

He cannot easily withdraw from the marketplace and live on his capital until conditions become more favorable for him.

The second lesson—or maybe it's only another way of stating the first—is that the workingman must organize if he is to talk on a plane of equality with the employer.

In labor negotiations, the whole, if not greater, is at least stronger than the sum of its parts.

The third lesson I have learned is that while legislation to improve the life of the workingman is vitally important, it must necessarily take a second place to the efforts of free working people, organized into free unions, to improve their own lot. We can legislate minimum wages, we can legislate workmen's compensation, we can legislate health and retirement insurance programs, but none of our legislative efforts can ever do more than establish a floor below which negotiations are not allowed, as a matter of simple public decency, to plunge the workingman. If he is to rise above that floor, if he is to participate as fully as his contribution to the general welfare entitles him in the benefits of society, then he will do so more completely, more rapidly, and more permanently through collective bargaining than through all the efforts of the most forward-looking legislative bodies.

I believe, Mr. Chairman, in a free economy. I do not believe in more Government regulation than is necessary to maintain minimum standards of decency. But I believe, and these beliefs are inseparable, that the parties to that free economy must be of equal strength. It follows from this, that agricultural workers must be able to be as free to help set the conditions under which they work as are agricultural employers. And the first essential step to achieve this must be the extension to these workers of the same rights that are enjoyed by their fellow workers on the assembly line, in the cabs of trucks, and behind sales counters.

As I have heard it argued that allowing farmworkers to organize would be "different" because if farm labor strikes during the harvest season, the employer is under a disadvantage. That's absolutely true. If farmworkers are organized, if they can refuse their labor to an employer because he offers them substandard wages or working conditions, if they can simply opt out of the labor market, the employer is under pressure. But he is under pressure to pay decent wages and to provide decent working conditions. And, Mr. Chairman, he very well ought to be under such pressure.

Labor negotiation is not supposed to be a set of circumstances in which there is a phony semblance of equality, in which the employer is very pleasant and polite to the employee, but in which the end result is foreordained because the employees simply have no way of making their point. The very purpose of the right to organize and the right to strike is to give to labor some leverage, some method of bringing pressure to bear on the employer. It assumes—and the history of agricultural labor proves the assumption fully—that employers are not going to pay as much as they can afford, but rather as little as they can get away with.

We are told that if agricultural labor can organize and strike, that in some circumstances crops are not going to get picked, and growers will be in trouble. That's too bad, and for the most part agricultural labor is not going to be any more anxious to put growers out of business