

TAPE ARC - 7, TC 7:00:00

THAMES TV: THIS WEEK

“CALIFORNIA GRAPE STRIKE”

YOUNG HISPANIC WOMAN interviewed by reporter:

7:01:35 WOMAN: I think that uh, he's the first Mexican-American in this nation that has uh, kept our power, that has uh, shown that the Mexican - Americans want liberty, that we want justice, and that we are willing to fight for justice until we get it. And I think that every one of his followers would give their life for Cesar Chavez.

CESAR CHAVEZ, BEDRIDDEN, speaks to a reporter:

7:02:24 ...the only thing we can point to is that we have a, uh educated an awful lot of farm workers, in the respect that it's not impossible to have a union, that it's possible, and we've broken the barriers. In the whole history of this country there's never been any collective bargaining agreements between farm workers and farmers. We've achieved that here, and so we have dispelled the myth that this couldn't be done. Secondly, we've also dispelled that other myth that uh, unions are not feasible in farm labor. And I think those are the two big achievements.

7:03:13 It's been a short time. I thought it would take uh, uh, ten, fifteen years before we could break the barrier, and that is before we could get one contract. It's going a lot faster in that respect. See if we look back on the history of the attempts

to organize workers in the United States, then uh, the short seven years that we've been organizing, really is a very short time.

YOUNG HISPANIC WOMAN interviewed by reporter:

Q: What do the pickets think of growers like Mike Botic?

7:05:15 I think they're used to treating the Mexican-American and the Filipino like uh, slaves, I would say so. And ah, they don't want to treat us like humans, and the reason uh, they don't want to negotiate with us is because they don't want a farm worker to sit across their table, and demanding uh, price for their work and uh, the things they want in their contracts. The growers are like a spoiled child.

MIKE BOSIC, "Mr. Grape," grower, interviewed by reporter:

Q: What do you think of Cesar Chavez?

7:07:48 Well, I think, I never even met the man, as I said previously, uh, I think that uh, what he's done, he has picked up the gauntlet, supposedly, for the Mexican-American people and he's trying to better their lot, if you will. I think his approach to solving the problems at times, has been distasteful to me. He does not represent the people as far as we can determine. Our employees have emphatically stated that if we were to sign a contract with him tomorrow, they would leave the fields. And uh, not work for us, and go elsewhere.

7:08:22 I think that in any of our cultural operations uh, a strike would be critical. In thinning, for example. If we wouldn't thin them at the right time we could lose the entire crop, uh. At harvest we have every dollar we have invested in the crop and it's important that uh, we be able to continue without interruption.

7:08:49 Well, sure, it would put us in an untenable position and we would have to meet every demand that they, that they made, or otherwise we would lose our investment.

7:09:04 I, I believe that Mr. Chavez himself probably is non-violent. I never have met the man. I believe he probably is. However, I believe there is an element in his union that probably is not non-violent. We've had a couple of incidents here in the valley this year, which, the burning of boxes, etc. I think his endorsement of the Students for a Democratic Society, his endorsement of Third World Liberation Front, to aid in his unionization drive, is indicative of some of the policies that uh, he adheres to.

7:09:46 Well I think that this is uh, the strategy that Chavez and the AFL - CIO are relying on. They're going for the underdog and uh, they have used this and apparently pretty effectively in some areas, in their propaganda. I can only go back and uh, reiterate what I said earlier, about what I said earlier about what we pay our employees. It's a pretty good wage and they can make about \$5 and \$6,000 a year without too much effort. Uh, I think this is the last vast area in this country where unionization has not, uh, has not been, does not have a toe-hold and I think this is what they're after.

ORGANIZER, Cesar Chavez' cousin, questioned by reporter:

Q: How many “Black Legs” crossing at border?

7:11:48 Well, uh, at this time, at this year, I think it’s hard to determine the amount of people breaking the strike, but uh, we know for sure that uh, we have distributed leaflets here at the border, and we have distributed 18,000 leaflets, that is, given a leaflet apiece to people walking across and one to each car coming across from the border. And I don’t know exactly how many people there are coming across to pick grapes, it’s kind of hard to determine... [Q: but in your view there is a substantial number?] ...there is a number of people, yes.

CESAR CHAVEZ, BEDRIDDEN, talks to reporter:

7:17:25 The boycott truly is one of the best uh, forms of struggle for a group such as ours, and it gives the best kind of involvement for groups who are willing, who want to help the disadvantaged, and as a non-violent weapon it would be very difficult to find another one that would uh, be superior to it.

Q: The Pentagon is buying more grapes than ever this year, do you think this is accidental or a deliberate attempt to break the boycott?

7:18:02 Now that is a most deliberate effort, and I would call that a very immoral act. They’re using the government to uh, break the boycott. The Defense Department is buying grapes, the Agricultural Department is buying grapes, and I heard that they uh, they just put the grapes on the Surplus Commodity List, which

means that they are going to be giving grapes to poor people ... [Q: who are on the welfare program?] ... on the welfare programs, which is uh, which is really ridiculous, but it shows to what extent the administration is going to try to break the boycott and the strike.

RONALD REAGAN, interviewed at airport:

Q: What do you think of the grape boycott?

7:18:54 Oh, the grape boycott. Well I've classified that in the past on a number of public occasions as immoral, and I think it is.

Q: Growers claim Chavez and followers are Communists... your opinion?

7:19:12 I think that there are, let me put it this way, I think that there are a number of people associated with him who are far more interested in various kinds of political social reforms than they are in organizing a union.

Q: Do you foresee a time when farm workers in America, will be organized in the same way as industrial workers?

7:19:34 Oh, certainly, and I have uh, as I say as an old union man, I have no quarrel with that.

Q: Would the workers have a right to strike, say at picking time, would you envisage that?

7:19:46 No, I really wouldn't, and this has been discussed many times and I don't think that the same rules of industrial unionizing could apply in the farm, because that would not be legitimate collective bargaining; that would simply be blackmail. If you simply wait until the crop is ripe and ready to rot, and then said now we won't pick it, the farmer isn't bargaining under those circumstances, he's being blackmailed.

CESAR CHAVEZ, BEDRIDDEN, interviewed by reporter:

7:20:11 Governor Reagan has a uh, fantastic mind, you know, to clutter up the facts. If the growers give us a contract they will find out what we really want. This is part of the propaganda that keeps them from uh, recognizing the union and settling down to meeting the demands that the workers are making. Also, this is why they are in so much trouble presently, because they've let this thing go for almost four years, to the uh, to a point where the whole industry is in trouble. They have no concept of uh, of uh industrial relations, absolutely not. They're living in the Eighteenth Century, and the governor included. It's the type of mentality that uh, that us, brings with it the uh, feeling that if they recognize the union they're giving up their manhood.

Q: Reagan's statement that the strike is blackmail?

7:21:32 Uh, first, Governor Reagan is speaking as an employer in this instance, and he would have to have that opinion, but, uh, there are others, other

situations where you can compare to agriculture where unions uh, do exist, and workers have the right to strike at the most crucial time and when they have the most leverage. But see, the point in, the real point is that that only way to avoid strikes is by having the right to strike which is the only way you can have a strong union, which is the only way you can have industrial peace.

7:23:04 Religion comes from our Roman Catholic, and there are very many good writings, you know, encyclicals, most of them are not followed, but they are very beautiful, you know, and so we try to apply those very simple things, and the teachings of Christ. I think that uh, you need very little else to make things work. I'm sure you can put that as an influence. Uh, uh, Ghandi has been a tremendous influence because uh, I think that he, uh, really is the first man who uh, really taught us how to accomplish great things, and how to be creative and uh, to, to uh, get people involved and keep them involved, and how to project a long, long struggle and how to bring about a final victory in a most difficult area, particularly the political area. If it can be done there, it can be done anywhere.

Q: Does the poverty of your own upbringing make you feel bitter or hostile?

7:25:16 I don't think so. I uh, it makes me want to struggle harder yes, but uh, I maintain that you can't struggle effectively if you are that bitter. And uh, life is a very short span you know, and you have to make it count if you're going to do something, so I can understand kind of being bitter about it, but I'm not saying that uh, it's not a uh, my upbringing and my poverty in the past has no relation to what I'm doing, you know, it has a lot of meaning. But I'm not interested in that kind of being bitter about those things....I am very determined. I uh, I'm determined that

it's got to be done, and I'm convinced rather that the only way to do it is to uh, to uh, make it you know your lifetime work.

Q: Usual fate of the heroes of the oppressed in America is that they get assassinated, does that trouble you?

7:26:38 You can't be troubled when you're in love with the thing that you're doing. We have throughout the history of the world, men who have faced uh, extreme dangers, but there was always some ideal that kept them going, and we see from the pages of history that those in fact are the real heroes, and one cannot be too concerned about uh, these things if you are going to struggle. The only alternative is to be put up, locked up in a vault, and you couldn't be of much help to anyone there.

Q: What do you see as the immediate shape of your struggle in the future?

7:27:25 What I'd want more than anything else, I want to see the poor take a very direct part in shaping society and let them make the decisions. And whatever we say, whatever anyone says has really little consequence, because the people aren't involved. And in our case if the poor aren't involved we won't have anything.