

Chavez opens 'Yes on 14' campaign at S.F. State

By Henry Weinstein

Cesar Chavez, president of the United Farm Workers of America, launched the Northern California "yes on 14" campaign yesterday at an enthusiastic rally of 1,000 students at San Francisco State University.

"There is only one real issue involved in the campaign: whether farm workers will have the right to determine for themselves if they want a union," the 49-year-old labor leader told the students.

"Will the workers feel secure that the law is going to continue to exist, will they feel they won't be fired if they vote for a union?" asked Chavez, who spent years as a crop picker himself before he started organizing farm workers nearly 20 years ago.

Chavez said he anticipates agricultural interests opposed to the controversial measure on the Nov. 2 ballot will spend upwards of \$2.5 million to defeat it.

Prop. 14 would guarantee the operating continuity of the Agricultural Labor Relations Board, first of its kind in the nation. It would also guarantee farmworkers the permanent rights and procedures of collective bargaining, free elections, and would give union organizers access to workers for an hour before and after work and an hour at lunchtime on growers' land.

The "access" provision, which is a codification of an ALRB rule, is the most ominous part of the measure, according to the growers, who contend it violates their private property rights. However, the State Supreme Court has upheld the "access rule." The growers have appealed to the Supreme Court in Washington. Chavez asserted that organizer access to workers would not interfere with the production of crops.

Chavez said the proponents of the measure hope to distribute five million leaflets and half a million bumper stickers.

He urged the students to register to vote and, after his address, registered some students himself. Chavez related the story of the migrant workers in this country, and said it was "a terrible irony that the people who harvest the food in this country don't have enough to eat in many cases."

Larry Tramutt, Northern California coordinator of the "yes on 14" campaign, said he was optimistic, but said it "will be tough fight. Seven per cent of the voters off the top will vote no on any measure," he said. "The opponents simply have to confuse the voters. We have to convince them to do something positive."

A number of students indicated they would work on the measure, but others simply seemed content to cheer loudly for Chavez.

At a news conference afterward, a skeptical student reporter asked Chavez why the UFW is supporting Democratic nominee Jimmy Carter, a peanut farmer. Chavez responded, "He endorsed Prop. 14 and who else is there to support?"

Chavez said, in response to another question, that unionization did not necessarily mean jobs would be eliminated as a subsequent result of mechanization. "Cotton picking and sugar beets were mechanized long before there were any unions on the scene," he noted.

Chavez said that although farm workers had made considerable progress in the last decade, it would be many years before they earn wages comparable to industrial workers, who gained the right of collective bargaining 40 years ago.

As he was about to leave another student asked Chavez if he planned to organize farm workers in Georgia now that Carter said he has given his support to Prop. 14. "Sure we'd like to organize there," Chavez responded with a wink. "We like peanuts."