

What is Happening? Trial Continued Until Nov.

16

Dorothy Day

The Catholic Worker, November 1955, 2, 7.

Summary: Anecdotes that focus on money, poverty, freedom, encounters with courts, accusations by the city, troublesome guests, and taxes. (DDLW #694).

We wish to emphasize again, that Ammon Hennacy, Dorothy Day, Mary Roberts, Carol Perry, Stanley Borowsky, Judith Beck, Richard Kern are not spending money for defense by lawyers as one of our readers accused us of doing, and as Fulton Lewis, Junior, broadcast over WOR during the course of the month. We pleaded guilty against the protest of the lawyers who are defending the other twenty defendants with whom we disobeyed the State Civil Defense law to take cover during the mock air raid drill of June 15, and with whom we were arrested and spent one or two nights in jail; and against the protest of the judge who said that philosophy had no place in a court room. The New York Times with its coverage was the only paper to emphasize the fact that we of **The Catholic Worker** intended our protest to be an act of penance for our guilt as citizens of a country which used the atom bomb at Hiroshima and Nagasaki, and that as **penance** we were prepared to pay the penalty for our civil disobedience. The other defendants are protesting the Civil Defense Act itself and have plead not morally guilty and the Quakers have allotted some of the Fund for the Republic money for their defense. The greater part of the defense funds, however, are coming from voluntary contributions from members of the War Resisters League, the Fellowship of Reconciliation, the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom which was started by Jane Adams and one of the members of which occupied the next cell to mine at the Women's Detention Home in Greenwich Village. We have made no appeal to our readers of *The Catholic Worker* to contribute to any defense fund for us. Our appeals are made for the poor with whom we live and share. Our refusal of defense is part of the direct action we believe in, in setting our face against war and defense spending.

The other difficulties to which I refer in my editorial this month were two other incidents which occurred during the month. The trouble with the city was with the Workmen's Compensation Board.

This Then Is Perfect Joy

There is an old man who had come to us periodically for food and shelter. His name is Arthur Johnson. He is not a Catholic. He has worked in the past as a janitor of tenement houses, and it is on his mind still, and with it a desire to help. We have had to watch him to keep him from doing grave damage to our house here at 223 Chrystie St. He has put fuses into electric light sockets, he has turned off the water and caused a burning out of our hot water tank so that we had to replace it. He is always wandering down into the basement to “take over.” Everyone has to watch the poor soul who still wants to “earn his living by the sweat of his brow.” Far from letting him help, our effort has been to keep him from it. Once I saw him sweep the sidewalk in front of the house, and needless to say I did not stop him from this innocent occupation.

Then, back in 1952, Tom Sullivan received a summons from the Workman’s Compensation Board to appear in their court. Arthur had complained that he had dropped a piece of machinery on his shin while working for us. Tom went to the board and there was no difficulty when he explained.

Suddenly last month the case was reopened. This time I was summoned. I went there at nine-thirty in the morning, down to Foley Square, sat in a little court room where there were two rows of seats for lawyers and those concerned in the cases, and in front a long table with the man who heard the cases (I suppose he was a judge), and on either side a secretary, one of them taking notes on a stenotype machine. I say listening to cases over which it seemed he, the judge, said he had no jurisdiction. There was an old colored woman who cleaned one day a week, and had for some years, and was injured while on duty. He had no jurisdiction because she should have worked two days a week to make her eligible. Another case was of a butler and there was no jurisdiction there because he was a domestic worker, and the Long Island suburb was under 40,000 inhabitants.

But when my case was called, I was sworn in, every word I said was taken down by the stenographer, and I was treated like an exploiter of labor and one who ground the faces of the poor. The point was established that The Catholic Worker is not, nor ever has been a charitable organization, that we were in fact a private enterprise, and worked for profit, and that if we chose to spend our profits on feeding thousands, it was nevertheless not legally a charitable organization. That was all very well, and we are quite content with that finding. We have never claimed tax exemption on the grounds of being a charitable organization, nor any other privileges. Our taxes at Chrystie street, amount to thirteen hundred a year and our taxes at Peter Maurin Farm are seven hundred.

We are making quite a sizable contribution in taxes to the city and have never questioned our responsibility to keep fire departments, water departments, health and welfare departments of the city supported by taxes.

Our taxes were going to pay that same official who informed me that unless Charles McCormick, Ammon Hennacy and I did all the work in feeding, housing,

cleaning, clothing, and cleaning up after everyone who came to us—if we accepted any help from anyone around us—then we were liable for any injury sustained by anyone of the thousands we fed. “And you are going to find yourself in great trouble,” he finished sternly. “Better get yourself a lawyer.”

Poor old Arthur was in again last night to the very good dinner of red cabbage and corn beef, and boiled potatoes. We eat family style when it comes to bread and oleo, and potatoes, and tea and sugar and milk, and no one questioned him, and he ate his fill, God bless him. As he left he came over to me and said, “I’ve got forty cents towards my bed money tonight and need another dime. The price of flops has gone up.” He is too deaf to hear any reproaches I might have made, if I had wanted to make them, or any warnings either, that by his very asking for a dime, he was breaking the laws of the great State of New York, which prohibits begging. If you beg, you can be arrested. If you sell without a license you can be arrested, and many cannot get a license. So the poor are damned if they do and damned if they don’t .

And the other trouble? It was Federal income taxes and investigations for Ammon Hennacy, Charlie McCormick, Carol Perry and me. Charlie has had no income for all the years he is with The Catholic Worker, but the rest of us could acknowledge having earned money on which we did not pay taxes, and which we refuse to pay because eighty per cent of the money so gathered goes for wars past and present. The others were treated with great courtesy, but one of the revenue agents made a coldly insulting remark to me based on my past, which was entirely uncalled for. But perhaps he was only stupid so I acted as though I did not hear it.

We have had enough of courts to see what manner of justice is dispensed to the poor, and we continue to rejoice that we are of them. We are learning a lot by these hearings about freedom and liberty and how to protect these great gifts, and one thing is sure, poverty is the great means to freedom in the world today. To be indifferent to the threat of it, to be ready to be deprived of all the things this world holds dear for the sake of the liberty of Christ, this is what it means to be free.