

M E M O R A N D U M

Most Rev. Joseph F. Donnelly, D.D.
December 7, 1973

TO: MEMBERS OF THE NATIONAL CONFERENCE OF CATHOLIC BISHOPS

FROM: BISHOP DONNELLY, CHAIRMAN (Bishops' ad hoc Committee on Farm Labor)

It has recently come to my attention that Frank Fitzsimmons, President of the Teamsters' Union has circularized the Bishops with a copy of a telegram which he sent to Cardinal Krol a few days after our November meeting and in which he claims to state, "the true facts" on the dispute between the Grower-Teamster combination and the Farm Worker Union.

Mr. Fitzsimmons's recital of, "the true facts" is in my opinion a bit dreamy. The Teamster have consistently resisted UFWA requests for free elections. The Supreme Court in California found that thousands of farm workers were under Teamster contracts without any choice. The boycott of the UFWA, which is not under the NLRA, is not illegal. Nor is it immoral. The recent agreement in the Farm-Worker-Teamster controversy is the third time the Teamsters promised to get out of the jurisdiction of the UFWA. In August of 1970 they told representatives of the Bishops' Committee that they would be "out of the fields in 10 days."

To help you evaluate, "the true facts" I am sending you a copy of a statement of the facts by AFL-CIO President George Meany which was published on November 24, in the AFL-CIO News. On November 30, President Meany prepared and sent to all AFL-CIO affiliates in the country a 2,000 word statement of the facts, as he states, "to keep the record straight and to keep you fully informed of the developments." We can send a copy of this too to any who might want more of the facts.

The resolutions passed by the Bishops in November were directed toward defending the right of farm workers to free elections to determine whether or not they want a union, and if so what union they want to represent them. The resolutions were protesting the injustice of Growers and Teamsters in refusing farm workers the free exercise of this right which Vatican II called a, "basic human right." To make the protest effective the Bishops expressed support of the UFWA boycott until free elections are held. The boycott covers head lettuce or iceberg lettuce (not native lettuce) which does not bear in its packaging the black eagle trademark of the UFWA. It also covers California table grapes. Very few of these now carry the black eagle.

Now it is fine to make a statement in defense of justice, but the statement alone will do little to promote justice. Hence, we ask you to take some practical steps to support the resolutions.

Personally, in private and in public, we should support the boycott by our practice. Institutions under the jurisdiction of the Bishop should be advised of the boycott and asked to support it. Priests and religious should be requested to support the action of the Bishops, bring it to the attention of the people, and request organized support of the boycott. Diocesan newspapers should convey the concern of the Bishops. Priest Senates should be requested to take action. Religious communities, universities, hospitals should be requested not to purchase the products under boycott.

In my opinion the action of the Bishops in this matter, and the action of church groups generally throughout America, is a noble instance of protest against injustice and support of the poorest of workers. At the first Constitutional Convention of the UFWA in September I told the delegates that similar protests of religious groups across America has been a proud day for religion in America. Please make our November action effective in the area of your jurisdiction.