

# BATTLE BETWEEN CHAVEZ AND DISSIDENTS WIDENS

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The rift between the leadership and dissidents in the United Farm Workers has been widened with the union's filing of a \$22 million slander and libel suit against nine Salinas farm workers.

Five of the nine workers, who are all union members, responded to the suit by beginning a fast in front of union headquarters in Salinas. On Sunday a Roman Catholic mass will be said there to commemorate the first week of fasting.

The nine are the same workers who, earlier this month in Federal District Court here, successfully challenged the authority of the union's president, Cesar Chavez, to oust them from paid positions with the union.

In the union's suit, filed in Monterey County Superior Court in Salinas on Nov. 22, the nine workers are alleged to have slandered and libeled Mr. Chavez and five members of the union's executive board by accusing them of misappropriating union funds. Campaign Money at Issue

The workers originally brought internal union charges against the five board members in October 1981, saying they had illegally used union money to finance their re-election campaigns just before the union's convention that September. Those internal charges were dismissed in November 1981.

The nine subsequently filed suit in Federal court charging that Mr. Chavez had illegally dismissed them as paid union representatives in retaliation for their backing a slate of candidates opposing the incumbents at the convention. They also renewed the allegation of misuse of union money and asked the court to order an accounting of funds.

But before that case came to trial, the issue of misappropriation of money was dismissed by agreement of both sides. A trial was held in the Federal District Court in San Jose in October, and on Nov. 16 Judge William A. Ingram ruled that the nine had been elected to their positions by union members and thus were not subject to Mr. Chavez's summary dismissal. Further legal action is pending on that issue. Continued Slander Charged

Ellen J. Eggers, a lawyer for the United Farm Workers in Keene, Calif., said the filing of the libel and slander suit was coincidental to the decision in the Federal case. She said the suit had been planned since summer because the nine workers continued to tell other U.F.W. members that Mr. Chavez and the executive board members had "stolen" union money.

The nine are also alleged to have circulated a leaflet in September and October 1982 that says they forced Mr. Chavez to pay back union money that had been misused.

"There was absolutely no money ever taken, loaned, borrowed, nothing, from the United Farm Workers union," Miss Eggers said. She said all the money used by the five board members in their campaigns had come from a special fund solicited from supporters in St. Louis as a private loan to be used by the incumbents. Said to Try to 'Get Even'

She said checks totaling more than \$3,000, signed by Mr. Chavez, represented reimbursement to the union for the pro-rated value of union resources such as cars and telephones that the incumbents used while they were campaigning.

Miss Eggers said the nine workers were charging misuse of funds "solely to get even because they're continuing to wage a war against the union and the board members."

Two of the fasting workers, Simon Rios and Mario Bustamante, maintain that the union leadership was "trying to intimidate us" by bringing the suit.

Speaking in Spanish, translated by Mr. Rios, Mr. Bustamante said of Mr. Chavez, "We want him to understand we are with the farm workers and want the union the way it was before, more democratic and with respect for the workers."

Diane R. Dickstein, an attorney for the nine workers, described the suit by the union as "harassment."