Farmworkers Continue Struggle

Over 300 Farmworkers and supporters marched in Raymondville, TX, protesting the attacks by "justice" enforcers and vigilantes.

The struggle by agricultural workers is undergoing a critical period. Government agencies and rich growers have combined forces to destroy the nationwide movement.

In California, the United Farm Workers Union (UFW) is fighting for its life in a strike against 11 big growers. In Arizona, the Maricopa County Organizing Project (MCOP) has been struggling against growers and the U.S. Immigration Department, which keeps importing scabs and deporting undocumented workers who join the strikes.

The Texas Farm Workers Union (TFW) has issued an urgent call for support. The TFW has been carrying out a strike against the Charles Wetegrove Produce Co. in Raymondville, Texas for the past 2 months.

Workers were being paid only 45¢ a bushel of onions, not even securing the federal minimum wage.

The company also refused to provide the workers with sanitary facilities or fresh drinking water. Organizers and strikers have been met with harassment and abuse from the growers and police authorities who have sided with the growers.

Many of the workers have been subjected to repeated threats. Police and vigilante harassment is increasing and the union bus was fire-bombed completely destroying it.

The legal battles and the rising terror campaign against the striking farm workers are tactics aimed at destroying the union and stopping the farmworkers who dare to speak out for justice and equality.

For more information or to send donations, write to: TFW, P. O. Box 876, San Juan, Texas 78589.

Taxes the Poor, Pays the Rich

This month, San Antonio City Manager, Thomas Ruebner, is finishing the draft of the City’s budget for the next fiscal year beginning in August. Ruebner and his Director of Budget and Research, Marcus Jahns, are probably hoping that what happened last summer won’t be repeated, when the Council did away with their budget.

If we recall, last summer after the defeat of the proposed City Bonds in the April election, some council members, headed by Bernardo Bureste, did away with the manager’s budget and wrote another in its place. They used Revenue Sharing funds for the projects rejected in that election. This was possible because the City had over $5 million from the sale of the city buses to VIA plus other income for this fiscal year.

For the next year, however, they do not have these funds. Consequently, some people are predicting a fiscal deficit of nearly $9 million if they don’t use Revenue Sharing funds to pay the City’s bills. If these federal funds are used for other projects or investments, taxes will have to go up. The City Council does not want to raise taxes. They prefer to use federal funds.

When Congress created the Revenue Sharing program, the intent was that State and local governments use it for investments or special projects, not to pay regular bills. This notwithstanding, many cities have had to pay their bills with these federal funds. In its May edition, EL PUEBLO noted that, “In fact, federal grants keep San Antonio from bankruptcy.”

The city most famous for economic questions, New York, has not yet been able to pay its bills. And many people pray that this will never happen in San Antonio. In New York, the bankers took control of the government and reduced a number of city jobs and, subsequently, public services.

In San Antonio, the same process is occurring, prior to bankruptcy itself. Each time the City prepares its budget, first we pay the bankers. As it stands in the Long Range Financial Project, "all Debt Service Funds were given first priority on revenue, thereby ensuring all financial liabilities are met."

In July’s edition, we will analyze the budget proposed for the coming year and the tax system that takes from the poor and the workers to pay the bankers.
PERSPECTIVA FEMENIL

This month's topic concerns companies that move their shops to other countries, their motives, the consequences on the job market and what can be done to counteract this.

Companies that close shops and move in search of cheaper labor are runaway shops. They are companies that depend more on laborers than on machinery such as the garment factories, where 95% of its workers are women.

Besides leaving thousands of unemployed, the runaway shops have undermined wages, weakened the unions and created divisions between skilled and non-skilled workers and among White, Black and Mexi workers from both sides of the border.

Because of its convenient location, Mexico has become one of the prime targets of runaway shops. Rather than cross oceans, the garment and electronics industries cross the border into Mexico (with the Immigration Department's consent) and exploit the Mexican women there.

By the mid-1960's, the runaway shops had become the major strategy for many of the labor intensive US industries facing competition from lower-cost producers from Europe and especially Japan. Between 1966 and 1971, 900,000 jobs and job opportunities were lost to runaway shops.

Those hardest hit were semi-skilled workers in the apparel and electronics industries, the majority of whom were women. In the women's apparel industry alone, 50,000 jobs were lost between 1956 and 1971. In 1975, the South Texas garment industry alone had 40% unemployment for garment workers soared to 17.6 percent.

Some union leadership launched a chauvinist campaign, "Buy American" to make the point that Americans have jobs. This has sowed divisions between US and foreign workers, instead of linking the miserable wages forced upon foreign workers by US multinationals to the relatively low wages of assembly workers in the US.

Many workers have responded to the runaway shops strategy with protests and strikes, although sporadic and short-lived. However, union leadership for the most part has taken a negative stand, "Don't ask too much of business or it will go away and leave us with nothing."

Workers must refuse to be intimidated by runaway shops. The 4000 ranch workers who were victorious in their 1974 strike proved that through effective organizing and a strong solidarity among workers, we can win the struggle. When faced with strike-breaking by undocumented workers and green card commuters from across the border, the strikers responded by organizing them into effective supporters.

The solution to the runaway shop is organization and solidarity between all workers from all countries. Unions should protect the rights of all workers. Workers are workers, be they Mexicans, Japanese, Chinese, Africans or Americans, and they should be paid according to the profits they produce.

BANDERILLAS POLITICAS

Mayor Lila Cockrell started her 3rd term in office by trying to set up a dictatorial government.

She felled the local unions and marched the citizens that go before the Council. The majority of the Council is made up of the GOP, with the help of the Express and Dresden News. The mayor says the Council gets harassed by citizens.

In this city, Cockrell is the one that gets criticized for being a very dishonest politician and a puppet to the GOP and the developers who run this city.

Let's hope the Council doesn't listen to her. Maybe she is mad because the majority of the Mexicans did not vote for her.

Speaking of dishonesty, would you believe that attorney Larry Mason headed the Grand Jury on the investigation of BODC? Larry Mason is married to attorney Jane Mason who is city attorney and who helped cover up for BODC.

How she covered up is a long story, but the Mayor put one of her attorneys on the Grand Jury.

The Mayor helped into office by BODC and the Mayor's appointees to the BODC Board are president of the Leasing Company that is subsidized poverty housing.

The Mayor tried to cover all this up. Local newspaper writers were unable to get legal opinions in favor of BODC since they were finding what BODC pretty bad.

Do you think that Larry Mason performed objectively as foreman of the Grand Jury? Incidently, he gave a large contribution to the mayor on her last campaign.

Speaking of the Grand Jury. The new foreman is Al Cram who is a close friend of Ninardo Zaragoza, ex-Investigative Director of BODC, and the main culprit.

Al Cram is also very close to Mayor Representative Frank Tejeda who was put in office by Zaragoza. In fact, Al Cram wrote a letter to the light in order to get those two when Tejeda first ran for office.
Work Hazards at Miller Curtain Co.

On May 4 and 10th, 1979, workers from Miller Curtain Co., 2630 New Jaredo Hwy., became very sick when chemical gas fumes filled the air, overcome the workers and causing several to pass out. On Friday May 4, around 1:00 p.m., approximately 50 women began to get stomach aches, nausea and eventually passed out when gas from bolts of curtains began to seep throughout the factory. Apparently, a chemical container that had been in the same truck with the curtains was leaking, thereby exposing the workers to the danger.

The incident occurred again on Wednesday May 10, when approximately 16 women became ill by the gas fumes. Both times the women were rushed to the hospital and released. Although the company, as well as the media, has downplayed the incidents, EL PUEBLO discovered that the accident could be more harmful than is being told.

Workers from Miller Curtain Co. told EL PUEBLO that they feared for their safety for many reasons:

1) After the incidents supervisors severely warned the workers not to talk to the news reporters.

2) Southwest Research Institute went to the factory to investigate and found the chemical to be "tertiary butyl mercaptan" which is used to give natural gas its odor. Although employers told workers "there was nothing to it," workers found out that the chemical may be harmful.

3) A long time worker from the plant told someone that this incident had happened before and the plant had not been shut down.

4) The media and the bosses called the women "hysterical."

5) When the incident happened again on Friday, employers told the women they were just being "nervous" and "hysterical," that there was nothing wrong!

All these distortions indicate the lack of concern for the safety of the workers of Miller Curtain Co. Instead of sincerely seeking a solution to a serious health hazard, the owners cover-up and avoid the issue.

Because they are much more concerned with their profits than with the safety of the workers.

The garment industry has long been known for its poor working conditions and low wages (see Perspective Feminil, May issue). And Miller Curtain Co., is no exception.

Workers work long hard hours, for example for little pay: 17 years experience at Miller can get you $3.50 an hour, 3 years experience $3.01, and 3 days, $2.90 an hour.

EL PUEBLO believes that the safety of the workers from Miller Curtain Co. has to be considered. But only until the workers themselves organise a union will their interests be protected. As long as bosses such as those of Miller exist, workers must organise to see that their interests are represented and that they get a just share from the profits they make for the garment industry.

More than 9,000 unionists from all over Texas marched in Austin recently to protest the proposed repeal of the Prevailing Wage Law. It was the biggest labor rally in Texas history. The Prevailing Wage Law requires public bodies such as city councils and school boards to make contractors pay the wages prevailing in their areas when they use tax dollars to build public projects.

The unity and militancy of the protesting workers forced the state Senate to retreat.

EL PUEBLO UNIDO

Mexican/Chicano

One of the most important tasks that we in EL PUEBLO want to accomplish is to contribute in a positive way to the unity of our working people.

The division of the Mexican people has its historical roots that date back to 1848, when the northern part of Mexico was conquered by the US. Since that time, the Mexicans that remained in the occupied territory saw how their rights were taken away and that their customs were stamped upon and despised by the invaders.

History has recorded these abuses. It has been written that the people of Mexico cried upon being forced to choose between their lives and their customs. Theirs was a bitter struggle of survival.

In the 1860's, with the initiative of the civil rights movement, the people of Mexican origin began to identify themselves as Chicanos.

That was a manifestation of resistance against more than a century of exploitation and racial discrimination. It is a natural process. When a colonized people begins to master its struggle for liberation, the first step is to recognize their cultural and national heritage.

The Chicano movement has been a positive step in the history of the Mexican people. But we cannot remain content with what has been achieved. We can see that they are denying us what we have gained; for example, more jobs with fair salaries, a good education, health and medical services, etc.

The division of our people is being used by the bosses to continue their exploitation and abuses of our people. They sic the cops on us, to kill us or lock us up in jail. The courts base all judgments, even those based upon racism, of which we are victims.

Our people are divided into the following sectors: Mexicans born and living in Mexico, immigrants residing in the US, undocumented workers and Mexicans born in the US, many dating three or more generations.

Within this last sector, there are several identification names: Chicanos, Mexican-Americans, Spanish-surnamed Americans or Latinos. Independent of these classifications, history shows us that in reality we are the same folks, we are Mexicans.

Following the lessons of history, we can not permit terminology to come between us. If we recognize that the bosses oppress us without caring for which name we go, then our unity to resist them should be our priority.

What do we have in common? That we are workers, that we are victims of racism, that in the schools they don't teach us the truth about our history, that they repress our language and our culture, that in the frequent wars we are the human bait along with the other oppressed nationalities—Blacks, Puerto Ricans and Native Americans.

The Prime Minister of Israel, Begin (who is one of the Pentagon's best clients), said that the US is doing with the Mexicans in the Southwest exactly what Israel is doing with the Palestinians—taking their land and colonizing them.

Begin, Carter and all that know our history, know that the Mexican people have been victims of an entire colonialist process. We, too, must understand our history so that we may create an effective unity and resistance.

Only a united people can make effective, democratic and just changes.
EDITORIAL

Campaign Against Undocumented:

A Threat To All

The hysteria instigated by the government over the undocumented workers continues to serve as a smokescreen. A smokescreen to cover up the real causes of a deteriorating economy and to justify future repression of all Mexicans born on either side of the border.

We continue to get daily doses of propaganda against the undocumented.

From President Carter, whose 'Immigration Plan' was opposed by every Mexican group in the U.S., to local politicians whose self-serving 'opinions' on this issue receive wide publicity.

Every 'official' statement is intended to add more fuel to the fire. Every 'news' item on this issue creates more anti-immigrant sentiments.

For example, President Carter's recent visit to Los Angeles was used to refocus the government's "Concern over this serious problem.

This "concern" was manifested by the FBI claiming that undocumented workers in L.A. tried to assassinate Carter. This wild inflammatory statement was made without any concrete evidence to support it.

Through the superficial propaganda against undocumented workers, the government hopes to pass racist laws aimed at controlling the growing strength of Mexicans in the U.S.

If we are to survive as a proud people and as workers, all Mexicans must join ranks on this issue. We must oppose the division of our people as 'legal' or 'illegal'. We must not cooperate when INS agents demand to see immigration documents, birth certificates, or other 'proof' of our right to live on these lands stolen from our people.

Solidarity with undocumented workers is the only solution to effectively counter the government's divisive and racist strategy.

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Charges Fraudulent Election

Ortiz Files Suit

"The District 6 election is for San Antonio's future," Councilman Rudy Ortiz told EL PUEBLO.

Ortiz lost his bid for reelection last April to attorney Bob Thompson by an 84 vote margin.

However, the whole election will have to be decided in court since Ortiz has filed suit charging Thompson with several violations of the Voting Rights Act.

Ortiz has charged that persons posing as city election officials picked up voting ballots from several people but never turned in the ballots. Other voters were misled when told they could vote on sample ballots thus nullifying their votes.

Elderly voters were issued false documents by Thompson supporters thus denying them of their right to vote.

Ortiz and his supporters have collected several affidavits from District 6 voters which will be submitted as evidence. The suit asks that the Court declare the April election null and either declare Ortiz the winner or call for another election.

Concerned citizens such as Araminda Saldivar and others have discovered evidence that the violation of the Voting Rights Act and the conspiracy to oust Ortiz was orchestrated by rich racists like Zachary, Cockrell, Paul Thompson and others.

Their general strategy was to oust Ortiz and thus dilute the power of the "minority" councilmen. By removing Ortiz, the balance of power on the council shifts to council persons supported by the GCL, land developers and other rich businessmen who control the city.

Mexicans and Blacks have acquired some strength on the city council as a result of city redistricting. This growing strength became a threat to powerful interests and money was poured into District 6 to remove Ortiz.

For example, developers like Ray Eilison lent money to Thompson through the Valley High Bank. At the same time, Paul Thompson, the local mouthpiece of the rich and racist elements, continuously attacked Ortiz in his newspaper column.

Even with this concentrated effort to remove Ortiz the official votes tallied showed Thompson winning by only 84 votes and many voting irregularities that result be settled.

The significance of the District 6 controversy is not simply the defeat of Rudy Ortiz. The real threat to San Antonio voters in general and Mexicans and Blacks in particular, is the interference in any given district by rich businessmen from other parts of town.

Future elections in any given district may be controlled not by residents of that district but by wealthy power brokers like the infamous GCL machine. By pouring money and using dirty tricks, these wealthy racists can control any district's election and thus control the city council.