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Pacem in Terris Award Celebration

DAVENPORT: The 1980 Pacem in Terris Award will be given by the Quad-City Coalition for Peace & Justice to Bishop Ernest Unterkoefer of Charleston, S. Carolina, and Crystal Lee Sutton, the real Norma Rae, on Saturday, Nov. 15, 1980, 7:30 p.m. at the Galvin Fine Arts Center, St. Ambrose College, Davenport, Iowa.

Bishop Unterkoefer will receive the award in the name of the six Catholic Bishops from the Southeast whose support of the J. P. Stevens boycott earlier this year helped to turn the tide in the textile workers' long struggle to win union representation in the plants.

Crystal Lee Sutton's real life experience with J. P. Stevens provided the basis for the movie, Norma Rae.

The Pacem in Terris Award was created in 1964 by the Davenport Catholic Interracial Council which was disbanded in 1976. Since that time the award has been presented by the Quad-City Coalition for Peace & Justice. The award honors Pope John XXIII and commemorates the publication of his 1963 encyclical, "Pacem in Terris."

Tickets may be obtained through the Social Action Department for $2. Refreshments following.

**Attached is background material on Crystal Lee Sutton and Bishop Ernest Unterkoefer, the award recipients**
CRYSTAL LEE SUTTON  
"the real 'Norma Rae'"

Crystal Lee Sutton was born and raised in Roanoke Rapids, North Carolina. Roanoke Rapids, a company town established in 1897 around two textile mills, was originally dominated by the Simmons Mattress Company. However, in 1956 J. P. Stevens Company bought the town's seven textile mills.

Crystal Lee worked for four years in Southern cotton mills. She got her first job in textiles—as a battery filler, feeding shuttles of cotton yard into looms from 4 p.m. to midnight—in Burlington at the age of 17. By then her whole family—including her mother, father, brother, sister, and an aunt (later a victim of brown lung disease)—was working in the mills.

In November 1972, Crystal Lee Jordan began work at one of the seven J. P. Stevens textile mills in Roanoke Rapids. Crystal was lucky, she had one of the best jobs in the mill. As a "gift-set maker," she endlessly folded and packaged towels and table linens, standing on her feet 8 hours a day in the finishing department, once again on the 2nd shift.

Crystal had seen the differences being "union" brought to her husband. Cookie Jordan not only earned twice what her father made, he enjoyed rights and benefits no textile worker ever had. Even though her father feared reprisals against the family, Crystal began thinking about the need for a union at J. P. Stevens.

In April of 1973, the Textile Workers Union of America sent an organizer, 55 year old Eli Zivkovich, into Roanoke Rapids to begin yet another attempt to unionize the J. P. Stevens Company.

Before Eli could hope to accomplish anything in Roanoke Rapids, he had to find someone to bridge the gap between him and the Stevens workers: someone who worked in the mills, who was young, eager, and preferably female; someone who knew most of the workers and the difficulty of the work; someone who was a natural leader, was courageous enough to fight back and hadn't been exhausted or discouraged by earlier unionizing failures; someone who was smart enough to know that she and the other workers were being exploited by the company and that only by standing together—forming a union—could the workers make a better life for themselves and for their children who would inevitably follow them into the mills.

On April 20, when Crystal Lee Jordan attended her first union meeting, Eli knew he'd found his "bridge." The next day, Crystal signed a union card, and started working as an "in-plant" organizer.

On May 30, 1973, after copying down an anti-union notice from the company bulletin board at Eli's insistence, Crystal was summarily fired by J. P. Stevens. In defiance, Crystal scrawled the word "UNION" in huge letters on a piece of cardboard and jumped onto a...
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Crystal's supervisors had sent for the Chief of Police, as they'd threatened to do when they fired her, and he found her on the table with her "UNION" sign still held aloft. She was dragged down, and led out of the Roanoke Fabricating Plant to spend a night in jail on disorderly conduct charges. The union bailed her out the next morning, and a few months later the charges were dropped. Her firing was later brought before the National Labor Relations Board--by the union--and ruled an unfair labor practice.

On August 28, 1974, nine months after Eli had returned North, the Textile Workers Union of America at last won the right to represent the workers at the seven Roanoke Rapids mills belonging to J. P. Stevens. This was their first victory against the company's opposition to unionization.

In the meantime, because of her union activities, which had also cost her marriage to Cookie Jordan, Crystal found that she had been blacklisted at every possible work place within an hour's drive of Roanoke Rapids. Unable to find a job, she and her three children returned to Burlington in 1976, where again she took any work she could get.

Still struggling to support her young family in Burlington, Crystal Lee married Lewis Preston Sutton, a textile worker, in November, 1977.

Through actions brought up by the Union, Crystal was reinstated at J. P. Stevens by order of the Judges of the Second Circuit Court in New York as part of their September, 1977, landmark decision against the company. This was the decision that opened up all the J. P. Stevens plants in North and South Carolina to union organizing. Crystal was awarded $13,436 in lost salary, and went back to the Roanoke Fabricating Plant on April 3, 1978 to work just two days--to prove a point--at her old job. A copy of her paycheck for those two shifts--totaling $46.40--is posted on a wall in her living room.

In November, 1978, Crystal Lee Sutton, still unable to find textile work because of the blacklist, took a job as a maid at the Hilton Inn, a motel in Burlington where her two teen-aged sons, Jay and Mark, were working. She left her job in July, 1979 because of a tumor in her foot. This was two weeks after the motel was bought by another chain.

New managment brought devastating changes to the workers at the motel. Suddenly all their vacation, overtime, and insurance benefits were taken away. Crystal's son Mark, now 19, had been cut back
to three days' work a week. Just married, and with his wife pregnant, Mark had to quit his job to try to find more secure work.

Mark was old enough to remember his mother's union activities in Roanoke Rapids, so he asked her what could be done for the motel's workers. Crystal's second son, Jay, 17, still worked at the Hilton Inn, and was becoming increasingly upset at the changing job conditions. He too, turned to Crystal for advice.

Ever since that fateful day in 1973 when she first joined the TWUA, Crystal had said "the union is my life... I guess it always will be," and she knew that collectively bargain for better treatment by management.

In October, Crystal contacted the Hotel & Restaurant Workers Union and began organizing her former co-workers at the Hilton Inn. Amidst management's threats of reprisals on union supporters, the Union scheduled the certification election for December 10, 1979—a month too early to gain an unshakeable majority, which resulted in a tie, with 10 votes challenged by both sides. Regardless of the final outcome—now in the hands of the NLRB—and despite fears of firing and blacklisting—the motel workers have regained their self-respect. Because of the efforts of Crystal Lee Sutton, whom Martin Ritt, director of the film "Norma Rae," has described as a "working-class Joan of Arc", they found, and still have, hope.

In an area in which the prevailing attitude is anti-union, where workers are called "lint heads" or "trash", where women are consistently paid less, and where all workers are paid the lowest wages in the nation, Crystal Lee Sutton, heartened by recent ACTWU victories at J. P. Stevens, has found her life's work: fighting back for the future of her children and for that of all Southern workers.

REFERENCES:
BISHOP ERNEST UNTERKOEFLER

Bishop Ernest Unterkoefler, head of the Catholic diocese of Charleston, South Carolina, was one of the six Bishops from four Southern states who in March 1980 endorsed the nationwide consumer boycott of J. P. Stevens products. The other five are Archbishop Thomas A. Donnellan of Atlanta, Georgia; Bishop Michael Begley of Charlotte, North Carolina; Bishop F. Joseph Gossman of Raleigh, North Carolina; Bishop Raymond Lessard of Savannah, Georgia, and Bishop Walter Sullivan of Richmond, Virginia. Most of the J. P. Stevens textile plants are located within these four states.

The six Bishops tried for three years to help reconcile differences between Stevens and the Amalgamated Clothing and Textile Workers Union (ACTWU). Their March 1980 statement said in part: "The anti-union activities by the J. P. Stevens Co. persuade us that the company has firmly made its choice to prevent the formation of employee organizations that can lead to collective bargaining."

The Bishops at that time pledged to back the boycott until Stevens, the nation's second largest textile manufacturer, "can demonstrate that it has eliminated the mood of fear and retaliation from its plants, bargains in good faith in contract negotiations, and responds to the rights of workers to organize."

On October 19, 1980, the union members in Roanoke Rapids approved their first union contract, ending the 17 year struggle with J. P. Stevens. The contract, which covers 3,500 workers at 10 plants compares favorably with other ACTWU contracts with Southern textile companies. The union agreed to end its consumer boycott and the corporate campaign against the textile chain.

Acknowledging this agreement, the six Bishops expressed cautious satisfaction but referred to many "obstacles" that remained to full unionization of Southern textile workers:

"It is appropriate for us now to express our satisfaction in the recent turn of events and to salute those who, on both sides of the table, assisted in resolving the problems. For our part, we continue to offer our services to both parties if any efforts of ours might be of use."

Most Reverend Ernest L. Unterkoefler, S.T.L., J.C.D., Bishop of Charleston, South Carolina was born August 17, 1917 in Philadelphia Pennsylvania. He attended the Catholic University of America, the Theological College of the Catholic University of America, where he also did his graduate studies in Theology and Canon Law. He was ordained to the priesthood at Trinity College Chapel, Washington, D.C. on May 18, 1944.

From 1944 to 1960, he served as assistant pastor in various parishes in the diocese of Richmond and Arlington. In 1960 he became
Chancellor of the Richmond Diocese; and in 1962 he was named the Vicar General. His consecration as auxiliary Bishop of Richmond took place on December 13, 1961. On February 22, 1965 he was installed as tenth Bishop of Charleston.

From 1966-1969, he served as secretary to the National Conference of Catholic Bishops. He has also been a member of the Administrative Board of United States Catholic Conference, member of the Administrative Committee of National Conference of Catholic Bishops, and Chairman of the Bishops' Committee on the Permanent Diaconate.

Bishop Unterkoefler has shown great interest in ecumenical affairs. At present, he is Chairman of the NCCB Commission for Ecumenical and Interreligious Affairs. He has also served as Chairman, Sub-Commission for Dialogue with Presbyterian and Reformed Churches, and Co-Chairman of the Anglican/Roman Catholic Joint International Sub-Commission on Theology of Marriage.

Bishop Unterkoefler has authored numerous magazine articles and edited two books: The Unity We Seek, Paulist Press, and The American Catholic Church and the Negro Problem in the 18th & 19th Centuries, Rome, Italy. He has received several awards, including one in 1978 from South Carolina Citizens for Life as Pro-Life Citizen of the year, and a 1979 award from Catholic Youth.