

THE BITTER HARVEST IN WINE COUNTRY (12/65)

A plump, olive-skinned woman stands defiantly in the black dirt of a vineyard outside this little valley town where Walter Reuther promised last week to "mobilize the entire American labor movement" behind her and those beside her.

There have been other visitors, here in the heart of California's \$17.5 billion-a-year grape industry, 140 miles north of Los Angeles.

Clergymen, some from across the country, who walk the picket lines; young civil rights workers; and others who bring money, truckloads of food and clothing, and pledges of a nation-wide consumer boycott against the wines, raisins and grapes and the men she pickets.

"You ask me why!" she says incredulously. "Have you ever tried raising four kids on \$1.25 an hour?"

The woman belongs to the National Farm Workers' Association, an independent Mexican-American group that is joined in the strike with the Agricultural Workers' Organizing Committee, a predominately Filipino AFL-CIO group.

"Twenty-five hundred of us out," she proclaims proudly.

That would be half the normal work force in the 400-square-mile strike area that fans out from Delano. But still the woman pickets, because, she says, "Every time we get somebody to go out, they bring in a lousy scab from Texas to take his place."

A few miles away, in a bright motel room, a tall, blond man casually straightens the creases on his spotless khaki trousers.

"Poverty? The last survey I looked at shows them averaging \$1.95. They don't want a strike and they don't really want a union either. They've got a real fine relationship with us – really personal. A union would destroy it."

He is Joe Brosmer, the relaxed, personable spokesman for the growers. He says there is, in fact, no strike at all.

"Unless you call a few hundred people walking out a strike. And what in the world do we want with scabs? We've got enough people right here who want to work."

For three and a half months now, they've been talking like that. Unions crying "strike," growers crying "foul" – and no one can say accurately which side, if either, is giving the true picture.

The unions still have a long fight ahead of them here but, if Mr. Reuther's visit meant what it sounded like it meant, they'll at least get a good start.

The strikers will tell you differently, of course, but so far they have no more than touched their powerful employers financially.

Still holding to the economic and political reins, exempted from the laws that require their industrial counterparts to bargain collectively, and able to find replacements for most strikers, the grape growers had a record harvest this summer.

Generally, they seem confident of equal success in the crucial post-harvest work now beginning – the fine preparation which will determine the quality and quantity of next year's crop.

But though outwardly confident, the growers are anything but cool. They gather in angry groups downtown at the Elks Club to denounce "outside agitators" and "union bosses" for their troubles.

Only a few blocks away, in the neat compact auditorium of the Filipino Community Center, Larry Itliong runs the AFL-CIO strike headquarters and he is never more than an arm's length away from a cigar.

The building is filled constantly with the sounds of Tagalog, and with the smells of cooking. It is here, in a large kitchen off the auditorium, where strikers can get three meals a day free – usually meat, always rice, potatoes and beans.

It is here, too, that Mr. Itliong passes out checks, ranging from \$15 to \$100 to help strikers' families pay their bills. Part of the money is collected by strikers' committees that canvass Filipino communities throughout the state, some is donated by unions, and some is sent by members who have found work outside the strike region.

Out on the edge of town, in the battered headquarters of the National Farm Workers' Association, the boss is Cesar Chavez, an articulate former migrant worker from Delano. Chavez founded the association three years ago as a community service organization and it recently won a \$286,000 federal grant for one of its anti-poverty projects.

The grant cannot be used until after the strike ends. But Mr. Chavez likes to say the Association's assault on poverty already has been launched.

The rooms outside his office are filled with young people – members of the Congress of Racial Equality and the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee. And there are Protestant clergymen from the Migrant Ministry, assigned to the association as part of their duty of looking after the workers who roam California's fertile San Joaquin Valley.

To the young people, It is more than just a strike' it's the beginning of a movement by Mexican-Americans and Filipinos to join the civil rights drive started by Negroes.