



The Rank and File Catholic

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

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Catholic Social Teaching for Today

BY: George E. Schultze, SJ**

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Catholic social teaching should guide our responses to the social and economic challenges of our day. For example, Catholic social doctrine teaches that the economy, government and technology are made to support men and women; men and women are not simply objects made to support these entities.

I have lived in California's Santa Clara Valley/Silicon Valley for most of my life. The traditional name recalls a great Catholic saint, and the other a material that is used in manufacturing microchips, the engines of the digital age. Mountain View, my hometown, is the headquarters of Google. Facebook is next door in Palo Alto, and Netflix is in nearby Los Gatos. They are now household names just like early valley companies Intel, Apple, and Hewlett-Packard.

Although the biotechnological revolution is now looming on the horizon; it is digital media that has the attention of everyone at the moment. We have at our fingertips: games, communication, music, technical information, and more—both good and bad. On the one hand, California has an unemployment rate hovering at 12% and a debt of \$26 billion; on the other hand, the private shares of Facebook have an estimated publicly-traded value of \$78 billion. No one can deny the technical achievements, societal benefits and financial successes of this generation, but I wonder whether iPod or droid sales will provide meaningful work for the unemployed and underemployed. While it makes no sense to become Neo-Luddites, Catholic social doctrine emphasizes the centrality of the human person in God's creation.

While studying at Cornell University's School of Industrial and Labor Relations in the 1970's, I heard faculty members predict the demise of the U.S. labor movement. Today union members are only 11.9 percent of the American workforce, over half of them are government employees, and in absolute numbers the U.S. has fewer union members at present than in 1983. Despite my protests, my professors were right. I will add that the National Labor Relations Act has failed to protect workers who organize, and the U.S. has no national labor policy. Nevertheless, people are now organizing more than ever, and with good-spirited people who are committed to solidarity, we might see changes that will make work life better for all of us. Remember: The Eastern Bloc no longer exists, and we are witnessing clear demands for democracy in Arab countries. Our social doctrine teaches that the truth sets us free and supports associations for our common good.

California is also the epicenter for the housing crisis that has rocked the nation. Whether you believe it was precipitated by misguided federal housing policy that promoted purchases by unqualified buyers or was due to the greed of American financiers, who made and sold risky loans, we all face decades of debt. The nation, state, and family are looking to cut costs and the legislative standoff in Madison, Wisconsin reflects the crisis. Our social doctrine teaches that government has a responsibility to assist its citizens but she also teaches that subsidiarity, leaving to the most immediate segment of society the responsibility of taking action where it is so capable, is the best means of preserving freedom and initiative (Catholic Catechism #2209). Unfortunately, California's public employee unions have campaigned against parental-notification when children seek an abortion and against traditional marriage between a man and a woman. Catholic social teaching upholds life in all its stages and calls the family the vital cell of society. Collective bargaining, yes; abuse of power, no. Santa Clara, our valley's patroness, was right, "Live and hope in the Lord, and let service be according to reason." Catholic social teaching remains our primary guide. **

Governors Impact on Labor Movement

By: Todd Johnson

Unions are under attack by many governors attempting to balance state budgets on the backs of workers. Governors in Michigan, Ohio, Indiana, Wisconsin, and Missouri are each pushing anti union legislation. Attacks are from many angles. "Right to Work", repealing prevailing wage, stripping collective bargaining rights, each to undermine the strength of workers and their unions. In March of 2006, Kentucky experienced attempts at similar anti union legislation under the guidance of then Governor Ernie Fletcher. Workers banded together in protest and more than 5000 of us marched to the capitol in Frankfort to show our displeasure. That battle on workers' rights was won by the workers. Governor Fletcher's anti union agenda did not pass. We are now fortunate in that we have a governor who is sympathetic to the plight of Kentucky's workers. The following is a partial list of accomplishments for Governor Steve Beshear in support of Kentucky's workers:

- Kentucky Economic Development Finance Authority increased incentive amount for Ford Motor Company Louisville Assembly Plant and Kentucky Truck Plant which opened the door for up to \$1 billion in combined investment and more than 7,000 total jobs for Kentucky.
- Department of Labor elevated to Cabinet status.
- Governor Beshear has committed to veto any legislation to repeal or amend our prevailing wage law.
- Governor Beshear has committed to veto right to work legislation.
- Governor Beshear supports public sector Project Labor Agreements (PLA). He intervened in a matter involving the Carter County School Board in support of PLA. The Commissioner of Education issued a letter of support of PLA on the project in Carter County.
- Governor Beshear has appointed various members of organized labor to multiple boards and commissions.
- Governor Beshear allocated \$750,000 in workforce development discretionary funds for pre-apprenticeship training grants for the construction industry. \$250,000 each was awarded to Owensboro's, Louisville's and Northern Kentucky's Building and Construction Trades Councils.
- Governor Beshear appointed attorney and advocate David Suetholz as General Counsel to Kentucky Labor Cabinet. *
- Directed the Kentucky Labor Cabinet, the Unemployment Insurance Division, the Department of Revenue, and the Department of Workers Claims to work together to share information relative to contractors that misclassify their workers as "independent contractors."
- Directed the Kentucky Finance Cabinet to implement procedures to improve enforcement of "responsible bidder" policies regarding contractors and subcontractors doing business with the Commonwealth of Kentucky.
- Appointed card carrying union member Mark Brown as Secretary of Labor.
- Appointed card carrying union member Mike Dixon as Commissioner of Work Place Standards.

As a Catholic union worker in the state of Kentucky, I thank Governor Beshear for not only his union support, but also for defending the dignity and respect of all Kentucky workers.

**Rev. Dr. George E. Schultz, SJ teaches Catholic social thought at St. Patrick's Seminary. In 2007 he published "Strangers in a Foreign Land: The Organizing of Catholic Latinos in the U. S."

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**The Kentucky Labor Institute,
Another Beacon of Hope
By: David O'Brien Suetholz***

When I was a child we were taught the song “This little light of mine” prior to our First Communion. I am reminded of this song as people who wear the mantle of “christianity” articulate views that are so counter to the plain message of the Gospels. I find myself reluctant to even call myself “Christian” because if they are what it means count me out. The constant bombardment of bad and then worse news by our ever-present media can leave one feeling isolated, helpless and alone. But we are never alone. God is constantly working around us and sometimes through us. The bedrock of my faith reminds me of that and sometimes I’m reminded by the admonition of that childhood song.

“This little light of mine” reminds me that I have a responsibility to profess my love and concern for my fellow brothers and sisters. I have found that, often we are rewarded for standing up for what is right by connecting with others who feel the same. Recently, there have been spontaneous acts of solidarity for the men and women who perform the essential services for the people of Wisconsin, Ohio and Indiana and found themselves unjustly targeted for attack and ridicule from their new Governors merely because they want to break their collective power.

Though public workers are not under attack by our Governor, similar acts of solidarity are emerging here in Kentucky. Academics and activists like Profs. Berry Craig, Ira Grupper, Sy Slavin, John Hennen, Clair Drucker, Avery Kohlers, Peter Fosl and Kay Tillou and several others have come together to form the Kentucky Labor Institute (KLI) to remind young Union members about the righteous roots of their movement. Knowing where we came from is a big step toward knowing who we are. Sadly, it seems that the truism “those who do not respect history are doomed to repeat it” is coming true as our society seems to be slipping into a neo-gilded age with the “haves” and the “have nots.” The KLI will offer basic labor history classes around the state and will eventually add classes on labor law, economics and the fundamentals of collective bargaining. KLI will also eventually have a physical exhibit space in Louisville to remind the public about the contributions of the labor movement toward creating a more just and equitable society.

The lights of these concerned professionals have joined together from eastern, central and western Kentucky to reach out and assist the labor movement and working people in this dark hour. They are yet another sign of hope because people of good will are letting their lights shine and are finding one another in the darkness.

“This little light of mine, I’m going to let it shine. Let it shine, let it shine, let it shine.” God bless.

**THROW THEM TO THE SHARKS!
The Chaplain’s Corner
By: Fr. Shonis**

This country was built on the backs of working men and women who came from Poland, Italy, Germany, Ireland, Lithuania, Slovakia, Russia and the rest of the European countries. Would these men and women have been allowed on the Mayflower? They probably would have thrown them to the sharks. No, our ancestors did not actually come over on the Mayflower. But don’t let anyone try to tell us we are not Americans because our ancestors did not come over on the Mayflower; that is unless you are looking for a fight.

Because in a deeper sense we were all on the Mayflower and we are all refugees and immigrants and we all made the crossing to America on the Mayflower. It doesn’t make any difference if we were naturalized last week or two hundred years ago, we are all fully American.

However, it was the immigrants who came to this country that formed the backbone of the union movement. They came from a Europe where unions were already beginning to form, albeit in the midst of bloodshed and violence, and they brought their desire for unions with them to the new country.

This last session of the Kentucky legislature, Senate Bill #6 was a poorly crafted immigration bill that would have caused more problems and probably not solved any. We who are the descendents of the European immigrants that came to our country and help build the nation into an industrial powerhouse can ill afford to forget that when we look at our newest immigrants and migrants that two and three generations ago we were they.

For unions to support the Dream Bill and actively take part into the struggle for justice with the immigrants is an investment in the future. When these migrants finally come into their own and are citizens, they will remember that it was the unions who befriended them in their hour of need, and from them will come the next generation of union people.

PUBLISHER’S NOTES:

***TRAFC staff are elated that David Suetholz has chosen to join our staff!! Welcome aboard David.**

For more information please see:

<http://www.labor.ky.gov/generalcounsel.htm>

AND

<http://law.nd.edu/features/alumni-spotlights/alumni-spotlight-david-suetholz-03/>

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:

dmgrief@comcast.net

We are very thankful to “The Catholic Labor Network”, <http://www.catholiclabor.org/> and Fr. Sinclair Outré, J.C.L. for hosting these newsletters.