

T H E Y A R D S T I C K

## Union Against Union

By Msgr. George G. Higgins

Father Richard Humphrys, pastor of Our Lady of Soledad Church in Coachella, Cal., recently issued a personal report on the farm labor problem in the particular Valley in which his parish is located. Copies can be obtained by writing directly to Father Humphrys, 52-525 Oasis Palm, Coachella, Cal. 92236.

Father Humphrys' report is based on his own investigation of the three-way conflict (between the United Farm Workers on the one hand and the Teamsters and the majority of the California growers on the other) which lead to a major strike in the Coachella Valley last spring and will probably lead to another strike as soon as the crop comes in again this year. I found the report heavily slanted against the UFW and in favor of the Teamsters. In other words, though Father Humphrys says that "to come out in favor of either union is a tremendous mistake" and insists that "we should be fair to both unions," he ends up -- perhaps unwittingly -- disregarding his own advice in this regard. I might add that my somewhat negative reaction to his report is shared by a number of other Protestant and Catholic clergymen who heard Father Humphrys summarize his findings in person when he was kind enough to receive us at his rectory in Coachella several weeks ago.

This group of clergymen from Canada, with whom I was traveling as a consultant, spent a week in California making their own investigation of the farm labor problem and, more specifically, of the dispute between the UFW and the Teamsters. The President of the Teamsters, Frank Fitzsimmons, who was in California just before we arrived, alluded to our trip in the course of a wide-ranging interview on the farm labor problem with Dick Lyneis, the highly respected labor reporter for the Riverside (Cal.) Press Enterprise.

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Fitzsimmons told Mr. Lyneis during an interview that he felt it quite proper for clergymen to make a study. Our group tried to do exactly that, but I am afraid Mr. Fitzsimmons will be disappointed by our findings. We found that some workers favor the Teamsters over the UFW and vice versa. While it was our impression that the majority of field workers are loyal to UFW, only a free secret-ballot election would give an answer. The sooner this is done, the better.

On the matter of the personal attitude of the rank-and-file towards Chavez, Mr. Fitzsimmons is mistaken. He told Mr. Lyneis that the Teamsters will never negotiate with Chavez because he "is not a trade unionist." He went on to say, "I wouldn't even let him be a janitor in a trade union office." He added, "Chavez is leading a cause, not a trade union, and his cause has nothing to do with the welfare of the Mexican-American worker. His cause, his teachings, and his ideals have all been taken from Saul Alinsky and his brand of Marxism."

Fitzsimmons doesn't have to agree with Chavez but to say he is not a legitimate trade unionist and to insult him by saying he would not even let him be a janitor in a trade union office is a contemptible and calculated insult to the man and his entire UFW membership. He should strike these statements from the record and apologize to Chavez and the UFW.

Smearing Chavez and the late Saul Alinsky as Marxist revolutionaries is inexcusable. I was a personal friend of Alinsky's for 20 years or more, and while I didn't always agree with him, I certainly know he was no more a Marxist than Fitzsimmons -- and neither is Chavez. Fitzsimmons apparently does not know that Alinsky had nothing to do with the organization of the UFW. To the contrary, he tried to dissuade Chavez from organizing field workers into a union. Chavez broke with Alinsky over this issue, and proceeded to organize the first viable union of field workers in American agricultural history. That union is now fighting for its very existence, not only against recalcitrant growers but, sad to say, against another union, the International Brotherhood of Teamsters.

If Father Humphrys, in his report, means we should let the workers decide which union representation they want, I agree -- and so does Cesar Chavez. But if he means, in the name of impartiality, we should silently watch the biggest U.S. union clobber the youngest and smallest one with misleading, malicious propaganda, I couldn't disagree more.

Mr. Fitzsimmons told Dick Lyneis: "Let the clergy worry about the Ten Commandments and we'll take care of the labor unions." That's what Chavez is afraid of, and frankly, so am I.