

# Fair Deal for Farm Workers

A point of decision is nearing on Capitol Hill in the long fight to extend to agricultural laborers the freedom to unionize that workers in industry generally have been guaranteed for more than thirty years. Hired farm labor is the most deprived section of the entire work force. Even now, with a Federal minimum wage finally in effect, the average annual earnings for farm workers run to substantially less than half the poverty level set by the Federal Government.

A bill to give them the same organization and bargaining rights that now prevail for all other workers has been reported out by the House Labor Committee and is now bottled up in the Rules Committee. In the Senate the subcommittee on migrant farm labor, headed by Senator Harrison Williams of New Jersey, has endorsed a similar measure. The big question is whether it can move this week through the full Senate Committee on Education and Labor. The Republican members have indicated that their strategy will be to boycott the sessions in the hope of blocking a quorum and thus killing the bill.

The measure has twelve Democratic sponsors in the Senate. It deserves the support of both parties. Unionism has won a small foothold in California's vineyards, thanks to the inspirational leadership of Cesar Chavez, but even there the infant United Farm Workers has had to rely heavily on strikes and boycotts.

Agriculture is becoming big business. It is time that the 1.5 million laborers on the largest farms were brought under the umbrella of industrial democracy.

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