

He started a kind of revolution
among migrant workers—but a rival union is now reaping the harvest.

IS CHAVEZ BEATEN?

By Winthrop Griffith

CALEXICO, CALIF. No one who sympathizes with him wants to admit that he is defeated. Some of his Anglo supporters still pace the sidewalks in front of city supermarkets, imploring customers to boycott the grapes and lettuce inside, but their posture now indicates to the skeptical outsider that they are engaged in a lonely vigil, not a dynamic national movement. His most zealous farm-worker followers still stand at the dusty edges of the vineyards and lettuce fields, waving the red-and-black banners and shouting, "Huelga!" (Strike), at the workers bent between the rows of ripe crops, but their rhetoric these days is more anguished than inspired. He still speaks with relentless enthusiasm at rallies in school auditoriums and town parks, but the cheers of his loyalists stem as much from nostalgia for the past struggle as from desire to hang in there for future battles.

Cesar Chavez came out of the lush fields and obscure towns of California's central valley a decade ago with a few lessons from Saul Alinsky, some money from the Reuthers and, at the noble candle-light rallies, the occasional political presence of the Kennedys. He also emerged with other assets: an almost shy charisma, a Catholic-Latin spirituality which reporters tended to romanticize and the cause of an American underdog which attracted that part of the public dimly aware of its own guilt. Chavez and his *campesinos* also had the luck of timing in the nineteen-sixties, when hero images and student demands for justice were appealing, even powerful. Their peasant-primitive tactics in field strikes and their urban boycott pressures triumphed in 1970, when scores of corporate growers surrendered to sign unprecedented labor contracts with the new United Farm Workers Union.

Today, the U.F.W. holds only a few fragments of the collective bargaining power it won in 1970. Chavez and the U.F.W. are not completely vanquished in their eternal war with the growers, but they are fighting for their lives—for the survival of *La Causa*—against a newer enemy, the Teamsters union.

The Teamsters, after four years of shrewd maneuvering, after last year's bloody battles with

Chavistas in the fields, are now cementing their victories and expanding their representation of farm workers. Teamster tactics during the first phase of their challenge to Chavez centered on collusive relationships with the growers. Last year, the old union flexed some of its brutal muscle to swipe grower contracts away from Chavez's idealistic and fledgling U.F.W.

This year, the Teamsters union is reforming in its effort to control representation of farm workers. Its leaders have called off the burly guards who stalked through the fields and taunted the Chavista pickets last year. Teamster organizers now consult directly with field workers before negotiating with growers. The contracts they sign grant wages which are as high as those secured by Chavez's U.F.W. The Teamsters have opened seven field offices in California and staffed them with experi-

enced personnel to handle contract grievances and other services for members.

In the past year and a half, the Teamsters have devastated the formal power which Chavez won just four years ago.

Early last year, the U.F.W. held contracts with about 300 growers. Today, Chavez says that he has "not counted them lately," and he awkwardly mentions them by name or place. They total less than a dozen. The Teamsters union now has more than 350 contracts, and it is getting more every month.

Chavistas working under formal contracts numbered about 60,000 in 1972. Today, they have dwindled to fewer than 5,000. The Teamster contracts now cover more than 55,000 field workers during the peak harvest seasons.

Chavez and the U.F.W. are broke. Last year, still commanding massive public sympathy, they received \$1.6-million from the A.F.L.-C.I.O. and as much from other sources to finance a general strike in the fields. Today, Chavez is scrounging among liberal organizations and unions to borrow money, and he regularly berates his staff to reduce office expenses. On a bleak day last winter, he tore a telephone wire from his office wall to demonstrate his wrath over long-distance phone bills. The Teamsters union is spending, easily, about \$100,000 a month for its farm-labor operations.

The money, the muscle and the organizing skills of the Teamsters were not the only major factors accounting for Chavez's fall. The times and the mood of the nation have changed since Chavez's movement first captured public attention and sympathy in 1965.

Through 1970, Chavez inspired devotion from church leaders, liberal politicians and many reporters throughout the nation. Now, the charisma and the cause are wearing thin. Fewer priests and nuns are working for him full-time, the rad-chics from New York's Sutton Place to San Francisco's Nob Hill are bored with it all, and editors routinely cross out many paragraphs filed by their reporters about the confrontations, arrests and injuries in Calexico and Fresno, Salinas and Modesto, Coachella and Stockton.

A San Francisco woman, who once worked as a volunteer in Chavez's boycott of the chain stores, says: "I was really a believer. My kids had never even tasted grapes, and for three years I used spinach to make salads. I still wish Chavez well, but I'm out of it now. Maybe Vietnam, the civil-rights thing, Watergate and all the rest of it wore me out. I worry more now (Continued on Page 29)

Winthrop Griffith is a freelance writer based in Northern California.

about the price of a head of lettuce than the issue of who picked it."

A Salinas Valley attorney, Dennis Powell, remembers a colleague who worked for the cause of the farm workers for more than five years: "He's in private practice now, doing well. I saw him recently. He doesn't give a damn now. He was most enthused when he talked about taking his wife and some friends to see 'Behind the Green Door' and another porno film. It's the decadent seventies."

At moments, the present Chavista effort seems like a forlorn echo of the sixties with its fading memories of inspired social movements, sharply expressed ideals and strategies of provocation.

In Calexico, near the California-Mexico border, 75 U.F.W. loyalists, protesting grower-Teamster contracts, recently turned out at 3 o'clock one morning to push for a one-day work-stoppage in Imperial Valley fields. They lined the roadway leading into *El Hoyo* (the hole), a marshaling point for the growers' buses and the workers seeking a day's wages cutting lettuce or asparagus. The Chavistas heckled the sleepy men and women walking toward the buses with logical arguments about justice and solidarity. The hungry workers—some of them under Teamster contracts, many of

them illegal aliens and most of them Mexican nationals holding Immigration Service green cards permitting them to work in the United States—kept walking by, holding their plastic-mesh lunch bags more tightly, staring grimly ahead.

The Chavistas clustered more closely, partly blocking the sidewalks. It wasn't enough; the workers streamed silently into *El Hoyo*. A few of them began to taunt the workers, insulting the men as "scab bastards" and the women as "whores of the growers."

Thirty cops from the Calexico police department and the Imperial County sheriff's office stepped out of nearby cars and pulled thick plastic visors down from helmet hinges to cover their faces. A voice on a bullhorn ordered the Chavistas to move back. Most of them did, but several moved across a line the voice had defined.

Three small rocks skidded across the asphalt. A dirt clod splattered midway between the more aggressive Chavistas and the forward cops. "Let's get 'em," one officer shouted. The cops moved across the roadway with clubs swinging and handcuffs ready. They struck hard at the shoulders and heads of 10 Chavistas and shoved three of them toward the waiting cars—and jail.

Deborah Peyton, a young attorney from New York via Oakland working for the U.F.W. office in Calexico, was still indignant as she spoke of the fracas later. She talked of "those good people, some

of them frail young women, standing with such courage against those big, grotesque, armed cops." Yet she had enough of a sense of humor—and a sense of history—to raise a fist only limply-clenched as she concluded: "The whole world was watching!"

No, it wasn't. There were no television cameras and no reporters from any dailies at the border scene. Only a few California newspapers printed a paragraph or two about the arrests. The three Chavistas, along with 15 others arrested earlier, were soon released from jail, and the charges against them were dismissed. No one called them "The Calexico 18."

Diminished public interest undermined some of the strength of Chavez's movement. The shrewd skill and raw power of the Teamsters union crippled his power against the growers. Now, the U.F.W. is being strained by a shift of sympathies by the farm workers themselves. Most of them still revere Chavez as a hero, still hope that the U.F.W. might resurrect its power someday, still identify more with the brown-skinned Spanish-speaking leaders of the U.F.W. than with the ruddy-faced Irish- and Scandinavian-named officials of the Teamsters union, but they are beginning to sign Teamster contract petitions through preference, not coercion.

The outsider has to understand that the struggle for the individual farm-worker
(Continued on Page 24)

family is far more a matter of physical necessity than political decision.

I learned that during an evening with the Hernandez family, in their one-room, cement-floored home near El Centro. It was 8 P.M.; all of the members of the family, except the youngest children and the grandmother, had spent 15 hours that day thinning the lettuce and riding the buses to and from the fields.

Three Hernandez babies were asleep on an old patio cot in one corner of the home. Two toddlers were devising a game with empty soft-drink cans in the middle of the room. Six older children were sitting in silence outside, staring at the ground or watching the sunset.

Their father sighed often as he answered the main question: "La Causa is good, and its time will come again. When I hear the cry of 'Huelga' I want to, you know, walk out of the fields, to screw the grower right at harvest time, to help Cesar in this hard time he has. But look around you, at all these open mouths to feed. We will keep thinning the lettuce because we need the dollars. I like the Chavez union most, but they made some mistakes. The Teamsters are not as bad as he says. They helped me get food stamps in January, when there was no work."

Mrs. Hernandez nodded in agreement as her husband talked, then she said: "We were—maybe in our hearts we still are—with Chavez. We were members of his union for two years, good years. Then the Teamsters came. We were on the picket lines last year, striking against the growers who got the Teamster contracts. But we signed the Teamster petition this year. It was printed in Spanish for a change. We work regular now."

On the wall near the door of the Hernandez home, there were four photographs from posters and magazines: Abraham Lincoln, Emiliano Zapata, John Kennedy and Cesar Chavez. The corners of the pictures were curling up over the tacks, and the paper was turning yellow.

The 1970 Chavez victories, which the Hernandez family still remembers proudly, were historic and impressive. One Western Teamster official recalls that he was "amazed that a motley bunch of rabble-rousers could milk so much out of those feudalistic growers." The Teamsters, already

representing cannery workers and always eager for any opportunity to grow, cast a covetous eye toward the U.F.W.'s newly won contracts. Despite the victories, then, Chavez's union remained vulnerable.

In part, the vulnerability expressed itself in the attitude of many of the growers who had signed with Chavez yet continued to detest him personally and to resent the militant tactics of the U.F.W. "Cesar and his crowd are just a bunch of Communist revolutionaries," a Coachella grower insists four years later. Racist comments, ranging from the paternalistic to the sadistic, pepper the remarks of some growers. "It wasn't fair for Chavez to strike my ranch," a Delano grower says. "My workers were simple people, good people, and I liked them and took good care of them. If a man and his family worked hard, I gave them a low-rent room and sold them groceries at only slight mark-ups. Once, I even paid for the funeral of the daughter of one of my workers." An Imperial Valley grower says: "Those people were made to suffer; some of them even enjoy the work. God made the Mexicans with stubby legs and greasy hair. So, you see, they can lean low and tolerate the sun in the fields. Chavez made those people think they're something better."

The U.F.W. was also made vulnerable by the Mexican border, which provides a natural cornucopia of docile, cheap laborers who unknowingly become strikebreakers, eagerly hired by American growers and accepted by farm-labor contractors and the Teamsters. Few American officials call them wetbacks now. They are, simply, the "illegals." Usually, they pay fees, up to \$300, to "coyotes"—body smugglers—to sneak them across the border at night and drive them far enough north where the U.S. Border Patrol is understaffed. Last year, more than 600,000 illegal aliens were apprehended by the Border Patrol in the Southwest alone. It is reasonable to double that figure to estimate the number of illegals who were not captured. About one-fourth of them move into farm work. Any effective strike, then, is virtually prohibited by what one U.F.W. official calls "that huge, phantom flow" of illegals into American farm fields.

Also, the shifting magnitude of the nation's force of field workers presented an administrative nightmare to the U.F.W. Roughly 3 million in-

dividuals work for wages on the nation's farms each year. No two statistical sources agree on the number of migrant farm workers, the group which comprises the majority of U.F.W. or Teamster members. The estimates range from 120,000 to more than 400,000. Sources agree only that the number of farm jobs is decreasing, the number of workers is increasing and that the majority of the jobs and workers are in California. Nothing is simple or stable in the agriculture of that state, except the balmy climate and almost year-long growing season. A grower plants lettuce for one period, asparagus for another, maybe tomatoes after that—all on the same farm in a single year. A worker toils in one field for five days, moves to another crop and field for two weeks, drives several hundred miles to work in another field for a different grower. The most sophisticated computer could become snarled by the attempt to keep track of farm union members.

Finally, the U.F.W.'s vulnerability became compounded by the system of hiring halls established by the union after its 1970 victories. Chavez, I concluded after watching him in action, is a superb organizer and an increasingly competent administrator, and he has a team of able lieutenants immediately behind him. But administrative skill fades beneath them in the hierarchy of the U.F.W. The new hiring-hall bosses, inexperienced in the ways of power and paperwork, made a mess of it. They often split up a family of workers, with only one car, between jobs in different locations. Older or senior workers and Chavez loyalists were frequently given preference in job assignments over younger workers. Most growers and increasing numbers of workers concluded that the U.F.W. hiring halls were a failure, and they wanted to return to the ancient and simpler system of direct employer-employee relationships and reliance on independent farm-labor contractors.

In 1972 and 1973, the Teamsters union pressed its challenge to the U.F.W. Growers, facing pressure from Chavez to sign new contracts, turned instead to the less militant and reputedly more efficient Teamsters union, which did not seek to establish hiring halls. Growers whose contracts with the U.F.W. were due to expire in 1973 toyed for a while with both unions,

tried briefly to return to non-union status, then signed with what many of them called "the lesser of two evils," the Teamsters.

Watching his contracts and gains falling like dominoes, Chavez complained: "We shook the tree [the U.F.W. vs. the growers], and now the Teamsters are stealing the fruit." George Meany, president of the A.F.L.-C.I.O., declared that the Teamsters were guilty of "the most cynical and unconscionable raid" of one union on another that he had ever witnessed. On Dec. 29, 1972, the California Supreme Court said, in essence, that the Teamsters and the growers in the Salinas Valley had signed sweetheart agreements. In a 6-to-1 vote, the court ruled that the growers had demonstrated "the ultimate form of favoritism" by signing with the Teamsters and judged that "at least a substantial number and probably the majority of the applicable field workers desired to be represented by the U.F.W.U. rather than the Teamsters."

The supreme court's decision voided a lower court injunction against the U.F.W.'s strike in the Salinas Valley, but that did not inhibit the onslaught of the Teamsters. Growers throughout the state deserted Chavez in droves. One grower near Salinas said: "I'd team up with the devil himself at harvest time to get the crop picked, to get rid of the U.F.W. hiring hall and to beat Chavez."

The outmaneuvered Chavistas fought back in the old ways, through the spring, summer and fall of 1973. They resumed boycott pressures against grape and lettuce producers, with thousands of volunteers marching in front of supermarkets in 63 cities across the nation. Growers and chain-store executives insisted that their sales were not down, but they also complained in multimillion-dollar lawsuits against the U.F.W. that they were suffering dearly. Fortified by the \$1.6-million contribution from the national A.F.L.-C.I.O., Chavez spread his strike to fields now covered by Teamster contracts. The strikers were paid \$90 a week for family expenses, for gas to move their old, battered cars from one picket line to another and for the bail they often had to pay after being arrested for "trespassing" or "unlawful assembly."

In half a dozen counties—Imperial and Riverside, Kern

and Fresno, Monterey and Stanislaus—the growers and Teamsters fought back in their old ways, with local court injunctions requiring extreme restraints on the numbers of and distances between the strikers-pickets on the roadways adjacent to the fields, with police and sheriffs' deputies eager to enforce the injunctions to the last inch, with Teamster guards (paid \$65 per day) called in to "protect" the fields under Teamster contracts.

On some days, the struggle became a seedy and pathetic affair. In one field, Chavez pickets and Teamster guards hurled overripe melons toward each other for half an hour. Isolated Chavistas in one county threw a score of crude Molotov cocktails toward irrigation pumps; none of them ignited. Teamster guards in another county burned an effigy of Chavez and mugged for cameras by guzzling beer and wolfing down bananas. The violence, however, escalated; and by summer, the battle was huge.

Throughout 1973, Chavez's legions totaled more than

20,000, many of whom were city Anglo supporters who joined the strike on weekends. In all the counties through the peak harvest months, more than 2,000 law-enforcement officers were called to duty in the fields. Several hundred Teamster guards roved over the rural roadways. Through the year, 3,800 individuals were jailed, most

of them Chavistas. Three hundred people from both sides were injured seriously enough to require stitches or hospitalization; 60 of them suffered gun wounds. William Grami, director of the Teamster agricultural organizing effort, was almost killed when a ballbearing slashed his forehead and came close to piercing his skull. One of

Chavez's sons missed death by inches when he ducked under the pellets from a shotgun blast.

In the late afternoon of Aug. 16 of last year, at the edge of a vineyard near the town of Weed Patch, in Kern County, Juan de la Cruz moved off the U.F.W. picket line for a moment to speak with his wife and to sip water

from a cannister she held. A pickup truck raced down the dusty roadway—"like lightning," witnesses later said—and a rifle barrel pointed out from the rider's side of the cab. The bullet tore through de la Cruz's chest. He fainted in his wife's arms and died in a Bakersfield hospital that night. He was 60 years old. He had been standing on the U.F.W. picket lines since 1965.

The U.F.W. was demoralized and near defeat. Most of the 1970 contracts were lost to the Teamsters last summer. The big-strike fund was spent; and Chavez, suspending most of the strike activities, sent his most dedicated supporters off to the cities to continue the boycott.

An apparent *coup de grâce* to the U.F.W. was inflicted in September. While Chavez, Teamster officials and A.F.L.-C.I.O. representatives were negotiating details of a previous verbal agreement (reserving cannery and food-processing workers for the Teamsters and field workers for the U.F.W.), 30 growers in the Delano area—Chavez's heartland—deserted the U.F.W. to sign contracts with a local

Teamster organizer. Teamster president Frank Fitzsimmons at first repudiated the contracts, but he later announced that they were in force and denied that there had been any previous agreement with the U.F.W. Chavez broke off the negotiations, saying that he would never again trust the Teamster leaders or work for a truce.

Through the fall and winter, the Chavistas licked their wounds, tried to raise money and met endlessly to develop new strategies, while the Teamsters lapped up more contracts from growers and the \$8-a-month dues from farm workers.

The struggle continues even now—less violently, with more subtle ploys by both sides, with occasional lawsuits and propaganda shots, and with no diminished determination by either adversary. The U.F.W. is down—way down—but not out. (Several U.F.W. operations are thriving, and a retirement village for members recently opened.) The Teamsters is sanguine, but not at all relaxed. ("We're in for two tough years," Grami says.) The quieter war of this year is waged with drastically different strategies, and it reveals more clearly the profound differences of style, attitude and motives between the U.F.W. and the Teamsters.

The main headquarters of the 2.3 million-member International Brotherhood of Teamsters stands stolidly on Louisiana Avenue in Washington, D. C., facing—with no timidity, it seems—the U. S. Capitol building. The Western Conference of Teamsters office, which still controls the agriculture organizing effort, is in a modern, sparkling white building in the WASP suburb of Burlingame, south of San Francisco. The carpets there are wall-to-wall, the front door is stained glass and the olive trees in front have been professionally transplanted.

The U.F.W. headquarters (named "La Paz"—peace) is on a rocky slope of the barren Tehachapi Mountains, in California's high desert country east of Bakersfield. The site is made barely beautiful by scrub oaks, scrawny pines and, in spring, sparse wildflowers. In summer, the surrounding canyons are infested with rattlesnakes. The old buildings once housed a tuberculosis sanitarium. Chavez's wife, who was a patient here as a child, refused for more than a year

to move to La Paz after a Hollywood supporter donated the property to the U.F.W. and Chavez decided to relocate from Delano. One of the first tasks of the staff after the move was to wash away the bloodstains coughed onto the walls of the main buildings 30 years earlier.

Teamsters president Fitzsimmons earns \$125,000 a year, and he usually travels long distance by private jet. M. E. "Andy" Anderson, vice president and director of the Teamsters' Western Conference in Burlingame, is paid \$50,000 yearly. Teamster agriculture organizers receive \$200 a week.

Chavez nets about \$5,000 a year, including the rent value of his home in La Paz. The standard salary of most U.F.W. officers and staff is \$5 a week. They survive through a semicomunal living arrangement in La Paz. On the road, crash with friends and supporters.

The differences in the public images of the Chavistas and the Teamsters became even more pronounced during last year's battles. One pair of news photos showed the fat, smug, defiantly-smiling face of a Teamster guard next to the lean, sad, nose-banded face of a U.F.W.-supporting priest whom the Teamster was accused of assaulting. Leaders of each side resent the public exaggeration of the stereotypes. "We are committed to nonviolence," Chavez says. "But if anyone thinks I'm a saint, he should talk with my wife. We just want to be known as practical, down-to-earth men." Teamster leader Grami says: "The image of the Teamsters as a bunch of bull-headed, brawling truck drivers is ridiculous. We are a big, efficient, powerful labor organization. We don't need any Zapata-type revolutionary leaders."

The instinctive reactions of leaders of both sides to some substantive questions are almost antithetical. I asked this question, abruptly in the midst of long interviews: "What is the short hoe?"

The answers of three Teamster leaders in separate interviews were similar: "The what? Oh, well, the short hoe is a hoe with a short handle, used by workers to weed and thin the rows of lettuce. The work can be done much more efficiently with the short-handled hoe than with the long-handled hoe, which allows the worker to stand fairly upright. Actually, the short hoe is one of those

phony issues Chavez tries to create to gain sympathy."

Chavez's first reaction to the same question was a facial expression of abject misery—and he was silent for at least 10 seconds. Then he struggled to find the descriptive words: "El cortito, the short hoe . . . probably the most crucifying work of all . . . degrading, the most vicious exploitation of the human body. For a person to bend down for 10 hours a day, to do that work, it's—well, in 10 years the body is just a wreck. . . ." Further words of explanation failed. Instead, Chavez demonstrated the work on the linoleum floor of his office, performing a macabre dance of shuffling slow side steps between the vision of the lettuce rows as he bent over with his head only a foot and a half from the floor, the imaginary short hoe in his hand. He then described, in clinical physiological detail, the immediate and long-term effects of the work on the brain, the stomach, the muscles of the calves and thighs, the vertebrae and, finally, the whole spinal column.

The immediate goals of the Teamsters and the U.F.W. are clear and identical: formal and unchallenged collective bargaining representation of farm workers in negotiations with growers. But the vastly different motives of each union and the totally different articulation of those motives clash more dramatically than in any other competition in the recent history of organized labor.

Teamster leaders change the subject when they are asked about economic power as a motive for entering the fuzzy, fluid and often frustrating area of farm labor. Their union controls the drivers of the trucks which transport food, the warehouse workers who load and unload the food and the employees who process or can the food in its preparation for the consumer. Wouldn't control of the workers who harvest the food give the Teamsters the final, powerful link to control the most basic necessity of American life and society? "No, we are a responsible union," answers Grami. "We would never seek to tie up the whole nation's food supply just for our own purposes."

Also, the increasing use of machines to tend and harvest crops suggests a logical justification for the extension of

Teamster coverage of truck drivers and cannery workers to the tractor operators and the workers who stand on the harvesting-sorting machines in the fields. But union officials downgrade that suggestion of a prime motive for organizing field workers. They say only that "mechanization of the field work is spreading" and that the Teamsters union welcomes it as an end to outdoor "sweatshop" conditions for the workers.

The Teamsters' most emphatic statement of motive embraces organizational pride in themselves and contempt for Chavez as a trade unionist. "The farm workers have been exploited by the growers," Grami says. "They need effective representation. Chavez can't provide that. He's a clever, charismatic, revolutionary leader, but his organization isn't strong enough to deliver. We have no charismatic heroes among Teamster leaders. But we can deliver. We have a strong, efficient, skilled organization which will stand behind every worker."

Chavez scoffs at statements that naiveté now clouds the motives of the U.F.W., and he denies that money or power motivates *La Causa*. Instead, he prefers to talk of the individual needs of workers, or of the religious roots of the movement: "This lady in Calexico last week, she showed me her terribly swollen legs and told me our medical clinic turned her away, so I made a note of it and then called the clinic director. . . . When Juan de la Cruz died, when we bury any of our members, we have a tradition, coming out of Mexico. We won't let those funeral-parlor Cadillacs carry the body to the grave. We do it with our own hands, carrying the body miles over the rocky roads."

But why the effort, why the tenacity? "Why do we hang in there?" Chavez responds. "I can give you a million answers. I once said you couldn't organize farm workers in conventional ways, the normal ways of unions. What we're saying is that it has to be a movement, it has to be an idea. Some of the labor leaders don't understand that. What happens is the people get to feel that the idea, the movement, belongs to them. It's theirs, not ours. No force on earth, including the Teamsters and the grow-

ers, can take that away from them. The more the people get beaten, the more they'll fight. The more persecution, the more strength they have. . . . You know of the experiences throughout the world—the persecution of the Jews, the Christians, the Mexican Revolution and all the other revolutions. You are persecuted, so you are forced to learn to survive. When you learn about your movement—and it's yours—you get to love it."

The power and efficiency of the Teamsters and the passion and tenacity of the Chavistas might match up ultimately as equal strengths, and it is likely that the Teamsters will inherit some of the intrinsic vulnerabilities of farm-labor organization which troubled the U.F.W. But for the present, Teamster leaders mock the raw democratic approach of Chavez and are pursuing an utterly pragmatic strategy.

With more than 350 contracts safely in its pockets for a few years at least, the Teamsters union is shifting away from its past, cozy relationships with growers ("We don't deny the charges about such past practices," a spokesman says), and is engaged in a genuine effort to consult with and organize the field workers. Sixty Teamster organizers now deal directly with the workers, gathering representation authorization cards before approaching growers with contract demands.

The Teamsters union is expanding benefits and services to its farm-worker members. Their new contracts provide for medical insurance and a pension plan. Wage levels for field workers are close to those provided in U.F.W. contracts, averaging between \$2.50 and \$2.60 per hour. Ten social workers in the Teamster farm-worker field offices in California provide other services, such as help in preparation of income-tax returns and applications for food stamps, advice on immigration problems and pressure to improve housing conditions and to eliminate corrupt or illegal practices by farm-labor contractors.

The Teamsters' administration of its agricultural effort is also going rural and Chicano. The office for the new Teamsters' Farm Workers Local 1973 is in an old schoolhouse surrounded by lettuce fields, just south of Salinas. Bill Grami's functions are gradually being assumed by David Castro, a Mexican-American recently appointed

secretary-treasurer of the newly chartered local.

In addition, the union's strategy this year includes an expensive public relations program, in contrast to the past few years when the union's officials were unaffected by the widespread indignation over collusive agreements with growers and the assignment of guards/goons to stalk the fields. It's clear that the priority image goal is to swipe the halo of non-violence which has hovered over the head of Chavez. No Teamster guards have been sent into the fields this year.

The Teamsters are also moving beyond their victories in winning contracts with grape and lettuce growers to organize workers in other crops and in new geographic areas. Recently, they signed contracts with 16 growers in California's Pajaro Valley for representation of more than 1,000 apple-orchard workers.

Chavez's new strategy is based on a "let's bend with the wind" attitude. In the fields, he still orders out flag-bearing pickets, but the tactics now are pure guerrilla warfare. U.F.W. spies (Chavez calls them "submarines") work in Teamster fields to report back to the U.F.W. the daily tactics of the growers and Teamster organizers. The "submarines" sabotage, when they can, the pace and quality of the field work. "It's always easier," Chavez says in a kind of cynical pleasantry, "to boycott low-quality food."

Chavez has also shifted the U.F.W. emphasis from massive worker strikes in the fields—impossible now that the union is broke and can't pay strike benefits—to the boycott of lettuce, table grapes and Gallo Wine in the cities. His only real weapon now is to pinch the growers in the marketplace, by inspiring the remaining Anglo supporters and loyal Chavistas to travel through the cities of Canada and the United States (he also talks grandly of organizing boycott efforts in Japan and West Germany) to reach the consumers.

By necessity, the U.F.W. is discovering compromise. For years, Chavez tried to get an endorsement from the national A.F.L.-C.I.O. for the boycott. But A.F.L.-C.I.O. president Meany, heeding the spirit of the National Labor Relations Act and the voice of the Retail Clerks, refused to go along with the U.F.W.'s sec-

ondary boycott of Safeway, A & P and other chains selling nonunion or Teamster-picked lettuce and grapes. This past spring, Chavez abandoned the secondary boycott to win A.F.L.-C.I.O. endorsement of the "product boycott" against lettuce and grapes. Chavez thinks the endorsement will put the U.F.W. back on the track to victory, but that's doubtful. Last year, neither Meany's rage over Teamster raids of U.F.W. contracts nor the \$1.6-million from the A.F.L.-C.I.O. were enough to prevent Teamster victories. This year, Chavez is picking up some support from local A.F.L.-C.I.O. unions, but the 13.6 million members of the A.F.L.-C.I.O. are not about to rise in militant wrath against a head of lettuce or a bunch of grapes at the corner grocery store.

In contrast to his words of the late nineteen-sixties and the heady year of 1970, Chavez is now counseling patience. Instead of the plea for "victory and dignity now," he explains that the U.F.W. may have to fight resourcefully for "20, maybe 30, years." He tells the workers who still flock to the steamy auditoriums for the rallies: "We will not give up. We will not go away. We have been wiped out before. We have been wiped out by the growers, by the courts, by the cops. We have been wiped out every day of our lives—by the short hoe, by the work of the day and the exhaustion of the night. We are very experienced in this business of getting wiped out. The Teamsters can't wipe us out. We will win."

Perhaps they will win, in some future year when the nation is ready once again to place hope in charismatic leaders of heroic causes. Perhaps the U.F.W. can renew its appeal to a broad, national following, in some future year when a major portion of the public is again receptive to televised battles for justice by society's underdogs.

But I suspect that the most valid assessment of the struggle comes from Bill Farley, a thoughtful man who works as a foreman for a corporate lettuce grower in the Salinas Valley. He says simply: "Chavez has served his purpose."

It took a hero, Cesar Chavez, and the militancy of his revolutionary union to shatter a lingering form of slavery in the United States. But perhaps success transforms the idealistic zealot into a novice as he achieves the alien arena of power. The ascendancy of

the Teamsters over the U.F.W. during the past year and a half indicates that maybe the passionate visionary, who was once victorious, must inevitably give way to the cool technicians of an entrenched organization.

The workers in the farm fields still have a long way to go to secure a decent life, and they may be replaced some day by the delicate steel arms and wide-track wheels of the harvesting machines. But the farm worker is better off than a decade ago, earning at least an above-minimum wage and some health protection in exchange for the hellish work in the dust among the spider-infested leaves under the searing sun.

Two weeks ago, the California legislature failed to enact legislation to give farm workers a secret vote to decide which union should represent them. If the legislature some day acts, the farm worker will finally have a political choice. Until then, the bent-backed men and women in the fields are reaping some benefits from the Chavez revolution, the Teamster organization and the continuing competition between the two unions.

Out of all the farm scenes of the past year, I remember most vividly a young man working in an Abatti Co. asparagus field seven miles north of Calexico. He had worked furiously for five hours, cutting the asparagus stalks, then he paused to sit on a stack of boxes at the edge of the field to eat his lunch.

Three Chavista pickets chanted "Huelga!" at him, and shouted their arguments about why he should walk out of the field to join their strike.

A Teamster organizer stepped over to talk with him for a few moments. The organizer gestured earnestly as he glanced nervously from the worker to the Chavista pickets.

The young man relaxed for several minutes after lunch and after the arguments ceased, then moved only to dust off his boots with the lower sleeves of his shirt.

Finally, he stood up abruptly, smiled a sheepish, puzzled smile at no one in particular, and hollered out in a happy voice: "Viva Chavez! Viva Teamsters!"

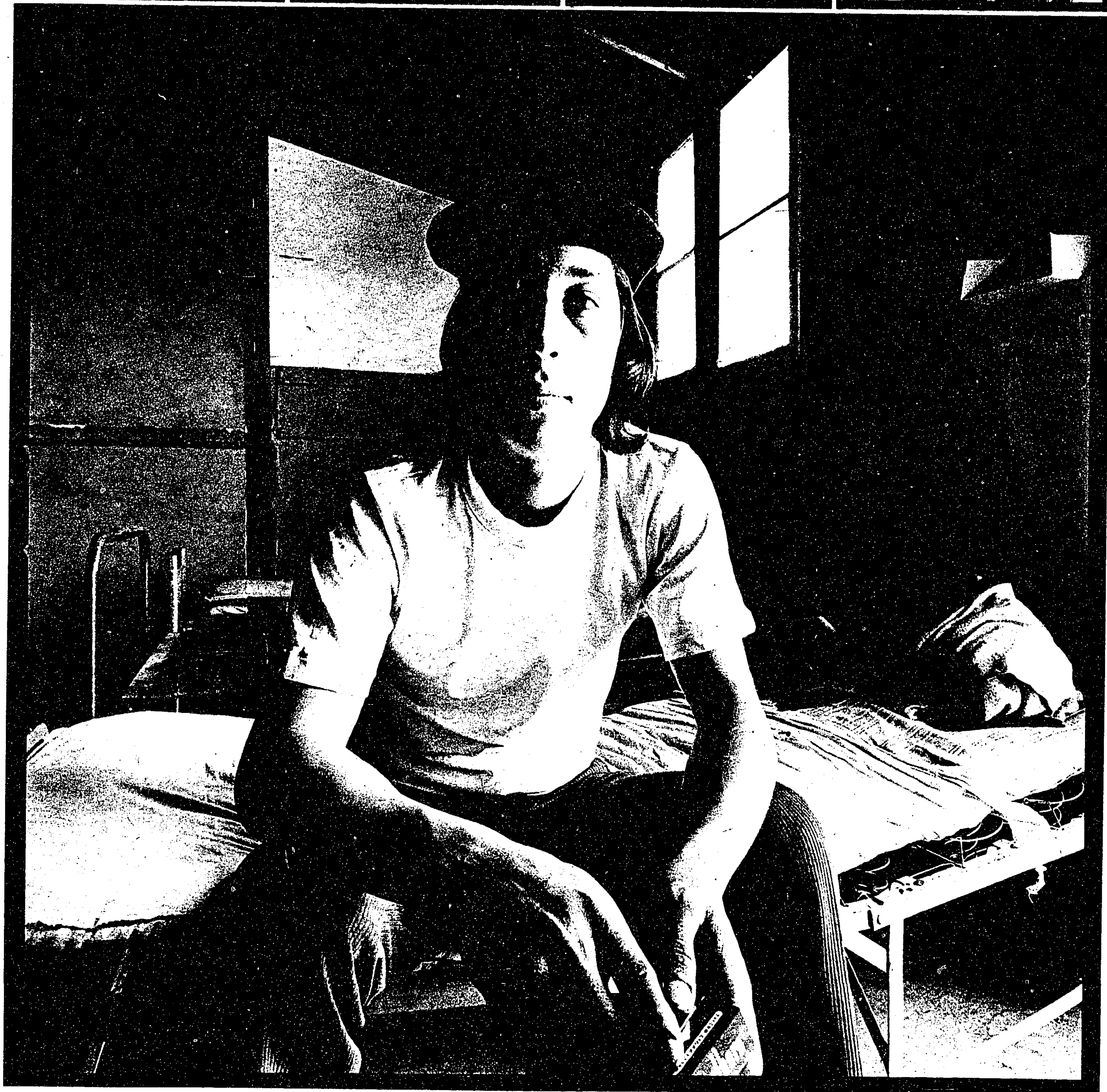
Then he turned away to resume the afternoon harvest and to face a new row of asparagus. ■



*'El cortito, the short
hoe...the most crucifying
work of all... the most
vicious exploitation
of the human body.'*

The New York Times

Published: September 15, 1974
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Somber faces of La Causa: Cesar Chavez (top left), head of the United Farm Workers Union, and California farm workers, one of whom is wearing the black-eagle symbol of the U.F.W. Above, a young farm worker in California sits it out one morning, awaiting word about whether or not he will work that day.



Breaking up fights between members of the Teamsters and the United Farm Workers in June, 1973, sheriff's deputies (foreground) subdue a U.F.W. member in Coachella, Calif.

The New York Times

Published: September 15, 1974

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Ending a 23-day fast in support of his nonviolent strike against the grape growers, Chavez breaks bread with the late Senator Robert F. Kennedy on March 10, 1968.

The New York Times

Published: September 15, 1974

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