Editorial: Rules of involvement

It was Catholic Social Teaching and in particular the publication in 1891 of Pope Leo XIII's foundational document 'Rerum Novarum' or 'On the Condition of the Working Classes', which gave tremendous impetus to what was until then the largely inconsequential, floundering labor movements which began in Europe and North America in the 18th century.

The Pope in that document advocated a series of reforms including limits on the length of the work day, a living wage, the elimination of child labor, the rights of labor to organize, and the duty of the state to regulate labor conditions.

So for over one hundred years, the Catholic Church has been a voice of support for workers and a conscience to society when it considers issues of importance to workers. Labor Day 2010 finds the labor movement in Guyana facing issues so serious that give good reasons for very concerned about the future trends of labor politics in this country. Many of these critical issues in the local labor arenas have persisted for a number of years like the stopping of the Government subvention to Critchlow Labor College, a move which brought that institution to its knees. However equally grave problems have arisen in just the past year these include the dismissal of the Bauxite workers and transfer of the Diamond Sugar workers.

The current administration often talks about "people's participation" and "people's success". In reality however we often get the impression that it's the authorities who consider themselves the sole proprietor of the people's will. They act as if they know exactly what is best for the people and are delivering these goods in the best possible manner. Any opposition they encounter from people as individuals or joined together in trade unions or other organizations is often regarded as a betrayal of the nation's will.
Though this government claims to represent the people how ready is it to let people speak for themselves? How ready is it to tolerate dissent?.

Isn't it this attitude of "I know what's best for you" that has caused the deadlock in talks on Local Government Reform? One Government official has even had the effrontery to say that Guyanese are not mature enough to have private radio stations. Too often the rules of involvement have not been devised in consultation with the people but have been handed down by officials for acceptance without discussion.

Roles are assigned, targets set and plans formulated with little reference to those who are most involved in carrying them out. Is it therefore surprising that targets are frequently not attained and plans frustrated? All who bear the burden of authority would do well to ponder the often quoted phrase of Mahatma Gandhi "There go my people I must follow them for I am their leader."

**Caribbean Bishops condemn sex abuse, urge on-going help for Haiti**

Seventeen Roman Catholic Bishops representing the leadership church in the Caribbean and the Antilles say that they “absolutely and unequivocally condemn the sexual abuse of minors by clergy and anyone else”, and have established policies for dealing with the issue. They also express their appreciation to Catholics in the region for the more than US$1 million which they have sent to Haiti following the January 12 earthquake that devastated the island. In addition the heads of the church in the Region have formed an ad hoc committee to coordinate vocation work in the diocese.

These were among the decisions made at by the church leaders during their 54th annual meeting which took place in Saint George’s Grenada from April 19 to 30 last. The conclusions were contained in a joint Pastoral Letter issued at the end of their encounter.

On the issue of the sexual abuse of minors the Bishops said:

“As Church leaders in the Caribbean Region in solidarity with the Holy Father, Pope Benedict XVI and the Church Universal, we, the bishops, view seriously and with sadness the various reports of clerical sexual abuse. We are ashamed of such regrettable incidents. We absolutely and unequivocally condemn the sexual abuse of minors by clergy and anyone else.

“We identify with the Pope, who in a recent Pastoral Letter to the Catholics of Ireland said to the victims of abuse and their families: ‘You have suffered grievously and I am truly sorry. I know that nothing can undo the wrong you have endured. Your trust has been betrayed and your dignity has been violated… In the name (of the Church) I openly express the shame and remorse that we all feel … I ask you not to lose hope.’

In the same letter, addressing the priests and religious who have abused minors the Pope stated, “You have betrayed the trust that was placed in you by innocent young people and their parents, and must answer for it before Almighty God and before properly constituted tribunals. You have forfeited the esteem of the people…and brought shame and dishonour upon your confreres…together with the immense harm you have
done to victims, great damage has been done to the Church and to the public perception of the priesthood and religious life...Openly acknowledge your guilt, submit yourselves to the demands of justice, but do not despair of God’s mercy. “

We also take note of the Pope’s words to the Bishops, “It cannot be denied that some of you and your predecessors failed, at times grievously to apply the long-established norms of Canon Law to the crime of child abuse. Serious mistakes were made in responding to allegations.... it must be admitted that grave errors of judgement were made and failures of leadership occurred. All this has seriously undermined your credibility and effectiveness. I appreciate the efforts you have made to remedy past mistakes and to guarantee that they do not happen again.”

As your bishops, we have established policies for dealing with sexual abuse of minors. We concur with the directives of the Holy See to comply with civil law in reporting all cases of sexual abuse of minors. We are also committed to do all within our power to facilitate the process of healing, and the protection of children.

Solidarity with Haiti

The Conference expresses its deepest appreciation and gratitude to the faithful of our region for the great generosity and fraternal concern shown toward their brothers and sisters of Haiti. In the wake of the devastating earthquake which took hundreds of thousands of lives you have donated over US$1.1 million as a symbol of your solidarity with your suffering brothers and sisters in their need.

Haitians will continue to need not only our financial support but also our prayers as they move into the future and embark upon the task of reconstruction and rebuilding lives with the hope that is characteristic of our faith in the Resurrected Jesus.

Seminary Formation in the Region

Due to the lack of vocations, the small number of seminarians, the difficulty in providing staff and mounting financial problems, the Regional Seminary Board took a decision in February this year to suspend seminary formation for a period of three years and to transfer its seminarians in philosophy to the Seminario of Santo Tomas in the Dominican Republic. Special provisions have been made for students completing their BA in Theology in Trinidad. Further to this, a decision was taken at this meeting in response to the recommendation of the Congregation for the Evangelization of the Peoples, that the Regional Seminary Board transfer full authority, responsibility and accountability for the Regional Seminary to the Archbishop of the Archdiocese of Port of Spain.

Concern for Vocations in the Region

Every diocese in the Region yearns for an increase in vocations in order to provide adequate pastoral care of all God’s people and to carry on the work of evangelization and mission. We, the bishops, have established an ad hoc committee to co-ordinate vocation work in the Antilles Episcopal Conference. The establishment of this committee is an indication of the priority which we continue to give to the ministry of
vocations, and is also a response to the present crisis in vocations in our respective dioceses. The committee will make its first report to the AEC Executive Committee in January 2011.

We call upon all Catholics in the region to continue to pray ceaselessly for vocations and create an ambience that celebrates the dignity of the call from God to serve His people and to ensure the resumption of seminary formation in Trinidad in three years.

Conclusion
As we have been reflecting we are reminded of the words of St. Paul to the Church in Corinth when he stated, “If one part of the body suffers, all the parts suffer with it. And if one part of the body is honoured, all the parts share its joy.” (I Cor. 12:26). For all of us, now is the time for discernment and healing. May God show us the way and may our Blessed Mother, Mary, with St. John Vianney intercede for the Church in our region.

Guyana issues stamp to honor Pope

The Guyana Post Office Corporation (GPOC) has issued a special stamp to honor the spiritual and administrative head of the Roman Catholic Church worldwide, Pope Benedict XVI. The launch of the stamp took place on last Tuesday at the post office. Three other stamps were also unveiled at the same time. They commemorated 100 years of Chinese aviation, the Chinese Lunar Year and the late Princess Diana.

Superior of the Jesuits in Guyana, Father Dermot Preston, who represented the Catholic Church at the event said it was an honor for him to do so. In brief remarks he noted that the Pope before the present one that was named Benedict, namely Benedict XV, is often considered one of the most forgotten Popes since he took up the position as the First World War was beginning. However he did condemn the war and made several strenuous efforts to bring about a peace settlement.

Fr Preston noted that when the present Pope Benedict XVI was installed he paid tribute to Benedict XV and explained why he chose that name, “Filled with sentiments of awe and thanks giving I wish to speak of why I chose the name Benedict. I remember Pope Benedict XV, that courageous prophet of peace who guided the church through turbulent times of war. In his footsteps I place my ministry in the service of reconciliation and harmony between peoples”, Benedict XVI said.

Remarks were also made by Mr Simon Bond, Deputy British High Commissioner and Mr Zhang Jungao, Chinese Ambassador. The stamps were launched by the chairman of the GPOC, Bishop Juan Edghill. Customer Service Officer at the GPOC Sharon Nurse presented framed first day covers to each of the three special invitees associated with the stamps that were launched.

25th Anniversary celebrations in T&T
Ten priests celebrated their 25th anniversary of ordination at a special Mass at the Regional Seminary on Wednesday April 28.

Archbishop Gilbert of Trinidad and Tobago was the main celebrant while Papal Nuncio to the Region Archbishop Gullickson preached the homily. The ten jubilarians were: Bishop Francis Alleyne OSB (T&T), Bishop Gabriel Malzaire (St Lucia), Fr Karel Choennie (Suriname), Fr Stephen Geoffroy (T&T), Fr Leroy Hopkin OP (Grenada), Fr John Persaud (Guyana), Msgr Michael Stewart (St Vincent and the Grenadines). Missing were: Fr Celsus Auguste of Dominica, Fr Charles Martin of Dominica and Fr Ron Yeemon of T&T. Fr Eddy celebrates 25 years but was not trained at the seminary.

**Meadow Bank wins Junior Quiz Competition**

The finals of the Annual Quiz Competition organized by the Roman Catholic Diocesan Youth Office was held at Marian Academy on Sunday 11th April, 29th 2010. There were seniors (16 to 30 years) and Junior (12-15 years).

Participants were quizzed on the synoptic Gospels of Matthew, Mark and Luke. Questions were also posed on areas pertaining to the Religious Orders and vocations in Guyana. In the final round of the Junior Category, Our Lady of the Mount, Meadow Bank youths represented by Augustus Shadeek, Aaliyah Kendall, Sarah Sookwah, Sonia Sookwah and Natasha Allicock gained the first place, followed by St Peter’s (BV) in second place and St Pius in third place. The preparation of the Meadow Bank youths were ably organized by Ms. Samantha Brotherson and Ms Susan English.

Special appreciation is extended to His Lordship Bishop Francis Alleyne, and the Roman Catholic Diocesan Youth Office for creating this wonderful opportunity for youths to know more about their faith. There is a great anticipation that more youths will be involved in next year’s competition, providing them with a wonderful opportunity to learn more about their faith together in a very enjoyable atmosphere.

**Viewpoint by Vibert Parvatan: WORKERS’ WELFARE**
During the month of April 2010, Guyana joined the International Community in observing Occupational Safety and Health month under the theme "Emerging Risks And New Patterns Of Prevention In A Changing World Of Work". There was a special event hosted by the Ministry of Labour in collaboration with business entities on April 28 - the Annual World Day for Safety and Health at Work promoting the prevention of occupational accidents and diseases. It took the form of a Fair with speeches, display of a wide range of safety equipment and the issuance of brochures.

On May 1, workers in many lands including Guyana will observe May Day or Labour Day with workers marching under the banner of their Unions lustily singing "Solidarity Forever".

Both events recognise the importance of Labour or human capital as an integral part in the development process of any country. In Guyana, significant progress has been made in the enactment of Laws to protect and secure the rights of workers.

In relation to safety and health at work globally, it is reported that there is a rise in work related stress disorders resulting from difficulties in coping with changing patterns of working life.

The International Labour Organisation (I.L.O.) has emphasised the need to apply internationally agreed labour standards to reduce human and economic burdens of work related - accidents and diseases. The I.L.O. estimates that everyday some 6,300 workers die from work related injuries or diseases. The I.L.O. Director General - Mr. Juan Somavia stated "the human cost of this daily tragedy is immeasurable".

In Guyana, with a history of slavery and the indentured system there has been a conscious effort by Government over the past decades to secure the well-being of workers and to protect their interests through the enactment of laws. These laws include:  Cap 98:01 Labour Hours of Work; Trade Unions; Trade Union Recognition; Cap 99:01 Employment of young persons and children; Holidays with Pay; conditions of employment of certain workers; accidental deaths and personal injuries (damages); bakeries (hours of work); household service workers (hours of work); termination of employment and severance pay; prevention of discrimination; and occupational safety and health.

From the foregoing it will be noted that workers rights are provided for under the Laws of Guyana. Additionally, many Agencies exist to ensure compliance with the said laws. In theory there should be little area for the abuse and exploitation of workers. However, human frailty combined with selfishness, greed and lack of feelings of caring and respecting others lead to the trampling and blatant disregard for certain laws which should secure workers rights.

Man's intellectual development and the numerous documented strategies including studies on motivation, techniques for conflict resolution and the repeated importance of Capital and Labour as material factors of production, ought to create a stage which will exclude arrogance, dogmatism, conceit bitterness and conflict which are often displayed with its negative effects.

Regrettably, that ideal situation does not often exist with the bad effects and worrying consequences falling at the doorstep of frustrated workers.
In Guyana, the time has come for representatives of employers and leaders of the workers to establish cordial and productive working relationships in which their inter-dependence and purposeful unity dictate their working in partnership for mutual benefit and for the development of the Country.

The enactment of laws to protect workers is not enough for the realisation of the specific goals. It demands avoiding confrontation with there being perceived winners and losers. Instead, the various groups should seek ways and means of alleviating suffering with an awareness and concern for the many people living in poverty who deserve better.

It is a sad indictment against so many categories and groupings of people including administrators and union leaders when it is acknowledged that in the distribution of wealth the rich are getting richer and the poor are getting poorer.

**Justin Prabhu to be ordained Deacon May 8**

Jesuit scholastic Justin Prabhu will be ordained deacon on May 8 in London, UK. Justin hails from the Madurai Province in India. After initial formation there he spent a year teaching in St Stanislaus College, Georgetown. He is expected to return to work in Guyana on completion of his studies.

The ordination will be done by Rev Vincent Nichols, Archbishop of Westminster at the Church of the Immaculate Conception, Farm Street, London.

Usually about six months to a year before ordination to the priesthood, a man is ordained to the diaconate which is sometimes called the ‘Transitional’ Diaconate. It so named because the man is in transition to the priesthood, and to differentiate it from the Permanent Diaconate. The man makes promises of celibacy and obedience to his bishop. It signifies the movement of a man from the lay state to the clerical state. The ordination ceremony includes various rituals, rich in meaning and history, for example, the prostration, laying on of hands, anointing of hands, giving of the chalice and paten, sign of peace.

**Uncle Harry progressing slowly**

Joseph Harry Persaud, known as “Uncle Harry” says he is still confined to bed but making slow progress one week after he was badly injured on Monday 19 last when he fell into one of the several open man holes on Wellington Street, just outside the offices of Catholic Standard Limited.

After his fall he was immediately taken to the Emergency Room at St Joseph’s Mercy Hospital where he was treated and received medication for pain along with extensive bruises and lacerations on his face and shoulder. X-rays to his head, shoulder and knee revealed serious damage in the form of a fracture to his left knee. Later that day he was taken to the Georgetown Public Hospital where his foot was put in a cast and he was
sent home. Uncle Harry who celebrated his 89 birthday in January is a prominent member of the Brickdam parish community where he belonged to the Men’s Guild and worked as sacristan for several decades. He has been a faithful vendor of the Catholic Standard for almost as long.

One week after his misadventure his face and shoulder remain swollen but less painful. His foot will be in the cast for at least six weeks. He wishes to say thanks for the telephone calls and other expressions of sympathy and good wishes he has received. The management and staff of the Catholic Standard wish Uncle Harry a speedy recovery.

MINISTER OF HEALTH MAKES A MOCKERY OF GUYANA MEDICAL COUNCIL: GHRA

Dear Editor,

With complete insensitivity to public, professional and legal sentiment Minister of Health, Dr. Leslie Ramsammy prevailed today, in protecting Police Surgeon Mahendra Chand from any meaningful sanction for his passive cooperation in the case of the tortured teenager. By securing ‘censure’ - the lightest possible sanction – in place of its original recommendation of a two-months suspension, the Minister has effectively deprived the Guyana Medical Council of the capacity to enforce professional standards.

The Minister throughout this case has shown scant regard for public indignation, professional standards, or the victim. Rather than stick to his peripheral statutory role the Minister made himself a central figure in this matter. The Medical Practitioners Act does not presume the Minister even to be a medical practitioner, nor have him pretend to be one. Moreover, under the Act the medical profession regulates itself, the Minister’s role is limited to approving decisions the Council takes. The Act (Section19) specifically provides for recourse to a High Court judge by any person aggrieved by a decision of the Council with respect to suspension. Such judicial oversight renders the Minister’s interference even more unnecessary.

Over the months of his prevarications, the Minister has referred several times to not wanting a decision which could be taken to court. In a press release last evening the Minister stated: “I believe the Council has established the protocol that would reduce the chances of success when those who the Council have censured and suspended in the past approached the courts to reverse the Council’s action.” In plain English this could translate into: I have forced the Medical Council into accepting the formula that its penalties must be so trivial no one would ever bother to legally challenge them.

The Minister’s agonizing in the press as if the doctor were the victim, (“he was damned if he did and damned if he didn’t”) and wanting “somebody to tell me what other options” were available to Dr. Chand, to say the least, are distasteful and misplaced. In a comment dismissive of the entire medical profession, Dr. Ramsammy also concluded that “any doctor you would have put in that position would have ended up in trouble.”

Having got the decision he wanted, the Minister is effectively depriving the Medical Council of the power of suspension for malpractice. A slap on the wrist for passive collusion with torturing minors virtually ensures every attempt at suspension for lesser mal-practice would be challenged legally, thereby making a nonsense of the Minister’s stated aim. His actions are in danger of creating two precedents: the Minister of Health now has a role in determining professional misconduct; and secondly, the Minister will be, in effect, the only person who can remove unethical or unprofessional physicians.

GUYANA HUMAN RIGHTS ASSOCIATION

Executive Committee