

294 EXTENSION OF NLRA TO AGRICULTURAL EMPLOYEES

STATEMENT OF HON. E. C. GATHINGS, A REPRESENTATIVE IN CONGRESS FROM THE
STATE OF ARKANSAS

Mr. Chairman, thanks very much for the opportunity of presenting this statement in opposition to H.R. 4769 which has for its purpose amending the National Labor Relations Act by bringing farm labor under its provisions. The bill as written would victimize farmers by placing wage force operations under the direction and control of a costly Federal Agency and put farm labor under the yoke of paying compulsory homage to a horde of Labor Union leaders. The bill goes farther than laws which are already on statute books applicable to various segments of industry.

Let's see what the bill does:

It would grant farm workers the right to organize, to bargain collectively, and to engage in other concerted activities.

It authorizes farmers to make pre-hire agreements covering farm workers with a labor organization. "The pre-hire agreements would be permitted as follows:

"1. The contract may be entered into before the majority status of the Union has been established.

"2. The agreement may require employees to join the Union seven days after their employment or after the effective date of the contract, whichever is later.

"3. The agreement may require the employer:

a. To notify the Union for opportunities for employment.

b. To give the Union the opportunity to refer qualified applicants for such employment.

"4. The agreement may specify minimum training or experience—or provide for priorities in opportunities for employment."

Even if this legislation were desirable, the timing is wrong completely. We are engaged in an all-out struggle with communist aggressors who seek "to bury us." All energies of the Nation are needed to win this war so that our gallant men can come home and engage in making for a better America in their communities. Social experiments such as this legislation would authorize can very well wait until peace comes.

The results of this legislation would be:

1. It would hurt the over-all wage earner as much as it would do damage to the wage payer as the cost of food would go up.

2. It would make fewer farm jobs available as producers of food and fiber would speedily move to mechanization.

3. Food production would decline as under the proposal the workers could go on strike if an acceptable contract could not be agreed upon between the farmer and his workers and such strike could very well come during the harvest season. Vital and essential food would go unharvested and rot in the fields.

With the expanding needs as populations continue to soar over the world farmers should be receiving incentives to increase their production to meet the needs of our people and to meet our export objectives and for food for peace assistance to friendly peoples in the underdeveloped countries of the world.

Only last year an amendment to the Fair Labor Standards Act was approved to bring agricultural workers under its provisions for the first time at a minimum wage rate of \$1.00 an hour. Within one year and one-half a 30% increase (\$1.30) in that rate will be paid farm workers starting in February, 1969. This wage law has thrown a large number of farm workers off the farms and out of a job. As labor costs go up, imports are brought into the country, and mechanization in agriculture accelerates, many more of these unskilled workers will be out of work and added to the Nation's relief rolls.

The net income of American agriculture in the year 1967 totaled 15.5 billion dollars, but in 1947 the net earnings were 17.1 billion dollars. While the farmer was earning a lesser net worth the National income is expected to reach about 640 billion dollars in 1967 when compared to 1947 it was 199 billion dollars. It is costing the farmer considerably more to grow the food and fiber, yet his earnings are less.

The passage of this legislation would work a severe hardship not only on farmers and their workers, but this added wage rate to agriculture would have a telling effect upon various industries that serve the farmer with fertilizer, farm implements, seed, insecticides, shipping containers, and transportation. These various industries would probably cut their production and reduce their workers in order to make a profit.

I hope that this legislation will not be approved by your Committee or the Congress. I appreciate the opportunity of giving you my views with respect to this bill.