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Proclamation of the Delano Grape Workers

REMARKS

OF

HON. JAMES G. O'HARA

OF MICHIGAN

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Monday, May 12, 1969

Mr. O'HARA. Mr. Speaker, last Saturday, May 10, was proclaimed International Boycott Day by the Delano grape workers. Consumers everywhere were called upon to withhold their patronage from stores selling table grapes.

When the Congress enacted the National Labor Relations Act over 30 years ago, agriculture workers were excluded from the provisions of this act. In effect, the Congress made second-class citizens of farmworkers by refusing to protect their right to form unions and to bargain collectively with their employers.

For the past 7 years, efforts on the part of the grape workers to bargain collectively have been largely ignored by the growers. Without the protection of the law, the workers had nowhere to go but to the public.

Two years ago, the farmworkers of California called upon consumers to boycott grapes in an effort to force the growers to recognize the rights of the workers and to bargain collectively with them. The boycott has been more and more effective as the public has become more and more aware of the plight of the farmworkers. By boycotting grapes, consumers tell growers that they will not purchase their product until they know that the workers who harvest it are assured of a just wage, humane working conditions, job security, and other employee benefits taken for granted by most working men and women in America.

Mr. Speaker, I insert the proclamation of the Delano grape workers for International Boycott Day at this point in the RECORD:

PROCLAMATION OF THE DELANO GRAPE WORKERS FOR INTERNATIONAL BOYCOTT DAY, MAY 10, 1969

We, the striking grape workers of California, join on this International Boycott Day with the consumers across the continent in planning the steps that lie ahead on the road to our liberation. As we plan, we recall the footsteps that brought up to this day and the events of this day. The historic road of our pilgrimage to Sacramento later branched out, spreading like the unpruned vines in struck fields, until it led us to willing exile in cities across this land. There, far from the earth we tilled for generations, we have cultivated the strange soil of public understanding, sowing the seed of our truth and our cause in the minds and hearts of men.

We have been farm workers for hundreds of years and pioneers for seven. Mexicans, Filipinos, Africans and others, our ancestors were among those who founded this land and tamed its natural wilderness. But we are still pilgrims on this land, and we are pioneers who blaze a trail out of the wilderness of hunger and deprivation that we have suffered even as our ancestors did. We are conscious today of the significance of our present quest. If this road we chart leads to the rights and reforms we demand, if it leads to just wages, humane working conditions, protection from the misuse of pesticides, and to the fundamental right of collective bargaining, if it changes the social order that relegates us to the bottom reaches of society, then in our wake will follow thousands of American farm workers. Our example will make them free. But if our road does not bring us to victory and social change, it will not be because our direction is mistaken or our resolve too weak, but only because our bodies are mortal and our journey hard. For we are in the midst of a great social movement, and we will not stop struggling 'til we die, or win!

We have been farm workers for hundreds of years and strikers for four. It was four years ago that we threw down our plowshares and pruninghooks. These Biblical symbols of peace and tranquility to us represent too many lifetimes of unprotesting submission to a degrading social system that allows us no dignity, no comfort, no peace. We mean to have our peace, and to win it without violence, for it is violence we would overcome—the subtle spiritual and mental violence of oppression, the violence subhuman toil does to the human body. So we went and stood tall outside the vineyards where we had stooped for years. But the tailors of national labor legislation had left us naked. Thus exposed, our picket lines were crippled by injunctions and harrassed by growers; our strike was broken by imported scabs; our overtures to our employers were ignored. Yet we knew the day must come when they would talk to us, *as equals*.

We have been farm workers for hundreds of years and boycotters for two. We did not choose the grape boycott, but we *had* chosen to leave our peonage, poverty, and despair behind. Though our first bid for freedom, the strike, was weakened, we would not turn back. The boycott was the only way forward the growers left to us. We called upon our

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fellow men and were answered by consumers who said—as all men of conscience must—that they would no longer allow their tables to be subsidized by our sweat and our sorrow: They shunned the grapes, fruit of our affliction.

We marched alone at the beginning, but today we count men of all creeds, nationalities, and occupations in our number. Between us and the justice we seek now stand the large and powerful grocers who, in continuing to buy table grapes, betray the boycott their own customers have built. These stores treat their patrons' demands to remove the grapes the same way the growers treat our demands for union recognition—by ignoring them. The consumers who rally behind our cause are responding as we do to such treatment—with a boycott! They pledge to withhold their patronage from stores that handle grapes during the boycott, just as we withhold our labor from the growers until our dispute is resolved.

Grapes must remain an unenjoyed luxury for all as long as the barest human needs and basic human rights are still luxuries for farm workers. The grapes grow sweet and heavy on the vines, but they will have to wait while we reach out first for our freedom. The time is ripe for our liberation.

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