

The history of labor relations in this country reflects that there have been sporadic efforts by farmworkers to organize themselves into labor unions. Perhaps the greatest such efforts came about in the thirties, when farmworkers in California, driven there by the great drought in the central plains, found that the promised land contained nothing for them but despair. These workers tried to unionize, but they were met with clubs and guns, and they found that camps could be concentration camps, and farms, prisons. Their effort failed, but the idea has never faded, and last year, there was at long last a successful effort to organize a significant number of agricultural workers.

In the absence of a framework of laws within which to conduct matters, efforts to organize workers into unions will meet with resistance of every sort, and the result is chaos. Not every employer resists unions, but the fact is that when there is no law, anarchy prevails, and in a state of anarchy, it is the powerful who prevail. For this reason, union activities in the absence of law results very often in the employment of mass firings, violence on both sides, economic reprisals, lockouts and other needless and ruinous actions. More often than not, in such a situation, a company or activity can be organized only after strenuous and violent efforts, with damage to both sides. If an employee group is able to beat down a recalcitrant employer, there will be a contract; otherwise there will not.

We witnessed industrial anarchy in the 1930's and we saw warfare between farmers and workers in the same period. There was widespread economic dislocation, and there was even more widespread injustice. We solved this by creating a framework of laws within which unions and employers could operate in conducting their relations.

Since that time, we have not had the yellow dog contract or the blacklist; we have not had industrial warfare. But the farmworker who would organize into a union must face the same obstacles that the industrial organizer of 1934 had to face.

In the Rio Grande Valley of Texas, today, there are efforts to start farm employee unions. These efforts are met with firings of those who are union members, or who look or talk as if they might be, or might like to be, union members. There are jailings, there are ugly incidents, and there are the old tools on the twenties and the 19th century: economic threats and reprisals, blacklists and employment of physical threats. All of this might not be halted by the bill before the committee, but one thing is clear: we can no more afford the kind of warfare between farmer and farmworker than we could the warfare between worker and industry 30 years ago.

Nor is this simply an economic question; it is a moral one as well. I do not believe that Congress can say to the majority of workers in this land that they have certain rights and that there are fair and unfair labor practices, and then deny this same privilege and protection to farmworkers.

I believe that if one man has a right under law, then all other men are entitled to it as well. I believe that if firing a man for union activity is an unfair labor practice at General Motors, then it is also an unfair labor practice in a factory field in California or Texas. But the fact is that there is no such thing as an unfair labor practice in the Federal lexicon, as far as farmworkers are concerned.