

NATIONAL CONFERENCE OF CATHOLIC BISHOPS

November 16, 1973

Washington, D.C.

The following resolutions were unanimously adopted by the Annual Meeting of the National Conference of Catholic Bishops in Washington, D.C. on November 16, 1973. This followed a one-hour discussion based on a presentation made by Bishop Joseph F. Donnelly, Chairman of the Bishops' Committee on Farm Labor. The resolutions read as follows:

- 1) It was moved and seconded that the National Conference of Catholic Bishops go on record in support of the right of the field workers in the agricultural industry to free secret ballot elections which will determine whether or not they want Union representation, and which union they want to represent them. The National Conference of Catholic Bishops calls upon the growers and the Teamsters to accede to this demand of the United Farm Workers of America without further delay. The motion was unanimously carried.
- 2) The National Conference of Catholic Bishops endorses and supports the UFW's consumer boycotts of table grapes and head lettuce until such time as free secret ballot elections are held. The motion was carried unanimously.

Report of Bishop Joseph F. Donnelly, Chairman of the Bishops' Committee on Farm Labor to the annual Meeting of the National Conference of Catholic Bishops, Washington, D.C., November 16, 1973:

"Mr. Chairman and members of the conference: The Bishops' Committee on Farm Labor was established in November, 1969 at the annual fall meeting of the National Conference of Catholic Bishops. The NCCB authorized the committee to study the table grape strike and empowered the members of the committee "to issue appropriate statements as in their estimation, the facts warranted."

"During the floor discussion of the committee's purpose and role, it was made a matter of official record that if the committee's efforts to persuade the parties to negotiate were unsuccessful, the NCCB was prepared to take further action. This meant, in context, that if necessary, the NCCB might at the appropriate time come out in favor of the boycott.

"Pursuant to this NCCB mandate, the Bishops' Committee held an extensive series of meetings in California with the top officers of the United Farm Workers and with a number of representative growers. As a result of these meetings, which extended over a period of several months, the parties eventually resolved their long-standing dispute in the table grape industry, through the normal processes of collective bargaining. Representatives of the Bishops' Committee, by invitation of the parties, sat in as observers at most of the bargaining sessions, and, in some cases, were called upon to mediate between the parties.

"In summary, I think it can be said that the Committee played an indispensable role in settling the table grape dispute.

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"The table grape controversy was finally resolved in July, 1970, when the so-called Delano growers signed collective bargaining contracts with the U.F.W. Shortly thereafter, a substantial number of lettuce growers in the Salinas Valley secretly signed agreements with the Teamsters, who could not claim to represent the workers involved. The California Supreme Court subsequently ruled that these Teamster contracts were collusive.

"The United Farm Workers immediately called a massive strike in the Salinas Valley. Thereupon, representatives of the Bishops' Committee were invited to mediate between the UFW and the Teamsters in an effort to resolve this unexpected crisis. With committee representatives serving as mediators, the parties worked out an agreement which ceded jurisdiction over field workers to the UFW. Under the terms of this agreement the Teamsters retained jurisdiction over the packing sheds and food processing plants which they had organized many years ago. The pact further stipulated that the Teamsters would use their best efforts to persuade the growers voluntarily to rescind their Teamster contracts and renegotiate them with the UFW. As it turned out, only a handful of lettuce growers took advantage of this offer within the period of time specified in the jurisdictional pact. The other growers refused to rescind their contracts and, to this day, they are still adamant in their refusal to deal with the UFW.

"Faced with this dilemma, the UFW subsequently called a national lettuce boycott-- and the battle was on again. Some months later, the Teamsters and the UFW sat down to work out a second jurisdictional pact -- this time under the auspices of the National Committee serving again as observers. This second pact also failed to achieve its stated purpose. In other words, the growers again refused to rescind their Teamster contracts.

"Even at that, the United Farm Workers continued to negotiate for several months with a number of interested growers. In the end, however, their negotiations broke down, and, in due time, the lettuce boycott was renewed. Shortly thereafter, in an effort to mediate between the parties, the Bishops' Committee, on its own initiative, held a series of three meetings with the top officers of the Teamster's International and the Western Conference of Teamsters. Two of these meetings took place in Washington, D.C. and one at the headquarters of the Western Conference in Burlingame, California. At the conclusion of the third meeting, after representatives of the committee had made their presentation, and had been excused, the Teamsters went into Executive Session and, a few hours later, publically announced that they had decided to take the UFW on and organize farmworkers all over the state of California without regard to the two jurisdictional pacts referred to above.

"In April of this year, upon the expiration of the UFW table grape contracts in the Coachella Valley, it was announced that the Teamsters had secretly signed up all but two of the growers in Coachella. This was a clear signal that the Teamsters -- who did not represent the workers in the Coachella Valley -- were determined, in collusion with the growers, to destroy the UFW.

"The UFW, understandably, was appalled by this development and immediately called a strike in Coachella and also called for another table grape boycott. Subsequently, the Executive Council of the AFL-CIO voted to supply the UFW with the strike fund of \$1.6 million. The Federation also sent experienced organizers to Coachella and invited all of its affiliated Unions

to send organizers from their own staffs.

"On September 28, the Teamsters, at the prodding of the National AFL-CIO, tentatively agreed to a third jurisdictional pact with the UFW. It was generally thought that this pact, unlike the earlier Teamster-UFW agreements, would "stick" and that it would prepare the way for an orderly and peaceful settlement of the farm labor dispute. Unfortunately, however, the Teamsters announced a week ago that they could not and would not abide by the terms of the proposed agreement.

"In the face of this development, the United Farm Workers Union had no choice but to accelerate its national boycott of head lettuce and table grapes as the only non-violent instrument of power left it. We must be clear about the fact that the very existence of the UFW is at stake in this struggle.

"The Bishops' Committee on Farm Labor has met to reconsider its own role in the light of this urgent crisis. The committee is convinced that the cause represented by Cesar Chavez and the United Farm Workers Union is a just cause. We are persuaded that the UFW represents the best interests of the nation's agricultural workers and that it deserves our whole-hearted support in its struggle to protect the legitimate economic rights of one of the most disadvantaged groups of workers in the American economy.

"Accordingly, the Committee moves the following recommendations:

- 1) ...as on page one
- 2) ...as on page one"

The following gave supporting speeches; no dissenting speeches were given.

Cardinal Medeiros of Boston, speaking as a member of the Bishops' Committee and strongly urging the adoption of the resolutions.

Archbishop Furey of San Antonio, who had previously been the Bishop of San Diego and therefore was able to say he knew the Coachella Valley as well as Texas... very strongly urged the adoption of the resolutions.

Bishop Walter Sullivan, administrator of the Diocese of Richmond, called attention to the fact that there is a very serious migratory labor problem on the East Coast and that it exists in his own Diocese. He strongly urged support for the resolutions.

Archbishop Carroll of Miami spoke of the migratory problems in Miami and in Florida. He said that he had met with Cesar Chavez to discuss the matter, and urged support for the UFW.

Bishop Eingman of Des Moines Bishop O'Rourke of Peoria (a member of the Bishops' Committee on Farm Labor) Msgr. Higgins (consultant to the committee)