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CATHOLIC BISHOPS BACK FARM WORKERS

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Delano, Kern County

California's Roman Catholic hierarchy announced its support here yesterday for unionization of farm workers as "a first and giant step toward a solution" of the farm labor problem.

"It is becoming evident that unless farm workers are given the chance to organize, they are going to become the wards of the State," declared Bishop Hugh Donohoe of the church's Stockton diocese.

He said his statement, to the U.S. Senate Subcommittee on Migratory Labor, was in behalf of all of the State's other Catholic bishops, including Archbishop Joseph T. McGucken of San Francisco.

The prelates, the bishop added, also support the extension to farm workers of all the other legal rights granted most other workers.

These include a minimum wage, Social Security and unemployment insurance coverage, "non-discriminatory employment opportunities, adequate sanitation and physical safety."

Other testimony to the subcommittee by Sheriff Leroy Galyen of Kern County – the center of California's bitter vineyard workers strike, drew an angry response from Senator Robert Kennedy (Dem-N.Y.).

Kennedy spoke out against the arrest of farm strike pickets for being "potential troublemakers." He suggested acidly that Sheriff Galyen and the county District Attorney "read the Constitution of the United States."

The sheriff said he ordered the arrest of 44 pickets, including nine ministers, for "unlawful assembly" last October because non-strikers told him "hey were going to cut up the pickets."

"This is a most interesting concept," said Kennedy. "How can you arrest someone if they haven't violated the law?"

Galyen offered no response to the incredulous Kennedy, the former U.S. Attorney General, who urged the sheriff to "reconsider your procedures."

But another subcommittee member, Republican George Murphy of California said he thought "it's too bad Governor Brown didn't think of this (the sheriff's procedure) before the Watts riots."

Nearly 1000 cheering, sign-waving spectators crowded the Delano High School auditorium and more than 300 others stood anxiously outside as the subcommittee held the last of its three hearings in California.

The major arguments focused on a bill by subcommittee chairman Harrison Williams (D-N.J.) to allow farm workers to unionize and on the seven-months-old vineyard strike in this area.

One of the local major grape growers, Martin Zinovich, told the subcommittee the strike is “a fiction” invented by “outside agitators” as a way “to force workers into a union.”

Worker and union spokesmen denied it vehemently but Zinovich contended that local farm workers “aren’t interest in the union.”

Kennedy immediately challenged the grower to prove his assertion by agreeing to a vote among th workers.

Zinovich said he doubted that the proper machinery could be set up for a vote. But Kennedy contended that “it can be done,” and said he is certain that “the two Senators from California and the Governor” could do it.

“We’re failing in our responsibility and duty,” the Senator added. “End this bitterness: permit the people to vote and decide for themselves, what, if any, union they want.”

After the hearing, strikers announced that today, they will begin a 25-day, 300-mile protest march from here to Sacramento.