

On Pilgrimage - September 1948

By Dorothy Day

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Summary: Opposes registration for conscription and describes their picketing a sign-up site. Notes how easily pickets become violent and her loathing of the use of force. Updates on construction projects and retreat work at Maryfarm. (DDLW #469).

Again we print the paragraphs "Do Not Register." Registration is the first step to war. During the course of the month we distributed the paper in front of high schools and colleges throughout Manhattan and Brooklyn. On Aug. 30, Robert Ludlow, Irene Mary Naughton and I, setting our affairs in order, as the saying goes, went forth, I should like to say, like an army with banners. Which means that we joined about thirty-two others on a picket line in front of Washington Irving High School, one of the places for the twenty-five year old to register. I must confess I always do these things with fear and trembling. I loathe the use of force, and I remember how Peter used to react to violence. On one occasion when two men fought in the office over on Charles Street he threatened to leave the work forever if it ever happened again. In a book by Federov on Russian Spirituality, there is the story of St. Sergius, who left his monastery for two years rather than impose his authority by force. On another occasion years ago at the Easton farm, one man knocked down another over a dispute about an egg (it is horrible to think of people fighting physically over food), and for the rest of the summer Peter ate neither eggs nor milk in order that others might have more. That was his idea of justice.

On a picket line there is always the threat of violence. A picket line may be called the use of force, compelling others to hear your point of view through the medium of the poster and the placard. I prefer to list it as one of the works of mercy, "enlightening the ignorant, counseling the doubtful, rebuking the sinner, consoling the afflicted," etc.

Picket lines are too often associated with violence, and it is true that as in Boston, an opposing party may suddenly spring in among you, wrest the signs from your hands, and by the use of force, infect others to use force. The very effort to hold on to signs, to resist being choked to death when the sign hangs around your neck, gives the appearance of participation in violence, and the police enter in then and contribute their share. From a peaceful, orderly demonstration I have seen a picket line become in one second a rioting mob. There is always the feel of it in the air, the threat of it. There is always the passer-by who contributes his share, "Why don't you get in their and rough 'em up!" to the crowd gathered on the other side of the streets watching for trouble. And of course we were all accused of being communists and socialists.

But the picket line went on, and the papers were distributed for three hours, through the hot noon day, and there was no trouble, nor has there been since

in New York. In Boston and Philadelphia there has been evidence of the mob spirit on picket lines but only at a few meetings in New York was there threat of trouble.

The picketing will continue every week until all the registration is complete.

At the farm we had just finished a retreat, and there was much work of cleaning up after one, and getting ready for the Labor Day retreat for families. We have a group of a score or more, and expect an influx of another fifty over the weekend, so we are using a neighboring farm to help house the older boys.

During the Spring we plan only one retreat a month for the next six months, and then as things work out, other groups find their way in and one cannot refuse the emergency calls made on us. In this way there were a number of extra retreats and weekends this summer which we had not counted on at all. There were a dozen young Puerto Ricans, for instance, who came up with Joe Gil one weekend and they brought goat skins which they stretched over drums and made into tom-toms. And they caught snakes and skinned them and cured the skins and made bracelets. There were three conferences today, and hearty eating, and swimming, and two seminarians and a priest had their hands full answering questions.

Work "proyectos"

Hans Tunnesen calls them "proyectos" and they certainly are coming on what with extra help like George Collins, from Pittsburgh, Ted Gibson from the Catholic University, Joe Sweeney, Bob Campbell, and others. The cellar was dug up over two Summers, right through rock and shale, and during this last month they cemented up the side walls and cut down oaks in the woods which John Filliger snake in with the tractor and worked into place. (He is getting to love that tractor as he does his horses.) It is such a foundation as the Empire State building might rest on, we all say, and though we will cover it over with tons of rock and dirt this year, it stands there for a future house. The potatoes are coming in, and turnip and beets and enormous carrots, and string beans and salads and tomatoes, and now the cannery is under way and Dave Mason and Joe Carter are busy in that from morning till night.