

On Pilgrimage - May 1966

Dorothy Day

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Summary: Recalls Peter Maurin's philosophy of poverty and of work on this May Day issue of the paper. Grouses about old cars. Admires the Bill and Dorothy Gauchet's hospitality to disabled and unwanted children. Laments the evils of the war in Vietnam. Praises the radical social critique of Saul Alinsky. Participates in a conference on nonviolence. Praises Cesar Chavez and the updates readers on the farm workers' stike. (DDLW #839).

Martin Corbin, managing editor of the *Catholic Worker*, has set the second Wednesday of the month as the day on which we go to press, which means that I must write this column today to be in time for press day, which is a week from tomorrow. Time was when we came out two weeks beforehand, before May Day, so that on that great anniversary of the *Catholic Worker* (we begin our 34th year this May) we could, all over the country, get out on the streets with it in all the cities all over the country where we had houses of hospitality.

Now that May first is the feast of St. Joseph the Worker, it is more than ever necessary to think of the paper as a message, a reiteration of Peter Maurin's teachings, since he was the founder of the CW movement and taught us what he liked to call a philosophy of poverty and a philosophy of work.

Peter was a French peasant, educated by the Christian Brothers, himself a Christian brother-teacher, who left them to become a teacher to the poor and the worker. He came to this country in 1909 or thereabouts, traveled over Canada and the United States as a migrant and unskilled worker, lived in cities in flophouses, ate at cheap beaneries, taught on park benches and city parks and street corners. "If you wish to reach the man in the street, go to the man in the street," he said. To Peter, a philosophy of work meant that all men should accept work as not only doing penance for sin, since they had to work by the sweat of the brow, but also, as co-creating with God, taking the material things of the universe and developing them. **"Man is made in the image and likeness of God, Creator."**

All work should be in some sense a development of the works of mercy, having to do with food, clothing, and shelter, health and education, recreation, and should be not only to earn a living, "by the sweat of one's own brow rather than by some one else's" but to earn a living for others who suffer from involuntary poverty and destitution. Poverty can be of mentality; the feeble-minded and retarded and delinquent; there are the lame, the halt and the blind; and there are the spiritually destitute. "Let your abundance supply their want," St. Paul said.

Poverty is an interior thing, a personal thing. One can only judge the practice of poverty in others by the generosity they evidence in sharing not only their material goods, but their physical, mental and spiritual wealth, and the generosity they evidence in giving their time, that most precious possession in this too short life

Spring Journeying

But we have written these things over and over, in one way or another, and this issue must be a real On Pilgrimage, telling of the travels Pat Rusk and I undertook this last month. It is exactly a month since we set out from New York in our 1958 Volkswagen, which right now is said to have many things wrong with it and yet after a night's rest keeps steadily on.

Many years ago I would have been afraid to take a long trip with anything but the best car, and since I never had that, I trusted to buses. After seeing the **Grapes of Wrath** in the movies, and the valiant pilgrims to the West Coast from the dust bowl area driving in ramshackle old trucks, I can dare anything.

I have had clutch rods come out in my hands, gas pedals go down through the floor, batteries fall out into the roadside, windshield wipers fail in cloudbursts, lights go out, fan-belts break, etc., etc. (Some of these things happened after inspection!).

These failures always seem to happen in some safe place or just as I drove up the homestretch. Many a time when something unaccountably went wrong and I was just able to pull over to the side, of the road, giving the car a rest seemed all that was necessary.

With a good book in the car one could only regard these halts as little unexpected gifts of time to oneself, time to relax and rest a while, Stanley Vishnewski's brother, who works in the Bethlehem Steel plant in Baltimore, operating a crane or some such giant machinery, was the one who told me that machinery and cars needed a rest too once in a while. And Peter Maurin always said that machinery should be the extension of the hand of man. I've known people who beat and yank and tear at machinery in anger when it does not respond to their touch and I soon learned on this car to shift gears gently, but very firmly, jiggling around a little when they seemed stuck. (Clutch is slipping, garage man said.)

Maybe, Pat says, the above paragraph will induce someone to buy a rebuilt, or even a new engine and clutch for us. Our brakes are all right and tires too. Though there was something wrong with the oil-feed-line yesterday and the green light showed for an hour, it is all right today, these last hundred miles. How all women need instruction when they use a car! But we all learn the hard way in this life.

April 4

This day found us back in Avon, Ohio, again at Our Lady of the Wayside Farm, which is no longer a farm, but another house of hospitality on the land. I cannot count nor tell of all the people Dorothy and Bill Gauchat have taken into this large red brick house—un-married mothers, alcoholic old women, a priest in trouble, and so on. Bill was the founder of the

Martin de Porres House of Hospital in Cleveland, which was located in a slum residential area facing the gigantic factories on the other bank of the Cuyahoga River, which flows through Cleveland. Bill is a graduate of St. Michael's College in Toronto. Dorothy, who came as a high-school student to help the house in those days, and later was an apprentice of Ade Bethune in Newport, looks like the heroine in **The Sound of Music**. After their marriage they moved to the farm in Avon, which used to be across the street from their present location, and there they were raising their family (eventually six children). They had cows, chickens, fruit, vegetables, and they dispensed hospitality in the two or three little guest houses on the place, usually occupied by migrant Mexican families who later settled on their own bits of property and worked in the industrial plants in nearby Lorain.

The work they are engaged in now is still one of hospitality and is of tremendous significance for our day and age. It denotes a respect for life, and for man's wisdom, for science and the possibility of developing cures for the conditions they are trying to alleviate

At a time when the world the instruments of death are ever more horrible, the Gauchats are caring for little ones who would otherwise be left to deteriorate and suffer in state hospitals for incurables: spastics, cerebral palsy victims, the deaf, dumb and blind, the retarded, the encephalitic. And they have been doing this now for years. They are permitted by the state to harbor only seven of these little victims. One wishes that the standards set for the individual practice of the works of mercy would be enforced in the state hospitals for these poor afflicted ones.

Loaves and Fishes

I could not help but think as we visited the Gauchats on April 4th, and now again on our way home, May 4, that their work in this area will be like the few loaves and fishes blessed by our Lord and increased to feed five thousand. Dear God, let this alleviation of pain and suffering here help to alleviate the pain and suffering which we, in our inhumanity, are inflicting in Vietnam. Last, night we saw the first part of **The Mills of the Gods**, a tv documentary on Vietnam. We saw the burned children and women in hospitals, evidence of the napalm (see the story in this issue of Redwood City, Calif, and the proposed manufacture of two hundred million tons of napalm in a factory they wish to build there.) We saw the torture by Vietnamese of Vietnamese, with our American soldiers and officers looking on. "That never would be permitted in France," that is, the showing of such a scene, or the filming of it, the French observer said, recalling the torture of prisoners of war in Algeria.

Faith

If I did not believe, if I did not make what is called an act of faith (and each act of faith increases our faith, and our capacity for faith), if I did not have faith that such work as the Gauchats' does lighten the sum total of suffering in the world, so that those who are suffering on both sides in this ghastly struggle, somehow mysteriously find their pain lifted and perhaps some balm of consolation poured on their wounds if I did not believe these things, the problem of evil would indeed be overwhelming.

The next stop I made was in Chicago, where I stayed with Nina Polcyn; a story about, her appeared in the **National Catholic Reporter** last month. She was associated with the Milwaukee House when it was running. The group there seemed to go off in all directions, so that you find former Milwaukee CW's like Nina, running the St. Benet's Bookshop in Chicago (300 S. Wabash); Ruth Anne Heaney teaching and living on one of the farms started by Catholic Workers in Rhineland, Missouri; Michael Strasser teaching at Duquesne in Pittsburgh; Ammon Hennacy in Salt Lake City, Alba Ryan in Maine, the Humphreys in St. Cloud, Minnesota, two priests, a Maryknoller in Japan and a Dominican in California, and so on and on. Anyway, Nina dispenses hospitality and news of the apostolate and is a center both at home and at the bookshop for all kinds and conditions of apostles. I went through Chicago going and coming and was present for a few hours of discussion at the home of the Heyermans (Helen Heyerman is Nina's sister) and there were representatives of almost every lay group in Chicago present. We had to leave early to have dinner at Monsignor Egan's.

Monsignor John J. Egan is now stationed in Presentation parish on the near West Side in what was once an Italian parish and is now predominantly Negro, I think. There were a number of priests there from a neighboring parish, and a Glenmary priest, Father Lester Schmidt, who had been "taking the plunge" they called it, spending the preceding week on West Madison Street (the skid row Chicago) many times without sleep because most of the hotels were filled up or would not have him. This idea of The Plunge was started by an Anglican priest a year ago and was a student venture designed to enable men and women to experience some of the desperate misery of destitution and homelessness. Father Schmidt, who was in shirt and slacks in that warm rectory, looked desperately tired with his head in his hands most of the evening, perhaps to shade his eyes from the blinding glare of electric lights, that I thought he was some friend of Monsignor Egan's who was having a break down. I could not help but think of a young man released from a mental hospital who attended our Christmas party at Chrystie Street a few years ago and sat through all the jubilation with his face in his two cupped hands and his head bowed.

Saul Alinsky

Monsignor Egan's guest that evening was Saul Alinsky, who to me represents the man of vision, one of the truly great of our day, in a class with Danilo Dolci and Vinoba Bhave. Thank God we have some heroes today in the social field whose vision illuminates the hard work they propose. Most of our aims are too small. I often think of Teresa of Avila, who said that we compliment God by asking great things of Him, and I do ask Him to make this vision of Saul Alinsky grow in the minds of men who hear him.

I know that several articles about Saul Alinsky have been published in Harpers within the last year and that another of his books is coming out soon. The book I remember of his is **Reveille for Radicals**, published twenty or more years ago and which tells most vividly of the Back of the Yards movement in Chicago, where churches, settlement houses, unions, corporation, institutions, were drawn together in a common aim. Since my own radical interests were sparked by Upton Sinclair's book **The Jungle**, Alinsky's book interested me, and because he thought in terms of building from the ground up, rather than from the

top down, on the principle of subsidiarity, he followed what I considered the philosophical anarchist position, rather than the Marxist socialist one.

Right now he is in the news for his attack on the poverty program, and because he has been called in by such cities as Rochester and Kansas City, Oakland and Detroit and other areas for consultation as to how to handle the gathering tensions between white and black.

What interests me about him is the largeness of his vision. At a time when there is much talk about air pollution and water pollution, he proposes that vast sums be set aside to tackle the national scandal of water pollution, for instance. He envisages something like the Tennessee Valley Authority with the use of the billions to build villages, schools, hospitals, roads, and all else needed (and this I suppose would mean decentralization, and a work which would be so vital that even the least worker would be caught up in the importance of the task on which he was called to work. It would do away with the sense of futility which is present in so many, the war on poverty projects, and the constant suspicion of political chicanery and corruption. It would truly be the rebuilding of the social order and the supplying of work at a time when automation and cybernation is the nightmare of the day.

Alinsky's attacks on Sergeant Shriver makes news, of course; his condemnation of the niggardliness of the funds allocated to the war on poverty and the consequent focussing of attention on the vast good thing. And when it comes to personal attacks in his public speeches, I heard him speak on the way home when we were passing through Detroit and I found humor but not malice in his presentation. He is not a demagogue.

The Little Way

Of course—and I am as firmly convinced of this as I am of the necessity for our own work—it will take the example of such people as Daniolo Dolci besides to point the way. Until each individual stops dumping broken down washing machines, refrigerators, cars, empty cans and assorted non-organic, unassimilable material down the banks of our brooks, ponds, streams, lakes and rivers, (not to speak of the outhouses still built over streams in the slums of our villages) we will not have such projects and reforms as Alinsky proposes. A Danilo Dolci would be sparking a strike against unemployment and destitution by getting a group of men together as he did in Sicily, to work on roads and fields. This resulted in world publicity when the men were all arrested for this unheard-of remedy for lack of work. Even working an idle field is confiscating property not their own. The sacredness of private property is not yet challenged by any but the Marxist.

Mulford Q. Sibley

My trip began, as most of my travelling does, with an invitation from Father Donald Conroy, chaplain of the Newman Club of the University of Minnesota, to take part there in a three day conference on non-violence. I was to speak with Father Bernhard Haering and Dr. Mulford Q. Sibley; there were three meetings a day. Unfortunately, the famous theologian was able to be present for only one day and had no opportunity to hear Dr. Sibley, whose plane

was delayed. Dr. Haering spoke beautifully on non-violence and was a most inspiring and attractive speaker until he began to make distinctions between **force** and **violence** which could have led his listeners to suppose that our own troops are using **force** in Vietnam, only sufficient to oppose the **violence** of the opponent

Dr. Sibley's contribution to the discussion can be studied by anyone who has \$1.45 to spend on a Doubleday Anchor paperback, **The Quiet Battle**, which is made up of writing on the theory and practice of non-violent resistance, which he edited. Dr. Sibley is professor of Political Science at the University of Minnesota, and has been visiting professor at Stanford and Cornell Universities. He is co-author of **Conscription of Conscience**, a study of American conscientious objectors of World War II.

I cannot say how deeply impressed I was with the man himself, and with the peace and quiet force of his presentation of non-violence. It is meetings like these that make such trips as this a rewarding experience.

Other Readings

Father P. R. Regamey, whose book on non-violence will be published in the fall by Herder and Herder is known to our readers already for his book on **Poverty**. Gordon Zahn and James Douglass are two other Catholic writers on non-violence, both men of scholarly integrity, men of truth. Richard Gregg, another member of the Society of Friends, is famous for his formulation of the theory of non-violent resistance, and his book on the subject has recently been reissued. There is also A. J. Muste's **Non Violence in an Aggressive World** published by Harper in 1940 and all his recent writings in **Liberation**.

I cannot end without writing of the work of the present foremost example of non-violent resistance to oppression, Cesar Chavez. Here is an example of non-violence in the cold class war, and race war which has been going on in our country for many years.

The struggle of course is still going on. The strike which began last September in Delano, California, among Filipino and Mexican grape pickers scored a great success when its boycott of Schenley products, wines and whiskeys brought about a recognition of the Farm Workers Union and a willingness to negotiate on the part of the company. But there are still a score or more of other planters to deal with. The Christian Brothers and the Jesuits who own vineyards also recognize the union. The famous Lenten pilgrimage from Delano to Sacramento with the Guadalupe Virgin banner leading it, ended on Easter Sunday. Five hundred miles of walking to petition the governor, who did not leave his Easter vacation in Palm Springs to hear the strikers, called attention of the United States to the migrant workers' situation. We will try in each issue of the **Catholic Worker** to keep up with the story of this struggle.

In Chicago, Pat and I met with Dr. Jorge Prieto, who had left his practice and his family to participate. Thousands joined the hundreds on the last day of the march.

"There I saw poverty and suffering," he said, with tears in his eyes. "There I saw evil." And he described the sufferings of the strikers and marchers. He himself is a Mexican from California and knows the condition of the people there.

Lisa Bowman

On yesterday I received a letter from a friend of Lisa, who told of her death of cancer in San Joaquin general hospital in Stockton, California, on Easter Sunday, not many days after she had left her hospital bed to join the march of the Delano strikers for a few hours to show her solidarity with them.

Lisa was born in New York in 1938 of parents who separated before her birth, according to the facts sent me in this letter. She was raised by her mother and a stepfather. We met her in New York at the Peter Maurin Farm on Staten Island some years ago. She spent all the time since working with the migrants in California and when I met her again on one of my trips west I told in my column of how she and her little daughter both picked olives and how proud her daughter was she was able to earn enough to buy herself a pair of sneakers. This same little girl's father left her mother before her birth, and Lisa worked in the Stockton State Hospital as psychiatric aide up to the time of her birth. Lisa later supported herself and her child with a combination of cannery and field work, temporary post office work, family help and welfare. She was well acquainted with the life of precarity. She followed the crops from the Long Valley below Stockton to Yakima, Washington.

She was cared for in her last illness, after several operations, by James and Norma Nelson of Stockton, who still have her children I believe. She was buried with a requiem Mass from St. Linus' Church in Stockton. I am certainly grateful to Sony Cavazos, who wrote me from Fresno giving me these details.