

I am here today to urge that Congress continue to right the ancient wrongs done to America's farm workers—the poorest of the poor and the most exploited.

You know the facts, as well as I do. The average farm worker wage in 1966 was \$1.07 an hour, while the average wage for manufacturing was \$2.75 an hour—over twice as much.¹ There are some 3 million people who do some farm work for wages during a year. Only about 600,000 work for more than 150 days of the year. And 400,000 to 500,000 constitute migrant farm workers, who seek jobs and incomes where they can—often without work or income or help of any kind for numerous weeks.

Even more cruel is the amazing record of productivity for American agriculture not shared by farm workers. Their productivity has climbed from 103 percent in 1958 to 155.8 percent in 1966 using 1957-59 as a base year.¹

Much of the fantastic rise in farm worker productivity is a result of rapid mechanization plus more and better use of fertilizers, seeds, chemicals, and other forms of scientific agriculture. It means cheaper food and fiber for American consumers.

We, therefore, have a compounding of injustice—farm workers wages are half the size of manufacturing workers wages, while farm worker productivity is going up twice the rate for the rest of the economy.

1. *Farm Workers Left Out of Law for Expediency's Sake.* The legislative history of the Wagner Act indicates that farm workers were left out of the basic labor-management law of the land in order to get the Wagner Act through Congress. Some arguments were raised by farm organizations to exempt farm workers because of farming's uniqueness. The basic reason was raw politics. Supporters of the Wagner Act felt farm workers would eventually be covered. They feared inclusion of farm workers would load the bill down and kill any chance of enacting the Wagner Act.

Chairman Connery of the House Labor Committee in 1935 said:

"We hope that the agricultural workers eventually will be taken care of . . . If we can get this bill through and get it working properly, there will be opportunity later, I hope soon, to take care of the agricultural worker."

In his study of the legislative history of farm worker exemption, James R. Wason, specialist in labor relations for the economics division of the Library of Congress Legislative Reference Service, says:

"The clear indication is that the decision to exclude agricultural workers from the Wagner Act was taken on the grounds of expediency, not philosophy."

During the same period, the LaFollette Committee was investigating the denial of free speech and assembly among farm workers. Its counsel is the now Secretary of the Treasury Henry Fowler.

In a report on farm workers, the LaFollette Committee stated:

"Collective action by the hired workers in industrialized agriculture, supplemented by social action of government agencies, similar to that applied to other industry, must become the order of the day."

"Order of the day," indeed! That call for action echoes down the corridors of American history. The farm worker's plight has been studied and pitied and studied again. Congress has a moral duty to respond now with legislation to right this wrong.

2. *There Is Nothing Unique About Industrialized Agriculture.* It has been argued that because farming is seasonal and because harvest time puts farm operators at a vulnerable disadvantage, farm workers cannot and should not be organized into unions the same as industrial workers.

Thousands of workers in processing plants are today organized into unions. Their representation elections are supervised and conducted by the National Labor Relations Board.

There is no practical reason why the NLRB cannot use the same administrative ingenuity in setting up elections and bargaining units for field workers on large commercial farms which it uses in handling elections for workers in fruit and vegetable processing plants.

Commercial agriculture is a highly profitable business. It has been made more profitable by heavy government subsidies which are no respecter of size of farm or size of income.

The proposed legislation does two things: 1) includes farm workers under the basic labor-management act; and 2) provides for hiring halls in setting up a labor pool with contract rights on seniority, wages and working conditions.

¹ Weighted average of all farm wage rates on a per hour basis, 1967 Economic Report to the President, p. 245.