

DICK MEISTER

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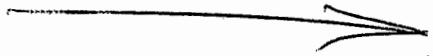
GOOD evening.

LET me start off the new year with some remarks on the united farm workers union. We haven't been hearing a great deal about the union lately, and I think some people fear the UFW has somehow gone away, or <sup>HAS</sup> ~~is~~ somehow become ineffective.

WELL, let me assure anyone who may feel that way that it just isn't so. The united farm workers union, believe me, is here to stay.

IT'S true enough that the UFW has only managed to organize about 20 percent of the quarter-million field workers in california and arizona, and otherwise only a few thousand in florida.

BUT though this means the UFW obviously has a long way to go, it does not mean the union does not have what it needs to travel that great distance. The UFW has more than proved its tremendous staying power in one of the roughest tests any organization has ever faced. And that's a record that gives ample proof the UFW can make it the rest of the way .. and eventually will make it.



THE UFW has established a firm base in california, thanks to its successful efforts in winning enactment of the farm labor relations act that gives farm workers the right to vote for a union to bargain with their employers.

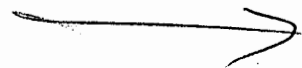
BUT building on that base will take lots of time and effort.

FOR one thing, california's powerful growers have not abandoned their intensive opposition to unionization.

SOME growers have formed ~~xxx~~ employer-controlled "company unions" to challenge the UFW in union representation elections .. and, in a few instances, have won the elections.

AND many growers are using a variety of tactics to "persuade" their employees to vote against representation by any union, and to severely limit the access of union organizers to their often isolated workers.

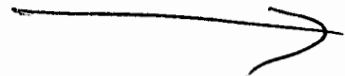
GROWER interests also are continuing their attempts to get the state legislature to weaken the farm labor law, although so far they have been unable to get their proposals out of committee.



AND the farm labor law itself certainly is not working smoothly. There has been constant turmoil within the staff of the labor relations board that administers the act. Many staffers have charged the board's chief officer with being anti-UFW. At the same time, however, many grower spokesmen have accused him of anti-grower bias.

THE farm labor board, in any case, has a tremendous backlog of unsettled election challenges, unfair labor practice charges against growers and other matters. And that has greatly slowed the holding and certification of union representation elections.

AND the law only requires growers to recognize the union voted for by their employees. It does not require them to sign a contract with that union ... only to bargain with the union in an attempt to reach an agreement. Hence many growers have been stalling in contract negotiations -- some for as long as two years -- forcing the UFW to resort to a series of scattered strikes and selective boycotts.

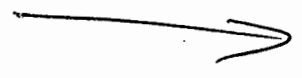


BUT despite all the problems, the UFW has been winning the vast majority of elections that have been held -- about 250 overall, including 35 of the 50 elections held last year -- and has managed to negotiate nearly 100 contracts that provide pay, benefits and rights unknown to farm workers until just a few years ago.

THIS has changed the basic nature of the UFW. It is no longer an organization seeking basic legal rights through highly visible demonstrations, boycotts and strikes. It has won those legal rights. It is now an established ~~trade~~ union with hundreds of contracts to negotiate and police, thousands of workers to organize, and a large and ever-growing organization to administer.

AND that, surely, is one of the UFW's major current problems. The UFW's members were highly skilled at the demonstrations that drew so much attention in the past. But they are not skilled at the complex job of running a union.

AS a matter of fact, they have taken only a small part in running the union. That has been left largely to cesar chavez and a small group of other UFW officers, many of them relatives of chavez, and his top aides, and to volunteers who are not farm workers.

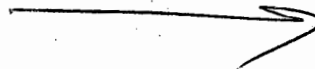


IT'S true enough that those who <sup>have been running</sup> ~~run~~ the union <sup>are</sup> ~~were~~ largely farm workers themselves and generally <sup>do</sup> ~~do~~ what their farm worker members want ~~to~~ done. But for the UFW to be a fully democratic union, the actual running of the union must be taken on by the members themselves. <sup>THE UNION</sup> AND FOR ~~IT~~ TO EXPAND, ~~HUNDREDS~~ THOUSANDS OF RANK-AND-FILE ORGANIZERS MUST BE TRAINED.

CHAVEZ and the other officers recognize this need.

THEY have purged the union staff of many of the volunteers whose main concern was not to build a farm workers union, but to use the union as a tool to bring about political reform or revolution.

THE UFW officers also have set up field offices around the state to be staffed by local rank and file members. They have restructured union committees at particular farms to gain greater membership participation. And they are conducting classes at individual farms to train workers to negotiate their own contracts, handle their own grievances against growers and their own health and safety problems -- functions previously handled mainly by UFW staff members, officers and volunteers.

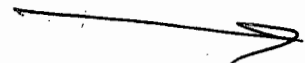


GETTING california's farm labor law to work smoothly is obviously another high priority for the UFW -- probably its highest priority. So is getting similar laws passed in other states and, eventually, winning enactment of a federal farm labor law that would cover all states.

PRESSING for such laws has become the UFW's main activity outside california. The UFW, for instance, has merged with a union whose sole program is seeking legal bargaining rights for some 6000 puerto rican farm workers in six eastern states.

THE UFW also has been lobbying for laws in florida, arizona, washington, and texas .. although in the most important areas texas, the efforts have been seriously hampered by the emergence of a rival union. It's led by former UFW organizers who reacted to the violence of growers and law enforcement officers by turning to violent tactics themselves and so were cut off from the UFW.

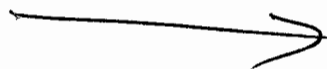
AT this point, the chances for enactment of laws in other states are very dim. The UFW simply has been too busy in california to show the strength elsewhere that is needed to win such laws.



FOR as the UFW's experience in California showed, such laws can be won only after the union has shown enough strength to make it attractive for politicians to support enactment of a law -- either because they want the support of the liberal backers that a strong union can rally, or because they want to end the disruptions that a strong union can cause by strikes, boycotts and demonstrations aimed at winning the rights such a law would confer.

THE chances for enactment of a federal law are even more remote. The Carter administration has been talking vaguely about putting farm workers under the national labor relations act -- BUT ONLY after the act is reformed to close the loopholes that have made it easier for employers to escape unionization in recent years.

IT'S not at all clear when -- and if -- those reforms will be made. And it is clear the UFW wants no part of the national labor relations act in any case. For one thing, it prohibits the kind of boycotts that have been the UFW's main and essential weapon and, even if reformed as proposed, would still prohibit them.

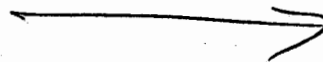


THE UFW wants a national farm labor law patterned after the california law which, among other things, allows the boycotts. But until california's law is working smoothly, there's not the slightest chance it will be used as a national model.

THE UFW's attempts to make the law work better have not been helped, obviously, by the noticeable lack of support from governor brown in recent months.

BROWN did a tremendous job in getting the farm labor law enacted. But he has backed off from the UFW, in part because of a general weakening of public support for the union, and in part because of brown's long-range campaign for the presidency, which calls for wooing corporate interests and others who opposed the UFW.

BROWN began moving away from the UFW after the loss of proposition 14 in the november 1976 election. Brown had identified closely with the proposition to strengthen the farm labor law, of course, and the loss was his first major political setback.






MUCH has been made of the loss of proposition 14 as a major setback for the UFW as well. But it really wasn't all that serious. Although imperfect, the farm labor law remains intact. And, thanks to the UFW's major campaign for prop 14, there is no immediate danger of the law being weakened.

CERTAINLY, the UFW lost badly. But in doing so, it drew the highly visible support of hundreds of ~~thous~~ands of people, and raised nearly two million dollars. Politicians and growers are not eager to take on an organization with that kind of clout.

NOW it is true, nonetheless, that the UFW has lost public support .. ironically because of the union's very success ... because of its new position as an established union, working within the confines of a law.

THIS requires, not the demonstrations and boycotts that rallied support to the UFW, but legal and political action -- including partisan support for politicians pledged to protect the farm labor law from attack, ~~but politicians~~  
~~whom the UFW's supporters don't necessarily support.~~



People don't hear much about the UFW these days. The media is not much interested in the routine, day-to-day activities of established unions. The media prefers the simplistic excitement of dramatic confrontation.

AND so, it must be said, do many of the UFW's supporters. They seem uneasy supporting an organization that has won its fight for basic legal rights and is now working with comparative quiet within the establishment. They obviously can't get behind farm workers with the same enthusiasm as they had when those farm workers were getting their heads bashed on

picket lines and drawing so much media attention. *NOR DO THEY HAVE THE PATIENCE ~~FOR~~ FOR the slow legal process. That the UFW must now employ in hands, and the term - enormous, they must do. They appear BUT* the UFW obviously still wants and needs as many supporters as possible, and has been trying to attract the kind of attention that gave the union such strong support in the past. The union has engaged in sit-ins at offices of the farm labor relations board and otherwise tried to call attention to its unhappiness over how the farm labor law is operating. The union also has begun campaigns against child labor and heavy pesticide use, and, most recently, a campaign involving mechanization on the farm.

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MECHANIZATION surely is one of the most serious problems facing farm workers, since at the current pace, an estimated 120,000 farm workers will be displaced by machines on californian farms alone during the next decade.

B) THE most serious problem facing farm workers, however, is the constant and heavy influx of illegal alien workers from Mexico.

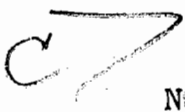
PERHAPS as many as half of the country's farm workers are now illegal aliens. And because they have no legal rights, and there are so many of them, and so many more who are trying to enter the country, the aliens are shamelessly exploited. Most must live and work under conditions as primitive as they were decades ago, despite the existence of the farm workers union.

PREVIOUSLY, the union opposed the entry of any aliens. But now the UFW is advocating that full rights and protections be granted the aliens, since there seems to be no practical way of blocking their entry anyway.



AS A matter of fact, the UFW is now trying to organize aliens. The union was instrumental, for example, in a strike last fall by the 6000 illegal aliens who harvest most of the citrus crop in central arizona.

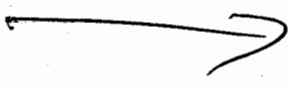
THE UFW's position has put the union into serious conflict with ptesident carter, who wants to grant only limited rights to only a limited number of alien workers, rather than grant full rights to all aliens.



NOR has the UFW's stand helped the union gain the new public support it needs. For public opinion polls show clearly that most people oppose illegal aliens and are ~~not~~ by no means eager that they be granted any rights .. except to be run out of the country.

IN any case, there are hundreds of thousands of aliens in this country who are living and working under miserable conditions .. and hundreds of thousands of other farm workers also living well below the povertty level.

BUT their way out of deprivation is no longer just a hope. There is a strong union of farm workers. And though it has a long way to go, it already has come a good long way.



FARM pay in california has more than tripled since the UFW began organizing less than 15 years ago. Thousands of california farm workers now have the legal right to medical care ... protection against health and safety hazards ... pensions, paid vacations and even paid holidays ... the right to be fired only for just cause, to argue with employers who treat them unfairly ... to be allocated work according to seniority .. to honor the picket lines of other workers .. to play an active role in politics ... and many other rights only dreamed of just a few years ago -- especially the right to unionization.

THAT farm workers have made it this far is the best possible evidence they will go the rest of the way. They have a long road to travel, but you can be sure they are going to make it.

*THEY'VE COME TOO FAR and learned too much to even consider  
throwing back.*

THIS has been dick meister. Thanks for listening. I'll be talking to you again in two weeks.

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