

# Coast Farm Vote May End Labor Feud

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DELANO, Calif., Aug. 16—In this dusty agricultural town and others like it throughout the state, organizers for the United Farm Workers and International Brotherhood of Teamsters are engaged in what may be their last battle to see who will represent the 250,000 field hands who harvest California's nearly \$1-billion worth of crops each year.

Under provisions of the state's new Agricultural Labor Relations Act, farm workers can petition for secret ballot elections to choose which union—if any—they want, under state supervision. This is the first law of its kind in the country—regulating agricultural labor relations—and officials in Washington are watching closely to see how it works, with the hope that it might provide a national model.

Farm workers were excluded from the National Labor Relations Act of 1936 as a result of lobbying by farm owners, and this resulted in a "law of the jungle" governing agricultural labor relations.

Now the state's big farm owners—many of whom have seen their profit margin decline as a result of boycotts of their products—are looking forward to stabilizing a situation that they could not envision years ago when the pickers, largely migrants who could not speak English, were powerless.

## Boycotters Interested

Many consumers who have heeded the requests of Cesar Chavez, Farm Workers union president, not to buy grapes, iceberg lettuce or Gallo wines over the past 10 years are also interested in the outcome.

So are supermarket owners who have been confronted with pickets chanting "Viva la huelga" (On with the strike) since large numbers of Mexican-American and Filipino grape pickers walked out of the fields here 10 years ago, striking in the hopes of winning certain economic rights, including higher wages.

The law goes into effect Aug. 28. It is expected that both the Farm Workers and the Teamsters will file thousands of signature cards from workers designating one union or the other as their desired bargaining agents and asking for elections at several hundred farms.

To demand an election, a union must present a petition signed by a majority of the workers at a farm during peak harvest time, a provision that insures that migrant workers are present to participate. Other unions can then get on the ballot by presenting the signatures of 20 per cent of the workers.

## Chaos Could Occur

The law provides that an election must be held within seven days after the initial petition is filed, and this could result in chaos. Gov. Edmund G. Brown Jr., who was instrumental in getting the elections bill passed this spring, appointed a board to administer the law only a few weeks ago. The board will have to verify in a short time thousands of signatures of workers to determine their legitimacy so as to ascertain their eligibility to vote.

The board is currently hustling to hire and train a staff of 75 persons to conduct elections as soon as Sept. 4. The Most Rev. Roger Mahony, Auxiliary Bishop of the Roman Catholic Diocese of Fresno, newly designated chairman of the Agricultural Labor Relations Board, said recently that the board would be able to supervise 150 union representation elections a day by the time the law went into effect, but this remains to be seen.

Bishop Mahony has said he plans initially to have 25 election supervising teams, each containing three members, at least one of whom will be bilingual and at least one of whom has experience in conducting elections in the industrial labor field.

To start, the board will set up field offices in Sacramento,

the state capital, and Riverside and Fresno, major agricultural centers. Additionally, there will be temporary local site offices, set up as teams of election officials move from field to field.

## Chavez Foresees Conflict

A few days ago, Mr. Chavez said he expected that "90 per cent of the growers won't sign contracts after we win elections—they'll sign contracts after we hit them with strikes and boycotts."

The new law requires the owners to bargain "in good faith" with the union chosen by the majority of workers, but there is no compulsion to sign a contract.

Mr. Chavez predicts that his union will win back a large majority of contracts it lost to the Teamsters in 1973. But Louis Uribe, a Teamster organizer, says: "We are very confident we will wind up with a majority of the contracts we have now," about 400 compared to 15 held by the Farm Workers.

In July, 1970, the Farm Workers culminated a five-year campaign by convincing the bulk of the state's table grape growers to sign contracts. This was the first major successful effort in this country at agricultural labor organizing. Previously, the union had negotiated a few contracts with wine

growers. Almost simultaneously, however, the Teamsters entered the field and signed the majority of the lettuce growers in the Salinas area, known as the nation's "salad bowl."

Mr. Chavez charged that these were "sweetheart contracts." They were never voided, but in December, 1972 the California Supreme Court said that there had been collusion between the Teamsters and the farm owners in the negotiation of the contracts.

In 1973, a number of the U.F.W. grape contracts expired, and growers signed with the Teamsters, sometimes after only brief renegotiation sessions with the U.F.W.

## Union Assails Tunney

FRESNO, Calif., Aug. 16 (AP)—Delegates to the Farm Workers national convention here censured Senator John V. Tunney, Democrat of California yesterday for supporting "repressive" farm labor legislation in Congress.

The U.F.W. accused Mr. Tunney of writing a secret ballot elections bill favorable to growers and the rival Teamsters union.

Mr. Tunney said he regretted the charge and that he shared the union's goal of giving farm workers "the right to bargain collectively and without fear."