

APPENDIX

STATEMENTS AND LETTERS FROM PROPONENTS OF H.R. 4769

STATEMENT BY STEVE ALLEN, FOUNDING MEMBER, NATIONAL ADVISORY COMMITTEE ON FARM LABOR

I appreciate the opportunity to submit this statement on behalf of the National Advisory Committee on Farm Labor, a voluntary, nonprofit organization of which I am a member, and whose purpose is to gather and present information about farm labor practices and policies.

"The committee discussed this matter carefully in executive session and decided not to include agricultural workers. *We hope that the agricultural workers will be taken care of * * * I am in favor of giving agricultural workers every protection*, but just now I believe in biting off one mouthful at a time. If we can get this bill through and get it working properly, there will be opportunity later, and I hope soon, to take care of the agricultural workers."

These were the words of Representative Connery, sponsor of the bill that in 1935 became the National Labor Relations Act. It is now 32 years since Congress took its first bite, and agricultural workers have been excluded four times since, when the Act has been amended.

The father of the National Labor Relations Act, Senator Wagner, had included farm workers in his draft of the bill; when it emerged from Committee they were specifically excluded for "administrative reasons."

Denied the reasonable processes of organizing and settling disputes under NLRA, farm workers have been forced to go their own way and have had virtually no option but to strike in order to force negotiations. In essence, the struggle over the years has been to try to establish grower recognition of a union representing the workers. Wages, working and living conditions, and hours are usually the sensitive issues which touch off a strike, but the overriding question has been whether or not the employer will sit down and negotiate with his workers.

The indignities to which farm workers have long been subjected because they lack strong unions would be impossible to discuss here in rightfully lengthy detail. But a quick review of recent months shows that the abuses continue unabated. A few examples:

In Western New York State alone, three migrant workers have been killed in the last nine months by fires in their ramshackle dwellings.

A strong union would be able to demand enforcement of housing and health codes dealing with farm labor camps.

A minister and a labor organizer were arrested on the charge of "disturbing the janitor in performance of his duties" as they conducted a prayer vigil on the steps of the Starr County Courthouse in Texas.

The existence of a lawfully protected farm workers' union would help deter local authorities from acting with such disregard for civil liberties and the right of free speech.

In Florida, worker representatives were turned away from a grower meeting with their list of grievances. The workers had no recourse but to go out on strike.

A legally recognized union of workers could have gained access to the growers for a negotiating meeting, and their differences could have been settled without resort to a strike as the only solution.

Incidents of violence on the part of a few growers and local authorities have occurred even during the past two years. On the struck ranches in California, pickets have been sprayed with insecticide, and one picket was run over by a truck. Not even the bloody war in Vietnam has seen an atrocity as vicious as that suffered by a long-time union organizer who was attacked and tortured by two men, as yet unidentified, who forced a broomstick with a nail attached up his