

# Undoing the Victory Won by California

## Grape Pickers 11 Years Ago

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Eleven years ago, a Louis Harris Poll showed the United Farm Workers Union to be one of the most heavily supported organizations in U.S. history.

Fully 12 percent of the nation's adult population — that's 17 million people — had stopped buying table grapes because of the boycott called by the UFW, which was trying to force grape growers in California to bargain with their workers for union contracts.

Thanks to the heavy pressures of the grape boycott and related boycotts of lettuce and Gallo wines, the UFW won a collective bargaining law in California in 1975. That forced the state's growers to grant union rights to their workers and seemingly guaranteed that the UFW would win similar laws from other states and, eventually, from the federal

government, which granted union rights to non-farm workers in 1935.

Yet today, the law in California is barely working and there are no real prospects that union rights will be extended to farm workers anywhere else. What's worse for the UFW, there seems to be relatively little public support for the union's attempts to reverse the drastic shift in its fortunes.

The shift came with the election in 1982 of Republican Gov. George Deukmejian, who got more than \$1 million in contributions from anti-union grower forces in his race to succeed Democrat Jerry Brown.

Deukmejian slashed by almost 30 percent the already sparse budget of the Agricultural Labor Relations Board that administers the farm labor law. He reduced the board's staff by one-fourth; appointed a grower ally, former GOP State Assemblyman David Sterling, as the board's general counsel; and re-

placed the board's majority of Brown appointees with appointees of his own.

Sterling has dismissed or arbitrarily settled many of the thousands of formal complaints lodged against growers for refusing to bargain or reach contract agreements with the UFW despite their employees' votes for UFW representation, for firing union supporters, denying union organizers access to their workers, or otherwise violating the law. Even those complaints that do go to the board typically remain unsettled for months.

Grape growers alone are the subject of some 500 of the unsettled unfair labor practice complaints. The UFW has said, too, that the grape growers are endangering their employees, and consumers, by careless use of pesticides and that the Deukmejian administration is not doing anything about that, either.

The union has been trying to win support for a new grape boycott, hoping that will force growers to get their ally

in the governor's office to administer the law properly.

But it's been more than a year since UFW President Cesar Chavez first raised the call. It's been almost as long since letters went out to 30 million potential supporters and since Chavez and others began holding rallies around the country and winning endorsements from religious and political leaders. In New England, for instance, official support has come from Mayor Raymond L. Flynn and the Boston City Council, Gov. Michael S. Dukakis and the Massachusetts Legislature and U.S. Sen. Edward M. Kennedy, D-Mass. Still, grape sales have not noticeably declined.

The UFW clearly has not been able to overcome the anti-unionism that has become widespread since the UFW's initial boycotts won it the legal rights that are now in jeopardy.

Farm workers are as desperately in need as ever of firm union rights and a

grape boycott once more seems to be the surest way of giving them that weapon.

The farm workers' initial victory came back in the days when organized labor was not on the defensive — in the days of the civil rights movement, of the war on poverty, of Vietnam war protesters. But these are the days of upwardly mobile young professionals and of a labor movement so weakened that it now represents less than 20 percent of the country's working people.

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