

Days With an End

Dorothy Day

The Catholic Worker, April 1934, 3-4.

Summary: Repeats P. Maurin's fear that increased state regulation leads to fascism and undermines personal responsibility. However, agrees with Pius XI in his encyclical "Forty Years After", that the state may intervene when a particular group is threatened and no other means are available to them. (DDLW #13).

To paraphrase on the title of Eugene O'Neill's play, our days are with an end – very much so. And it is to explain this our end in view that I am writing this editorial.

People come to the workers' school and talk and hear much talk about the encyclical, *Forty Years After* – about the NRA and how far it goes to approach the Pope's idea, about international peace and international associations of working men and industrialists.

And then when they have heard all this from the lips of priest, professor and laymen, Peter Maurin rises up with the voice of one crying in the wilderness and says,

"The great danger of the present day is Fascism and the tendency of all organization is to lead to fascism."

"What about the Pope and *Quadragesimo Anno*?" our listeners proclaim. And Peter continues his warning,

"Fascism! Beware of state regulation because it leads to Fascism."

Whether it is the state regulation of the NRA or the state regulation of the socialists, or the state regulation recommended by Pope Pius XI, his warning is the same,

"Beware of Fascism."

Peter's hour at the school is from seven to eight; the speakers take the floor at eight, and the listeners enter into discussion with the speaker from nine to ten or ten-thirty or eleven. (Often it is hard to get them home.)

But for the benefit of those who linger over their suppers, I am rehashing Peter's preachings thus:

In view of the general disorder and chaotic condition of affairs, Pope Pius issued his great encyclical on Saint Francis of Assisi. It was a clarion call to action, Catholic action. It was vital – of tremendous importance for the righting of the world's ills. It was the message of Christ's vicar on earth – the message that Christ himself gave in the Sermon On the Mount.

Time passed and the condition continued. In fact matters go from bad to worst so that a world wide catastrophe threatens.

The result was the encyclical Forty Years After, recalling Pope Leo XIII's encyclical on the Condition of Labor which was also disregarded for forty years.

Peter's message is that Forty Years After does not hold up *the ideal* of personal responsibility voiced by the encyclical on St. Francis of Assisi. It is as though a sad and weary father said to his children who warred continually on one another:

“Very well – you will not follow the ideal for the sake of Christ. I will present to you then still another program of action – organization – the organization of some so that others may be coerced thereby. You will not voluntarily reform, so pressure must be brought to bear.”

But - the organization held up as best by Pope Pius XI, is not the organization of the labor union as we know it here in America. It is the organization of *Catholic* workingmen, to work for Catholic and non-Catholic alike. Complete and widespread organization. Michael Gunn's ideal of the Labor Guild approaches more nearly to this than the NRA. But Mike Gunn is also a voice of one crying in the wilderness.

One of the professors who lectured us was pointing out how Utopias would never work. But always it is the ideal of a Utopia held up that has influenced the masses.

There is always a great need of idealists who hold up the ideal rather than the practical. Without them men would not strive so high. Little by little, it can be found that the ideal works and is practical and then people are surprised.

The perfect state – it is a thing to fight for.

Christ said, “Be ye therefore perfect even as your Father in Heaven is perfect.” “Go ye therefore and sell what you have and give to the poor.” “If you have two coats take one and give it to your brother, and if your brother ask you for your coat, give him your cloak too.”

People do not scoff at these words because they are the words of Christ. A great many regard them hopelessly and falling back on their poor humanity they admit their inability to live up to these words. But nevertheless these words (hard words) go down through the ages, and through them many have followed the precept as well as the counsel. And have influenced humanity greatly thereby. (As for those who don't – God knows that we are but dust and he is a kind and tender father.)

The Catholic Worker stands opposed to Communism, Socialism, and Fascism. *The Catholic Worker* regards the existing system of labor unions as a poor and faulty one, far below that of organization described by Pope Pius XI in his Encyclical, Forty Years After. *The Catholic Worker* fears the NRA inasmuch as it may lead to more state regulation and bring nearer the danger of Fascism. *The Catholic Worker* is not “standing for” the Cooperative Commonwealth Federation in Canada for that very reason. More state regulation, to an even greater degree than that of the NRA.

We admit the danger of these palliatives to the existing disorder but we see their danger from a different standpoint than do many others who oppose them as being the offshoots of Moscow thought.

We believe with the Pope that whenever the general interest of any particular class suffers and is threatened with evils *which can in no other way be met*, the public authority, the state, must step in to meet them. . . .“If within the walls of a household there occur grave disturbances of mutual rights, the public power must interfere.” But not the italics - “which can in no other way be met.”

Peter Maurin believes that the Pope is opposed to political action, that he welcomed the dissolution of the Catholic party in Italy and the Centrist party in Germany. “Organizations of Catholic Workingmen” is another thing entirely.

So – though we say that Michael Gunn more nearly approaches in his idea the teachings of the Pope than does the NRA – we continue to cling to the *ideal* as held up in the gospel and in the encyclical on St. Francis of Assisi.

We shall not reach it we know. But that does not mean that there is no use trying.