

## INTRODUCTION

A.V. Krebs, Delano: The Beginning of a Revolution

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On December 7, 1965, I sat in St. Peter's in Rome as the bishops at Vatican II overwhelmingly promulgated a document on "The Church in the World Today," thereby making it part of official Roman Catholic teaching. Article 68 of that document, dealing with "Economic Participation and Conflict," contained the following comments:

"Among the basic rights of the human person must be counted the right of freely founding labor unions. These unions should be truly able to represent the workers and to contribute to the proper arrangement of economic life. Another such right is that of taking part freely in the activity of these unions without risk of reprisal. . . . Even in present-day circumstances, however, the strike can still be a necessary, though ultimate, means for the defense of the workers' own rights and the fulfillment of their just demands. As soon as possible, however, ways should be sought to resume negotiations and the discussion of reconciliation." (Cited in Abbott, ed., *The Documents of Vatican II*, pp. 277-278)

On December 17, less than one week later, I stood in the Filipino Hall in Delano, California, and read to the predominately Roman Catholic striking workers the words their bishops had made into official church teaching so recently. And although the words were written out of a variety of situations across the world, and out of the wealth of Catholic experience accumulated since the first "social encyclicals" of Leo XIII, they could have been written with these Mexican-American and Filipino-American workers specifically in mind, so directly did they speak to the situation in Delano, California.

It had seemed a long way from Rome to Delano, and the pomp and finery of St. Peter's contrasted starkly with the simplicity and poverty so apparent in Filipino Hall, but the juxtaposition in my own life of these two events—bishops meeting in solemn council and workers meeting in the midst of a strike—drove home to me in an unforgettable way that both events were part of a single event, the event by which Mr. Krebs describes Delano: "the beginning of a revolution."

Part of this revolution, of course, is a new radical sense on the part of the church of its involvement in the world, of the necessity of translating the love commandment into something more than pulpit platitudes, and of this side of the revolution, Vatican II, with its pastoral constitution on "The Church in the World Today," serves as a convenient symbol, just as does the July, 1966 conference in Geneva of the World Council of Churches dealing with the responsibility of the church in the modern world of revolution.

But the other part of the revolution—the part on which Mr. Krebs' book rightly concentrates—is the increasing recognition on the part of the dispossessed all over the world that they need no longer accept their poverty and downtroddenness passively or abjectly. If those with power are unwilling to share the benefits they have accrued for themselves, then those without power are beginning to find ways of gaining the power they need to claim rights long denied them. This is part of a world movement, involving the struggle for independence of the African nations from generations of paternalistic colonialism, the struggle of the Negro to escape from the despotic and terroristic rule of the white man over him, and—among other things—the struggle of the farmworker to organize, so that he may secure the basic economic rights granted in almost all other sectors of the economy but, unaccountably, still denied to him.

It is, as Mr. Krebs makes clear, still only “the *beginning* of a revolution.” Indeed, one of the most important facts about the story he has told in his book is that the story is not yet finished. A battle for social justice and human dignity has been initiated in Delano, but the battle will go on for many months and even years before the outcome will be secure. There have been some setbacks and there may be more. Some of the gains have been consolidated. But both setbacks and gains now become part of the larger story. For the ripples emanating from Delano have already moved beyond the confines of the San Joaquin Valley. While agricultural workers are being organized there, the concern is beginning to spread—to the Napa Valley, to El Paso, to Houston, to the Midwest, to the deep South. The ripples have already made their way to Washington, beckoning congressional investigating committees to Sacramento, Visalia, and Delano. Such concerns will sooner or later make their way into federal legislation, guaranteeing to farmworkers some of the rights long since guaranteed to workers in other sectors of the economy.

If the strikers in Delano “win” a clear local victory, that will be another blow struck in the cause of justice, for which men everywhere can rejoice. But even if they “lose,” their loss will be a temporary though grievous one, since their struggle will be continued elsewhere. Whatever happens, they will have been involved in “the beginning of a revolution,” and ultimately will be the beneficiaries of a victory that others must now help them to achieve.

The fact that what is happening in Delano bursts the confines of Delano itself is further illustrated by that factor in the Delano strike most irritating to those not siding with the workers. This has been the presence in Delano, virtually from the beginning, of the so-called “outside agitators.” The charge is a familiar one to those who have followed the civil rights struggle: those on the local scene who have a vested interest in the status quo always insist that there really is no local problem, and that even if there were, it could be better solved by the local parties involved than by the intrusion of “outside agitators” who only cloud the issues and make resolution of them more difficult.

What the argument fails to acknowledge is that injustice anywhere is a blow against justice everywhere, and that a man's ethics cannot be determined solely by his geography. There is no “outsider” in the struggle for justice. Wherever there is social wrong—whether it be in

Selma or Vietnam or Johannesburg or Chicago or Delano—men everywhere must be concerned to set wrong right. There are no longer, in our shrinking and interlocking world, “local problems”; every local problem is global in its implications. Thus it is significant and symptomatic that events in Delano have aroused the sympathy and active involvement of the California Migrant Ministry, the Bishops’ Committee for the Spanish Speaking, Stanford students, priests, and nuns, Councils of Churches across the land, Cal students, rabbis, farmworkers in Texas, clergy in Chicago, union officials in New York City. For the Delano story is also their story, and it is, by consequence, our story. That “no man is an island” is not simply an interesting sentiment from the poetry of John Donne, but an accurate description of the 20th century world and 20th century man.

Thus the story Mr. Krebs has told so well is not just the story of a local strike, although it is, of course, that. It is also, in microcosm, the story of 20th century man all over the world—man engaged in revolution, man struggling to achieve a level of human dignity that should rightfully be his without struggle, man willing to work and suffer today so that he and his children need neither go to bed hungry tonight nor wake up despairing tomorrow.