

C. W. Editors Arrested In Air Raid Drill

Dorothy Day

The Catholic Worker, July-August 1956, 1, 8.

Summary: Describes her and 18 others' arrest and court appearances for civil disobedience after demonstrating and not taking shelter in an air raid drill. Speaks of the courage and suffering needed in battle and in using spiritual weapons. Going to jail is one way of visiting the prisoner. (DDLW #243).

With 5 Others They Plead Guilty, Are Released On Bail; Eleven Others Plead Not Guilty as In Last Year's Trial

The night before our public protest in Washington square Park, which is a block away from the Civil Defense Headquarters in New York City, there was a meeting at the Quaker hall on East 20th St. at which I spoke about "our moral and religious heritage." It was the subject given to me, and everyone knows that Catholics have no tradition of pacifism as the Quakers, Brethren and Mennonite have. So I tried to explain that when men fought as they had been doing this past month in Poznan, Poland, and in East Germany a year ago they were bravely, though futilely trying to uphold man's freedom, his ideals, his right to educate his children. According to the Thomistic traditions laid down for the conduct of a just war, there must be some reasonable chance of success, and when men in an isolated city revolt against the Soviet oppressor they are not fulfilling these conditions. At the same time who would convict them of sin? They are using the only means they know about, the only means they have been taught. They are in a better state than the great mass of fearful or indifferent men, who think of their material safety, their families and not only are afraid to fight but forget the traditions of the saints, who saw their brothers or their parents put to death for their faith, and rejoiced to follow them in suffering. The latter used spiritual weapons, the weapons of suffering, prayer and forgiveness. "Father, forgive them for they know not what they do."

But just as daily or frequent communion become rare since the days of the early Christians, until the days of St. Pius X, so also the use of spiritual weapons ceased to be put first. For many centuries the tradition has been to fight first and when all other weapons have been used, then to trust in prayer. We need to reverse this practice, and with faith and love, overcome the enemy. I pointed out in my talk that certainly there were heroic virtues among the warriors and that even in the time of David, one could point to the nobility of Urias, when King David with deceit and treachery tried to make him go from the battlefield to his wife, to cover up his own adultery. Urias said, "the arc of God and Israel and Juda dwells in tents, and my lord Joab and the servants of my lord abide upon the face of the earth. And shall I go into my house, to eat and to drink, and to sleep with my wife? By thy welfare and the welfare of thy soul I will not do this thing."

So David fell deeper into sin by having Urias sent to the front where fighting was heaviest so that he would be killed. An easy way of getting rid of an enemy, and a way the Communists in Spain were accused of using by John dos Passos. Urias was a greater man at that time than David. David was not permitted by God to build the temple because his hands were stained by blood.

We are certainly willing to exalt the courage of men at war, and with Gandhi to point out that it is better to fight than to run away. And we wish to point out also that we believe the whole point of the life of Joan of Arc, was that she followed her conscience, she recognized the supremacy of conscience and stood out against the Bishops of France and England.

I went on in my talk to say that our public demonstration on the next day of refusing to take shelter was not only to practice civil disobedience to a law which was unreasonable since there is admittedly no shelter and no defense except by dispersal, by fleeing the cities, but also to do penance for our having been the first to drop the atom bomb on Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Our demonstration was to show our willingness to go to jail, to be deprived of our freedom, to suffer disgrace in the eyes of those who cannot understand our position.

God knows, it is a suffering. I don't think any of us, not even Ammon Hennacy, enjoys these demonstrations, this "going to the man in the street." It is so much easier to sit behind a typewriter, to sit in an office or a meeting house and talk about these actions and these ideas. There is a tenseness in the atmosphere, both among those who are engaged in civil disobedience, and those who are officers of the law and forced into the duty of arresting us. Only the day before, another of a series of home made bombs had been exploded in a telephone booth at Macy's department store, and in any public demonstration the police are always afraid some unbalanced person or someone insane in his own personal way will try to explode a bomb. (Certainly the government has set him the example in violence, in bomb-making and throwing.)

Even before the sirens began their unearthly noise at four-ten p.m. newspaper reporters and photographers, and a television camera were on the scene which of course added to the confusion. Many friends who did not intend to demonstrate had to be urged away so that they would not be caught outside a shelter, and when the sirens blew, the police and civil defense auxiliaries, as many of them as there were of us, converged upon us and told us to take shelter. When we refused they announced we were under arrest, and escorted us to the patrol wagons which were drawn up a block away.

There were four of us women in one: Elizabeth Quigley, Quaker and mother of three children, Pat Daw, twenty-two years old and soon to become a mother, Dean Mowrer and I. There were fifteen men, two of whom were there on the spur of the moment. There was Stanley Borowsky and Ammon from the CW and Dan O'Hagan from Pendle Hill, and the others represented the War Resisters, the Fellowship of Reconciliation, and the American Friends' Service Committee.

We were all taken nearby to the Mercer Street station and the charges against us were made out there. It took from four-thirty until six-thirty and then we were brought again in patrol wagons to the Tombs where we were all locked in cells to await the night court. Judge Strong called our case almost immediately, treated us with courtesy, set our bail at one hundred

dollars each and set Wednesday, July 25 for trial in the magistrates' court at 151st St. We had to stay until midnight; it took so long to make out papers for us all. We had many friends in court and there was none of the disagreeable excitement of last year when we were called "murderers" by Judge Kaplan. We have been having a wide experience among judges this past year and were singularly fortunate in having Judge Strong sitting that night, and Judge Comerford the following Wednesday.

The cases of the seven who pleaded guilty to civil disobedience was severed from the eleven who pleaded not guilty. We will all appear in court again October 31.

Other Incidents

My friend Helen Crowe told me after the trial that she had last seen Judge Comerford at the laying of wreaths at the statue of St. Thomas More in Central Park on his feast day as head of the Irish Counties' Association. It is an annual affair and is accompanied by the playing of harps and bagpipes.

Stanley Borowsky

Probably Stanley in his modesty would not want to be cited for heroic penance. He decided to stay in jail rather than pay bail. Bail was there and available for him, and we all thankfully accepted it because although we have pleaded guilty, we have not as yet been tried. But Stanley wished to remain. He looked cheerful and calm after his five days imprisonment and went as cheerfully back again to his cell. Stanley has fasted and prayed, and as a pilgrim has walked to our retreats from New York to Newburgh, from Brooklyn to the end of Staten Island (aside from the ferry ride) and he is accounting life in jail as one of the works of mercy, the visiting of prisoners. God bless him. We wish he would come out, but if he is making his own kind of a retreat, we can only reflect that God is being praised where perhaps before He has been blasphemed, and the world is a little brighter for it.

P.S. The day after this was written Stanley was released without bail.