

Quotes on Labor, Capital, Worker Rights & Free Markets

Labor and Capital

But above all we must remember the priority of labor over capital: labor is the cause of production; capital, or the means of production, is its mere instrument or tool. [On Human Work](#) #12

The means of production cannot become a separate property, called capital, as opposed to labor. They cannot be owned against labor or to exploit labor. They cannot be owned just for the sake of owning them. The only title to their ownership - whether private, public, or collective- is that they serve labor. This means that under suitable conditions the socialization of certain means of production could be acceptable. [On Human Work](#) #14

Capital is both the earth's resources and all the means invented to help us to use -and to humanize- those resources. From the simplest tools to the most modern ones -machines, factories, laboratories, and computers- all are the result of human work. [On Human Work](#) #12

It is right to struggle against an unjust economic system that does not uphold the priority of the human being over capital and land. [The Hundredth Year](#) #35

Work and Workers' Rights

Work remains a good thing, not only because it is useful and enjoyable, but also because it expresses and increases the worker's dignity. Through work we not only transform the world, we are transformed ourselves, becoming "more a human being." [On Human Work](#), #9

The obligation to earn one's bread presumes the right to do so. A society that denies this right cannot be justified, nor can it attain social peace. [The Hundredth Year](#), #43

Human work is the key to the solution ... of the whole "social question." To consider work is of decisive importance when trying to make life "more human." [On Human Work](#), #3

All work has a threefold moral significance. First, it is a principle way that people exercise the distinctive human capacity for self-expression and self-realization. Second, it is the ordinary way for human beings to fulfill their material needs. Finally, work enables people to contribute to the well-being of the larger community. Work is not only for one's self. It is for one's family, for the nation, and indeed for the benefit of the entire human family. [Economic Justice for All](#) #97

Yet the workers' rights cannot be doomed to be the mere result of economic systems aimed at maximum profits. The thing that

must shape the whole economy is respect for the workers' rights within each country and all through the world's economy. [On Human Work](#), #17

The varieties of crime are numerous: all offenses against life itself, such as murder, genocide, abortion, euthanasia and willful suicide; all violations of the integrity of the human person, such as mutilation, physical and mental torture, undue psychological pressures; all offenses against human dignity, such as subhuman living conditions, arbitrary imprisonment, deportation, slavery, prostitution, the selling of women and children, degrading working conditions where people are treated as mere tools for profit rather than free and responsible persons: all these and the like are criminal: they poison civilization; and they debase the perpetrators more than the victims and militate against the honor of the creator. [The Church in the Modern World](#) #27

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. In the words of Pope John Paul II, "The experience of history teaches that organizations of this type are an indispensable element of social life, especially in modern industrial societies." [Economic Justice for All](#) #104

Workers not only want fair pay, they also want to share in the responsibility and creativity of the very work process. They want to feel that they are working for themselves -- an awareness that is smothered in a bureaucratic system where they only feel themselves to be "cogs" in a huge machine moved from above. [On Human Work](#), #15

We consider it our duty to reaffirm that the remuneration of work is not something that can be left to the laws of the marketplace; nor should it be a decision left to the will of the more powerful. It must be determined in accordance with justice and equity; which means that workers must be paid a wage which allows them to live a truly human life and to fulfill their family obligations in a worthy manner.

Other factors too enter into the assessment of a just wage: namely, the effective contribution which each individual makes to the economic effort, the financial state of the company for which he works, the requirements of the general good of the particular country ... and finally the requirements of the common good of the universal family of nations....[Mother and Teacher](#) #71

It is in their daily work...that persons become the subjects and creators of the economic life of the nation. Thus, it is primarily through their daily labor that people make their most important contributions to economic justice. [Economic Justice for All](#) #96

Yet the workers' rights cannot be doomed to be the mere result of economic systems aimed at maximum profits. The thing that must shape the whole economy is respect for the workers' rights within each country and all through the world's economy. [On Human Work](#), #17

We must pay more attention to the one who works than to what the worker does. The self-realization of the human person is the measure of what is right and wrong. [On Human Work](#), #6

Work is in the first place "for the worker" and not the worker "for work." Work itself can have greater or lesser objective value, but all work should be judged by the measure of dignity given to the person who carries it out. [On Human Work](#), #6

We must consequently continue to study the situation of the worker. There is a need for solidarity movements among and with the workers. The church is firmly committed to this cause, in fidelity to Christ, and to be truly the "church of the poor." [On Human Work](#), #8

The government should make similarly effective efforts to see that those who are able to work can find employment in keeping with their aptitudes, and that each worker receives a wage in keeping with the laws of justice and equity. It should be equally the concern of civil authorities to ensure that workers be allowed their proper responsibility in the work undertaken in industrial organization, and to facilitate the establishment of intermediate groups which will make social life richer and more effective. [Peace on Earth](#) #64

In the first place, the worker must be paid a wage sufficient to support him and his family.

[The Fortieth Year](#) #71

Work is a duty, because our Creator demanded it and because it maintains and develops our humanity. We must work out of regard for others, especially our own families, but also because of the society we belong to and in fact because of the whole of humanity.

[On Human Work](#), #16

Consequently, if the organization and structure of economic life be such that the human dignity of workers is compromised, or their sense of responsibility is weakened, or their freedom of action is removed, then we judge such an economic order to be unjust, even though it produces a vast amount of goods, whose distribution conforms to the norms of justice and equity.

[Mother and Teacher](#) 83

We inherit the work of the generations before us, and we share in the building of the future of all those who will come after us. All this should be kept in mind when considering the rights that come with work or the duty to work.

[On Human Work](#), 16

Free Markets and Competition

“Economic activity cannot solve all social problems through the simple application of commercial logic. This needs to *be directed towards the pursuit of the common good*, for which the political community in particular must also take responsibility. Therefore, it must be borne in mind that grave imbalances are produced when economic action, conceived merely as an engine for wealth creation, is detached from political action, conceived as a means for pursuing justice through redistribution” [Caritas in Veritate](#), 36.

There are needs and common goods that cannot be satisfied by the market system. It is the task of the state and of all society to defend them. An idolatry of the market alone cannot do all that should be done. [The Hundredth Year](#), #40

But it is unfortunate that on these new conditions of society a system has been constructed which considers profit as the key motive for economic progress, competition as the supreme law of economics, and private ownership of the means of production as an absolute right that has no limits and carries no corresponding social obligation. This unchecked liberalism leads to dictatorship rightly denounced by Pius XI as producing "the international imperialism of money".[26] One cannot condemn such abuses too strongly by solemnly recalling once again that the economy is at the service of man. [On the Development of Peoples](#) #26

Individual initiative alone and the mere free play of competition could never assure successful development. One must avoid the risk of increasing still more the wealth of the rich and the dominion of the strong, whilst leaving the poor in their misery and adding to the servitude of the oppressed. [On the Development of Peoples](#) #33

First, one may not take as the ultimate criteria in economic life the interests of individuals or organized groups, nor unregulated competition, nor excessive power on the part of the wealthy, nor the vain honor of the nation or its desire for domination, nor anything of this sort. Rather, it is necessary that economic undertaking be governed by justice and charity as the principal laws of social life. [Mother and Teacher](#) #38,39

The Church's teaching opposes collectivist and statist economic approaches. But it also rejects the notion that a free market automatically produces justice. [Economic Justice for All](#) #115

After the failure of communism, should capitalism be the goal for Eastern Europe and the Third World? The answer is complex. If capitalism means a "market" or "free" economy that recognizes the role of business, the market, and private property, as well as free human creativity, then the answer is "yes." If it means a system in which economic, religious, and ethical freedom are denied, then the answer is "no." Marxism failed, but marginalization and exploitation remain, especially in the Third World, just as alienation does in the more advanced countries. [The Hundredth Year](#) #42

Unlimited competition utilizing the modern means of publicity incessantly launches new products and tries to attract the consumer, while earlier industrial installations which are still capable of functioning become useless. While very large areas of the population are unable to satisfy their primary needs, superfluous needs are ingeniously created. It can thus rightly be asked, in spite of all his conquests, man is not turning back against nature, is he not now becoming the slave of the objects which he makes. [A Call to Action](#) #9