

'There's no turning back now,' says Cesar Chavez Leader of the grape strikers

'La Huelga' Becomes 'La Causa'

By DICK MEISTER

SAN FRANCISCO. NEXT s.o.b. gets in my way. I run over." Truck drivers are notorious for idle threats, but this one, on the water front here, sounded as if he really meant it. Burly and unshaven, he jumped from his truck, slammed the cab door, and furiously thrust his hands deep into the pockets of his sheepskin jacket. He pounded his foot. "Move, dammit! Move!" Fifteen weary men and women stared back. The 15 of them, swarthy farm workers and long-haired young activists, began singing "We Shall Overcome," then switched to Spanish. "Nosotros venceremos . . . Nosotros venceremos . . ." They waved crimson and black picket signs at the driver; they leaned, defiant if not calm, against the front bumper of his truck. But they would not move, not

even if he did mean it. "Not after eight days, we won't move," declared one of the demonstrators. For eight days last month, he and his fellow pickets had held back the truck, and more than a dozen others like it, all filled with table grapes which had been trucked 200 to 300 miles north from the magnificently fertile Central Valley of California for San Francisco longshoremen to load onto ships bound for Manila, Saigon and other distant ports. The demonstrators would move, they vowed, only if the grape growers whose product was in the trucks in front of their picket line granted them what the longshoremen who waited behind the picket line had won 34 years ago—union contracts, contracts that would give vineyard workers the economic protection guaranteed the country's urban workers.

They did not get any contracts from the grape growers. Instead, they

got a court order that threatened them with jail unless they moved. It finally broke their waterfront blockade and sent tons of juicy California grapes off to the boys in Vietnam. "O.K., O.K.," said the infuriated but no less determined picket captain, a terribly intense young woman named Kathy Murguia. "If we can't stop grapes here, we'll stop them someplace else." And off went her band to a supermarket, to picket and to shout: "Don't buy grapes. Don't buy grapes."

The plea should sound familiar, for it is being sounded all over the country today. If it is not at a supermarket in San Francisco, or a chilly pier on the city's waterfront, then it is outside a crowded supermarket in New York City, Boston or Detroit, at a school cafeteria, church, government office, Congressional hearing room or political rally.

The locales are a long way from the hot, dusty vineyards around

Delano, Calif., the nondescript valley town of 12,000 inhabitants where grape pickers, most of them Mexican Americans, called The Strike—La Huelga—in September, 1965. But Kathy Murguia and thousands of others—students, clergymen, politicians—have made the cry an essential part of the same struggle: the most successful effort yet in 50 years and more of futile efforts to organize farm workers and win them collective bargaining rights.

THE development has been remarkable and swift. What started ago as a little more than three years quickly became a compelling social movement that has drawn together such diverse elements as the old left and the new, young activists; or old-line union men, civil-rights organizations, religious groups and big industrial unions. This fall, it evolved into a national boycott and

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well—and a major political issue argued by Presidential candidates. As remarkable as the movement is the man who has led it all—a uniquely gifted, truly charismatic figure named Cesar Chavez.

Ask a striker or boycott supporter why it happened and you're likely to draw an incredulous stare—and an angry question in return ("You ever try raising four kids on \$1.50 an hour?"). Grape growers and their allies have different responses, often couched in language, not surprisingly, like that used by urban employers during the equally turbulent organizing drives by industrial unions in the nineteen-thirties. The growers, fearful of losing an almost unique upper hand in labor relations, will tell you it's primarily a move by "union bosses, radicals", and all manner of "outside agitators" to force their employes into something they neither want nor need. The

harsh fact, nevertheless, is that vineyard workers share the plight of farm workers generally—working and living conditions that, in the words of the United States Senate Subcommittee on Migratory Labor, "must be recognized for what they are—a national disgrace." Most farm workers live, at best, in sterile, prisonlike compounds and, at worst, in crumbling shanties in rural slums, and have little voice in community affairs. Nor do they have much say on the job, where they may work 10 or 12 hours a day, six and seven days a week, often lacking such simple amenities as toilets and clean drinking water.

California's vineyard workers always have been better off than most farm workers. Their generally prevailing base wage of \$1.50 an hour is higher than most, for instance, and, on some days, individuals can make two or even three times as much through piece rates that provide bonuses—generally 15 cents to 25 cents

—for every box of grapes picked. Growers repeatedly point to these wages and the fact that vineyard workers are less migratory than most, and note that they have injury insurance and are covered by state housing, safety and sanitation regulations and, in some cases, by minimum-wage laws.

YET the vineyard workers also average far less on a yearly basis than the \$3,000 poverty-level figure (some where between \$2,000 and \$2,300, according to union figures), are lucky to find more than six months of work in any year, and are rare indeed if they can afford to keep their children from joining them in the vineyards. Over-time pay, paid holidays, vacations, sick leaves, pensions and unemployment insurance benefits generally are denied them, and those few laws that are supposed to provide them some rudimentary protections are but laxly enforced. Practically nothing is guaranteed them; they can be fired at any time, for any reason.

In brief, says a strike leader: "The work is back-breaking, it is temporary, and it still leaves us almost at the bottom, standing ahead only of even more destitute farm workers in other states."

Now at least some of the vineyard workers want union bargaining rights—the weapon that has been dangled before them for so long as the only way to give them a voice in their own destinies. But here, too, the law has ignored them. Under the National Labor Relations Act, most industrial employers must bargain collectively with their workers if a majority of the workers prove they want to bargain, and then must sign a contract with the workers' union. But farm employers have managed, thanks in part to a



SUPPORTERS—A demonstration outside a New York hotel where Richard Nixon, who opposed the grape boycott, was speaking during this fall's campaign.

powerful lobby, to remain exempt from the law since it was enacted in 1935. That, in essence, is why the pickets are in front of the supermarkets. If the law will not make grape growers bargain, the pickets and their supporters hope they can, by shutting off sales of the growers' produce.

THE pickets were not at the markets at the beginning, three years ago. They were lining back-country roads, outside the vineyards that sprawl over the 400 square miles where most of the country's grapes are grown, hidden from urban centers in the heartland of

can group, would try it differently.

A glance makes clear this is a union leader seen but rarely in California's valleys: a stocky, sad-eyed, disarmingly soft-spoken man, shining black hair trailing over the edge of a face brushed with traces of Indian ancestry; a man who talks of militance in calm, measured tones, a soft trace of Mexico in the quiet voice; an incredibly patient man who hides great strategic talent behind shy smiles and an attitude of utter candor; a devout Roman Catholic.

Growers call Chavez "a dumb Mex... revolutionary political opportunist... Trotskyite." But to his followers he is a messiah who inspires utter devotion. "Here was Cesar," recalls an eloquent but typical enthusiast, "burning with a patient fire, poor like us, dark like us, talking quietly, moving people to talk about their problems, attacking the little problems first, and suggesting, always suggesting—never more than that—solutions that seemed attainable. We didn't know it until we met him, but he was the leader we had been waiting for."

Chavez, starting out as a migratory worker from Yuma, Ariz., in the late nineteenthies, has been through what they have been through—in the vineyards, cotton fields and fruit orchards of Arizona and California—for most of his 41 years. He has seen the Anglo organizers

come and go, the A.F.L. and C.I.O. men who have promised so much for so long, and he has learned from their failures. Ten years with Saul Alinsky's Community Services Organization, first as an organizer in California's valley towns, then as national director at its Los Angeles



LEADER—Chavez at the California State Capitol in March, 1966, after leading a 25-day, 300-mile march of grape strikers from Delano to Sacramento.

headquarters, taught Chavez other valuable lessons about organizing his fellow Mexican-Americans. He does not march among them preaching the virtues of Samuel Gompers and trying to organize them as if they were so many Anglo plumbers. He tries to build from within—to let his people organize themselves, in their own way. "Grass roots with a vengeance," Chavez calls it.

To be successful, his union could not be "a neat business operation with no heart" that promised merely the negotiation of better wages, hours

and working conditions in return for the payment of dues. Farm workers had seen too much of that kind of unionism. Their union would have to teach them the unified, self-directed action the outsiders never had taught. As Chavez says, they'd have to learn to do everything for themselves, "from the most mundane office work to the most sophisticated bargaining"—and their union would have to offer "programs which guarantee a new life."

It was slow going. Chavez, after resigning from the Community Services Organization in anger over what he saw as its lack of concern for the farm worker, settled in Delano in the early sixties with his wife, Helen, and their eight children. For three years preceding the strike, and while working in the vineyards himself, he patiently gathered a core of vineyard workers and their families into his association—more properly a combination community organization and civil-rights group, rather than a union. They formed their own credit union, where they could borrow the money they always seemed to need, and banded together to buy tires for their battered autos and to get other necessities at discount prices they could afford.

"I thought it would be four years, maybe five, before we'd be ready for a strike," says Chavez, "and I was really scared we might go too soon and get crushed." But the A.F.L.-C.I.O. group jumped the gun. It had won a 15-cents-an-hour increase in the then-prevailing base wage of \$1.25 from nearby growers during the early phase of the 1965 harvest season and, when its members moved into the Delano area vineyards, they demanded the same. Had they

gotten it, that would have been that. But growers, fearful, they said, of weakening the incentive of pickers to go all-out for piece-rates bonuses, were adamant; they would not even discuss the demand.

The strike was on and, once on the picket lines, the strikers demanded far more than just higher base pay. They would settle for nothing less than the whole range of union rights: their pay, and everything else, would have to be negotiated by their own representatives and guaranteed in writing. Chavez held back for a few days, but his members were too eager. They were willing, if not as ready as they thought, to try the ultimate test—even if it meant, as it did, losing a \$286,000 Federal anti-poverty grant their association had just won.

Chavez knew they could not do it alone. There were at least 5,000 vineyard workers in the strike area and probably no more than 300 local families in his association, perhaps 200 in the A.F.L.-C.I.O. group. Besides, growers, undeterred by law and able to recruit from a steady stream of migrants, would replace strikers as quickly as they left their jobs. It was essential that financing, manpower and pressures also come from elsewhere, through what Chavez calls "a strong, broad coalition of forces willing to throw their full weight into the battle." So, with perfect timing—this is the day of the civil-rights movement and the War on Poverty, after all—he immediately sought and won active outside support, from unions, minority and anti-poverty organizations, students, political leaders, clergymen, and liberals and radicals generally.

strike as the main activity of its Migrant Ministry, they set up well-stocked commissaries in the strike area, ground out tons of propaganda, and personally pleaded with non-strikers and others to join what had mushroomed from "La Huelga" into "La Causa." They solicited contributions all over the state; spoke at university rallies, church affairs, political gatherings and union meetings; petitioned legislators, and inspired lesser versions of their movement among farm workers and their allies in several other states. They demonstrated at the metropolitan headquarters of the larger growers and at markets that sold their grapes and grape products. They braved the threats of growers and armed guards who descended on their picket lines outside the vineyards; hundreds of them, clergymen included, eagerly went to jail to test stringent picketing regulations hastily drawn up by unsympathetic local officials.

Just six months after the strike began, they gathered, in March, 1966, nearly 10,000 strong, before the steps of the State Capitol in Sacramento, to demand "a new social order for the farm worker." There they met 80 strikers who had marched in a dramatic 25-day pilgrimage north from Delano, planting the seeds of their movement all along the 300-mile route. That was perhaps the most dramatic of the outsiders' activities, but it was not the last; they have continued the other activities, and much else, to this day, without a noticeable slackening of pace.

It often has been self-serving, inefficient and disorganized work the outsiders have performed; the wild distortions, and sometimes out-

THE farm workers' economic battle quickly became a cause—a civil-rights movement with religious overtones as well as a strike. Outsiders flocked to the vineyards with money, food, clothing, tactical advice and picket signs; they made the strike headline news, and they split once-sleepy Delano, and eventually the entire state, into warring camps. "I'm here," announced an early arrival in clerical garb, "because this is a movement by the poor people themselves to improve their position, and where the poor people are, Christ should be, and is." Other supporters may have been less poetic, but all said much the same thing in their own way: This was part of their own battle against society's power structure.

Naturally, the power structure in Delano and elsewhere did not much care for "these outsiders," as a Delano housewife declared, "coming to our town and meddling in our affairs." Her attitude was shared by the growers, of course, and by the men who run the commercial, religious and governmental affairs of the little town whose economy they dominate. "There's no civil-rights problem here," said one, taking what has become a classic position, "and no wage problem either . . . and those pickers don't want a union; it's just an idea of Chavez and all those bleeding hearts. I think maybe the Communists got something to do with it, too."

THE "bleeding hearts" persisted, nonetheless. Led by the Northern California Council of Churches, a Protestant group which adopted the

right lies, of the single-minded, naive, uninformed and inexperienced partisans among them can be maddening. So can their impromptu style, especially to the well-programmed men of organized labor who try to bring some method to it all. ("I love these people," remarked a top San Francisco union official. "But, God, they're like a bunch of hippies sometimes. They come bouncing down to a warehouse—all of a sudden like—and tell us, 'Quit unloading

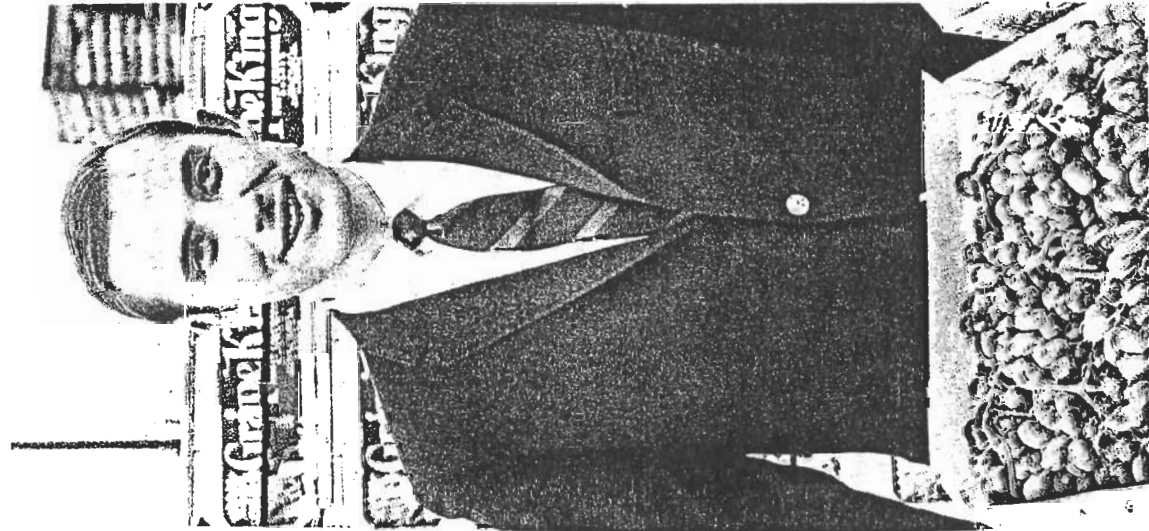
those scab grapes!' Hell, why don't they tell us these things in advance? We could arrange something.") But, if not always well done, the outsiders' activities have been absolutely essential; they have kept the effort from dying as so many farm organizing efforts before have died, from lack of public attention and support.

DURING this second phase, big labor's first serious notice

came from Walter Reuther, who marched through the streets of Delano and outside the vineyards in a demonstration that made growers reconsider their wishful premise that this would be a standard, quickly abandoned farm strike. His United Auto Workers union, Reuther told cheering farm workers, would contribute at least \$5,000 a month "for as long as it takes to win this strike." That was just before Christmas Day in 1965. Seven months later, the

tion, was dispatched to Delano on an almost full-time basis, backed by a monthly budget of \$10,000 at the minimum (not counting the \$3.50 a month in dues the union is getting sporadically from what it claims now to be 17,000 members throughout the country, and outside contributions of more than \$250,000 a year).

Yet the growers have retained the upper hand; they have their own powerful allies within the state's business,



PROTAGONISTS—In Delano, Calif., Cesar Chavez breaks bread with Robert F. Kennedy at an ecumenical mass last March, ending a 25-day fast by which he dramatized his grape workers' cause. Left, a leader among the growers from whom Chavez seeks union recognition is John Giumarra Jr., whose family sells some \$6-million worth of table grapes a year.

financial and political hierarchies. However unprecedented, the concrete gains of the farm workers have been relatively slight: 11 contracts or union-recognition agreements from the 100 or 50 growers involved, covering only a few thousands of California's 300,000 farm workers; and, because of strike pressures, an increase of about 25 cents an hour in the base pay of most vineyard workers.

The pay of those under contract has gone up considerably more, to a base guarantee of as much as \$2.55 an hour, returning what the union says is an average of more than \$3 an hour including piece-rate bonuses. The contracts also provide some of the first employer-paid holidays, vacations, pensions and health-care services in the history of farm labor and, among other things, require growers to provide nonprofit housing, field toilets, drinking water and tools.

MOST of the growers who have signed contracts raise wine grapes, and strikers hardly have touched the more numerous growers of table grapes—most especially not the largest grower of all: Joseph Giumarra, whose family-owned corporation oversees 5,000 acres of vineyards spread over two California counties. As many as 3,000 workers pick 52 million to 65 million pounds of grapes every year for Giumarra, bringing the corporation a gross return of anywhere from \$5.5-million to \$7.5-million. "If Giumarra the giant union organizer, 'the others will fall too.' It is true, at any rate, that Giumarra is, if not the leader, then certainly a grower whose views and tactics are precisely those of most growers.

Joe Giumarra, a raw-boned, slight, gray-haired man of 69, is typical of California grape growers in other ways as well. He is an immigrant, a proud, independent man who still works a full day in his vineyards and who, like many table-grape growers, came to Delano from Southern Europe in the early nineteen-twenties, saved frugally, bought cheap parcels of land here and there, and then hit it big when subsidized Federal water began pouring into the area.

Strikers like to picture Joe Giumarra and his fellow growers as devils. They are not, but they do seem quaintly out of touch with what has been going on beyond the vineyards since they moved into the valley beside the Mexican-Americans three decades ago. They often seem sincerely perplexed that anyone would suggest farm workers need—or want—anything but what the patron grants them. They didn't need a union; they merely needed a chance to work hard.

Joe Giumarra doesn't talk much to interviewers. He leaves that to his nephew, John Giumarra Jr., a young man typical of growers only in his views. John, a clean-cut 27-year-old Stanford Law School graduate who looks like a clean-cut Stanford Law School undergraduate, is a pleasant, eager and articulate advocate. The words roll out rapidly; John Giumarra knows what he wants to say, and he knows the grape business as well as any man in the country:

"Joe, my three other uncles and my father came over from Sicily—it was right after the first war. It was bad, believe me. The Italian Government needed money—foreign credit and that sort of thing. Confiscated everything. Even my grandmother's wedding ring—

really! They started a little fruit stand in L.A. Sold what they grew up here—all through the Depression. Then . . . Well, there's 11 Giumarra families around here now, all of them on this farm. Over 50 people, and they all work here, every day. Except the kids, of course. They're in school."

CERTAINLY, they have a multimillion-dollar corporation, he says, but they're on a slim margin, just like all the growers. "You're lucky to break even—and some years you can't even do that. Sure, you make it some years, but not by all that much." Take the \$3 or so growers are being paid these days for the standard 26-pound lug of grapes. "The box alone costs 50 cents to 55 cents; then there's another, say, 70 cents for the picker. Then you've got property taxes, equipment, all the weather can kill you. It's like going to Las Vegas and rolling the dice—a very risky business. It's not easy like people think. . . ."

Even so, he says, the Giumarra Corporation "is willing to sit down with any responsible union." Chavez's organization, however, doesn't make the grade. It's "a rebel outfit that doesn't represent anybody." John Giumarra isn't sure the vineyard workers need a union, anyway. "You have to go slow-motion to get less than \$2.10 an hour. And it doesn't matter where they live, they get free transportation. If they don't live around here, we give them a place to stay, too. Absolutely free." Nor is he sure the Giumarra Corporation can afford a union. "It's competition. Those other states don't pay farm workers like us . . . a union could drive the pay way out of line—the price too. Believe me, the consumer

better look out." (He scoffs at Labor Department studies showing that labor costs amount to only 2 cents to 5 cents of every dollar spent by growers, and that even doubling current wages would add no more than a few cents a pound to the price.)

John Giumarra insists that his family's corporation actually has not been struck, anyway. He concedes that a strike was called, but, he says: "Our workers weren't willing to go on strike in favor of Chavez—that's why he called the boycott. If they did go on strike, they could have us at the bargaining table within a week. Our crop is perishable; it has to be harvested."

He voiced that argument as he stood outside the Delano High School auditorium recently with other grower spokesmen who were boycotting a House subcommittee that was holding another of what have come to be seemingly endless hearings on the vineyard dispute. Inside the auditorium, Chavez, cheered on by 600 strikers who filled the seats behind him, attacked the logic of Giumarra's argument—one most growers utter at the drop of the words "strike" or "boycott."

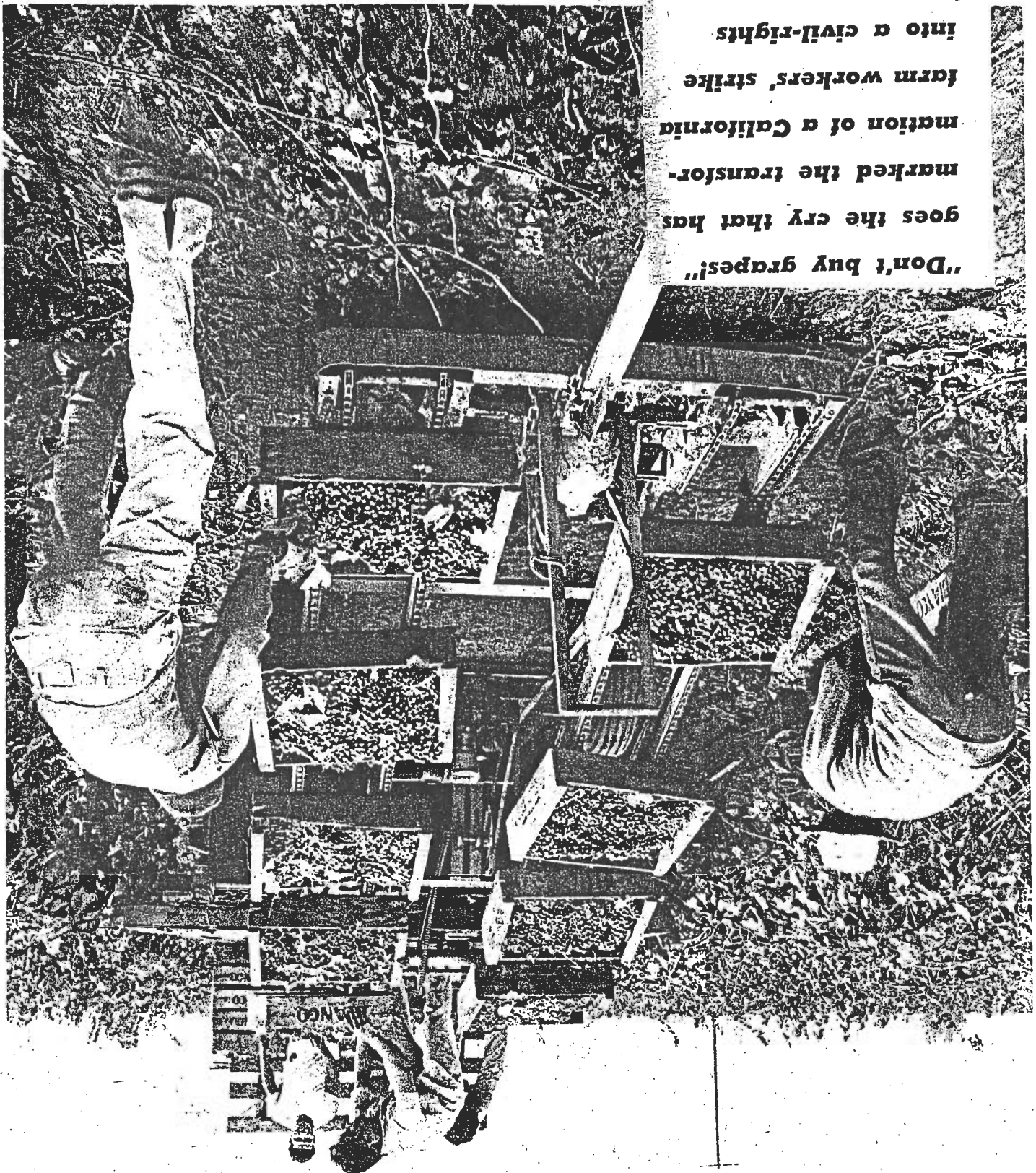
MOST of the pickers working in Giumarra's vineyards and in those of other struck growers, Chavez conceded, are Mexican nationals brought here in massive numbers to replace his striking members during the harvest, as part of a work force of 350,000 nationals now working at various jobs in California. The nationals—and there are indeed an undetermined but comparatively large number in the vineyards—carry permits, commonly called "green cards," that allow them to live and work in this country without be-

coming citizens. They are supposed to live here permanently and are not supposed to replace strikers, but legally determining their residence status and what constitutes "strikebreaking" is a tricky matter. Chavez has demanded that the immigration laws be enforced strictly and that most of the "green-carders" be sent home to Mexico. The Labor Department and a group of liberal Democratic Congressmen have made similar demands of the Justice Department, but Giumarra and the other growers have held them off with assertions that their workers actually did not strike, or at least that those who did strike have abandoned the picket lines. Some assert as well that the "green-carders" actually began working for them before a strike was called.

In any case, there are Mexican nationals in the vineyards who, Chavez told the subcommittee, "can afford to work for much less than workers who maintain residence in our country . . . because the standard of living where they live is much lower." (And who, whether working legally or not, have little affinity with a locally based American union.) Jim Drake, a chunky, 30-year-old Protestant minister who serves as Chavez's administrative assistant, put it in harsher terms: "The growers are using the poorest of the poor of another country to defeat the poorest of the poor in this country. That's about as low as you can get."

OUTSIDE the auditorium, John Giumarra Jr. showed his first real sign of anger: "It's nothing but a damn lie!" Around the building, near the rear doors of the auditorium, a dozen or so grape pickers

"Don't buy grapes!" goes the cry that has marked the transformation of a California farm workers' strike into a civil-rights issue, a quasi-religious cause and a nationwide boycott.



PICKERS—In a California vineyard, workers harvest wine grapes. Of 100 or so growers in California, 11—almost all growers of wine grapes—have signed contracts or union recognition agreements. Their workers' base pay ranges as high as \$2.55 an hour, but for the overwhelming majority of California's grape workers, the base is \$1.50, an annual income no more than \$2,300, according to the union.

huddled in the shade. The men had the same dark, sinewy look as the men, inside, and they, too, wore faded jeans and denim shirts; the women, chubby for the most part, wore, like those inside, floppy straw sombreros, loose, baggy slacks, and faded red kerchiefs knotted around their necks. But no, said one, who decided someone should talk to the reporters: "No, sir! We're working. We don't want anything to do with that damn Cesar. Nobody does—nobody that's a real worker, anyway. Look at me—I make \$2.50 an hour. Who needs a union?"

They weren't afraid; they were going to march in and tell the subcommittee "the truth." Four of them did, echoing, in halting English, the words Giumarra was voicing rapid-fire outside the auditorium. (One woman, though, added a new element to the dialogue. She had heard, she told the subcommittee, that the union didn't favor children working in the fields. "How," she asked plaintively, "do they expect me to keep my 14-year-old out of trouble?")

How had the dissenters got to the auditorium? "Well," said a woman, "the boss came up to us in the field and asked us, 'You want to go to the high school and tell them the truth?' He brought us here in his own trucks, too. Si, si—right over there. . . ."

It may be the easy availability of strikebreakers; it may be a reluctance of marginal workers to risk what little they now have by walking off the job for an uncertain future; it may be that farm workers really do not want a union. But, whatever the reasons, orthodox strike activities, even in the unorthodox manner of Cesar Chavez, cannot do the job.

THUS the boycott. Chavez's union had used the tactic to win its first major contracts, in 1966 at the Schenley and DiGiorgio Corporations. Both came after national boycotts against the

easily identified liquors of Schenley and canned goods of DiGiorgio (then including S&W Fine Foods, which the company subsequently sold). As Schenley vice president James Woolsey says, it wasn't the strike that brought his corporation to the bargaining table but "a threat of serious damage to our business on a nationwide scale . . . the adverse publicity generated against us."

The present boycott began last fall, with Giumarra's grapes as the sole target, at a time when farm-union organizers were at an apparent dead end. It did not improve their situation significantly, however. Then Chavez, following a superb instinct for the dramatic, and sincerely concerned that his members might turn to violence in their frustration, began a fast. It was to reaffirm, he said, a commitment to the Gandhian principles of non-violence that had guided him from the beginning.

There had been no serious violence in the vineyard dispute, despite a spate of minor attacks and extreme provocations for which union and grower forces blamed each other, but there was a danger that Chavez, emerging as a Martin Luther King of the newly aroused Mexican-American, would be supplanted by men from the Southwest who preached a "brown power" version of the black militants' call to arms. The frustration hit its peak when the strike was extended

to the nearby Coachella Valley this spring and Chavez became convinced that "someone would hurt someone." The pickets were removed from the Coachella area; Chavez announced that "no union movement is worth the life of one farm worker and his child or one grower and his child," and retired to a private retreat, to fast, pray, and read the Bible and the writings of Gandhi.

After 25 days, he broke the fast in March, before 4,000 supporters at an ecumenical mass in Delano's city park. Senator Robert F. Kennedy was at Chavez's side as he slumped in a chair set up on a flatbed truck and nibbled feebly at a tiny bit of bread handed him by a priest. Senator Kennedy took a portion from the same home-baked loaf, then hailed Chavez as "one of the heroic figures of our time" and congratulated those who were "locked with Cesar in the struggle for justice for the farm worker and the struggle for justice for Spanish-speaking Americans."

Chavez feels that by his fast he managed to turn his followers from the path which militants everywhere else seem to be skirting: "It made our nonviolent position clear; everyone can understand it now, both ourselves and our adversaries." The ordeal eventually sent Chavez to a hospital where he lay immobilized for three weeks. Even now, he still must spend most of his time in bed, although he has resumed full direction of the union.

Chavez's fast focused national attention on Delano again, and the unbending growers of table grapes began feeling pressure. Swiftly, the Giumarra-only boycott was expanded to include the

grapes of all the growers. In one way, the growers brought it on themselves, by allowing Giumarra to use their labels on some of the containers the corporation shipped to market, in an attempt to hide them from strikers. But they would have been involved anyway; the union was faced with nearly insurmountable problems in trying to single out one grower among many who shipped grapes to the same stores. "It was the only way we could do it—take on the whole industry," says Chavez. "The grape itself had to become a label."

THE boycott soon became the main activity of strikers and their allies. By now, the vineyard picket lines have been all but abandoned. Some strikers actually have returned to work, to ease the strain on their union's treasury, and about 200 of them and their families have been sent off, on union salaries of \$5 a week, to more than 30 cities in this country and Canada to wage probably the most extensive boycott in American labor history.

Backed by their allies' muscle and financing, strikers are demanding that markets, school cafeterias, city agencies and other buyers and sellers of food quit handling grapes or face picketing, demonstrations and the opposition of the strikers' influential supporters. The supporters have made their own forays into many other communities, as far abroad as Western Europe, and many stores have gone along with the demands

(so many thousands, says Chavez, that "we can't begin to count them"; growers "can't count them" either, but feel Chavez is guilty of gross exaggeration—as usual, most of them add).

Some large universities also have joined the boycott and even a few school districts. The union-oriented mayors of a half-dozen major industrial cities, including New York, have ordered municipal purchases cut off. Also, the nation's chief religious organizations, Catholic, Protestant and Jewish, have asked their millions of members to bypass grapes.

IN New York, where California growers normally sell about 20 per cent of their table-grape crop, sales dropped by 90 per cent at one point this summer. Shippers were forced to put grapes in cold storage or ship them to other areas—where the resulting surplus drove prices down (some grower sources estimate the summer boycott activities cost growers \$2-million to \$2.5-million).

Grape sales have picked up recently, however, and Alan Mills of the growers' Grape and Tree Fruit League claims that, by now, the bulk of the 1968 crop has been harvested, sold to wholesalers and shipped out of the vineyard area. He acknowledges there were some problems, but insists "they were problems that were overcome." Chavez is no more precise in his estimate of the boycott's concrete effects, although he insists that "prices are shot to hell"

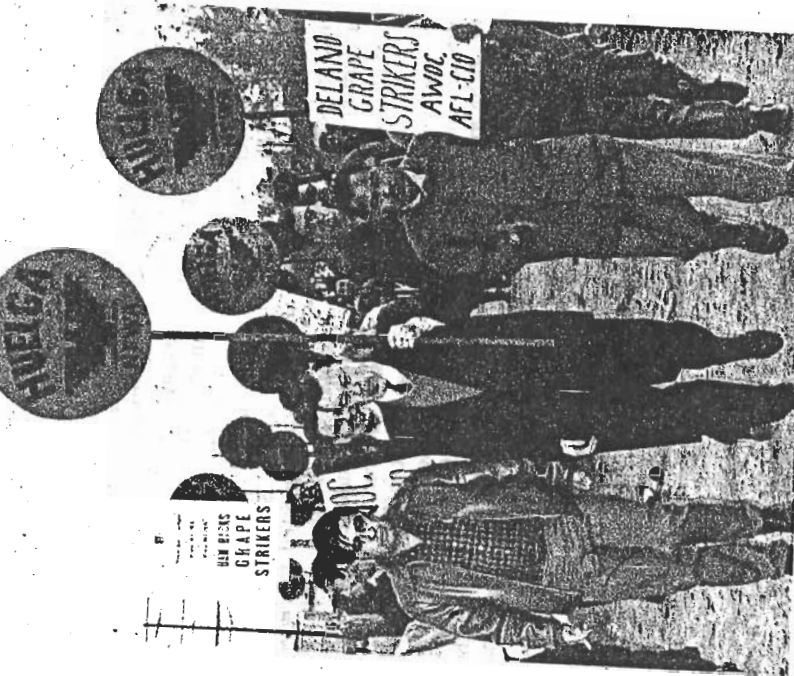
**"It was the only way—
take on the whole industry!"**

ing them with violating the law against secondary boycotts. (Ironically, the law does not cover farm workers because of their exclusion from the National Labor Relations Act.) "Their hearts are with us," noted a disgruntled picket as she watched a group of previously cooperative

Teamsters unloading grapes in front of a picket line in San Francisco the other day, "but their bread and butter is elsewhere. They don't want to be sued." The legal action has indeed made the unions cautious—especially in New York City, where they have backed off from picketing and other pressures that made the boycott so successful there this summer.

CHAVEZ'S union nevertheless has scored a significant victory. The boycott finally has made its cause a major national issue; it has forced politicians to take sides. During this year's election campaign, Vice President Humphrey, Senator Eugene McCarthy and other liberal Democrats, following the lead of Senator Kennedy, repeatedly voiced their support of the boycott and its aim of winning bargaining rights for farm workers. Republicans, led by Richard Nixon and Gov. Ronald Reagan of California, generally opposed the grape pickers' efforts (with the major exception of Senator Jacob Javits in New York).

McCarthy was the first to raise the issue when, during the primaries, he declared that the grape boycott should be supported by "all those who are concerned with human dignity and determined to lift poverty from our land." Humphrey followed with a similar statement. "As more people know that the boycott is almost your only effective



ALLY—In December, 1965, three months after the start of the grape strike, Walter Reuther of the U.A.W. joined Chavez (left) on the picket line.

and that sales are down 50 per cent in major Eastern marketing areas.

It is obvious that growers are being hurt, although it is impossible to measure the specific harm. Prices are down compared with 1967 and, although the over-all volume of grape shipments actually is above last year, so is the tonnage of grapes being stored for future sale. How much of this is the result of a heavier crop this year and how much the result of the boycott can only be speculated on at this point; sales between now and February should tell the story.

One thing is clear: growers, who once talked as if Chavez's union didn't exist,

Chavez's union, "more and more will support it." (Ed Muskie must not have been listening; long after his running mate had delivered that statement, he told a group of astounded California reporters that he hadn't even heard of the boycott.) Mr. Nixon was silent until after the national party conventions. Then he spoke out against the boycott, and at a California campaign rally gleefully plopped grapes into his mouth.

This is a crucial development, for political action is essential to Chavez's strikers. Like the industrial workers of the nineteen-thirties, they need the protection of the National Labor Relations Act to allow them to win what they are struggling for on the picket line by simply casting a ballot in a union election or signing a union authorization card, and they need a law to protect them from "green card" strikebreakers.

"With or without a law we will continue to struggle," promises Cesar Chavez. Suddenly, the shy smile that has driven once supremely self-sure growers to distraction ceases the dark face. "They said we couldn't do what we're doing, didn't they? Well, we're doing it, aren't we?" The tone remains soft, almost childlike, but the fleeting grin passes. "Sure, we know it will take time. But when we win in Delano, we'll win everywhere; we're fighting the strike of the century for our people.

"How can I say it without sounding presumptuous? Really, it's a nonviolent fight to the death. They destroy our union or we conquer them. We'll take them on everywhere, wherever there are grapes—anywhere. Any way we can do it, we'll do it. There's no turning back now."

AGROWING number of Congressmen have been speaking out in favor of granting legal bargaining rights to farm workers, if only as a way to ease the pressures of the boycott and demonstrations. But counterpressures from the White House—now that Mr. Nixon has been elected—probably will be enough to keep Congress from acting, at least in the near future.

Even Chavez's most enthusiastic Congressional supporters feel this way. Representative Phillip Burton of California concedes, for instance, "We don't have a prayer now—not in the next Congress anyway." Chavez agrees, and fears, in fact, that Mr. Nixon will launch legal counterattacks on the vineyard strikers and their boycott. "We're going to get the business," says Chavez. "There's no