

Texas Farm Workers Union  
(512) 843-8381 or (512) 689-5281

REC'D MAY 29 1979

## Farmworkers ask help against "terror campaign"

Texas farmworkers who struck the Rio Grande Valley's second largest onion grower for a month--driving up wages but failing to win union recognition--have asked for help in countering what they call a "terror campaign" being waged against them.

The Texas Farm Workers Union (TFWU) charges that their organizers and strikers are meeting with "harassment and abuse" from the growers and from the police, who, they say, have sided with the growers throughout the strike. "Many have been arrested on trumped-up charges and the arrests are continuing daily."

The TFWU contends that the purpose of the legal battles and the "rising terror campaign" is "to financially and morally destroy our union and to put a halt to the farmworkers who dare speak for justice and equality."

When the onion harvest began in <sup>early</sup> April, the farmworkers found that growers were paying only 40¢-50¢ per bushel, less than last year and, for most pickers, lower than minimum wage.

They called on the TFWU for help, and within a few days five fields of the Charles Wetegrove Produce Company were empty and what Wetegrove now claims was \$300,000 worth of onions was going unpicked.

Wetegrove's response was to try to pick the fields with strikebreakers, recruited first from other parts of Texas, then from Mexico. But the TFWU--which has a history of bringing undocumented workers into the union's strikes, rather than trying to bar them from the fields--was successful in calling the strikebreakers to the picket line, except where state police barred them from talking to them.

Wetegrove told reporters during the strike that there was "no future" in vegetable farming in the Rio Grande Valley if wages rose higher than those in Mexico.

Running confrontations between police and strikers have brought dozens of arrests in the strike. Troqueros--labor contractors who truck their workers from field to field--have reportedly pulled guns on union organizers talking to the farmworkers. When one striker was hospitalized by a car crashing through a picket line, police arrested two strike leaders for felonious mischief, but let the driver go. A TFWU bus, used as strike headquarters, was firebombed and destroyed.

The strike waned when some workers returned for the 70¢-80¢ per bushel that Wetegrove began to pay because of the strike's effect. Now, as many of the farmworkers move north with the crops, the TFWU is faced with an empty treasury, looming court battles, and continuing harassment and arrests. Strike leaders' lives have been threatened.

- MORE -

The TFWU is asking for moral and financial support both to fight its legal battles and to counter the "rising terror campaign" against the union. Contributions can be sent to the TFWU Legal Defense Fund, Box 876, San Juan, Texas, 78589. Telegrams urging that police cease harassment, that charges against strikers be dropped, and that the civil rights of organizers and strikers be protected can be sent to Texas Governor William Clements in Austin, Texas; District Attorney Edna Cizneros, Willacy County Courthouse, Raymondville, Texas; Sheriff Oscar Correa, Willacy County, Texas; and Police Chief Sabas Garza, Jr., Raymondville, Texas.

Besides employing tens of thousands of farmworkers in its fruit and vegetable fields, South Texas is a starting point for the yearly northern trek of migrant workers who fan out into the fields of the West and Midwest following the crops. Because it is a "right-to-work" state, unionization of farmworkers in Texas is much more difficult than in California. Unionization is also made difficult because farmworkers do not fall under the National Labor Relations Act. The TFWU has called for the repeal of the Texas "right-to-work" law and the federal Taft-Hartley Act under which it was passed. They have also called for passage of a federal Agricultural Labor Relations Act.

"LA CASITA FARMS, INC." ---- A PROFILE OF A "SMALL TEXAS FARMER"

Since the strike began in Rio Grande City during the melon harvest, June, 1966, there has been a constant barrage of propoganda from the Valley farmers. The fact that the truth has been so strained by these growers is proof that the strike has struck fear into their hearts. They have grabbed at straws to offset the evidence that their workers are among the poorest paid, worst treated in the United States.

The following profile of one ranch, where the strike has been most effective, is presented to inform those who support the right of the Valley farm workers to live in the twentieth century.

The spokesman for LaCasita has been Mr. Roy Rochester, vice president and manager of the Rio Grande City ranch. Who is this man? Born in Fort Worth, Texas, Rochester became foreman and superintendent of the Tracey Waldren Company of Yuma, Arizona, in the thirties. After serving in the Marine Corps in World War II, he became farm manager of the L. T. Madrone Company and Arizona Farms in Phoenix, where he worked until he assumed his present position in March, 1961. He is a Methodist layman of some status in his denomination and an outstanding spokesman against collective bargaining.

Rochester takes his orders from California, where the present office of La Casita is located. The important fact, never mentioned by Rochester, is that La Casita is owned by absentee landlords! La Casita Farms (Inc.) is the only subsidiary of Harden Farms of California, Inc., Salinas, California, which owns 100% of its capital stock. To know La Casita, then, one must know the parent corporation, Harden Farms of California, Inc.

The founder of Harden Farms, Eugene E. Harden, (Vice President of La Casita Corp.) was born in 1899. Prior to 1929, he was active as a grower and shipper of produce in Holtville, California. In 1929 Harden was active on an individual basis as a grower of produce and livestock in the Salinas, California area. In 1926 he formed Harden Farms, Inc.

In 1954, a related corporation, Harden Farms of California, was formed with the offices in Salinas. Harden appeared as president. The new corporation was chartered in January, 1954, with authorized capital of 500,000 shares at \$1 par value. Harden Farms of California, Inc. leases its land from Harden Farms, Inc. The financial statement on Harden Farms of California, Inc. at Jan. 31, 1964, reflected a net worth of \$540,394 with working capital centered in the accounts receivable. No figures are available regarding the value of the land owned by Harden Farms, Inc. from whom Harden Farms of California, Inc. leases its land.

La Casita Farms was incorporated in August, 1954, in Texas. Originally, Chet W. John was president; Jack Reeves, Vice President; and Mark Yekes, Secretary. On Jan. 9, 1958, Harden Farms, Inc. of Salinas, California, bought 50% interest in the Texas agribusiness and the remaining outstanding stock at a later undisclosed date.

Clarence Morse became the president of La Casita, Inc., the wholly owned subsidiary of Harden Farms. Morse, born in Arizona in 1905, was employed in 1944 as ranch superintendent by Harden Farms, Inc. and continues in that capacity at this time for Harden Farms of California, Inc. He runs the La Casita operation from California through Rochester.

La Casita Farms, Inc. grows, packs and ships melons, peppers, carrots, cabbage, celery, lettuce and other vegetables approximately 300 days a year. Produce is sold on consigned and F.C.B. basis throughout the entire United States through brokers to large chain outlets. Some chains, such as H.E.B. markets, receive produce at the packing sheds in trucks owned by the chain itself.

La Casita produce is popular. Under the label "La Casita", sales for the year ending April 30, 1964, were \$1,243,771. April 30, 1965, sales were \$1,094,553. April 30, 1966, sales (shortly before the strike) saw a jump to \$1,843,530! The gross profit on sales in the 1966 year was \$382,529. The net profit was \$185,021 (better than 10% profit on sales.) Much of this increase in sales stems from enlarged acreage under cultivation.

Of course, profits are high due in part to the over abundance of cheap labor in the Rio Grande Valley. La Casita hires between 300 and 400 workers on almost a steady basis. These workers receive, on a piece rate basis, between 60¢ and \$1.00 per hour. Workers on ranches with similar profiles in California receive between \$1.40 and \$2.00 per hour. This is true of Harden Farms of California in Salinas, California. The argument that La Casita is a struggling "small farm" with limited assets, operating on a basis of perpetual indebtedness is a bald-faced lie.

When the field workers at La Casita Farms, Inc. struck in June, 1966, they asked for union recognition, improved working conditions, and \$1.25 per hour. Their demands are far below what La Casita Farms, the wholly owned subsidiary of Harden Farms of California, can afford to pay.

OPEIU #277

Prepared by the United Farm Workers Organizing Committee, AFL-CIO  
P. O. Box 54  
Rio Grande City, Texas

## HARDEN FARMS OF CALIFORNIA AND THE TEXAS STRIKE

The United Farm Workers Organizing Committee, AFL-CIO has had a strike against La Casita Farms, Inc. of Rio Grande City, Texas since June, 1966. La Casita is a wholly owned subsidiary of Harden Farms of California, Inc. and uses the same label both in Texas and in the parent city, Salinas, California. That label is Hi Goal. Other labels include La Casita, Harden Crisp, and Hard'n Fresh.

The management of Harden Farms of California, Inc., with offices at 1162 Abbott St., Salinas is as follows: President, Clarence Morris, Vice President, Roy Scott, Vice President in charge of sales, Gene Robertson, Secretary, Everett Hillard, and Treasurer, Alv Ferrasci. Since the beginning of the strike in Texas in the melon harvest of 1966 these men have fought the United Farm Workers Organizing Committee through their Rio Grande City management, namely Ray Rochester and his brother and assistant Jim Rochester.

Harden Farms of California, Inc., through its Rio Grande City management has employed a long list of strike breaking techniques including the use of armed guards. The United Farm Workers Organizing Committee, AFL-CIO, holds the management of Harden Farms of California responsible for the following matters:

- 1) The shooting at Benjamin Rodriguez by Jim Rochester on the first of February, 1967. Rodriguez was picketing on the private property of a ranch owned by a friend of the strikers. The property is adjacent to La Casita ranch. (Rochester has recently been deputized by the sheriff of Starr County, Texas, so that he can defend ~~the~~ ~~xxx~~ property he manages as an officer of the law!) Five priests were in the company of Rodriguez, and Rochester had them arrested also.
- 2) Management of La Casita requested the Texas Rangers to come to Rio Grande City to "put an end to this strike." Ranger Captain A.Y. Allee stated to the Alamo Messenger (Catholic Newspaper of the Archdiocese of San Antonio), June 1, 1967, that the Rangers had been requested to come in and keep law and order. He professed neutrality, but then pointed out that the Rio Grande City ranch management had said that if the strike were successful they would turn the rich vegetable and melon land into grazing land for cattle. Stated Allee: "That would mean only 25% as much work for the people here. I am certainly not going to stand around and let that happen!"
- 3) Jim Rochester informed the owner of a restaurant where eight Rangers eat regularly that anything the Rangers ate would be paid for by him. Later the Rochesters provided the Rangers with crates of melons.
- 4) Texas Rangers beat Magdaleno Dimas with the butts of shotguns in a private home and then carried him to jail. Later he was taken ~~to~~ <sup>from</sup> jail to a hospital where he was treated for a concussion and internal bleeding. At the instruction of "officer" Jim Rochester, Dimas was charged with shouting "viva la huelga" and "using a gun in a rude fashion." Dimas, who had been hunting that afternoon, had not been anywhere near the person of Jim Rochester that day.

United Farm Workers Organizing Committee director, Cesar Chavez, in Rio Grande City on June 9 16th stated to the press: "The fact that Harden Farms of California has continuously refused to enter into negotiations with the union is reason enough to blame them for every bit of violence against the strikers here. They could sit down and talk things over with us, just like Guerro (a Rio Grande City company which has recognized the UFWOC, AFL-CIO). Instead, they sit in their offices in Salinas (California) and give orders to destroy the strike, and the strikers. The blood is on Harden's hands."

In mid-January James Drake, Administrative Assistant to Chavez called Ray Rochester while in Rio Grande City and requested a meeting. Rochester replied: "You're talking to the wrong man. We take our orders from Morris in Salinas."

# LEGISLATION: AN ANSWER

by Eugene L. Boutilier

Agricultural workers over the entire nation stand at the bottom of the social heap. An important answer to their condition is federal legislation designed to include them under the National Labor Relations Act

**T**WELVE DAYS OF LEGISLATIVE HEARINGS, SIX before a Senate Subcommittee and six before a House Subcommittee, were held in the last three months on a bill to bring farm workers under the National Labor Relations Act. The bill, introduced several years ago by Senator Harrison A. Williams, Jr., of New Jersey, has been widely recognized as the key legislative remedy for the most important grievances of the people who do the work of tending and harvesting our fruits and vegetables, and caring for our other crops.

The story of the farm worker is dramatic, and much of what took place in the hearings was also dramatic. When Domingo Arredondo from the Rio Grande Valley, Texas, finished his personal story, Representative Frank Thompson, who was presiding over the Special Subcommittee on Labor of the House Education and Labor Committee, had to admit that he was fighting to keep back the tears. When three Senators held hearings in the Rio Grande Valley, the crowds, the TV crews, and the volatile charges regarding brutality and false arrests competed for attention with the pro and con arguments on the merits of the bill.

My purpose here is to omit the drama of the farm worker struggle, even though it is a great and significant drama, and to pinpoint as precisely as possible the arguments on proposed legislation.

## I

*Farm workers have bitter grievances.* Fifty years ago the wages, plus fringes, of the people who worked on farms were nearly on a par with the wages in industry. Today, however, the great majority of farm workers, whether permanent or seasonal, whether resident or migratory, receive very low pay. In October 1966, the national average hourly wage for all farm workers was \$1.18. Texas paid an average of \$1.05, up 7 cents over the 1965 rate. Eight southern states had farm worker average pay under \$1.00 an hour, with a low of 74 cents in South Carolina. The high, reflecting the recent strike, was \$1.58 in California, a 22-cent increase in eighteen months. In 1965, the average migratory farm worker earned \$1737, \$600 of which was from non-farm work. The average manufacturing worker received over 100 per cent (\$1.47) more pay than the average farm worker. Less than 12 per cent of these workers received any free food. Farm workers are the lowest paid occupational group in America.

---

*Eugene L. Boutilier, a United Church of Christ minister who lived on strike at Delano, California, for nine months, is Washington director of the National Campaign for Agricultural Democracy.*

Working conditions as well as wages of farm workers are a source of major grievances. Farm workers stoically accept the fact of hard, outdoor stoop work surrounded by mud or dust, insect and pesticides, performed in bitter cold of Michigan autumn mornings or terrible heat in Texas summer afternoons. The protested working conditions are matters that result from neglect and tradition rather than economic necessity, such as: lack of safety equipment on machinery; lack of portable toilets; lack of cool drinking water and personal drinking cup; lack of planning to prevent unnecessary over-exposure to agricultural poisons; dangerous transportation; complete lack of job security even when there is work; archaic, inefficient work procedures that drag down productivity.

There is bitter opposition to intentional over-recruitment of workers and lack of advance planning for their efficient use, so that men show up for promised work and find none available or stand around losing valuable time waiting for trucks or equipment or supervisors to show up, waiting while crews are redivided and re-assigned, waiting without even being paid for their waiting time. Workers harbor resentments from being cheated in room, board, wages, and transportation fees by camp operators and labor contractors. They suspect and sometimes prove cheating in tallying their earnings. They know that the vast majority lack coverage by laws providing workmen's compensation, jobless benefits, minimum wage, full social security, and effective child labor prohibition. For many, basic welfare and medical services are still effectively placed out of reach.

All of these grievances are amplified by the workers' powerlessness and lack of effective communication in dealing with a grievance. This lack of communication leads the workers to assume the same exploitation from fair farm operators that they have experienced from the unscrupulous ones. Workers know that if they object to any procedures, no matter how valid their opposition, they can be fired on the spot, replaced by somebody nearby, and dismissed out-of-hand. All of these grievances have to do with the demand for dignity and justice as well as income.

## II

*The issue stems from large corporation farms.* The alienation that workers feel is heightened by the fact that very few agricultural employees are "hired hands" with any kind of personal relationship to their employer. One-half of 1 per cent of America's farms pay 30 per cent of the farm wages. Six per cent pay 76 per cent of the wage bill. Over half of America's farms use no farm labor.

The grievances of America's agricultural work force concern *agribusiness* (not the small businessmen),

their contractors and personnel managers, or their highly organized marketing groups. These businessmen unilaterally make almost all decisions about the work force and the working conditions and, both on and off the job exercise very substantial control over the lives of the workers by controlling the instruments of local government and community life that are supposed to serve or protect the workers. This unilateral influence in rural America stifles democracy, promotes class strife, and leads some of the men who have the unchecked power to use it irresponsibly.

It is these leaders of agribusiness, the 3 per cent of the farmers of the country who ship over \$50,000 yearly inter-state, who would be affected by the proposed legislation according to present jurisdictional standards. They are among the most influential individuals and corporations in America. It is a long way from the problems of a farmer with three acres and a mule to the problems of Griffen Farms in Fresno County, California, which collected \$2,397,073 in federal price supports last year and is known for low wages and poor working conditions.

### III

*A remedy for the grievances.* The grievances of farm workers resemble the grievances of workers in the factories and mines, on the railroads, and elsewhere in American business prior to unions. The successful remedy over and over again has been the forming of an association of working men to enter into direct formal meetings with the management, leading to the writing of a contract that gives the workingmen guaranteed solutions to as many of their grievances as their bargaining position permits, and guarantees to management that the workers will do their jobs according to specified work rules and at specified pay. Everybody has benefited from this increased communication and stabilization. It has brought industrial peace in large measure to America.

*The process of unionization.* A union gains the right to represent the employees of an industry by convincing management that it represents the workers and that therefore management must negotiate with the work force through the union. Farm workers want to organize into effective labor organizations that can deal with their grievances. They have begun unions repeatedly for a century, striking over 500 times in the last thirty-seven years, but have always been beaten down.

Workers in agriculture are trying again in California, Arizona, Texas, Florida, Wisconsin, New York, and elsewhere today. If they have organization they can, through their numbers, bring democracy to the rural power imbalance. If they can win some job security and a fair return for their labor, they can help buy decent education, housing, transportation, and food rather than wait for charity or governmental subsidies to give them these essentials through special programs.

These self-help labor organizations cannot be built by the workers without protection. Opposition power is too often used unjustly and effectively against them. Their methods and leaders are attacked and ridiculed. Their supporters are fired, blackballed, jailed on phony charges, or worse.

This used to happen to almost all unions, but thirty years ago Congress created the Wagner Act, which has since been amended by the Taft-Hartley Act.

### IV

*America's basic labor law.* This legislation states as national policy that our national interest is served by full production, not by industrial strife, and that this interest is advanced by defining and protecting the rights of employees and employers, by establishing rules and procedures to encourage them to recognize each other's legitimate rights, and by negotiating labor contracts through collective bargaining. It guarantees federally supervised democratic union representation elections when necessary. Over 25 million votes have been cast under these rules. The Act prohibits a variety of "unfair labor practices," by either management or labor, such as using any kind of coercion on individuals. Its purpose is to establish an equitable framework for industrial peace. It has been amazingly successful. This legislation, for political reasons, was re-written in Committee in 1935 to specifically exclude agriculture.

Today, a campaign is being waged to remedy that defect. The proponents argue that justice and community peace will be increased by passage. This side includes the Secretaries of Labor and Agriculture, the unions, numerous church groups (including the General Board of the National Council of Churches, the Bishops' Committee for the Spanish Speaking, the National Catholic Rural Life Conference, the Union of American Hebrew Congregations, over 15 State Councils of Churches, over 10 national denominational bodies), the National Farmers Union, the National Consumers League, Americans for Democratic Action, the National Sharecroppers Fund, a number of Mexican-American, Filipino, and civil rights groups. The other side includes representatives of agricultural management, such as The American Farm Bureau Federation and the various fruit and vegetable associations. The composition of Congress is such that these forces appear to be about evenly matched, and extensive grass-roots letter writing may well decide the issue.

### V

*The cost squeeze.* The opponents of the bill charge that unionization will increase labor costs, thus pushing production costs upwards, reducing farm income, increasing mechanization, squeezing smaller farmers off the land, and leaving displaced unskilled workers out of work.

Their arguments are always framed to develop sympathy for the plight of the smaller grower, for a good reason. We all feel concern for "the little guys." But the economic competition is between the small grower and the worker on the one hand and the large-scale corporate farms on the other, not between all growers and all workers.

Farmers are currently, by Farm Bureau figures, leaving the farm at a rate exceeding 100,000 a year. Farm labor is similarly declining. This is the direct result of the rise of large-scale, mechanized corporate farming with big-business *capitalization*, cheap labor, huge subsidies, and privileged marketing arrangements. It was

not caused by some 1 per cent of America's farm workers joining the union in the last three years.

Increased labor rates will benefit the remaining family farmer, who, as George Meany points out, "remains the symbol of American independence and self reliance . . . he doesn't have any workers to exploit. . . he is placing his own standard of living in competition with the workers hired by the corporation farms, the factories-in-the-field." The Advisory Commission to the US Department of Agriculture argues that the opportunity for the family farmer "will be enhanced if wages and working conditions for hired farm labor compare favorably with those in industry."

In fact, however, unionization at Schenley Industry's large farm in California has *not* raised production costs. Mrs. Dolores Huerta, United Farm Workers negotiator, testified that the stabilization and improvement of Schenley's work force has lowered per unit production costs despite a good wage increase.

Increased mechanization is an inevitable force that has been increasing for years. Cesar Chavez, director of the United Farm Workers Organizing Committee, has stated that he does not oppose mechanization because there are some jobs now done by hand, some difficult stoop work, that no man should have to do. He argues the vastly increased productivity of each agricultural worker made possible by machines produces wealth (out-put per man hour rose twice as fast on the farm as in the rest of the economy from 1960 to 1966). The issue is whether the people doing the work will receive a fair portion of this money and under what procedures will the available jobs be distributed. He demands that the workers have a voice in these decisions.

If the union has its way, mechanization will mean that a man whose whole family now works in the field to supplement his income, can permit his children to go to school, his parents to retire, his wife to stay home, and he can earn enough to support them all, while the grower makes more from his labor than ever before. The work force will be reduced, but a social good will have been done. This is only possible if a job advancement and training program, which the union advocates, is inaugurated.

## VI

*Harvest strikes.* The opponents argue that if NLRB is extended, the union will have an unfair advantage over the grower. This is stated in various ways: that the union, by harvest-time strikes, will "put the grower out of business" or "if unionization comes among farm workers, at harvest time the farmer will have two alternatives, either capitulate to any union demand, or witness a collapse of his farming operation . . . (There is not) any basis for believing that equality of bargaining power can exist between a farmer and a union." (Testimony of Richard O'Connell, National Council of Farmer Cooperatives.)

The point made is that the grower's harvest is so uniquely vulnerable to strike that the workers must never be granted any bargaining power at all, even though all other workers have it. Actually, nearly

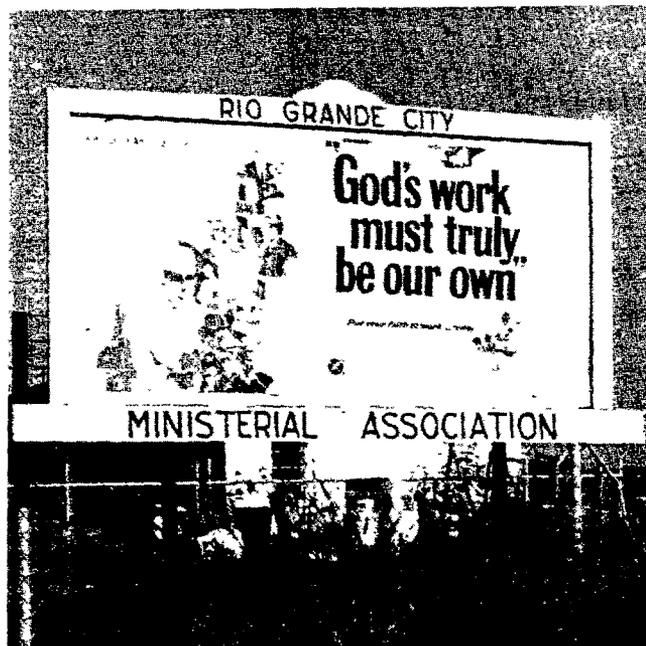
every industry has a time when it is particularly vulnerable to a strike, otherwise the strike weapon would have no power. Yet this has not been an excuse to permit other industries to be exempt from the right of workers to organize nor to set up machinery to handle grievances.

The vulnerability argument is an emotional argument, not a rational one. For 30 years the food processing and canning workers, who are covered by NLRB procedures have had unions. Numerous elections have been conducted, contracts have been negotiated, and there is a long history of labor peace in these industries. The work is seasonal, the workers travel, and the products are highly perishable when they arrive at the door of the cannery or freezer, just as they were in the field. This has made no great difference. It is merely one of the labor-management equities which must be balanced in setting forth terms of wages, hours, and work.

Farm industries will have more labor peace, not less, once farm workers are organized and there are bona fide guarantees that workers can rely on. Farm workers live and work in an economic jungle today. Once they have the right to join unions and work under negotiated contracts, there will be a civilizing atmosphere good for both employer and employee.

Austin Morris, S.J., whose study of *Agricultural Labor and National Labor Legislation* is the basic work in this field, observes: "The fact is that no one really knows what may happen if farm workers become substantially organized. Our experience in this area is too negligible. It must be observed, however, that the earlier efforts of agricultural interests to exempt the food processing industry from the provisions of the NLRB were based on identical arguments and fears. Organized labor was going to ruin agriculture through its control of processing plants and packing sheds. Because of the same vulnerability and the same perish-

(Continued on page 16)



whole attitude was one of accepting the hostility shown toward him."

## VII

Mrs. Gutierrez, the community action director, is deeply concerned that the social level of the Mexican-American workers be raised, but feels that the strike organizers have chosen the wrong target. "The strike organizers want minimum wages," she says, "that is good. But they say the reason these people are down is because the growers keep them down. I think the reason these people are down is because they have been down for generations. Before the growers even started planting here, the workers were already in this bad shape. These people need education, they need vocational training, they need home-maker services. The union is having a strike to try to get minimum wage—that is their department. In our department, we have a training program in which we take these chronically unemployed, these bottom-of-the-barrel people, and train them as carpenters, as plumbers, as highway construction men. We give them personal counseling. We say, 'Now, see here, you smell bad, your feet stink, you need to comb your hair, you need to shine your shoes, to stand up straight, to be courteous.' We try to improve the persons with personal counseling. Then, we have basic education. Some of these people can't even write their own names. We try to teach them to read, basic math, how to write, to raise the level of education, to bring them up to standards so they will be worth minimum wage."

Despite the efforts of the poverty war agency, on balance the union would appear to be more effective in breaking through the age-old barriers of class and economic distinction. As Ed Kreuger says, "the morale of the workers has never been higher. For the first time they can see a glimmer of hope."

The tangible results of the UFWOC are slight, however. One smaller grower has indeed agreed to negotiate with the union, but none of the major growers, such as La Casita Farms, have given any indication of ever being willing to do so. Until they do, the tension present this summer is certain to continue into the fall and from thence to next summer's melon harvest. The Valley farm workers have the full support of the AFL-CIO.

The question of the union's value to the workers in the long run could nevertheless be asked. Will unionization actually bring about the desired alterations in the economic and social condition of Starr County workers?

All parties to the dispute agree that the union is not the entire solution. Jim McKeithan, lawyer for the union from Mission, Texas, admits that "The union could not possibly solve the unemployment problem in Starr County, because there simply are not enough farm jobs to take care of all the people. But we do hope to improve the economic condition of those who work, and thereby improve the entire local economy." And Willis Deines emphasizes that point but from a different perspective: "Unionizing the farm workers is

not going to make more employment, and this is what we need in the Rio Grande Valley. It is my belief that unionizing the farm workers will provide less employment." The definitive answer to the question finally can never be known short of giving the union a try, but if past union history is any indication, McKeithan's position probably makes the more sense.

The logical solution to the present crisis lies with the Congress of the United States. Presently under consideration in the Senate is a bill to amend the National Labor Relations Act (the so-called Wagner Act), passed in 1935, to include agricultural workers, who are now specifically excluded. The Wagner Act establishes provisions for calling an employee election upon petition of 30 per cent of a firm's employees. The results of such election determine whether or not employees will be represented by a union in negotiations with management. At present, however, these provisions do not apply to farm workers, and growers are under no compulsion at all to recognize even the existence of organized labor.

"So much of the trouble is caused by the fact that agriculture is not covered by the National Labor Relations Board," Jim McKeithan says. "If the workers on the farm want to organize and have an election, there is no legal way to force the farmers to do it except by the old-fashioned methods of picketing and going on strike and trying not to buy the farmer's products. Of course the union has to stay within the law, and I think they are trying to do so. But at the same time, they have to put pressure on these growers to make them negotiate, which would largely be unnecessary if we had coverage under the NLRB."

David Lopez feels a bit of sadness at the necessity to employ the strike method. "Here, where we have no coverage at all, the only way we can put pressure is by picketing and demonstrations and boycotts, which I feel is certainly not the best way. It not only causes a financial loss to the workers, it causes a very serious financial loss to the producer and, as a result, to the entire area."

It just may be that agricultural workers will reach their goal of coverage by the Wagner Act as a result of the hearings conducted by the Senate Subcommittee on Migratory Labor in Rio Grande City and Washington, D.C., and the efforts of organized labor as well as the National Campaign for Agricultural Democracy (see Eugene Boutilier, page 10). Senator Williams offered hope in his concluding remarks at the Rio Grande City hearings. "The atmosphere and the events of recent months in the Rio Grande Valley and more particularly Starr County," he said, "comprise the most powerful testimony this subcommittee has ever received as to the need to extend the established rules and procedures of the collective bargaining provision of the National Labor Relations Act to the farm industry."

And when that happens, the Texas Valley farm worker will have *begun* to find his way into the just world promised to American citizens by American citizens. □