



The Rank and File Catholic

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

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

LABOR DAY STATEMENT SAYS RENEWED RESPECT FOR WORKERS IS KEY TO RENEWED ECONOMY

By: Bishop Stephen E. Blaire

Bishop of Stockton

Chairman, Committee on Domestic Justice and Human Development

WASHINGTON—People of faith stand with people who've been left behind and should seek economic renewal that makes workers and their families a central concern, according to the annual Labor Day Statement from the Committee on Domestic Justice and Human Development of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB).

"Millions of Americans suffer from unemployment, underemployment or are living in poverty as their basic needs too often go unmet. This represents a serious economic and moral failure for our nation," wrote the committee's chairman, Bishop Stephen E. Blaire of Stockton, California, in the statement, *Placing Work and Workers at the Center of Economic Life*.

Bishop Blaire cited the 12 million Americans officially unemployed, the millions more who are underemployed or who have given up looking for work, 10 million "working poor" families, and 46 million people, including 16 million children, living in poverty as a sign of a broken economy. He cited the words of Pope Benedict XVI, who said poverty often "results from a violation of the dignity of human work," either because of a lack of job opportunities or because, in the words of Pope John Paul II, "low value is put on work and the rights that flow from it."

According to Bishop Blaire, the "terrible human costs" of a broken economy include workers being exploited or mistreated, stagnant or falling wages, and stress on families. As a result, "many employees struggle for just wages, a safe workplace, and a voice in the economy, but they cannot purchase the goods they make, stay in the hotels they clean, or eat the food they harvest, prepare, or serve."

"An economy that allows this exploitation and abuse demands our attention and action," wrote Bishop Blaire. He noted that the bishops work to provide hope and help to exploited workers through programs such as USCCB Migration and Refugee Services and the

Catholic Campaign for Human Development, but said that "everyone and every institution" in society—businesses, government, unions and private institutions—should collaborate to support workers and create an economy "that serves the person rather than the other way around."

"This Labor Day, millions of working people and their families have urgent and compelling needs," Bishop Blaire concluded. "I ask you to join me in a special prayer for them and all workers, especially those without a job struggling to live in dignity. May God guide our nation in creating a more just economy that truly honors the dignity of work and the rights of workers."

The full 2012 Labor Day statement can be found online in English at www.usccb.org/issues-and-action/human-life-and-dignity/labor-employment/labor-day-statement-2012.cfm

WHAT SIDE OF THE TABLE ARE YOU ON? SOLIDARITY IN THE WORKPLACE

By: Linda Houck

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It's no secret that union membership and strength is under attack from some political agendas in this country, but it may not be as obvious that we face an attack on our solidarity from an unexpected place: within our very ranks.

That's right - the "Solidarity Forever" phrase that's a mantra in union circles is, like our Catholic faith, something that needs to be lived out in everyday life to have real meaning and substance. Our regular workplace behaviors sometimes belie our union cards, and one of the most troubling behaviors that undermines union strength is what's known as "mobbing."

Mobbing has been identified as a group behavior in workplaces that involves the targeting and emotional abuse of a particular co-worker by peers and supervisors in the workplace. For those who are familiar with the concept of "bullying" that is being combatted in our schools as a destructive behavior, mobbing is nothing less than a form of workplace bullying, and it can have consequences not only for the individual employee, but also for the strength of the union representing each worker. The difference between bullying and mobbing, however, is that while

bullying is often instigated and directed by one person, mobbing has a component of collective aggression that takes over, even though the spark may be lit by one person.

In many cases, the mobbing victim is a competent, strong and even creative worker who may be envied by co-workers or perceived by bosses as a threat to their own jobs. Through intimidating behavior, including isolation, exclusion, humiliation and sometimes sabotage, the worker is neutralized in the workplace. For the victim, the emotional abuse can lead to insomnia, poor concentration, multiple stress-related health issues, and eventually to leaving the workplace altogether.

Union leaders are often aware of the supervisor who sometimes “picks on” one or two specific workers, and we have some recourse to combat abusive supervisors. But when that supervisor encourages the worker’s colleagues to participate in the abuse and invites or instigates mobbing, or when collective aggression against one individual develops within a bargaining unit, the union leader now has to consider the impact of this behavior on the entire bargaining unit as well as the victim.

Why, as co-members of a workplace organization designed to protect the rights of workers through solidarity, would some workers “mob” another worker? Well, just like the schoolyard bully and his cohort, the workers, however misguided, may feel a sense of superiority, power, and control in having a profound effect on someone else’s life and career. Because of their cooperation with the supervisor to target and abuse a co-worker, they may also enjoy some benefits in the workplace: lighter work duty, better assignments, and minor promotions within the bargaining unit. This favoritism and reward for acting out of solidarity with union brothers and sisters can be the seed of destruction planted within the union. And it should be no surprise that targeting of effective union reps is often attempted by management; if they can encourage lack of confidence in and lack of support for those who speak out the loudest in the workplace, they are halfway to winning the battle.

How does mobbing manifest itself in the workplace? Sometimes the identification of a target comes about when the worker “blows the whistle” on some management behavior or brings a concern to management about some controversial issue that reflects on how the workplace is supervised. The worker may be called “difficult” and portrayed to his or her co-workers as someone with a negative attitude and someone whom they should avoid, lest they be seen in the same light by management. The behavior can escalate from there into true isolation and harassment.

What we see in some places is that co-workers are encouraged to identify minor issues in dealing with this person and to take those issues to management, who are “monitoring” the situation. Thus, the little everyday issues in the workplace that might be simply discussed and ironed out between co-workers become documented issues of job competency on file with management, and they ultimately impact the employee’s performance review or evaluation. But

employees can also contribute to this kind of documentation unwittingly, without malicious intent. For example, one of our union reps was asked by management to speak to a fellow employee about her attire and did so, thinking that she was sparing the employee an official reprimand. A few weeks later, in a performance review, the question of appropriate attire was addressed, along with the comment that it had even been noted by her co-workers. Fortunately, the union rep who sat in on the review asked appropriate questions about the situation, and the issue was withdrawn from the evaluation.

Union leaders need to make employees aware of the need for solidarity in the workplace and remind them of their roles in the workplace structure. I frequently remind my local members that they are not supervisors; we do our jobs and let our supervisors do theirs. And, while personality conflicts are inevitable in the workplace, we all need to remember that we are part of the same union that exists to protect each and every one of us. The behavior that strikes at one person in that unit may someday strike at any of us. Mobbing, bullying, and cooperation with management in activity against any one member are actions that work directly against the goals of collective bargaining and against our collective interests in the workplace.

THE ELECTION IS ABOUT PROTECTING THE POOR AND SAVING THE MIDDLE CLASS

*By: Larry Bulman, St. Michael's the Archangel
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As a practicing Catholic and an officer of a major international union, I find myself in the unique position of defending both my faith and my principles. As the member of a proud and strong union family, I have personal experience with the enormous good that unions do. As a devout Catholic, I also have personal experience with the deep and profound impact of faith in my daily life.

My union has endorsed Barack Obama for re-election as President of the United States, an endorsement I fully support. I know that many in the Catholic community have had issues with the President for some of his policies. I also know we will not all agree with the President all of the time, but there is absolutely no doubt that Barack Obama has the best interests of the American people at heart. He is a Democrat with a capital “D,” but he is also a democrat (small “d”) in the sense that he believes in the strength and integrity of our democratic system and he has proven that time and again as President of the United States. There is no one in politics today who cares more about the poor and the middle class than he does, and he has fought valiantly to protect all of us in the face of the most partisan and divisive political climate this nation has ever seen.

Each of us must answer to a higher power when it comes to the personal choices we make. The decisions my fellow Catholics make that are deeply private

should remain exactly that—between a man or woman and God. It is not for me to say what you or anyone else must do. The choices that you make in regard to your personal lives are simply none of my business, nor are they the business of any elected official, despite what some would have you believe. Unfortunately, the opportunists out there are all too willing to seize on some of these issues—like birth control—and use them to enflame others for no good reason other than to gain political capital.

Don't allow yourself to be used in this way. Look at the bigger picture and understand that Barack Obama is fighting hard to help the poor and disadvantaged, and to restore our fading middle class. His policies have at their heart a compassion and concern that has been missing for a long time in our political discourse. He has brought healthcare to tens of millions of Americans—among them many children—despite the rancor and rhetoric of the far right who seem to not care that tens of thousands of Americans die every year because they have no health care.

Like many of my fellow union members, I have been dismayed over the past few years at the attacks on labor unions and all that we have achieved throughout our existence. Many of the benefits and privileges you enjoy today were won through the blood, sweat and tears of those who went before us in the trade union movement. We are not the enemies of progress; we are the instruments of prosperity. Yes, the President of the United States is a friend of organized labor, but why shouldn't he be? We are the working men and women who not only help build this country but who also keep it running day to day. We have as much right at the table as corporate CEOs and wealth management people like Mitt Romney.

When Election Day arrives in just a few short months, I will be proud to say that I am a Catholic who is casting his vote for Barack Obama because I know he is the right man for our time.

***ACCURIDE ONCE OWNED BY BAIN CAPITAL**

The Accuride Corporation was once owned by Bain Capital in back in 1986. During this time they doubled its market share and increase profitability by 66% before it was sold off to Phelps Dodge for a profit of 116 million dollars. But at what cost....busting the union. The plants 420 union members were out of a job and most would never work at Accuride again.

The Catholic Church teaches that the right to organize is an inviolable human right, and to deliberately deprive people of their right to organize ... what do we call that? A mortal sin!

*Based on an article in *The Henderson Gleaner*
9/12/12 Chuck Stinnett Business Editor

The Chaplain's Corner Vatican Council II...50 Years Later Our Marching Orders

*By: Fr. Anthony Shonis
Holy Name of Jesus Parish, Henderson, KY*

Fifty years ago the Holy Spirit gave a gift to the Catholic Church ... Vatican Council II. This was an ecumenical council in which all the bishops of the Catholic Church around 2500 met for four years not to condemn of the modern world but to embrace the world.

“The joys, hopes, the grief and anguish of the people of our time are the joys and hope the grief and anguish of the followers of Christ as well”. Para. 1 The Church in the Modern World of the Modern World.

The changes that the Vatican Council II set in motion will not be fully realized for hundreds of years, but the direction has been set...the the Church will engage the modern world and throw its resources behind the struggle for justice and peace.

One area is the role of lay people (baptized Catholics) in the Vatican II's Dogmatic constitution on the Church “The laity by their very vocation seek the kind of God by engaging in temporal affairs ...they life in the ordinary circumstances of family and social life...they are called there by God so by exercising their proper function and being led by the spirit of the gospel, they can work for the sanctification of the world from within.”

This doesn't mean simply helping the priest with communion or serving on the parish council but it does mean that wherever people work for justice and freedom they are carrying out the mission of Christ. It means Catholics who join unions and participate in the struggle for workers rights are fulfilling the mission of Christ and doing the work of the Church.

Fr. Anthony Shonis

JOHN CARR...THANK YOU

John Carr retires after 25 years as a top policy advisor to our US catholic Bishops. John Carr was a true friend of labor and he help write the paper “Diocesan Construction Policies: Practicing What We Preach” which was the foundation of our Diocese of Owensboro's commitment to insure that all Churches in the Diocese are built with dignity.

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