

Farm Workers Celebrate the Past And Plan Expansion at Convention

By LES LEDBETTER

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FRESNO, Calif., Aug. 28—The United Farm Workers of America ended its third convention here today with a mixture of exuberance and seriousness that has pervaded this three-day meeting.

A martyr's mass this morning reminded the 1,500 delegates and 1,500 supporters of the price paid over the last 15 years to organize 101,000 farm workers on 42 ranches in the West. Celebration at a rally-barbecue-dance this afternoon reminded thousands of U.F.W. supporters that the union had won a new labor law in California, made peace with the International Brotherhood of Teamsters and was supported by a friendly Administration in Washington.

The exuberance of delegates to the convention has been expressed in music and applause, exploding with each message of congratulations from religious, labor and political leaders across the country.

Labor Secretary Ray Marshall brought greetings from President Carter and delivered a speech asking the union to support Administration proposals to expand labor laws to cover farm workers and to register illegal aliens. He expanded on the proposals at a news conference afterward in an effort to meet the objections of the U.F.W. and its president, Cesar E. Chavez.

'Dramatic Gains'

Mr. Chavez opened the convention with his report citing the "dramatic gains" of the farm workers over the last 15 years: Minimum wages were more than tripled, health and retirement plans were established, and minimum job standards and job security were achieved.

When the farm workers met here last, two years ago, California's Agricultural Labor Relations Act was still untested and faced legal and funding problems. The union also faced a hostile Administration and was fighting with teamster organizers as well as farmers and growers.

Mr. Chavez said that most of these problems had passed and that new "U.F.W. contracts free farm workers from the exploitation and discrimination that impoverishes so many of our people in this land of wealth and promise."

But Mr. Chavez also noted that the U.F.W. must improve worker involvement in the union's administration, organize hundreds of thousands more farm workers in the West, the East and the South and continue to fight extensive legal and political battles.

"We are convinced that the vanguard of this movement must be the workers themselves; we must completely turn

over the task of running the union to them," he told the cheering delegates.

An aide to Mr. Chavez explained later that many nonworker volunteers from the early organizing days, especially those "with political agendas they wish to force on the union," were being supplanted by farm workers.

Mr. Chavez, who was unanimously re-elected president of the U.F.W. yesterday, praised "movement volunteers" who have worked "side by side with the farm workers" rather than those who "have come with the idea of saving the farm workers from the union."

Although he touched only briefly on the proposal by the Carter Administration to identify and in some cases give legal status to the millions of illegal aliens in this country, as well as a plan to include the farm workers under a revised National Labor Relations Act, Mr. Chavez was supported by the delegates in his opposition to these proposals. The union passed resolutions against the proposals before Secretary Marshall made his address yesterday.

General Proposals

In his speech, which was interrupted by applause two dozen times, the Labor Secretary said that the documentation of illegal aliens was necessary in order to protect "these frightened people" who "work scared" for less than minimum wages and under unsafe conditions.

He said that farm workers should be covered under the N.L.R.A. because a separate Federal law "would only encourage the myth that farm workers should be treated differently from other workers."

However, at a news conference after his speech, Secretary Marshall said that the Carter Administration was only making general proposals in these areas and that final legislation could be changed to meet U.F.W. objections.

He said that he understood the union's wish to avoid the weaker provisions of the Federal labor relations act, as compared to the California Farm Labor Law, which "provides a very good model" for separate Federal legislation; that he doesn't "believe in braceros" or imported laborers when there are so many unemployed citizens in the United States; and that he felt that documentation of illegal aliens would not be permitted to create discrimination against minority workers, as the U.F.W. believed.

Mr. Chavez smiled at these indications that the Administration would be flexible, but he remained adamant in defending the union's opposition to the proposals as they have been announced.



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Labor Secretary Ray Marshall, left, and United Farm Workers president Cesar E. Chavez at the union's convention in Fresno, Calif., yesterday.

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