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AFL-CIO JOINS FIGHT VS. TEAMSTERS

By Dick Meister

The AFL-CIO's Executive Council gave the United Farm Workers Union \$1.6 million today to help finance the farm workers' organizing fight against the Teamsters Union.

The grant, to cover the next three months of operation, was announced by AFL-CIO President George Meany, who said the teamsters are engaged in "the most vicious strike-breaking, union-busting effort I've seen in my lifetime."

What the Teamsters are doing, of course, is signing contracts with the grape growers who had held contracts with the Farm Workers Union – until they decided that Teamster contracts would be easier on them. And, as Meany noted, this development could eventually destroy the Farm Workers Union.

Meany promised, however, that "we're going to do anything that's necessary to keep that union alive."

And at this point, the AFL-CIO seems to be the only effective weapon available to Cesar Chavez and other leaders of the Farm Workers Union.

This is not the first time that the Teamsters Union tried to raid the farm workers. But in previous raids, the farm workers were able to rely heavily on political pressures and pressures from religious leaders which are not as readily available this time around.

Instead of sympathetic Democrats in the White House and the governor's office in Sacramento, the farm workers are faced with Republicans who have become closely allied with the Teamsters. And the church leaders who previously were crucial in drumming up public support for the farm workers have lost a lot of their effect because they are no longer considered neutral in the union versus union battle, but adherents of the Farm Workers Union.

The AFL-CIO grant, and lesser amounts that have been coming in from the Auto Workers and other individual unions and union members, will provide strike benefits and other support to members of the Farm Workers Union who have walked out of vineyards in Riverside, Kern and Tulare Counties to demand that their grower employers renounce recently-signed teamster contracts and negotiate new contracts with the Farm Workers Union.