

Church's Role in Labor Disputes Defended

Washington — A Catholic Conference official defended the role played by organized religion in such labor disputes as the Farah strike and the battle between the United Farm Workers and the Teamsters, and vowed the churches will never "walk away from this struggle" in the hour of need.

Msgr. George C. Higgins also defended the labor union movement itself against critics' charges that its demise is at hand, and asserted the movement has an indispensable task to carry out in achieving justice for the poor, "black and Spanish-speaking workers in particular."

Msgr. Higgins' views were expressed in the 1974 Labor Day Statement of the United States Catholic Conference. The priest, who is USCC secretary for research, is a long-time arbitrator and columnist on the labor scene.

During the past year the American labor movement has been caught between conflicting fires, Msgr. Higgins said. "It is being told, at one extreme, that it is too weak to survive and, at the other extreme, that it has acquired such excessive power that it should not be permitted to survive in its present form."

"Both of these judgments are extremely superficial and, to put it mildly, premature," Msgr. Higgins stated.

While labor unions ought to be spending as much time as possible thinking through their future role, the priest wrote, "they cannot afford to neglect their immediate task of organizing the unorganized, who can still be counted in the millions."

With an "indispensable assist"

from religious and civic organizations throughout the United States, the labor movement recently made significant progress in this area on two related fronts, Msgr. Higgins claimed.

In the first instance, the strike at the Farah manufacturing company and the nationwide boycott of Farah products made it possible for thousands of clothing workers in the Southwest to achieve the right to organize and bargain collectively with the company. The Farah settlement "was only the first step in what ought to be and promises to be a full-scale organizing drive, especially among black and Spanish-speaking workers," Msgr. Higgins wrote. "Church-related agencies stand prepared to cooperate with this effort in the interest of achieving economic justice and the right of self-

determination for millions of disadvantaged workers."

In the second instance, Msgr. Higgins noted, the AFL-CIO initiated a concerted drive to help the United Farm Workers Union "regain the hard-won collective bargaining contracts which were taken — or, as they themselves insist, were stolen — from them during the past year by a rival union, the International Brotherhood of Teamsters."

"The decision of the national AFL-CIO to endorse and support UFW's boycott and to assist the farm workers in other ways as well may prove to be the decisive factor in resolving the California farm labor dispute peacefully and with justice to all concerned," Msgr. Higgins stated.

The USCC official also rejected the charge that Catholic, Protestant and Jewish

organizations who have supported the United Farm Workers are prejudiced against the growers and the Teamsters.

"Their sole purpose at this time is to help the farm workers of this nation achieve the right to organize into a union of their own choosing — a right which has been legally guaranteed in every other major industry for many decades," Msgr. Higgins said.

"Once this right has been effectively guaranteed," he continued, "the religious organizations involved in the California dispute will do everything they possibly can, in a spirit of reconciliation, to promote a constructive working relationship between UFW and the growers on the one hand, and on the other hand, between UFW and the Teamsters."



President Ford, addressing the VFW in Chicago. [RNS Photo]

Msgr. Cocuzzi to Take Post in Washington, D.C.

Msgr. George A. Cocuzzi, pastor of Holy Family Church, is going on leave for a year to work with the National Center of Urban Ethnic Affairs in Washington, D.C.

He told his parishioners last Sunday that he expected to leave Oct. 1. The Pastoral Office said a replacement would be named within the month.

Msgr. Cocuzzi, a doctor of canon law trained at Gregorian University in Rome, served the diocese for 12 years as vice chancellor, as chancellor, and notary before his appointment to Holy Family in 1966. He is a former president of the Priests Council.

He said this week that he expected to go to Washington in mid-September to find out precisely what his job would be with the urban agency.

"I have always been interested in urban affairs," he said, "and my experience in this parish has sensitized me to the crying needs that exist in cities. They exist in Rochester."

"It was a happy coincidence that I was eligible for sabbatical leave when the Washington opening came up."

The urban-ethnic center, maintains liaison with the National Council of Catholic

Bishops but is funded from other sources. It was organized by Msgr. Geno Baroni, who spoke before several Rochester audiences two years ago, explaining his "ethnic" approach as a bulwark against urban decay. Msgr. Baroni argues against the "melting pot" concept and the conventional idea of "upward mobility" that he says leads inevitably to the suburbs. He would have Catholics of foreign background maintain the cultures, values and customs of their forbears as a means of knitting their neighborhoods together.

The Washington agency will assist the bishops in their projects for the nation's bicentennial celebration, Msgr. Cocuzzi said.

He is a native Rochesterian, educated at the old cathedral school, St. Peter and Paul, St. Andrew's and St. Bernard's seminaries. He was ordained in 1949 and assigned to St. Jerome's, East Rochester, for two years before being sent abroad for study. Pope John XXIII named him a papal chamberlain in 1959, and Pope Paul VI appointed him a domestic prelate in 1965.

Ford Urges Leniency for Draft Resisters

Chicago [RNS] — President Ford said here that he is "on the side of leniency" in dealing with Vietnam War draft resisters and deserters.

"In my judgment, these young Americans should have a second chance to contribute their fair share to the rebuilding of peace among ourselves and with all nations," the new commander in chief said in a surprise statement to the national convention of the Veterans of Foreign Wars.

But Mr. Ford did not support unconditional amnesty. He said those accused of what is "loosely described as desertion and draft dodging" should "work their way back" into citizenship.

The membership, however, voted to turn down the President's suggestion.

Later in the week during their convention, members were asked by Sen. Edward M. Kennedy of Massachusetts to reconsider their stand.

"In the action you took," he said, "I believe that you were in error."

By a voice vote, the veterans unanimously rejected Sen. Kennedy's request.

President Ford's views as expressed to the VFW contrasted

sharply with those of former President Nixon, who insisted that young men who resisted the draft or deserted would have to "pay the penalty."

Some form of amnesty for young men in jail, self-exile or under legal threat for opposing the Vietnam war is supported by many religious groups. Some, such as the National Council of Churches, advocate "unconditional amnesty." Others would impose some type of alternate national service, and a third stand, advanced by the National Conference of Catholic Bishops, holds the general position that young men who conscientiously opposed the war deserve pardon.

President Ford began his remarks on amnesty to the VFW by noting that as minority leader of the House of Representatives and recently as vice president he expressed "strong conviction that unconditional blanket amnesty for anyone who illegally evaded or fled military service is wrong."

"It is wrong," he added, winning loud applause from his audience. The VFW opposes any amnesty.

"Yet in my first words as President of all the people, I acknowledged a power higher

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Bishop Praises Ford on Amnesty

Washington — President Ford's statement on amnesty "is a welcome sign of his determination to bring about reconciliation in our country," the general secretary of the National Conference of Catholic Bishops said here.

Citing statements on amnesty made by the American Catholic Bishops in 1971 and 1972, Bishop James S. Rausch said, "The Bishops' position appears to be fully supportive of the approach

suggested by the President."

At the same time, Bishop Rausch suggested that "consideration should be given to unconditional amnesty at least for those who resisted military service because of their conscientious convictions."

"Mr. Ford's initiative is a constructive step toward opening a genuine national dialogue on this pressing issue," Bishop Rausch stated.