

CHURCH SOCIAL TEACHING, PART 4: UNIONS AND WORK

We're all familiar with the battle in Wisconsin and Ohio between the teachers' unions and the governors and legislators of those states. Many folks in Wisconsin were surprised when Archbishop Jerome Listecki of Milwaukee waded into the conflict with a statement in support of workers' unions. But there really should be no surprise. Since 1891, with the publication of Leo XIII's encyclical **Rerum Novarum**, the Catholic Church has been a strong supporter of worker's rights to organize into unions or similar fraternal organizations.

But first, a word about my own particular biases. I am very much in favor of unions but I also disfavor them too.

You cannot look at the history of America in the 20th century without recognizing the many ways that unions have contributed to the welfare of the workforce, then and now. Did you enjoy your weekend? Do your children enjoy going to school, and not having to be sent out to work at age fourteen, because it is against the law to make children work? Do you and your neighbors enjoy higher wages than you might if business owners were the only ones with any say in setting prevailing wages? For these things and more, thank a union member. There is scarcely a single progressive labor policy adopted in the last one hundred years that has not been fought for by organized labor. It is important to realize that almost all workers in this country have safe working conditions and somewhat decent wages and benefits because of unions, whether there is a union where they work or not. The government did nothing to ensure or provide safe and fair working conditions or minimum wage laws until the unions brought the issues into the public consciousness in the late 1800's and early 1900's.

In addition, there are certain professions and occupations that are inherently dangerous and highly stressful. I'm thinking of firefighters, policemen, miners, sanitation workers, steel workers and workers in other large industries, etc. They need to be able to negotiate lots of things in addition to wages and pensions: work hours and work load, professional upgrading, working

conditions and benefits, vacations and medical leave, work standards and grievance procedures.

And yes, nowadays I would even include teaching as a hazardous profession. Ask any public school teacher... they will be able to tell you some very interesting stories about times they felt endangered by parents or students.

Some may reply that they work in a non-union shop and have decent conditions and pay and benefits. Sure they do. Many large non-union employers do this because it keeps unions out of their shops. I'm not being cynical...it's just that the bottom line is very important to companies and they don't want to have to deal with what they feel will be excessive union demands.

Now....that leads me to the flip side of my bias. Have unions overreached? Absolutely... especially public-sector unions (as opposed to private sector unions such as autoworkers, teamsters, IBEW, etc). They have often become their own worst enemies by incessant and sometimes ridiculous demands. While they demand that corporations work for the common good, they've often forgotten their own obligation to work for the same common good. Excessive and unrealistic demands affect everyone, not just the entity the unions are negotiating with. In many cases, the total compensation package of a public employee exceeds that of his or her privately-employed counterpart. Over many years, through collective bargaining our elected representatives and their delegates have agreed to arrangements that have increased the expectations of public employees.

In hindsight, this was irresponsible. Hopes and expectations were raised for public workers that simply could not be sustained. Promises of pensions, health care benefits and wages were made that can't be fulfilled. Public service unions should learn from the experiences of their brethren in the private sector. Decades of increased wages and benefits in the auto industry, for example, signed and sealed through collective bargaining,

plus poor decisions by management, foreign competition, and unsustainable debt loads have created the perfect storm. The UAW is a fraction of what it used to be in terms of membership and clout. People finally realized only by working together with management can success be achieved for everyone. **For workers to succeed, the employer must succeed** (emphasis mine).

The whole thing reminds me of a parental dictum when dealing with teenagers: "It is much easier to say No and change it to a Yes, than it is to say Yes and change it to a No." When unions don't get an unqualified YES, or a former YES gets changed to a NO, there is a reaction (work slowdown, strike, blue flu, etc). Do this often enough, and corporations will leave the US and go to other countries where the labor costs are less excessive (the fact that labor laws in those countries are more lax is a whole other topic). Unemployment rises, costs rise, product quality suffers, taxes rise.

Let some think I am way off base in my biases, I can only say that they are square in line with papal documents and statements by the US Bishops. Because of space limitations, I can only share a small sample of statements. In 2009, long before Wisconsin, Pope Benedict wrote this: *Governments, for reasons of economic utility, often limit the freedom or the negotiating capacity of labor unions. Hence traditional networks of solidarity have more and more obstacles to overcome. The repeated calls issued within the Church's social doctrine, beginning with Rerum Novarum, for the promotion of workers' associations that can defend their rights must therefore be honored today even more than in the past, as a prompt and far-sighted response to the urgent need for new forms of cooperation at the international level, as well as the local level. [Caritas in Veritate]*

The same thought is echoed in 1981, when John Paul II wrote **Laborem Exercens**. He states that it is a mistake to marginalize or dismiss unions as impediments to economic growth. "A union remains a constructive factor of social order and

solidarity, and it is impossible to ignore it."

That encyclical (**Laborem Exercens**) is a monumental treatise on work and on the rights of workers. John Paul starts off by looking at human labor and work in and of itself, and writes this: "[Work] is not only good in the sense that it is useful or something to enjoy; it is also good as being something worthy, that is to say, something that corresponds to man's dignity, that expresses this dignity and increases it. If one wishes to define more clearly the ethical meaning of work, it is this truth that one must particularly keep in mind. Work is a good thing for man-a good thing for his humanity-because through work man not only transforms nature, adapting it to his own needs, but he also achieves fulfillment as a human being and indeed, in a sense, becomes 'more a human being'."

Therefore, the Pope says, anything that debases or threatens the dignity of human labor and the worker is proper grounds for Church concern. "In order to achieve social justice in the various parts of the world, in the various countries, and in the relationships between them, there is a need for ever new movements of solidarity of the workers and with the workers. This solidarity must be present whenever it is called for by the social degrading of the subject of work, by exploitation of the workers, and by the growing areas of poverty and even hunger. The Church is firmly committed to this cause, for she considers it her mission, her service, a proof of her fidelity to Christ, so that she can truly be the 'Church of the poor'."

It might be easy for a reader to think that the Church is always and in all ways supportive of labor unions. Not so. One has only to look at how US bishops have opposed unions in Catholic hospitals and Catholic schools. It's a case of "Do as I say, not as I do" (and that too is a whole other topic!). Look at this statement from the **Catechism of the Catholic Church** (# 2430), which speaks about the different vested interests: *Economic life brings into play different interests, often opposed to one another. This explains why the conflicts that characterize it arise. Efforts should be made to*

reduce these conflicts by negotiation that respects the rights and duties of each social partner: those responsible for business enterprises, representatives of wage-earners (for example, trade unions), and public authorities when appropriate.

In his statement, Bishop Listecki did favor union rights. But he also said: "Every union, like every other economic actor, is called to work for the common good, to make sacrifices when required, and to adjust to new economic realities." Afterwards, the bishop's spokesman said: "Depending on who you talk to, you would think the archbishop is the biggest union supporter or the biggest union buster in Wisconsin."

Bishop Robert Morlino of Madison WI made a more in-depth analysis of the situation in a series of columns in his diocesan newspaper. It's applicable to union/corporate relationships across the board...in fact, what the bishop said is relevant to the whole economic discourse that this nation is engaged in. Bishop Morlino is as conservative as they come, but here he is right on target.

The bishop noted that the issue has two "horns": "[It] comes down to either a choice for the common good, of sacrifice on the part of all, at times that pose immense economic threats, both present and future on the one hand, and on the other hand, a choice for the rights of workers to a just compensation for services rendered, and to the upholding of contracts legally made."

He said that as Catholics, it's possible to see both sides, "yet the current situation calls many of us to choose between these two goods." In the end, he stated, the "teaching of the Church allows for persons of good will to disagree as to which horn of this dilemma should be chosen, because there would be reasonable justification available for either alternative."

Bishop Morlino suggested that the current debate regarding the benefits and wages of public employees is one of "fairness," but noted that "there appears to be no common ground in terms of what the word 'fair' actually means. The relativism

of our culture and society once again does us grave harm, because the cultural response to the question of the meaning of 'fair,' and a culture governed by the dictatorship of relativism cannot agree on what the word 'fair' means. What is left is the emotion which displays itself over and over again with increased lack of civility."

Bishop Morlino urged Catholics of the Madison Diocese to consider the fairness issue... and this is something all of us can think about. "At a time when all are called to sacrifice, this question requires a weighing of the relative sacrifice which all are called upon to make, so that a judgment about just proportions can be made by each one of us.... There appears to be no common ground in terms of what the word 'fair' actually means among various individuals. Some believe that 'a fair solution' would require sacrifice from everyone but self.... The cultural response to the question of the meaning of 'fair' is, 'well, what's fair for you is fair for you and what's fair for me is fair for me,' leaving us no common ground for reasonable and civil discourse.... What is left is the emotion which displays itself over and over again with increased lack of the civility to which President Obama recently, rightfully, called all of us."

This is a very scary time for anyone who presently has a job, or who is looking for work. The employment situation is grim, not just in the US, but the world over. One might think that a major cause of the unrest in the Middle East, for example, is repressive governments. There is that, but lack of jobs and meaningful work is also a huge factor. My prediction is that the union unrest in Wisconsin and Ohio is but a harbinger of things to come in this country as more and more people compete for fewer jobs and even scarcer economic resources. The emotion of fear is going to reign supreme, and where there is fear, violence inevitably follows. It's going to take a major conversion of attitudes in this country if anything fair and constructive is to be accomplished. God help us all, please.

Congregation of Holy Cross
2011 Jubilarians

Sixty-Fifth Anniversary of Ordination

Rev. William J. Brinker, C.S.C.
Rev. Howard A. Kuhns, C.S.C.

Sixty-Fifth Anniversary of Religious Profession

Bro. Edward C. Luther, C.S.C.

Sixtieth Anniversary of Ordination

Rev. Lawrence A. LeVasseur, C.S.C.
Most Rev. Charles A. Schleck, C.S.C.
Rev. Thomas C. Tallarida, C.S.C.
Rev. John V. VandenBossche, C.S.C.

Sixtieth Anniversary of Religious Profession

Bro. Herman F. Zaccarelli, C.S.C.

Fiftieth Anniversary of Ordination

Rev. Maurice E. Amen, C.S.C.
Rev. Ernest J. Bartell, C.S.C.
Rev. Thomas E. Blantz, C.S.C.
Rev. Thomas E. Chambers, C.S.C.
Rev. William G. Condon, C.S.C.
Rev. Donald F. Guertin, C.S.C.
Rev. Thomas F. McNally, C.S.C.
Rev. Joseph S. Peixotto, C.S.C.
Rev. Richard J. Segreve, C.S.C.
Rev. Robert G. Simon, C.S.C.
Rev. Joseph L. Walter, C.S.C.

Fiftieth Anniversary of Religious Profession

Bro. James H. Miller, C.S.C.

Twenty-Fifth Anniversary of Ordination

Rev. Robi H. Gomes, C.S.C.
Most Rev. Ponon P. Kubi, C.S.C.
Rev. Francis J. Murphy, C.S.C.
Rev. Elias Palma, C.S.C.
Rev. Bakul S. Rozario, C.S.C.
Rev. Thomas G. Streit, C.S.C.
Rev. Mark B. Thesing, C.S.C.

Your favorite page.....

OBSCURE ENGINEERING CONVERSION FACTORS

1. Ratio of an igloo's circumference to its diameter = Eskimo Pi
2. 2000 pounds of Chinese Soup = Won ton
3. 1 millionth of a mouthwash = 1 microscope
4. Time between slipping on a peel and smacking the pavement = 1 bananosecond
5. Weight an evangelist carries with God = 1 billigram
6. Time it takes to sail 220 yards at 1 nautical mile per hour = Knotfurlong
7. 365.25 days of drinking low-calorie beer = 1 Lite year
8. 16.5 feet in the Twilight Zone = 1 Rod Serling
9. Half a large intestine = 1 semicolon
10. 1,000,000 aches = 1 megahurtz
11. Basic unit of laryngitis = 1 hoarsepower
12. Shortest distance between two jokes = a straight line
13. 453.6 graham crackers = 1 pound cake
14. 1 million microphones = 1 megaphone
15. 1 million bicycles = 1 megacycle
16. 365 bicycles = 1 unicycle
17. 2000 mockingbirds = two kilomockingbirds
18. 10 cards = 1 decacard
19. 52 cards = 1 deckacards
20. 1 kilogram of falling figs = 1 Fig Newton
21. 1000 ccs of wet socks = 1 literhosen
22. 1 millionth of a fish = 1 microfiche
23. 1 trillion pins = 1 terrapin
24. 10 rations = 1 decaration
25. 100 rations = 1 C-Ration
26. 2 monograms = 1 diagram
27. 8 nickels = 2 paradigms
28. 5 statute miles of intravenous surgical tubing at Yale University Hospital = One I.V. League.

UNIVERSAL LAWS

1. **Law of Mechanical Repair** - After your hands become coated with grease, your nose will begin to itch and you'll have to pee.

2. **Law of Gravity** - Any tool, nut, bolt, screw, when dropped, will roll to the least accessible corner.
3. **Law of Probability** - The probability of being watched is directly proportional to the stupidity of your act.
4. **Law of Random Numbers** - If you dial a wrong number, you never get a busy signal and someone always answers.
5. **Variation Law** - If you change lines (or traffic lanes), the one you were in will always move faster than the one you are in now (works every time).
6. **Law of Close Encounters** - The probability of meeting someone you know increases dramatically when you are with someone you don't want to be seen with.
7. **Law of the Result** - When you try to prove to someone that a machine won't work, it will.
8. **Law of bio-mechanics** - The severity of the itch is inversely proportional to the reach.
9. **Law of Physical Surfaces** - The chances of an open-faced jelly sandwich landing face down on a floor, are directly correlated to the newness and cost of the carpet or rug.
10. **Law of Logical Argument** - Anything is possible if you don't know what you are talking about.
11. **Brown's Law of Physical Appearance** - If the clothes fit, they're ugly.
12. **Wilson's Law of Commercial Marketing Strategy** - As soon as you find a product that you really like, they will stop making it.
13. **Doctors' Law** - If you don't feel well, make an appointment to go to the doctor, by the time you get there you'll feel better. But don't make an appointment, and you'll stay sick.

CREDIT CARD INFORMATION

NAME: _____
ZIP CODE: _____

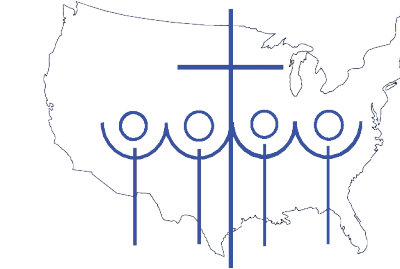
Visa **Mastercard** **Discover**

Amount you wish to give: _____
Card Number: _____
Expiration Date: _____

Signature: _____

If you wish us to keep this credit card info on file, check the box.

CROSS



LINKS

Phone: (574) 631-6022
Personal E-Mail: frherb@earthlink.net
Business E-mail: cscassn@nd.edu

HOLY CROSS ASSOCIATION
P.O. BOX 771
NOTRE DAME, IN 46556-0771

May 17, 2011

Greetings, my friend!

I hope this newsletter comes to you nice and crisp! It has been raining so much out here in the Midwest that everything is soggy. Even the herbs are hunkered down, longing and waiting for sunshine and warmth! This particular Herb is going to be transplanted to North Carolina from May 4-11, hopefully to enjoy a sunny warm vacation with the folks.

My prayers and the prayers of the community do go out to all who have been affected by the vicious weather and the fires that have characterized this Spring so far. Given the wars and the economic distress we're all involved in, it might feel like a perfect storm is overturning or threatening to overturn our lives. Many will ask: "What is God trying to tell us?" Our Father is not a destroyer. He is our ever-present help in time of need. All that is happening is due either to the natural processes of Mother Nature, or to human sinfulness and greed. The proper question might be: "What are we doing to ourselves?"

There is much going on in Holy Cross these days also. On Saturday April 30th, Paul Ybarra, CSC and John Antony Britto, CSC were ordained to the priesthood. Over Memorial Day weekend, 27 Holy Cross religious will celebrate the 65th, 60th, 50th, and 25th years of ordination, as well as the 60th and 50th years of religious profession. That's a lot of history there! I've listed their names inside and invite your continued prayers for them.

From June 13-16, there will be an Assembly of the members of the Indiana and Eastern Provinces of priests and brothers. This will be a first-time event for the combined Provinces, and serve as preparation for the July 1st merger of the Eastern Province into the Indiana Province. At that time, we will become the **United States Province of Priests and Brothers**.

NOTE: for those who have remembered "Priests of Holy Cross Indiana Province" in your Wills or Bequests, there is no need to make a change. The former title will exist indefinitely in the background for precisely these kinds of situations.

Already changes are being made in preparation for the merger. You will see new logos and letterheads, for example. Undoubtedly you will hear more about my brothers from the Eastern Province and the good work they do for the mission of Holy Cross. These are exciting and complex times, and we appreciate your support as we work through it.

My own involvement as a writer for the Association may change too, since I've reached the stage of what is called "Active Retirement". After 26 years of this ministry, the well is starting to run a little dry, and there are stirrings within for a change in ministry. Nothing has been decided yet...there's still many things that need to be looked at. I'm still extremely happy walking the journey with you, but I might need a new pair of shoes!

I pray you have a happy and safe summer, with time for some relaxation, even if it be just sitting in the backyard with a beer or ice tea or margarita! If gas prices stay as high as they are, there's not gonna be a whole lotta travelling!

Love deeply, pray faithfully, laugh often!

★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★

MAY APPEAL

This May, we ask you to keep the needs of our elderly, retired, and ill religious at Holy Cross House in your prayers, as I can assure you the men who live there remember you daily at Mass and in their prayer. Though not able to do as much as they did when younger, I know you will find them at all hours in the chapel...their ministry is now a ministry of prayer for the Church

★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★