, history, tradition and common sense will tell him that without God there is neither happiness, security or prosperity, either in men or in nations.