

Day After Day - January 1937

Dorothy Day

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Summary: Details about caring for workers during the seamen's strike—the need for large amounts of food, space to sleep, illness, high rent, and the threat of violence. Says unions need a supernatural outlook for “without a fatherhood of God, there can be no brotherhood of man.” (DDLW #314).

For the last month THE CATHOLIC WORKER has occupied a large store at 181 Tenth Avenue, just around the corner from the headquarters of the striking seamen. From the first day the place has been thronged from 8 in the morning until midnight. Joe Hughes, one of the seamen who has for the last eight months been one of the Catholic Workers, both at Mott Street and the farm, is in charge, together with Bill Callahan, John Cort, Joe Galleo and Bill Evans have come to the rescue of our coffee squad and helped keep the three five-gallon pots boiling.

Right now we are using 125 loaves of bread a day, fifty pounds each of peanut butter, apple butter and cottage cheese, and we can't stop to count the pounds of coffee, sugar, and milk. St. Joseph is taking charge of the payment of bills to the Federal Co-operative, which is working night and day with us and begging on the side to keep us going.

One day a box of dried prunes came in, and having no extra burner on our gas stove, we put them out as they were and they went fast. For two months the men have been living on nothing but stew, and not much of it at that. They are worn with the long strike, but their courage is undiminished. They are prepared to stick it out for the winter, and we are prepared to stick it out with them. Not prepared with money, of course. Our grocery bill mounts gigantically, with 800 to 1,000 men to feed, but we always have the assurance that St. Joseph is our almoner. It is up to him.

Strategy Finance

Frank Jones is the member of the Strike Strategy Committee in charge of finance, and he came over to our branch on Tenth Avenue to be interviewed on how the strike is financed and how much it costs. He is a young fellow, very serious and burdened with the care of the thousands of seamen who need to be housed and fed.

"During November it cost \$550 a day," he said, "and I hate to tell you our deficit. We don't like to make it public because it disheartens the men. The other night at the Madison Square Garden meeting the ticket sales amounted to \$1,200 and the collection \$2,200. Only a third of those attending paid admissions. The unemployed and strikers got in free. There was about \$600 in pledges, and we don't count those until we've collected them.

"We make some money on the sale of the Pilot, the men who are out on the street bringing in from 60 cents to \$6 a day.

"I don't know what the food costs or how they get it. Somebody else has charge of that. We put up about 200 men down in the neighborhood at South Street at 20 cents a night, 400 up around headquarters here, 100 in Harlem and 200 in Greenpoint. A lot of the men are staying with friends, or have some money left from their pay, although they donated to the strike fund as they came off ship."

Need Money

Since the strikers are in revolt against the corrupt union leaders who hold the money the men have been paying in for dues for years, the Strike Strategy Committee is always faced by a money shortage.

The rent of the headquarters on Eleventh Avenue, near 23d Street, comes to \$85 a month, although they used to pay \$50. Dominick Curzio is the agent for the building, and just last month he served a dispossession notice on the strategy committee. They had to pay \$300 down and sign a lease agreeing to pay \$85 a month hereafter, making all repairs themselves. When they were arranging the details of the lease, Dominick remarked that his lawyer was also Joseph P. Ryan's lawyer.

A Sick Guest

The days continue warm, flu weather, everybody calls it, and our doors at Tenth Avenue stand open a good part of the day. The hall is crowded all the time, all the benches occupied and many standing.

One fellow I noticed sleeping with his head on the long table in the middle of the room most of the afternoon. Later he came up to get a cup of coffee at the stand by the kitchen door and said he had a chill. I noticed that his eyes were bleary and that he looked feverish, and recommended that he sleep on one of the two beds in the back room where Bill and Joe are sleeping now (their beds are already taken at Mott Street).

One of the seamen recommended eucalyptus oil on sugar and went out to get some, and we dosed him with that, but he continued to lie there, shivering under heavy quilts and coughing rackingly.

I got a thermometer later and took his temperature and it was one hundred and three. The only place he had to stay was a 20-cent lodging house in the neighborhood, so thinking a hospital the best place for him, I called a taxi and took him down to St. Vincent's.

Discussions

All day the place is packed, the men coming and going, on and off watch, and they sit around for hours at a time too, reading the Catholic magazines, papers and pamphlets that we have around the place. Many of the books we have on hand have been borrowed, and we need more literature on social questions. All the copies of the encyclicals which we had on hand have been taken and tomorrow we'll have to order a hundred more. Groups get together to discuss not only the strike, the probabilities of winning it, but all the questions of nationalism, war, pacifism, economics, the machine and unemployment, and again and again the question of the faith is brought up, and how, without a supernatural outlook, unions cannot help but fail, how, without a fatherhood of God, there can be no brotherhood of man.

We are appealing to our readers not only for spiritual sustenance for these men in the way of books, but also for food in the shape of bread and jam and peanut butter and apple butter, or any such spread. We are sure our readers around New York have jars of preserves they could spare for these men who are going on short rations in a fight to achieve better conditions of labor for themselves and their brothers.

Another Fallen

News was just brought in of a young fellow on the picket line, ailing for days, who collapsed on the line and had to be taken over to Bellevue, where they found he had pneumonia. . . . It is eleven o'clock at night as I write this, and there are still about a score hanging around the hall, which Bill is trying to sweep up. Word was just brought in that a squad of terrorists patrolling the waterfront, the same as those who, with the assistance of guns, leaped on the running board of trucks this morning and forced the truck drivers to drive through the picket lines to the piers, is on the loose in the neighborhood. Six of the strikers were beaten up tonight with clubs. One of them has a broken shoulder. . . . Warning was brought from headquarters that they were liable to come in and break our place up. Such are the usual tactics in labor warfare. The testimony of the La Follette Committee has brought this out plainly. And yet, whenever there is violence. it is usually laid at the workers' door.