

FACT SHEET



January 2026

Self-Styled ‘Pro-Worker’ GOP Senator Is Objectively Anti-Worker

Failed Attempt to Whitewash Forced Unionism Misleadingly Invokes Pope Leo XIII’s Social Teachings

by Stan Greer

Republican U.S. Sen. Josh Hawley (Mo.), a Presbyterian who was raised as a Methodist, seemingly struck a blow for Christian ecumenism last September 30 when he attended¹ a D.C. event celebrating the legacy of *Rerum Novarum*,² a Catholic encyclical promulgated by Pope Leo XIII in 1891.

Rerum Novarum is widely regarded as “pro-worker.” With respect to labor organizations, it affirms that the state must protect each worker’s freedom to join a union. At the same time, it doesn’t remotely suggest the individual worker shouldn’t be able to choose not to join a union.

Unfortunately, International Brotherhood of Teamsters (IBT) President Sean O’Brien and the other Teamster officials and operatives who put together last fall’s event are now trying to misuse *Rerum Novarum* and the renewed interest in this document stemming from widespread public concerns about workers in the age of AI to advance their own agenda. And this agenda is hardly pro-worker.

The IBT hierarchy and Hawley are teaming up in the 2025-26 Congress to press for passage of S.844, a radical, arguably unconstitutional measure that would empower federal bureaucrats to impose unwanted union job terms and conditions on employees and employers without even granting the employees a chance to vote first on the so-called “contract.”

Unjust Labor Laws Make Employees Involuntary Parties ‘to the Violation of Justice’

Even though Hawley campaigned on a 100% pro-Right to Work platform when he first successfully ran for Congress in 2018, S.844 would actually help union bosses acquire the power to force employees to fork over union dues, or be fired from their jobs, even when Big Labor has failed to sway the employer to acquiesce to such a scheme.

In testimony submitted to the Senate Health, Education, Labor and Pensions (HELP) Committee last October 8, O’Brien sought to link S. 844 to Leo XIII. But the reality is that the “pope of labor” plainly regarded the freedom not to join a union, along with the freedom to join, as critical. Indeed, just four years after *Rerum Novarum*, Leo offered these words of caution for workers, especially Catholic

workers, across the U.S. in *Longinqua*, an encyclical addressed to the American bishops:

[W]orking classes . . . assuredly have the right to unite in associations for the promotion of their interests But it is very important to take heed with whom they associate, lest whilst seeking aid for the improvement of their condition they may be imperiling far weightier interests. The most effective precaution against this peril is to determine with themselves at no time or in any matter to be parties to the violation of justice.

Leo XIII implicitly understood that, unless the individual worker has the legal right not to join or otherwise support a labor union, that worker may involuntarily be made a party “to the violation of justice.” That is no less true in the 2020s than it was in the 1890s.

Forced Dues Extracted From Faithful Catholic Workers Subsidize Pro-Abortion Advocacy

Today many of the American unions that additional thousands, if not millions, of workers would be forced to join and bankroll if S.844 becomes law support public policies and practices that, according to the teaching authority of the Catholic Church, constitute “violations of justice.”

For example, according to the U.S. Council of Catholic Bishops, the U.S. Supreme Court’s 1973 *Roe v. Wade* ruling, which legalized abortion on demand nationwide, “normalized the taking of human life.”³

But top bosses of labor unions like Unite Here (hospitality workers), the Association of Flight Attendants, and Starbucks Workers United loudly supported *Roe* and denounced *Dobbs v. Jackson Women’s Health Organization*,⁴ the Supreme Court decision that overturned it in 2022.

In violation of their conscience, unionized faithful Catholic workers and other unionized employees who share their opposition to abortion on demand routinely subsidize pro-abortion advocacy through the dues or fees they must fork over to Big Labor as a job condition.

Leo XIII would undoubtedly strongly condemn the U.S. labor laws that systematically make workers parties to the violation of justice. But Josh Hawley and Sean O’Brien want

the individual worker to have even less freedom vis-à-vis Big Labor. Their crusade is a travesty of *Rerum Novarum*.

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Endnotes

1. See post entered on Sen. Hawley's X (formerly known as Twitter) account a little after 8:00 PM on Sep. 30, 2025.
2. "Rerum Novarum: Teamsters Celebrate the Legacy of Pope Leo XIII's Encyclical on Labor," Teamster press release, Oct. 1, 2025.
3. "USCCB Statement on U.S. Supreme Court ruling in *Dobbs v. Jackson*," June 24, 2022.
4. Michael Saltsman, "Give Pro-Life Union Members a Choice," *Wall Street Journal*, May 9, 2022.