

Fact-Finding Report August 20, 1968

To: Members of the Conference Board of Christian Social Concerns

Fr: John V. Moore, Chair, Conference Board of Christian Social Concerns of the California-Nevada Annual Conference of the United Methodist Church

Friends:

The Board, meeting the first of August, postponed action on the grape boycott until the Task Force on Labor, Management and Marketing in California Agriculture could present its report at the September 6th meeting. Prior to the meeting I had received an invitation to spend a day with Cesar Chavez and the United Farm Workers Organizing Committee (UFWOC). I asked Neal Barker, chairman of our Task Force, if he could arrange meetings and conferences with growers and non-union farm workers. (Neal has given several weeks of his time this month to this problem.) Neal and I are reporting our experiences, impressions, and opinions to you. Perhaps you have already received Neal's report along with background material.

Wednesday, August 14, I talked briefly with Edgar Manherz, our pastor in Delano, and Cesar Chavez, and spent two hours with Allen Grant, president of the California Farm Bureau. In the afternoon we talked with workers harvesting tree fruit. Thursday Neal spent all day at the Congressional Hearing in Delano. The Rev. Fred Wilken and I ate lunch with two Congressmen and their assistant, and returned for the afternoon session. Thursday evening Neal and I listened to five anti-union farm workers. Friday we spent three hours with two growers involved in large grape operations. In the evening I observed the UFWOC picketing the Delano Police Department. I ate supper Friday and breakfast Saturday with union members in Filipino Hall, and slept on the hard floor of the hall Friday night. Before returning home I spent three hours with representatives of the union and a migrant minister.

WHAT I HEARD

Ed Manherz, United Methodist minister in Delano, stated that the Ministerial Association had taken no position, believing that to take sides is to lose the other side.... The local Migrant Ministers did not contact the Ministerial Association.... I'm now concerned with California agriculture. DiGiorgio's Sierra Vista has closed, cutting off a \$500,000 annual payroll.... The payroll in the Delano-Lamont area is off \$2,000,000.... Thirty-two businesses have closed their doors in Delano. (A grower estimated this to be twice the normal rate).... The people who work in the fields in this area are for the most part local people. I can show you 500 homes (\$10,000-\$20,000) of people who work in the fields.... The grape growers are predominantly Catholic, but workers and growers have turned against all the churches in the town...." Ed reported the declining increase in membership. Balancing the budget is an increasing problem. He showed me the record of income and the provision for special

benevolent giving for those who did not want to give to World Service and Conference Benevolences. (I was surprised at the small proportion given in the "special" category). Ed told of the pickets cursing the workers in the fields, shouting obscenities, mouthing such epithets as "Judas!" "Traitor!" (A representative of the UFWOC acknowledged that some of the pickets did swear, but that they tried to restrain obscene harrassment)...Ed said that the food coming to the NFWOC from outsiders was not going to workers but to "misfits and strikers Chavez has brought in.... It is hurting the town and good workers...." When Ed came to Delano he sensed a feeling of community and brotherhood which he's never experienced before. Today the town is torn apart.

Cesar Chavez was being interviewed as UFWOC pickets walked in front of the Delano Police Department. A union worker charged that he had been pulled from his car and beaten by men from two cars. The union charged the police with failing to investigate or act upon the complaint. The police said that the alledged beating had taken place outside of their jurisdiction. In the interview, Chavez stated that the union was committed to non-violence, but that he feared that this could be interpreted as weakness or cowardice and that greater violence could cone. While Chavez was being interviewed, one of the leaders of the Farm Workers Freedom to Work (the anti-UFWOC workers group) parked in front of the police station. As he passed Chavez and the newsmen, he sneered, "He's a liar." Chavez is convinced that the UFWOC has the support of the workers. He said that if the growers were so certain that the workers were against the union, they should not fear elections. If the union lost in the elections, they would accept that.

Allen Grant, president of the California Farm Bureau, and a churchman, asserts that the farmers trust neither Chavez nor Hartmire (Migrant Ministry). He also stated that after participating in a forum with Chavez, he felt that Chavez was to be respected. He asks why the effort at organization is being made in California when wages and working conditions are so much better here. Grant sees acceleration of change to crops requiring little hand labor and rising competition of foreign producers, especially in Mexico. He thinks that the boycott will be broken, and that the union will not be successful in its organizing efforts among farm workers. Grant, a man who dropped out of school after the death of his father, put his brothers through college, and succeeded in farming, is convinced that others can do the same if they are willing to work. He feels that the church has never listened to the growers. He cites a meeting to which he invited growers to tell their side of the story. The churchmen who came to spend the day listening began walking out for other appointments two hours after the session began.

We talked with ten workers in the field of a small grower. After working through the morning hours picking tree fruit, they went home to clean up and returned to talk with us. One man and two women spoke English. These workers were not critical of the UFWOC, although only two, a father and daughter, were members. The crew boss, who was employed year round at an hourly rate, with several months off when he could earn more picking fruit, was afraid that at the union scale he could not support his family. He works more than eight hours a day. The other men working from 6:00 to 11:30 on piece rate were

making from \$20 to \$25 a day. They felt that they could not do as well at the union wage scale. The boss expressed fear of mechanization and that they might be forced off jobs because they were “green card” workers. He felt that the union would be good when workers were fired unjustly. He also stated that some labor contractors discriminated against Mexicans by giving better trees, vines to Anglos. They felt that their employer was fair. They would pick a few trees and come to an agreement as to a fair price. These workers have lived in the area from two to twenty-five years. We learned later that the workers did not know that one of their fellow workers was a union member. He was the fastest worker in the crew.

Congressmen Phil Burton (S.F.), Matthias (the Valley), Hawkins (L.A.), Alphonso Bell (L.A.), and Dent from Pennsylvania came to Delano for a House Subcommittee hearing. Except for a lawyer representing the growers speaking to the green card issue, and three workers, the testimony was offered by UFWOC members or supporters. Jeremy Sherry, editor of the *Central California Register*, the Roman Catholic Diocese publication, stated that his paper had not taken sides in the controversy. He testified that because of his coverage of the Mass following Chavez’s fast, the *Register’s* advertisers had been told to cancel their advertising. The advertising income of a special issue of the paper decreased from \$13,000 in 1967 to \$3881 in 1968. Sherry further stated that the paper had given twice as much editorial space to the growers to present their views than they had to the union. He charged that agro-business salesmen had threatened to take business away from those who advertised in the *Register*. He said that Mendosa [leader of the FFWF] had sent flyers to all of his [Sherry’s] advertisers threatening to picket if they did not cancel their advertising. Sherry expressed the belief that the attack upon the paper was a “vicious power play by growers who are angry with the church....”

Pastor Peck, a young man assigned two months ago to Our Lady of Guadalupe Church in Delano, expressed the church’s concern for the welfare of the community. He said that his bishop had spoken to the pastors of the area saying that an atmosphere of freedom and respect is basic to any resolution of the conflict. The bishop stated that: 1) Any man has the right to organize; 2) If some want to form a union, that is their right, but it is also the right of workers not to form a union; 3) In a protracted controversy, mediation is essential. He felt that this was a role for the federal government. Pastor Peck spoke of both sides feeling intimidated and of the tensions in Delano.

Fred Wilken, United Methodist pastor in Sanger, testified that many farm workers cannot get into hospitals, and that some communities have no clinics. He spoke of the church’s involvement in the power struggle.

The Delano chief of police offered to make his records available to the Committee.... The growers indicated their willingness to testify before the Committee and requested agenda items in advance.

The Delano High School auditorium was filled to capacity, with union sympathizers in the majority. Just before noon, approximately 100 non-union workers

walked to the front of the auditorium where they stood until one of their number suggested that they do as requested by the Chairman, and be seated. In the afternoon, three non-union workers testified. Mike Carmona referred to himself as a neutral and said, "I don't think Cesar Chavez represents the workers." When asked if he was opposed to a vote being taken among the workers, he replied, "Yes, I think." He said that he would allow his crew to join a union. He said that workers with him were making \$11.50 per hour plus 15 cents per box for eight hours a day, five days a week, and packing 40 to 50 boxes a day. Dolores Mendosa, a crew boss, has worked in the area for twenty years. Dolores, a fiery woman, said, "We don't need clothes and food.... All we need is for people to leave us alone and let us work.... We're not low class.... We pay our taxes.... The picket line is a whole bunch of people on Welfare...." The Chairman asked, "Would you favor letting your people vote?" She replied, "No...they're out in the field. That's their vote.... We want it the way it was three years ago.... You can't even talk to your next door neighbor.... You don't know who your friends are...." Amelia Lucero and her husband have 90 workers under them. Amelia said that she didn't know much about the union but that she wants to work and her kids want to work. She doesn't believe in leaving the kids at home. "A union...my kids can't work?" Her three children, 14, 15, and 16, work with her. She has sent one daughter to college. She expressed the same feeling about tension and division in the community in these words: "Everyone's been hurt around here. There's hate around here. It used to be peaceful. I wish there could be peace again...." Chavez was asked whether he knew of any cases where people were prevented from getting jobs because of their interest in unionization. He answered that they would submit several documents of instances of blacklisting and firing. Chavez said that wages in 1965 were \$1.10 to \$1.25 per hour with exceptions as low as \$1.00. A worker testified that under the Schenley contract, workers were receiving \$1.90 per hour.

Thursday evening in a private home we listened for two hours to anti-union workers. One man said that he quit the union because he couldn't give a full day's work. He charged that the union organizers had been trained in Mexico. He objected to UFWOC praising Pancho Villa, feeling that they should be praising Washington and Jefferson.... A mother earns \$3000 a year working seven months. She showed her husband's check stubs, which revealed how much less he was making now, compared with his income before unionization. Three of her children work with her, earning all of their school, clothes, and spending money for the year. She prefers having them with her to being "on the streets." She and another woman spoke of being harrassed with obscenity by pickets. They said that their pastor called them "scabs" and said that "they weren't Christians." They stopped going to church because in Sunday School their children were taught about Pancho Villa and Cesar Chavez. They have a new pastor and this teaching has stopped. They told of their experiences after the filing of a contract. One of the women was favored by all of the workers except two or three to be the steward. When it became clear that she was the favorite, the three union members said that they couldn't decide then. The decision was made

that night at the union hall. No notice had been given of the meeting. A woman who could not speak English was chosen.... One woman charged that her neighbor sold canned goods which she had received from the NFWOC. "It was a better buy than at the store." (Jim Drake, of the Migrant Ministry, requested that a letter be written stating the facts and the name of the person selling the goods. He promised that the matter then would be investigated.) The women had known Cesar as a boy. They couldn't understand how people could support him.... They said that they have thought of moving to get away from the conflict and tension of Delano. "If the union wins..." they would move.

Friday we spent three hours with one grower-corporation employing more than 500 workers that day. One of the men stated, "We have a certified labor dispute because one worker, of the 2800 who have worked for us for the past three years, signed a complaint....and we have a certified dispute." These men are struggling with conflicting pressures of financing the operation, uncertainty of weather, nurturing the fruit to harvest, hassling with buyers who are trying to profit from the boycott, supervising the workers in the field, and the threat of unionization. While a large operation, larger farms in the area have gone bankrupt.... The houses on their land were comparable to many homes in Earlimart and Delano. They were not squalid as farm worker housing often is. The founder of the enterprise lives with his wife in a modest house on the land. The food served the workers included more variety than the food served in the UFWOC kitchen.... Talk of election among workers makes no sense to them. They are convinced that Chavez does not represent workers. They feel that they have had good relations with their workers and the people of the community. They went to school with many of them. They and other growers contributed to their building of churches and Filipino Hall.... They were highly critical of Chavez personally, expressing the feeling that he had ulterior motives. "He's not a worker!" They were puzzled, hurt, and irritated by the involvement of the churches. One saw the issue clearly as one of law and order and that the churches, by supporting the secondary boycott, were supporting an illegal action.... In the fields we talked with the leader of a group from Coachella Valley who for four years had come north to work in the grapes in the Lamont-Delano area. They worked for the same growers each year. When asked about toilets, he replied, "When it's 105° who wants to use an outhouse which is 120°?" The portable outhouse apparently received little use by the workers.

Friday evening I observed 250 pickets, a double line a block long, pacing back and forth in front of the Delano Police Department. Twenty or twenty-five of the pickets were Anglos. Men and women, grandmothers, teenagers, fathers holding the hands of their small children marched. Periodically they chanted, "We want justice!" (It was the cleanest picket line or march I've ever seen. The people were spic and span. I saw only one moustache, one beard, and one moustache-goatee combination). The demonstration took on the air of a football rivalry as three or four cars bearing anti-Chavez signs circled the block. A pickup with teen-age girls in the back also circled the block cheering for Chavez. The football air was only an impression, however, for the community is deeply and bitterly divided.... The march ended when the people gathered on the lawn in front of the station to listen to word of the arrest and jailing of their member who had charged that he was beaten by anti-union men.

Police officers began to appear, entering a building and emerging with night sticks and gloves. I saw no uniformed officer in sight of the crowd, but judging from the officers I saw through the glass, I suspect that eight or ten officers were at the ready just inside the building. The crowd dispersed without incident.

During the few hours I was at Filipino Hall, UFWOC's meeting hall and kitchen, I sensed that here was a community. Volunteers prepared the meals for whoever came to eat. Some of the people have been on strike for three years. They've walked picket lines day after day. (I wondered if these people felt the divisions and hate as did others in the community; but the feeling they gave me was one of quiet commitment and confidence and hope. They were not on the defensive, but rather gave the feeling of being an important part of a cause infinitely larger than themselves. I'm sure that there are good days and bad days, but I suspect that there is a morale or spirit which gives strength to these people).

Saturday, Jim Drake, of the Migrant Ministry, said that Cesar had been working for twenty years for the same objectives which the UFWOC seeks. Through the years Chavez has taken every opportunity to talk to individuals about what he's trying to do. From 1962-1965, Chavez, Dolores, and Drake talked individually with 5000 individuals as they helped them work out their problems with the health, welfare, education, and legal agencies of the state. "One thousand became deeply committed and have been the core of the movement," Drake said.... The *Contract* is central to the aims of Chavez and the UFWOC.... Three thousand farm workers participated in a vigil in front of the courthouse in Fresno when Chavez was standing trial, charged with violating an injunction.... The union contends that the boycott is a consumers' boycott. The growers argue that its effectiveness has been the coercive pressure of unions in the East.... Chavez and the UFWOC see their struggle as more than an effort to organize. It is of the same cloth as civil rights and the war on poverty. Chavez welcomes support of "those whom others criticize as 'outsiders,'" because he feels that poverty and civil rights are everyone's problems.

A BIASED VIEW OF SOME OF MY BIASES

Before I record other impressions, hunches, and opinions, I feel that I should acknowledge some of my biases, which influence what I see, hear people say, and the judgments to which I come. I'll state them with as little elaboration as possible.

My sympathy is for the poor and the underdog.

I suspect that the law, the courts, and law enforcement in the Valley reflect the bias of the middle class. The plea for "law and order" is often blind as to whose interests are served by these particular laws and order.

I believe that the bias of the Protestant Churches and the schools in the Valley reflects the interests of the growers.

The Migrant Ministry shares the bias of the UFWOC.

I believe that police harassment and brutality exist, but I do not believe specific charges apart from consideration of the evidence.

I am highly suspicious of workers or organizations whose primary purpose is to destroy unions.

I like peace and harmony, but I remember that Our Lord spoke of a sword of division as well as a balm for healing.

HUNCHES, IMPRESSIONS, AND OPINION

Without exception, growers, anti-union workers, and the one pastor with whom I talked said, "The churches have not listened to us." By "the church" is meant the state Council of Churches and other church groups outside of the area, for local churches and pastors have listened to small and large growers and non-union and antiunion workers. Neal and I were the first persons who had sought out any of these people, except for Mr. Grant.

Defensiveness is common among the growers and the non-union people. They feel that they are being condemned and unjustly treated by outsiders. They are convinced that living and working conditions for farm workers in their communities are better than in most, if not all, states.

Green Card workers are aliens whose green card entitles them to work in the United States. Some green card workers have lived in the United States for 15, 20, and 25 years and longer. The UFWOC's attack is upon those who have received green cards since the outset of their strike at Giumarra, and who are working where the union is striking. From the union's point of view, the granting of new green cards is an extension of the bracero program without its restriction upon employment of braceros where there were certified labor disputes.

Wages are higher in California agriculture than elsewhere in the country. A grower admitted that the threat of unionization had forced wages up. Efficient workers can make more money by piece rate than by the hourly minimum. Unionization has meant a forty hour week, whereas many workers work longer hours. Families have augmented their income with wives and children working, although some growers will employ no one under eighteen. The union contract eliminates farm work for those under eighteen.

Elections are a crucial issue. Employers and anti-union workers argue that there would be elections if a sufficient number of workers petitioned for them. The union argues that elections would reveal the attitude of workers. They say that they won their closest election with an 80% majority. Growers charge that the union brought in workers to vote. The union asserts that the elections were supervised. The crucial question in elections is that of qualifications for voting. The outcome can be greatly influenced, if not determined, by the qualifications of voters. The contrasting attitudes toward elections indicate their

significance in this power struggle.

The agricultural scene is characterized by acceleration of mechanization, rising foreign competition, especially from Mexico, increasing size of farms, tree fruit competition with table grapes, the perishability of crops, the role of the government, and efforts for unionization. When he spoke at UCD, Chavez said that he was not fighting mechanization, but poverty. A Migrant Minister expressed the feeling that the end of the family farm was not far off, regardless of the effectiveness of the union, unless small farmers saw their future with the workers rather than the corporate giants. I asked several growers if they thought that they could circumvent the union by mechanizing. They did not reply. I suspect that mechanization will lend strength to unionizing efforts. Chavez and his workers are looking far into the future to a way of agricultural life different from huge enterprises on the western side of the Valley.

Consumers and processors are integral to the farming scene, along with growers and workers. Resolution of the conflict is important to the entire country, but factors over which farmers and workers have little or no control impede the resolution of their problems.

Charges and counter-charges fill the air. Each side accuses the other of harassment and violence. Anti-union people assert that the workers are against Chavez or else he could pull the workers out of the fields. Union workers reply that growers use strike-breakers. Critics of Chavez say that the union cannot supply workers to those growers with union contracts. Union representatives reply, "Not so this year." They counter-charge with, "A grower asked for twice as many workers as he needed, so that one-half of the men we sent sat around all day. The next time we sent half the number he requested and he accused us of not supplying workers."

Delano has been the hardest hit by the conflict. Whether it has been Alinsky's methods which have polarized the community or not, the town is divided into two camps.

Paternalism is still part of the scene. Growers unconsciously think of doing things "for" their workers and "for" the workers in the area, although the workers at one farm we visited chose their own cook and made the decisions about eating arrangements. It is interesting that the growers so critical of paternalistic government are so blind to their own paternalism.

History has not been helpful to the growers. I did not get from non-union or anti-union people any feeling that there might be significant parallels between the Delano scene and other efforts to organize labor in our history. There are some important differences, but the similarities are striking in terms of the attitudes and actions of workers, the union, growers, the churches and pastors, the courts and the police. It is my meager knowledge of this history and my appraisal of it which significantly influences my judgment about the conflict.

Adamancy and potential violence are ingredients in Delano. Growers state that they see no reason for dealing with Chavez since they have all the workers they need. Members who are the core of the union have made great personal sacrifices until dedication to and sacrifice

for their cause have become their common way of life. They know that they must deal with the growers. If the growers think that they can ignore the UFWOC indefinitely, I think that they are unrealistic. They may postpone dealing with Chavez, but it is a postponement and not a cancellation.

The language of the conflict has been violent, but compared with other efforts at organizing workers, bloodshed and damage to property have been minimal. Anger and hate are deep. Like Martin Luther King, Chavez is a restraining force inhibiting the violence which is beneath the surface. Nevertheless, I felt the potential of greater violence in the conflict.

For more than half a century the Methodist Church affirmed the right of employees to organize and bargain collectively. The United Methodist Church reaffirmed this position. Through the Migrant Ministry the State Church Council has gone beyond asserting a principle. It appears to me that they have directly supported the organizing efforts of the UFWOC, with all of the ambiguities of such direct action.

Only workers can decide whether or not they want to organize. For the Church Council to presume to make this decision would be as paternalistic as practices of some growers which are condemned by some of the churches.

Farm workers are divided about Cesar Chavez and the UFWOC. Neal is convinced that the workers are not with Chavez and the UFWOC. I do not know whether or not they are. I do believe that farm workers should be brought under the NLRB. Mediation offers hope only when the parties are ready for mediation. Since mediation implies a tacit recognition of Chavez and the UFWOC, I suspect that unless the pinch becomes tighter the growers will continue to see no need for mediation.

If our Board calls upon our members to boycott table grapes, we ought to realize that this is to go beyond affirming the right to organize and bargain collectively, and beyond the support of the organizing efforts of the UFWOC. It is to support a particular tactic in the struggle for recognition. The issues are not black and white. There are now casualties and will be casualties as a result of the organizing efforts, and all of the other forces at work in agriculture. Those who forgo grapes for a few months or a year will not pay the price which countless people on both side of the conflict will be forced to pay.

I went to Delano to listen, to become better informed, and to feel with the people. There's something irresponsible in making decisions which affect the lives of others without feeling something of what these decisions mean for others.

The Task Force will bring its recommendation regarding the grape boycott to the full Board meeting on September 6. I hope that this report, along with Neal's, and the material which he has sent you, will help prepare you for participation in the debate

and decision.

Shalom,

John V Moore