

In conclusion, it remains to say—and to emphasize for the record—that this Labor Day Statement in defense of the UFW is not meant to be an attack on the Teamsters as such or an attack on the growers as a group. To the contrary, we agree with Cesar Chavez, head of the UFW, when he says that farm workers and growers (and Teamsters, we would add) are neither saints nor sinners, neither all good nor all bad—but “both are men,” fallible and imperfect men who deserve to be treated with equal respect by reason of their dignity and worth as human beings.

In defending the UFW, then, we are conscious of the fact—as one experienced writer has put it—that choosing up sides as between “good guys” and “bad guys” avoids the basic issue in the current agricultural labor crisis. The basic issue is that farm workers have a right to organize into a union of their own choosing and that no other union and no group of growers should be permitted to interfere with the untrammelled exercise of this right. We happen to be convinced, on the record, that the Teamsters and their overt and covert allies in the industry have been doing just that since the Delano grape dispute was finally settled at the bargaining table in the summer of 1970. We think they are wrong, and, with the best of good will, we urge them to cease and desist—in fairness to the farm workers themselves, for the good name of the Teamsters and the growers, and, last but not least, for the good of the agricultural industry as a whole.

The agricultural industry has been needlessly caught up in the most bitter and divisive kind of conflict for a dozen years or more. And for what purpose? Presumably to avoid dealing with the UFW—the only union which can validly claim to represent

the workers who harvest the nation's crops. For the good of all concerned, the time has come for the leaders of the industry to recognize that that was a serious mistake on their part and, having settled with the UFW and having broken with the Teamsters, to begin making up for lost time by developing a mature system of labor-management relations based on mutual trust and confidence. By comparison with other industries in the mainstream of American economic life, it is rather late in the game for the agricultural industry to be facing up to its responsibilities and its opportunities in the field of labor-management relations—but better late than never. To try to postpone the inevitable and to go on fighting against time—that “most ruthless and relentless” of enemies—would be disastrous for the agricultural industry from every conceivable point of view.

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LABOR DAY STATEMENT

Rev. Msgr. George G. Higgins
Secretary for Research
United States Catholic Conference

FARM LABOR PROBLEM

The struggle of American farm workers to organize into a union of their own choosing has been going on for more than a decade, and the end of the struggle is not yet in sight. Three years ago, with the signing of collective bargaining contracts across the board in the table grape industry, it appeared that the United Farm Workers Union had won its costly battle for survival and was finally in a position to extend its organizing efforts into other crops, not only in California, but throughout the entire agricultural industry. No sooner had those historic contracts been signed, however, than a rival union unexpectedly moved into the picture—or was invited in by anti-UFW growers—and the battle was on again in deadly earnest. The Teamsters secretly negotiated inferior collective bargaining contracts with a large number of lettuce growers—contracts which the California Supreme Court subsequently described as collusive.