

On Pilgrimage - July 1959

Dorothy Day

The Catholic Worker, July 1959, 1, 2, 6.

Summary: Vivid description of being transported in vans to court after arrest for civil disobedience. Deplores the conditions at the women's house of detention. Notes similar conditions for migrant workers. Delights in visitors, guests and her reading. Keywords: jail, prison (DDLW #753).

In response to the article "Prison Revisited," by Deane Mower, in the last issue of **The Catholic Worker**, we received the following letter: (addressed to 22 Chrystie St. instead of 39 Spring St.)

Dear sir: I wish to express commendation of the article PRISON REVISITED in the June issue of your paper. We always welcome fair criticism. We are at all times ready to receive suggestions for improved procedures.

I was particularly impressed by the complaint about bologna sandwiches on a Friday. A check of this was instituted and report received from the Deputy Warden in charge of the pens, copy of which is herewith attached. Yours very sincerely, ANNA M. CROSS.

REPORT: From: Commanding Officer, Court Detention Pens Manhattan

To: Correction Commissioner (thru channels)

Subject: Article in The Catholic Worker re: Dorothy Day

1. Dorothy Day was received in our pens at Felony Court Manhattan Friday, April 24, 1959, Sentenced to \$25 or ten days workhouse for violation 101-2 State Emergency act by Magistrate Roe.
2. In an article appearing in The Catholic Worker this prisoner claims she was given a bologna sandwich which she unintentionally ate without any thought of it being Friday, a day – which people of Roman Catholic faith are to fast from eating meat.
3. Correction Officer Ramon Caccarale, Shield No. 836, assigned to kitchen at the Manhattan House of Detention for Men which supplies food for lunch to our court pens stated he inspects

food before sending it here, and he never sends sandwiches containing meat on a Friday to the pens: instead of meat he generally substitutes jelly.

4. However, rules of the Roman Catholic faith are “when in an institution there is no choice of menu the rule of fast is not enforced, and is regarded as not committing any breach of the rules or regulations of the Church.”

Joseph T. Casey

Deputy Warden in Command Court Detention Pens. Manhattan.

When Deane read this letter she suggested that they thought I had taken the nom de plume of Deane Mowrer!

We are not going to prolong this correspondence, but find it necessary to correct it. We hope they have changed our address on their files. We never lived at 22 Chrystie St. and 223 has been torn down. It was Deane who wrote the very good article which will probably be included in some sociology reader together with other of our CW articles.

But we insist we **did** have bologna sandwiches in the pen. (We are delighted that they use this term,— that they admit to herding us human beings into “pens” like animals.) As to who was guilty, it might have been the Woman’s House of Detention, because before the girls go from the detention floors to trial, they are each given a sandwich nicely wrapped, and the Manhattan court detention officers hand out the tea. Or perhaps sometimes it is the one and sometimes the other. Anyway, wrapped, and the Manhattan court detention officers hand out the tea. Or perhaps sometimes it is the one and sometimes the other. Anyway, Deane called attention to it, after we had eaten, but none of us minded; our conscience did not bother us. Bob Steed who is very rigid about such things, also Stanley Vishnewsky and Charles Butterworth probably would not have eaten the sandwich, and of course not Ammon, that staunch vegetarian. But it has been many many years now that I sit down to a table, measuring the amount of food there is and the number to be served, always wondering whether there is enough to go around and praying the Lord to stretch it. So I gratefully eat whatever there is without question.

Other Criticism

Deane’s article only mentioned the meat in passing. This comment took up two sentences in a long article which filled five columns. I should like to add a few criticisms.

First of all, — to criticize the pens on wheels, the vans, which take the prisoner to the jails. Please, dear readers, when you see one pass you on the street, pray for the poor human beings shut up inside that foul pen. One kindly officer who

kept lamenting several years ago that he loves us and yet he had to be the one to arrest us, told me to sit away up close to the driver's seat and I would be less jolted. "Hang on to the spare tire stored there," he advised. Only once did I have the opportunity to do this. Usually women are confined to a tiny pen in the back of the van, the forward part of which is for men. You are locked in and on many occasions the men are handcuffed to one another. I remember peering out of the slits at the top of the compartment at the back, to see Dan O'Hagen trying with his handcuffed hands to wrap his coat about a poor shivering prisoner who was evidently having a chill brought on by withdrawal from drugs. To see these men treated like wild beasts touched me to the heart.

This ride in the van is to be dreaded more than anything else. Regardless of age or condition, and one year there was a pregnant woman with us, and every year I have suffered from arthritic pains, we are all herded into this steel pen, where with nothing to grab hold on, we are tossed from side to side, hitting the ceiling on some occasions as the police van speeds from lower Manhattan to the uptown court at the other end of the island. Sentenced from there, it is another long ride down town. The only thing I can compare it to is the punishment in the fairy tales, – the wicked stepmother and step sisters being put in a nail studded barrel and rolled down a mountain.

If I believed in bringing suits against the city, I would do it for the sake of all the other women who have to submit to this ride. It is cruel and inhuman punishment and more to be dreaded than the trial itself. At least for me it was sheer agony.

This year, thanks to the fact that three adolescents (young college men under twenty one) were arrested with us, we were tried in the adolescent court in lower Manhattan, and there were not these terrifying rides. And the day we were brought from jail to the court for trial (we spent five days because we would not pay bail) we went to court in a bus like any other bus with springs and regular seats. At the moment of arrest, when the all clear signal had sounded, we were even treated to the luxury of driving to the Elizabeth street station in one of the Civil Defense official cars; but that was because a young woman and her two children had been arrested with us. They were released, so our next ride was in a van.

Other Criticisms

We need to repeat, again and again and again, that overcrowding of the detained and the sentence, and lack of work, for the 300 women detained for trial, the presence of adolescents in a prison filled with women who are repeaters, all these serious criticisms are ignored. The lack of any treatment for drug addicts as criminals instead of as patients (though of course drug addiction leads to crime) is another criticism, though the **New York Times** carries a story this month of the probable opening of wards in several hospitals in New York for addicts.

We can only regard the attention paid to a casual remark about a bologna sandwich as a perverse sense of humor on the part of the Department of Correction officials who took it up. Are they playing with us? Are they being sarcastic, sneering at the seriousness of our criticisms? Are these matters to be laughed at? There are slum conditions indeed, in the Women's House of Detention in the richest city in the world.

Up to the present time we have felt that Anna Cross, Commissioner of Correction, was making noble efforts to chance conditions for the women. But this particular letter is an example of tithing mint and cumin.

Migrant Workers

There was a terrible story last month of sixteen Mexicans burned to death as the truck they were being driven to work in, rammed a tree. Thirty-two more were seriously injured. The driver, another Mexican, told the highway patrol that he had dozed at the wheel.

Some of the chapters in Ammon Hennacy's autobiography tells of his riding in just such trucks to the fields to harvest carrots or cauliflower or cotton. The corner where the trucks gather up their laborers is called the slave market. At dawn these ramshackle converted closed-in busses are heavily loaded. The passengers can never see where they are going. They are driven such long distances that in this case, a water barrel blocked the only exit. These workers were on their way to garlic fields and for many of them in was their last day's work before they returned to Mexico.

Migrant Family

We have an American family staying in one of our beach bungalows. They have worked in the packing sheds of the onion fields in Arizona, being paid so much a dozen for tying bunches of onions. They arrived by car one day in June with a very sick child with a high temperature. There are five children and they have all been through a siege of measles and flu. We are happy indeed that we have a place on the beach for them to rest up after their cross-country trip. They are an intelligent and literate family and we are enjoying their visit.

Fritz Eichenberg

An Italian dinner with Fritz Eichenberg one evening. They were having good stew at the house, but we went out in order to visit and talk. At St. Joseph's loft there are too many interruptions, especially after I have been in Staten Island for a few weeks. Every one in the very large Catholic Worker family wants to visit too. And everyone who comes into the office wants to meet Fritz. We just

had a letter that very day from a man and his wife who wrote, “we cannot repay you for the wonderful friends met and articles enjoyed through The Catholic Worker. Eichenberg alone is beyond price.”

I forgot to tell him about this so I do it now publicly.

He in turn told me about a wonderful artist from Japan, Shiko Munakata who at present has a gallery in his own name at 46th St., between Fifth and Sixth Avenues where his incomparable woodcuts are being shown this month. Fritz described him, his incredible speed in working, his amazing effects of script and picture, the color effects over the black and white. He has an interpreter and in addition to his work sessions at Pratt Institute, he stops to lecture and tell wonderful folk tales and legends, laughing with joy, so filled with happiness that every one must laugh with him. He sounds like someone completely alive, and filled with the joy of creation. Someone who is truly, in his capacity as creator, made in the image and likeness of God.

Indian Doctor

The next night going back to Staten Island, I sat on the ferry boat and read in **The New Yorker** an account of an Indian doctor who performed tens of thousands of operations all over India for cataracts and other troubles of the eye. His name is Dr. Muragapa Chenavirapa Modi and he is 41 years old. He makes no charge for his work. It is financed by philanthropic organizations and by the government. He was asked why he travelled over such a vast territory, an area of 300,000 square miles. He began, he said, in a private hospital but when he found that his patients sold their homes or their cows, to pay the fare to get to him, “I saw that I would have to go to them to keep them from selling everything they had,” he said. He carries about fifteen assistants with him and they set up camps for their patients. There are two million totally blind and six million partially blind in India.

Another remark he made astounded me. “I am not interested in religion; it is a walking stick and once you have learned to walk you have no need of a stick. Service to the suffering human body, which is the temple of God, is the best form of worshipping God. I take much pleasure in this service.”

I could not help but think of St. James saying: “Pure religion and undefiled before God is to visit the widowless and fatherless in their afflictions and keep oneself unspotted from the world.”

It seems to us his is pure religion, when he confesses that he is dealing with God’s temples.

A heroine

Another happy encounter during the month was the paperback book. “The Inn of the Sixth Happiness,” by Alan Burgess, originally published by Dutton as “The Small Woman” in 1957 and reprinted by the Christian Herald, Concordia Book Club, Lutheran Book Club and Reader’s Digest. And of course familiar to people who frequent the movies. The story of this heroine in China, travelling through far mountain regions to bring the story of Jesus to the ends of the earth, and gathering up many little orphans on the way, – this is a great adventure indeed. It is a true story, and well told.

We count ourselves rich to have had these encounters this month, with Shiko Munakata, Dr. Muragapa Chenavirapa Modi and Gladys Aylward, the missionary.

At this moment we are all breathing a sigh of relief: the crisis about Charles Butterworth has passed, and though he was sentenced to six months on both charges, of harboring a fugitive and helping him to escape, Judge Noonan suspended the sentences. When Ammon went to get the judge’s signature for the release of the bail, he said he saw a statue of the Blessed Mother in his office. The Judge also said that his son read **The Catholic Worker** each month.

Trip Postponed

I had intended to go to the west coast to speak at some Quaker work camps the last days of June and the first of July, but the date of the retreat, which I had been looking forward to was set for the same time, and my spiritual director said that the retreat came first. How good it is to have some one settle such a matter. I had felt quite torn between the two engagements. The retreat is for those interested in the spiritual family of Father Charles de Foucauld and is being given by Fr. Brennan who teaches Scripture at St. Bernard’s Seminary in Rochester, New York.

There will be more about this in a later issue. “Seeds of the Desert,” by Fr. Rene Voillaume, published by Fides Press, is made up of conferences given to the Little Brothers of Jesus, and is the best spiritual reading for our time that I have come across. Fr. Charles (Jack English), Trappist at Conyers, Ga., translated some additional conferences for me from the French and we have been passing them around to our friends.

I am hoping to go to the west coast in October so that I may fill some of the engagements I missed this June.