

Open Letter to John Brophy, CIO Director

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Summary: Urges John Brophy, the C.I.O. trade unions director, to use the technique of sit-down strikes, a nonviolent form of coercion, a means used by Gandhi and an example of pure means advocated by Maritain. "The use of force is unchristian." (DDLW #318).

During the General Motors strike you will remember, I stopped to see you at the Statler Hotel in Detroit, Mr. Brophy, and we talked for an hour or so about Catholics and trade unions and the sit-down technique and unity in unions.

We talked about how the apostles were foreign agitators of their day, about organizing in the south and the brotherhood of man. You told me how the United Mine Workers down there, in spite of Jim Crow laws, had the Negroes and whites in the same union, meeting in the same union hall, at the same meetings, and how the officers were some of them colored and some of them white.

I remember you saying that at a meeting you spoke at before the stewards of the Pullman car porters union, the race issue was never raised either in the speech or in the questions afterward, and how you and Randolph, one of the officers of the union, recalled it later with surprise, and a pleased surprise that organization of both Negroes and whites had progressed so far.

We talked about the salaries of auto workers and how, according to government standards of decent living, 90 per cent of them were underpaid; that in the statistics given out by the General Motors company high salaries and low were lumped together to strike an average salary and so mislead the public. I recalled how just the day before Archbishop McNicholas of Cincinnati had also expressed his distrust of the figures given out by General Motors and his direct knowledge of the low wages of many of the auto workers.

Gov. Murphy

We talked of Governor Murphy and the splendid work he had done in preventing violence in the auto strikes—there is a Catholic who is standing out in the eyes of the workers as seeing Christ in his fellow man—and we talked of the violence on the other side and the injury of some of the labor leaders when their car was crowded off the road by a gang of thugs who sped away after wrecking their opponents, leaving them with broken legs and other injuries by the roadside.

You will notice, Mr. Brophy, that in articles in the last issue of the paper we commended the sit-down technique and its effectiveness as a non-violent means of coercion, and I wish to write to you now, to urge you as a Catholic scholar as well as an outstanding union man in this country, to read Maritain's essay in his latest book, "Freedom in the Modern World," on the use of *pure means*.

You are a man of influence, and it is your duty as a Catholic and a trade unionist to preach in season and out of season the use of pure means. And by that we mean nonviolent coercion, a Gandhi technique which does not resort to the use of force.

Force

The use of force is un-Christian. Its use is exalted by Hitler and Mussolini and Stalin. But there is a chance now in this country, with both the President and his wife with their hearts open to the workers, to build up good labor unions, which will not only achieve better living conditions, but serve as great educational forces in the land.

Your work in the Committee on Industrial Organization is educational and you are interested in Catholic philosophy, the Catholic way of life. You know the principles, and it is within your power to urge always their application.

You understand our work, here at THE CATHOLIC WORKER. You understand what we are talking about in regard to voluntary poverty and works of mercy as well as trade unions and cooperatives. (I noticed that your room at the Statler was a very small hall bedroom. None could ever accuse you of being a union leader for what you could get out of it.) I am writing you this letter to let you know that the eyes of the worker are on you as a *Catholic*.