

# Ghosts strike Goldwater ranch

Debra Preusch

**By Tom Barry**  
**EL MIRAGE, ARIZ.**—The large land-holdings of Goldmar, Inc., and the Arizona Citrus Company have long been the stronghold of Republican power and anti-labor politics in Arizona's Maricopa County. The irrigated lemon and orange groves, which stretch for miles from the suburbs of Phoenix to the desert mountains, have provided the money base for conservative politicians who have given this state one of the worst farm labor bills in the country, kept it a "right to work" state, and elected conservative representatives like Barry Goldwater to political office.

Monday, Oct. 3, growers here had their previously secure power shaken by an angry group of farmworkers. Two hundred illegal Mexican migrants stopped picking fruit at Goldmar's 3,000-acre Arrowhead Ranches and demanded: a \$3.00 an hour minimum wage, daily payments, latrines in the fields, trash pick-ups at their labor camps, blankets and tents, medical care and running water.

Supporting the striking illegals was the Maricopa County Organizing Project (M-COP), a non-profit group formed earlier this year to get better living and working conditions in the farm country surrounding the tiny town of El Mirage.

Every year for the last 20, migrants have come to the Phoenix area to find piece work in the citrus groves. They come from small mountain villages in the Mexican states of Guerrero, Guanajuato, Queretaro and Nyarit.

## Ghosts of the orchards.

Prior to this strike, the presence of the thousands of illegal citrus pickers had been largely ignored by the Phoenix press, covered up by the government and denied by the growers. Their desperate living conditions, low wages and exploitation by agribusiness have remained guarded secrets for two decades.

But this year, encouraged by M-COP organizers, the men local people call the "ghosts of the orchards" broke the silence about their lives and—in what may be a first in American labor history—hundreds of illegal workers went on strike.

Terrified of the Border Patrol (La Migra), victims of unregistered labor contractors who often rob them, and treated unmercifully by their foremen, the Mexican migrants felt they had little to lose by confronting the citrus growers publicly.

During their annual stay of five months the illegals make the citrus trees their home. Never coming out from the cover of the luxuriant fruit trees, the pickers find dubious shelter in makeshift tents of old canvas, plastic and orange crates. Over wood fires the field hands cook their meals of frijoles and tortillas; they live without running water, sanitation facilities and contact with the world outside the trees. At Arrowhead pickers receive 60 cents per bag of citrus, which, despite hard work, means less than \$2.00 an hour.

## Border Patrol and sheriff raids.

At Goldmar the striking illegals were hit by a Border Patrol raid Oct. 4, the second day of the strike.

Coming onto the ranch with four cars and an airplane, the Border Patrol picked up 18 of the strikers, including one prominent organizer. Fleeing workers were arrested and sent back to Mexico the same day.

After the Border Patrol came the Maricopa County Sheriff's department, with orders to arrest M-COP members, accused by owner Steve Martori of trespassing on Goldmar property. Deputies also threatened to arrest all the workers involved in the work stoppage on charges of criminal trespass. M-COP organizers Lupe Sanchez and Jesus Romo were arrested and taken to the county jail in downtown Phoenix, 25 miles away.

## Temporary end.

The third day of the strike, Oct. 5, M-COP and the workers decided to call a



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temporary end to the strike.

In a statement made while being arrested at Goldmar that day, Jesus Romo told the deputies: "Goldmar, the Border Patrol and the Sheriff's department are in collusion to harass the workers and the labor organizers, all in a blatant attempt to kill this strike."

The Sheriff's department is denying the workers the right to receive visitors. It is denying them the right to freedom of speech and assembly by interfering and denying them access to visitors from the outside."

"The workers have asked for blankets and bathrooms and what they get is raids," added M-COP organizer Caryl Sanchez.

Lupe Sanchez, a former UFW organizer and town magistrate for El Mirage, also charged that the growers had called in the police to break up the strike and scare the workers. "We have a right to be there. Arrowhead is a labor camp where the workers live. The Goldwaters and the Martoris want us out of there so they can send foremen in to intimidate the workers. The foremen go in at night, wake the men up and tell them Migra will pick them up the next day if they stay off work."

## Workers still have rights.

M-COP succeeded in getting a temporary restraining order in federal court Oct. 7 allowing them access to the fields and giving workers the assurance that they could not be evicted from their camps without eviction procedures. In issuing the order U.S. District Court Judge Carl Muecke told the Arrowhead lawyers that the temporary labor camps—no matter how makeshift—were the legal residences of the field hands. Just because growers force their employees to live so

minimally did not mean workers lack constitutional and statutory rights, said the judge. Muecke also said he may ask the FBI to investigate M-COP's charges that the Border Patrol and county deputies were used for strike-breaking purposes.

Armed with the restraining order and backed by the demonstrated unity of the farmworkers, M-COP has gone back to the citrus rows to organize another work stoppage if Goldmar management will not meet their modest demands. Workers in surrounding ranches are also preparing to walk out if similar demands are not met by ranch owners.

## Concessions.

By Oct. 9 the Arrowhead growers had begun to make some concessions to the migrant demands, building latrines and collecting trash from the camps. Company foremen had also come around to the scattered labor camps, asking the now-organized workers what all they want. The men asked for a cook house, a refrigerator, and \$1.00 per bag of lemons.

Negotiations are currently underway at several area ranches with a negotiations team of M-COP organizers and a committee of three migrants.

Calling the first work stoppage a success, Lupe Sanchez said, "The Arrowhead work stoppage was only the first of a series of strikes planned for this area. Work stoppages are being planned for other ranches next week, with similar strikes in the onion and lettuce fields later this month."

Located in an office next to the United Farm Workers in the Chicano migrant workers community of El Mirage, M-COP is also organizing a food and clothing drive to support the workers during

the strikes. Without work the men find it hard to pay the jacked-up prices at the convenience and company stores at the ranches, making the food support critical to the success of the organizing efforts.

## Hit-and-run operation.

M-COP has only indirect connections with the UFW, which is currently concentrating on strengthening existing labor contracts in California.

UFW field organizer Daniel Morales said the UFW has only one existing contract in Arizona but hopes to win more when eight Teamster contracts expire later this year. He explained that the UFW would be organizing only at Arizona companies that also had farming operations in California.

Morales described the work stoppages by the illegal citrus workers as a "hit-and-run" operation and was not optimistic that unions could be formed by the illegal workers. He is optimistic, however, that M-COP and the workers can succeed in raising wages and bettering conditions at the camps. He said conditions at the citrus orchards were the worst he has seen in the country and that if wages were increased for the illegals, all the farmworkers in Maricopa County will benefit.

In another development U.S. Attorney Michael Hawkins said that he would not prosecute growers for harboring aliens simply because they improved living conditions at the camps, something the growers had told M-COP they were worried about.

## You can always fight.

Summing up the experience of their first week's efforts, Anastasio Tello said, "The Mexican people are among the most

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## LABOR

# Labor law reform wins big in House

By Dan Marschall

Organized labor reversed its legislative losing streak Oct. 6 when the House of Representatives approved its proposals to significantly reform the nation's labor laws. Key provisions of the bill, cleared by a 257-163 margin, remained intact, despite concerted efforts by business groups and Republican congressmen to delete them.

The victory followed intensive lobbying efforts by organized labor, including a grass-roots mail campaign, and is the first concrete achievement of labor's newly-formulated strategy of building coalitions with women's, minority, environmental, religious and consumer organizations.

Passage of the bill, which assists unions in organizing workers by speeding procedures of the National Labor Relations Board and punishing recalcitrant employers, is said to bolster labor's developing left wing—those young unionists and international officials who advocate greater attention to organizing and allying with non-labor constituencies.

The Senate has held preliminary hearings on similar legislation but is not expected to vote on it until February 1978.

## Drawing the line.

"Labor was very successful in creating the impression that this bill was really important," comments a congressional staffer. The AFL-CIO reportedly put out the word that any Congress person who voted against it would not receive AFL-CIO funds in primary battles next year.

"We drew the line on this one," says Don Stillman, United Auto Workers public relations director. "This was an issue that no matter how Congressmen voted on other bills, no matter how many gold stars they had received from the AFL-CIO, that if they weren't with us on this issue, we wouldn't be with them next November."

Support from the Carter administration, obtained after extensive negotiations with AFL-CIO representatives, also enhanced the bill's prospects. Removed were several especially controversial provisions—including the repeal of section 14(b) of the Taft-Hartley Act and a section that would allow union certification, without a ballot election, if 55 percent of the workers in a bargaining unit signed cards—that business intended to stress in order to kill the entire measure.

"The ability to move it quickly prevented them from getting up a full head of steam. We clearly had the initiative," explains the congressional staffer. Opponents had a relatively short time—about three months—to lobby against a complex bill. They also failed to paint it as legislation that would benefit only the narrow interests of the "union bosses," a successful tactic in their defeat of common situs picketing last March. Its broad base of support gave new representatives, who have voted down other labor proposals, more leeway to approve this package.

## Illegals

Continued from page 3.

humble and easy going people in the world, but once they realize that something must be done, they will do it even if it means death. Nothing will get in their way; the Mexican people are very brave.

"They ask me why I would want to fight this company and perhaps lose my job forever. I said that my job was not important to me: the truth is more important than any other thing. We are not doing this for ourselves but for those who come after us.

"Some of the other workers have told me: 'I can't fight, this is not my country,

## Business division, labor lobbying.

In addition some sectors of the "business community" were reportedly reluctant to strongly oppose the bill. While the National Association of Manufacturers and the Chamber of Commerce fought it from the beginning, the highly influential Business Roundtable remained neutral until mid-September.

This delay was partially the result of labor's emphasis that the bill would hurt only employers who used illegal tactics to keep unions out. The business groups who opposed it thus placed themselves in the same camp as firms like the J.P. Stevens Company, the Southern textile company that has viciously fought unionization for over 20 years.

## The new labor law will aid organizing in the South.

## Labor's coalition strategy with women's and civil rights groups was key to victory.

Though an ineffective business campaign was one reason for the bill's adoption, the primary factor was the sophisticated lobbying and promotional work of organized labor. They won the backing of 25 prominent environmentalists along with groups like the National Organization for Women, Ralph Nader's Congress Watch, the NAACP, and the Central Conference of American Rabbis.

The contours of the campaign took shape after the situs picketing debacle. AFL-CIO president George Meany instructed his aides on the necessity to build the broadest possible coalitions in support of their legislative goals, an approach that had been advocated by labor leaders such as UAW president Doug Fraser and Machinists' head William Winpisinger, among others.

This strategy became evident in the formation of the Coalition for a Fair Minimum Wage and in organizing for Full Employment Week.

In April the AFL-CIO created the Labor Law Reform Task Force, headed by Vic Kamber, former research director of the Building and Construction Trades Dept., to spearhead the campaign. With a one-year budget of \$800,000, the task force published a weekly newsletter, produced 100 copies of a film sent free to state federations, and mobilized a corps of 600 unionists in every congressional district to generate grass roots pressure on legislators.

## Getting the information out.

"Our main job was getting out the information," says Doris Hardesty, task

the owners of the ranch didn't send for me. It's my own fault that I am here.' But I have told them: 'What do you mean you can't fight for your rights? Of course you can. You have the same rights here as you do in Mexico. You have a right to your possessions and your earnings, and you have the right to live without fear of the Migra. You don't have to hide yourself in the bushes forever in fear!'"

With the spirit and strength of many workers living in the trees like Anastasio Tello, the fields of agribusiness across the country may soon test ripe for a new kind of labor organizing.

The Maricopa County Organizing Project can be contacted at P.O. Box 919, El Mirage, Ariz. 85335.

Tom Barry is on the staff of Seers Rio Grande Weekly in Albuquerque.



In 1966 RCA moved its color television production from Indiana to Memphis. Five years later, they closed the plant and moved operations to Taiwan.

force staff member in charge of community contacts. "Once people understood what labor law reform was all about, it was easier to get support. The story of human suffering at places like J.P. Stevens really did make a difference."

In early July the AFL-CIO briefed lawyers and lobbyists of international unions, many of which sent special representatives to lobby for the bill. Teams of unionists, including members of the Teamsters, the National Education Association and others not affiliated with the AFL-CIO, then held briefing sessions with Representatives.

Some internationals organized their own campaigns. The UAW, calling the bill their "number one priority," utilized up to three-quarters of their community action staff in lobbying for the bill in Washington and around the country. When rank and filers came to the capital for regional conferences, they spent much of the time convincing elected officials of the need for labor law reform.

The Machinists union generated

250,000 pro-reform postcards from all but four congressional districts. "It's all on the line on this one," said Winpisinger. "This is not a litmus test; it's the absolute test."

The campaign culminated with an Oct. 4 dinner sponsored by Americans for Justice on the Job, an AFL-CIO-initiated coalition of about 50 organizations. Over 1,500 persons heard speeches from Vice-President Walter Mondale and other luminaries, again spotlighting the importance attached to the bill by labor.

By the third day of House debate the pattern was so clear that one employers group put out an advanced statement pledging to "redouble our efforts to see that this bill is defeated in the Senate."

"This issue is basic and gained a lot of support from civil rights groups and the women's movement," concludes Stillman. "The important thing coming out of this is that those links, where they've been broken, are gradually coming back together. That's the key to progressive legislation in this Congress."

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