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On labor issues, bishops say one thing, do another

Rita C. Schwartz | Jun. 26, 2009

Catholic teacher in Washington, D.C. school (CNS photo)

Opinion

On June 22, 2009, ?Respecting the Just Right of Workers: Guidance and Options for Catholic Health Care and Unions? was released by a Coalition consisting of the AFL-CIO, SEIU International, Catholic Health Association and the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops.

The National association of Catholic School Teachers, a national union representing teachers in Catholic elementary and secondary schools, takes issue with the members of the Bishops? Conference because of their negligence in the application of Catholic social teaching when their fellow bishops are involved, especially in regard to employees most directly under the bishops? control, in particular, Catholic school teachers.

In the foreword to ?Respecting the Just Rights of Workers,? Bishop William Murphy talks about the ten year dialogue exploring ?how Catholic social teaching should shape the actions of unions, management and others in assuring workers a free and fair choice on questions of representation in the workplace.? What follows is a blueprint to be followed by management and labor in Catholic Health Care institutions to ensure a process that is ?free, fair and respectful.?

Throughout the document, the U.S. Bishops are making clear to Catholic healthcare employers that a worker?s right to unionize is ?a fundamental principle of social justice recognized by the church.?

This is the latest social justice document of the U.S. Bishops that all but sky writes DO AS WE SAY, NOT AS WE DO. Where were the bishops when Cardinal Sean O?Malley cut the archdiocesan high school system into individual units and discarded the 30 year history of union recognition and negotiated contracts, making the teachers employees at will?

Where were the bishops when former St. Louis Archbishop, Raymond Burke, wrote to teachers in the fledgling elementary teachers? union that ?Neither the Archdiocese nor individual parishes will recognize or bargain collectively with any organization as a representative of teachers,? while at the same time recognizing and negotiating with the high school union?

Where were the bishops when Scranton Bishop Joseph Martino not only busted the Scranton Diocese Association of Catholic Teachers after some 30 years of union recognition but established his own ?company union,? something which is illegal in every other workplace in America?

Cardinal McCarrick, formerly of Washington, D.C. sums up the DO AS I SAY, - ?Catholic social teaching can and should guide relationships between management and labor. It should be up to workers to decide through a fair process whether to be represented by a union. . . we want to ensure that workers make these choices freely and fairly ...? while Cardinal McCarrick?s fellow bishops, O?Malley, Burke and Martino, serve as the poster children for the bishops? Catholic Social Teaching Wall of Shame (NOT AS WE DO).

The National Association of Catholic School Teachers is actively working with local Catholic School Teacher unions throughout Pennsylvania to achieve passage of House Bill 26, legislation that will provide safeguards for a fair process of union recognition and collective bargaining.

Here, as well, the bishops of Pennsylvania have gone all out to block the bill?s passage.

Until the U.S. Bishops begin to address the just rights of other church employees, the laborers in the church?s educational vineyards can only regard ?Respecting the Just Rights of Workers? as but one more example of the bishops? failure to practice what they preach.

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