Experiences of C.W. Editor in Steel Towns with C.I.O.

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Summary: Impressions from a fact-finding tour of Pennsylvania steel towns and interviews with such figures as Bishop Boyle of Pittsburgh; John L. Lewis, chairman of the CIO; Kathryn Lewis, his daughter; and John Brophy, Director of the CIO. For readers seeking background information on the steel/labor struggle, she recommends several books. Applauds church and government efforts to support labor in its struggle to organize and notes with satisfaction The *CW*'s ability to transcend race and ethnic boundaries.

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A story like this is too big to compress in one column. Impressions crowded upon one over two weeks of constant observation are hard to put down on paper. There could be an interview with Bishop Boyle of Pittsburgh; with John L. Lewis, chairman of the Committee on Industrial Organization; with John Brophy, director of the committee; with Philip Murray, head of the Steel Workers' Organization Committee (SWOC); with Pat Fagin, president of District No. 5 of the United Mine Workers; with the wives and mothers of steel workers; with Father Kazincy, who spoke from a wooden platform out in an open air mass meeting at Braddock last Sunday; with Smiley Chatak, the young organizer of the Allegheny Valley; with the Slovaks, the Croatians, the Syrians, the Italians and the Americans I have been seeing this past month–individuals among the 500,000 steel workers who have been unorganized, oppressed and enslaved for the last half century in the giant mills of the American Iron and Steel Institute.

Bishop Boyle

When I got to Pittsburgh, I went to call on Bishop Boyle. I got there just after supper on a Monday night and we talked until ten about labor, about the social teachings of the church, about subsistence homesteads.

"As far as I can see, this employee representative plan means nothing," the Bishop said, and he referred me to Father Lonergan, a pastor in Clairton, where the steel works and the coke by-product works extend for miles along the Monongahela,

who wrote a paper on collective bargaining for the priests' convention last year in Pittsburgh.

"Only where labor is as well organized and as powerful as capital can the authorized representatives of organized capital and the authorized representatives of organized labor sit down at the same table and arrive at a free and equitable agreement," Father Lonergan stated.

And the CIO and its work of organizing steel gives promise of becoming sufficiently powerful to do just that.

"I have known Philip Murray for the past thirty years," the Bishop said, "and he's a good, sound Catholic and labor leader. And you have my permission to interview priests in the diocese and in all these little steel towns as to the organization of their workers."

Bishop Boyle's is a modest residence, next to the Cathedral, so much the middle class home that you'd never know that a prince of the church lived there.

John L. Lewis

Before I went to Pittsburgh, I stopped in Washington to see John L. Lewis at the offices of the United Mine Workers, whose president he has been for many years. He is a big man, huge chest and shoulders, and the fact that he needs a hair cut made his head more massive than it is. Small ears, set close to his head, overhanging brows like black mustaches, intensely serious blue eyes and a grave mouth. I was prepared to like him because, engrossed as he is in the ideal of an industrial democracy–carried on the wave of a great movement into the position of leader, he has not lost sight of the American workers as a whole. President of the United Miners, pledged to the organization not only of steel here and now but also of rubber, auto, aluminum, radio and other great industries–he still finds time to take in the plight of the sharecropper in the south and lend them his support, and to interest himself in the work of Father Coady for cooperatives in Nova Scotia.

I asked him what he thought of the hand the Communists were giving him. He had been attacked most bitterly by them for many years past, and not alone by them but by other elements in the working class movement.

"My idea of Communists," he said, "is that they are products of the system. Given a decent social order, and you'll have good Americans. I've read all that's been written on Communism and Fascism these past years (Has he read Gurian and Dawson, I wonder?) and I'm not having any. What I want to do,–what I want to help to do,–is to make America an industrial democracy."

Kathryn Lewis

Working in the office with her father is Kathryn Lewis, who is 25, who never studied sociology or economics at Bryn Mawr, where she went to school for a few years, but who has learned since she was a child what was going on in the labor movement. Born in Springfield, Illinois, where Lewis' home is, she lived also in Pittsburgh and New Mexico as a child while her father, who had grown up in the mines and whose Welsh forebears had before him, was organizing. Then there were long years in Illinois where she saw her father fought by the Progressive Miners who seceded from the United Mine Workers, accusing him of making contracts without their consent and "selling out the workers." (There are dark as well as bright sides to the story of every labor leader.)

John Brophy

Then there is John Brophy, to whom I talked not only in his office in Washington, but also in Pittsburgh, where he lives. He has a 13-year-old daughter, Jacqueline, and a 17-year-old son, Philip, who attends St. Meinrad's in Indiana.

When he was 12 years old John Brophy went to work in the mines and for 20 or 25 years after he was a workker and checkweighman. His parents were workers and he considered himself a worker. But he was also a Catholic. He had his pride as a Catholic and he felt a deep loyalty to the church to which his English and Irish forebears had clung through grim persecution. But he also had his loyalty as a worker to consider.

"Often I thought that the Church and labor were in opposition," he said, "I was a Socialist for a while and I thought that the encyclicals were anti-socialist tracts and distrusted them as such. There was none to explain the social principles of the teachings of the Church. I went through hell!" But he's come through it, and he is a loyal worker and a loyal Catholic now.

Reads C.W.

He is a middle-sized, sandy-haired man, his hair flecked with grey, his eyes blue. He sat in his shirt and his collar was wilted. He was glad to see me. He'd been reading The Catholic Worker for some time.

(Brophy had his quarrels with Lewis in the past, just as Powers Hapgood, another CIO organizer, did, but Lewis has that quality of leadership which repairs mistakes, conciliates enemies and works for unity in the movement.)

Brophy has long been interested in workers' education and has tried to further educational work in the trade union movement since 1920.

Brophy's library includes whole shelves of books on coal, works of Maritain, Chesterton, Monsignor Ryan, Tawney, Veblen and all of Newman, "I am a

convert too inasmuch as I have come back to a realization of the Church's social teachings and now look on labor's problems from a philosophical angle, in relation to man as a *person*."

Sweep of Drive

From the offices on the 36th floor of the Grant Building, which look out over Pittsburgh and from which you can see the three rivers, the Allegheny, the Monongahela and the Ohio, sweeping down the valleys, the word goes, "*Steel is going to be organized.*"

To realize what that means one must know the history of labor and steel. Way back around 1890, when there was a union, and when Pope Leo XIII came out with the program which called for organizations of workers in order that they might deal with their problems, the Carnegie Steel Co. decided to break the union.

That was the great Homestead strike of 1892 where workers were shot, when they fought off the Pinkerton men who came down in barges to open up the mills to strike-breakers. You can get the history of this in *American Labor Struggles*, by Samuel Yellen, published by Harcourt Brace; in *Steel-Dictator*, by Harvey O'Connor, published by the John Day Company, and in many other books on the labor movement. To understand the magnitude of the struggle now, it is necessary to read about the past.*Men and Steel*, by Mary Heaton Vorse, covers the situation in 1919.

Moral Support

But now for the first time, government is on the side of labor, recognizing labor's right to organize in unions of its own choosing (since 1890 it has been an official teaching of the Church though many priests have disregarded the problem as an economic one instead of as a moral one). Now for the first time, a government official has pledged relief in case of lockout or strike. Now for the first time, organization of steel has been thought out in terms of all the workers, skilled and unskilled, foreign and American-born, instead of in terms of crafts which made the grave mistake of building up an aristocracy of labor so that unity was destroyed.

The Catholic Worker stand is clear in regard to industrial unionism; together with the priests with whom we have talked, we stand pledged to support it. Four-fifths of our Catholic working people are in the cities, and it is not only to organize them for better conditions, but of education, in order that a better balance between industry and agriculture may be achieved, in order "that as many possible of the workers may become owners" that we are closely following this situation.

Last month The Catholic Worker was distributed in Bethlehem, in Pittsburgh, Aliquippa, in Tarentum, in Braddock and in many other centers. I saw Negroes looking with delight at the Negro and white worker on the masthead of the paper. I sat by a Slovak at an open-air mass meeting in Tarentum while he translated from the paper for the benefit of his companions who did not read English.

We ask our readers in steel centers to write for bundles of the paper and to help us distribute it among our brothers in Christ.