future generations. Monsignor Sampson's influence on our children and on so many others throughout the world should be remembered, as it will be missed.

SPRINT'S FIRING OF 235 EMPLOYEES IN SAN FRANCISCO

HON. TOM LANTOS

OF CALIFORNIA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, February 29, 1996

Mr. LANTOS. Mr. Speaker, on July 14, 1994, the Sprint Corp. abruptly closed down La Conexion Familiar, its San Francisco telemarketing subsidiary, and fired all 235 La Conexion Familiar workers. These employees were let go just 1 week before they were scheduled to vote in an organizing election under the supervision of the National Labor Relations Board. A majority of the employees at La Conexion Familiar had signed a petition indicating their desire to unionize. The employees said that they were seeking to improve working conditions which included restrictions on drinking water and bathroom breaks.

The National Labor Relations Board charged Sprint with over 50 Federal labor violations and with illegally closing La Conexion Familiar. An administrative law judge upheld these 50 labor violations, but offered no assistance or remedy to the fired employees. The NLRB general counsel has appealed to the full Board charging that the closing was an illegal effort to thwart a union organizing drive.

The U.S. Department of Labor held a public forum in San Francisco this week, entitled ''Public Forum of the Effects of a Sudden Plant Closure and the Impact on the Principle of Freedom of Association and the Right of Workers to Organize.'' This forum was the first of its kind under the terms of the NAFTA agreement. I submitted testimony to this forum and would like to share my testimony with my colleagues. Therefore, Mr. Speaker, I respectfully request that my testimony be entered into the RECORD.

EFFECTS OF SUDDEN PLANT CLOSURE AND THE IMPACT ON THE PRINCIPLE OF FREEDOM OF ASSOCIATION AND THE RIGHT OF WORKERS TO ORGANIZE

(By Tom Lantos)

I would first like to commend you for holding this hearing which is the first of its kind under the terms of the NAFTA agreement on a case involving violations of worker rights in the United States. As you know, I was strongly opposed to NAFTA, but it is now the law of the land and we must live by its provisions. I will be the first to make sure that the spirit and intent of the principles contained in NAFTA's side agreement on labor cooperation are given maximum attention in the enforcement of NAFTA's provisions.

The North American Agreement on Labor Cooperation states plainly that every effort will be made to guarantee to all workers the right of freedom of association and the right to union representation.

The Sprint workers who are the subject of today's hearing were clearly denied these rights. Sprint's shutdown of La Conexion Familiar demonstrated that reality falls well short of the goals of the NAFTA agreement on labor cooperation. This is a case of a company which willfully violated our labor law and which was cited with more than 50 violations. It is also a case of human pain and suffering.

As you know, on July 14, 1994, 235 individuals were thrown out of work by Sprint. Many of these workers live in my Congressional district. Today we heard from several of these workers who have told us in their own words the turmoil they have had to endure.

I have heard their pain from the beginning of this tragic situation and I have observed first hand the wrenching consequences of Sprint's behavior of these worker's lives. In a split second these workers were unemployed. Their families were in disarray. And the promise of the American dream was destroyed. ''How could this happen'', they asked, ''After all, this is America, where laws are supposed to mean what they say and are supposed to be enforced to the letter.''

When Sprint abruptly shut its ''La Conexion Familiar'' facility one week before an organizing election, we had a classic case of US labor law not adequately protecting American workers. Two hundred and thirty-five workers lost their jobs, victims of an illegal campaign against workers' rights. More than a year and a half after losing their jobs, the workers at La Conexion Familiar are still struggling and awaiting justice. Out of the 177 workers who were scheduled to vote in the union election, fewer than half are working—the rest are still out of work.

The National Labor Relations Board moved as quickly as current law permitted. But in spite of their efforts it took over four months until the case was heard and well over a year until a decision was issued. And the process is far from over. As of today, this case is 593 days old and it will take many more months before the Board issues a final decision, even as they expedite the case. It will take years before all parties exhaust available appeals. In the meantime, the workers are the ones paying the price for the inability of our system to provide prompt and effective remedies for this obvious and egregious violation of the law.

The Sprint case is not atypical. The latest data available from the NLRB show that by the end of 1994, the medium number of days it took for an unfair labor practice case to reach a decision by an administrative law judge was 360 days and the median number of days to a reach a Board decision was 601 days. What this means is that half of all these cases took even longer. The average age of cases pending before the Board (as of September 30, 1994) was 758 days. Add to that years of appeals through the courts and we have to recognize that our current system of labor law is in fact an easy and inexpensive tool for companies to use to break the law rather than abide by it.

It is simply unjust for workers who have lost their jobs as a result of unfair labor practices by their employers to have to wait so long for a remedy. Our labor laws and their enforcement mechanisms must be strengthened.

Under these circumstances, I admire the courage of the workers at La Conexion Familiar. They stepped up to the plate and took a swing at their rights. What they did not know was that the game was rigged against them and Sprint was throwing a spit ball. What would you do if you were a worker in a plant or a facility such as La Conexion Familiar and you were told by your supervisor or your manager:

''Look, don't even try to organize, because we'll shut the plant down and it will take you four to five years to prove that the company did anything wrong. In the meantime, you will be out of work.''

Under these circumstances would anyone try to organize? There is no question that the average worker would say, ''No.''

This is what is so admirable about the Sprint workers at La Conexion Familiar. In spite of all the threats, the coercion and the spying, they still tried. They demonstrated that the importance of organizing a union is not from a bygone era, but that organizing a union is more relevant than ever. It is our system of labor law and its enforcement which must be brought into the 21st century.

This is why I am testifying today in support of Sprint workers and all workers who want to organize. I will continue to do everything I can to seek a remedy in this case and will continue to push for labor law reform which provides prompt and effective penalties against labor law violators. Workers must feel secure in their belief that they can exercise their right to organize without fear of retaliation by their employer and without running the risk of losing their job.

One reason I opposed the NAFTA agreement was that it perpetuated the ineffectiveness of US law in protecting workers rights. In the case of the right to organize, the NAFTA agreement provides only a mechanism for exposing violations of these rights and this Forum is part of that mechanism. It is important for workers to demonstrate the widespread abuse of workers rights. But it is clearly not enough.

The objectives of the NAFTA side agreement on labor cooperation are admirable. But the law itself should contain penalties against the companies who benefit from expanded trade opportunities but at the same time violate their workers' rights, whether in Mexico, Canada or the United States. I will fight hard to ensure that the NAFTA agreement is amended to include real penalties and appropriate enforcement provisions.

I support calls for an international code of conduct for all companies operating on a global scale. This code will ensure that workers' rights, which we in the United States are at least committed to on paper and which are contained in the NAFTA side agreement on labor cooperation, will become a part and parcel of acceptable behavior in international commerce.

The promise of international investment and trade must go hand in hand with the promise of improved working conditions and living standards for workers both in the United States and abroad. By recognizing and protecting the rights of workers to form unions and engage in collective bargaining, we are not giving workers entitlements or handouts. We are giving them the tools to stand up for themselves and claim their fair share of economic progress that they had a hand in producing.

Thank you.

ST. DAVID'S DAY

HON. PAT DANNER

OF MISSOURI

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, February 29, 1996

Ms. DANNER. Mr. Speaker, for more than 850 years, the legacy of St. David has been an inspiration to generations of people of Welsh descent, including such prominent American leaders as Abraham Lincoln and Thomas Jefferson.

While the annual celebration will be delayed slightly this season by leap year, St. David's Day, March 1, will recognize the legend of the patron of Wales—one of the most illustrious bishops of ancient Wales.

In fact, a 10th century manuscript refers to St. David as the spiritual leader of the Welsh.