

**CATHOLIC SCHOLARS FOR WORKER JUSTICE**  
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Findings and Statement of Support:  
**Warwick Health Care Campus**  
**Bon Secours Charity Health Care System, Warwick, N.Y.**

August 6, 2008

**REQUEST:**

Workers with various specialties at the Warwick Health Care Campus (WHCC is composed of: St. Joseph Community Hospital Schervier Pavilion and Mount Alverno Center), Warwick, N.Y. have asked CSWJ to support their campaign to form a union for collective bargaining purposes. WHCC is a member of the Bon Secours Charity Health System (Roman Catholic). CSWJ visited with a large group of workers on July 1, 2008 in Warwick, N.Y. CSWJ listened to the workers and received their request for CSWJ's support for their organizing campaign. The union they have selected to represent them is 1199 SEIU – United Healthcare Workers East.

**FACTS:**

We were initially alerted to this campaign by the receipt of a "Jesus Joke" that was circulated at WHCC in Warwick, N.Y. The joke (a copy will appear on our website) features the picture of a person shaped like a pickle at the top of the page followed by this text:

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*With the union you're always in a "pickle"!*

Two guys and a union worker were fishing on a lake one day, when Jesus walked across the water and joined them in the boat. When the three astonished men had settled down enough to speak, the first guy asked humbly, "Jesus, I've suffered from back pain ever since I took shrapnel in the Vietnam war...could you help me?"

"Of course, my son," Jesus said, and when he touched the man's back, he felt relief for the first time in many years.

The second man, who wore very thick glasses and had a hard time reading and driving, asked if Jesus could do anything about his eyesight.

Jesus smiled, removed the man's glasses and tossed them in the lake. When they hit the water, the man's eyes cleared and he could see everything distinctly.

When Jesus turned to heal the union worker, the guy put his hands up and cried defensively, "Don't touch me! I'm on long term disability."

*See ya next week for another union joke...*

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When asked about the “joke,” many workers told CSWJ directly that they saw this flyer at many places in their workplaces. There is no proof that the hospital administration or the hospital’s “union avoidance” consulting firm, The Burke Group, circulated this joke but, so far, there have been no denials either. In any event, it certainly stimulated our interest. A CSWJ member immediately drafted a resolution on the joke and that has led to a wider investigation into the union-busting activities of Bon Secours Charity Health System’s institutions in Warwick, N.Y. This is a report on that investigation. (Note: Because of the uncertain origin of the “joke” we do not mention it in our Statement of Support. We are continuing to investigate this matter, however.)

Conversations with workers and the receipt of employer-circulated documents indicate: (1) the workers’ clearly wish to unionize, and (2) the Board and administrators at WHCC are determined to resist their choice to bargain collectively. Here, reported in first person by Professor Joseph J. Fahey, is a discussion of these two points:

(1) When I asked the workers why they wanted to organize to a person they said “respect.” When I asked for more information the workers said they wanted to do their jobs better to assist those in need and they thought the power to negotiate work and staffing conditions would assist the patients, the hospital, and their self-respect. Of course, they wanted better wages, benefits, and especially just and fair grievance procedures. Many told stories about how they were constantly short-staffed, about how they were harassed by supervisors, and how intolerant superiors were when they needed emergency time off to care for family needs. One woman, for example, who was at a close relative’s death bed, was told that if she didn’t make her shift at 7AM the next day, she would be fired. Phrases I heard often were: “they have no humanity” and “this is just a business” and “what makes this a Catholic system?” Since many of the workers were Catholic they told me they were really incensed by the “Jesus joke” that they saw everywhere. They said they protested this and haven’t seen any “jokes” since.

Tempers really began to flare, however, when they spoke of their desire to form a union. Many said they “started treating us like children” by talking down to them and comparing union organizers to “traveling salesmen” who should be avoided at all cost. The workers spoke of mandatory meetings – some lasting as long as two hours – where the union was criticized and supervisors portrayed union organizers as thugs who merely wanted the workers’ money for their lavish lifestyles and political interests. Also, these mandatory meetings were often required of everyone, thus leaving the patients unattended for short and long periods of time. Workers reported they were called into supervisors’ offices and read the riot act about being pro-union and warned not to recruit others. They even received a form from Human Resources that urged them to revoke their Authorization Cards. The workers stated that “outside consultants” who did not work at the hospital (but who had valid hospital badges) wandered about in every work location speaking against the union whenever and wherever there was a chance. The consultants distracted them from their work and were annoying, to say the least. It is believed the “consultants” were – are, as of this writing -- employees of The Burke Group, a “union free” consulting firm hired by the hospital.

(2) As already indicated, the employer has fiercely resisted the workers desire to form a union. CSWJ has copies of the following documents:

\* “Anatomy of a Union Card” – a form that states: “Even if you signed a card, you can still change your mind.”

\* A lengthy letter from Thomas R. Brunelle, EVP/Site Administrator (3/25/08) that states: “We (the hospital) are not in favor of a union...” and further, “You have *absolutely no obligation* to sign a *union authorization card*. I ask that, if you are approached, you do not sign such a card.” (Emphasis in all statements in original)

\* A letter (4/15//08) that warns workers about the perils of “third party representation.” Among the statements made: “The Third Party generate revenue and they generally do so via initiation fees and regular dues payments of the employees in the units.”

\* A memo from Human Resources (5/14/08) entitled: “**RE: YOUR RIGHT TO REVOKE THE AUTHORIZATION CARD YOU SIGNED**” that provides workers with an address for SEIU and a detachable form that asks SEIU to “VOID THE CARD AND RETURN IT TO ME IMMEDIATELY.”

\* A flyer (5/20/08) entitled: “**MAKE IT STOP! Tired of Door-to-Door Salesmen? YOU CAN STOP IT!**” This document informs workers that union organizers cannot “bother you or attempt to force their way into your home.”

\* An undated (although sent around 7/1/08) sheet printed on yellow paper that is entitled: “**WHAT COULD SEIU 1199 COST ME?**” The document then lists a host of negatives: Fees, Fines, Assessments, Strikes, Lock Outs, Permanent Replacements, Contracts, Wages & Benefits, etc.

Union professionals inform us that some of this is illegal and, if the union filed a complaint, would surely receive a judgment against the employer if charges were filed with the NLRB. Because this will take a great deal of time, however, and because the fines (if any) will be negligible, they would rather push for the election despite the decided disadvantage they find themselves in due to that these unfair employer practices.

There is one more document we have from the employer that should be examined. It is the Mission Statement (Nov. 27, 2002) of the Bon Secours Charity Health System. It reads as follows:

We are Bon Secours Charity Health System, a caring community called together to make visible God’s love and compassion.

As a Catholic ministry, we work with others embracing the challenge of making wise and just decisions to foster an environment of healing for our patients, residents, staff, partners and communities.

Recognizing the dignity of each human being, we relentlessly seek healing and wholeness for all peoples, especially those who are vulnerable, poor and dying.

CSWJ notes that there are Bon Secours hospitals and health facilities that are organized and at which there are quite cordial and just relationships between administrations and unions. In fact, these partnerships have resulted in positive benefits for all at the hospitals, especially and foremost for the patients. It is important for us to keep the good in context with the yet to be good!

**FINDINGS:**

- (1) The workers at WHCC have filed a valid request to form a union according to CST.
- (2) The administration at WHCC has adopted a hostile attitude toward the workers and the union.
- (3) The administration has intimidated, harassed, and subjected workers to anti-union propaganda through general and one-on-one meetings.
- (4) The administration of WHCC violates both the letter and the spirit of Catholic Social Teaching on workers' rights to join unions.
- (5) The Trustees of WHCC have employed a "union avoidance" consulting firm to assist them in securing a "union free" workplace.

**CSWJ STATEMENT OF SUPPORT:**

Catholic Scholars for Worker Justice supports the right of workers at the Warwick Health Care Campus of Bon Secours Charity Health Care System, Warwick, N.Y., to bargain collectively with their employer through an independent union of their choice. Catholic Scholars for Worker Justice calls upon the Trustees and administration of the Warwick Health Care Campus to follow the letter and the spirit of Catholic Social Doctrine on workers' rights by supporting in word and deed workers' efforts to form labor unions at the Warwick Health Care Campus. Catholic Scholars for Worker Justice calls upon the Trustees and administration to end their campaign of harassment and intimidation against workers who have freely chosen to support a union at the Warwick Health Care Campus. Catholic Scholars for Worker Justice urges the Board of Trustees and the administrators of the Warwick Health Care Campus to immediately discontinue their reliance on consultants or firms that specialize in "union free" workplaces. . Catholic Scholars for Worker Justice calls upon the Warwick Health Care Campus and the Bon Secours Charity Health Care System to recognize that labor unions are an "indispensible element of social life." (*Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*, #305)

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For further information contact: Sr. Mary Priniski, O.P., Executive Secretary, Catholic Scholars for Worker Justice, at The Labor Guild, 85 Commercial Street, Weymouth, MA 02110. 781-340-5885 Email: [marypriniski@yahoo.com](mailto:marypriniski@yahoo.com)