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AFTER several years of slow, almost imperceptible progress, california's farm union organizers suddenly are moving so fast it has become difficult to keep up with them. So, tonight, let's try to get up-to-date.

JUST three months ago no self-respecting shopper would even consider buying a california grape. The grapes were grown, with only a very few exceptions, by men who refused adamantly to grant their workers the simple, basic right of a union contract. Yet today, more than ten percent of the california grapes on the market are coming from unionized growers ... and the chances are very good that there soon will be even more union grapes for sale.

BEFORE getting into the why of this suddenly changed situation, let's look at the box score. It shows that nine of the state's major wine grape growers have signed union contracts with the united farm workers organizing committee since it began its drive under cesar chavez nearly five years ago. And it shows that eight table grape growers, one melon grower and one giant grower of just about everything also have signed contracts.

THE ^{drive} ~~movement~~ that led to this began in september, 1965, in the heart of the country's grape growing area, in kern and tulare counties, later spreading to riverside county and, in a ~~way~~ small way, to the grape and melon growing areas of imperial county and, outside california, to phoenix, arizona and parts of texas and other farming states.



THE effort was waged first by two separate union groups and then by the united farm workers organizing committee, a merger of the separate organizations. Through it all, the demand simply has been for recognition -- acknowledgement by growers that the organizing committee does indeed represent their workers and agreement by the growers in turn to sit down with committee negotiators and agree on a legal contract that would spell out guarantees on wages, hours and working conditions.

THE farm union groups pressed their demands -- the same as auto workers, steel workers and the like successfully made on employers in the 1930s -- first in the form of strikes. But they found that striking a vineyard is not the same as striking an auto factory. The workers are migratory, there are not just a few factory gates to picket, and law enforcement officers in farm communities are even less cooperative than were the urban cops of the 1930s.

MOST important, the farm union organizers found that even when they could convince terribly poor and beaten-down farm workers to join their strikes, growers replaced them easily ^{from} ~~with~~ a steady stream of poor migrants from throughout this country and Canada.

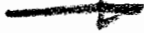
SO the farm unions turned to organized labor's second major weapon, one actually older than the strike. This is the boycott. Farm union ~~organizers~~ ^{members and supporters} went into action all over this country and in some areas abroad.



THEY urged consumers to bypass the wines, liquors and canned goods produced by some of the largest of the grape growers, and to bypass the stores that sold these products. Then the farm union began pressing the stores directly. Many buckled into the pressures. They did not want their stores picketed by people charging them with being part of the well documented exploitation of farm workers. And the large growers involved -- major national corporations -- didn't like what the union boycott activities were doing to their reputations, if not to their sales.

FINALLY, the giant schenley corporation gave in, in early 1966. The corporations farm holdings are only a tiny part of its corporate empire. But they do include one of the largest vineyards in the strike area, and schenley soon tired of the assaults on its reputation over that small part of its empire. Schenley recognized the union and negotiated a contract covering its vineyard workers.

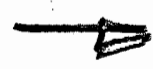
THEN came another big corporation -- di giorgio, another major grower of wine grapes. After that came some of california's largest wineries Gallo, Paul Masson, Franzia, Almaden, Noviate, Christian Brothers. Once schenley and digiorgio led the way, it was easy for them to come along. And, like schenley and di giorgio, they were accustomed to dealing with unions. Their field workers had never been unionized. But the workers in their wineries, canneries and other operations had been granted union contracts long ago.



THE naive referred to these developments as part of a breakthrough that would lead to widespread farm unionization. But california's table grape growers remained firm, and they are the men who grow most of the country's grapes. So the Farm workers organizing committee called a boycott against the largest of the table grape growers, giumarra and sons of kern and tulare counties. But giumarra simply began using the labels of other growers on the boxes which carried giumarra grapes to market.

THIS left the farm union with but little choice. So, in the fall of 1968, the call went out ... Boycott all grapes. No one knows the precise economic effects of ~~that~~ ^{the} boycott which has been waged since then against california grapes. But it is obvious that it has had a great economic effect on grape growers, as well as a great psychological effect.

THE most seriously hurt have been the men who grow grapes in the cecahella valley in riverside county, and in the arvin region of kern county to the north. For these are the areas where each season's grapes ripen first. The grapes here are brought to maturity ~~first~~ quickly and rushed to market in hopes of returning a quick profit because they are the first of the year to go on sale. They must be sold rapidly, and they cannot be held for sale to wineries after losing their value as fresh table grapes.



SO it's not surprising that the first table grape growers to sue for peace were from these areas. Their move for peace came just about a year ago, when ten major coachella valley growers began negotiating with the farm workers organizing committee through the federal government's mediation and conciliation service.

THE growers conceded that the boycott was ^W hurting them badly, by ~~and~~ cutting their sales ~~by~~ as much as twenty percent. As unexpected as the growers move was agreement by the mediation service to step in. For, although the service has helped settle virtually every major national strike in recent years in the urban industrial field, it does not, strictly speaking, have jurisdiction in farm disputes, since farm workers and their employers are not covered by the country's labor laws. And certainly there was every reason to believe that president nixon, a grower oriented opponent of farm unionization, would tell his mediation service to stay out.

BUT nixon gave his approval for the mediators to step in, and for them to move rapidly. They failed, strictly speaking, since the negotiations broke off never to resume. But the mediators laid important groundwork which led, eventually, to the rapid developments ~~which~~ ^{THAT FALL} been experiencing recently. ~~in the~~ ^{CCO}



THE new developments began in April, just before the start of the new harvest in the coachella valley. The growers who had tried to reach agreement through the mediation service last year just didn't want to go through another year of boycott harrassment.

BUT how were they and the organizing committee to get together and agree on a peace treaty? The answer to this came from a committee of roman catholic bishops which was formed ~~in~~ ~~xxxxxxx~~ by the national conference of bishops to do this very thing -- to bring ^{the} union and reluctant growers together.

THE bishops committee had been up and down the state's farming valleys ~~for~~ several months, talking to more than three dozen grape growers. Among the growers were the two major ^{coachella} ~~valley~~ ~~grape~~ grape growers who eagerly broke the ice in february and granted union recognition to the farm workers organizing committee.

THESE growers were the first in the table grape field to sign a union contract, but that was only the beginning, Within two months, nine other growers signed -- more than had signed In the entire 4 1/2 year history of the united farm workers organizing committee *and its predecessors*

INCLUDED were other coachella valley grape growers and, more importantly, two of the ~~the~~ largest and most influential growers in the delano area of kern county where the organizing committee ^{HAS} ~~is~~ ^{CENTERED} its drive. These growers once were among the most outspoken opponents of the organizing committee. But they finally realized, said one of them in an extremely significant statement, that, quote, cesar chavez and his union are here to stay.

PERHAPS as important, the organizing committee also won ~~it~~ some contracts outside of the state's vineyards -- including, most especially, a contract with a giant firm operated by a grower named hollis roberts. Roberts operation is one of the largest agricultural empires anywhere, and certainly the largest in this country to ever be unionized. It sprawls across 46 thousand acres of farm land in five counties, and produces ~~is~~ ^{is} different crops, including more walnut^s than any single grower in the world.

THE organizing committee's recent victories also include ~~an agreement~~ ^{an agreement} with ~~an~~ ^{ARIZONA GRAPE GROWER AND AN} imperial valley melon grower, the first grower^y of anything in ~~that~~ ^{these} important farm area to ~~XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX~~ reach ~~an~~ ^s agreement with ~~the~~ ^{A FIELD} union.



THE Pressures of the boycott, it's extremely clear, finally led to the grape victories. And these, in turn, gave the union the strength and daring to venture into other crops such as melons, which are extremely vulnerable to strikes in a way that grapes are not vulnerable. ~~Once~~ Grapes can be kept on the vine for some time, and also ~~will~~ keep in cold storage after picking. But melons must be picked within three days of ripening and sent off quickly to market. Otherwise they will rot. This means that a ~~strong~~ ^{STRONG} strike can have a great effect. If every picker walks out of a melon field just at harvest, the grower has only three choices: Agree to the strikers' demands, hire replacements for them or let his melons rot. Previously, the organizing committee was not strong enough to bring out enough workers to force ~~the~~ growers into making such a choice, but the recent ~~strikes~~ ^{IN} successes in the vineyards gave it ~~such~~ strength.

THIS is not to say that all of the struck growers have agreed to the organizing committee's demands. Those growing more than 10 per cent of the imperial valley's huge melon crop have agreed. But others have taken the alternative of hiring replacements for the strikers. They are tennagers, whom the growers are paying two dollars an hour -- more, that is, than the strikers are demanding. So far, this transparent ploy has worked for most growers, but it may not work for much longer.

THE organizing committee's recent successes ~~also~~ have brought another new pressure into play -- the pressure of the market place that the extremely economic growers keenly appreciate. The committee is strongly pushing the sale of grapes from the growers who have signed contracts, and growers who have not signed clearly are watching sales figures for the union grapes to see how well they do. No figures are yet available, but there are strong indications that the demand is heavy for table grapes this year in areas like new york, boston and smaller cities like berkeley where overall grape sales were way down in the past.

THE battle is far from over, however. There are thousands of growers to be signed to union contracts, in the vineyards and in every other crop. And strikes continue in the imperial and coachella valleys, and the boycott of non-union grapes continues everywhere.

BUT even if cesar chavez and his united farm workers organizing committee go no farther, the recent developments mark them as the most successful of the organizers who have tramped california's farms for a half century and more. They will, however, go further -- much further. And, meanwhile, I'm sure we all know which kind of grapes to buy and which not to buy.

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