

Catholic Labor Network Gathering
Social Ministries Gathering of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops
Washington, DC
10 February 2007

Welcome:

Fr. Sinclair Oubre welcomed everyone to the gathering, and gave a brief explanation of the Catholic Labor Network and the order of business for the day. All participants introduced themselves.

Special Guest:

Mr. Paul Edwards – World Movement of Christian Workers

The World Movement of Christian Workers grew out of the Young Christian Worker Movement, which began to decline in the late 60's early 70's.

In 1966 the World Movement of Christian Workers began. It is headquartered in Brussels.

Among the work that the Movement is involved in:

- Developed a 4 year program based upon "Decent Work and a New Society". The basis of this program is their belief that there must be international solutions to worker issues.
- Has Non-Governmental Organization (NGO) status with the International Labor Organization (ILO).

Concrete Examples of the work of the World Movement of Christian Workers:

English Movement of Christian Workers – This is a national organization in the UK. With approximately 250 members. In the UK, more and more workers are having to work beyond contractual hours, such as 50-60 hours a week. It has become a cultural issue: "The first person to leave the office for the day is the worst worker." "Lunch is for wimps."

They started a program called "Reclaiming Time". They are now working to have a debate in Parliament on this issue.

Bishop of a local Diocese asked them to develop a training program for workers. They created a program called Community and Leadership.

International movement also publishes a quarterly bulletin.

Paul spoke of the disconnect between the real United States and the view of the U.S. in other countries, based upon American television shows, war policies, etc. Part of the view is that we all have large houses, large cars and everyone is rich and happy. He visited a 7-11 with Clayton Sinyai, and was shocked and stunned to find Hispanic laborers waiting for work. One individual had been there every day for a month, and had not found work. When asked why he would go through the hassle of leaving Mexico, and going through the difficulties of the American system (for non-U.S. Citizens), only to find no work, the gentleman said that globalization was destroying work in his country. He had no choice but to come and take his chances in the U.S.

Interlude - Fr. Sinclair Oubre

Thanked Paul for his insight and spoke to the participants of the importance of the World Movement of Christian Workers having status within the Church as a Lay Association of the Faithful, and also as an NGO member of the ILO. This gives their association clout and a voice, with the Catholic Labor Network does not have. He stated that both of these issues needed to be addressed by the group.

Speaker

Mr. Clayton Sinyai – Author Schools of Democracy

Clayton gave a summary of his book *Schools of Democracy*. He described his own work with laborers describing them as being seen as the “lowest rung” of contract workers. For example: “They are not the brick-layers. They are the guys that carry the bricks for the brick layers.”

He spoke about the Knights of Labor, who helped to mold the laborer into an “upright, wise” laborer, who could be entrusted with the duties of a democratic citizen, who must develop informed opinions on matters. This movement didn’t last long, but skilled workers managed to form sturdy craft unions. Many of them survive to this day, such as the teamsters and many of the craft unions. Led by Samuel Gompers, they came together to form the American Federation of Labor (AFL). “Unions are the schools” that taught laborers about true democracy.

Catholicism’s effects on Unionism

- **Activity of Msgr. John Ryan – Book “A Living Wage”**
After WWI, The U.S. Bishops commissioned him to write a book. Samuel Gompers and the AFL, saw him as a friend, though they were often on different sides of issues related to government control. Catholics favored an activist government, but Gompers and the AFL did not.
- **Rise of the CIO – Ryan was leading the Social Action Commission of the USCCB, and worked with the CIO. *Rerum Novarum* was written, and Msgr. Ryan was instrumental in spreading the word about *Rerum Novarum*, especially through his book “*A Living Wage*”. The leader of the Steel workers was deeply influenced by Ryan and this showed in his creation of industrial councils. Warring between labor and management was a luxury that America could not afford.**
- **The experience of Catholic Trade Unionists (ACTU) and the development of Labor Schools. Clayton argued that this was the last time that Catholic thought greatly affected the Labor Movement. (Question: Is this because we are Americans first and Catholics second?)**

Today, many unions are giving up on the National Labor Relations Act and the Government to protect them. However, unions like the SEIU and the Hotel Workers, depend on politics as much as old unions do.

2nd Speaker – Had accident. Unable to attend.

Fr. Sinclair and Tom Shellabarger revamped agenda

Brigitte Gunther – Coalition of Imokalee Workers

Yumm Brands (Taco Bell and others) now has an agreement with the Coalition. Tomato suppliers are having to clean up their act if they wish to sell to Taco Bell, etc. They are working to get other restaurants on board with them, such as Burger King and McDonalds.

There are some tensions between the Chicano workers and the new immigrants. One of the constant problems between them is theft of the new immigrants income.

Bishop Nevins in Florida has been very supportive of this movement. He has written letters, and also encouraged the other Florida Bishops to support the efforts of the *Coalition of Imokalee Workers*. He has supported *CIW* with letters, and with his spiritual support.

Fr. Jon Pedigo – Catholic Campaign for Immigration Reform (CCIR) in Silicon Valley
Fr. Pedigo spoke on his work with CCIR, which is part of Justice for Immigrants. (JFI)

Clayton Sinyai –
Spoke on his work locally with Day Laborers.

Mr. Tom Shalleberger – USCCB Social Justice Commission
Affordable Housing
Book *The State of Working America (2006-2007)*
By Mishel, Bernstein and Allegretto
www.epinet.org
ILR PRESS

Affordability Problems are moving up the income scale. Most people cannot rent in the cities they have grown up. This is a fact of life not only for low wage workers, but also for professionals like teachers and nurses.

Real family income grew between 1947-1973 in all economic categories.

1973-2000 - Lowest fifth grew only 12.1%

2000-2004 - All declined. Lowest fifth -8.3%, top fifth -2.0%

2005 - All income growth went to the highest top fifth.

Kim Bobo – Interfaith Worker Justice
Immigration

Immigration is going to be the fight of the next 6 months. The Catholic Church will probably be THE institution that will be able to affect change in this.

She was on FOX news the other day, and received a great deal of hate e-mail after that.

Next month 75-100 congregations will be banning together on immigration. They are trying to get a number of congregations in on this event. If the church is already public about their involvement then they cannot be “harboring” immigrants.

They are also working to put a spotlight on the “hate groups” who are taking the policing of immigrants upon themselves.

Minimum Wage

She believes that the Federal Minimum Wage issue is progressing and will come to fruition soon. The indexing piece will be very important.

Wage Thievery

The Department of Labor has abdicated their responsibilities when workers are not being paid the wages they are owed by their employers.

The partnerships with unions around the country are very exciting. They are growing and they are good. The San Diego Interfaith Committee, is assisting workers in their efforts to exercise their right to organize. In addition, the SDIC has made it possible for religious leaders are present during the contract negotiations. They don't say anything, but their presence matters.

Programs the Interfaith Worker Justice is working on

- Seminary Summer
- National Conference in Chicago June 16-19

Luncheon Speaker

David Bonior addressed the participants during the lunch session. Founder of American Rights at Work, and now the director of the Edwards Campaign, he reflected on the challenges he faced in Congress, as well as, the challenges that labor faces today.

Wrap Up Session

All participants were given time to share their own work with the group, and/or to discuss other issues pertinent to worker issues and the Catholic Church. It was very beneficial and appreciated by all present.

The Session closed at approximately 3:00 p.m.