

A NASTY new battle is beginning to shape up in the farm labor field...involving, not grower versus worker, or grower versus union, but union versus union...in a fight over which union is going to represent california's largely non-union farm workers.

ON one side stands the teamsters union and, on the other, the national farm workers association and the af of l-cio.

(a great deal of)
THE farm workers association, as you know, has stirred up agitation among farm workers during its eight months long strike in san joaquin valley vineyards...~~the farm workers association has stirred up~~ so much agitation that even the most bitter opponents of farm unionization concede that the time has at last come.

THE af of l-cio realized some time ago that this was happening, and jumped to the side of the farm workers association. The teamsters, carefully biding their time, waited until much of the ground had been prepared by the other union groups and then moved in...not on the side of the farm workers association or the af of l-cio, but against them.

THE teamster approach IS SIMPLY To tell the farm workers and employers who have been prepared for unionization *by others* that the unionization should come through the teamsters.




IN one sense, this is an important development: Farm workers, long virtually ignored by big labor, are being fought over. This is as significant as the fact that their cause has become a major political issue. But in most other ways the development, if it continues in its current direction, is a bad one.

IT'S bad, I think, because the teamsters might well win the battle...or, at least, wage such a fierce fight that the farm workers association will have to grasp even more tightly to the af of I-CIO for support.

IN either case, there's a good chance that the farm workers association would lose its identity as a democratic social movement rather than just a union. If this should happen, farm workers ^{WILL} not have lost the opportunity to have a union of their own to improve their miserable economic condition. But they will have lost a marvelous chance to develop socially in a way no orthodox union would allow.

I'D like to return to this later. But for now, let's look at what the Teamster^s/union has been saying in its new campaign to organize farm workers.

THE teamster argument is telling. The union is a powerful one, of course. And it's a union which already represents many of the workers who haul farm produce from the fields and process it in canneries and frozen food plants. Some employers, anyway, feel it logical that the Teamsters union also should represent field workers.



IF logic fails to convince an employer, there's always the fear of what teamster truck drivers and cannery workers could do if he ~~will~~ go along with a teamster demand that he recognize the union as representative of his field workers.

FARM employers also are quite aware of the so-called stability of the teamsters union...the reputation of ^(social of) its officials for playing along with employers, and controlling their rank and file. They know, too, that the teamsters union is a conservative organization unlikely to make anything but simple economic demands.

FINALLY, growers are aware that teamster leaders have candidly admitted that they're not trying to organize field workers as a way to help the field workers necessarily, but as a way to protect their truck drivers and processing plant workers... protect them from the actions of field workers who might be swayed ^{by other unions} to what the teamsters call irresponsible strikes and other actions ~~by the union~~. Teamster officials have implied, in short, that they, like the employers, want to keep field workers in line.

AND the field workers? What is the Teamsters Union telling them? That the union is strong, of course, and that, through unity with drivers and processing workers the field hands can, by joining the teamsters, get the best deal.

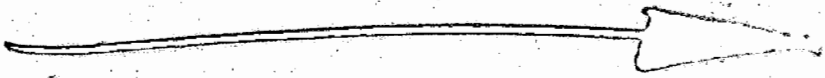


AND there's no doubt that the teamsters union has done a great deal for the state's cannery workers. Their current contract is by far the best ever negotiated on behalf of such workers anywhere.

TOO, the teamsters now claim to have signed eight major growers and labor contractors to contracts covering their field workers... which is exactly eight more contracts than the farm workers association has managed to sign despite its long strike.

LET'S not forget, however, that the teamsters have been perhaps even more irresponsible toward the farm worker than the af of l-cio until very recently. The union could have waged an effective drive in behalf of the field workers long ago, by using its control of the produce drivers and processing workers as a powerful weapon.


BUT it didn't. Instead, it signed one contract covering field workers...at the bud antle corporation in salinas in 1961...then said it was not interested in any other field workers because they were too difficult to organize. If growers mechanized their field operations and thus hired skilled, non-migrant workers to harvest their crops, then, said the teamsters union, it would be interested.



MEANWHILE, the union joined growers to demand continued importation of mexican farm workers into california. The teamsters feared that the cutoff of mexican labor would force growers to take steps to attract u-s field workers which might reduce, if only temporarily, the flow of money and produce into the canneries where the union's members worked.

THE teamsters sudden new interest in organizing field workers was prompted, as i said, by the fact that agitation by the farm workers association had brought field workers to the verge of unionization. So, whether the teamsters want field workers in their union or not, they have to try to sign them up...or see them go by default to the farm workers association...soon to become an af of l-cio affiliate, and thus not exactly a friendly partner of the teamsters, expelled, as they were, from the af of l-cio.

IT'S typical of the teamsters that they'd move in to try to capitalize on the ground work of others. Especially since its expulsion from the af of l-cio, the union has had a habit in some areas of taking over groups previously unionized, or at least prepared for unionization, by af of l-cio unions...getting the groups to switch to the teamsters on promises that teamster militancy will get them more bread and butter... promises, not at all incidentally, which usually are fulfilled.



OFTEN, the teamsters go about their organizing from the top down as it were. That is, the union, in effect, organizes employers rather than employees. In organizing clerical employees at transportation firms, for instance, the union will approach the employer, asking him to sign a union shop agreement which will automatically put all his ^{OFFICE} employees into the teamsters union.

IN this way, the union avoids the effort of having to wage a campaign among the clerical workers, and risking an election in which they might vote against joining the teamsters. Should the employer balk at this tactic, the ~~union~~ teamster truck drivers who work for the firm will suddenly be faced with picket lines informing them that the firm's clerical help is non-union and that their employer is thus unfair. The drivers don't cross the picket lines, and the employer is faced with giving in or ^{TAKING} costly and time-consuming legal action.

THIS is the sort of thing which the teamsters could do in farm labor organizing. Or they could try a variation...which, in fact, they've already tried...to sign a contract not with the grower who ^{EMPLOY} field workers, but with ^{the} labor contractor who supplies workers to ^{the} grower for a fee. Any workers who apply to the contractor for a job ^{is} thus become ^a teamster member.

SUCH tactics get the job done, and no doubt bring much needed and deserved economic benefits to the workers involved. But I'm concerned about what they mean otherwise, especially ^{what they may mean to} the farm worker.

THE farm workers association has carefully based its organizing on grass roots activity...organizing employees, not employers, and, unlike orthodox unions, working closely with church and civil rights groups and the like. And completely bypassing, incidentally, the paracritical labor contractors...unnecessary middle men who have no right to be in business.

BY doing this, the association has given farm workers something they need even more than economic improvement...the drive and ability to join the mainstream of society. Once they have this drive and ability, as cesar chavez and other association leaders are well aware, the economic improvement will follow almost naturally.

BUT the teamsters union doesn't think in such terms. Neither does the af of l-cio, even though it now has joined with the farm workers association, now that the feeling of victory is in the air.

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THE old orthodox methods, remember, were used by the af of l-cio in running its largely ineffective agricultural workers organizing committee during the five years preceding the outbreak of the vineyard strike. True, the strike originally was called under the organizing committee's name. But it actually was called by a group of filipino workers who had already organized themselves into a tightly knit group and then took up the af of l-cio banner.

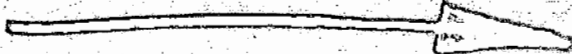


THE af of l-cio leader who moved in to eagerly hand them that banner was al green, whose methods as state director of the organizing committee were similar to those of the teamsters. So similar, in fact, that most observers are awaiting official word that green is leaving the af of l-cio to join the teamsters in their drive.

THEY'RE also awaiting word that the farm workers association has formally affiliated with the af of l-cio. What they don't know, and some fear, is that in affiliating with the af of l-cio, the farm workers association will turn to the orthodox organizing methods, al green or no al green. For though the methods were ineffective before for the af of l-cio, they might well work now...now that the way has been paved through the use of UN-orthodox methods by the farm workers association...and now that pressures from the teamsters and other pressures may force them to use the speedier ^{or} orthodox tactics.

IN a sense, the association already has put these tactics to work. The two growers who have recognized it as the bargaining agent of their workers, after all, did so without ~~holding~~ holding elections...even though it may well be true that the association clearly represented a majority of their field workers.

AND the association is using the same tactic in its attempts to get recognition from the largest of the grape growers it has struck, the digiorgio corporation.




IT'S at digiorgio that the teamsters and the farm workers association and the af of l-cio may have their greatest conflict. For digiorgio always has been the number one target of farm union organizers, and some teamsters leaders also would like that prize.

FOR several weeks now, teamster organizers have been passing out sign-up cards to workers at digiorgio's struck sierra vista ranch in tulare county. Their efforts have been publicly supported by digiorgio officials...who announced awhile back that as a substitute for the elections they were demanding as proof of whether their workers wanted ~~to form~~ a union, and which one, they'd accept such cards as proof.

REGIONAL teamster officials say ~~that~~ they have nothing to do with the circulation of cards at digiorgio's ranch...that they are content, at least for now, to confine their organizing to areas outside the vineyard region, where the farm workers association and the af of l-cio are not yet active...but would like to be, of course.

THE regional Teamster leaders, along with local teamster officers who they say are conducting the digiorgio drive, have been meeting with association officers to try to avert an open battle at digiorgio. But so far, they apparently have gotten nowhere.



TO muddy the situation more, the international longshoremen's and warehousemen's union apparently has thrown its support to the teamsters. Despite what I suppose most of us would like to believe, the I-L-W-U...or rather, I-L-W-U president Harry Bridges...appears to be no fonder of the farm worker association ~~methods~~ methods than is the teamsters union...even though, like the teamsters, the I-L-W-U has played a vital role in the association's boycotts ^{Conductors} ~~against~~ ^{of} the products of struck growers.

IT is certain, in any case, that some union, or unions, will at last organize California's farm workers. But it is not at all certain whether those workers will be organized as part of a broad social movement or merely as part of a narrower trade union movement.

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