

Buckley, the Bishops and Farah

In early November, before the U.S. Catholic bishops met in Washington, columnist William Buckley protested the actions of many bishops in supporting the boycott of the Farah Manufacturing Company's products. Though the bishops as a body did not endorse the boycott, Buckley's column has received some response, from Archbishop Coadjutor Leo C. Byrne of St. Paul and Minneapolis, and Bishop Joseph L. Hogan. Here then are the texts of the Buckley column and the responses to it.



WILLIAM BUCKLEY

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In the next few days, the Catholic bishops will convene, and one fears that they will vote most imprudently to endorse the boycott of the product of a company called Farah, which manufactures pants of one sort or another in San Antonio and, principally, El Paso.

The boycott of Farah products has become the new thing to do among the restlessly indignant. Their success among Catholic clergymen is greatly to be regretted if only because some Catholic priests whose social thought has not moved since the mid-'30s are captive to the superstition that unionizing an enterprise is always under all circumstances the thing to do, and that one can automatically reason from a non-union plant, to a plant that abuses its employees.

What is so very strange about the Farah situation is that the workers do not desire a union.

The wages at Farah are apparently at the level of the wages of unionized plants in the area — even higher, it is maintained. This is perhaps one reason why, when the Amalgamated Clothing Workers of America went down to Texas to organize the plants, they failed to come up even with the 30 per cent required to bring on a union election under the supervision of the National Labor Relations Board.

A union scorned in such a way is greatly embittered, and sophisticated organizers know which faucets to turn.

In this case, since El Paso and San Antonio are heavily inhabited by Mexican-Americans, the strategy has been to influence local clergy and in turn the clergy of the entire country. The organizers have been very successful, and the culmination of their success would be the endorsement by all the bishops at their forthcoming congregation.

Meanwhile the organizers launched a boycott to support a walkout at Farah.

The Cause began to pick up momentum. That September the National Students Association voted to boycott Farah. By December, the Harvard Co-op was being picketed by hundreds of Harvard Students whose assertive literature suggested that they were all majors in industrial relations in the Southwest. If it is required that all Harvard go pantless in order to bring the Amalgamated Garment Workers Union into El Paso, Texas, that, one gathers, is the price the boys are prepared to pay.

But the moral torch has been held by clerical hands. El Paso's Bishop Metzger has talked about Farah's violations of "social justice." Bishop Hogan of Rochester wrote the local merchants urging them to consider the "moral issue." Bishop Byrne of St. Paul urged the boycott of local merchants. It snowballed. Five bishops from the Southwest backed the boycott, then the Texas Conference of Churches, and bishops in Pittsburgh, Scranton, Philadelphia and Buffalo.

I tell you, it is enough to make a man feel sinful for defending the right of Farah's workers to reject Mr. Finley's union.

Those seeking sacerdotal relief must go to the Rev. Paul Poling, a retired Presbyterian minister who conducted a lengthy personal investigation into the Farah situation and last June released the results of his inquiry. He concluded that the Most Rev. Bishop Metzger was quite full of baloney on the factual questions at issue, and pointed out that the bishop has never accepted an invitation to two of the Farah plants to talk to the workers.

One fears that the simple old identifications continue to pursue us. Good and humane management, is the myth, requires a labor union. No union, no social justice. And one fears more, that Catholic clergymen increasingly believe that only by taking positions on secular matters are they taken seriously.

"Mr. Buckley ignores the fact that Mr. Farah still refuses to abide by an NLRB order to bargain with Amalgamated Clothing Workers of America . . ."



ARCHBISHOP BYRNE

In a column appearing early in November, Mr. William Buckley, a nationally syndicated columnist, takes issue with a number of American Catholic bishops, myself among them, for supporting the consumer boycott of Farah slacks and jeans. I have asked for this opportunity to respond.

It is a long time since I have been classified among the "restlessly indignant," but I welcome the label. Obviously a bishop cannot speak out on every issue of social injustice, but some issues are of such magnitude that action becomes necessary. Such an involvement is not another post-Vatican II innovation; Amos, Isaiah and Jeremiah, prophets of old, spoke out against the social and secular sins of their day, and I suspect they too were told to limit their concerns to the purely religious.

Mr. Buckley makes the argument that the Farah workers, some 9,000, mostly Mexican-Americans and mostly women, in factories located in the labor-cheap Southwest, do not want to be represented by a union. In that assertion he echoes the argument of their employer, Mr. Willie Farah, and a publication written by Dr. Paul Newton Poling entitled "For the Defense of Farah Workers." In that assertion Mr. Buckley also ignores the fact that Mr. Farah still refuses to abide by a National Labor Relations Board's order to bargain with the Amalgamated Clothing Workers of America, as the result of an election in 1970 won by the union. The company has ignored at least 15 other orders from the NLRB.

Last October Bishop Sidney Metzger of El Paso wrote to all Catholic bishops of the country sharing the results of an elaborate and careful interview-study of nearly two thousand Farah workers and strikers. For over thirty years he has lived and worked in the Diocese of El Paso and he knows the problems well. His study documented the workers complaints: drastic production demands, no job security, no negotiated production standards, no negotiated wage increases according to a definite schedule, inadequate maternity insurance and negotiated leaves for illness. Average take home pay at Farah Manufacturing Company is \$69 per week (\$3,588 per year), compared to \$102 per week for the same work in a union plant in El Paso (\$5,304 per year). Grievances such as these can be remedied by collective bargaining.

In March Bishop Metzger wrote a second letter to the bishops rendering a progress report on the strike. He reaffirmed the grievances of the workers. They are, insufficient assurance of job security, reasonable and negotiated production quotas, and a fair wage scale. "Without these three basic requirements there is no social justice," he wrote. I agree.

The one tool that can bring about fair representation and assure collective bargaining is a massive consumer boycott of Farah products. To this end I wrote in June to

the management of Dayton's, Donaldson's, and Powers, three large retail clothing stores in the Minneapolis-St. Paul area, asking them not to "re-order Farah products until that company recognizes its employees' right to organize for collective bargaining." I did not, as Mr. Buckley claims, "urge the boycott of local merchants."

The boycott of Farah slacks is having its effects. The company's quarterly report for fiscal 1973 shows a \$9.1-million drop in sales over the previous year's comparable period. On November 1 the company announced the closing of two plants because the boycott is hurting, one in Texas and the other in New Mexico. But I do reiterate my support of the consumer boycott of Farah slacks produced by Farah under the following labels: Kinrod, Beau Mark, Cliff Mark, Daire, Golden Scroll, Passport, Club 20, and Su Par Jeans.

The Church has a long and respected tradition espousing the right of the worker to organize in a union and to enjoy the protection of collective bargaining. Its "mounting concern over secular problems," to quote Mr. Buckley, is not new. In 1891 Pope Leo XIII, in *Rerum Novarum* (The Condition of Labor) espoused the right of workingmen to join in associations to protect their interests. In 1931 Pope Pius XI, in *Quadragesimo Anno* (Forty Years After) repeated that right. So also did Pope John XXIII and Pope Paul VI in more recent times, not to mention the Second Vatican Council. America's own James Cardinal Gibbons defended the rights of this nation's working man to join the Knights of Labor, the forerunner of today's great labor organizations, demonstrating forever the deep concern of the Church for economic justice for the workingman. I can do no less today.

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BISHOP HOGAN

Last February I spoke on the question of the Farah strike and boycott. This statement was not based on some naive pro-union bias. It was based on five months of careful research. It was a hard decision for me to make and I assure you that I am not to be classed among the "restlessly indignant." I made my decision based on the facts of the dispute, on visits to the plant by a commission in San Antonio that went there specifically to report to me on this issue, on the long tradition of concern for social justice by the Church. At that time I concluded: "I will personally support the current nationwide boycott of Farah slacks until an equitable resolution of the issue is reached."

I stand by that statement. It has been confirmed by other people who have taken the time to investigate the issue. As a result of the recent Bishops' meeting in Washington, a committee of the Department of Social Development and World Peace of the U.S. Catholic Conference, unanimously supported the boycott of Farah products. Their supports were based on their in-depth investigation and visits with Farah management and strikers. At the Bishops' meeting, Bishop Sidney Metzger of El Paso received a tremendously warm applause following his statement on Farah as a demonstration of support.

I feel even more sure that the position of refusing to buy Farah products is a just one and one which should be considered by all people of conscience. Mr. Buckley did not take the trouble to ask me how I arrived at the stand. I question the amount of time that he spent investigating the issue. There seem to be some assumptions on his part that the leaders of the Church just sort of jump on bandwagons with no regard for true justice.

Again I urge the people of this diocese to examine their roles in this dispute. Justice is not easily achieved nor should it be taken for granted. This is one way open to the people to practice in their lives what they believe from the Gospels. We serve a God who cares for the poor and deprived, as much as he cares for the powerful. May the Spirit help us to serve him well.