

BISHOP METZGER'S SECRET

by J.M. Haffert



Almost every American has heard of the Farah strike and boycott. No event in recent labor strikes seems to have surfaced deeper feelings for and against labor unions. And in the midst of it, on the side of the union was Most Rev. Bishop Metzger of El Paso, Texas. The dispute was settled when a majority of Farah workers voted for the union and shortly afterwards (on March 19th, feast of St. Joseph) Bishop Metzger flew to St. Louis. He showed the effects of the terrible strain of the labor conflict which, centered in El Paso, had sent shock waves through the nation.

I obtained his permission to tell the following story which he had kept to himself.

"To end the strife," Bishop Metzger said: *"I had a secret weapon."*

SECRET "WEAPON"

The Bishop repeated: "It seemed impossible, but I knew the strife would soon end because of that secret weapon which even yet no one knows about."

We wondered all the more what the "secret weapon" could have been. Bishop Metzger had become involved in the Farah fight because of a six page letter he wrote to Bishop Hogan of Rochester in reply to Bishop Hogan's request for information about the Farah situation. In that six page letter Bishop Metzger said that there was social injustice in the Farah plant (which employed mostly Mexican women of El Paso). The union got the letter and published it all over America to support a national boycott of Farah.

Deep bitterness developed. Farah himself called the Bishop a name and even some of the priests turned against him. "If you want to carry a real cross," Bishop Metzger told us, "Just touch the question of social justice." And then he explained his secret weapon.

"I WAS AMAZED"

A 7 year old girl died of cancer shortly before the strike and boycott ended. She was the daughter of one of the strikers and had been suffering all during this time from the painful disease which finally took her life. Father Munoz, her pastor, told the Bishop about the beautiful death of the child:

"During it all she offered all her suffering," Father Munoz said, "She would tell her father to pray the Rosary to end the trouble, and she constantly recalled of the joy of her first Holy Communion."

Bishop Metzger was touched by what Fr. Munoz told him and went personally to the mortuary to join the few mourners and to console the poor family.

"When I looked into the coffin and saw the little face, I was amazed," he said. "Although her face had been distorted by the terrible disease it had such an angelic look . . . a look of such peace. And in my heart I cried out: *'This little child will end this strife!'* And that became my prayer, my secret weapon."

Shortly afterwards, although there seemed no hope that the labor strife which had grown so bitter could ever end, it was over.

"I know there are some abuses of power by unions as well as by owners," Bishop Metzger told us, "And there are some unions I would never support. But labor strife has become one of the most devious factors in America and one that has caused hatred and even bloodshed. And the ultimate solution will be found in the example of that 7 year old little girl who offered her sufferings for her own parents involved in this strife . . . for justice to them and for peace."



LIKE JACINTA

Like Jacinta at Fatima, this child was showing the way. Only God's grace as Bishop Metzger pointed out can heal the wounds and bring peace to our people both in management and labor. This child recalled the joy of her Communion in the midst of her suffering and begged her parents to pray the Rosary for labor peace. If enough of us make reparation and pray for the same peace . . . it will come.