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REUTHER PLEDGES SUPPORT

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Delano, Kern County

Walter Reuther stormed into this little valley town yesterday in a dramatic display of union support for the San Joaquin Valley's striking grape pickers.

The dynamic, red-haired leader of the AFL-CIO's most powerful industrial union – the Auto Workers – told crowds of cheering workers who mobbed him:

“You've got to win this strike and we're going to stay with you until you do.”

Reuther said that his union and the AFL-CIO's industrial union department, which he heads, will donate \$5000 a month to strikers “for as long as it takes to win this strike.”

Then, at a night-time rally attended by 700, Reuther handed the strikers a check for \$10,000 - \$5000 for the December payment and \$5000 as a “Christmas present.”

Town officials set up a meeting between Reuther and leading valley growers, and both sides assembled in a private home in Delano late last night to discuss the dispute.

Besides his pledge of financial support, Reuther promised to mobilize union support for a Nation-wide boycott of grape products from the strike-bound area and to demand a Senate investigation of farm working conditions.

After flying into Delano, heart of the 400-square-mile area where strikers have been battling for 14 weeks, Reuther was taken on a whirlwind tour.

He went to the fields where the AFL-CIO's agricultural organizing committee and the independent National Farm Workers Association have been picketing, to urge workers to “come out on strike.”

In town, he visited several picket lines in front of grape packing sheds. At each stop, he was mobbed by workers and continually repeated his pledge of support.

Reuther was followed by about 50 sign-carrying strikers as he marched up and down the streets of the town, 300 miles south of San Francisco.

“Viva Reuther! Viva Reuther!” they shouted.

The strike, being conducted primarily by local Mexican-American and Filipino workers, is “an important new beginning” in the long battle to organize farm workers, he said.

“It may take time, but if we stick together we will eventually gain social and economic justice for the farm worker as we did for the workers at Ford, General Motors and the other big companies.”

Reuther’s visit was not entirely welcome, however.

As he moved into the union headquarters a crowd of about 25 greeted him with signs telling him that “you are not welcome Mr. Reuter... when we are ready for unionization we will call you.”

He ignored them and greeted a union crowd on the opposite side of the street. Helmeted police stood between the two groups. Although there were loud verbal exchanges, there was no violence.

Elsewhere, however a grower was arrested on charges of assault and battery after two clergymen at a picket line said he shoved, slapped and hit them. Phil Patti, 52, became abusive shortly after Reuther visited the pickets, they said.