

California Farm Workers Law Passed

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SAN FRANCISCO, May 29—The California Legislature completed passage today of the Agricultural Labor Relations Act and sent it to the man who proposed it, Gov. Edmund G. Brown Jr., who will sign it next week.

Final passage came in the Assembly by a vote of 64 to 10. The Senate had earlier approved the bill 31 to 7.

The law is expected to bring deep changes in this state's immense agricultural operations and could set a national pattern. It is designed to end the strife that resulted from competing negotiation drives of the United Farm Workers Union led by Cesar Chavez and the International Brotherhood of Teamsters.

The legislation comes before a special legislative session, meeting during the regular session, as a device to make the act effective in September. The harvest of many crops will then be in full swing so that union representation elections can be held. Otherwise, the bill would be effective Jan. 1 with much disruption of contracts during the interim.

The new law is modeled on the National Labor Relations Act. It is designed, according to one of its authors, to change the flow of power on which farm labor organization in this state has been based. The national law has never covered farm workers, which is one of the reasons for the competition that has characterized field labor unions here. In addition, the growers have been able to play unions off against each other, and this will end also.

"Traditionally, farm labor has been organized from the top down," said Rose Elizabeth Bird, Secretary of Agriculture and Services, to whom Governor Brown in January gave the job of producing a farm labor bill. "Cesar Chavez used boycotts to force growers to sign up. The teamsters negotiated directly with the growers, who forced workers to join the union.

"We wanted to change that," she said. "We wanted to give the farm workers themselves the power."

The bill sets up a five-member

board that will be appointed by Governor Brown. The board will oversee secret ballot elections to select unions. The workers on a farm will decide between competing unions, or for no union, the latter a provision written in at the growers' insistence.

"We wanted the secret ballot elections to encourage democratization among farm workers," said Secretary Bird. "Also, by use of this key institution in American life, the secret ballot, we overcome the question of legitimacy which has plagued farm union organizations here."

The growers have asserted that the United Farm Workers coerced field workers into union membership. That union has argued that growers sold out field workers by forcing them to join the teamsters.

The new act permits strikes at any time. But the secret ballot certification elections can be held only during harvest, to insure voting opportunity for the maximum number of workers. Elections must be called quickly after filing of qualified petitions seeking them. No negotiations can begin with a grower until certification has been won by the union.

The major interests touched by the bill all got some benefit from it. The growers were persuaded by Governor Brown that they must accept this act to avoid being caught in disputes between competing unions. The teamsters were persuaded that a bill would be passed with Governor Brown's backing, so when they received some protection through amendments, they supported the bill. For the United Farm Workers the legislation provides a chance for re-establishment of contracts through persuading field workers to join the union.

No Secondary Boycotts

Agreement was reached that the law will forbid secondary boycotts of the sort that tried to prevent goods from reaching the market place, but consumer educational boycotts against buying from a grower who is under attack will be permitted.

The bill that was passed was the result of a series of discussions, the most crucial of which were usually led by Governor

Brown, a 37-year-old who once worked in the fields while he was a Jesuit seminary student and who marched with the United Farm Workers in the nineteen-sixties when they sought contracts with grape growers.

The expectation is that the new law will put an end to one kind of conflict between the U.F.W. and the Teamsters. In the past, the U.F.W. has charged the Teamsters and growers with conspiring to force the Chavez union out of the fields.

In 1970 the Teamsters began to pick off contracts with growers who had been brought into the U.F.W. orbit by the grape boycotts of the nineteen-sixties.

There is a question whether the U.F.W. will attempt to keep alive its present boycotts, such as those against the Gallo wineries of Modesto and the Franzia wineries of Stockton. The U.F.W. also has boycotts going against iceberg lettuce at Salinas and against table grapes. These will probably continue until September to keep up pressure against the employers.

"We're going to continue boycotting," said Jerry Cohen, an attorney for the U.F.W. "Some elections can't come until next year. Also, we believe the teamsters have some sweetheart contracts and we want to keep pressure on those."

Rams Workers' Truck

HIDALGO, Tex., May 29 (UPI)—An angry melon farmer ran his automobile through a group of United Farm Workers organizers today, rammed a truck scattering workers on the ground and leaped from the vehicle waving a pistol and ordering the union men off his land.

Othal Brand, a Rio Grande Valley farmer, told the demonstrators that if law enforcement agencies were not going to enforce a court order preventing U.F.W. disruptions of the canteloupe harvest at Griffin & Brand Farms, he would.

Hidalgo County sheriff's deputies moved in and persuaded Mr. Brand to put away his pistol and leave the scene while the demonstrators cursed and pounded on his car. No shots were fired and no arrests were made.