

File →

NEWSletter



1300 SOUTH WABASH AVENUE · CHICAGO 5, ILLINOIS

VOL. I, NO. 2

September, 1960

LEGISLATIVE REPORT

Your letters and telephone calls have made an impact. For the first time since 1949 when Public Law 78 was first passed, the bill to renew it has not sailed through Congress as its supporters would want it to. On the last day of the session, the Senate did renew the law by passing H. R. 12759, but they extended the law for only six months as a stop-gap until it could be reconsidered in the next Congress. The law will now terminate on December 31, 1961. The bill was passed on a plea from Senator Carl Hayden of Arizona who asked that the bill be passed for six months to give ample time for its consideration and amendment in the next Congress. He guaranteed that the House-Senate Conference would agree to the six month extension, which it did, and President Eisenhower signed the bill last week.

This is a major victory. In the four previous extensions of the law the groups which have opposed it in its present form have made little headway. If we keep working as we have, our chances of getting a more just and equitable law and of eventually terminating this program are now very good.

VISIT YOUR SENATORS AND CONGRESSMEN NOW

The most important thing that can be done right now is to visit your Congressmen and Senators telling them of your opposition to the law as it now stands and asking them to vote for proper amendments to it when it comes up again in Congress next year.

WHAT TO DO

- Organize a small delegation of voters from your organization, your neighborhood, or among your acquaintances and make a date with the Congressman from your district. If you can, try to see one or both of your Senators.
- Inform yourself about Public Law 78 so that you can talk to intelligently about it. This can be done easily and quickly. If you need information, write us and we will be glad to send you a resume which you can use to brief yourself and your delegation.

--- Tell him that as voting citizens of his district you oppose the present law because:

- (1) Underpaid and under-employed U. S. farm workers must compete with an annual importation of nearly one-half million Mexican workers. For example, the average U. S. farm worker earns less than \$1,000.00 a year for both his farm and off-farm work.
- (2) Mexicans are being used increasingly in year-round and skilled occupations contrary to the intent of the law.
- (3) This program depresses the already inadequate wage rates of domestic farm workers.
- (4) Family farmers' incomes have been reduced because they must compete with this cheap labor supply which is used almost exclusively by large-scale operators (2% of U. S. farms).
- (5) Separating men from their families for long periods of time has had serious consequences on Mexican family life and this program has been strongly opposed by the Mexican Bishops.

--- Tell him that you think the law should be amended to correct these abuses and to:

- (1) Limit foreign workers to necessary crops in temporary labor shortage situations.
- (2) Authorize the Secretary of Labor to establish wages for foreign workers which will not undermine domestic wage scales.
- (3) Authorize the Secretary of Labor to refuse to certify foreign workers unless there is an actual shortage, employers have made active efforts to recruit domestic workers, domestic workers are guaranteed the same benefits as foreign workers, and wages paid to U. S. workers are not less than those paid to foreign workers.
- (4) Establish a tripartite advisory group composed of members from management, labor and the public to advise the Secretary of Labor.

--- Ask him to keep you informed when bills on this program are introduced and what position he intends to take.

A personal visit to your Congressman and Senator is more important than many hundreds of letters. Remember that it is your opinion in which he is most interested because you are the people who vote and whom he represents.

NEW JERSEY YCW GROUP MAKES FRONT PAGE

The Ramsey Young Christian Workers made the front page of the Ramsey Journal on September 8 for the outstanding work they have been doing on migrant workers in their area. Starting with a quiet investigation into the conditions under which migrant farm workers live, the group has now scheduled a public meeting for September 28 to bring the situation before the public. Senator Harrison A. Williams of New Jersey has been invited to speak at the meeting which will be held in St. Paul's Church.

The group reported that they were ordered off one farm when they asked why the migrant workers were not allowed to go to church services on Sunday. The five men in this instance were quartered in a cinder block building next to a pig tank. They also reported that as farms are exempted from the minimum wage law, the migrant workers receive lower pay than most native workers, usually about 85¢ an hour. In addition, they must pay for food provided by the farm owner.

They hope to make use of the forces of public opinion to assure improvement in the lot of the workers. They have contacted a Spanish Augustinian priest at their seminary a few miles away who will help them. The group is also providing a service to the workers by taking them to Mass. They report that the migrants are friendly and receive them warmly each time. The bad news so far is that five men at one farm were fired because they asked for a raise in pay from 85¢ to \$1.00 an hour.

Albert E. Vierheilg is head of the group and Joseph Leto is treasurer.

THE ARCHBISHOP AND MIGRANT LEGISLATION

Most Reverend Robert E. Lucey, Archbishop of San Antonio, deserves the admiration of all of us for his constant and forthright fight for so many years to better conditions of American migrant workers. One of the first leading churchmen to expose the underprivileged conditions of migrant farm workers, he has become a leading Church authority on farm problems and was one of the five members of President Truman's Commission on Migratory Labor in 1951.

Archbishop Lucey has been an outspoken critic of Public Law 78. In a recent speech he castigated "those members of Congress who stand in fear and trembling before the organized might of the farm bloc ready always to vote for the strong against the weak." What success has been achieved to create more just employment for migrant workers can in large measure be attributed to his leadership and influence.

Archbishop Lucey is a member of the Bishops' Committee for Migrant Workers and Executive Chairman of the Bishops' Committee for the Spanish Speaking.

"THE MIGRANT FARM WORKER IN AMERICA"

The Senate Subcommittee on Migratory Labor of the Committee on Labor and Public Welfare has just published the most concise up to date summary of the migrant worker situation. Covering the whole field of migrant labor, it will be useful for groups wanting good background material. Entitled "The Migrant Farm Worker in America", the report may be obtained from the Committee, New Senate Office Building, Washington 25, D. C. or from our office.

Very Reverend William J. Quinn

Very Rev. Msgr. William J. Quinn
Executive Secretary

Lester C. Hunt

Lester C. Hunt
Executive Assistant

BISHOPS' COMMITTEE FOR MIGRANT WORKERS
1300 South Wabash Avenue
Chicago 5, Illinois



5428th

Miss Helen L. Johnston
Migrant Health Unit
U. S. Dept. of Health,
Education & Welfare
Washington 25, D. C.