

There can be no question that within the last few years we have made important gains in the field of farm labor. As one who was active in the successful fight to end the mass importation of "braceros" under Public Law 78, I am delighted with the first steps that have been taken in minimum wage protections, education and health services, and day care centers for the children of migrant farmworkers. These, though, are only beginnings. We need to do much more, and in other fields as well, and we need to do it quickly.

For let us recognize very clearly that until recently there has been a conscious, and a largely successful, effort to exclude the farmworkers of this country from much of the basic economic and social legislation written in the last 34 years.

They have been denied unemployment compensation, and yet their need for income protection may even be greater than that of other workers because of the seasonal employment patterns and low wage structure of agriculture.

They have been denied workmen's compensation in all but a few States, and yet farmwork has become one of the most dangerous of all occupations.

Until the end of Public Law 78 on December 31, 1964, we even interfered with their labor market by importing thousands of foreign workers to do the jobs that American workers were prepared to do if paid decent wages and afforded decent working conditions.

In brief, we have treated our hired farmworkers like second-class citizens. The result has been predictable: American farmworkers today are one of the most deprived and disadvantaged groups in our society. Their poverty truly deserves the description of "a harvest of shame."

Thomas Pitts, the very able secretary-treasury of the California Labor Federation, pointed out earlier this year that:

The events of the last few years suggest that domestic farm workers are likely to remain second-class citizens in an affluent society unless the social-economic legislation applicable to most of the nation's workers is extended to them.

As first order of business, Mr. Chairman, we should grant farmworkers the same rights to organize and bargain collectively as are enjoyed by their industrial brothers. Let us acknowledge the facts: big agriculture is big business. The myth of the small family farm has been largely replaced, if not devoured, by the giant of corporate agriculture.

But despite the changes of the last 100, 50, and even the last dozen years, farmworkers are still treated as dispensable, second-class employees. They can achieve a collective-bargaining relationship—the basis of working relationships in almost every other sector of our economy—only with the consent of their employer. In other words, collective bargaining may occur only in those cases where the farmworkers themselves—through strikes, boycotts, and other means—are able to force their employers to bargain with them. Industrial workers passed through this barrier 32 years ago with the Wagner Act. But agricultural employees are still waiting for this fundamental employment security.

The very reasons that have historically been used to oppose this basic protection for farmworkers are, in reality, the very reasons why it is so important to provide it. The fact that agriculture is subject to