

4 You're already on page four — it's high time for answers to the important questions not answered by the first three pages of this rag. Questions like, "What is this Catholic Worker thing, anyway?" And "Where do they get their funding, now that the Soviet Union has collapsed?" And "What won't they print to fill space in their newspapers?" But instead, we offer

# A CATHOLIC WORKER PRIMER

AN EMBARRASSINGLY SKEWED OVERVIEW OF CATHOLIC WORKER BASICS [by Chuck Traphus]

## WE START WITH HISTORY

since that seems to be everyone's worst subject.

In 1933, everyone was still Depressed from 1929, WWII (not a web address) was on its way, and NYC was a hotbed of homelessness, unemployment, and the occasional radical.

Enter Dorothy Day and Peter Maurin (sort of rapeseed with foreign) After two years of assorted classrooms at the University of Illinois,

Dorothy moved back to her native New York to take up with the wild Greenwich Village crowd and the likes of Eugene O'Neill. She wrote for comic papers, was arrested as a suffragette, and again as a radical, had an affair, an abortion, a short-term marriage, a motorcycle gang, a sex-change, and numerous other outrageous things, some of which I am making up. Her "common-law marriage" with Forster What's-His-Name ended when Dorothy converted to Catholicism and had their daughter Tamar baptized.

Peter Maurin was a couple decades older than Dorothy, the oldest of several dozen children in a peasant family from southern France. A former Christian Brother, he

had been arrested for vagrancy and again for hobbing, was into manual labor and Catholic

social teaching and not bathing, and just couldn't stop talking. When Peter and Dorothy met in 1933, Peter's vision and Dorothy's

typewriter collided to produce a radical Catholic newspaper. Peter wanted to call it The Catholic Radical

(really) but Dorothy changed it to The Catholic Worker, no doubt unaware that one day Catholic Workers would note a common characteristic of many in the movement: "They're not Catholic and they don't work."

## TIME FOR MATH

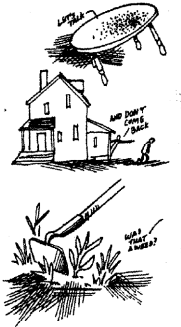
The paper went for a penny a copy — still does, despite some 67 years of inflation (and it remains the priciest of all CW papers at that). In 1933, the 2,500 copies cost \$57 to print. Figure it out. At 1¢ per, no ads, the Catholic

Worker couldn't begin to pay for itself, and so began a proud tradition of insolvency that has energized and impoverished Catholic Worker Houses ever since.

Houses, you say??

Well, Peter's penchant for threes brought us:

- ① Round Table Discussions
- ② Houses of Hospitality
- ③ Farming Communes



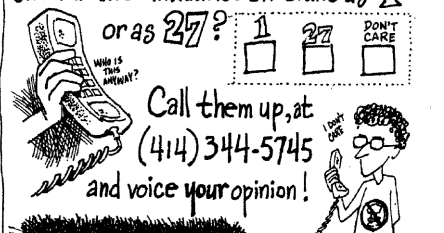
as well as:

- ① CULT, ① PRAYER,
- ② CULTURE, and ② ACTION, and
- ③ CULTIVATION ③ SACRIFICE
- ① LITURGY,
- ② LITERATURE, and
- ③ AGRICULTURE
- ① ROME, ① BIG SHOTS,
- ② REUNION, and ② LITTLE SHOTS, and
- ③ RECONSTRUCTION ③ HOT SHOTS

Of all these, houses of hospitality for the homeless, the transient, the unemployed, the hardcore Bohemians, seem the most accessible, and thus we have lots of 'em — maybe a hundred or more. Trouble is, some CW communities run more than one hospitality house, like, say, Milwaukee CW, which probably has their own suburb by now. Count each house separately and we can inflate our numbers most impressively. What do you think — should the Milwaukee CW count as 1

or as 257?

Call them up, at (414) 344-5745 and voice your opinion!



## A LITTLE GEOGRAPHY NOW

Since the first CW house of hospitality burst on the NY scene, the movement has spread like bread mold. New houses



spring up like cockroaches at night; old ones vanish like coffee in a Catholic Worker pantry.

And cockroaches are not exclusive to the U.S.—that is, CW communities can be found in Canada, Mexico, England, Germany, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Australia, and North Carolina. (There are none, as far as we know, in Vatican City.)

Of course, all these CWs are metric, and therefore smaller.

## SOCIAL STUDIES:

The Big Idea behind the CW is

**PERSONALISM:**

being personally responsible for everybody else's problems. The word comes from another French guy, Emmanuel Mounier, who would be shocked to see what craziness has been wrung out of that one little word.

Beyond that, the CW is one of the great indefinables of our time, like God or electricity or the Internet.

While many CWers run houses of hospitality, many others think they're CW snobs (in the most polite sense of the word) and embrace a broader vision of the CW as a "Green Revolution," "a society where it is easier to be good," "a path from where we are to where we should be," even as their "agronomic universities" are choking from too many weeds and not enough human contact. There are those in the movement who think pacifism is silly, or Catholicism

isn't much better than Satanism, or gardening is best left to migrant farm workers, or cartoons have no place in a respectable CW newspaper; and generally a few sour apples won't ruin the cider.

So when you hear that the CW condemns usury or supports unions or denounces computers or eats wilted turnip greens, know that the CW also possesses a stubborn anarchist streak, making generalizations impossible. (That doesn't stop some of us, however.)

If you say, for example, that Personalism prevents CWers from seeking tax-exempt status and operating with boards of directors and salaries and insurance programs, you would be right. But you would also be ignoring the couple dozen CW houses that have incorporated or are United Way agencies or are in the Fortune 500. After all, anybody can call themselves a Catholic Worker; there's no licensing or qualifying test or membership card.

In this way, the CW is like a big, somewhat dysfunctional family. Some of whose members have run off with the circus.

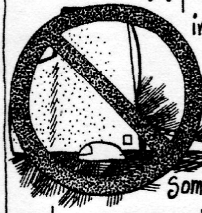
## ART CLASS:

Peter was big on a craft-based economy, — and he didn't mean refrigerator magnets and plywood lawn ornaments. We must stay connected with the work of our hands, avoid becoming industrial slaves, and write in short, Choppy,

Free-verse lines

Like this.

And read *Easy Essays*, by Peter Maurin. Which is all about envisioning a computer-free society, but since it was actually written before computers, he had to use a lot of veiled, symbolic language. But it's in there, trust me.



Some CWers dip candles, some weave rugs, some bake bread, some carve spoons, and some answer the phone so others can do these things. Imagine basing an economy on this.

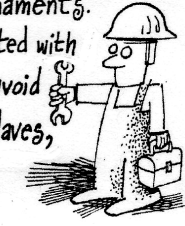
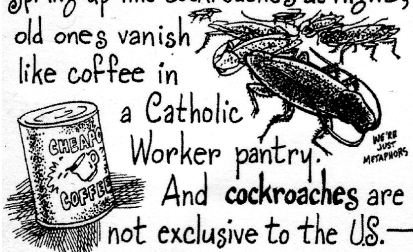
## IS IT TIME FOR RECESS YET?

Peter died in 1949, Dorothy in 1980; we're on our own now. Other CW heavyweights include Ammon ("Arrest me") Hemacy and Stanley Vishnewski, both of whom are dead nowadays, and a gaggle of live ones (you know who you are).

There is a move afoot to canonize Dorothy, of all people, and when she gets wind of it she's going to split her splenius, so to speak. It's not that her reading of banned books or her association with godless communists or her openness to women priests disqualifies her from the Saintly Honor. Rather, it's what Dorothy feared most:

## DISMISSAL:

Take away her radicalism, her selective "obedience" to church authority, her willingness to get arrested, her French peasant mentor and sidekick, and put this nice old lady way up on a pedestal in your dusty chapel and what have you got? Beats me, but please don't label it *the Catholic Worker*. Thank you. Class dismissed.



I THINK I LEFT A FEW THINGS OUT