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## Catholic Popes and Bishops on the Importance of Labor Unions

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## **Catholic Popes and Bishops on the Importance of Labor Unions**

### **Pope Francis, 2014**

Trade unions have been an essential force for social change, without which a semblance of a decent and humane society is impossible under capitalism.

### **US Catholic Bishops, Labor Day Statement, 2014**

At their best, labor unions and institutions like them embody solidarity and subsidiarity while advancing the common good. They help workers "not only have more, but above all be more... [and] realize their humanity more fully in every respect" (*Laborem Exercens*, No. 20). Yes, unions and worker associations are imperfect, as are all human institutions. But the right of workers to freely associate is supported by Church teaching in order to protect workers and move them--especially younger ones, through mentoring and apprenticeships--into decent jobs with just wages.

### **US Catholic Bishops, Economic Justice for All, 1986**

The Church fully supports the right of workers to form unions or other associations to secure their rights to fair wages and working conditions. This is a specific application of the more general right to associate. . . No one may deny the right to organize without attacking human dignity itself. Therefore, we firmly oppose organized efforts, such as those regrettably now seen in this country, to break existing unions and prevent workers from organizing.

Migrant agricultural workers today are particularly in need of the protection, including the right to organize and bargain collectively. U.S. labor law reform is needed to meet these problems as well as to provide more timely and effective remedies for unfair labor practices.

### **Pope John Paul II, *Laborem Exercens*, 1981**

. . . Worker solidarity, together with a clearer and more committed realization by others of workers' rights, has in many cases brought about profound changes. . . On the world level, the development of civilization. . . has also revealed other forms of injustice much more extensive than those which in the last century stimulated unity between workers for particular solidarity in the working world.

This is true in countries which have completed a certain process of industrial revolution...

In order to achieve social justice. . . there is a need for ever new movements of solidarity of the workers and with the workers. This solidarity must be present whenever it is called for by the social degrading of the subject of work, by exploitation of the workers, and by the growing areas of poverty. . . The church is firmly committed to this cause for she considers it her mission, her service, a proof of her fidelity to Christ, so that she can truly be the "church of the poor." And the poor appear under various forms. . . as a result of the violation of the dignity of human work: either because the opportunities for human work are limited. . . or because a low value is put on work and the rights that flow from it, especially the right to a just wage and to the personal security of the worker and her or her family...

Modern unions grew up from the struggle of the workers - workers in general but especially the industrial workers - to protect their just rights vis-a-vis the entrepreneurs and the owners of the means of production. Their task is to defend the existential interests of worker.

Their (unions)task is to defend the existential interests of workers in all sectors in which their rights are concerned. The experience of history teaches that organizations of this type are an indispensable element of social life, especially in modern industrialized societies. Obviously, this does not mean that only industrial workers can set up associations of this type. Representatives of every profession can use them to ensure their own rights.

[Unions] are indeed a mouthpiece for the struggle for social justice, for the just rights of working people in accordance with their individual professions.

### **Paul VI, Octogesima Adveniens, 1971**

Although for the defence of these rights democratic societies accept today the principle of labour union rights, they are not always open to their exercise. The important role of union organizations must be admitted: their object is the representation of the various categories of workers, their lawful collaboration in the economic advance of society, and the development of the sense of their responsibility for the realization of the common good.

### **Fathers of the Second Vatican Council, 1965**

#### **Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World (Gaudium et spes)**

Among the basic rights of the human person must be counted the right of freely founding labor unions. These unions should be truly able to represent the workers and to contribute to the proper arrangement of economic life. Another such right is that of taking part freely in the activity of these unions without risk of reprisal.

### **Leo XIII, Rerum Novarum, 1891**

The most important of all are workingmen's unions, for these virtually include all the rest. History attests what excellent results were brought about by the artificers' guilds of olden times. They were the means of affording not only many advantages to the workmen, but in no small degree of promoting the advancement of art, as numerous monuments remain to bear witness. Such unions should be suited to the requirements of this our age - an age of wider education, of different habits, and of far more numerous requirements in daily life.

It is gratifying to know that there are actually in existence not a few associations of this nature, consisting either of workmen alone, or of workmen and employers together, but it were greatly to be desired that they should become more numerous and more efficient. We have spoken of them more than once, yet it will be well to explain here how notably they are needed, to show that they exist of their own right, and what should be their organization and their mode of action...

How greatly such manifold and earnest activity has benefitted the community at large is too well known to require Us to dwell upon it. . . The State should watch over these societies of citizens banded together in accordance with their rights, but it should not thrust itself into their peculiar concerns and their organization, for things move and live by the spirit inspiring them, and may be killed by the rough grasp of a hand from without.