

Clash Likely Between Sugar Industry and Farm Union

Special to The New York Times

MIAMI, Oct. 9—A confrontation in the Florida cane fields, as well as in the courts, appears likely in the coming weeks between the sugar industry and the United Farm Workers Union.

The dispute centers basically on the union's opposition to the use by the industry of about 10,000 Jamaican cane-cutters in the 1972, \$160-million sugar harvest, which begins later this month and ends next March.

But in a larger sense, the issue is whether the California-based union, affiliated with the American Federation of Labor and Congress of Industrial Organizations and headed by Cesar Chavez, can make further progress in organizing migrant farm workers in Florida and other states.

Need for Jamaicans Doubted

The union came here in the summer of 1971. Last February, representing 1,200 orange pickers, it signed a three-year contract with the Coca-Cola Company's food division, the first labor contract for migrant

workers in Florida. The union is also involved in a strike of about 200 tractor and truck drivers against the Talisman Sugar Company, which is in Palm Beach County.

In the present controversy, the union contends that with large unemployment of domestic farm workers there is no need to import the Jamaicans, which the industry has been doing for the last six years.

The industry's position is that few have signed up for cane-cutting, regarded as one of the hardest and, by United States standards, lowest paid type of farm work.

Late last month, the union asked a Federal judge here to stop the importation of the Jamaicans.

At the end of several days of testimony last week, Judge Peter T. Fay of Federal District Court indicated that the bringing in of workers did not deprive Americans of their right to be hired in preference to foreign laborers.

"It is my opinion that even while the Jamaicans are coming here, what greater protection

is there to domestic workers than to know that they are qualified and if they apply for work they must be given the job," Judge Fay said. He is expected to rule next week.

Union and industry officials agree that regardless of Judge Fay's ruling, the next phase of the controversy will be played out in the cane fields.

Observers believe that the union's ability to recruit a large number of unemployed cane-cutters will test its claim of representing most migrant farm workers in Florida and elsewhere in the country.

"We want to harvest the crop and if they produce the workers, our answer to that offer is a standing yes," said Charles Kelso, an Atlanta attorney, expressing the industry's view.

Ten days ago, union officials in Florida began advising their out-of-state offices that jobs were available in cane fields here. Eliseo Medina, the union's state director, said that at least 1,000 Florida cane-cutters would be immediately available to cut cane, and added that hundreds of others

would come from around the country.

Mr. Medina is to meet with industry representatives soon to discuss, among other issues, the payment for transporting out-of-state cane-cutters to Florida.

"The industry is paying the Jamaicans' air fares," Mr. Medina said. "We are not asking for anything different than the Jamaicans are getting, and under the law we are entitled to the same deal."

The New York Times

Published: October 10, 1972

Copyright © The New York Times