

STRIKES WIDENED BY CHAVEZ UNION

Grape Grower Contracts in California Expire

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BAKERSFIELD, Calif., July 29—The strike against California table grape growers spread across the entire San Joaquin Valley today when the United Farm Workers Union failed to renew its contracts with growers in the Delano area.

The strike that was called this afternoon left the union holding just two contracts with grape growers.

Once the strike was announced by César Chavez, the union chief, there was speculation that the 29 growers in the Delano area would sign contracts with the International Brotherhood of Teamsters.

The teamsters, who have already taken nearly 50 contracts from the fledgling U.F.W.U., had been predicting even before today's strike was announced that they would get the Delano contracts, which represent the bulk of the grape growing industry in California.

It had been forecast that if the Chavez union failed to hold onto the Delano contracts, it would find it hard to survive. It was pointed out that the union's membership, which was once over 40,000, had already fallen to 15,500 and would dip to a mere 6,500 if the Delano contracts were lost.

Plans for Strike Action

However, officials of the U.F.W.U. were busy announcing plans to begin strike action against the Delano growers tomorrow.

Mr. Chavez said that negotiations had broken down over a number of issues. He mentioned the union hiring hall, union recognition, labor camps, pesticide control, grievance procedures and the union's right to conduct secondary boycotts as questions that had led to the breaking off of talks and the calling of the strike.

"We were fighting to keep what we got after five years of struggle and they were trying to take away what we had," Mr. Chavez said.

In the labor dispute here in the San Joaquin Valley today's action by the U.F.W.U. was the most crucial action to date. There had been speculation that the farm workers would yield as much as possible to avert strikes and keep the Delano contracts.

The strikes are expected to be particularly bitter because this is considered to be the union's stronghold.

It was here in 1970 that the grape growers, after a labor dispute that had gone on for five years, signed contracts with Mr. Chavez and his union. The other growers followed and as a result the U.F.W.U. was able to organize the entire industry across the state.

But when those contracts began to expire three years later, instead of renewing with the U.F.W.U., the growers began to sign with the teamsters union.

The teamsters signed their first pacts in the Coachella Valley to the south. They signed all but two growers—K. K. Larson and Lionel Steinberg, both of whom remained with the U.F.W.U.

When the harvest moved north to the Lamont-Arvin area, the teamsters also took over those contracts. The U.F.W.U. had hoped to change the pattern with the Delano growers and they remained optimistic until negotiations broke off this afternoon.

Mr. Chavez indicated that he

would not be surprised if the Delano growers went to the teamsters. He said that the growers "had the teamsters in the back room while negotiating with us." He did not elaborate.

Mr. Chavez said that the union did not give in on the hiring hall issue because "people must have the right to set fair rules on hiring practices and to eliminate labor contractors."

On the issue of union recognition, he said that previous contracts covered all crops but that in these negotiations the growers were insistent that the contracts cover only grapes.

"That would be unworkable," Mr. Chavez said. "You might be working for three hours in the morning under a contract and then move to another orchard in the afternoon and not be covered by the contract."

Mr. Chavez said that labor camps now are "worse than they were three years ago" and that some effort to force improvement was needed in the contract. He said that the union also wanted provisions for pesticide control written into the contract.

Of the reports that his union was in deep trouble and that it might not survive this labor crisis, Mr. Chavez said in a statement:

"The strike is not going to be lost even though we may not win it. If they [the growers] don't sign this year, they'll sign next and if not next year, the following. We have nothing else to do, no place else to go and we have our patience."