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Success in Organizing, Failure in Collective Bargaining: The Case of Tomato Workers in Northwest Ohio, 1967-69

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Working Paper No. 12
March1991

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Abstract

Northwest Ohio is one of several areas in the Great Lakes region specializing in a variety of cash crops that historically require great influxes of migratory labor for brief periods of cultivation and harvesting. Bad economic conditions of migrant tomato pickers in northwest Ohio gave rise to their unionization between 1967-69. Baldemar Velasquez and the Farm Labor Organizing Committee (FLOC) made strong efforts at organizing them and succeeded in negotiating 21 contracts in 1968 and an additional 11 contracts in 1969. After the emergence of FLOC in 1967, the union had to press the case for free access to migrant camps, and had to go on strike before winning recognition and entering negotiations. Paradoxically, the successful organizing efforts produced collective bargaining agreements that the union eventually abandoned because they failed to remedy the low wages, irregular employment, and adverse working and living conditions. The theoretical frames of reference developed by Taylor (1977) and Craypo (1986) are used to explain and understand the union's organizing success and failed collective bargaining. The paper documents the major events surrounding the unionizing activities and also interprets this paradoxical outcome in farm labor relations.

Abstract

Northwest Ohio is one of several areas in the Great Lakes region specializing in a variety of cash crops that historically require great influxes of migratory labor for brief periods of cultivation and harvesting. Bad economic conditions of migrant tomato pickers in northwest Ohio gave rise to their unionization between 1967-69. Baldemar Velasquez and the Farm Labor Organizing Committee (FLOC) made strong efforts at organizing them and succeeded in negotiating 21 contracts in 1968 and an additional 11 contracts in 1969. After the emergence of FLOC in 1967, the union had to press the case for free access to migrant camps, and had to go on strike before winning recognition and entering negotiations. Paradoxically, the successful organizing efforts produced collective bargaining agreements that the union eventually abandoned because they failed to remedy the low wages, irregular employment, and adverse working and living conditions. The theoretical frames of reference developed by Taylor (1977) and Craypo (1986) are used to explain and understand the union's organizing success and failed collective bargaining. The paper documents the major events surrounding the unionizing activities and also interprets this paradoxical outcome in farm labor relations.

Success in Organizing, Failure in Collective Bargaining: The Case of Tomato Workers in Northwest Ohio, 1967-1969[1]

by

Rene Perez Rosenbaum[2]

Labor unions and strikes in U.S. agriculture seem insignificant in comparison to those of organized labor in other industries. For the most part, such activities in agriculture have been meager, sporadic, and scattered. But attempts to establish collective bargaining have been frequent and labor trouble widespread. The Industrial Workers of the World were active in organizing farm workers from 1910 to 1917. During the period 1930 to 1939

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[1]Acknowledgements: The manuscript is made possible by a post-doctoral fellowship from the Julian Samora Research Institute at Michigan State University. The author wishes to thank members of the Farm Labor Organizing Committee (FLOC), especially its former Secretary-Treasurer, Ray Santiago, for the access he provided to the numerous newspaper articles on FLOC. The author also wishes to thank Joseph Spielberg Benitez, Laura B. Delind, Sally Pratt and Maxine Baca Zinn for their comments on earlier versions of this paper.

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collective action in agriculture also played an important part of the larger labor movement: 275 strikes in 28 states and the District of Columbia involved nearly 178,000 farm workers (Jamieson, 1976). Again in the 1960s, hired farm labors engaged in extensive organizing, strike, and negotiating activities. The successful Delano, California grape field strike led by Cesar Chavez in 1965 rekindled national interest in agricultural unionism (Cohen, 1968). Farm worker organizing and unionizing activities emerged in Arizona, Florida, Michigan, New Jersey, New York, Oregon, Texas, Washington, Wisconsin, and Ohio.

While union activity in the 1930s was a defensive maneuver in that it coincided with sharp wage cuts (Martin, 1988), the farm worker movement of the 1960s had a more offensive posture, with overtones of a civil rights movement. Their persistent ranking at the bottom of the earning scale in the American labor force was a great impetus for farm workers in the 1960s to seek unionization. For example, while manufacturing employees had an average income of over $5,000 in 1965, the migrant farm workers followed far behind with only $802 (Erenburg, 1968). Indeed, their relative earnings declined from World War II until about 1964 (Taylor, 1977). With better wages, they sought better working and living conditions and a chance for equal representation under federal labor relations law ("First attempts," 1967).

This paper documents and interprets major events in the decade of the 1960s that surrounded unionizing activities at one agricultural labor market -- tomato field workers in northwest Ohio between 1967 and 1969. Northwest Ohio was one of several areas in the Great Lakes region specializing in a variety of cash crops that required "great influxes of migratory and casual labor for brief periods of cultivating and harvesting." (Sternsher, 1968)

Vegetable farms in northwest Ohio that grew tomatoes for commercial processing gave rise to the unionization of farm labor. Unionized workers went on strike before the agricultural union was recognized and negotiations could begin. The negotiations produced ineffective agreements that the union eventually abandoned. Paradoxically, successful organizing efforts produced collective bargaining agreements that didn't remedy the membership's low wages, irregular employment, and adverse working and living conditions.

This paper covers two contrasting approaches to explain and better understand (1) the union's organizing success, and (2) its apparent lack of collective bargaining strength. Considered first is Richard Wayne Taylor's work on the success of organizing hired farm workers. Discussed next is Charles Craypo's work on the conditions needed to attain effective collective bargaining outcomes after organization takes place. After that comes the first comprehensive,

primary source documentation of the major unionizing activities of tomato field workers in northwest Ohio. The paper then gives an analysis of the conditions that produced successful organizing but unsuccessful collective bargaining in this organizing and collective bargaining case. The final section briefly summarizes the paper's major analytical conclusions.

Organizational Factors and Sources of Union Bargaining Strength

Taylor's Approach

Taylor (1977) synthesized the literature concerned with the organizational factors in the farm labor market to develop a framework delineating those conditions that appear important in determining the unionizing potential of hired farm labor. His approach characterizes the pertinent factors under three headings: economic, government, and "other." Among the economic factors were the following: (1) attachment to farm labor force, (2) sex composition, (3) race composition, (4) age distribution, (5) skill level, (6) employment in the nonagricultural sector, (7) labor market structure, (8) vertical integration, (9) employer resistance, (10) concentration of workers, and (11) product demand conditions. The government category included the legislative and legal influences and the "other" category included the nature of union leadership and union and public support.

Taylor applied his approach to seven hired agricultural labor markets in the United States in which farm labor organizing activity had taken place since World War II. These labor markets included sugar workers in Hawaii, sugar workers in Louisiana, grape workers in California, lettuce workers in California, citrus workers in Florida, cucumber workers in Wisconsin, and vegetable workers in Texas. (Note that Taylor, who wrote in 1976, did not include tomato workers of northwest Ohio.) Using available information about the seven labor markets, he analyzed the effect of each organizational factor in an attempt to identify the key elements that influenced a union's success or failure in each of the seven markets. In Hawaii, California, and Wisconsin, where successful organizing had taken place, he found the following factors to be favorable: (1) concentration of workers in a given area, (2) vertical integration, (3) strong leadership, (4) homogeneous race composition, and (5) union and public support. In Hawaii and Wisconsin, unionization also met little employer resistance and was sanctioned by state legislation that give agricultural workers the right to organize. In Louisiana, Florida, and Texas, where organizational activity failed, the legislative and legal environments were unfavorable. Moreover, employer resistance generally was very strong and union and public support were lacking.

Craypo's Approach

In contrast to the approach developed by Taylor that explains organizational success or failure, the framework developed by Craypo (1986) explains union bargaining strength after organization. His analysis revolves around what he identifies as the sources of union bargaining strength. Five market and institutional conditions were crucial to establishing and maintaining union bargaining strength. Two of these determine the employers' ability to pay higher labor costs, the remaining three determine the union's ability to make the employers pay. The extent to which these conditions are met distinguishes weak from strong unions.

Craypo indicates that employers have greater ability to pay higher labor costs if (1) product market conditions permit them to pass on such costs in higher product prices without jeopardizing their profit margins or if (2) technical production methods enable them to offset higher money cost for labor with productivity increases. The necessary product market conditions are enabled by four types of industry structure:

1. Market power through industrial concentration
2. Spatial limitation
3. Regulatory rate-setting
4. Government contracts and subsidy (Craypo, p. 21)

The union's ability to make the employer pay higher costs first depends on the union's ability to organize the

relevant work force to strike effectively. Second, competitive unionism involving the relevant workforce must be avoided. Third is an institutional requirement to establish a bargaining structure to ensure that the economic terms and conditions of the relevant work force are negotiated in a single agreement. If more than one agreement exists, it is important that their economic provisions are identical or very similar. In effect, this third condition entails establishing a consolidated bargaining structure that is sufficient to take the wages out of competition. According to Craypo, this structure differs depending on the industry organization and production processes.

Major Events Surrounding the Unionizing Activities in Northwest Ohio Between 1967 and 1969

Ohio's tomato industry for commercial processing in 1968 consisted of approximately 1200 farmers who grew 30,800 acres of tomatoes under contract with approximately 20 processors. The state's tomato production area then as well as today, was concentrated in the northwest region, close to the producing areas of southeastern Michigan and northeastern Indiana. The Ohio production area is located in about 16 counties next to the western end of Lake Erie and extends primarily from Sandusky County west and south through Drake and Miami counties. Ohio's tomato production generally decreased in concentration as distance from the lake increased. Growers who belonged to the Ohio

Agricultural Marketing Association (OAMA), produced about 35 to 40 percent of the tomato acreage in the state. The growers who produced the remaining 60 to 65 percent of the acreage did not belong to any bargaining or marketing association. Of the approximately 20 tomato processors in the state, the six largest ones purchased about 85 percent of the state's total (Meier, 1969).

According to Meier (1969), Mexican-American farm labor first became a source of labor supply for northwest Ohio in the early 1940s. The region had begun to expand tomato production and individual growers found they could no longer rely on family and local labor to harvest their expanding crop. By 1968, well over 25,000 migrants traveled from Texas to Ohio each year (Iorio, 1968). They arrived in late April to prepare the fields for sugar beets, went to northern Michigan to pick cherries in mid-July, and returned to Ohio to pick tomatoes in mid-August.

The Emergence of FLOC-1967

Baldemar Velasquez, founder of the Farm Labor Organizing Committee (FLOC), began the organization of the tomato field labor market in September 1967. Baldemar was one of nine children in a former migrant family that settled in Ohio in 1954. He was born and lived during his youth in Pharr in the Rio Grande Valley of south Texas, home of many migrant farm workers that came to Ohio. Although the Velasquez family left the migrant stream, the parents and

children did not give up farm labor. While at Pandora-Gilboa High School in Ohio, Baldemar did field work every summer. While Baldemar was a 20-year-old junior at Bluffton College in Bluffton, Ohio he decided to do something about helping the migrants organize. Cesar Chavez and the organized migrant labor groups that were growing rapidly across the southwest provided him immediate inspiration. While a student activist at Bluffton College he was also influenced and supported by Dr. John Mecartney, professor of sociology. He followed the migrant stream into Wisconsin, where he met Jesse Salas, who was organizing workers in the pickle fields ("Youth Advises," 1967). Perhaps most significant in Baldemar's resolve to organize the farm workers was his memories of having been a migrant farm worker, "memories of working in fields where owners cheated or refused to pay him and his family, of insults and racial slurs which humiliated human dignity, of living in housing not fit for the farm animals, and of being refused service in restaurants and other public places simply for being Mexican" (Valdes, 1984).

A major problem for FLOC in organizing the migrant people could have been the crew leaders, the men who arrange the work situation between a given farmer and a given group of workers under their authority. FLOC overcame this problem early into the organizing efforts, however; many crew leaders strongly supported the formation of a farm

worker union ("Youth Advises," 1967). Like Baldemar, they aspired to become part of the farm labor movement taking place. After Velasquez returned to Ohio from Wisconsin, he began meeting with his father and his father's friends from the Ottawa, Leipsic and Belmore, Ohio areas. He told them of his visit with Salas and about what Cesar Chavez was doing in California to unite the Mexican-American people, La Raza, behind "la causa" (Stamos, and LaFoe, 1971). They began visiting migrant labor camps and talking to workers about the problems they were facing and the idea of forming a union. After several meetings they arranged a meeting of crew leaders on August 25, in Pandora, Ohio where the Velasquez family lived. At the meeting, some 30 crew leaders voted unanimously to form FLOC. These crew leaders represented and had the following of more than 700 migrant workers in the Pandora, Leipsic, Columbus Grove, and Ottawa areas ("Youth Advises," 1967).

At the official announcement of FLOC's formation, made in Bluffton, Ohio on September 5, Velasquez sought support for his organization and cooperation from the growers and processing companies. He mentioned that immediate unionization was not the goal of the organization. Instead, the organization sought only to inform migrants of their right to organize and of other rights they had under existing laws: "We plan no strikes and no marches now. Those would accomplish nothing for us. We hope just to be

an organized voice for the single worker who has no one to support him and who will fear economic reprisal" ("First Attempts," 1967; "Migrant Workers Unit," 1967). Elsewhere ("Youth Labor," 1968; "FLOC: Seeker," 1968; "Bluffton College Student," 1968; "Migrant Labor Seeks,"1968), Baldemar said he recognized that the small farmers had their problems, and that he would like to see the growers and migrants work together to improve the economic conditions of both groups. According to Velasquez, "The real problem (was) with the companies rather than the growers" ("Youth Advises," 1967).

Publication of a bilingual newspaper, La Voz del Campesino (The Voice of The Farm Worker), the start of a regular radio program aired on Lima, Ohio's WIMA station, and the creation of a traveling "Teatro" that dramatized life experiences of working people, were the main works of the organization that fall ("FLOC: The First," 1977). Despite FLOC's educational and cooperative approach, however, the companies and growers became disturbed immediately. Some growers denied FLOC supporters permission to distribute the newspaper in migrant camps, so the newspaper had to be circulated secretly ("Newspaper for Migrants," 1967). Baldemar himself was chased off farms as he tried to photograph field workers and their housing facilities ("Youth Advises," 1967). He was also arrested on trespassing charges when he attempted to distribute copies

of the FLOC newspaper at the Libby McNeill & Libby migrant camp in Leipsic, Ohio ("Migrant Leader Arrested," 1967; "Young editor," 1967). His arrest was a prelude to the issue of access to migrant camps that FLOC would continue to face. In Putnam County contained over 5000 migrants where the growers were particularly hostile (Iorio, 1968).

The exclusion of farm workers from National Labor Relations Act coverage and the lack of Ohio state law to provide farm workers collective bargaining rights increased the cost of organizing and lessened the incentive for the farm workers to organize. The migrants' nomadic nature and the short job duration were also deterrents to unionization. Added to that was the understandable fear migrants had of losing their jobs if they joined a labor organization. After coming over 1500 miles to get a job, the migrants were reluctant to confront the growers. "The people (were) afraid" ("Youth Advises,"1967).

To cope with these problems, FLOC spent the winter months making contact and organizing the farm workers who were out of the migrant stream and had settled in the local communities. These settled-out migrants faced language barriers in the local communities and lived in barrios, some of which had developed into city ghettos. They had encountered problems of racial discrimination in employment, education, housing, and in other areas of life. Through its involvements, FLOC began to establish a power base in this

settled-out farm worker community--a community more receptive to and tolerant of organizing than were the migrants. When the migrants returned to Ohio in the spring of 1968, FLOC organizers again contacted them. Organizers followed them to Michigan in mid-July, and returned to Ohio with them in August when the tomato harvest got underway (Iorio, 1968). These organizing efforts helped migrants conquer some of their fears and drew them toward unionization.

The Migrant Camp Accessibility Dispute - 1968

In its efforts to organize the migrant farm workers, the union pressed the case for free access to migrant camps in the 1968 growing and harvest season. Under the advice of attorneys Jack Gallon and Francis Reno, FLOC engineered a plan in the summer of 1968 to bring a legal decision on whether FLOC could enter migrant camps (Iorio,1968). On June 24, at the farm of Lewis Klass near Leipsic, Ohio, Baldemar and 20 FLOC members were presenting a short play depicting the migrants' situation when Mr. Klass drove up. As Velasquez described it, Klass took the crew leader aside and "tried to get him to make us leave. But ... we all stuck together" ("FLOC Stage is Set," 1968). When the crew leader refused, the frantic farmer charged into Velasquez with his pick up truck. Velasquez was not seriously injured, but Jack Gallon who questioned Klass, recorded the grower's admission that he had attempted to injure

Velasquez. When the farmer was told that his statements had been recorded, he tried to snatch the tape recorder. Upon failing to do so, he took a punch at Gallon, an act photographed by the FLOC photographer. The charges filed against Klass became the first courtroom test of strength for the migrant farm workers' union ("Farmer Runs Down," 1968; "Leader Encourages," 1968).

Other growers organized to avoid a similar incident. They hired an attorney to meet with Gallon and Reno to reach an agreement that would permit FLOC to speak to migrants on farm and camp sites (Iorio, 1968). The farm group that signed the agreement included Mr. Klass and represented approximately 200 growers from Putnam County, and a few from Hancock and Henry Counties.

While the agreement set up standards according to which FLOC could enter the camps and meet with the workers, it also spelled out certain conditions under which talks could take place. The agreement stipulated that FLOC had permission to speak to the migrants only if agreeable to the migrants; if not, the FLOC members had to leave the premises. The agreement also stated that no more than four members could visit the farm or camp site at once. The visit had to take place between the hours of 7 and 10 p.m. Monday through Saturday; between 2 and 4 p.m. and 7 and 10 p.m. on Sunday. Only the distribution of a reasonable amount of literature and the FLOC newspaper were allowed on

the premises; the contract did not permit signs, cameras, recorders, loud speaking equipment, nor weapons of any kind. Moreover, FLOC had to notify the owners 24 hours in advance and no farm or camp site could be visited more than twice during the 1968 harvest season. The agreement also stipulated that growers could not discriminate against any migrants because of their lawful activities with FLOC. The agreement remained in effect until December 31, 1968 ("Farmers and FLOC," 1968).

The Ackerman Strike and Its Aftermath - 1968

Lucas County contained about 850 migrants concentrated in a small area on it east side. The growers in Lucas County, not as adamantly opposed to FLOC as had been the Putnam County growers, had allowed FLOC organizers to enter the camps. Rudy Lira, an ex-migrant who had started organizing farm workers in Lucas County six years earlier, was very important in FLOC's 1968 unionizing efforts. He was field representative for Lucas County Welfare Department and a FLOC representative and leader. He had developed strong rapport with the migrants who returned to the area each year and they had learned to trust his judgement. Through his efforts and those of other settled-out migrants the farm workers had become organized well enough to seek a written contract from area growers (Iorio, 1968).

The strikes that followed occurred only after Lucas County growers refused to enter collective bargaining

agreements with the union. They preceded several FLOC attempts to meet with the growers. Letters requesting that growers attend a meeting with union members and leaders to discuss the farm workers' problems were sent to all Lucas County growers in the Oregon and Jerusalem Townships. After a week passed, Baldemar called 10 of the largest growers and arranged another meeting for September 3 in Bono, Ohio. On the day of the meeting some 200 area workers attended but no growers came and none sent representatives. The FLOC membership wanted to call a strike but the union's leaders, unprepared to strike, convinced the disgruntled workers to give the growers another chance to enter negotiations (Iorio, 1968; "Precedent-Setting," 1968).

On the evening of September 5, FLOC called on grower James Ackerman, who employed about 30 migrants. The union demanded that he enter a written agreement with the union or else face the alternative of a strike. After some five hours of discussion, no consensus was reached. In hopes of reaching an agreement and avoiding a strike, FLOC sent one of its coordinators, Ted Iorio, to meet with Ackerman on Friday morning, September 6. After these talks broke down, the union had no alternative but to call the strike. At midday the supporting workers left the fields. After a parking lot rally at the New Catholic Church in Bono, the workers proceeded to the Ackerman farm to commence their picketing. Workers at other farms also joined the strike

and by mid-afternoon upward of 150 migrant laborers and children picketed the Ackerman home, where the demonstration was concentrated ("FLOC Stages," 1968). The number of strikers and demonstrators grew to 500-600 by Saturday's end ("Migrant Strike," 1968). In all, 10 farms would be completely struck before the first contract would be gained ("FLOC Gets Contract," 1968).

FLOC's original demands included a wage increase of 4 cents to 20 cents per hamper plus a 3 cent bonus for staying all season, $10,000 paid life insurance, paid hospitalization, free daycare, an adverse weather guarantee of $6 per day, and $2 per hour guaranteed minimum wage to protect the picker in the early and late period of the season when work was slow("Little Cesar," 1968). The union, however, reduced its original demand for a wage increase of 4 cents per hamper to two cents that Friday afternoon ("300 Migrant," 1968).

Ackerman had reported on Friday that he was willing to recognize the union, but rejected its demand for a 2 cent increase for each hamper (33 pounds) of tomatoes picked. "We have contracted to deliver tomatoes at a certain price, and there is no accommodation possible in regarding the wage increase," he said ("300 Migrant," 1968). Ackerman, described by Velasquez as "perhaps the most reasonable of Lucas County growers," had this further to say: "Baldy has always said that he has nothing against the grower, only the

canning companies. Well, if the company (Stokely-Van Camp) will pay it (the 2 cents), I'll gladly pass it on to the migrants. Otherwise I'll have to wait until next year" ("FLOC Gets," 1968).

Picketing took place at the Ackerman farm until after dark both Friday and Saturday. No picketing took place Sunday, but negotiators met at 11:30 a.m. Throughout the series of discussions with area growers, attorneys Jack Gallon and Francis Reno, Tom Willing and Les Brinkman of the University of Toledo Law School, and Ted Iorio, an area law student, represented FLOC members. Negotiating for the tomato growers were Paul Slade, president of the area growers' association and 1968 chairman of the Lucas County Migrant Affairs Committee. Ackerman and Richard Smackle, both generally credited with being leaders of area growers, were also present during the negotiations as was Howard Boggs, Ackerman's attorney ("Precedent-Setting," 1968).

After eight hours of negotiations, Ackerman and Smarkle reached an agreement with FLOC that ended the three-day strike at their farms. The FLOC negotiators further called on the growers to persuade other growers to sign the agreement. At a meeting at the Jerusalem Township Hall later that evening FLOC negotiators met about 20 farmers. At the urging of Paul Slade, the farmers demanded proof that the migrants were supporting FLOC. The move was apparently a ploy. Before FLOC's chief organizer for Lucas County, Ted

Iorio, could return with the union's membership rolls, the farmers and their counsel staged a walkout of their own. Not all members of the grower group agreed with this strategy, however; John Lajti and Harold Habagger stayed to sign the agreement ("4 Growers," 1968). Additionally, one grower came to the site of the striking workers and told the migrants he wanted to join ("FLOC Gets," 1968).

FLOC achieved in 1968 what many thought was impossible in its second year of existence--a labor contract with eastern Lucas County tomato growers. The agreement brought unionization and collective bargaining to migrant workers in Ohio for the first time. The three-day strike at the Ackerman farm ended with the signing of five contracts with area farmers. The key points of the contracts were as follow:

1. FLOC was to be the sole recruiter and bargaining agent.

2. The contract was binding until a new contract was negotiated. Negotiations were to begin after December 1, 1968.

3. Minimum wage was to be 16 cents per hamper for picking, plus one-half cent per hamper provided the worker remained until the end of the season or $1.15 per hour (slack season). Any previous agreement at a higher rate was still binding, however.

4. Federal housing regulations were to be met for the 1969 harvest season. FLOC would keep a record of housing conditions as they were before workers came in, in case there were any charges of property damage.

5. Before a worker could be fired there had to be a hearing with an impartial arbitrator.

Complaints were to be taken care of within 5 days.

6. There was to be no discrimination against those which participated in the strike or anyone who participated in union activities.

7. All complaints (of both grower and worker) were to be handled by the FLOC representative on that farm--and if necessary a FLOC official and neutral arbitrator.

8. An attempt was to be made to secure a 90-day insurance policy to cover the workers from the date of departure for a job.

9. The workers were required to remain until the end of the season (date when the processing plant closes) unless there was a valid emergency reason (Knorre, 1968).

Monday morning strikers returned to work only in fields of those farmers who had signed the agreement. Workers remained on strike at farms of growers who had not signed the contract. By late Monday evening, FLOC had negotiated 21 contracts ("Precedent-Setting," 1968; "More Sign," 1968). Seventeen were with growers within the boundaries of eastern Lucas County and four were with growers in adjacent Ottawa County. FLOC membership increased to over 350 families and included approximately 90 percent of area farm labor. Considering developments, membership rolls and FLOC popularity increased rapidly all across the state("Precedent-Setting," 1968).

Beneficiaries of the eastern Lucas County strikes were not only area workers. Reportedly, farmers raised wages in nearby areas of Ohio and Michigan to keep the workers needed

to harvest their crop. The precedent-setting contract gained also had the added effect of unifying the growers, something FLOC wanted to do to help them against the canneries (Iorio, 1968).

The Ackerman strike was described as unusual (Iorio, 1968), not the average strike ("Precedent-Setting," 1968), and "more like a holiday" ("FLOC Stages," 1968). Consider also the description of the strike by Fr. Donald Ranly, a Precious Blood priest who helped FLOC during the strike:

> What a sight, what an experience. It was downright thrilling. Here were these people, out on strike, supposedly angry with their employers and with the Establishment, with a white world that treated them like second class human beings at best, and there they were singing, laughing, listening to speeches, having a wonderful time on the front lawn of this Anglo farmer. It was a fiesta, not a strike, believe me (Stamos and Lafoe, 1971, p. 96).

According to Ted Iorio, another participant and observer of the Ackerman strike,

> There was no malice. There was on the other hand, a very strong sense of community . . . Children were present by the scores; hot dogs and kool-aid were consumed in amazing large quantities; 'mariachis' (a group of singing instrumentalists) were present and provided entertainment; literally hundreds of jokes were shared among farm workers, many of them the traditional 'gringo' jokes--all told in a spirit of good will. To passers-by this would not appear to be a strike but rather a 'fiesta mexicana'. To this Anglo observer it was truly a beautiful event (Iorio, 1968, p.8).

During the Ackerman strike many people spoke to the striking farm workers. Migrant leaders from Monroe, Wood, Putnam, and Lucas Counties gave speeches. Jack Gallon also

addressed the strikers, telling them "we will stay here until Ackerman is ready to talk. We are here to get a contract for us, for others, and for our children" ("FLOC Stages," 1968). At one point in the strike a Catholic priest stepped up to the microphone and told the migrants that what they were doing was right and good:

> It is a very Christian thing to do, to fight to make a better world for yourselves, for your children, and for the exploited and oppressed everywhere. You are making history today. It is good history. We are with you and I am sure that Christ is with you. Viva la Causa ("FLOC Stages," 1968)!

The mayor of Toledo, who spoke twice to the strikers, although he lacked jurisdiction in the matter, also showed his support (Knorre, 1968).

The response of the community to the strike, though mixed, was mostly positive. Assistance, financial and otherwise, came from many sources. Professors at the Toledo Law School and other labor attorneys in Toledo donated their time (" 'Little Cesar'," 1968). The mass media aided tremendously having given the problem good public exposure. Almost without exception the media looked with favor on what FLOC was doing (Iorio, 1968). Catholic and Protestant groups also assisted. They provided food, blankets, and other needs. The facilities of Our Lady of Mount Carmel Catholic Church in Bono were also made available to the strikers. FLOC had been supported over the past year by the Synod of Ohio United Presbyterian Church; the Episcopal

Diocese of Ohio; and the Ohio Conference, United Church of Christ (Knorre, 1968). In addition, the UAW Kaiser-Jeep unit of Local 12 donated $2000; Local 626 Meatcutters, Local 365, Teamsters, and the Gladieux Corp. contributed food ("'Little Cesar'," 1968).

Police reaction, moreover, was amazing. The only incident in which a grower threatened Baldemar's life resulted from Baldemar's attempt to persuade a crew leader from the farm of Richard Smarkle to join the strike. The local sheriff's deputies immediately let the grower know that type of behavior would not be tolerated. After taking food to a camp where workers were afraid to leave, the Lucas County sheriff's deputies returned to Bono and ate supper with the strikers (Knorre, 1968). When complimented for their handling of the situation, one lieutenant replied, "This is the way we prefer it, believe me. These (migrants) are nice people. We like it that way. . . " ("FLOC Stages," 1968).

Obviously, some growers and company representatives viewed the contract as a threat to the tomato business in northwest Ohio. Chick Dohns, field supervisor for the Stokely Van Camp Company in Curtice, Ohio, who annually negotiated with many targeted growers, claimed that the contract was really going to hurt his company. He warned that if Stokely and other processors in the area started

losing (even several) growers because they gave up tomato growing, "it could put us right out of business."

Richard Smarkel, one original signer of the precedent setting contract, said after signing the contract that he needed about 12 or 13 tons of tomatoes from each of his 30 acres to break even and that the settlement of the strike meant he could finish the season with about 18 tons per acre. Mr. Paul Slade noted at a press conference Friday, September 13, that labor costs resulting from the setting of the crop, hoeing, picking, supervision, housing, social security, workman's compensation, and transportation took away as much as 48 per cent of the return on a ton of tomatoes. Other production costs, for land, plowing, cultivating, spraying, plants and fertilizer, drained away another 46 percent, leaving about 6 percent profit ("'Little Cesar'," 1968).

In light of these industry considerations, it is worth noting that FLOC's original demands were very different from the terms it finally agreed to. Although the union achieved a history-making closed shop agreement, none of the explicit economic terms and conditions were met. As matters turned out FLOC was only able to get but a couple of cost items. The agreement increased the migrant worker's pay from 15 cents to 16 cents a hamper with an extra 1/2 cent incentive for transportation home provided they stayed until the end of the harvest season. Besides the 1.5 cent wage increase,

the contract served to put in writing what before had been an oral contract. The power to control recruitment of labor for the farmers who signed the agreement was perhaps the most significant provision of the contract.

Unionization and the 1969 Harvest Season

With FLOC's membership having grown to 3,000 in less than two years ("Ohio's Migrants," 1969), FLOC approached the 1969 harvest with demands for a two-year contract. Payment to workers was to be according to increases in the farmers' yield per acre ("Only 1 Tomato Grower," 1969). But opposition, to FLOC by groups that represented farmers and the growers themselves was increasing. Twelve farmers, members of the OAMA, who had signed contracts with FLOC the year before, switched from growing tomatoes to other crops in 1969 ("FLOC: The First Five," 1977). The Farm Labor Advisory Group (FLAG), which organized in January 1969 as a reaction to FLOC, issued the suggestion of creating labor pools among farmers to save a perishable crop. The Help Establish Legislative Protection (HELP) group fought against organized labor's effort to provide protection through the National Labor Relations Board ("FLOC: The First Five Years," 1977). Both groups were associated with the Ohio Farm Bureau Federation ("Farmers Launch Program," 1969).

In addition, industry representatives increasingly urged the mechanization of Ohio's tomato crop. Dr. Gould,

secretary-treasurer of the Ohio Canners and Food Processors Association, noted the costs of labor at a meeting in Toledo in early December of 1968: "We simply will not be able to compete with other markets, particularly the foreign markets of France, Italy, and Portugal," he said. "In Portugal, the wage rate for picking tomatoes is between eighty-five cents and $1.20 per day. Here in Ohio we start them at $1.40 per hour. If we don't mechanize, we'll price ourselves out of business" ("Fate of Ohio," 1968).

Dr. Gould, also an agricultural economist at Ohio State University, went on to say that delaying Ohio's entry into tomato mechanization was a research lag. "Horticulturally, we are simply behind the times. Before we can use machines almost exclusively, we've got to come up with a variety of tomato plants that will produce all its ripened tomatoes at the same time" ("Fate of Ohio," 1968).

Negotiations over the 1969 contract provisions took place for several months before the harvest season. Mr. Boggs and Paul Slade represented the growers and attorney Jack Gallon, represented FLOC. A final version of the contract was drafted with the assistance of Jerome Gross, executive secretary of the Toledo-Labor-Management-Citizens (LMC) committee. The contract provided for minimum payment of 16.5 cents per hamper for the worker if yields per acre were less than 21 tons. For yields of between 21 and 24 tons per acre, the worker would receive 17.5 cents; for 24

to 27 tons per acre, 19 cents; and for yields of 27 tons or more per acre, 20 cents per hamper. Mr. Boggs said then that he felt that the contract was fair to both farmers and farm workers. It gave the farmer the minimum cost per hamper, keyed to his actual cost of operation, while affording the worker a chance to share in the profits of a bountiful crop ("Only 1 Tomato Grower, 1969).

To sign the pact, a meeting between about 25 growers and FLOC representatives was arranged for Monday, August 18, 1969, just a few days before the beginning of the harvest season. At the meeting, only one tomato grower, John J. Lajti, signed the agreement. According to Boggs, several tomato growers chose not to go along because they remained unconvinced that their migrant workers really wanted representation by the union ("Lucas County," 1969).

Following a meeting with several FLOC organizers Tuesday, August 19, Velasquez and Gallon issued the farmers a final ultimatum: Lucas County tomato growers had until Friday, August 22, to sign the pact or risk "appropriate economic action." FLOC also filed a suit in the Court of Common Pleas requesting a temporary injunction that would require five farmers to use only migrant tomato pickers recruited by FLOC. The five farmers had violated the 1968 contract and a March 1969 agreement by refusing to employ FLOC members. One week later, during a mediation session in the chambers of Judge George N. Kiroff, the five growers

agreed to sign a two-year labor contract with the migrant workers' organization and FLOC dropped the charges against them ("FLOC Calls Off Suit," 1969).

Encouraged by this development and still hoping to avert a strike, the (LMC) committee invited all Lucas County tomato growers and representatives of FLOC to an exploratory meeting Friday September 5. Jerome Gross and Judge Kiroff, would represent the committee ("Tomato Parsley," 1969). As matters turned out, growers didn't meet with an LMC representative.

FLOC responded with its decision to stop production at the Stokely-Van Camp Company plant in Curtice, Ohio. On Monday, September 8, about 50 FLOC members and several priests and nuns picketed the Curtice processing plant where the farmers delivered the tomato crop. During the picketing, most of the 40 year-round employees of the plant -- members of Local 20 of the Teamsters Union-- honored the picket ("Picket Lines," 1969). Emphasizing that its dispute was not with the processor but with the union, FLOC agreed to withdraw its pickets at mid-afternoon, when two Genoa local school district buses loaded with children could not get through the long lines of trucks and tomato trailers ("Kiroff Quits," 1969).

An LMC mediation session held that same evening produced two unsigned tomato growers with interest in signing. After studying the contract overnight, they agreed

to sign. This brought the number of farmers having signed with FLOC to eight ("Kiroff Quits," 1969).

As the campaign to sign area tomato growers to a labor contract continued, it became apparent to FLOC that some growers would have to be struck. On Thursday, September 11, eighty striking farm workers left the farms of Wayne Heilman of Old Fort, Seneca County, and of Hubert Knipp near Elmore in Ottawa County. That same day Elmer Habberger, in Lucas County, became the ninth farmer to sign with FLOC ("FLOC Strikes," 1969). Eight days after the strike against the Heilman and Knipp farms, both agreed to sign a contract ("Pickers End," 1969). FLOC's campaign to sign area tomato growers to a labor contract ended for the season with 11 growers signing agreements. The contracts would not be up for renegotiations until after the 1970 harvest season ("Farm Labor Union," 1969).

Through the fall of 1969 and the spring of 1970, FLOC began what it called a "process of internal reevaluation." FLOC held meetings and raised questions to find out how it could best respond to the needs of its membership. The organization recognized that negotiating contracts with small growers whose tomatoes were contracted to the large processors could not provide the benefits it sought for its members. In a 1971 meeting in Pearson Park near Toledo, the union's membership voted to forego making more contracts new growers. FLOC made a policy commitment to generate a new

campaign against the canneries. FLOC committed itself to building an organization capable of organizing enough workers and developing enough supporting resources to take on the processors ("FLOC: The Second," 1975).

Analysis of the Organizing and Collective Bargaining Outcomes

The previous section of this document arranged the 1967-69 unionizing activities of tomato field workers in northwest Ohio into 4 major events: (1) the emergence of FLOC in 1967; (2) FLOC's migrant camp accessibility dispute with Putnam County growers before the 1968 harvest season; (3) the 1968 Ackerman strike and its aftermath; and (4) unionization and the 1969 harvest season. After FLOC's recognition by the growers as the migrants' bargaining agents, the collective bargaining process produced agreements that were eventually abandoned by the union because they didn't remedy the membership's low wages, irregular employment, and adverse working and living conditions.

FLOC's organizational success and collective bargaining failures can be interpreted in context of the organizational factors and ability to pay/ability to make pay frameworks presented in section II above. Analyzed in this fashion, it is possible to explain, better understand, and learn from these labor market events and outcomes.

Organizational Factors Analysis

Table 1 below presents a summary of Taylor's classification of organizational factors in relation to the Ohio tomato field labor market. The attachment to farm labor force factor appears to be favorable despite the migratory nature of the work force. Although the harvest seasons are short, lasting from 6 to 8 weeks, the workers were not temporary workers; they were permanent migrant workers. Many had been migrating to the region for years, with little hope or choice of leaving farm labor. They "travel out of habit coupled with the hope of gaining better wages than those they receive in Texas, a state which is over supplied with cheap labor and in which one might have hope of earning $4 or $5 per day for ten or twelve hours of work in the scorching sun" (Iorio, 1968, p.1).

The conditions in south Texas made factor 4, employment in non-agricultural sectors, unfavorable to organization. However, this unfavorable condition to organization appeared neutralized by at least three other considerations: the strike occurred at the peak of the harvest season when tomato harvest labor is in high demand; strike breakers were hard to get in Ohio, much harder than they would have been in Texas or California, and; the skill level required to pick tomatoes. The third consideration proved a counterbalance during the 1969 strike at the Wayne Heilman

Table 1

Organizational Factors in the Ohio Field Labor Market

Organizational Factors	Favorable	Unfavorable	Not Determined
1. Attachment to Farm Labor Force	*		
2. Race	*		
3. Skill Level	*		
4. Employment in Non-agricultural Sector		*	
5. Labor Market Structure		*	
6. Concentration of Workers	*		
7. Vertical Integration		*	
8. Product Demand Conditions	*		
9. Employer Resistance	*		
10. Legislative and Legal		*	
11. Leadership	*		
12. Union and Public Support	*		
13. Sex Composition			*
14 Age Distribution			*

farm when a movement to enlist volunteer help was announced in several churches. The Heilmans, however, were not enthusiastic about the assistance of the inexperienced volunteers. According to Mrs. Heilman, "There was a very high percentage of rejects in the hampers they picked and they did a lot of damage to the vines" ("Tomato Pickers," 1969).[3]

Racial harmony, strong leadership, union and public support, relatively little employer resistance--as measured by the fiesta, non-violent atmosphere of the strike, and the concentration of workers in a small geographical area, were also helpful to organization. Additionally, the perishable nature of the tomato crop played a similar role as having a product market where the demand for the product was increasing. Furthermore, while the lack of National Labor Relations Act coverage increased the cost of organizing and lessened the incentive of the farm workers and unions to organize farm workers, law enforcement during the unionizing events was not hostile to FLOC. In 1969, the enforcement of previously negotiated agreements prevented strikes at six farms that agreed to new agreements. Finally, consider that the lack of vertical integration and the presence of an unstructured labor market in the industry did not appear

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[3]This newspaper story was obtained from FLOC's collection of newspaper stories. It did not indicate a source.

significant factors in the ability of the union to organize against the growers.

Ability to Pay/Ability to Make Pay Analysis

This concluding analysis seeks to explain the poor collective bargaining outcomes recorded by FLOC in its 1968-69 contracts. Are the poor collective bargaining outcomes attributable to ability to pay or ability to make pay considerations? Information on the existing market and institutional conditions provided in previous sections and will be investigated to make a determination. The discussion begins with consideration of the necessary institutional conditions.

To investigate the necessary institutional condition for the union to organize the relevant work force (to strike effectively against the grower), a determination of what workers constituted the relevant work force needed to be made. Two important considerations in this regard were the perishable nature of the tomato crop and the legal mechanism for the ownership transfer which involved the physical transfer of the crop itself. The farmers retained legal ownership of the crop until it was delivered to the processing plant, so the relevant work force had to be comprised both of the workers who harvested the crop and of those workers who afterward hauled the crop to the plant.

In Ohio, the tomato growers were of small scale, so they sometimes handled the hauling operation. Sometimes

crew leaders were involved since they usually had trucks and could use their labor to load or dump the hampers. In the latter case, the crew leader plus the tomato picker constituted the relevant work force. The harvest workers were so effectively organized and field strikes so successful, however, that the question of whether the workers who hauled the crop were organized became purely academic.

Negotiating a labor contract for tomato field workers required that the union be recognized as the farm workers' bargaining agent. To do so, the union singled out a leading employer of organized workers as its initial target. Because the typical method of securing union recognition (i.e., filing a request with the National Labor Relations Board of certification as a bargaining representative) was not available to farm workers and because other ways of getting the farmers to negotiate had failed, it became necessary to force union recognition by striking. After striking activity produced a signed contract with one grower, the union approached other growers where farm workers were organized and urged them to sign a similar contract. When they did not comply, they were struck. By these means, the economic terms and conditions negotiated were nearly identical for all the farm workers and growers who bargained. In effect, a type of successful pattern

bargaining developed wherever FLOC had organized the relevant work force.

The institutional condition in Craypo's framework pertaining to competitive unionism did not surface directly. FLOC was the only agricultural union representing the workers involved in the tomato harvest. However, some growers often demanded proof that the migrants were supporting FLOC. At least one 1969 contract was worded so it pertained to the migrants themselves, rather than the union ("Pickers End," 1969). This case not withstanding, the bargaining units involved in the collective bargaining process were individual farmers and the FLOC organization.

In context of the ability-to-pay/ability-to-make pay framework, the data indicate that the reason effective negotiations did not take place between the growers and farm workers in 1968-69 wasn't due to the union's inability to establish the necessary conditions to make the growers pay. All three institutional conditions required for the union to make the employers pay were present. The investigation suggests that the union's weak bargaining power is better understood in terms of the tomato farmers' inability to pay higher labor costs. Consideration is given now to the 1968-69 industry conditions to determine whether they were favorable to the employers' ability to pay.

As indicated earlier, employers can pass on higher labor costs in the form of higher prices if certain product

market conditions exist. More efficient production methods can also offset higher costs with productivity increases. The remaining part of this section investigates these two conditions in terms of mechanical harvesting of the tomato crop in 1968-69 and in terms of the marketing system for tomatoes for commercial processing.

The growers' abilities to pass on higher labor costs by offsetting them with higher productivity was hardly affected by the mechanization of the tomato harvest. A total of eight machines harvested only 150 acres in 1968 and 20 machines harvested approximately 600 acres in 1969 (Shark, 1969). Mechanization of the tomato harvest was not an option by which growers could increase productivity to offset the higher money costs for labor.

The growers' inability to pay higher labor costs and the subsequent ineffective bargaining outcomes also appear the result of the product market conditions associated with tomatoes for commercial processing. The type of marketing system that characterized the production and marketing of tomatoes for commercial processing was not one that gave growers any ability to pay higher labor costs. Five features of the marketing system for tomatoes grown for commercial processing are presented to make that point.

First, the farmers' ability to pay higher labor costs was constrained by the extent that processors avoided most production risks. By coordinating production through

contractual vertical integration, processors assumed ownership responsibilities only after the crop was delivered to the plant. With the high risk of bad weather in the northwest region during the harvest season, the variability in quality and yield was an important yet uncontrollable factor in the farmers' ability to pay. This factor made the farmers sales revenue to the enterprise and therefore their ability to pay unstable and not guaranteed. In a real dual economy sense, under the existing marketing arrangement, tomato processors in Ohio avoided the variable portion of demand that was agricultural production at the farm level.

Second, the relationship between volume of processing tomato produced on the contracted acreage and the capacity of the plant is controlled by the processors. Unlike in open market exchange where individuals farmers would expand their rate of output (possibly until marginal cost equals price), in tomato production under the system of contractual vertical integration, the rate of output was monitored by processors for effective coordination with their processing capacity. When the supply of raw stock delivered to the processing plant exceeded the level of maximum processing plant capacity, processors put limits on the quantity of tomatoes that could be delivered per acre per day by any grower. They also specified a cut-off date on maximum delivered tonnage per acre or both. Where the risk carried by the growers of not being able to market all their

tomatoes in a good crop year was an implicit component of the negotiated price and growers were guaranteed a market for what processors considered surplus, there was usually an adjustment in the price of the surplus to a lower level (Connelly and Cravens, 1968). In these ways the quantity of the crop that farmers could market was influenced by how processors protect themselves from being overwhelmed by a glut of tomatoes during the bulk of the tomato harvest.

Third, processors practiced a pricing policy that was not favorable to the growers' ability to negotiate relatively higher prices for the tomato crop. Although annual bargaining between farmers and processors could increase procurement prices, the probable bargaining range was relatively narrow, making it improbable for the farmers to obtain substantially more money. This was so primarily because of the oligopsony that faced growers involved in tomatoes for commercial processing. The supply side of the market consisted of approximately 1200 farmers and the demand side had approximately 20 processors. Additionally, the level of buyer concentration was quite high, considering that the six largest processors purchased about 85 percent of the states total product. Using the price of other commodities to anticipate the reaction of growers (Armburster and Helmuth, 1981), processors were able to guarantee their supply of tomato raw stock without getting too far out of line with the price of competing commodities.

The result of this practice, considering the long term down trend in relative farm prices (Schiller, 1983), was to make it more difficult for the farmers to negotiate relatively higher prices for the tomato crop.

Fourth, the marketing structure facilitated the processors' ability to decide over quality measures in their favor (and against the grower). In this case, the processors developed and administered the minimum grade level for marketable tomatoes. This minimum grade level frequently varied at the discretion of the buyers as they considered changes in supply and demand (Connelly and Cravens, 1968).

Fifth, the sequential nature of the total marketing process (Breimyer, 1976) impacted the timing of farm-processor contract negotiations that in turn impacted the growers' ability to accommodate higher field worker wages. Processors made a projection about the amount of processing tomato raw stock needed for the summer pack and estimated the acreage needed by the early part of each calendar year when they negotiated with the farmers. The farmers, by signing contracts over the winter months, committed themselves to growing for a particular processor a certain acreage of tomatoes at a particular price. Because of these commitments, during the harvest season in August and September when farm workers could most effectively strike, farmers were unable to pass on higher labor costs through higher product prices. The amount of money in the wage pool

was fixed by the arrangements made during the winter months. The only option for a grower who chose to increase the farmer workers' wage level was to reduce what was already a low profit margin.

Conclusion

In this paper, unionizing activities of tomato field workers in northwest Ohio were arranged into four key events. Richard Wayne Taylor's work was then used to explain and better understand the union's organizational success. This was followed by an interpretation of the unsuccessful collective bargaining outcomes based on Craypo's model on the sources of bargaining strength. In retrospect, the two contrasting approaches employed in this case serve well to explain and understand these two paradoxical labor market outcomes. FLOC's organizational success is explained and understood by the organizational factors identified in Taylor's approach and investigated in Ohio's tomato industry's agricultural labor market. As summarized in Table 1, most factors appeared favorable for organization. They were more than sufficient to neutralize any of the unfavorable factors.

With the aid of Craypo's ability-to-pay/ability-to-make-pay approach we can also understand the poor collective bargaining outcomes. Table 2 below presents a summary of Craypo's classification of the sources of union bargaining strength in relation to Ohio's tomato fields labor market.

Table 2

Sources of Union Bargaining Strength in the Ohio Field Labor Market, 1968-69

Sources of Union bargaining strength	Present	Not present
Employers ability to pay conditions		
Product market conditions		
Concentrated industries	*	
Regulated industries	*	
Geographically constrained industries	*	
Technical production methods	*	
Union's ability to make the employer pay conditions		
Organize the relevant work force	*	
Eliminate competitive unionism	*	
Establish a consolidated bargaining structure	*	

In terms of the bargaining framework, the overall conditions were not favorable to establish bargaining power. As can be clearly seen from the table, the product market conditions that permit employers to pass on higher labor costs in the form of higher product prices to consumers were not present in this labor relations case. Only the institutional conditions necessary to make the employer pay higher labor costs were met. The analysis suggests that the poor collective bargaining outcomes negotiated in 1968 and 1989, and FLOC's 1971 decision to abandon negotiations with the growers all together, are explained by factors that pertain to the employers' ability to pay, not the unions' ability to make the employer pay.

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