

## On Anniversary of Workers' Encyclicals

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

On 15 May, we shall celebrate the anniversary of two of the Church's greatest social encyclicals.

The first *Rerum Novarum*, “The Workers’ Charter”, was promulgated by Pope Leo XIII in May 1891. This encyclical letter, written 90 years ago, describes the bitter conditions of the working class in the nascent industrial society, and the Pope is firm and forthright in defending the legitimate rights and proclaiming the basic interests of the workers.

The second *Quadragesimo Anno*, written by Pope Pius XI in 1931, declared that, in spite of the passage of four decades since the promulgation of *Rerum Novarum*, many of the just grievances of the workers remained unremedied, or had even got worse, and new labour problems had arisen. In this encyclical letter, Pope Pius reiterated the principles laid down by his predecessor.

It is fitting for us to celebrate the 90th anniversary of *Rerum Novarum* and the golden jubilee of *Quadragesimo Anno*, for we can see how important the

contents of these two great encyclicals are to our society. The problems put forward in the encyclicals are awaiting solution and the practical directives contained in them are awaiting implementation by all of us. Our unceasing efforts and our appeals to the public conscience should give our society hope of reform and of a better world.

The seriousness of labour problems in Hong Kong can be seen in the number of victims of industrial accidents. According to available data, 235 people died in industrial accidents during 1980, and 70,386 other workmen suffered injuries at work in that same year. There is still a great deal to be done for the safety of the workers in Hong Kong!

High inflationary rates affect us in every aspect of life. This causes special anxiety to the large numbers of workers who receive such low wages that at times they can hardly support their families. This is a problem that calls for deep concern for the betterment of relations between employers and employees and for the welfare of the workers.

We read in the Popes' Encyclical letters that the wages of working man should be adequate to the needs of his family. In addition, he should be able to save a

portion of his wages for emergency use. All men have equal right to exist and to enjoy all that is due to their human dignity and to their social status. Workers' rights and their status in our society today should therefore be fully recognised and respected.

For this reason, dear brothers and sisters, I wish to draw your attention to these two masterly encyclicals on labour problems. Let us give heed to what is written in them, and let us manifest our concern in action.

**+ John Baptist Wu**  
**The Bishop of Hong Kong**  
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