

# Informer Says He Was Part of Coast Plot to Kill Cesar Chavez

By EARL CALDWELL  
Special to The New York Times

SAN FRANCISCO, Jan. 1—Despite the disclaimers of Federal officials, an unemployed laborer who describes himself as a paid police informer insists that certain farmers in the San Joaquin Valley of California ordered the assassination of Cesar Chavez, the farm union leader.

The informer, Larry Shears, 32 years old, said that he had been offered \$5,000 to participate in the plot and that he had witnessed what appeared to be the payment of \$30,000 to carry out the assassination.

Mr. Shears, a thin, long-haired man who lives in Bakersfield, offered a series of tape recordings and documents that he said demonstrated the veracity of his story.

Jerry Cohen, chief counsel to the United Farm Workers Organizing Committee, has expressed concern for the safety of Mr. Chavez, who heads the union, and has said that he will seek a Congressional investigation.

## Warned by Agents

Mr. Cohen said that last July 31 Federal agents secretly warned the union that they had reason to believe an attempt to assassinate Mr. Chavez was being organized. On one occasion Federal agents were said to have provided protection for Mr. Chavez at a rally.

But last week, according to an Associated Press dispatch, a Federal spokesman said that the Government "now considers the case closed" after the informer was unable to provide any proof of a plot.

Mr. Chavez has been a controversial figure in his union's long and bitter struggle to organize and to raise the wages of workers on the huge California fruit and vegetable farms.

The investigation into the alleged assassination plot was conducted by the Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms Enforcement Division of the Internal Revenue Service, an arm of the Treasury Department.

Various officials of the enforcement division on the West Coast with whom Mr. Shears said he had dealings have declined to comment on the case and have referred inquiries to Washington.

On Thursday a revenue service spokesman in Washington declined comment on the case, saying, "I.R.S. has an established policy of not commenting on investigations."

Donald W. Bacon, now a tax consultant with Gulf and Western Industries, who until November was Assistant Commissioner for Compliance at the revenue service, recalled that there had been an investigation. He said:

"At one time there was a threat on Chavez's life. Sometime in early fall. There was an alleged plot. I authorized payment of an amount that might have included payment to an informant. I understood the information wasn't satisfactory and therefore he was not paid."

He added, "The attempt was never made on his life. The investigation stopped."

Two key men named by Mr. Shears as participants in the alleged plot have been arrested on unrelated charges, and one is still in jail. Neither was charged with organizing an assassination. One was ar-



The New York Times  
Cesar Chavez

rested on a narcotics charge and the other for murder.

Because there has been no official action against any of those mentioned by the informer, the names of alleged plot participants are withheld. Despite the arrests, leaders of the farm union are still worried.

Mr. Cohen said, "Maybe all we got was a reprieve. We still have people out there who put up a substantial sum of money. They could be looking for another hit man."

## Kennedy Pressed Fee

Mr. Cohen said that he had spent much time investigating the story related by Mr. Shears and had concluded that there were elements of truth in it. He said that Mr. Shears's tapes and documents proved that he did work with the Federal agents and that the Government did authorize the payment of \$10,000 to him for his role as an informer in the case.

It was also learned that Senator Edward M. Kennedy, Democrat of Massachusetts, had been instrumental in getting the \$10,000 fee approved for payment to Mr. Shears. The informer said that the money was to have been paid not only for his services as an informer and later as a witness but also to enable him to relocate his family outside California. He has a wife and two children.

Mr. Shears said that he never received the \$10,000. However, he did show a copy of a canceled check issued by the Treasury of the United States in the amount of \$500.

He also had a copy of a voucher showing that the payment had been made to him for "information and evidence necessary to identify [name withheld] and those persons who

are providing [name withheld] the funds to arrange the arson and murder of Cesar Chavez."

The canceled check for \$500, dated Oct. 4, 1971, was issued through William J. Vizzard, a special investigator in the Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms Enforcement Division.

Mr. Shears said that nearly three years ago he was without work and offered his services to the Kern County Sheriff's Department as an informer. He said that he had promised information that would lead to arrests and convictions for violations of narcotics laws.

He said that he worked with the sheriff's department over a period of time and, because of his success, was then put in touch with the State Narcotics Bureau, with whose agents he subsequently worked.

The sheriff's office confirmed that Mr. Shears had done work for it and said that his information had proved reliable.

Mr. Shears said that in late 1970, while he was working for the state agency, he came in touch with a 26-year-old man who eventually broached to him the idea of assassinating Mr. Chavez.

## Suggests Burning Slide

Mr. Shears related that this person was involved in narcotics and that he planned to set this person up for an arrest that would have earned him \$500 from the state.

As the relationship between the two developed, the contact man offered Mr. Shears a way to earn money, the informer said. He asked Mr. Shears if he would burn an amusement slide to permit the owner to collect insurance. Mr. Shears said that he declined the job but that the slide was later destroyed by fire.

In the early spring, he said, the contact man offered him \$5,000 to burn some records in Delano. He said that he questioned the contact man about the deal and learned that the records belonged to Mr. Chavez and that it was his offices that were to be burned. In addition, the plan was to steal certain records from the union's files and then make a "hit" on Mr. Chavez—that is, assassinate him.

"And I thought, whoa, God, and I know [name withheld] and I knew his people and his organization, and I knew he was capable of it," Mr. Shears said.

## Demand for Money

It was at about that point Mr. Shears said, that he had heard about the Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms Enforcement Division and decided to contact it with the information about the assassination plot. Until that time he had not had any dealings with the division, he said.

Mr. Shears said that he made contact with the division, told what he knew and then, realizing that his identity as an informer would become known, demanded enough money to relocate outside the state. He said that Mr. Vizzard and Richard Cook, another special investigator for the division, agreed to try to get him \$10,000 and that a contract was drawn up.

Next, Mr. Shears said that the area chief of the enforcement division, Melvin Warner, was brought in. He said that Mr. Warner wanted him to take

a lie-detector test but that the idea was dropped when he expressed opposition. Instead, he said, he agreed to try to get an agent in touch with the contact man who had broached the assassination idea. He said that the agent was Lester Robinson and that he was successful in getting him in touch with the contact man.

## 'Hit' Man Selected

Meanwhile, Mr. Shears said, he received from the contact man detailed diagrams of Mr. Chavez's office and was told that the killing would be done by a 36-year-old "hit" man who was wanted for murder by Kern and Ventura Counties. However, the contact man told him the hit man would himself be shot after the murder, Mr. Shears said.

The plot was then held up, he said, because the persons ordering the killing insisted that certain files be stolen before the assassination took place.

Mr. Shears said this aroused the interest of the Federal investigators, who speculated that the Chavez files might contain "tax information on these farmers."

Another delay occurred, he said, when the prospective hit man was picked up on the murder charges already pending against him. This man is still in jail and his case has not come to trial.

After several days, Mr. Shears went on, he called the contact man to ask if the assassination was still on and was told, "The guy will be here Friday with the money to do the records."

## Man with Paper Bag

He said that on that Friday, though uninvited, he went to the contact man's house but was told to wait outside. He said that he saw a man, whom he identified as the son of a farmer in the valley, arrive about 4 P.M. with a brown paper bag that he assumed contained the \$30,000.

Mr. Shears said that a little later the contact man came out of the house and told him, "The money is here," but added "The decision to go—we still don't have that decision."

When asked who was making that decision, Mr. Shears said that he did not know.

He said that on another occasion, involving the burning of the amusement slide, the same payoff man delivered the money to pay for the job. He also said that the owner of the slide, whom he described as a loan shark, was the man to whom the files to be stolen from Mr. Chavez's office were to be delivered.

## Questioned by Police

Mr. Shears said that earlier the agents supplied him with a small radio device that enabled them to eavesdrop on his conversations with the contact man when they discussed the assassination plot. That, he said, enabled the agents to know that he was on the level.

The alleged assassination plot hit its final snag when the amusement slide operator was picked up and questioned by the Fresno police about the burning of the slide.

Mr. Shears said that information that he had given the Kern County Sheriff's Department had been passed to the Fresno police and that, in questioning the slide operator, they dropped

the names of Mr. Shears, the plot contact man and several others.

He said that the slide operator then became suspicious and called the payoff man, who they visited the contact man. The two decided that there was an informer in their midst and that Mr. Shears was the suspect, he said.

Mr. Shears said that he was successful in covering himself but that Mr. Vizzard and another agent, Bill Bertolani, became worried and decided to move to get the contact man off the streets.

He said that they got another agent, Mr. Robinson, to purchase 1,000 amphetamine pills from the contact man and then arrest him.

The Kern County Sheriff's Department assisted in the arrest, made in August, on charges of sale and possession of dangerous drugs. The sheriff's office said that \$6,700 was taken from the contact man's home as evidence and that from \$20,000 to \$22,000 was left there because it was not needed as evidence. The case is still pending and the suspect is free on bail.

Mr. Shears said that he felt

the Federal agents considered the plot investigation closed because two men had been arrested—on unrelated charges.

He said that the agents then told him that he was not going to get the \$10,000 that had been promised. Rather, he said that Mr. Vizzard passed word to him that he was going to be paid only \$500.

Officials of the farm union agreed with Mr. Shears in believing that all that may have been accomplished was to delay an assassination attempt.

They said that in recent months there have been a number of arson attempts against various union offices, that others have been riddled with bullet holes, and that at least two attempts were made to steal records in the union offices.