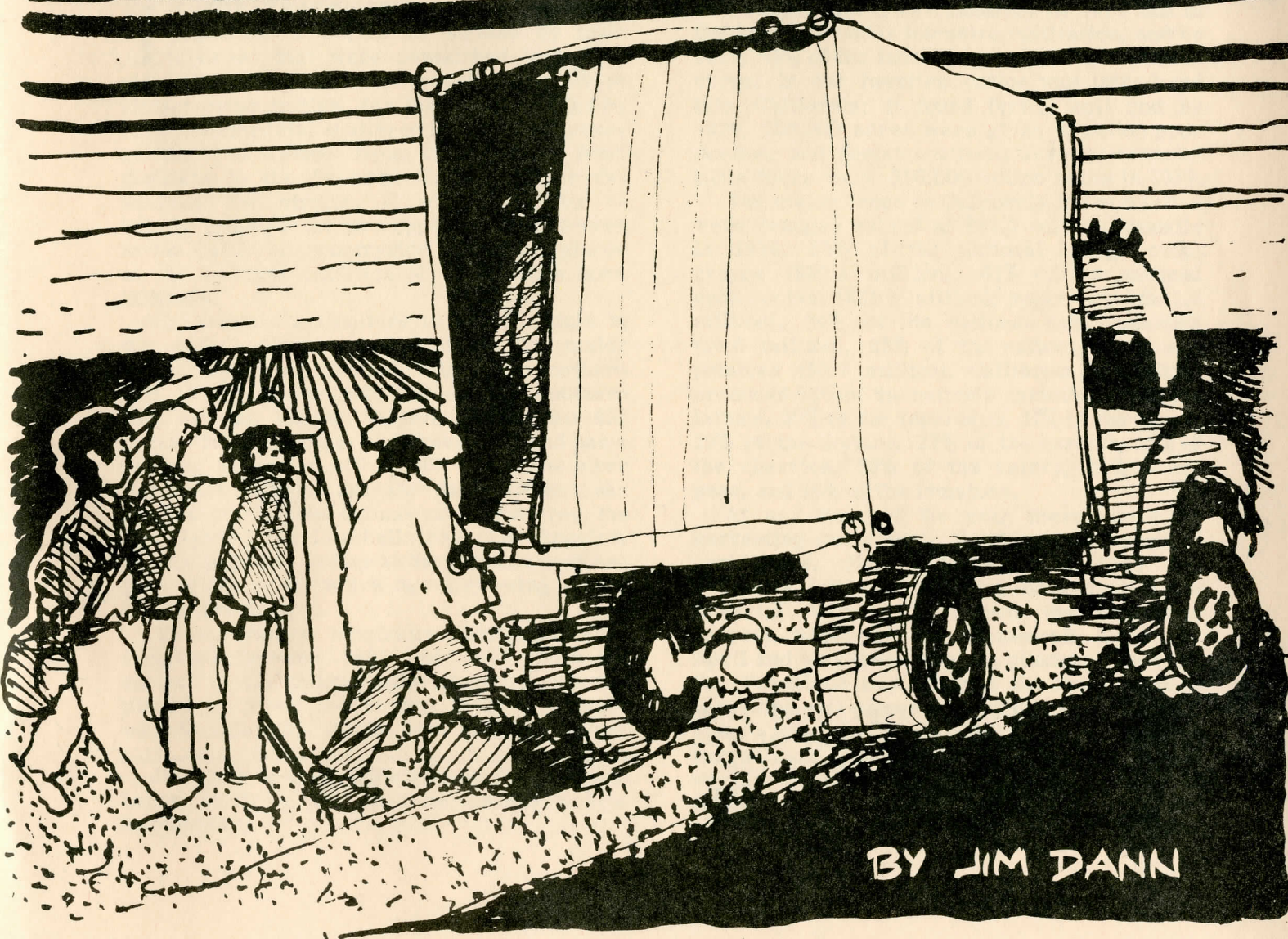


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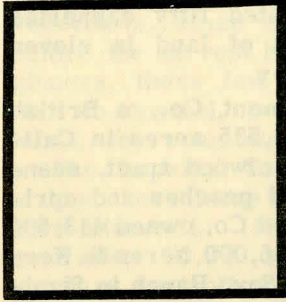
Communists try to organize "FACTORIES IN THE FIELDS"

ORGANIZING CALIFORNIA MIGRANT WORKERS IN THE GREAT DEPRESSION



BY JIM DANN

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In the Great Depression — 1930-1940

COMMUNISTS TRY TO ORGANIZE "FACTORIES IN THE FIELDS"

by Jim Dann

IN THE YEARS 1933 and 1934 California witnessed a series of strikes by farm laborers that were unmatched before or since that time in breadth and depth. These violent class battles, for the most part led by open communists, shattered the apparent peace of the countryside from the northern fruit districts to the Imperial Valley. Before describing the strikes, it will be helpful to briefly examine the two opposing class forces in the California countryside and then to glance at the militant tradition of California's farm laborers.

California's agriculture is based mainly in the great valleys of the state. The major valley, the Great Central Valley (the northern half is the Sacramento Valley, the southern half the San Joaquin Valley), extends for 430 miles (from Redding to Bakersfield) and has a growing season of 250 to 300 days. The other important valleys are the Santa Clara near San Francisco, the Salinas near Monterey, the San Gabriel and Coachella near Los Angeles, and the Imperial Valley at the extreme southern part of the state, which has a growing season of 300-350 days.

These valleys, originally semi-arid, were irrigated between 1880 and 1910. With the spread of irrigation, cattle ranching was replaced by wheat and barley; these later gave way to intensive crops such as sugar beets,

row crops, and fruit orchards. By 1900 half of the land was under intensive cultivation, and by 1919, 78% of the land was given to the intensive crops. In the twenties cotton was introduced into California; it found fertile soil and by 1929, 200,000 acres were given to cotton production, and despite national acreage restrictions there were 316,000 cotton acres in 1939.

The major crops in California in the thirties were oranges valued at \$39.3 million annually in 1939, 65% of the national orange crop; grapes (\$30.3 million), 81% of the national crop; cotton (\$21.0 million); sugar beets (\$11.7 million), 24% of the national crop; peaches (10.6 million), 23% of the national crop; and potatoes (\$9.7 million). California in addition produced 93% of the nation's apricots, 63% of the lettuce, 50% of the asparagus, 37% of the pears, 29% of the melons, 27% of the carrots, 25% of the cherries, 23% of the celery, 21% of the peas, and 15% of the tomatoes.

At any time of the year there was some harvesting going on in California's diversified agriculture. For instance, in January and February lettuce was being harvested in the Imperial Valley. In March the asparagus harvest began at the Sacramento Delta. In April and May there was pea picking around the San Francisco Bay. In June the cherries were harvested in Alameda County. Then in July there was the Santa Clara Valley apricot harvest, and in August the pear harvest. Grapes were picked in the San Joaquin Valley in September and October. And for the rest of the year there was the cotton harvest in the upper

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San Joaquin Valley.

Since the days of the Mexican land grants California had never been predominantly a land of the small family farm. This was even less so by the 1930's. In 1939, 6.8% of the California farms accounted for 52.6% of the total value of the products, while 43.3% of the farms accounted for only 4.9%. The acreage was similarly concentrated: In 1935 less than 3.5% of the farm operating units controlled better than 62.5% of the acreage in farm land. These census figures, however, underestimated the concentration of agriculture since many of these operating units were owned by the same company; for instance, the H. P. Garin Co. operated 45 large farms counted in the census as separate operating units.

In the San Joaquin cotton belt and the Imperial Valley the concentration was even more marked. In the cotton belt (Kern, Tulare and Madera counties) less than one-half of one per cent of the farms controlled more than one-third of the irrigable land. In the Imperial Valley while 17% of the farms, averaging 13 acres, had only 1% of the land, 6% of the farms, averaging 1200 acres, had 43% of the land. These figures, of course, do not take into account multiple ownerships such as H. P. Garin, which owned and leased several ranches in that valley. Smaller farms were more common in the economically unimportant north coast and Sierra foothills, or in the truck farming areas around Los Angeles, San Francisco, and the Sacramento Delta. But these small and medium farmers in the latter three areas were effectively under the control of the big companies, who contracted for and financed their crops.

One of the giants of California agriculture was DiGiorgio Fruit Company, which dominated the grape market. It operated 27 ranches, owning 15,885 acres and leasing 2,057 acres. Grapes were grown in 10,160 acres, and better than 63,000 tons of the fruit were sold. Some 15,615 tons of other fruit were sold, plus hay, grain, and asparagus. DiGiorgio employed 1,050 workers in the off season and 5,220 men during the peak seasons.

Another California "farmer" was the California Packing Corporation with assets of 65 million dollars. Its operations included 30,000 pineapple acres in Hawaii, 17,000 pea and corn acres in Illinois, thirteen salmon canneries in Alaska, a fishing fleet, and scores of canning plants from New York to the Philippines. In

California, Calpack operated fifty canneries and farmed 23,000 acres of land in eleven ranches in the central valley.

Balfour-Guthrie Investment Co., a British owned concern, operated 8,535 acres in California; its 4,000 acre Brentwood tract, scene of a 1934 strike, produced peaches and apricots. The Kern County Land Co. owned 413,500 acres in California and 106,000 acres in Kern County. The 4,000 acre El Soyo Ranch in Stanislaus County was highly diversified, producing 40 different varieties of fruit and vegetables, plus a dairy and a turkey farm. The Union Sugar Co. owned 14,000 acres and leased 4,400; the American Crystal Sugar Co. owned 12,000 acres of sugar beet land; Spreckles Sugar owned 14,800 acres and Holly Sugar Co. owned 6,500 acres.

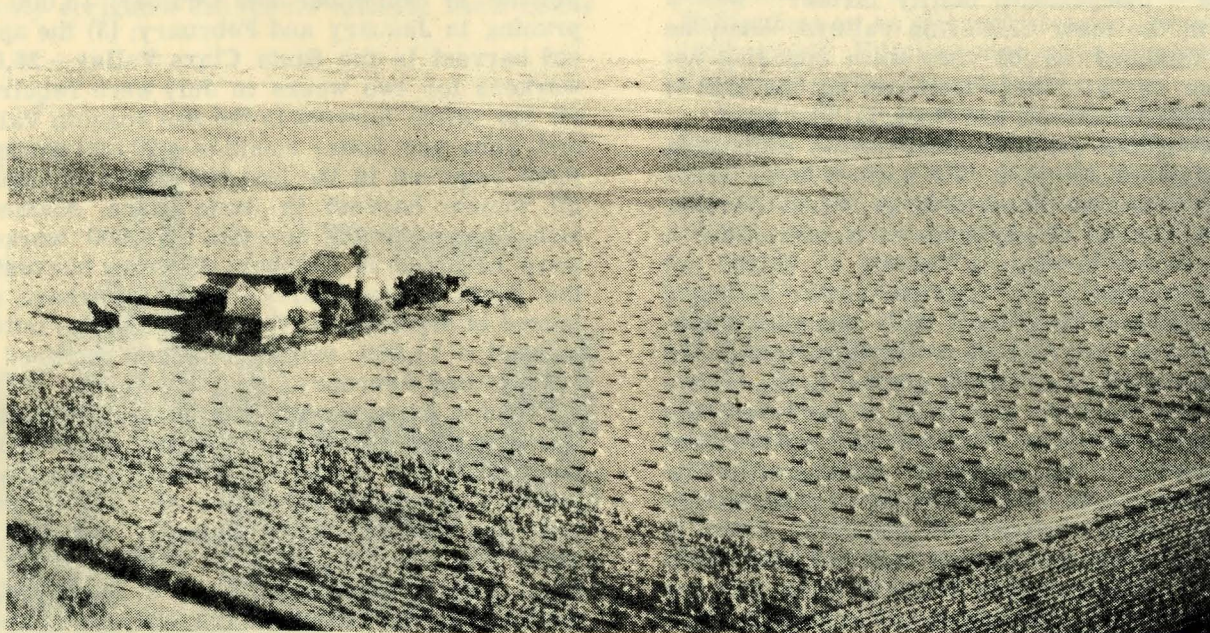
J. G. Boswell & Co., which ginned 16% of California's cotton in 1937, owned 13 farms in California; it also controlled the Tulare Lake Land Co., which owned nearly one million dollars worth of land in Tulare County. There was also River Delta Farms Co., which farmed 31,000 acres; Diamond Ranch Inc., 51,667 acres; Italian Swiss Colony Wine Co., 1,200 acres, with another 1,500 under contract. Stokely Bros. & Co. had 41,908 acres under contract. However, the largest California landholder was the Southern Pacific Railroad, which owned four million acres, of which 19,951 acres were leased for agriculture on a sharecropping basis. Some other "farmers" in California were Crocker First National Bank, which directed the California Delta Farms, 6,440 acres; Hearst, of newspaper notoriety, who owned 300,000 acres, and Libby McNeil and Libby, the big canning concern, whose 5,000 acres were mainly concentrated at the Tagus Ranch in Tulare County.

Canning and shipping also were highly concentrated in California: Calpack and Libby in 1935 canned 27% of the peaches, 25% of the peas, 21% of the apricots, 30% of the spinach, and 59% of the asparagus packed in the U.S. The California Fruit Growers Exchange shipped 75% of California's citrus crop, while the California Walnut Growers Association shipped 80-90% of California's walnuts. Cotton ginning was likewise concentrated with four firms ginning two-thirds of the cotton. Many of these shipping companies farmed land directly; for instance, S. A. Gerrard Co. farmed 3,405 acres in the Imperial Valley, and A. Arena Co. farmed 1,511 acres of melons and 1,090 acres of

vegetables. Since crops were contracted for before the harvest by the shippers, canners, or ginners, these few large industrialists were able to control, besides their own extensive lands, the remaining "independent" farmers.

The Imperial Valley was a prime example of how these large grower-shippers controlled agriculture: in 1936, 40 of these shippers controlled 83.8% of the lettuce acreage, 13 shippers controlled 85.5% of the pea acreage, 20 shippers controlled 68.2% of the carrot

rations of California. For instance, Mr. McBean, president of Newhall Land and Farming Co., which owned two million dollars worth of land in cattle, orchards, and general farming, was also a director of Pacific Telephone and Telegraph, Pacific Mutual Life Insurance Co., and Crocker First National Bank. Newhall was also tied to Tidewater Oil, Bank of California, and other corporations. The Lerdo Land Co., whose president was also vice-president of El Soyo Ranch, was tied to Southern California Gas Co.,



Santa Maria Valley bean fields

acreage, 6 shippers controlled the entire cabbage acreage, and 36 shippers controlled 83.4% of the cantaloupe, honeydew and honeyball acreage in the country.

The shippers, canners, and ginners additionally used production financing as a means of further controlling agriculture. A contract would tie the loan to delivery of the crop to an affiliate of the lender. Anderson Clayton & Co., the world's largest cotton processor, had advanced \$6,500,000 in 1939 to 2,000 farmers. The American Fruit Growers Inc., which shipped 9,000 cars in 1936, had financed 50% of these before harvest in the form of cash loans secured by crop mortgages and marketing agreements.

The big farming companies in California were tied through interlocking directorates to the large industrial, finance, and utility corpo-

Southern California Edison Co., Union Bank & Trust Co., Consolidated Steel, and many others.

The biggest California "farmer" was Bank of America. California Lands Inc. in 1935 owned 2,670 farms with a total acreage of 531,000. Most were leased but 10% were operated directly. The company had 14 district managers and 70 superintendents, each of whom managed 70 properties of which about four were operated directly through resident foremen. The average size was 250 acres but there were several ranches of 20,000 and 14,000-acre size. In 1937 the company made over \$2.5 million, \$837,000 coming from the farms run directly and \$1.2 million from sharecropping arrangements. California Lands Inc. was a wholly-owned subsidiary of Transamerica Corporation, a holding company controlled by Bank of America. (The farms mainly came from Bank

of America foreclosures.) In addition the bank held mortgages covering 7,398 farms, totaling one million acres.

The four big California railroads, Southern Pacific, Union Pacific, Western Pacific, and Santa Fe, had besides their own lands a more than passing interest in agriculture. Nearly 30% of their freight revenue came from agriculture. The electric power companies, can companies, paper companies and many others depended on the big growers for much of their business.

The "independent family farmer" was a myth in the main California valleys. When the farm workers struck they were opposing not medium or even large farmers, but the bulk of California industrial and financial capital.

Throughout the historical period California county governments in the valleys were completely under the thumb of the growers. Sheriffs, D.A.'s, Boards of Supervisors were related to the growers through a variety of links, not excepting family. All political power belonged to the growers because of their financial dominance. The migrant farm worker, often not even a citizen, was rarely a voter in the county where he worked; and even if he voted, his political power was nil. The state government was similarly dominated by agribusiness; the legislature gave overwhelming representation to the grower-controlled counties. Thus in their intermittent battles against the farm workers, the growers could always rely on state and county officials to aid them by manipulating health codes, relief dispensation and other laws, or by the application of naked police power.

The Farm Worker's Life

Since industrial and financial capital controlled California agriculture, it is not surprising that the factory system should have prevailed in the fields. Thus in California there was a greater dependence on the hired farm laborer than in any other state.

The factories in the fields differed from the factories in the cities by the extreme seasonableness of the former. Laborers had to move from employer to employer, crop to crop, and area to area as the labor demand shifted. Harvest times varied from the Salinas lettuce harvest, which lasted seven months, to the apricot harvest, which lasted only ten days. The employer needed a large quantity of labor on hand for generally short periods of time,

because of the perishability of California's crops. On one day the apricots are too green to be picked; the next day the crop must be harvested within a week to ten days or the remaining apricots will spoil.

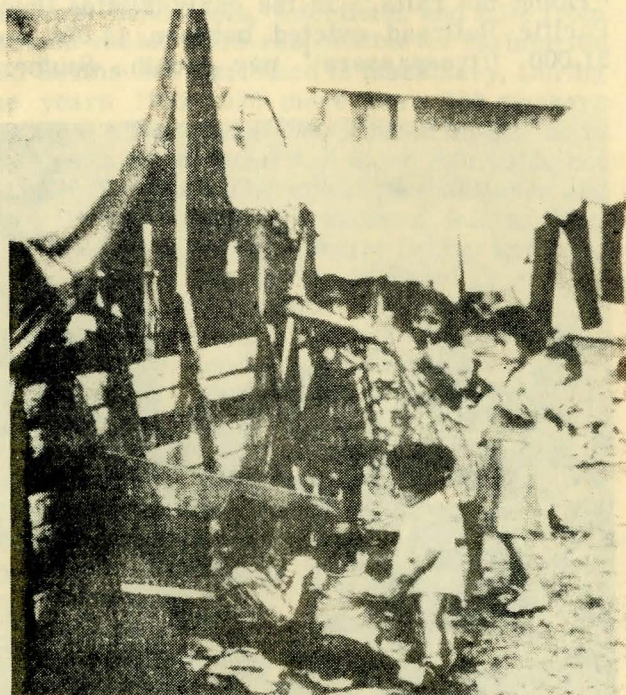
The "high points" of the year for the farm labor were: (1) cotton picking in the upper San Joaquin Valley—33,000 workers were required in October; 20,000 in November and December; (2) grapes in Fresno, Tulare and San Joaquin counties—25,000 workers were required for picking in September and October; 15,000 for pruning in January and February; (3) the apricot harvest in the Santa Clara Valley—25,000 workers for two weeks in July were required; (4) the peach harvest in the San Joaquin Valley and Yuba and Sutter counties—20,000 workers were required in the last two weeks of August; (5) tomato harvest in Santa Clara, Alameda, and Contra Costa counties—16,000 workers were required in October; (6) prune harvest in the Santa Clara Valley—15,000 workers required in September; (7) Imperial Valley lettuce harvest—11,000 workers were required in January and February.

Thus a farm worker had to keep moving in order to stay employed for the whole year. Some examples of the well-filled year that were actually surveyed: A worker started the year with pea picking in the Imperial Valley, followed the peas to San Luis Obispo County in April and to Alameda County in May, picked apricots in the Santa Clara Valley in June, grapes near Fresno in August and September; he then returned to the Imperial Valley for the early pea crop. A Mexican family started the year with lettuce and cantaloupes in the Imperial Valley, then to the Santa Clara Valley for apricots, then to Fresno for the grape harvest, and ended the year picking walnuts in Ventura County. An Oklahoma family started the year in the Imperial Valley, moved 650 miles to Marysville in August for the peach harvest, then grapes at Fresno, and finally cotton at Bakersfield. There were of course hundreds of such variations.

Actually, however, few workers worked such well-filled years. Studies showed that the average number of months in which farm workers received employment was between six and seven. And there were many interruptions and much part-time work. Being hired for a harvest often meant working only half a day; market and weather conditions caused all kinds of interruptions. The depression caused an ever

increasing surplus of labor in the fields, and this surplus of labor was used to speed up operations causing even less steady employment. The employers advertised in various ways for a super-abundance of labor at a particular time and place, thereby forcing the wages down.

Before 1880 farm laborers were single white men; but between 1880-1900 Chinese workers released by the completion of the railroads did the bulk of seasonal and vegetable work in the newly irrigated California valleys. Their ranks



declined due to the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1881, and the slack was mainly taken up by the Japanese, although Armenians, Italians, Portuguese, Spaniards, Germans, and Indians were also imported by the growers after 1900. By 1909 there were 30,000 Japanese farm laborers in the state. After Japanese immigration was restricted, the importance of Japanese farm laborers decreased; a few of them became small independent owners. Between 1910 and 1920, single white men, called contemptuously "hobos," "fruit tramps," or "bindle stiffs"

once more roamed the California fields looking for work. In 1914 growers complained of a labor surplus; but the war soon changed the surplus into a shortage and the growers turned to Mexico for their farm labor needs.

After 1917 tens of thousands of Mexican families were imported to California to work in the fields. The Mexican population in California increased from 33,700 in 1910 to 200,000 in 1930. Fear that Southerners in Congress might choke off the growers' supply of cheap Mexican labor led the growers to turn to the Philippines as an alternate source. From 1923-1929 single Filipino men were imported into California at the rate of 4,000 a year.

Remnants of previous waves of immigration had left their mark on the California farm labor supply in 1930. But the workers were predominantly Mexicans, Filipinos, and native whites, who were leaving the depression cities in search of some work. The 1930 U.S. Census reported that of some 186,000 farm laborers in California in 1930, 77,800 were native white, 41,200 were Mexican, 32,000 were foreign-born white, 16,100 were Filipino, 14,600 were Japanese, 2,200 were Chinese, and 1,800 were Afro-American. Those small or medium farms that employed labor generally hired whites only, (or Japanese only in the case of small Japanese farms), so that in the big factory-type ranches, Mexicans and Filipinos were a majority.

The depression greatly increased the number of seasonal farm workers, first as Californians left the cities in search of work and later as hundreds of thousands of dust-bowl refugees streamed into California. This was only partially offset by the forced repatriation of 100,000 Mexicans in the thirties and the return of large numbers of Filipinos to the Philippines. By 1935 it was estimated there may have been 300,000 farm workers in California.

Over 1,200,000 people streamed into California from other states in the depression decade. Almost 27% of this immigration was from one state, Oklahoma; an additional 25% came from Texas, Arkansas, and Missouri. The other major source states were the farm states of Kansas, Nebraska, Colorado, Iowa, and South Dakota. Some 143,000 of these dust-bowl refugees became farm laborers; of these 54,000 had been farm laborers, 47,500 were independent farmers, and 42,000 held non-agricultural jobs before migration.

The coming of the "Okies" and "Arkies" changed the composition of California farm

labor. The dust-bowl refugees came from an area that was rich in rural class struggles. The Industrial Workers of the World (IWW), had had a big influence in Kansas, Oklahoma, and Arkansas. During World War I the IWW-influenced Working Class Union had launched an armed rebellion in rural Oklahoma and Arkansas to avoid compliance with the draft. So the newcomers were not prepared to accept docily the conditions they found in the "golden state." The Mexicans were influenced, to some extent, by the radicalization of the revolution in their country; and Filipinos too were now prepared to fight the deteriorating conditions. The thirties were to be filled with class strife in the countryside.

Wages for California farm workers had never been high but the rate dropped by better than 50% from 1929 to 1933. The 1925-1929 daily rate (without board) for California farm workers was \$3.50. In 1930 it dropped to \$3.00; in 1931 the rate was \$2.75; in 1932, \$2.40; and in 1933 it dropped to \$1.60 a day. The great strike wave of 1933-34 raised the wage to about \$2.00 where it remained for the rest of the thirties. This was not the whole story, for the increasing numbers of available workers found less and less steady work. The family income for 753 migratory families averaged \$289 in 1935, down from \$381 in 1930; another study showed many families secured earnings of less than \$100. This compares with government "minimum subsistence" or relief budgets of between \$780 and \$850.

In the thirties, taking advantage of the labor surplus, the growers dropped wage rates to rock bottom. The San Joaquin hourly rates in 1931 ranged between 20 cents and 25 cents; they were dropped to 15 cents in 1932 and early 1933 until the strikes forced them up slightly.

Housing for agricultural workers was either in private labor camps of their employers or various shack towns, squatters' camps, auto camps, or slums of towns. In the employers' camps the housing was low-grade: a 1939 survey of these camps found 39% with neither showers or tubs, 56% with cold water only, often meaning a community tap; only 8% had flush toilets. In the Madera County cotton camps there were on the average about five occupants per room.

Outside the city limits of many valley towns arose various "Hoovervilles" of squatters, who built more or less permanent shelters. Outside of Bakersfield, for example, there were two

camps of about 200 families each, Hovertown and Hollywood. The houses were made of canvas, odd pieces of wood, gas cans, cardboard, chimneys made of coffee cans. There was no water except from the river. At El Centro in the Imperial Valley, there were numerous camps at the edges of town made of old tents, gunny sacks, boxes, scrap tin. Flies swarmed in clouds, and the children of the farm workers were thinly clad. The backyard was the toilet; water was obtained from a muddy irrigation ditch. There were hundreds of such shacktowns.

Only a minority of the farm workers owned cars with which to follow the crops. The long distances the seasonal workers had to travel were negotiated mainly by hitch-hiking or "riding the rails." In the early thirties Union Pacific Railroad evicted between 14,000 and 31,000 "trespassers" per month. Southern



Workers in camp; note polluted water pool

Pacific evicted between 40,000 and 50,000 a month. These "trespassers" were overwhelmingly farm workers trying to get from one crop to the next. In 1932 Southern Pacific evicted or arrested 681,000; and in 1933 the number was 720,000. Between 1930 and 1935, 117 of these "trespassers" were reported killed by Southern Pacific railroad police.

Relief and welfare were negligible. For one thing Mexican and Filipino workers, not being citizens, were ineligible, and the newly-arrived migrants from the dust bowl were unable to satisfy a 3-year residency requirement. The number of persons in the San Joaquin Valley receiving relief in November 1936 was only 1,034, while unemployment was at least 100,000. Since relief was locally administered those few who were eligible were subject to being cut off at harvest time, when the growers wanted a surplus labor force.

Agricultural labor was dangerous and unhealthy. The use of electricity, liquified gases, farm machinery, and automobiles in California farms was responsible for many accidents. Ladders, hand tools, infections, and falls from various causes were responsible for the injuries and deaths not attributed to machinery. During the years 1932-1936 there were 252 workers reported killed and 45,095 injured on the job in California agriculture. And these figures do not include the many who contracted diseases and later died as a result of exposure, fatigue from long hours, the strain of heavy lifting, and contact with cattle, fumigants, or liquid gases.

With such bad housing, improper diet, and long hours of work, it is not surprising that terrible health conditions followed the agricultural worker. The 14 principal agricultural counties had in 1938 60% of the state's smallpox cases, 48% of the states' malaria cases, and in 1934 47% of the state's typhoid fever cases. The population of these counties was only 15% of the total. The 1938 infant mortality rate for Kings County was 95.2 compared with the state average of 43.8.

Unionism in the Fields

Soon after its founding in 1905 the IWW made its appearance among the "fruit tramps" of California. Its job delegates traveled from the lumber camps of the North and the mines of the Sierras to the fields of California. They followed the routes of the migrant workers, who would work a stint as lumberjack or miner and then pick fruit in California. The IWW was able to establish "wobbly halls" in the key agricultural towns — Bakersfield, Sacramento, Fresno, and San Diego — and particularly in the latter two a hard fight had to be launched for "free speech." From their headquarters in these towns after 1912, IWW camp delegates went to the fields and provided leadership for many

spontaneous strikes. In Tehama County, for instance, they won a 20% increase for peach pickers. They claimed 10,000-12,000 members in the California valleys.

In August 1913 some 2,800 workers were camped near the Durst hop ranch at Wheatland in Yuba County. Conditions were terrible: There was only employment for 1,300, no housing or sanitation, and water was insufficient for the 105° weather. Durst had purposely asked for more workers than he needed to force down wages. An active IWW chapter of 30 was formed and there were several mass rallies. When sheriff's deputies attempted to break up one of these the workers fought back; many were injured and four were killed (two workers, a deputy sheriff, and the county district attorney). Following the battle a statewide reign of terror was unleashed against the IWW with many of its organizers arrested and beaten.

The IWW was only temporarily set back; it continued to organize, and in 1917 led several strikes. A strike of 2,000 German, Italian, and Japanese orchard pruners near Fresno was won in February. In April there was an orange-picking strike near Riverside. In June a thousand carloads of cantaloupes were lost to the growers as a result of an IWW strike in Stanislaus County. With the apparent power of the IWW growing, the Federal government took advantage of the war to launch a nationwide roundup of the IWW. Over 500 were arrested and 160 were convicted of violation of federal wartime statutes (42 of them in California). Many others were rounded up; 100 were picked up when the IWW hall in Fresno was raided. Despite a "revolutionary" outlook the IWW was ideologically unprepared for an assault of this magnitude and suffered a defeat; it went "underground," organizing the Toilers of the World, which did some work in Santa Clara County, and at that union's demise in 1918, the Agricultural Workers Industrial Union, which did some organizing in 1919 and 1920 but likewise disappeared after a second crackdown.

There had been strikes before the IWW. As early as 1884 a strike of Chinese hop pickers was reported in Kern County, and in 1887 there was a strike of white grape pickers; but in those years the growers were generally successful in dividing white workers from Chinese workers, and both from the Japanese workers. As the latter began to dominate California agriculture they formed national labor organizations which were capable of leading strikes;

an example was the 1906 walnut strike in Santa Barbara County. An important strike involving 1,000 Japanese and Mexican sugar beet workers took place in Ventura County in 1903. But national labor organizations were strategically weak because the growers tended to play one nationality against another. The IWW, which was multinational, overcame this obstacle and became the main agricultural labor union for all nationalities after 1910. After it was defeated in 1920 there was no viable organization of farm laborers for eight years.

An organization of Mexican workers, the CUOM in California, was started in 1927. It was influenced by the traditions of the IWW and the Mexican revolutionaries. The local in the Imperial Valley was, at first, more conservative; it was organized by the Mexican consul at Calexico and changed its name to the Mexican Mutual Aid Society. In 1928 the union leaders made some moderate demands on the melon growers, which the growers refused. A spontaneous strike broke out near Brawley and Westmoreland—the first since the IWW. The sheriff acted quickly, arresting over 40 and closing down the union office.

In 1928 the union had asked for 75 cents an hour against the going rate of 50-60 cents. By 1930 the hourly wage rate had fallen to 30 cents. In January a second spontaneous strike of Mexican and Filipino lettuce pickers broke out in resistance to those wage cuts. Some 5,000 workers were on strike. Members of the Trade Union Unity League (TUUL), which had been organized by the Communist Party, went to the valley to lead the strike. The CP organizers tried to maintain the strike by having truckloads of food and tents brought into the valley from Los Angeles. But the deputies turned the trucks back and prevented the erection of makeshift relief tents sheltering the workers evicted from the struck ranches. After several TUUL organizers were arrested, workers began to return to work.

The official-led Mutual Aid Society tried to regain control of the movement from the TUUL, but while the Mexican consul was negotiating with the growers the communists pulled off another strike in February. The shed workers and lettuce packers struck and after a month-long strike won across-the-board wage increases. The TUUL was growing, and during March and April active membership grew to 500. Headquarters were set up in Brawley, and

plans were laid for a general strike in the valley in July. A planning conference was scheduled for April 20, but on April 14 sheriff's deputies raided the union arresting over 100, of whom eleven were charged with criminal syndicalism. In addition, two Mexican nationals were deported. The officials made it impossible for the TUUL or even the Mutual Aid Society to operate in the valley. A grower-imposed "peace" reigned until late 1933. Meanwhile the hourly rates dropped to 12.5 cents an hour.

There was no real effort to follow up these actions by means of day to day organizing and fighting with the workers on smaller issues. Organizationally the C&AWIU was stagnant in San Jose, and only one worker from the Calpack strike was recruited to the party. As the CP said self-critically in the *Western Worker*, July 1, 1932: "Our methods of work were wrong. The practice of running from town to town, holding mass meetings, making all kinds of reckless statements or promises, not keeping appointments with workers and not organizing defense committees to carry on the work served to make our organization look ridiculous in the eyes of the workers."

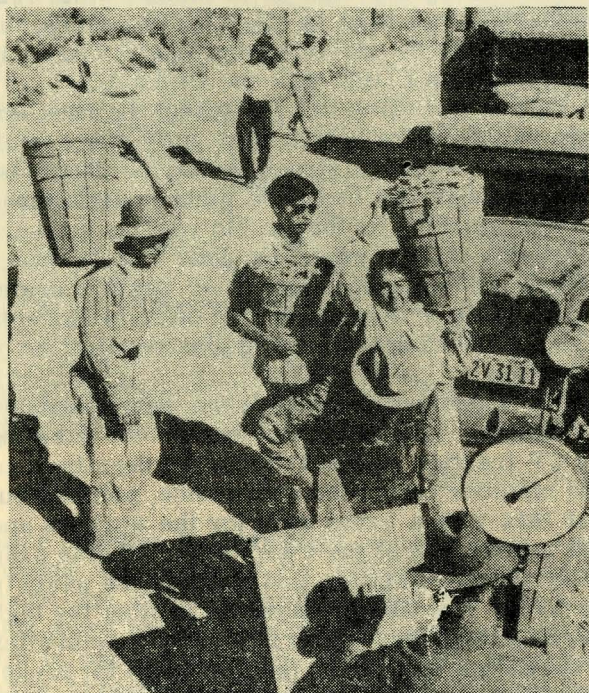
The First Strikes

The first strikes organized beforehand by the C&AWIU took place near the San Francisco Bay. The C&AWIU headquarters was located at San Jose, and the CP had a base in San Francisco and Berkeley, which could provide various kinds of help to the fledgling union. Their San Francisco paper, the *Western Worker*, was used in the fields until the C&AWIU was able to initiate its own paper. The CP provided financial help, publicity, various propaganda materials, and in many cases mobilized radical students from the university at Berkeley to aid the strikes.

In 1932 the C&AWIU had been organizing in San Mateo, Santa Clara, Alameda, Contra Costa, and Solano counties in the Bay area, and had also been among the Spanish and Mexican orchard workers in the Vacaville area of Solano County. From November to January these workers were employed pruning the fruit and nut trees in the area. In 1928 the pay for this kind of work had been \$3.50 a day, but by 1932 the rate had dropped to \$1.50. It was here that the C&AWIU prepared its first strike of 400 orchard pruners. Striking for a wage increase to \$2.50 and union recognition, the union

encountered bitter opposition from the owners and the Vacaville police. The union gained only experience; it lost the strike.

One of the lessons learned was that the ranchers were not hurt by the strike since it took place in the pruning season and not the picking season. Pruning season lasts several



Wages for these pea-pickers is one cent a pound

months and there is no particular rush about it; however, when the fruit ripens it must be picked in a matter of days or the crop is lost.

For California's ranchers the period was one of temporary business recovery. Farm prices were rising, but ranchers were taking advantage of surplus labor to keep wages down to 1932 levels. Even the Los Angeles Chamber of Commerce later admitted that "some of the labor disputes were brought about by the fact that in some agricultural sections ridiculously low prices were quoted for agricultural labor..." This employer drive for profits helped provoke strikes throughout the state.

One of the typical spring strikes was the June cherry strike. The price of cherries had risen in 1933 to \$80 a ton from the 1932 level of \$60 a ton. Yet in Santa Clara County, one of the main growing areas, the growers reduced the hourly wages of cherry pickers from 30 cents in 1932 to 20 cents in 1933. The C&AWIU,

which had been organizing there since the 1931 cannery strike, was in a good position to fight for retention of the 30 cents wage. In June 1933 the union demanded 30 cents an hour, an 8-hour day, and union recognition.

The key to winning the strike was breaking the Spalding Ranch, the largest cherry orchard in the area, owned by a Sunnyvale banker; it employed 278 cherry pickers. While several of the smaller ranches agreed to 30 cents the big ranches followed the lead of Spalding and insisted on the 20 cent rate. On June 14 the CP called for a strike, and 500 workers on 12 ranches that had C&AWIU organization, including Spalding, were out. Other orchards paying 20 cents were picketed, and in a few days 900 workers were on strike and 20 ranches had cherries unpicked in the trees. This was an explosive situation; the growers stood to lose the whole crop, since cherries will rot rapidly if not picked.

Two days after the strike was called the first violence erupted. Some 100 strikers were at a ranch chasing strikebreaking pickers out of the orchards. This was a key tactic evolved by the C&AWIU; since pickets could not cover all the orchards effectively, they would mass large numbers of strikers at one orchard, enter the field and chase the scabs out, violently if necessary. Someone called the Highway Patrol, which drove the workers off with rifles and beat the leaders with rifle butts. A strike leader was beaten senseless in the fight. The next day 250 strikers turned up to picket the Spalding ranch. This was a second hallmark of the C&AWIU — escalation. If attacked by cops or growers, they would mass everyone they had for a demonstration or mass picketing. If attacked again, they would fight back; it didn't matter whether they fought the cops, deputies or growers. They correctly identified all three as the same. The third innovation they gave to agricultural organizing was mass demonstrations at jails and courts for their arrested comrades. Always, they would concentrate their forces for an attack. At Spalding an even more violent encounter took place when scores of deputies and highway patrolmen charged the picket lines with clubs, tear gas, and pick-axe handles; the workers fought back, but 27 of them were arrested and more than 50 injured.

When the arrested workers came up for a hearing in San Jose and Santa Clara the C&AWIU mobilized hundreds of workers to mob the courthouses. The next day two mass meetings

were held to keep the strikers' spirits at a high level and to form picket lines, which returned to the Spalding ranch the next day. Later, armed ranchers invaded and destroyed the CP's Workers' Center in Sunnyvale; but by now they were acting in frustration, and this type of intimidation did not cause the strike to flag.

The striking Spanish workers, most of them residents of the area, had a large amount of support from the community. The C&AWIU kept them united and on the offensive. The ranchers finally had to agree to the 30 cents wage, although they still refused to recognize the union. On June 24 the C&AWIU, not strong enough to insist on union recognition, sent its men back to work. It was the union's first taste of even partial victory.

The cherry strike involved the greater part of the C&AWIU efforts in June, but seven organizers were spared for El Monte where the raspberry crop was to be picked. There were 600 to 700 raspberry acres in Los Angeles County, mainly near El Monte; of this, 80% was in the hands of small Japanese operators who rented from large American owners. The labor force they hired was almost entirely Mexican. Pickers were paid as little as 9 cents an hour.

Near the end of May 20 men and two women, including C&AWIU organizers, called at the home of the head of the Japanese growers' association demanding 25 cents an hour or 65 cents a crate. The demand was rejected and the C&AWIU called for a mass meeting on June 1 at Hick's Camp, the main Mexican "Hooverville" near El Monte. The meeting was called jointly by the C&AWIU and the Mexican union, COUM. Many of the workers had been in the latter organization so the white C&AWIU organizers had to work with them. As became apparent later, however, the communists did not work well with Mexicans.

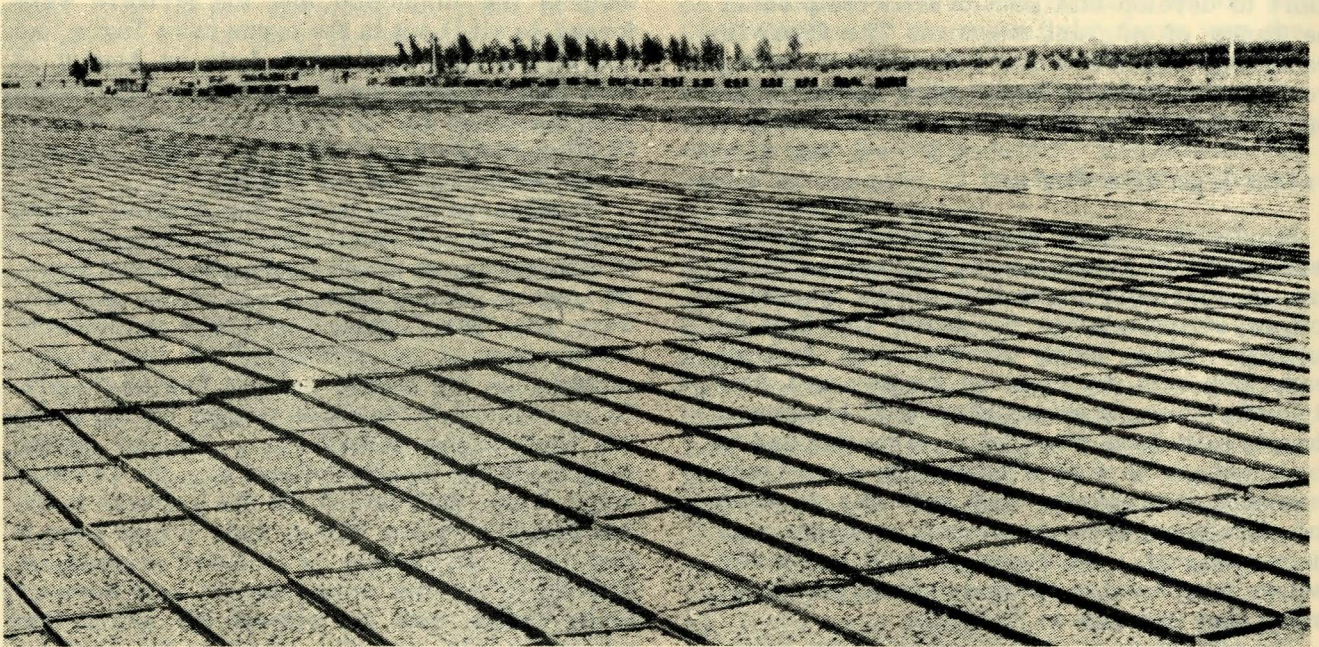
More than 500 workers came to the meeting. They voted to reject the growers belated offer of 12-15 cents an hour and called a strike beginning the next day. Spirits were high; a general strike committee of 60 rank-and-file workers was elected at the meeting. The C&AWIU, in order to get more rank-and-file participation, often broke tradition by electing these rank-and-file committees. But electing a committee at a mass meeting when the spirit is high is one thing; actually getting them to take organizational and political leadership is more difficult. It is here that the C&AWIU failed. The

key organizational tasks remained in the hands of the CP organizers and often the strike committees became paper organizations. This led to a lot of resentment, especially when the workers (and the strike committee) were Mexican and the CP organizers white. The workers tended to regard the communists as white liberal managers. Thus in El Monte, while real leadership was held by the CP organizers, the chairman of the strike committee was more in sympathy with COUM than the C&AWIU.

This latent split did not affect the first few days of the strike, which were fully successful. Over 1,500 workers struck, emptying the fields. Since the berries had to be picked within three days of ripening or they would rot, the growers were almost in a panic. On June 5 the growers offered 15 cents an hour or 40 cents a crate, and on June 7 they upped the offer to 20 cents an hour or 45 cents a crate plus recognition of the union.

A mass meeting of strikers was scheduled to consider the offer, but before the meeting the CP fraction met and discussed the situation. One member called for acceptance, pointing out that this was a great gain for the workers and that recognition of the C&AWIU would give a big boost in consolidating and building the union in the area. The others, however, noting the high spirit among the workers and the possibilities of spreading the strike, decided to go for broke. This focus on the money gains rather than union recognition was a key error that the CP repeated again and again. At the mass meeting a CP member asked the workers (Western Worker, Aug. 7, 1933): "Do you want 20 cents or 25 cents?" The answer was 25 cents as expected and the strike continued. This type of manipulation was also an unfortunate hallmark of the C&AWIU. The CP fraction kept political decisions in its hands and did not deign to discuss the political issues with the masses. Fear of the masses, and latent racism perhaps, were at the basis of these mistakes. In the long run this style of work made it impossible to build the union.

At this point the growers in coordination with the police decided to isolate the "reds" from the workers as no compromise seemed possible with the C&AWIU in the saddle. They were able to do this precisely because the CP organizers had not developed close ties with the workers and had not worked with and developed the strike committee as a genuine leadership body. At a meeting in the El Monte



Apricots: world's largest producer

police station the Mexican consul from Los Angeles and some of the COUM leaders convinced the strike committee that the communists were not interested in winning the strike, only in prolonging it. So the next day, when the police arrested eight CP members and kept the others out of El Monte, the consul was able to gain control of the strike. He formed a new company union, CUCOM, that was to have quite a later history.

The strike was expected to end at this point on the growers' terms, now that the reds were out of the picture. But neither the consul nor the growers had reckoned with the militancy of the workers. Instead of ending, the strike spread almost spontaneously all over Los Angeles County. Besides berry pickers in the San Gabriel Valley and Orange County, onion and celery workers in Santa Monica were out; altogether more than 6,000 Mexican farm laborers struck. The consul had all he could do to remain abreast of the strike wave.

The El Monte school board dismissed Japanese children and sent them to the fields; laborers were imported from Los Angeles, but the berries were rotting. In desperation, on June 29 the growers offered berries at a penny a box to whoever would pick them. Many came but the strikers mobilized 2,000 men and swarmed over the fields. Violence flared be-

tween the strikers and deputies near Arcadia.

Some six workers were arrested, but the fields were cleared. The consul urged the workers not to picket the fields but to no avail. Finally on July 7 after mediation by state and federal officials, and the Mexican and Japanese consuls, an agreement of \$1.50 for a 9-hour day and recognition of CUCOM as the bargaining agent was accepted, and the strike ended. The C&AWIU had been offered a somewhat better deal a month before. The CP later issued a public self-criticism of its role.

Organizing agricultural workers is more difficult than organizing industrial workers. The seasonal nature of the work makes it difficult to hold a group of workers together. After the harvest, the union member would leave the area in search of other work; perhaps he went to a crop area where there were no union organizers. Under these circumstances it is very important in farm labor organizing to distribute the leadership to as many workers as possible. Only in this way, by building a cadre of thousands of organizers, who could be in each crop area, can the union retain its members. The C&AWIU failed to a large extent to develop new leadership from the rank and file. Some workers became organizers, but not enough to guarantee the long-term survival of the organization. It takes time and a great

effort to develop that kind of leadership out of the ranks of migrant workers. The C&AWIU leadership seemed more interested in going from one strike to the next, rather than in making the painstaking effort to train successors.

Union Ups the Ante

Shortly after the El Monte strike the C&AWIU held a district convention in California. There was considerable criticism of the vagabond notions of organizing. Emphasis was laid on building strong local, section, and district leadership with the local as the key unit. The style of organizing exemplified by El Monte was sharply criticized. The strike leadership had to come out of the fields; unless the organizers developed unbreakable ties with the workers and developed them to become organizers in their own right, the growers could too easily isolate the "outside agitators" from the workers as they had done in El Monte.

The strikes so far had involved, at the most, a few thousand workers in the smaller crop areas of the state; but in the second half of August the C&AWIU started to play for bigger stakes. In the San Joaquin and Sacramento Valleys upwards of 20,000 workers were involved in the peach, grape, and cotton crops, which were picked in succession from August through November. Organizers had been active there for some time, and when the peach harvest began they were ready.

The two cornerstones of the San Joaquin Valley peach industry were California Packing Corporation and Libby, McNeil and Libby. The former employed 2,000 peach pickers at two of its Merced County ranches; the latter employed 700 peach pickers at its Tagus Ranch in Tulare County. Both operations were struck August 14 and both were completely shut down.

In the Tagus strike on August 14 large picket lines were thrown around the ranch. A truck load of strikebreakers that tried to get through on the first day was forced off the road and the men scattered. The following day state highway patrolmen arrived and with the help of local deputies guided two truckloads of welfare recipients through the picket lines. But this was no substantial help. There were 16,000 tons of peaches to be picked, all highly perishable.

In an effort to break the strike the management obtained an injunction on August 15 banning any more picketing of the ranch. The deputies and highway patrolmen stood ready to

enforce the injunction and the strikers were forced to sit it out in the towns near Tagus, but the strike remained solid. Late on August 18 the Tagus management reached an agreement with the union for 25 cents an hour. On August 20 the workers returned to Tagus literally under the banners of the C&AWIU.

Smaller ranches in the San Joaquin Valley were also struck, and every day brought news of several more peach orchards closed down. By August 15 at least 4,000 peach workers were out. The Calpack and Libby agreements set the tone of the settlement for the smaller ranches. In the Reedly area of Fresno County, 75 ranches were struck on August 18, the same day that Tagus settled. In a 24-hour strike almost all the 1,000 workers won the 25 cents wage. After that almost all the growers in the San Joaquin Valley raised their wages even if there were no strikes or C&AWIU organizers. The spirit of the union spread and workers would strike with or without the union. The militant class struggle spirit of the workers was excellent, but the union's small forces left it unable to take organizational advantage of the situation with the result that little permanent organization remained after the peach harvest.

Less than a week later, as peach picking began in the Sacramento Valley, the strikes spread north. In Chico, in Gridley, and in Butte County peach pickers hit the bricks. The C&AWIU closed down the Steadman ranch and the Butte County orchards owned by Bank of America. Soon smaller ranches were affected and 1,200 workers were out. With the strength of the union growing it could now afford to keep the workers out for the few extra days to obtain 30 cents instead of 25 cents. Bank of America and other Sacramento Valley corporations were forced to pay 30 cents an hour.

The peach strike gains, amounting to 100% increase in wages in some cases and affecting some 20,000 workers, popularized the crop strike among California's farm laborers. In many areas of the state, field workers struck, sometimes under the leadership of C&AWIU, sometimes under independent leadership. In any case the strikers, where successful, used the "red" techniques of mass picketing and dealing with strikebreakers in an active manner.

In the San Joaquin Valley the grape harvest follows the peach harvest. And in early September there was every indication that the C&AWIU would try to repeat their successes in peach

picking with bigger victories, at least in a monetary sense, in the grape harvest. In mass meetings and in the pages of the *Western Worker*, CP, TUUL, and C&AWIU organizers promised plenty of action in the harvest of California's most valuable crop. Already in August a small strike in vineyards near Bakersfield had occurred, and by mid-August C&AWIU organizers were active in the vineyards throughout the valley. On August 21 State Labor Commissioner McDonald, fearing the "disorders" that were part of the C&AWIU strikes, urged the growers to be "reasonable" and pay at least 25 cents or the state would be faced with its worst strike to date. The growers refused and announced a rate of 20 cents an hour.

For the industry to refinance its crop at



Onion worker

25 cents would be a considerable loss. While the big corporations could afford to raise wages without refinancing, the medium-sized farms, which had already contracted for the crop, could not. Rather than refinance all the farms, the capitalists preferred the "riskier" approach of mobilizing the medium farmers to crush the strike. The state, judging the dangers of this approach more important than the short-term financial loss, wanted either the capitalists

or preferably the medium farmers to take the loss. Adding to the capitalists' fears was the fact that communists were leading the movement. They feared a social revolution in addition to the wage increase. The state saw more clearly that the "Revolution" was more in the nature of rhetoric at this point and preferred co-optation to violence.

The C&AWIU had loudly proclaimed its intention of leading a general strike of the grape crop, but in fact they had made no real plans for a general strike and did not have enough organizers to cover the whole grape district from Fresno County to San Joaquin County. So the C&AWIU concentrated its forces in the Lodi district of San Joaquin County where the grapes do not ripen until the end of September. However, when walkouts occurred anyway in Fresno County in early September the union could not resist the temptation to take the leadership and extend the strike; by September 10, 6,000 were on strike in Fresno. Too late the growers saw the wisdom of accepting the state's recommendation of 25 cents an hour. The strike continued for three more days of violence, including a gun battle, before the workers returned to work.

The Lodi strike was to prove even more violent. On September 7 the growers announced their offer of 1.5 cents a tray (12.5 to 20 cents an hour); on September 13 a mass meeting of strikers put forward the central demand of 50 cents an hour. For the first time the growers negotiated with the C&AWIU before a strike. There was some scaling down of differences in negotiations, with the growers now offering the state's "reasonable" 25 cents an hour (the lesson of Fresno sunk in) and the union willing to take 40 cents. On September 26, at the city park in Lodi, 5,000 workers were told the result of negotiations; the workers voted to strike the next day for 40 cents. While 40 cents an hour was hardly exorbitant, the fact that 25 cents or 30 cents was the best rate going in other crop areas made the figure unrealistic. The union should have accepted the 25 cents and the union recognition that came with it as a basis to begin to build the organization. The growers could recruit strikebreakers from other areas for less than 40 cents. The only way the union could win the strike now was to rely on force to keep scabs from the orchards. But when it came to violence the growers had the upper hand since they could use the organized violence of the state and

county, while the union had no serious plans to oppose this with stronger violence on the part of the workers.

This fact of life was to be made abundantly clear in the next few days. The orchards were largely deserted at first, but by September 30, some 28 strike leaders were already in jail and 104 special deputies were patrolling the highways to keep the mobile pickets away from the orchards. The union tried to concentrate on four key orchards, but picketing was largely halted by September 30. Now the strikers were filling up the streets of Lodi, increasingly ineffective in preventing some strikebreakers from picking the crop. The situation grew tense as strikers and other workers milled around the town while the growers formed a 1,700-man vigilance committee, fully armed. The union claimed it was forming a 1,000-man defense committee, but that was just big talk.

On the night of October 2 it called another mass meeting in defiance of the sheriff; and when the lights in the city park were turned off, the workers lit torches. While the union's meeting was still in progress 1,000 vigilantes gathered at a theater and prepared to drive the workers out of the county. They rounded up all seasonal workers in the town, picked out the leaders for "special treatment" and drove the others at gun point out of the county. The strike was over; the union leaders were in jail; their followers were out of the county.

As a revolutionary union whose leaders were nearly all open members of the CP, the C&AWIU faced special problems. While in theory the union's program was not an exact replica of the party's, in practice at mass meetings representatives of the union invariably called for the overthrow of the capitalist system and the establishment of a Soviet California. Actually there was a lot of playing at revolution since the communists had more faith in the state than they seemed to indicate. Several times the CP organizers called on the governor to protect them from the vigilantes, and during the cotton strike they were to accept token relief from the government. On the one hand, the revolutionary talk at the mass meetings only served to scare the growers and give them justification for recruiting small farmers and townspeople to the vigilantes. On the other, the workers must have been less than convinced of the seriousness of the calls for revolution, since one doesn't ask the state

for protection if he is really about to overthrow it. Additionally the C&AWIU failed to unite with all the groups in the rural areas that it could have brought together. For example, the California Grange, which represented small farmers, was in the thirties quite sympathetic to the idea of unionism among the farm workers. But the Grange was not quite ready for a revolutionary program.

King Cotton Struck

The October cotton strike was in many ways the culmination of the year-long campaign. It was the longest and the most violent strike. It involved the biggest area and the most workers. The success of the cotton strike was built upon some of the earlier mistakes. Some of the strikers in the peach and grape strikes became organizers for the C&AWIU in the cotton strike. In Arizona, a few weeks before, the C&AWIU led a successful cotton strike; this also contributed to the experiences the union could draw upon. In no previous situation was the union as well prepared.

In late August and September union organizers covered the six cotton counties — Kern, Kings, and Tulare in the south and Fresno, Madera, and Merced in the central San Joaquin Valley. The union had trained a corps of Black, white, and Mexican organizers, who formed a network of more than 19 locals in the cotton belt. The late maturity of the cotton crop gave the union two more weeks to prepare. Mass meetings were held on farms and vacant lots in the towns; leaflets and union membership cards were widely distributed. The Tagus Ranch local near Tulare became an organizing base; even though no cotton was grown on the ranch, the workers from the ranch furnished cadre for much of Tulare County. The union organized a 1-day walkout of 1,000 Tagus workers to go to a picnic, which collected money for the upcoming cotton strike. The AFL Building Trades Council in Visalia was contacted and promised full support. In addition the CP organized a United Farmers League to appeal to poor farmers to join the workers against the finance corporations. A few small farmers joined the formation, signed contracts with the C&AWIU, and hired their workers through the union. Other small farmers donated their land to the union to set up camps for evicted workers.

On September 17 a conference of delegates from the locals formulated demands for the

cotton season: (1) wages of \$1 per 100 pounds; (2) abolition of labor contractors; (3) all hiring through the union. A central strike committee of 30 was elected; C&AWIU county organizers were chosen for the six counties.

One dollar per hundred was not a high wage. A grown man working 10 hours a day could pick 200 to 300 pounds maximum. At best the wage meant 30 cents an hour; for most pickers it amounted to less than that. In the twenties as much as \$1.50 per hundred had been paid but in 1932 the going rate had been only 40 cents a hundred (or 8 cents-12 cents an hour). A meeting of the San Joaquin Valley Agricultural Labor Bureau (SJVALB) on September 19 allowed a C&AWIU representative to read, but not discuss, the union's demands. A rate was subsequently agreed upon in closed session by ten directors of the SJVALB. Of these ten directors, four were large growers (more than 2,400 acres), five operated cotton gins, and one was a banker. They set a rate of 60 cents per hundred (12 cents to 18 cents an hour) and stipulated that the rate could not be changed without another meeting.

The ranchers planned to repeat the Lodi tactics and crush the strike quickly. But the workers were more than ready to do battle, and scattered strikes broke out soon after the 60 cents wage was announced. In the Wasco area of Kern County 800 walked out on October 2; others were striking in Kings County. This occurred despite the fact that the C&AWIU wanted to wait to call out four counties simultaneously on October 7. (Fresno and Merced counties had late-maturing, mid-October cotton crops.) A three-part grower plan to break the strike was promulgated at various growers' meetings on October 5 and 6. The plan was (1) to evict immediately all strikers and their families; (2) to drive out of the valley all strikers and strike agitators; (3) armed resistance to picketing. The county authorities gave full cooperation to the ranchers in their efforts to repeat the Lodi experience. In a Madera meeting, according to the Los Angeles Times, Oct. 9, 1933, the sheriff urged the growers not to "let the agitators buffalo" them; the district attorney promised he would "wink" at any illegal evictions.

In the first few days thousands of workers and their families were evicted from the cotton ranches. In one area 75 growers gave strikers 5 minutes notice and then sent trucks to take the workers' belongings and dump them on the

highway. On October 5, 100 striking families were evicted from the J. Y. Peterson ranch. On October 6, 1,000 pickers were given 24 hours notice in the Kern Lake area. On October 8, 200 more were evicted in Kern County. Yet the evictions had no effect in forcing the strikers back to work. By October 8 some 6,000 were on strike in Kern County, some 2,000 were out in Kings County and the strike was just getting under way in Tulare County. Actually the evictions had the opposite effect intended. The strike committee had prepared for them, and tent camps were set up on small farms throughout the area. In these camps, which the growers dubbed "concentration camps," the C&AWIU kept the strikers together and had a ready reserve of pickets. Near Arvin, Porterville, and Pixley hundreds of families settled in union camps; the major camp was near Corcoran in Kings County where some 2,500 were encamped as early as October 9.

Evictions were thus backfiring, but the growers tried to put part of their plan into operation from October 8 to October 10. Growers formed county committees such as the one in Kings County "to rid Kings County of all strikers" (Chronicle, Oct. 7, 1933). In Woodville in Tulare County, 70 armed vigilantes broke into a hall where a strike meeting was being held on the night of October 8. The workers fought back with chairs, injuring two growers. However, the vigilantes overcame the resistance, and at gunpoint marched the strikers 15 miles down the highway to the county line. The vigilantes then gave all other strikers in the county until 7 A.M. to go back to work or get out of Tulare County.

But the workers countered the threats in kind: A Tulare mass meeting the next day formed a defense committee. On the 9th, 500 strikers in an auto caravan paraded through various Kern County towns with banners. On that day the Los Angeles Times (Oct. 10, 1933) reported more than 12,000 were on strike; the union claimed 18,000. Union organizers were arrested in Hanford and Madera county as tension mounted in the cotton counties.

The tension came to a violent climax on October 10 when battles erupted in Pixley in Tulare County and Arvin in Kern County, some 65 miles apart. A caravan of pickets had visited a ranch near Pixley. The pickets were surprised and surrounded by a group of ranchers and held at gun point until deputy sheriffs

took them to town. By 2 P.M. 350 strikers gathered in Pixley to protest in a vacant lot; they were addressed by strike leaders. As armed vigilantes gathered across the street the workers retreated to their headquarters. The vigilantes tried to follow. When the workers moved to stop them, the ranchers opened fire — 15 were wounded, a Mexican woman was killed, and an official of the Mexican consulate, who was on the scene, was also shot and killed by the growers. Seventeen strikers were arrested.

On the same day on a road near Arvin a group of armed growers assembled to protect a few strikebreaking pickers from a caravan of strikers. For 5 hours the two groups faced each other across the road. In the afternoon, fighting broke out, the growers using rifle butts, and the strikers stakes. Shots were fired by the growers and one striker was killed, twenty wounded. These tactics of the growers did not have the expected intimidating effect. Instead, all the concentrated bitterness, the class hatred of the strikers, came out. This feeling was harnessed by the communist organizers into solidifying the strike. On October 11 the strike was more solid than ever. There was virtually no cotton picking in Kern, Kings, or Tulare counties. If the growers were still not clear on their failure to crush the strike, others were. In a front page editorial the San Francisco Chronicle (Oct. 11, 1933) condemned both the vigilantes and the "agitators," and called for mediation to stop the strike. The Lodi tactics had led the growers to an impasse; other tactics had to be used to end the strike.

For some days the State Labor Commission had seen this and had urged mediation. Now in the wake of violence at Pixley and Arvin the state again offered mediation. To bribe the strikers into accepting this the state made the unprecedented offer of relief for the strikers. The strike committee accepted this arrangement — thereby taking the first fatal step down the road of co-optation.

The various state and federal officials who descended on the valley feared the increasing influence of the communist union leadership. They wanted the strike ended right away; and to end the strike it was obvious some rate higher than the 60 cents had to be paid. But the growers, especially those who were financed at 60 cents, could not pay any higher. The state officials wanted the growers to take the loss for the sake of the larger issue; the growers still hoped to break the strike. The California ruling

class, or at least its leading newspapers, seemed to be split on this issue: The Chronicle strongly backed the governor's efforts at mediation, while the Los Angeles Times condemned the "milk and water" policies of the state.

Meanwhile the strikers tried to benefit from the state and federal relief. By October 15 relief was being distributed at the Corcoran camp. Only \$10,709.26 total was distributed during the month-long strike however (less than \$1 per striker), so it is doubtful that the relief provided the union much benefit. In fact it only gave the state a club to hold over the union's head. When the time was ripe the state used the threat of withholding relief to force the strikers to terms. To begin this process the governor appointed a three man fact-finding committee to hold hearings in the valley.

Meanwhile, with the strike still solid, the union called various marches and meetings to protest the killings. In Visalia 1,000 demonstrated at the Tulare County Courthouse on October 11. At the same time a march was held in McFarland in Kern County. By now only a few ranches were still trying to operate with skeleton crews. There was another Visalia demonstration on October 13 of 1,000 workers. On October 14, 5,000 marched at the Tulare funeral of Dolores Hernandez, one of those murdered at Pixley; earlier in the day thousands had gathered at Pixley and then marched to Tulare. On October 15 the strike spread north to Madera County when workers walked out on two big ranches there. The next day in Bakersfield 2,000 strikers demonstrated at city hall and then attended the funeral of the worker killed at Arvin. The night before, in Pixley, 3,000 Tulare strikers in a mass meeting vowed to stay out for \$1 a hundred. During the week the Mexican consul from Monterey had been going from camp to camp in an attempt to form a union of Mexican nationals that would negotiate with the growers and oust the communist leaders; he met with no success and left the valley soon afterwards.

The next week the fact-finding committee held hearings in Visalia, where representatives of the growers and the strikers gave testimony. The strike spread to Fresno and Merced counties on October 20, kicked off by a mass meeting in Mendota the night before. In Tulare there were more arrests, but the bitterness the strikers felt over the Pixley murders kept the strike fully effective there.

In Kings County the strike was completely

effective, the growers there more and more focusing on the Corcoran camp as the source of their difficulty. From this camp, which by now housed 5,000 men, women, and children, auto caravans left to ride up and down the county roads effectively stopping any cotton picking. On October 19 the county attorney declared the camp a health menace and ordered it to install various water and sanitary facilities. The camp complied. The sheriff then hired 15 special deputies to guard the camp.

On October 23 the governor's fact-finding committee announced its decision. It recommended a "compromise" rate of 75 cents a hundred (15 cents to 22 cents an hour). By this time the growers had no other choice but to accept the rate. Some of their number in Kern, Fresno, and Merced counties were already paying 75 cents and 80 cents (a few ranches had even signed contracts with the C&AWIU for \$1 a hundred), and the other ranchers were closed down. To clinch their decision the Federal Intermediate Credit Bank exerted pressure on them. On October 24 the SJVALB convened a meeting to ratify the 75 cent rate.

But the union rejected the offer, and on October 23 issued a call for massive picketing. The workers responded: At one Tulare ranch 1,000 strikers invaded the fields, drove off all the strikebreakers with clubs, slashed cotton sacks, and caused other damage. In Kings and Kern counties similar incidents took place. The next day Tulare County hired 60 new deputies; the state sent 100 state police into the area, and the National Guard was mobilized at Hanford and Visalia. Meanwhile all relief to the strikers was cut off.

On October 25 the strike committee voted to hold out for 80 cents a hundred and a union contract, which was key, despite the governor's proclamation that the strike was ended and everyone must go back to work. There were many arrests reported and several instances of violence, as the growers and state were no longer split over tactics and both determined to crush the strike. The focus of the ranchers was now to break up the Corcoran camp.

On the night of October 25, some 300 armed strikers guarded the camp. Next morning the sheriff was drowned out by jeers when he came to deliver an ultimatum to evacuate the camp. Growers appeared offering 75 cents and free fuel to all who would work; there were no takers. A federal food administrator told the strikers there would be no more food; the

crowd was unmoved. An attempt by the sheriff to enter the camp to arrest a strike leader was repulsed. The Mexican consul also urged the workers to return to work at 75 cents. Bloodshed seemed inevitable, but that evening the state pressured the union to evacuate the camp. The next day the union accepted the 75 cent rate, but still demanded contracts. But having evacuated the camp, its power to continue the strike diminished. The union leaders issued contradictory statements as to whether it was ending the strike, and with no firm leadership the workers began to return to work.

The strike was now all but over, but the situation was still critical for the growers. They had to make up for a month of virtually no picking in a short time or the rains would destroy the crop. Many workers were still refusing to work for those ranchers who did not sign contracts; and those growers who were well known vigilantes found it impossible to hire pickers. By November 7 over 100 growers signed contracts with the C&AWIU.

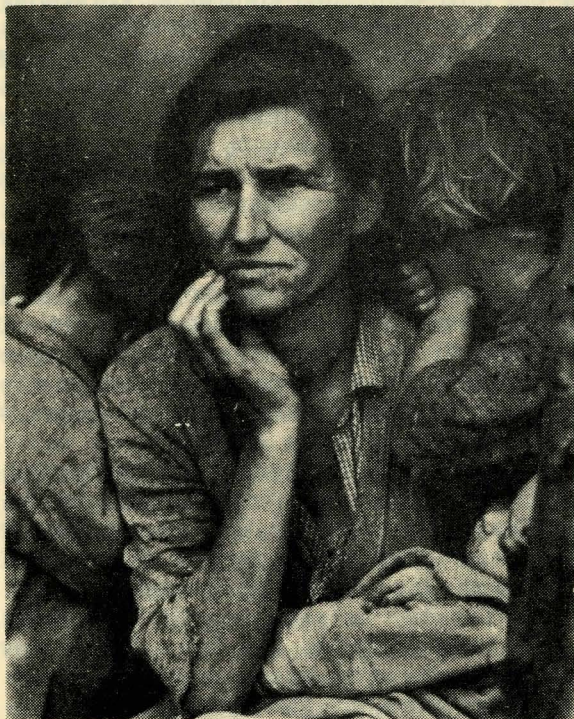
The union and its communist leadership were fooled by the two-faced nature of the state. They were clear on the "stick" aspect and devised bold and ingenious methods of dealing with the ruling-class violence. But they fell for its "carrot" aspect. They could not see that accepting aid from the enemy (relief) strengthens the enemy more than themselves. They gave the state just enough credence by participating in fact-finding commissions and similar farces so that it could force them out of their camp and destroy their ability to fight for the only really meaningful demand, a union contract. Nevertheless, the union gained prestige from the strike and by mid-November its (paper) membership in the Valley was 7,000. The CP was able to recruit a number of the most active strikers.

Bosses Hit Back

The cotton strike alerted every growers' group in the state to the "menace" they faced from revolutionary union organizers. While by no means eschewing the tactics they used at Lodi, growers were determined not to let themselves get trapped as they were in the cotton strike. The ranchers were clearer in that they had to combine force with flexibility in order to defeat the union. The Imperial Valley growers especially took careful note of the lessons of the 1933 strike wave since they

had every reason to believe they were next on the C&AWIU's list. The Western Growers Protective Association of the valley met in October to deal with the situation well before the lettuce harvest got under way in December.

They adopted a two-prong strategy. On the one hand they had the Imperial County author-



ities recruit and arm a large number of deputies to prevent picketing and to break up union meetings. During the 7-month period from September 20, 1933 to April 20, 1934 some 247 men were deputized by the Imperial County sheriff.

Second, they decided to form a company union with which they could deal in preference to the C&AWIU. Thus, grower strategy amounted to combining the successful elements of the Lodi and El Monte experiences. However, the grower's natural proclivity was to favor the violent approach over the flexible approach, and in the end their failure to stick to the original strategy gave the C&AWIU its opening.

The Mexican consul at Calexico was encouraged in October to revive the COUM. An agreement was reached November 1 between COUM and the growers to pay 22.5 cents an hour for the lettuce harvest and to provide at least 5 hours work to any workers taken to the fields. While this agreement was unlikely to

make any lettuce harvester prosperous, it was a substantial improvement over the prevailing rate of 12.5 cents to 15 cents.

Had the growers stuck to the agreement they probably would have been successful in keeping the communists out of the valley. But some of the companies broke the agreement within two weeks. In order to draw attention to this fact the union called a 1-day strike on November 13. The ranchers complained that some of their number were observing the agreement and that they had no control over those who were not. The consul had the harvesters go back to work after a day while he met with the growers. The negotiations dragged out through December with no concessions made to the workers.

During this period C&AWIU organizers entered the valley. A local was organized and many Mexican workers, disgusted with the tactics of the consul, joined the C&AWIU. In the last weeks of December the C&AWIU won control of the COUM and when negotiations were resumed on January 2 the growers found themselves face to face not with the pliable consul but with the C&AWIU. The union no longer asked that the growers merely live up to the agreement, but demanded instead 35 cents an hour, recognition of the union, free transportation to the fields, and grower-supplied free drinking water (an important demand in the arid valley where most workers had to drink from muddy irrigation ditches).

The strike was called on January 8; and according to union estimates, 3,000 walked out that day. By January 9 there were 5,000 on strike. Because of the high unemployment in the valley, if the growers could prevent mass picketing they could still harvest their crop. The authorities thus focused their attempts to prevent outside help from reaching the valley. With the strike leaders in chain gangs, the strikers in stockades, and the other workers terrorized, the strike was effectively broken.

A strike in February of 4,000 pea pickers was smashed by the same tactics. The strikers were first cleared off the roads, then their camp was invaded and burned to the ground by the Imperial County deputies. The strikers were driven from the area, and strikebreakers were imported.

The CP tried to operate underground in the valley now; open work was out of the question. In the prisons organizers were trained who, when released, would try to hold the local together. The leaders who were not arrested

operated secretly; C&AWIU leaflets had to be passed out clandestinely. As March ended the growers became very nervous about the perishable melon crop, which would ripen in April and May. While force had been enough to break the pea and lettuce strikes, the growers felt a return to the flexible strategy of October was necessary. As far as the C&AWIU was concerned there was to be no letup in terror, but the Mexican consul was encouraged to organize a company union. This union was formed and was immediately recognized by the growers as the sole bargaining agent in the valley.

The CP, forced to remain underground, issued leaflets denouncing the company union and proclaiming the C&AWIU the only genuine union in the valley. This sectarian approach only isolated the communists from the workers. The federal government turned the final screws when a federal mediator, Pelham Glassford, arrived on April 3. In his week-long stay he met with the authorities, the growers, and the consul—but not the C&AWIU. The latter had put forward demands on April 2 that if not fulfilled were to lead to a melon strike. Glassford urged upon the growers a higher wage schedule to avoid the strike; at the same time he advised them not to negotiate with the communists. In talks to the workers and in public circulars he urged the melon pickers to spurn the communists and “troublemakers.”

The union issued several attacks on Glassford, but without real effect. Those few union leaders not in jail were in San Diego, isolated from the rank and file. The union plan was to call a general melon strike on May 9. But at two pre-strike conferences, one in Yuma, Arizona, the second in San Diego at the end of April, only a few delegates came. The weakness of the union was apparent: Only in Calexico and Brawley were there organized locals, and the Brawley local was considered shaky since the members there had joined the consul's union in order to get jobs. The north, central, and southern sections were isolated from each other, and the leaders that the workers had confidence in were in jail. At a final pre-strike conference on May 7 the Brawley local did not even show up; the conference decided a strike was impossible.

By June the union, although defeated in the Imperial Valley, was at the peak of its power in the counties near the Sacramento Delta and the San Francisco and Monterey Bays. Here it had

a large influence among the workers, and a surprising number of ranches had signed contracts with the union. In the Los Angeles area too the union's influence was increasing. By early August, when the migratory workers began returning to the San Joaquin Valley, the skeleton C&AWIU organizations still there would begin to fill out. The Imperial Valley defeat had been a setback, but in general the union's position in June 1934 was better than a year before. Nevertheless the weaknesses of that form of organization could not be afforded any longer. The CP leadership was beginning to see this. As a first step in overcoming their isolation the C&AWIU carried out a united front strike with the AFL in June against the Balfour-Guthrie corporation in Brentwood. The strike was defeated because the AFL-C&AWIU coalition was too shaky to stand up to fascist-like tactics of the companies. The lack of stable organization, of secondary leadership, of a base among the shed workers, the romanticism, the illusions in the state were glaring weaknesses. As objective conditions began to shift in favor of the class enemy, these weaknesses of the C&AWIU proved fatal.

A year before, the slight business upturn had raised wages in the cities, but in the countryside the wages were artificially kept down to 1932 levels. In June of 1934 farm labor wages were still low, but relatively they were at the highest level in four years, and what is more, urban wages had not improved as much. This made it easier to break farm strikes in 1934 than in 1933. Secondly, the growers were better organized and more prepared to deal with strikes than before.

Both the Imperial Valley and the Brentwood strikes indicated that the growers were better prepared in 1934 than in 1933 to crush the farm strikes. The formal organization that was to coordinate statewide farm labor strikebreaking was the Associated Farmers of California. This organization was originated at a meeting of the California Chamber of Commerce two weeks after the cotton strike ended. It was formally inaugurated on March 28, 1934 at a Fresno meeting. Five institutions were large responsible for its formation: the California Farm cotton producer.

The largest contributors were the American Can Co., the Santa Fe Railroad, California and Hawaiian Sugar Co., Cannery League of California, Fiberboard Products Inc., Holly Sugar

Co., Pacific Gas and Electric, Southern Pacific Railroad, Spreckles Sugar Co., and the San Francisco Industrial Association. Other contributors included Bank of America, Crocker First National, Crown-Zellerbach, California Packing Corp., Libby McNeil and Libby, Southern California Edison, Union Pacific, Western Pacific, and the Los Angeles Times.

The purpose of the organization was to crush strikes. By April 1934 an official of the Associated Farmers was boasting that they had influenced more than 20 counties to pass anti-picketing ordinances, and a few to pass ordinances restricting strike camps. Avowed an official: "In addition the respective counties have in most cases perfected some type of organization to meet whatever communistic troubles may develop. Some counties have organized elaborately while others have skeleton organizations which can be rapidly expanded in case of trouble."

The C&AWIU was in a weak position after the Brentwood strike, but the fear that the

communists and left-wing union organizers. The C&AWIU bore the brunt of this, since the police in the agricultural areas made even less pretence at respect for civil liberties than city cops. C&AWIU organizers were arrested, beaten, and driven out of town in San Jose, Fresno, San Diego, and other places. In Sacramento the biggest haul was made: 34 of the top leaders and organizers of the union were arrested on charges of criminal syndicalism. Eighteen were kept in jail for six months; at a trial in March 1935 eight were found guilty. Over a year later the convictions were reversed, but the top union organizers had been kept out of circulation for 2 years. The Associated Farmers had devoted much of its funds and efforts toward securing these convictions.

CP On the Wrong Track

The C&AWIU was formally dissolved on March 17, 1935. By then the CP's policy was to oppose dual unions. With the top leadership in jail, however, the union had been inoperative since the July raids.

The anti-communist roundup of July 1934, and the indictments that followed, marked the end of the second period of CP activity in California's "factories in the fields."

The first period from 1930-32 before the NIRA had been a period of cautious advance. The CP had no base among the agricultural workers; there was no organized union movement for the communists to work with. The communist organizers themselves, coming from middle class or student backgrounds or from the Eastern cities, had little in common with the agricultural workers. They were all white while many of the field workers were Mexican and Filipino. The CP policy of dual unionism kept them isolated from the AFL canning and packinghouse workers or even the Teamsters or maritime workers, each of which might have provided an "in" to the field workers. Thus the CP moved cautiously: They organized unemployment councils in the cities and then in the valley towns, tried to involve agriculture workers in their "hunger marches," came to the aid of Filipino victims of race riots, and aided the few spontaneous strikes that broke out.

It would have been wiser if they had abandoned their dual union policy and worked within the AFL canning and packinghouse unions or in the Teamsters and then, from a stable base among these workers, reached out to the field



union would in the late summer and fall repeat the 1933 experience obsessed the rulers of the state. The union had to be struck down, and the time to do it was before the workers returned to the Central Valley. The San Francisco general strike, initiated by left-wing maritime unions, provided the excuse. In July 1934 police raids on communist headquarters in San Francisco set off a state-wide roundup of

workers. Nevertheless the CP's policy worked at least for the short term. A small cadre was trained in the strategy and tactics of agricultural unionism, and steeled in some rough strikes. As urban organizers began to adopt the mores of rural workers, and a few Mexican, Filipino, and Black workers became organizers for the CP, an organization was born—the Cannery and Agriculture Workers Industrial Union.

Thus, by the time Roosevelt was elected and the climate of the NRA established, the CP was in a good position to take advantage of the new favorable climate and unleash a series of massive strikes. The second period lasted 18 months from the Vacaville strike to the Brentwood strike. In this period the communists moved out; massive effort was thrown into the battle and the militancy of the C&AWIU bowled the growers over, at first. The C&AWIU core of organizers followed the crops up and down the state, and the strikes grew in intensity and breadth until the fall campaign in the San Joaquin Valley shook the state's agribusiness to its foundations. The great cotton strike illustrated not only the strengths of the C&AWIU: militancy, courage, reliance on the strength of the workers, and participation by all nationalities. It also illustrated the union's weaknesses: revolutionary sloganeering coupled with lack of clarity about the role of the state and its welfare agencies, lack of a secondary leadership among the rank and file, isolation from the rest of the labor movement, no base among the more stable shed workers.

It was these weaknesses that made the organization unable to stand up to the government crackdown. And the third period had to be a period of retrenchment, a period of working with other groups. Thus the Party's new "united front" policy put forward about this time found ready acceptance.

The C&AWIU first evaluated its weaknesses. The union failed to become a stable organization and three reasons were put forth to explain this failure: First, it was an independent trade union unaffiliated to the rest of California's trade union movement. It received little or no support, and in many cases bitter and active opposition, from the AFL unions. This was due as much to the unwillingness of the AFL groups at that time to help organize the agricultural field workers as it was to the fact that the C&AWIU was an independent union.

Second, the C&AWIU was based too exclusively on the migratory field workers. The union

failed to concentrate sufficiently on the more regularly employed and higher-paid workers who would have supplied a more stable group for permanent organization.

Third, the weakness of the trade union movement in the smaller cities and of small farmer organizations in the rural regions made it difficult to stop terror and vigilantism against the union.

"Important aspects of the situation in California give hope that a real beginning is being made in developing a stable trade union movement on a state-wide scale. Of fundamental importance is the growth of the AFL trade unions generally throughout the state, and the increased unionization in the smaller cities. Accompanying this growth in trade union membership, there has developed a more progressive and intelligent union and central labor union leadership that recognizes the importance and necessity of organizing workers in agriculture."

The last statement was a figment of the CP's imagination. The AFL bureaucracy had not become more "progressive," as the CP was later to find out, or any less anti-communist. But perhaps they were more "intelligent" in that they were willing to use the communist cadre to build their union. Unlike the C&AWIU, the AFL had no trained organizers. So under these illusions CP and C&AWIU organizers went to work for the AFL; and the expansion of that organization in the next few years was due in great part to communist cadre.

Not all of the CP's forces were sent to the AFL. After 1934 many communists in the rural areas returned to the unemployed councils. Various unions and committees of welfare recipients, WPA workers and the like were organized in the valley towns. The former C&AWIU cadre now became a key element of leadership in these. A national federation of unemployed and WPA workers, called the Workers Alliance, was formed. In California the locals of the Workers Alliance drew up agreements with the AFL so that members of the Workers Alliance, when they got seasonal work, would transfer their membership to AFL locals. Thus former C&AWIU organizers were able to dovetail work among the unemployed with their activities with seasonal workers in the AFL.

Nevertheless the disarray the C&AWIU fell into in the fall of 1934, coupled with rising wages, made difficult any organized strikes

that season, except in Salinas (see below). In the spring of 1935, spontaneous strikes occurred in Los Angeles, Butte County, and Santa Barbara. Former C&AWIU organizers were active in all of these, and the example of the great strike wave of the previous year was of great importance. Clearly the climate for organizing among field workers was very favorable.

Late in July some 1,200 apple pickers came together to discuss the prevailing picking rate of 20 cents an hour. They voted to strike for 25 cents. Although the strike began without outside organization, as it proceeded, communists in the local public-works and unemployed councils gave the strike some organization. The situation became hardened and then critical to the growers when 200 shed workers also walked out. Using anti-communism as a scarecrow, the growers mobilized 250 vigilantes and violently suppressed the strike; workers and organizers were beaten and driven out of the county. Unable to maintain picketing in the face of such pressure the workers pulled out of the county, leaving the apples to rot in the orchards. In desperation, the growers raised the wage rates and the government rushed relief clients to Sonoma, but much of the crop was lost.

For the CP the lesson was clear: small localized strikes could not succeed in the face of severe repression. They needed a state-wide organization that had leftist, as well as center, forces in it—an organization that could link up with the AFL and the transportation unions, which were key to California's agribusiness. Only then could a stable organization be built in California agriculture.

While the communist-led unions underestimated the importance of winning the shed workers, if for no other reason so that the fields workers could be organized, the AFL made the opposite error. It was natural for the AFL to concentrate its attention on the shed rather than the field. As a business union, it was interested in organizing only to the extent it won stable dues-paying members. The seasonal field workers did not fill the bill and the AFL wasted little effort on them.

In general, where AFL shed locals were strong, as in Salinas, they were isolated from the field workers. This was a serious weakness and it proved the undoing of that union. In the union's base, the Salinas Valley, the grower-shippers laid elaborate plans to defeat the union in the fall of 1936. Outside that valley the agribusiness barons sent aid to their Salinas

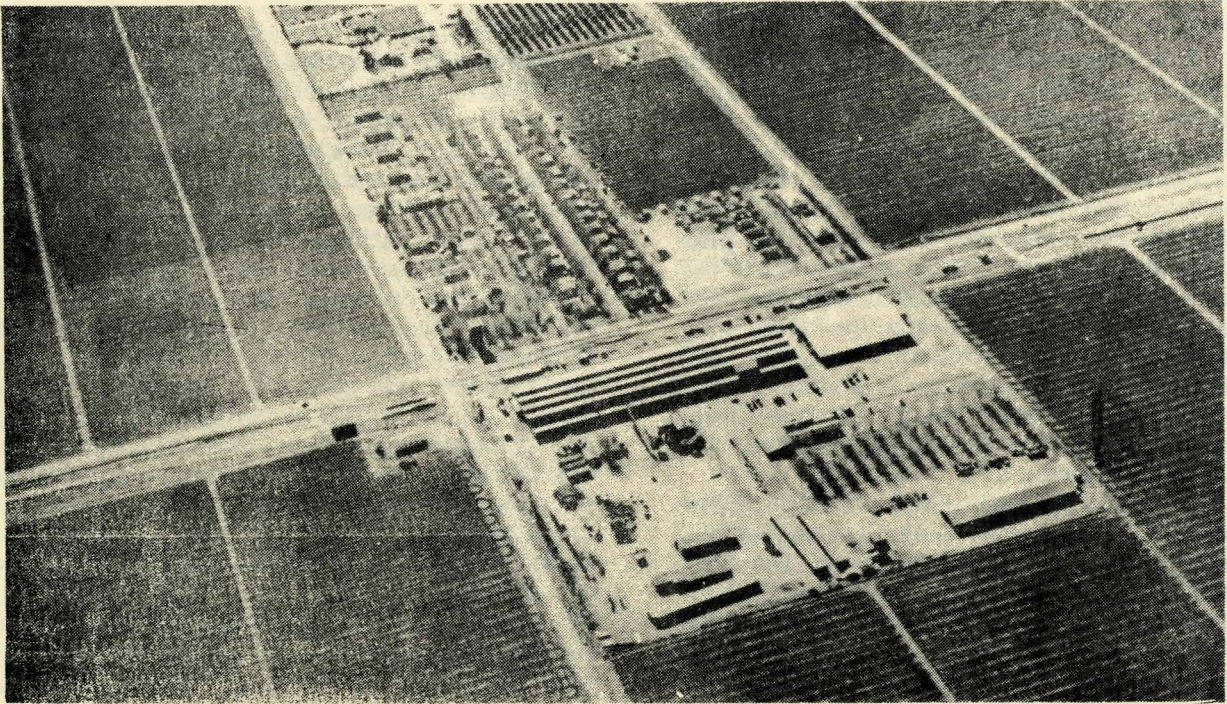
brothers. The San Francisco Industrial Association set up an opposite number in the Salinas Valley and during the strike sent its employees to take charge of espionage. The Associated Farmers sent one of its leaders to take charge of the local Grower-Shipper Vegetable Association. Sheriffs from Imperial, Riverside, San Benito, and other counties arrived to "advise" the local authorities.

All 72 shippers in the Valley signed a statement delegating all authority in dealing with the union to the Association. During the strike this capitalist unity was strictly enforced; one company which tried to make a separate peace found itself unable to obtain ice, paper, boxes, or transportation from the Santa Fe Railroad.

The union made no such elaborate plans. The AFL leadership instead relied on negotiations and offered to work without a contract when the current one expired September 1. The companies, however, wanted a strike and posted notices saying that anyone working after September 4 would be considered as accepting the companies' terms. Thus industry provoked a long bloody strike with the 3,000 shed workers.

From the start the violence mounted, reaching a climax on September 16 when a bloody battle erupted in Salinas. Teamsters throughout the state refused to touch the "hot" lettuce. While the sheds continued to operate it was estimated that the strike was costing the growers at least two million dollars a month. But the companies did not budge on the crucial issues. Finally after 6 weeks the AFL leadership gave up and sent the men back to work without union recognition and on the companies' terms. It was clear that the AFL paved the way for its own defeat by splitting the workers—white from Filipino workers, communist and radical from non-communist.

The communists faced a dilemma: If they worked outside the AFL they found themselves isolated from the urban workers and deprived of any support, especially from the crucial transport workers. If they worked in the AFL they helped to build a union whose corrupt leadership was thoroughly anti-communist and incapable of, or unwilling to, unify field and shed workers. The answer should have been to build bases of rank-and-file workers especially in the transport field. Then the question of an independent field workers' union or work within the AFL would not have been so important since these rank-and-file caucuses, had they been properly led, could have supported either. The answer the



DiGiorgio "farm" (aerial view of section)

CP found, however, was to take advantage of the increasing split between the Teamsters and the Maritime Federation.

The C&AWIU was not the only dual union abandoned by the CP after the adoption of the united front strategy. The small Marine Workers Industrial Union was also given up, and CP members moved into the constituent AFL unions of the Maritime Federation of the Pacific. The leading force in the Federation was the International Longshoremen and Warehousemen's Union (ILWU) whose left wing, with the help of the communists, soon achieved dominance. The ILWU in order to protect its organization on the waterfront began an aggressive "march inland." This threatened the Teamsters' traditional dominance of the West Coast AFL. Soon both unions became involved in an increasingly bitter rivalry to organize inland warehouses in California. Barge-men and warehousemen became organized by the ILWU, and to protect these the ILWU fostered the formation of AFL locals of shed and field agricultural workers in such cities as San Jose, Oakland, Sacramento, and Stockton. Communists and other ex-C&AWIU organizers were very active in the formation of these and were soon in the local leadership. The Teamsters now were moved to organize produce truckers and warehousemen; they too formed AFL agricultural workers locals in such cities as Bakersfield and San Diego. But unlike the ILWU the Teamsters were staunchly anti-communist and "their" agriculture locals were generally right-wing.

Thus, when in mid-1936 conferences were called to form a state-wide AFL agricultural workers union, it was not surprising that a fight for control would be waged between the ILWU and the Teamsters. It was also apparent whose side the anti-communist AFL state leadership would eventually take. A full-scale founding convention was called in February 1937 at San Francisco, which was attended by delegates from 14 AFL locals, 15 CUCOM locals, four FLU locals, and the Southern California Japanese Farm Workers Union. With the radical CUCOM and FLU locals supporting the ILWU-leaning AFL locals, the ILWU gained the upper hand. George Woolf, an ILWU organizer, was elected president. In March, the AFL state executive council overruled the convention and appointed their own man president. The ILWU-leaning Stockton Central Labor Council and some other AFL bodies denounced this move and called a second convention in April. This convention with delegates from 18 locals representing 15,000 farm workers, reaffirmed the decisions of the February convention and established the California Federation of Agricultural and Cannery Unions. Communists and other left-wingers predominated in its executive board.

In the months preceding the convention an aggressive organizing campaign had taken place in the canneries in San Francisco, Oakland and Richmond. In March the left-wing Stockton Central Labor Council authorized the local there to organize the city's canneries. This led to the

strike of April 15 which closed down the four canneries in the city. The Associated Farmers determined to break the strike, and this time with the help of the Teamsters. Some 1,200 special deputies were recruited from rural San Joaquin and Stanislaus Counties with the goal of reopening the canneries by force. The plan was to escort two truckloads of produce to the Stockton Food Products Plant. How far the rivalry between the right-wing and left-wing unions had gone was indicated when the AFL official leadership declared the strike illegal, and the Teamsters went so far as to agree to sanction beforehand the Associated Farmers' strikebreaking trucks.

On April 23 a spinach truck pulled up at the plant; 3,000 cannery workers, longshoremen, and sympathizers attacked the truck. Then according to plan the deputies and California Highway Patrolmen attacked the strikers. A battle ensued with one side using tear gas grenades, the other rocks and clubs. Finally the deputies opened fire leaving several workers wounded. More than 60 were injured in the fray, but the plant was "opened." At this point the AFL leaders stepped in: They revoked the charter of the striking local and ordered the men back to work. They then negotiated a settlement with the canneries, with themselves as bargaining agent. Through these series of maneuvers, which were nothing less than scabbing, the right-wing forces in the AFL gained control of the Stockton canneries.

With labor unity at such a low ebb, the Maritime Federation wasted no time in quitting the AFL and joining the newly formed Committee for Industrial Organization (CIO). The ILWU and CUCOM-affiliated agricultural workers locals subsequently also seceded and joined the CIO's UCAPAWA. Other left-wing locals, however, which attempted to stay in the AFL, were purged by the AFL leadership. In Oakland, Sacramento, and San Jose the AFL took control of the hesitating locals by purging the left-wing leadership. The apparent ease with which the AFL gained control of the majority of cannery locals from the communists and their allies showed real weaknesses in the latter's basebuilding approach toward rank-and-file workers. No rank-and-file formations were evident in those locals that were prepared to back the radical leaders and take the locals into the CIO.

In order to grab the field from the new CIO union the AFL and Teamsters mounted an

aggressive unionization drive that by the end of 1937 organized almost 60,000 cannery workers in 21 locals. A new State Council of Agricultural and Cannery Workers, with a Teamster as president, was established in September. The employers offered no resistance to the AFL drive, fully realizing that the alternative was the CIO and the communists. The CIO rightly called these "company unions" but their past organizing approach was responsible for AFL success. They had organized in such a way that the workers saw no crucial difference between the AFL and the CIO. So naturally they took the line of least resistance, the AFL. At bottom it was the responsibility of the CP, which still had not given up the elitist style of organizing that characterized the C&AWIU. As communists moved up into leadership positions they lost their ties with the rank and file, and their unions were taken from them. Thus UCAPAWA started at a disadvantage, which it was never able to overcome. In 1937 UCAPAWA got bargaining rights over a few fish canneries and one walnut processing plant; virtually all other organized canneries were under the AFL.

The CIO's first strike of field workers in 1937, apricot pickers in Yolo County, was a failure and this set the pattern for the next two years. Although in May 1938 UCAPAWA won a pea pickers strike that was mainly against labor contractors, not growers, they lost an October Kern County cotton strike, the first since 1933. Nationally UCAPAWA grew in 1938; in California it declined in membership and influence. By December 1938 there were only 15 locals in the state. Three of them, representing cannery workers in San Jose, San Francisco, and Oakland, were paper organizations since all the canneries were under AFL control. UCAPAWA locals in Marysville, Stockton, and Sacramento were likewise inactive. There were other small field-worker locals—Modesto, Brentwood, Camarello, Chowchilla, and Lodi—that were developed from small spontaneous strikes in 1938. There were only four stable locals of the union that provided it with some kind of base: Local 3 of Los Angeles Dairy Workers, Local 5 of Alaska Cannery Workers in San Francisco, Local 18 of the shed workers in Salinas, and Local 9 of the citrus workers in Orange County.

At the same time the AFL had grown. It had 16 active cannery locals with 50,000-60,000 members, six locals of citrus workers in the San Gabriel Valley, five locals of shed workers in Oakland, Salinas, San Francisco, San Jose

and Santa Maria, three dairy locals, and three winery locals. Thus while the AFL made no attempt to organize the fieldworkers, except in the more stable citrus industry, the CIO was deprived of a base among the canning and packing workers, without which attempts to organize the fieldworkers were doomed.

Most of the UCAPAWA leadership were CP members, veterans of the C&AWIU drive of 1933-34. But the rebel militancy that characterized the C&AWIU had mellowed. By 1938 the CP nationally was supporting the New Deal; in the UCAPAWA this was translated into an absolute dependence on the NLRB or other government mediators. The result was less romanticism it is true, but the union acted to deaden class struggle. The UCAPAWA desired to become a business union like the AFL not an organization of class struggle like the old C&AWIU. The communist union leaders hankered to become union bureaucrats like their AFL counterparts, not revolutionary agitators as they once were.

Unfortunately for them, the label "communist" that they carried with them, although in reality it had lost its meaning, brought back fearful memories of 1933 to the growers. The growers preferred the AFL and gave the latter encouragement. Thus the CIO, outmaneuvered from the start, lacked the rebel militancy that might have turned the tables on the AFL. In actuality there was no real attempt. Patient basebuilding among the more stable cannery and shed workers linked with uncompromising mili-

tancy to organize the fieldworkers, full dependence on the power of the workers, not on the government, and unity with urban workers were the keys to winning in California's valleys. The old C&AWIU had some of the requisites, especially the militancy, but was lacking in the others. After its demise, its successors made some short-term progress in organizing the more stable agricultural workers, but militancy declined and dependence on the state increased. This was precisely the fault of the communists, who led many of the old AFL and CUCOM locals and later the CIO. Thus without real drive the CIO by default let the growers choose the union—they went for the AFL.

After 1938 UCAPAWA conducted two more major strikes. The DiGiorgio property in Yuba County was struck, but the union lost. In the Madera County cotton strike the UCAPAWA gained a compromise wage gain, through the intervention of the liberal governor. But in both cases there were hardly any lasting organizational gains. In 1940 the UCAPAWA watched its organization virtually disappear. In early 1941 the communists threw in the towel, and the CIO turned over its only functioning local, citrus workers in Southern California, to the AFL and abandoned the fields and sheds of California.

Since that time, although some of the shed workers maintained some kind of phony union membership, the field workers, once again after the war predominantly Mexican, remained unorganized. Not until the recent Delano movement was the tremendous militancy and class solidarity of California's field laborers relived.

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