

# Florence Is A Communist

By Dorothy Day

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*Summary: Lauds the courage of a Southern household maid who became a Communist hoping for a better social order. Notes the degradation of cottons workers and prods Catholics to become lay apostles to help build up a new social order. (DDLW #329).*

Florence is the young maid in the home of a sodality leader in New Orleans where I stayed last month on my way back to New York. Part of the work of the sodalists throughout the country is to combat Communism by the positive program of the Church and so the word Communism came up during dinner conversations.

Florence had just recently come down from the deep South and she was not yet trained to the niceties of waiting on table and pretending not to hear what was being said.

“Are you a lecturer?” she wanted to know, and, “What do you lecture about?”

“Labor and Communism and things like that,” my hostess answered her, and added, “Do you know what Communism is, Florence?”

“Yes, I am a Communist,” Florence stated, and afterward when we were alone together in the kitchen she went into more details about her beliefs.

## Communist's Work

“Communism,” she stated, “is to help the poor.” So the poor of the small town of Jacobi where she came from, were quite ready to be enrolled in the ranks of the Communists.

There were about eighty Negroes signed up with the Communist group in her little town in Louisiana, and in the neighboring towns of Lettsworth, Lagonia, Batchelor, Torras and Susport there were groups of from forty to sixty in each town.

They were not doing anything much at present, not even meeting, she explained, since the young Communist organizer who had been keeping contact with them had been jailed and run out of town. He had been transferred by the Party to another state, so there the matter was halted.

But the groups had literature and some of them read. They went to Church, they believed in God, but they knew that this present social order in which they and their neighbors never had enough to eat or a decent place to live, was not a good social order. They could readily see that they must do their part to help

bring about a better order. What that part was they did not know as yet, but they were organized, and they read and thought and waited.

## **Cotton A Curse**

According to a government "cross section survey" made by the Department of Agriculture of people employed as farm laborers, the average annual earnings of female cotton pickers in Louisiana was \$62 a season. The men averaged \$178 a season.

Granville Chapman in a communication from Texas to the New York Times stated, " Cotton is the curse of the South. I hate it because of what it does to the children. . . .It is much too hard, too exhausting work for the children." But the schools close so that they can continue to work in the fields to supplement the earnings of their parents.

Down in the section that Florence comes from men, women and children work in the cotton and sugar cane. They are degraded to a condition worse than that of slaves, because slaves were better cared for. The condition of the whites is just as bad.

St. Thomas said that a modicum of goods is necessary for men to lead a good life, and they want that modicum of goods. The very fact that they are organizing shows that they realize their dignity as men, as creatures of body and soul, as temples of the Holy Ghost.

Where are the lay apostles among Catholics who will run the risk this Communist organizer did in gathering together groups to help build up the new social order the Holy Father calls for?