

Social Affairs Committee  
Assembly of Québec Catholic Bishops

# HAPPY WORKERS' DAY!

On May 1<sup>st</sup>, 2010, the members of the Social Affairs Committee of the Assembly of Québec Catholic Bishops wish all Québec workers a *Happy Workers' Day!* Whatever your occupation, May 1<sup>st</sup> is a day to celebrate. Since 1886, this day has commemorated the battles fought and won as well as those that still must be waged to *obtain* and *maintain* working conditions that ensure human dignity. We acknowledge these legitimate aspirations and the efforts already undertaken to ensure better social justice – particularly when it means maintaining existing jobs and developing new employment opportunities.

*Work is a fundamental **right** and a positive **good** for humanity<sup>1</sup>. Its purpose is to bring *life in abundance*<sup>2</sup>, the life Christ came to share with us.*

Going about your jobs – or searching for a job – your goal is to serve society as well as to care for your family, notably by providing safe comfortable homes and ensuring quality education for your children. Our hope is that on-going campaigns to guarantee respect for the right to work and to ensure just remuneration will be successful, not only in our society, but everywhere in the world.

*Work is also 'an obligation', that is to say, 'a duty'.<sup>3</sup> Each of us has talents which we are called to develop not only for ourselves and our families, but also for society as a whole. This can be accomplished through remunerated employment or through contributing in other ways. From an historical perspective, we have *inherited* the benefits secured by our predecessors' labor. We are the artisans of the future which we will *bequeath* to successive generations. Although work is both a right and a duty, it should not be the sole reason for existence. Work is designed for personal fulfillment. *Work is meant for humans and not humans for work*<sup>4</sup>.*

May 1<sup>st</sup> Workers' Day also acknowledges those who are currently unemployed or whose job security is precarious. In 2009 alone, 37,400 jobs were lost in Québec and of these, 32,300 were full-time.<sup>5</sup> Those affected suffer on many levels ranging from a loss of self-confidence, isolation and family tensions to severe depression.<sup>6</sup> *A society that cannot provide employment, or that imposes unacceptable working conditions, is no longer worthy of being called a society*<sup>7</sup> (free translation).

Unemployment or exclusion from the work force also has serious consequences for society as a whole.<sup>8</sup> In the current economic context, there is the risk that a particular fatalistic outlook will become so pervasive that it will be considered *normal* that thousands are unemployed. One has every right to be concerned about the human costs resulting from frequent layoffs and their impact on the common good. Are these situations always justified? Have the pursuit of greater shareholder profits and the fallout from a weak economy become over-used *explanations* to justify downsizing? Before the decision to *restructure* is finalized, why not explore other scenarios that could contribute to maintaining the current level of employment? Should the following alternatives not be considered: innovation, reevaluating long-term objectives, revising marketing plans and using modern production methods that focus on value-added products? Layoffs should be the last recourse. Happily, some companies have made concerted efforts to help fellow entrepreneurs during these difficult times.

Unemployed workers have taken the initiative to counteract their isolation by organizing and providing mutual help and solidarity. These activities help to maintain the momentum that is essential to supporting human dignity. In response to the often-asked question: *So what do you do?...* people might answer: *We are working to build our future.*

Unemployment is a problem that affects all levels of society and it concerns not only those who have lost their jobs. Therefore it is essential that we support the *Mutual-Help* initiatives organized by the unemployed and excluded. This gesture of solidarity is vital! According to certain market forecasts, job opportunities will present themselves<sup>9</sup>. If favorable circumstances prevail, we could anticipate achieving our objective of full employment. To reach this goal, it is necessary to find the balance between educating and training people, developing one's personal talents, analyzing current market needs and making reasonable decisions about retirement.

The people or institutions with the power to legislate employment and economic policies have a serious responsibility to aim for full employment. *Work is a positive good for all humanity, it must be made available to all who are capable of engaging in it. Full employment is an indicator that an economic system is oriented toward justice and the common good*<sup>10</sup>.

With everyone's cooperation, current difficulties will be overcome and hope will triumph over despair. On this *May 1<sup>st</sup> Workers' Day*, we ask God to bless each worker.

*God our Creator, you expect humanity to progress and collaborate in your work of creation. Help us to act so that all people have working conditions that are respectful of their dignity and that by endeavoring to improve their own circumstances, they will move forward in a spirit of solidarity and service<sup>11</sup>.*

## Happy Workers' Day!

### Social Affaires Committee

Msgr. Pierre-André Fournier; Msgr. Roger Ébacher; Msgr. Jean Gagnon; Msgr. Paul Lortie; Mrs. Bernadette Dubuc, Sister Élixa Fernandez, SFA, Fr. Michel Forget; Mrs. Denise Martel and Ms. Louise Royer.

Translation : Mrs. Honore Kerwin-Borrelli; Mr. Brian McDonough

<sup>1</sup> Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*, Ottawa, Liberia Editrice Vaticana - CCCB, 2006. No. 287

<sup>2</sup> The Gospel according to St. John, Chapter 10, Verse 10.

<sup>3</sup> Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, *op. cit.*, No. 274

<sup>4</sup> John Paul II, *Laborem Exercens*, 1981, No. 6.6.

<sup>5</sup> Emploi Québec, *Bulletin de l'emploi au Québec*, December 2009

<sup>6</sup> Catechism of the Catholic Church, Paris, Centurion / Cerf / Fleurus-Mame/ CCCB, 1998, No. 2436 and Lise Poulin-Simon and Diane Bellemare, *Le Plein Emploi – Pourquoi?* Sainte-Foy, Presses de l'Université du Québec, 1983. Chapter IV – *Les coûts sociaux du chômage*, pp. 97-118.

<sup>7</sup> Podvin, Bernard, Spokesperson for The Conference of Bishops of France, *Suicides au travail*, September 30, 2009 <http://www.eglise.catholique.fr/actualites-et-evenements/actualites/suicides-au-travail.html>

Reference: January 29, 2010.

<sup>8</sup> Poulin-Simon and Bellemare, *op.cit.*, Chapter III – *Les coûts économiques du chômage*, pp. 73-95.

<sup>9</sup> Emploi Québec *Marché du travail : Perspectives à long terme 2008-2017*, September 2008, page 24:

*To replace those who are retiring, and to prepare for the expected growth in the job market, more than 1.3 million people must enter the work force, and of these, more than three quarters will replace those who are leaving. (free translation)*

<sup>10</sup> Refer to: Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, *op. cit.*, No. 288

<sup>11</sup> Congrégation pour le culte divin, *La Liturgie des Heures*, Paris, Cerf / Desclée de Brouwer/ Mame, Tome III, p. 918. Inclusive version of the oration for Monday morning IV (free translation).

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