

Report of
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to the 30th Annual Meeting of the
CALIFORNIA GRAPE & TREE FRUIT LEAGUE
Fairmont Hotel - San Francisco, California
March 24, 1966

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Do all of you remember the day when the circus used to come to town?

Remember the big parade they used to have during the day that snaked through the city enroute to the fair grounds?

Everyone would follow along and end up in the big tents to watch the show.

Things really haven't changed much since those days. The only change in the circus is that now they include political sub-committees as part of the show. And the parades start after instead of before the performance.

Last week, the citizens of California were treated to the famous Senator Harrison Williams' three-ring circus. Ring one in Sacramento...the center ring in Visalia...and the third in Delano.

And, believe it or not, as soon as the Delano show was over...the parade started. The next morning about 100 so-called farm workers, along with ministers, priests, professional demonstrators and some self-styled leaders started their trek towards the State Capitol in Sacramento. The parade is nothing more than a publicity stunt for the benefit of the news media.

In fact, during the past seven months, the public throughout this state and nation has been subjected to a barrage of propaganda of this type in an attempt to create in the minds of many people that thousands of grape pickers have left their jobs and have been out on a so-called strike since the first week of September.

The simple truth is that there is no strike in Delano. More than 5,000 of the people who regularly, year after year, picked our crops, stayed on the job. In fact, they picked the largest crop in history. And, furthermore, the vineyards have been competently pruned by the same people who have performed the pruning operation for a number of years.

Many of you here today were undoubtedly involved in the strife of the 30's and can remember the various groups who were attempting to cause civil unrest throughout the state. The situation we have today is somewhat comparable to that period. We have the same groups...with the same philosophy, striving to achieve the same goals. The only difference is that they are now hanging their hat on the presently popular phrase "civil rights."

In early September of 1965, the Agricultural Workers Organizing Committee sought to force the workers into a union by demanding recognition of their organization by the Delano grape growers. At about the time this effort was losing momentum, AWOC was joined by a locally formed and based group known as the National Farm Workers Association.

For a very brief period, these organizations succeeded in frightening perhaps as many as 500 workers away from their jobs. In many cases, growers told their employees that if they did not want to be exposed to the threats and harassments being hurled at them by a few agitators, they did not need to return to work for the time being. However, most of the workers returned to their jobs within a few days.

The tactics used to scare off workers varied from picketing their homes, threatening them with anonymous 'phone calls in the middle of the night, and shouting obscenities at them.

Having realized that their efforts were failing, the California Migrant Ministry offered the two union organizing forces help to revive the dying cause.

Through the leadership of the Migrant Ministry, churches throughout the state were urged to support the union against the growers. Many church laymen and ministers took exception to this new role ministers and priests were taking. The role of the union organizer. They felt this role violated the clergy's respected position by pitting Christian against Christian in a pure economic struggle.

As you well know, a clergyman has always commanded a position of respect. He is looked upon by the subscribers of organized religion as perhaps one notch above the masses and, therefore, has always been spared from criticism and doubt.

We have spent countless hours with representatives of every conceivable religious sect pointing out the true facts surrounding the situation in Delano. In many cases, the clergymen, with which we have dealt, have had their minds made up before they came to Delano. They merely used the trip as an excuse to satisfy their congregations.

It is certainly evident to me that religious hierarchies have elected to abdicate their positions as representatives of all churches by entering into the field as union organizers. These hired leaders are giving the impression to the public that THEY represent their congregations.

Churchmen who have been involved in the Delano dispute have refused to believe our statements that our workers have rejected the attempts of the union organizers and, therefore, these unions do not represent our workers. They tell us, "Have an election and prove it."

I maintain that the church-going people of this state do not subscribe to the involvement of church leaders in the foreign policy of this government, public demonstrations, free speech demonstrations, civil strife activities, labor organizing activities, and many other programs that are causing unrest in this country.

I want to see elections held among the congregations of the churches in the country to determine if the philosophy church leaders are expounding today is representative of the attitudes of their flocks. I feel certain that Americans would reject these self-appointed leaders in the same manner our workers have rejected the agitators in Delano.

As far as I am concerned, church leaders had better start looking for other financial means to carry out these radical theories they are attempting to force upon us.

It is apparent to me that the need for churches to administer to the spiritual need of man has taken a back seat to the need to fight causes of various types. If the churches want this perhaps it is about time that they, like any other political organization, be relieved of their tax exempt status and start paying their own way.

The highly emotional nature by which churches supported the organizers did breathe new life into the campaign. However, it became evident in a very few days that the entire scheme was failing again.

The leaders of this so-called movement began looking in all directions for ways to put some more new life in the organizing attempts. They called upon members of the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE), the Students for Democratic Society, the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee (SNCC), and the W.E.B. DuBois Clubs, as well as those opposing this country's support of South Viet Nam.

Instead of striking workers, the picket line consisted almost entirely of campus agitators, ministers, priests, paid professionals...all people who were trying to maintain the fiction that a strike existed.

Again failing to attract workers, these agitators in a blind revenge tried to organize a boycott of Delano grapes and grape products. That, too, resulted in utter failure. The failure is evidenced by the fact that fresh table grape shipments from the Delano area have increased by 54% since the announcement of the so-called boycott.

The means used by these agitators to gain publicity in the news media have veered from the absurd to the pitiful.

We have even been treated to the spectacle of a publicity-seeking comedian giving a press conference in Delano.

We have been asked:

Why don't you negotiate with the unions?

It has been apparent from the beginning of the organizational effort that our workers are not interested in becoming part of these unions. They have rejected all of their efforts. And we respect their decision.

We cannot, in good conscience, and will not, enter into any type of negotiations with these unions and thereby actually force out workers into something that is not of their own free choice.

We have also been asked:

Why don't you submit to an election to prove your point?

The workers voted every day of the harvest. How? The size of our crop and the efficiency with which it was harvested are votes that even the most prejudiced person cannot ignore nor submerge with half-truths and false or mis-leading statements. They have voted with their feet, so to speak...by going to work regularly in our vineyards.

The proof is that some 5,000 of our regular workers stayed on the job and picked the largest crop of grapes in history. Recent figures from the Federal-State Market News Service, a governmental agency, prove this. These figures show that, as of March 13, 1966, the shipment of table grapes by rail from the Kern District totaled 9,228 as compared with 8,441 on the same date in 1965, the year before. This is a 9% increase over 1965.

Wages are frequently mentioned as a cause for this agitation. Under hourly guarantees, plus incentive rates, harvest workers during the past season were earning upwards of \$2.00 per hour. A survey of some of the high-labor-using growers in this area revealed an average wage of \$1.73 per hour for the table grape harvest season. This does not include the free housing that is provided. The survey was based on an audit of 578,303 hours and a payroll of about one million dollars. A further sample of wages was taken from the records of 460 men and women field workers. This particularly large ranch showed an average pay of \$2.06 per hour.

The harvest of wine grapes returned to the worker as high as \$2.77 per hour. A survey was also conducted in this operation to determine average hourly pay. The figures show that during this period the average was \$2.43 per hour. This includes part-time housewives and teenagers.

This is well above the national minimum industrial wage of \$1.25 per hour and considerably higher than the state average of \$1.51 per hour. Many growers in Delano provide free, year-round housing to single male workers and many families. In addition, growers provide all utilities, and pay the salaries of cooks selected by the workers themselves. Those not living in the grower-supplied dwellings are paid a higher hourly base.

~~The so-called strike is pure myth, manufactured out of nothing by outside agitators who are more interested in creating trouble in the United States than in the welfare of the farm workers.~~

How valid are the claims of these people that thousands of our employees are out on strike?

We say such claims are utterly invalid. For proof, we cite figures from the California Department of Employment. This department conducted a very intensive investigation into the situation here to determine if a labor dispute existed. Growers on 33 individual ranches were interviewed. The workers who left their jobs were interviewed. The result of this investigation shows that evidence of workers leaving their jobs exists on 15 ranches in the Delano area.

The Department of Employment based their decision on the evidence of only 49 workers, when they found they left their jobs for one reason or another. Three growers were found to have no dispute. The balance indicated that there was a dispute in the area, but no evidence of a loss of employees.

There is the proof. This so-called strike is a gross piece of fiction. The public has been treated to a monumental "snow job" and there is no substance to the widely circulated claims.

What has been the results of this publicity campaign?

We found out last week.

It was announced from Washington, D.C., that the Senate Sub-Committee on Migratory Labor would be coming to California to conduct hearings on four bills relating to agricultural labor.

We were told that the committee decided on California to hold the hearings because we could provide an abundance of information for the members of the Committee on California agriculture and its labor force.

In Sacramento, most grower witnesses were given the opportunity of appearing last in a long line of union witnesses. In many cases, the chairman of the committee, Senator Harrison Williams of New Jersey, asked growers just to hand in their statements and not take up time by reading them.

The same performance was repeated in Visalia...the difference from the previous day's session was that only one grower testified.

And again in Delano...only one grower testified.

The three days of hearings held by Senator Williams reminded me of an old-time medicine show. The barker pulled every trick he could think of in an effort to sell the public, via the press, his own special brand of "political snake oil."

Finally, I would like to make a few observations.

The methods these various groups are using are certainly foreign, in many ways, to us as growers. We have, however, been able to cope with them by staying together in all our actions. The agitation our workers have been subjected to is nothing more than an extension of the attempt to create civil unrest throughout our country. It is starting to filter down from the cities into the rural areas. And it is going to be around for some time.

Through our trade associations, we can and must pull ourselves together even tighter. We must support them in such a manner that they can do a job for us and get it done quickly and properly.

There have been any number of instances where we have had to call upon the League to assist us with problems. Individually we could not have handled them. The same is certainly true with Joe Brosmer and the Agricultural Labor Bureau in Fresno.

We also became faced, during the past few months, with the necessity of embarking on a public relations program to offset the propaganda that was being sent out by the organizers. In this particular field, we were fortunate that

California agriculture has seen fit to maintain and support a strong and experienced public relations organization. The Council of California Growers, at our request, opened a full-time office in Delano and has taken charge of all press relations.

I certainly have had my eyes opened during the past few months in regard to this art of public relations...or attitude conditioning. In the first place, we in agriculture have only one thing to sell to the public. That is the truth and facts. Too often, these items are not sensational. And if they are not sensational, they do not command the headlines. Half-truths and misleading stories sell better than the truth.

I have visited with numerous reporters over the past seven months. The shocking thing is that many reporters say to me..."You're right, the truth just doesn't sell."

It is because of this type of reporting we have today that it is even more vital that California agriculture work harder to build our own public relations organization, the Council of California Growers, so we can offset the volumes of fiction being disseminated with the truth. I am confident that in the long run, and it might take some time, the truth is going to win out.

Finally, ladies and gentlemen, I want to urge each and every one of you to become deeply concerned with the political activities in this state and nation. It is of the utmost importance that we all get involved in politics: like never before. The time for the grower to say, "Let George do it," is over. George is doing it and doing it to us. This next year, with a reapportioned Legislature, could very well be a disaster for California agriculture. Our voice in the political arena is growing faint...in some instances can't even be heard...and only we as individual growers can strengthen it.

Thank you.

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