

DICK MEISTER

I USUALLY try to avoid that irritating journalistic habit of dividing the flow of events into twelve month segments ... to avoid doing what some newspapers like to call year end roundups. But after looking over my files on farm labor I was convinced that this time a year end roundup might make some sense.

FOR the developments in farm labor this year have been extremely swift and far ranging. At the first of the year I recall talking to a group of soaking wet pickets on a pier in San Francisco. There they stood, in the driving rain, trying to convince longshoremen not to load grapes which had been trucked from struck Kern County growers for shipment overseas.

THEY did convince the longshoremen to honor their boycott. But who would have thought ... not merely hoped, mind you, but thought ... who would have thought that, in less than a year, these pickets would have a union ~~OF~~ their own -- not an association of farm workers which hoped to become a union, but an effective union of farm workers, the first of any real consequence in American history.

IT may be repetitious to those of you who have followed the developments closely. But let's briefly trace what happened after that rainy day in January. Those events have been among the most ~~important~~ <sup>SIGNIFICANT</sup> in recent American labor history, and it's important that we pin them down.

ONE of the first major breaks of the year for farm workers was the declaration of support for farm unionization issued by all ~~of~~ of california's roman catholic bishops. That support was announced, you'll recall, at a hearing in delano of the u-s senate subcommittee on migratory labor.

AND it was during these hearings, early in the year, that the support of robert kennedy for the farm workers' cause was made clear to the general public. Kennedy's move is extremely significant. For, in building up the base of support which he hopes to use in future political efforts, kennedy is wooing the farm worker~~s~~ and the mexican american. Very few major politicians have ever done this, and it is a clear indication of the new political influence of the farm worker~~s~~.

SHORTLY after the delano hearings, ~~the~~ farm workers won their first concrete victory after seven months of striking in ~~the~~ kern and tulare county<sup>IES</sup>. This was the agreement by one of the thirty three struck growers, schenley industries, to recognize their union, the national farm workers association, as the bargaining agent for schenley field workers.

AS important as this was, however, it was chiefly a symbolic victory. Schenley, after all, is only indidentally a grower. It has little of the stature in agriculture held by, for instance, the largest of the struck growers, the digiorgio <sup>corporation</sup> corporation.

DIGIORGIO wouldn't fall as easily as schenley had. But the corporation had seen what was coming. Farm unionization was at last on the way. So it moved to make certain that, when unionization came to the digiorgio corporation, it would come on digiorgio's terms. Months of haggling followed.

IN the meantime, the christian brothers decided to practice what the catholic bishops were preaching. ~~THEY~~ recognized the farm workers association as the bargaining agent for the field workers at ~~THEIR~~ napa vineyards. The farm workers association had won its first northern california victory.

AND farm workers were marching from delano to sacramento, in an extremely ~~dynamic~~ and effective illustration of their cause and their determination... picking up widespread public support ~~along the way~~ and firmly planting the roots of unionization in farm communities up and down the rich central valley.

GOVERNOR brown, you remeber, refused to meet the marchers when they finally reached sacramento on easter sunday. But this eventually hurt no one but pat brown. And his attempts to make up for it brought more victories to farm workers, later in the year.

BROWN was a key factor in the farm workers eventual victory over the giant digiorgio corporation, for instance. For it was the governor who set up the elections which enabled digiorgio's workers to vote for, and get, union representation.

AS important in the victories over digiorgio was the boycott of digiorgio products conducted nationwide by the farm workers association and its many supporters.... a boycott as effective as that which played a key role in that first victory, at schenley industries.

BUT while the powerful teamsters union had played a crucial role in the schenley boycott, on the side of the farm workers association, it changed sides once the digiorgio battle got under way. For di giorgio had decided that, if it was to have a union, it would much rather have a stable, conservative teamsters union than a volatile farm workers association group.

THE teamsters quietly naturally agreed, and a three way battle was on. First, digiorgio held its own union representation elections ~~AT TWO OF ITS FIVE FARMS...~~ won, not too surprisingly, by the teamsters. Then Governor brown convinced digiorgio to set aside the results of ~~the~~ <sup>THOSE</sup> election, ~~and~~ and agree to hold new balloting under auspices of the state.



THE Possibility that the teamsters might win these elections as well finally moved the af of l - cio to take the national farm workers association under its official wing. It was merged with the af of l -cio's agricultural workers organizing committee to form the united farm workers organizing committee. And the newly merged af of l - cio group won the new elections.

THEN, suddenly, the farm workers ~~movement~~ drive began to bog down. Their next ~~targets~~ targets were digiorgio's other ~~farms~~ farms. They had to move to unionize all the properties of the state's biggest grower. It was an obvious and necessary next step.

BUT digiorgio and the teamsters were both stalling. Digiorgio agreed to hold elections at its other farms. But the corporation insisted that the elections had to be held under ground rules agreed to by both the teamsters and the af of l - cio... and the teamsters weren't agreeing to anything. They were stalling for time. They couldn't afford to lose another election.

THE afl-cio threw its whole weight into this one, however... another significant farm labor development of the year ~~by the~~ For, though the af of l -cio often had talked a big game on farm labor, it rarely had taken big action. But it did in this instance. Finally, the pressures of the af of l-cio and governor brown moved the teamsters to drop out of the election picture at digiorgio, and the vote was on *at the ~~farm~~ Frank Kern County, farm.*

THE farm workers organizing committee, alone on the ballot, won that election ... and it got a commitment from digiorgio to hold elections, next year, at the corporation's two remaining non-union farms, in yuba county.

IN the meantime, the af of l - cio's farm worker group won an election at a small grower's farm in delano ... the first such election it has won, and the first significant indication that the little guys may follow the big corporations toward farm unionization.

~~The~~ The teamsters union also won a major victory this year. It was granted representation rights at the third largest of the delano area growers -- the perelli-minetti firm. And it was granted representation right under the noses of the afl - cio. Teamster officials signed the agreement, in fact, while af of l - cio pickets marched outside demanding the same thing in the name of the af of l - cio.

THAT inadequate sketch of the year's farm labor developments brings us just about up to the present. For the latest major activity of the delano farm workers involves the perelli-minetti situation. For several weeks now, supporters of the af of l - cio group have been urging stores to take perelli-minetti wines off their shelves, ~~with the biggest demonstration~~

~~at ...~~

THIS is a rough campaign, one of the toughest taken on by the vineyard strikers. For it involves them in what amounts to a jurisdictional dispute. It's one thing to get the public worked up when it's a battle of the obviously oppressed farm worker versus the giant grower. But it's another thing when it's the af of l-cio versus the teamsters ... one farm union versus another.

AND it's pretty difficult to get the public to see workers who have a teamster union contract -- sweetheart or otherwise -- as oppressed. They may take sides for the worker against the grower, in other words, but not necessarily for the af of l-cio worker against the teamster worker.

YET the agreement of perelli-minetti to sign with the teamsters represents a dangerous precedent. If allowed to stand, the agreement may well inspire other growers to try to beat the af of l-cio to the punch and sign with the teamsters ...

~~getting, of course, ...~~  
~~not~~ and giving their workers very little say in the contents of the union contract which will cover them.

THE perelli-minetti agreement with the teamsters should be overturned, whatever its contents. It was not really perelli-minetti's workers, after all, who asked to be covered by a teamster contract. It was teamster officials who asked this. An election should be held, in which the workers would decide who they want to represent them -- af of l-cio or teamsters.

I FEAR that the agreement never will be overturned, however, if the current af of l -cio campaign isn't improved -- and improved considerably. At least in san francisco, it couldn't be more inept. It's being run by a group of well-meaning but terribly inexperienced ~~and~~ people. They ~~don't understand the issues~~ <sup>aren't recouping the loss</sup> and, frankly, they're either ~~lying~~ <sup>lying</sup> or incredibly ~~well~~ <sup>well</sup> informed. If they keep it up, they'll do far more damage to their own ~~own~~ cause than the teamsters ever ~~thought~~ <sup>thought</sup> of doing.

DESPITE these current problems, it has been ~~quite~~ <sup>A FANTASTIC</sup> a year for cesar chavez and his dedicated troops in delano. At the beginning of the year there was little more than hope, determination and great future potential.

BUT now, chavez' group is well on the way to completely unionizing one of the nation's largest growers, the once violently anti-union digiorgio corporation ... has union contracts ~~with~~ <sup>with</sup> another major corporation and ~~with~~ <sup>with</sup> small grower as well ...has gained tremendous political influence ... has picked up supporters and imitators throughout the country ... has set some extremely important precedents and ex<sub>2</sub>mples ... and become an official segment of the american labor movement.

IT still has a big battle with the teamsters on its hands ... and with part of the af - l-cio, in fact ... those within the labor movement who would calm it down, and make it "respectable".



EVEN the victories have, in a sense, hurt. For they have made many potential supporters feel that the battle is won, and ease off the ~~an~~ broad general support which has been <sup>A</sup> crucial factor in the victories so far.

NOR did this november's election make any easier the major battle of the state's farm workers -- their drive for the legal right to collective bargaining. This is an absolute need, ~~xxxxxxxxxxxxxx~~ Otherwise, they'll be forced to go on for years, picking off one grower at a time.

*NEVERTHELESS, THE EVENTS OF THIS YEAR,*

~~THEY SHOULD MAKE IT CLEAR TO EVERYONE THAT, ONE WAY OR~~

another, farm workers finally are going to get what they're after.

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