

TEAMSTERS START FARM UNION LOCAL

13-State Unit Chartered as Chavez Backers Picket

Special to The New York Times

MONTEREY, Calif., June 6 — Frank Fitzsimmons, president of the International Brotherhood of Teamsters, presented a charter today to the union's first farm workers local at a news conference in the Del Monte Hyatt House here. Security at the conference was rigid.

Teamster activity among the farm workers was conducted heretofore by the union's Agricultural Workers Organizing Committee.

For several years, the teamsters have been locked in a fight with the United Farm Workers (A.F.L.-C.I.O.), led by Cesar Chavez, for the jurisdiction to organize field hands. About 100 persons, most of them Mexican-Americans, picketed the hotel today. There was a brief fist fight when some of the pickets attempted to approach the area where the teamsters were holding the event, but no arrests were made.

Publicity arrangements for the event were coordinated by Lynn Nofziger, who directed President Nixon's 1972 reelection campaign in California. Some of the pickets wore buttons saying "Nixon eats lettuce," an allusion to critical statements Mr. Nixon has made about the Chavez-led boycott of iceberg lettuce. The United Farm Workers is also boycotting table grapes and Gallo wines.

Workers Under Contract

Mr. Fitzsimmons, a staunch supporter of Mr. Nixon, made it clear today that the teamsters would continue to organize farm laborers. He said the new 13-state local, which will have its headquarters at Salinas, a town near here, had signed contracts covering 316 companies and 50,000 workers, almost all in California.

David Castro, who accepted the charter for the new local, presented Mr. Fitzsimmons a stack of petitions that he said had been signed by 15,000 farm workers. The petition said the farm workers "freely selected the teamsters union as our sole bargaining agent. As teamster members with much appreciated support of our international union, we are receiving wages and benefits unprecedented in farm labor."

However, some of the pickets said they had walked off the job to protest Mr. Fitzsimmons's presence here, and said their employers had deducted union dues from their paychecks even though they had not authorized the check-offs.

Farm workers are not covered under the National Labor Relations Act so there is no formal mechanism for workers to vote by secret ballot for union representation. Mr. Fitzsimmons said the teamsters "will continue our drive to bring farm workers" under the act.

The United Farm Workers signed the first major set of agricultural contracts in 1970 when it reached agreement with most of the state's table grape growers.

Later that year, the teamsters signed most of the lettuce growers, but in 1972 the California Supreme Court ruled that the teamsters union had worked in collusion with some growers to block the organizing efforts of the Chavez-led union.

When the table grape contracts expired last year, few of the growers remained with the U.F.W., signing instead with the teamsters.

Mr. Chavez has charged that teamster contracts were signed without worker approval and there is litigation pending on some of them.

A number of the growers asserted in making the change that the U.F.W. had not properly administered its contracts with them. In addition, some of them said they found it easier to deal with a more traditional kind of union, like the teamsters.

Mr. Chavez has responded by contending that what bothers the growers is having to deal with a union that is led by Mexican-Americans, as the U.F.W. is.

The New York Times

Published: June 7, 1974

Copyright © The New York Times