

Official City Support For Boycott of Lettuce Is Forbidden by Koch

Mayor Koch has vetoed official city participation in the United Farm Workers of America boycott of nonunion iceberg lettuce and Chiquita-brand bananas.

The boycott effort, organized by Councilman Robert Steingut of Brooklyn, had apparently been promoted by Joseph C. Hoffman, president of the Health and Hospitals Corporation, who said in a letter to Mr. Steingut that the municipal hospital system would "abstain from purchasing these two products."

However, the Mayor yesterday informed the Department of General Services that his administration forbade boycotts. A spokesman for the vacationing Mr. Hoffman hastily added that the original expression of support "was written out of Joe's personal conviction."

"My policy is that the city of New York, in its fragile financial state, should not engage in economic boycotts," Mr. Koch said after informing the Department of General Services that city purchasing agents were not to be prohibited from buying the products.

"We would not want others to boycott the City of New York," Mr. Koch said. "If private people want to participate in boycotts, that's all right, but as city policy I believe it's harmful."

The boycott debate began on July 30, several days after the City Council unanimously approved a resolution supporting the seven-month-old boycott. The boycott was called by the union's leader, Cesar Chavez, against major California growers.

Mr. Steingut wrote to Mr. Hoffman, seeking his support, and Mr. Hoffman replied by saying that a directive ordering all facilities to support the boycott would be sent.

However, Mr. Hoffman discovered that the central purchasing department at General Services was responsible for buying food for the hospital system. His spokesman said that a memo would be sent to the director of purchasing asking that the products be boycotted citywide in a show of solidarity with the striking farm workers. That, however, was before Mr. Koch made his policy clear to both city agencies.