

AGRICULTURAL WORKERS IN MEXICO AND THE UNITED STATES*

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ABSTRACT

This article presents the results of extensive interviews with agricultural workers and leaders in Sinaloa, Mexico, and in California. It shows how individual workers understand their social conditions and reveals their strategies for agitation and resistance, as well as the alliances that they seek to form. The interviews explore agricultural workers' demands such as those for higher wages, access to social services, freedom of association (including the right to unionize), land reform, and the legalization of immigration status. The article documents how workers react to obstacles that thwart their attempts to organize and advocate for their rights. In particular, it reveals both similarities and differences between the strategies of workers in the United States and the strategies of their Mexican counterparts. This research is placed in its social and historical context and used to provide recommendations for addressing agricultural workers' grievances.

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INTRODUCTION

Researchers have written relatively little on the social movements of agricultural workers in the Mexican Northwest and the American Southwest. Despite agricultural workers' central place in rural Mexican civil society, there have been surprisingly few studies documenting their perspectives and struggles (Boege, 1977; Carton, 1986; Köppen, 1985, 1989; Paré, 1981; Posadas Segura, 1983, 1985, 2002, 2005; Posadas Segura & García, 1985). Similarly, though a large number of Mexicans in the United States work in agriculture, few studies have examined them as individual agents (Besserer, 1999).

Agricultural workers are embedded in a complex web of social, economic, legal, and ideological forces. The demands of employers, as well as governmental and legal institutions, mediate workers' actions, often serving as mechanisms of repression. Furthermore, agricultural business's structural reliance on seasonal labor creates obstacles to effective social action (Basok, 2002; Miles, 1987; Suárez-Orozco, 1998). In the United States, workers also confront restrictive migration policies that place many of them in a state of perpetual insecurity and marginalization (Gleeson, 2010; Heyman, 1998; Massey, Durand, & Malone, 2002; Yamamoto, 2007).

Studies of social movements have traditionally emphasized the role of social classes, paying limited attention to the individuals that make up these classes (Marx, 1992). In contrast to studies that primarily engage with structures of class, gender, and/or race (Hayduk, 2009; Otero, 1999a), this investigation examines the attitudes of individual workers. Previous fieldwork has targeted workers from Northwest Mexico (mainly Sinaloa and Baja California), as well as from the Southwest United States. This investigation builds on the seminal contributions of other scholars (Brooks & Fox, 2002; Davis, 2003; Fox, 2004; Kearney, 1999; Kiy & Woodruff, 2005; Krissman, 1996; Mares, 1991; Martin, 1989; Martínez Saldaña, 2004; Mines, 1998; Palerm, 1991, 2006; Rivera-Salgado & Escala Rabadán, 2004; Vélez-Ibáñez, 1996, 1999; Villarejo et al., 2000; Wright, 1997, 2005).

The focus on individual attitudes is not meant to dismiss the importance of class-based analysis. Indeed, many workers are aware of the social conditions that restrict and repress them. Class consciousness informs the situation of these workers and guides their actions (Durand & Cuellar, 1989; Zemelman & Valencia, 1990). However, class divisions do not exhaust the forces that shape civil society. Social action is determined by complex interrelations between interest groups, emancipation movements targeting youth and women, ethnic groups, and organizations that defend human rights.

We present here two related but independent studies conducted with the help of students in the bachelor's and doctoral programs in the social sciences at the Universidad Autónoma de Sinaloa in 2005 and 2007. The investigation brings together the results of extensive questionnaires presented to workers in the

Culiacan Valley of Sinaloa and in central California. It aims to illuminate agricultural workers' demands, such as their demands for greater autonomy, higher wages, access to social services, freedom of association (including the right to unionize), and migratory policy reform. It also attempts to document some of the factors that thwart agricultural workers' attempts to organize and advocate for their rights. It shows how workers view and react to these obstacles.

This investigation attempts to draw attention to Mexican agricultural workers' perspectives on social movements in the Mexican Northwest and the American Southwest. What leads agricultural workers to mobilize? What are their demands? What alliances do they seek out? Who are the principal actors? What risks are involved? The goal is to better understand agricultural workers' social movements, as well as to formulate proposals and strategies that can guide efforts to improve working conditions. The hope is that this research will also contribute to the formation of international academic networks and present strategies to improve the plight of migrant farm workers in Mexico and the United States.

BACKGROUND

This work extends research by Posadas Segura on agricultural workers' social movements in Culiacan, Sinaloa, and San Quintín, Baja California (Posadas Segura, 2002, 2005). The migrant Mexican agricultural workers in Sinaloa and Baja California participate in the migrant route that links the Mexican Northwest and the American Southwest. Sinaloa and California have the most developed capitalist agricultural organization in their respective countries. They also contain the highest number of Mexican agricultural workers in their respective nations, totaling 207,000 in Sinaloa (INEGI, 2001) and more than a million in California (Villarejo et al., 2000)—36% of all agricultural workers employed in the United States (Aguirre International, 2005). In 2008, Sinaloa's agricultural production was valued at 32,357 million pesos, making it the principal agricultural economy in Mexico (SIAP, 2010). Agricultural workers make up more than 80% of the economically active population in the countryside.

Likewise, California is the primary agricultural economy in the United States. Two thirds of California's \$32,000 million from annual sales in agriculture are produced in the nearly 200 mile stretch of the Central Valley (Guzmán et al., 2007). The majority of the agricultural workforce is composed of Mexicans born in Mexico (93.5%). Another 4% is made up of Mexicans born in the United States (Mines, 1998). In all, 96% of the workers identify themselves as Mexicans, Hispanics, or Latinos; 8% of the workers are members of indigenous groups (Villarejo et al., 2000). Agricultural workers comprise 90% of the economically active rural population. Despite the vital contribution these workers make to the state's wealth, their households are among the poorest in California. In 2008, one in eight agricultural workers had a family income of less than \$15,000; nearly

half of the workers reported a family income of less than \$35,000 (Employment Development Department, 2008).

Internal migration in Mexico and international migration from Mexico to the United States have been closely linked for over a century (Massey et al., 2002; Suárez-Orozco, 1998). The structural changes in Mexico's economy beginning in the 1980s have moved Mexico from state-guided import substitution industrialization to an export-based strategy that emphasizes market liberalization (Lara, 1998a, 1998b; Lara & Carton, 1999; Otero, 1996; Suárez-Orozco, 1998). The new Agrarian Law introduced by President Carlos Salinas de Gortari in 1992 allowed the sale or rent of *ejidos* (cooperative farms established during the Mexican land reform program in the 1930s), the deregulation of the agricultural economy, and the elimination of many state subsidies and technical assistance, which had been necessary to enable farmers to compete in the international market (Otero, 1999b).

This has led to migration. Within Mexico, the primary movement of people has been from rural areas to urban centers (Díaz-Briquest & Weintraub, 1991). However, a large group of unemployed and underemployed migrants perform seasonal labor in the agricultural sector. In Northern Mexico, technological advancement and economic restructuring has facilitated the shift to labor-intensive agriculture such as the production of fruit, wheat, and cotton. This has greatly increased the demand for seasonal workers (Astorga Lira & Commander, 1989). Many of the workers in agriculture in Northwest Mexico come from poorer regions in Southern Mexico. Indeed, given the limited employment opportunities in their regions, some Southern villages depend almost entirely on remittances sent by migrants in the North (Barron & Rello, 2000). As well, many small landholders in the region are forced to supplement their income by working as day laborers.

In Northern Mexico, employers frequently violate workers' rights, a problem magnified by workers' economic vulnerability and dispersion. Workers generally receive little job security, low wages, and few employment or retirement benefits. Accommodation, when supplied, is often substandard. Though the work is hard and often leads to injury, employers often fail to provide medical care or they require that employees pay for it. Labor organizations face structural obstacles, including the temporary nature of employment, which makes it difficult to recruit workers, who depend on their employers and understandably fear retaliation if they join labor organizations (Posadas Segura, 2005; Vanackere, 1988).

Unfortunately, wages are rarely high enough to allow workers to save or to invest in local development. As a consequence, many seasonal workers in Northern Mexico aspire to migrate to the United States either through the H2A Program (Binford, 2004; Smith-Nonini, 2002) or through unauthorized channels. Indeed, the economies of Mexico and the United States have been closely linked for decades. The rapid growth of the United States over the last century has

created a strong demand for Mexico's mobile labor force. Mexican workers began to cross the border in response to labor shortages in agriculture when the United States joined the First World War in 1917. The war, combined with the Immigration Law of 1924 (which severely restricted migration from Europe), made Mexican labor even more crucial to the U.S. economy. Between 1911 and 1930, the American Immigration Registry reported a total of 678,000 legal Mexican workers. Many more entered through unofficial channels (Calavita, 1992; Tichenor, 2002).

Employers considered Mexican workers particularly attractive since they accepted low wages and generally returned home at the end of the season. If they chose to remain or demanded better working conditions or higher pay, the government could deport many of them for crossing the border illegally or overstaying their visas. This tactic was used to prevent Mexicans from participating in labor movements. For instance, Carey McWilliams, in his 1935 exposé of migratory farm labor in California, *Factories in the field. The story of migratory farm labor in California* describes how police, at the behest of the growers, broke the 1928 strike by cantaloupe pickers organized by the Mexican Labor Union of Imperial Valley (McWilliams, 2000).

In the 1940s, the Bracero guest worker program (1942–1964) brought 200,000 Mexican workers to Texas, California, Arizona, Arkansas, and New Mexico annually. The program reinforced the American economy's dependence on Mexican labor and also indirectly contributed to the entry of many more unauthorized seasonal workers. The Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) served the interests of agribusiness by controlling labor movements (Calavita, 1992; Heyman, 1998). When the program ended in 1965, the authorities maintained a relatively tolerant attitude toward unauthorized migration. Not until the 1986 Immigration Reform Control Act did the government move sharply toward increasingly restrictive immigration policies. Though the act permitted the legalization of 3 million undocumented immigrants, it also allotted more funds to border protection and placed (for the most part poorly enforced) sanctions on employers hiring illegal workers.

The North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), launched by the governments of Mexico, the United States, and Canada in January 1994, and the further neoliberal restructuring in Mexico and the United States provide the background for this study. NAFTA included provisions for the removal of agricultural tariffs over the following 14 years, exposing Mexican producers to heavily subsidized competition from the United States (and, to a lesser extent, from Canada). Economic, legal, political, cultural, and ideological obstacles prevented negotiation on unskilled labor migration (Delgado Wise & Cypher, 2007; Fernández-Kelly & Massey, 2007). Instead, President Clinton signed the 1996 Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigration Responsibility Act in an effort to curb illegal immigration. Congress voted to double the number of U.S. Border Patrol agents over five years, thus raising the numbers to 10,000, and mandated the

construction of fences in the most heavily trafficked areas of the U.S./Mexico border. In March 2003, the Department of Homeland Security absorbed the INS. The post-9/11 period has seen an increasingly militarized border, and the authorities have increasingly treated immigration as an issue of national security to the exclusion of its economic and social aspects (Winders, 2007).

The United States continues to depend heavily on Mexican labor, which makes the restrictive U.S. policy toward Mexican migration paradoxical, at least on the surface. Mexicans make up the largest group of migrants, but they are specifically targeted by restrictive migration policies (de Genova, 2004). In 2010, the Department of Homeland Security budgeted \$11,436 million for customs and border protection (Department of Homeland Security, 2010). Much of this budget is concentrated on policing the U.S.-Mexican border, including the multi-billion-dollar Secure Border Initiative (Archibold, 2010). The focus on preventing unauthorized migration at the U.S.-Mexico border neglects the many ways in which people living in the United States come to have unauthorized status (such as overstaying a visa) (Yamamoto, 2007). Comparatively few resources have been devoted to the enforcement of laws against businesses employing undocumented workers. Unsubstantiated claims about how migrants threaten national security, foster criminality, and undermine U.S. institutions come not only from extremist groups but from elected public representatives.

Government statements and actions are often symbolic, rather than genuinely aimed at curbing immigration. Though they may have devastating impacts on individuals—thousands of people have died crossing the desert since the implementation of Operation Gatekeeper (Cornelius, 2001)—they have not significantly curbed immigration levels. Rather, they have fostered criminal networks dedicated to smuggling people across an increasingly lethal border (Spener, 2004). Douglas Massey has suggested that the post-1965 immigration policy toward Mexico has created a *de facto* guest worker program characterized by the vulnerable status of migrants (Massey, 2003). United States employers benefit from migrants, who ensure the existence of a flexible, contingent workforce that can be controlled by the threat of deportation, does not demand unemployment benefits, and goes away when demand wanes (Heyman, 1998).

The distinction between authorized and unauthorized residence is not merely a means of controlling entry. Rather, it plays a defining role by extending the state's coercive power over most aspects of migrants' lives (Gina Núñez & Heyman, 2007; Wilson, 2000). Their undocumented status prevents them from enjoying the full range of rights and protections. It also leaves them open to exploitation (Yamamoto, 2007). Periodic raids and deportations wrench apart families and leave workers vulnerable and afraid. It is against this backdrop that workers answered the questionnaires and reflected on their plight, the alliances comprising their social movements, and their strategies for resistance.

METHODOLOGY

The present article draws on research carried out in Culiacán, Sinaloa, between June 27 and August 19, 2005, and in California between January 27 and February 17, 2007. It is based on a series of structured interviews with a combination of closed and short semi-open questions that measured the different concepts, observations, and variables investigated. These interviews provide the quantitative analysis presented below. A series of interviews with labor leaders in Mexico and California develop and supplement this analysis. All interviews were conducted in Spanish.

According to the Programa de Apoyo a Jornaleros Agrícolas (PAJA), the Culiacan Valley region within the state of Sinaloa has a population of approximately 180,000 agricultural workers. However, since July and August are periods of lower activity than at other times, it is difficult to know the precise population at the time of the interviews. Workers are divided between migrants and former migrants who now reside permanently in the area. They live in camps, workers' colonies in towns and cities, neighborhoods, and *ejidos*. The researchers visited 21 areas where workers live and gave 117 questionnaires to 54 (46%) men and 63 (54%) women. This figure coincides with PAJA's estimate of the gender distribution in the agricultural workforce. The ages of the workers were as follows: 34 (29.1%) children and minors under 14; 59 (50.4%) workers between 14 and 34; 20 (17.1%) workers between 34 and 64; and 4 (3%) workers who were 65 or older. Again, these numbers roughly replicate PAJA's official workforce statistics. Twelve agricultural businesses employed the workers who were interviewed. These included eight large businesses (classified by the Mexican Federal Labor Law as having more than 300 employees), three medium-sized businesses (defined as having between 100 and 300 employees), and one small business (with less than 100 employees).

In contrast, more than a million migrant agricultural workers and their families reside in California (Villarejo et al., 2000). The Department of Labor estimates that there are approximately 600,000 migrant agricultural workers in central California. (Again, as February is one of the months of lower activity, we cannot be certain exactly how many workers were present during our surveys.) The workers are divided between those who have settled in the area and circular migrants. They live in camps, on farms, and in neighborhoods composed largely of agricultural workers in towns and cities.

Investigators visited 27 separate locations between January 27 and February 17, 2007, and completed 99 questionnaires. It proved difficult to find people willing to respond to our survey. Due to a recent crackdown on undocumented immigration in California, workers were reluctant to participate. As a result, researchers interviewed people wherever they could: in public washrooms, corner stores, public parks, open air markets, and camps, as well as in homes located in rural areas, towns, and cities.

The 99 questionnaires were distributed equally between the San Joaquin Valley and the Sacramento Valley. In all, 75 (75.75%) of those surveyed were men, with 24 (24.25%) women, a figure that corresponds to the State of California's 2007 statistics on the agricultural workforce. The mean age of the workers is 34: 38 (38.3%) of the workers were between 15 and 34 years old; 52 (52.52%) were between 34 and 64 years old; and 5 (5.5%) were senior citizens between 65 and 102 years old. These figures represent the distribution found in the workforce.

THE RESEARCH IN SINALOA AND CALIFORNIA

The fieldwork in Mexico and the United States in 2005 and 2007 confirms that agricultural workers participate in diverse social movements. In general, rural migrants join social movements to pursue their labor demands. Among the principal triggers are employers' failure to pay owed wages, mistreatment, discrimination, and the desire to normalize migration status. The formation of social movements requires, first, a collectively perceived injustice; second, a means of effective communication among participants; and third, the capacity for organization (de la Garza, 1993; Posadas Seguro, 2005).

In the following sections, the article sets out and discusses some of the similarities and differences between the social movements of agricultural workers in Mexico and the United States and their causes, alliances, strategies, and other aspects.

Some Similarities between Workers in Mexico and the United States

The demands of workers in Sinaloa and California and their role in social movements. Workers in both Mexico and the United States emphasized labor-related demands. Only Mexican workers raised grievances related to land reform, while U.S. workers considered immigration reform to be the primary issue. The 2005 field investigation in Sinaloa, Mexico, shows that 77.94% of the workers surveyed had labor-related demands, including demands for higher wages, steady employment, education, and improved living conditions, access to medical and other public services, and better treatment by employers. A total of 11.76% presented other types of demands, such as demands for land, higher prices for crops, and access to credit and state subsidies, while 10.3% did not express any demands.

The field investigation of 2007 in California reinforces the prevalence of these grievances but also demonstrates the need for a binational labor agreement. In all, 91% of the workers had demands of a work-related and international

character such as those for higher wages and the regularization of their status, while 3% presented other types of demands, and 6% did not voice any demands.

The workers who were interviewed listed many of the principal reasons that could give rise to their participation in a social movement. In Sinaloa, low wages or the failure to pay wages motivated 63.1% of workers who had joined social movements, while 21.43% protested against substandard accommodation. A total of 9.52% reacted to mistreatment, while 3.57% acted in response to unreasonably hard or adverse working conditions, and 2.38% raised demands for adequate medical services. In California, 50% advocated for the legalization of their migration status, while 37.5% campaigned for higher wages or demanded that employers pay wages that were owed, and 12.5% responded to mistreatment and discrimination.

The organization and mobilization of resources in Sinaloa and California.

The surveys also identified important similarities in the organization and mobilization of resources in Sinaloa and California. Many workers lack formal ties to organizations that can help express their grievances. In Sinaloa, 47.01% of those interviewed said they did not belong to an agricultural, indigenous, or labor organization; 42.73% did belong to a union or other organization. In all, 10.3% of those interviewed either did not know whether they belonged to an organization or chose not to respond. In California, only 9.4% of workers were members of a union or similar organization. The low participation of the rural migrant workers in unions and in other civil society institutions raises concerns about restrictions on the right to freedom of association.

Aside from actual membership, there is a significant, though not overwhelming, difference in how workers identify with unions and similar organizations in Mexico and the United States. In Sinaloa, 52.86% of those interviewed identified with these organizations, holding that they defend their interests, while 47.14% reported the contrary.

Union leaders hold that workers identify with their organizations when their interests intersect with the union's mission. Cruz Cota Moreno, a Sinaloan delegate from Los Trabajadores del Campo affiliated with the Confederación de Trabajadores de México (CTM), pointed out that "Rural workers identify with organizations that suit them. When it is in their interest to participate in an organization, they recognize it." Similarly, José Zavala Aispuro, president of the independent El Sindicato Industrial, Obrero y Campesino de Sinaloa (STIOCS), observes that "Agricultural workers appreciate our organization, especially when it involves fighting an injustice." Nonetheless, the high rate of nonidentification raises concerns about the effectiveness and scope of these organizations.

In California, 40% of those surveyed positively identified with organizations that purported to support the rights of workers; 60% did not identify with these organizations on the grounds that they did not represent the workers'

interests. The 40% identification rate is noteworthy, considering that the majority of those surveyed are not union members.

Leonel Flores, coordinator of the *Coalición para los Derechos de los Inmigrantes del Valle Central* and activist in the *Unión de Ex-Braceros e Inmigrantes del Valle*, states that “Agricultural workers do identify with many independent and autonomous organizations that defend their interests despite their weaknesses, many of these economic and some political. But we believe that there are organizations that over the years have managed to establish themselves on many levels (UFW, OTAC, FIOB) with membership, media presence, a voice in state and national institutions, etc.”

Arturo Rodríguez, president of the United Farm Workers (UFW), affirms that “The owners and the government recognize that the workers have problems because the union pressures them [the owners and government]. Take the frost that just occurred that left the orange grove workers unemployed. The union and various nonprofit organizations that support agricultural workers play important roles resolving problems of work, health, housing, education and [providing] a voice in the media through *Radio Campesina*.”

According to Leoncio Vázquez, of the *Coalición para los Derechos de los Inmigrantes de Fresno* and leader of the Binational Front of Indigenous Organizations (known in Spanish as the *Frente Indígena Oaxaqueño Binacional* ([FIOB]), “From the FIOB’s perspective, we are attempting to organize people so that they know their labor rights and so that they have a place they can go to when these rights are violated. Here they will find people who speak their language. It’s like the voice of indigenous communities before the government. We organize, represent, and express their demands to the government.”

Migrant agricultural workers face enormous structural challenges caused by the nature of agricultural work. These include the seasonal nature of the work, the structure of rural business practices, and state and employer opposition to workers’ right to freedom of association. All this presents obstacles to the effectiveness of labor organizations. Nonetheless, agricultural workers show significant support for the creation of labor, social, political, and cultural organizations that could defend their interests.

In Sinaloa, 66.67% of those interviewed felt they could achieve their demands by organizing among themselves, as compared to the 33.33% who were skeptical as to whether this would make any difference. In comparison, 72% of the people interviewed in California agreed that they could take steps to improve their situation by organizing within their group. These statistics provide support for the view that agricultural workers will increasingly create groups that better represent their interests.

With regard to the potential of organization from within migrant groups, Luis Magaña, president of the *Organización de Trabajadores Agrícolas Valle Central de California* (OTAC), asserts that “When we organized ourselves as agricultural

workers to improve the conditions of tomato pickers, it was particularly important that we were from the same area or region and spoke the same language. By language, I'm not referring to the language spoken, but rather that we share the same interests. At the moment, we have a large number of Mexican agricultural workers. This provides us with something very important for the organization: among the undocumented workers are many very capable people, including very intelligent people such as teachers, who can undertake the necessary organization within their group to improve their conditions. At this time, we have a strong voice that takes into account the leadership we find there."

Strategies and tactics in Sinaloa and California. International migrant agricultural workers employ diverse tactics to mobilize and to pressure business or government to obtain their demands. The success of these strategies affects their level of satisfaction with social movements.

The questionnaire documents the level of agricultural workers' satisfaction with the results achieved by social movements; it finds that workers in Mexico and the United States express similar levels of satisfaction. In Sinaloa, 51.28% of those interviewed indicated that they had succeeded in having their grievances addressed and expressed satisfaction with the solution to the problems caused by their employers or the authorities; 25.64% indicated that they had failed and were thus unsatisfied with the results obtained, while 23.08% felt that they had reached a stalemate or that the changes brought about by the social movement had both positive and negative aspects.

José Zavala, an agricultural worker leader in Sinaloa, contends that "The agricultural workers are satisfied because they have won many battles for small benefits that are very important for them, such as wages, vacation time, bonuses [*aguinaldos*], and the construction of roads in their regions of origin." The indigenous agricultural worker organizer Ricardo Zárate says, "Now there is a doctor's office, though there is no doctor. There is running water, sewage, and bathrooms. I'm 75 years old, but I'm very happy because I see some results."

In California, 53.6% of those interviewed indicated success and satisfaction with the solutions to the problems caused by their employers or the authorities, while 46.7% indicated that they were unsatisfied with the results obtained. The fact that a slightly higher percentage of Californian workers expresses satisfaction reflects the workers' diverse demands, which are not limited to the normalization of their status. The levels of satisfaction and dissatisfaction of the agricultural workers are, however, directly related to the main causes of their social movements: wages in Mexico and legalization in the United States.

As Californian agricultural worker leader Arturo Rodríguez explains, "We're satisfied because, for example, we fought last year for a policy that protects the workers and obligates the employers to take care of workers affected by high temperatures (exceeding 90 degrees), which had caused six deaths among the grape pickers in the Central Valley. We are also attacking basic problems such

as unemployment with the Agricultural Job Opportunities, Benefits and Security Act [AGJOB] put forward and negotiated by the UFW with the employers and other sectors over the last six years.”

Dolores Huerta, cofounder of the UFW along with Cesar Chávez and current president of the Dolores Huerta Foundation, reports similar success: “When we undertook a campaign to raise wages, we used direct action through marches and the media. The employers ended up accepting our demands and raising wages.” Indigenous agricultural worker leader Leoncio Vázquez is somewhat more pessimistic: “Despite perhaps not having a great impact, we have had public mobilizations and press conferences to demand the resolution of problems indigenous workers face. We have sometimes won, and sometimes they have ignored us. But we continue with our movement.”

The role of agricultural business and political repression in Sinaloa and California. Agricultural businesses usually confront the demands and social movements of agricultural workers in a united and organized manner. These businesses typically enjoy the support of the state and of political elites. But as we can see from the quotations above, that support is not total, so they are obliged to resolve at least some of the workers’ claims.

The fieldwork in Mexico and the United States in 2005–2007 affirms that agricultural workers generally perceive state intervention as a form of political repression favoring the employer. In Sinaloa, 63.46% of workers considered state intervention a form of political repression, while 36.54% denied this. In California, 66.7% said that the intervention of the state is a form of political repression, while 33.3% disagreed.

This makes it clear that workers perceive political and legal intervention as a tool that furthers the ends of agribusiness, rather than as a means of solving the problems that the workers face. As a result, relations between the agricultural workers and the state are poor in both Mexico and the United States.

Alliances between agricultural workers versus alliances with business and government. Groups of agricultural workers usually prefer to form alliances with each other. The fieldwork in Mexico and the United States demonstrates that solidarity among agricultural workers is the principal strategy. The vast majority of respondents emphasized the need for unity among workers. Nevertheless, this need is only sometimes met. In Sinaloa, 51.25% of the workers interviewed agreed that the agricultural workers do in fact unite to fight for their demands, but 48.75% argued the contrary.

In this respect, agricultural worker leader José Zavala suggests, “Sinaloan agricultural workers unite with whomever necessary to resolve their problems. The problem is when workers come from the rest of the country. But it is possible and necessary to unite permanent and temporary workers, both migrants and locals. They face the same problems, the same pathetic wages. If we don’t unite, then we will continue in the same situation and our employers will do whatever

they want. The employers own huge territories. The same ones who own the balers where the permanent employees work in the shade are those who hire the temporary workers in the fields under the sun. Therefore, as comrades we have the same cause.”

Similarly, agricultural workers’ leader Ricardo Durán says, “The migrant agricultural workers united with the Sinaloan residents because they come from far away. They agree with us. If something happens and they have problems, they come to us for help.”

In California, 45% of the workers interviewed thought that the agricultural workers united to fight for their demands; 55% identified considerable disunity. In Sinaloa and Mexico, the risk of losing one’s job contributed to the reluctance to unite to address grievances. For undocumented workers in California, the threat of deportation was an added major factor.

One of the principal causes of dissent and disunity among agricultural workers in California is the presence of undocumented workers, which fragments the workforce. The possibility of a guest worker program adds a third category of workers with another status and different interests. Agricultural workers’ leader Luis Magaña reflects that “The opportunities for organization are good if we have a political plan to remove the fear of organizing. There are many laborers in the field and a limited group of workers who control the labor supply. The opportunities are poor if we don’t include recent arrivals and only organize those who can legally work. Then we will have union contracts with the ranches, but the undocumented migrants without the right to work will remain marginalized and we will end up divided.”

Arturo Rodríguez notes that “The marches on May 1, 2006, froze the agricultural industry in California. Nobody worked: it was a tremendous statement. We combined negotiation with activism, pressuring the owners and the government to act.” Dolores Huerta clarifies: “People do unite, but it’s not easy, particularly with new immigrants. They need to act with responsibility and know that we aren’t here to do their work. They need to organize to do their work.”

Finally, Leoncio Vázquez states that “More than on any other subject, there is a great deal of unity [on migration reform] between immigrants, no matter people’s origin, the country they come from, or the language they speak. We always see more of a unified response when dealing with migration reform. Regarding other concerns, there is less unity, depending on the interests in play and the interests of each person.”

Attitudes toward alliances with educational institutions. Migrant agricultural workers attempt to ally themselves with educational and other institutions to solve their general and specific problems. The field investigation in Mexico and the United States in 2005–2007 demonstrates that workers search for alliances with educational institutions. In Sinaloa, 73.96% of migrant workers mentioned that they should liaise with universities and/or other educational institutions to

fight for their interests; 26.04% thought that they should not pursue these connections. In California, 88.9% of migrant workers thought they should liaise with the universities and/or other educational institutions, while 11.1% rejected this strategy.

Universities have a number of functions, including research and the provision of legal and practical advice. In many cases, the student body and members of the faculty are engaged in activism. For example, the Universidad Autónoma de Sinaloa has achieved some notoriety through its participation in many strikes and social movements led by agricultural workers, particularly in connection with the demand for a fair wage. There is also the possibility of building international alliances between research groups in universities to influence public policy and law.

Some Differences between Workers in Sinaloa and California

As we have seen, workers in Mexico and the United States express similar attitudes on various issues, although they do express some differences. Here we draw attention to two particular differences. First, we find that workers in the United States are far more open to alliances with (primarily Protestant) religious institutions. Second, workers in Mexico are far more skeptical about the role of political parties and legislation than are workers in the United States.

The Catholic Church and the Protestant churches. In Mexico, where the Catholic Church is predominant, agricultural workers mostly repudiate possible alliances with it. In Sinaloa, 46.96% of the agricultural workers thought that they should not seek help from the church to defend their claims, while 33.33% said that the church has a role to play, and 17.20% expressed other considerations. However, in the United States, where Protestant churches are more prevalent, workers search for possible faith-based alliances to achieve their demands. In California, 88.9% of the agricultural workers believed that they should work with the churches to defend their claims, while only 11.1% did not.

Mexican history and culture endorse a strong separation between the church and the state that limits the church's public function in the minds of many citizens. In the United States, the Protestant churches and the Catholic Church play a major philanthropic role, providing workers with food, housing, education, and medical services, as well as advocating for their rights. Since many workers do not have recourse to official governmental channels, churches play a major role in grassroots activism.

Grassroots movements versus political parties. The field investigation in Mexico and the United States in 2005–2007 shows a remarkable difference in support for grassroots organizations as compared to measures to seek out members of political parties to realize their demands. In Sinaloa, 62.07% of the agricultural

workers who were interviewed believed that they did not need the help of political parties to succeed, while 37.93% thought that political parties ought to play a role. However, in California, 64.3% of those surveyed believed the engagement of political parties was necessary for success, while 35.7% dissented. Thus, in Sinaloa, workers who (at least in theory) possess full political rights envisage political parties as having a lesser role. In California, where workers lack the right to vote, political actors are thought to have a more important role.

The legislative branch of government. The field investigation illustrates that agricultural workers in Mexico do not feel well represented by the legislative branch of government. In Sinaloa, 63.64% of migrant workers indicated that they were not properly represented at the legislative level, though 36.36% responded that legislation did have a positive role in furthering their causes. In California, the opposite was seen: 62.5% of migrant workers believed that members of the legislature did properly represent them, as opposed to 37.5% that dissented. The efforts of some members of Congress on behalf of migrant workers have led to optimism about a political solution.

SUMMARY AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Low and unpaid wages are the primary causes of social movements in Mexico, whereas the undocumented status of workers has a principal role in the United States. Workers find that agribusiness contests their demands with a united and organized front, often with state support. Workers in Mexico perceive state intervention primarily as a form of political repression rather than as a force that represents them. Many workers in the United States express optimism about the possibility of a solution to their grievances through legislation. Despite this optimism, a majority still regards the state as an instrument of repression. This reveals a depressing democratic deficit inherent in both societies. Furthermore, the majority do not belong to unions or other organizations that are the best means to advance their causes.

Despite this lack of membership, approximately half of those interviewed in Sinaloa and 40% in California identify with organizations that defend their demands. Two thirds of workers in Sinaloa and nearly three quarters in California believe that they can achieve results by organizing with other members of their groups. This bodes well for long-term solutions to their many grievances, including the need for a living wage, decent accommodation, safe working conditions, freedom from harassment, and, in the United States, the regularization of immigration status.

Agricultural workers in Mexico and the United States need a new social contract that recognizes their essential role in society. This will not come without a struggle. The workers confront historical and structural forces that exacerbate many of their grievances. With the current economic recession, the passage of Arizona's controversial Senate Bill 1070, and the drug-related violence in

Mexico's Northern states, the prospect for short-term progress looks bleak. Nonetheless, the conviction of many agricultural workers in Sinaloa and California that they can better achieve their goals by organizing among themselves is reason for optimism. Top-down solutions presented by researchers or politicians may inform the debate and contribute to a comprehensive solution, but they cannot replace grassroots agitation.

History teaches us that employers and the state oppose people's efforts to unionize, often with violence (Daniels 1981; McWilliams 2000). Mexico's unions have lost much of their political power under the neoliberal reforms begun under the Partido Revolucionario Institucional (PRI) during the 1980s and continued under President Fox and President Calderon's Partido Acción Nacional (PAN) government (Cravey, 1998, Otero, 2004; Samstad, 2002). Within the United States, the irregular status of many workers fragments the workforce and creates additional challenges. These are formidable but not insurmountable obstacles. They help us identify the strategies necessary for social change.

The investigation in Sinaloa and California showed that around four fifths of workers in both Mexico and the United States seek alliances with educational institutions. Researchers should continue to develop interdisciplinary and interinstitutional studies of Mexican agricultural workers working in the United States and in Mexico. Universities can provide independent research untainted by the partisan agendas that so often shape the debate. Effective political action requires an understanding of the shifts in the global economy. Moreover, studies of labor movements can identify effective strategies for agitation.

In Sinaloa, workers need strategies to confront a rapidly changing political and economic environment, largely brought on by the export-oriented, market friendly reforms. These have undermined many rural and agricultural organizations that traditionally had a voice under the corporatist system. Agricultural workers report a lack of confidence that the state represents their interests and a corresponding decline in petitioning activity (Holzner, 2007). The demise of corporatism and the one-party system has left a void for labor movements that has not yet been filled. Popular politics has retreated from broad, ideological questions aimed at transforming society to local issues confronting urgent problems of survival (Holzner, 2007).

Labor movements must form new alliances based on a larger vision that identifies common interests across social groups. In particular, opportunities exist for agricultural workers to unite with indigenous groups (Bartra & Otero, 2007) and for them to ally with labor movements around the world. Only independent organizations bound neither to the state nor to particular political parties can effectively represent the workers (Otero, 2004). Substantial reform will come only with the establishment of new institutions that grant agricultural workers an effective voice and resist the more devastating effects of the global market. The labor movement must also form transnational ties with broader social

movements searching for alternatives to neoliberal globalization. These institutions must take a broader, transnational perspective that addresses the ways in which international trade law and U.S. and international agricultural production impact the Mexican market and its workers.

Unions also have a major role to play in the United States. Rather than allowing mass migration to be framed as an economic threat to native-born workers—especially African Americans—it should instead be seen as presenting an opportunity for combating structural racism and economic exploitation (Hayduk, 2009). Happily, unions have come to realize the necessity of incorporating undocumented migrants into their agendas in order to uphold labor standards and to increase membership (Avci & McDonald, 2000). Immigrant workers and their descendants have assumed a prominent role in many major unions, and these have begun to recognize the need to build alliances between immigrants and native workers (Basok, 2008). These organizations include the United Farm Workers, the UFCW International, the Laborers' International Union of North America, and the AFL-CIO.

The most pressing issue is the large, vulnerable undocumented population. The United States' restrictive immigration policies and the current economic disparities between the United States and Mexico make clandestine migration unavoidable (Massey et al., 2002). In fact, increased border security has contributed to an even larger undocumented population, as workers choose to remain in the United States for longer periods of time rather than risk crossing the border. The United States needs to normalize the status of undocumented residents, moving them out of the exploitative, informal economy.

Normalization will be effective only if it is combined with sufficient opportunities for Mexicans to legally seek work in the United States. Otherwise, the structural dependence of U.S. agriculture on a Mexican workforce will simply lead to new waves of undocumented migrants. The Agricultural Job Opportunities, Benefits and Security Act (AgJOBS) combines regularization with an increase in the numbers of guest workers allowed employment in the United States. Though guest worker programs have well-documented problems (Basok, 2002; Cavalita, 1992; Smith-Nonini 2002), they are the best feasible option in the current political climate, especially if combined with union oversight that guarantees the equal treatment of temporary workers.

Mexico and the United States are mutually dependent, sharing the longest border in the world between a developing and a developed state. We have seen the human costs of largely futile enforcement. As Hispanics grow in political power and workers agitate for their rights, we hope for a more equitable solution. Agricultural workers in Mexico and the United States perform one of the most dangerous yet most important functions: the production of food. The U.S. economy depends on agricultural workers who make up the backbone of the economy. Arturo Rodríguez's reference to the May 1, 2006, marches protesting

against H.R. 4437, which would have criminalized undocumented migrants and those who provided aid to them, attests to the potential power of this sector. If agricultural workers in Mexico and the United States join forces, the long-term prospects for achieving their goals are promising.

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