

Republic Strikers Still Out/Day After Day

By Dorothy Day

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Summary: Supports strikes but not using violence by strikers or company guards. Quotes Norman Thomas on our violent history. Keywords: non-violence, labor (DDLW #906).

Traveling as I have been this last month across the country, impressions crowd so fast upon me that it is hard to get them all down. I have arrived now in Los Angeles and have settled down for a month at the home of Dr. Julia Metcalfe and her sister who have a Catholic circulating library and Monday night meetings, and through whose efforts, George Putnam has been able to get the Los Angeles branch of the Catholic Worker under way.

Steel Workers

Going through my suitcase, I come across a receipt signed by John Brezina, J. Skaroupka, P. Wincheff, and Paolo Giordano, steel workers still on strike at the Republic Steel mills in Cleveland where there are a thousand men still out and where there are a thousand families suffering want.

A Benedictine priest accompanied me, and a group of men gathered so that there was almost a round table discussion then and there. They have a big headquarters, a store, where the men have been meeting and where groceries are distributed once a week by the basketful to the families who have not been put on relief. Clothes are badly needed for the children, and we ask our school groups throughout the country to make up bundles and send them on to them, care of the CIO headquarters, 43rd and Broadway, Cleveland, Ohio.

Violence

Brezina, president of his local told us how one afternoon a mob of guards from the steel plant descended on the headquarters and beat up everyone who was there, men, women and children, so that over a hundred of them had to be taken to the hospital. This happened a couple of months ago and I suppose was reported in the papers as one of the "riots" attendant on the steel strike. In protesting against violence in strikes, most of the public do not know that these riots are in reality mob beatings inflicted by armed guards to discredit the strikes by shouting about reds, some comments of Norman Thomas in his book *Human Exploitation* are in order. (Reader please note: In quoting from this book we by no means endorse the political views of Mr. Thomas to which we are as strongly opposed as we are to the Dictatorship of the Proletariat. The book itself is just a very good analysis of human exploitation. Ed.'s note.)

Causes

"Agitators have their uses and perhaps their abuses, but no agitator or group of agitators of any color from the blue of the NRA eagle which so perturbs the Chicago *Tribune*, to the pink or red of far more radical organizations, could have produced or supported the wave of strikes which in 1934 swept along with it fruit pickers in California; the wretched onion pickers of Hardin county, Ohio; dairy farmers in Wisconsin and New York; longshoremen and marine workers in Texas and the west coast; truckmen in Minneapolis; street car employees in Milwaukee; the auto-lite factory workers in Toledo and a half million textile workers all over the country.

No Fun

"Strikes aren't fun. They are grim work. They require an endurance and heroism of men and women and even children far nobler than the heroism of war. Their heroes are not individuals but the mass of workers."

In regard to violence in labor tactics, Mr. Thomas says: "Even the old I.W.W. in the days of its greatest militancy, probably won more by unarmed mass demonstrations, leading to wholesale arrests which crowded the jails, than by more violent tactics. Oftentimes it has been proved that the way to keep strikers from getting out of hand and acting as a mob is not to denounce violence but to organize meetings and non violent demonstrations."

"Unquestionably the strike is a form of coercion. But even in America with our tradition of violence—the violence of Indian wars, of the frontier, of lynchings, of the underworld rackets, and of the third degree habitually used by the police—the strike deserves to be classified as a comparatively non-violent form of coercion, which on the whole has won more victories for justice, at less cost of human bloodshed, than the patriotic wars which clutter up the pages of history."

A Forecast

The forecast for the year 1935 is not a very cheerful one. Kiplinger Service declares: 'For 1935 as a whole, government technical advisers are figuring on business only slightly better than in 1934 as a whole."

Strikes, according to Nations Business, official organ of the Chamber of Commerce of the United States, "will continue a serious drag on business for the next year." This organ of the capitalists admits that "strikes are the most effective weapons of labor in the fight for unionization."

Pearl L. Bergoff, head of the Bergoff Detective Agency of New York City, who sent out thousands of men to "protect the mills" during the textile strike—in other

words to act as strong arm men and deputy sheriffs (hired by the employers), is reported to have said:

“There’ll be more strikers in 1935 than ever in history, and it don’t make me mad.”