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# A victory for the dignity of work

Bishop Gabino Zavala | Jun. 30, 2011

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The unprecedented assault on workers? rights now spreading across the country betrays our nation?s commitment to serve the common good and defend the dignity of work. But the National Labor Relations Board has recently taken a small but important step in leveling the playing field for workers.

From Wisconsin to Ohio to New Hampshire, political leaders have demonized unions and stripped workers of basic rights that give them a voice at the bargaining table. Teachers, nurses and first responders are the victims of an ideological agenda that hurts hardworking Americans who simply want a voice on the job.

This is nothing less than a moral failure that undermines values at the heart of our democracy and diverse faith traditions.

Amid this bad news is a glimmer of hope. The NLRB has recently changed rules on the timing of union elections [1]. Though a relatively minor rule change, it restores fairness to a process that is tilted heavily in favor of employers who often delay union votes by months or even years with excessive litigation. Irresponsible companies that stall to prevent workers from voting to form a union frequently retaliate against employees with threats and intimidation. In fact, during organizing campaigns more than a third of employees simply fire workers who are pro-union.

Without clear rules about the timing of elections, workers who want to form a union often never even have the chance to vote. The NLRB rule change simply makes sure workers have the right to vote in a timely manner without unnecessary delays. But don?t be surprised if some CEOs and political leaders oppose this change or any step that helps empower workers.

The sad reality is that many of the same CEOs who eviscerate workers? rights have awarded themselves generous bonuses. Elected officials who rely on political contributions from corporate lobbyists take away basic rights for workers even as they lavish the wealthiest Americans with tax breaks.

In the name of fiscal responsibility, many governors and members of Congress are proposing extreme policies that target workers, families, children and the elderly. The result is an America where the middle class is squeezed, the rich get richer, and the most vulnerable are left behind.

As a Catholic bishop, I?m proud to stand with diverse faith leaders whose religious traditions teach that workers must have an effective voice in ensuring safe working conditions, just wages, reasonable benefits and the right to unionize without intimidation. Faith communities have long been on the front lines in the struggle for worker justice. Dorothy Day of the Catholic Worker movement, the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr., Cesar Chavez and Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel were all inspired by their faith to support working conditions consistent with human dignity.

Today, Pope Benedict XVI, the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, Protestant clergy and Jewish leaders support the vital role unions play in helping to build a fair economy built on shared prosperity. Politicians who claim the family values mantle will have to answer to the faith community when they target workers? rights that have helped generations of Americans achieve economic security.

At a time when state legislatures across the country pass anti-union legislation and corporate profits are soaring, this pragmatic ruling from the National Labor Relations Board is a victory that should help inspire a renewed commitment to worker justice.

[Gabino Zavala is an auxiliary bishop in the Archdiocese of Los Angeles and board president of Interfaith Worker Justice.]

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