

Although the Carter administration formally supported OPIC, President Carter himself never publicly mentioned the agency, and refused to send a letter to House members urging passage of the extension bill.

With such a poor record and so few friends, how did OPIC get Congress to renew its legislative life for another three years? The answer, in part, is that it is almost impossible to kill a bureaucracy once it becomes en-

trenched in Washington, even when it has outlived, or failed of, its original mandate. OPIC has a big budget, its own stable of high-powered lobbyists, its special-interest groups and a staff of 120 professionals who fought hard to keep their jobs. Congressman Ryan was probably right when he said, "If this agency were not in existence today and if this were a bill to create the agency, I doubt it would get more than fifty votes on this floor." □

## SQUARE TOMATOES AND IDLE WORKERS

# THE FARM WORKERS' NEXT BATTLE

### CESAR CHAVEZ

On February 16, the United Farm Workers appeared before a rare public meeting of the University of California Board of Regents to plead the case of thousands of farm workers who had been displaced by machines developed through U.C. research. Our union does not oppose progress, we told the regents; we do not even oppose mechanization. The university should be congratulated on its tremendous breakthroughs in mechanization technology. No one can deny that U.C. has had success in its research programs. They've done a very good half of the job.

But we believe the progress should be complete. The other half of the job is to use this wonderful technology to develop complementary programs for the workers who are losing their jobs. Research should benefit everyone, workers as well as growers.

It is no secret that there is a deep disagreement between the union and the university on the practical results of its research. U.C. claims to have had little, if any, impact on workers; we know mechanization affects workers because we see them unemployed and begging for welfare. So we urged the regents to join with us in asking Governor Brown to appoint an independent blue-ribbon committee to conduct a thorough and impartial study on the effects of U.C. research, if any, on the farm workers, and to issue appropriate recommendations. Governor Brown received a telegram on February 16 from us urging him to name the blue-ribbon panel, and he has not yet responded.

What was the reaction to our initiatives? "The university is an agent of change," said U.C.'s vice president for agriculture, J.B. Kendrick Jr. "It does not decide public policy or compensate losers among conflicting societal interests."

It is difficult to understand how anyone can tag as losers men and women who have had no voice in a headlong rush into mechanization. The farm workers call the machines "*los monstruos*"—the monsters. They see them as mechanical behemoths that threaten to decimate the farm labor work force and turn California into another Appalachia, with an underclass of unemployed workers as poor as any to be found in Kentucky or West Virginia.

Kendrick calls them losers in an impersonal process

of change, but in the workers' view it is a cruel irony that the rapid spread of machines—bringing hardship and suffering to countless thousands of displaced men and women—is spearheaded by one of the great institutions of public education in the nation.

In the harvest of thirteen crops alone, more than 120,000 farm worker jobs will be lost to machines and for most of the crops the university is developing farm equipment at an increasingly swift pace. U.C. research projects already underway or nearing completion will mechanize the great majority of such labor intensive crops as wine grapes, raisin grapes, lettuce, fresh tomatoes, peaches, apricots, cherries, melons and celery, to name only a few. Kendrick dismisses the workers as losers, but we believe the university has a moral and social responsibility to the farm workers and to others who are adversely affected by its programs.

History will judge societies and governments—and their institutions—not by how big they are or how well they serve the rich and powerful but by how effectively they respond to the needs of the poor and helpless.

In our boycotts, we always assumed that supermarkets and other corporations must take seriously the needs of society, and especially the needs of the poor, even though they are answerable only to their stockholders for the profits that they earn. We often asked, if individuals and organizations did not respond to poor people who are trying to bring about change by nonviolent means, then what kind of democratic society would we become? And some corporations did respond by joining with millions of Americans in honoring the farm workers' boycotts.

If corporations and other social institutions can recognize their moral responsibility, how much more should we expect from a great university that is supported by all the taxpayers, including the farm workers, particularly when that university is a direct cause of hardship and misery for the poorest of the poor in our society? It is appropriate for the people to expect that an institution responsible for educating their children will be an example to the young by demonstrating through its policies and deeds its commitment to a just and peaceful world. How can the university teach justice and respect for the freedom and dignity of all people when it practices the

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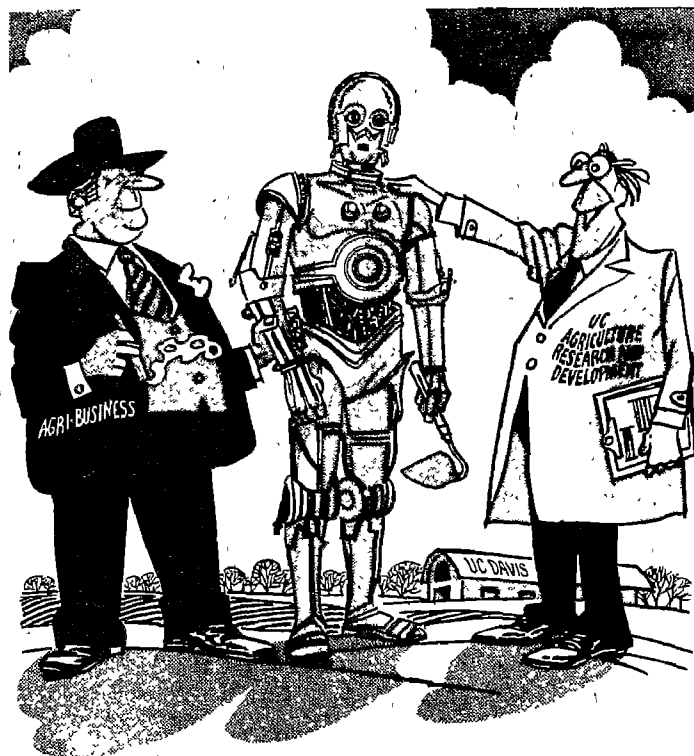
opposite with its money and its people by refusing to live up to its own moral and social obligations?

Contrast these obligations to U.C.'s record in developing farm technology and its anti-farm-worker bias.

Last summer the electronic-eye tomato sorter was widely used for the first time in California tomato fields. The state Assembly's Office of Research, after a thorough study, projected that at least 7,500 farm workers would be displaced by the sorter last year alone.

Displacing the work force in the tomato harvest or industry is an omen for all farm workers in the age of U.C. mechanization research. In 1964, some 50,000 farm workers found jobs in the harvest. By 1972, after implementation of the U.C.-Blackwelder tomato harvester, 32,000 workers had lost their jobs and the work force shrank to 18,000. By 1976, the number of workers had risen to 27,000 as a result of increased tomato acreage, but by then U.C.'s electronic-eye sorter had been introduced. Each sorter reduces the number of workers on a harvest machine from fifteen to twenty to two to six, a 66 to 90 percent displacement. Soon, if the sorter continues to be adopted, only 3,000 farm workers will be left in processing the tomato harvest, a loss of 24,000 jobs from the 1976 level.

When confronted with the effects of its research on farm workers, the university responds that its programs are needed to keep down prices for consumers. But does the consumer really benefit? The mechanization of the tomato harvest appears actually to have increased their price to consumers. Since 1964, the price of a can of tomatoes has risen 111 percent, while the price of all foods went up only 90 percent, and the costs of all other produce only 76 percent.



*"It Uses the Short-Handled Hoe and Won't Join the United Farm Workers."*

Renault, Sacramento Bee

U.C. agricultural engineers have been able to develop their machines only with the enthusiastic assistance of other U.C. scientists. Most fruits and vegetables are too fragile to withstand the rigors of machine harvesting, so the university has genetically reprogrammed the plants to the needs of the machine. The "square-round" tomato developed at U.C., Davis, and in general the new varieties of tasteless, pulpy, nutritionless fruits and vegetables are the result.

The public underwrites agribusiness' research. Of U.C. mechanization research funding for fiscal years 1975-76, only 6.5 percent was supplied by the agricultural industry. The rest of the money came from public funds: 69.5 percent from the state general fund, 6.4 percent from the federal government, and 17.6 percent from marketing order money.

The taxpayer pays twice for state-supported farm research. He pays, first, when public funds are used to develop the machines with no thought for the men and women whose jobs are wiped out; he pays again when these once gainfully employed workers turn to the state for support and the public is forced to absorb the social costs of mechanization.

The displacement of 120,000 farm workers due to mechanization will raise the California unemployment rate by 1.2 percent. Recent studies and testimony before the Joint Economic Committee of Congress and the House Subcommittee on Crime tie an unemployment rise of 1 percent to an increase in a myriad of social problems, including suicides, mental hospital admissions, crime, alcohol abuse, cardiovascular disease, infant and maternal mortality, automobile accidents, and a substantial loss of state and federal revenue.

Mechanization has been a problem for farm workers for many years. The first shock came in cotton more than twenty-five years ago. As early as 1950, a third of California's cotton crop was harvested by machines. By 1964, 97 percent of the state's crop was mechanized.

Some 100,000 workers found jobs in the cotton fields, more than were employed in cotton than in any other single crop. By the late 1950s, thousands of families who relied on cotton harvesting for their livelihood were left without jobs or a future. Today, in such west San Joaquin Valley farm communities as Corcoran, Hanford, Huron and Mendota, there are thousands of workers who were laid off by the cotton machines and never able to find new jobs. Their children, an entire generation, were raised in these hamlets of unemployment, unable to find work and subsisting on welfare.

Sugar beets, almonds and most of the field crops were also completely mechanized, leaving in their wake thousands of farm workers with nowhere to turn and nothing to look forward to except lives of misery and poverty. These workers learned that mechanization grabs your dignity as well as your job.

We knew mechanization was a serious problem, but the union was too busy trying to get organized and fighting for its life against agribusiness to tackle the mechanization question. But after the California Agricultural Labor Relations Act was passed in 1975, and

collective bargaining gains were slowly made, the leadership of the union began to see the mechanization issue as the most inevitable battle.

First we tried to deal with the problem in contract negotiations, but there was no uniformity, and it was difficult to expect an employer who agreed with us to compete with other growers in the industry. Next we tried to talk to growers about their responsibility to the workers who contribute so much to building up the wealth of their ranches but are often left stranded when machines are imported. We were unsuccessful.

Then we tried legislation. In the spring of 1977 we introduced two bills written by state Assemblyman Art Torres. One measure required that social impact studies be conducted before public money was spent for mechanization research. A companion bill created a state fund to assist and compensate farm workers displaced by machines. Revenue would be collected through a tax on those who directly profit from mechanization. Both bills were defeated in committee.

An administrative requirement on U.C., similar to the social impact study legislation, was vigorously opposed by the university in legislative budget hearings. The bills will be reintroduced in revised form during the current legislative session.

At the union's Third Constitutional Convention last August in Fresno, the delegates unanimously passed a resolution committing the union to an all-out drive on mechanization. After the convention, the UFW National Executive Board developed a plan to implement the workers' resolution.

We kicked off the campaign with four daylong union-sponsored conferences organized throughout the state in February. More than 2,000 union members and active supporters attended the seminars. They heard union leaders and staff detail the extent of the problem and participated in workshops where they contributed their ideas on how the UFW could best implement its campaign. At each conference, farm workers and city supporters alike pointed to the need to focus attention on U.C.'s research role.

The year after passage of the 1975 Farm Labor Law, U.C.'s Division of Agricultural Sciences produced a pamphlet entitled "Labor Management in California Agriculture: A Practical Guide." Questions posed and answered by the pamphlet included: "Stopping the union is a big job. How could we go about it?" "What about making sure I don't hire pro-union workers?" "All this [the law] is a lot of trouble for the short time every year I need a lot of labor. Maybe I should just mechanize and forget labor problems?"

The pamphlet carried a note saying it was designed for growers who had been unable to attend U.C. Division of Agricultural Sciences classes on the new law.

U.C. Extension offered a class to growers in 1977 on the union and the legal aspects of union representation elections. The *Woodland Daily Democrat* reported (March 31, 1977): "A group of California growers . . . got a lesson in combatting unions at U.C. Davis Extension. Farm Employers Labor Service Manager George

Daniels explained how to wage psychological warfare against farm workers' unions battling for the vote of agricultural workers in union certification elections. . . . Daniels explained how to get around ALRB. (Agricultural Labor Relations Board) rules if growers found it necessary."

Given this history, was the university's rapid drive to mechanize California farms triggered by the recent successes of the farm workers' movement? In the two and a half years since passage of the law, our union, after winning secret ballot elections, has signed more than 100 contracts with growers. Negotiations, at varying stages of progress, are underway at another 100 ranches, and our union is awaiting certification as bargaining agent at yet another fifty companies. Despite problems with enforcement and maladministration of the Act, the law is alive and functioning, and free collective bargaining is a reality for farm workers, at least in California.

Since it was founded nearly sixteen years ago, the union has achieved some success in raising wages and improving working conditions for farm workers in California. More important, we have destroyed the myth of grower invincibility; farm workers are no longer afraid to stand up for their rights.

The University of California's Kendrick is not the first person to call the farm workers losers. The workers have met such contempt before when they faced seemingly insurmountable odds. And they managed not only to survive but to prevail. □

## LETTERS (Continued from page 322)

warden's office. Reference to the rattrap was also a fabrication, as my assistant was setting a mousetrap and he will attest to the fact he has never set a rattrap while employed at this facility. . . .

At the close of the article, in describing the electric chair, Mr. Kaplan indicated there is hot water pumped to the head to impede searing. His statement to the afore-stated is a complete fabrication of his imagination, as there is no running water or plumbing contained in the death chamber or is water used as he indicated. The direct quote used, "We're all ready to go, hallelujah! It's coming back" is only truthful in reference to the operational condition of the electric chair. The word "hallelujah" is not a word used by me and was certainly not used in his presence. At no time did I state, "It's coming back," as the death penalty is a fact of state law.

In the interest of brevity I have limited my comments to the most outstanding discrepancies in Mr. Kaplan's article. *Nicholas Mellas, Assistant Warden, Operations Stateville Correctional Center*

### New York City

I am flattered that Warden Mellas has taken the time to confirm the major points of my article by presenting this minor bill of particulars as "the most outstanding discrepancies." Nowhere does he take issue with my portrayal of Stateville as a violent, overcrowded, gang-ridden, and unsanitary prison, with wholly inadequate work and training programs, medical and food services, and staff. I stand by my article in all respects but one: had I spent more time at Stateville, I am confident that I would have learned to distinguish a rattrap from a mousetrap.

*Jay L. Kaplan*

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