

On Pilgrimage - May 1971

Dorothy Day

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Summary: Notes recent anti-war protests and describes visits to the Berrigan brother's mother. Tells of a new Catholic Worker rural hostel in Schenectady, New York, a visit to Worcester, MA, and a visit to her daughter in Vermont. Keywords: prison, war taxes (DDLW #509).

In the last few weeks, 300,000 or more young people have been on pilgrimage, converging on Washington, D.C. to express their opposition to war and conscription but "peace is still a long long march away," I.F. Stone, Washington reporter commented. Those who represented organized labor were mainly blacks from the hospital workers union, and some teamsters and auto workers, but as Stone pointed out, "clearly the organized labor movement, rank and file, were still wedded to the military-industrial complex by bread and butter as well as ideology." The scenes which truly reached the hearts and minds of the public were the Vietnam Veterans Against the War who camped on the Mall for four days, then marched on the Capitol and threw away their medals in shame and protest. "I know of no war and no country," Stone goes on to write, "in which there has ever been such a scene as that which took place on the west side of the Capitol that morning. It will be remembered with pride in our history books."

Father Dan Berrigan calls attention in one of his writings to the fact that waging war is a total act, but not waging peace. He wrote this perhaps before suffering imprisonment with his brother Phil for their act against the war, the burning of draft card records, but now he speaks more loudly from jail itself. Granted that Danbury Federal Prison is not a tiger cage in Vietnam where protesters there are suffering, -still a prisoner is a prisoner, and being behind bars like an animal in a zoo, and the nightmare of reverberating sound from the stone and metal which surrounds one is indeed a torture. The long list of prisoners for peace which is published in the **Peacemaker** each issue is getting longer and longer.

The massive attempt to tie up traffic to keep Pentagon and other Washington workers from getting to their jobs lasted for two days and resulted in the arrest of ten thousand demonstrators. What with leaders of peace movements confined in Federal prisons, one wonders when we are going to use such "relocation" camps as were set up in 1941 for 109,000 Japanese-Americans, to take care of such protesters as converged on Washington the end of April and the first week in May.

Travelling

I myself have been on Pilgrimage a good part of the last month. It is good to reach our readers so personally. I always come home with new insights, new knowledge—books under my arm given me along the way, new friends, and news of spreading activity in the CW movement itself. I visited Art Harvey of South Ackworth, New Hampshire who has a mail order book shop handling a great number of books by and about Gandhi. Art and Ammon Hennacy served six month terms in Sandstone Prison in Minnesota for trespassing on a missile base some years ago. He carries on a practical application of Karl Meyer's tax refusal (see article in this issue) by having teams of workers in orchards where they prune trees, harvest apples and later blueberries and work seven months of the year. They work and live in a style which frees them from the payment of taxes for war. Perhaps about a hundred are engaged in this way of life, which results usually in some settling in communities of the **moshavim** variety, each having some small acreage and a house built by themselves. Considering the New England climate, no small achievement! It certainly means an emphasis on the ascetic, on sacrifice.

One book I brought back was printed in 1965 in India and is titled **Talking of Gandhi**, a four part program for Radio, by the British Broadcasting Corporation. It is made up of excerpts of interviews with people in England and India who knew Gandhi. There is an alphabetical list of contributors at the end of the book.

The making of these four scripts in 1956 was the "largest project ever devoted by the BBC to the presentation of one man." The difficulty in working with fifteen miles of recording tape to make the five or six hours of broadcasting, and the techniques used are described in detail. We know so many young people including a young priest at our parish church who are studying the audio-visual arts that we read these four broadcasts with great interest. The script and narration was by Francis Watson and in the next to the last paragraph of the introduction there is the following important statement:

"Of the months spent in selecting, cutting, and building up the programs one thing needs to be said. Recording tape is a wonderful invention, and like any other inventions it must be handled with restraint and integrity. You can do anything with it, reverse the words in a man's mouth, distort his meaning, mangle the context, change the voice to a caricature. The only safe rule for handling anything so dangerous is absolute honesty.

Such a statement made by an expert should alert us to the dangers in believing what we hear or read of excerpts from taped conversations of Fr. Philip Berrigan and others with him who will be on trial for conspiracy against the government of the United States in a few months.

The Berrigans' Mother

The pilgrimage from which I have just returned was to Schenectady, the home town of Mrs. Berrigan, mother of two priest sons who are imprisoned for acts of protest against war.

It gave me great joy to meet this valiant mother of six sons who herself has endured great harassment these last years. She is living at Loretto Home for the Aged (I do not think she

is as old as I am) and must use a walker since she broke her hip some time ago and has had to have several operations. Her room is so small that the students from Le Moines who came with me and I had to sit with her out in a little parlor. There is only one window in her room and it is "very close." I hope she gets on a waiting list for a room with two windows so that she can have a current of air without leaving her door open. It is so hard to control the heat in institutions, even such a one as The Catholic Worker, and both in Tivoli and in N.Y. I have a room which I can keep cool winter and summer.

Perhaps she would not have called the constant surveillance exercised by underground movements harassments. "They were courteous young men," she said—but then she is a courteous woman, full of patience and loving-kindness. It was good to see her and sense her serenity.

Schenectady

Perhaps I give undue emphasis to Schenectady but I just returned yesterday and am trying to get my report written before we go to press Thursday. I have two apologies to make, first for a letter, hastily dictated and not read which I wrote the week before in answer to Bob La Sala's letter from International House asking what was to be the topic of my talk at the college. I had dictated something Vinoba Bhava had written, "to teach others, it is good to speak of saints and heroes." In the letter, it had turned into "saints and eros." Puzzled but trustful, the students handed out this title to the press and we had quite a large audience! It was obvious that the letter was dictated. The initials DD/RM at the bottom indicated that.

My second apology is due to Father McVey. When he was ordained a few years ago, his first parish was in Pulaski, a town north of Schenectady, and a nearby deserted t.b. hospital seemed to him a good place for a rural house of hospitality. Two years ago his dream became a reality. When I was told about the project three years ago, I had spoken "a discouraging word" and said that it was an impossibility to take on such a large project. I ate my words when I saw the place a few days ago. There are a hundred or more men there, and three families with eleven children and the place is well kept and cared for and growing in scope daily. Volunteers painted the old frame buildings, built in 1910, and the men themselves did the repairs, townspeople cooperated with food and students with transportation and work, and it looks and is, a happy place. It was a bright sunny day when Eileen Whiteside and her daughter drove me the hour's drive north. The nearest town is Orwell, and Lake Ontario is about ten miles away. Far north as it is from New York City, the weather was perfect the day we visited. We walked through the pine woods of the 136 acres and sat by a wide brook which was racing over stones and pools, and which used to be the entire water supply of the hospital. There is a chapel and Mass is offered daily in the evening. They are beginning their third summer and I was delighted to see this rural house of hospitality where worker and student, young and old work together to realize St. Catherine's dictum, "All the way to heaven is heaven, because He said, I am the Way."

I have written many times of these rural hostels where men could be put up and families who are wandering around the country to find work are taken care of.

Orwell, in the last chapters of his “Down and Out in Paris and London,” spoke of this need also. There are not many free hostels in the U.S. or any other place, it seems to me. In the Middle Ages every monastery had a pilgrim’s hostel. In New York state now there is Graymoor, where the Franciscans have a very good place where men stop for three weeks or longer to rest up, clean up and recuperate on their way into the mountain resort areas, looking for work. There is a diocesan House of Hospitality in Pittsburgh on Tannehill Street with Fr. Bassompierre in charge. It was formerly a large orphanage and Fr. Owen Rice, the labor priest of Pittsburgh diocese ran it for years. It began with a small Catholic Worker group. In Portland, Oregon there is the Blanchette House of Hospitality, which is a men’s hotel and cafeteria with a halfway house nearby for men out of prison. In Albany several houses have opened up which I have not visited yet.

Fr. Gilgun

In Massachusetts, Hubbardston, there is another farm, a small one with a big house and a barn on it where a work of restoration is being done and where scores of young people and neighbors gather each Sunday at four o’clock for the sacrifice of the Mass which is most beautifully offered with joy and reverence. Fr. Bernard Gilgun who is pastor at the nearby town of Lancaster calls the farm the House of Ammon. His last letter read, “We have a little three-act play called **Ammon—the One Man Revolution** which we have done a few times. Last week we went to the University of Massachusetts and did it in the lounge outside the cafeteria. We got a good audience, between fifty and one hundred, then sold the paper and sat around talking with professors and students. We had a lot of fun and feel sure we have reached one another. Right now we are busy working on the house and preparing the garden but plan to bring our living theater to shopping centers now and again when we sell the paper.”

Hubbardston is in the Worcester diocese where the Upton farm is located. Someone wrote that Mary Paulson would like to see an Eric Gill school started on the farm at Upton (to the east of Worcester) but it is not yet under way. Professor True who teaches at Assumption College and Tom Puchalsky who teaches a course at Assumption and full time at Lincoln Sudbury Regional High School were responsible for my New England trip. Michael organized a wonderful day for the Catholic Peace Fellowship where speakers and work shops went on during the day, and where I spoke at night. The meeting involved both Holy Cross College and Assumption, and I spoke also at the above High School and at a Teachers Training school, going on to Boston to speak to a small gathering of the Harvard Catholic Club, the next night.

The Catholic Peace Fellowship meeting in Worcester shows how much can be done in one day, and how many can come from how far to listen to three speakers in the morning and attend a few workshops in the afternoon. I was particularly impressed with Sister Elizabeth Hillman, a Cenacle nun, devoted to the work of the CPF and the other sisters and priests, some of whom had served prison terms for conscience’ sake.

I stayed at Michael True’s whose third floor is available to visitors. Ammon and Joan often stayed there. Mary, the oldest of the six children had arranged the room for me even to

taking down her own pretty curtains for my room. She is twelve, and then there is Michael 11, John 9, Chris 6 and the twins who are five. Mary Pat, the mother, is young and beautiful and is continuing her studies too. How happy it is to meet happy families! Sunday night I stayed at John and Helen Cort's new house on Nahant where John's father-in-law is living with them since his wife's death. Helen is his only daughter and it seemed to me he was a pretty tranquil man considering the size of John's family which he had moved into. Their house is by the sea and John has always been interested in sailing. And now he has lobster pots to put out in his spare time. He is working at urban renewal work in nearby Lynn.

Vermont

I have to give news of my own family every so often. The bus ride from Boston to Vermont was along winding roads through New Hampshire on a beautiful sunny day. Sunny days have been rare these past few months. Tamar met me at Springfield, Vermont and all the children were home in the Perkinsville house except Mary who is graduating this June from Cobleskill Community College. It was a full house, Becky and John and four months old Lara; Sue and Jorge and 2 year old Tanya (visiting); Nicky and Brenda with Sheila, 2 and Jude, 2 mos. also visiting from nearby; Erie visiting from Springfield where he shares an apartment with a friend; Jimmy on crutches after his painful operation for a tumor on a leg bone; Maggie who had cooked the chicken which was ready for us all; Martha who cleared up, Hilaire whose maple syrup I forgot later to take back with me, and Katy who read fifteen books in one month (a rainy one doubtless) recently. Their rambling house on Cady hill, as their dirt and rocky road is now called, is surrounded of course by two old trucks, two disabled passenger cars and the VW which keeps going. There was a beginning made to clear up all the gardens and a large patch of bleeding hearts were showing, poking up through the leaves mulching their roots. There were still patches of snow all through the woods, and in the shadow of the barn and around the mailbox there were mounds of snow. It was spring vacation for the children and Hilaire who is 13 was getting out his fishing tackle. The fishing season was starting on Saturday, and on that morning they were all up very early.

The state of Vermont, catering to the sportsmen last fall killed off what they call the trash fish, suckers, catfish and perch, putting some kind of plastic in the water which sealed their gills so they suffocated. Hilaire told me. This included the trout which had not been caught thru the season last year. Now in the spring, they have restocked again. The season lasts from the last Saturday in April until Labor Day. The Hennessy crowd occasionally go in swimming until November so the plastic spoiled that for them. Once two of the girls went in so early in the spring that they came out all bloody, cut by the ice! Maybe Martha who told me that was exaggerating. She is now leading a hermit's life up on the hillside in the log cabin which John built. She is vegetarian and is reading I Ching which Sandra, one of our young guests, brought with her. "Old Chinese horoscope kind of thing," Jorge says. "You throw sticks, figure out the numbers, consult the book—it's a way of getting advice without consulting people."

I glanced at the book which is one of the Bollingen series, Princeton University Press, and read the forward by C.G. Jung who calls it "this great and singular book . . . There is

so much that is obscure about it that Western scholars have tended to dispose of it as a collection of magic spells, either too abstract to be intelligible or of no value whatever.” He goes on to talk of “oracle techniques, or a method to explore the unconscious . . . this monument of Chinese thought, which departs completely from our way of thinking.” It seems the children are all engaged in the Search these days, learning about Hindu Ashrams, Buddhist monasteries, and now Chinese(spiritu) meant learning from Hutterites, reaches out in all directions. The **Catholic Worker** crowd was always satisfied with the ecumenism which meant learning from Hutterites, Dhokobors, Indians, Mennonites, Amish, Brethren, as well as Quakers. Perhaps it is the wars our young people have lived through, Korean, Algerian, and now the Vietnam war that gives them this interest in the religious thinking of the far east.

In Tamar’s very busy life she still has time for handicrafts. Father Heffey who heads the farming commune in Australia sent her a bag of wool from black sheep and she has been having a wonderful time, she said, spinning it.

She had a wooden spindle, and one of the dogs ate it, she said, and now she has to make another. We went out for a walk with the dogs, Tamar and I, on several afternoons and it was fun to see them eating the grass and other green things which were springing up along the roads. “Spring tonic,” Tamar said. There are two calves and I don’t know how many rabbits and sixteen hens around the place, but the dogs are all over—Rex, my particular old pet, a cocker spaniel-beagle; Ingot, a female colly and Rex’s companion; Champ, their son, a big mutt of a dog, but very obedient and recognizes that he is not a house dog. Sam is a small black dog—they say a combination of cocker spaniel, beagle and airedale; Nipper a Labrador retriever springer spaniel; and lastly Friend, a German shepherd Doberman pinscher. All of them a friendly lot and only occasionally fight among themselves.

Open School

An open school program has started at the Springfield high school where two of the girls go (though Maggie graduates this June). “This off-premise” school began as a pilot phase of a five-district learning experience, offering independent choice and freedom of action to intellectually certain and mature students and constructive path-finding to uncertain ones and encouragement and guidance to the distracted! Students chose a list of learning activities from a check list and planned a step by step outline for each activity. They also keep a written journal in which they record daily progress in each activity. Thirty five students are enrolled with one paid teacher and other volunteer teachers. There are field trips. Some courses where expensive equipment is needed are taken at the local high school where there is a language lab and gym, etc. There has been disapproval expressed by some readers of the local paper claiming that children today are being spoiled enough. How afraid people are of the word freedom. Michael True says that most schools now are like prisons.

Both Mahatma Gandhi ashrams and some of the Friends’ schools require this keeping of a daily account of reading and study and progress, and I shall try during this next month for the June issue to keep such an account especially since my pilgrimaging continues in June

with trips to South Dakota, Chicago, and Block Island. But how often I have made this resolution! I should regard it as a daily examination of conscience.