

The Farm Workers' Movement: A People's Fight Against Corporate Exploitation 1972

Published by the Grapevine.

(Editor's Note: Most of us, at one point or another, have read about the heartrending conditions of migrant workers: their unbelievably low wages, miserable housing, poor health, the anachronism of child labor, etc.

All of us also know the name of Cesar Chavez. During the late 60s he must have been the most publicized grassroots leader. The strike by grape pickers against California's major grape growers, Cesar's fast in support of the strike the country-wide and later international boycott of table grapes, all of this made good copy and served to highlight the plight of America's farm workers.

Thus the symptoms of farm worker exploitation and the more flamboyant aspects of farm workers' efforts to gain fair contracts from the growers have become quite well-known. Much less known but equally important is a story which deals with the nitty-gritty of the farm workers' struggle for economic dignity: their efforts to form a nation-wide farm workers union.

If one looks at the influences of conglomerate corporations which more and more pervades agriculture, this struggle is surely one of David against Goliath. But many signs point to a slow but certain victory over these giants, simply because the farm workers' unionizing efforts are part of a movement and they can count on the hands and hearts of people.

This issue of Grapevine attempts to draw together the various aspects of the farm workers' union movement: history, philosophy, tactics, program, church support. Because California has been the prime focus of the movement and the United Farmworkers Organizing Committee has been central in its development, much of our material pertains to this state and to UFWOC. This emphasis does not detract significance from the whole farm labor movement, for, as its organizers are fond of saying: "As California goes, so goes the nation").

Farm Workers—Who Are They?

The People

This country's farm workers are an astonishing mixture of people, totaling between two and five million. Most of them are black or brown, but there is also a sizeable group of whites, an older group of single Filipino men, and recently a growing number of Puerto Ricans. Many of these workers belong to families where all the members work in the fields,

beginning with the youngest of five, because that is the only way to make a subsistence income. There are also the single foreigners, Mexicans or Puerto Ricans, who have been contracted for one particular season. And occasionally there are students and housewives who need to earn a quick extra dollar.

In this issue our attention will be limited to those Americans who depend on farm labor as their total means of income. There are the people who are most cruelly caught in a vicious net of corporate profit making. The core of the problems of farm workers is *systemic* and it is their systemic exploitation which produces the pitiful statistics. But at the same time it is the driving power for a farm workers union.

The Conditions

Statistics about the living conditions of farm workers may be quite well-known by now, but as a reminder here is once again a sampling:

Wages

- Average annual earnings in 1968: \$1,307.
- Average hourly wages in 1969: \$1.43.
- Farm workers are specifically excluded from collective bargaining laws and unemployment insurance. They are discriminated against in minimum wage coverage (\$1.30 for farm workers, \$1.60 for others) and social security laws (they must earn \$150 or work 20 days for one employer in order to be covered). Without contracts farm workers do not have the protection of job security, holidays, sick pay, overtime pay, sanitary toilets, etc.

Health

- In 1969 infant and maternal mortality was 125 percent higher than the national rate.
- Death from influenza and pneumonia 200 percent higher than the national rate.
- Death from t.b. and respiratory infections 260 percent higher than the national rate.
- Death from accidents 300 percent higher than the national rate.
- A California Health Department survey in 1969 revealed at least 150 cases per 1,000 workers of pesticide poisoning.
- Child labor is very common. In California alone ¼ of the farm workers are children under 16.
- Farm labor is rated the third most dangerous occupation by the Senate Subcommittee on Migratory Labor.

Housing

- In 1969 the average farm worker house had only 1.9 rooms.
- 18.4 percent of their housing does not have indoor electricity.
- 90.4 percent does not have a sink.

- 95.6 percent does not have a flush toilet.
- 96.5 percent does not have tubs or showers.¹

There is a federal housing code for migrant camps, matched by codes in 32 states, but their enforcement is pitifully slack because of local political connections. Thus migrant workers are the worst-housed group in the nation, according to a recent New York Times article.²

The Employers – Who Are They?

It is a common misconception that farm workers are employed by farmers. This could still be validated some years ago, but it is now a well-known fact that conglomerate corporations are more and more controlling agriculture. Agriculture has become agribusiness and major growers are partners in this new industry.

For instance, in California a mere 7 percent of the farms occupy 80 percent of the arable land. The top 2.4 percent of the farms account for nearly 60 percent of the hired farm labor.³

The conglomerates maintain lobbyists which influence federal and state legislation in their favor, they dominate government departments and hire advertising firms to woo public attitudes toward them *and* their workers.⁴

In addition, these large corporations often enjoy the benefits of legislation designed to help small farmers. The Agricultural Adjustment Act of 1933, for example, was designed to buffer the income of small farmers through price support and curbs on overproduction. One of the Act's main concerns is with cotton. In California one cotton empire received \$4.37 million for not growing cotton in 1969.⁵

Further, one can say that agribusiness is receiving a continuous government subsidy by being exempt from the state-federal unemployment insurance system, the non-application of collective bargaining laws to agriculture, the absence of enforcement of the minimum wage laws, and university research on mechanization of agriculture. Finally, agribusiness, is aided in its exploitation of workers by the states' as well as the government's assistance in providing cheap foreign labor.

1. Statistics from U.S. Department of Labor and from U.S. Department of Agriculture, 1969.

2. New York Times, Nov. 27, 1971.

3. *So Shall We Reap: The Story of Cesar Chavez and the Farm Workers' Movement* by Joan London and Henry Anderson. Crowell Collier, New York, 1970. p.2

4. Idem, p.3.

5. Idem, p.3.

A Little History Forerunners

All during this century much energy has been spent on the organization of farm workers in California. That state's farm worker population has traditionally been a colorful blend of people: Filipino, Indians, Chinese, Japanese, Mexicans, impoverished white small farmers. A variety of organizing efforts sprang up in this mixture, the history of which is excellently described in "So Shall Ye Reap", a documentary of the farm workers' movement from its inception in the early 1900's to the present.

A few notes from this book: after World War II farm worker organizing picked up real momentums in California. In 1959 the AFL-WIO formed an Agricultural Organizing Committee: (AWOC), which was to organize the heretofore unorganized. It was to be a nation-wide union, starting off in California and spreading to the Northwest and Southeast. Money for the drive was plentiful, but the leadership came from 'outsiders' and was consequently not attuned to farm workers' needs and weak on strategies to organize them. By 1964 AWOC had lost the possibility of being effective. The formation and demise of AWOC is important as an example of how not to reach farm workers: this kind of big labor input relied too much and too little on the human side of organizing.

Two men, from very different backgrounds and working in disparate places, had other ideas about how to organize farm workers. Father Thomas McCullough, a Roman Catholic priest, had the significant vision that the problems of wages, health, housing and child labor were symptomatic of a deeper one: that of the relationship between labor and management. McCullough, after having tried other approaches such as talks with farmers, became an organizer of farm workers. While serving a parish, he began visiting farm workers in their homes and bringing small groups of them together on a weekly basis. In due time Cesar Chavez was to attend one of them....

Ernesto Galarza, a Mexican-born doctor of philosophy, was another true friend of the farm labor movement. One of his crucial contributions lies in the fact that he fought for a union which was primarily concerned with the human needs of farm workers. He doubted that a merger with any established union could produce the benefits peculiar to the situation of farm workers.⁶

In retrospect it can be said that these germinal ideas from a clergyman and an intellectual were awaiting embodiment in a leader who truly represented his people. That leader came forward in the person of the Mexican American farm worker Cesar Chavez.

6. Idem, see pp. 39-78.

Cesar And UFWOC

So much has been written about Cesar Chavez that it is not necessary to go into repeats here. For our purpose it is most essential to stress that Chavez is an extremely good organizer with an uncanny notion of how to give his organizational and philosophical principles political as well as human significance.

Before the grape pickers strike, which began in 1965 and which put Cesar and the farm worker movement in the limelight of national concern, Chavez had been organizing Mexican Americans for more than 10 years. During the 50s he worked as an organizer for the Community Service Organization (CSO), a Los Angeles-based agency modeled on the approach of Saul Alinsky. Cesar resigned from his post as director of CSO in 1961 over disagreements about the priority of farm labor organizing as a solution to the economic and social problems of Mexican Americans. Cesar felt that that was the only way to gain dignity for farm workers, but others saw no hope in this route and wanted to leave agricultural work entirely to foreign contract workers.

Thus, in 1962, Chavez set out to organize workers entirely on his own. He started in the town where he then lived, Delano. His fledgling movement was called the National Farm Workers Association (NFWA). The strategy: no outside financial support in the beginning; organization of farm workers around their daily problems such as insurance, credit and workmen's compensation, no mass meetings but small but small house-sessions; no talk of strikes. By 1964 the NFWA had some 1,000 dues-paying members in 50 local groups around Delano.

In 1965 Filipino workers struck grape growers in Delano over a wage dispute. The members of NFWA voted overwhelmingly to join them in *la huelga*, even though Cesar did not deem the Association ready to carry off successful strike. But the movement he had built had such firm roots that the strike soon mobilized all kinds of support from publicity, other unions, volunteer help. The farm worker movement was underway.

Structurally too NFWA moved forward: in 1966 it merged with AWOC, big labor's earlier attempt at organizing farm workers and the group to which most Filipino workers belonged. There now was *one* representative group for farm workers: the United Farm Workers Organizing Committee, AFL-CIO. Cesar became UFWOC's director and Larry Itliong, a long-term Filipino organizer of farm workers, its assistant director. UFWOC by then had begun accepting financial support from established unions, but Cesar remained in total control of the strategy and philosophy of UFWOC.⁷

7. Indebted to Idem, pp. 141-157.

the Church and the Farm workers

The church has had a longstanding relationship to America's farm workers. Although the church is an integral part of the societal structures which have kept farm workers among the most disadvantaged in the nation, during the past 50 years it also has been one of the few institutions which has produced a measure of personal care for them.

Migrant Ministry – The Past

Traditionally the church's presence among farm workers has been called the Migrant Ministry. This has always been a cooperative venture among the denominations, whose program consisted of much-needed services: day care for children, adult education, distribution of food and clothing, literacy and recreational programs, counseling, worship services.

In the 1950's some 38 state Migrant Ministry Committees had come into being and a national office was established within the newly founded National Council of Churches. Its function was one of communication and coordination of concerns among Migrant Ministry personnel across the country.

During the '60s some Migrant Ministries, notably the one in California, became concerned with the issues of justice and dignity as farm workers defined these themselves. The focus shifted from the provision of services 'from the top down' to a response to the farm workers' self-determined needs. This transition was a slow process. Many questioned the 'propriety' of the church's involvement in labor disputes, strikes and boycotts. Discussions took place about the 'service'-approach and the 'political activism'-approach as a form of mission.

By 1970 however the just cause of the farm worker movement and the non-violent nature of its struggle had convinced scores of churchmen of the necessity for a Christian presence with the movement. On a national organizational scale this resulted in a move toward greater autonomy on the part of the Migrant Ministry. Where before it had been a part of the program of the National Council of Churches, it now established itself as an entity in itself, although still related to the NCC. In January of 1971 the group adopted a new name as well as a new identity. The National Farm Worker Ministry (continuing the National Migrant Ministry) was born.

Farm Worker Ministry – The Present

Purpose

It is worthwhile to quote NFWM's definition of itself: "The National Farm Worker Ministry is a movement within the churches to be present with and support farm workers

here in the continental United States and in those places from which farm workers originate, as they organize themselves in order to overcome their powerlessness and achieve equality, freedom and justice for themselves and their families in wages and working conditions, health protection and resources, educational opportunities, and the normal relationships of social, religious and community life. The Ministry supports the practice of non-violence and self-determination. The Ministry is a response to the call of God to be with the poor and oppressed, and to affirm a concern for the human life of farm workers and all to whom they relate.”

Building The Farm Workers Union It's a Social Movement

Philosophy And Life Style

The cornerstones of UFWOC's operation are the concepts of non-violence and of servanthood, stemming from Cesar Chavez' personal commitment. The non-violent posture is both a pragmatic necessity and an inspirational tool. Without being militantly non-violent UFWOC would have little chance of influencing growers' behavior or gaining federal legislation. At the same time non-violence keeps emotions focused on the proper goal of the movement: gaining dignity for its workers.

The notion of servanthood rests on “self-sacrifice, discipline, hard work and (internal) satisfaction.” “Man needs a sense of being a servant in this way without romanticizing or commercializing it,” says Cesar.⁸

This philosophy results in a life style among UFWOC's organizers which is unpretentious. Since 1965 movement workers have been paid a salary of \$5 a week, with food and housing provided by UFWOC. It is understood that all of their energy is spent on 'la causa'. The movement workers' dedication to this life and work style symbolizes to farm workers the potential for their new humanity.

Services

Because of the great needs of farm workers in the areas of health, economic security, legal services et.al. and their all too real disadvantages in obtaining services from already established institutions (farm workers have several strikes against them: their poverty, that fact that by and large they belong to racial minorities, their frequent moving from field to field) UFWOC's leadership decided several years ago that they need their own service institutions. Principal among these are:

8. *Christian Science Monitor*, May 27, 1971. Article by Curtis J. Sitomer.

- ***The Robert F. Kennedy Farm Workers Medical Plan.*** This health plan is financed by growers under UFWOC contracts, who pay 10¢-an-hour contributions for each farm worker. (There is no relationship between the Plan and the Robert Kennedy Foundation, based in Washington, D.C.) Since 1969 the Plan has paid over \$700,000 in benefits to farm worker families.

Families who have worked together as little as 50 hours in one quarter are eligible to receive these benefits from the Plan: doctor office visits (\$5. per visit), X-ray and lab work (\$100 per year per family member), \$15 for medicines, \$100 for off-job accidents.

Two clinics operate in support of the Plan: one in Delano and one in Mexicali, Ca. The Plan has a board of trustees which consists of three growers and three UFWOC representatives.

- ***The Farm Workers Credit Union, Inc.*** is one of the oldest programs of UFWOC. It is the farm workers' bank for saving and borrowing.
- ***The National Farm Workers Service Center, Inc.*** is the non-profit service arm of UFWOC. It has established more than a dozen service centers in the Southwest which handle problems people may have with immigration, welfare, police, consumer fraud, income tax, etc. It also sponsors the health clinics, the credit union and the retreat center.
- ***The Economic Development Fund*** is one of the newest developments in the farm workers union. The employers under UFWOC contracts are paying 2¢ per box into this fund. The proceeds will be used for low income housing for retired workers, for co-operatives, educational programs and the retraining of workers.
- ***La Paz*** is a newly acquired education and retreat center for farm workers. It is an 80-acre site in the hills east of Bakersfield, Ca. The UFWOC headquarters have moved here from Delano. In the near future training sessions for ranch committees and organizers will be held here. The cultural and literacy unit of UFWOC is housed at La Paz.
- ***Huelga Schools*** are after-regular-schoolhours classes in which children from 5 to 18 receive educational experiences pertaining to the farm worker struggle. The schools were developed by the National Farm Worker Ministry in close connection with UFWOC.⁹

Structure

In organizing farm workers UFWOC functions as a very socialized union. Its greatest concern is to balance central authority and workers' rights. The union's pivotal operating unit is the *ranch committee*, a group of five workers elected each year by their fellow workers on individual ranches with UFWOC contracts. The ranch committee is responsible for the

9. *California Migrant Ministry Newsletter*, fall 1970.

enforcement of the contract and deals with the growers in case of grievances. The thrust here is to make the individual farm workers feel that their power under the contract is real, so that they will stand up for it.

Another crucial element in the structure of the union is the *hiring hall*. Through this hall all farm workers are contracted and dispatched to their jobs according to seniority. In this way the need for individual labor contractors, traditionally a device for exploiting farm workers, is cancelled out.

Today UFWOC holds some 200 contracts, covering 30-40,000 farm workers. In all of these cases workers have shown in elections that they wanted to be represented by UFWOC.

UFWOC's central staff counts some 100 people, while an additional 350 work in field and boycott offices. UFWOC welcomes the help of volunteers as long as they recognize the self-determination rights of farm workers.

The union itself is growing — it has a membership of at least 55,000 at this time. Its members contribute regularly to the union, but this is still not enough to make UFWOC a self-sustaining union. It is dependent on contributions from the AFL-CIO, the United Auto Workers, many other labor unions, church groups and concerned individuals.

It's an Economic Strongarm

Strikes And Boycotts

The struggle for union recognition on the part of farm workers began with a strike in 1965 and gradually gained leverage through an every more effective boycott. Farm workers have struck their employers many times over very basic injustices in their working conditions, despite the tremendous hardships such strikes spell for them. And many times also boycotts have been organized in support of the striking workers. In fact, it has been the consumer boycotts of growers' products which have won contracts for UFWOC. Boycotts therefore have proven to be a most meaningful way of pressuring growers, although their success obviously depends on the concern and commitment of the public at large.

The great table grape boycott, started in 1967 and ended in 1970 when the growers in question signed contracts with UFWOC, is a good example of what boycotts can accomplish. It is estimated that California grape growers lost 20-25 percent of their income due to the boycott. Several large growers were forced into negotiations with UFWOC because they were going bankrupt. It is interesting to note that contract negotiations were started in the summer of 1969 but dragged on for a year, because the parties could not agree on UFWOC's demands for pesticide safeguards. It was the boycott which gave

UFWOC the leverage to force growers finally into this provision which affects workers as well as consumers!

Boycotts must be deemed the single most important tool for the gaining of justice on the part of farm workers. In addition they have an educational and moral value which is often unexpected. For instance, California's State Department of Agriculture has recently banned the use of DDT on grapes and other crops. (For suggestions on how you can use boycotts in support of farm workers right now see p. 7)

Contracts

The contracts which UFWOC has negotiated are a very first for farm workers. Following are some of the most basic provisions:

- **Hiring hall.** Employers must request workers through the Union hiring hall. The Union must provide the needed workers within 72 hours. Workers not provided during that time can be hired directly by the employer.
- **Seniority.** Seniority determination is the responsibility of the union. Older workers with long seniority can no longer be replaced by illegals from Mexico.
- **Discrimination.** There will be no discrimination as to race, color, creed, religion, age, sex, political belief, national origin or language in hiring or housing.
- **Job security.** Workers cannot be fired without just cause.
- **Grievance procedures.** These are spelled out in individual contracts.
- **Medical plan.** The growers pay 10¢ per hour into the RFK Medical Plan.
- **Health and safety.** The contracts ban the use of persistent pesticides (e.g. DDT, Aldrin and Dieldrin). They require toilets in the fields and cool drinking water with individual paper cups. They provide for safety standards in regard to use of pesticides protective garments, tools and equipment.
- **Holidays and vacations.** Christmas Day shall be a paid holiday. A worker employed for one year is eligible for a one-week vacation.
- **Hours of work.** A normal work day shall consist of 8 or 9 hours a day for 6 days of a week. For additional hours the worker will be paid 2¢ an hour extra.
- **Wages.** The contracts provide for increases in wages and for piece rates. In 1971 the hour wage was generally \$1.90 per hour. Piece rate wages are much higher than this.

- **Enforcement.** It is understood that the written contract is only the beginning. The ranch committees are elected to enforce the contracts and implement grievance procedures.

The NFWM Board has the right to set policy, take programmatic action and make statements. It speaks 'from' the Church, as a part of the Church, and 'to' the churches as it confronts them with the needs of farm workers, but only in its own behalf.

The operating budget for NFWM is provided by Church Women United, the mission boards for the major denominations, local churches and concerned individuals. Its staff consists of 20 full-time people.

Program

NFWM does not plan to mount a new program. Instead, its program is the giving of support to the farm workers' movement and the provision of linkages between that movement and the religious community.

Some activities of NFWM:

- **Worker-Priest Program.** This is an effective form of direct assistance to the farm worker movement. Some 15 men and their families are presently living on a subsistence basis and devoting all their time to the myriad needs of farm workers who are building the human kind of union which UFWOC is. The worker-priest assignments fall into four categories:
 - (1) working in the fields and serving as friend and counselor for fellow farm workers, while at the same time acting as an agent of change and promoting the organization of farm workers.
 - (2) serving full-time as an organizer in a strike or boycott situation or as a trainer of ranch committees.
 - (3) developing educational opportunities for the children of strikers.
 - (4) organizing programs in education, reflection and recreation at La Paz for the families in the farm worker movement.

The worker-priest program was developed by the California Migrant Ministry and is supported by denominational and interdenominational bodies. It is now fully a part of NFWM.

- **Farm Workers Emergency Relief Fund.** Farm workers are more vulnerable than any other workers to the damages which natural disasters and unemployment can bring. The

Relief Fund is an attempt to build up. A reserve for the crises farm workers find themselves in unexpectedly.

- **Participation Plan.** NFWM invites groups of five or more to become connected to its work for a fee of \$50. Such participants will receive regular and detailed information on developments and events within the farm worker movement; receive help from NFWM in getting connected to boycott or organizing work in their regions; be invited to any NFWM regional meetings held in their areas.

- **Contact Persons:** The Rev. Wayne (Chris) Hartmire; 1411 W. Olympic Blvd., Room 501, Los Angeles, Ca. 90015 (NFWM Director).

Mr. David Hernandez, P.O. Box 3, Dayton, Ohio 45402 (NFWM Director).

Mrs. Jean Powers, 475 Riverside Drive, Room 552, New York, N.Y. 10037 (NCC).

The Rev. Ed Krueger, 2103 Chicago Ave., McAllen, Tex. 78501 (NFWM worker-priest).

The Rev. August VandenBosche, 18910 Northwest 43d Ave., Opalockaa, Fla. 33054 (Florida Christian Migrant Ministry).

Elections And Legislation

ELECTIONS. Whenever growers have consented in having elections for union representation (in the hope that a union acceptable to their interests, like the Teamsters, would win and thus get UFWOC off their backs), the workers have always elected UFWOC. From 1965 to 1971 there have been over 50 valid elections in agriculture in California, Arizona and Washington. In every case but one the elections has been won by United Farm Workers.

The methods by which elections have taken place include cardcheck, secret ballot and ratification. Agribusiness interests and the Farm Bureau have contested that these methods are not valid. Yet the NLRA recognizes them as *bona fide* expressions of the will of the workers. On other grounds too these elections cannot be deemed invalid, for they have always been supervised by a neutral arbitrator chosen by all parties to the elections.

The growers however continue to sell the point that UFWOC is afraid of elections. There are three major reasons for their arguments. 1) When a grower has consistently refused to even talk about elections, UFWOC has indeed stopped to work for them and instead asserted that a strike by the workers is the election (i.e. the expression of the will of the workers). 2) On some farms and in some communities farm workers have agreed that fair elections are impossible because of the rampant intimidation against UFWOC around them. 3) UFWOC is against collective bargaining legislation as it is now written. Since this legislation includes the right of secret ballot elections, the conclusion is

drawn that UFWOC is really afraid of them. UFWOC is however opposing the legislation for different reasons (see section on legislation).¹⁰

A favored tactic of growers is to play off the farm workers union against other ones, notably the Teamsters Union. Often, when pressure to recognize UFWOC has become very strong, growers have signed contracts with the Teamsters Union instead. Over the years UFWOC has however steadily gained in allegiance among the workers. Finally, in March 1971, the Teamsters Union signed a 'peace treaty' and agreed to leave the organizing of farm workers to UFWOC alone. Some growers in the meantime have also recognized the grassroots strength of UFWOC. During the recent lettuce struggle some acknowledged that "the Teamsters have our contracts, but UFWOC has our workers."

LEGISLATION: The NLRA of 1935 was the first major federal legislation which gave industrial workers a chance to organize. It established procedures for union representation elections and good faith bargaining. During the next 12 years the major industrial unions of today came into being. By 1947 they had grown so strong that Congress passed amendments to the NLRA which, among others, restricted the unions' power by outlawing certain unfair labor practices by employees and certain secondary boycotts (the Taft-Hartley amendments). In 1959 the Landrum-Griffin amendments strengthened the secondary boycott restrictions and made organizational recognition picketing illegal under certain conditions.

UFWOC favors the extension of the original NLRA to agriculture, but it opposes the Taft-Hartley and Landrum-Griffin amendments. Cesar Chavez has testified before the Senate Subcommittee on Labor in 1969 that these amendments take the teeth out of farm workers unionizing. Specifically the restrictions on boycotts are harmful for UFWOC. Primary boycotts (don't buy grapes) and secondary boycotts (don't shop at so and so because they sell grapes) are UFWOC's most powerful weapons.

The Farm Workers Union movement then asks for the same 'period of grace' as the industrial workers had from 1935-1947. That is: it asks for an exemption from the Taft-Hartley and Landrum-Griffin restrictions on the NLRA, so that farm worker unionizing will have the economic power under law (through boycotts and pickets) to gain signed agreements between farm labor and agribusiness.¹¹

The Future

Sooner or later there will be a national union of agricultural workers. The seeds

10. *Elections and Legislation in Agriculture*, unpublished paper by Wayne C. Hartmire, director of the National Farm Worker Ministry.

11. Testimony by Chavez before the Subcommittee on Labor of the Senate Committee on Labor and Public Welfare, April 16, 1969.

UFWOC has sown in California are bound to bear fruit also in other regions of the country. With fair contracts achieved for California's grape pickers, the push is on for the same benefits for citrus-fruit and vegetable workers.

To be sure, agriculture is becoming more and more mechanized. But this does not necessarily make farm labor obsolete. It merely calls for different skills on the part of workers.

It is true also that better paid farm labor will raise the price of fruits and vegetables on the consumer market. But all along agricultural workers have really been subsidizing consumers. Wages account for 1-5 percent of the retail price of agricultural products. A 100 percent increase in wages would still result in no more than a 3 percent increase in the cost of food.¹² This 'sacrifice' would certainly offset the enormous increase in benefits for farm workers.

A persuasive argument for an agricultural union comes from a 'converted' grower. "It will be good for the country if agriculture is unionized. I think it was Henry Ford who said it made the country when industry was unionized because, with higher wages, the workers could afford to buy the cars they were making. The same would be true with fruit and vegetables....."¹³

meanwhile: The Struggle Continues

Focus: Lettuce

The signing of UFWOC contracts with major grape growers in Delano during the summer of 1970 was just the beginning of the struggle for justice in the fields. Perhaps this first major victory has more clearly pitted UFWOC's people movement against the systems of agribusiness.

The latest UFWOC challenge focuses on *lettuce*: When grape growers were signing contracts with UFWOC in 1970, California's lettuce growers made secret agreements with the Teamsters Union so that they would not have to deal with UFWOC. Some 7,000 lettuce workers struck the vegetable industry protesting that they wanted UFWOC instead of the Teamsters.

Some growers rescinded their Teamster contracts, but others obtained a court order against all strike activities in the Salinas Valley. Hence a boycott of lettuce was started in

12. *So Shall Ye Reap*, p. 190.

13. *Why They Signed With the Union*, article in the *Farm Quarterly* by Ron Hartley, Sept.-Oct. 1970.

major cities across the country. After the Teamsters and UFWOC 'made peace' in March 1971, negotiations between the lettuce growers and UFWOC began. The boycott was then suspended.

The talks took place weekly from May till November. The proposed UFWOC contracts were eventually no different from the ones agreed on with the grape growers. But no agreement could be reached with the majority of the lettuce growers (six of them did sign contracts with UFWOC)

Being planned again are a *primary* boycott of iceberg head lettuce as well as a *secondary* boycott against certain large chain stores which sell non-union lettuce. Another long struggle is ahead. Its success will greatly depend on the amount of consumer solidarity it can muster.

Action Suggestions

- Look for union label lettuce. Check to see if the United Farm Workers' label (black Aztec eagle) is on the lettuce carton. Ask to see the cartons in the cooler so you can be sure you are buying farm workers union lettuce.
- Boycott non-union iceberg head lettuce grown in California and Arizona. When in doubt avoid head lettuce.
- Join local boycotters as they try to persuade chain stores to handle only farm workers union lettuce.
- Spread the word about the lettuce boycott through personal contacts, communication networks, denominational newsletters, etc.
- Contribute money so that farm workers will continue to make progress.
- Volunteer to work full-time for Cesar Chavez and the farm workers.
- *Contact:* National Farm Worker Ministry, (see above for names and addresses).
Andy Anzaldúa, UFWOC, P.O. Box 62, Keene, Calif. 93531.

These Are UFWOC Lettuce Labels

Freshpict Foods, Inc.
Prime
Ram
Interharvest, Inc.

Mel Finerman Co., Inc.
D'Arrigo Bros..
Greenhead
George Lucal

Paseo
Amigo
Chiquita
Blue Chip

Silver Queen
Pandol And Sons
Three Brothers

Lettuce Boycott Offices

Boycott Central
P.O. Box 62
Keene, Ca. 93531
(805) 822 5571

Atlanta
Tom Gannon
820 Moreland Ave., S.E.
Atlanta, Ga. 30316

Baltimore
Peter Standish
2020 E. Lombard St.
Baltimore, Md. 21231
(301) 342 2007 hm
254 6412 ofc

Boston
Andrea O'Malley
173 Harvard St.
Dorchester, Mass. 02024
(617) 282 4085

Chicago
Chester Ruiz
1300 S. Wabash Ave.
Chicago, Ill 60605
(312) 939 5120
626 1938

Cincinnati
John Banks
1015 Vine St. #706
Cincinnati, Ohio 45202
(513) 651 3245 ofc
861 9608 hm

Cleveland
Mack Lyons 2705
Detroit Ave.
Cleveland, Ohio 44113
(216) 696 2686 ofc
861 3121 hm

Dallas
Israel Mendoza
2315 Knight St.
Dallas, Tex. 75219
(214) 521 7825

Denver
Richard Longoria
1854 Race St.
Denver, Colo. 80206
(303) 333 1279
333 1278

Detroit
Bill Masterson
3419 Michigan
Detroit, Mich. 48216
(313) 825 4811

Fort Worth
Walter Pearson
1322 Hemphill
Ft. Worth, Tex. 76104
(817) 924 9023

Houston
Bill Chandler
1828 Arbor
Houston, Tex. 77004
(713) 9334

Kansas City
Andy Piesko
1621 Washington
Kansas City, Mo. 64108
(816) 471 3419

Los Angeles
Dale VanPelt
P.O. Box 57277
Los Angeles, Ca. 90057

Or
1411 W. Olympic Blvd.
#301
Los Angeles, Ca. 90015
(213) 386 8130
671 3815

Minneapolis
Rogelio Uvalle
3422 Fremont Ave. N.
Minneapolis, Minn.
55412
(612) 522 6707

New Jersey
Joe Thek
114 No. Fulterton
Montclair, N.J. 07402
(201) 783 5771

New York
Jose Gomez
19 W. 34th Street
New York, N.Y. 10001
(212) 596 0148

Philadelphia
Richard Trejo
2536 N. Mascher St.
Philadelphia, Pa. 19133
(215) 739 9111

Pittsburgh
Bill Patterson
227 No. Fairmont St.
Pittsburgh, Pa. 15206
(412) 361 2023

Portland
Kate Barton
2206 NE 11th Street
Portland, Ore. 97212
(503) 282 8057

St. Louis
Harriet Teller
4323 McPherson
St. Louis, Mo. 63106
(314) 535 2720

San Antonio
Fred Garza
832 Mistletoe #2
San Antonio, Tex. 78212
(512) 733 1655

San Francisco
Kit Bricca, Bay Area
Coord.
920 Weeks St.
E. Palo Alto, Ca. 94303
(415) 323 0506

San Jose
Fred Schumacher
237 N. 1st Street
San Jose, Ca. 95113
(408) 292 4651

Seattle
Sara Welch
5800 17th Ave. NE
Seattle, Wash. 98105
(206) 522 8480

Tampa
Robbie Jaffe
217 S. Howard Ave.
Tampa, Fla. 33607
(813) 255 5051

Washington, D.C.
Ramon Romero
7332 Piney Branch Rd.
Tacoma Park, Md. 20012
(301) 587 0510