The Dignity of Work and the Rights of Workers

What Does the Church Say About the Dignity of Work and the Rights of Workers?

The economy must serve people, not the other way around. Work is more than a way to make a living; it is a form of continuing participation in God's creation. Workers have rights to decent work, just wages, safe working conditions, unionizing, disability protection, retirement security, and economic initiative. The economy exists for the human person; the human person does not exist for the economy. Labor has priority over capital.

Notable quotations from Catholic Social Teaching on the topic of the Dignity of Work and the Rights of Workers

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

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 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
For when people work, they not only alter things and society, they develop themselves as well. They learn much, they cultivate their resources, they go outside of themselves and beyond themselves. Rightly understood, this kind of growth is of greater value than any external riches which can be garnered. People are more precious for what they are than for what they have. Similarly, all that people do to obtain greater justice, wider brotherhood, a more humane ordering of social relationships has greater worth than technical advances. For these advances can supply the material for human progress, but of themselves alone they can never actually bring it about.

The Church in the Modern World, #35

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

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

Quotes from Catholic Social Teaching pulled from http://www.cctwincities.org