

Labor Fightback Network



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RESOLUTION IN SOLIDARITY WITH THE FARMWORKERS IN SAN QUINTIN, MEXICO

(adopted by the Second National Labor Fightback Conference -- Rutgers, N.J., May 15-17, 2015)

Whereas, as many as 70,000 farmworkers (jornaleros) in the Valley of San Quintín, Baja California (Mexico) have been waging intermittent strikes and organizing road blockades and mass mobilizations since mid-March 2015 to demand an increase in their daily wage from 100 pesos to 200 pesos per day [raise from \$7.50 per day to \$15], an eight-hour workday, health care, overtime pay and vacation days, an end to the widespread sexual abuse, and, most important, the legal recognition of their independent union -- the Alianza de Organizaciones Nacional, Estatal y Municipal por la Justicia Social del Valle de San Quintín (Alliance of Farm Workers of San Quintín, or Alianza) -- as the bargaining agent for these 70,000 workers; and

Whereas, these farmworkers (many of them indigenous workers from Oaxaca) pick strawberries, tomatoes, and other fruit primarily for export to the United States under the label of Driscoll Farms, through its Mexican subsidiary, BerryMex; and

Whereas, the farmworkers are currently "covered" by "protection contracts" signed between the growers and the CTM, the CROM and the CROC -- essentially government-run unions -- where the contracts signed are nothing more than sweetheart deals favoring the growers; and

Whereas, articles in the mainstream media on the conditions of farmworkers in San Quintín describe rat-infested camps, some without functioning toilets, with workers routinely having their wages illegally withheld, and many facing debt after being gouged by the overpricing of necessities sold at company stores, and with pay so low that it amounts to less than one-tenth of what U.S.-based farmworkers earn"; and

Whereas, over the weekend of May 9-10 the Baja California government, instead of opening negotiations with the farmworkers, as promised, sent in police to quash the farmworkers' protest, severely wounding 70 workers, many with rubber bullets shot at close range, leaving some of the workers in critical condition; and

Whereas, the repression against the farmworkers of San Quintín made front-page news and created a huge backlash across Mexico, forcing the government to (1) meet with representatives of the Alianza and promise legally recognize the workers' independent union (promising a "registro" to the Alianza) and (2) promise to implement many of the demands raised by the workers that pertain to Mexican labor law; and

Whereas, the growers are refusing to abide by the agreement signed between the Mexican government and the Alianza, arguing that they have more than 60 signed contracts with the CTM, the CROM, and the CROC, and that they will therefore not recognize nor open negotiations with the Alianza; and

Whereas, the leadership of the Alianza, soon after the strike began, issued a call to the U.S. labor and community movements to organize a boycott across the United States of Driscoll's, extending the boycott of Driscoll's that was launched one year ago by the Familias Unidas por la Justicia; and

Whereas, upon learning of the strike of the farmworkers in San Quintín, unionists and community activists in cities throughout California and other U.S. states launched a campaign incorporating the struggle of the San Quintín workers into the Driscoll's boycott; and

Whereas, many of the San Quintín farmworkers have either worked in the farms owned by Sakuma Brothers in the state of Washington, or have family who work for Sakuma Brothers Farms, where the workers have been subjected to a wide range of abuse for years, such as inadequate piece rates, wage theft, racist and

sexist abuse by supervisors, substandard housing and continuous retaliation for their efforts to improve their conditions; and

Whereas, the Washington State AFL-CIO has recognized the independent union formed in 2013 by the Sakuma farmworkers -- the Familias Unidas for la Justicia -- and has endorsed and supported the boycott of Sakuma Brothers Farms; and

Whereas, throughout the May 15-17, 2015 weekend of the Second Labor Fightback Conference in Rutgers, N.J., Al Rojas, a founding member of the United Farm Workers of America and current president of Sacramento LCLAA (AFL-CIO), was in constant touch with the leadership of the Alianza by phone, enabling him to give the conference participants regular updates on the status of the struggle by the farmworkers in San Quintín; and

Whereas, the Second National Fightback Conference brought together union and community leaders and activists from National Nurses United (NNU), Communications Workers of America (CWA), US Labor Against the War, Labor for Single Payer, United Electrical Workers (UE), the Moral Mondays Movement, the South Carolina State AFL-CIO, the Savannah (Georgia), Central Labor Council, the American Federation of Teachers (AFT), National Education Association (NEA), Teamsters' union, United Steelworkers of America (USWA), Service Employees International Union (SEIU), United Food and Commercial Workers (UFCW), AFSCME, Sacramento Labor Council for Latin American Advancement (LCLAA-AFL-CIO), and International Longshore and Warehouse Union, MEChA, #BlackLivesMatter, and others.

Therefore Be It Resolved, that the Second National Labor Fightback Conference goes on record in support of the struggle of the 70,000 farmworkers in San Quintín and the 468 farmworkers in Skagit County, Washington, for better wages, working conditions, and the recognition of their fighting unions -- Familias Unidas por la Justicia and the Alianza de Organizaciones Nacional, Estatal y Municipal por la Justicia Social del Valle de San Quintín (Alliance of Farm Workers of San Quintín) -- as the legitimate bargaining agents for these workers; and

Be It Further Resolved, that the Labor Fightback Conference opposes the "protection contracts" signed between the growers and the company unions, and demands that the Mexican government formally give the "registro" to the Alianza, as promised, that it meet the Alianza's demands pertaining to Mexico's labor laws, -- and that the government use all its powers to compel the growers to rescind the "protection contracts" with the company unions, negotiate directly with the Alianza, and agree to increase the workers' wages to 200 pesos a day, while resolving the other demands raised by the workers; and

Be It Further Resolved, that the Labor Fightback Conference calls upon all the unions and community organizations to which the participants at the conference belong to urge them to boycott all Driscoll's products as a means to compel the growers to sit down at the negotiating table with the Alianza and meet their just demands, and to compel Sakuma Farms to rehire strikers and sign a contract with Familias Unidas por la Justicia in Washington State; and

Be It Further Resolved, that the Labor Fightback Conference calls upon the entire trade union movement in the United States to support and promote the Driscoll's boycott and build ties of solidarity with the San Quintín farmworkers, organizing union-to-union solidarity, visits to San Quintín, and tours to the United States of representatives of the Alianza so that these workers can tell their stories directly to U.S. workers; and

Be It Further Resolved, that the Labor Fightback Conference will link the struggle of the Sakuma Brothers and Driscoll's workers in the state of Washington, as well as the boycott of their farm produce, to the struggle of the San Quintín workers; and

Be It Finally Resolved, that the Labor Fightback Conference will send this resolution to the Alianza and Sakuma Farms workers, with copies to the broader labor movement to be used as a template for further resolutions in solidarity with the farmworkers of San Quintín and Sakuma Farms in Washington State.

(Resolution submitted by Alan Benjamin (member, San Francisco Labor Council), and Al Rojas (president, Sacramento Labor Council for Latin American Advancement / LCLAA)