


ABOUT A month ago, we were talking about a big breakthrough in california's four year old vineyard strike and boycott ... agreement by ten major table grape growers to negotiate a union contract with the united farm workers organizing committee -- and with the help of the nixon administration at that.

HOPES were high. But in less than a month they have been dashed. The negotiations have been stalemated, with little hope -- for now, anyway -- that they will ~~be resumed~~ even be resumed.

THE grape boycott continues as ever, with bold and often false words of propaganda spewing out at a rapid rate from partisans on both sides. And there's no more concrete evidence now than there was before the false breakthrough that labor management relations on the farm will enter the twentieth century.

SO what happened? And what's likely to happen now?

THE breakthrough, ~~as you can see from the~~, came on June 13. ^{TEN}
table grape growers from the coachella valley in riverside county and from the arvin region of kern county to the north sued for peace. Led by a ~~farmer~~ ^{LIBERAL} grower named lionel steinberg, they asked the federal mediation and conciliation service to arrange contract negotiations between them and the farm workers organizing committee -- negotiations such as the union had been demanding ~~for four years~~ ^{SINCE 1965} from all grape growers as the main goal of its strike and boycott.



THIS WAS an extremely important move. Steinberg, a member of the state board of agriculture, is one of the state's most prominent growers. And he and the other nine growers produce, between them, ten to fifteen percent of the state's grapes overall, and about one-third of those shipped from the coachella and arvin regions.

THE growers finally admitted that the grape boycott was hurting them badly, and it was hoped that other growers, similarly hurt but unwilling to admit it, would seize on the move of their fellow growers as a way out. They finally had a leader they could follow gracefully. And there were indications that this might happen.

QUIET rumblings were heard among ~~substantive growers~~ other california growers, and especially among those in arizona who, like those from the regions where the ten who agreed to negotiate are located, face more severe boycott effects than growers from other regions.

AND ONE of the most prominent of those ~~growers~~ other growers actually did join in -- a man named bruno dispoto. This was extremely significant, too. For dispoto is from delano ~~in kern county~~, the **KERN COUNTY** heart of the four year old grape battle. For years, he was a key target of the farm union organizers, and he was one of the most articulate ~~of the union's grower opponents~~ and outspoken of the union's grower opponents. Dispoto, who joined the negotiations after they were under way, thus was the MAJOR TABLE GRAPE first grower from the major grape growing and grape strike area to agree to the union ~~demands~~ **demands** FOR NEGOTIATIONS.




BUT dispotos move didn't amount to much. For on that very day -- july third, it was -- federal mediators recessed the talks that had been going on in los angeles between the growers and the union for more than three weeks. And they haven't been resumed since.

AND why did the talks break down? Pressures from other growers who, unlike dispoto, did not want to negotiate with the union had a lot to do with it, ~~_____~~ On the very day that dispoto agreed to negotiate, for instance, a growers committee filed a seventy-five million dollar damage suit against the farm workers organizing committee in fresno. ~~_____~~

~~_____~~
THE suit asked the federal courts to outlaw the grape boycott -- on grounds that it is an unreasonable restraint of trade in violation of the sherman anti trust act.

IT'S doubtful that the suit will get anywhere. And if it does, I think we better start worrying about that constitution of ours. But there's always a chance, and the message from the other growers to those who were negotiating was clear: hold off, you won't have to sign a union contract after all. We'll get the boycott outlawed.

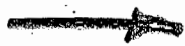
THE filing of the anti boycott suit was only one reason for the breakoff of the union grower negotiations, ~~_____~~. But it did come at just the right moment. On that day, the negotiati^{ons} were very near a breakoff and the federal mediators were trying hard to get them moving together again. Then came word of the suit, and it was all over. 

ONE positive thing was accomplished by the suit, however. For in filing it, the growers had to admit that they indeed had been damaged by the boycott which, until then, they had insisted wasn't hurting them. They put the damages at twenty-five million dollars, asking that the court award them triple damages.

SOME of the other key grower pressures came from Washington where ~~Senator George Murphy~~ senator George Murphy of California kept pushing for his so called consumer rights bill. This is simply a bill that would take ^{AWAY THE ONLY} the farm unions two ~~of~~ real weapons ~~of~~ ^{of the} farm union organized by outlawing ~~from them by~~ farm boycotts and ~~and~~ strikes ^{during} ~~at~~ harvests and other critical times. ^{Some clear} The message ^{was} to the growers who negotiated ~~was also~~ hold off, and we'll get the boycott outlawed.

IN the meantime, Whitaker and Baxter, the right wing public relations firm hired by the growers, was bending every effort toward inflaming public opinion against the farm union negotiations.

WHILE all this was going on, the negotiators were arguing heatedly with each other, ^{making life} ~~making life~~ almost impossible for the federal mediators who were sincerely trying to finally settle at least part of the grape strike and boycott and hopefully pave the way for broader settlements.



THE growers were new at this business of negotiating. And they clearly wanted to grant the union as little as possible. The union's main demand was for recognition, after all, and they had recognized the union. So the contract that went along with that recognition didn't have to include very much.

BUT the union negotiators weren't having any of this. They wanted at least what the wine grape growers had granted them in the earlier contracts the union had negotiated after recognition -- the first and, so far, the only contracts won by the organizing committee.

THERE seems to be no point in going into all the details here. The union and grower negotiators were stymied on every major contract issue ranging from pay ~~to~~ to ~~protection~~ protection from pesticides for ~~the~~ workers. *The union demanded for special*

IT is important, however, to ~~understand~~ *UNDERSTAND* that the union ~~had~~ *ALSO STRONG* pressures on it ~~as well as the growers~~. A contract with the eleven growers -- the original ten plus Bruno Disposito -- would set a pattern, of course. Other growers, should they follow the lead, hardly would settle for granting the union any more than the eleven growers. And consider the problems that a settlement with the eleven growers would create for the boycott. A grape is a grape, after all, and it would be a little hard to stamp a union label on a grape to show that it was grown by ~~one~~ *was* of the growers under contract and thus ~~fit~~ *BUYING* for ~~selling~~ farm union supporters.

THE union did have some vague plan for ~~stamping~~ ^{PUTTING} union labels on the boxes carrying the grapes of unionized growers to market, and I suppose sympathetic store owners could have advertised ~~that they were~~ that they were selling union grapes. But the confusion nevertheless would have been enormous.

WOO, the union appeared to be stringing out the negotiations in hopes of drawing more growers like Disputo into the talks and getting the broadly based contract that it really wanted.

SO the net result was a stalemate. Federal mediators, putting the blame about evenly on both sides, had to ~~mark~~ recess the negotiations for an indeterminate period. The way it looked at that point, the two sides could have sat in the same room for months and both ~~still~~ refused to back down. So the fight moved back to the supermarkets, the courts and the congress. And there it is raging full force today.

STEINBERG, apparently hurting more than the other growers in ~~the~~ the negotiations, tried to settle on his own, and even ~~asked~~ ^{ASKED} former governor pay brown to represent him. But that did not good. The organizing committee doesn't appear to be much interested in signing with a single grower, especially one who is not offering them very much in the way of contract terms. ~~Steinberg's fellow growers~~ ~~asked president Nixon to step in and appoint a fact finding commission to hear the charges and interests of both~~


STEINBERG'S fellow growers asked president nixon to step in and appoint a fact finding committee -- one union representative, a grower and one neutral -- to hear the claims and demands of both sides and recommend a settlement. But nixon so far hasn't even responded, and the organizing committee and most growers are content for now to continue their fight elsewhere than in conciliation.

THE organizing committee feels it has the growers on the run at last, with the boycott becoming more effective every day. Meanwhile, it has increased its boycott pressures, especially those ~~maxxaxfxxx~~ aimed at getting safeway stores, the west ~~largest~~ largest seller of grapes, to take the fruit off its shelves.

THE growers continue pressing for some legal remedy -- new legislation that would strip the organizing committee of its power or, at the outside, a court ruling that would do the same thing.

MEANWHILE, the growers have lined up the most powerful of allies -- the u.s. department of defense. The department, it turns out, has almost doubled its grape purchases since ¹⁹⁶⁸ ~~1965~~, when the grape boycott began.

AND that, believe me, is an awful lot of grapes -- enough to provide tremendous help for growers whose sales have been sharply cut by the boycott.



ACCORDING to the defense department's own testimony to a senate subcommittee this month, it bought eleven million pounds of grapes during the fiscal year that ended this june. But in the previous fiscal year, before the boycott began, the department bought about seven million pounds of grapes.

REPECIALLY revealing are the figures on grapes purchased for shipment to vietnam. In the pre-boycott 1967-68 fiscal year, the department bought 550 thousand pounds of grapes for delivery to south vietnam. But during the ~~previous~~ ^{RECENT} fiscal year, after the boycott started, the department bought 2 1/2 million pounds of grapes for vietnam.

THAT'S an increase of 350 per cent. And that's enough grapes to supply every american in vietnam with ^{ABOUT} eight pounds each. What do you suppose they do with those grapes? Have you ever tried eating eight pounds of grapes, even over a period of a year, and even before the good guys stopped eating the damn things?

THE organizing committee and some of its congressional supporters are convinced, and I can't much blame them, that the defense department is trying to help out the poor growers.

DOLORES HUERTA of the organizing committee told the congressional subcommittee that it ~~was~~ ^{NOTE} is nothing short of a national outrage ... an all out effort by the military to bail out the growers and break our boycott.

OTHER committee spokesmen contend that the defense department not only is buying far more grapes than it really needs, but also is careful to buy them from the growers who are being hurt the most at that time by the boycott. As we hurt the grower, says one union attorney, the grower cries and they help him out.

DEFENSE DEPARTMENT spokesmen have a curious response to these charges. Yes, they say, we are buying more grapes ... but nevertheless we're neutral in the union-grower fight. And why neutral? Because, though their purchases of grapes obviously do provide the growers with tremendous help that they could get nowhere else, they are not bought for that reason. They are bought ^{purely} ~~simply~~, claims the defense department, for reasons helpful to the military.

THE Grapes are cheap, that is, in plentiful supply, more easily shipped than some less available and more expensive substitutes and, as the growers say in response to charges that the department is helping them, that quote -- and this, so help me, is a quote from a grower, -- that, quote, american fighting men in vietnam, like americans everywhere, want grapes on their table.

THE ~~grower's~~ defense department's strange concept of neutrality drew angry responses from at least two members of the senate subcommittee.



SUBCOMMITTEE chairman walter mondale of minnesota declared that, at best, the defense department's supposed neutrality is highly theoretical, because the practical effect is that the department's policy favors the growers.

ALAN cranston of california went further. He immediately wrote defense secretary laird demanding that the defense department show real neutrality by cutting back its grape purchases to the pre boycott level. Cranston cited president nixon's recent executive order telling federal employees that, quote, we cannot tolerate favoritism, or even conduct that gives the appearance of favoritism.

CRANSTON also cited a recent order issued by laird himself. It called on ^{the} defense department ~~experts~~ ^{quote} to show a social consciousness in evaluating the domestic impact of all its actions.

^{before} THE Defense department deputy who testified ~~for the defense~~ for the subcommittee -- dale babbone, who is in charge of food procurement for the department -- cranston ~~noted~~ ^{TOLD} laird dryly, testified, ^{THAT} quote, ~~that~~ your order had not come to his attention.

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