

Beyond Politics

By Dorothy Day

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Summary: Discusses the C.W.'s means to achieve a better social condition in comparison to communist means. Exhorts "the rich to become poor and the poor to become holy." Criticizes capitalism's unbalanced distribution of wealth and admits a certain compatability exists between Marx and Christianity. (DDLW #166).

Women think with their whole bodies and they see things as a whole more than men do.

Maybe I am saying this to justify myself for my protesting this last month the refusal of bail to the eleven Communists, a protest which was published in the *Daily Worker*, the *American Guardian* and other papers, much to the horror of many of our Catholic fellow workers.

It is necessary to explain if we do not wish to affront people. We sincerely want to make people understand our point of view.

First of all, let it be remembered that I speak as an ex-Communist and one who has not testified before Congressional Committees, nor written works on the Communist conspiracy. I can say with warmth that I loved the people I worked with and learned much from them. They helped me to find God in His poor, in His abandoned ones, as I had not found Him in Christian churches.

Salvation Is of the Poor

I firmly believe that our salvation depends on the poor. "Inasmuch as you have not feed the hungry, clothed the naked, sheltered the homeless, visited the prisoner, protested against injustice, comforted the afflicted, etc., you have not done it to Me." Christ identifies Himself with the poor. The Church throughout the ages in all its charities, in the person of all its saints, who lived the lives of poverty with the poor, did these things. But since these works were for centuries confined to priests, brothers and nuns, the great mass of Christians did not participate these last few centuries except in a most indirect manner. Pius XI called everyone to do these things when he called for Catholic Action. The great tragedy of the century is that the workers are lost to the Church, he said. All this has been repeated many times.

Our Positions

But I must speak from my own experience. My radical associates were the ones who were in the forefront of the struggle for a better social order where there

would not be so many poor. What if we do not agree with the means taken to achieve this goal, nor with their fundamental philosophy? We do believe in, “from each according to his ability, to each according to his need.” We believe in the “withering away of the State.” We believe in the communal aspect of property as stressed by the early Christians, religious orders, the communes of Switzerland and Spain, and in a society of federated associations, cooperating in about the same way as postal companies, railroads, Red Cross, cooperate now, without the aid of the state, and without the interference of hostile states. We believe in the constructive activity of the people, “the masses” and the mutual relations which existed during the mediaeval times and were worked out from below. We believe in loving our brothers regardless of race, color or creed and we believe in showing this love by working for better conditions immediately and the ultimate owning by the workers of their means of production. We believe in an economy based on human needs rather than on the profit motive.

Certainly we disagree with the Communist Party, as we disagree with other political parties who are trying to maintain the American way of life. We don’t think it’s worth maintaining. We and the Communists have a common idea that something else is necessary, some other vision of society must be held up to be worked for. Certainly we disagree over and over again with the means chosen to reach their ends, because as Fr. Baker has said, and Robert Ludlow repeated many a time, the means become the end.

No Conspiracy Proved

Up to now the Communist Party has been a legal party and has maintained workers’ schools, social centers, publications, strike headquarters, relief setups, etc. As for their conspiracy to overthrow the government by force and violence, I do not think that the state has proved its case. I have not read any of the literature that the defense is putting out in asking for bail and appealing their case, but I do know that the general argument runs like this:

They believe, of course, that violence will come. (So do we when it comes down to it, and we are praying it won’t.) They believe that it will be forced upon the workers by the class struggle which is going on all around us now.

Berdyaev pointed this out in his book, *Christianity and Class War*, and Supreme Court Justice Murphy (who was not too consistent a Third Order Franciscan) also pointed this out in one of his decisions. Class war is a fact and one does not need to advocate it. The Communists point to it as forced upon them, and say that when it comes they will take part in it, and in their plans they want to prepare the ground, and win as many as possible to their point of view and for their side. And where will we be on that day?

If we spend the rest of our lives in slums, as I hope we will who work for and read the CATHOLIC WORKER, if we are truly living with the poor, working side by side with the poor, helping the poor, we will inevitably be forced to be

on their side, physically speaking. But when it comes to activity, we will be pacifists, I hope and pray, non-violent resisters of aggression, from whomever it comes, resisters to repression, coercion, from whatever side it comes, and our activity will be the works of mercy. Our arms will be the love of God and our brother.

The Rending of War

And as for our great masses of Catholic people, they will be dragged in, poor though they be, or workers though they be, to use the same means of force and violence, to hate their enemy, to defend the status quo, because there will be no time for fine distinctions then and the Catholic will not be able to apologize for his siding with the duPonts, the Morgans, the Girdlers, war profiteers, the cynical politicians, the literary people, the intellectuals who will use fine and exalted phrases to inspire and integrate the body and soul of the worker in one passion -the desire for sweat, blood and tears, for suffering, and they will use these mysterious cravings of the human heart and once again betray the workers into war. War, the rending of the Mystical Body of Christ, as St. Cyprian called it.

Final Aims

But the Communists, “the eleven,” the Communist leaders in the expelled CIO unions, they are not honest, everyone says. They do not want improved conditions for the workers. They want the end, the final conflict, to bring on the world revolution.

Well, when it comes down to it, do we of the CATHOLIC WORKER stand only for just wages, shorter hours, increase of power for the workers, a collaboration of employer and worker in prosperity for all? No, we want to make “the rich poor and the poor holy,” and that too is a revolution obnoxious to the pagan man. We don’t want luxury. We want land, bread, work, children, and the joys of community in play and work and worship. We don’t believe in those industrial councils where the heads of United States Steel sit down with the common man in an obscene **agape** of luxury, shared profits, blood money from a thousand battles all over the world. No, the common good, the community, the commune must be considered. Some day engineers, scientists, managers, foremen, workers, all interested workers, may sit down together, but never the Fairless’ with their \$50,000 pensions, who brought about the class war going on right now.

During 1949, up to August, 412 miners were killed at work. And as for crippling and disabling accidents, there were 14,871 during these same months. The press and the pulpit with them excoriate John L. Lewis, who is demanding a pension for the workers.

Struggle for power, the newspapers shout, and talk of Lewis and Murray (neither of whom are ever confused with the Communists), as strangling the country. It is a very unequal struggle still, as far as I can see, from the evidence before me. If business has managed so well, if everyone is being so well-paid, well-housed, well-fed, what is all the shouting for?

Capitalism Judged

In this issue we have **Osservatore Romano**'s judgement of Capitalism. We also have a story of the uprising of the peasants of Italy, where Communists polled 40% of the vote in spite of shocking interference of press and pulpit in politics. Every pastor in the U.S., in churches which had Italian parishioners, seemed to be urging the people to write to friends in Italy that they would get no help from the U.S. unless they voted our way. Pastors from Italian churches went to Italy and all kinds of opinion-making tactics were used by the public relations men of the Capitalist order.

In view of the fact that Russia and official Communism controls so much of Europe and Asia and is spreading, hysteria has been built up here which is a terrible indication of our lack of confidence in our "own way of life," our own integrity, our moral supremacy which Mr. Truman was just talking about this morning. We have come to the point of using repressive measures, such as the Communist trial and the expelling of left-wing unions. Is the system with its expose of graft and corruption)the facts are brought to light again and again but nothing is done about it) worth saving? And will it be saved by such means?

What else have we, people say, seeing only the world around them, as we have made it these last few swift-moving generations? If they took time to think, if they had the zeal of the CP for school and study and meeting and planning, and with it all the thirst for martyrdom; and if Catholics delved into the rich body of Catholic liturgy and sociology they would grow in faith and grace and change the world, bringing about this change "within the shell of the old, with a philosophy so old it looks like new," as Peter Maurin used to say.

But what has all this to do with signing protests, advocating bail for convicted Communists?

I can only quote Claudel, "God writes straight with crooked lines."

I believe that we must reach our brother, never toning down our fundamental oppositions, but meeting him when he asks to be met, with a reason for the faith that is in us, as well as with a loving sympathy for them as brothers. "We understand because we believe," as St. Anselm says and how can they understand with a darkened reason, lacking this faith which is our privilege to possess which would enlighten their minds? Maritain says he is more certain of his faith than he is of his own existence, since Primordial Truth has told him through the intermediary of the Church which is itself an object of faith.

St. Thomas, he quotes as saying we are led to faith by the natural reason, the testimony of the law and the prophets, and the preaching of the Apostles and their successors. But if the Communists do not accept this authority and if their reason is darkened, how can they reach the faith which they must have in order to know and understand?

The bridge - it seems to me - is love and the compassion (the suffering together) which goes with all love. Which means the folly of the Cross, since Christ loved men even to that folly of failure.

St. Therese said her aim was to make God loved. And I am sure that we pray to love God with an everlasting love (Pascal said we would not search for Him if we had not already found Him) and yearn over our fellows in desire that He should be loved. How can they hear unless we take seriously our lay apostolate and answer them when they speak to us? We believe that God made them and sustains them. It is easier sometimes to see His handiwork here than in the Pecksniffs and Pharisees of our capitalist industrial system. We must cry out against injustice or by our silence consent to it, and if we do not cry out the very stones of the street will, as Jesus has said.

And what about Fr. Duffy, people are asking. Just yesterday a reporter from an information sheet run by ex-FBI men for business men, called up, and every day or so there are other calls.

Here we have a priest in politics, not coming out in favor of bingo, but concerning himself with peace and war, land and cooperatives, housing and the condition of the poor. He is, in order to be heard, involving himself on the Communist side in that Communists are in the Non-Partisan League, the American Labor Party, the Irish Progressives, etc.

"I am speaking where they invite me, I am reaching the poor," he says with a brogue that endears him to New York radicals and utterly confuses the Catholics of New York and Boston. (He was mobbed on one occasion by some pious zealots who tried to tear his collar off, the symbol to them of his priesthood.) "I am trying to go where they never hear or see a priest," he says. "I am trying to bring them the word of God."

No one can doubt his sincerity and goodness. Fr. Duffy, well known too our readers, is a man without guile. What fault he has is a terrible impatience which makes him a hard man to work with anywhere. He wants to see results, which makes him impatient of the CATHOLIC WORKER.

He thinks he is practical when he outlines on paper a good social order and then says with a child's wonderment, "Why don't they follow it?" In the face of constant emergencies and tragedies of temperament, sickness and disorder he says brusquely. "Go sit in Church. Read a chapter of the Imitation. Only God can help you." And he suffers under his own helplessness to change men, to change the social order. So he takes refuge in writing and speaking to those no one else is reaching. Whenever he speaks, he points out his differences. On leave

from Ireland, and having the courtesy of the diocese (to say Mass but not to preach or engage in regular parish work) he has no salary, no funds, and relying only on the dimes he gets for his pamphlets, he lives in a three-room cold flat and lives on Trappist fare. Of course he is an embarrassment to the diocese.

He is no St. Thomas, who was excommunicated at one time for drawing so many truths from Aristotle, a pagan philosopher brought by Moslem scholars from the East to the West.

He is no St. Alphonsus Liguori, who was also disciplined by the Church (they were handing out plenty of excommunications in those days) and finally kicked out of his own order. He is no Joan of Arc, who tried to go to the people in her own day. But in his own way he is stirring up thought on all sides. Others may come who will not reconcile Marxism to Christianity, but the Marxist to the Christ. There is truth to be found in Karl Marx as there was in Aristotle.

But the temper of the day is not peaceful. Only a few short years ago our present enemies were our allies, the allies of this government, and it was our C.O.s who were being arrested and confined for their beliefs, for not fighting side by side with Russia. We realize our opponents and I am sure Fr. Duffy does also. We are convinced once again, however, that not the weapons of force, nor the weapon of the lie which is used by both sides, will save us. Only Truth and Love. We must love seventy times seven, from the heart, and talk of it seventy times seven.

And as for the folly of this procedure, and the seeming triumph in this world of evil over good, Fr. De Lubac, the French Jesuit, writes:

“So long as we talk and argue and busy ourselves on the plane of this world, evil seems the stronger. More than that, whether evil distresses us or whether we exalt it, it alone seems real. The thing is to enter on another plane, to find that fourth dimension which represents the kingdom of the Spirit. Then Freedom is Queen, then God triumphs and man with Him.”