

# Bishop Emrich Comments on Detroit Newspaper Strike

(Editor's Note: The following comments on the current Detroit newspaper strike are the viewpoints of Richard S. Emrich, the Episcopal Bishop of Michigan. Emrich was one of three advisors appointed by Governor Romney to meet with striking union officials and the publishers to resolve the four-month-old strike.)

BY RICHARD S. EMRICH  
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Since Governor Romney appointed me as one of a commission of three to advise on the resolution of the newspaper strike, I find, after hours of fruitless work and weeks of reflection, that I now believe that the striking unions are unjustly harming the city, the newspapers, and the cause of all good unions.

What I write is in the realm of principle (although I shall use some details to illustrate principle); for, surely, it is only in the grasp of principle that we can form a moral judgment, or bring order to an unhappy situation.

Let me tell the story, as I see it, with the hope that the moral power of this community will be aroused.

First, a peculiar circumstance of newspapers is the pressure of time and the deadline which must be met; or, to put it another way, a newspaper is an extremely perishable product. While we can make pills or shoes, and store them, there is nothing older than yesterday's paper. Newspapers either come out at the proper time with their information and advertisements, or they are close to worthless. This is an important background fact which distinguishes newspapers from some other business concerns; which can give us sympathy for those responsible for publishing; and which reveals how vulnerable they are to harassment.

Second, this time factor means that no paper can be published in a healthy manner which does not possess an orderly and reliable organization. Newspapers, by their nature, require more order than many other enterprises; and, injuring everyone, this is precisely what they do not possess. The Detroit News and The Detroit Free Press must sign 21 contracts with 14 different unions.

It requires little imagination to see the result of this messy situation which has grown up like weeds in a garden. Not only is there an enormous waste of time which leads the Publishers, quite understandably, to want longer contracts to give some stability to the future; but the fact of 14 unions leads inevitably to competition between the unions as an ambitious and ill-advised union leader tries to prove he can get more than others.

When one union can tie up an entire organization, this gives to that one union an inordinate amount of power—and power is a heady drink which usually corrupts.

What we are witnessing in the present strike is two social organizations, with unlimited veto power, depriving an entire metropolitan area of its newspapers, after 12 other unions willingly and responsibly signed their contracts.

For the good of all this organizational situation must be changed. If it is not changed, one can predict in the future the trouble that always arises from confused organization.

On the union side we read, not simply that the Pressmen are picketing the Publishers, but that another union, that wants to return to work, is picketing the picketers. I will defy anyone, who knows anything about the effect of confusion and poor organization upon human nature, not to feel sympathy for the men whose responsibility it is to

publish these papers. We should not lose sight of the real issue by immersing ourselves in details. The real issue is, on the union side, a moral and organizational mess which has tempted a small minority to a scandalous misuse of power. They have closed down two papers, deprived a large metropolitan area of needed news before an election, put thousands out of work; and caused a big enough mess to bring in a mayor, a governor, and even the President, to no effect.

While I developed a personal affection for the men in the two unions, and hope it was mutual, I found that my reason sided with the Publishers in their resolve not to permit this misuse of power, this anarchic power play, to succeed.

The men in the unions, as well as the Publishers, both claim to be "sincere." Since God alone can look on the inward heart and judge sincerity, the people of this city should look at the outward organizational mess, and form their judgment. It is quite possible for men who are inwardly sincere to be outwardly wrong.

Third, one of the most fruitful social truths comes to us from the mind of St. Paul when he describes the Church as a Body, composed of many members, each part of the Body having its necessary function and dignity. This is the true conception of a community, of course, be applied to all social groups—the body politic, a university, a business enterprise, and the family. There are two truths in this conception of the body which need to be recovered and applied to this strike.

(a) If each person, or group, is only part of the body in Church, State, business or family, then the whole body has its rights, as well as the part. Justice is due to the whole, as well as to the individual units. Freedom, then, must always be social, responsible, and limited, because we are members one of another. So, as against the anarchy of self-will, St. Paul exhorts each man not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think. If we act without due regard for the common good and the rights of the body, that is arrogance, presumption, and creates anarchy.

(b) Within the social structure, as within the human body, there are distinctions of position and differences of function. If a part of the social body has its necessary and honored place where it belongs, that means also that it can get out of place. In any social organization there is inevitably an "up" and a "down."

"The rule," says Richard Weaver, "is that each shall act where he is strong; the statement of identical roles produces first confusion and then alienation, as we have ourselves seen recently when they know their position. If their work and authority are defined, they can proceed on fixed assumptions and conduct themselves without embarrassment toward inferior and superior. When the rule of equality obtains, however, no one knows where he belongs." There are grades, orders, distinctions, lines of authority, an "up" and a "down."

In every social organization, including the unions. It is an anarchic confusing of functions which has led, in great part, to the tragedy of this long strike.

It is the purpose of management to manage, of leadership to lead, of government to govern. This responsibility cannot be relinquished; nor are subordinate parts capable of making wise decisions, simply because of the subordinate positions they occupy.

Management stands, so to speak, on a hill overlooking the whole enterprise, seeing the relationship of the parts to each other, seeing the past and planning the future, and possessing a perspective which no other part of the organization can possibly have. By its nature it cannot

relinquish its function, or permit policy to be dictated from below, without bringing disaster to the whole body.

Management can, and should, receive complaints, criticisms, and suggestions from subordinate units; but it must reserve the right to analyze them, to form policy, and not necessarily to agree with a cure demanded by a part of the whole.

Shall one perish in a disease dictated policy to the Bishop and Council? Shall one department in the University of Michigan presume to dictate policy to the President and Regents? Do we no longer in America see the rights of the total body, or recognize that a man or unit can get "too big for his britches?"

Management cannot permit a part to dictate policy for the whole, for the simple reason that each subordinate unit is in a valley where it often does not see the total picture, or recognize the effect upon the whole of a particular demand.

Not only is the management of the newspapers refusing to permit the strike, but they are playing to succeed its right that the misuse of power, jeopardizing the whole, and hurting the city, should be reversed? But it is rightly refusing to permit policy to be dictated by a subordinate unit.

The city of Detroit must learn to recognize that any group can misuse power, and that even a union can say, "The public be damned." Remember (a) that 12 out of 14 unions, the vast majority, signed their contracts; (b) that, in the judgment of many, a considerable financial package was offered to the striking unions; and (c) that, compared with labor in general, with teachers, clergy, and public servants, these strikers are

well paid men. The issue here is one of order, of the responsible use of power, of management's right to be management. Consider one of the issues. The Pressmen's Union stated that it had a mandate (which means command, or order) from its membership for time and a half pay on Saturday night, which night falls within their normal 35-hour work week. This means that they were demanding a 23-hour work week at regular pay, with everything over that time and a half. Now this is policy; for management on its bill sees that if this principle is granted to the Pressmen, it must with justice be granted to all.

The Pressmen in the valley are demanding a principle of management which it, on its hill, sees must apply to the average. The union is provoked because management will not compromise on this; but management rightly says it will not compromise on its right to manage, which means to determine policy. In determining policy men are not equals in an organization; for what seems reasonable, even of little consequence, to men in a subordinate unit may be of enormous consequence when applied to the whole.

The Publishers have offered what many consider to be a generous financial package to the striking unions; but they refuse to permit the Pressmen to drive the bus, even though the Pressmen have stopped the bus. Does everyone on a bus have a right to put his hands on the wheel?

Because Pressmen have their rights, and duties, do they have the right to deprive management of its rights and duties? Are the Pressmen's "arrogance," "presumption," "insubordination," "anarchy" no longer part of America's vocabulary?

Just as the moral indignation of the people rose in the past against the misuse of power by the Church, government, and big business, so it will rise today against the misuse of power by unions. In history irresponsibility and excess are always punished.

Finally, what I have written is really pro-union, for it is obvious that this strike hurts the legitimate cause of unionism. Actually, since organized labor is being hurt by this misuse of power, the strikers may be said to be members of two anti-union unions. It is obvious that all men, and not just some, can be corrupted by power.

Because unions have a legitimate function, it does not follow that they can usurp other functions. Why is it, for example, that one union can veto the capacity of a whole paper to publish, and throw thousands out of work, but no other union can veto the capacity of the Pressmen to strike? What kind of justice is this?

Unions have a right to organize, but they do not have a right to foment an organizational mess upon an industry. They have a right to their place; they do not have a right to get out of place. They have a right to ask, or demand, that labor share in the prosperity of a company; they do not have a right to deprive thousands of employees of their pay for months, when these thousands want to return to work. Because a union was gone yesterday, it does not follow that it cannot be foolish, irresponsible, and unjust today.

This strike has gone on long enough, and, in ways hard to

measure, has done incalculable harm. Since the strike hurts the common good, harms the newspapers, throws thousands of innocent people out of work, and injures the cause of good unionism, what in the name of heaven is the sense of it? If it is caused by a personality problem within a union, let the union members correct the personality problem. Let the unions resolve this problem by themselves before the moral power of the people, or the government acting for the people, steps in with a less desirable solution. If you agree with this analysis of the total situation, speak to the men who are striking, and ask them to exercise some statesmanship. Good union leaders are wise statesmen, loving the common good, and not destroyers. And, wherever you are placed, do what you can to end this shameful situation.

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**REALISTIC VOTING**—Pam Adams, eighth grader at Whittier Junior High School, takes an election authorization slip for seventh grader Earl LaBelle as the students vote for their student council on voting machines loaned by Nankin Township officials. Terry Becker was elected council president.

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