

On Pilgrimage - July August 1946

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Summary: Reports on hearing Canon Cardign speak of the Catholic Action movement which is reaching the workers with the Church's social teaching. Endorses non-violence, withdrawal, and getting at the roots in any mass movement. Eulogizes Sidney Hillman for his ground-breaking work in the garment industry. Notes that Peter Maurin received sacramental anointing and requests prayers for a labor leader who stopped practicing his faith. Quotes from Eric Gill's stations of the cross. (DDLW #427).

On a hot Saturday afternoon in July a group of us from St. Joseph's House of Hospitality went uptown to Cathedral High School to hear Canon Cardign, who was spending a day in New York and was going to greet the Catholic Action groups and the cells of the Young Christian Workers. It was Abbe Kothen, his assistant in Belgium, who wrote *The Green Revolution* with a foreword by Canon Cardign, published by the Dominican Press in 1939 in Paris. We had time for only a few brief words but he promised to come down to *The Catholic Worker* office when he returned from his travels in August.

Here are a few of the things he said to the assembled young people. It was the first time he had talked in English, he said, and once we were accustomed to his accent we could understand perfectly. His voice is so clear, so forceful, so enthusiastic that it was hard to realize he was on a long exhausting trip and had survived a long and exhausting war.

FACTORY WORKER

He had worked in factories as a boy, he said, and his father had been a worker before him. He swore then, as he left the factories to study for the priesthood that he would devote his life to the workers, he would give his life and his strength for them. His first parish was in 1912. He got together six boys and six girls (his technique reminds one of *the Soul of the Apostolate*.)

"I said to them, 'If you believe, we will build up a movement that will spread around the world. If you believe'"

GO TO THE POPE

By 1925 he was criticized and stopped by the hierarchy for his radical and unheard of (up to that time) approach to the social problem. He went to Rome. He was laughed at by everyone.

He, a parish priest, to go to the Pope himself! But the Pope saw him, gave him a private audience.

We talked for hours. And every year I have seen him since. He said to me, “The great tragedy of the century is that the masses of the world are lost to the Church.” He said, “many have come to me concerned in saving this group or that group, but none has come to me and said, ‘I will save the masses of the world to the Church.’”

EMPTY CISTERNS

Canon Cardign’s technique is to gather small groups together in parishes, in factories, in mines, mills, workshops, barracks, hospitals, ships, in the fields, in the schools. The first duty of these small groups, the first duty of the individual, he points out, is “forming oneself, educating oneself, preparing oneself,” in other words, filling ones own cistern so that we will not be empty cisterns without water, unable to quench the thirst of others. His emphasis is not only on the mass approach, but the personalist approach.

“The problem of the working people of the world is that they do not know the social teaching of the Church. They do not know their own dignity as sons of God, as temples of the Holy Ghost. Without work there is no religion, without work there is no prayer, without work there is no food, no clothing, no shelter, no dignity. They must know that they are not slaves, not machines, but they must realize their own dignity.”

SEEDS SOWN

Now there are 2,000 cells in Belgium alone and the movement has spread to all the world. During the war there were 400 underground cells. The Belgian leaders of the movement met their deaths in Dachau and Buchenwald. They have given up their lives for their brothers. They have watered the seed sown by Canon Cardign with their blood.

MATERIALISM

“It is a very labor movement,” he said, “fighting the materialism of the day. Our enemy is not communism so much as materialism. Communism is very strong in Europe, but the Communists cannot say, now that they have known our movement that the Church is the Church of the bourgeois, the rich, the capitalist. It is the Church of the masses.”

MORAL SYSTEM?

We are anxious to see the Canon when he returns to talk to him about the ideas of Fr. Vincent McNabb and Eric Gill. To talk to him about machines that turn men into machines, about decentralization, about striking at the roots; about whether the inquiry system of the Jocistes inquires as to the morality of the job, the work; whether it does not tend to accept the system as it is, our present industrial system that has brought about war and destruction for the masses. We want to ask him about “sanctifying one’s surroundings.”

Have the Jocistes a philosophy of poverty, a philosophy of work? We want to see a mass movement along the lines of non-participation, along the lines of a withdrawal, along the lines of nonviolence. A man who has the courage to think in terms of a mass movement should get at the roots, and though this withdrawal can be done only step by step, it should be worked towards.

SIDNEY HILLMAN

This month Sidney Hillman, a great labor leader died. The New York Times devoted almost an entire page to his obituary. He started as an emigrant, working for six dollars a week in a clothing factory. He had been in prison and in exile in Russia for trying to bring about social change. When he was in prison he used his time for study (“The first duty is to inform oneself,” Canon Cardign had said.) When he was out of work in Chicago, he continued his study of history and social principles, the ideas of Lincoln, Jefferson and founding fathers. He built up a tremendous union in the industry in which he worked, and it was during its first strike in 1911 that he met the girl who was to be his wife and who was with him when he died. He brought about such cooperation between the employer and the employee that in Hart Schaffner and Marx there never was another strike from that day to this. His union made many suggestions to employers as to how to increase efficiency for both worker and employer and on occasion the union was able to loan money to the employer to tide over difficult times. The union had unemployment, cooperative housing, sick benefits, life insurance, a bank, etc. for many years. The Catholic Worker has always banked at the Amalgamated, which is located on Union Square. One of the first labor papers for which I wrote on space rates, was the Amalgamated Clothing Workers paper, **Advance**, many many years ago.

HANDS OF FEW

According to an account sent out by The Association of Catholic Trade Unionists in this industry which numbers some 275,000 workers, the owners and the managers are generally the same people. The owners manage their own businesses. They supply their own capital and consequently do not have to depend on stockholders and banks. For this reason they have great liberty in dealing with their labor problems and knowing most of their workers, they have a greater capacity to understand the workers’ point of view. Ownership in the industry is not concentrated in the hands of a few.

GREAT LOSS

Anyone interested in unions would do well to study the history of the Amalgamated, for which Sidney Hillman was responsible. He is a great loss indeed to the labor movement, a man of noble aims and works, whose integrity was never questioned by any save perhaps the Hearst press.

IMMEDIATE NEEDS

With our attitude towards the machine and the land, people wonder why we bother about unions. But things being as they are, the system as it is, steps must be taken. We are not angels and we cannot fly, we must take one step at a time. In order to better conditions for the workers, unions are necessary. In order to give the worker time to think, halfway decent living conditions, organization is a duty, not only a right. If Catholic Workers with some sense of responsibility joined their unions, attended their meeting, they would little by little prepare the ground and drop the seeds that would bring forth fruit, in a distributist order. If they studied, as Hillman studied, the dynamite contained in the writings of such men as Fr. McNabb, G.K. Chesterton, Eric Gill, and Popes Pius XI and XII, they would have the theory of a revolution that would change the face of the earth.

PRAY FOR PETER

During the month Peter Maurin was anointed. He has been sick for the past couple of years and staying down at the farm at Easton. He is no worse than he has been, but when one is nearly seventy and with heart trouble, it is not good to take chances. The doctor has said that he might die in his sleep and how would he feel if we had never had him anointed. When I asked the pastor to send Fr. Gibson up to the farm, he told me sternly that I should have done it long before, and I felt he was right. What a habit we have of looking at the Last Sacrament as the end. And we do not like to think the end has come for our dear ones. And yet anointing is for the health of the soul and body. Often people rally after being anointed. We should have more instruction on it. Here is a beautiful paragraph from Mother Mary Loyola's **Welcome** which describes Extreme Unction:

EXTREME UNCTION

I trust, my God, that thou hast in store for me that merciful sacrament which is the perfection of the Sacrament of Penance, that last anointing which will purify my soul from the remains of sin and heal the wounds and weakness sin has left. Give me by Extreme Unction the strength, the patience, the trust in thee which I shall need in the hour of my death. Let it comfort me by lessening my fear of

death, my sorrow at leaving my friends, my dread of the eternity on which I am entering, and the account I have to give. Let it curb the power of the enemy, and enable me to merit greatly by the cheerful acceptance of thy Will in all my pains of body and mind. I put my trust, dear Lord, in the prayers of thy Church for me at that hour. That I may profit by them to the full, I will become familiar with them now. So will their sound be welcome at the last, and as she prays thee by the holy anointing and by thy most tender mercy to forgive all I have done ill by the misuse of sight, and hearing, of smell, and taste and touch, my soul will be roused to intelligent response. How much they miss who hear these prayers for the first time when they come to die. Who have never troubled to learn what the Church will ask for them in the hour of direct need."

Life and death! Within a few weeks my daughter will have another baby, and last week her husband's father Wm. Hennessy, of Washington, D.C. died, for whom we ask prayers and remembrances at Mass.

LABOR LEADER

In this column, as I have remarked before, I put all that has been in my mind to write during the month, about interviews, meetings, daily events. Sometimes it is all about the farm, sometimes about the city, sometimes it is about people, or the things we have read about people. Last week we were reading about Joe Curran in the New Yorker, the Horatio Alger like quality of his career. The story told of the new Union headquarters, the labor school, the library, the indoctrination, about race relations in the union, the recreation hall, the cultural activities and finally about Joe's home life. A Profile of that sort never talks about the soul. I wonder why. Man is a creature of body and soul, and man in his relationship to God, man and his affiliations to groups who worship God, are always matters of great interest to all.

FORMER CATHOLIC

So I thought it would be interesting to supplement the New Yorker account by a frank statement of Joe's religious position. We are interested in Joe's soul, just as we are in his love for his wife and baby and homelife. And we do not think we are intruding on his privacy, he being a public character now anyway, in discussing his soul life. He is a former Catholic, as many a labor leader is, having too great an interest in this world, to the exclusion of the next. Or perhaps to the neglect of any consideration of the next in relation to preparation for it. However, both Maritain and Mauriac have pointed out that he who works for his fellows, for justice and for the recognition of their dignity, is working for Christ even though they deny Him. And doubtless they will receive their reward.

SUPPORTING STRIKE

Joe Curran and Joe Ryan have long been enemies and Joe Ryan sits in the front pew at Mass. We have often written about Joe Ryan and the kind of union he has (Fr. Swanstrom, the priest who is doing relief work for Europe wrote a thesis on the longshoreman's union) and we concerned ourself a good deal in the 1937 strike that witnessed the birth of the National Maritime Union. We housed many a worker during that early strike of '36 and we spent many thousands of dollars which our kind readers sent us, to feed the men over a period of three months. The men will long remember the gallon pots of coffee on the stove night and day for three months and the wooden tubs of peanut butter and cottage cheese and the good pumpernickel bread and the radio going and the piles of literature on social action. Charlie O'Rourke, John Cort, Bill Callahan, Joe Hughes and Austin his brother, and I were over at the Tenth Avenue headquarters for months during that strike which won for the men the gains that have made Joe Curran famous. Down before the Dies Committee, Mrs. John Brophey and I heard Curran testify as to the aid given them by the Communists. "There was no one else to help us," he said. He didn't like, evidently, to acknowledge any Catholic help. It is the tradition of the worker, to think of the Church as tied up with the shipowner rather than with the worker. Of course we admit that our help was but a drop in the bucket and the Communists must have poured money in. What a strange unequal contest, and how we Catholics must use both spiritual and corporal works of mercy. We never use enough of either, it seems to me. We have not yet begun; we have not loved enough; we have not offered our lives as Canon Cardign has, for the worker.

BAPTIZED

Joe is a Catholic, a baptized Catholic, so I ask our readers to pray for him, the head, as he is, of one of the biggest and most powerful unions in the country and one which has done great work for its men. He is married or the second time, being divorced from his first wife. On one occasion he was advertised as a Catholic when he was running for political office on the west side, and when I telephoned to ask him about it, to pin him down as to whether he was a "practicing" Catholic, he told me of his second marriage. No, he had not been married the first time before a priest, he had not had time, going to sea as he was. So there is no reason why he cannot be married this second time before a priest, "But I don't want to do any Jimmy Walker" he growled over the phone, showing an honest unwillingness to profit by irregularities as well as a misunderstanding of his situation spiritually.

WEAPON OF PRAYER The Holy Father has asked for Catholic leaders of workers who themselves are workers. Joe Curran is, or should be a Catholic and a great labor leader. He is well worth praying for; it is for this reason that I write these paragraphs, not to provide you, our readers with interesting and spicy bits of information in the way of a spiritual profile, but to arouse your interest in praying for the soul of Joe Curran. I have already asked many a convent of holy nuns through the country to pray for Harry Bridges, another former Catholic, and another great labor leader. And there will be results, of that I am sure. Prayer is a weapon that they cannot combat.

CORBETT BISHOP

There were many visitors to the farm during the month, among them, Corbett Bishop, the absolutist who during three separate imprisonments was on a hunger strike for 80, 160 and 250 days respectively, and during these times forcibly fed through the nose. I do not think that I have ever met anyone who has been so successful in overcoming the flesh. He has in him the spirit of martyrs. He stayed for several days and we had a long enough visit for me to be convinced that he was one of these good normal human beings (and we certainly are experienced enough in having the care of those who have many a quirk mentally and physically) full of love for his fellows, but determined to make the protest commensurate with the greatness of the evil he was combatting. He never hated or felt resentment towards his captors (that sounds like a line out of a martyrology) and certainly great cruelty was inflicted on him. He was pinched until he was black and blue, he was beaten over the legs with blackjacks, and for six months he was deprived of clothes, a most subtle form of torture, worthy of Germany or Soviet Russia. I had sent him Eric Gill's Stations of the Cross, and he read aloud to the jail doctor, the meditation on the stripping of Jesus.

X - HE IS STRIPPED

It was the custom of the
Romans to crucify men
naked.

Clothes are for dignity
and adornment:
the angels of our imagination
are so adorned.

To strip a man naked is
more than an affront
to his modesty;
it is to deprive him of all
status and all evidence
of the freedom of will
which marks man off
from the beasts.

Let us consider how we
also thus spurn our
fellow men.

It is not only criminals
than we spurn.

If we deprive any man of
what is due to the
dignity of humanity
("Child of God and if
child heir also") we are
in effect stripping him

for his crucifixion as
Christ was stripped.
And man's principal dignity
is his responsibility-
the consequence of
his free will.
In our industrialism it is
chiefly man's responsibility
as a workman
that is destroyed.
He is no more than a
"hand," an instrument
for the profit of his
master.
We may not be able to do
much to alter our world
We can at least set our
minds against it.
To be anti-community is
no good at all.
Unless we are against the
evil system of which
Communism is the
necessary inevitable consequence.
How many of us Christians
take the trouble to discover
why millions of workers
are in revolt against
capitalism and money rule?
What dignity and adornment
is there in the life of the
factory hands of Birmingham?
We have stripped our fellow men
naked