

FARM UNIONS PLAN MERGER ON COAST

Rival of Teamsters to Get an A.F.L.-C.I.O. Charter

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Special to The New York Times

SAN FRANCISCO, July 27—

Two California farm labor groups announced a merger plan today, presaging a showdown battle with the Teamsters Union in the state's agricultural valleys.

Under the merger plan, a local union charter of the American Federation of Labor and the Congress of Industrial Organizations is to be issued to a new unit formed by consolidating the National Farm Workers Association, led by Cesar Chavez, and the Agricultural Workers Organizing Committee, A.F.L.-C.I.O.

The committee has worked for some years trying to bring California farm labor into the union fold.

The merger plan was made known at a press conference at the offices of the California A.F.L. and C.I.O. Thomas L. Pitts, the federation's secretary-treasurer, called it "a historic occasion."

Mr. Chavez, whose association called a strike of grape pickers in the Delano area last September, said George Meany, president of the federation, had sent word that the charter would be issued to the merged union by the national executive council meeting in Chicago on Aug. 22.

Unity Gain Is Seen

Mr. Pitts asserted that the step represented "the unity of the labor movement in California on behalf of the farm workers of California."

Mr. Chavez declared the action would preclude any jurisdictional strife between his association and the committee, which had had "a close working relationship in the current situation in Delano."

Neither Mr. Chavez nor William Kircher, A.F.L.-C.I.O. director of organization, could offer figures on the membership involved. Mr. Kircher said, however, that the number of workers indicating a desire to be represented by the group "runs literally into the thousands."

The grape workers' strike received the blessing of the federation last December, when Walter Reuther, of the United Auto Workers, visited Delano and pledged \$5,000 a month to the strikers until they had won their demand for recognition.

Mr. Chavez, who led a 25-day march of the workers, mostly Mexican-Americans, from Delano to Sacramento last spring, said this monthly payment was still being received.

Break During March

The first break in the situation came during the 300-mile march, which was marked by religious overtones.

Schenley Industries, against which the Chavez association had carried on a nationwide boycott, suddenly recognized it as bargaining agent for company field workers. Christian Brothers, another big producer, followed.

DiGiorgio Corporation, the biggest employer of field hands in the Delano area, became the subject of a boycott while proposing a bargaining election whose terms were unsuitable to several unions.

The election, held last month, was boycotted by merging unions. The teamsters won.

Gov. Edmund G. Brown brought Ronald Haughton, co-director of the University of Michigan's Industrial Relations Institute, into the state to investigate. Mr. Haughton recommended a new election, which was accepted by the unions. It is scheduled for Aug. 30.

Einar Mohn, director of the Western Conference of Teamsters, was asked whether the merger of the Chavez union and the committee meant a fight with the Teamsters.

"I think it will be a little skirmish," he replied.