NATIONAL CATHOLIC REPORTER
Published on *National Catholic Reporter* (http://ncronline.org)

USCCB Backs Labor Rights

Michael Sean Winters | Feb. 24, 2011 Distinctly Catholic

Just arrived at the condo we are renting in Puerto Rico and ? voila ? there is wifi! So, while I was in transit and enjoying a late lunch looking out over the turquoise waters of Luquillo Beach, Bishop Stephen Blaire, Chairman of the USCCB Committee on Domestic Justice and Human Development, was issuing a statement supporting the stance taken by the Wisconsin bishops in favor of the right of workers to unionize and bargain collectively. That right has been under attack by Wisconsin?s new governor. Bishop Blaire?s letter took the form of a letter to the chairman of the Wisconsin Catholic Conference, Archbishop Jerome Listecki. The text follows:

Your Excellency:

As Chairman of the Committee on Domestic Justice and Human Development of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, I write to express support for and solidarity with your clear statement, on behalf of the Wisconsin Catholic Conference, of February 17, 2011, articulating traditional Catholic teaching on workers, their rights and the common good. You and our brother bishops in Wisconsin are offering a timely reminder of what the Church teaches on the rights and duties of workers, including the right to form and belong to unions and other associations, and the obligation to address difficult problems with respect for the rights and needs of all. As you insist, ?hard times do not nullify the moral obligation each of us has to respect the legitimate rights of workers.?

You point out that Pope Benedict XVI, in Caritas in Veritate, states, ?The repeated calls?for the promotion of workers' associations that can defend their rights must therefore be honoured today even more than in the past.? (#25) In Laborem Exercens, Pope John Paul II calls labor associations ?an indispensable element of social life, especially in modern industrialized societies,? but also reminds unions ?to secure the just rights of workers within the framework of the common good of the whole of society.? (#20)

The situation in Wisconsin is not unique. Other states and the federal government also face daunting challenges of growing budget deficits and how to allocate burdens and share sacrifice in ways that reflect principles of social justice, economic fairness and wise stewardship. Your efforts to share the consistent teaching of the Church in the midst of this controversy are an example for all of us on how to apply our moral principles to the ?signs of the times.?

Catholic teaching and your statement remind us these are not just political conflicts or economic choices; they are moral choices with enormous human dimensions. The debates over worker representation and collective bargaining are not simply matters of ideology or power, but involve principles of justice, participation and how workers can have a voice in the workplace and economy. As you point out, ?It does not follow from this that every claim made by workers or their representatives is valid. Every union, like every other economic actor, is called to work for the common good, to make sacrifices when required, and to adjust to new economic realities. However, it is equally a mistake to marginalize or dismiss unions as impediments to economic growth. As Pope John Paul II wrote in 1981, ?[a] union remains a constructive factor of social order and solidarity, and it is impossible to ignore it.?? (Laborem Exercens #20, emphasis in original)

We pray that the leaders and people of Wisconsin--and across our nation--will respond to your ?appeal to everyone--lawmakers, citizens, workers, and labor unions--to move beyond divisive words and actions and work together, so that Wisconsin can recover in a humane way from the current fiscal crisis.?

I write to assure you that your brother bishops stand with you as you share Catholic teaching on workers and unions and call for dialogue, mutual respect and the search for the common good as a way forward in these difficult days.

Sincerely,
Most Reverend Stephen E. Blaire
Diocese of Stockton
Chairman, Committee on Domestic Justice and
Human Development

Source URL (retrieved on *11/29/2015 - 08:18*): http://ncronline.org/blogs/distinctly-catholic/usccb-backs-labor-rights