

# New Charges Hit Farm Board

## Agency's Own Employes Form Union

BY HARRY BERNSTEIN

Times Labor Writer

California's farm labor agency has been shaken by new charges of bias and the agency's own employes now have formed a union, partly to protest the agency's alleged failure to enforce the farm labor law, it was learned Wednesday.

The Agricultural Labor Relations Board has been embroiled in controversy since it was created by the Legislature in 1975 in an attempt to end decades of farm labor strife in the state.

The agency has been accused frequently by unions of bias in favor of growers, and by growers of favoring Cesar Chavez' United Farm Workers of America.

Charges of bias against growers were renewed again this week by two legislators, who made their own investigation of grower charges that some ALRB agents have been helping the UFW.

But more sweeping charges of bias have been made by several ALRB agents who charge that top agency officials are taking disciplinary action against agents who are trying to enforce the law.

"Many of the staff members of the ALRB are in real fear of their jobs because they have tried to enforce the law, and because ALRB officials are responding to pressures from conservative legislators and growers," charged Jerry Goldman, a Los Angeles attorney for two of the agents.

In San Francisco, Stewart Weinberg said one of his clients is another ALRB staff agent, Carlos Bowker, "who was fired Tuesday night, one day after he was elected to the board of governors of the new union of ALRB employes."

Harry Delizonna, general counsel for the ALRB and the chief target of the staff criticism, denied charges that a "purge" is going on because of political pressures by growers and their allies in the state Legislature.

"If you are running a business and you hire 130 people in a very short period of time, you would expect some of those people would not work out for various reasons," Delizonna told The Times in a telephone interview from Sacramento.

"Well, the end of our probation period time is rolling around and some people have received unfavorable probation reports from their supervisors. Since I make the final decisions on their employment, naturally, I am the target of criticism," he said.

He strongly denied firing Bowker for trying to form a union of ALRB employes, saying, "That is a lie. I did not know Bowker had anything to do with the union.

"His case can be appealed and it would not be proper to discuss it."

Bowker's attorney said his client was accused of making a verbal threat against another employe, "but it was a minor incident, and typical of the kind of excuse an anti-

union employer would use to get rid of one of the more active advocates of a union."

Delizonna also denied reports that he demoted Maurice Jourdane, the outspoken chief of operations of the agency.

"Jourdane indicated he wanted to go back to trying cases, and as chief of operations he could not do that kind of field work. So he has been returned to his old job as staff attorney at his request," Delizonna said.

But other ALRB staffers insist Jourdane was forced to take the lower-paid staff attorney's post because, as one

put it. "Jourdan is known to be a strong supporter of vigorous enforcement of the law."

Another ALRB agent, Louis Lopez, has been suspended for alleged "insubordination" after he reportedly refused to perform an assignment in El Centro.

Other staff employes have been transferred from the Imperial Valley area, center of most farm labor activity at this time of year.

Despite the confusion, the UFW won two ALRB-conducted elections in the Imperial Valley last Friday, getting 261 votes at Growers Exchange to 64 for no union, and winning 141 votes at the J. A. Woods Co. to 39 for no union.

The UFW's longtime rival, the Teamsters Union, has closed down most of its operations in the Imperial Valley, and did not contest the UFW in the two elections. The two unions reportedly have reached a tentative peace agreement, but final details must still be worked out and approved by the unions' boards of directors.

In Sacramento, Chavez demanded the removal of two legislators from a committee which watches over ALRB operations.

The two, Sen. John Stull (R-Escondido) and Assemblyman Tom Suitt (D-Indian Wells), conducted their own investigation of the ALRB last week, interviewing workers at the K. K. Larson and Bob Kull ranches in the

Coachella Valley, where Chavez' union is trying to organize farm workers.

Stull said that after talking to about 45 workers, he concluded some ALRB agents have been acting in a "prounion" manner.

Delizonna said he is investigating the accusation, but "it is possible that there has been a misunderstanding. Our agents are supposed to answer questions of workers about their rights, and some workers may have interpreted the right given them to vote for a union of their choice as 'prounion.'"

But to Chavez, the actions of Stull and Suitt were "outrageous" as he filed unfair labor practice complaints against the two legislators with the ALRB, then asked the Legislature to remove them "for direct violations of the very law whose enforcement they are supposed to oversee."

The legislators questioned farm workers in front of their bosses, using company supervisors as translators, and based their questions on "wild and unfounded" charges made by the growers, Chavez said.

Stull said, "I have no other way to get the information. What do they want me to do? Talk to Chavez?"

Suitt said he used one of his own staff members to interpret for him and, "in most areas, the board is functioning in a reasonable manner."

2/17/77

LA Times

part 11 p. 2