

# SPARTACIST-WEST

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ISSUE

## The Delano Strike WHAT WILL IT TAKE TO WIN?



The late Dow Wilson, Painters' union militant, in commenting on the Delano grape strike, had this to say: "When a strike enters the boycott stage, it is already lost."

Unfortunately, this is generally true. A boycott is not really going to do much financial damage to DiGiorgio. But there is another approach that has a good chance of succeeding where a boycott will not.

That is to spread the strike; to close down the numerous DiGiorgio and S & W plants that have continued to operate; the warehouses, the canneries, the wineries, even a sawmill. To accomplish this would be no easy matter, but shutting down even half of DiGiorgio's total production for two

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Both the NFWA pickets above and a group of Catholic priests have asked Teamster leader Einar Mohn to abandon plans for having his organization serve as DiGiorgio's company union. The Teamster membership has yet to be heard from in this matter.

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weeks would probably cost that corporation more than a consumer boycott lasting two years.

The difference between these two tactical approaches is yet another illustration in practice of the basic cleavage between the Old Left, which looks to the working people as the only reliable force for social change, and the New Left, which looks everywhere else, frequently to such vague constituencies as the "public," the "community," or the "poor."

Wresting a written contract from DiGiorgio would mean bringing one of the few remaining open-shop industries in the U.S. under unionization. Most other big industries accepted labor unions 30 years ago; have learned to live with them, and, in time, how to housebreak them. Why, then, are DiGiorgio and the other growers putting up such an intense fight?

For one thing, although labor costs are only a small percentage of food prices, the wage bill for the industry as a whole is quite huge. And once solidly organized, farm workers would soon demand non-wage items other workers receive, such as social security, unemployment insurance, disability benefits, etc. In addition, secondary profits from such things as labor contracting and slum housing would in time also be eliminated.

But the main reason for the growers' strong resistance is not just economic. More important is the threat a farm workers' union poses to their considerable political influence on several levels. For instance, the Delano experience shows that the rural cops in this state are like something out of Mississippi.

On the legislative scene, both in Sacramento and Washington, the still powerful farm bloc--the only voice heard as representing the residents of rural areas--has been able to secure a number of special privileges, such as farm subsidies, financial assistance, irrigation projects, and exemptions from virtually all labor laws.

In addition, one factor which has done much to prevent the development of a union of farm workers has been the "gentlemen's agreement" between organized labor and organized agriculture by which the necessary votes for laws benefitting industrial workers have been obtained from growers' representatives, with the understanding that labor will confine itself to mere token attempts at organizing farm workers.



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ican artist Fernando Castro Pacheco, illustrates the issue of *El Malcriado*, Delano bi-weekly. The artist states: "We are sons of the Mexican Revolution, seeking bread and justice. Our revolution will not seek to dissolve the existing social order to dissolve . . ." Unfortunately, there are no examples of triumphant unarmed revolutions.

Meanwhile, the independent Teamsters union, which would seem to be in a good strategic position to organize farm workers in view of its contract with truckers and canneries, has done virtually nothing in this direction since signing a contract with a Salinas grower five years ago. The recent activity of this union in the valley seems to be motivated by a desire to "protect" its members in canneries from lost wages due to work interruptions caused by farm strikes.

One Teamster official is reported to have made an interesting complaint: "Nobody authorized Cesar Chavez to go around organizing farm workers." Nobody has, except a few thousand farm workers.

This underlines an interesting paradox; the Farm Workers Association could not have originated except outside the existing labor organizations; yet its ultimate success will probably depend on the support, other than verbal, that it can secure from these organizations.

Due in part to its origins outside the house of labor, and in part to Chavez' background of ten years in the Alinsky-oriented Community Service Organization, the Delano strike has involved not merely the support, but also the active participation of such groups as the protestant Migrant Ministry, the Catholic Church, SDS, SNCC, Students Committee for Agricultural Labor, and Citizens for Farm Labor. In fact, during the early days of the strike, there was an agreement between the Agricultural Workers' Organizing Committee and the FWA that the former would seek to raise money from labor unions while the latter would concentrate on other groups. This illustrates the tendency of the FWA to rely primarily on middle class sectors for support, rather than on the working class.

Consider, for example, the March on Sacramento, a tactic which won much publicity, and clearly revealed the Governors' attitude toward the working man: "Growers have problems, too." Part of the basic policy of the march, repeatedly asserted, was that it was not a protest, but a march of "penance for the sins of the strikers." Coming from one of the nation's most sinned against sectors, such statements were clearly aimed at securing respectable, middle class support; it was not a slogan that would appeal to union militants.

The boycotts have been another example of this. Labor movement boycotts are

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rare; successful ones virtually unknown, except under unusual conditions such as a firm or product marketed in a small area where labor has considerable influence. They usually fail because they are attacks on the distribution end, where labor's power is weakest, due to dilution by numerous non-labor elements, instead of at the production end, where the strength of labor is concentrated.

Despite a widespread belief that the boycott of Schenley Liquors was the prime factor leading to that firm's signing the FWA's first contract, no substantiating evidence, such as sales figures, has so far been produced.

In fact, the Schenley Corporation is not typical of California agriculture, but is unique. Its main business is distilling and distributing liquor; it operates 26 distilleries in the midwest and handles several well-known imported items. Its California wineries and vineyards are only a small portion of its operations; thus it had little to gain from a long fight to retain the open shop in California agriculture.

With the other growers the situation is the reverse, and to argue that a DiGiorgio boycott alone will result in a signed contract because the Schenley boycott did is to encourage illusions--illusions that can lay the groundwork for a defeat.

Despite a vigorous and effective technique of picketing under difficult circumstances, the growers have been able to harvest a portion of their crops. These scab products then proceed via truck, train and ship thru canneries, wineries and warehouses.

The indicated alternative strategy in the present situation would be to extend the strike into the processing stage. The difficulties are numerous; legal problems and inter-union rivalries are only the beginning. But the obstacles are not insurmountable. A key to success would be the existence of left-wing elements in certain strategic unions. The creation of such groups, however, depends precisely on that element of class consciousness which the New Left repeatedly denies.

To give one specific example of what a small group in a key union can accomplish, consider the action taken not too long ago by a group of militants within the San Francisco Teamsters local. A few printing plants were operating despite picket lines of the International Typographical Union with crews of imported strikebreakers. A number of Teamster

members felt that the existence of a professional strikebreaking crew operating in their home city was a threat to all labor. They raised the question repeatedly at union meetings, and after several months were able to win the support of a fairly large chunk of the local membership, as well as from some members of two other unions, the Longshoremen's and the Sailors.

One morning the strikebreakers arrived at work to find the plant surrounded by 500 husky union men, who proceeded to demonstrate a total unfamiliarity with the philosophy of non-violence, administering the necessary lesson on the evils of scabbing, and reportedly placing one sinner aboard an outbound train in his underpants.

Police were present at the scene, and had the sense to check with City Hall. Labor's Friend, Mayor Jack Shelley, was not ready, at this point at least, to forego all labor support by having city cops battle a big group of union men in defense of a scabherding operation.

Had the Teamsters adhered to a non-violent approach the police would have simply arrested them and smashed the operation with expensive trials, fines and sentences, exactly as it smashed the S.F. sit-in movement.

The Teamsters union is not a model one. Many a Teamster official has gotten rich at his business--the buying and selling of the labor power of the workers he controls. "Sweetheart" contracts are not unknown; many locals have a poor record on their treatment of Negroes and other minority groups. Yet even such a union can provide the framework for vital action, if it contains an organized grouping of militants.

If the FWA can find a way to shut down the S&W cannery in Redwood City (under Teamster contract) or the S&W warehouse in San Francisco (under ILWU contract), and a dozen other DiGiorgio operations, Robert DiGiorgio may consider signing. If the present level of labor solidarity and awareness does not permit developments in this direction, it is doubtful that the current strike will end with the major growers under contract.

The presence or absence of strong left-wing caucuses in a number of unions has a lot to do with the chances of victory or defeat. And in the long run, the building of a Left Wing in the labor movement is more likely to produce significant social changes than any amount of classless "community" organizing by the New Left.



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