Farm Workers Celebrate the Past
And Plan Expansion at Convention

By LES LEBETTER
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FRESNO, Calif., Aug. 28—The Unite
Farm Workers of America ended its thir
convention here today with a mixture o
exuberance and seriousness that has per
vaded this three-day meeting.

A martyr’s mass this morning reminded
the 1,500 delegates and 1,500 support
of the price paid over the last 15 years
to organize 101,000 farm workers on 42
ranches in the West. Celebration at a
rally-barbecue-dance this afternoon re
minded thousands of U.F.W. suppor
ters that the union had won a new labor law
in California, made peace with the Inter
national Brotherhood of Teamsters and
was supported by a friendly Administra
tion in Washington.

The exuberance of delegates to the con
vention has been expressed in music and
applause, exploding with each message o
of congratulations from religious, labor
and political leaders across the country.

Labor Secretary Ray Marshall brought
greetings from President Carter and
delivered a speech asking the union to
support Administration proposals to ex
pand labor laws to cover farm workers
and to register illegal aliens. He expanded
on the proposals at a news conference
afterward in an effort to meet the objec
tions of the U.F.W. and its president,
Cesar E. Chavez.

Climate Gains

Mr. Chavez opened the convention with
his report citing the “dramatic gains” of
the farm workers over the last 15 years:
Minimum wages were more than tripled,
health and retirement plans were estab
lished, and minimum job standards and
job security were achieved.

When the farm workers met here last,
two years ago, California’s Agricultural
Labor Relations Act was still untested
and faced legal and funding problems.
The union also faced a hostile Administra
tion and was fighting with teamster or
ganizers as well as farmers and growers.

Mr. Chavez said that most of these
problems had passed and that new U.F.W.
contracts free farm workers from
exploitation and discrimination in suffer
impoverishes so many of our people in
this land of wealth and promise.’

But Mr. Chavez also noted that the U.F.W.
must improve worker involvement in
the union to help organize hundreds of
thousands more farm workers
in the West, the East and the South
and to fight extensive legal and
political battles.

We are convinced that the vanguard
of this movement must be the workers
themselves; we must completely turn
over the task of running the union to
them,” he told the cheering delegates.

An aide to Mr. Chavez explained later that
many nonworker volunteers from the early
organizing days, especially those
“with political agendas they wish to force
on the union,” were being supplanted by
farm workers.

Mr. Chavez, who was unanimously re
elected president of the U.F.W. yesterday,
praised “movement volunteers” who have
worked “side by side with the farm work
ers” rather than those who “have come
with the idea of saving the farm workers
from the union.”

Although he touched only briefly on the
proposal by the Carter Administration to
identify and in some cases give
legal status to the millions of illegal
aliens in this country, as well as a plan
to include the farm workers under a re
vised National Labor Relations Act, Mr.
Chavez was supported by the delegates
in his opposition to these proposals. The
union passed resolutions against the
proposals before Secretary Marshall made
his address yesterday.

General Proposals

In his speech, which was interrupted by
applause twice dozen times, the Labor
Secretary said that the documentation of
illegal aliens was necessary in order to
protect “these frightened people” who
“work for less than minimum wages
and under unsafe conditions.

He said that farm workers should be
covered under the N.L.R.A. because a
separate Federal law “would only encour
age the myth that farm workers should
be treated differently from other work
ers.

However, at a news conference after his
speech, Secretary Marshall said that the
Carter Administration was only mak
ing generics proposals in these areas and
that final legislation could be changed
to meet U.F.W. objections.

He also said that the workers from the
unions’ wish to avoid the weaker provisions
of the National labor relations act, as
compared to the California Farm Labor Law, which
“provides a very good model” for
the N.L.R.A. “We don’t believe in braceros,” he
said. “We believe that the N.L.R.A. should not be
authorizing discrimination against minority workers, as
the U.F.W. believed.

Mr. Chavez smiled at these indications that
the Administration would be flexible,
but he remained adamant in defending
the union’s opposition to the proposals
as they have been announced.

Labor Secretary Ray Marshall, left, and United Farm Workers president
Cesar E. Chavez at the union’s convention in Fresno, Calif., yesterday.