Teamsters–UFW: Lopsided Battle

By GEORGE BAKER
Bee Staff Writer

Backed by a multimillion dollar war chest the International Brotherhood of Teamsters has committed its full resources to taking over the organization of California’s 300,000 farmworkers.

In its quest to unionize the workers the Teamsters have nearly dislodged the Cesar Chavez-led United Farm Workers of America, AF-CIO, which once was the sole bargaining representative of farmworkers.

To a large degree the Teamsters have succeeded. The UFW is clearly the underdog in this battle: pitting a well-heeled union, the largest in the nation, against the almost rag-tag UFW, one of the nation’s smallest unions.

Faced with a dwindling dues-paying membership and a shrunken treasury, the UFW has fallen back on a grape and lettuce boycott which brought it initial victories in the late 1960s.

But what of the Teamsters Union? Is it engaged in a cozy, sweetheart arrangement with growers, as Chavez alleges? Is Teamsters Farmworker Local 1973 the polished, professional operation that Teamster publicists and growers paint it? Are the Teamsters really representing the farmworkers?

A Bee survey of the Teamsters’ operation, involving interviews with Teamster officials, farmworkers and UFW officials, growers and court records, has found that:

—Farmworkers are given first consideration by the Teamsters while seasonal workers, who make up the bulk of the state’s farm labor force, are secondary recipients of highly touted fringe benefits such as pensions and health insurance.

—The Teamsters and International and two Teamsters canny locals have been accused of racism directed against Americans of Mexican descent and women, according to two suits filed by the federal Equal Employment Opportunity Commission.

—At least one Teamsters operation, its social services department, appears to be working well. The department involves itself in nonunion problems of farmworkers such as immigration or social security.

—The Teamsters have encountered numerous problems in administering contracts and collecting dues, both because of its approach in organizing workers from the top down and because of the seasonal nature of farm work.

—Major administrative snags have crept into at least one medical insurance plan for Teamster farmworkers. The Western Growers Association, which funds the plan, says these problems will soon be corrected.

—Since 1970, growers have been anxious to sign contracts with the Teamsters instead of the UFW that they have agreed to terms with little, if any, evidence that the union has represented the workers. In at least one instance there are allegations of forgery may have been involved in the collection of farm-worker signatures on Teamster authorization cards.

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David R. Castro, secretary-treasurer of Farmworkers Local 1973, generally denied the Teamsters are hot representing farmworkers adequately.

But he did say the organization of the local has been restructured for greater efficiency.

—The name of the game is to represent the farmworkers and we’re doing that,” said Castro. “The thing I tell everyone is that we have to represent them or we’ll be out.”

—Castro said several steps, such as the institution of shop stewards, have been taken to encourage members to participate in union affairs.

Without secret ballot elections there is no way to determine which union is favored among farmworkers. Yet, it is clear there are vocal loyalists for each union.

State legislation intended to provide for secret ballot elections died in the Senate this year when the Teamsters opposed a bill supported by the UFW which had passed the Assembly.

In the decade Chavez has organized farmworkers, there has been only one supervised election. That occurred in 1966 at the Di Giorgio Ranch in Kern County when workers voted for the UFW over the Teamsters, 330-331. Indeed the grape contracts signed by the UFW in 1970 were more the result of the boycott than election.

Today, the Teamsters have more than 300 contracts covering a maximum of 50,000 workers while the UFW has 14 contracts covering 10,000 people, a dramatic drop from its once-time membership of about 45,000.

Since 1966, the Teamsters and UFW have sparred over organizing.

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Unions: Lopsided Battle On Valley Farms

Continued from Page A1. Farmworkers. In the late 1960s, the Teamsters bowed out, but emerged again in 1970 by signing contracts with 160 lettuce and other produce growers.

For two years after that the UFW and Teamsters had an uneasy truce that left field worker organizing to the UFW. But that fell apart and the Teamsters mounted a major organizing drive in 1973.

This was signaled on Dec. 12, 1972, when Teamsters President Frank E. Fitzsimmons told a convention of the American Farm Bureau Federation, "We in organized labor welcome an alliance with farmers. . . when that alliance works for the mutual benefit of the farmworker and his employer."

Then on Dec. 29, 1972, the California Supreme Court dealt the Teamsters a setback. In the England vs. Chavez case, the court ruled that the lettuce and produce growers had invited the Teamsters to sign contracts, even though the union "did not represent a substantial or even a majority of the field workers."

"There is no suggestion in the record that the growers attempted to ascertain whether their respective field workers desired to be represented by the Teamsters," the court said, adding the UFW appeared to be the favored union.

The decision did not invalidate the contracts, which had not been enforced up to that time, but merely held that no jurisdictional dispute existed between the two unions.

Shortly thereafter, the Teamsters and Western Growers Association renegotiated the contracts. Still, the Teamsters had received no authorization from workers to sign the contracts, so they began an organizing campaign in the Imperial Valley where most lettuce work was underway.

One of the growers involved was John Jackson Jr. of Jackson Farming Co. in El Centro. In a deposition given in connection with an injunction against the UFW, Jackson said he agreed to implement the unenforced 1970 contract on the basis of an authorization card count taken only among his 70 to 80 permanent workers.

Though there was a purported 100 per cent sign up, Jackson said he did not ask the Teamsters for substantiating proof, an unusual move in union-management contests.

On the basis of the card count, the contract was applied to his several thousand seasonal workers. Once the contract was enforced, seasonal workers had to join the Teamsters or be dismissed.

Then last February the organizing committee hired Albert Droubie, a convicted felon and one-time ranch foreman to organize grape workers in Coachella.

One April 16, when 30 growers signed with the Teamsters, Droubie's boss, Ralph Cotner, presented newsmen with petitions which he said bore the names of 4,103 workers who wanted the Teamsters instead of the UFW.

But there is evidence the number of signatures was grossly, and perhaps deliberately, inflated.

For example, George D. Marsh, a public information officer with the state Employment Development Department, said in a court affidavit that on April 14 there were only 1,500 farmhands working in Coachella.

Moreover, on March 13, the Teamsters had written letters to each of the growers demanding recognition on the basis of representing a majority of workers on each ranch.

The petitions contained 2,284 signatures, but Marsh said there were only 200 people working at the time. In about 40 affidavits, UFW members said their signatures were forged or they were tricked into signing papers which turned out to be petitions.

Last January, Droubie, the man responsible for collecting the signatures, told two UFW attorneys he and two organizers had forged many of them.

The allegation was made by UFW attorneys Jerome Cohen and Sanford Nathan, who told The Bee they met with Droubie in an Indio motel and he told them he wanted "to blow the lid on the Teamsters."

Cone Macias, a high-ranking Teamster official, called the allegations a "damned lie," and said the signatures were collected by many workers.

An Indio judge has issued a bench warrant for Droubie's arrest in connection with an old charge of grand theft. Droubie could not be reached for comment.

When the E & J Gallo Winery of Modesto signed a Teamsters contract on July 10, 1973, it was ratified by the workers, 158-1.

But that vote is somewhat misleading. Ernest Gallo, president of the company, noted in an interview that at least 22 families living in Gallo housing at the time had joined a UFW strike and did not vote in the election. Others had simply walked off their jobs. Had all those workers voted, the results might have been different.

Tomorrow: The UFW's decline.
UFW Workers Fight Back Against Teamster Power

By GEORGE L. BAKER
Bee Staff Writer

Not long ago, Cesar Chavez farmworkers union was marching inexorably toward unionization of most of the state’s farmworkers.

It had much of the table grape and wine grape industries under contract and was ready to strike out after new crops.

Yet, today his army of true believers is in retreat, struggling to survive the onslaught of the Teamster Union which last year took over most of the UFW’s contracts with growers.

The United Farm Workers of America is still fighting back, vowing never to give up until it regains the jurisdiction over farmworkers that it rightly believes rightly is its.

Many observers of the decade-long farm labor struggle believe the Chavez union is on the brink of disaster outflanked and out muscled by the Teamsters.

Its dues-paying membership has slipped from about 45,000 to 10,000. Last year it collected only $600,012 in dues compared to $1.2 million in 1972, according to federal records. It paid out $2.8 million in strike benefits last year yet it was unable to win back any contracts. As of Dec. 31, 1973, it had only 8259.983 in cash on hand, compared to $1.1 million a year before.

But Chavez and other leaders of the UFW remain confident.

“We think the picture is misleading,” said Chavez. “It would appear that the Teamsters are gaining a lot of ground and signing contracts. In reality, they are pretty well discredited and this will come across.”

Those who dismissed the movement in the mid 1960s when it unfurled its black eagle flag are doing it again, he said.

“They have no understanding of the power of the workers. They look at power in terms of money, prestige and friends. That certainly is power. But public opinion, and workers and solidarity gives us more power in the end,” Chavez said.

“I don’t think we’re in that bad a shape,” said UFW counsel Jerome Cohen, citing as an example, the union’s use of political influence in getting its version of a secret ballot election bill through the Assembly this year.

It is the same fight as in the late 1960s when the UFW was first struggling to organize, “except you’ve got the Teamsters in it and that makes it a little tougher,” he said. “It may take a little longer, but it is the same fight.”

Chavez does not maintain every farmworker in the state backs him and his cause. Instead, he said, “I am reasonably certain that were workers able to make a decision, they would choose our union over the Teamsters in most every instance.”

Indeed there are workers with grievances against the UFW, ranging from the dues structure to the seniority system to the hiring hall. But most everyone agrees Chavez did more than anyone to increase dramatically the wages of farmworkers.

When he began organizing in 1964 the average wage paid a Delano grape picker was $1.25 an hour. Ten years later it has more than doubled to $2.50. This increase is reflected in many other agricultural areas.

The Teamsters now claim to pay the highest wage in the table grape industry, $2.52 an hour at K. K. Larson ranch in Thermal, but in reality the pay scales of the UFW ($2.51 an hour) and Teamsters are comparable.

What is vastly different are the contracts and the way in which they are enforced. At the bottom line, the question is, who has the power? — worker or grower.

To Chavez, the most inherent evil in the farm labor system is the lack of self determination by the workers.

So, when he began signing contracts in 1967, he instituted a hiring hall and a ranch committee system.

The hiring hall is the key to the Chavez operation. The power to assign jobs and seniority, once resting in the hands of farm supervisors or labor contractors, was given to the workers themselves.

To get a job a worker must receive a dispatch from the hiring hall. And dispatches are assigned on the basis of seniority.
Struggle to Retrieve Power

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Teamster Bars Vote To Keep Power

By GEORGE L. BAKER

Bee Staff Writer

Teamsters Farmworkers Local 1973 will not hold an election of officers for two years, says its secretary-treasurer, David Castro, because he might not win the election before then.

The local is under the trusteeship of the Teamsters International and

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Castro, appointed by Western Conference head M. E. Anderson, says the local may become independent in the next three to nine months.

In the meantime, it has held no elections of officers or general membership meetings.

"Suppose we had an election and it was stacked and I lost," Castro explained. "To be very honest, I have to make sure the local is going to make it."

And the local, Castro said, can make it only with him at the head.

"I have to be better known among the union workers," Castro continued. If the men serving below Castro "can't sell me, I'll lose the election."

A recurring complaint of the Teamsters operation is that it is run automatically, with minimal participation of farmworkers.

This is going to change soon, Castro promised. The local leadership is trying to obtain the names of workers qualified to act as shop stewards so that grievances arising on farms can be handled immediately.

If there is only one person on a ranch crew who appears qualified, Castro said Teamster business

agents will name that man. If the selection is contested by the workers, elections will be held.

"That's why I want to start the shop stewards, so the worker will have a bigger voice," said Castro.

And membership meetings will be held as soon as meeting halls can be found in various farming communities, he said.

But last year, then director of the Western Conference, Einar C.

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Mohn. had a different explanation for how the farmworkers would fit into the Teamsters operation.

"It will be several years before they can start having membership meetings, before we can use the farmworkers' ideas in the union," Mohn said.

"I'm not sure how effective a union can be when it is composed of Mexican-Americans and Mexican nationals with temporary visas. Maybe as agriculture becomes more sophisticated and more mechanized, with fewer transients, fewer green carders and as jobs become more attractive to whites, then we can build a union that can have a structure and that can negotiate from strength and have membership participation."

The Teamsters are laboring under another handicap. The federal Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) has alleged the international union and locals in Salinas and Modesto have discriminated against Mexican-Americans working in canneries.

In both instances, the EEOC charged the Teamsters and several companies discriminated by maintaining "an English-only policy for elections, meetings, notices and otherwise failing to provide bilingual services."

Additionally, the EEOC said, there is reasonable cause to believe that the employers and Teamsters discriminated against Spanish-surnamed Americans by harassing and intimidating persons who tried to file grievances.

Castro, a Mexican-American, said these problems do not exist in Local 1973, whose membership is primarily Mexican-American.

The local, he said, has contracts printed in Spanish and several other languages, regularly files grievances on behalf of anyone and has a biracial leadership group and regularly gets ideas for improving local affairs from members.

If farmworkers see the Teamsters as a vehicle to better their wages and working conditions, the union's chief organizer, William Grami, has a slightly different view.

"Publicly, the Teamsters have said the reason they have organized farmworkers is to lift many of them out of poverty and to improve their lot."
Teamster Strength: Moving To Hold Farm Power

"Teamster power" refers to the association's efforts to negotiate contracts with agricultural and farm-related industries. The text mentions that the union is negotiating contracts with the American Agriculture Federation and the American Farm Bureau Federation. The negotiations aim to secure better wages and working conditions for the members.

The document also highlights the importance of the Teamsters' role in representing the agricultural workers and their struggles. It mentions the commitment of the union to fight for fair wages and working conditions.

The text concludes by reiterating the Teamster's stance on the importance of solidarity and the need to continue the fight for workers' rights. The document emphasizes the significance of alliances and support from other unions and organizations in achieving these goals.

The final part of the text notes the Teamster's commitment to the fight against injustices and the need to remain vigilant in protecting the rights of agricultural workers.
Teamsters Often ‘Fail To Communicate’ With Workers

By GEORGE L. BAKER
Bee Staff Writer

Last February, several thousand asparagus cutters, members of the Teamsters Union, walked out in a wildcat strike against several Imperial Valley growers.

Upset because they had not received a raise in two years and because most growers were paying by the hour instead of on a more lucrative piece rate basis, the workers completely shut down the harvest.

The growers reacted swiftly. The night of the walkout, Feb. 18, three of them, along with a farm labor contractor, decided to meet the workers demands.

Oddly, the Teamsters, who supposedly represented the workers, were not told of the meeting nor participated in it. The growers, out of hand, simply changed the rate of pay written in the contract.

This incident, recounted in a court deposition given by one of the growers involved, John Jackson Jr., is indicative of the problems faced by Teamsters Local 1973.

It has enforced contracts with growers erratically and done relatively little, it appears, to educate workers about what is available to them under the contracts. In many instances, the Teamsters appear to be short-handed in dealing with thousands of workers who harvest a particular crop for a few weeks and then move on.

Further, the local has concentrated its efforts, according to some growers, on permanent employees, leaving seasonal workers to deal with growers on their own or with the aid of the United Farm Workers.

Whether this is deliberate or the result of a shaking-out period in the operations of local 1973 is an open question.

Based on the amount of dues collected last year, the local is either having trouble collecting from workers and growers who are supposed to deduct the dues or workers are simply refusing to join, despite language that requires them to.

According to federal records, the local (then an organizing committee) collected $638,838 in dues last year. At any one time the local probably has 15,000 to 17,000 people working so that in a month its $7-a-month dues would have brought in $136,000.

One of a series

What is the biggest difference between operating under a UFW and Teamster contract? Replied Mike Bozek, a major Coachella Valley grape grower: “The main difference is that we can run our business the way we want to. The people are free to go to work where they want to. There is better medical coverage and the Teamsters have a pension plan.”

“If you want to have a tractor driver do some field work, you can do it. If you want to keep a crew together and loan it to another grower, you can do it. If you want to put an extra crew on, you don’t have to go to the hiring hall.”

“The Teamsters have enforced the contract to the hilt,” he continued. “If anybody thinks we have a sweetheart contract, they are misguided. I think they are making a sincere effort to enforce the contract.”

A former Teamster organizer, let go in a budgetary cutback, said the local has “the blind leading the blind. The only thing keeping them in the ball game is that they have money. They don’t have people to go out and do the things to keep people happy.”

Teamster organizer Cono Macias said the union is fully enforcing its contracts and that workers are happy under the Teamsters. “We have to keep the workers happy or we’ll be out faster than Chavez was,” he said.

Part of the local’s problems may be traced to the philosophy of Teamsters applying traditional trade union concepts to a relatively unsophisticated labor force.

Says the local’s secretary-treasurer David B. Castro, “The membership’s primary responsibility is to familiarize itself with the local office and to ask questions about the local. We want workers to completely read contracts and we have literature for them in both English and Spanish.”

The asparagus strike is an example of the Teamsters failure to communicate with workers or to represent their interests.

The growers were paying cutters on a pack-out basis, the amount of asparagus shipped from each field, after rilling part of the crop. Workers were insistent on a field-box rate so they could see each day how much they were making, rather than waiting until the next day to find out what had been packed.

In his deposition Jackson commented, “There had been a lack of effort on the part of the Teamsters to communicate to the worker what
The workers are seen as a reflection of the farm's policies and practices. The farm's emphasis on productivity and efficiency has led to a culture of industrialization, where the workers are reduced to mere cogs in the assembly line. This has resulted in a dehumanization of the labor force, where the workers are viewed as interchangeable parts rather than individuals with unique talents and ideas.

The farm's focus on profitability has also led to a disregard for the workers' well-being. The long hours, intense labor, and low wages have taken a toll on the workers' health and morale. Many workers have reported feeling exploited and emotionally drained, which has led to high turnover rates and a lack of job satisfaction.

Despite the farm's success, there are concerns about the ethical implications of its practices. The use of cheap labor and the exploitation of workers for profit raise questions about the farm's commitment to social responsibility. Some critics argue that the farm's success is built on the backs of its workers, who are often subjected to harsh conditions and low wages.

In conclusion, the farm's success is rooted in its efficient and profitable production methods. However, the cost of this success is borne by the workers, who are subjected to long hours, low wages, and poor working conditions. It is essential to consider the ethical implications of the farm's practices and to ensure that the workers' rights are protected and their well-being is prioritized.

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Further reading:

- [Source 1]
- [Source 2]
- [Source 3]
Snafus Stall Laborers' Teamster Insurance Claims

By GEORGE L. BAKER

When a contractor's bus carrying 48 farmworkers to the High and Mighty Farms near Blythe skidded off a road last Jan. 15, 19 workers were killed, including Manuel Mendoza and three of his teen-age children.

Like several others who died in the early-morning crash, Mendoza was a member of the Teamsters Union, which provides up to $2,000 in life insurance for farmworker members.

Yet, more than nine months after the accident, Mendoza's widow, Esther, now caring for six children in Mexicali, has not received any of the insurance. Why?

Teamster officials say there is some question about Mendoza's eligibility for insurance.

Her attorney, Henry Moreno of San Diego, has written several letters attempting to get the money. So far, he has been shuffled from the local office in Salinas to a field office in El Centro.

The treatment of Mrs. Mendoza is not an isolated example.

Numerous farmworkers have complained that their doctor bills have not been paid or have been paid slowly by the insurance company underwriting one Teamsters' medical insurance plan.

According to a top-ranking Teamster official and an insurance expert with the Western Growers Association (WGA), the association-funded Plan 10 is plagued with administrative snafus.

Under Plan 10, growers pay a monthly premium of $14.50 for each eligible worker. The money goes to the WGA Trust Fund which has contracted with Connecticut Life Insurance Co. to underwrite the plan.

The problems of collecting benefits were told by two workers. Ramon Gallo, a lettuce cutter in El Centro, said he developed a sore on his leg which had to be treated by a Mexicali doctor.

Though the Teamsters helped him fill out medical insurance forms, there was a snag after that. "In June 1973 I received $5 from the Teamsters. I am still paying the doctor bill of $80 because $18 is still owing."

Another Imperial Valley worker, Humberto Flores, was working under a Teamsters contract and tried to have the Teamsters' plan pay for $60 of his wife's medical bills. The bills weren't paid because the Teamsters said he didn't qualify.

The Teamsters have another major insurance plan, the California-Arizona Grower Trust Fund, which covers most of the workers in the Coachella and San Joaquin Valleys and is nearly identical in benefits to Plan 10.

But, it was discovered, the plans benefit permanent workers more than seasonal workers because they contain stringent requirements for eligibility based on the number of hours worked each month.

To be eligible for such things as hospital benefits, a Teamsters worker must have worked 80 hours the previous month. If a worker is employed 40 hours by a grower with a Teamster contract and 40 hours by a non-Teamster employer, he is ineligible for benefits. (This is similar to the United Farm Workers of America, AFL-CIO.)

MORE
Life on a pension of about $15,000.

Retirement will be a reality to many. When the time comes, the pensioners will have the luxury of choosing where to live. The community will benefit from their presence, and the economy will benefit from their contributions. The pensioners will be enjoying the peaceful life they have earned.

The message is clear, the need for pensioners is real. Let us all take action to ensure that the pension system works for everyone.