

New Labor Law Expected to Set Off Arizona Clash

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PHOENIX, Ariz., June 10 — The United Farm Workers union and Arizona's produce growers are locked in a classic American labor battle over organization of migrant field workers in the irrigated crop lands of the southwest desert.

The two sides are already hammering each other as they have been, off and on, since 1967. But the major point of collision should come some time after Aug. 13 when a new state labor law goes into effect.

Both sides have resolved never to give in.

The new law, applying only to the farm workers union, sharply restricts the union's major weapon, the boycott, which proved so effective during the grape strike in California. It also sharply restricts the union's power to organize in the fields and to strike during harvest time.

Darwin Aycock, president of the Arizona American Federation of Labor and Congress of Industrial Organizations, called the bill "outrageous."

A spokesman for the growers called it "the most refreshing thing that's happened in the last 10 years."

The state plans to enforce the law. The union plans to violate it.

Governor Hails Law

Gov. Jack Williams, a Republican, who signed the bill immediately after passage, said on May 30, "it will help all of Arizona just as the right-to-work law did. That law [which prohibits compulsory union membership] has made Arizona one of the most successful states in terms of economic growth in the nation and the same attacks were made upon it."

The farm workers union reply has been a campaign to recall the Governor. The union says it has gathered 23,000 signatures on petitions in the last two weeks. It will take 103,000 signatures to place the issue on the ballot. Governor Williams has not commented on the recall campaign.

In five years of organizing efforts, the union claims 3,500 members among the 35,000 to 40,000 field workers in the state. Growers try to ignore the pickets and bring in nonunion workers.

Among the new law's provisions are these:

¶A grower facing even a threat of strike at harvest time can go to court for a 10-day restraining order. If he does, the issues must then be settled by binding arbitration.

¶The union is prohibited from contacting workers while on the growers' property.

¶All secondary boycotts are outlawed; primary boycotts are limited to naming the specific grower of the produce. A supermarket picket with a sign reading "don't buy nonunion lettuce" would be subject to a \$5,000 fine and a year in jail. The sign would have to contain the specific grower's name and that grower would have to have a current dispute with the union.

¶No strikes are legal unless approved by a secret ballot supervised and certified by a



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Cesar Chavez, the farm workers' union leader, and Mrs. Coretta Scott King at a rally in Phoenix last Friday.

seven-man state board appointed by the Governor.

Much of the struggle seems as though it were put together by a heavy-handed Hollywood script writer.

The growers say that national security is at stake in Arizona. One of the most influential men in farm affairs in the West, who asked not to be identified, said in Yuma that it was a struggle with communism for control of the nation's food supply.

The growers also say it is a struggle to preserve free enterprise by men who tried to scratch a living from the desert with their bare hands and won, and now face a horde trying to take it all away from them.

Cecil H. Miller Jr., president of the Arizona Farm Bureau Federation, said the union was terrorizing workers to force them to join, that a general strike in agriculture could bring on a failure of the state's economy and that "unless law is allowed to prevail over anarchy in our fields, the high drama staged in Phoenix over the past few weeks can become deep tragedy for all of us."

Fast by Chavez

That "high drama" was the 24-day fast by Cesar Chavez, director of the union, a fast begun after the new law was signed.

Last Saturday, when the weakened leader finally called off his fast, supporters marched through Phoenix from the Memorial Hospital to Del Webb's TowneHouse, a hotel across from the tall, white, new buildings of the Rosenzweig Center.

At the hotel, more than 5,000 persons, most of them poor Mexican-Americans, attended a memorial mass for the late Senator Robert F. Kennedy and Mr. Chavez broke his fast with communion bread.

His fast seemed as symbolic to his cause as the new state labor law seemed to the other side.

In a letter to union members during the fast, he said that he

was not particularly protesting the new law, nor was he angry at the growers.

"My concern is the spirit of fear that lies behind such laws in the hearts of growers and legislators across the country," Mr. Chavez wrote.

"Somehow these powerful men and women must be helped to realize that there is nothing to fear from treating their workers as fellow human beings.

"We only wish an opportunity to organize our union and to work nonviolently to bring a new day of hope and justice to the farm workers of our country."

On May 31, the United Farm

Workers struck the cantaloupe fields around Yuma, where the melons sit in flat valleys under the jagged, bare mountains and men can only work from dawn to 1 or 2 P.M. because of the blinding heat.

They struck at the very moment of harvest—the one time when the growers are most anxious over their crop, when the most damage can be done to perishable melons. There were shouts over loudspeakers by both sides, someone threw some melons, high school youngsters were brought in to harvest the fields, and claims of victory were issued by both sides.

Such struggles will continue, the union says, moving with the harvest to other crops at other times in Arizona's hot valleys where there is no winter.

The Rev. James Drake, director of organization of the union, said that the growers faced an intolerable challenge at a crucial time—unsure they can get their harvest picked if there is a strike and then unsure they can get it bought by consumers if there is a boycott.

He explained the recall, saying that the message to other states and governors was "when you mess around with the farm workers we push back."

Mr. Aycock, the A.F.L.-C.I.O. leader, said of the recall petition, "In my judgment, as sure as the sun comes up in the east and sets in the west, they're going to get those signatures."

Last Sunday, when Mr. Chavez broke his fast, a dozen clergymen stood at the celebrated mass, most of them in red vestments with the black eagle of the farm workers on their chests.

They sang together, holding hands, "We shall overcome."