



The Rank and File Catholic

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

Volume 10

Number 2

Henderson, Kentucky

September, 2014

Publisher:

Mary Anne McMurray
Holy Name of Jesus Parish,
Henderson, KY
mcmurray42420@gmail.com

Chaplain:

Fr. Anthony Shonis
Holy Name of Jesus Parish,
Henderson, KY
ashonis@holynameparish.net

Staff:

David O'Brien Suetholz
Kircher, Suetholz & Grayson PSC.
St. William Parish
Louisville, KY
dave@unionsidelawyers.com

Editor:

Todd Johnson,
Sprinkler Fitters LU 669
St. Stephen Cathedral,
Owensboro, KY
Org669@aol.com

2014 USCCB LABOR DAY STATEMENT

This year's Labor Day Statement focuses on unemployment among young people. Following are excerpts from that document:

Of particular concern is that "the unemployment rate for young adults in America, at over 13 percent, is more than double the national average (6.2 percent)". "...The situation is even worse in other parts of the world, with young adult joblessness reaching up to three and four times the national average even in places like England and Australia. In some countries, three-fourths of young people who work have resorted to the unstable and sometimes dangerous informal economy in an attempt to make ends meet. Pope Francis has said young people "call us to renewed and expansive hope, for they represent new directions for humanity and open us up to the future." (Evangelii Gaudium, No. 108)."

Meaningful and decent work is vital if young adults hope to form healthy and stable families. Work and family life "must be properly united and must properly permeate each other. In a way, work is a condition for making it possible to found a family, since the family requires the means of subsistence which man normally gains through work" (Laborem Exercens, No. 10).

Our challenge this Labor Day is to rise to the challenge of solidarity posed by Jesus when he commanded, "[L]ove one another. As I have loved you, so you also should love one another" (Jn 13:34). The Catechism of the Catholic Church teaches, "Socio-economic problems can be resolved only with the help of all the forms of solidarity: solidarity of the poor among themselves, between rich and poor, of workers among themselves, between employers and employees in a business, solidarity among nations and peoples" (No. 1941).

...we need to fix our broken immigration system to stop the exploitation and marginalization of millions of people as well as address the development needs of other countries. In doing so we would also level the playing field among workers, provide more opportunity for all who can work, and bring about a needed "change of attitude toward migrants and refugees" (Pope Francis, Message for the World Day of Migrants and Refugees).

Supporting policies and institutions that create decent jobs, pay just wages, and support family formation and stability will also honor the dignity of workers. Raising the minimum wage, more and better workforce training programs, and smarter regulations that minimize negative unintended consequences would be good places to start. In doing this we follow the lead of Pope Francis in rejecting an economy of exclusion and embracing an authentic culture of encounter. Our younger generations are counting on us to leave them a world better than the one we inherited.

LABOR DAY 2014

By Bill Londrigan

President, Kentucky State AFL-CIO

As we reflect on the contributions and importance of America's trade union movement, we would do well to remember that the fundamental rights enjoyed by all workers such as health and safety laws and regulations, social security benefits, wage and hour protections, child labor laws, pensions, health care and so much more were achieved only through the organized efforts of the working men and women of the American labor movement.

I have heard and read many predictions about the future of the American labor movement. Like a pendulum which swings from one side to the other with economic and political power split between the wealthy few and struggling masses, opposing viewpoints frame current discussions about the status of the American labor movement. It is easy to see which way the pendulum has swung during the past forty-plus years - in the direction of the few to the detriment of the many. The richest few have accumulated the greatest concentrations of wealth in history. While accumulating this unprecedented wealth they have denied workers an equitable share of the wealth they helped create.

The incomes of the top 1% have increased over 240% since 1979, corporate profits are at record levels while wages have stagnated, the middle class has shrunk, union density declined and those put in public office by the 1% have voted to cut off food stamps to millions of families as poverty rates soar.

Yet even if the pendulum has not really begun to swing away from the wealthy it may have reached its apex. We may be witnessing at this very moment in history the sparks of a resurgence of labor activism

with the potential to eclipse the worker uprising of the 1930s. Union resurgence is occurring in service sector occupations where wages remain lowest and the ability to provide for a family is virtually impossible without a second job and public assistance. It is happening right now in some of the larger cities, where much of the labor uprisings occurred during the 1930s – New York, Chicago, St. Louis, Detroit, Milwaukee.

Workers at fast food restaurants in cities across the nation are going public with their issues – low pay and benefits, long hours, lack of dignity. They have held one-day and two-day strikes, lunch time strikes, demonstrations and rallies to bring communities together to support their struggle for improved living and working conditions.

As a consequence fast food workers are finding they have common interests and struggles. Fast food and service workers recently held their first national conference in Chicago and have subsequently announced their intention to form the first fast food workers national union. Just as millions of workers learned in the 1930s, today's workers are also finding out that their only source of power is to be organized and the only way to be assured of a measure of fair remuneration and dignity on the job is through collective bargaining!

There is now much to be hopeful about. There is a stirring in the land. A spark has been lit. The rich have gotten too rich and the poor too poor and the rest squeezed in the declining middle. Just as the workers who occupied their workplaces in sit-down strikes sparked a mass movement of millions of workers who joined unions and created the great American middle-class, so too will the workers in our post-industrial service economy rise up and take control of their destinies and organize millions of like-minded, economically disenfranchised workers and spontaneously ignite the resurgence of the American trade union movement.

POPE FRANCIS ON WORK

As reported in the Boston Globe (July 5, 2014)

During a visit to Southern Italy's depressed Molise region, where the Pope Francis spoke to over 150,000 people, including industrial workers, farmers, local youth, the poor and unemployed, as well as the imprisoned and the elderly, he noted that "Not having food to eat isn't the worst part of being unemployed. We can go to a soup kitchen and be fed. The problem is that unemployment robs us of the dignity of bringing food to our tables."

Francis then asked the working class and intellectuals gathered in the university's great hall to find answers to the complex questions the current economic crisis poses. The way to do it, according to the pontiff, is by "being creative about the future".

THE MINIMUM WAGE: IT'S WORSE THAN YOU THOUGHT

By Vinnie Rotondaro

From the National Catholic Reporter (July 17, 2015).

The current federal minimum wage of \$7.25 per hour will net a full-time worker less than \$15,000 per year -- below the poverty line for a family with even ONE child. But millions of workers aren't even entitled to \$7.25. These include over 4 million tipped workers (or rather, workers who deserve tips) whose minimum wage is set at \$2.13.

SHOP LOCALLY

By Todd Johnson,

Sprinkler Fitters LU 669

St. Stephen Cathedral, Owensboro, KY

In a message to Amy Jackson, president and CEO of the Greater Owensboro Chamber of Commerce, Todd Johnson thanks Ms. Jackson for encouraging readers of the (August 3) Owensboro Messenger- Inquirer to shop local businesses as they compete with out-of-town stores.

Shopping local businesses certainly strengthens "our economy and turns dollars right here to support taxes, wages and reinvestment in our community." Owensboro is fortunate to have a variety of specialty shops as well as large chains that support our local economy. There is little reason to shop anywhere else, anytime.

With those thoughts in mind, I also would like to remind our politicians and local businesses to be loyal to other local businesses. When new retail outlets come to town with new construction, should incentives be in place for them to use local contractors and local labor? Do existing local businesses want us to buy local, but hope that we, as Owensboro-Daviess County residents, turn our heads when they use out-of-town contractors and labor to complete new projects?

A drive through the parking lots of the new Holiday Inn, the new apartment project on Ralph Avenue, Academy Sports and Aldi grocery store will reveal that most license plates are from out of town and out of state, and that includes the contractors.

Many of their paychecks will return to other cities. Our local contractors and construction workers should receive the same loyalty that local retail outlets hope to receive. Our local contractors and construction workers have back-to-school shopping to do. They, too, contribute to our community in various ways through charitable giving, local churches, local sports, the local chamber of commerce and local shopping.

AMERICA'S SCHIZOPHRENIA

By Fr. Oubre Sinclair

From *The Examiner*, Beaumont, TX (August 17, 2014)

Americans see the Statue of Liberty as a symbol of our most basic value: individual freedom. However we conveniently ignore where the statue came from, and the words that are actually engraved on its base.

The base of the Statue of Liberty addresses the poor of Europe, who looked to the United States as a refuge from their crushing economic poverty, and the state of continuous war.

The second strophe of *New Colossus* reads:

“Keep, ancient lands, your storied pomp!”
cries she with silent lips. “Give me your
tired, your poor, your huddled masses
yearning to breathe free, the wretched
refuge of your teeming shore.
Send these, the homeless, tempest-tost to
me,
I lift my lamp beside the golden door!”

Sadly, before the Statue of Liberty was erected, and these words were inscribed, Americans were already reluctant to welcome the tired, poor, huddled masses yearning to breathe free. This country's citizens fought a horrific war over the humanity of enslaved Africans.

Irish immigrants faced persecution, discrimination, and hatred by Americans who were already here.

On the west coast, Chinese immigrants, brought to the United States to meet the labor needs of the Gold Rush and the building on the transcontinental railroad, were looked upon with suspicion and as a threat to white workers. In response, the US passed the *Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882*, which barred immigration from China for 10 years under the penalty of imprisonment and deportation.

These very people, who were often disparaged, were the one's who mined our gold, dug our coal, and died in our mines. They built the railroads that stitched our nation together, and died along its tracks.

This hostility to workers is not limited to immigrants. America has a history of hating their worker citizens when they have had the audacity to become visible, or insufficiently compliant.

Set in Oklahoma and California, John Steinbeck tells the story of the Joads as they are driven from their dirt farm in Oklahoma by the great Dust Bowl to California. In California, they are not welcomed as fellow citizens and American refugees fleeing from a great natural disaster, but as cheap labor, a burden on society, and potential victims for rogue deputies.

Both Black and White Cajuns tell stories of discrimination because of their accent, their non-English background, and their Catholic heritage.

I believe that we have and continue to exploit domestic and immigrant workers because we do not truly see their face. Rather, we make them objects that invade our field of vision, and prevent us from seeing the world the way we want it to be.

As we ponder the massacres being carried out by ISIS, as we hear stories of modern slavery and human trafficking, and as we see images of bombed civilian neighborhoods, we want to scream, “How can a human being do this to another human being?” Yet the answer is as old as humanity, “They can do these things because they do not see the face or the person of the other.”

Our country continues to struggle with the tension produced by the words on the Statue of Liberty and its reaction to immigrants. With the recent influx of immigrant children, we have choices: Will we see the face of these children, and thereby see their humanity, and our divine bond as sons and daughters of God, or will we see them as other and as objects?

The Spanish philosopher, George Santayana, reminds us, “Those who do not remember their past are condemned to repeat their mistakes.” Let's remember our past with the descendants from Africa, let us remember our past with the Irish and Chinese immigrants, let us remember our past with our own Cajun grandfathers and grandmothers. If we do so, we will treat our new immigrants differently, and we will finally bring to life the words on the base of the Statue of Liberty: “Give me your tired, your poor, Your huddled masses yearning to breathe free, The wretched refuge of your teeming shore. Send these, the homeless, tempest-tost to me . . .”

BUILDING TRADES OFFER CAREER OPPORTUNITIES

By Fr. Anthony Shonis

From *The Gleaner*, Henderson, KY, (February 8, 2014), in a Letter to the Editor.

I loved the article on the Career and Technical Education unit (Jan. 10 edition of *The Gleaner*), especially the picture of the high school student in the welding mask.

I often think that going to college is overrated (having taught for 14 years at a university, I think I can say that).

If a young person has basic math skills, some mechanical aptitude and does not mind hard work, the building trades are wonderful.

Recently I was given a tour of the Training Center for the Plumbers and Pipefitters Local 663 in Owensboro. All the apprentices I spoke to that evening, and many of them were practicing their welds, were enthusiastic about becoming certified welders.

With the Plumbers and Pipefitters, it is a five-year apprenticeship program and it is hard because these classes are held in the evening after a day's work. But all the apprentices seemed to recognize that with

their welding skills came with a sustainable wage which gives them and their family a future. Also I saw the good work of the vocational students in the carpentry classes who were helping to build the Habitat House that Holy Name is sponsoring.

Published in the Editorial Page of The Gleaner (Henderson, KY) February 8, 2014

THE CHAPLAIN'S CORNER

Last Sunday, the Labor Day weekend, I preached at all the Masses a homily on the Catholic bishops continuing support for raising the minimum wage.

No one takes a vacation on the minimum wage or sets aside money for retirement on the minimum wage or sends their children to Catholic

schools on the minimum wage. The adults who work for the minimum wage are in 'survival mode'. We are now approaching one of the most stressful time for the Catholic community ...an election. The Catholic community at Holy Name is very diverse and we live in a society that is polarized, but from where I stand everyone is wearing a white hat, but honest decent people do have sincere political differences.

The word from the Catholic Bishops is do not let these political differences spill over into the Church. Do not wear political buttons at the Eucharist, do not put out political literature in the back of Church and do not use the Church facilities for a political rally, but Do VOTE!!!

Fr. Anthony Shonis

"The Rank and File Catholic" (TRAFc) 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 TRAFc, and Mike Roby, then Editor of TRAFc, were his guest. A "FREE" DVD of the program may be obtained from the TRAFc 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
Kentucky Labor Institute: www.KentuckyLaborInstitute.org

Current and back issues of "The Rank and File Catholic" (TRAFc) newsletter are also available at the Catholic - Labor Network website (<http://www.catholiclabor.org/R-F%20Catholic%20Nwsltr/R-F%20Catholic.html>).
Mail address to: mcmurray42420@gmail.com. THANKS