

The NFWA Strike Fund 1966

In 1966, I recruited Doug Weston of the Troubador Club in Los Angeles to produce two sold-out back-to-back Joan Baez concerts at the Santa Monica Civic Auditorium and raised \$60,000 for the farmworker movement.

In addition, and in about the same time period, I organized a \$100-a-person garden party event in Beverly Hills, which netted perhaps \$15,000 for the farmworkers. These monies were slated to be used to organize farmworker cooperatives, an assignment I had been given by Cesar Chavez when I arrived in Delano in October of 1965 to begin my full-time work for the National Farm Workers Association. The Joan Baez concert and the garden party events were the culmination of my fundraising efforts during my first year of service to the farmworker movement.

At the conclusion of the garden party event, Cesar took me aside to tell me he wanted to start a strike fund for the NFWA and would I be willing to assign the funds I had raised in Los Angeles to this purpose in exchange for taking charge of an annual grant provided by Jack Conway, head of the Industrial Union Department, through an organization with which he was affiliated, the Center for Community Change? Cesar told me the grant amounted to \$50,000 a year, would be renewed each year for at least three years, and was to be used to provide such services as co-ops, social services, credit unions, etc. I readily agreed. The burden of raising funds was lifted from my shoulders, and I was now free to implement many of the plans that Cesar and I had discussed throughout the year.

Three trustees (two ministers and a Catholic priest) were appointed to set up and oversee the new strike fund. One of the trustees was a CPA and he took responsibility for filing the annual reporting forms with the IRS. Neither Cesar Chavez nor I had any direct control over the fund, and when I left the union toward the end of 1973, the fund was only used to accumulate interest so that someday it would be large enough to pay strike benefits for farmworkers.

As late as 1978, I had reason to believe the fund was still being held in trusteeship, but I cannot say for certain.