

# Long Lettuce Strike Tests Chavez Union's Strategy

By **ROBERT LINDSEY**

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LOS ANGELES, June 15 — A strike by the United Farm Workers of America against major California vegetable growers will be five months old on Tuesday, and there are still no indications of a settlement in the increasingly violent dispute.

Negotiations between growers and the union resumed 10 days ago after a four-month break, but they collapsed again this week. Afterward, Mike Storm, president of the Growers-Shippers Vegetable Association of Central California, said:

"We're at a complete impasse again, and it doesn't look very good for settling very soon."

Cesar Chavez, the migrant worker who came out of southern Arizona in 1961 to begin building what became the nation's first successful union of farm workers, subsequently reminded his members at a rally that it had taken five years to win a contract with grape growers in the Delano area of the San Joaquin Valley. He said that he was equally as patient now to continue the strike in order to raise the wages of farm workers to levels adequate in today's economy.

## Scene of Confrontations

The strike now is centered 100 miles south of San Francisco in the lettuce fields of the Salinas Valley, which was the scene of several violent confrontations between strikers and nonstriking lettuce harvesters this week.

Beginning next week, picketing is expected to resume in the Imperial Valley, almost 600 miles south of the Salinas Valley, where the summer melon harvest is

getting under way. The Imperial Valley, which is situated along the Mexican Border, is where the strike began Jan. 19.

Mr. Chavez has been seeking a one-year contract with wage increases of upwards of 40 percent as well as broadening of a clause contained in contracts with some growers that allows the U.F.W. to prevent farm workers not in "good standing" in the union from working.

Under a contract effective before the strike, the base pay for the approximately 20 percent of workers under U.F.W. contracts who are paid by the hour was \$3.70. When talks collapsed this week, the growers' last offer was \$4.35 an hour, while the union was holding out for \$4.85 an hour.

## 'Dream Strike' Seen

When the strike began, Mr. Chavez termed the work stoppage a "dream strike," the union's first shutdown not aimed at winning recognition as a union but to upgrade wages to levels paid truck drivers, packing house workers and others in the labor chain that brings food from the fields to the table.

He said then that he was optimistic that growers, then at the peak of the winter lettuce harvest, would settle quickly, and it appeared that he was hopeful he could get one or more of the larger growers to meet his demands for higher wages and set a precedent that other growers would have to follow.

However, apparently at least partly because of the size of the union's demands, the growers remained united and did not break ranks.

As the strike has worn on, Mr. Chavez has called it a battle for the union's survival. Growers say they cannot afford the

wage demands and changed work rules sought by the union. In many cases, they have replaced the striking workers with nonunion members.

## Impact on Pickets

The loss of wages for almost five months have caused some workers to return to the fields, crossing picket lines. The return of these employees, coupled with the arrival of nonunion workers, at least some of whom are illegal immigrants from Mexico, have allowed the struck growers to continue production. It has been the presence of these "replacement workers," whom Mr. Chavez calls "scabs," that has led to most of the confrontations recently.

In one outbreak of violence this week, law enforcement officials near Salinas arrested 104 U.F.W. members for assault and other charges.

Politically, Mr. Chavez has apparently not been helped by the recurring allegations of violence by his members. Several bills that would limit the union's rights under California's pioneering Agricultural Labor Relations Act, the nation's first law giving farm workers the right to organize unions, have been introduced in the state Legislature. Many of the union's most prominent liberal supporters of the past, including Gov. Edmund G. Brown Jr., have been conspicuously quiet recently regarding support of the strike.

The union's strategy has been to strike some growers selectively while allowing others to continue operations; currently, 6 of the 16 major growers in the Salinas Valley are being picketed.

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