"There's no turning back now," says Cesar Chavez, leader of the grape strikers.

'La Huelga' Becomes 'La Causa'

By DICK MEISTER

SAN FRANCISCO, Oct. 11 - The trend of the streets is not for the workers, but for the workers. This is not the same as it was in the past. But this, one on the water front here, sounds as if he really meant it. Burly and unshaven, he jumped from his truck, slammed the cab door, and furiously thrust his hands deep into the pockets of his sheepskin jacket. He pointed his foot. "Move, dammit! Move!"

Fifteen weary men and women were already there. They had been there for weeks. They had been working hard. They had not moved. They were not going to move. They were not going to give up. They were not going to let anyone take their jobs away from them.

"We are not going to move," they shouted. "We are not going to give up. We are not going to let anyone take our jobs away from us."

The strike was continuing. It had been going on for weeks. It had been going on for months. It had been going on for years. And it was not going to stop. It was not going to end.

The workers were not going to give up. They were not going to let anyone take their jobs away from them.

DIANA MEYER is labor editor of the San Francisco Chronicle.
well—and a major political issue argued by Presidential candidates. An argument of the movement is the man who has led it all—a uniquely gifted, truly charismatic figure named Cesar Chavez. Ask a striker or boycott supporter why it happened and you're likely to draw an incredible stare—and an angry question in return ("You ever try raising four kids on $1.50 an hour?"). Grape growers and their allies have different responses, often couched in language, not surprisingly, like that used by urban employers during the equally turbulent organizing drives by industrial unions in the nineteenth-eighties. The growers, fearful of losing an almost unique upper hand in labor relations, tell you it's primarily a move by "union bosses, radicals," and all manner of "outside agitators" to force their employees Cesar," recalls an eloquent but typical enthusiast, "boating with a patient, poor like us, dark like us, talking quietly, moving people to talk about their problems, attacking the little problems first, and suggesting, always suggesting—never more than that—that solutions seemed attainable. We didn't know it until we met him, but he was the leader we had been waiting for.

Chavez, starting out as a migratory worker from Yuma, Ariz., in the late nineteen-thirties, has been through as much as what they have been through in the "cotton, towns," cotton fields and fruit orchards of Arizona and California—for most of his 41 years. He has seen the Anglo operators come and go, the A.F.L. and C.I.O. men who have promised so much for so long, and he has learned from their failures.

Ten years with Saul Alinskey's Community Services Organization in California, the valley town, then as national director at Los Angeles

SUPPORTERS—A demonstration outside a New York hotel where Richard Nixon, who opposed the grape boycott, was speaking during this fall's campaign. California's $4-billion-a-year farm industry. Although Meat-

The pickets were not at the markets at the beginning, the picketing signs along back-country roads, out of the vineyards that sprawl over the 400 square miles where most of the country's grapes are grown are a reminder of the fight for better terms.

The California grape pickers, like other migrant workers, have not been able to organize because the growers have managed, through the industry's unions, to block any effective efforts at improving working and living conditions. The growers rely on a system of "guaranteed" wages and working conditions, which they claim are better than those of other industries. However, these guarantees are often violated, and the workers are left without any protection against exploitation.

The grape pickers, however, have been able to organize and have won some important victories, including the right to form their own union and to negotiate contracts with the growers. These victories have provided a model for other workers in the state and have inspired similar efforts in other parts of the country.

The grape pickers' struggle is an important part of the broader struggle for workers' rights and social justice in California and throughout the United States. Their success has shown that it is possible to organize and win against the power of the growers, and that workers can fight for better living and working conditions.
LEADER—Chavez at the California State Capitol in March, 1966, after lead-
ing a 28-day, 230-mile march of grape strikers from Delano to Sacramento, headquarted, taught Chavez other valuable lessons about organizing, his fellow Mexican-American. He does not march among them preaching the virtues of Samuel Gompers and trying to organize them as if they were as easy Anglo plumbers. He tries to build from within—to let people organize themselves, in their own way. "Grass roots with a vengeance," Chavez calls it.

To be successful, his union could not be "a neat business operation with no heart" that promised merely the negotiation of better wages, hours, and working conditions in return for the payment of dues. Farm workers had seen too much of that kind of unionism. Their union would have to be one of them, the unified, self-directed action the outsiders never had taught. As Chavez says, they'd have to learn to do everything for themselves, "from the most mundane office work to the most sophisticated bargaining"—and their union would have to offer "programs which guarantee a new life."

It was slow going, Chavez, after retiring from the Community Service Organization in 1961, because of its lack of contacts for the farm workers, settled in Delano in the early sixties with his wife, Dolores, and their eight children. For three years pre-
tending the strike, and while working in the vineyards themselves, he patiently gathered a core of grape-growing workers and their families into his association, properly a combi-
nation community organization and civil rights group, rather than a union. They formed their own credit union, where 30-40 of them would borrow the money they always seemed to need, and banded together to buy fuel, for their batteries, autos and to get other neces-
sities at discount prices they could afford.

"I thought it would be four years, maybe five, before we'd be ready for a strike," says Chavez, and I was really scared we might go too soon and get crushed." But the A.F.L.-C.I.O. group jumped the gun. It had won a 15-cent-a-
hour increase in the three-
prevailing base wage of $1.35 from near workers during the early phase of the 1963 harvest season and, when its members moved into the Dela-
no area vineyards, they de-
manded the same. They had gotten it, that would have been that. But growers, fear-
ful, they said, or weakening the incentive of pickers to go out all by piece-price system, were adamant; they would not even discuss the demand. The strike was on and, on the picket lines, the strike

AFL-CIO's had no more than
just higher base pay. They

strike for nothing less

right to their pay, and every-
thing else, would have to be negotiated by their own repre-

sentatives and guaranteed in writing. Chavez was held back for a few days, but his members were too eager. They were willing to strike as early as they

icle. "I did not want to lose the 230,000 Federal anti-poverty grant their associ-

ion had just won.

Chavez knew they could not do it alone. There were about 5,000 vineyard workers in the strike area and prob-
ably no more than 300 local

families in this association, perhaps in the A.F.L-

C.I.O. group. Besides, growers,خدمة

agreement by law and able to recruit from a steady stream of migrants, would re-

luctantly deal with as quickly as they left their jobs. It was necessary to put Kristensen and 

power and pressure also came

from elsewhere, through what Chavez calls "a broad, broad campaign of forces wishing to throw the full weight into the battle." So, with perfect timing—this is day of the civil rights movement and the War on Poverty, after all—be-havior was sought and con-

victed when a strong leader, who was not the last

on, those and workers' planters who think maybe the Communists got something to do with it, too."

The strike as the main activity of its Migrant Ministry, they set up well-stocked communalities in the strike area, around out-

pensions, and personally pleaded with

sick striking workers, and in July

what happened from "Las Heras" into "Los Cucos." They solicited contributions all over the state, spoke at universities rallies, church af-
fairs, political gatherings and union meetings, petitioned legislators, and inspired lesser residues of their movement among farm workers and their allies in several other states. They demonstrated at the metropolitan headquarters of the larger growers and at markets that sold their grapes and grape products. They defied the threats of growers and armed guards who de-

president in their picket lines

outside the vineyards: hundreds of them, citizens in-

cluded, eagerly went to jail to test stringent picketing reg-

ulations hastily drawn up by

unsympathetic local officials.

Just six months after the strike began, they gathered, in March, 1966, nearly (10,000)

strong, before the steps of the State Capitol in Sacramento, to demand a "new social or-
it for the farm worker." There they met 80 striker's who had marched in a dram-

25-day pilgrimage north from Delano, planting the

seeds of their movement all along the 300-mile route. This was perhaps the most dra-

matic of the strikers' activi-

ties, but it was not the last

in to this day, without a noticeable slackening of pace.

It offers has been self-

serving, inefficient and disor-

ganized work, the outsiders have performed; the wild dis-

ruptions, and sometimes out-

right lies, of the single-minded, naive, uninformed and inexperienced persuasion among them can be maddening. So can their impractical style, especially to the well-programmed men of organized labor who try to bring some method to it all. (I love these people), remarked a top San Francisco union official. "But, God, they're like a bunch of hippies sometimes. They come bouncing down to a warehouse—all of a sudden like—and tell us, 'Quit unloading those scab grapes!' Hell, why don't they tell us these things in advance? We could arrange something.'"

But, if not always well done, the outsiders' activities have been absolutely essential; they have kept the effort from dying as so many farm organizing efforts before they have died, from lack of public attention and support.

During this second phase, big labor's first serious notice came from Walter Reuther, who marched through the streets of Delano and outside the vineyards in a demonstration that made growers reconsider their wishful premise that this would be a standard, quickly abandoned farm strike. His United Auto Workers union, Reuther told cheering farm workers, would contribute at least $5,000 a month "for as long as it takes to win this strike." That was just before Christmas Day in 1965. Seven months later, the A.F.L.-C.I.O. — doggedly reluctant to put more than token financing into what had been a losing cause for so long, and hesitant over the unorthodox ways of the Mexican-Americans — nevertheless chartered Chavez's group as the United Farm Workers Organizing Committee, merged its own organizing committee into it, and made its efforts a major concern. William Kircher, the A.F.L.-C.I.O.'s strapping, bulldoglike director of organization, was dispatched to Delano on an almost full-time basis, backed by a monthly budget of $10,000 at the minimum (not counting the $3.50 a month in dues the union is getting sporadically from what it claims now to be 17,000 members throughout the country, and outside contributions of more than $250,000 a year).

Yet, the growers have retained the upper hand; they have their own powerful allies within the state's business.
financial and political hierarchies. However, unpromised, the interweaving of the farm workers have been relatively small. In contracts or union recognition agreements from the 100 to 200,000 or anyone in the community's only a few thousands of California's 500,000 farm workers, and, because of strike presence, increase of about 25 percent an hour to the base pay of most vineyard workers.

The pay of the worker contract has gone up considerably, to a base guarantee of at least $20 an hour, reiterating what the union says is an average of at least $50 an hour including piece-rate bonuses. The contracts also provide some of the employer-paid holidays, vacations, and health care, sometimes in the heart of farm labor and, among other things, guarantee non-discrimination in work space, drinking water, and tools.

Most of the growers who have signed contracts raise wine grapes, and strikers have competed with numerous growers of table grapes—mostly not the largest growers of all: John Giusti, whose family-owned corporation oversees 5,000 acres of vineyards spread over several states. As many as 2,000 workers picked one million pounds of grapes every year for Giusti, bringing the contract a gross return of anywhere from $2 million to $8 million. John Giusti, Giusti likes to sit down with any responsible union, Chaves assured, however, does not make the grade. It's "a rebel outfit; it doesn't represent anybody."

John Giusti and his family have sold the vineyard workers need a union, anyway. "You have to go slow-auction to win over the poorest of the poor. And it doesn't matter where they live, they get free transporation. If they don't live somewhere, we give them a place to stay, too. Absolutely free,"

Joe Giusti, a raw-boned, slightly-gray-haired man of 69, is typical of California grape growers. He is an immigrant, a person who relies on independent labor, who still works a full day in the vineyard with his family. He who, like many table-grape growers, come to Delano from Southern Europe in the nineties-twentieth, saved frugally, bought cheap, parcels of land here and there, and then hit it big when the subsidized Federal water began pooling into the area.

Many like to picture Joe Giusti and his fellow growers as devils. They are not, but their do seem quaintly out of touch with what has been going on beyond the vineyards since it moved into the valley beside the Mexican-American community three decades ago. They often seem sincerely pleased that anyone would suggest farm workers need—or want—anything but what the patron grants them. They didn't need a union; they merely needed a chance to work hard.

Joe Giusti doesn't talk much to interviewers. He leaves this to his nephew, John Giusti Jr., a young man typical of growers only in his views. John, a clean-cut 27-year-old Stanford Law School student, who looks like a cleancut Stanford Law School graduate, is a pleasant, sagacious and articulate advocate of the words roll out rapidly: John Giusti knows what he wants to say, and he knows the grape business as well as any man in the business.

"Joe, my three other uncles and my father came over from Sicily. So it was right after the First World War. It was bad, believe me, the Italian Government the leader, then certainly a government whose policies and actions are precisely those of most growers.

Certainly, there is a multinational—so corporacion, he says, but they're on a slim line just like the other growers. "You're lucky to break even some years you can't even do that. Sure, you make the bricks, but not by all that much." Take the $5 or so grower is being paid for 10,000 pounds of the end and 26-pound cart. Growers grew alone, $5 to 5 cents: then there's another, say, 70 cents for the transport to the market, not worry, equalization, all sorts of growing costs. And the picker will come it is. It's like going to Las Vegas and rolling the dice—a very risky business. It's not easy like that.

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"Don't buy grapes!" goes the cry that has marked the transformation of a California farm workers' strike into a civil-rights, religious cause and a nationwide boycott.

PICKERS—Iowa's sharecroppers, workers have always been poor. Of 100 or so growers in California, 11—a little over a fifth—have signed contracts or some recognition agreements. But the overwhelming majority of California's grape workers, the best it $1.50, an annual income to more of $2,000, according to the union.
buddled in the shade. The men had the same dark, shiny look as the men inside, and their jeans were faded, and denim shirts; the women, chubbier for the most part, wore, like those inside, floppy straw sombreros, loose, baggy slacks, and a vast array of kerchief knots around their necks. But no one, who decided someone should talk to the reporters: "No, sir. We don't have anything to do with that album," was, as usual, nobody that's a real worker, anyway. Look at me—I make $2.50 an hour. Who needs a union?"

They weren't afraid; they were going to march in and tell the subcommittee, "the truth." Four of them did, others in hushed voices. Englebardt, the words Gunnarson was voicing, ran fast inside the auditorium, as the records were played through with an added new element to the dialogue. He heard, and told the subcommittee, that the union didn't favor children working in the fields. "Of course, they expect me to be old 14-year-old-out-of-trouble?"

How had the disorders got to the auditorium? "Well, sir," said a woman, "the boys came up to me and asked, 'What do you want to go to the high school and learn the truth?' He brought us here in his own trucks, too. Sir, remnisce over there.

It may be the easily available speakers' strike. It may be a reluctance of marginal workers as much as what little they now have by walking off the job for an uncertain future; it may be that farm workers really do not want a union. But, whatever the reasons, orthodox strike activities, even in the unorthodox manner of Cesar Chavez, cannot do the job.

To the boycott. Chavez's union had used the tactic to win major contracts, in 1968 at the Sche men, DiGiovanni Corpora- tion's Oakland, Calif., mill. Again, at the National Liqueurs of S&W Wine Foods, which the workers said was a "union busting" operation. As Sche men vice president James Woodley says, it wasn't the workers' union that he called but the workers who have been most active in the struggle for union recognition in the past.

The picketers were removed from the Cochella area; the union's "union movement is worth the struggle for farm worker and his child or one grower and his child," and retired to a profession including S&W Fine Foods, which the workers said was "union busting". As Sche men vice president James Woodley says, it wasn't the workers' union that he called but the workers who have been most active in the struggle for union recognition in the past.

The present boycott began last fall, with Giannar's grapes at the "ripe target," at a time when farm-union picketing was at an ap- parent dead end. It did not improve their situation signifi- cantly, however. Then Chavez, following a superb instinct for the dramatic, and sincerely and soundly concerned that his members might turn to violence, in a fast. It was to reaffirm, he said, a commitment to the Gandhian principles of non- violence; this had guided him from the beginning.

There had been no serious violence at the vineyard dis- puts, despite a spate of minor attacks and extreme provocations for which union and growers' fences were blamed each other, but there was a danger that Chavez, emerging as a Martin Luther King of the newly aroused Mexican-American, would be sup- pressed by men from the Southwest who preached a "black militants'" call to arms.

The frustration hit its peak when the strike was extended to the nearby Cochella area. The spring and Chavez's union became convinced that "some- thing has to be done." The pickets were removed from the Cochella area; the union's "union movement is worth the struggle for farm worker and his child or one grower and his child," and retired to a profession including S&W Fine Foods, which the workers said was "union busting". As Sche men vice president James Woodley says, it wasn't the workers' union that he called but the workers who have been most active in the struggle for union recognition in the past.

At the 35-day boycott in March, before 4,000 grafted workers on the consumer mass in Delano's city park. Senator Robert F. Kennedy was at Chavez's side as he in a chair set up on a flatbed truck and nimbly wielded a tiny bit of brand and handed him by a priest. Sen- ator Kennedy took a portion of the grapes from the same home-baked loaf, then hailed Chavez as the "headlights of the heroic figures of our time" and congratulated those who were "locked with Cesar in the struggle for justice for the farm worker and the struggle for justice for for all American people." Chavez feels that by his fast he managed to turn his followers away from the militants everywhere else seems to be skirting: "It made our violent position, it made everyone can understand it now, both by ourselves and our adversaries." The ordeal eventual- ly sent Chavez to a hos- pital where he lay immobilized for three weeks. Even now, he still must spend most of his time in bed, although he has resumed full direction of the union.

Chavez's fast focused na- tional attention on Delano again, and the unending, growers of table grapes began feeling pressure. Swiftly, the Giannarson-only boycott was expanded to include the grapes of all the growers. In one way, the growers brought it on themselves, by allowing Giannarson to use their labels on some of the containers the corporation shipped to mar- ket, in an attempt to hide them from strikers. But they were with nearly incommunicable problems in trying to single out one grower among many who shipped grapes to the same stores. "It was the only way we could do it," take on the whole industry, says Chavez. "The grape itself had to become a label.

The boycott soon became the main activity of strikers and their allies. By now, the boycott's legal lines have been all but abandoned. Some strikers actually have returned to work, to ease the strain on their union's trea- sury, and about 200 of them and their families have been seen on union salaries of $5 a week, to more than 30 cities in this country and Canada to wage probably the most extensive boycott in American labor history.

Backed by their allies, the members and financiers, strikers are demanding that on their own, school cafeteria, city agen- cies and other workers and sellers of food quit dealing with grapes or face picketing, dem- onstrations and the opposition of the strikers' influential supporters. The supporters have made their own forums into many other communities, as far abroad as Western Eu- rope, and many stores have gone along with the demands (so many thousands, says Chavez, that "we can't begin to count them"; growers "can't count them" either, but feel Chavez is guilty of gross exaggeration — "as usual", most of them add). Some large universities also have joined the boycott and even a few school districts. The union-oriented mayors of a half-dozen major industrial cities, including New York, have ordered municipal purchases cut off. Also, the na- tion's chief religious organ- ization that of the Catholic and Jewish, has asked their members to buy grape products.

In New York, where Cali- fornia growers normally sell about 20 percent of their table-grape crop, sales dropped by 90 percent at one store this summer. Shipments were forced to put grapes in cold storage or ship them to other areas — where the resulting sur- plus drove prices down (some growers estimate the summer boycott activities cost growers $3 million to $5.5 million).

Sales have picked up recently, however, and Alan Miller, one of the growers' groups that were the first to sell grapes at a profit, "We're happy that, by now, the bulk of the 1969 crop has been harvested," he said today, "sold to wholesalers and shipped out of the vineyard area. We acknowledge there were some problems, but it's clear they were problems that were overcome." Chavez is no more happy but he is more precise in his "estimate" of the boycott's concrete effects, although he insists that "prices are up to hell"

"It was the only way... take on the whole industry"
and that sales are down 50 per cent in most Eastern marketing areas.

It is obvious that growers are being hurt, although it is impossible to measure the specific farm, prices are down compared with 1967 and, although the over-all volume of grape shipments actually is above last year, so is the tonnage of grapes being stored for future sale. Now much of this is the result of a heavier crop this year and how much the issue of the boycott can only be speculated on this point; talk between now and February should tell the story.

One thing is clear: growers, who once talked as it Chavez's union, "nobody will support" it. Ed Monkie must not have been listening; long after his running mate delivered that statement, he told a group of disheartened California reporters that he had even heard of the boycott. Mr. Nixon was asked whether the national party conventions, then spoke up against the boycott and, at a California campaign rally gleefully pinched grapes into his mouth.

This is a crucial development, for political action is essential to Chavez's strikers. Like the industrial workers of the nineteen-thirties, they need the protection of the National Labor Relations Act to allow them to win what they are struggling for on the picket line by simply casting a ballot in a union election or signing a union authorization card, and they need a law to protect them from the "green card" strikebreakers.

A GROWING number of Congressman have been speaking out in favor of granting legal bargaining rights to farm workers, as only as a way to ease the pressure of the boycott and demonstrations. But from the White House — now that Mr. Nixon has been elected — probably will be enough to keep Congress from acting, at least in the near future.

Even Chavez's most enthusiastic Congressional supporters feel this way. Representative Phillip Burton of California, for instance, "We don't have a prayer now — not in the next Congress anyway." Chavez agrees, and says, in fact, that Mr. Nixon will launch legal counter-attacks on the vineyard strikers and their boycott. "We're going to get the business," Chavez says. "There's no

Nevertheless, there is a definite political trend in the farm workers' direction, and one that seems unstoppable. The election undoubtedly will slow the pace. But, although the drive to give farm workers the legal rights held by most other Americans who work for a living may be with us for a much longer time than its supporters had hoped, it apparently is here to stay.

Politicians who once discussed the "farm problem" solely in terms of such cold and complex matters as plenteous and solid banks will have to talk as well of farm workers. Chavez and his grape pickers will not let them do otherwise; they have brought their struggle out from isolated vineyards and into the mainstream of American economic and political life: they have laid a solid foundation for farm unionization, and they are not about to quit.

"With or without a law we will continue to struggle," promises Cesar Chavez. Suddenly, the shy smile that has driven once sufficiently self-satisfied growers to distraction creases the dark faces. "They said we couldn't do it. We're doing it. We're doing it. What are we doing? Don't they understand?"

The tone remains soft, almost childlike, but the fleeting grimaces. "Sure, we know it will take time. But when we win in Delano, we'll win everywhere; we're fighting the strike of the century for our people."