



A growing injustice: Farm workers' rights need Senate vote, not sham hearings

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State Sen. Darrel Aubertine - the chief opponent of equal rights for New York's tens of thousands of long-suffering farmworkers - held an Albany version of a Moscow show trial yesterday.

The supposed objective was to hear perspectives on a bill to extend basic labor protections to the men and women who pick our food. To give them overtime pay, an unpaid day off per week and the right to organize and bargain collectively - protections enjoyed by everyone else but denied this one group of workers since field hands were excluded from labor rights in the 1930s.

The real goal of farmer-legislator Aubertine: To stymie and stall a measure that has been bottled up for decades thanks to special interest lobbying - and kick off even more decades of delay.

The Agriculture Committee was the perfect stage for the farce. It has no jurisdiction over labor bills. But Aubertine got the bill diverted there, with the connivance of Senate Democratic boss John Sampson, in a typical Albany move to slow it down or kill it.

True to form yesterday, Aubertine pretended to consider the bill - with his thumb on the scale.

Of the invited witnesses, 14 were against the bill and five spoke in favor. The only farmworker Aubertine invited - to a hearing on farmworkers' rights - was the brother of a supervisor at a notorious duck farm. The witness opposed the bill.

Telling the truth was left to advocates, including human rights campaigners like Kerry Kennedy. They were gracious and yielded some of their time to the powerless and exploited people who work the fields to provide us food.

Stop the cynical delays. End the shameful shenanigans. Put the bill on the floor and vote.