

TONIGHT, let's take a look at that strike which has been raging in the salinas and santa maria valleys for nearly a month now ... the largest farm labor strike in many years, and perhaps the most important ever. It is going to lead, quite simply, to the unionization of the bulk of california's farm workers ... and so, ultimately, to the unionization of farm workers everywhere.

THE dispute, as I'm sure you're aware, pits the afl-cio's united farm workers organizing committee, directed by cesar chavez, against an alliance of the teamster union's farm worker division and some of the country's most powerful growers. ^{among other crucial effects,} ~~It has~~ brought ^{great} turmoil to the salinas valley, one of the world's richest farm areas, ^{and} caused nationwide shortages of basic vegetables, and greatly increased the price of those available.

BEFORE we go any further into what's happening now, however, let's go back to the beginning. The dispute started at the tag end of july. That was when teamster union and grower spokesmen unexpectedly announced that they had signed contracts covering about two hundred growers in the salinas, santa maria and imperial valleys. The growers produce the bulk of the country's major vegetable crops and employ between fifty and seventy thousand field workers during the harvest peak.

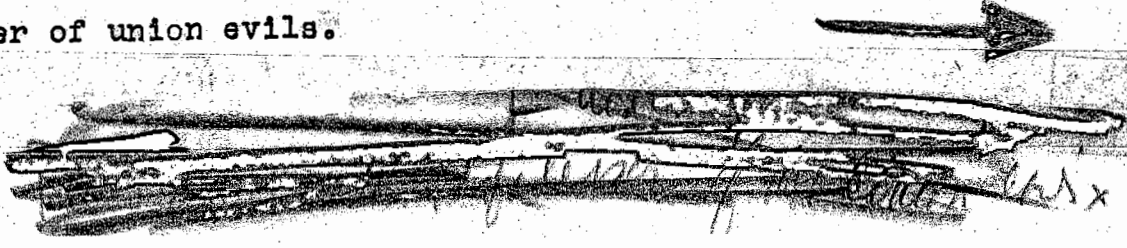
The teamster-grower agreement was by far the largest single farm labor agreement ever reached. And it involved growers who obviously are the country's most important in terms of union organizing.

THE growers also were those who had most bitterly fought union organizers over the years ... sometimes shedding blood in the process. They were some of the growers, for instance, who took part in the violent lettuce strike of 1936 which John Steinbeck wrote about ... by all measurements the most bitterly anti-union of California's strongly anti-union growers.

WHY the shift in grower tactics? And if they were to finally come to terms with a union, why sign an agreement with the teamsters -- a union which represented only a handful of field workers? Why not sign with the United Farm Workers Organizing Committee, which was leading the new campaign to organize field workers?

IF we can answer these questions, I think, we will have reached an understanding of what's going on around Salinas.

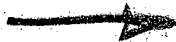
SO, first, why the shift in grower tactics? Why did they decide to abandon years of violent opposition to farm unionization and sign with the teamsters? The answer, simply, is that the farm workers organizing committee made them do it. The committee's success in organizing grape growers ~~ultimately~~ made it clear that, after a half century and more of struggle, California's farms actually were going to be unionized, and the growers chose the teamsters as the lesser of union evils.



WHAT it amounted to was this: the vegetable growers knew they would become the prime target of the farm workers organizing committee once the committee had signed up the grape growers ... and they knew ~~by the end of the year~~ that the grape growers finally would sign union agreements *at the end of this July*

THE organizing committee, that is, was on the verge of demanding that the vegetable growers follow the state's grape growers and recognize the committee as the bargaining agent of its workers. If the vegetable growers did not agree, they faced the prospect of a major strike. More serious was the prospect of a national boycott of their produce ... most serious of all the prospect of a boycott against the easily identifiable products of the corporations that ~~own~~ ^{own} many of the farms ... the purex corporation, for instance, and the united fruit corporation and its chaquita bananas. The vegetable growers, obviously, did not want to face the same sort of boycott action that finally brought ~~the purex~~ grape growers to the bargaining table after ~~causing them losses~~ ^{COSTING THEM} millions of dollars.

IT was an extremely painful situation for growers who for years had ~~so easily~~ ^{SO EASILY} practiced their belief that field workers should have no voice whatsoever in their wages, hours and working conditions -- agree to the demands of cesar chavez and the organizing committee, a truly democratic and effective union that would give their workers a strong voice, or face a disastrous boycott.



THERE was another alternative, however. Why not call in another union and cut off cesar chavez at the pass? Why not sign quickly with another union before chavez group could appear ... another union that would be less democratic and less effective in its representation of the field workers? If the growers called in the right union, it might almost be as good as having no union at all.

THE growers found the right union in the teamsters. For many years the teamsters had represented the truck drivers who haul the growers produce and workers in the canneries and frozen food plants where their vegetables are processed. And for many years, the teamsters had wanted to control the field workers, as a way to better the position of the food processing workers -- assuring them, for instance, that there would not be any ~~strikes~~ ^{DISPUTES} by field workers that would curtail their work. What the growers now hoped for was widespread expansion of the system which had prevailed for nine years at one of the growers' operations, the giant bud antle holdings in the salinas valley. There, the teamsters represented field workers, but in such a way that the union really ^{IS} an agent of the grower. The union, in essence, ^{TAKES} ~~took~~ dues from them ^{WORKERS} and, in return, merely ^{TELLS} ~~told~~ them ^{WILL} ~~would~~ their pay and conditions ^{WORKERS} be. They rarely, if ever, vote on anything, and any negotiating -- if ^{INDIVIDUAL} ~~any~~ is ever ^{really} ~~done~~ -- is done by teamster officials over whom they really have no control.



SO, like the digiorgio corporation in the grape dispute before them, the vegetable growers called in the teamsters, in the form of an official named bill graml, Graml was only too eager to agree to represent all of the growers' field workers, and on terms less hard on the growers than those demanded by the farm workers organizing committee. Wages and benefits were less in the teamster agreement, of course. ~~And~~ most important, union members had far less of a voice in farm operations. The organizing committee demanded, for instance, that several dangerous pesticides be kept out of the fields and that others not be used without consultation between grower and workers representatives. The teamsters demanded no such things. And, in contrast to the demand of the organizing committee for growers to seek ~~help~~ ^{WORKERS} first from the union hiring hall in the same way as waterfront employers and contractors do, the teamsters allowed growers to continue getting help from paracitical labor contractors who supply ~~farm laborers~~ ^{them} like so much cattle, ~~for an absolutely unnecessary additional fee.~~

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THE teamster agreement also required all workers to join the ~~teamsters~~ ^{union} after ten days and have \$1.25 taken out of their meager checks every week ~~in~~ ^{deducted} in union dues. It mattered not that the workers had not ~~even~~ ^{been} consulted on whether they wanted to be represented by the teamsters or on the terms of the agreement which would dictate their pay and working conditions. And it didn't matter ~~to the growers or the contractors~~ ^{to the growers} that the workers ~~clearly~~ ^{clearly} obviously wanted to be represented by their own organization, the farm workers organizing committee, run ~~with~~ ^{with} tight rank and file control by their fellow ~~workers and Mexican~~ ^{MEXICAN-AMERICAN FARM} americans, and not, by a teamsters organization run by professional union technicians. anglos in alligator shoes and shiny suits




NOR did it seem to matter that the teamsters had agreed, in 1967, to give the organizing committee the sole jurisdiction over field workers while it retained jurisdiction over the other workers in the food processing industry.

THESE things didn't matter, that is, to the growers and the teamsters. They mattered very much to the farm workers organizing committee and its allies. And, almost immediately after the teamster-grower agreements were announced, the organizing committee began picketing a large grower in salinas and cesar chavez began a fast to protest the teamster contracts.

THEN a national committee of roman catholic bishops stepped in -- the same committee that helped settle the vineyard dispute. There also was an important meeting in san francisco between einar mohn, director of the teamsters' western conference, and leonard woodcock, national president of the united auto workers union, a close ally of both the teamsters and the organizing committee.

THE result was a reiteration of the agreement of 1967 between the teamsters and the farm workers organizing committee. The organizing committee, that is, was granted jurisdiction over field workers. The teamsters got jurisdiction over the others in the food industry.



THEN, under the threat of strikes, several major growers set aside their teamster contracts and began negotiating agreements with the organizing committee. Most of them refused to budge, however. The teamsters agreed ~~to~~ not to interfere with those growers who did ~~not~~ want to switch contracts, and agreed not to try to sign any more growers. But teamster organizers insisted they would honor the contracts of those growers who did not want to switch to the organizing committee ... and insisted that the committee's agreement with the teamsters prohibited it from striking the reluctant growers.

THE organizing committee ~~and~~ did not agree, and so called the big strike that is now going on. Since then, the teamsters have openly sided with the growers. Bill Grami, their chief organizer, attacks Chavez and his allies for being against, quote, law and order ... is openly opposing the strikers ... refusing to release growers from their contracts with the teamsters and meanwhile attempting to sign contracts with other growers.

AT first, the organizing committee brought out between five and seven thousand workers at nearly 150 farms in the Salinas valley and in the Santa Maria valley in northern Santa Barbara county, and severely ^{cut into} ~~interfered~~ the harvesting and shipment ^{of produce} ~~of produce~~ and ~~lettuce and several other vegetables.~~

GROWERS reacted immediately by getting more than two dozen court orders against the strike ... on grounds that it is an illegal jurisdictional strike. But the orders, issued by monterey county judges, have been ignored ... and a judge in the santa maria valley has refused to issue a similar order there, on grounds that the workers had not been given a chance to say whether they wanted to be represented by the teamsters.

DOZENS of pickets have been arrested for violating the court orders that were issued. And this, among other things, has lessened the original impact of the strike. But though more people are working than before and more produce is being harvested and shipped, the strike and the constant threat of boycotts to back it up have remained effective.

ONE of the largest of the growers finally signed with the organizing committee. That was the Interharvest Corporation, which grows about twenty percent of the salinas valley's lettuce, and which is owned in turn by United Fruit. The other growers ~~immediately~~ went to court, claiming that Interharvest violated an agreement that no grower would abandon ^a ~~the~~ teamster agreement unless all growers abandoned them.

THIS suit ^{Has BEEN} ~~was~~ dropped, however, and another large grower, the freshpick food operation owned by the purex corporation, has begun negotiations with the organizing committee, ^{so} ~~we~~ have several other smaller growers.

THESE developments have prompted several counter actions. There has been a great deal of violence, and the formation of citizens committees ~~by~~ ^{COMPOSED OF} teamsters, growers and their numerous allies among the silent majority types who dominate things in areas like salinas. Members of one of the committees have been picketing, in violation of a court order, those growers who are dealing with chavez's organization. This kept interharvest from operating for several days. But police have been arresting the counter pickets and operations have begun again at the big farm.

THAT, I think, brings us pretty much up to date. Most of the salinas and santa maria valley's growers remain under teamster union contracts that provide as little as possible for their workers. And most of the growers are being struck by the united farm workers organizing committee, which is demanding contracts that really help the workers -- workers whom it, and not the teamsters, really represents. Court orders against picketing are being defied openly, violence is a common occurrence, and probably only half of the normal crop is being harvested and shipped.

A FEW growers are relenting and agreeing to negotiate new contracts with the farm workers organizing committee, despite the counter picketing by teamster and grower forces. But the majority of growers, as I said, remain firm. So how long will it continue?




LEGAL action, it seems clear, is not going to stop it. Neither has there been any sign of success from possible peacemakers. The catholic bishops committee remains in salinas, but it has accomplished nothing concrete. The auto workers union is in no position to again intervene on behalf of its farm union allies, largely because it is tied up in negotiations with the country's auto firms ... and because it is borrowing 25 million dollars from the teamsters, mainly to bolster its strike benefit fund, in anticipation of an auto strike.

AND the state and federal governments aren't about to become involved in such controversy -- not unless they can find some way to assure that their intervention would assure a grower - teamster victory.

IT also is clear that the farm workers organizing committee is not going to drop out .. and may, in fact, launch a boycott to strengthen a gradually weakening strike, just as it did in the vineyard dispute.

A BOYCOTT could eventually pressure growers into settling, if not the loss of millions of dollars which the strike alone is inflicting. Or perhaps the teamsters will pull out. Certainly the union's national and regional officers would like to see it happen, and certainly the local organizers who started the whole damn thing have indicated they may be ready to quit. Even supposing they are ready, however, executing the face saving maneuvers will take time.



I'M NOT about to predict what will happen, and when ... beyond saying that, whatever happens, tremendous progress already has come about. The fact that the growers of the salinas valley have signed union agreements with anyone, even teamster officials, is an incredible development considering the violent struggle against unionization that had been waged unrelentingly for these many years by those extremely important growers.

THE great need now, ~~of course~~, is to make certain that the unionization that finally is here is unionization on the best possible terms for the workers who have been so miserably exploited. This means, not the ~~obvious contract~~ deals offered ^{by growers} by teamster organizers with slight concern for the workers involved, but the contracts demanded by cesar chavez and the united farm workers organizing committee. These are the agreements that would ~~at least~~ give ~~the~~ field workers a individual, independent and genuine voice in their own destinies, the standing as dignified human beings that has so long been denied them. The organizing committee has no choice but to continue struggling for such agreements, no matter how long it may take, ~~and no matter what form the struggle may take.~~ For the agreements eventually won in the Salinas valley will set a precedent ^{FOR} ~~on~~ farms all over the united states.