

## COMPENDIUM ON CHURCH'S SOCIAL TEACHING PART 71

### **The right to work – Role of the State and civil society**

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Today's excerpt from the *Compendium* takes a look at the role of state and civil society in promoting the right to work.

There tends to be general agreement on the role of the State in promoting employment. Governments formulate policies that seek to promote employment mainly through encouraging industry and enterprise in the economy.

According to the social doctrine of the Church: "Employment problems challenge the responsibility of the State, whose duty it is to promote active employment policies, that is, policies that will encourage the creation of employment opportunities within the national territory, providing the production sector with incentives to this end. The duty of the State does not consist so much in directly guaranteeing the right to work of every citizen, making the whole of economic life very rigid and restricting individual free initiative, as much as in the duty to 'sustain business activities by creating conditions which will ensure job opportunities, by stimulating those activities where they are lacking or by supporting them in moments of crisis' (*Centesimus Annus*)."

In recognition of the fact that the world is now a global economy and that there is free movement of goods and services and people, the role of the State with regard to employment also extends to international cooperation agreements with other nations especially as it relates to wage rates, working conditions and ability to work in other countries.

The fact is that when people are able to work and earn an income, this ensures a peaceful environment free of unrest and achieving social justice. It is therefore essential for governments to cooperate with each other to safeguard everybody's right to work.

"Given the quickly developing global dimensions of economic-financial relationships and of the labour market, there is a need to promote an effective international cooperation among States by means of treaties, agreements and common plans of action that safeguard the right to work, even in the most critical phases of the economic cycle, at the national and international levels. It is necessary to be aware of the fact that human work is a right upon which the promotion of social justice and civil peace directly depend."

The role of the state is clear. Equally important however, is the role of non-governmental organisations such as Labour/Trade Unions. "Important tasks in this regard fall to international organisations and to labour unions. Joining forces in the most suitable ways, they must strive first of all to create 'an ever more tightly knit fabric of juridical norms that protect the work of men, women and youth, ensuring its proper remuneration'."

Despite the important role that Labour Unions have had, many still do not recognize their value, as well as the value of other organisations that seek to protect the rights of workers.

In a nutshell labour unions are important for the following reasons:

To organise workers

To arrange contracts

To ensure satisfactory working conditions and wages

To settle industrial disputes

To encourage its members to be responsible workers

Finally, “to promote the right to work it is important today, as in the days of *Rerum Novarum*, that there be ‘an open process by which society organize(s) itself’ (*Centesimus Annus*). Meaningful testimonies and examples of self-organisation can be found in the numerous initiatives, business and social, characterised by forms of participation, cooperation and self-management that manifest the joining of energies in solidarity.

These are offered to the market as a multifaceted sector of work activity whose mark of distinction is the special attention given to the relational components of the goods produced and of the services rendered in many areas: instruction, health care, basic social services and culture.

The initiatives of this so-called ‘third sector’ represent an ever more important opportunity for development of labour and the economy.” This tells us that while many of us think of the right to work in the traditional sense of industry and commerce, there are other types of activities that also must be taken into consideration when governments devise policies to promote employment, and when other organisations are seeking to promote people’s right to work.

There are many jobs in the entertainment industry, the social sector and health and education sectors, which can possibly be ignored, if we have a narrow view of what should be considered work, or who should be considered workers.

Next week we look at the family and the right to work.

Persons interested in purchasing the *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*, may contact the Justice Desk, Archbishop’s House at 622-6680.