Chapter 3

FARM LABOR ORGANIZING: THE BACKGROUND

From the beginning of the latter half of the nineteenth century until the Progressive Era in California, grower power over labor was highly impersonal and virtually unrestrained. Grower and labor interests would not extend rights and participation to the racial and ethnic minorities who worked as wage laborers on farms. The Chinese, who were imported to work on the Central Pacific Railroad and became available for farm work upon its completion, were considered a cheaper source of labor than slaves would have been. Supposedly, they would work for considerably less than American laborers, they could be dismissed during the off-season, and they were housed and fed at extremely low cost. Strong social and racial prejudice further weakened the farm employers' sense of responsibility. Ironically, the strong race prejudice that allowed commercial farmers to profit from Chinese immigrant labor, contributed to its elimination. Xenophobic feelings fed a national movement to have Chinese immigration cut off, which it was, in 1882. To some extent, white farm workers escaped the burden of prejudice heaped on "persons of color," but their circumstances were little better in other ways. The periodic depressions of the nineteenth century

generally managed to wipe out whatever meager economic foothold they were able to acquire.[1]

The Japanese, however, were something of an exception to the rule of farm worker powerlessness. The Japanese came to fill the seasonal agricultural labor market by about 1890. They organized to enter the labor market and initially seemed to accept extremely low wages in anticipation of driving other workers out. Then, with the crops ripening, they would threaten a work stoppage unless their demands were met. These demands included options to lease or rent small parcels of a grower's field. Despite the success of their labor associations, the Japanese were not interested in aggressive, sustained union organizing.[2] Agricultural landowners soon came to despise the Japanese tactics and to fear their industriousness and skill as horticulturalists, for the Japanese were very good at farming and making

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[1] Lamar B. Jones, "Labor and Management in California Agriculture, 1864–1964," *Labor History* (Winter 1970): 23–28.

[2] According to the U.S. Senate Subcommittee of the Committee on Education and Labor:

> The Japanese were not interested in the regular labor organizations, but operated independently as racial groups. Like the Chinese, they followed the practice of organizing themselves into gangs under the direction of a boss or contractor, providing their own food and housing at work, and living apart from the employer, the regular white labor force, and the migratory white laborer. It has been estimated that Japanese and Chinese approximated 50 percent of the employees on the larger farms. The Japanese laborers were used chiefly in berries, citrus fruit, deciduous fruits, grapes, sugar beets, vegetables, and nursery products, performing the usual stereotyped hand operations. Data available for this period indicate that the Japanese were not often hired for periods of less than 1 week or more than a season. The Japanese were influential in bringing about a change in the payment of wages from a daily to a piece-rate basis. They avoided the time rates and insisted on payment for piece work because of their ability to excel in the "stoop" work characteristic of the principal operations in the intensively cultivated crops that grow on or close to the ground. Gradually the differential between wages of white and oriental labor disappeared or became insubstantial. Working first at lower wages than the whites, the Japanese succeeded in increasing their wages during the decade 1900–1910. After 1910 they operated on approximately the same basis as whites.
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> U.S. Congress, Senate, Subcommittee of the Committee on Education and Labor, *Report*, No. 1150, Violations of Free Speech and Rights of Labor, 77th Congress, 2nd Session (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1942), Pt. 4, 238–39 [hereinafter cited as *La Follette Committee Report*].

productive land that others had little use for. Race prejudice built and fueled a movement to limit Japanese entry into the United States and to bar them from land ownership. In 1906, the federal government negotiated a gentlemen's agreement with Japan and in 1913 the California state legislature passed the Alien Land Law,[3] accomplishing in part each goal.

Virtually no outside organization, local, state, or national, championed the farm workers' cause, but among agriculturalists within the state a great debate was under way between advocates of the family farm and supporters of large-scale commercial farming. It is fascinating to note that throughout the nineteenth century and into the twentieth, agrarian idealists were responding vigorously to the self-serving "progressive" ideology of the bonanza wheat farmers and their ilk. In 1854, the forward-thinking editors of the *California Farmer* asserted,

> California is destined to become a large grower of Cotton, Rice, Tobacco, Sugar, Tea, Coffee, and where shall the laborers be found? . . . The Chinese! And everything tends to this — those great walls of China are to be broken down and that population, educated, schooled, and drilled in the cultivation of these products, are to be to California what the African has been to the South. This is the decree of the Almighty, and man cannot stop it.[4]

In response, advocates of the Jeffersonian ideal of the family farm argued that such attitudes corrupted sacred American values. In speeches before the state Agricultural Society, agrarians supported a different image of American agriculture.

> The safety and well being of society depends on the intelligence and comfort of the laboring classes. . . . They are the workers, and by their numbers, under our form of government, they are the ones who choose rulers and determine the destiny of the Republic. They cannot fulfill the duties of citizenship on the wages of peons or coolies. Their relation to the State demand[s] of them education and virtue, which are only to be expected of those who have the

[3] The enforcement of the Alien Land Act drove many Japanese into the cities. Carey McWilliams *Factories in the Field* (Hamden: Archon Books, 1969), 116.

[4] Paul S. Taylor, "California Farm Labor: A Review," *Agricultural History* 42 (January 1968): 50.

> means furnished by a fair share of the profits of capital in exchange for their labor and skill to bring education, comfort, and advancement within their reach. This has been the American theory. . . . It has fostered independence of labor; it has prevented class distinctions, it has been the parent of virtue, intelligence, and patriotism; it cannot be superseded and this country remain a Republic, where rights and benefits are reciprocal.[5]

Notwithstanding their opposition to the system that demeaned minorities, however, the rural traditionalists were frequently as racist as their "progressive" industrialist counterparts. In attacking large-scale commercial agriculture, they were attacking the influx of undesirable immigrants. As one prominent agrarian said, "I am not able to concur in the opinion that the immigration in large numbers of this people [the Chinese] is desirable. A slower growth of a community, with the elements in it only of Christian civilization, seems to me far preferable to rapid development by an alien, heathen population. Would not 25 stalwart German or Scandinavian emigrants, with their families, be better for the real interests of the State than the whole Chinese population of [Sacramento]?"[6] Notwithstanding their racial and religious preferences, agrarian idealists did wage a strong campaign against bigness and commercialism. As late as 1891, the president of the state Agricultural Society used the Society's convention as a forum for attacking the big commercial farms. As it turned out, though, the growing economic preeminence of the industrial farms was just too great. Industrial agriculture was highly profitable and thus attractive. The idealism of the agrarian traditionalists lost out to rural industrialization.

Before the Progressive Era, then, there was indigenous opposition to industrial farming and the labor system it depended on, and at least one group, the Japanese, had developed effective labor associations. Neither proved sufficient to upgrade the position of the farm laborer.

Between 1908 and 1917, urban industrial unemployment forced significant numbers of whites into the agricultural labor pool and for the first time the labor movement took an interest in farm workers. This

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5 Quoted in Cletus E. Daniel, *Bitter Harvest* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1981), 30.

6 Quoted in Daniel, *Bitter Harvest*, 29–30.

phenomenon marks a second period in the history of outside involvement in the plight of the California farm worker. The labor organizations that took an interest in farm workers were the American Federation of Labor (AFL) and the International Workers of the World (IWW), known as the Wobblies. In 1903 the Central Labor Council of Los Angeles, AFL, passed a resolution calling for an organizing effort among migrant farm workers in California. According to the resolution, the drive was to be conducted without regard to race or nationality. It was quite apparent, however, that the AFL was neither a champion of farm workers nor an advocate of racial tolerance. What the AFL really wanted was to protect its urban organizing efforts. The AFL did not want impoverished, seasonally unemployed farm workers scabbing on industrial workers in the cities. The task of organizing farm workers was delegated to the California State Federation of Labor and its executive council — cautious, aristocratic, "racially fastidious" men keenly interested in friendly relations with farm owners. J. B. Dale, the man assigned the task of unionizing farm workers, did not even take his campaign into the farming regions, and in 1916 the AFL abandoned its interest in farm workers entirely.[7]

Unlike the AFL, the IWW did have a keen interest in farm workers; not because they were farm workers, however, but because they were such a good example of the callous exploitation of workers under a capitalist system. The Wobblies were issue-oriented, class-conscious missionaries. As a result, they got involved in an effort to establish their own right to free speech. Organizing got short shrift. The free speech issue came to a head in Fresno in 1910–1911 during the trial of a well publicized court case. The leftist ideology of the IWW evoked an extreme reaction.

Outside the courtroom a variety of repressive and violent tactics were used against the Wobblies by police and vigilantes, but the struggle ended with a compromise providing for limited free speech for the IWW. Meanwhile, the Wobbly campaign on behalf of farm workers had foundered. By the time they recovered from the decimating free speech fight and reoriented their tactics, it was too late. Their symbolic and practical achievements were overshadowed by their opposition to World War I and

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[7] Harry Schwartz, "Organizational Problems of Agricultural Labor Unions," *Journal of Farm Economics* 8, no. 2 (May 1941): 456–66; Henry William Spiegel, "Trade Unions in Agriculture," *Rural Sociology* 6 (June 1941): 117–25.

resultant prosecution under the Federal Espionage Act and state syndicalist laws passed during the war years. The Wobblies attempted a comeback during the 1920s, but were never again a potent force in farm labor organizing.[8] These incidents were the first in a pattern that would become evident later on: the mainstream of the labor movement took little interest in farm workers, leaving the field to leftists whose ideological views, rather than group identification, drew them to the farm workers' cause.

The agricultural labor movement, such as it was, had collapsed, but progressivism was on the march. Interestingly, the Progressive coalition in California included a not insignificant number of farm employers, traditionalist agrarian holdovers. In 1914, when the coalition initiated a proposal for an eight-hour workday, farm owners organized a Farmers' Protective League to oppose it. They had little difficulty defeating the proposal, but one incident gave farm owners considerable difficulty, and Progressives leverage. In August, 1913, E. B. Durst, a hop grower, advertised in newspapers throughout California and Nevada for 2,700 farm workers to come to his ranch in Wheatland, California, to work the harvest. In reality, Durst needed only 1,500 workers. Twenty-eight hundred people responded to his ads. Half of them were aliens. Twenty-seven different nationalities were reported among 235 men in one work gang alone. Seven interpreters were needed to communicate with the workers. Those who could not obtain work were destitute, unable to move on, and overcrowded the makeshift labor camp set up to house those who were employed. Durst rented tents to the migrants for 75 cents a week. He prevented local merchants from making deliveries to the camp and in so doing forced the migrants to buy groceries and other necessities at the company store owned, of course, by Durst. Durst provided only nine outdoor toilets for the 2,800 residents of his labor camp and drinking water was not allowed in the fields. Instead, Durst's cousin sold lemonade there for five cents a glass. Another of Durst's relatives owned and operated a lunchtime "stew wagon." A veteran Wobbly organizer, Richard "Blackie" Ford, was present in Durst's Wheatland labor camp that August. He called a meeting in the workers' camp to protest conditions there and to call for a strike. At the meeting, attended by

[8] Schwartz, "Organizational Problems of Agricultural Labor Unions," 456; Sidney C. Sufrin, "Labor Organizations in Agricultural America, 1930–1935," *American Journal of Sociology* 43, no. 4 (January 1938): 549–50.

virtually everyone in the camp, Ford held a sick baby up to the crowd and shouted, "It's for the kids we are doing this." With that, sheriff's deputies waded into the crowd, one of them fired a shot to "quiet the mob," and a riot ensued. A district attorney, a deputy sheriff, and two workers were killed. The National Guard was called out, and all over California Wobblies were arrested. Ford and another Wobbly organizer, Herman Suhr, were arrested, convicted of murder, and sentenced to life imprisonment.[9]

In response, Hiram Johnson, political Progressive and governor of California, created a Commission on Immigration and Housing to investigate the causes of the Wheatland Riot. The chairman of the committee was Simon Lubin; the executive secretary, Carleton Parker. Both men fought hard to force agricultural employers to upgrade conditions on their farms. Lubin and Parker won some concessions, but had to compromise on what they considered minimum acceptable standards. Another Progressive commission, the Commission on Land Colonization and Rural Credits, was created in 1915. Members Harris Weinstock, Chester Rowell, and Elwood Mead led the committee, which issued a report the following year condemning industrial agriculture and calling for a democratization of the farm system. Acting on the Weinstock–Rowell–Mead recommendation, the state legislature allocated funds for two settlement projects, one in Durham, California, the other in Delhi. As time went on, however, these experiments in democracy failed due to administrative ineptness, poor funding, and an increasingly hostile social and political climate.[10] Another effort to reform the farm labor system was sponsored by agrarian reformers, a tax bill aimed at breaking up the large farms. But it was twice defeated when it came before the state legislature in 1916 and 1918.[11]

Progressives certainly generated publicity for the farm workers' cause — publicity associated with legitimate institutions and sober and restrained methods of protest. And Progressive reformers Lubin and Parker

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[9] Carleton H. Parker, *The Casual Laborer and Other Essays* (New York: Russell and Russell, 1967), 1–199; *La Follette Committee Report*, Pt. 4, 243–47.

[10] California State Assembly, "Report on Land Colonization and Rural Credits," November 29, 1916; McWilliams, *Factories in the Field*, 200–10; *La Follette Committee Report*, Pt. 4, 247–54.

[11] George E. Mowry, *The California Progressives* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1951), 86–104; Spencer C. Olin, Jr., *California's Prodigal Sons: Hiram Johnson and the Progressives, 1911–1917* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1968).

asserted an image of the industrial agricultural workplace that challenged the profound prejudices so common among farm owners and others in the nineteenth century. Their new ideology claimed that industrial working conditions breed psychological pathology; that the individual farm worker should not be held personally responsible for the conditions of his life. Parker wrote, for example, "As a class, the migratory laborers are nothing more or less than the finished products of their environment. They should therefore never be studied as isolated revolutionaries, but rather as, on the whole, tragic symptoms of a sick social order."[12] Neither Lubin nor Parker, however, and indeed none of the Progressives, were in favor of trade unionism. They vigorously opposed solutions which proposed to change the existing structures of economic and political power. Lubin and Parker's Commission on Immigration and Housing, in fact, supplied the Justice Department with the information it needed to crack down on the Wobblies at the time of the First World War.[13]

By 1927, the reformist energy of Hiram Johnson's tenure as governor had been spent. That year the state government was reorganized in accord with conservative interests. In the Johnson years, a significant change in the composition of the farm labor market had taken place. During the First World War, farm owners had claimed acute labor shortages, and under the banner of patriotism extraordinary measures were taken to assure that the crops would be harvested. Urban workers, women, and children (mostly teenagers) volunteered for field work. Mexican nationals were also used extensively. It was during this period that Mexicans began immigrating in large numbers, as did smaller numbers of Filipinos. Most of the Filipinos who immigrated were single males, since families were not then permitted to enter the United States. After the war, Mexican immigration supplemented by 30,000 Filipinos became the major source of supply. During the 1930s, however, 1,250,000 destitute white workers came to California to

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[12] Parker, *The Casual Laborer and Other Essays*, 88.

[13] U.S. Congress, Senate, Subcommittee of the Committee on Education and Labor, *Hearings* pursuant to S. Res. 266, A Resolution to Investigate Violations of the Right of Free Speech and Assembly and Interference with the Right of Labor to Organize and Bargain Collectively, 76th Congress, 2nd Session (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1940), Pt. 59, exhibit 9371, 21887–919 [hereinafter cited as *La Follette Committee Hearings*]; Melvyn Dubofsky, *We Shall Be All: A History of the IWW* (Chicago: Quadrangle Books, 1969), 445–68.

escape the drought in Texas, Arkansas, Oklahoma, and other southwestern states. Many entered the farm labor pool. These "dust bowl" refugees gained widespread attention though their migration was not as great as the non-white immigration in the 1920s, or for that matter, the 1940s.[14]

The early and mid-1920s were quiet, though, despite inflammatory conditions. World War I had created an enormous worldwide demand for American foodstuffs that carried farmers to their highest peak of prosperity. But in 1920 an inevitable slump began. Millions of soldiers in Europe and elsewhere in the world returned to their farms, and soon world overproduction of farm crops sent prices rapidly downward. The result was that farm income dropped from $10 billion in 1919 to $4 billion in 1921. There was some recovery afterward to about six or seven billion in the later 1920s, but the farm depression lasted until the middle 1930s.[15] Across the country, big business was in ascendance. Banks, utilities, railroads, and food processors expanded into farming, and farmers, in a burst of energy, sought to rationalize and control the price of farm goods and the agricultural labor market by stepping up the organization of cooperative associations and labor bureaus. The largest and most effective of the farm labor bureaus was the San Joaquin Valley Agricultural Labor Bureau organized in 1926.[16] Meanwhile, Mexican farm workers, particularly in Southern California, were developing organizations of their own. In various ways the Mexican government gave official sanction to these "mutual aid societies" and to more broadly based workers' unions established by Mexican farm laborers. The Mexican vice consul at Calexico, Carlos Ariza, for example, supported the founding of the Workers Union of the Imperial Valley (La Union de Trabajadores del Valle Imperial). The Workers Union recruited 1,200 workers and in 1928 participated in a melon strike, but the strike was unplanned and poorly led and consequently

[14] McWilliams, *Factories in the Field*, 103–33.

[15] "[O]ne fourth of all farms in California in the years 1930 to 1939 were lost by owners who were unable to meet debt and tax charges." *La Follette Committee Report*, Pt. 4, 289.

[16] In 1942, the LaFollette Committee reported that the Agricultural Labor Bureau of the San Joaquin Valley had labor and set the wage rate for 30,000 workers in the cotton industry, many thousands in the grape industry, and hundreds in the other fruit crops in the valley. *La Follette Committee Report*, Pt. 4, 409.

failed. Available statistics indicate a sudden rise in union activity in 1930, reaching a peak in 1933.[17]

Widespread disturbances and spontaneous, short-lived strikes in Southern California attracted the attention of the Communist Party, marking a third period in the history of outside involvement in California farm labor issues. The strike that drew the Party in occurred on January 1, 1930, when a group of Mexican and Filipino lettuce pickers, disgusted with their wages and working conditions, walked off the job at several farms in the vicinity of Brawley in the Imperial Valley. This spontaneous act generated a full-fledged strike among 5,000 workers in the valley. Since most of the workers were Mexican and no leader emerged among the strikers, the Mexican Mutual Aid Society of the Imperial Valley, successor to the Workers Union of the Imperial Valley, was pushed into leading the strike. Ironically, communist organizers first heard of the strike by reading the *Los Angeles Times*, "the most staunchly antilabor, antiradical newspaper in the state" at the time. The Trade Union Unity League of Los Angeles (TUUL), an arm of the Communist Party, sent three organizers to the area. For several days Frank Waldron, Harry Harvey, and Tsuji Horiuchi kept a low profile, but after some preliminary work they established a branch of the Communist Party's Agricultural Workers Industrial League (AWIL) and announced their presence with handbills and leaflets setting forth demands and calling for farm workers to join them. Almost immediately, they were arrested, charged with vagrancy, jailed, and roughed up. This violation of the organizers' civil liberties provoked attention from the Southern California American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) and, of course, from the International Labor Defense (ILD), the legal rights and propaganda arm of the Communist Party.[18]

Representatives of the ACLU went to the sheriff's office in Brawley, California, to protest the situation:

> Before the Reverend Clinton J. Taft and his associates had even finished voicing their protest, Sheriff Gillett was on his feet, punching, kicking, and shoving the two men through the door of his office

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[17] Charles Wollenberg, "Huelga, 1928 Style: The Imperial Valley Cantaloupe Workers' Strike, *Pacific Historical Review* 38 (February 1969): 45–58.

[18] Daniel, *Bitter Harvest*, 105–40; McWilliams, *Factories in the Field*, 213–19; *La Follette Committee Report*, Pt. 4, 210–17.

> and out into the street, where he continued to vent his rage, cursing his terrified victims and challenging them to slug it out with him. In describing the encounter several days later, Taft readily conceded that Gillett's office "richly merits the description which he himself has given it on the upper left hand corner of his official envelopes: 'The lowest-down sheriff's office in the world [57 feet below sea level].' "[19]

The ACLU publicized the incident, but failed to free the men, though the ILD did manage to get them out on bail. Meanwhile, the strike was still on. Local authorities monitored all communication coming into the valley and thus managed to track the strikers' movements and prevent food, money, and other support from reaching them. The Mexican Mutual Aid Society cooperated with local officials to wreck the AWIL, and Mexican officials friendly to the growers began recruiting Mexican immigrants to fill the strikers' jobs. The strike collapsed. The Imperial County district attorney, Elmer Heald, with the help of Los Angeles Police Captain William Hynes and his "Red Squad," used the criminal syndicalism laws to go after strike leaders. They engaged three labor spies "to get the goods on them."[20] A roundup of AWIL members and militant farm workers ensued and some of the arrested were selected to stand trial in El Centro.

> To members of the jury, whose individual economic well-being was inextricably bound in one degree or another to the agricultural economy of the valley, and thus to the major growers in the region, it mattered little in the end whether the suppression of the AWIL and its agents was a product of crass economic self-interest or of genuine patriotism [i.e., anti-communism]. As their verdict would attest, jury members believed that the strikebreaking scheme hatched by employers and local authorities was fully justified as an act of self-preservation against upsetting ideas carried by men who were "outsiders" literally as well as figuratively. In

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19 Frank Spector, *Story of the Imperial Valley* (New York: International Labor Defense, 1930), 18; also see testimony of Elmer E. Heald, *La Follette Committee Hearings*, Pt. 55, 20172–200.

20 *La Follette Committee Hearings*, "Documents relating to the Intelligence Bureau or Red Squad of the LA Police Department," Pt. 64, 23507–17.

> testimony before a congressional hearing some months after the trial, District Attorney Heald noted that the fundamental objection of valley citizens to the El Centro defendants was that they were "*not only not residents of [the] valley, but not a single one of them ever had a job in Imperial County, ever worked there, never did a day's work — not a single one of them ever did a day's work in Imperial County.*"[21]

The defendants were convicted of all charges against them, many of which had been trumped up.[22] Given the political climate of the courtroom, the defendants' insistence on "hewing the Communist line" hurt them, but it is hard to know what might have helped, for as Hugh T. Osborne, a member of the Imperial County Board of Supervisors, and Charles E. Nice, the county indigent commissioner and secretary of the Brawley Chamber of Commerce, made abundantly clear, the major concern of the locals was to break any potentially successful unionization effort.[23]

Liberals and leftists in San Francisco and Los Angeles protested local official handling of the strike and the trial for years, but the result of all the controversy was a sharpening of the differences between the ACLU and the ILD as the former sought to defend the civil liberties of the strikers while the latter pursued agitation and propaganda.

After the El Centro trial, the AWIL changed its name to the Agricultural Workers Industrial Union (AWIU) and later to the Cannery and Agricultural Workers Industrial Union (CAWIU) when it joined a small independent union, the American Labor Union, on strike in Santa Clara. The Santa Clara cannery strike, involving 2,000 workers, was forcibly broken by the cannery's owners.[24] This, and other spontaneous strikes that were aided by the CAWIU and failed, led to a precipitous decline in CAWIU membership. But the communist organization was to have new life breathed into it by a young man "exiled" to the West by powerful older men jealous of his talents and offended by his brashness, determination, and success.

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21 Quoted in Daniel, *Bitter Harvest*, 124 (emphasis added).

22 George H. Shoat, "Imperial Valley Outrage," *Open Forum* (June 5, 1930).

23 See the testimony of Hugh T. Osborne, *La Follette Committee Hearings*, Pt. 55, 20164, and that of Charles E. Nice, ibid., 20180.

24 *La Follette Committee Report*, Pt. 4, 435–38.

In 1930, Samuel Adams Darcy was made Communist Party district organizer for the states of California, Nevada, and Arizona. Darcy had no experience working with farm laborers, but his astuteness and gift for organizing led him to believe that highly personal, bread-and-butter issues, grass roots organizers, careful planning, and efficient preparation were essential to a farm labor organizing drive. Darcy put his ideas forth at a meeting of District members in July, 1932. In the months following, CAWIU activists concentrated their efforts in the agricultural valleys around San Jose and worked hard to orchestrate rather than simply react to farm labor unrest.[25] After careful preparation, the CAWIU backed a strike at the fruit ranch of one of Vacaville's leading citizens, Frank H. Buck.

Buck had just been elected to Congress on the Democratic ticket headed by Franklin Delano Roosevelt. Before his election, Buck had announced that he would pay workers $1.40 for an eight-hour day for work in his orchards, and that if elected he would raise wages even higher. On November 8th, Buck was elected. On November 14th he dropped his workers' wages to $1.25 for a nine-hour day. In response to Buck's treachery, 400 Mexican, Filipino, Japanese, and Anglo tree pruners walked off their jobs and set up picket lines. One hundred and twenty-five of these men were signed with the CAWIU. The action spread.

Growers in the area set out to break the strike. The mayor of Vacaville, himself a grower, coordinated efforts between orchardists and local officials. In the court of public opinion, the CAWIU was charged with sabotage and generally defamed. Anti-communist rallies were held and local vigilantes actually kidnapped several strike leaders from jail, beat them, cut their hair, slopped them with red paint, threatened their lives, and ordered them out of town. As threats and violence increased, the picket lines came more and more to be manned by women and children. It was hoped that Vacaville's aroused citizens would be less likely to beat women and children than to beat men. Visiting AFL officials from the Sacramento Federated Trades Council lent public support to the growers.[26] After two months, the strike was broken, but the CAWIU had demonstrated staying power and its leaders had learned several valuable lessons. They had

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25 Ibid., Pt. 4, 208–17.

26 Daniel, *Bitter Harvest*, 138.

learned not to call a strike during the off-season when growers are not threatened with the immediate loss of their crop. They learned to rely on the permanent and semi-permanent farm worker residents of a community rather than the apparently more militant migrants to sustain a strike. And they learned that organization in support of workers smarting from callous and unjust treatment could generate remarkable persistence.

Tactically, then, the communists were well positioned to begin again. By 1933 the communists under Sam Darcy had become accomplished organizers. The year 1933 has been called "The Great Upheaval" because labor unrest, strikes, anti-strike activity, and violence were widespread. In 1933 the CAWIU was in the forefront of farm labor organizing, not because its ideology was ultimately persuasive, but because it was the only organization with the leadership, structure, strategy, and persistence to maintain a continuing presence in the face of overwhelming odds.

The Mexicans, who were the majority of farm workers in 1933, were notably unpersuaded by communist rhetoric, as the following example will illustrate. In 1933 a berry pickers strike initiated by the CAWIU in El Monte in the San Gabriel Valley pitted Mexican farm workers against Japanese growers leasing roughly 700 acres from various white landowners. The Japanese were successful in bringing in scab labor, but were willing to negotiate with the Mexican strikers anyway. In an unusual move, they offered a significant wage increase and official recognition to the CAWIU. The Mexican workers did not like the CAWIU. Despite what appeared to be a major victory for the union — the extraordinarily generous terms offered by the Japanese — fewer than 10 percent of the strikers joined the CAWIU. The growers' offer encouraged Mexican members of the strike committee to break away from the CAWIU, and with the help of consular officials, they formed the Confederación de Uniones de Campesinos y Obreros Mexicanos (CUCOM). Mexican farm workers, given the opportunity, repudiated the CAWIU in preference for their own ethnic-based union. Local authorities used the split between the CAWIU and the CUCOM to get rid of the CAWIU, but when the CUCOM settled with the Japanese growers, there was little benefit to be derived because the Japanese refused to fire their "scabs."[27]

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[27] *La Follette Committee Hearings*, Pt. 62, exhibit 9576, 22536, and Pt. 53, exhibit 8751, 19693–96.

Nonetheless, it was the CAWIU that spearheaded the big organizing push in 1933. District Chief Darcy appointed Pat Chambers to lead the organizing drive. When Captain Hynes got wind of Chambers' activities, he wrote to Imperial Valley authorities warning them to be on the lookout for him. Judge Von Thompson, presiding judge at the El Centro trial and one of a number of officials to respond to the warning, wrote back to inform Hynes that Imperial Valley law enforcement officials were conferring "for the purpose of meeting the proposed activities and taking care of Mr. Pat Chambers in the proper way."[28] Chambers and active CAWIU organizers were indeed harassed and defeated by law enforcement officials, but they scored some victories, too.

All in all, the CAWIU had been orderly, nonviolent, and remarkably successful in gaining wage increases, but made little headway in the direction of union recognition and collective bargaining rights. In early September, however, the fortunes of the CAWIU began to turn. A poorly planned strike among grape pickers in the San Joaquin Valley near Fresno ended amid mounting arrests and incidents of intimidation and physical assaults.[29] A grape strike in the Lodi area was halted by vigilantes.[30]

The greatest single confrontation between farm workers and farm owners in California that year, or any other for that matter, took place "in the cotton" in the lower San Joaquin Valley.[31] The cotton strike is particularly significant for the light it sheds on the relationship between private local authority and public state and federal authority. In 1933, 75 percent of the agricultural work force was Mexican. There was a huge cotton surplus in the summer of 1933 and another bumper crop was expected. This made growers very uneasy. Nevertheless, commodity prices had actually increased slightly due in large measure to the Agricultural Adjustment Act (AAA). The Agricultural Labor Bureau of the San Joaquin Valley met and

[28] Ibid., Pt. 64, exhibit 10411, 23640–41.

[29] Stuart Jamieson, *Labor Unionism in American Agriculture*, U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics Bulletin no. 836 (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1945), 8–21.

[30] Ibid.

[31] Daniel, *Bitter Harvest*, 75; Jamieson, *Labor Unionism in American Agriculture*, 8–21, 30–42; *La Follette Committee Hearings*, Pt. 54, 19899–20036; *La Follette Committee Report*, Pt. 3, 332–43; Pt. 62, exhibits 9574 and 9575, 22513–31; McWilliams, *Factories in the Field*, 211–29; Paul S. Taylor and Clark Kerr, "Uprisings on the Farms," *Survey Graphic* 24, no. 1, January 1935, 19–22.

set the price of wages. The piece rate for picking cotton was to be 60 cents per hundred pounds. The CAWIU planned to agitate for higher wages for cotton pickers and sought the help of well-known liberals, Lincoln Steffens and Rabbi Irving Reichert of the State Recovery Board. Rabbi Reichert's appeal to Governor James Rolph met with silence. A strike was called on October 4th. Growers responded immediately with force and violence. On October 5th, seventy-five growers participated in the eviction of strikers and their families from labor housing in and around Corcoran. Local police officials also joined in the illegal action — eviction from grower-owned housing without sufficient notice was against the law — and spelled out in words as well as deeds just how they understood their public responsibilities. As Kings County District Attorney Clarence Wilson said, "The sheriff and I told the growers not to worry much about the pickers' rights anyway. . . . [W]e could control the strikers because they didn't amount to anything and couldn't even vote, but the growers were well known and had lots of influence and we were much more afraid we couldn't control them.[32] Or as an undersheriff in Kern County said, "We protect farmers out here in Kern County. They are our best people. They are always with us. They keep this country going. They put us in here and they can put us out again, so we serve them."[33]

In Tulare, Kings, and Kern Counties, finance and ginning companies, chambers of commerce, the Farm Bureau, and the largest growers in the area advocated the formation of farmers' protective associations to drive the CAWIU out, and growers threatened to boycott any valley merchant who sold food to the hungry strikers and their families.

There was a public outcry against such tactics and a strengthening of the strikers' will to resist. By October 9th, approximately 12,000 workers were on strike in the three counties mentioned. State officials were critical of growers for refusing to negotiate with the CAWIU. On October 10th, forty armed growers came upon a meeting of strikers in Pixley. Pat Chambers, who was conducting the meeting, sensed danger and quickly disbanded the group, instructing the men, women, and children in attendance to move across the street to union headquarters. Eyewitness

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32 Quoted in Daniel, *Bitter Harvest*, 182.

33 Peter Matthiessen, "Organizer: Profile of Cesar Chavez," Part 1, *The New Yorker*, June 21, 1969, 42–85.

accounts confirm the following sequence of events. One of the growers fired his gun. A striker grabbed the barrel of the gun and pushed it down. Another grower then beat that striker to the ground and the first grower shot the striker to death. With that, the rest of the growers opened up on the crowd of strikers and continued firing until they had no more ammunition left. All this took place with a group of highway patrolmen and sheriff's deputies standing by watching. Unimpeded, the growers got into their trucks and drove off. Only then did the policemen set out after them. The police caught up with the growers, stopped them, collected a few of their guns and then allowed them to go on. Two strikers were killed in the melee and eight were wounded, including one woman.[34]

Another violent incident occurred on October 11th near Arvin. During a fight that pitted growers using gun butts against strikers with grape stakes, a shot was fired and a Mexican worker fell dead. With that, growers started using the other end of their guns. A deputy sheriff threw tear-gas into the crowd and broke up the riot. Growers claimed that a striker perched in a tree nearby had fired the shot that killed the worker. Police arrested several strikers on murder charges and others for rioting. The charges, however, had to be dismissed when an investigation revealed that no striker had had a gun in his possession.[35]

These two incidents in particular incensed public opinion. A variety of outsiders came into the area as a result: state and federal mediators, highway patrolmen, investigators, protest delegations, relief officials, and an honorary representative of the Mexican government, Enrique Bravo. On the other hand, locals prepared to handle the situation themselves. In Kern County, on October 13th alone, 600 permits were issued to growers allowing them to carry concealed weapons. Outside pressure did force Tulare County officials to take action against growers involved in the Pixley killings, however. Eight growers were arrested for their part in the incident. But, "[a]uthorities sought to mollify employers who were angered over the arrests by arresting Pat Chambers at the same time on a charge of criminal syndicalism. In keeping with the bizarre character of justice in the region, the criminal complaint leading to Chambers' arrest was lodged by another

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34 Miriam Allen deFord, "Blood-Stained Cotton in California," *The Nation*, December 20, 1933, 705.

35 McWilliams, *Factories in the Field*, 221–22.

of the growers who had taken part in the Pixley attack."[36] Governor Rolph increased the number of highway patrolmen in the area and reminded valley officials that the rule of law would be upheld, but turned down a request for a special prosecutor, asserting that local officials could handle things. He did, however, instruct the State Emergency Relief Administration to provide relief to the strikers and their families.

The incidents at Pixley and Arvin had increased the militance of the workers and actually strengthened the strike. The CAWIU had responded to grower violence with restraint and consequently had won an unaccustomed measure of respect from the public. With the public engaged, the issue of the strike would not die. The federal government was forced to step in to try to settle things, marking a fourth phase in the history of outside involvement.

The New Deal was a watershed for the labor movement in America and yet farm workers were excluded from the benefits bestowed on labor in the 1930s. The Roosevelt Administration's response to the cotton strike explains why, at least in part. As Cletus Daniel argues in his history of California farm workers, the most serious difficulty New Dealers had in addressing the problems of labor in California agriculture was philosophical. They took a rational, paternalistic, and fundamentally anti-union attitude.

> The approach that New Deal brain trusters first chose to effect changes favorable to labor . . . reflected a fundamental antiunion bias. Theirs was clearly not the selfish and defensive antiunionism of most American employers, but an aversion based on a shared conviction that the class conflict that had necessitated unions was neither an inevitable nor a natural by-product of the capitalist system. Once capitalism had been purged of those exploitative features spawned by unconstrained economic individualism and infused with the ethic of the national welfare, the New Dealers argued, industrial conflict would disappear, and with it the need for strong unions. Franklin Roosevelt had first embraced this vision of a conflict-free capitalist economy during the Progressive era, and it remained with him as he assumed the presidency. In his clearest exposition of this theme, Roosevelt said, "There is no such

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[36] Daniel, *Bitter Harvest*, 201–2.

> thing as a struggle between labor and capital. Not only is there no struggle, but there is and has always been the heartiest cooperation for neither can capital exist without the cooperation of labor, nor labor without the cooperation of capital. Therefore, I say there is no struggle between the two, not even a dividing line."[37]

The representative of the Roosevelt Administration who took charge of the cotton strike situation was George Creel. Creel had been given responsibility for implementing the Recovery Act in California. He was in favor of organization but opposed to "self-interest" and "militancy." Together with proponents of the National Recovery Act (NRA), he preached cooperation, while the CAWIU resolved "to develop struggles in every cannery, on every ranch."[38] Like so many other New Dealers, including Roosevelt himself, Creel was not only paternalistic, but authoritarian as well. As the cotton strike continued, with Governor Rolph and state government officials failing to intervene decisively, Creel saw his chance to become the architect of a New Deal for California agriculture, and took it. He had no legal authority to step in, since the agricultural workers had been excluded from the application of the National Industrial Relations Act, but that did not matter to Creel.

> He not only ignored the fact that the law did not apply to agricultural workers, but also ignored an administration decision in late September which transferred responsibility for the settlement of industrial disputes from the NRA to the newly created National Labor Board. . . . To overcome the extreme intransigence of both parties to the dispute, Creel . . . , always with dubious authority, [used] every imaginable level of federal power and influence.[39]

Creel applied as much pressure to each side and to influential third parties as he could manufacture. Creel maneuvered Rolph into creating a fact-finding commission staffed by Catholic Archbishop Edward J. Hanna of San Francisco, Tully C. Knowles, president of the College of the Pacific, and University of California labor economist Ira Cross, with Norman Thomas as an observer. Meanwhile, pressure that he had directed against

[37] Ibid., 168.

[38] *La Follette Committee Hearings*, Pt. 54, 19965–66.

[39] Daniel, *Bitter Harvest*, 204.

strikers — making relief conditional upon a return to work — backfired when several children of striking cotton pickers died of malnutrition. Relief was reinstated.

At public hearings before the fact-finding commission, the two sides confronted each other with a parade of witnesses who simply confirmed the previous positions of workers on the one hand and owners on the other. Strikers claimed that the wage of 60 cents per hundred pounds was too low to sustain them at even a minimal level of decency, while growers claimed it could and moreover that 60 cents was all they were able to pay. Creel consulted with officials of the bank financing the cotton crop and got the word that 75 cents per hundred pounds was the highest piece rate cotton growers could adopt and still make a profit, and this is what the fact-finding commission approved. Union recognition was not endorsed. The growers had "consented" to creation of the commission on condition that they did not have to approve the commission's findings nor accept its recommendations. Once the recommendation on wages was made, however, Creel regarded it as binding. Growers and strikers both denounced the wage rate — for opposite reasons, of course — but Creel set out to force both parties to accept it. He threatened growers with exclusion from New Deal farm programs and strikers with removal from relief. By October 26th, both sides capitulated to the commission's "recommendation." Thus was the cotton strike resolved. Both sides felt that the federal government had been the real winner. Growers were especially angry with the outside interference in their affairs.

> Less than a week after the cotton strike ended, Creel was in contact with citrus growers in Tulare County advising them how they might rationalize their labor policy in order to defeat unionism in the region. . . . Had the cotton growers practiced a more enlightened policy toward their workers, he insisted, it would have been impossible for "a small group of agitators to come in from the outside and win workers away from . . . employers."[40]

Creel's efforts to help growers keep outside agitators out were not appreciated. He, too, was considered an outsider. To Creel, collective bargaining meant government paternalism and, if necessary, authoritarian

[40] Ibid., 217.

imposition of "rational" and "fair" standards. After the cotton strike, the leaders of both sides understood this and bitterly resented it.

Of the thirty-seven agricultural strikes reported in California during 1933, twenty-four were led by the CAWIU. Of the 47,575 farm workers involved in these strikes, 37,550, or 79 percent, we're under CAWIU leadership. And, of the total number of workers who struck under the union's auspices, 32,800 won higher wages. Only four CAWIU strikes, affecting 4,750 workers, ended in failure.[41] But the union was not in good shape at the end of the 1933 harvest. In October, the CAWIU had 12,000 determined supporters in the San Joaquin Valley. By mid-November it was virtually defunct in the area. New Deal labor policies may have done more to wreck the strike than growers. Growers, however, had realized that federal officials had no legal basis for intervening in farm labor relations and began to close ranks to keep the federal government out. Wages began to rise, ever so slowly, cutting into the rationale for labor militance, and it became clear that the Roosevelt Administration was not willing to risk a hardline policy with growers to have its rational paternalism prevail. The workers were exhausted and beaten down by the long strike. Growers elsewhere took their cue from the cotton strike and mobilized against union activity, employing new tactics as well as old.

In Los Angeles, Riverside, and San Bernardino Counties, an area threatened by a citrus strike, growers got anti-picketing ordinances passed, together with bans on the distribution of union literature, and they contacted local Roman Catholic priests in predominantly Mexican neighborhoods to get them to warn their parishioners against communist-inspired disruptions. Growers also raised wages to 25 cents an hour — the rate established by successful union action elsewhere. The citrus campaign barely got off the ground, so CAWIU activists returned to the Imperial Valley where they were again met with unrestrained physical abuse and arbitrary arrest after announcing a lettuce strike on January 8, 1934. In the physical confrontations that followed,

> representatives of the Los Angeles Regional Labor Board and the State Labor Commissioner were 'detained' by valley authorities

[41] Schwartz, "Organizational Problems of Agricultural Labor Unions," 456–66; Sufrin, "Labor Organizations in Agricultural America," 549–50.

and subjected to hostile treatment. In reports to their superiors, the two men told of being confronted by a captain of the state highway patrol who warned in a threatening tone, 'You men should get out of here. You are hurting our work. We don't want conciliation. We know how to handle these people, and where we find trouble makers we'll drive them out, if we have to *sap* them.' "[42]

Growers had a lock on the area. The sheriff and undersheriff of Imperial County were growers. The police chiefs of Brawley and El Centro were growers. And the captain of the Highway Patrol in the valley was a grower, as was Brawley's justice of the peace. Farm workers were denied the right to picket or even to assemble. When ACLU lawyer A. L. Wirin, who had secured an order in San Diego Federal District Court enjoining interference with a workers' meeting planned for January 23rd, appeared in the valley, he was abducted by a group of vigilantes, beaten, robbed, and left barefoot in the desert. When he got back to El Centro, he was greeted by a mob of 300 armed vigilantes and escorted out of town.[43]

Reaction was strong. After all, a federal court order had apparently been violated. The Justice Department, however, took the position that technically, the court order had not been violated since Wirin, the principal speaker for the meeting, had been abducted before the meeting began. There had been, according to the Department of Justice, no interference with the meeting itself. The National Labor Board was spurred to action, however. Campbell McCulloch of the Los Angeles Regional Labor Board took the position that peace in the valley would not be achieved until there was binding arbitration of labor disputes. On January 26th, Senator Robert Wagner announced that the National Labor Board would launch an inquiry into the Imperial Valley situation. McCulloch was instrumental in getting Wagner to act. An exceptionally knowledgeable committee was assembled, studied the situation, and in very short order submitted its report and recommendations. The report was remarkable. It recommended that immediate action be taken to safeguard the civil liberties of the workers; that health, education, and housing programs be developed to assist agricultural workers; that subsistence farms and gardens be created to

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[42] *La Follette Committee Hearings*, Pt. 54, exhibit 8765, 20037–41.

[43] *La Follette Committee Report*, Pt. 4, 455–57.

maintain workers in the off-season; that a federal coordinator be appointed to regulate the labor supply in the area; that Mexican nationals working in the fields be sent back across the border; that both labor and owners be organized to promote orderly collective bargaining, and that a federal board be established to oversee the process. It did not say that workers should be free to join the organization of their choice, however, nor did it recognize the paramount position of the CAWIU in previous organizing efforts. Simon Lubin, the Progressive reformer, was a member of the committee. He put the committee's ideas into a few brief words when he said that what was necessary was "the thorough organization of labor and the thorough organization of business management" so that "both might co-operate to a common end . . . ."[44]

Officials in Washington did not support the report. Farm workers had no political clout in Washington, and growers, since the cotton strike, had been registering vigorous protests there over federal interference in their affairs. The National Labor Board bowed out, referring "interested parties" back to the state. Vigilantism intensified in the valley. The ACLU remained interested and active, but impotent. Attorney Grover Johnson, for example, was attacked in broad daylight by a group of men that included a county supervisor and the administrator of a county hospital, after obtaining the release from jail of two CAWIU members. Growers, with the support of Mexican Consul Joaquín Terrazas, allowed a Mexican farm workers union to be formed on condition that they could dictate policy to the union. Once again, pressure built for the federal government to step in, but instead of sending federal marshals to the scene, the Roosevelt Administration enlisted the help of the Department of Labor. The secretary of labor, Frances Perkins, thought of CAWIU activists as follows:

> I got this brainstorm and said to myself, "What kind of people are they? They're like children and children take comfort in authority. When children are having a tantrum when grandma, or Old Aunt Susan, who is a person of authority comes in, they calm right down, because Aunt Susan knows where she's going and what she intends to have. There isn't any of this fluttering like dear, kind,

[44] *La Follette Committee Hearings*, Pt. 54, exhibit 8766, 20044.

> sweet mama who doesn't seem to know what it is one's aiming at, trying to obey all the rules of child guidance and rearing."[45]

"Old Aunt Susan" turned out to be Brigadier General Pelham D. Glassford, appointed by Perkins as special labor conciliator for the Imperial Valley. Glassford felt that the CAWIU must go before the situation could be resolved, but his master plan for the area was akin to what Creel's had been in the San Joaquin Valley cotton strike. Glassford, however, had no power to compel the growers to do anything.

Glassford knew this as well as anybody, so he set out to win the growers' confidence and support by denouncing the CAWIU. Glassford then planned to use his relationship with the growers to try to influence the situation.

The ACLU was not pleased with the Glassford plan, especially when Glassford refused to condemn extralegal tactics used by growers against the CAWIU. The ACLU complained to Washington, demanding Glassford's recall. Glassford's response to his superiors in Washington was, "It is absolutely essential at the present time that they [the growers] believe me to be entirely under their control."[46] The Labor Department backed up Glassford, hoping that the Glassford strategy, to destroy the CAWIU and thus make valley growers amenable to reform, would work. But all of Glassford's later suggestions for reform were summarily rejected by Imperial Valley growers. Glassford reported back to Perkins that valley growers were by then so secure that they no longer felt obliged to deal with their own company union, the Mexican farm workers union founded with the support of Terrazas. Glassford finally understood the real state of affairs in the valley. The grower coalition had no intention of allowing any outside "interference" in its affairs.

Finally, Glassford broke with the growers, seizing his opportunity when an ACLU attorney in the valley, under the seal of Glassford's protection, was brutally assaulted on a railway platform in Niland. Glassford denounced the growers' actions in no uncertain terms:

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45 Quoted Daniel, *Bitter Harvest*, 240–41.

46 See the testimony of Pelham David Glassford, *La Follette Committee Hearings*, Pt. 55, 20135.

> Apparently a small group of owners and shippers who have set themselves up to rule Imperial Valley desire only to fog the issue with their doctrines of violence, intimidation, and suppression of the workers. They are placing themselves in the position of being the most dangerous "reds" ever to come to Imperial Valley . . . .
>
> Satisfied that there is little danger of a disturbance during the present melon season, the big growers and shippers apparently are content to do little or nothing toward ameliorating conditions of the workers.
>
> The feeling of security is enhanced by the fact that the principal labor agitators have been incarcerated. It is unfortunate that our courts of justice should be used as a means for eliminating the agitators from the situation, on what are apparently trumped up charges.[47]

Glassford left the valley shortly after making that statement.

In the wake of the cotton strike of 1933, leaders of the Agricultural Committee of the State Chamber of Commerce and the California Farm Bureau Federation were enlisting support from farm employers throughout the state in a campaign to squash the CAWIU. In March 1934, the Associated Farmers of California was created. Its activities were financed by railroads, utilities, banks, oil companies, and other antiunion industrial groups. The Associated Farmers launched a statewide anti-communist, anti-union campaign. Their strongest weapon was the California criminal syndicalism law. On July 20th, the arrests that the Associated Farmers had sought took place. Seventeen leaders of the CAWIU were arrested, including Pat Chambers. The Associated Farmers financed part of the cost of the prosecuting attorney's research and clerical work on the case. Eight of the seventeen defendants were found guilty on two of six charges — and sent to prison.[48]

The CAWIU's extinction, however, was due to a policy shift by the Comintern. In 1934, the Communist Party insisted on a more ideological stance and a shift from organizing independent trade unions to an effort to "bore from within" established trade unions. The Communist Party in the

[47] *La Follette Committee Bearings*, Pt. 55, 20136.

[48] *La Follette Committee Report*, Pt. 4, exhibit I, 694.

United States, in compliance with directives from Moscow, disbanded its independent organizing drive among farm workers. In 1934 the communists applied to the AFL for several union charters, but their main concern was to involve the California State Federation of Labor in a comprehensive industrial union that would include packing shed and cannery workers as well as farm workers. The AFL's conservative, craft union–oriented leaders were not open to such efforts, but at the grassroots level in California, the communists won approval. Edward Vandeleur, secretary of the California State Federation of Labor, and Paul Scharrenberg, former secretary of the federation, both of whom opposed the communists' efforts, actually gave reassurances to the Associated Farmers that the AFL would not support the plan for a statewide agricultural cannery and packing shed workers' union. Vandeleur fired a non-communist farm labor activist much disliked by growers to curry favor with growers and to further undermine the communist group.[49]

At the national level, organized labor's lack of commitment to farm workers was clearly demonstrated by its failure to fight to have farm workers included under provisions of the NLRA passed in 1935. At that time, the powerful farm lobby successfully argued against including farm workers on the grounds that farming was "unique," and "special," and thus should be exempt from labor legislation. Farmers had in mind two characteristics of their industry, the seasonality of farm work, with its very uneven demand for farm labor, and the perishability of farm products. These characteristics make the agricultural industry extremely vulnerable to strike action, and farmers were adamant about curtailing the possibility. Farmers also argued that agriculture was the nation's most vital industry and that under no circumstances should it be disrupted. They painted a vivid picture of crops rotting in the fields while people went hungry. To buttress their position, farmers consistently claimed that farm labor shortages existed. Public records indicate that farmers complained of a general "scarcity of farm labor" during both the Great Depression when there were millions of unemployed laborers, and during the labor-scarce years of the Second World War. "The decision to exclude farm workers from the

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[49] See the testimony of S. Parker Frisselle, *La Follette Committee Hearings,* Pt. 49, 17945–46; *La Follette Committee Report*, Pt. 4, 627.

benefits of the NLRA was made behind closed doors and without a single voice having been raised in their defense."[50] Political pressures to counter those exerted by organized farmers were simply not generated by organized labor or other interested groups.

Activism at the state level continued, however. Disgruntled activists representing federation locals and independent ethnic unions met in April 1937 and founded the California Federation of Agricultural and Cannery Unions (CFACU). Shortly thereafter, the CFACU, dominated by veterans of the CAWIU and other communist-led unions, opted to join the CIO when the AFL's rival indicated an interest in organizing a nationwide campaign among workers in agriculture and related industries. Meanwhile, a bitter struggle was going on within the AFL in California involving the International Longshoremen and Warehousemen's Union (ILWU) and the International Brotherhood of Teamsters (IBT).

The ILWU, under Harry Bridges, had formulated a plan to expand into the production, processing, packaging, handling, and transporting of the products handled on the docks in California. Combined with Bridges' radicalism and pro-CIO thinking, this made AFL officials nervous, and it incensed Teamster leaders who also wanted jurisdiction in those areas. The AFL executive council followed its fears and awarded jurisdiction over warehouse workers in the interior of California to the Teamsters. Bridges then split from the AFL and joined the CIO. The new organization formed to spearhead the CIO drive into agriculture, canning, and packing was the United Cannery, Agricultural, Packing, and Allied Workers of America (UCAPAWA). In the months that followed, the AFL and the CIO competed with each other in a jurisdictional contest. UCAPAWA adopted a strategy aimed at cannery and packing shed workers to the neglect of farm workers, and the conservative AFL developed cooperative relations with employers in the canning and packing industries. Reacting to a strike originated by AFL radicals at several major canneries in Stockton in April 1937, the State Federation of Labor declared the strike illegal. The federation ousted the radicals, then entered into negotiations with the cannery owners and came up with an exclusive contract for the AFL. The contract recognized

[50] Jerold S. Auerbach, "The LaFollette Committee; Labor and Civil Liberties in the New Deal," *Journal of American History* 51 (December 1964): 435–59.

the California State Council of Cannery Unions, a Teamsters affiliate, as the exclusive bargaining agent for 65,000 workers. After their Stockton triumph, AFL conservatives began a vigorous campaign against all radical-controlled agriculture and cannery workers' locals under its auspices. In cooperation with agricultural owners, the AFL undercut the CIO-affiliated UCAPAWA and radicals within its own organization.

> A key Federation advantage here has been its grip on the teamsters who control much of the flow of farm produce to market. AFL strength in many canneries has also been important. These strategic advantages have been utilized at times to fight UCAPAWA, and successfully so. In several cases growers have been deterred from signing contracts with or recognizing UCAPAWA because of AFL threats that such action would prevent their products from reaching market or being canned.[51]

Inter-union rivalry damaged the farm workers' cause, certainly, but the organization of community sentiment at the local level remained the major obstacle; and this, despite national publicity highly favorable to farm workers. The year 1939 saw the publication of John Steinbeck's *The Grapes of Wrath*[52] and Carey McWilliams *Factories in the Field*,[53] damning indictments of the abusive labor policies that prevailed in California's industrialized agriculture. The living and working conditions of farm laborers in California were also publicized by public hearings conducted by Senator Robert LaFollette's subcommittee of the Senate Committee on Education and Labor. Despite the widespread publicity, "Senator Elbert Thomas [who had participated in the hearings] expressed the unhappy truth that the agribusiness complex in California was an 'empire' whose 'impregnability' was not fully appreciated by those who believed that public exposure of the human degradation in which it trafficked would somehow guarantee reform. 'It is traditional in the West,' Thomas said, 'and is so much an ingrained habit that nothing this committee could say would even scratch that empire.' "[54]

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51 Harry Schwartz, "Recent Developments Among Farm, Labor Unions," *Journal of Farm Economics* 8, no. 4 (November 1941): 833–42.

52 John Steinbeck, *The Grapes of Wrath* (New York: Viking Press, 1939).

53 McWilliams, *Factories in the Field* (1939).

54 Quoted in Daniel, *Bitter Harvest*, 284.

Prior to 1956, the outstanding example of pro-grower, anti-labor government policy was the development of the Mexican contract labor program. The program was begun during the First World War. In the course of World War I, California growers and railroad interests lobbied successfully for the establishment, under federal auspices, of the first Mexican contract labor program. The arrangement was quite simple, involving no guarantees to Mexicans, but allowing the growers to avoid the $8.00 head tax normally charged immigrants at the border.

During the 1920s, the national issue was immigration quotas. Between 1927 and 1931, numerous bills were introduced in Congress to put Mexico under the quota system. Chief spokesmen in favor of quotas were a coalition of the American Federation of Labor that wished to protect domestic wages, various racist and patriotic organizations that wished to protect "American blood," and groups of social workers and public health officials who wished to better provide for Mexican immigrants already in the United States. Leading spokesmen against Mexican quotas were the California Farm Bureau, the Agricultural Labor Bureau of the San Joaquin Valley — which spoke for chambers of commerce and other groups allied to California agricultural businesses — and the Santa Fe, Southern Pacific, and Union Pacific Railroads, all of which were involved in the transport of California's agricultural produce. With the mood of Congress and the American public restrictionist in the late 1920s, it was a battle between anti-quota and pro-quota forces. The opposition forces were able to keep Mexican quota bills from coming out of both the House and Senate Immigration and Naturalization Committees until 1931, when a House bill passed, but died for lack of companion Senate legislation.[55]

During the 1930s, California agricultural businesses were supplied with an ample seasonal labor pool by the "Okies" and "Arkies" who migrated from the "Dust Bowl," but with the advent of World War II, a farm

[55] Carey McWilliams, *North From Mexico: The Spanish-Speaking People of the United States* (Philadelphia: Lippincott, 1949); N. Ray Gilmore and Gladys W. Gilmore, "The Bracero in California," *Pacific Historical Review* (August 1963): 265–82; Ernesto Galarza, *Merchants of Labor: An Account of the Managed Migration of Mexican Farm Workers in California 1942–1960* (Santa Barbara: McNally and Loftin, 1964); Sheldon L. Greene, "Immigration Law and Rural Poverty — the Problem of the Illegal Entrant," *Duke Law Journal* 3 (June 1969): 475–94; Ellis W. Hawley, "The Politics of the Mexican Labor Issue, 1950–1965," *Agricultural History* 40, no. 3 (July 1966): 157–76.

labor shortage developed as migrants were recruited by defense plants, shipyards, and the military; and so, in June of 1942, California Governor Culbert Olson wired the War Manpower Commission, the secretary of labor, the secretary of state, and the secretary of agriculture, Claude Wickard, saying that 20,000 Mexican workers were needed immediately and 159,000 would be needed by October, 1942.[56]

In late June, Secretary Wickard went to Mexico City as head of a U.S. delegation, which included the president of the American Farm Bureau Federation, to negotiate a contract labor program. The Mexican government demanded guarantees that its citizens would not be treated as badly as they had been under the World War I program. An agreement was signed on July 20th, whereby the United States government guaranteed the contract workers transportation to and from the border, the prevailing wage of the area in which they worked, employment during 75 percent of their contract period, and the same health and housing standards provided American farm workers. Since the "prevailing wage" had to be set prior to the importation of Mexican workers, the Department of Agriculture simply accepted as "prevailing" the wage level set seasonally by growers' organizations like the Agricultural Labor Bureau of San Joaquin County. The maximum number of Mexican contract laborers working in a California harvest under the wartime program was 36,000 — or 8 percent of the state harvest labor force in 1944.[57]

In 1946 agricultural business interests working principally through the American Farm Bureau Federation pressed for the establishment of a permanent contract labor program with Mexico. While federal officials negotiated with Mexico between 1946 and 1949, Mexican workers continued to be brought in under temporary agreements. There were protests against the arrangements. When a permanent program was agreed to in August 1949, both the American Federation of Labor and the Congress of Industrial Organizations protested that such a program would take jobs away from domestic farm workers and lower the wages of those who did work. Mexican-American organizations like the G.I. Forum also protested.

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[56] Gilmore and Gilmore, "The Bracero in California," 269.

[57] Ibid., 269–72.

Public sentiment was aroused by the national publicity given to 10,000 jobless domestic farm workers in California in the spring of 1950.[58]

The year 1947 marks the beginning of a fifth period of outside involvement in the farm labor issue, with organized labor essentially uncommitted, but involved tangentially. Several important characteristics define the farm workers of this period. First, the common bond of powerlessness that had linked them with other workers had been severed by the inclusion of other workers under the National Labor Relations Act. After 1935, farm workers were indeed a class apart. Second, farm workers were becoming more settled, less transient. Third, after the influx of impoverished whites in the Depression years, minorities, mostly Mexican Americans and Mexicans, were again predominant in the farm labor pool.

In 1947, Bob Whatley, a farm worker and veteran labor organizer from Oklahoma, who was then working in the Bakersfield area of California, wrote to H. L. Mitchell, president of the National Farm Labor Union (NFLU), asking for some literature and a speaker. The NFLU had evolved from the Southern Tenant Farmers Union (STFU), founded in 1934 by Mitchell and Clay East in Tyronza, Arizona. The STFU had been organized to resist some of the effects of the federal government's Agricultural Adjustment Act, in particular the eviction of sharecropper families from the land under Section 7-A of the Act.[59]

The STFU entered the American labor movement by way of affiliation with the United Cannery, Agricultural and Packinghouse Workers of America (UCAPAWA), heir to the radical unionism of the 1930s. This affiliation ended in March, 1939, however, when Mitchell and his supporters split with the UCAPAWA leadership whose ties were with the CIO. During the next six years, the STFU held its own in the South, relying not on organized labor, but on independent funds, and a few channels of communication with a national audience. Mitchell tried to get a charter from the AFL in 1940, but was turned down, principally for his socialistic leanings. He tried again in 1945 and succeeded due to the sponsorship of Patrick

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[58] Ibid., 273–75; Hawley, "The Politics of the Mexican Labor Issue," 158–60; Greene, "Immigration Law and Rural Poverty," 475–94.

[59] Schwartz, "Organizational Problems of Agricultural Labor Unions," 461.

E. Gorman of the Amalgamated Meat Cutters and Butcher Workmen of America, who had ties to AFL President William Green.[60]

On receiving Whatley's letter, Mitchell went to Bakersfield, California, with his director of organizations, Henry Hasiwar, toured the area, and concluded that Hasiwar should remain in Bakersfield to work with Whatley. Eventually, leadership of the California local of the NFLU rested with Hasiwar, who had been an effective organizer in several industrial union drives during the 1930s, Ernesto Galarza, who had served as political liaison for Latin American unions and had a Ph.D. in economics from Columbia University, and James Price, a shed foreman at the DiGiorgio Ranch in Arvin.

The union's strategy was to enlist as many workers as possible from a single employer, call a strike, demand wage increases and union recognition, and picket to keep "scabs" out of the fields. American Federation of Labor affiliates would then provide strike relief and political support to keep the picket line going while church or student groups would furnish occasional money and boost morale. By August 1947, Local 218 of the NFLU had 1200 members, most of whom worked for the DiGiorgio Fruit Company.

When DiGiorgio ignored the union's request for union recognition and negotiations on wages and working conditions, a strike was called on September 30th. Despite the fact that most farm workers involved were residents, locals called the strikers "outsiders" and charged them with attempting to "make themselves the bosses of Kern County and eventually of all California agriculture."[61] The action against DiGiorgio was to last for three years. It eventually failed, due mainly to manipulation of the bracero program which provided growers with an effective strike-breaking weapon. According to provisions of the law, braceros were not to be employed except in instances of domestic labor shortage and never to be employed in fields where domestic workers had walked out on strike. Yet in two major tests of NFLU power, the DiGiorgio strike and the Imperial Valley strike of 1951, braceros undermined the strike effort of domestic workers.

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60 Ibid., 464.

61 *La Follette Committee Report*, Pt. 4, 268; also see the testimony of Joseph DiGiorgio, *La Follette Committee Hearings*, Pt. 48, 17658.

A number of events in connection with the DiGiorgio strike are significant. Joseph DiGiorgio called on his connections in and outside the community to put down the strike. Sheriff John Loustalot was prompt in responding, as was a representative of the U.S. Department of Agriculture. Together they "persuaded" the braceros, who had refused to cross the picket lines on the first day of the strike, to go back to work. Failure to work meant immediate deportation.

The union protested to the Department of Agriculture in Washington, appealed to the Mexican Embassy, and tried to mobilize support through a sympathetic congressman, Representative John F. Shelley, and the Washington labor lobby. It met with some success. The Department of Agriculture stalled, but did finally order the cancellation of all contracts, terminating its agreement with DiGiorgio on November 10, 1947. However, the six-week delay in removing the braceros broke the strike that season because by mid-November the harvest was over. Pruning had begun, but there were enough non-union workers for that task.[62]

The union then turned its attention to the local office of the California Farm Placement Service. Federal regulations under the Wagner–Peyser Act prohibited referrals for employment where a strike was in progress, but the Bakersfield office had refused to post notices that a strike was in effect and had continued to refer applicants to DiGiorgio farms. The union made some headway with the Farm Placement Service, too, but by November 20th, DiGiorgio was able to compensate for the loss of braceros and farm placement referrals through recruitment by its own agents. Persistent demands by the union for the removal of "wetbacks" used as strikebreakers did result in roundups by immigration agents in the spring, however.

At the end of November, Secretary of the Interior Harold Ickes published a syndicated newspaper column expressing his views on the plight of migrant farm workers, the "notorious Associated Farmers," and the DiGiorgio strike. In response, the Kern County Special Citizens Committee made its appearance speaking for the leaders of the community in agriculture, industry, finance, and newspaper publishing. The committee released a lengthy pamphlet entitled "A Community Aroused," in which the Ickes

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[62] Ernesto Galarza, "Big Farm Strike: A Report on the Labor Dispute at the DiGiorgio's," *The Commonweal*, June 4, 1948, 178–82.

column was denounced. The economic life of Kern County, the pamphlet said, depended on uninterrupted production. The strike was an invasion of the community by outsiders who threatened "the pioneers who built Kern County . . . the people who made America great."[63]

The Central Labor Council of Bakersfield endorsed the strike and placed DiGiorgio products on a boycott list. DiGiorgio products also appeared on the boycott lists of major labor councils, including those of Los Angeles and San Francisco. Local Teamsters, supported by the winery workers, struck the DiGiorgio ranch, refused to deliver supplies, and joined the picket lines. On October 26th, the Executive Council of the California State Federation of Labor voted $1,000 for the strike fund and issued a statewide appeal to all affiliates. Additional cash contributions of over $80,000 came from all sectors of the labor movement throughout the nation. Meanwhile, the State Conciliation Service had made futile attempts to induce DiGiorgio to enter negotiations with the union. Nationally known religious and lay leaders, most of whom were supporters of the National Sharecroppers Fund, spoke out on behalf of the union. With this backing, the union attempted to expand within Kern County and into Tulare and Fresno Counties. It began setting up political committees and registering voters, and in May 1948, began construction of its own hall on an acre of land donated by Mrs. Bertha Rankin, a local union sympathizer.

In February 1948, DiGiorgio called on the California Senate Factfinding Committee on Unamerican Activities to investigate the NFLU. The Associated Farmers claimed that AFL officials were "suckers for a handful of out-of-state men who were using communist front groups." In paid advertisements, the Kern County Special Citizens Committee called H. L. Mitchell a former "official of a communist-dominated CIO union." And, Joseph DiGiorgio asserted, "all this agitation is communist inspired by subversive elements." No officer of the union had ever been a member of the Communist Party, however, and so the committee was not able to establish communist domination of the strike, but it did state that the National Sharecroppers Fund was a "communist front organization."[64]

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[63] Ibid.

[64] Ernesto Galarza, *Farm Workers and Agri-Business in California, 1947–1960* (Notre Dame and London: University of Notre Dame Press, 1977), 110–11.

Legal harassment was common during the strike. Union organizers were stopped in the streets by police and searched for weapons. Tensions on the picket line were high, and by spring 1948 the effectiveness of the strike had come to rest with a mere 100 men and women. The tense situation led to violence. On the night of May 17, Price, Hasiwar, and five other union members were fired upon as they sat in union headquarters discussing the strike. Price suffered a head wound, but recovered.

On November 12th and 13th, 1949, a subcommittee of the House Education and Labor Committee convened in Bakersfield to investigate the strike. DiGiorgio's lawyers walked in on the hearings to serve Mitchell and other union officials with a libel complaint asking $2 million in damages. The cause of the action was the showing of a film produced by the Hollywood Film Council, *Poverty in the Valley of Plenty*. Mitchell could not raise the funds to contest the suit and was forced to settle out of court, to recall all prints of the film, and to end the strike. Congressman Richard Nixon helped draft a report concerning the film which was used as propaganda against the union.[65]

The NFLU participated in limited action and strikes against other agricultural employers through 1952. In the Imperial Valley, the NFLU used citizen's arrests to enforce statutes prohibiting employment of braceros in labor disputed areas. However, local courts ruled against the tactic and the Immigration Service refused to remove alien "scabs" from the fields. Nor did affairs change when the bracero administration was transferred to the U.S. Department of Labor in 1951. Domestic workers were pushed out of crops by braceros, and braceros reappeared in the Los Banos strike of 1952 to break the union challenge.

In response, the NFLU launched a political challenge — a demand for termination of the bracero program, and, to get around the problem of ineffective strikes, requests for organized labor's support of boycotts. Neither demand found a favorable audience. Lacking strong labor or liberal support, the demand for an end to the bracero traffic ended in minor reforms in the bracero administration. As for the boycott launched in 1947, despite initial success, it collapsed when a court injunction was issued on the grounds that the NFLU was covered by the "hot cargo" provisions of the

[65] Ibid., 114.

Taft–Hartley Act. The National Labor Relations Board initially concurred, despite the fact that farm workers were explicitly excluded from provisions of the NLRA, but later reversed its position.[66]

As the follow-up to the injunction, the Associated Farmers and their fellow lobbyists introduced a bill in the state legislature to prohibit the controversial "hot cargo" boycotts. The Teamsters Union saw itself as the chief target of the bill and sought to prevent its passage, and so entered into negotiations with the Associated Farmers, agreeing in 1951 not to support an NFLU strike in the Imperial Valley in exchange for grower efforts to kill the bill. Teamster President Dave Beck ordered Teamster officials in the Imperial Valley to abide by all contracts to transport products harvested, "regardless of any labor interference or other alibis."[67] California State Federation of Labor Secretary-Treasurer C. J. Haggarty commended the Teamsters for their willingness to confer with the Associated Farmers.

The Teamsters had the power to make or break a strike called by the NFLU. Teamsters, in accord with the position of the Central Labor Council of the San Joaquin Valley, had picketed in the DiGiorgio strike, but in a later action in Tracy, Western Conference of Teamsters officials waved union members through NFLU picket lines, and the Teamsters failed to support the NFLU melon strike in the Imperial Valley.

In 1952, the National Farm Labor Union was renamed the National Agricultural Workers Union, or NAWU. Shortly thereafter, the California State Federation of Labor removed the NAWU locals from its rolls for failure to pay per capita dues. Mitchell, meanwhile, redirected the union's resources away from California to the Deep South. NAWU activists remaining in California directed attention to the Mexican contract labor system.

In the period 1947–53, then, the institutional hegemony of the growers was challenged, but not broken. The farm workers' status within organized labor was marginal. The movement was underfunded. Violence was used against it. The bracero program was manipulated to undercut the farm workers' union. And stalling tactics successfully defeated farm worker efforts to have regulations enforced. The Teamsters also played a large role in defeating the farm workers' struggle to organize effectively.

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66 Ibid., 98–117.

67 Quoted by Murray Kempton, *New York Post*, June 22, 1951.

In 1959, a series of meetings of a liberal organization called the National Advisory Committee on Farm Labor influenced the AFL-CIO to create a new affiliate, the Agricultural Workers Organizing Committee (AWOC) to spearhead an organizing drive among agricultural workers.[68] Organizing committees were originally designed by CIO international unions to facilitate an aggressive opening sally on an unorganized sector of the labor force. In the case of farm labor in California, the situation was somewhat different because there already existed an AFL-chartered union, the National Agricultural Workers Union (NAWU), and a CIO union, the United Packinghouse Workers of America (UPWA).

The UPWA was the successor of the UCAPAWA and the radical left of the labor organizing movement in California agriculture. After World War II the UPWA was in active control of a significant number of fruit and vegetable packing sheds in California, but the Teamsters, then an AFL-CIO affiliate, claimed jurisdiction over shed workers too. Like the Teamsters contracts with shed operators, the UPWA agreements contained "no strike" clauses by which they justified their violation of NAWU picket lines in the late 1940s and early 1950s. The UPWA and the Teamsters were openly competitive with regard to shed workers, but both the UPWA and the IBT shrank from the problems of organizing harvesters and excluded field workers from their jurisdiction. The growers fought hard to cut the ground from under the UPWA. A major weapon was the bracero program. The UPWA locals in California, which held some seventy-five shed contracts at one time, were overwhelmed by new technologies that displaced workers, by competition from the IBT, and by grower use of braceros. By 1958, the UPWA had lost 3,000 packing jobs. As the number of domestic packers dwindled, so did their wages. By 1959 the situation was described by the union's "Packinghouse Worker" as "an uphill fight to hang on to the scattered outposts" of its organization. At that point, the UPWA began to show some interest in organizing farm workers.[69]

When the AWOC entered the field, then, the NAWU had been operating among field workers and the UPWA among employees of the packing

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[68] Lawrence T. King, "Pickets in the Valley," *The Commonweal*, October 14, 1960, 64–67.

[69] Ibid.; Grant Cannon, "Farm Labor Organizes: The AFL-CIO Makes Its Bid for Farm Labor in California," *Farm Quarterly*, Spring 1961, 60–65ff.

sheds and processing plants. The UPWA was ripe for a jurisdictional quarrel with the NAWU, however, because the UPWA had been making efforts to organize field hands. Shortly after John W. Livingston, the director of organization of the AFL-CIO, appointed Norman Smith director of the AWOC, Smith made it clear that the AWOC was the organizing agent for the two unions.

A part of Smith's strategy was to recruit pickets in the skid row areas of California's agricultural towns. Smith was a veteran of early UAW campaigns against the giants of the automobile industry. His experience with industrial plants in the East had confirmed for him the organizing potential in the crowds of men who gathered outside the gates of factories seeking work. Smith perceived a similar situation in the daily labor shapeups in the skid rows of places like Oakland and San Jose. So it was there — among the most transient and least skilled elements of the agricultural labor force — that Smith enlisted members for AWOC picketing.

Smith would disperse flying squads of pickets to besiege selected farms, large and small, while he and his assistant, Louis Krainock, maneuvered to negotiate with the owners. Smith and the AWOC challenged growers of cherries, peaches, tomatoes, apricots, and pears. Dozens of strikes were certified. If there was any pattern to these forays it was that the AWOC focused its efforts on highly perishable crops that required large numbers of seasonal workers for a short period of time and which were harvested mainly by experienced Anglo migrants. The AWOC demanded pay increases, job security, control of foreign labor, union recognition, and formal grievance procedures.

Smith had to deal with police surveillance, the importation of foreign labor under the bracero program, litigation and injunctions, government officials biased in favor of the growers, and a pro-grower publicity blitz. Essentially, the effort failed. The AWOC came out of these encounters with some economic benefits, but without collective bargaining contracts.[70]

Meanwhile, the AWOC was straddling a jurisdictional dispute between the NAWU and the UPWA. In the fall of 1960, Smith chose to

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[70] Henry Anderson, "Picketing in Perspective: An Editorial," Citizens for Farm Labor, *Farm Labor,* March 1966, 5–6; "To Build a Union," Citizens for Farm Labor, *Farm Labor*, June 1966, 11–28; August 1966, 13–25; September 1966, 1–25; Dick Meister, "Still in Dubious Battle," *The Nation*, September 24, 1960, 178–80.

redirect AWOC resources to support the UPWA in a lettuce strike in the Imperial Valley. Because the UPWA was actively recruiting field hands for the strike, Smith appeared to align himself with the UPWA in its jurisdictional dispute with the NAWU.

Big labor's internecine warfare was not confined to the ranks of the AFL-CIO, either. The Western Conference of Teamsters, major shippers of the produce, abided by a no-strike contract with growers, and refused to aid the UPWA-AWOC coalition. As the harvest ended in the Imperial Valley and the crews moved north to Salinas, the strikers followed. The threat of the strike, plus internal financial problems caused one big lettuce grower, Bud Antle, to sign a contract with the International Brotherhood of Teamsters covering his field labor operations. The Teamsters then loaned the company $1 million. The Salinas Growers–Shippers Association denounced the contract and expelled Antle from the Association.[71]

In the fall of 1960 in a legal battle with DiGiorgio Fruit Corporation over the showing of a film — the same film that the NFLU had been sued for showing — the AWOC was penalized $60,000. During the 1960–61 season, an additional $21,000 in legal fees and over $4,000 in fines were imposed on the flying squads in the strike of the winter lettuce crop in the Imperial Valley. AWOC's total budget for the year was only $100,000. These financial losses and the infighting between the NAWU and the UPWA hit the AWOC hard and it declined rapidly. In the summer of 1961, the AFL-CIO withdrew support, allowing AWOC's efforts to fail.[72]

After 1961, local initiative filled some of the gap left by big labor's pull-out. A number of Anglo and Mexican fruit pickers had been operating independently at the local level. They and some of the AWOC central staff called a conference in Strathmore, California, to see what could be done to save the union. Two hundred workers attended the session. They voted to assess themselves $2 each and to send a delegation back to the AFL-CIO's midwinter convention in Miami Beach. Mrs. Maria Moreno, one of four delegates to go, reported the following, "Mr. Meany [AFL-CIO President George Meany] told us if we keep going we will soon have our union built.

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[71] Ronald B. Taylor, "A Romance Rekindled," *The Nation*, March 19, 1973, 366–70.

[72] "Tossed Salad," *Newsweek*, February 20, 1961, 26; "Violence in the Oasis," *Time*, February 17, 1961, 18.

He said there would be as much money as needed. He told us to tell the people back home he was going to back us all the way."[73]

Meany sent Al Green to replace Smith as director. Like Smith, Green found the shapeup on skid row the only visible target for his organizers. Green did not have much success building a farm labor union following this tactic. Few major strikes were attempted during this period. The only cohesive force within the AWOC during this period was a group of Filipino vegetable and grape workers centered in Delano. They were organized by Larry Itliong, Ben Gines, and Andy Imutan, and it was they who were responsible for initiating the Delano Grape Strike of 1965.

Once again, in 1958–1960, an attempt to organize California farm workers had fallen short. During the same period, however, the preconditions for an ultimately successful organizing drive were being prepared beyond California's borders, in the national arena. Two developments in particular should be remarked upon: the support long given to farm employers by agencies of the U.S. government was eroding; and new support for farm workers was emerging from liberal public interest organizations allied with big labor.

A major fissure in traditional support of farm employers by the federal government came with the appointment of James P. Mitchell as secretary of labor by President Eisenhower in 1956. Mitchell's unexpected appointment brought a "liberal Republican," a future protege of Nelson Rockefeller, and a former labor consultant to several New York department stores to the post of secretary. Mitchell adopted a policy of consultation and accommodation with major labor, becoming a formidable figure in the Eisenhower cabinet because of the success of his conciliatory policies.

In 1958, a major battle developed between the Taft and the Eastern wings of the Republican Party, with conservatives supporting a national right-to-work law. Mitchell emerged in this struggle as an effective advocate of unionism, and was seen as positioning himself for the Republican vice-presidential nomination in 1960.[74]

Mitchell remained a symbol and executor of elite-controlled reform, but the new vigor and visibility of his views made him more reliant upon

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73 Anderson, "To Build a Union," 23–24.

74 J. Craig Jenkins and Charles Perrow, "Insurgency of the Powerless: Farm Worker Movements, 1946–1972," *American Sociological Review* 42 (April 1977): 249–68.

liberal allies, and they brought increasingly heavy pressure to bear upon him to advance their objectives, which included greater recognition and protection for farm labor. In 1957, Mitchell ordered an internal review by the Labor Department of all its policies bearing upon farm labor questions. In response to liberal complaints about the effects of the recession of 1958–59, Mitchell pledged full enforcement of the 1951 law requiring farm employment be offered to domestic workers prior to the importation of braceros. In 1959 Mitchell went further, supporting reform legislation to extend the minimum wage to agriculture. In 1960, his reform efforts reached the end of their tether, when the secretary proposed abolition of the bracero program. State grower associations enlisted Ezra Taft Benson, secretary of agriculture, to defend the program in the cabinet and before Congress. The White House remained neutral. Mitchell withdrew his proposal.[75]

Nonetheless, his incumbency had coincided with an important shift in public and elite attitudes, a shift to which the secretary's conduct was bound both as cause and response. In 1956 the Democratic National Convention endorsed a platform plank calling for increased welfare benefits for underemployed migrant workers. The following year the National Council of Churches, already involved in the civil rights movement in the South, launched a study of migrant camp conditions and child labor in the fields. As a result, in 1958 the NCC brought public pressure to bear on Secretary Mitchell to strictly enforce existing law on migrant labor camps. The same year, the AFL-CIO, and several liberal interest groups, became directly involved in a call for abolition of the bracero program. In October of 1958 the National Sharecroppers Fund announced the creation of a National Advisory Committee on Farm Labor. The members of the Committee, Dr. Frank P. Graham, A. Phillip Randolph, Clark Kerr, Helen Gahagan Douglas, Mrs. Franklin Delano Roosevelt, Norman Thomas, and Dr. Maurice von Hecke, were close to the national leadership of organized labor. The committee sought to capitalize upon its influence by convening a national conference on the conditions of farm labor. The aims of the conference, which was held in February 1959, were to encourage new national legislation, and to stimulate big labor support for organizing farm labor. William

[75] Ibid.

Schnitzler, the secretary-treasurer of the AFL-CIO, at the closing session of the conference, acknowledged the "horrifying and degrading" conditions of farm laborers, and announced that "after some months of study and consultation, we have formulated a program for an organizing campaign." Shortly thereafter, the Executive Council of the AFL-CIO approved a document drawn up by Walter Reuther and H. L. Mitchell, entitled, "An AFL-CIO Program to End 19th Century Poverty in 20th Century Rural America." Funds were allocated for a four-pronged program: 1) the abolition of alien labor programs; 2) federal legislation to protect the health and welfare of farm laboring families; 3) education of the public to the plight of farm workers; 4) an organizing drive in the fields. It was in response to point four that the AWOC was established. Secretary Mitchell had been encouraged and probably coerced into moving the policy of the Eisenhower Administration in the same direction, although not with the same goals, as those set out by a liberal-labor coalition which was growing in numbers, recognition, money, and institutional support. By 1960, it was evidently too late for farm employers to arrest the fledgling farm labor movement and impose a settlement upon it on the local level. The lights were going down in a larger theater, and national actors were costuming themselves.[76]

In 1960, the Democratic party platform condemned the bracero program, but in 1961 President Kennedy refused to accept Labor Secretary Arthur Goldberg's advice that a two-year extension of the program be vetoed. Goldberg did, however, succeed in overturning the long-established practice of letting growers set "prevailing wages." Under Secretary Goldberg, the Department held hearings and set statewide minimum farm labor wages which growers would have to offer domestic workers as a precondition for receiving bracero certifications. By 1963, when the bracero legislation was up for renewal, the Kennedy Administration was developing the issue of poverty for the 1964 campaign and was counting the votes of minorities to whom the civil rights movement had given added stature and influence in the consortium of liberal constituency groups. A one-year extension of the program was won by an alliance of farm bloc states, whose representation was reduced by the decennial reapportionment and further threatened by Supreme Court apportionment decisions. Within the full

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[76] Sue Keisker, "Harvest of Shame," *The Commonweal*, May 19, 1961, 202–5.

panoply of federal farm programs, the bracero program was small, serving a narrow beneficiary group, and drawing intense liberal opposition. Farm bloc congressional delegations consequently backed away from it, hoping to save more economically central federal farm programs. Thus, the sixth period of farm labor development drew to a close, with significant administrative and legislative victories. Those victories were secured by a combination of cooperation and pressure between federal officials, a reinvigorated coalition of liberal reform groups, and organized labor. These victories occurred without direct farm worker insurgency, but they broke the stranglehold of farm employers by moving the drama to a national theater and linking the farm workers to national leaders and national values.

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