

In Support of the Employee Free Choice Act

by Bishop Gabino Zavala

As a Roman Catholic community of faith, we are committed to the dignity and freedom of all persons. We are particularly moved when the dignity of working men and women is threatened. The right of workers to freely associate and form unions without fear of intimidation or retaliation is consistent with the democratic principles that sustain our society and ensure the quality of life for its citizens. This right is also consistent with the precepts and teaching of the Roman Catholic tradition. The social teachings of the Church have always held that the promotion and defense of the dignity of the laborer, created in God's image and likeness, is integral to the proper ordering of every healthy society. We are morally obliged, therefore, to stand with workers when attempts are made to compromise that dignity which issues directly from God.

As the United States now endures what is perhaps one of the greatest economic crises in its history, it is vitally necessary to recognize that we cannot recover the health of our economy and our society without ensuring that the dignity and freedom of every worker is secure. Every worker is entitled to fair wages, adequate benefits, and safe and dignified working conditions. The vital core of the American economy is the middle class, which is comprised of workers and small business owners, and it will continue to diminish unless these rights are respected and heeded.

The right of workers to organize and join unions is essential to the dignity and welfare of workers, and it is a right that today is radically threatened. When employees begin to discuss the formation of a union, for example, they are routinely harassed and intimidated, their jobs are

The freedom to join trade unions and the effective action of unions...are meant to deliver work from the mere condition of a 'commodity' and to guarantee its dignity... The right of association is a natural right of the human being... Indeed, the formation of unions cannot... be prohibited by the state because the state is bound to protect natural rights...

(Pope John Paul II, *Centesimus Annus*, 199)

threatened, and many become too afraid to even speak of a union out loud. This rampant practice among too many employers deeply offends the conscience of our democracy and faith community.

The Employee Free Choice Act intends to address and counter some of the more egregious violations of workers' dignity that are today pervasive for so many workers. This legislation would allow workers to form and join unions as certainly and as freely as they might join a church community or a civic organization. Workers would be able to cast their vote for a union from the safety and security of their own homes simply by signing and submitting union authorization cards. Additionally, the legislation would impose just penalties on employers who attempt to illegally interfere with this democratic right of their employees.

As a people of faith, we are committed to the health of our nation, its economy, and to the working men and women who provide us with indispensable goods and vitally necessary services, we make this appeal to the conscience of every member of the United States Congress to vote in favor of the Employee Free Choice Act, to ensure the democratic right of workers to form unions, to secure the health of our economy and our society by promoting and defending the dignity of every worker.

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