
A MAY DAY MESSAGE



On this International Workers Day, on this liturgical feast of St. Joseph the Worker, we express our gratitude and admiration to all who are working at making our world better. In this Jubilee Year 2000 which is dedicated to Jesus who gave us the "Gospel of Work" and who was himself a worker, we express our deepest respect to the 197,300 men and 168,000 women workers in New Brunswick, we want to ask for them a better distribution of the riches, and wish them a weekly beneficial day of rest.

A DAILY PRAYER

At the dawn of this new day we pray with the Church: *"You ask humankind, Creator God, to perfect itself day after day and to achieve through its labour the great work of creation: with your help, may all men and women have working conditions respectful of their dignity so that, as they strive to improve their own lot in life they may act in a spirit of solidarity and service."*

LOVE OF WORK

Along with health, work comprises the human being's main wealth. As it was with their forebears, people of today cannot find happiness without a job they enjoy and which they believe is useful to their surroundings. They want work which allows them to earn an honourable livelihood, which benefits their families and serves the population as a whole. While creating lasting and well paying jobs is an aim to be reached, those persons and groups - employers, employees, labour unions, workers councils, and governments - which spare no effort at reaching this ideal are to be congratulated. Work is a precious possession which must be protected and preserved.

THE DIGNITY OF ALL

According to biblical tradition, one of the characteristics of the jubilee year concerns the liberty of people, freedom from all forms of bondage. In the workaday world, all kinds of constraints have crept in to impede freedom and happiness. When the machine is more important than the human being, when profit overrides the quality of life of employees, when the speed of work is inhuman, it is more than time to evaluate what is really going on in mills, warehouses, or work sites. When men and women leave work exhausted, battered, and bewildered, working conditions must be reviewed. There is such a thing as good fatigue, the fatigue which comes following normal exertion, but daily excessive fatigue is a sign that the quality of work needs to be improved. In every circumstance the worker must feel respect, dignity, and consideration. Labour unions, which in New Brunswick represent 22.4 % of workers, contribute much to the respect of persons.

DISTRIBUTION OF WEALTH

A second characteristic of the jubilee year deals with the redistribution of wealth. During the jubilee year, debts were remitted. This biblical injunction could be followed today by redistributing goods produced. The growing disparity between rich and poor in our society must not be tolerated. Rich multinationals benefiting from tax-free preferential treatment benefit from the generosity of governments: the New Brunswick Common Front for

Social Justice presented the population with statistics which speak for themselves. Social welfare clients must survive on allowances well below the poverty level. The jump in oil prices is one of the most blatant examples, a dizzying climb whose consequences are felt by the consumer world as a whole. The six richest persons in the world today have a disposable income higher than that of the 250 million poorest people on earth combined; 70 % of the world's poor are women. The growing gap between rich and poor is a real scandal. There should not be any poor people among the People of God. Our earth's resources were created by God and placed at the disposal of all humankind: this is an object of our faith. The earth belongs to the Lord. Psalm 94 (95) repeats it constantly: *For the Lord is a great God... In his hand are the depths of the earth; the heights of the mountains are his also; the sea is his, for he made it, and the dry land, which his hands have formed* (vv. 3-5).

UNACCEPTABLE SITUATIONS

We must once more draw the attention of our governments to the plight of the unemployed and the seasonal workers. The reform of unemployment insurance has contributed in creating a new class of poor people and in widening the gap between rich and poor: a longer waiting period, the amount given and the number of cheques received are all factors making our people poorer. It is unacceptable that employment insurance coffers bulge with billions of dollars and that the unemployed cannot be given fairer compensation, especially when it is these same workers who along with their employers contributed to this fund in the first place. With all these billions, could we not in all justice bring relief to workers afflicted with unemployment? Could we not create more stable and better paying jobs?

WEEKLY REST

With the rise of new technologies and the opening of shopping centres on Sunday, the risk is great to lose several of our traditional values, factors which have marked and formed our society: the Sunday day of rest, for example. The first pages of the Bible showed us a God who is both at work and at rest. On this International Workers Day it is important to realise the fate we reserve to those whom we force to work on Sundays; if they did not show up for work, some would simply lose their livelihood. We must also look at the impact of Sunday jobs on family life. It is imperative that some of the legislation in this regard be reviewed so as to ensure the respect of every person's legitimate right to rest; the greatest good of our society depends on this.

NEW MILLENNIUM

May the year 2000 be for our fellow citizens a favourable time for better-paying jobs. May unemployment which affects so many in our society be more and more whittled down. May the Women's World March lead to the disappearance of every trace of injustice and poverty. And may the workers long remember the benefits of the year 2000.

- + Ernest Léger, Archbishop of Moncton
- + André Richard, C.S.C., Bishop of Bathurst
- + Faber MacDonald, Bishop of Saint John
- + François Thibodeau, C.J.M., Bishop of Edmundston

« From A Bishop's Journal » (328) (26 April 2000)