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STRIKE TO END

By Dick Meister

Labor Correspondent

A tentative agreement that would end the grape boycott and the five-year-old struggle to unionize California's grape industry was reached yesterday by union and grower officials.

The agreement, expected to be announced today by Director Cesar Chavez of the United Farm Workers Organizing Committee, covers 26 growers in the Kern and Tulare county region who produce half of the grapes grown in California.

This means that virtually all of the State's grape growers would be covered by union contracts before the end of this week, since most of the others have signed previously or will sign shortly.

Thus Chavez is expected to announce the end of the vineyard strike that began in September 1965 as well as the end of the extremely successful boycott that began three years later.

Chavez and other officials declined public comment pending today's formal announcement. But there were few doubts that an agreement was to be reached with the growers who had been the first targets of Chavez' group, as well as the largest and most prominent targets.

In addition to granting Chavez' main demand for the Organizing Committee to represent vineyard workers in bargaining on their wages and working conditions, the agreement reportedly guarantees a minimum wage of \$1.80 an hour plus fringe benefits, limitations on pesticide use and other terms.

The negotiations between the Organizing Committee and the growers have been going on, in the utmost secrecy, for about two weeks – in large part because of the peace efforts of a committee of Roman Catholic bishops.

The growers involved had been the Organizing Committee's strongest opponents, but the boycott and the new public demand for "union-label grapes" finally moved them.

In the end, according to one observer, the largest of the growers, John Guimarra Jr., told his fellow negotiators that "unionism has finally come to this industry and there's no sense pretending it will go away. The thing to do is to come to the best possible terms."

Guimarra and his fellow growers went into the negotiations in hopes of completing them in time for the start of the grape harvest in the Delano area vineyards this week.

This was done earlier this year by growers in the State's other vineyard areas, where the harvest comes sooner. They signed with Chavez as their grapes ripened.

Those growers produce about 35 per cent of the State's crop. The growers who produce the other 15 percent of California grapes grown outside Delano are in the Fresno area and also have begun contract negotiations with the Organizing Committee.

The major breaks that led to the contracts began this April, in large part because of the boycott's increasing success.

Until then, Chavez' organization had been able to win contracts from wine grape growers but not from the more numerous table grape growers.

Chavez now is planning major campaigns among growers of melons and other produce in the Imperial Valley and among fruit and vegetable workers in the huge Salinas Valley.