

**National Crisis**

**Will NFL Disappear From TV?**

By Msgr. George G. Higgins  
NC News Service

The National Football League Players Association is the smallest union in the United States but if its 1,300 members go on strike the White House may be tempted to call a national emergency.

No rational person would consider professional football essential to human welfare or national health and safety. Yet roughly one half of the American public is incurably addicted to the game and one can only guess the consequences if this

quasi-religious weekly ritual were unavailable for any length of time.

But we may be confronted with just such a crisis. The NFLPA is threatening to call a strike and as a result the football season may be delayed or even cancelled.

The players and owners are currently going through the motions of negotiating a new contract but they seem to be making little progress. The main issue is money — and there seems to be a lot of it to go around this year.

The owners recently approved the largest contract in television history, a five-year pact worth about \$2 billion. The players want their fair share of the money and are willing to strike, if necessary, to get it.

The public tends to think they are already overpaid but the players point out that their salaries fall far short of the averages in pro basketball and major league baseball. Baseball and basketball salaries averaged \$143,000 and \$186,000

respectively in 1980, while the football average was \$78,000.

That's why the NFL players are seeking a radical change in how they are compensated. They want their pay tied to league revenues and they want the union to have a say in setting pay levels.

Thus they have demanded 55 percent of the league's gross revenues to fund a common pot from which a joint union-management committee would set salaries and benefits. While the 55 percent figure is negotiable, the players are unwilling to budge from their demand for a reasonable share of gross revenues.

I hope they stick to their guns. They are the game and they are entitled to a fair share of the extraordinary profits accruing to the owners.

Although the current average salary of \$78,000 may seem out of line compared to your income or mine, that's not really a fair comparison. The players' salaries should be compared to those of other professional athletes and to the owners'

earnings.

Furthermore, the union contends, the present system gives teams an incentive to trade or cut high-earning veterans and as a result the average career of a football player is very short — only 4.7 years. The union argues that if salaries were pegged to gross revenues the owners would keep the best available athletes rather than the lowest paid.

Their argument makes a lot sense to me. But if the owners refuse to meet the players halfway, there's going to be a lot of open television time this fall.

Professional football is not one of my addictions. Except for the last quarter of the Superbowl, I can take it or leave it.

Nevertheless, I fear for the stability of the republic should a strike lead to cancellation of the 1982 NFL season. We simply do not have enough mental health therapists to weather such a catastrophic turn of events.

Msgr. Higgins for years was the labor expert of the U.S. Catholic Conference.

**Justice Is Done through Man's Labor**

Following is excerpted from Pope John Paul's Portuguese-language address on the rights of farm-workers.

"You too go along to my vineyard and I will pay you whatever is fair." In this and other gospel passages, Jesus expresses himself by means of parables, the content of which is taken from the world around him. The Divine Master refers many



times in them to the work in the fields and countryside. He does so in the parable of the laborers in the vineyard. By means of examples taken from the created world and facts known to his hearers, Christ introduced them to the reality of the suprasensory and invisible reality of the kingdom of God. In truth, it was in this way that he got men to comprehend his spiritual reign.

The man who works honestly, freely and intelligently continues the work of creation and realizes communion with God. By becoming a sharer in the redemption, he can arrive at gradual and full sharing in the divine life. It is in this view that we shall meditate on this parable, dear sons and daughters of Portugal.

I want to tell you, all of you who live engaged in the hard task of cultivating the earth: My presence here is a concrete sign that the church recognizes and understands your rightful aspirations for justice, progress and peace in carrying out your profession. The church, the pope, the bishops of Portugal are with you to help you to overcome incomprehensions and injustices, to give a hand to the poorest and most deprived, within the sphere of their mission, in order that all may be able to progress and serenely participate in the high human and Christian values of worthy and productive labor. We are here in the shrine of Our Lady of Conception of Vila Vicosa, under the gaze of the "queen" of Portugal.

The parable of the laborers in the vineyard which has just been read contains two important truths of

the supernatural order. The first is that the justice of God's kingdom is done also through man's work, through "his labor in the Lord's vineyard." Everyone is invited by him for the purpose of building up the world in various modes, moments and aspects of human life on earth. The second truth is that the gift of the kingdom of God granted to mankind is above all and any means that men are accustomed to use for evaluating the relationship between merit and reward, between work and wages. This gift transcends man. Since it is supernatural, it may not be measured with merely human standards.

The gospel text of the laborers in the vineyard and the others belonging to today's celebration invite us to reflect upon man's work, especially upon the work of tilling the earth, in view of the order and justice that ought to reign in society.

As you will know, the church has dedicated much attention to these problems of the so-called social question; she did so above all in the last century.

Although her attention was given originally to industry and industrial labor, the labor of the man who cultivates the soil has also constituted an explicit and integral part of the church's teaching ever since the time of Leo XIII. Likewise, Pius XI denounced the negative influence of industrial capitalism on the soil and deplored the situation of many peasants, whom we "reduced to an inferior condition of life, deprived of the hope of being able to acquire any bit of land, and consequently subjected forever to the condition of proletarians, unless fitting and effective remedies are adopted."

But it was above all Pope John XXIII, the offspring of a peasant family, who devoted special attention to the problems of agricultural life. He claimed back for agriculture the place that beehood

it. He not only recommended overcoming the imbalance existing among the various sectors of each country, but he also dealt with the question in a world perspective. He brought out the need for fresh balances and solid cooperation on the part of rich, mainly industrialized nations with poor nations, which are on the way to development and have backward agricultural economies.

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