

# On Work

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# Chapter 1

## Introduction

In this series Dorothy covers the period of rapid industrialization shortly after World War II. Included are Peter Maurin's philosophy of work, the role of unions, and a critique of industrial capitalism.

# Chapter 2

## The Church and Work

*The Catholic Worker*, September 1946, 1,3,7,8.

*Summary: Discusses in length the modern industrial problem of the machine and its relation to factory, land and worker. Explains the C.W.'s attempt to gain the workers back to Christ, by explicating a philosophy of work that distinguishes between those machines that are the extended hand of man and those that make man the extended hand of the machine. Such a philosophy sees people as cooperating with their creator, and to labor is to pray. Criticizes American Catholics for not applying Papal teaching to the work area and shows a particular acrimony to a priest who tell workers to sanctify their surroundings instead of changing it. (DDLW #154).*

I have before me Canon Cardijn's pamphlet, "The Spirit of the Young Christian Workers," and on Page 21 of that pamphlet he says: "It is useless to steer clear of the vital and therefore most difficult problems under the pretext of Catholic Unity." So I shall try to write about most difficult and vital things such as the factory and the land, and the workers.

### Catholic Action

The Catholic Worker is not part of Catholic Action as such, having no Mandate from the Hierarchy for this work. It is lay activity, so well described by Maritain in his book, *TRUE HUMANISM*. The ACTU (ASSOCIATION OF CATHOLIC TRADE UNIONISTS), the YOUNG CHRISTIAN WORKERS, THE CATHOLIC ACTION CELLS that are springing up all through Manhattan and Brooklyn, are definitely part of CATHOLIC ACTION. There are Chaplains in charge, and whether the work is in the guise of CYO (CATHOLIC YOUTH ORGANIZATION) or YCW, it is the attempt to reach the workers, to try to gain back the workers to Christ. Canon Cardijn quotes the Holy Father, Pope Pius XI as having said to him, "The workers of the world are lost to the church." And he has had what is in effect a MANDATE from the Holy Father himself to try to reach the workers of the world.

## Lost Philosophy

Beginning at the beginning of the pamphlet, there is that much quoted line, “Without work there will be no host, no wine, no chalice, no altar and no Church,” and I wish to fling down the challenge at once, that what is the great disaster is that priests and laity alike have lost the concept of work, they have lost a philosophy of labor, as Peter Maurin has always said. They have lost the concept of work, and those who do not know what work in the factory is, have romanticized both it and the workers, and in emphasizing the dignity of the worker, have perhaps unconsciously emphasized the dignity of work which is slavery, and which degrades and dehumanizes man.

## Sanctifying Their Surroundings

Can one sanctify a saloon, a house of ill fame? When one is in the occasion of sin, is it not necessary to remove oneself from it? If the city is the occasion of sin, as Father Vincent McNabb points out, should not families, men and women, begin to aim at an exodus, a new migration, a going out from Egypt with its flesh pots?

## Subtle Sin

And when we are talking about sin, I’m not talking about adultery, fornication, theft, drunkenness as such. In the great clean shining factories, with good lights and air and the most sanitary conditions, an eight-hour day, five-day week, with the worker chained to the belt, to the machine, there is no opportunity for sinning as the outsider thinks of sin. No, it is far more subtle than that, it is submitting oneself to a process which degrades, dehumanizes. To be an efficient factory worker, one must become *ahand*, and the more efficient one is, the less one thinks. Take typewriting, for instance, as an example we all know – or driving a car, or a sewing machine. These machines may be considered good tools, an extension of the hand of man. We are not chained to them as to a belt, but even so, we all know that as soon as one starts to think of what one is doing, we slip and make mistakes. One IS NOT SUPPOSED TO THINK. TO THINK is dangerous at a machine. One is liable to lose a finger or a hand, and then go on the scrap heap and spend the rest of one’s life fighting for compensation for one’s own carelessness, as the factory owners say, for not using the safety devices invented and so plentiful, for the benefit of the workers. The existence of those same safety devices is an example of the truth of what I write.

## The Danger

AND HERE IS THE DANCEROUS PART, it is not so much the loss of the hand or the arm, but the loss of one’s soul. When one gives one’s self up to one’s work, when one ceases

to think and becomes a machine himself, the devil enters in. We cannot lose ourselves in our work without grave danger. De Rougement brought this out in his last book, *THE DEVIL'S SHARE*. As soon as one becomes *beside* one's self, as soon as we lose ourselves, as soon as we give ourselves up to anything, whether it is sex, or drink, or work at the machine, there is the danger of the devil entering in. He looks for just such opportunities, and modern life is full of them. See our recreations football, baseball. These are supposed to be recreations and yet they enjoy themselves most who most thoroughly lose themselves in the mob. And the mob is a mob whether friendly or hostile, as Eugene Debs, the great socialist labor leader pointed out.

"I have only experienced the friendly mob," he said once, when I was released from jail, and they met me and bore me on their shoulders. It was a friendly mob but it smelt like a beast. The beast was there."

"Work is not a punishment, a curse, or enslavement, but the cooperation of the laborer with his Creator and Redeemer," Canon Cardijn writes.

But what kind of work? "Without the worker there will be no host, no wine, etc."

## Nothing Amidst Much

In the last few issues of the *Farm Labor News*, published by the Farm Labor Union which has its headquarters in Memphis, Tennessee, it is stated:—there are 6,744,000 family workers, migratory workers on the land. These are homeless, landless people, wandering around harvesting crops. In that same issue they speak of a 50,000 acre plantation where 10,000 human beings work. They deal with the machine, the cotton picker, and the flame-thrower weed killer which is about to displace "one half the present population engaged in cotton farming" according to the Department of Agriculture.

"The House of Haves has just about gotten farming fixed" R. E. Paris of Florence Arkansas, writes to the editor. "I cannot find any place where the tenant farmer and sharecropper fit in this machine age. I am going to liken the machine age in farming to the man who built his house upon the sand. The storm came and the wind blew and the house fell and great was the fall thereof."

"The Department of Agriculture expresses the pious hope that the displaced workers will find jobs in industry," according to the story. The very use of the word *pious* shows the undercurrent of bitterness to religion, though the union works with ministers all through the south.

## Widespread

I have these papers before me and so I quote from them but the same goes for wheat growers who have 100,000 acre farms and gamble in their one crop farming and live in the cities. They grow the wheat and homeless laborers harvest it. It is milled in big cities and all the



good taken out of it in the way of wheat germ, and the dead product sold to the consumer. Is this the kind of wheat our Lord took into His hands when He consecrated it and said, "TAKE, EAT."

## Sanctify

CAN we sanctify such work?

"Too much cotton and none to wear," reads another story. There are twenty-two million bales in the warehouses of the world and the price is over twenty-six cents a pound, the highest it has been in twenty-two years. The only way workers will get cotton in clothes, work clothes, comforters, curtains, sheets, towels (one can't use silk or rayon or nylon for these) is to wait for the U. S. Government to work out a world agreement with other countries to limit the acreage and set the prices. Meanwhile the cotton is held in the storehouse. Can one sanctify such practices as these? Oh, the efficiency of modern business which leads to war!

## I Accuse

Yes, I accuse the leaders, the teaches, the intellectuals, the clergy, of having a romantic attitude towards the workers. They write with fervor and glowing words—they dramatize the struggle, they are walking on picket lines, they love the man in the dungarees and the blue or plaid shirt they write glowingly of his callused hands—they take these leaves from the communist notebook—they are glorifying the proletariat, the dispossessed, the propertyless, the homeless, and the workers can hang a holy medal on their machine or over their bunk in the fo'castle and pray as they begin and finish their work, and go home to their two-room or three-room apartment and surrounded by children and an exhausted wife, sanctify their surroundings— or forget them in the nearest tavern with polluted beer, adulterated wine, or hard liquor. The YCW comment at the end of Canon Cardijn's pamphlet is this: "The YCW shows the workers that whatever a man's state (which after all is according to the dispensation of providence) his primary struggle is against himself, and when that is well in hand the rest is largely a question of *adapting himself to his surroundings*, in order to get the very best out of them both spiritually and temporally."

## Accept? Then?

In other words, accept the machine, accept the factory, the speed-up system, the work in which you are spent—so spent indeed, that on coming out of the factory exhausted, though not physically (the work is light, many say), one seeks the anodyne of drink or sex. No, the immorality is not in the factory, so much, it is after it, a result of it. For some months I lived in Farmingdale, Long Island, where there was a gigantic airplane factory where they were constructing bombers. It was flung up during the war, and transportation was difficult what

with gasoline and tires, and poor bus service. So girls were always accepting lifts from the men to and from work. Even on the bus there was crude horseplay and immodest talk.

## Effects

A man is “spent” in his work. He is emptied. He is emasculated. And vital statistics from Dr. Baker’s figures from the Department of Agriculture, show that it is not only city life, but life in the factories that is cutting down the size of the family so that at present we are a middle-aged country.

I speak frankly as a lay person to priests, of this vain attempt of priests to urge the workers to sanctify one’s surroundings, to adapt oneself to one’s surroundings. What kind of homes do priests live in? How large are their rectories their monasteries, their house of studies? How can they speak of “home” so glowingly, how can they talk of the large family with such unction, when they see the two-room apartments, the four-room apartments on Mulberry street, on Mott street?

## Trash

Should the worker sanctify his surroundings in the lumber camps where huge forests are being denuded all over the country, for profit. Do they bring him homes: Where did all the lumber go? It is tragic, as I write on this white paper to think that trees were cut down to make this paper, and the billions of Daily News, True Stories, detective fiction, movie magazines that fill the drug stores and the bus stations. “Pennsylvania used to have 28,650,000 acres of forest. Now less than 4,000 acres of forest remain within the commonwealth and Pennsylvania has dropped in lumber production from the first to twenty-fourth place among the states.” (Circular from the Department of Forests of Pa.)

Do we just “adapt ourselves” to this evil of destruction and waste, not only of men but of raw materials? We can no more bless it “sanctify it” than the priest can bless the scrap iron which he sprinkles with holy water in the church yard before it sets off to kill Japanese or Germans. (A picture of this was in the Hearst paper in Chicago.)

And yet, that is what the clergy are doing, when they accept this system, this *industrial* capitalism. Canon Cardijn is opposed to the materialism of the day, but most priests when they sensitively use the word materialism, rather than communism or red fascism, are meaning the same thing.

## Temporary Lift

“Where Christ is present among the masses, in all their circumstances, conditions, modes of life, there *Christian mysticism*, which is union with Christ, takes on a deeper and more

extensive reality.” I am still quoting from the pamphlet. But I deny that Christ is present in the factories, among the workers, that they take Him there “The workers of the world are lost to the church.” They are still lost for all the Jocist YCW, CYO, and Catholic Action that is going on. It is impossible to sanctify a house of shame. It is a delusion, a deception, and once more the workers are being betrayed. For a while they may be aroused to hope, they may lose themselves in meetings, in mass demonstrations, in pilgrimages to the Holy Father and filled with the afterglow of these glorious experiences warm their factories with them, but it will not be lasting. Communism creeps inexorably on, and shows its influence one way or another. The Popular Republican Movement of France, which has as part of its economic program nationalization or national control has elicited this comment from the Holy Father, in his letter to the Social Study Week held by French Catholics in Strasbourg recently:

“IT IS EVIDENT THAT INSTEAD OF ATTENUATING THE MECHANICAL NATURE OF LIFE AND LABOR IN COMMON, NATIONALIZATION, EVEN WHEN LICIT, THREATENS TO ACCENTUATE THESE STILL MORE, AND CONSEQUENTLY THE BENEFIT DERIVING FROM IT TO A TRUE COMMUNITY IS VERY MUCH OPEN TO QUESTION”

## The Pope’s Words

In 1939, in an address to the International Congress of Catholic Women’s League, the Holy Father said: “In this age of mechanization the human person becomes merely a more perfect tool in industrial production and how sad it is to say it, a perfected tool for mechanized warfare. And at the same time material and ready-made amusement is only thing which stirs and sets the limits to the aspirations of the masses . . . In this disintegration of human personality efforts are being made to restore unity. *But the plans proposed are vitiated from the start because they set out from the self-same principle as the evil they intend to cure. The wounds and bruises of individualistic and matererialistic mankind cannot be healed in a system which is materialistic in its own principles and mechanistic in the application of its principles . . .* To heal the wound there is one sovereign remedy, that is a return of the heart and mind of mankind to knowledge and love of God the common Father, and of Him whom God has sent to save the world, Jesus Christ.”

## The Masses

Continuing this charge of sentimentalizing or romanticizing of the proletariat, we would like to call attention to the use of the word Masses. I used to work for the *Old Masses*, and I had quite a few articles in *The New Masses* published by the Communists in New York City. One of my articles on the birth of my daughter in a public hospital was reprinted all over Russia and, according to my old friend Michael Gold of the Daily Worker staff, I have quite a bit of royalties coming to me in Russia since it was translated and reprinted in many languages. Diego Rivera, the Mexican artist, told me in 1929 that he had read it when he was in Russia. It was he, in fact, that told me it had been reprinted. *The Masses*. What a

glowing word it was to us then. To speak to the Masses. To write to the Masses, to be a part of the Masses—our hearts during those years, glowed within us at the idea.

## The People

And now the Holy Father in one of his great Christmas messages, points out the difference between *the Masses* and *the people*. He tells us that the expression, *the Masses*, conveys the idea of the inert mass, being moved this way and that, swayed as by a wind, controlled by the demagogue. Whereas “the people” conveys the idea of persons, creatures of body and soul, temples of the Holy Ghost, men and women and children made to the likeness of God, divinized by their baptism and made sons of God.

Since that great message the Holy Father (these comments of his were only a part of it) I have hesitated ever again to use the word “*Masses*.” Canon Cardijn or his translator uses it thirteen times in a twenty-page pamphlet. He used *crowd* once— “to capture the crowd,” and *multitude*, once.

## Long Range View

This is an old controversy. We started to read about it in the pages of Blackfriars, the English Dominican monthly. It certainly went on when G. K. Chesterton and Eric Gill were still alive. (It is their point of view we represent.) We gave up pages of the Catholic Worker to it when Father Paul Sanley Furfey and Father John J. Hugo wrote on it back in 1939. It often ends in acrimony, and I hope that our friends will not credit us with any but the most loving desire to gain them for a long-range program of action. We need to start in the factories of course. Here is what Eric Gill said in some letters to the Catholic Worker in 1940:

“I should like to say simply that fundamentally the problem of the machine is one which should be dealt with by those who actually use machines. At present, as you know, the responsibility for using or not using machines is entirely that of men of business whose interests are, of course, simply in buying and selling and not in making, and therefore in a broad way it may be said that the first thing to be done (first in the sense of most important) is for the workers to recapture the control of industry.”

## Mad Commercialism

“This, of course, is the communist idea but, unfortunately, the communists couple with this their very crude materialist philosophy and their equally crude idolatry of the machine. For the rest, it should be obvious that some things are better made by machines than by hand. For instance, it would be ridiculous to make typewriters except by mass production, otherwise they would be absolutely prohibitive in price, and the whole point of a typewriter is to save money and time. But again it should be obvious that the whole idea of saving time and

money, to such an extent as we have developed it, is a product of our quite mad unholy commercial competitive rush.”

## Hand, Man, Holiness

“Then again, such things as watermills and windmills, which save human labor grinding corn, sawing wood, etc.) are obviously proper instruments and this brings us to the point of distinguishing between those machines which simply save human muscular labor and those which displace human creative skill. . . the worker is a man and not simply a ‘hand.’ Work done by man is human work to be valued and thought of as such and not merely as a ‘cost in the account books.’

“To labor is to pray – that is the central point of the Christian doctrine of work. Hence, it is that while both Communism and Christianity are moved by ‘compassion for the multitude,’ the object of communism is to make the poor richer but the object of Christianity is to make the rich poor and the poor holy.”

## Riches or Responsibility

“The Trades Union movement seems to be moved solely by the ambition to raise wages and shorten hours of labor. However just such an ambition may be, it can never be the ruling motive of the Catholic Worker. The poverty induced by Industrialism stinks, but poverty as seen by Christians is actually a holy condition. Therefore, what is demanded by the Catholic Worker is not so much money as control, not riches but *responsibility*.”

“And this is in line with the Christian Doctrine of private property, the individual appropriation of the means of production. For it is as workmen that man primarily needs property. How else can he maintain complete responsibility? ‘The hiring lieth, because he is a hireling,’ but this is not to say that the wage slave is a bad man but that he has not the responsibility of an owner, and only he who is fully responsible can truly serve his fellows.”

## The Lord Knew

I would like to go on with comments on passages from the pamphlet, “The Young Christian Worker.” The lay apostle, Canon Cardijn says, “must aim at getting hold of the Crowd.” I say, with Dom Chautard, that he must aim at the handful, the few, as Canon Cardijn himself did when he started his parish work with six young people to train as lay apostles. Beware of the Mass! Of the Crowd! Remember Debs’ words about the beast there is in it. Our Lord knew what was in men and when the crowd cheered Him as He came into Jerusalem He knew that the following week they would crucify Him.

## Whole and Holy

“The worker’s life is a prayer and a sacrifice.” Can a *hand*, or *tool* pray or sacrifice? Can a man who is not *whole*, be holy? “We may speak of the mysticism of labor without exaggeration.” But when a man loses himself is it God or the devil who is going to enter in? De Rougement’s book is important reading. It was reviewed by *The Catholic World*, and though written by a non-Catholic, it contains only Catholic truths, according to the reviewer. De Rougement is the Protestant leader, a Swiss, of the personalist and communitarian movement in Paris, of which Emmanuel Mounier is the Catholic leader.

## Supernaturalize

“This supernaturalized ideal of labor must needs be accompanied by a supernaturalized ETHIC of labor, by a proper morality in working conditions. Such influences as self interest, hatred and violence have no place in it. Catholic teaching on this point is in direct opposition to that of the atheist, the agnostic, and the materialist, and it is these who have the ear of the laboring classes in the matter of work.” Here again is the pacifist in the class struggle. Yes, we are all pacifists in the class struggle, though not in international wars, alas! Although if ever war was justified, one would think that people could fight for their homes for their lands for their families their work. (Half of the tenant farmers and sharecroppers of the South are going to be evicted in the interests of big business, remember, within the next five years, according to the Department of Agriculture of the U. S.)

## Holy Resistance

Supernatural selfishness *is* in order here, and a hatred of such work that degrades and dehumanizes. We must hate evil. I am not arguing for class war, for resistance at the point of machine guns, for barricades (which go, by the way, with the city streets), There must be some probability of success; that is one of the conditions for a just war. But I am in favor of the nonviolent techniques of the strike, the withdrawal of labor, violence will be inflicted, but let it not be on the part of the worker. In Steinbeck’s book, *IN DUBIOUS BATTLE*, about a strike of the migratory workers in California, the closing pages tell of the killing of the organizer of the workers, and the satisfaction of the communists at this shedding of blood. One must lay down one’s life for one’s brothers, they say, we must sacrifice even to the shedding of blood. Of course they do not stop there. But they do regard the shedding of one’s blood as so essential that I have seen the workers goading the police to bring about this violence so satisfying to man, who has not been taught the use of his spiritual weapons so that he may take heaven by violence, and make it more possible to praise and worship God here and now thus beginning one’s heaven on earth to what extent it is possible.

## Saints and Workers

“The basic ideal of family life is to”multiply the number of the elect“. Let this be brought home to the working classes, for they in particular are equal to the acts of generosity, devotion and self denial which such an ideal demands.”

What about wages, housing, the mother working, the father withdrawn for long hours from the home, so that under our present civilization a child might as well not have a father. And are not the clergy “laying burdens too heavy for them to bear,” on the shoulders of the workers, and themselves not willing to lighten them by lifting a finger, to change the conditions of their life. It is not right that *heroic* sanctity be demanded of the worker and the women of his family. We are all called to be saints, St. Paul says, and Pope Pius XI has repeated in his encyclical on St. Francis de Sales. It should be an ordinary thing, not a heroic thing. What is being done to make it possible for the worker to be a saint, a good ordinary saint, following the Little Way.

## Sound Doctrine

“Maybe the worker’s life is a Way of the Cross, but . . . it is a continuation of the mission of Christ the Worker. Let these His successors grasp the possibilities and the dignity of their state, and they will be proud of it, *instead of trying to change it.*” Woe, woe to the shepherds who do not feed the sheep good sound teaching. Woe to the shepherds who feed themselves and do not feed the sheep. In Ezekial there are terrible warnings and a terrible threat. If the workers are lost to the church, who will be held responsible?

## Priest and Worker

Cardinal O’Connell of Boston worked in a cotton mill when he was a little boy, but he only stayed a week or so. He soon got out of it, I’ve heard many a worker say laughing. Canon Cardijn worked too (was it in a factory?) when he was a child and his father had worked before him, but he did not stay there. Our Lord was a worker yes, as well as a priest, and St. Paul worked with his hands as a weaver of goats’ hair. But they did not work in factories, tending a machine, sitting half senseless in front of it, their hands unused, as I have seen men do in the Pepperill mills in Maine. They saw their work, they were responsible for their work, so they could regard their work as holy. It was whole work. I am tired of hearing our Lord compared to a modern factory worker. Philip Hagren has a biting and strong article in a recent issue of the CATHOLIC WORKER (it had been printed in *The Cross and the Plough*) and in it he wondered how priests would like it if there was subdivision of labor in offering up the Holy Mass, thousands of them reciting the Gloria, thousands reciting the Introibo (but to be consistent we should break it down to one senseless syllable, rather than to a prayer or canticle). The priests’ work has remained unchanged, but not the factory workers’.

## What To Do

It is all very well to criticize, people will say. We will agree to much of what you say, but what is there to do? But I say, we have been told what to do, but will we do it? Do we listen to the Holy Father himself? Did we listen during the war when he urged us not to extend the scene of carnage and we immediately, here in America entered in. When he urged the sisters and priests to keep the war out of the school room and they went on selling war stamps; when he urged setting up cities of refuge, while we justified the bombing of cities and innocent peoples.

## Writers

G. K. Chesterton has written two books—WHAT'S WRONG WITH THE WORLD and THE OUTLINE OF SANITY. Eric Gill has MONEY AND MORALS and CLOTHES. If our priest friends would study these four books, and then start thinking in terms of the few, rather than of the Masses, we would have a beginning.

If they would only read Father Vincent McNabb, a priest like themselves, and prayerfully consider what he has to tell them, he who lived in the largest city of the world.

## Kinds of Work

All workers do not have to be farmers. There are many occupations on the land. A community needs libraries, bookbinders, engravers letterers, craftsmen of all kinds. A community needs bread, and bakeries, and carpenters and cabinet makers, and silversmiths, and laundries, and blacksmith shops. Teachers are needed and doctors are needed, and nurses. There are many small towns and villages that need apostles. Where are the men who will, like Moses, so have compassion on the slavery of their brothers that they will lead them out of the land of bondage, literally. First by word and then by deed. There are not only the Pharaohs to be considered but the Bishops.

## Help Or Hinder

I attended a meeting in New York when Canon Cardijn spoke. I wondered, were there any workers there? Or where they not all of them white collar workers, office workers, desk workers, paper workers. Did they not associate themselves with their employers, rather than with the workers, and did they not in subtle ways do the work, too, of their employers, in sanctifying their surroundings and making the worker realize the dignity of his surroundings and his work rather than to attempt to change them?



## Chapter 3

# Reflections on Work - November 1946

*The Catholic Worker*, November 1946, 1, 4.

*Summary: Emphasizes learning to work with crafts and trades to counter the evils of industrialism—to acquire a philosophy of work. Complains that clergy are too easily “bribed” by business and lauds the work of the French worker priests. (DDLW #227).*

One night, just as we were beginning compline, two young boys came from Mott street, hitch-hiking, to pay a call on us at Maryfarm, Easton, 75 miles from New York. They would not come upstairs to the chapel, so while I fed them bread and milk and tomatoes (that was all that was left of supper), I talked to them. One is half Polish and half Italian, and the other Italian. They are both sixteen, smooth-cheeked, round eyed, young, strong and soft. Both have been in trouble with truant officers and probation officers for years. The reform schools are all crowded, accommodating sometimes twice as many as they have room for, so the boys know that there is no penalty for their minor misdemeanors. They merrily go on their way of petty stealing from their mothers and families, hanging around street corners and social clubs, of which our neighborhood is full, loafing, swearing, smoking, drinking—well on their way to more serious crime. The courts are full of just such young ones. How to reach them? They are cynical, they gamble, they want to get rich quick. They play the numbers, the horses. They don't want a job, because they want big money. They see others making a killing. Everyone wants to get ahead, to be better off. This is what they are taught in the school, public schools and in the Catholic schools. But they are not taught to work—they are not taught a philosophy of work. They are not taught a philosophy of poverty which will make them use their talents rather than seek wages.

## Begin at the Beginning

“You’ve got to begin at the beginning,” a priest said to me when I was talking to him about the Carmens and the Pasquales of our acquaintance.

You cannot talk to these boys on religious grounds because they are not convinced there is a God, nor that the Bible is His inspired truth. They don't believe in the ten commandments,

nor in the Gospel of love of the New Testament. And they don't believe because they do not see it worked out in the lives of religious any more than they see it worked out in the lives of lay people. We live in a business world just like everyone else, and we live by investments, usury, big business; by our present industrial system which is materialist and as godless as Communism. So how can we talk to them. It is too late to reach them in ordinary ways. They need a conversion. A shock treatment. They are too old. Only a revolution will change them. That's why people accept Hitlerism, Fascism, Communism. They accept it like a religious conversion.

## Jocist Movement

It is this point, of course, which is recognized by the Jocist movement and we must at once give Canon Cardign the credit for the tremendous zeal which was so contagious and which brought the workers by the thousands into his movement in Belgium and all over the world. Mass demonstrations, mass liturgical functions, warm the heart, arouse the spirit, fan the fire and must be used, though at the same time we must recognize the danger of dealing with "masses" as such. Mobs and masses are to be feared, and yet also we must remember the three thousand who were converted on that first Pentecost. Three thousand was no small number. I saw three thousand hunger marchers parading through the streets of Washington, D.C.

I saw them lined up by the roadside living in tents, and they seemed like a mighty crowd, a goodly army to me, and a dangerous menace to the police. We are so used to dealing in millions these days, dealing in conscriptions and mass slaughters that three thousand is nothing. We are prejudiced against mass demonstrations both because of Hitler and Mussolini and Stalin, and because of our own mob reactions. But we must give credit to the brave Canon for his inspiring work with his thousands. It was after we wrote the last article, in September, and after talking to those two boys, that we wished we had some such demonstration as the Canon could put on to show the dignity of work, that we could bring these boys to.

We appreciate what has been done along Jocist, YCW lines, but we wish to go much further, to get at the evil of the industrial system and to make people recognize it.

## Catholic Radical

Peter Maurin wanted to call *The Catholic Worker* The Catholic Radical because he believes in getting down to the *roots*. And the root of our evil, he has been crying out like a prophet, like a St. John the Baptist, is the lack of a philosophy of work.

It is significant that it is in reformatories that boys are taught crafts and trades. It is significant that it is in insane hospitals that the patients, some few of them, are taught to use their hands to do creative work.

But the sad part of it is that though they have these schools, teaching skills, and some learn to do things very well, and probably get great joy out of doing them, they do them with the sad sense of futility, of boondoggling, of having been given something to do because they are either criminal or insane—and not that they are doing things which are good and natural to man that they can continue doing when they get out, creating, making, using mind and body to work on beautiful things God has given man, raw materials He has provided, and in so working on God's good things, getting a sense of the sacramentality of life, the holiness, the symbolism of things.

## Maryfarm

Down on Maryfarm at Easton, we have been working with wool from the Angora goat and the sheep the men sheared one evening after supper. Their hands are strong and it didn't take long. My daughter took one bag of wool from her own sheep which had been given to her by Fr. McGee as a wedding present, and washed it while she was doing the babies' washing every morning. It was a full and heavy fleece and took a week to dry. Then during evenings she teased it to get enough light wool to stuff the new baby's mattress for the little cradle. The rest of the same fleece was worked on by two Hungarian women who were making the current retreat. They had raised wool and spun it back in Hungary before they came to this country, they said. They had raised flax, too, and they advised us about ours, when to pull it. Our new spinning wheel arrived from Montreal. It cost thirteen dollars, and in just a few evenings Tamar had carded and spun six hanks of wool. Two bags of wool from the other two sheep we sent away to be spun single-ply so that we can set up the loom. We are working on the angora wool now.

## Beautiful and Practical

Living as close to the land as we do, we can see the use of all this and how, as the work comes along, and we gain skills, it is both beautiful and practical. Peter used to remark sadly that the rich made their money out of the machine and then always bought hand-made things, from clothes and shoes, to things of beauty in their home.

What a wealth of meaning the psalms have for us when we are living closer to the earth which feeds us. All the symbolism of the Old and New Testaments, which make us see the sacramentality of life, is made plain to us.

## Symbolism

Symbolism is well made use of by the State today. All the military insignia we are by now so accustomed to and look for, is worn with pride, and means a great deal to those who wear them. Both machines and the things of nature are used, and men learn to read and

interpret. The Communists with their symbols—hammer and sickle—their factory chimneys, their bridges, their machines, are building up a sense of the sacredness and holiness and the dignity of the machine and of work, in order to content the proletariat with their propertyless state. They do not disdain symbolism.

There is a new symbolism today, the symbolism of the machine, and there is something ugly and devilish in it, and when priests, in their attempt to reach the worker, make use of these weapons of the devil, we must cry out.

## Ossie Bondy

Ossie Bondy, the former head of our Windsor House of Hospitality, just sent me a few pages torn from one of the Canadian magazines with this comment: “Since you condemned industrialism, here is one aspect of it that will make you sad.” The two pages contained pictures of girls and men in factories being visited by their chaplains and one caption read, “A new idea in industry and an answer from Scotland to the contention that the Church has lost touch with the worker—is the industrial chaplaincy system instituted by the Church of Scotland.”

I am sure that this idea of industrial chaplaincy is welcomed by big business. I am sure, too, that they are quite ready to pay the salaries of the padres. James J. Hill, the railroad magnate, a magnate and great to the extent of being a great villain and thief, accepted huge grants of land from the government across the country, and imported foreign born workers to be exploited in this country and eventually perverted and ruined by our industrial system—this same James J. Hill contributed a great deal to religion. There is a picture of him on the walls of the seminary at St. Paul, Minnesota, and he is said to have said that religion was most necessary for the workers. To keep them contented with their station in life, no doubt.

## Railroads

I have called attention before to the railroad discount of the clergy rates in most parts of the country, and have called it a bribe to the Church so that the railroads can continue their exploiting of workers (the Holy Father has asked for the deproletarianization of the workers) with no outcry from the men of God.

It is the custom, too, when railroads import Mexican helpers as they do from coast to coast, to pay the salary of a padre for them, since they are all Catholics. The morality of employing these workers who are more steady than our American “gandy dancers” and “bindle stiffs,” and taking them for long periods, sometimes for years, from their homes and families, and herded together to live in barracks, is not questioned by these clergy.

## Mine Owners

Many a priest in the mining district, it is said, is paid by the mine owners who, as individuals or as corporations, have obtained possession of the land and added to their crimes by ruining it. Down in Scranton there is many a home falling into the ground because in their greed they have removed props (natural pillars of coal, or often heavy timbers) in order to get the last vestige of coal from the earth, literally undermining the city.

## Priests in Factories

And as I write of these priests accepting benefits from coal operators and railroads, I read of an account of the Liturgical conference in Denver, where a Jean Rogues, delegate of the Center of the Liturgical Apostolate of France, tells of the work of a dozen French priests work in the factories in order to enter into “the mentality, problems and culture of the workers.”

Called Mission Paris, the endeavor owes its origin to Pere Godin, who wrote a book about five years ago stating that France must be considered as a mission, since the workers had been lost to the Church. The story sent out by a priest from the liturgical conference stated that their chief instrument in winning back the workers was the participation in the liturgical life of the Church. I should not say that this was the chief instrument. Their chief instrument is their living and working with the workers, in this way winning their love and their confidence so that they can speak to them, so that they can understand them. We have also heard from priests in Europe that there are many priests in Russia driving cabs, working at hard labor and doing truly apostolic work of the martyrs. These are magnificent beginnings and show a tremendous spirit. To try to bridge that terrible gap between the clergy and the laity, between the man of God and the man of the family—truly this is a great work, and a work which we must comment on, and commend. Not for all, of course, because all these works demand a different vocation. But we should know about them and know about the need for them, and praise them where they are being done.

## Housing

And only to show the need, I must tell the story of the Msgr. I recently talked to in Chicago in reference to a big vacant house across the street from his church, which could be remodeled so as to accommodate four families. There was a garage in the back where another family could be put up. There was an ample yard all around where the children of these families could be put out to play. In addition to this setup, we know four families in Chicago, three of them with children, two, three and four children, who are up against it for decent housing. They are friends, they have all worked with the Catholic Worker movement, they are workers and professional men, thus bridging the gap between worker and scholar, as it is so often bridged in America. They are all interested in the family, work, property, responsibility and the discussion and working out of the lay apostolate for the family. In many cases this is how

many former Catholic workers who ran our houses, edited our papers, have advanced into another greater work, the work of the family, the healthening and strengthening of the first community.

## **The Monsignor**

One of our fellow workers went with me when I talked to the Monsignor about renting the house for a family center. Al works as a freight handler and was dressed in a cap and leather jacket, ready to go to work.

All the Monsignor had to say to us was that the family was the responsibility of the state, and that the neighborhood had deteriorated so that it was full of truck drivers instead of the doctors and lawyers which it had once boasted, that he had bought the property to protect the church and that he didn't want any shanty towns around him.

"A freight handler is one step lower than a truck driver," Al commented as we left.

# Chapter 4

## Reflections on Work - December 1946

*The Catholic Worker*, December 1946, 1, 4.

*Summary: Reports on the hard life and work of the coal miners of Western Pennsylvania and the strike demands of John L. Lewis. "We want to change man's work; we want to make people question their work; is it on the way to heaven or hell?" Emphasizes the holiness of work and the sacramental quality of property. (DDLW #229).*

A long time ago I read a Russian story about a mother and daughter who earned their living by sewing. They sat by a window and rested their eyes by lifting them from their work now and then to survey the scene outside. Then someone came and built a house right next to their window which rose like a massive wall and shut out the light and sun and air. They worked in sorrow for many years. Then the wall was demolished, and when it was gone, they grieved for it. They had come to enjoy being shut in the tenement next door! I remember how extraordinary this gloomy story seemed to me. Yet it pointed to the moral that we not only get used to our ugliness and hardships but we can actually come to love them.

Once a migratory worker said to me fervently, "There's nothing I like better than getting out in that hot field and chopping cotton." He meant it, too, with the hot sun on his back and the vast field all around, and silent men, women and children working down the long rows around him, a long, endless, stupefying work that identifies the man with the field he works in.

### Unique Misery

Down in Derry, Pennsylvania, in the soft coal regions, almost worked out now, a soft coal miner told me after we had talked together for several days:

"Miners don't want to do anything else. They don't want to be farmers. Many of them that leave their work and try something else go back to it again." And I suppose it is true. The entire industrial world has so little to offer what with its cannibalism, its competition, that the men go back to their black holes and their nine hours a day underground, six days a week

(it is still that, though they get much more pay), and begin to take pride in its hazards, its own unique misery.

On a three-day visit through western Pennsylvania, we drove through a number of mining towns with their company houses, company stores, their bleak slag heaps, their mud roads, their meager gardens, backyard toilets, and in every town there were taverns, but only in a few there were churches.

## Iselin

In Iselin, a town of five hundred families, one of the sodality girls told us that most of the men did not go to church though half the families were Catholics, Slovaks, Poles, Italians, all of whom should be Catholic.

The company houses, with no furnaces, no plumbing, had just been offered to the miners, so that they could but them, rather than put the mine operator to the expense of repairing and modernizing them, and the prices asked was \$600! They were good-sized houses, too, and better than most that we saw. How well built they were can be judged by the price asked. Most of the families were afraid that this generosity on the part of the owners meant that the mines were played out and they were reluctant to buy.

There are gardens there; many of the miners keep chickens and pigs, but in that town there is nothing but one company store, and two churches, one Catholic and one Protestant.

## Darkness

The miner said: "It's black down there. No light but what you carry on your hat. Occasional lights at the sections. But it is very black."

How can men love darkness rather than the light? How can men choose such an occupation, except that they are forced to it? We have told in previous issues how they have had to draft the men and 14-year-old boys for the mines in England. Families are trying to keep their children out of the mines, and the press and the pulpit, the school and the mine owner, all are recruiting workers for this most hazardous occupation.

It is not so many hundred years ago that the only way they could get miners was to make bondsmen of them. Technically they were not slaves but they were bonded over to the owners of the mines, men, women and children, and if they tried to escape they were beaten back to work.

In 1770 there was a production of only six million tons. Yet now the whole transportation system, the whole factory system, is bound up with coal. It is the basic industry. Radio commentators say that strikes and lack of workers may mean a great impetus to the study of atomic energy for fuel and power these days.



## Inhuman

How much do men meditate on coal and its uses? There is a limited amount of it in the earth; many of the mines in Pennsylvania are worked out now, leaving ghost towns. The forests are cut down, so soon we will have neither wood nor coal, looking at things from the long view. Yet it is not with any knowledge of organic gardening, the necessity for tree-planting, the use of other forms of energy, that miners, families in the Ruhr and in England, yes, and here in America, too, despite the fact that men go back into the mines after trying other things, revolt against this form of labor. It is because it is inhuman, it demands too much of a man, and they do not leave it for other work because that other work, too, whether it is farming for profit, or working in factories, is inhuman and “takes it all out of a man.”

## Shorter Hours

People want to know what this present coal strike is about. It is about shorter hours for one thing, because the men work fifty-four hours a week despite a thirty-five hour week and time and a half pay for overtime. This pay rate means higher wages, of course, but what use are those higher wages when men are so exhausted they end up in the saloon and gamble and drink away a good part of their pay. Drink is one of the greatest problems of the workers, according to the priests, and we tell them, “When work is inhuman, recreation is going to be inhuman, too. It all goes back to work.”

## Welfare Fund

The strike is also about the welfare fund. Up to this time there have been no pensions, no recreation, no education, no adequate medical service.

John L. Lewis put forward six reasons for his demand for this fund.

1. To furnish adequate and modern medical service to miners and their dependent families with a choice of physicians which, in many areas, particularly in the south, they do not now have. We plan to replace the present company doctor scourge.
2. To provide adequate hospitalization under proper standards.
3. To provide insurance, and health insurance for the miners, which they cannot provide. Life insurance now costs the miner about 277 per cent of what it costs people in sedentary occupations. This fund can provide insurance on a mass basis much more cheaply than the individual can buy it himself.
4. Men who are injured And disabled in the mines through loss of limbs, blindness, or other major physical injuries, need rehabilitation. There are no facilities available to the mine workers now and there are probably living 50,000 men who have been incapacitated from further mining who have received no assistance in rehabilitation or training for other employment.

5. conomic aid in distress or hardship cases. Families become impoverished because they have not received compensation provided by the states due to the manipulation of the company doctor system and by reason of the testimony of the company doctor, which is the only medical testimony available because no other doctor is permitted to attend the victim.
6. If any money is left in the fund, we propose to use it for cultural and educational work among the mine workers.

## Need For Fund

The need of such a fund is evidenced by these figures: Every year some 1,500 miners are killed; some 60,000 to 70,000 are injured, many of them so badly they are thrown on the scrap heap. Most of these accidents occur because the mine operators do not comply with government recommendations for safety. Pennsylvania state laws are the best in the country, but it has been up to the state to formulate a code, and to get inspectors to enforce it. Most operators, working for banks, utilities and railroads, who are the real owners, know nothing about and care nothing about conditions. Richard Mellon is president of the Pittsburgh Coal Company, one of the largest, and we heard of the annual hunt put on by the Mellon family, which is attended by thousands of spectators. Thanksgiving day, when we were leaving the mining district, we drove through Ligonier, on our way to the super highway and passed many a hunter, dressed in a bright red coat, with high silk hat, beautifully mounted, cantering along through the early morning sunshine on his way to the meeting place. The contrast, which contrast we were not looking for and which was forced upon us of great wealth and poverty was a terrible one. We were reminded of an article in the Catholic Digest, written by Fr. Miller the Redemptorist, pointing out the report of the Dept. of Commerce showing that American corporations have accumulated during the war \$52 billion dollars in profits after payment of taxes!

When we can read figures like this, when we read of the inhuman suffering of the workers, when we remember the blood that is on our coal, we know what the Holy Father means when he says that the world has lost a sense of sin. Not personal sin, but **social sin**. When priests do not cry out for the workers, try to share with the workers their poverty, then surely this is what the Holy Father means when he speaks of the devitalization of the Church. They are dead branches indeed.

## Church and Work

This is not meant to be a news article. It is part of the series, the Church and Work. I do not presume to go for three days to the mining regions and write authoritatively on coal and mining. I am writing on work and the Church.

Ten years ago when I visited Arkansas I heard of mines worked by Germans and Italians long before the United Mine Workers came to organize them. The priests aided in the formation

of associations of workers, there were credit unions and cooperatives in the parish. The farmers were also sometimes miners. Msgr. Ligutti's great project at Granger, Iowa, is made of miners who have their own schools, recreation halls, little farms, and in the schools the children have a rural education, not just an urban one which brings the worst features of the city to the land.

## Stories

These are stories the priests in these mining towns could tell to their parishioners both in Sunday sermons and daily homilies, and when they are on strike, and when they are laid off. Stories of what has been done in other parts of the world to emphasize the dignity of the worker, and the dignity of many kinds of work. They could give to the worker a philosophy of work right from the altar, day after day, and do their part in changing the face of the earth.

## Part of Heaven

"All the way to heaven is heaven, because Christ said, I am the way." And work should be part of heaven, not part of hell. In the black underground caverns where the miners lose for month after month, from early fall till late spring, all light of day, there is a glimpse of "everlasting night where no order is and everlasting horror dwelleth."

There is one more aspect of this "work" which I wish to bring out, and that is this. The attitude toward property.

The Holy Father says we must deproletarize the worker. That is, we must get him out of the wage slave class and into the owner class. One very good reason is that a man loves what is his, and has a sense of responsibility for it, almost a sacramental sense in regard to his house, his land, and his work on them. We want to change man's work; we want to make people question their work; is it on the way to heaven or hell?

## Bread and Wine

Man gains his bread by his work. It is his bread and wine. It is his life. We cannot emphasize the importance of it enough. We must emphasize the holiness of *work*, and we must emphasize the sacramental quality of *property* too. That means the property of the poor. They have very little of it. We know that it is dangerous, it corrupts, it is almost a testing ground in this life of attachment and detachment. We must love it as a sample of God's providence and goodness and we must be ready always to give it up.

## No Respect for Property

When we talk about property we do not think of stocks and bonds, shares in coal mines, the property of the hunters in their red coats whom we saw prancing by that Thanksgiving morning. They have no respect for property. For instance, the farmers around Pennsylvania only own the ground plough-deep. They do not know this until they begin to object to the mining operators which undermine their homes and cause them to settle in the cave ins that are prevalent throughout Pennsylvania. When the operators finish taking out all the coal in a given place, they start to retreat, taking out pillars of wood and pillars of coal. The roof falls in, and the ground above settles. This goes on all through that region, and the farmer who objects is told he can pay for all the coal which the miners would have been able to mine from his acres, at the current rate. Since the operators know how deep the seams are, and how extensive, they can calculate to the ton how much coal there is in a given area, and how long it will last.

## Depends On War

There is no respect for property here. So why do we talk of fighting communism, which we are supposed to oppose because it does away with private property. We have done that very well ourselves in this country. Or because it denies the existence of God? We do not see Christ in our brothers the miners, in our brother John L. Lewis. We deny Christ here. And what about that other argument about the use of force? We live in an age of war, and the turning of the wheels of industry, the very working of the mines depends on our wars.

## Louis Budenz

We heard Louis Budenz speak at the Harrisburg forum as we passed through on our way to the mining sections, and one of his messages to Catholics was this warning: that the communists would try to foment anti-clericalism and divide the people from the hierarchy.

There is really no need of their doing it. It is already an accomplished fact. Pope Pius XI himself said, "The workers of the world are lost to the Church."

Our good readers absolve us from any charges of anti-clericalism as they read these rather severe articles on the Church and work. They know that the wish of our heart is to bring closer together the priest and the people. There is a great division between the two and one of the very reasons of the Catholic Worker's existence is to bridge this gap.

# Chapter 5

## Reflections On Work - January 1947

*The Catholic Worker*, January 1947, 1, 2.

*Summary: Quotes Peter Maurin's account of the work of Leon Harmel whose exemplary industrial organization inspired Pope Leo XIII. Praises the Quebec governments homesteading policies. Repeats the need for a philosophy of work and the ideal of the village community. Keywords: distributism, industrialism. (DDLW #431).*

“Once upon a time,” Peter Maurin said, “there was a man by the name of Leon Harmel. He lived at the same time in France as Count Albert de Mun. The latter tried to reach the intellectuals and the former the workers. Leon Harmel came of artisan stock and he swore to bring his policy as employer into harmony with the teachings of the Gospel. His father had been a good employer before him. Leo XIII said that Leon Harmel had given him the greatest consolation during his pontificate.

“Leon Harmel’s life work began with the death of his wife in 1870 when he was forty-two years old. He had been very sad at his wife’s death and had consoled himself with reading and prayer. ‘All for Jesus,’ by Faber, was one of the books that influenced him. He started then and worked for forty years more, for his workers, for his community. He never knew fatigue.

“He was the owner of spinning mills where 1,200 workers spun, dyed and wound the wool in Val des Bois, France. The work he did for his 1,200 workers back in 1870 resulted in social legislation that benefitted millions of workers in France now. What other employers refused to do voluntarily, the state forced them to do.

## UNIONS

“He saw the need of industrial organization, and his workers were formed into syndicates, as the unions were called there. (Unions were at first so fought in this country that laws against them were passed. There was one famous law against “criminal syndicalism.”) There was a council made up too of employers and employees and at this council everything was discussed from wages and hours to management of the business. There were sick funds, five to 15 cents a month being deducted from the pay. There were life pensions. The workers had their own

bank and co-op store, a general bakery managed by the workers. Christian brothers ran a cooperative hostel for the unmarried men. There were few married women working, but girls who had to go home to get dinner for their families were let off half an hour early. Workers could take time off for confession, and all holy days were observed, not only of obligation, but those of the patron saints of the workers' groups and associations.

"The little village of Val-de-Bois was a garden city, a few miles out of Rheims. The mills were by a stream, and gardens and plots of land surrounded every cottage. There was a church with three priests and schools taught by the sisters and Christian brothers. The second and third generation of workers could be counted among these 1,200 who participated in the management of their work as well as benefitted by its materiality. The employer lived with his employees and the tone between employer and employee was one of friendship rather than class war.

"It was Leon Harmel who started popular pilgrimages to the Holy Father, not only to build up a sense of loyalty to the Holy Father, but to bring the worker to the attention of the Vatican. On one such pilgrimage when the Pope commended Leon Harmel, the latter said, 'We will bring you ten thousand pilgrims.'

"In 1889 there were 17 trains of workers on pilgrimage to the Holy Father.

"Leon Harmel belonged to the third order of St. Francis. He was known for his imperturbable optimism. He died in 1915."

## OLD AND NEW

Peter Maurin told me these things during our first participation in class war which developed in strikes in the early years of the *Catholic Worker*. He was pointing out how in factories there were occasionally employers, though few and far between, who had a conscience in regard to their employees.

Peter was recognizing things as they were, recognizing that not all men wished to go to the land, that not all men wished responsibility. In a decentralized economy there could be such factories and such communities on the land. I thought of these conversations with Peter when so many visitors and correspondents took up the question of the machine and the land, as a result of my previous articles on work.

In Canada in early December, a pastoral letter signed by Cardinal Villeneuve, three archbishops and 14 bishops was read in all the Catholic Churches. The Bishops pointed out that Quebec still had 10,000,000 acres of tillable, uncultivated land, enough to establish 500 parishes with 200 families each.

"This is a permanent task," the letter read, pointing out the need of space for the family, and work for the father. The government of Quebec, fearful of the urbanization of the population which means a degraded proletariat, offers great inducements to those who wish to get back to the land. Families must be approved and meet certain requirements as to health and ability. They are offered 100 acres at 30 cents an acre, free transportation, use of tractors, monthly allowances of \$15 for from three months to a year, cash grants for building houses

and stables and credits for all land cleared. In the Gaspé peninsula 33 new parishes with from 150 to 200 families have been established in the last fifteen years.

## NEW MEN NEEDED

A comment in a news story about this pastoral urging the Canadian Catholics landward reads, “no one realizes better than the Church itself that to the young men of today the virtue of pioneering sounded bleak and harsh beside the siren voice of the cities.”

And we repeat, as long as in our education we have no philosophy of work, no recognition of man and his capabilities, his wholeness, his holiness, his dignity as a worker; as long as we accept our city civilization and its amusements, radio, movies, drink and cigarettes with the comment “there is no sin in it,” we will continue on our merry path through chaos to catastrophe.

As long as we think of the isolated farm, rather than the village community, as long as we are business-minded in regard to farming, thinking of cash and profits rather than farming as a way of life, as long as we neglect to teach voluntary poverty as an ideal, we are going to have fierce competition on the land as well as in the city. Four H. clubs, the teaching of spinning and weaving in the Canadian schools, the cooperative set up of Nova Scotia and the maritime provinces, and Christian recreation can bring people together and bring a taste of heavenly joy here on the earth.

# Chapter 6

## Reflections On Work - March 1947

*The Catholic Worker*, March 1947, 2, 4.

*Summary: Focuses on worker ownership and calls for workers to fight for the means of production, to shun working for the war effort, for priests to come out of their rectories to help the poor, and for all to start the struggle for reform of the social order and against charity growing cold. Repeats the need to be one with the poor and to resist the present social order. (DDLW #452).*

This issue of work, of property, of the social order, is so big an issue that it is hard to deal with it, to make our readers understand, even to make our own lay apostles understand. When we joined in the past with workers in a strike, or wrote about strikes, contributed to the resources of workers by running a soup kitchen as in the seamen's strike, by talking about such issues as wages and hours, many of our own did not understand why we went into these issues. I believe we must be on all fronts, must work on all fronts. We must begin somewhere. We cannot leap back a mile in retracing our steps but go back a step at a time to that point where there can be a *restoration of property*. How can the worker get back to the ownership of property unless he has a wage which will enable him eventually to become an owner; a wage sufficient to let him save not only for education of the children, for sickness, for old age, but for ownership. And ownership not only of homes but of *the means of production*, which does not necessarily mean large factories.

### Worker Ownership

I believe that in the constitutions of the Amalgamated Clothing Workers and the International Ladies Garment Workers there is a clause which points to one of their aims: the ownership by the worker of the means of production – a truly Catholic aim and one which has been achieved by many in the garment industry. The whole industry, as an article by an ACTU writer points out, is made up of many small owners, and the resulting relationship of worker and owner is a human one.

Why are we afraid of being called medievalists, and refuse the long-range program of ownership,



even if it means overturning the whole industrial capitalistic system? Why are we afraid of the word peasant? The Southern Agrarians use the term yeoman as a more accepted title.

## Apostolate of the Laity

We will have to go back to before the Reformation to return to the idea of apostolate of the laity. There is more anti-laicism than anti-clericalism in the country today, I am sure.

Thank God most of our priests are the sons of working men, the rector of a seminary said to me once. That is very true. But it is so easy to get out of the habit of poverty, of charity, of hospitality. St. John had to keep pleading, “my children, love one another.” And in the first chapter of the Apocalypse there is the sad statement that charity had grown cold. There is always a losing of early fervor, of early charity, of early understanding. It is hard to remain as little children, and be unsuspicious, to clean the heart of all bitterness, to keep the loving spirit.

## No Leadership

It is also true that these sons of working men have not thought out these issues, and they have not had the leadership that the workers have had in Karl Marx, in his analysis of the social order, and his condemnation of it. They have accepted this social order; they have not questioned it. They have said, “The poor you will always have with you.” They have said, “Seek first the kingdom of heaven.” Their great strength was also their weakness. Their conviction of heaven was so strong that they did not think this world worth bothering about. But what of their brothers – are they not worth bothering about? How can we see our brother hungry and say, “Go be thou filled” and not give to him? Charity is not enough. If he has been robbed, restoration must be made to him. God put man on this earth to work for his bread, but what if there is no work? He has been defrauded of his work, of his labor, and of the fruits of his labor. He has neither work nor property and his state is bad indeed.

## Expenditure for War

There is work now. Much of our national expenditure by the government is for war, past and present. Much of this work, this labor, is not good work, constructive work, but work for preparedness, or dealing with pensions or hospitals, etc. It is not even in building homes that have been destroyed by war, let alone homes here in this country where we did not have that destruction. Slums are still with us. Many houses have been torn down, more than have been put up. Farms have been consolidated and produce less than if they were all small farms; soil has been depleted, national resources have been wasted. And are we to sit by and see man, and God’s good earth, so ruined and degraded, and then be told, “Do not bother about these things, seek first the kingdom of heaven?”

## Not Nihilism

Julian Pleasants of Notre Dame, in writing me about the first article *The Church and Work*, has said that he has found a curious parallel between Canon Cardijn's passivism in relation to the social order and Fr. Hugo's in regard to war. He seems to believe that Fr. Hugo counseled "super-natural nihilism," doing nothing. I would say that Fr. Hugo certainly believes a cause worth *dying for*, and to die for a cause, to suffer for a cause, to go to jail for a cause, to offer the tremendous resistance of spiritual weapons, is certainly not nihilism, a doing nothing.

A withdrawal from the social order, and the draining away of others with you is not doing nothing, and Julian Pleasants recognizes this. It is putting up a very stiff resistance, and suffering greatly to do so. A withdrawal from a war economy, not only from the army but from what was called the *war effort*, demands moral stamina; an endurance of suffering and deprivation.

## Sell Your Soul

During my last speaking trip to and from the Rural Life Conference, I visited some of our families, some of the young men who have married and started the heroic job of raising children under this present regime. One of those families who suffered from refusal to participate in the war effort, lived for a time on one of our farms and there were times when food was scarce indeed. The trapping of a deer for food, the begging from the parish for milk, the staying in bed from hunger – these are some of the things they had to tell of. To combat the social order when one has a family is a grim thing indeed. But the point is this: life in the cities under our present housing and working and feeding conditions is often as bad. Unless you consent to sell your soul.

At this point, of course, I can hear howls rising up at my lack of charity in accusing people of selling their souls in war and peace. I am merely stating two things. Pious XI has said that the workers of the world are lost to the church. Most of the intellectual and spiritual leaders, whom God will hold responsible for His poor, for His workers, for His little ones, are not seeing the problem as a whole, nor helping the workers. They are *in honor*, and so, as the psalmist says, *without understanding*. When you are rich, you are not close to the poor. People may be poor as individuals, yet collectively rich. They may think they are poor, live frugal, self-denying lives, and yet be surrounded by riches, which they own collectively. They possess the power and security which goes with it. The Trappist may be poor individually, and yet the order may be rich. In the stories of the Paradise of the Fathers, the collective work of the monks produced such wealth that they could not find enough poor to partake of it. And it is interesting to remember – that it was the result of their own work and deprivation that this wealth was produced; it was not the conscience money of a James J. Hill or a Charlie Schwab, who in fear of hell were trying to restore money robbed from the poor, from the worker. (On the one hand, the capitalist-industrialist, the robber baron weeps that if he paid a living wage industry would go broke and all the workers would be out of jobs. On the other hand they have such huge surpluses of property and money and goods,

and the worker remains in his pauper, proletariat, destitute state.)

## One With The Poor

To be one with the poor, to share with the poor, to be one of the poor. It would be so healthy and so wise and so holy a thing to do, that the devil puts every obstacle possible in the way. One is always being taken in! If one expects the poor to be also holy, one is sadly mistaken. But what affrontery to expect this. How many sneers have been flung our way because we have advocated holy poverty (not destitution). Why are you trying to get the worker out of his poverty if you believe it to be holy, they will say. But we are trying to get him out of his destitution. One can have a home, tools, a certain amount of security, and still be poor.

How often we have heard of *whining beggars; poor but honest parents*. One might more correctly say, rich but honest. But no, if one has wealth, one is supposed to be in good repute. It is so unbelievable that any one who is rich can be called a thief, dishonest, and in a way a murderer, and none pays any attention any more. Our Senate investigations show that. It is just too unbelievable! Or perhaps it is taken for granted and cynically condoned.

On the other hand, the poor! All the workers want is more wages and less work, it is said. Of course. That is as far as they can think at present. They have no time to think, let alone take care of their souls. And who is teaching them to think?

## Charity Grown Cold

Charity has grown cold, because the priest is removed in his fine rectory from the people. It is not necessary to cite instances. They can be multiplied by the thousand. The young priest soon becomes embittered and tells stories about how he is taken in. There was a terrible letter about beggars in *America*, the Jesuit weekly, last winter, complaining of their dishonesty. A Franciscan wrote it. There was a masterpiece of a letter in answer from John Cogley, one of the editors of *Today*, in Chicago, who pointed out that the poor were poor in everything these days, in honor, in virtue, in all attractiveness. It is indeed hard to see Christ in the undeserving poor, in His most degraded guise. We admit that there will always be the poor, the wastrel, the drunk, the sinner. But Christ came to save them. He loved them. We just insist that there do not need to be so many of them, the degraded, the twisted, the warped, the miserable ones, employed and unemployed.

## Start the Struggle

The young priest who keeps his faith in his fellows, who begins to see the work to be done in the social order, may be discouraged at the magnitude of the task in the face of the apathy of the day. But I would say to him, work, study, pray, start the struggle although there seems small chance of success. You have nothing to lose but your chains, as the Marxist says.

## Nothing to Lose

In Belloc's *Characters of the Reformation*, he speaks of how Pascal is the one who gave that faulty presentation of faith: you have nothing to lose by believing. If there is no resurrection, and you have lived with faith, you have been better off anyway. If there is, you have gained all. The Little Flower comforted herself this way in the dark night of the soul. And I say too, the struggle is upon us, the handwriting is on the wall. We have nothing to lose. We must fight to overcome this social order, and it is collapsing anyway. We must try to get out of this system, because we are going to lose our jobs anyway. If war comes and employment keeps up, again I say, be not passive pacifists, but withdraw from the war industry which keeps war going, and die for your faith. We women, children, and civilians are going to die anyway, so let us die with the proper motive, of dying for our faith in peace, for our belief in our fellows. And so I say too, we are going to be poor anyway. We are going to be unemployed anyway, because if we do not have war, it will be a depression, so let us begin our revolt now.

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