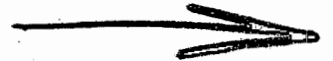


WHAT with vacations and such things, it's been a few months since I've been able to talk with you. So tonight, let me try to catch up with the very important struggle that's been going on in california's vineyards ... a struggle that threatens the very existence of the only real union which farm workers have ever had.

IT began back in may, with the start of the grape harvest in the coachella valley of riverside county. But to understand it properly, let's go back a few more years, to 1970. That's when the state's major table grape growers finally signed contracts with the farm workers union headed by cesar chavez .. an extremely important union victory brought on mainly by a very successful boycott against the grapes of those growers who finally signed the union contracts.

THAT was the essential base which farm union organizers had so desperately sought, in more than a half-century of organizing efforts. And once they got it, chavez and his aides prepared to move quickly into the basic vegetable crops of the state .. in the salinas valley, where growers always have been the country's most important targets for ~~union~~ ^{FARM} organizers.

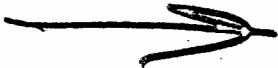


THE salinas valley growers also had always been the staunchest opponents of union organizers. But they were wise enough to see the grape settlement as signalling the inevitable. California's farm workers were going to be unionized, and those in the salinas valley would be next.

THE salinas valley growers had only two apparent alternatives: sign contracts with chavez' union or face a boycott such as that which cost grape growers millions of dollars before they signed.

THERE was, however, another alternative that had been overlooked previously. The growers could arrange to sign with another union that would not demand as much. At the same time, the growers could ease the sting of a boycott by pointing out that, unlike the growers who had been the targets in the grape boycott, they were unionized.

AT this point the teamsters union entered the dispute. The teamsters had been involved briefly in the grape dispute, but allowed themselves to be forced out. This time, however, they were eager to get involved. They moved in quickly, at the growers' call, to sign contracts with the salinas valley growers just a day before chavez announced the end of the vineyard strike and the beginning of a new organizing effort in the salinas valley.



THE contracts were inferior to those being demanded by chavez' group. But even more to the point was that, as teamster officials acknowledged, the union did not even enforce the contracts anyway, whatever the terms.

THE contracts were sweetheart contracts designed only for the mutual benefit of teamster officials and growers. They did not give the farm workers improved conditions or a voice in the operations of the union which now supposedly represented them -- and to which they had to pay dues, on pain of losing their jobs.

THE growers used the contracts to block chavez' union from getting real contracts that would give farm workers a voice and force the growers to spend some money to provide decent wages and working conditions.

THE teamsters used the contracts to gain control over a group of workers whose newly-found militancy threatened strikes and other disturbances which could be disadvantageous to the produce truck drivers and food processing workers whom the teamsters actually represented.

AND they used them to get the growers' contributions to the union's huge pension funds and other trusts from which growers' officers' defense loads to pay as a way to win funds.
THIS, of course, was the genesis of the lettuce boycott ...
lettuce being the principal crop of the growers who signed teamster contracts.




THAT boycott is still being waged by the farm workers union, since very few growers have agreed to abandon their teamster contracts and sign with the farm workers.

BUT now, the farm workers union has turned its main energies to another grape boycott -- because the teamsters have been doing, in the vineyards, what they did in the lettuce fields. And lasting teamster success in the vineyards would be far more serious than in the lettuce fields.

IT would not just keep the farm workers union from expanding, as important as that is. It would plainly destroy the union, since the union has very few contracts, and hence very little standing in a practical sense, outside the vineyards.

THE farm workers union signed the first of its major grape contracts in the coachella valley, and they were the first to expire. That was back in may. And the teamsters were there to offer the growers teamster contracts to replace the expired contracts they had signed with the farm workers union three years before.

ALL but two of the coachella growers signed with the teamsters. And it became evident that growers in the vineyard areas to the north, in kern and tulare counties, would also sign with the teamsters as their contracts with the farm workers union also expired -- UNLESS the growers could be stopped from continuing to play sweetheart.

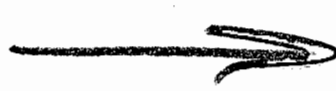


THE farm workers union tried to dissuade them by calling a strike against the coachella valley growers who signed with the teamsters. But the grape harvest went ahead nevertheless, with sheriff's deputies and teamster goons standing guard between pickets and workers at the vineyards.

WAGING a successful farm strike is virtually impossible, in any case. A farm is not like a factory. You do not just put your pickets up at a few gates and, presto, close down operations. A farm has many, many entrances. And farm employers, under very few of the legal constraints of urban employers, can easily recruit strike-breakers.

THE farm workers union claims the coachella strike nevertheless did great harm to the growers, cutting the output of grapes, and lowering the quality of those picked by forcing ~~the~~ growers to use inexperienced workers.

THE output was down a bit from normal years, and so was the price, and perhaps the quality. But that could just as well be attributed to the abnormal weather this year. The action against the coachella valley growers, at any rate, did not persuade them to switchback to the farm workers union. Nor did it keep other grape growers from also signing with the teamsters as their contracts with the farm workers union expired.



SO many growers have switched that as of today, the farm workers union, which just two years ago had 180 contracts covering 40,000 members, had only a dozen contracts, covering 6500 members. Let me repeat that. Two years ago, the farm workers union had 180 contracts covering 40,000 members .. today the union has only a dozen contracts, covering 6500 members.

AND so the farm workers union is taking what its grower opponents, anyway, call its last stand, in a battle that has been fought on several fronts.

IT has been waged with strikes against the grape growers of fresno county, who have never signed contracts with any union. And it has involved action against the growers in the 400 square miles of vineyards that fan out in kern and tulare counties around the little town of delano where the union began its struggle eight years ago.

THE growers around delano are the most important of all. They grow nearly half of the country's entire grape crop, and it is they who gave the farm workers union its first great victory, by signing contracts in 1970 after five years of strikes and boycotts .. but who refused to renew those contracts when they expired on july 31st this year.

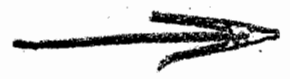


AND why not refuse? The teamsters union was standing by, offering the growers the tempting prospect of signing contracts on lesser terms, like most of the state's other grape growers had done before them.

THE heart of the farm workers' contracts is a provision requiring growers to get their workers from the union's hiring hall. Growers who want help call the hall and the union decides who to send -- a system that gives the union and its members a very important voice.

TEAMSTER contracts have no provision for a hiring hall. Growers get their workers where they please, as long as they collect teamster dues from them after they come to work, and turn those dues over to the union. And growers in this situation usually turn to parasitic labor contractors for their help, paying those body brokers a fee which comes from the pay of the workers themselves.

THERE are other important differences between teamster and farm workers union contracts. The farm workers contract gives employees a strong say in the use or non-use -- of pesticides and in related matters, for instance. But teamster contracts leave most of those things to the growers alone.




IMPORTANT, too, is the fact that the farm workers union is an extremely democratic union, unpredictable, inexperienced, and likely to make all sorts of demands and try all sorts of things on growers. Whereas the teamsters is a well-established, orthodox and very conservative union, controlled tightly from above by quite predictable leaders who are relatively easy to deal with, if you are willing to pay the price.

ALL this may be beside the point anyway, since, as I noted before, the teamsters haven't really been enforcing their farm contracts. They have just been used as a handy way to keep field workers from taking any actions that might harm, on one side, the teamster truck drivers and cannery workers, and on the other, of course, the growers.

THE farm workers union, at any rate, tried to keep the delano growers from signing teamster contracts by calling another strike when the farm workers' old contracts expired at the end of july. But though the growers remained as unbending as the growers in the coachella valley before them, the teamsters union backed off a bit and did not immediately offer contracts to the delano growers.

THE teamsters acted mainly because of concern with the public response to their actions in coachella. Widespread publicity was given to the union's use of \$67-a-day goons to patrol the vineyards, supposedly to protect workers who were ordered to join the union or lose their jobs.

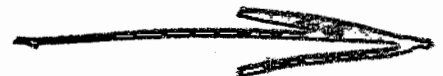


AND thanks to the allies of the farm workers union in the church and elsewhere, the teamsters were branded as vicious raiders trying to destroy an extremely popular union headed by an extremely popular leader, cesar chavez.

NONE of this sat very well with the teamsters national leaders, who are in the midst of an expensive campaign to clean up the image of the union and of its ambitious national president, frank fitzsimmons .. who wants very much to remain as teamster president, and who hopes to do it by showing people he is mister clean, as contrasted to jimmy hoffs, who is trying to take back the union presidency.

FITZSIMMONS and others at the top of the teamsters union also have hopes of getting back into the afl-cio, which ousted the teamsters in 1957 for corruption, and which now counts the farm workers union as one of its important affiliates.

AND so fitzsimmons and company have decided it might be wiser to back out of the farm labor scene -- IF they can get some concessions from the afl-cio and the farm workers union .. and if it can be arranged so that the teamsters do not appear to have backed down.



ATTEMPTS to make such arrangements began some months ago, in talks between fitzsimmons and president george meany of the afl-cio. And they were moving fairly close to agreement just before the farm workers contracts in the delano area expired at the end of july.

FOR the first time, chavez and his aides were called into the talks between teamster and afl-cio officials. And there were reports, as a session opened on august ninth near the headquarters of the western conference of teamsters in burlingame, that an agreement was near.

BUT then on august tenth, just as a morning session was getting underway, word came from delano that the growers there had signed with the teamsters, even as the teamsters and the farm workers union were negotiating in burlingame on which of the unions should sign those growers.

CHAVEZ, playing as ever for the press, marched theatrically out of the motel where the talks were being held, claiming he had been "stabbed in the back." What he didn't say was that the teamster leaders had immediately repudiated the contracts signed by over-eager teamster organizers in delano, and were willing to continue negotiations.



THE talks broke off nevertheless, with chavez demanding better evidence of "good faith" on the part of the teamsters .. especially since the delano growers refused to give up the teamster contracts which teamster leaders had declared invalid.

IN the meantime, the situation got desperate in delano, where the farm workers union was still picketing to try to get growers to sign new contracts. One union member was killed in a scuffle with a deputy sheriff outside a bar frequented by strikers. And another member was shot and killed by a non-striking worker as he drove away from a picket line, after another of the rock-throwing incidents which the previously non-violent pickets engaged in, to the distress of chavez and others in the union leadership who insisted that the union must remain basically a ~~symbol~~ symbol of non-violence.

AFTER the deaths, the farm workers union called off the picketing, in favor of what undoubtedly will be its main weapon anyway: a nationwide grape boycott, which is just now getting fully underway in five dozen cities around the country.

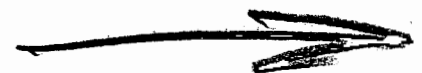


AND I think we can be sure that the boycott activities in the supermarkets will be the most important aspects of the struggle, as they were in the original struggle against the grape growers, between 1965 and 1970%

AND if the farm workers union and its allies can again convince large numbers of people to boycott grapes, the struggle also will be won. It's not the same ball game this time around, however .. not with the teamsters so deeply involved. This time many of the growers can claim, thanks to the teamsters, that they are unionized and thus should not be boycotted.

AND some of the most influential of the farm workers' political allies will have to go easy for fear of offending the very powerful teamsters.

BESIDES which, the political lineup is much different this time. Before, the farm workers union had friendly democrats occupying the white house and the capitol in sacramento, and they exerted important pressure in behalf of the union. But now the union is faced with unfriendly republicans -- especially in the white house, which has become quite close to the teamsters union.

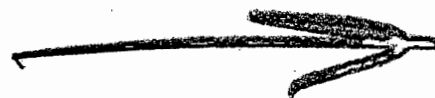


WHICH seems to indicate that some agreement has to be reached by the farm workers union and the teamsters, as the essential first step toward any resolution of the very serious problems of california's farm workers.

AS I indicated, the teamsters' national leaders really do ~~not~~ want to reach any agreement, if only to clean up the teamsters' public image, and avoid the great pressure which the farm workers union and its allies promise to keep applying steadily for a long, long time.

BUT as I think I also indicated, this is a very delicate matter. Some graceful path must be laid out for the teamsters to follow without seeming to lose face. AFL-CIO President meany has been trying to lay out that path, and though he has not done it yet, I think the odds are with him.

FOR whatever else you may think of george meany, you must give him this: He is one of the most able mediators in the country. And if there's any way to settle the teamster-farm worker dispute, and I'm sure there is .. george meany is the man who can do it.



MEANY already has made several major concessions to the teamsters, undercutting what had been the teamsters' main objections to the farm workers union, which the teamsters attack as "irresponsible."

SEVERAL previous agreements have been reached between the farm workers and the teamsters, with each union blaming the other for ultimately breaching the agreement. So many has given his personal guarantee that any agreement reached by the farm workers union will be honored. Meany promised, in fact, to arbitrate any disagreement between the two unions, or between any growers and the farm workers union.

MEANY has even agreed publicly with ^{SOME of} the teamsters' main criticism of the farm workers union -- that the union's hiring hall is poorly run, *for example.*

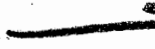
MEANY also is trying to get Chavez to agree to join the teamsters in attempting to get farm labor covered by the national labor relations act. That would allow farm workers to vote, in legally binding elections, on which union they want to represent them, but which would prohibit them from waging the boycotts which they have called to try to win that representation, ^{100 000} ~~but~~ which have hurt teamster truck drivers and other teamster members.



THERE have been other concessions. But the toughest problem has been what to do about the contracts held by the teamsters. The teamsters apparently had agreed to turn over all their contracts with grape growers to chavez' union, in exchange for retaining their lettuce contracts. The lettuce contracts are much more numerous and really much more important than are the grape contracts, however, and chavez has been extremely reluctant to concede them to the teamsters.

CHAVEZ' forces, in fact, do not seem willing to agree to anything that would allow the teamsters to remain anywhere in the area of field ^{WORKER} organizing. They want the teamsters to leave the lettuce fields, the vineyards, and everywhere else the farm workers are. And until they do, they will boycott the lettuce and grapes that come out of those fields, even though peace talks may be continuing *with the Teamsters Union representatives of the workers who paid those police.*

CHAVEZ' people are right. The farm workers union is the true representayive of the farm workers, and the teamsters should damn well stick to their truck drivers, warehousemen and what have you, and quit playing sweetheart with growers. But practically speaking, the teamsters may not want to give up everything, and the farm workers may have to compromise if the dispute is to be settled ~~shortly~~ *within a* reasonable period of time.

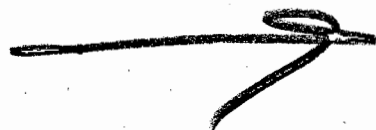


THE attempts to put together some kind of a compromise agreement probably will resume next week, after labor day, in talks between fitzsimmons and other top teamster officials on one hand and, on the other, chavez and top leaders of the afl-cio.

BUT even supposing they do agree, there's a most important third party who will not be at the peace talks, but whose agreement will have to be secured is peace is to come. I'm talking, of course, about the growers.

IN the earlier dispute between the teamsters and the farm workers union over representing lettuce workers in the salinas valley, you remember, the teamsters finally agreed to give up the contracts they had gotten from the lettuce growers who were so eager to head off the farm workers union.

BUT there was one catch: The teamsters would give up their contracts only if the growers also agreed to renounce them and sign with the farm workers union instead. Only two of the lettuce growers actually did this, which is why most of the salinas valley growers, the most important in the country for farm union organizers, are still under teamster contract.



NOW we're also faced with grape growers who have teamster contracts which they, too, do not want to give up, whatever the agreements that might be reached between unions.

THEY can be convinced to switch contracts to the farm workers union, and I'm confident they eventually will be convinced.

BUT that may take a long, long time.

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