

Catholic bishops back Wis. union protesters

by [Daniel Burke](#)

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WASHINGTON (RNS) The U.S. Catholic bishops on Thursday (Feb. 24) threw their moral weight behind the pro-union protesters in Wisconsin, saying the rights of workers do not abate in difficult economic times.

"The debates over worker representation and collective bargaining are not simply matters of ideology or power," said Bishop Stephen Blaire of Stockton, Calif., chairman of the U.S. bishops' committee on domestic justice, "but involve principles of justice, participation and how workers can have a voice in the workplace and economy."

Wisconsin Gov. Scott Walker says proposed legislation to limit collective bargaining rights for public-sector employees is necessary to close a \$137 million deficit in the state's budget, a political strategy that has since spread to statehouses in Indiana and Ohio. Union supporters have responded with massive protests.

The bishops' support for unions came in the form of a public letter addressed to Milwaukee Archbishop Jerome Listecky, who had already said on Feb. 17 that "hard times do not nullify the moral obligation each of us has to respect the legitimate rights of workers."

"Your efforts to share the consistent teaching of the church in the midst of this controversy are an example for all of us on how to apply our moral principles to the `signs of the times,'" Blaire wrote to

Listecki.

Pope Benedict XVI and his predecessor, Pope John Paul II, were both ardent supporters of unions and workers' associations, Blaire said in the letter.