Proposition 14 only
	a temporary setback

By Dick Minett

The battle over Proposition 14 is ended, but the war to unionize agriculture goes on. And the odds do not favor growers, despite their smashing 3 to 2 defeat of the proposition put before California voters in November by the United Farm Workers Union.

Listen to UFW President Cesas Chavez, speaking with the confidence learned from hard experience:

"In this movement... there may be temporary setbacks, but we never lose. The war on Proposition 14 was an investment. When things like this happen... it's happened often -- it brings us closer together. We've not lost our brotherhood... we've not lost our unity... and there's more of us than they.

"Chavez spoke out at a post-election gathering of 800 of the UFW members and supporters who worked more than four grueling months for Proposition 14. Their response -- cheers, applause, foot-stamping agreement -- was just one in-dication Chavez was not exaggerating.

"There obviously are rough times ahead. Flushed with victory, growers will press the State Legislature hard to weaken the Agricultural Labor Relations Act that finally gave collective bargaining rights to California's farm workers last year.

"But all such machinations will be futile, says Chavez, and the union will fight on, and its organizing committee has already announced it will continue the battle no matter what the outcome of Proposition 14).

COMING BACK

"Certainly the chances for a come-back seem much greater than were the chances for passage of Proposition 14.

Above all, the UFW faced the "impossible" 10-1 vote cast in such elections. It's usually 8 to 10 percent against any proposition, much higher -- often significantly in a defeat, the measure...""
UFW attorney Jerry Cohen attacked the changes as the "first major step toward gutting the farm labor law itself." Nevertheless, the changes should not in themselves have any serious effect on organizers.

Further, other changes grant organizers access to the grower buses that transport many farm workers, and — most importantly — require growers to list their employees for organizers, as Proposition 14 proposed. This is aimed at the growers' habit of trying to hide the identity and whereabouts of employees from organizers.

Cohen is worried, however, that the farm labor board will act on a proposal by Chairman Gerald Brown to exempt from the provisions of Proposition 14 any demand that is "clearly, and essentially may act as a collective economic pressure that is a reasonable" demand for opposite restrictions.

GROWER BILLS

Grower allies in the Legislature have begun introducing bills that would force the board to act on the demands. They also have served notice that, when the board comes up for re-funding next year, they will again demand changes in the law in exchange for their votes, just as they did before the UFW initiative qualified for the ballot.

Leo McCarthy has pledged that he and the legislative majority he commands will block the attempts to weaken the law. Governor Brown has pledged similar support. But even they concede that will be difficult, given the determination, unity and, especially, the political muscle shown by growers in defeating Proposition 14.

The UFW will have to be deeply involved in the legislative fight. The union also will have to police the 54 contracts it has managed to negotiate, negotiate at more than 150 farms where it has won representation elections but not contracts, press hundreds of outstanding unfair labor practice charges against growers — and do a lot more organizing, as well as campaigning in hundreds of forthcoming elections.

"Now, in short, the real struggle will begin — a far greater struggle than was waged over Proposition 14, but the kind of struggle the UFW has waged so successfully over the past 13 years."

"We're going back to strikes, boycotts and conflict," says Cesar Chavez. "No question about that."

Rick Mester has co-authored a new book on the history of farm labor organ- ing: A Long Time Coming, which will be published in May by Mariamill.