

GILROY, CALIFORNIA:
A STUDY OF UNION ORGANIZATION
IN A RURAL COMMUNITY

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
Part I	
Chapter I	
The Community: Its People and Their Work.....1	
The population and its composition 2	
The principal work areas in Gilroy 7	
Chapter II	
The Local Economic and Labor Situation Prior to 1938 13	13
The unchanged importance of agriculture and trading to the community 13	13
Labor unionism in agriculture in the Gilroy Area prior to 1938 14	14
Labor unionism in the building trades 24	24
The Union campaign in the food processing plants 27	27
Part II	
Chapter III	
The Course of Union Activity in Gilroy's Agri- cultural and Food Processing Industries Since 1938 33	33
Unionism among Gilroy's farm laborers since 1938 34	34
Strengthened union position in the food processing plants after 1939 40	40
Chapter IV	
The Nature and Extent of Unionization in Gilroy's Industrial Plants 48	48
The Be-Ge Manufacturing Company 49	49
The Robinson Fan Corporation 56	56

Chapter V

The Development and Pattern of Unionization Since 1938 in Certain of Gilroy's Retail Trades and Services	61
The retail grocery stores	62
The bars and restaurants	71
The experience of Gilroy's garages and commercial shop operators	78

Chapter VI

The Character of Organized Employer Resistance to Unionism in the Gilroy Area	88
Local farm employers groups	89
Local retail employers associations	95
Participation by other local groups	101
Local influence of the Associated Farmers ..	103

Part III

Chapter VI

Impacts and Implications from Unionization in the Gilroy Area	110
The pattern of public resistance to union organization	110
Factors which will shape future develop- ments in the Gilroy area	121
A forecast of further developments	127

General Bibliography	132
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PREFACE

Much has been written of the history and development of the labor movement in the United States, and particularly so within the past twenty years. Interest in the progressive rise in the number of workers organized by trade or by industry has materially increased in the minds of thinking persons situated in all areas of our economy. However, with the recent spectacular growth of the Congress of Industrial Organization and with the extension, by the American Federation of Labor, into the fields of industrial organization the attention of students and laymen alike has been attracted primarily to the labor situation in giant industries of the metropolitan centers. The techniques and patterns of union organization in the steel, automobile, textile, and maritime industries have been studied at length, for here some of labor's greatest strides have been made.

To the present, on the other hand, relatively little has been written dealing with the progress of labor organizations in extending their influence into the smaller community. The principal reasons for this appear to be that no extensive unionization of outlying areas or small towns has, until recently, been undertaken on a scale worthy of note. Offering less lucrative and normally non-strategic goals, the small community has provided additional problems to the already difficult job of the union organizer. Excepting the "company-

owned" community typical of the extractive industries, the small town, and particularly the rural community, has been by-passed in the process of organization. Remoteness from the influences of industrial centers, the absence of large or even moderate sized industrial plants, the interflow of large number of migrant workers, and the characteristic difficulty of indoctrinating farm workers by conventional methods has made this by-passing advisable, until the metropolitan areas were adequately organized.

Experience in the small town of Gilroy, California indicates that this basic preparatory period has passed. Although a rural and predominantly agricultural community, Gilroy, in the words of some of its inhabitants, is now having "more union trouble". Having long thought themselves secure in their freedom from extensive unionism, local people have watched larger communities to their north and to their south become fully unionized. Within the past several years, however, they have seen their own local food processing plants organized, and quite recently the hotels and some of the retail outlets, notably the restaurants and the grocery stores. To the present, none-the-less, the impact of this unionization has not been felt by the community as a whole. It has been only very recently that the implications of total union organization upon this small town and upon its agriculturalists have been appreciated by them. Continuing efforts are being made to organize their automobile repair shops, their welding

and farm machinery repair shops, and there are some indications that efforts have been again strengthened to organize their farm laborers. Insofar as these attempts have affected the farmers they have caused Gilroy's "union trouble".

Inexperienced in relations with labor organizations, the townsfolk are suspicious and concerned. They frankly do not know whether or not their fears are justified, but the great dependence of the community as a whole upon the continuing unhampered agricultural pursuits in the locality makes any potential threat to the growers a threat to the community as a whole.

This situation then offers an interesting laboratory in which to examine the history, the parties, and the developments that have become evident in this general organizational process, perhaps as they shall prove to be an evidence of future developments in other rural communities. Of particular interest also to the student of industrial relations and sociology are the impacts of this unionizing process upon the townspeople. The contrasting responses to this union activity by the workers and by their employers, as well as the attitudes of the community as a whole, have revealed a pattern of behavior that warrants investigation.

As might be supposed, the specific field chosen for this study is practically undocumented. Background materials in the fields of "Techniques of Union Organization", "Labor Unionism in Agriculture", and sociological studies relative to the rural community are of course available and have been

consulted. As necessitated by the paucity of available published sources, a series of interviews has been conducted. An effort was made to obtain contacts with representative spokesmen from both the town's employers and the unions, with a particular endeavor to sample all strata of both the worker and employer groups. In addition, several neutral or public sources were investigated. Wherever possible the interview was controlled by means of a check-list in order to insure the directness as well as the direction of the discussion. More often than not this was followed by a free exchange in which the interviewee was encouraged to express matters of his own opinion.

The possible sources of interview have not been exhausted, nor could they be. It is felt, however, that a sufficient breadth of coverage has been secured to reveal adequately the various patterns and developments as they have unfolded. Some insight has been gained into the process of union organization in a rural community.

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CHAPTER I

THE COMMUNITY: ITS PEOPLE AND THEIR WORK

Geographical data relative to the community.

Named after John Gilroy, a prominent early settler, the town of Gilroy, California was incorporated on March 12, 1870 and has consistently remained an active trading center serving the rich agricultural district of southern Santa Clara County. The town is located in the Santa Clara Valley which extends southward from the lower San Francisco Bay approximately 60 miles with an average width of 20 miles. The community is located astride U.S. Highway No. 101, 80 miles south of San Francisco and midway between the cities of San Jose and Salinas, California.

Because of its fortunate geographical location, Gilroy affords many particular advantages to its farmers and ranchers. The town is situated in an especially fertile valley and is sheltered both to its east and west by low mountain ranges. Though the Pacific Ocean is but twenty-five miles to its west, Gilroy is protected from heavy winter coastal storms, and because of its protected location the town is virtually immune from destructive frosts and freezes.

The valley enjoys a long growing season for the mean temperature remains above 60° from May through October. The summers are particularly warm thus permitting the cultivation of high-margin row and orchard crops which flourish when

climatic conditions are conducive to fast growth. Though the average annual rainfall is twenty inches, summer rains are entirely absent. Irrigation is required to supplement the rainfall and nearly every ranch has developed wells for the maintenance of its own water supply.

Gilroy has the further advantage in its location of being served by extensive means of communications. The availability of Highway No. 101 insures to growers an easy means of trucking their produce to the adjacent metropolitan markets. Long-route transportation is facilitated by the fact that the Southern Pacific Railroad Company's Coast Route Line also runs through the town. Adequate rail sidings are available to growers and processors, as well as the community's other industries. Two bus lines serve the area and numerous truck lines operate in and through the town.

It is evident then that Gilroy enjoys many of the essentials that tend to make for agricultural stability. The excellence of its transportation and communication facilities has tended to enhance its position as a trading center, thus giving the community economic predominance over its neighboring towns in the lower Santa Clara Valley.

The population and its composition.

The most recent estimate, made in 1946, showed Gilroy to have 5,214 inhabitants. More important, however, is the fact that the town serves a trading area with an unofficial

population of 15,000. The nearby cities of Salinas and San Jose have city populations of 13,600 and 85,000 respectively, and area populations of 57,400 and 183,000 respectively. The proximity of these metropolitan centers has had a sustaining effect upon Gilroy as a food producing locality.

Though the town does not have a particularly well diversified economy, it does support several business enterprises totally absent from the typical rural scene. However, as regards occupational areas, the great bulk of the community's workers are found in agricultural pursuits. The State Department of Employment's local office records approximately 8,000 persons, including working farmers, full time farm workers, and itinerants employed in agriculture during 1948, in the Gilroy district.^{1.}

Also of great importance to the community as a source of employment are its food processing plants. Providing stable, full time employment to but a few maintenance, warehouse, and office employees from November to May, these plants, during the harvesting and picking seasons, employ approximately 1,100 workers^{2.}, many of whom are local residents. It should be noted also that many of the workers in the food processing industry are itinerants who flock to the picking and processing areas during the summer months.

1. Basic Economic Data for Local Offices, California Department of Employment (Sacramento, 1948), "Gilroy".

2. Loc. cit.

The great vulnerability of the community's workers to the extreme seasonality of farm and food processing employment is to some degree evidenced by the following table:

WEEKLY AVERAGE NUMBER OF UNEMPLOYMENT INSURANCE PAYMENTS
Gilroy, California, 1945-1947

<u>Month</u>	<u>1945</u>	<u>1946</u>	<u>1947</u>
Jan.		267	331
Feb.	15	467	441
Mar.	45	451	484
Apr.	53	342	445
May	84	288	390
June	286	374	357
July	53	153	145
Aug.	36	50	97
Sept.	3	16	37
Oct.	-	2	48
Nov.	32	67	139
Dec.	101	234	224

Source: State Department of Employment.^{1.}

There are several other work areas in the community which are removed from these seasonal influences. Approximately 250 inhabitants of Gilroy find year-round employment in two new and expanding farm machinery manufacturing plants in town.^{2.} The building and construction trades provide more or less permanent employment for 200 workers, and the community's well-diversified retail trades insure stable employment to an additional 450 inhabitants.^{3.}

1.

Industrial Survey Associates, Santa Clara County Economic Survey Report, (San Francisco, 1948), Appendix, Table 2.

2. Basic Economic Data for Local Offices, California Department of Employment (Sacramento, 1948), "Gilroy".

3. Loc. cit.

As is typical of most of the agricultural districts in California, Gilroy's population is composed of large segments from several racial groups. Mexicans, Filipinos, Orientals, and to some degree, Negroes, have taken an important place in the community's agriculture as the groups best adapted to withstanding the physical discomforts of the intense summer heat while performing the strenuous, though tedious, row-crop stoop labor. Many of these workers are from among the vast, unorganized army of migrant farm laborers which, during the planting, growing, and harvesting seasons move and remove from district to district and crop to crop obtaining agricultural employment throughout the State. A few have become fairly permanent on the Gilroy scene finding year-round employment as ranch laborers.

No sharp lines may be drawn as to the specific crops that attract each racial group. But experience shows that the Mexicans are considered the most stable and dependable for the greatest variety of work. Orchard picking, row-crops and tomatoes, as well as work in the food processing plants, are all handled well by the Mexicans. In many instances full time Mexican ranch laborers are used as truck and tractor drivers during the fall and spring soil preparation. During the processing seasons, when the canneries swell to their peak employment, many Mexican women and girls find work there on the canning lines.

The Filipinos are found in greater concentration, as a racial group, in the lettuce and asparagus districts of the Salinas Valley and the San Joaquin Delta. Significant numbers of them do find employment, though, in the Gilroy region, especially as unskilled help in row-crop cultivation and harvest.

The Orientals, particularly the Japanese, are entering the Santa Clara Valley in increasing numbers as laborers and as contract or "shares" farmers. Much of the garlic, onions, and peas, as well as nearly all of the strawberries raised locally, are planted, tended and harvested by Orientals. There is a growing trend for this racial group to form their own cooperatives as typified by the Hirasaki Farms which are now one of the largest growers and shippers of lettuce and peas in the Gilroy area.

The Negro is not a substantial figure on the Gilroy scene. Those Negroes that have found employment locally have done so as semi-skilled or unskilled laborers in the building or construction trades; they have made practically no entrance into agricultural work.

The town's retail establishments and manufacturing enterprises are nearly all owned and operated by native whites. A few retail outlets are run by Mexicans or Orientals, but in every instance these stores cater to their own racial groups and are located in the Mexican or Filipino sections of the town.

The principal work areas in Gilroy.

A more intense examination of Gilroy's occupational areas substantiates the observation that agriculture is the community's greatest source of wealth and employment. It is estimated that ninety percent of Gilroy's wage earners are engaged either in the growing, processing or handling of some agricultural product. An indication of the diversity and magnitude of the area's productivity may be seen from the following figures as compiled by the Gilroy Chamber of Commerce, which show the average annual output per crop, for the years 1946-48 to be:

	<u>Acreage</u>	<u>Output</u>	<u>Valued at</u>
<u>Fruit:</u>			
Prunes (dried)	16,000	24,000 tons	\$6,000,000
Apricots	900	4,000 tons	400,000
Pears, peaches	260	2,600 tons	230,000
Tomatoes	2,000	14,000 tons	406,000
Strawberries	50	149,165 crates	373,000
Walnuts	800	352 tons	250,000
Cherries	30	185 tons	57,300
Grapes (wine)	5,000	13,500 tons	1,500,000
Apples	40	250 tons	18,750
Almonds	75	55 tons	27,500
<u>Vegetables:</u>			
Cucumbers	600	7,200 tons	410,000
Garlic	726	7,600 tons	690,000
Sugar Beets	1,900	34,600 tons	491,000
Peas	900	135,000 hampers	356,000
Spinach	600	2,400 tons	96,000
Lettuce, onions	265		53,200
Beans	205		30,600
<u>Grains:</u>			
Alfalfa Hay	650	3,250 tons	131,250
Grain, Vol. Hay	1,800	3,100 tons	84,000
Barley, wheat	1,600	34,000 sacks	108,000

In addition to this, Gilroy, in recent years, has had an egg production from its poultry industry averaged at over one-half million dollars annually. The area's dairy herds have yielded a better fat production valued at nearly \$600,000 annually, and its beef cattle industry is estimated to be worth approximately three and one-third millions of dollars.

It is apparent from this that Gilroy's farming industry is a "going concern". Providing direct employment for over 8,000 workers in the past year, it is also a source of derivative employment to many others. From an economic point of view, this agricultural produce constitutes the life-blood that sustains the whole community.

There are two prospering manufacturing plants located in the town, the largest of which is the Be-Ge Manufacturing Company. This firm was organized in 1936 for the manufacture of land leveling equipment, the founders having felt that the then existing machinery could be materially improved upon. The perfection and acceptance of a hydraulic gear-pump, adaptable to all types of land leveling equipment and incorporated into the Company's own products, has led to the continuing success and expansion of the firm. This Company now operates a plant providing over 250,000 sq. feet of floor space and employs upward of 200 men in various skilled and unskilled categories of the metal trades. Encouraged by the recent great expansion in irrigated farming, and the extensive use of land leveling equipment therein, the Be-Ge Manufacturing Company has expanded

its line and now produces scrapers to 13 cubic yards capacity, drag-type land levelers to 18 ft. widths, and scraper planes to 60 ft. in length. The firm markets its products throughout the United States, in Canada and Mexico, and is undertaking an export trade.

Gilroy's other principal manufacturing enterprise is Robinson Fan Corporation. This firm also recently established, has directed its efforts toward the perfection and production of fans, blowers, and air conveyors as these are adapted to farm uses. The Company's line of products include agricultural dusters, spray booths and spray rigs, and also dehydrators and hay dryers. The firm employs 15-20 full time skilled and semi-skilled production workers, particularly as machinists and sheet metal specialists.

In a community so closely tied to the fluctuations of seasonal employment, this manufacturing industry, more or less divorced from such influences, provides a stabilizing effect upon the town's economy. While these plants in no way absorb field and cannery workers unemployed in their "off-season", they have attracted a significant body of stable and skilled workers that are not normally found in a rural community.

There are two large food processing plants in the district, one of which is a cannery and the other a dehydrating plant. The Filice and Perrelli Canning Company, which has its main offices in Richmond, California, owns and operates

a cannery located directly in the town of Gilroy. During the canning season, which extends from July to October, the following are processed: spinach, apricots, plums, peaches, fruit cocktail and tomatoes, all primarily on a brand-pack basis. The cannery has nine complete canning and cooking lines, provides employment for 750 workers during the summer peak, and has an annual payroll of between a third and a half million dollars. Maintenance and warehouse personnel numbering 25-30 men are retained during the "off-season" to handle the pack and to convert, repair and maintain the cannery's equipment.

C.B. Gentry, Inc., located on the outskirts of Gilroy, is a large vegetable dehydrating plant. The firm's basic products are onion and garlic flakes which are sold extensively for seasonings in cooking. Gilroy has long been known as the onion and garlic center of the United States and a sizeable portion of these crops is processed by the Gentry Corporation. This firm employs approximately 125 persons during the peak processing period in the late summer and maintains a maintenance and warehousing crew of 25 throughout the year. Like the Filice and Perrelli cannery, the Gentry Company contracts out all of its trucking and hauling to locally established truck companies.

The community's building and construction tradesmen are experiencing steady work conditions as a result of local affects of the post-war building boom. The very profitable

operations of the agriculturalists during the past ten years have encouraged many of them to seek new homes or substantial farm building improvements. In 1947, 76 permits for new residential units were issued by the local Building Department, the valuation of such permits being listed at slightly over \$400,000, a substantial increase of over the 1946 valuation of new permits of \$117,000. Plant expansions in the community's manufacturing industries are creating more job opportunities in the building trades than there are workmen available at the present time. It should be pointed out, however, that the current building boom is no more normal to Gilroy than to the nation at large.

The town's retail trades in every respect are those to be found in any average small community, with the possible exception that the town does support a large number of farm machinery repair and welding shops. These establishments, to the present date, have provided their services for farmers throughout the district on short notice, regardless of the time of day. The extensive use of farm machinery throughout the Santa Clara Valley has made their operation successful despite their highly competitive relations.

Comparatively new to Gilroy are the outlets for several chain grocery, novelty, and general supply stores. In recent years they have brought new jobs and new services to the community, and are thus broadening the base of a well-diversified retail groups that promises to be one of the fastest growing segments in the local economy.

It may thus be seen that, as regards its location, its people, and their work, Gilroy is, in many respects, an average small town in a California rural community. It possesses some factors in its geography and economy that are particularly beneficial to its inhabitants. It has a better than average industrial development for a town of its size and location, despite its great dependence upon the continuing success of its agriculturalists. But essentially the atmosphere is one of an "averageness" or normality in which the inhabitants have felt a certain security. It is into this setting that the unions are moving in their local organizational efforts.

CHAPTER II

THE LOCAL ECONOMIC AND LABOR SITUATION PRIOR TO 1938

Recent efforts of organized labor to extend its influence into Gilroy Area are not a new experience to the people of the lower Santa Clara Valley. To the contrary, organizing drives, strikes and negotiations of varying degrees of intensity and success have been known to the townsfolk since shortly after 1903, when the first local union charter was granted to certain workers in the building trades.

In one instance the local reaction to trade unionism has been characteristically both violent and bitter, the rejection being complete. This has been the experience of unions and other groups which have attempted the organization of farmers and of the farm workers. In certain other instances, the local acceptance of unionism has typically been more cordial than hostile, and the continuing relationship, in general, has been good. This has been the experience in the building trades. Somewhere in between these extremes has been the degree of acceptance of trade unionism, in fact and in theory, in the Gilroy food processing plants, the only other area of significant union activity prior to 1938.

The unchanged importance of agriculture and trading to the community:

As has been indicated, agricultural pursuits are the very heart of Gilroy's economy. For the most part, the activities

of those persons not actually in agriculture are devoted to serving or supplying those other persons who are. To varying degrees, but in every case to some degree, the townspeople are close to, and in sympathy with, the area's growers. Any threat to the security and well-being of these agriculturists is, in fact, felt to be a threat to the remainder of the community, from the small retail store owner to the manufacturing plant operator. It is an example of the "closeness" of a small town intensified by any external disruption.

Such has been the attitude of the local people in their rejection of the repeated efforts of various unions to organize the farm laborers. The farmers themselves have felt secure in taking strong action, individually and collectively, against the organizers because of this unqualified support of the townsmen. This solidarity has been one of the significant factors which has contributed toward the nullification of every effort to organize the Valley's agricultural workers.

Labor unionism in agriculture in the Gilroy Area prior to 1938:

Agriculture in California is not typified by the family farm nor by that type of farming which maintains a small number of farm hands on a full-time basis. Rather it is the practice to import the great bulk of the workers on a temporary basis at planting and harvesting time. The consequence has been that the farmer seldom works side by side with his workers and that contrasts rather than similarities of social background have become

apparent, particularly when farm labor is brought into the area in large numbers.¹ There is seldom any more of an identity of interest between the average Gilroy farmer and his transient harvest hands, be the crop prunes, garlic, tomatoes, or barley, than between a metropolitan water front employer and his workers. It is not, therefore, remarkable that the farm workers to some degree have felt the same influences and pressures that have interested their urban counterpart in the advantages of trade unionism. It is their feeling of insecurity that has made the farm workers a goal of past union organization.

The farm operator, usually uninformed about unions and their activities except, perhaps as they are described in the urban press or by the large and influential farmer organizations, has been apprehensive of every effort made to organize his workers. His reasons have been plain. With the increased standardization of marketing techniques, the farmer is finding farm wages to be very nearly the only variable cost of production within his control that may be adjusted to conform to the harvest prices quoted by the produce marketers and processors who take his crops. Naturally, perhaps, the grower has resisted the unions as an influence that may tend to diminish his control over such a vital cost of operations². Further, as is commonly known, the harvesting

1. Jamieson, Stuart, Labor Unionism in American Agriculture, U.S. Department of Labor Bulletin No. 836 (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1945), pp. 5-8.

2. U.S. Congress, Senate, Report of the Subcommittee of the Committee on Education and Labor, 77th Cong, part 47, pp.17216-20

period is one of crisis to the farmer. An entire year's productive investment of time, effort and money may be lost should insufficient pickers be available for any reason during the short period after the produce has matured and before it deteriorates. This is particularly true of the types of high margin row and orchard crops that are so plentiful in the Santa Clara Valley. The experience of the farm operators has been that the uncontrolled labor market, augmented so materially by the masses of transients, has performed sufficiently well to meet his needs. This was particularly true during the depression years and only slightly less true during the recovery years.

Under government supervision, during the period 1942-46, Mexican Nationals were imported in sufficient quantities to meet his labor needs, and there appears to be no significant shortage of farm laborers in the foreseeable future. The result, then, simply is that the Gilroy agriculturalists fear any influence that may attempt to control in any way the availability of their normally adequate labor supply. They fear financial ruin that could result from any union action, punitive or otherwise, in withholding farm laborers during the crisis period.

The lines have normally been drawn between the farmer, on the one hand, strongly motivated by his own convictions against the principle of organized farm labor and supported by unified local opinion, and, on the other hand, the labor organizer who has endeavored to show to the great mass of migrant workers the advantages of collective action. As will be seen, the issue

has been decided, more often than not, in favor of the farm operator, but then only because of the influence of outside pressures.

The first evidences of a strong and coordinated attempt to organize the agricultural workers in the Santa Clara Valley came in 1931, and were local manifestations of the current State-wide unrest among field and packing shed laborers.¹ In large measure, this labor strife, in the form of strikes, and in some instances of race riots, may be largely attributed to the great impact of the depression upon California's migrant labor force. Price declines and urban unemployment, combined with Government-sponsored crop reduction and acreage control, all were reflected in wage reductions in the agricultural labor market and increased job competition verging on mass unemployment. Worker's protests, particularly against wage cuts, at first strongly made, declined with the increased pressure of a deepening depression. Unemployment in the urban communities of San Jose, Oakland and San Francisco, inadequately met by existing measures for organized relief, threw many marginal workers into the agricultural labor market. The resulting labor surplus led to cut-throat job competition and repeated wage reductions which caused the hourly wage levels to fall from an approximate average, in the Gilroy Area, of 40 cents in 1929 to 18 cents in 1933 with tomato and prune pickers often receiving less than 15 cents per hour.

¹. General material for this section of the report was obtained through interviews held with 12 long-time farm residents of the Gilroy area. These interviews were conducted between November, 1948 and April, 1949.

Several local disturbances, mainly in the form of protest strikes, conducted as reactions to wage reductions dotted the Santa Clara Valley during the growing and harvesting season of 1930 and 1931. The short-lived American Labor Union, a loose association of agricultural and cannery workers in the Santa Clara district, sponsored a number of these ineffectual strikes. In July, 1931, the A.L.U. undertook a strike of cannery workers in San Jose, however, which had repercussions throughout the Valley. The significant features of this strike were its size, for over 1500 cannery workers throughout Santa Clara County walked out¹. and the fact that for the first time the Communist directed Trade Union Unity League, through the instrumentality of its Agricultural Workers Industrial Union, participated in, and eventually took control of, a Santa Clara Valley strike. The strike saw numerous mass meetings, parades, and rioting which led to forceful police action, particularly in San Jose, and the arrest of numerous strikers. As a consequence the strike failed and none of the union demands were met by the employers. Processors and growers throughout the Valley applauded the defeat of the strike generally, but particularly the marked failure of its radical leadership. During this Santa Clara County cannery workers' strike the A.W.I.U. changed its title to the Cannery and Agricultural Workers Industrial Union, or the C. & A.W. I. U. After its defeat in this strike the union led no further important disputes for

1. San Jose Mercury-Herald, July 31, 1931; also Gilroy Dispatch, July 31, 1931.

nearly a year and during the winter of 1931-32 the Trade Union Unity League directed its organizational efforts toward the unemployed in the metropolitan areas.

The Spring of 1933 saw a number of general or crop-wide walkouts. The C. & A.I.W.U. shifted its attention again to the possibility of mobilizing California farm labor into a militant union organization through the media of well-planned strikes, strategically located and timed.^{1.} The result was a wave of crop strikes that affected the entire Santa Clara Valley Area as well as nearly every agricultural district in the State.

A general strike of pea pickers caused a two-week work stoppage in this crop in the Gilroy area, as well as throughout much of Santa Clara and Alameda Counties from April 14-30, 1933. The strike of over 2000 Mexican, Filipino, Negro and white pickers prepared and led by the C. & A.I.W.U., was uncommonly well-directed. Representatives had been delegated from each migrant labor camp to consolidate the union proposals and later to coordinate the strike. However, local growers again were able to muster strong local support, particularly in the nature of police arrests, and deportations as vagrants of those person in the labor camps who refused employment.^{2.} In defeating the strike, growers and townsfolk alike, as well as the authorities, made much of the "Communist

^{1.} Porter M. Chaffee, A History of the Cannery and Agricultural Workers Industrial Union, (Unpublished manuscript), W.P.A. Writer's Project, Oakland, California, 1938.

^{2.} Oakland Tribune (California), April 14, 1933.

leadership" and "red agitators", as public opinion aligned solidly against the strikers. Union demands of 30 cents per hamper piece rates or 35 cents per hour for a time rate, together with union recognition, were denied and on April 30, the C. & A.W.I.U. called off the strike with only insignificant and local gains made.

A strike of over 500 cherry pickers in the vicinity of the small community of Mountain View,¹ Santa Clara County, from June 14-24, 1933, had only indirect effects upon the Gilroy cherry growers. The strike was again directed by the C. & A. U. I. U. and at its peak all picking on the twelve largest cherry ranches in the County, located in the northern end of the Valley, ceased. Violence and police retaliation followed the strike-call. Due to the extreme degree of perishability of the crop, the union made certain significant compromise gains. The initial demand had been for 30 cents per hour, an 8-hour day, and union recognition. A majority of the larger orchards did grant the wage demand in an effort to save the crop from destruction. Growers in the Gilroy area, having a relatively small acreage², were not struck nor did they grant the wage increase, continuing to pay the previous rate of 20 cents per hour. Sufficient pickers remained available in the Gilroy Area despite a differential of 10 cents per hour paid in orchards less than 30 miles away.

1. San Jose Mercury-Herald, June 17-19, 1933

2. Total acreage in the Gilroy district in 1933 devoted to cherry orchards was approximately 45 acres.

There appears to be no indication that the Santa Clara County pear strike, conducted successfully in August, 1933 by the C. & A. W. I. U., principally in the Agnew and Milpitas districts, had any local effect upon the Gilroy area growers. This strike, however, did see the first Government recognition of the Cannery and Agricultural Workers Industrial Union through the arbitration efforts of a representative of the California Bureau of Labor Statistics¹. No attempt was made to organize the pear pickers in the Lower Santa Clara Valley, the acreage devoted to pears being relatively small.

The years 1934-35 were relatively quiet as regards labor disputes in the Santa Clara Valley, and particularly in the Gilroy district. Several factors contributed to this. As the country struggled up out of the depression, urban employment opportunities attracted many persons who had entered the agricultural labor market in 1931 back to the cities thus reducing the over-supply of farm labor. Further, progressive farmer spokesmen had recognized that the continued payment of hourly wages below 15 cents was a contributing cause of the unrest; by the summer of 1934 wages generally had increased to 20-25 cents in the Gilroy vicinity with a crisis settlement in the strawberry fields north of Gilroy bringing workers, predominantly orientals, a wage of 30 cents per hour.² More

1. Jamieson, Op. cit., p. 93

2. Gilroy Dispatch, July 23, 1934.

numerous job opportunities, increased wage rates, and improved Government relief facilities resulted in a lowered interest by the workers towards continued strife.

Despite continued efforts by the leaders in 1934 to retain its membership, the C. & A.W.I.U. was unable to maintain locally the organizational impetus it had achieved in 1933. Two types of opposition were encountered. The Associated Farmers of California, Inc., as described below^{1.}, had come into being in 1934 in the consolidation of several local grower associations. Well-financed and aggressively led, the Associated Farmers took up the fight against continued union activity in agriculture and met the C.&A.W.I.U. "head on". Aided by the wave of anti-radical union leadership that swept over Northern California as a result of the 1934 maritime strike in San Francisco, the Associated Farmers were able to bring about the arrest and conviction of several of the more active Communist organizers on charges of criminal syndicalism^{2.} A less spectacular, but probably more effective cause of the decline of union influence in California agriculture was the continuing apathy of the workers to further struggles against the farm operators. Evidences indicated that the workers were more interested in "business" unionism than in "fighting" unionism. The revolutionary policy behind the Trade Union Unity League was not in accord with this. These increasing pressures led to the termination in March, 1935 of the C. & A.W.I.U. when its

1. See Chapter VI.

2. Jamieson, Op. Cit., p. 113.

parent body, the T.U.U.L., dissolved. A change in the Communist Party policy directed its labor union organizers to enter independent labor organizations or unions of the American Federation of Labor.

Since 1935 Gilroy farmers have been involved directly in but one local farmer-worker strike. In several instances, however, the farmers and their workers have participated, more or less actively, in strikes in adjacent communities. The notable example of this was the six-week Salinas lettuce field and shed strike of 1936. This strike, one of the most violent in the history of California's agricultural unionization, was a "show down" struggle between the A.F. of L. Fruit and Vegetable Workers Union and the employers' Grower-Shipper Vegetable Association, strongly supported by a reawakened Associated Farmers Association¹. Despite considerable encouragement from the Teamsters Union, the strikers were unable to withstand the combined opposition of the employers associations and their imported strike breakers, the local police who consistently raided and dispersed union picket lines, and unsympathetic independent growers who continued to supply the struck plants with produce grown in adjacent areas.²

The realization that the organization of field workers alone was a useless effort has been spreading among union leaders since 1934. With the Salinas Lettuce strike defeat there appeared to be doubt that any kind of agricultural

¹. From Apathy to Action, October 6, 1936.

². U.S. National Labor Relations Board, Report of Cases 178-178ee, Washington, July 14, 1939.

unionization could be made to pay its own way. Every effort was made by all interested parties, from local farmers to the strong farm organizations, to encourage this view. They felt that the organization of the districts farm laborers must be stopped at any cost.

Labor Unionism in the Building Trades:

In another area of union organization the reaction of Gilroy's employers, and townsfolk generally, has been markedly different than that shown to the farm labor unions. The long-time experience of the American Federation of Labor's Building Trades Unions has characteristically been one of passive acceptance by the community. Several factors may be considered as contributing to this.

Primarily, the early entrance of unionism into the building trades in Gilroy was the result of the local action of skilled carpenters to affiliate with the United Brotherhood of Carpenters and Joiners. There was no externally conducted organizing drive, and no strikes or factional disputes. The organizing process was directed by local craftsmen, respected by their neighbors, and no appreciable opposition occurred, therefore. Another reason for the favorable acceptance of union penetration into the building trades was the fact that it in no way constituted a threat to the area's agriculturalists. Since union recognition and a moderate wage scale were the only initial demands, no one in the community was greatly concerned.

Union leadership was never radical and was directed in the early years solely towards the enforcement of certain wage and hour rules among the skilled membership.

Gilroy Local No. 354 of the United Brotherhood of Carpenters and Joiners of America was chartered in February, 1903 and has continuously maintained its local organization in the community¹. The carpenters' local provided the entering wedge for the other craft unions in the building trades. As a consequence of the excellent relations maintained by the carpenters and the cohesion they had encouraged among all skilled building craftsmen, the entrance of unionism into other crafts, although externally directed, was similarly well-received.

Concurrent with the chartering of the Gilroy Carpenters' Local was the complete unionization of the building trades in nearby San Jose. First efforts to organize the other tradesmen in Gilroy, the painters, plumbers, electrical workers, plasters and hodcarriers, and laborers were successfully conducted by the San Jose locals of the respective crafts. In the years following, membership drives were conducted all the rough the Santa Clara Valley by the San Jose organizations with conspicuous success. The Gilroy local of the Carpenters Union maintained its jurisdiction and aided in the overall organizational drive, particularly through the instrumentality of the Gilroy Building Trades Council, established in 1910.

¹. Information relative to the Gilroy Building Trades was obtained principally through an interview with Mr. C. V. Toombs, Business Agent, Carpenters Local No. 354.

The fortunes of the Santa Clara County Building Trades Unions have varied. Under the strong and protective guidance of the San Jose Building Trades Council they rode the crest of the 1925-28 building boom, survived the depression years, and by 1938 had reestablished a strong bargaining position for their membership. Local labor disputes and work stoppages did occur in several instances in 1935-36 as a local manifestation of growing union strength. Demands were made in 1936 by local carpenters upon the San Jose Building Trades Council to assist in the narrowing or elimination of the customary 8-10 cent hourly wage differential then existing between urban and rural trade wages. No satisfaction was then gained nor was any until during World War II, when the differential was removed.

From 1935-38 the number of craftsmen in each of the building trades seldom exceeded 8-10 journeymen, with the exception of the carpenters. As a consequence, Gilroy's plumbers, painters, plasterers and electrical workers continued to carry membership in San Jose local unions and attended union meetings in that city. By 1936, Gilroy Carpenters Local No. 354 had slightly in excess of 50 regular members. Through local strikes and negotiations with Gilroy contractors this union secured the acceptance of a union price list in 1936 that established the current wage differentials between the various crafts. In 1937, the practice was adopted of a county-wide negotiation between the San Jose Building Trades

Council and certain prominent contractor-employers. The resulting contract, with the inclusion of established area differentials was then accepted throughout Santa Clara Valley.

As indicated by 1938 the area's building tradesmen were strongly organized along strict craft lines and coordinated under the direction of their city councils. From the point of view of chronology, if not of importance, to the community, the building trades afforded Gilroy its first taste of union organization. It was not an unpleasant experience.

The Union Campaign in the Food Processing Plants:

The organizing drives in the food processing plants provided Gilroy, together with the larger communities in the Northern Santa Clara Valley, with a new experience in union activity.¹ In large measure the story of the organization of the food processing plants in the Santa Clara Valley must be told in the light of strong inter-union conflicts that made purely incidental the 1937-38 organizing campaign among the farm laborers.

The 1936 Salinas Lettuce strike failure had indicated to the A.F.L. union leadership the importance of area-wide, or preferably state-wide organization. The continuous flow of lettuce during the strike, brought into the Salinas packing sheds by farmers from the adjacent areas of Gilroy, Hollister,

¹. Information relative to the organization of the area's processing plants was obtained from representatives of Cannery Workers Union and also employer representatives from each plant.

and King City, where labor conditions were normal, was a direct cause of the strike failure. The embattled Fruit and Vegetable Workers Local (A.F.L.) had received aid from the California State Federation of Labor and from the Brotherhood of Teamsters, but was given no assistance by other farm unions. Consequently, at its 1936 convention the State Federation of Labor formulated plans to federate local unions into one state-wide union covering workers in agriculture and its allied industries¹. It was felt that such a union must include the workers in the food processing plants, as a source of organizational stability and control.

Two unions were particularly well-qualified to conduct the campaign from within the A.F.L., the Teamsters, and the Maritime Federation of the Pacific, the latter having organized the bargemen and warehouse produce handlers in the agricultural delta region of Central California. Strong rivalry bordering on open warfare arose between these two powerful groups which led to the rapid organization by one or the other of every processing plant in the San Francisco Bay Area and Santa Clara Valley, and nearly every plant in the agricultural districts of Northern and Central California. Transportation centers for agricultural produce became the battle ground for the two unions, each setting up militant locals in these strategic communities. As the struggle continued it became more and more a dispute between the left-wing elements, dominated

1. Rural Worker, Vol. I, No. 14, September, 1936

by Harry Bridges and his International Longshoremen and Warehousemen, and the conservatives within the State Federation of Labor together with the Brotherhood of Teamsters. The conflict was intensified in 1936 when the Maritime Federation seceded from the American Federation of Labor and joined the C.I.O., for the latter then chartered a new international, the United Cannery, Agricultural, Packing and Allied Workers of America, or U.C.A.P.A.W.A. which carried on the dispute with new vigor.

The Gilroy area was not a principal area of dispute in this struggle but strong pressures were felt in the community. Since the town is located astride the U.S. Highway No. 101 and between the two transportation centers of San Jose and Salinas, it felt much of the back-wash of the conflict in these cities. Also, the Felice and Perrelli Cannery located within the town of Gilroy became one of the focal points of contention, despite the fact that substantial initial gains were won there by the American Federation of Labor. The area's further participation in the conflict grew out of the fact that the Teamsters Union, in support of the newly formed State Council of Agricultural and Cannery Workers undertook the organization of the Santa Clara Valley's produce truckers.

The local situation was somewhat eased despite the continued organizational activities of U.C.A.P.A.W.A. (C.I.O.) in adjacent areas, when in July, 1937, as a means of settling

a Stockton, California cannery strike, the State Federation of Labor signed a "package settlement" with the California Processors and Growers Association, giving the former organization jurisdiction over some twenty of the large Central California canneries. Complaints were raised from within the ranks of the A.F.L. particularly the Central Labor Council of Santa Clara County, that despite the exclusive bargaining rights and closed shop gains made in the blanket agreement, in its haste to shut out the U.C.A.P.A.W.A., the State Federation had, in effect, agreed to a policy of company unions.¹ As a part of the settlement the State Federation had taken over and chartered several company unions, as employee associations, in Filice and Perrelli plants. Undoubtedly the employers association had played upon the C.I.O.-A.F.L. rivalry to gain a better contract and it was able to deal with the union in a more acceptable manner. From the State Federation's point of view, the package contract paved the way for A.F.L. control over the bulk of the food processing plants in California.

In the Santa Clara Valley, Local No. 20852, under an A.F.L. federal charter, maintained jurisdictional control despite its disagreement with the State Federation's package deal and its refusal to accept the master agreement. In

¹. Farmer-Labor News, Vol. 15, No. 10, July 2, 1937.

the 1937-38 packing season the union strengthened its hold on the Valley's food processing plants, adapting most of the individual contracts to conform with the yearly State Council of Cannery Worker's agreements with the Processors and Growers Association. Contract negotiations for the Filice and Perrelli Cannery in Gilroy, in accordance with the position of Federal Local No. 20325 of Santa Clara County, were not made a part of the master agreement. Despite the fact that the cannery owners were members of the employers association, it negotiated separately with Local No. 20325 for several years.

The reaction of the people of Gilroy towards the Cannery disputes was one of remarkable detachment, considering the fact that nearly 30 full time employees and over 250 seasonal employees of the local plant were town residents. Public opinion seemed to indicate that the dispute was a three-sided one between the A.F.L., the C.I.O., and the cannery owners. No strike was called and no time was lost in the 1937 processing period at the Gilroy cannery. Townspeople who worked for Filice and Perrelli apparently never seriously considered going over to the U.C.A.P.A.W.A. as did some San Jose plants.^{1.} Since no strike interrupted the summer canning season farmers moved their produce with but little difficulty to the cannery. Some local disturbances were felt as a result of the Teamsters' organization of the produce truckers. However, since the established trucking companies were the principal targets of

^{1.} Federal Labor Union 20325 of San Jose disaffiliated in June, 1938 and joined the C.I.O. as Cannery Workers Union No. 11.

this unionization, the individual farmer was left relatively free to move his crops from his fields on his own and his neighbor's vehicles.

It is apparent that the Santa Clara Valley, in its entirety by 1938 had a liberal education in the process of union organization. For the most part, Gilroy was in between two of the areas of greatest struggle, San Jose and Salinas, and in both the farm labor and the cannery campaigns, the townspeople were probably more spectators than participants. Nonetheless, by 1938 they had seen and known the seriousness of union-employer conflict. Many of their present day attitudes stem from impressions made by both the unions and employers in the three areas of union extension into the Gilroy area prior to 1938.

CHAPTER III

THE COURSE OF UNION ACTIVITY

IN GILROY'S AGRICULTURAL AND FOOD PROCESSING INDUSTRIES

SINCE 1938

The more recent history of unionism in agriculture in the lower Santa Clara Valley shows a marked departure in the attitudes of union leadership from that shown during the 1933-36 farm labor disputes. For the most part, the unions have all but deserted the field and have for all practical purposes abandoned efforts to organize the district's farm workers. As will be seen, a variety of factors has contributed to this present status of farm labor unionism.

A different result must be noted in the progress of unionism in the Valley's food processing plants. Here the American Federation of Labor affiliated Cannery Workers Union, Local No. 679, situated in San Jose, has extended its jurisdiction throughout the County and has increased its membership and strengthened its standing by obtaining bargaining rights in new food processing plants as they have opened. Virtually alone now in the field, its position appears to be secure against any foreseeable external pressure.

An examination of the attitudes and beliefs of the rural people in the Gilroy vicinity shows them to be unalterably opposed to any extension of labor unionism that may directly and detrimentally affect the area's farmers

and growers. The "problem" of labor unions is a topic of daily discussion. Despite every evidence to the contrary, the townsfolk in general, and the ranchers particularly, choose to believe that they are in imminent danger of being totally engulfed in the processes of labor unionism. Much of this trepidation is traceable to what one resident described as "the 'close call' we had in the early 1930s". It may not yet be said that the community's ten-year experience with responsible union leadership in the local canning industry has appreciably allayed its fears in this regard. Thus no single conclusion may be drawn in describing the reactions to the recent course of union activity in the district's farming and related industries

Unionism among Gilroy's Farm Laborers since 1938:

Any discussion of the union experience among farm laborers anywhere in California must be undertaken with a complete appreciation of the extreme difficulties to be met in organizing the heterogeneous mass of migrant workers.¹ There is reason to believe that even in the absence of organized employer resistance no appreciable degree of unification of farm workers could be achieved on a permanent basis. While no lengthy analysis may be made here of the migrant worker and his place in California's agricultural economy, certain factors in his composite "make-up" may be shown to have

¹. A colorful description of the life and activities of California's migrant farm workers may be found in Steinbeck, John, Their Blood is Strong, (San Francisco, S. J. Lubin Society, 1938)

retarded and discouraged his interest in union membership. Primarily, either by nature or by necessity, he is unstable. His residence in any one community is limited to the time necessary to cultivate, pick, cut or pack the local crop. When that work is done and the job closes he must move on to new employment. As a consequence, it is all but impossible for unions to maintain year around locals in the agricultural areas. Certainly there is not even any assurance that the migrant and his family will return to the same community season after season; more probably he will not. Secondly, the many nationalistic stresses tend to divide the heterogeneous migrant labor force. It is difficult for union organizers to cut across racial and national lines to achieve true collective action. This situation, in the years following the Salinas strike, led to the formation, in the Salinas and Stockton, California areas, of Mexican and Filipino labor unions.¹ This tendency toward organization among national groups was a contributing factor to the failure of the national labor organizations in California agriculture. Thirdly, many of the migrants who flooded the prewar California labor market were the so-called "dust bowl refugees" from the South-Central United States. Many of these had been independent farmers and did not believe in unionism, in theory or practice, and rejected organization for this reason. Lastly, the migrant is poor. Because of

1. Jamieson, Labor Unionism in American Agriculture, pp. 179-186

this he is not a stable source of union dues, and normally must be contacted by union representatives in the fields before collections may be made. The practical problems here are apparent and the result has been that the farm labor unions have never been able to pay their own way, necessitating sizeable grants from parent organizations. These considerations make one thing clear: before any appraisal may be made of the limited results of the organizing campaign among the Gilroy area farm laborers, the tremendous natural obstacles to the union must be understood.

The years 1937-38 had seen the Santa Clara Valley farm labor campaign largely subordinated to the inter-union rivalries in the struggle for jurisdictional control of the cannery workers. The conclusive victory there of the A.F.L.'s State Council of Agricultural and Cannery Workers, together with the latter's reversals in farm labor strikes elsewhere in California, led the A.F.L. to materially restrict its activities among the field workers. The C.I.O.'s Union of Cannery, Agricultural, Packing and Allied Workers continued its organizational drive but also on a much reduced scale, throughout 1939 and 1940.

Several conditions militated against the continuance of a broad organizational program by U.C.A.P.A.W.A. Apathy of the migrant laborer to union organization continued to spread. In 1939-40 urban recovery and industrial expansion in the San Francisco Bay area and in Southern California

attracted many farm workers away from the agricultural labor market. Of particular importance were the job openings becoming more available in the State's shipbuilding and aircraft industries. As a consequence the agricultural labor market surplus came to an abrupt end and "spot" labor shortages arose, despite the improved functioning of the State Agricultural employment services. More and more farm job competition declined and individual workers attached much less significance to the benefits of union membership.

Increased farm wage rates also acted to influence farm workers in Santa Clara County against active participation in the unions. After 1938 farm prices rose, along with urban employment, particularly since many local crops such as dried prunes and apricots were in heavy demand for the export trade. Price improvements permitted the payment of increased farm wages to the extent that the unions, in fact, had relatively little to offer the farm workers.^{1.}

It then became the policy of U.C.A.P.A.W.A. to reject sponsorship of spontaneous crop strikes unless the union had undertaken the initial negotiations. Several exceptions were made to this policy, one of which was the pea pickers strike in the fields surrounding Gilroy in September, 1939. On a dozen ranches in the lower Santa Clara Valley 200 pea pickers struck for a wage increase to 25 cents per hamper from the prevailing local rate of 21 cents. Despite the early entrance

^{1.} In the cherry harvest, for example, local wages paid per hour for picking were in 1939, 25¢; 1940, 35-40¢; 1941, 40¢; 1942, 50-75¢. California Department of Agriculture, Agricultural Labor Report 881b, Nos. 1,49,103.

of the C.I.O. affiliated farm laborers union, the strike was unsuccessful in every regard.

Thereafter, the influence of U.C.A.P.A.W.A. continued to decline appreciably throughout central California and in February, 1941 that organization formally abandoned all efforts to maintain an active program for farm labor organization.¹ During and since the recent war the union has not attempted further organizational activities.

No effort was made by the A.F.L. to challenge U.C.A.P.A.W.A. in a membership drive in the Santa Clara Valley after 1939. Content and secure with its victory in the canneries, the A.F.L.'s Teamster Union controlled State Council of Agricultural and Cannery Workers sharply restricted its field worker organization. In only one regard did this body affect the Gilroy scene. In 1940-41 the A.F.L. secured the affiliation of the powerful Filipino Agricultural Laborers Association. Groups of Gilroy Filipinos had long had a loose association with the Salinas local of this union. Technically the Gilroy Filipino workmen were involved in this change in affiliation. No practical results were noted locally, however, since no negotiations were ever conducted by representatives of either group with local growers.

An interesting sidelight has been thrown on the present very limited activity in the farm labor union field.

1. Jamieson, op. cit., p. 188.

Since the war the A.F.L. National Farm Labor Union has undertaken no strikes in the Santa Clara Valley. Its local No. 218 did undertake the unsuccessful strike against the Di Giorgio Farms in Kern County, California. Though the union has claimed in excess of 6,800 farm labor members in the San Joaquin Valley¹, it has, to the present, been unable to establish itself as the collective bargaining agent for its members. Mr. Hank Hasiwar, representative of the N.F.L.U., when asked if his union had done any collective bargaining, replied, "No, not in California. We haven't negotiated any agreements".²

In the past two seasons the C.I.O.'s Food, Tobacco and Agricultural Workers Union has undertaken the organization of farm laborers in the Stockton area asparagus fields. To date no positive gains have resulted from this activity. It is the opinion of experienced labor observers that there is little evidence that the C.I.O., through its F.T.A. union, will be able to make any penetration into the Santa Clara Valley. The strong A.F.L. influence there in the food processing plants, in the produce trucking, and building trades virtually precludes successful organization by a C.I.O. union in the Gilroy district.

1. Sacramento Bee, August 24, 1948.

2. In testimony before a board conducting public hearings regarding the Sugar Beet Industry at Berkeley, California, October 27, 1948.

Strengthened Union Position in the Food Processing Plants
after 1939:

Though the Associated Farmers were able to fight to a standstill the union organization of the farm workers, the victory went clearly to the union in the canneries and other food processing plants, not only in Gilroy, but throughout the County, as well as in most of Northern and Central California. Clear cut also was the dominance of the A.F.L.'s federally chartered unions under the direction of the Teamster-controlled California State Council of Cannery Unions.^{1.} As a result of the adoption of the practice of multiple employer bargaining in the industry, between the State Council and the Processors and Growers Association, the C.I.O.'s International Longshoremen and Warehousemen Union has been unable to break into the industry significantly in any of the Santa Clara County food processing plants. Since 1939 the A.F.L. has been acting to achieve this degree of solidarity.

It will be remembered that the Santa Clara County Federal Union No. 20325 had refused to enter into the blanket agreement between the Processors and Growers and the State Council. In April, 1939, however, the difficulty was resolved when the membership of the Santa Clara County local union

1. U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, Union Agreements in the Canned Fruit and Vegetable Industry, bulletin No. 174 (Washington, Government Printing Office, 1944).

ratified the master agreement. Critics of the union pointed out that the 500 members voting represented only those cannery workers employed on a permanent basis and included none of the union's thousands of members seasonally employed who were not yet at work in the plants.^{1.} In any event, this vote insured a united front against any attempted C.I.O. inroads.

Activity of the A.F.L. unions since 1939 has been mainly in the direction of consolidation and towards increasing employee benefits through collective bargaining. By that year most of the operating canneries were organized by Local 20325. In 1941 the Gilroy Plant of C.B. Gentry, Inc. was constructed in anticipation of a greatly increased demand for dehydrated onion and garlic products. Initial contacts were made by the Cannery Workers union, in order to undertake the unionization of the plant, soon after the firm went into production in July, 1942. For some time prior to this a significant dispute had been growing between the Teamsters Brotherhood and the Federal Unions as to how far the latter's jurisdiction should extend beyond the canneries into allied fields of food processing. It was the contention of the Teamsters that the Cannery Union should restrict its influence solely to the fruit and vegetable canneries. There was no urgency in the settlement of this internal rivalry inasmuch as

^{1.} San Jose Mercury-Herald, April 7, 1939; also Gilroy Dispatch, April 8, 1939.

as the plant, devoting its whole output to government contracts, paid union scale to all of its workers and, for the most part, hired only union members. In 1945 the award of the plant to the Teamsters Warehouse and Truckdrivers Union Local No. 806 of Salinas by the Teamsters Union opened the way to the immediate organization of the plant by that union. Jurisdiction over the Gentry Plant has remained with the Teamsters up to the present. The wage scale paid in the dehydrating plant is so regulated as to be equal to that paid in the County's Canneries, this despite the fact that working conditions are considered to be appreciably better there than in the canneries. Excellent relationships have been maintained between the plant management and a responsible union leadership since 1945.

Administrative weaknesses of the State Council of Cannery Unions in the control of its Federal Unions became apparent during the war. The anomalous position of the State Council had become evident in the Gilroy Gentry Plant dispute in 1942. For practical purposes, the State Council of Cannery Unions was controlled by the Teamsters, but there was not an identity of interest with the Teamsters. Bickering and sniping became more prevalent. In order to settle the dispute before an open breach arose, the Council petitioned for membership within the International Brotherhood of Teamsters and in June 1944, the affiliation was completed. Title of the Santa Clara County Federal Union No. 20325 was changed to

Cannery Workers Union Local 774; but the numerical designation of this local, having jurisdiction over the Valley's canneries was subsequently changed to Local No. 679. As regards the affiliation of the State Council with the Teamsters, it is the freely expressed attitude of the Council's leadership that the Teamsters were able to do the Cannery Unions the most good as affiliates, and the most harm as independents. It was simply a recognition of the old adage, "If you can't beat 'em, then join 'em."

A one day strike of 100 cannery workers of the Clara-Val Cannery in Morgan Hill, a town 10 miles north of Gilroy, accomplished union recognition in that plant in July, 1946. A 10 cent wage increase and other scale benefits were granted by the Santa Clara County Employers Association, then and now the bargaining agent for the operators of that cannery.

The following year, after prolonged negotiation, the Cannery Workers Union organized the shed operations of Gilroy's Hirasaki Farms. No strike was required when the Farm's operators were advised that strike-pledge cards had been received by the union from nearly 100% of the Farm's cutters and packers. A 10 cent wage increase and the union's current seniority provisions were granted.

In 1948 the freezing operations of the Driscoll Berry Farms in San Martin, California, between Gilroy and Morgan Hill, were organized by the Cannery Workers Union, Local No. 679. While the Farms themselves are largely operated on a

share-crop basis almost exclusively by Japanese tenants, the pre-freezing operations are not appreciably dissimilar from typical cannery processes, and a number of Gilroy cannery workers do this work. A strike, which lasted three weeks and was won by the Cannery Union, had two unusual aspects. In an action against the Farm's ownership, the union was able to recover in excess of \$3,000 for back wages under the State of California Minimum Wage Law. But of more interest was another facet of the dispute. The Valley's farmers had taken no appreciable interest in the strike adopting the attitude, as they had before, that the food processing plants were a legitimate area of union organization and that this was essentially a union-employer dispute. However, on the morning of June 17, 1948, a picket, presumably placed by the Teamsters Union, stopped the shipment of that portion of the Driscoll Farm's fresh berries which were to be trucked to urban markets. The reaction of the farmers was swift. The picket, despite the fact that his purpose was to assist the Cannery Workers strike, constituted a threat to all farmers, they felt. By telephone communication that evening interested farmers in Gilroy, San Martin and Morgan Hill were advised of the situation. The next morning nearly fifty farmers in a menacing frame of mind, met the picket at the trucking platform as he drove up to establish the picket line. With a normal sense of self-preservation the picket drove on. No further attempts

were made to interrupt the flow of fresh produce to the markets and the Driscoll strike was soon settled. It is interesting to note that in the minds of local farmers there was a definite line of division between that union activity which did not concern them and another which did.

Speculation arose among Gilroy district residents as to what was the motivating force behind this effective reaction toward union picketing of a loading station. There appears to be no doubt that the concensus of local opinion is that Valley members of the Associated Farmers informed and organized the growers in their action. Certainly they were implementing the fundamental principle of the Associated Farmers as expressed by its President in 1948 when he said:

"Let us rededicate ourselves to the Association's principles: our unswerving belief that the California farmer has a right to grow his crops, to harvest his crops, and to transport them to market, without interference."¹

Concurrent with their "clean up" program of the County's previously unorganized food processing plants, the unions in both the master agreements with the Processors and Growers Association and in negotiations with non-member canneries worked for increased employee benefits. Cannery operators themselves were virtually compelled to assist through increased wages as a simple means to attract sufficient workers to the processing plants, in light of the acute manpower shortage during the war. In 1939, a straight hourly wage of 52½¢ was paid to all non-supervisory male employees with a 10¢ lower differential paid to women. Where piece work was used 44¢ per hour was the

¹. Associated Farmer, December 30, 1947.

guaranteed average to 50% of the workers. In this year, for the first time, a rural area differential was secured by the cannery operators placing the hourly wage in the Gilroy Cannery at $47\frac{1}{2}$ ¢ for men, $38\frac{1}{2}$ ¢ for women and a guaranteed piece work average of 40¢. In 1940 the contracting parties adopted a five-bracket wage scale based upon a job classification and analysis survey of all jobs normally performed by men. Hourly wages extended from $52\frac{1}{2}$ ¢, for the low skilled bracket, five employees, to 75¢ for bracket one. Women were paid a flat $42\frac{1}{2}$ ¢ per hour, piece work rates remained unchanged, and the rural differential was established at 5¢ lower than the metropolitan scale. This rural differential was decreased to $2\frac{1}{2}$ ¢ in 1941 and has been abolished since 1942. Hourly wages in all brackets have increased steadily from the 1941 span of 63¢ for bracket five to 90¢ for bracket one to a 1949 span of \$1.20 for bracket five to \$1.65 for bracket one. Womens' flat rate has increased from 50¢ per hour in 1941 to \$1.05 in 1949, but since 1941 a woman doing a man's job is paid the man's rate. The adoption of a 40 hour straight time work week when certain specified, less perishable crops are being processed, and the installation of a vacation program are examples of more recent employee benefits accruing to workers in the Valley's food processing plants.¹

1. Progress of Wages Under A.F.L. Cannery Contracts Since 1937, (San Jose Cannery Workers Union Local No. 679, 1946) Recent wage rates were obtained from the current collective bargaining agreement between the California Processors and Growers, Inc., and the California State Council of Cannery Unions, A.F.L.

The contrast between the effectiveness and permanence of union organization in the farm labor and food processing fields is obvious. Conceding very material organizational difficulties among farm labors, the contrast is nonetheless remarkable. No little credit or blame, depending upon the point of view, for this difference lies in the attitudes of the rural individual, farmer and townsman alike, who has bitterly opposed farm labor unionism as detrimental to the welfare of the area's growers. However, behind that rural individual, farmer and townsman alike, must be noted the powerful farmer associations, and cognizance must be taken of their part in molding public opinion. At the present there is discernible also a clear line of demarcation between that area of employment which the Gilroy residents believe properly subject of unionization and that which is not.

CHAPTER IV

THE NATURE AND EXTENT OF UNIONIZATION IN GILROY'S INDUSTRIAL PLANTS

Modern manufacturing enterprises are normally not a part of the California rural scene. An examination of the small farm communities of the southern Santa Clara Valley shows that almost without exception their principal industries, other than agriculture, if indeed any exist at all, are limited solely to food processing plants, canneries, dehydrators, freezing plants, or wineries. The absence of industrial businesses from these small towns may be attributed to several factors. The predominant cause is the unavailability of adequate transportation facilities. Remoteness from urban production centers tends to increase costs of raw or semi-finished materials, since these usually must be shipped by truck or rail to the rural manufacturing plants from industrial centers. Increased unit costs often result also from the greater cost of marketing and delivering rural-made goods. Under these circumstances, only firms with other manufacturing advantages may remain competitive against urban manufacturers of similar products.

Another factor acting to discourage the location of manufacturing plants in farm communities is the lack of an available skilled labor force. It is most uncommon to find

highly trained metal workers, for instance, in a small community, other than those already employed in the town's garages and repair shops. Further, it is difficult to attract skilled tradesmen from urban to rural communities, particularly since lower wage rates are customarily paid in the farm areas. Difficulty in securing adequate housing facilities acts as a further barrier to the influx of skilled workers to a small town in sufficient quantities to permit the installation and operation of a large sized plant.

Under these circumstances it may be expected that for any industrial enterprise to prosper in a rural area it must be located adjacent to adequate transportation facilities. In all probability the firm must be expected to commence production initially on a very limited scale and to expand operations only as the supply of available workers increases or can be attracted to the area. For the most part this has been the experience of the two manufacturing plants established in Gilroy. At present these firms are a substantial complement to the town's agricultural economy, but it has been only recently that they have attained such a particular position of importance as to set Gilroy apart, somewhat, from neighboring farm communities.

The Be-Ge Company:

By 1938 the Be-Ge Manufacturing Company had begun to establish itself as the producer of a line of farm equipment which was considered by farmers to be superior to any then

manufactured. Under the impetus of increased orders for their land leveling equipment, the firm expanded twice between 1936 and 1938 and during the latter year it increased its employment to approximately 75 production workers. With its products protected by patents, the firm has since continued to prosper. Improvements have been made upon the basic hydraulic gear pump which give the firm its initial advantage in the farm implement field, employment has risen to over 200 workers, and the firm in 1948 expanded into a large new plant.

Initial contacts were made by the union in 1938. International Association of Machinists, Local 504, had completed the organization of machine, manufacturing and repair shops in San Jose the previous year and its extension into Gilroy was virtually a foregone conclusion. Local 504 had been able to unionize the machine shops in San Jose only after a long and bitter power struggle which was culminated in a hard fought strike. Arising out of the capitulation of the San Jose employers, however, was the complete acceptance of the union in their plants. Thus secure, the union extended its influence quickly into communities surrounding San Jose without incident. In this atmosphere of constructive business unionism the management of the Be-Ge Corporation accepted without reservation the union proposal which established the union shop but permitted the company to continue its 5% wage

differential paid below San Jose rates. The organizing process was carried out so complete and quickly that there was little or no impact felt by the community.

No wage adjustment was called for in the first year of unionization. Although the wage scale for comparable skills was slightly higher in San Jose than in Gilroy, a differential which has continued to the present, rates at Be-Ge were high in comparison to those paid in other industries in the town. In 1938 journeymen machinists and welders were receiving approximately 90¢ per hour straight time, with time and one-half paid for work over eight hours. Common laborers were paid 50¢-60¢ straight time, depending upon the nature and conditions of work required. An examination of prevailing rates paid elsewhere for comparable skills, as in the building trades and for maintenance personnel in the canneries, shows these workers to have received an average of 75¢ - 80¢. The men's rate for all seasonal cannery work was then only 52½¢ and it was not until three years later that bracket 1 workers in the canneries were paid 90¢ an hour. The union scale for carpenters in the Gilroy area was 75¢ in 1938.

In the years from 1938 to 1942 all employers of machinists bargained individually with the San Jose Lodge of the Machinists union. This was a period of expanding production and increasing wages, and was marked by harmonious collective bargaining between the unions and employers. It is apparent that the union was in a position to exploit its position had

it chosen to and the union in fact did secure annual wage increases during this period throughout the county. Patterns of wage settlements were established by early negotiators in San Jose, and other employers were virtually obliged to sign at this "established" rate. The strategic advantage of the union lay in the fact that it could, for all intents and purposes, set the "going rate" wherever it wanted, within reasonable limits, and be certain of signing the whole industry of the county at that scale. It lay within the union's power to conduct the pattern setting negotiations with those employers most apt to grant the desired wage rates. In practice, the Be-Ge Corporation was not usually among those who established the pattern, but because of the profitableness of the firm, and because union demands were not considered excessive, the Gilroy corporation followed the county pattern and paid the established rate.

The only strike in the history of the Be-Ge Company took place in the summer of 1941 and lasted for only two days. This was an inter-union dispute, conducted by the Valley's welders as a means of establishing their identity as a trade and thereby eliminating the necessity of their belonging to more than one union in order to do various types of welding. Until 1941 each trade in Santa Clara County required welders to carry a card of its local if the welder was to work on materials, or in areas, normally within the jurisdiction of that trade. One worker interviewed recalled that during this

period he was a member of four unions and held working permits from three others, and instances were given where some welders carried as many as eleven union cards and permits. The alternative to not joining these unions was to chance not being able to work on an "open job", and to have to lose work-time in trying to establish membership with the various building or construction trades, the steamfitters, boilermakers, shipfitters, etc. The 1941 jurisdictional dispute was settled by the San Jose Central Labor Council in favor of the welders and they returned to their jobs at Be-Ge directly. Since that time no labor disputes have interrupted production in Gilroy plants.

During the war years, 1942-1946, wages at Be-Ge were covered by national wage stabilization policies and no formal wage negotiations were conducted during that period. In 1946, wage negotiations were resumed between the employers and the union, but on a considerably different basis. During the war the various machine shop and manufacturing plant employers had banded together as a means of solving their mutual problems of production and employment which grew out of their government contracts. The organization, until 1946, was extremely informal and had more characteristics of a trade organization than a full-scale employers association. Shortly after the war the employers decided to continue with their organization and formalized it under the title, "Machine Shop Employers Association of Santa Clara Valley".

Bargaining since 1946 has been conducted on a multiple employer basis, between the Machinist's Lodge and this employer's group which includes upwards of 80% of the large plants employing machinists in the Valley. On the employer side, a seven-man policy committee is elected annually which meets frequently and deals with various industry problems, probably the most important of which currently are matters of union and employee relations. Periodic industry meetings are held during which the policy committee reports to the membership. Five members of this policy committee constitute the employers' bargaining committee to conduct contract negotiations with the Machinists Union. Because the Be-Ge Corporation is by far the largest industrial organization in the lower end of the Santa Clara Valley the custom has arisen of including, on a permanent basis, a representative of the Gilroy firm on both the policy and negotiation committees.

This multiple employer plan has worked well in the San Jose negotiations. While it has reduced the union's power in the early establishment of favorable wage patterns, the union has accepted the plan for certain positive benefits it does afford. Because the Machinists are an independent organization, they are particularly vulnerable to attack by either of the large labor federations. In Santa Clara County, at least, this type of bargaining has established the status of the union. The leadership of Local 504 has been willing, therefore, to sacrifice some possible economic net gain to

the membership for a higher degree of political security. In any event, the four annual negotiations conducted since the employers formalized their organization have been harmonious. Machine shop operators who are not members of the Machine Shop Employers Association of Santa Clara Valley have been willing to accept the "master contract" arising out of the union-employers' association negotiations.

The present wage scale paid at the Be-Ge Corporation conforms with the rural rates prescribed by the master contract. All production workers, regardless of specific trades, are covered by this industry type of union contract. Approximately 85 percent of Be-Ge's employees work under this Machinists Union contract, including all warehouse personnel. Supervisory, clerical, and technical personnel are the only employees not covered. A special contract is also made annually with the San Jose Local of the Teamsters Union covering one employee truck driver. Present rates paid at the Be-Ge plant for certain key jobs are: Journeyman Machinists, \$1.74 per hour; Welder, \$1.74 per hour; Turret Lathe Operator, \$1.52 per hour; General Helper, \$1.31 per hour; and Common Laborer, \$1.13 per hour. These rates average approximately five percent lower than those rates paid for the same jobs in San Jose. The Be-Ge Company, however, over the period of the last ten years particularly, has attracted an adequate and stable mechanically-skilled labor force, the members of which apparently prefer to exchange those other advantages of rural life for a slightly inferior wage rate. Workers' opinions

generally are that reduced costs of living, through lower food bills and rentals, and lower daily transportation expenses (few Be-Ge Employees live farther than a five-minute drive from the plant) more than compensate for the financial loss resulting from the lower rates. That excellent employer-employee relations exist at this Gilroy manufacturing company is attested to by employment records which show that approximately 50 percent of the company's employees have worked there continuously for the past five years, and that the great bulk of employment turnover has been among common laborers, many of whom were hired on a temporary basis.

The Robinson Company:

Gilroy's other industrial plant is the Robinson Fan Corporation, a manufacturer of field and orchard spray equipment and industrial fans and blowers. This firm opened its Gilroy plant on a small scale after the war and at present employs less than 20 persons. During the early life of the firm there was considerable speculation among the townspeople as to whether or not the firm would succeed. As with so many firms, founded by the inventor of a somewhat radical and untested product, the firm initially was almost wholly without experienced business management and without an adequate capital structure. Until 1947 control of the company was divided and the business nearly foundered for want of aggressive and competent leadership. Within the past two years the firm has gone

through two reorganizations. Ownership is now, however, strongly concentrated in the present managers. Prospects of the Robinson Fan Corporation appear to be excellent inasmuch as the firm has recently perfected what is considered to be the most efficient orchard air spray rig on the market.

Production of the corporation's products is still on a unit rather than assembly-line basis and, until quantity markets are developed, the officers of the company prefer not to manufacture for storage and future sale. As a consequence the number of production employees is small. Principal job classifications now held by workers are journeyman machinist, welder, steel layout man, general helpers, and common laborer.

To the present, employees of the Robinson Fan Corporation have not been organized by any union. Though this situation is somewhat remarkable it seems less so when the small size of the enterprise is considered. In the opinion of both workers and employers there, the union will "move in" when there are enough employees to warrant the administrative problems which accompany such organization. Until 1947, and particularly in the early life of the corporation, work was generally irregular as when, for example, during one period of reorganization all production workers were laid-off for a period of over 4 months. The union has apparently been reluctant to absorb into membership such an unstable work group. As the firm prospers and as production increases it

is expected that overtures will be made by San Jose Local 504 of the Machinists to arrange the acceptance of the master contract signed between shop owners and the union in the Santa Clara Valley. It is not anticipated that resistance to such organization will be offered by the company despite the fact that this will necessitate some wage advances, insofar as Robinson's wage scale does not meet union minimums for certain job classifications.

Journeyman machinists at the Fan Corporation are currently paid an hourly rate of \$1.60, or 14¢ below the union scale. Welders are paid at the rate of \$1.70 per hour, which is 4¢ below the wage specified in the master contract. On the other hand, the company pays its general helpers between \$1.35 and \$1.55 per hour while the union rate is but \$1.31. To some degree, however, this significance differential over union scale is explained by a difference in job content of the "helpers" classification. At the Be-Ge Corporation, where union job classifications and rates are observed, the activities of general helpers are restricted. At the Robinson Company, helpers tend to be actually "all-around" workers who paint, weld, rivet, or burn as the circumstances require. In other respects virtually all union work requirements are being met by The Fan Corporation. Acceptance of the provisions of the Santa Clara Valley machine shop master contract will not create any great problem, other than the wage and job content adjustments, and

for that reason, it is not anticipated that any objection to union organization will be made by the company.

The two industrial plants in Gilroy provide year-round employment to approximately 250 skilled and semi-skilled tradesmen, a circumstance which exerts a considerable stabilizing influence upon a community whose economy otherwise suffers such severe seasonal fluctuations in agricultural activity and employment. Investigation indicates that the presence of these small but relatively important manufacturing enterprises in the town has provided many benefits to the community with virtually no disadvantages. The firms, as perhaps typical of many small businesses, have maintained alert programs of employee relations and, in the case of the Be-Ge Manufacturing Company, a mature relationship with a responsible and "business-like" union.

For these and other reasons, the processes of unionization has created little stir in the community itself, despite the complete organization of the area's largest industrial employer. Evidence of this is shown by the infinitesimal number of man days lost through strike, the short welders dispute in July, 1941, being the only unrest the local manufacturing industry has known. Perhaps the greatest indication of the lack of the union's interference in the lives of the townsmen and farmers alike is the fact that an estimated 50 percent of them did not know at the time of

interview whether or not the Be-Ge Company was organized by any union.

Again the pattern appears to be borne out that in those economic spheres which do not impinge directly upon the area's farmers, unionism is accepted by the people of a rural community. In no way has the encroachment of unions into the industrial plants provided any threat to Gilroy's agriculturalists, and with complete disinterest the citizens of the community have accepted the organization of the Be-Ge Plant. Their attitude will not change in the case of the Robinson Company for the simple reason that the people of Gilroy consider the town's manufacturing plants to be a legitimate area for union activity.

CHAPTER V

THE DEVELOPMENT AND PATTERN OF UNIONIZATION SINCE 1938
IN CERTAIN OF GILORY'S RETAIL TRADES AND SERVICES.

It has been the recent union activity in the community's retail trades and services, strongly conducted during 1947-48 and currently in process, that has reawakened the townsfolk's interest in, and fear of, trade unionism.¹ The interest has not been passive. Not since the organization of the Felice and Perrelli Cannery has the community felt so strongly the impact of unionism as manifested by picket lines, employee's organization meetings, and attempts by the employers to promote collective resistance. While the sympathy of the people has been unalterably behind the farmers in their rejection of unionism among farm workers, and though they have witnessed in a relatively disinterested manner the organization of the food processing plants and the town's largest manufacturing plant, here in the retail trades they are appreciating the implications of total unionization in the community

¹. Material relative to the process of union organization in the community's retail trades was obtained through interviews with four retail grocery store operators, seven hotel, restaurant, and bar owners, and four employers in the automobile garage and commercial shop businesses. Representatives of each union involved were also interviewed with the exception of Automobile Mechanics Union, Local No. 1101, I.A.M., whose representatives apparently have adopted a policy of not participating in this type of research.

for the first time.

The local Gilroy Dispatch and the heavily subscribed urban press had acquainted the community for years with the progress of the Retail Clerks Union in the neighboring cities, but pre-war contacts by the union in Gilroy had produced no significant results. Open shop practices throughout the war had led townsmen to believe that they were secure against extensive unionization. Perhaps it was this false feeling of security that has recently made the impact upon them so great. In any event, as a new experience, the townspeople have felt divided among themselves. The cleavage was accentuated by a picketline and for the first time many heretofore disinterested parties militantly "took sides". Surprising to nearly everyone was the realization of what a significant number of the town's workers were either members of, or were in sympathy with, the labor unions.

The Retail Grocery Stores:

The force of the impact of union organization was felt most strongly with the complete unionization of the town's retail grocery stores, by the Retail Clerks Union, Local 428, of San Jose. In October, 1947, the myth of isolation and security was destroyed.

Gilroy has three types of retail grocery outlets, the chain store, the supermarket, and the small, family-operated

so-called "mom and pop" grocery. Of the first type there are two in Gilroy, one being a store operated by the Safeway Stores Chain, the other by Purity Stores, Inc. The local Red and White market may possibly be considered as one of these since it belongs to the national marketing organization of that name. However, since it is locally owned and operated it should more properly be considered as a small supermarket. Bettencourt's Supermarket is the town's largest grocery and is in every way the leading outlet of this type in the community. This store compares favorably as to volume of sales and number of employees with the typical big city supermarkets. There are nearly a dozen of the "mom and pop" groceries, including two run by, and largely for, the Mexican and Filipino residents, but not including those stores, combined with gas stations, which are found along the highways near the town.

The long-time experience of all of these stores was one of freedom from union influence. Initial processes that led to their complete unionization took place in 1939-40 in San Jose. By that time, the A.F.L. affiliated Retail Clerks Union had consolidated its position so strongly in San Jose that it was able to win bargaining rights for its members in the grocery stores, including the chains. Application of these bargaining gains had particular effect upon the Gilroy scene years later inasmuch as they were not immediately enforced by the union in any of the chain outlets in communities

south of San Jose. The ability of the union to enforce these contract provisions in the two chain stores in Gilroy was apparently unknown by the independent grocery store operators. Certainly union action in this connection came as a distinct surprise to local store owners at a most disadvantageous time.

As early as 1939 "flying squads" of union organizers from Retail Clerks Union, No. 428 of San Jose contacted the Gilroy clerks, passing out union literature as these workers left the stores and talking to them during their lunch hours and relief-breaks. No appeal was made at this time to the operators of the small, family run stores. Such organizational efforts as were made at this time were directed at the employees of Bettencourt's Supermarket and the Red and White Market. No particular progress was made by the union, other than to acquaint the clerks with the union's activities, inasmuch as both stores were paying wages above the then current union scale. It is the opinion of all interested groups that up to 1940, at least, the union had few if any tangible benefits to offer and apparently these initial contacts were made solely to feel out the store operators and their workers.

For the duration of the war period no efforts, direct or indirect, were made by the union to organize Gilroy's grocery store clerks. This coincided with a nation-wide lull in union activity in the non-industrial areas. Local circumstances, highlighted by an extreme man-power shortage in the non-essential industries, provided the individual job seeker

with an excellent opportunity for individual bargaining with employers. Throughout this period local wage rates rose in response to higher urban wages. All groceries maintained a non-union open-shop policy, including the chain stores.

In July and August, 1947, the organizing campaign was again undertaken by Local No. 428 in an effort to establish its jurisdiction over all of Santa Clara County. The principal goal in Gilroy was the unionization of Bettencourt's store. It was recognized that should this leading store be won over, the remaining stores would fall in line. Secondary attempts were made, however, to interest the operators of all the groceries in the desirability of the new union shop. Again the policy was adopted of contacting the clerks by means of handbills and personal conversations both in and around the stores and at the workers' homes. In each store a sympathetic employee was designated by the union as an "inside organizer". This person's principal responsibility was to arouse interest in the union among other clerks and to "talk up" the benefits of union membership. During August, 1947, two meetings of the grocery store clerks were called by the union leaders. Both were well-publicized and were held in private meeting rooms at the local Milias Hotel. They were "pretty well attended", between 15-20 clerks attending, nearly all from the chains and the supermarkets. Some were genuinely interested in union membership, others were merely curious. Encouraged

by this attendance, the union felt that it had established a sufficiently strong position to win a strike.

On August 28, after repeated warnings to the management, a picket line was placed around the Bettencourt store and all food deliveries to the store were discontinued.

In the meantime, the owner of that store had tried to align the other grocery operators behind him in an informal employers association for the purpose of presenting a united front against the union. Having no experience in this sort of action, there was considerable doubt among the owners and employers as to what the proper course of action should be. No formal meetings were held and only indirect commitments of the vaguest kind were made. Managers of the local chain stores made it clear that their policies in the whole matter would be dictated to them by the chain's management. Owners of the small, family-operated stores, who relied upon their businesses for a small but regular incomes, were unwilling to participate actively in any joint employer action. Inasmuch as their salaries were paid out of profits from their operations it made little difference to them what the union wage scale might be. Since no clerks were hired by these family groceries, union security provisions in no way affected their activity. Aside from expressing the opinion that they "didn't want the unions telling them how to run the business", and that they were "behind Al Bettencourt", the "moms" and "pops" contributed little to the employers' strength; probably they

injured the store owner's general position by affording a false appearance of employer solidarity. Their presence among the employers apparently precluded the possibility of closing all of the groceries, should any of them be struck, so dependent were they on the day-to-day receipts of their businesses. As a result, the attempted joint employer resistance was worthless, and whatever association there might have been among them fell apart once the picket line was established at the Bettencourt market.

Of considerable interest also was the reaction of the general public prior to and during the strike. Regular customers followed the strike preparations by both the union and the employers with interest. As a result of conversations with these townspeople, many of whom were friends as well as customers, the owner of the Bettencourt Supermarket felt reason to believe that should the strike actually be called no considerable loss of business would be sustained. This, however, was not the situation after the union had struck the store, despite the fact that it remained open to the public throughout the strike and the device of price reductions was used to attract a larger volume of trade.

The strike lasted from August 28 to October 3, and resulted in a 60% loss of business from normal income from operations for that period. The strike, in the first several days, was not particularly effective. Many non-union people, particularly the farmers, patronized the store solely for the

experience of crossing a picketline and in protest against the union action. Much was made of the fact that the store operator provided the pickets with chairs, a beach umbrella, and cold refreshments.¹ While the management was trying to get the community to laugh the picket line out of existence, the union took more practical steps to enforce the strike. Shop stewards and representatives of other unions in the town were placed on the picketline in a strong show of inter-union cooperation. Every union member in the area was warned not to cross the picketlines under pain of a \$50.00 fine. Shop stewards from the food processing and the manufacturing plants and the building trades representatives all insured that their membership and families observed the boycott. It was at this time that the consolidated strength of the union workers came into evidence as it effected public sentiment, and the store's business declined continuously after September 3rd. Whatever may have been the agreements among the various employers, no constructive action was taken to support the struck store. From start to finish the strike was between an isolated store and a well-supported union; the ultimate result was a foregone conclusion.

Before the strike could be successfully concluded, however, the union was forced to show its ace-in-the-hole, the previously won collective bargaining agreement with the chain stores throughout Santa Clara County. On October 1st, the

¹. Gilroy Dispatch, August 30, 1947.

union and chain store managements announced that the union shop provisions of their contract would be immediately enforced in the Gilroy stores of Safeway and Purity, and employees of these stores joined the union without delay. This changed materially the management position in the Bettercourt strike. No longer could the strike be clothed in the guise of a one-man crusade to keep the unions out of the town's retail trades, for, as a result of the union's extension of its union shop contract to local chain outlets, the union was already in. With this turn of events, Bettencourt acceded promptly to the union demands and the strike was terminated on October 3, 1947.

Of interest may be the reflections of the store owner, Mr. Albert Bettencourt. In his opinion, his action in "taking the strike" was the greatest single business mistake he has made in eleven years as a retail grocer. Despite the fact that the dispute nearly resulted in his financial collapse, the strike, to his mind, did even more to harm his position in the community. Where he had thought his action would be considered to be a one-man stand against the union, instead it was thought by many to be a one-man stand against a significant proportion of the townspeople themselves. Despite the friendly support of local press, he found the community unwilling to reject the conclusion that an employer who refuses to run a union store does so because he refuses to pay the union scale or maintain union conditions. It is Mr. Bettencourt's

opinion that no retailer, relying upon the goodwill of the public for business success, should "take a strike" unless he is absolutely certain, after a consideration of all possible lines of action, that, as a result of community support and cooperative employer support, he can withstand the union and beat the strike. It is his further opinion that even under these circumstances the retailer should consider the effect of the strike upon the public opinion, and that this primarily must be the ultimate test.

The Bettencourt Store strike had community-wide reverberations for nearly every family in town did a portion of its marketing there. It became a principal topic of conversation over tomato field and backyard fences. For the first time, many small town housewives felt the full implications of their husband's union membership. Neighbors parted company, if only temporarily, at the picketline as some persons continued to buy at the struck store and others refused to, though the great bulk of the farm families continued their patronage. Of great significance, however, was the change in the attitude of the townspeople. A loss of business of 60% in a predominantly non-union rural community indicates that many purchasers, other than the union families, chose not to support the store in its strike.

Once a union agreement was signed covering the Bettencourt Supermarket, and particularly since the Safeway and

Purity stores had previously been organized, all other Gilroy groceries quickly fell into line. The pattern of collective bargaining agreements for Santa Clara County's union grocery stores is presently set for them by annual negotiations between the Retail Clerks Union, Local No. 428, of San Jose and the Coast Counties Retail Grocery Employers Association, also of San Jose. None of the Gilroy grocery store owners is a member of this employers association. Individual bargaining between local owners and the union, however, is at a minimum, since, as in the food processing industry, non-members of the employers association sign the master agreement with but only minor local modifications, if any.

The union-management dispute in the retail groceries resulted in Gilroy's only post war strike to date. Its importance is considerable. The reluctance of a significant proportion of the townsfolk to cross a picketline will be seen to have had a determinative affect upon the subsequent organizing contacts on the town's bars and restaurants.

The Bars and Restaurants:

In accord with Gilroy's characteristic "averageness", the town supports a normal number of bars and restaurants for a community of its size and location. Whatever disproportion there may be as to type of establishment would be in the direction of a larger number of small restaurants which face onto

the highway, and cater principally to truck drivers and motorists. More often than not, these "truck stop" restaurants are operated by the owner, with the help of but one or two hired cooks or waitresses, any of whom may act as part-time dishwasher. Only a few of the larger establishments, licensed to sell whiskey and wine, maintain a bar together with the restaurant. In addition to these, the town has four sandwich shops run in conjunction with soda fountains, and one large public dining room in the town's only large and modern hotel, the Milias Hotel.

Initial contacts with these establishments were made by San Jose Local 180 of the Cooks and Waiters Union in cooperation with the Bartenders Union, Local 577, A.F.L., in June, 1939. The situation in Gilroy offered two possible lines of penetration open to the unions, as a result of local conditions. The desirability of organizing the largest establishment in town employing both bartenders and culinary workers was evident. The owner of the Milias Hotel, furthermore, as the mayor of Gilroy, was vulnerable to certain pressures that might be brought to bear by the union. Another line of approach was to organize the roadside restaurants by threat of strike, the result of which would be to cut off patronage by the organized teamsters and truckers, and to discontinue food and beverage deliveries to the struck shops. Neither of these lines of action, however, had been aggressively pursued by the union prior to the war because of the fact that

it was considered more important to organize completely the San Jose and other urban restaurants before extending into the southern part of the County. Some indirect pressure, however, was brought upon the management of the Milias Hotel through the Santa Clara County Employers Association with the objective being the extension of that association's master agreement with the union to cover this important Gilroy restaurant employer. By the start of the war only one restaurant owner had shown an interest in accepting the union scale in Gilroy. For the war's duration no active organizing was conducted, again largely the result of the excellent individual bargaining position of job seekers from 1942-45. In the period immediately following World War II the union consolidated its position in and around San Jose and did not resume its organizational drive in Gilroy until the Fall of 1947. To maintain employee interest it was the practice of the union between 1944 and 1947 to send, once or twice a year, a group of organizers into the Valley towns to contact the employees and to determine those shops which might prove most receptive to later organization.

By the middle of October, 1947, the Bettencourt strike had been won decisively by the Retail Clerks Union. In an effort to capitalize on that victory the Cooks and Waiters, and Bartenders Unions immediately took up again their campaign in Gilroy. Political and public pressures were brought against Mr. George Milias, Gilroy's mayor, to accept the union

shop in his hotel. Mr. Milias found himself in a difficult position. The surprising pro-union attitude of the townspeople in the grocery dispute, together with the traditionally strong farmer opposition to the union supplied the horns of his political dilemma. The Milias Hotel employs a number of negro culinary workers. During this period they, in particular, showed a marked interest in union membership and the adoption of the union shop in the hotel, primarily because they were then receiving less than the announced union scale of \$10.00 per day. By the end of October the union had obtained strike sanction against the Milias Hotel and had set a tentative date for the strike and the discontinuance of deliveries of foods and beverages, as well as linen and laundry deliveries to the hotel. Shortly before the strike date the management took steps to accept the union proposals. The hotel owner took membership in the Santa Clara County Employers Association and together with negotiators of that group reached an agreement with the union, accepting the established union scale, on November 5, 1947.

To other restaurant operators this settlement came as a considerable surprise. While it was well-known to many of the local business men that discussions were underway, no indication was evident that an agreement was near. Various of the more outspoken restaurant owners had urged collective employer action but no positive steps had been taken by them previous to the Milias settlement. Two meetings, in quick

succession, were called by the owner-operator of the Busy Bee Restaurant. Only four owners attended and little was accomplished in light of the small number of employers who attended the meetings. In the opinion of all concerned this lack of timely owner action was the direct cause of the unions' success in "signing the industry". Earlier and well-attended meetings would have kept all employers apprised of the Milias Hotel developments. In fact, it is the stated opinion of Mr. Hershel Morgan, business agent of the Bartenders Union, Local 577 of San Jose, who directed the unions' campaign in Gilroy, that, faced with a well-organized and resolute employers' group, the unions probably would not actually have called the Milias Hotel Strike and would have postponed their organization plans. Certainly such employer action as there was, coming after the signing of the largest employer in the town's restaurant industry, was totally ineffectual. As a result the attitude of the various employers became one of "I'll sign up if the others do". By the late spring of 1948 every restaurant and bar, including the creameries and soda fountain-snack shops, had accepted and signed the union agreement.

Relations between the employers and the union have been uncommonly good since that time. There are numerous indications that allowances are being made by the union in adapting its contract to meet the needs of owners of the small restaurants. As an example, whenever a Gilroy restaurant

owner needs a replacement cook or waiter to meet a short-time emergency, clearance is always given for the owner to hire a non-union worker in the event that no union member is locally available. On the other hand, the unions have refused to make one adjustment considered important by local employers. It is their contention that the unions should adopt two distinct scales of wages, one to be applied to the larger restaurants, the other to the smaller restaurants, with the determination made by seating capacity. The owners feel that this would remove the present difficulties imposed upon a small shop in having to pay the standard rate. Largely for administrative reasons the unions have refused to establish this "A" and "B" shop plan, preferring a standard scale, now established at \$11.00 per day.

The Cooks and Waiters Union and the Bartenders Union have acted together in the organization of Gilroy's restaurants and bars. Current practices continue this joint action. All contracts entered into by Local 180 are co-signed by Local 577 and vice-versa. As a consequence, neither organization will sign an agreement that is not endorsed by its sister local. The advantages of this are obvious. Many establishments with which contracts are made employ workers of both unions. Standardization of wages and conditions is desirable, therefore. Further there is no opportunity for an employer to play one union against the other in order to arrive at more satisfactory terms with one or the other. The joint

union practice is popular with local employers as eliminating the need for meeting possibly conflicting requirements, and also as necessitating but one negotiation with the two unions. Both employers and union representatives have commented upon the continuing responsible conduct of the other.

In retrospect several factors stand out as particularly noteworthy. It is apparent that if an employer group particularly seeks to reject union entrance into its shops, cooperative action must be taken before the union has accomplished any significant penetration. In a small community as soon as one of the employers, particularly an influential one, signs with the union it is virtually impossible for the others to continue to act together. This is the experience of both Gilroy's grocers and particularly, its restaurant owners.

Great significance must be attached to the strategic role played by the Teamsters Union throughout this organizing process. Though their participation was more often merely threatened rather than actual, its part in the union victory is considerable. The ability of the Retail Clerks and Cooks and Waiters to stop deliveries to a struck shop, upon request to the Teamsters Union, was a strong weapon in their hands. Gilroy's position, astride a major trucking artery, further increased the potential of this weapon.

Also, the great influence of the union's success in the grocery store strike upon subsequent negotiations with

with the restaurant owners is interesting. The attitude of Mr. Bettencourt that any employer who deals directly with the public should not "take a strike" was one of the compelling reasons why the owner of the Milias Hotel entered into a union agreement rather than to allow an open dispute. Informal discussions between Mr. Bettencourt and other restaurant operators convinced the latter that they too would be wiser to sign than to fight. As will be seen, however, this policy was not adopted by one other influential segment of Gilroy's retailers.

The experience of Gilroy's automobile dealers, garage, and commercial shop operators:

Another of the local businesses is currently feeling the early pressures of union organization. The goal of this activity is the unionization of the community's automobile garage mechanics, together with the workers in the farm machinery repair and welding establishments, which are locally termed the commercial shops. Employees of these shops are mechanics of varying degrees of skill and experience, many of whom do not fit easily into the established union categories of journeyman mechanic, helper, and apprentice. A few of these employees, not more than a dozen in number, are qualified journeymen with adequate shop and factory training to justify their rating. The bulk of those men employed as

mechanics are those who "grew up with a wrench in their hands". Raised on farms, many of them have had years of practical experience in farm machinery and equipment repair where skill was less of a requirement than ability to improvise. Some others, having shown aptitude in the local high school's machine and automobile shops, have continued their interest in the local repair shops, together with the "farm mechanics".

The employers are of two types; either they are automobile service garage owners, with firms that normally combine sales and service, or they are operators of the commercial shops, in which the owner-operator is assisted by as many workmen as conditions demand. In the town of Gilroy there are approximately a dozen well-established automobile sales agencies, each maintaining service and repair facilities. In addition there are several repair garages that are independently owned. The daily operation of these establishments is patterned after that of the same type of business in the urban communities which deal solely with automobiles and trucks. These companies of course are open for business only during specified hours and only a few are in operation on Sundays and holidays.

The commercial or welding shop, on the other hand, follow no such rigid schedule. Rather, their operations are patterned to meet the needs of their customers who, for the most part, are the area's farmers. The very existence of these shops depends upon the immediate availability of their

workmen whenever or wherever in the district mechanical work may be required. Of course, during planting and harvest times particularly, the community's agriculturalists may not and do not observe the conventional hours of business. From dawn until dark, seven days a week, the growers operate their farm equipment. It is, then, the unique service performed by the commercial shopmen to be able, on short notice regardless of the time of day, or day of the week, to travel, if need be, anywhere within a radius of 20 miles in order to maintain and repair this equipment.

It is into this situation that the Automobile Mechanics Union, Local No. 1101, affiliated with the International Association of Machinists, has attempted a penetration, thus far without significant results. First contacts by the union organizers with locally employed mechanics of the larger garages were made late in 1946. In the ensuing months every automobile mechanic employed in an agency garage was approached by the union representative. Interest in union shop was heightened among this group of workers because of the advantages that would accrue to many of them. Application of the union classifications of mechanics to the Gilroy shops would have resulted in the up-gradⁱng of approximately a third of the employees to a full journeyman status. It would do away with the various categories of journeyman standing - Class A, class B, etc. - now in use in local shops.

Two circumstances existed that tended to lessen the attractiveness of the union offers. The first was that the union would restrict the hours of work to 44 hours per week, with the possibility of a later reduction to 40 hours. This was a considerable departure from the 9 hour day and six day week, then customary. Under this schedule the employees in all work categories were making excellent wages and, as a result, preferred the 54 hour week. By means of simple arithmetic the employees were able to determine that despite the proposed up-grading their "take-home" pay would be materially decreased. For those men already receiving journeyman's wages the reduction would be even greater.

Another factor that has discouraged union membership is the close relationship that exists between the garage operators and the relatively small number of mechanics employed in their shops. Most of the present new-car dealers in Gilroy are men who have had practical experience in automobile shops. Six of them have had a journeyman's rating in automobile repair work, and four of this six have been or are union machinists or mechanics. Several of them have been shop-foremen and therefore are qualified to instruct and supervise their employees. Close personal contacts in the course of this supervision have resulted in a high degree of mutual regard between management and the workers with the consequence that these employees would hesitate to permit the unions to influence this relationship.

Throughout the spring and summer of 1947 the union conducted regular meetings of the towns automobile mechanics at the Milias Hotel. Also urged to attend were the employees of the welding and repair shops. Attendance at first was not substantial. Few of the journeymen mechanics participated in spite of the fact that many of them were former union members. Practically none of the commercial shopmen attended. To them it was apparent that the adoption of union-regulated hours of business would distinctly limit their ability to serve their best customers, the area's growers. As a result, the membership drive did not achieve any appreciable significance until the Fall of 1947 when the interest of the whole town was attracted to the union activity in the grocery stores.

Paralleling the efforts of Local 1101 to sign the mechanics were the efforts of the garage owners to resist. In August, 1946, these employers formed a trade group known as the Gilroy New Car Dealers Association. The purposes of this organization were primarily to allow the systematic exchange of members' opinions upon employee matters. The fact that the local agency owners had not considered such an association necessary prior to the advent of union activity in their shops seems to substantiate this. Frequent meetings also were held by this employers association, the principal topics of discussion being recent union contacts and the means of resisting the union. It was the concensus of opinion then,

as now, that the employers should "put their house in order". They hoped to minimize the attractiveness of the union's offers to their employees by meeting the union wage scale and by adopting the same shop conditions other than hours and worker classifications, that the union called for. In so doing the employers virtually nullified the union's organization program and at no time prior to October, 1947 did anyone employer feel that there was a real threat of a union entrance into his shop.

Despite this lack of progress the union continued to press its campaign, singling out that worker-category which was most susceptible to unionization. This was the relatively large group of Class "B" and Class "C" mechanics who received 10 cents and 20 cents respectively less per hour than the Class "A" or "top journeymen" mechanics. These men are employed in the shops normally in a ratio of 4 to 5 to each Class "A" mechanic. Their ratings were, and are, established by the garage owner on the basis of his evaluation of the individual worker's ability and experience. It was the promise of the union to eliminate the various ratings of the mechanics and to establish the top journeyman rate for all. The union would also establish helper and learner classifications. By emphasizing the advantage of union membership in terms of increased status as well as increased hourly wages, union representatives sustained some interest throughout the Spring and Summer of 1947 and received membership applications from a number of these lower rated workmen.

In the Fall and Winter of 1947 the interest of the town at large was strongly attracted to the union campaigns in the groceries and in the hotels and restaurants. Interest also centered upon the possibility of the garages "going union". In all probability interest here was heightened in light of the fact that the normal extension of union organization beyond the garages would have been into the commercial shops. There again, the remarkable community solidarity in the support of the farmers and their interests played a part in checking the union drive. While the farmers and townspeople alike had complacently watched the organization of certain of the town's retail trades, they cooperated vigorously in keeping the union out of Gilroy's automobile and farm machinery repair shops. The situation reached a climax when in February, 1948, the union announced that it has signed a majority of the mechanics employed in the local Buick sales and service agency owned and operated by Mr. Gus Broderson¹. The announcement came as a distinct surprise to the management. Only 4 mechanics were employed in the shop and it was felt that the one top journeyman and one of the Class "B" mechanics would steadfastly refuse union membership on the basis of the resulting decreased "take home" pay. An informal poll of the employees by the owner showed that three of the four admitted membership, however.

Advised of the possibility of his winning a National Labor Relations Board employees election in his shop, Mr.

¹. Gilroy Dispatch, February 6, 1948.

Broderson contacted the Santa Clara County Employers Association. He was assured that membership in that association would place the entire capacity of that association to stop the union at his disposal. The result was that the association, in the name of its member, petitioned the San Francisco Regional Office of the N.L.R.B. to conduct a shop election among the four mechanic-employees to determine whether or not the union should be certified as their bargaining agent.

It was between this time and the actual election, which was held in December, 1948, that the tremendous pressure and influence of public opinion was brought to bear against the union. As has been indicated above, these forces were insignificant in the organization of those retail trades which did not have some recognizable affect upon the Gilroy farmers. In the case of the mechanics the situation was different for their unionization was but one step away from the organization of the farm equipment repair shops. Great social pressures were exerted upon the mechanics by the townspeople and by the farmers to reject the union in the election despite the fact that they already had taken union membership. Furthermore, other mechanics in town, mindful of the quick sweep of the unions throughout the groceries and restaurants after the initial foothold had been gained, strongly urged the Buick Agency mechanics to stay out of the union. Groups of workers from other shops visited the homes of those mechanics who were to participate in the election to stress upon them the

extent of the influence of their vote upon other shops. It appears that local pressures were strongly toward the rejection of the union. Though the farmers took no collective action in this matter their individual admonitions were uniformly in opposition to the union.

During this period the union endeavored to maintain the advantage it had won and to strengthen its position in other shops. Certainly the union had reason to believe that it would win the election, but force of public opinion precluded that result. The official vote was for the unanimous rejection of the union as the bargaining agent of the workers. Since that election the union has attempted no further organization and has signed no agreements in the town. Local shops continue to pay the union scale of \$1.63½ for top journeymen with 10 cent differentials for the lower rated workers. There appears to be every indication that local garage owners will "keep their shops in order", and they continue to feel the need of maintaining non-union shops. As long as employees desire the extra work it is probable that the garages will maintain no less than a 48 hour week.

Gilroy's retail tradespeople have had a varying experience in their union contacts. To some degree each has been different. In the groceries strong union organization and planning easily prevailed over the poorly coordinated employer group. The restaurant operators saw a union admittedly not yet ready to extend its influence into Gilroy

"sign the industry" by capitalizing upon another union's victory and by unionizing the one large restaurant employer in the town. The garage owners on the other hand, adopted the policy of collective resistance sufficiently early to counteract effectively the union's organizing drive. The lack of public support may be shown to have had a considerable influence upon the inability of the grocery and restaurant operators to reject the unions. The crystallization of the public opinion in favor of the garage and commercial shop owners, as it bore upon their employees, was probably the principal factor in the union defeat in the automobile and farm equipment repair shops in Gilroy. Once again the well being of the district's farmers has been seen to have had a determinative influence upon the local people.

CHAPTER VI

THE CHARACTER OF ORGANIZED EMPLOYER RESISTANCE TO UNIONISM IN THE GILROY AREA

Prior to the advent of union activity in California's agricultural districts in the early 1930s there were no employers associations, as they are known today, in existence in the Lower Santa Clara Valley. Informal groupings of farmers and ranchers were not uncommon, but they did not associate in the manner or for the purposes which have characterized their deliberate organization since the period of the Valley's farm labor unrest. As a result of the fact that union organization in other than the building trades was unknown in the typical rural California community, no emphasis was placed upon collective employer action. A factor contributing to this has been that small town agriculturalists and often small town retail store owners have prided themselves upon being individualists. This attitude springs from the normal situation that the farmer and the store owner either survive or fail depending upon the accuracy of estimates and judgements made by each as an individual in the conduct of his business affairs. In both of these areas of enterprise is there wide latitude for decision making and much credit for a profitable year's business or a successful year's crop is attributable to the sagacity of the individual. Years of

self-reliance and self-sufficiency have acted as retarding influences even when the advantages of multiple-employer action have become apparent. The result of course, for the most part, has been that local Gilroy employers either have presented no effective joint action or have achieved a degree of unity too late to stem the rising tide of unionism in local industries. Unable in most instances to work together cooperatively, the employers have found an increasing need to turn to other employers associations and to local authorities to help them in their anti-union struggles.

Local Farm Employers Groups:

For several decades, however, there have been abundant evidences of the customary association of agricultural employers, mutually interested in the local labor market and crop conditions, to meet and determine, in advance of the planting or harvesting operations, the wage rates which are to be offered for specific types of work during the ensuing season. For the most part, these wage fixing conferences are extremely informal, and are usually ex parte affairs with the employees or their representatives, union agents, or labor contractors, having no voice in the determination.¹ In local practice these pre-operation wage settings

¹. Report of the LaFollette Committee, Part III, p. 181.

may be made by as few as three or four growers in a street corner discussion or by a relatively large number of representatives at a Farm Bureau Section meeting. Despite relatively imperfect channels of communication, word of the "established wage" spreads rapidly throughout the area. Variations from this established wage are made as the season progresses as a means to control the labor market, to meet the prices offered by the food processors, and to bring the local rate to a closer approximation of wages paid in adjacent areas. Under pressure from the sale price of their crop, the farmers do tend to stand together in resisting a threatened strike, called in order to obtain an increase in the set wage.

The nature of this joint, but essentially unorganized, farmer resistance followed a recognizable pattern during the period of farm labor unrest throughout the Santa Clara Valley from 1933-1936. Typically, the farm labor union representatives, having determined the extent of their proposed demands either with or without conferences with the worker-members, presented these demands to the growers individually, in the absence of formal employers associations. Then usually as a result of informal discussions, the farmers decided to stand together in rejecting the union proposal and to hold to the "established" rate. If the farm laborers were then at all well-organized, the strike was called and picketing started. Invariably at this point in the process, aid from external

sources was given to the struck farmers, most notably from some large farm organization, the local Chamber of Commerce, or from local government and police authorities. In some instances the farmers themselves virtually retired from the field as their new "champions" took over the fight. More usually, however, the farmers consolidated their position and strengthened their resistance to the strikers and their leaders. The consequence, more often than not, was the complete defeat of the strike and the maintenance of the established wage without any recourse to true collective bargaining. Thus it was occasions of crises and outside support that customarily tended to cause the formation of loose farmer associations. These wage-determining groups have not retained formal organization and in recent years the growers have reverted largely to an individual wage fixing basis.

The local office of the State Agricultural Employment Service has recently urged the farmer employers to act more formally in their wage determination as a means of obtaining early and authoritative wage information, to be quoted throughout the State, in order to maximize the efficiency of farm labor movements during the picking season. The Gilroy-San Martin Prune Growers Association has been formed recently, primarily as a trade and marketing association, but also as an employers wage determining group. The difficulties presented to such an organization, particularly in an area like that

of the Southern Santa Clara Valley where most farms and ranches are relatively small and the farmer members thus numerous, is illustrated by the 1948 experience of the local Prune Growers Association. Mr. Stuart Fletcher, Secretary of the Santa Clara County Farm Bureau, presided at a meeting of growers held approximately two months prior to the anticipated harvest period. The purpose of the meeting was to determine the number of pickers or "knockers" required to handle the picking operation, and to establish the wages to be paid for the coming season. Because the labor supply was considered to be plentiful, the price was set at \$6.00 per ton, a decrease of \$4.00 from the 1947 scale.¹ As a consequence of this low rate few pickers were on hand in the local labor camps when the harvesting was expected to commence. Despite the expected abundance of labor, many workers went north to the peach orchards in the Yuba-Marysville district, bypassing the Santa Clara Prune district. Furthermore, the fruit matured late on local prune ranches and by the time it had ripened there was, in fact, an acute labor shortage. When the harvesting was begun, local growers were forced to pay \$12.00 to \$15.00 per ton in order to attract sufficient farm laborers into the area to process the crop.² Since that time local growers have declined to make known their established wage and

1. California, Department of Agriculture, California Weekly Farm Labor Report 881-A #142, August 14, 1948.

2. San Francisco Chronicle, September 5, 1948.

their labor requirements appreciably before the picking is actually to start. Experience has shown that by not making advance announcements they will not discourage any of the normally adequate labor force from coming into the district. Prices then need be set only high enough to retain sufficient workers to complete the harvest.

It is perhaps remarkable that the local growers have not established a formal area-wide or county-wide association of agricultural producers. Farm employer associations of a formal nature are in effective existence in other agricultural areas in the State. Typical of these are the Agricultural Labor Bureau of the San Joaquin Valley and the Grower-Shipper Vegetable Association of Central California. Other such associations are in operation in the Sacramento Valley, in the Imperial Valley and in the Southern California citrus belt. Several reasons are given by local growers for their lack of enthusiasm for such an organization, despite their knowledge of the successful operation of such groups in other areas in connection with wage determination and labor recruitment. Essentially the Santa Clara Valley is made up of many small farms on which are grown an extraordinarily wide variety of crops. Because of this diversity, there is no one critical harvesting period for the whole Valley. The farmers have felt in the past that the normal flow of farm labor into the district and from crop to crop has been

adequate to the point of obviating a full scale recruitment program. Because of the fact that most farms in the Gilroy Area are of less than 75 acres, farm labor, though a vital cost, is not such a great cost to each farmer to warrant his participation in an organization devoted to maintaining low wage scales. Another factor that has acted to cause local disinterest in an area-wide growers association is that most growers in the Gilroy district are members of State-wide crop marketing associations. Characteristic of these are the California Beet Growers Association with headquarters in Stockton, California. The great majority of Gilroy's sugar beet raisers are members of this organization which restricts its activities to wage, price, and labor problems related to this one crop, and represents farmers wherever this product is grown in the State. The cooperative nature of this trade and marketing association is evident, assessments being made against individual growers on a beet acreage basis. Similar crop associations exist among the tomato, apricot, asparagus, and walnut growers, to mention but a few.

Local farmers appear to be unconcerned with the fact that the lack of an area organization is costly to them. An examination of local farm wages shows Gilroy rates to be appreciably higher than both hourly and piece-work scales paid in adjacent districts where area-wide growers' associations exist to influence their local labor markets. The

difference is particularly marked in the orchard and vineyard crops. The Santa Clara County rate of 85¢ - \$1.00 per hour for the harvest operation is 10¢ to 15¢ higher than in adjoining Counties where the employers are organized.¹ The psychology of local agriculturalists apparently is that it is worth it to them to pay something more than the others if, as a result, there continues to be an adequate supply of labor at the critical planting and harvesting periods, throughout the area, regardless of the existence or not of a farmer-employers association.

Local Retail Employers Associations:

Association of employers in the local retail trades and services has been a post war product of union organization of their establishments. In every instance the alliance of these owner-operators was affected for the purpose of presenting a united front to the union. The cooperation was attempted hurriedly, most often at the last moment before positive union action was taken and, as a consequence, was accomplished under extreme pressure. This atmosphere of desperation, together with the total lack of employer experience in joint effort, acted to nullify any constructive program of union resistance. Only in the case of the automobile

1. California, Department of Agriculture, California Weekly Farm Labor Report 881-A #136, July 3, 1948; #140, July 31, 1948; #142, August 14, 1948; #144, August 28, 1948; #149, October 2, 1948; #154, November 6, 1948.

garage owners was timely action taken by the employers. There alone were the employers able to achieve a collective attitude and to reject the union approaches. In the other instances the association was accomplished in such haste and so imperfectly that it precluded the complete dissemination of information, the examination of possible forms of union action, and the exchange of employer commitments in the event of a union strike and picketing. In the case of the grocery stores and the restaurants particularly, there was never an instance of an employers group meeting with the union for the purpose of settlement on terms most favorable to the employers or to reject all union proposals. It has been noted that a display of resolute employer cooperation, in all probability, would have forced the Cooks and Waiters and Bartenders Unions to cancel their proposed hotel strike in 1947 with much loss of prestige and bargaining power to these unions. There is considerable doubt as to whether the restaurants and hotels could have been organized in 1947 or 1948 had the union been firmly repulsed in its initial action, but no such employer stand was made. The situation in the grocery stores was typical despite the fact that the prior unionization of the chain stores placed the grocers in a weaker tactical position. Here again it appears that could the employers have accomplished the degree of unity necessary to permit true joint action, the Bettencourt strike would not have been lost

to the union. Hindsight indicates that had the owners of particularly small family-operated grocers evidenced a willingness, through collective action, to effectuate the slogan "A strike against one, is a strike against all", their establishments still would not be unionized. Certainly such a cooperative reaction to the union drive would not have left the owner of Bettencourt's Supermarket in the untenable position described by one townsman as "so far out in front he was being swung at from every direction". A consideration that tended to hinder joint employer action was the dependence of the small store owners upon their daily receipts for operating capital. There is, however, the strong probability that these stores would have been closed but a few days, if at all, had every independent grocery closed at once. It is doubtful that the strong degree of union cooperation affected later within the town against the one struck supermarket could have been accomplished against 8 or 10 different outlets. It is entirely possible that the weight of community opinion would not have been directed against all the grocers, as it was against Mr. Bettencourt, but instead would have turned in solid opposition against the Retail Clerks Union, had all groceries closed together at the time one was struck. In actuality the short-lived association of employers was so internally weak that none of these possibilities was realized and no unity was accomplished.

In the one instance of the New Car Dealers Association did Gilroy employers achieve joint action in their union relations in sufficient time to meet the union as an organized group instead of as individuals. As soon as first contacts were undertaken by the San Jose local of the automobile mechanics union in 1946 the large garage owners formed their organization. Meetings were held irregularly but frequently. Principal topics of discussion were specific trade problems, most often as they related to their common problem, the Gilroy labor market and the unionization of their shop employees. This employers association adopted a formal organization and operated through committee investigations and reports on particular circumstances. Three constructive results are believed to have been achieved by the garage owners through their organization. All shop owners adopted the general program of paying the union scale and meeting all minimum working conditions demanded by the union in their San Jose organizing campaign. This program was completed by local employers only shortly after the first contacts were made by the union, and before any of the union conducted employee meetings were held. This action by the owners evidenced a desire on their part to be able to offer every employee benefit to their workers that might accrue from union membership. The mere fact that the employers had an established employee policy acted to impede the union's organizing progress. Further, in adopting

this program of meeting the union demands, the garage owners made certain that no one member would be so far below the standard as to invite union penetration into his shop thus giving the union a foothold in the industry. It will be remembered that is precisely what did happen later in the Milias Hotel dispute in the restaurant industry. A second positive result of the garage employers organization was that the union was unable to bargain with the owners as individuals, but instead could meet only with the executive group of the association which represented all of the garage owners. This, together with the uniformity of working conditions, proved to be nearly insuperable to the union organizers in trying to establish an inroad into some one of the shops. The third result considered to have benefited the employers was their ability, as a consequence of their close association, to exchange information quickly and arrive at joint decisions in sufficient time to parry each union thrust.

Opinions differ even among the employers as to the actual effectiveness of the New Car Dealers Association in Gilroy as an instrument to keep the union out of the town's garages. Owners of grocery stores and restaurants seem to believe that if the Mechanics Union should be as aggressive as were the Retail Clerks and the Cooks and Waiters Unions the garages could be organized in short order. These other owners seem also to have adopted the attitude of one of their

number that any employer who deals with the public directly cannot afford a labor dispute. There is a considerable segment of community opinion that holds the unions to be very nearly irresistible once they embark upon an all-out campaign. On the other hand the garage owners and others in the town point out that in all probability the garages would not be unionized were it not for the employers association and to that degree, at least, their organization has been effective. These garage owners will probably continue in their alliance particularly should union activity be resumed in the near future.

An imperfect sampling of Gilroy's other retail trades indicates a complete lack of interest in employer organizations. In the barber shops, the gas stations, the bakeries, and department and clothing stores no attempt has been made by the employers to associate in anticipation of union efforts to organize their establishments. In most cases it is the attitude of these retailers that in all probability no employer organization will be attempted until evidences indicate an interest by the unions in their shops. In every instance there is an unwillingness on the part of any one person to assume a position of leadership in undertaking the first steps of organization. One interesting explanation for this general feeling of employer apathy was volunteered by a small shoe shop operator. He expressed the opinion that, as a result

of his observation of the responsible union conduct in dealings with the groceries and restaurants since the organization of these establishments, there is doubt in his mind that he would try too hard to resist the unions. It is interesting to speculate, though he alone of the unorganized employers expressed this attitude, as to whether this opinion is growing. In any event the town's small employers, for the most part, continue to be unassociated. The ephemeral organizations of the restaurant owners and of the grocers have entirely disappeared. It is to be expected that the automobile dealers alone, of Gilroy's retailers, will maintain their formal employers association.

Participation by other local groups:

Other local organizations have not played the same significant role in Gilroy that they have in some other communities in resisting the encroachment of unions. The Chamber of Commerce, for instance, has taken no substantial part in the union relations of any of the town's businessmen and even in the instance of the month-long grocery strike, the Chamber maintained a purely negative attitude. This was the position expected of it by most of the residents. Never a very dynamic organization on the Gilroy scene, the Chamber of Commerce has for a long time felt the domination of the town's mayor. It is suspected by many townspeople that, because

of political pressures, the mayor was content to let the Bettencourt strike run its natural course. Thereafter he was scarcely in a position to have the Chamber take a strong stand either in organizing employer resistance or in settling labor disputes. The result has been that this organization has not and probably will not play any part of consequence in the community's labor problems.

Gilroy's service, civic, and fraternal clubs and organizations have made a conscious effort to keep out of every union problem except those affecting the farm laborer. In the matter of the retail stores these groups have taken no part in the dispute or the negotiations and have not apparently gone on record either in support of the union or the local merchants. This was not the situation from 1933-1936 when radical unionism entered the farm labor field and brought out all of these groups, as well as the population as a whole, strongly in support of the area's farmers. There is every reason to believe that should this same threat arise in the foreseeable future their response would, in the case of the farm laborers, be the same despite their disinclination to participate in any of the retail store owner's union dealings. This circumstance arouses interest as to whether or not there is some organization or agency large and strong enough to mold public opinion so positively against farm labor unionization.

Local influence of the Associated Farmers:

An extensive study of the history and policies of the Associated Farmers of California, Inc. is not within the scope of this report.¹ However, some consideration should be given to the tremendous significance of the activities of this organization, particularly as they influence the thinking of farmers and the general public in the Santa Clara Valley, and throughout the State. Associated Farmers' spokesmen in recent years have asserted time and again that theirs is a farmers' organization and is authorized, therefore, to speak for the farmers of the State on matters of industrial relations. There is considerable question as to the validity of this assertion. Probably an excellent case may be made, on the other hand, in support of the conclusion reached by the La Follette Committee that:

"It (the Associated Farmers of California) is the first recorded example of a formal organization conforming in type to the 'belligerent' or 'anti-union' urban employers' association, established primarily to handle labor difficulties presented by the efforts of agricultural laborers to organize and bargain collectively"².

In any event it appears certain that the Association is not and never has been a spontaneous body of simple "farmers", notwithstanding the name and its early publicity. In the

1. Activities of the Associated Farmers in 1935-36 are documented fully in the LaFollette Committee Report, Part IV, Section 3, Chap. 2, pp. 617-634. More recent activities through 1940 are detailed in Part VIII of the Report.

2. Report of the LaFollette Committee, Part IV, p. 634

January 18, 1938 copy of its bulletin, "From Apathy to Action", the Associated Farmers asked the question: "How can agriculture combat labor leader domination when the union organizers single out one branch at a time?" They furnished the following answer to that question: "By a union of farmers, willing to back up every individual farmer and every branch of the industry with money and concerted assistance". A brief examination of the circumstances surrounding the founding of the Association may indicate what groups actually were to compose and finance this "union of farmers".

The Associated Farmers of California, Inc. was formally organized at Fresno, California on March 28, 1934. The purpose of the association was to prevent, by every means possible, the recurrence of the labor unrest and strike conditions which had swept throughout California agriculture the previous year, and to restrict or eliminate the opportunity for farm labor organizers to accomplish union organization and to participate in collective bargaining agreements. Initial organizational and promotional steps were undertaken by the California State Chamber of Commerce which secured the assistance of the California Farm Bureau Federation as a means of facilitating the establishment of local offices for the Associated Farmers throughout the agricultural districts of the State. In 1934-35, the Association was financed almost entirely by industrial interests located in

San Francisco. Financial support came from a large number of employers associations and industrial and commercial concerns including railroads, public utilities, canning, sugar and dried fruit companies, and from banks.¹ For a period of many months the Associated Farmers was wholly subsidized by the Industrial Association of San Francisco, one of the most bitter anti-union employers' associations in the entire country.²

With this strong and well-organized backing, tools were placed in the hands of processors and growers the State over to combat the unions to a standstill in 1935. Conducting the fight on a political as well as on an economic basis, the Association had published or reprinted bulletins and leaflets bearing such titles as "From Apathy to Action", "Government by Terror", "Farewell to Russia", and "Seeing Red, the Story of Communism". Capitalizing upon the wave of anti-radical reaction that swept California in 1934 and as a means of bringing about the death of the left-wing Cannery and Agricultural Workers Industrial Union, the Associated Farmers was instrumental in the arrest and conviction of several of the union leaders on charges of criminal syndicalism.³ Through 1936 the Association crystallized grower resistance, participated in nearly every strike of consequence in opposition to the unions and literally drove the labor organizers

1.

Report of the LaFollette Committee, Part IV, p. 588.

2. Ibid., p. 602.

3. Jamieson, Labor Unionism in American Agriculture, p. 113.

out of the State's agricultural areas. This position of dominance has been maintained up through the early 1940s and in recent conflicts the Associated Farmers has broken every major strike among farm laborers, with the exception of those disputes in the canning and processing plants. Though its arguments have been couched in economic terms it would seem that the Association and its county units are anti-union organizations and, in fact, have no other functions.

Standing now without significant opposition the Associated Farmers has endeavored to strengthen its position among the "working" farmers in the State whom, in the past, the Association has defended, but has not actually represented. It has continued to use every media of publicity in its continued campaign to suppress farm unionism. It has again strongly entered the political arena and has taken strong stands against Federal or State arbitration in farm labor disputes,¹ and against the extension of unemployment insurance benefits to farm workers.² It is currently supporting bills before the State Legislature inimical to farm labor union interests relative to secondary boycotts, mass-picketing, closed shop, etc.

1. Associated Farmer, June 15, 1939.

2. Associated Farmer, January 31, 1949.

3. Associated Farmer, February-March, 1949.

In December, 1948, The Associated Farmers inaugurated a plan for insuring farmers of the State against losses sustained through strikes and other labor difficulties. Under this policy, the insurance against labor dispute-incurred losses, to the extent purchased, would provide indemnity for all charges and expenses incidental to the production, transportation and processing operations.¹ The California State Federation of Labor has attacked this strike insurance plan as the kind that "would encourage lockouts and promote industrial strife."² The Federation's article continues:

"It appears that the anti-labor association is anticipating organization of agricultural workers in California and is preparing all of its forces and resources to stave off such organization."

Whether such insurance is actuarially feasible has not as yet been demonstrated, but the Association has been granted a permit, in the name of the Agricultural Insurance Exchange, by the office of the California Insurance Commissioner. It appears plain, however, that a purpose behind the insurance program, perhaps more significant than that announced by the Association, is to provide farmers with a measure of disregard for the economic consequences of an agricultural strike. In so doing the Associated Farmers would remove one of the few remaining obstacles standing in the way of complete farmer cooperation in any all-out anti-union campaign to be undertaken in the future.

1. For complete information regarding conditions and rates see: Associated Farmer, January 31, 1949.

2. Labor Review, quoted in Associated Farmer, Feb.-March, 1949.

The publicity and activities of the Associated Farmers have had a strong influence in molding public opinion in the rural communities of the State. No association, in the one year following its organization, could have reacted so effectively and so successfully against farm labor unionism unless it had been able to do this.¹ No association could have maintained an organization of County offices unless it had won the support of the farm areas. No little of this support, of course, has been bought, but much as been earned by producing satisfactory results in the form of victories over the unions in the crop-wide strikes in the 1930s. Growers generally have followed the lead of the Associated Farmers since 1940 without question. Discussions with Santa Clara County farmers reveals their complete faith, and almost a blind faith, in the Association and its announced stand on a variety of agricultural labor and political matters. Conversations with farm people show them quick to adopt the Association's arguments, reasoning, and phraseology, as stated in its monthly bulletin, "The Associated Farmer", into their own expressions. In short, the Association has "sold" itself to the farmers of the Gilroy district, at least, and only to a slightly lesser degree, the townspeople also. It is estimated that about one-half of the local farmers are members of the Association, but that a considerably larger number regularly reads the monthly bulletin. As

1.

The continuing effectiveness of the Associated Farmers in the Southern Santa Clara Valley is evidenced by such power demonstrations as that exhibited at the occasion of the picketing of the Driscoll Berry Farms in the summer of 1948. See Chapter III, supra.

a consequence the opinions of a significant segment of the Valley's economy are influenced by this organization, particularly on problems related to farm labor. The usefulness of such an organization tends to be diminished during periods of industrial harmony. It is anticipated, however, that the Association will be able to retain its support, by emphasizing the continuing threat to the farmers of a unionized labor force. Thereby, the Associated Farmers of California, Inc. will remain a potent force on the farm labor scene in the Gilroy area, and throughout the State.

CHAPTER VII

IMPACTS AND IMPLICATIONS

ARISING FROM UNIONIZATION IN THE GILROY AREA

The pattern of public resistance to union organization:

As has been described, the Southern Santa Clara Valley has had a long and close acquaintance with labor organizations, although it is not popularly appreciated, especially in metropolitan areas, that the unions have made any significant penetration into the rural districts of the State. It cannot be doubted, even though Gilroy is predominantly a farm community, that the town has been both target and goal for union activity, particularly since 1938, but actually for a much greater length of time. Several factors have, of course, tended to accelerate the processes of unionization in Gilroy beyond those experienced in most other rural communities. Perhaps of greatest importance has been the town's geographical location. Midway between two strongly unionized urban centers, San Jose to the north, and Salinas to the south, Gilroy could be expected to be the recipient of strong pressures from labor organizations, the leaders of which recognized the restraining influence exerted by a neighboring non-union community. Although organization of the various trades in Gilroy was invariably attempted only after the particular unions had become firmly established in the metropolitan areas, the persistence of low wages in Gilroy was,

prior to unionization, a continuing source of friction between the unions and urban employers. The indirect influence of the emergence in 1934 of the uncommonly strong maritime unions in the San Francisco Bay area also helped to create an atmosphere favorable to the growth of labor organizations in adjacent areas. The town's location, directly upon a major artery of transportation, has exposed it to union influences and made it vulnerable to union infiltration to an extent not experienced by more remote farm communities. The great increase within the last twenty years of the use of trucks as a means of overland hauling has further accentuated the influence of the strongly organized teamsters on the community.

Thus aided by strong external pressures, it is not surprising that labor organizations were able to effect a strong entrance into certain of Gilroy's trades and industries. Perhaps more important is the consistent pattern of public reaction to the unions, a response which has not altered appreciably over time. The impact of the unionization process upon the townspeople has been varied, but in every instance has been in accordance with this established model. More and more it has become clear that whenever the unions, in the course of their organizational activities, have influenced or threatened the security of the district's agriculturalists, popular opinion has been directed solidly against the union

and in support of the farmers. The constancy of this pattern may be traced into every work area in the town where the unions have attained any degree of power.

In the building trades and in the community's manufacturing plants where there are no conflicts with farmer interests, the process of unionism was conducted without any appreciable impact upon local residents. The carpenters accomplished their complete organization early, and by maintaining a policy of responsible and constructive trade unionism they have won the respect and confidence of the townspeople. The entering wedge having been driven by the carpenters, the other crafts followed until today all workers in the building and construction crafts are members of local or San Jose unions. In the case of the manufacturing plants in the town, the situation is comparable. Here again, adverse reaction by the community has been totally lacking, a situation which also in part may be attributed to the responsible and conservative union leadership which has arisen. But of more importance is the fact that it has been and is the attitude of the townsfolk that as long as the welfare of the agricultural producers is not menaced, then the unions may be justified in their organizational activities.

The town's hotel and restaurant industry is another case in point. Local residents were apathetic, after the first inroads had been made, in their reaction to the campaign of

the cooks, waiters, and bartenders in their rapid organization of the town's restaurants, bars, hotels, and creameries. To only a slight degree was the situation different in the case of the retail groceries. There the issue was presented dramatically to the local people. Either they could cross the union's picket lines, in support of a Gilroy merchant who was fighting union organization, as a general protest, or they could observe the pickets and accept unionism in fact in the community's retail stores. Bettencourt's near financial failure, as a direct result of the loss of 60 percent of his business during the period of the grocery strike reflected both the efficiency of the strike as it was conducted and, more important, that local shoppers felt no desire or compulsion to protest against the spread of unionism into the town's stores. If unionism in other than the agricultural industries was to be stopped or retarded in Gilroy as a result of public opinion, the golden opportunity was presented at the time of the Bettencourt strike. The disinclination of the public to stand together in opposition to the Retail Clerks Union would have been predicted only by someone acquainted with the standard pattern of public reaction which was in evidence prior to 1947 and which has continued since.

The impacts of unionism upon the community growing out of the organization of the food processing plants is particularly interesting. Developments were watched closely

by both the farmers and the townspeople because, in the instance of the local cannery especially, union activity verged narrowly upon a disruption of the farmers' normal activities in bringing their produce to the plant for processing. As was illustrated above, the unionization of the Felice and Perelli Cannery was largely the outgrowth of a heated inter-union rivalry which saw the Teamsters Union best the Maritime Unions in the race for control of the Santa Clara Valley food processing plants. Considerable credit for the Teamsters and A.F.L. victory, of course, must be given to the California Processors and Growers Association, which organization chose to bargain with the Teamsters Union to the complete exclusion of the left wing Maritime group. During the course of this internecine union rivalry, the lack of direct interference with the farmers led the community to consider these struggles as solely an inter-union affair or, at most, a three sided fight involving also the plant management. There appears to be abundant evidence to indicate that had a protracted strike been called, or had all produce hauling been interrupted, either of which occurrences would have caused economic loss to local farmers, civic officials and the town police would have entered the dispute with the complete support of the townspeople. As events transpired, the dispute did not halt individual trucking, a strike was not called, and the public, therefore, did not

actively participate.

There is no doubt but that there is a point beyond which unions may not go without arousing public reaction. Such a situation was that at the Driscoll Berry Farms, where the basic pattern was again in evidence. As long as the strike of the freezing plant was limited to processing operations only, no resentment was evidenced by either the farmers or the town residents. When, however, the strike was extended to prevent the normal marketing of produce, the reaction was swift. Here, also, an external influence must be noted. Action of Associated Farmer members in all probability was responsible for the quick retaliation, but there appears to be no doubt that the strike of the loading platforms would not have been permitted to last for any length of time in any event.

The recent developments in Gilroy's automobile and commercial garages are also interesting as border-line situations where the area's farmers are adversely, though indirectly, affected. To be sure the struggle has been fought to date primarily in the garages owned and operated by the new car dealers. There is no direct farm problem there. But it is common knowledge locally that the organization of the automobile garages is, for practical purposes, tantamount to organization of the commercial garages, and the welding and farm machinery repair shops. Therein lies the

problem to the farmers who require the services of these shops regardless of time of the day, or of day of the week. Trepidation on the part of local farmers appears to be well-founded, for one of the strong union arguments presented to garage workers during the active organization period in 1948 was a marked reduction in the number of hours worked, presumably with some compensatory wage adjustment. The possibility of the complete cessation of planting or harvesting operations as a result of a farmer's inability to have vital equipment or machinery repaired, particularly during a crisis period, is truly terrifying to him. As long as the community is so materially dependent upon farm incomes for its general prosperity there appears to be no doubt but that the people of the town will continue to show the same interest in this problem in the future as they have during the period of union organization and the National Labor Relations Board election at the Broderson garage. At that time there were no "disinterested" persons in Gilroy and, as a result of constant persuasion, tremendous moral pressures were brought to bear upon the mechanics directly involved in the voting. The outcome, as has been described, was the complete repudiation of unionism in the work area so closely related to the farmers of the district.

In the instance of the attempted organization of farm laborers in the Southern Santa Clara Valley throughout the 1931-1936 period, the basic pattern of public reaction was most evident. The effect of these union attempts upon the

farmers of the district was unequivocal, and public resentment crystallized against such efforts. Several factors were immediately apparent, to those persons close to the farm labor disturbances, which would have acted strongly to the disadvantage of the farmers, had the unions accomplished complete organization of agricultural laborers.

First and foremost, the growers would have been denied free access to what has historically been an adequate labor market. The labor-contractor method of securing sufficient help has long been used in the Valley, as elsewhere in the State, as the means of insuring to the grower a stable labor situation. A further advantage of this system to the farmer is that he is able to determine or to establish the wage which he is willing to able to pay, and that he need make upward revisions in the pay scale only as it is necessary to attract a greater supply of workers to his fields. Too much stress cannot be placed upon the importance to the individual farmer of the necessity of his unrestrained ability to exploit a favorable labor market or to pay only as much as is required by local conditions at the moment of the particular operation for which laborers are sought, inasmuch as the operators of food processing plants customarily refuse to quote the purchase price at which they will accept produce until immediately prior to the harvesting season. During the planting and growing periods, the farmers, therefore, are unable to budget

their expenses for materials or labor so as to guarantee that they will meet their costs of operation. The alternative to the growers, then, is to minimize labor costs to the utmost during the pre-harvest period and to hope that in so doing they will save what may be the margin of the year's profit.

Another source of fear to local growers arising from the possibility of total unionization of a district's farm workers is the ability of union leadership to withhold necessary laborers from individual growers during critical periods. Several farmers who were interviewed considered this of more importance than the loss of the right to control the determination of wages. Because of their inherent lack of faith in union leaders, a situation made more understandable in light of the radical and irresponsible leadership of the early organizing period, farmers in the Gilroy district have strong feelings against allowing any person or organization the opportunity of wielding such a powerful weapon of coercion.

Residents of Gilroy have been well aware of the attitudes of local agriculturalists on these matters, as the result of daily contacts and the strongly pro-farmer, anti-union policies of the rural press. In the early 1930's concern in problems confronting the growers was not passive nor was the participation of their civic representatives in the various farm labor disturbances which dotted the Santa Clara Valley at that time. For example, in the case of the April,

1933, strike of pea pickers in Alameda and Santa Clara Counties, considerable violence and intimidation marked the dispute before it was finally defeated by local growers, townspeople, and the authorities. Arrests and deportations were carried out by police and armed sheriff's deputies, who were reported to have visited the local labor camps and either "run out of the country" or arrested for vagrancy those unwilling to accept the growers' offers of employment¹. Charity agencies in the two counties were reported as making a special survey among their clients, with the intention of cutting off from county aid all "able-bodied men who refused to work in the fields". Rumors of "armed bands of Reds" among the strikers stirred up illegal and extra-legal opposition from other anti-labor elements in the rural communities.²

The Santa Clara County cherry strike in the summer of 1933 again saw the active participation of non-farm groups in the labor dispute. No demonstrations of opposition were made in Gilroy because this strike had few local repercussions. In adjacent rural communities and in San Jose, however, special deputies, "armed with pick handles and tear gas" raided the headquarters of the radical Cannery and Agricultural Workers Industrial Union, and dispersed strikers wherever they congregated.³

1. Oakland Tribune, April 14, 1933.

2. Iden., April 15, 16, 1933.

3. San Jose Mercury Herald, June 17-19, 1933.

These were not isolated instances of community retaliation. Rather they were typical of both the spontaneous resistance of unorganized farmers and townspeople and also of the highly organized opposition directed by local agencies of the Associated Farmers. To be sure, not all retaliation was as violent as in the pea and cherry strikes, but it appears that without exception the residents of the Valley opposed local union leadership of the period, and, as stated by the editor of the Gilroy Dispatch, that "the organizers didn't have a friend in the country". Newspapers in the farm communities conducted an unrelenting attack upon unionism among farm workers, and large cannery and packing shed employers, and the Associated Farmers bought space in the local press to "give the public the facts". By no stretch of the imagination may the farm labor dispute in the Gilroy area be considered as solely a farmer and union struggle. As has been stated, the vast majority of the persons employed in the Gilroy area are either engaged in some phase of agriculture or are, in some way, serving the district's agriculturalists. Perhaps their concern for any threat to the farmer group has been motivated by self-interest, or possibly their concern arises from a true community-interest but, whatever the cause, Gilroy's people have met every farm labor union effort with outright resistance and with outspoken hostility.

The nature of popular reaction to the inroads of labor organization in Gilroy is so evident and has been so persistent over time as to be very nearly reducible to a formula or rule. Certainly it may be demonstrated that the

relationship is direct or positive between the extent of the union's threat to the district's farmers and the degree of resentment of the townsfolk. There is reason to believe that other labor unions which may be contemplating future organizing drives in Gilroy or in adjacent rural communities would do well to consider the probability of success of their efforts in the light of this pattern of resistance.

Factors which will shape future developments in the Gilroy area;

Several consideration or conditions in particular will continue to operate and provide determinative influences upon future farmer-and employer-employee relations in the Gilroy district. Among these factors which will tend to shape later developments is the continuing difficulty unions are having in organizing the farm laborers in the rural areas. The reasons for this difficulty are several. The farm laborers, and especially the great mass of migrant workers which constitute the bulk of the Valley's farm help, do not want to become burdened by the restrictions and responsibilities which accompany union membership. They appear to consider factors other than increased wages, greater security and improved living conditions as more desirable. They wish to maintain the unfettered right to move and remove when and where they choose. They hesitate to accept anything which will tend to "locate" them in anyone district or to associate them permanently with any group. They appear to place freedom of movement before

economic stability. Therefore, while they tend to be ready to support union efforts in the district or crop in which they happen to be working at any one time, for whatever immediate benefits they may gain, they will refuse to remain in that area to pursue a strike or even to retain local union membership. The resultant inability of labor leaders to rely upon the unceasing aid of these unorganized laborers is a great hindrance to successful union activity.

Closely related to this is the growing disinterest of the American Federation of Labor in any attempt to organize farm workers. Recognition of the inherent difficulties in farm labor unionization led the A.F.L. to abandon the field- and shed-workers and to concentrate their organizational efforts upon the more stable cannery workers. As long as the A.F.L. remains dominate in the Valley there would seem to be little chance for the Food, Tobacco and Agricultural Union of the C.I.O. to make any inroads into the Gilroy area, despite the recent, though unsuccessful, efforts in the asparagus fields of the Stockton delta region. A.F.L. Cannery and Teamsters Union officials have stated in interviews that "they wouldn't touch the farm laborers with a ten-foot pole". They feel they have had ample proof that the organization of the migrants cannot be made a paying proposition.

Another factor which would seem to preclude the future organization of agricultural workers is the continuing prominence and power of the Associated Farmers of California in

their anti-labor political activities. As long as such a militant association stands ready to enter every farm labor dispute, to finance and direct local farm and community resistance, and to publicize successful opposition to unionization the odds would appear to be strongly against union victory. The Associated Farmers is continuing its legislative program to insure its future political position. In these and other ways this organization is maintaining an effective program that will in all probability block farm labor organization in the foreseeable future.

Another factor which is tending to shape labor developments in the Gilroy district is the growing influence and power of the Teamsters Union. The importance of produce trucking in the rural districts to all farmers and to the more isolated farm communities places a strong economic and political weapon in the hands of those who control the truck drivers and, in turn, the trucking industry. To be sure a considerable amount of produce is hauled to local markets or to local processing plants by non-union farmers or farm workers. Most long-route trucking, however, is done by employees of established truck lines who are union members. All hauling for the canneries is done by organized teamsters. The strength of the Teamsters Union has played a considerable part in Gilroy's hotel and restaurant dispute when the threat of interruption of food and beverage deliveries and linen supplies

was instrumental in bringing the employers to terms. Active support of the union truck drivers in the retail grocery dispute, requiring the management of the Bettencourt stores to do all of their own produce hauling, was another instance of the strategic position of the Teamsters. Strong indirect pressures were brought to bear upon the operators of the town's several "struck-stop" restaurants which rely so heavily for their patronage upon the drivers of trucks and vans that travel Highway 101 by the hundreds every hour of the night and day.

From the point of view of union affiliation and control, the Santa Clara Valley belongs to the A.F.L., and the Teamsters Union, more than any other, has created and maintained this situation. The Teamsters were the victors in the 1938-1939 inter-union scramble for control of the cannery workers, and the current strength of the Cannery Workers Union in Santa Clara County is directly attributable to the affiliation of the Cannery Unions with the Teamsters International. This relationship has benefitted the local unions by causing the Teamsters to stop raiding the weaker independent cannery unions and also by giving the cannery locals powerful support in driving the C.I.O. unions out of the area.

The A.F.L. unions in Santa Clara County appear, for the most part, to be secure against rival unionism. Protected by the Teamsters, Cannery Workers Union Local No. 679 of San Jose is now well established. At the present time it is inconceivable that any new food processing plant could operate

in the Valley without employing a majority of workers who are already members of the San Jose Local. Since its organization this local has issued 55,000 individual membership cards to cannery workers in the County's food processing plants. Consequently, it would be virtually impossible to man the canning or processing lines of a new plant without hiring, in the normal course of employment, many active or inactive members of Local No. 679.

One possible area of future conflict in the Valley lies in the relationship between the Teamsters Union and the Retail Clerks. Heretofore, and currently in Gilroy, the Teamsters have given powerful support to the Retail Clerks, especially in the case of the 1948 grocery store strike. Recent pronouncements by Teamster leaders and spokesmen would seem to indicate that they consider the work areas now controlled by the Clerks Union to be legitimately within the jurisdiction of the Teamsters under the general policy that everyone who handles a product on its course from manufacturer to consumer is a warehouseman or teamster. To date, no local manifestations of this dispute are in evidence in Gilroy. It appears that the struggle in all probability will be decided in the urban areas with no local implications until a settlement is reached.

Gilroy's location is a vital reason for local importance of the Teamsters Union. The great dependence of the whole Valley upon the trucking industry for the movement of its produce to the urban centers and the shipment of necessary retail supplies and manufactured products from metropolitan

areas would seem to give promise of increasing strength to the Teamsters Union. This situation is accentuated locally by the availability of Highway 101. As a consequence it appears that the dominant position of the Teamsters will be one of the factors which will continue to shape future developments in the Gilroy area.

Another controlling influence would seem to be the continuing excellent relationship between employers and the unions in those trades and industries where the unions are now securely implanted. Many of the disputes as they did arise, particularly in the town's retail trades, stemmed on the employers side from a lack of trust and faith in the motives of union leaders which was based upon early community contacts with farm labor organizers. Prior to 1948, the ten years of constructive collective bargaining in the manufacturing and food processing industries had done little to dispel this distrust. However, after less than two years of bargaining in an atmosphere of mutual respect and confidence, representative spokesmen for the town's grocers, hotelmen, and restaurant operators have expressed unlimited satisfaction with the type of union leadership with which they are currently dealing. More than one retailer expressed the sentiment that, contrary to expectations, union representatives have been understanding and cooperative, and thoroughly reasonable in allowing minor deviations from the master contract. Several times the view was volunteered that the retail operators

would not have opposed the union so violently had they known in advance what little inconvenience the unions would cause. This is an attitude long expressed by the managements of the Be-Ge Corporation and the Felice and Perelli Cannery, and the community is beginning to feel its more general acceptance throughout the unionized trades. This climate of constructive and wholesome union-management relation should continue to exert a controlling influence in future labor developments in Gilroy.

A forecast of further developments:

Perhaps some speculation may be made, if only into the immediate future, as to prospects of further unionization in the community and the nature of the community response. There appears to be no doubt but that the present course of unionization will continue in Gilroy. Barring a violent interference with present economic trends such as would result from an international crisis or from a major depression, there appears to be every reason to believe that the retail trades in Gilroy will become very nearly as completely unionized within the next few years as are these trades in San Jose at the present time. This will mean that the extension of the union shop will go into the town's barbershops, gasoline stations, department and novelty stores, etc. The defeat suffered by the Automobile Mechanics Union in Gilroy will very definitely retard further local activity by that organization, and there is serious doubt that the mechanics

employed in the town's garages and repair shop will be organized in the foreseeable future.

There appears to be no prospect whatever for the significant organization of farm laborers in the Santa Clara Valley. It does not seem that any union may organize these workers without the backing of the Teamsters Unions, a circumstance which precludes the entry of the C.I.O. affiliated farm labor or cannery workers unions into the district. A.F.L. leaders in the area continue to disclaim any interest in the organization of farm help. Still another factor seems to indicate this same general result. Other unions in the area have achieved a considerable degree of security in the Valley. For the most part these unions have benefitted from an atmosphere of constructive relationships, with many employers, which has grown out of the relative harmony that has prevailed during the past 10 years. The last thing these A.F.L. unions would appreciate would be a repetition of the warfare of the early 1930's, and it is virtually a foregone conclusion that anti-union forces will be as effective now as they were then. Much of what these union leaders have worked for since 1938 would be destroyed in any all-out labor dispute. As a result, it seems more probable that these leaders will try to prevent a full scale organizing drive among the agricultural workers of the district. On every hand it is becoming more generally understood among labor leaders that a farm labor dispute is perhaps the one area where all anti-union elements in the Santa Clara Valley will be welded together into a strong opposition

force which will enjoy the support of the general public. Unionization therefore could be accomplished only after a major struggle which would tend to break down the harmonious relationships that now exist. This conclusion is based upon the premise that there will not occur, in the foreseeable future, another great agricultural depression. In the event of such a depression it is conceivable that many of the conditions which fostered farm labor unrest in the Gilroy area, as in all of California, will reappear. It does seem, however, that the farm associations will be more experienced and better equipped to prevent large-scale unionization in the Santa Clara Valley than they were in the early 1930's.

Despite the diminishing prospects for farm labor organization, it is apparent that farmers in the Gilroy area will continue to fear the possibility of union activity among their workers. This trepidation will continue largely because of ignorance on their part, but also because of the biased information they will continue to receive both from the Associated Farmers and through the rural press. It may be expected that this genuine, though groundless, fear on the part of the community's agriculturalists will continue to act as a strong motivating force throughout the area in the future as it has in the past.

Several other considerations appear worthy of note. The tendency, already experienced in Gilroy, for urban wage

rates to be extended into the rural communities will certainly continue. While the differential may persist in the more remotefarm communities, there is every prospect, in the case of Gilroy, that it will be entirely eliminated because of the advanced degree of unionization in the community. The rural rate has been removed in the canneries and in the hotels and restaurants. There is the strong probability that this differential will be eliminated in the near future in the retail stores, and at some later time in the town's manufacturing plants.

Another factor, evolving from current labor-management relations, is the prospect for stronger and more inclusive employers associations, which will tend to be organized upon county-wide membership rather than upon a town or city basis. Already there are associations of Santa Clara County's retail grocers, machine shop operators, and building contractors. More generally the Santa Clara County Employers Association is finding strong support from a variety of small businesses. The county-wide nature of these employer's groups is, of course, patterned after the jurisdictional areas of most of the A.F.L. unions in the Santa Clara Valley. Jurisdiction throughout the County is held by San Jose Locals of the Cannery Workers, Machinists, Teamsters, Retail Clerks, and others. Only in the building and construction trades has control been decentralized to local unions in the rural communities. There is reason to believe that the County's employer associations will continue to draw members from the smaller towns,

particularly as unionization is extended into the rural districts.

In most areas of future union activity it appears that the impacts of subsequent organization upon the townsfolk will continue to decrease. Here again, the conditioning influences of nearby urban unionization will remain powerful, and, too, the current union-employer relations, constructive as they are, have proved enlightening to the whole community. Further unionization in the retail trades, for example, may be expected to continue without marked community opposition. In those areas close to the farmers, however, the established pattern of public reaction can be expected to prevail for some time. Unionism there will continue to be potentially a disruptive force in the Gilroy area until, after a long experience of peaceful unionism in other industries, the trepidation of the community's farmers may be allayed.

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