



# The Rank and File Catholic

(Connecting the teaching of the Church with the struggles of Labor)

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## Politics of Faith vs. Politics of Fear

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Sometimes it seems the most effective structure for today's political campaigns is one that elicits fear. "If you vote for 'Candidate A' he will undermine our national values and destroy our way of life." "A vote for 'Candidate B' will surely result in making us more vulnerable to attack!" In wave after wave the fear mongering washes over us in sixty-second sound-bites. Political ads constantly warn of what we must be on guard against. As Christians, however, we are reminded that God has a different vision for us.

We are not to live in fear, or to cast our precious votes based upon fear. Rather, our lives and our elections are to be testaments of love (from the Latin word "caritas" or charity) to what this nation and our world can become. In *Deus Caritas Est*, Pope Benedict XVI explained that "charity must animate the entire lives of the lay faithful and therefore also their political activity, lived as 'social charity'" (no. 29).

That is why the U.S. Bishops in their document, *Forming Consciences for Faithful Citizenship*, tell us that it is not enough to just state what we fear or are against. Rather, we are to articulate with our voices and our votes what we stand for: "Both opposing evil *and* doing good are essential obligations" (no. 24). Therefore, our votes are not to be considered so much as barriers against what we fear, but as building blocks for a just, peaceful and loving Kingdom of God on earth.

We might then say that a stand against abortion is imperative, but so too the bishops tell us, is the demand for political leaders who will do the things necessary to alleviate the perceived need for such tragedies. Are the candidates and parties willing to undergo the labor pains necessary to birth a new health care system? Can they conceive and fully fund a plan for affordable daycare? Do they dare to deliver adequate family leave laws that are helpful and enforceable? Can they create and sustain an environment which is genuinely nurturing for full and fair collective bargaining? Will they push for living wages? All of these things might allow more room for a hard-pressed young couple or a frightened single mother to truly consider choosing life!

The challenge of forming consciences is great. We cannot just say we are against NAFTA or against immigration. We must struggle with the difficult questions that divide us and we must face the great wall of reality before us in regard to immigration issues. Our faith demands that we force our political leaders to hammer out policies which value the rights of traditional U.S. workers while respecting the human dignity of laborers in other countries and immigrant workers within our borders.

But all of the above work is challenging, time consuming and often less than clear-cut. In short, it may be helpful to remember that the politics of fear usually begin and end with our own immediate and often short-sighted self-interest. The politics of faith is rooted in charity and leads us forward towards a just solution for all.

## Obama vs. McCain for President

By: Todd Johnson,

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The Rank and File Catholic (TRAFC) newsletter staff and contributors unanimously support Senator **Obama** for President of the United States! Below are some of issues which we feel reinforce treating workers with dignity and respect. The Church has always stood on the side of forming workable and enforceable unions where workers are paid prevailing wages and getting the benefits they deserve under safe working conditions. His opposition to NAFTA and CAFTA is very encouraging! His support for OSHA is great!

The following data was taken from the AFL-CIO web page [www.aflcio.org](http://www.aflcio.org) and the Associated Builders web page: [www.abc.org](http://www.abc.org). Obama Opposed Disqualifying Millions of Workers from Overtime and Equal Pay Protections. Obama voted against a measure that would have disqualified as many as 10 million workers from minimum wage, overtime pay and equal pay protections under the Fair Labor Standards Act. (S.Amdt. 128 to S. 256, Vote 27, 3/7/05)

Obama: Construction Workers Must Make Prevailing Wage. Obama said, "We need to make sure workers building America's infrastructure are making the prevailing wage and getting the benefits they deserve." He voted against a proposal to strip prevailing wage requirements from bridge construction projects. (S.Amdt. 2844 to H.R. 3074, Vote 334, 9/12/07; Barack Obama speech to Building Trades Conference, 4/15/08)

Obama Voted for Harsher Penalties for Employers That Violate OSHA and Wage Protections. Obama supported an amendment that made "willful" or "grossly negligent" safety and health violations of the Occupational Safety and Health Act (OSHA) a criminal felony, provided back pay to undocumented workers in cases of employer wage-and-hour violations and increased fines for wage-and-hour infractions and OSHA violations. (S.Amdt. 4106 to S. 2611, Vote 141, 5/23/06)

Obama clearly states his belief in unions in the following link; <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kJ3ibE6LtEE>

## McCain OPPOSES OUR FREEDOM TO FORM UNIONS

McCain Voted Against the Employee Free Choice Act but For a National Right-to-Work for Less Law.

McCain voted against the Employee Free Choice Act, which would level the playing field for workers trying to form unions. He voted for a National Right-to-Work for Less law that would attempt to eliminate unions altogether. [H.R. 800, Vote #227, 6/26/07; S. 1788 Vote #188, 7/10/96]

McCain Voted to Allow Employers to Hire Permanent Replacements During a Strike. McCain voted against ending debate on a bill that would bar employers from hiring permanent replacements for striking workers. [S. 55, Vote #189, 7/13/94]

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Back issues of TR AFC may be found on Fr. Shonis's WEB page, [www.thecatholicjourney.com](http://www.thecatholicjourney.com) under "THE RANK AND FILE CATHOLIC" Tab.

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## The Chaplain's Corner

### CAN A PRACTICING CATHOLIC VOTE FOR Mr. OBAMA? ...YES!

There are some politicians in this country as well as pastors that would like us to think that the Catholic bishops have endorsed a particular political party; however, they have not! Just the opposite, as the Bishops document Forming Consciences for Faithful Citizenship states, "the responsibility to make choices in political life rests with each individual in the light of a properly formed conscience". A conscience formed in the light of the Church's teaching...absolutely, but still the freedom of the individual conscience.

Abortion is an intrinsic evil (the means cannot justify the end), but so is torture and racism. The Church's social teaching is broad and covers many areas and no political party consistently upholds them all. Neither the Republican nor Democratic Party platforms are totally in agreement with the Church's social thinking. The Church's social tradition spans a long continuum e.g. pro-life, anti-capital punishment, against the war in Iraq, the right of labor to organize, anti-euthanasia, against racism, support of affordable healthcare. So whether a practicing Catholic votes for John McCain or Barack Obama neither is any less a Catholic for doing it. In fact by exercising their right to vote they are fulfilling their God-given duty as responsible citizens.

#### The Chaplain's Corner continued:

#### Interview with Herman E. Felder President Local 541 Service Employees International Union (SEIU)

On Thursday, July 3<sup>rd</sup>, I interviewed Herman Felder a member of St. George Parish in Louisville, Kentucky and President of Local 541 SEIU Racetrack Employees Union. Herman is leading Local 541 in the first strike ever against Ellis Raceway, Henderson, Kentucky. When I talked with Herman Ellis Raceway had just announced that due to a dispute with the horsemen association the racing season had been cancelled. Since then however, an agreement was reached with the horsemen's association and the track is scheduled to open on July 11<sup>th</sup>. The following day, July 4<sup>th</sup>, I visited the picket line and spoke with the strikers. I think they realize that their jobs no longer exist and yet their spirits and morale were positive and strong.

Herman introduced me to the workers and I had an opportunity to talk with them and to offer a prayer. This strike began in December and they have been on the picket line throughout a long cold winter. Sometimes you win a strike and sometimes you lose, but workers who have the courage to stand up for themselves on behalf of their families are **never** losers. We may lose individual battles but in the end **justice will prevail** and the war will be won.

Fr. Anthony Shonis.

## The Editor's Corner

The 2008 presidential election is of critical importance to America's working families. The American dream is veering off-course and we have come to a decisive fork in the road. The choice of this election involves either taking the course that will provide some of the same decision making that has put us on this current downward slope, or we can choose to pursue a different route.

How you vote is a deeply personal and private decision. Because voting is such a sacred and defining feature of our democracy, it demands that we take time to study the differing visions of America being proposed by the presidential campaigns of Senator McCain and Senator Obama.

It would seem that the choice of this election involves either taking the course that will provide some of the same decision making that has put us on our current downward drift or we can pursue a fresh, brighter route.

Senator McCain, by his voting record and actions' demonstrate an unquestionable alliance and support of the failed Bush Administration policies (95% of the time) that have pushed our great nation off course. In issues that are of direct interest to all Rank and File workers, he voted for and continues to support NAFTA. He opposes the Employee Free Choice Act. He supports replacement of "striking" workers. He favors "Right to Work Legislation". He supports taxing your employer-provided health benefits. He has spoken in favor of "reviewing" OSHA policies to ensure they do not overburden employers.

Senator Obama on the other hand has pledged to end tax breaks for corporations sending jobs over seas. He has pledged to support prevailing wage laws and to look for alternative energy solution in an attempt to make our nation more independent from foreigners. His record, although brief, has been one of unquestionable support for those who labor to support their families. His short time in Washington has been a plus to working men and women. He has been untainted by Washington's ways and as a result, can bring a fresh approach that is not confined by party labels.

Mike Roby

### VOTE CHANGE, VOTE OBAMA!

WASHINGTON – *An American Catholic Tradition*, the U.S. bishops' [2008 Labor Day statement](#) calls for "renewed vigor as we seek to build together a society that cares for its own, reaches out to the poor and vulnerable, and offers true hope to all".

TR AFC staff HIGHLY recommends reading this link!