

The Listener

By Dorothy Day

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Summary: Notes labor unrest and growing awareness of inequalities in the social system. Lauds doing what one can, quoting saints. (DDLW #884).

ECONOMY

“We are making every possible economy in all directions, which include adjustment in salaries and rotation of employment. We have no bonus plan or special compensation given in addition to the salaries of either officers or employees,” says H.S. Wilkinson, Chairman of the Board of Directors of the Crucible Steel Company of America at the annual meeting of the stockholders in May.

“Reports we get by telephone indicate steel operations this week showed a marked increase all along the line,” he added.

Meanwhile the Communists are busily doing their best to organize the steel industry. Low salaries and unemployment, the “every possible economy in all directions” Mr. Wilkinson talked about, are making such organization possible.

About sixty per cent of the steel workers are unemployed and less than two per cent are organized, according to charges made by a new steel union, organized by Communists, which now has a membership of 3,500 members. There are 577,000 steel workers. Of those working, many are working on the stagger plan, many as little as one day every two weeks. Wages have been cut; relief is almost non-existent. The average is one dollar a week for a family of five or six, and this is rarely in cash. Unmarried steel workers receive no relief. Organization of any kind, even by the old union, the Amalgamated Association of Iron, Tin and Steel Workers, is fought by the steel industry. No stranger is permitted to remain in company towns without investigation. Meetings and organization are forbidden and organizers of every kind must function under cover.

DOING THEIR BIT

People are becoming conscious of the inequalities of the social system and are awakening to their responsibility toward their neighbor. Down in Staten Island a young manager of one of the Roulston’s stores was fired with no explanation. He was the only one in the family working and his father was a cripple. The neighbors and all the people who traded at Roulston’s organized a protest, and keeping the petition at an adjacent butcher shop they got signatures from everyone who came in, to send to the management of the store, asking for his reinstatement. A year or so ago they would not have been so alive to the need for social action.

BEST OR NOTHING?

“The best is the enemy of the good,” Father Joseph P. McSorley quoted to us in talking over the first number of THE CATHOLIC WORKER. He was translating from the Italian and the little saying was by way of pointing out that it was pleasing in the sight of God to do the good one could and not to neglect doing that because of ambitious desire to do the “best.”

Don Bosco felt that way about it too. In his biography we read about a friend of the great Italian who always wished to do the very best, and how Don Bosco always went ahead on the other hand and did what he could, piling up achievement after achievement with his very small and humble beginnings. To make a start, that was the thing. Not to wait until it was possible to make the perfect thing.

And just a few Sundays ago we heard a little talk from a parish priest down in Staten Island. He was talking to the children about their posture in kneeling and the necessity for a vehement Amen to the final prayers said by the priest at the foot of the altar.

“Snap to it!” he had shouted, right in the midst of those final prayers. It was the children’s Mass and he kept them afterwards for a talk, telling them that if they didn’t do a thing right instead of half-heartedly, they might as well stay outside the door.

And I thought sadly, if we waited to pray until we had the fervor of a saint, we’d wait a long time.

The great St. Teresa wrote in her autobiography of the thoughts which were like “little gnats which buzz about by night here and there,” and troubled her at her prayers. “Against this evil I know no remedy,” she said. “The sole remedy which I met with, after having wearied myself for many years is. . . to consider the memory no better than a madman, and to leave it alone with its folly, for God alone can check out its extravagances.”

St. Thomas Aquinas declared that, for the practice of virtue, a certain amount of good was indispensable. . . . Cardinal Manning said that God’s commandments could not be preached to men without empty stomachs. – Abbe Lugan.