**Fear and Tension Grip Salinas Valley in Farm Workers' Strike**

By STEVEN V. ROBERTS
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SALINAS, Calif. — Red Lewis, his bony butt toward a field laden with ripe green cauliflower, “I’m harvesting my crops,” he said grimly, “that’s what I planted. I’m harvesting my crops”.

Joe Violini, spat into the dust and said: “You’re goddamn right, we’re harvesting our crops.”

Across the field, a group of Mexican-Americans formed a ragged picket line and waved the red banners of the United Farm Workers Organizing Committee, “Huelga Huerta”! They shouted, “Strikers!”

“The growers thought we were going to lose our jobs,” said Mr. Lewis, a 21-year-old Mexican-American wearing sun-glazed, reddish-brown hair. “They think that because we’re losing work that we won’t want, but we’ve got nothing to lose. We’ll walk till we get what we want.”

Red Lewis and Tanis Reyna symbolize two sides of a dispute that has paralyzed the Salinas Valley in tension and controversy.

One is a white farmer, determined to run his land and harvest his crops. The other is a Mexican-American field hand, feeling the first rush of an organizing campaign demanding more security and better working conditions in his backbreaking job.

Several weeks ago, the International Brotherhood of Teamsters announced that it had signed contracts with 200 California growers covering 7,000 field workers. Cesar Chavez, the union leader of the United Farm Workers Organizing Committee, had signed the agreement as a “security bid”.

Field workers, he said, were the province of his union, which recently won a five-year battle to organize workers in the California grape industry.

The growers at first angrily rejected the Teamsters and transferred the growers to another union, saying they preferred to deal with the Teamsters.

The farm workers struck August 15, when a wildcat strike erupted 300 miles away in the Mexican - American barrio of East Los Angeles in another indication of the impact of the international war.

Most of the Salinas Valley’s 6,000 field hands stayed out and farmers were forced to use a few schoolboys and families to harvest their crops. Some of the workers’ chief crops, reported to have been virtually shut down.

Last week, Interharvest and Freshpick, two of the area’s biggest growers, signed contracts with the Teamsters, but the other growers were holding out. And as the strike lengthened, tempers rose. Reports of beatings were rampant.

Sunday, the Valley was filled with the valley like a fog rolling in from Monterey Bay.

This lush, narrow valley stretches for nearly 100 miles through central California. It is an agricultural mecca, famous for its abundance of fruit, vegetables, including “East of Eden” and “The Long Valley.”

In some ways the valley has not changed much since the nineteen-thirties, when Steinbeck was writing about it. The fields are still a marvel of mosaic of leafy trees: yellow, green, red, blue, green broccoli. The aroma of ripe strawberries and garlic and conveyored the land’s rich greenness.

Men still believe in simple virtues here — thrift, hard work, and Americanism. The town board turned out to send the Salinas sons of the American G.I. to World War I, and today the newspaper carries letters urging Washington to “win” the war in Vietnam.

But in other ways Salinas has changed a great deal. It has grown from a town of 4,000 in Steinbeck’s youth to 60,000, “spreading like a grass toward the foothills,” as he wrote in “Travelers’ Charley.”

When prosperous farmers in “The Long Valley” came to town, they ate at the Hotel Conomis on Main Street. Today the hotel has a seedy look and a sign that says, “No Credit, No Checks, Cash.”

The well-to-do now eat at the Towne House or the Tee n Turf, all neon and plastic and red leather.

Steinbeck was born in 1902, the son of a miller. His old house is a confection of turrets and wrought iron railings and scalloped siding. Now the governors mill out from town in sleek ranch houses without a curved line in them.

Steinbeck’s farmers were usually small, independent operators, rooted in their land like the huge eucalyptus trees they planted to break the land’s wind. But in recent years there is a large new crop of farmers are now taking over the land that has been inherited by many of the older farming families.

Steinbeck has been in the Valley for 25 years. He has written a number of books, including “East of Eden” and “The Long Valley.”

Mr. Lewis, right, and his partner, Joe Violini. “I’m harvesting my crops,” said Mr. Lewis, “that’s what I planted them for.” He blames trouble on “agitators from outside.”

Mr. Lewis is a tall, grizzly man who has lived around with a German shepherd in his station wagon, which has an American flag tacked to the rear.

He has nothing against unions, he said, “I still have my union book from the strike of ’58. But my workers don’t want to belong to Chavez’s union, this is being forced on them.”

Why they were they all on strike? “Many families refused to picket, but they’ve been threatened and intimidated so much they went out,” he said.

“Agitators from outside are getting the people outside on strike.”

Joe Violini was born in this valley 80 years ago, the son of a Swiss immigrant farmer, and has lived in the same house, on the same land, since the 1800s. For a fellow who was born and raised here,” he said, “It’s damn hard to eat this stuff. People who aren’t citizens aren’t telling you what to do. What’s that amounts to.”

The farm workers union is only the latest thing that is troubling Joe Violini. He complains about taxes and welfare. And a few years ago the state put a new road right through his property, cutting off his view of the Salinas River.

“You don’t have any control anymore,” he said, “you have eyes burning under the felt brim of his cowboy hat. You act like you own the land, but you don’t.”

“God damn,” he went on, “years ago if you worked and paid your bills you were all right. Now you have problems other people create for you. I can’t quite put my finger on them but they’re there.”

Several hundred yards away, the striking field hands could hear fingers on their problem — Red Lewis and Joe Violini. “Those growers are just threatening people in the thirties,” said Ray Hunt, one of the leaders. “They don’t want the teamsters to show down our throat.”

“The union would give us security in our jobs,” added Carmen Reyes, one of six brothers striking the line. “The way it is now we have no one to defend us if something goes wrong. There’s nobody to kick us up.”

“The forest is always on top of you when you’re working,” said Miss Reyna’s brother Tanis. “We don’t have any control anymore,” he said, “we’re living here, they’re living the short-handled hoe. Now they’ve got to work in the fields they’ll find out it’s no picnic.”

Like the growers, the farm workers feel that the current dispute is a foretaste of a deeper problem. Carmen and Tanis Reyna are both 21, but they were unable to find work in Salinas and were forced to leave home.

“The only place there’s no discrimination,” said Tanis. “is when they take you into the Army.”

The crowds here are mainly manned by the young, who have been thrown out of their homes. “We’ve got nothing against the army,” said a man in a red shirt. “We’ve got nothing against the army. It’s just that we’re not going to do it.”

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