

Straight Talk On The Grape Strike* 1968

Compiled by: The Rev. Wayne C. Hartmire, Jr., Director, The California Migrant Ministry

*The growers say that Cesar Chavez is a power and money hungry labor agitator.....*Cesar Chavez comes from a family of migrants and was a migrant farm worker. From 1952-1962 he was a community organizer for the Community Service Organization (CSO). In 1962 he left his job as the organizing director of CSO because of his deep feelings about the suffering of farm workers and his conviction that farm workers had to protect themselves and improve their condition through their own organization. He and his wife, Helen, and their eight (8) children moved to Delano, California in 1962. They lived on a small savings account and seasonal work in the fields while Cesar began organizing the National Farm Workers Association (NFWA). Prior to the strike Cesar's salary was \$60.00 per week. Since the strike began in September 1965 he has lived the way all the strikers live: basic bills (e.g., rent, utilities, etc.) are paid by the Union; food comes from the strike store or kitchen; \$5.00 per week is paid to all adults who work in the strike. The food and money come from unions, churches, individuals, etc. Without these contributions, there would be no strike.

*What about the charges by Senator John Harmer and others that there is no need for food, money and clothing.....*Food and money are needed all the time. They are used efficiently and effectively. Clothing has never been a serious need. The CMM has discouraged people from sending clothing because the strikers do not have facilities or the time to sort it, put it in usable condition and use it effectively.

*The growers say that the workers do not want Chavez' Union and that the boycott is an act of frustration.....*If it is so obvious that the workers oppose Chavez why don't growers agree to elections to prove their point. Prior to every strike and boycott, UFWOC has offered to join the grower involved in setting up fair elections to determine the will of the workers. In every case the grower has refused even to discuss such an election. After having closed the door on the only democratic method available to convince the public that their workers are content (and thus to get the boycott off their backs), growers then ask us to accept their word about the feelings of their workers. Whenever the Union has forced an election by strike and boycott, the workers have voted overwhelmingly to be represented by Cesar Chavez' United Farm Workers Organizing Committee (UFWOC). These elections two (2) at DiGiorgio and one (1) at Goldberg plus card checks at six (6) other ranches are the only hard evidence we have as to the will of the workers.

**I freely admit my bias in favor of the organization of farm workers; but the statements here tell the truth as we in the California Migrant Ministry have seen it with our own eyes. (September 1968)*

*Some people say the DiGiorgio election was rigged in favor of Chavez.....*That is simply not true. All parties involved in the conflict (Teamsters, UFWOC, DiGiorgio) agreed to the supervising body (American Arbitration Association) and to the procedures for the election. All parties were present at the polling place and when the ballots were counted. Strikers and strikebreakers alike were eligible to vote. All voters had to be proven DiGiorgio's workers. Each of the parties had the right to challenge any voter as to eligibility. All challenged ballots were set aside for later determination of eligibility (based on company payroll records, pay stubs, etc.). The field workers' vote came out — UFWOC — 530, Teamsters — 331, no union — 12. The challenge ballots were never evaluated and counted because their inclusion would not have changed the final result.

*But what about the workers now in fields at Giumarra and other ranches; don't they prove that the workers are happy and don't want Chavez.....*I watched most of Giumarra's workers come out of the fields to join the strike on August 3-5 of 1967. By August 5, the Giumarra packing shed was virtually shut down. (CMM staff and other churchmen have watched workers come out of the fields at many ranches in the Delano area and the Coachella Valley.) The company then proceeded to recruit strikebreakers. Many of these strikebreakers are green card immigrants who live in Mexico and commute seasonally to California to cash in on the harvest season. They do not support their families on the U.S. cost of living index. Their major objective is to make as much as they can, as fast as they can so they can return to Mexico and invest it in their homes, businesses and families there. They are perfect strikebreakers. As strikebreakers come in, the Union gets some of them to join the strike. The company then recruits more strikebreakers to take their place. That cycle continues. The cost of the harvest is increased tremendously but the growers are apparently willing to pay the cost in order to fight the Union.

*But the growers say that 90% of their workers are local people and that they have year-round work in table grapes.....*The figures of the Farm Labor Service of the State Dept. of Employment say something else. There are three (3) major work periods in table grapes: In Kern County in 1967-78 for example:

Pruning & Tying	Peak: Dec. 18-Jan27 (6 wks)	3200 workers needed at peak
Thinning & Girdling	Peak: May 13-June 1 (3 wks)	3500 workers “ “
Harvest	Peak: August 7-Sept. 2 (4 wks)	6000 workers “ “

There are migrants at work in each of these seasons. At the peak of the harvest approx. 50% of the field workers are migrants.* At other times of the year there is less work, e.g., October 28, 1967: 3,000 workers; Dec 2, 1967: 200 workers; Feb. 24, 1968: 200 workers; March 30, 1968: 0 workers; July 13, 1968: 800 workers.

* William H. Metzler "Farm Mechanization & Labor Stabilization, Part II," Giannini Fdn., Report 280 — the 50% figure is based on a normal year. During the strike the number of migrants in the harvest has increased.

*But many farm workers have said publicly that the real workers do not want Chavez.....*This is not true and there is no evidence to substantiate it. The only public evidence that we have (elections and card checks) proves the opposite: that field workers want the protections of a contract and trust Cesar Chavez and UFWOC. From the beginning of the strike the growers have supported and made use of labor contractors, local business people and a small number of farm workers in their efforts to oppose unionization. The first group was the Kern-Tulare Independent Farm Workers, exposed by the late Senator Robert Kennedy as a company union. Subsequently there has been the “Facts from Delano” group, Mothers Against Chavez, Men Against Chavez and now the Agricultural Workers Freedom to Work Association (AWFWA). The AWFWA openly supports Max Rafferty, calls the Union a communist conspiracy and is aligned with the anti-union, right-to-work forces of the state and nation. They have been embraced by Reagan and Rafferty as the true representatives of the workers. In fact they are only another pitiful example of man’s willingness to sell out the rightful aspirations of his brothers for the sake of personal gain.

*Why don’t farm workers use the legal machinery that is available to get elections and settle the strike (as some politicians have suggested).....*Farm workers are specifically excluded from the National Labor Relations Act (NLRA). They have no rights under the law to seek elections that might lead to collective bargaining. If growers refuse elections (as the table grape growers have) workers have only one recourse: to apply economic pressure until they have gained union recognition and collective bargaining.

*The growers say that California grape workers make \$2.50 per hour and more.....*It is true that some workers earn more than \$2.00 per hour during certain parts of the harvest season. But the harvest season is short and families should live in decency year-round. Through the whole year, day in and day out hourly wages in California agriculture are \$1.40 (\$1.40 x 40 hr. week x 52 weeks is \$2,912). Even this low wage level has been reached as a result of union pressure and the bracero policies of the U.S. Dept of Labor: Add to these low wages the seasonal nature of farm labor and it is then easy to understand why annual income for male farm workers in California is just under \$2,000 and family income is between \$2,500-\$3,000 per year.

*But the contracts between UFWOC and other companies threaten to destroy these companies.....*Contracts with workers that provide humane wages and working conditions do cost money. No one has ever denied it. But workers earn by their labor a fair wage and just conditions. Bargaining provides the arena for working out the meaning of fair wages and just conditions. American industry has long accepted the self-interest value of a bargaining relationship with workers. DiGiorgio, Schenley, Gallo, Almaden, Paul Masson, Christian Bros., Perelli-Minetti, Novitiate Wineries have contracts with UFWOC and they are all in business. DiGiorgio has sold most of his table grape acreage in Delano not because of the Union but because in 1952 he signed a contract with the U.S. Government which had two (2) main parts: 1) the Government agreed to provide publicly

subsidized water to DiGiorgio acreage in excess of 160 acres; 2) DiGiorgio agreed to sell the excess acreage in ten (10) years (see the U.S. Reclamation Law of 1902).

*What about the smaller landowners, the marginal table grape growers who will be hurt by the boycott.....*A boycott is a costly and ambiguous event. The workers do not like the strike or the boycott. They will call it off anytime their employers agree to bargaining. The Union has offered to use the boycott machinery to market the grapes of any grower who will sit down with his organized workers. (Some chain stores who have stopped selling grapes would love to have union-harvested grapes to sell.) Farmers (large or small) can no longer justify their own survival in business if it is purchased at the cost of suffering for farm workers and their children. Farmers are often exploited at the market place. They need to get together to change that injustice just as their workers are getting together to change a long-standing injustice in the fields.

*The growers say they favor unionization but that Chavez is untrustworthy (or worse).....*The major agricultural lobbies have consistently opposed the extension of the NLRA to agriculture. The Council of California Growers, the California Farm Bureau Federation and the American Farm Bureau Federation are among the major opponents of present efforts to extend the NLRA – (SB-8 and HR-16014). The agricultural industry has given lip service to the rights of their workers to organize but in every specific instance they have bitterly opposed unionization. (Before Chavez it was Norman Smith of AWOC and before that Ernesto Galarza, etc.) Cesar Chavez has proven to the world his dedication to the aspirations of his own people and indeed to the needs of all men. He is a leader in non-violence, known and supported by the major religious bodies in this country. The U.S. Labor movement is firmly supporting his efforts. Cesar Chavez and the workers with him have no desire to destroy anyone – least of all their employers. The agricultural industry may someday recognize with gratitude that they can choose to bargain with humane and reasonable men.

*What are some of the provisions of the existing UFWOC contracts.....*There are now nine (9) contracts negotiated between organized workers and their employers (mostly wine grape growers). These contracts raise wages, provide grievance procedures and make provision for overtime pay, job security, rest periods, health and welfare plan, holidays and vacations with pay, health and safety protections on the job, and other benefits. All contracts include no strike clauses.

*Many public figures say the boycott is illegal.....*Contrary to the statements of some misinformed persons, it is perfectly legal to engage in a primary boycott, calling on consumers to stop purchasing a product directly involved in a labor dispute (e.g., Calif. table grapes). It is also legal under federal law for farm workers to engage in a secondary boycott (e.g., “don’t buy at Mayfair” because Mayfair handles grapes) since farm workers are not covered by NLRA which outlaws secondary boycotts. (California has no state secondary boycott law; other states may have). In New York, four (4) unions that are covered by the NLRA (not including UFWOC) stipulated that they would not coerce chain

stores in regard to grapes. This action has nothing to do with the legality of the consumer boycott.

The California Migrant Ministry
1411 West Olympic Blvd, Suite 501
Los Angeles, Calif. 90015
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