Schenley to Bargain With a Grape Union

By PETER BART
Special to The New York Times

LOS ANGELES, April 6—The seven-month-old grape strike appeared to be nearing settlement today as Schenley Industries, Inc., a major grape grower, formally agreed to bargain with a labor union representing field workers.

The strike in the grape vineyards of central California, though involving only a few thousand workers, had attracted wide support from church and civil rights groups around the nation, which helped start a nationwide boycott of Schenley products.

The strike also became a cause célèbre in intellectual circles.

Labor officials here said this marked the first time in the history of California, the nation's leading agricultural state,

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SCHENLEY AGREES TO A GRAPE UNION

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that a union of field workers
had gained official recognition
from a grower."

"Labor history was written
here today," said William L.
Frank, president of the
organization for the A.F.L.-C.I.O.,
who noted that the Schenley
agreement might mark a mile-
stone in the long journey toward
agricultural unionization.

However, late today the Coun-
cil of California Growers re-
received word that Schenley was "not representa-
tive of California agriculture
where growers steadfastly re-
fuse to sell out their workers
and force them into a union
that does not represent them."

The agreement does not auto-
matically end the 8-month-old
grape strike in Central Cali-
nonia, but there were indications
that the strike might be near-
ly ended. Schenley officials
announced that "some impor-
tant announcement" about
the grape strike tomorrow and
a spokesman indicated today
that "at the present time a labor
agreement could be reached."

Union officials here said that
if both Di Giorgio and Schen-
ley, the biggest and second big-
gest grape growers in the state,
would recognize the union the
other smaller growers would
"come around." At the peak of
the grape season, Di Giorgio
employs some 1,600 workers,
while Schenley employs some
450.

The agreement announced
today by Schenley was with an
independent union, the National
Farm Workers Association,
which consists largely of Mexi-
can-American grape pickers
in the central California regional

Cesar Chavez, the swarthy,
articulate president of the
N.F.W.A., said his independent
union planned to join the Ameri-
can Federation of Labor and
Congress of Industrial Organiza-

tion shortly.

Mr. Chavez said that Mr.
Kircher was mainly responsible
for re-establishing communication
between his union and
Schenley.

The agreement between
Schenley and the N.F.W.A. rec-
ognizes the union as sole bar-
gaining representative of the
agricultural laborers and pro-
vides that wage negotiations
for a new contract shall begin
within 30 days.

Sidney Korshak, attorney for
Schenley, said he was "sure"
that a wage agreement could be
reached shortly. He warned of
the peril of the workers," he said.

Mr. Chavez's impoverished,
four-year-old union has tried
to start a national boycott
against Schenley in recent
weeks with the aid of religious
and civil rights groups and
other sympathetic labor unions.
Schenley officials have mini-
itized the impact of the boycott.

Upon hearing of the agree-
tment today some 250 grape
pickers who were marching to-
ward Sacramento tore up their
signs and posters denouncing
Schenley.

The marchers were on a 300-
mile trek from the vineyards
to the State Capitol to help
dramatize their strike and boy-
cott. They halted 30 miles from
Sacramento today to celebrate
the Schenley agreement at a
boisterous high-spirited rally.

Mr. Kircher praised Schen-
ley as "a pioneer in the break-
through against the last front-
iers in this nation where work-
ers are still denied the right
to organize and bargain col-
lectively."

The Schenley agreement came
as a dramatic climax to a long
strike that has bitterly divided
the grape country around
Delano, Calif.

Growers initially dismissed
the strike as an unimportant
wildcat walkout. Most observ-
ers, noting that the local unions
had only meager financial re-
sources, predicted it would be
crushed.

California's $3.7-billion agri-
cultural industry employs some
560,000 workers. The average
family income of seasonal farm
workers is estimated at about
$2,500.