

Schenley to Bargain With a Grape Union

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LOS ANGELES, April 6—The seven-month-old grape strike appeared to be nearing settlement today as Schenley Industries, Inc., a major grape grower, formally agreed to bargain with a labor union representing field workers.

The strike in the grape vineyards of central California, though involving only a few thousand workers, had attracted wide support from church and civil rights groups around the nation, which helped start a nationwide boycott of Schenley products.

The strike also became a cause célèbre in intellectual circles.

Labor officials here said this marked the first time in the history of California, the nation's leading agricultural state,

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SCHENLEY AGREES TO A GRAPE UNION

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that a union of field workers had gained official recognition from a grower.

"Labor history was written here today," said William L. Kircher, national director of organization for the A.F.L.-C.I.O., who noted that the Schenley agreement might mark a milestone in the long struggle toward agricultural unionization.

However, late today the Council of California Growers released a statement saying that Schenley was "not representative of California agriculture where growers steadfastly refuse to sell out their employes and force them into a union that does not represent them."

The agreement does not automatically end the 8-month-old grape strike in Central California, but there were indications that the strike might be nearing a climax.

The Di Giorgio Fruit Corporation, the biggest employer in the grape vineyards of central California, said it would make "an important announcement" about the grape strike tomorrow and a spokesman indicated today that he was "optimistic" that a labor agreement could be reached.

Union officials here said that if both Di Giorgio and Schenley, the biggest and second biggest grape growers in the state, would recognize the union the other smaller growers would "come around." At the peak of the grape season, Di Giorgio employes some 1,500 workers, while Schenley employs some 450.

The agreement announced today by Schenley was with an independent union, the National Farm Workers Association, which consists largely of Mexican-American grape pickers in the central California region.

Cesar Chavez, the swarthy, articulate president of the N.F.W.A., said his independent union planned to join the American Federation of Labor and Congress of Industrial Organizations shortly.

Mr. Chavez said that Mr. Kircher was mainly responsible for re-establishing communication between his union and Schenley.

The agreement between Schenley and the N.F.W.A. recognizes the union as sole bargaining representative for the agricultural laborers and provides that wage negotiations for a new contract shall begin within 30 days.

Sidney Korshak, attorney for Schenley, said he was "sure" that a wage agreement could be reached shortly. "We are mindful of the plight of the workers," he said.

Mr. Chavez's impoverished, four-year-old union has tried to start a national boycott

against Schenley in recent weeks with the aid of religious and civil rights groups and other sympathetic labor unions. Schenley officials have minimized the impact of the boycott.

Upon hearing of the agreement today some 250 grape strikers who were marching toward Sacramento tore up their signs and posters denouncing Schenley.

The marchers were on a 300-mile trek from the vineyards to the State Capitol to help dramatize their strike and boycott. They halted 30 miles from Sacramento today to celebrate the Schenley agreement at a boisterous high-spirited rally.

Mr. Kircher praised Schenley as "a pioneer in the breakthrough against the last frontier in this nation where workers are still denied the right to organize and bargain collectively."

The Schenley agreement came as a dramatic climax to a long strike that has bitterly divided the grape country around Delano, Calif.

Growers initially dismissed the strike as an unimportant wildcat walkout. Most observers, noting that the local unions had only meager financial resources, predicted it would be crushed.

California's \$3.7-billion agricultural industry employs some 500,000 workers. The average family income of seasonal farm workers is estimated at about \$2,500.