

Chavez and Teamsters Intensify Fight

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SALINAS, Calif., Sept. 7—

The job of the cortadore, the man who cuts lettuce from its thick roots, is hard work, even for the young men with strong backs who toil in the broad

green fields of the Salinas Valley.

Jose Morales knows this harvest work very well. He has labored in the lettuce fields of California and Arizona during harvests since 1962 when he and his brothers and sisters came here from Mexico.

This is the first lettuce crop in the Salinas Valley in 13 years that Mr. Morales will not help to pick. But he is in the fields every day, moving among the rows of workers, seeking a different harvest.

Mr. Morales, 37 years old, is campaigning for votes for the United Farm Workers of America in the decisive union elections that are being held this month in the Salinas Valley and other farm centers of central California.

New Law in Effect

California's unusual farm labor law, which went into effect the week before last, has thrown the entire collective-bargaining future of the state's 250,000 farm workers up for grabs. All existing labor contracts can be challenged if a majority of the workers on a farm petition for an election at harvest time.

The state's two principal farm labor representatives, the United Farm Workers and the International Brotherhood of Teamsters, are now locked in a struggle in the central valleys of the state in dozens of union elections, a broad contest that will continue through the changing seasons as the harvest moves to other parts of the 800-mile-long state.

It is a debate carried into

the fields and work camps of the laborers, a dialogue that holds the potential to give one union dominance in the future and banish the other.

"Listen," Mr. Morales said in Spanish the other day to a knot of cortadores who had moved far enough ahead of the packaging machines that follow them to take a break, "this election is everything that we have been working for. Everything will be different after we vote. Wages, working conditions, everything."

The men nodded their heads and smoked cigarettes. A few asked questions. "Are you sure the vote will be secret?" asked one man nervously.

"Yes, yes," Mr. Morales responded. "A secret ballot. It is the new law."

Both sides have opened propaganda campaigns that contain a dizzying amount of charges, and it is difficult in the short lifespan of a campaign—an election must be held within seven days after the filing of a petition—to ferret out scurrilous claims from legitimate ones.

The mood here is that the last-minute activity is of little value anyway. The whole farm

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labor issue has been such an emotional and explosive drama for the last decade that it is felt that the preferences of individual laborers were settled a long time ago.

In the mind of Mr. Morales, an earnest and broad-shouldered man, the outcome of the election is obvious. "This is the first time that the workers in the Salinas Valley have a chance to vote for the union they want," he said after the cortadores returned to work in the field, bent over endless rows of lettuce, their sharp blades flashing. "In the past, the teamsters and the growers got together and told the workers what kind of contract they would get."

While many outsiders might be conditioned to expect the U.F.W. to sweep most of the upcoming contests, because of the emotionalism that has surrounded the long and often lonely struggle by the union's leadership to upgrade the entire range of life for Mexican-American farm laborers, the teamsters have some powerful factors working in their favor.

First, it is a strong national union with a membership of about two million, possessing the resources that could guarantee and sustain its agricultural membership.

Workers' Fear on Vote

By the same measure, there are farm workers who might personally favor the U.F.W. and its principles, but who fear that the growers, long antagonistic to the U.F.W. and its leadership to upgrade the entire contracts with the union after the election. Therefore, there is some anxiety, nourished by the teamster organizers, that a vote for the U.F.W. will lead to strikes, unemployment and economic hardship.

As if to underscore this point, this summer the Salinas growers agreed to give teamster workers a 20 per cent increase in wages, an achievement not lost on the rank and file.

This brought teamster wages in the valley above the older existing contract that the U.F.W. has with Interharvest, the single big contract held by the U.F.W. in the area. But the U.F.W. boasts of better fringe benefits in its package, and field workers at Interharvest can make about \$150 a week in regular pay.

Hiring Hall a Factor

Another potent factor is the U.F.W. hiring hall. For the first time in California agriculture the responsibility for the assignment of workers has been taken away from the traditional labor boss, who usually worked under special arrangements made with the grower, and placed in a hiring hall based on the industrial model. Here the union passes out work assignments on the basis of union seniority and other considerations.

The introduction of the hiring hall has had a mixed reception by the field workers, with many resentful of its disruption of old work patterns.

Results of the earliest elections held outside the Salinas

Valley yesterday were inconclusive, with the U.F.W. taking two contests while the third went to the teamsters. But these elections were held on small farms—called "ranches" in local parlance—and in each case one of the rival unions had failed to get on the ballot by filing intervening petitions by the deadline.

The first election under the new law was held Friday night on a small artichoke ranch near Watsonville and both unions were on the ballot. The official outcome was not announced, but the victory apparently went to the U.F.W.

The Salinas Valley, the famed "salad bowl" of the nation that was the setting for John Steinbeck's "East of Eden," has been a teamster stronghold for several years since the giant national union signed contracts with most of the lettuce growers.

The U.F.W. has always contended that the deals were "sweetheart contracts" that ignored the wishes of the workers, arranged only because the growers felt threatened by the economic and social revolution fomented by Cesar Chavez, the farm union president.

While the U.F.W. organizing staff in Salinas was predicting victory in the 22 union elections scheduled for early this week in the valley, Mr. Chavez tended to be a little less confident. He stood inside the U.F.W. hiring hall on Wood

Street the other day, a small figure in a blue cardigan sweater and slacks, and in an interview discussed the impending showdown with the teamsters, as volunteer workers sorted campaign circulars on a table beside him.

"We're waiting for the teamsters to pull their tricks," he said softly. "They always come up with something. Everything is quiet, then all of a sudden they're trying to beat the hell out of you."

During the organizing fights in the Salinas Valley in 1970-71, teamster organizers with two-by-fours used strong-arm tactics against their rivals.

Guns Reported at Farm

Mr. Chavez spoke of the troubles representatives were encountering in trying to gain access to workers on farms in the San Joaquin Valley, the agricultural production center of this state. He said the appearance of men with guns who stopped U.F.W. organizers at a farm outside Stockton last week indicated how far some would go to stop the democratic process.

"In many, many cases our people can't get into the fields," he said. "This is not a fair election, not by a long shot." Later, Mr. Chavez and a band of about 25 U.F.W. supporters traveled across town to a work camp operated by the Bud Antle Company, one of the major lettuce producers in the state, where about 1,500 workers, mostly Mexican-Americans,

are employed under a teamster contract.

Mr. Chavez, in this milieu, needed no introduction. He simply walked into a dining hall, where about 40 men were bent over yellow plastic plates holding mounds of rice and beans and meat, and stood silently next to a bubble-top machine that dispensed a raspberry drink. The workers needed no cajoling. One by one they rose from the white benches and walked to Mr. Chavez and quietly shook his hand. Mr. Chavez said nothing but nodded his head slightly in accepting the greeting.

Outside the hall, however, after about 100 workers gathered in the dusty street, Mr. Chavez did speak, and his whole demeanor changed as he stood before the men, who were dressed in work clothes and sipped on soft drinks or cans of beer, and passionately asked them to vote for his union.

"The campesino [field worker] has to decide this election by himself," Mr. Chavez told the men in Spanish. "No one else can do it for him. The teamsters use fear. Do not be afraid. If the farm industry is not dominated by one union, it will always have the unions fighting each other instead of the grower. We are all campesinos and we should get together and work together. The U.F.W. is more than just a union—it's liberty and people. This is the most important decision of your life."



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Jose Morales campaigning for the United Farm Workers with lettuce pickers near Salinas, Calif.

Before Mr. Chavez could to make his way to Mr. Chavez's side, Mr. Chavez's workers and the secretary-treasurer of Teamsters Local 890, the union representative of the men in the camp, strode into the crowd with an aide and tried

ed that the Chavez supporters were preventing him from speaking to his men, but when his aide crossed the street to rally the workers lining the porch of a dormitory, they shouted him down. The teamsters finally relented, got back in their car, and backed out of the camp, while the Chavez forces led the workers in a chant that could be heard out to the highway: "Chavez si! Teamsters no!"