



The Rank and File Catholic

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

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Don't Let It Happen To You!!

By: Andy Meyers

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Earlier this year the state of Indiana and their elected leaders decided to go against public option and ram the proposed "right to work" bill through the state's political chambers and on to the governor desk where he signed into law the most blatantly anti-worker bill on the market. With the passing of this bill, Indiana has become the 23rd "right to work" state in our country.

What is the purpose of "right to work" laws? The supporters of such laws claim that if a state adopts R.T.W it will be more attractive to businesses which in turn would provide more jobs for the public workforce. Fair enough, right? If true maybe but... what happens if the National Right to Work Committee gets their way and over 50% of the states adopt R.T.W.? Well... if the U.S. House, Senate, and President would like to make it a national law they can. They can pass a national R.T.W. policy and all 50 states will now be R.T.W. states. Hmm...

Now which states will benefit in job growth due to businesses moving in? Through the smoke screen of proposed job growth that has been created by our illustrious politicians, I believe the answer could be found: **Union Busting 101!!**

R.T.W. laws can cripple the financial status of Unions and therefore provide fewer challenges to the employers when they discriminate or take advantage of their employees. Unions provide knowledge, legal assistance, and financial support where the workers would be at a distinct disadvantage against the corporations. What better way for the employers to have total control of their employees then to get rid of the organizations that can provide assistance to the average Joe where they would otherwise be at the mercy of the employer.

Unions have been the ultimate combatant for the working class against powerful greedy corporations who aren't interested in the wellbeing of others. Unions have brought us the "family and medical leave act", the 40 hour work week, job safety laws, employer provided health care as well as child labor laws to protect our children. Unions have also brought up the wages and standard of living for all of us whether you belong to a Union or not.

What effects will this have on Hoosier family's financial status? R.T.W. states have seen their wages diminish and statistics show R.T.W. states have anywhere from \$1,000 to \$5,000 a year less income per worker than non R.T.W. states. For families with two people in the workforce that's up to a \$10,000 cut in income. What's going to happen to that child college fund? What about the family vacation? What about school books? The budget must be cut somewhere.

The truth is only two R.T.W. states have seen any job growth over the last 10 years. North Dakota and South Dakota have seen an increase in employment after they discovered their lands to be rich in oil. I'll admit their economies have been booming as of late but there is no correspondence between that and their R.T.W. laws. As a matter of fact the two states passed their laws years ago, 1947 and 1948 respectively, well before their economic boom. Needless to say, this Hoosier is hoping for an oil discovery somewhere within our borders.

What is the future of Hoosier health coverage? Once again, statistics show that R.T.W. states do not provide their employees the opportunity for health care coverage nearly as often as the non R.T.W. states. The death rate among children in R.T.W. states is significantly higher than non R.T.W. states. This is obviously due to the lack of health care coverage provided. The poverty level also increases dramatically where R.T.W. laws are in place. Common sense tells us that an increased poverty level leads to increased abortions.

The effects of R.T.W. go against all our Church's beliefs. Our Lord speaks to us on numerous occasions about standing United against wrongdoers, looking after one another and helping those in need. With that said, here are a few excerpts from the good book that I believe speak of some of the issues presented above.

(Proverbs 28:19) *"He who works his land will have abundant food, but the one who chases fantasies will have his fill of poverty."*

(James 5:4) *"Look! The wages you failed to pay the workmen who mowed your fields are crying out against you. The cries of the harvesters have reached the ears of the Lord Almighty."*

(Ephesians 6:9) *"Do not threaten them [employees], since you know that he who is both their Master and yours is in heaven, and there is no favoritism with him."*

Stand Up for Worker's Rights

By: Chad Mills

Plumbers & Pipefitters Local 633

St. Mary of the Woods Parish, Whitesville, KY

First I would like to introduce myself; I am a Catholic who attends St. Mary of the Woods church in Whitesville, KY. I have been employed by the Plumbers & Pipefitters Local 633 for the past 20 years.

I am currently working on the OMHS new hospital in Owensboro. This project employs nearly 800 people, some of which are organized labor and some which are not. About half the workers are not from the local area. The other half who are from the local area, about 95% are hired through local union halls. So obviously when you hire from local union halls, you employ more local people. As organized labor on this particular project, we enjoy better working conditions, wages, insurance and pensions.

Lately there has been a lot of talk about Right to Work and we as organized labor do feel like everyone has a right to work but for decent wages and benefits. I have always heard that Unions were formed to make an honest person an honest living and I think the Good Lord would absolutely agree.

As Union members, we need to remember what it is all about, to fight for the less fortunate and not against them. Everyone deserves what we have and I urge each and every one of you to stand up for workers' rights.

Significant Dates in Labor History

March 25, 1911—The Triangle Shirt Waist Fire

A fire in lower Manhattan kills 145 women workers at the Triangle Shirt Waist Fire. The tragedy highlights the harsh conditions which young women had to work, evoking the public sympathy or reform

May 10, 1894—Pullman Strike

Union workers walk out of the factory of the Pullman Company in Pullman, Illinois. The strike organized by Eugene V. Debs and the American Railway union will end in total defeat.

June 27, 1905—IWW Founded

Western miners and other activists from the Industrial Workers of the World met at the convention in Chicago. The IWW, or Wobblies, is one of the most radical of all organized labor groups. Though they will achieve only limited success in moving their agenda forward, they will inspire generations of labor activists with their militant spirit.

September 3, 1916—Adamson Act

The Adamson Act established an 8-hour workday for employees of interstate railroads, with overtime for longer hours.

The Chaplain's Corner Catholic Priests Organize

By: Fr. Anthony Shonis

Holy Name of Jesus Parish, Henderson, KY

Recently I joined an organization of Catholic Priests named Association of U.S. Catholic Priests (AUSCP). It is not a union at least not officially. Officially it is an association of U.S. Catholic priests who seek to be a voice of hope within our pilgrim Church.

Its goal is to continue to celebrate and implement the vision of Vatican Council II as well as advocate for the spiritual, physical and psychological needs of priests.

This may sound like a radical idea, but actually Canon Law (Church law) is very supportive of priests associations and other countries have them e.g. Ireland, El Salvador, Austria, Australia.

People organizing to promote their goals is the most normal thing in the world. Not only the working people who have a union, but all professions have their professional associations that promotes their cause.

We know one of the hardest institutions to organize is hospitals. And by and large the majority of doctors see no reason for union in hospitals and yet doctors themselves are organized with the American Medical Association. All workers and, yes priests are workers, know that to safe guard their rights it is vital that they speak with one voice.

My hope is that the Church's hierarchy will have the good sense to recognize that AUSCP is not a threat to the Church's life but is a resource that they can count on to help spread the Gospel.

Workers and Their Unions: Affirmation and Challenge

The following is an excerpt from the Labor Day Statement of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops:

Human Costs and Moral Challenges of a Broken Economy

By: Bishop Stephen E. Blaire

Bishop of Stockton

**Chairman, Committee on Domestic Justice and
Human Development**

Beginning in *Rerum Novarum*, the Church has consistently supported efforts of workers to join together to defend their rights and protect their dignity. Pope Leo XIII taught that the right of workers to choose to join a union was based on a natural right and that it was the government's obligation to protect that right rather than undermine it (*Rerum Novarum*, no. 51). This teaching has been affirmed consistently by his successors. Pope John Paul II, in his powerful encyclical *Laborem Exercens*, noted unions "defend the existential interests of workers in all sectors in which their rights are concerned. . . . [They] are an indispensable element of social life, especially in modern industrialized societies" (no. 20). Most recently, in *Caritas in Veritate*, Pope Benedict XVI

said, "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 . . ." (no. 25).

There have been some efforts, as part of broader disputes over state budgets, to remove or restrict the rights of workers to collective bargaining as well as limit the role of unions in the workplace. Bishops in Wisconsin, Ohio, and elsewhere have faithfully and carefully outlined Catholic teaching on worker rights, suggesting that difficult times should not lead us to ignore the legitimate rights of workers. Without endorsing every tactic of unions or every outcome of collective bargaining, the Church affirms the rights of workers in public and private employment to choose to come together to form and join unions, to bargain collectively, and to have an effective voice in the workplace.

The Church's relationship with the labor movement is both supportive and challenging. Our Church continues to teach that unions remain an effective instrument to protect the dignity of work and the rights of workers. At their best, unions are important not just for the economic protections and benefits they can provide for their members, but especially for the voice and participation they can offer to workers. They are important not only for what they achieve for their members, but also for the contributions they make to the whole society.

This does not mean every outcome of bargaining is responsible or that all actions of particular unions--or for that matter employers--merit support. Unions, like other human institutions, can be misused or can abuse their role. The Church has urged leaders of the labor movement to avoid the temptations of excessive partisanship and the pursuit of only narrow interests. Workers and their unions, as well as employers and their businesses, all have responsibility to seek the common good, not just their own economic, political, or institutional interests.

The teaching that workers have the right to choose freely to form and belong to unions and other associations without interference or intimidation is strong and consistent. At the same time, some unions in some places have taken public positions that the Church cannot support, which many union members may not support, and which have little to do with work or workers' rights. Leaders of the Church and the labor movement cannot avoid these differences, but should address them in principled, respectful and candid dialogue. This should not keep us from working on our own and together to advance common priorities of protecting worker rights, economic and social justice, overcoming poverty, and creating economic opportunity for all.

Special Event

Nationally known speaker, Gregory Pierce, will speak at Holy Name of Jesus Catholic Church at 7 pm on Tuesday, May 1, the Feast of St. Joseph the Worker. Mr. Pierce is the author of *Spirituality at Work* and *The World as It Should Be*.

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PUBLISHER'S NOTE: The major expense we have in the publication of this newsletter is the cost of distribution! It would be helpful if we could e-mail it to as many as possible. If e-mail would work for you, please send your e-mail address to: mcmurray@insightbb.com. THANKS

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

"The Rank and File Catholic" (TR AFC) newsletter debuted on Television on September 30th, 2005. This ½ hour program was recorded at the "West Kentucky Community and Technical College" located in Paducah, KY as part of a series titled "THE UNION LABEL" and was hosted by Berry Craig. Fr. Anthony Shonis, Chaplain of TR AFC, and Mike Roby, Editor of TR AFC, were his guest. A "FREE" DVD of the program may be obtained from the TR AFC staff.

Additional information may be found on the internet at:
United States Conference of Catholic Bishops; www.usccb.org/sdwp/national/labor.htm
CATHOLIC CONFERENCE OF KENTUCKY: www.ccky.org
The Catholic – Labor Network: www.catholiclabor.org
Catholic Social Teaching: www.osjspm.org