

The first was not June 14th.



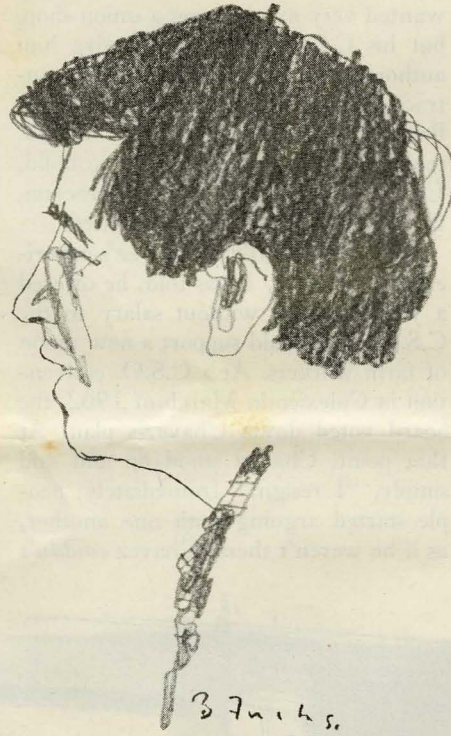
PROFILES



ORGANIZER~II

THE walls at the headquarters of the United Farm Workers Organizing Committee, in Delano, California, are decorated with photographs of Martin Luther King and Mahatma Gandhi; beside them is a blood-red poster of Emiliano Zapata, complete with mustachio, cartridge belts, carbine, sash, sword, and giant sombrero, under the exhortation "*Viva la Revolución.*" All three, in their different ways, are heroes of U.F.W.O.C.'s director, Cesar Chavez. There are also portraits of John Kennedy and Robert Kennedy, black-bordered and hung with flowers, as in a shrine. Here and there is the emblem of U.F.W.O.C., a square-edged black eagle in a white circle on a red background, over the word "HUELGA," which in Spanish means "strike." According to one legend, the eagle appeared in a dream to Chavez; according to another, the inspiration came to Chavez's cousin Manuel from the label on a bottle of Gallo Thunderbird wine. The truth is that after Cesar Chavez settled on an Aztec eagle as an appropriate symbol for the union, Manuel sketched one on a piece of brown wrapping paper with the help of Cesar's brother Richard. They then squared off the wing edges so that the eagle would be easier for union members to draw on the handmade flags that are now a familiar sight on picket lines near vineyards in the San Joaquin Valley and elsewhere in California, where for nearly four years U.F.W.O.C. has been conducting a strike to win union contracts for the grape workers.

I was shown around the offices and introduced to members of the staff one morning by LeRoy Chatfield, one of Chavez's assistants. Before joining the union movement, three and a half years ago, Chatfield, a man in his early thirties, with the white hair of a blond child in summer and a wide-eyed, bony face, had been known as Brother Gilbert, of the Christian Brothers. He had been a teacher at Garces High School, in Bakersfield, but it was Cesar Chavez, he told me, who had given him his education. Chatfield introduced me to two staff lawyers, Jerry Cohen and David Averbuck; to the Reverend James Drake, a young Protestant clergyman who has been working with Chavez since 1962; to Philip Vera-Cruz, a Filipino vice-president of the union; and to Chavez's wife, Helen,



Cesar Chavez

who runs U.F.W.O.C.'s credit union. Mrs. Chavez speaks very softly, but Chatfield told me later that she has a hot temper, which has been known to erupt on rare occasions. "Sometimes she has less faith than Cesar in non-violence," Chatfield said.

Manuel and Richard Chavez were on the point of setting off for New York by car to try and gain support for a boycott of California grapes, which seemed to be faltering. Large quantities of Thompson seedless grapes had been arriving in New York in boxes marked "Hi-Color," a label belonging to a subsidiary of the DiGiorgio Fruit Corporation, with which Chavez had signed a contract, and which was therefore exempt from the boycott. According to Manuel Chavez, DiGiorgio had not been harvesting table grapes in recent months, and workers had reported seeing "Hi-Color" boxes in the vineyards of non-union growers. "I am going over to New York," Manuel Chavez said. "How far is it?" His face had been serious, but suddenly he laughed.

One of the union's vice-presidents is Dolores Huerta, a very pretty, sad-eyed young woman who does not look like the mother of seven children but is. Mrs. Huerta told me that she met Chavez through a man named Fred

Ross. Ross had been active in behalf of the migrant Okies during the Depression, had taken up the problems of displaced Japanese and Nisei during the war, and was working to help Mexican-Americans by setting up branches of a private agency called the Community Service Organization when Chavez and Mrs. Huerta came under his influence. In 1955, when Mrs. Huerta first met Chavez, she was an active member of the Stockton chapter of the C.S.O. "I had heard a lot about him from Fred Ross—Cesar this and Cesar that—but I didn't really get a chance to talk to him, and he didn't make much of an impression on me," she said. "I forgot his face. I knew he was a great organizer, but he never showed it. It came out in the reports. He was very unassuming, you see—did a lot of work but never took any leadership role. The first time I really heard him speak was at a board meeting in Stockton in 1957. He had to respond to sharp questions from an attorney, and I was very impressed by the way he handled it. You couldn't tell by looking at him what he could do. You had to see him in action to appreciate him. In 1958, they made him organizing director of the whole C.S.O., but even then he wasn't the forceful leader that he is now." Mrs. Huerta paused, and laughed. "Of course, everywhere he worked tremendous things happened," she said. "Those things didn't just happen by themselves. The rank and file began to see Cesar as the real head of the organization long before the leadership did."

For a year and a half, between August, 1958, and November, 1959, Chavez worked at organizing the farm workers of Oxnard against the inequities of the so-called *bracero* program, which he believed was being abused for the growers' benefit by both the Farm Placement Service of the California Department of Employment and the Bureau of Employment Security of the United States Department of Labor. The program had been set up during the Second World War, when there was a scarcity of farm laborers, to bring Mexican *braceros*, or field hands, into this country on a temporary basis. Even in the late nineteen-fifties, Chavez found that American laborers supposedly assigned to jobs by the F.P.S. still had trouble getting work when any *braceros* were avail-

able. According to law, the American workers should have been given first choice. Chavez documented hundreds of cases of illegal job discrimination by taking groups of unemployed workers to fill out employers' work cards day after day and keeping a record of the results. Then he staged sit-ins—his men went out and stationed themselves opposite the *braceros* who had taken their jobs—and protest marches, at the end of which the cards were burned in a gesture of contempt for the corruption of the hiring practices. Reporters were invited to the fires. These maneuvers anticipated tactics that Chavez would refine in his own union, and they worked. Because of all the publicity, American workers began getting more jobs. There were some eighteen hundred workers around Oxnard who were loyal to Chavez, and they held firm when he demanded better wages and working conditions. The growers

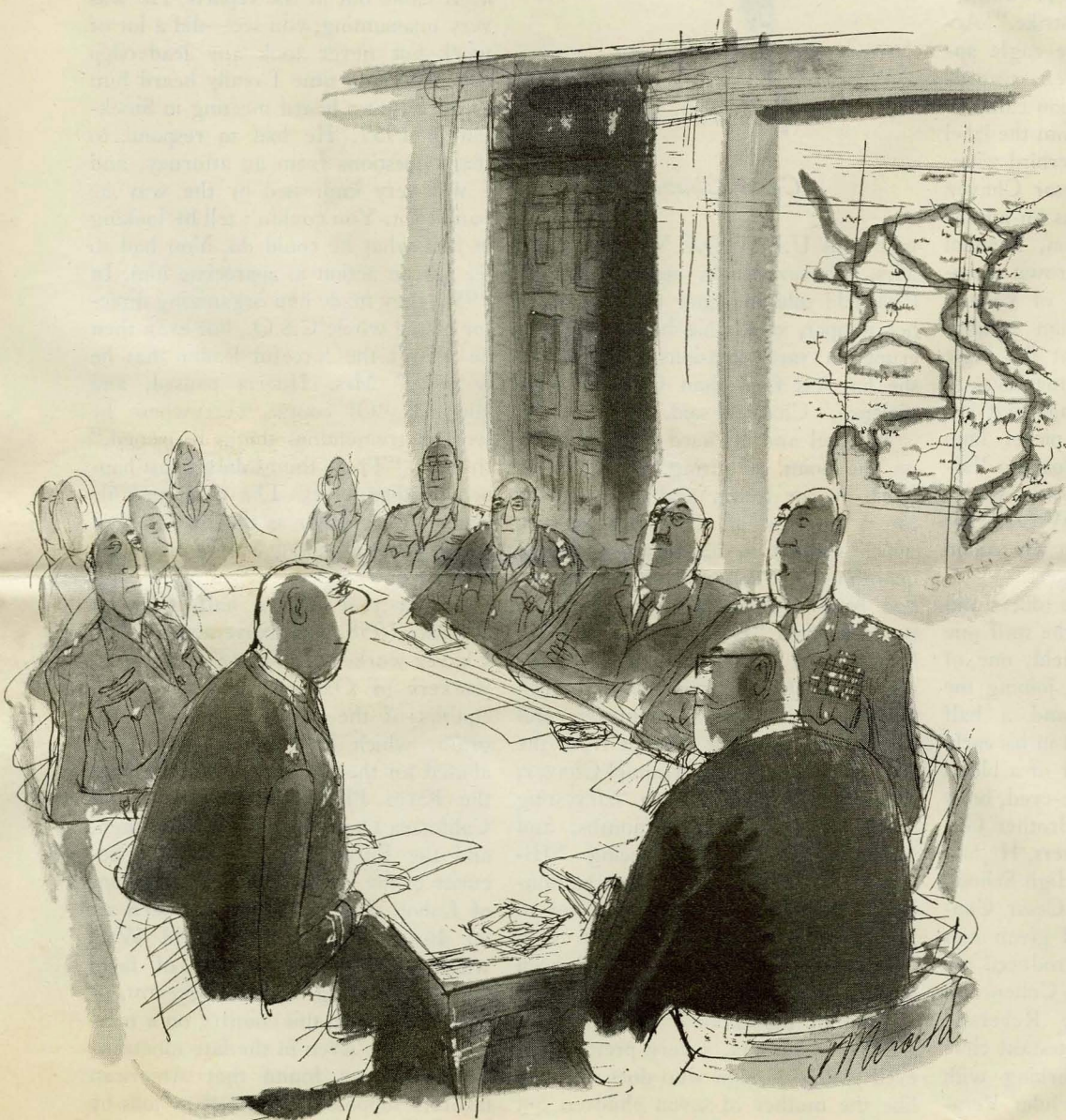
met his terms, though not officially. Without giving their names, they would call up and ask him to send so many workers to be picked up by a truck near a certain church. Chavez wanted very much to get a union shop, but his C.S.O. job did not give him authority to negotiate an actual contract, and he watched in despair as the Packinghouse union of the C.I.O. took over what he had begun to build. Under routine trade-union direction, the organization soon disintegrated.

In the aftermath of Chavez's experience at Oxnard, I was told, he offered a year's service without salary to the C.S.O. if it would support a new union of farm workers. At a C.S.O. convention in Calexico in March of 1962, the board voted down Chavez's plan. At that point, Chavez stood up and said simply, "I resign." Immediately, people started arguing with one another, as if he weren't there. Chavez *couldn't*

resign, they decided. But he had, and that evening, when he and Dolores Huerta and Fred Ross went across the border to Mexicali to get something to eat, they were all very depressed. According to Mrs. Huerta, Chavez was heartbroken.

Chavez was immediately offered a well-paid job as an organizer for the Agricultural Workers Organizing Committee, a farm workers' union that had been set up by the A.F.L.-C.I.O. in Stockton during his own successful organization of the workers in Oxnard, but at the time he wanted no part of traditional trade-union methods, and he turned it down. He spent two weeks finishing up his work for the C.S.O., and on March 31st, his thirty-fifth birthday, he drove off with his wife and his children—he had eight—to Carpinteria Beach, southeast of Santa Barbara, and not far from where he had picked tomatoes for several seasons during

his own time as a migrant worker. This was the last vacation he has ever had time or money enough to take. After six days on the coast, Chavez had made up his mind how and where he would begin his own organization drive for farm workers, and the Chavezes went straight to Delano, where his wife's family lived and where his brother Richard had been head of the local C.S.O. chapter. Chavez himself had first worked in Delano's vineyards and cotton fields in 1937, when he was ten. He has said that he chose Delano because he knew that hard times were ahead and his family would not starve there, but another good reason for choosing Delano was the composition of the work force. There are seventy-odd grape ranches in the Delano area, with an estimated thirty-eight thousand acres of table-grape vineyards, and grapes, unlike most crops, require tending of one kind or another—pruning, tying, thin-



"Suppose we leave Jeane Dixon and her long-range predictions out of this."

ning, girdling, leafing, cultivating, spraying, and so forth—for almost nine months of the year. Because of the long work season, the farm workers of Delano are less transient than most, and many stay the year round—a situation that makes organizing them both simpler and more effective. The growers are doubtless right in their contention that Delano's grape workers, who average twenty-four hundred dollars a year, are the best-paid farm workers in California, but, in Chavez's opinion, the most desperately poor are not necessarily those most inclined to take action; unlike people who have glimpsed a spark of hope, the destitute are often too defeated to revolt.

In Delano, Mrs. Chavez got a job picking grapes at the DiGiorgio Corporation's huge Sierra Vista Ranch, and Chavez took a three-day trip to "absorb" the Valley, from Marysville south to the Tehachapi Mountains, crisscrossing the flat countryside on long, straight roads. Then he returned to Delano and got a job picking peas—the first of a series of part-time jobs that helped to support the beginnings of his organization, which was called the National Farm Workers Association.

At first, Richard Chavez did not appreciate what his brother was trying to do. Richard was earning his living as a carpenter, and had small interest in a farm workers' union. As for Manuel, he was working at that time in San Diego, making good money as a car salesman; when Cesar asked him to join the new association, he flatly refused. "We aren't farm workers anymore," he said. "We got away." But Cesar argued that because the Chavezes had got away didn't mean they could abandon all the others. Finally, Manuel agreed to join up for one month. He has never left.

Apart from Mrs. Chavez, the only person who was enthusiastic from the start of what is now known as *La Causa* was Mrs. Huerta. When Chavez left the C.S.O., she told him she would be honored to work for him—the verb is hers—and a few months later she quit her job as a lobbyist for the C.S.O. at the state capitol in Sacramento and moved to Delano. Not long after Chavez started to work in Delano, the Reverend Chris Hartmire, the state director of the Migrant Ministry of the National Council of Churches, who had worked with

Chavez in Oxnard, assigned James Drake to Delano. Drake had just arrived in California, and this was his first mission. Like Mrs. Huerta, he was not overwhelmed by his first encounter with Chavez. "Cesar was very quiet," he told me. "He just mentioned that he had quit his job to start organizing farm workers around Delano. I was expecting to do the same thing, more or less. I was assigned to spend six weeks in Delano, and I'm still here."

When Chavez first got to Delano, the cheapest rental he could find was a house on Kensington Street, a block north of the one he lives in today. He had a small garage that he used as a headquarters, and it was so hot in there, Drake recalls, that all the ink melted down in a mimeograph machine the Migrant Ministry had lent him. "Everything was so oppressive that first summer that everything he wanted to do just seemed impossible," Drake told me. "He had so many kids, and they had almost nothing to eat, and they had an old 1953 Mercury station wagon that burned much too much gas and oil—it belonged in a museum even then. So I really thought this guy was nuts. Everybody thought so except Helen—even Helen's family. I had a car and a credit card, but I couldn't really help much besides that. They had no money, but whatever they had they

shared. I'd bring a lunch with me, but it was very important to them that I eat with them, and they were so gracious that I finally gave in. What impressed us most at the Migrant Ministry was that even though Cesar was very hard up for financing, he didn't want *our* money. He made it clear right from the start that whatever organization he got going would be entirely independent; he didn't want any Teamster money or any money from the A.F.L.-C.I.O. or any other money that might compromise him."

"Cesar had studied the structure of the C.S.O.," Mrs. Huerta said, "and he tried to correct its mistakes in his organization. Mainly, he wanted the people who did the work to make the decisions. He wanted the workers to share, to participate, and he still does, because without that the union has no real strength. This is why he would never accept outside money—not, at least, until the strike began. He wanted the workers to see that they could pay for their own union." Very early in his

struggle, Chavez turned down a private grant of fifty thousand dollars, offered without conditions, because he felt that the gift would put pressure on him to obtain immediate results. "Manuel and I almost quit," Richard Chavez told me.

In that first year, after Chavez had spent his own savings, amounting to twelve hundred dollars, he sometimes found himself asking people for food. This was hard on his pride, as he admits, but he came to believe that the union got some of its best members as a result of this begging. He has frequently said, "The people who give you their food give you their hearts."

Chavez got up early every morning and worked until midnight, taking a survey up and down the Valley to find out what farm workers really wanted. With his youngest child, Anthony, who was then four, he went from door to door and out into the fields, distributing eighty thousand cards on which the workers were invited to set down how much they thought they should be earning. At that time, the average wage was ninety cents an hour, and it is a measure of their morale that most of the workers said that they deserved a dollar-ten, or perhaps a dollar twenty-five. Occasionally, a man would say that he deserved a dollar-fifty, or even a dollar seventy-five, and a few might scrawl on their card a note of encouragement or hope. These people Chavez visited in person, and many became the first members of his association.

"His consistency and perseverance really struck me," Drake told me. "A disability case, a worker injured on the job—he would stay with that worker day and night, day and night, until he could locate an attorney who would take the case for nothing, or find some way of settling it that was of benefit to the worker. That's how his union was built—on plain hard work and these very personal relationships. It was a slow, careful, plodding thing. The growers didn't even know he was in town. Even when the strike started, they had no idea who Cesar Chavez was. But the workers did. Day and night, they came to his house, because his office was his house. He just built up this very basic trust. He ran a series of house meetings and never talked about forming a union—just an association of concerned people—because there had been unions and unions and strikes and strikes, and every one of them had failed. He learned out of a government manual how to keep books, and he set up a credit union. He talked about



coöperatives and everything, but he never used the word 'union' until 1965, when the strike began."

One of the early members was a man named Manuel Rivera. Rivera came to Chavez in 1963 with the complaint that his labor contractor not only had refused to tell him what his hourly wage was for work already done but, when he protested, had kicked him out of the truck and let him walk back to town; the police had shown no interest in his case. Chavez learned that Rivera's old car had broken down for good, and that the Rivera family had spent three days at the bus station in Delano. The Chavezes took the whole family into their own small house and lent Rivera an old Volvo. When Rivera had saved a little money and was ready to move on, he said, "How much do I owe you?" and Chavez answered that he didn't owe anything; he owed help to other farm workers. After returning Chavez's old car all polished up, Rivera left Delano, and Chavez soon forgot about him. Six months later, Rivera showed up again. Over Chavez's protest, he paid union dues for all the months since Chavez had taken him in, and on the job spoke so fervently of Chavez to other workers that he eventually brought in more than a hundred new members. (In 1966, Rivera was run down and permanently crippled by a flatbed truck belonging to a grower whose fields were being picketed.)

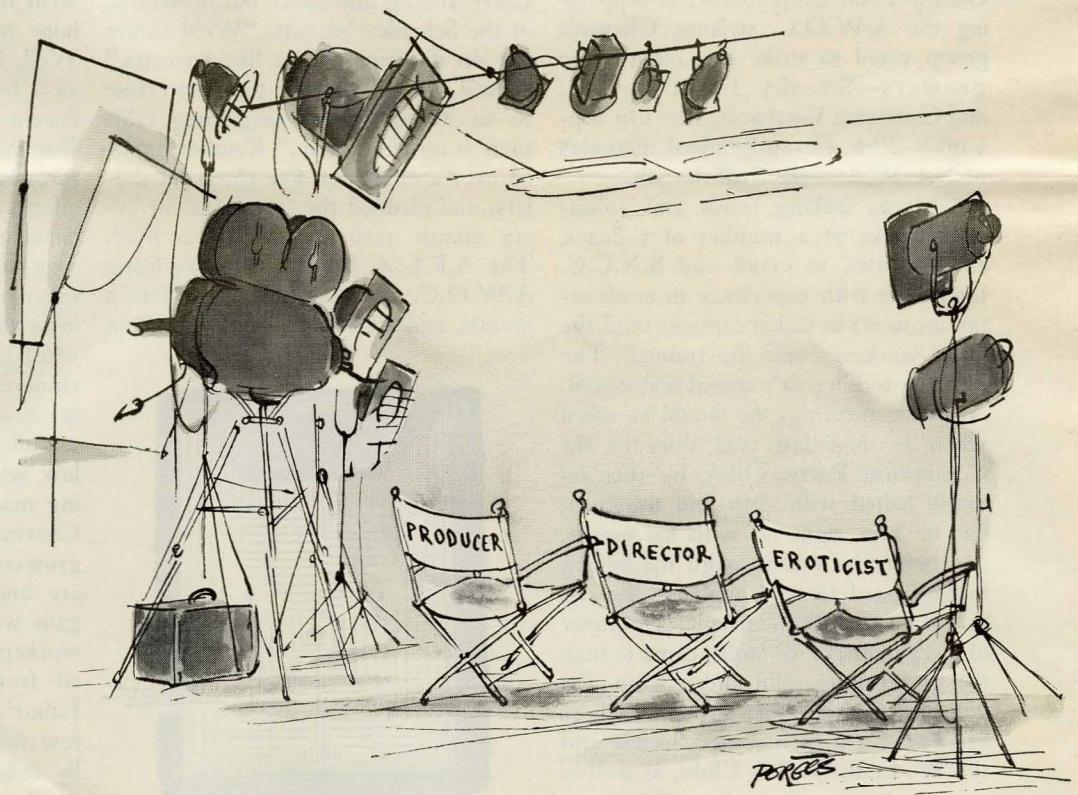
The organizing work has always gone slowly, and it was especially difficult at first. Manuel Chavez still has his 1963 N.F.W.A. card. On it, along with a green eagle, is printed "Delano Local Number 2. Cesar Chavez, General Director. Manuel Chavez, Secretary-Treasurer." Manuel laughed as he showed it to me. "I guess Cesar was one local and I was the other. We were the membership, too. It's a good thing Richard was still a carpenter—he was kind of supporting us." In this dark period, Chavez, who was penniless, turned down a job, at twenty-one thousand dollars a year, as director of the Peace Corps in a four-country region of South America.

Chavez held on, and by August, 1964, his association had a thousand members. A number of these new members, including Julio Hernandez, who is now a union officer, came

from the town of Corcoran, about twenty-five miles northwest of Delano. It was in Corcoran, on October 4, 1933, that five thousand cotton pickers, many of them Mexicans, began a strike that spread up and down the cotton fields of the San Joaquin Valley, and eventually involved eighteen thousand workers. As was customary in the Depression, wages had been drastically pushed down by advertising for many more workers than could be used, then letting starving men with starving families underbid each other for jobs, until the pay ran as low as fifteen cents an hour. When the cotton pickers struck, the growers armed themselves and, after evicting the strikers from their camps, followed them to a rally in Pixley, just north of Delano, where they opened fire on the crowd and killed two workers. A third worker was murdered the same day at Arvin, a town southeast of Delano, in Kern County. Eleven growers were arrested and eleven were acquitted. The strike, which lasted for twenty-four days, won a small wage increase for the workers, but the leaders of the union that ran the strike—the Cannery and Agricultural Workers Industrial Union, an unabashedly pro-Communist organization—were flogged, tarred and feathered, and finally jailed. At the time of the Corcoran strike, an assistant sheriff was quoted as saying, "We protect our farmers here in Kern County. They are our best people.

They are always with us. They keep the country going. They put us in here and they can put us out again, so we serve them. But the Mexicans are trash. They have no standard of living. We herd them like pigs." Like the signs of Chavez's childhood that read "NO DOGS OR MEXICANS ALLOWED," remarks of this sort are considered poor public relations these days, but the underlying attitude, I was told by members of Chavez's union, is still very much alive.

After a new surge in membership, Mrs. Chavez left the fields to work full time at running the credit union, and Mrs. Huerta took over the bookkeeping and other responsibilities. At about this time, a man named Gilbert Padilla was assigned by the Migrant Ministry to work with Drake on the problem of improving conditions in labor camps run by the counties of Kern and Tulare for migrant workers. A large-scale rent strike organized in the Linnell and Woodville camps of Tulare County by Drake and Padilla and a lawyer named Gary Bellow finally closed them down and led to the construction of new camp buildings. "The county was making a big profit on those camps, which were just slums," Drake told me. "When the workers found out about that profit, it wasn't hard to organize a rent strike." The workers Drake and Padilla had organized during their rent strike came into Chavez's association in February, 1965, and in the summer of that year Padilla led



them in a strike at the J. D. Martin Ranch, in Tulare County near Earlimart, and won a pay raise for the grape pickers there. This small victory lifted morale in the new union, and that September what is now known as the California Grape Strike began in earnest.

THE Agricultural Workers Organizing Committee, the A.F.L.-C.I.O. farm workers' group Chavez decided not to go to work for in 1962, had made some small gains for its members—most of whom were Filipinos—but it got no further than the unions of the past in winning legal contracts and the right to collective bargaining. (Because of the failures of farm unions in the past and a general feeling that unions dominated by what are known as Anglos had actually worked with employers against the interests of Filipino and Mexican-American farm workers, the Agricultural Workers Organizing Committee, like Chavez's National Farm Workers Association, avoided the word "union" in its title.) On September 16, 1965, the Mexican Independence Day, Chavez's N.F.W.A., which was made up mostly of Mexican-Americans, voted to support an A.W.O.C. strike for a wage increase which had started a week before. Led by two Filipino organizers, Larry Itliong and Ben Gines, six to eight hundred A.W.O.C. workers had struck a number of Delano vineyards, including the huge holdings of the DiGiorgio Fruit Corporation; in supporting the A.W.O.C. strikers, Chavez's group voted to strike two other large growers—Schenley Industries, Inc., and Guimarra Vineyards, Inc. On September 20th, eleven hundred members of N.F.W.A. walked off the job.

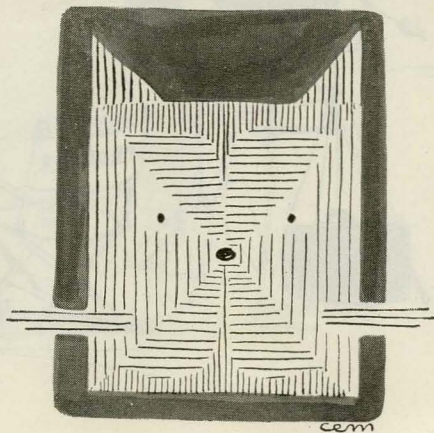
Chavez, seeking funds and volunteers, spoke at a number of colleges, and appealed to CORE and S.N.C.C. for people with experience in confrontations to act as picket captains until the farm workers could be trained. The response to Chavez's appeal was mixed. At public meetings, he would be asked when he had last paid dues to the Communist Party. Once, he was actually pelted with eggs and tomatoes, but he kept right on with his speech, and before he was through the booing had changed to wild applause. Besides S.N.C.C. and CORE people, a number of clergymen, of all faiths, came to man the picket lines, and there were also volunteers from other groups, such as Students for a Democratic Society and the W. E. B. DuBois Clubs, as well as an assortment of hippies of uneven

quality, some of whom were less help than hindrance. Chavez eventually got rid of those who were becoming financial burdens, or sources of embarrassment because of their behavior. "He didn't act nearly as fast as the rest of us wanted," Chatfield told me. "He agonized about those kids for months. But when he did move—" Chatfield made a chopping motion with his hand. "Man! Like a knife!"

The strikers' main efforts in the early months were concentrated on Schenley Industries. The Schenley farm in Delano was such a small part of the company's operation that a defense against the boycott that was undertaken in late 1965 might scarcely have seemed worth the negative publicity Chavez's volunteers were trying to give the Schenley trade name all across the country. But the Schenley fight was costly for the farm workers. Hundreds of people already poor had sacrificed their jobs to strike, and that first autumn exhausted the strike fund. Despite a good many misgivings in some quarters about Chavez and his allies, the labor movement began to provide some support for the strike. A workers' clinic was operated by a volunteer nurse, and out-of-town doctors gave free service. (No local doctor ever volunteered.) In San Francisco, the Teamsters refused to cross the Schenley picket lines, and in mid-December Walter Reuther, of the United Automobile Workers, marched through the streets of Delano with Chavez and Larry Itliong and spoke out in defense of the Schenley boycott. "We'd rather not do negative things like boycotts," he said, "but when the growers refuse to sit down at the bargaining table there is no alternative." Reuther handed over a check for five thousand dollars, and pledged the same amount every month until the strike was over. The A.F.L.-C.I.O. was underwriting A.W.O.C. at ten thousand dollars a month, and collections had been taken

up by the Garment Workers, Seafarers, Packinghouse Workers, and other A.F.L.-C.I.O. unions, as well as by church and student groups. But the combined sums did not pay for the strike, which was costing forty thousand dollars a month. The deficit was made up in hardship.

By the middle of March, 1966, when the Senate Subcommittee on Migratory Labor conducted hearings in California, the two organizations involved in the strike—N.F.W.A. and A.W.O.C.—had conducted by far the longest farm strike in California history, and seemed to be on the edge of total defeat. The chairman of the subcommittee was Harrison A. Williams, Jr., a Democrat from New Jersey, who had been supporting the interests of farm workers in Congress since 1959—the year the subcommittee was established—and he was accompanied by Senator Robert Kennedy, of New York, and Senator George Murphy, a California Republican. Chavez addressed Senator Williams's subcommittee with his usual frankness. "Although we appreciate your efforts here, we do not believe that public hearings are the route to solving the problem of the farm worker," he said. "In fact, I do not think that anyone should ever hold another hearing or make a special investigation of the farm-labor problem. Everything has been recorded too many times already, and the time is now past due for immediate action. Or, some people say education will do it—write off this generation of parents and hope my son gets out of farm work. Well, I am not ready to be written off as a loss, and farm work could be a decent job for my son, with a union. But the point is that this generation of farm-labor children will not get an adequate education until their parents earn enough to care for the child the way they want to and the way the other children in school—the ones who succeed—are cared for. . . . All we want from the government is the machinery—some rules of the game. All we need is the recognition of our right to full and equal coverage under every law which protects every other working man and woman in this country." Chavez was referring to the fact that growers, unlike most other employers, are under no legal obligation to bargain with their employees, since farm workers have been specifically exempted from the terms of the National Labor Relations Act, and only a few farm workers have been affected by federal minimum-wage legislation. In the course of the hearings, Bishop





"And now, before we proceed to the next canvas, we pause in our commentary to bring you this message. Featured in our fourth-floor cafeteria today is our special chef's salad—one dollar and forty cents, beverage and dessert included."

Hugh A. Donohoe, of Stockton, expressed unanimous support for the strikers on the part of the eight Roman Catholic bishops of California and made an eloquent appeal for full collective-bargaining rights for farm workers.

On March 17th, the day after the hearings, Chavez set off on a widely publicized workers' march—or *peregrinación*, as he called it—from Delano to the steps of the capitol at Sacramento. The *peregrinación* was inspired in part by the freedom march from Selma, Alabama, that had taken place a year before, but, like a fast that Chavez undertook two years later, it had a religious connotation as well. Its emblem was the Mexican patron saint of the *campesinos*, La Virgen de Guadalupe, and the *peregrinación* was to arrive at the capitol steps on Easter Sunday. Chavez had suggested that the march should be penitential, like the Lenten processions of Mexico—an atonement for past sins of violence on the part of the strikers, and a kind of prayer. But *La Causa* was supported by a number of Protestants, Jews, and non-believers,

and some of them made it clear that they did not see the slightest reason for atonement on the workers' part—weren't the workers the victims? "The question was brought up at a special meeting," Mrs. Huerta told me. "We put the Virgin to a motion, and virginity won." Sixty-seven strikers set off on the three-hundred-mile march to Sacramento, where they hoped to meet with Governor Edmund G. Brown. The progress of the *peregrinación* was slow and ceremonial; as Chavez had anticipated, it received a good deal of support and participation from people along the way, in the form of food and shelter for the marchers. More than fifty of the strikers, who came to be known as *los originales*, made the entire march from Delano to Sacramento, which lasted twenty-five days, and when they arrived on the capitol steps, in the rain, on Easter morning they were joined by thousands of supporters and some notable figures in politics and labor. Governor Brown had forsaken notables and *originales* alike in favor of a weekend at Palm Springs with Frank Sinatra, but the occasion did not lack

a climax, for it was announced that Schenley had agreed to negotiate a contract. The contract, which was signed in June, 1966, provided an hourly wage of a dollar seventy-five and a union hiring hall. Except for some contracts the International Longshoremen's and Warehousemen's Union had won for pineapple workers in Hawaii, it was the first real contract for farm workers in the history of American labor.

The strikers now turned their attention to DiGiorgio, whose Sierra Vista Ranch occupied forty-four hundred acres near Delano, and began to establish a boycott of DiGiorgio's products. Suddenly the Teamsters union, which had provided important support for the strikers in the fight against Schenley, announced that it was prepared to represent the DiGiorgio workers, and the company quickly arranged an election in which workers could choose the Teamsters, Chavez's N.F.W.A., or no union at all. The election was held on June 24th, but Chavez told his

people not to vote, and Governor Brown ordered an investigation by Ronald W. Haughton, of the American Arbitration Association, who recommended that a second election be held. There followed two tense months of accusations, violence, reprisals, injunctions, and arrests. Among those arrested was Chavez. Having persuaded ten workers to walk off the job at DiGiorgio's Borrego Springs property, northeast of San Diego, Chavez and two clergymen, one Protestant and one Catholic, accompanied them into the ranch to retrieve their belongings and were arrested for trespassing. All of them except the Catholic priest were then stripped naked and chained together by some zealous sheriff's deputies.

The Teamsters was the only union that had supported the retention of the *bracero* program, and, as Chavez saw the situation, the Teamsters had entered into an alliance with DiGiorgio to work out what is known as a "sweetheart" contract—one that would almost certainly benefit the union and the employer but might or might not help

the workers. Under these circumstances, Chavez concluded that he had no choice but to merge N.F.W.A. with A.W.O.C., under the banner of the A.F.L.-C.I.O. The merger took place in August, before the second election at DiGiorgio, and the last phase of the battle with the Teamsters was extremely vicious. The A.F.L.-C.I.O., which had expelled the Teamsters in 1957, charged that the Teamsters were controlled by gangsters, and the Teamsters countered that the new organization, called the United Farm Workers Organizing Committee, was influenced by an international Communist conspiracy. Prevented from picketing at the Sierra Vista Ranch, the strikers held nightly vigils outside the labor camps, at a shrine set up in the back of Chavez's old Mercury station wagon; the workers, some of whom had been recruited by DiGiorgio from as far away as Juárez, Mexico, were proselytized when they came out to pray. The second election was held at Sierra Vista on August 30th, and anyone who had worked there for fifteen days or more during the previous year was eligible to vote. The Teamsters already had a large California membership of workers directly dependent on agriculture, which is a four-billion-dollar industry in the state, and the workers in the packing sheds voted 94 to 43 to join the Teamsters. But the field workers, some of whom had heard about the election in Mexico and had come back at their own expense, voted for U.F.W.O.C. by 530 to 331.

Nine days after the DiGiorgio election, the field workers walked out of the vineyards of A. Perelli-Minetti & Sons, demanding to be represented by U.F.W.O.C. But the company, which makes Tribuno wines, signed a contract with the Teamsters. After another inter-union struggle, in the course of which a U.F.W.O.C. picket, John Shroyer, was beaten up, the Teamsters reversed their policy and came to terms with Chavez. Under a general agreement reached in July, 1967, U.F.W.O.C. gave the Teamsters representation of certain shed workers in return for representation of all field workers, including those at Perelli-Minetti, whose union contract was at once transferred to U.F.W.O.C. After these developments, Gallo, Almaden,

Christian Brothers, and the other large California wineries presented very few difficulties for Chavez; the big wineries, which sell their products under their own nationally advertised brand names, would be especially vulnerable to a boycott, and by September of 1968, when the Paul Masson vineyards signed, almost all of them had contracts with U.F.W.O.C.

Meanwhile, the growers of table grapes, who are less vulnerable, continued to resist, and they were unquestionably heartened in November, 1966, when Ronald Reagan, who had spoken out against the grape strike from the start of his campaign, was elected governor. In that same month, U.F.W.O.C. won another representation election at the vineyards of Moseian-Hourigan-Goldberg, a relatively small firm in Delano, by a vote of 285 to 38, but that was the last new representation election any table-grape grower has permitted. In fact, there had not been much good news of any sort for the union in many months until a few days ago, when ten table-grape growers in the Coachella Valley indicated that they would be willing to negotiate with Chavez.

CHAVEZ eats no breakfast and is careless about lunch. He usually sits down to a modest meal in the evening. During the day, he drinks a great deal of Diet-Rite Cola, and he keeps a supply of dried apricots and prunes and a package of matzos in a drawer in his desk at U.F.W.O.C. headquarters in Delano. On the other hand, he is very fond of Chinese food, and I drove thirty miles with him one evening last summer to eat dinner at his favorite Chinese restaurant in Bakersfield. It was a family outing. Helen Chavez and four Chavez daughters went in one car, with a friend; Chavez and I were in a second car with the youngest daughter, Elizabeth, and the two young Chavez sons, Anthony and Paul. The only child missing was Fernando, nineteen, who was living with his Chavez grandparents in San Jose.

All eight of the Chavez children have nicknames. Elizabeth, who was then ten, had pronounced her own name as "Titibeth" when she was a baby, and it had stuck: Paul, eleven,

who had been an especially rotund infant, started out as Bubble, and the name was later modified to Babo; and Anthony, who had just turned nine, was called Birdie, because of his supposed resemblance to a bird. "My own name was Manzi," Chavez told me. "As a small child, I was supposed to have liked *manzanilla*—you know, camomile tea? So the family always called me Manzi."

The memory made him smile. There is a single silver strand in the black Indian hair that falls across his forehead, and a black mole on the brown skin just below his lower lip seems to balance a gold tooth in his smile. He went on talking cheerfully about his childhood. His paternal grandfather had been a peon in Mexico, but had come to the United States with his family in 1889 and acquired, as a homesteader, about a hundred and sixty acres of sage and mesquite desert in the Gila River Valley some fifteen miles northeast of Yuma, Arizona. Chavez's parents were both born in Mexico, but Cesar Estrada Chavez entered the world, on March 31, 1927, as a citizen of the United States. According to Chavez, his grandfather, another Cesar, greatly admired the big Mexican haciendas, and since he had nine sons and six daughters, some of whom had families of their own, he designed his house on the same scale. It lasted a half century, and might have lasted indefinitely in that dry climate if the roof had been of tile instead of adobe, because the walls were twenty-four inches thick. The house was cool in summer, warm in winter; it stood on a slope against the hills, with a laundry and a woodshed on one side and a garden on the other side. The farm produced cotton, lettuce, carrots, and watermelon, with maize, grain, and alfalfa for the animals, and it fed not only the Chavez families but many strangers who were wandering up and down the land in the Depression years. "At that time," Chavez said, "my mother's patron saint was St. Edwiges—I think she was a queen who gave everything to the poor—and my mother had made a pledge never to turn away anyone who came for food. And so, you know, ordinary people would come and have the food, and there were a lot of hoboes that used to come, at any time of day or night. Most of them were white. We lived in my aunt's house in Yuma for a while, and my mother sent my brother Richard and me out into the street sometimes to look for *trampitas*—that was our affectionate way of calling the hoboes. I remember the first one. We



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found him sitting under a retaining wall, right around the corner, and we wanted this one bad, so we could quit looking and go play. But when we told him all about the free food just waiting for him around the corner, that tramp couldn't believe it. 'What for?' he said. 'What are you doing it for?' 'For nothing,' we said. 'You just come with us.' So we hustled him around the corner, and he ate the food, but he still didn't believe it. She'd just give them very simple things—beans and tortillas and hot coffee—but it was a meal, and soon all the hoboes knew about her, because word spreads. We didn't have much, and sometimes there was enough for everybody and sometimes there wasn't."

Manuel Chavez, who is first cousin to Cesar and Richard, came to the farm to live when he was small, and has been so close to Cesar ever since that the two men refer to each other as "my brother." For a while, this produced a certain amount of confusion in the union movement. The story goes that one time someone came to Cesar and begged him for enlightenment: *Was Manuel his brother?* In this period, Manuel's volatile nature was a constant threat to Cesar's program of non-violence, and Cesar considered the question a few seconds before he answered it. "Sometimes," he said.

The farm in the Gila River Valley represents a lost home to all three men. By 1937, Chavez's grandfather had died and the family's money was all gone; the farm was seized by the county to pay off the local taxes and the water bill. While they were working in the Imperial Valley last summer, Manuel and Richard drove over to see the homestead, and reported to Cesar that they found only a ruin of fallen adobe on another man's farm. "I missed that house," Cesar told me. "When I was living there, we had all kinds of space—it seemed like the whole world belonged to us. In the cities, I couldn't get used to the fences. We couldn't play like we used to. On the farm, we had a little place where we played, and a tree in there was ours and we played there. We built bridges and we left everything there and when we came back the next day it was still there. You see, we never knew what stealing was, or to be stolen from. Another thing that we learned after we left the farm—my dad especially—was that people would lie to you. Lie without batting an eye. For instance, they'd say, 'If you go to so-and-so place, they have a job for you, at a very high

wage.' And we always went for it, hook, line, and sinker. They'd get you to go because you were competition. And we'd get there and we'd find there was no housing. The wages weren't what they'd said, and in many cases there wasn't even a job. I remember now that my dad and my mother had a heck of a time trying to understand why anyone would really—you know—just *lie*."

Chavez was quiet for a while. "We went to live in Brawley, and we used to shine shoes, and we really hustled. The cops wouldn't let us into Anglo

Town, where the white people lived, but there was a diner right on the line, kind of, and everybody talked about how it was supposed to have beautiful hamburgers. It also had a sign reading 'WHITE TRADE ONLY,' but we had just come from the country, from Arizona, from a community that was mostly Mexican or whites too poor to bother about us. So we didn't understand yet, and we went in. The counter girl was up at the far end with her boy friend, and I said, 'Two hamburgers, please!' Chavez shook his head. "The girl said, 'What's the matter—you can't read? Goddam dumb Mex!' She and her boy friend laughed, and we ran out. Richard was cursing them, but I was the one who had spoken to them, and I was crying. That laugh rang in my ears for twenty years. It seemed to cut us out of the human race."

With the loss of their land, the Chavez family became migrant farm workers. Up and down California they followed the crops, struggling for shelter, clothing, food. When the trek began, Manuel was twelve, Cesar ten, and Richard eight. Their childhood was already over. They worked with their parents in the fields, picking prunes and figs and apricots, turning grapes for raisins, hunching and stooping down row upon row, from the Imperial Valley north to Marysville, and then south again in November, taking such poor, segregated schooling as they could find in the brief winter season between pruning and girdling. Chavez says that he attended more than thirty schools, without ever reaching high school. Although all members of the family were United States citizens, they were in constant peril of deportation: the Border Patrol, known as "*la migra*," rarely concerned itself with the difference between Mexicans and Mexican-Americans. "My mother was so frightened of '*la migra*' that she



would be trembling whenever we were near the border," Chavez said. Sometimes the family lived in tents or under bridges, eking out a meagre diet with fish and with greens culled from roadside ditches. "Mexicans like hogweed," he said enigmatically. He and Richard saved tinfoil from old cigarette packs found on the highway; from the sale of an enormous ball weighing eighteen pounds, he remembers, they made enough to buy two sweatshirts and one pair of tennis shoes. In 1939, in San Jose, Cesar's father joined a C.I.O. union that was organizing workers in the dried-fruit industry; this union was broken, like all other farm workers' unions, as soon as it went out on strike.

Chavez stopped talking to point out some freight cars on a railroad siding; in the twilight, I could just make out that the cars were heaped with sugar beets. "That is one crop I am glad is automated," he said. "That was work for an animal, not a man. Stooping and digging all day. And the beets are heavy. Oh, that's brutal work. And then to go home to some little place, with all those kids, and hot and dirty—that is how a man is crucified. Crucified." He spoke with a low, intense burst of anger, gazing back at the cars of beets. "The growers don't care about people, and they never will. Their improvements, their laborsaving devices are all for their own benefit, not for ours. But once we get union contracts, we'll be protected. We're not afraid of automation. We'll split the profits of progress with them, fifty-fifty."

At Bill Lee's Bamboo Chopsticks, in Bakersfield, we all sat at one big table in a corner. The older girls announced that they wanted the combination shrimp plate, and there were jokes between Chavez and his children about shrimp strikes and hungry strike-breakers who might cross the picket line in the middle of the table. In the excitement, Chavez repeatedly confused the names of Sylvia and Linda, his very pretty older daughters, and at last Linda shouted, "He doesn't know us apart!" Chavez shook his head ruefully; he gazed at her until she looked at him and smiled. But then he called Linda "Sylvia" again, and his wife hissed at him with real vehemence.

Mrs. Chavez, whose maiden name was Fabela, has fierce Spanish eyebrows. Her father was a colonel under Pancho Villa in the Revolution, and Chavez sometimes teases her about her hot blood. They met in Delano during the Second World War when Chavez, then fifteen and still migrating, found



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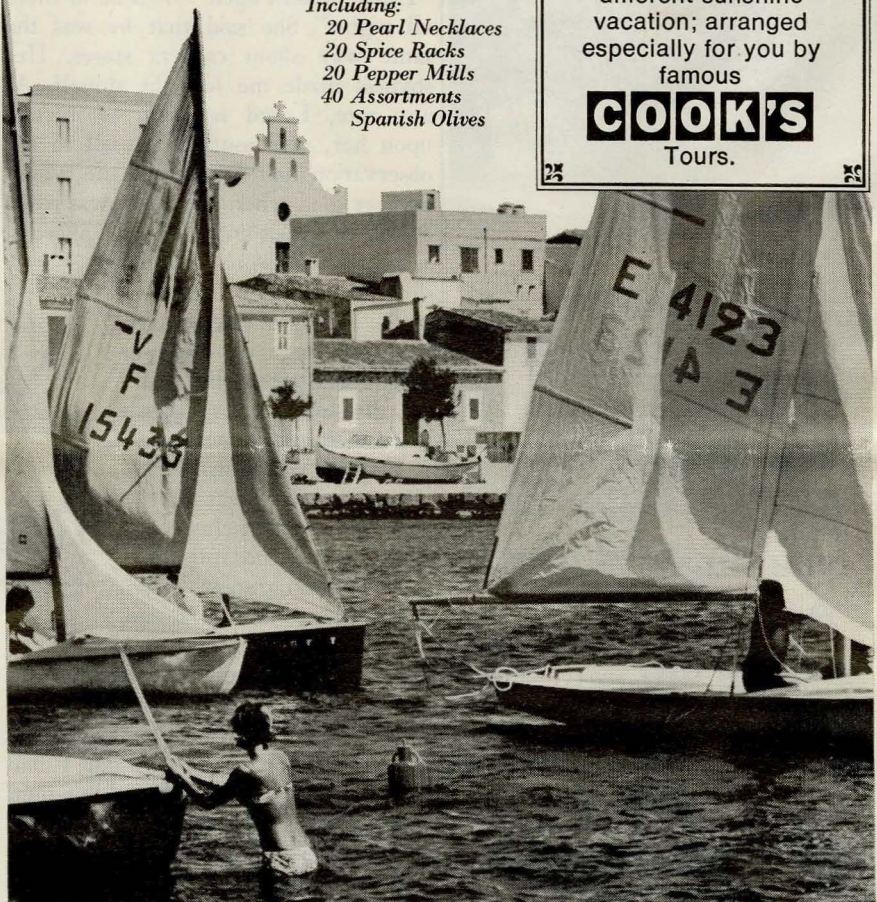


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himself stranded there, out of a job. She was working in a grocery store. "She used to give me gas coupons, I think," Chavez told the children. "Then she asked me to a show. How could I say no?"

Unwillingly, it seemed, Mrs. Chavez began to smile.

"Who paid?" Sylvia asked.

"She did, of course." He laughed a little, smiling warmly at his wife. "She had a job and I did not—what could I do?"

"Were you a lover in your days?" Linda inquired.

"Love 'em and leave 'em, I bet," another daughter said, and the shrimp eaters giggled as a group. The children were all salty and affectionate with their father without being impolite.

"Well, I was very friendly, you know. A lot of girls were my friends, but I was not a lover." Chavez said this simply, without coyness.

Chavez was called to the telephone while we were breaking open our fortune cookies, and we waited for him a little later in the street. There was a bookstore right across the street from the restaurant, and Mrs. Chavez said, "I hope it isn't open—he'll be in there all night." She said that he was the same way about camera stores. Her shyness made me feel shy myself. At any rate, I had no wish to intrude upon her, and confined myself to the observation that I supposed she would be very glad when the strike was over. Helen Chavez's smile, when it appears, is a beautiful surprise. "Yes," she said, paying no attention to the fatuity of my remark. Standing there on the sidewalk, considering life without the strike, she spoke the word with all her heart.

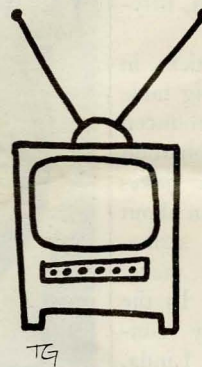
On the way home, Chavez reminisced about the two years he spent in the Navy, where he first became interested in photography. "I got in this poker game," he said. "I think that was the first time and the last time I ever gambled. And I won and I won and I won—I could not stop winning. There was more money lying there than I had ever seen before. And I couldn't quit. The guy who gets that far ahead, he can never quit." Finally, a loser begged Chavez to buy his camera so that he could keep on losing. Chavez said he had forgotten what happened to the money, but he kept the camera and started taking pictures.

He had joined the Navy in 1944, and he served for two years on a de-

stroyer escort on weather patrol out of Saipan. He had never been on a ship before, and at first he was very seasick, and frightened of the sea. In fact, the ocean still disturbs him. "I like the sea, but I don't rest there," he said. "I think. The waves coming in, you know. They make me think. I love the woods. Big trees. That's where I rest."

In 1948, Cesar Chavez and Helen Fabela got married. "We went to live on a farm near San Jose, and there was a little tiny house for me and my family. I was married, Richard was married, and there was my mother and my dad, my sisters, and my other brother. We worked the strawberries, sharecropping—it was horrible. We worked there for two and a half years, and we never made any money. We figured later that the whole family together was making twenty-three cents an hour. At the end of the month, we just didn't have anything left over. We worked two and a half years. Every day, every single day—Saturday, Sunday. And I couldn't get my dad to leave. I didn't want to leave him there, yet I couldn't get him to leave—because he'd made a commitment, you know. His word! There were hundreds of people caught in this exploitation. Finally, we got him to admit that we were being taken, and that the best way was just to leave the whole damn thing."

In 1950, Richard and Cesar went to work in a lumber camp on the Smith River, just south of the Oregon border.



TE

It was summer, and they slept in the big woods along the river. One day, they asked the foreman if they could build a cabin in the woods, and because they were both good, dependable workers the permission was granted. In their spare time, they built a serviceable cabin, and in the process learned basic carpentry. For Richard, this was a turning point, because not long after that he

became an apprentice carpenter. The brothers loved the cool forest and the river, they were proud of their cabin, and they were making good money. But although both had steady work and could have brought their families there, they returned in the same year to San Jose, where they lived in a slum area known as Sal Si Puedes—a name that may be translated, roughly, as Escape If You Can. Before long, Richard became a carpenter, and Cesar, supporting his family as best he could, took the first steps in his career as a labor or-

ganizer and the founder of what may become the first effective farm workers' union in America.

IT is as an organizer, rather than a union leader, that Chavez sees himself, and one afternoon while we were driving back to Delano from some appointments he had had in San Francisco he told me, with cheerful fatalism, that when his union is established and his own people, no longer preoccupied with survival and aspiring to consumer status, find him too thorny for their liking and kick him out, he might like to go and organize somewhere else—maybe in the Mexican slums of East Los Angeles. He always speaks passionately about organizing, but he does not romanticize his work. "There's no trick to organizing, there's no shortcut. A good organizer is someone willing to work long and hard," he said. "Just keep talking to people, and the people will respond. People can be organized for the most ridiculous things. They can be organized for bad as well as good. Look at the John Birch Society. Look at Hitler. The reactionaries are always better organizers. The right has a lot of discipline that the left lacks. The left always dilutes itself. Instead of merging to go after the common enemy, the left splinters, and the splinters go after one another. Meanwhile, the right keeps after its objective, pounding away, pounding away."

Going south through Oakland toward the freeway, Chavez pointed out St. Mary's Church, in whose hall he had held his first big meeting for the Community Service Organization. "I was green, you know, but we brought in over four hundred people. Oh, I was so happy! I was *happy!*"

By the time we reached the freeway, it was nearly five, and an hour later we were still caught on a belt of noise and ugliness that bored through the sprawling suburbs of the Bay area. The rush-hour traffic was stifling any chance we had of reaching Delano in time for a union meeting that evening, and Chavez said, "Maybe I could stop in San Jose and just say hello to my mother and my dad." Aside from his parents and his son Fernando, he has two sisters and a brother living in San Jose. The brother is a carpenter. One sister is married to a carpenter, the other to a plasterer. "They're pretty good guys," Chavez said. "But they're not interested in what we're doing. I don't see too much of them." Chavez talked a lot about his sister Rita, who became president of the San Jose C.S.O. In a fight to get blacks into her

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chapter, he said proudly, she had beaten down the prejudice against them that she found among many of the Mexicans. "Oh, Rita's great!" he said. "If she had a choice, she'd be swinging with us right now, down in Delano."

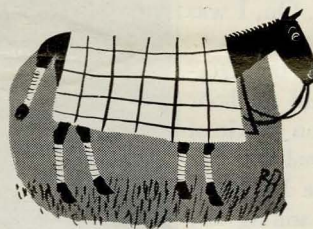
Chavez has always wanted to have his family involved in his organizing work as much as possible. "Of course, I'm lucky to have an exceptional woman," he said. "Even if I come home at four in the morning, I give her a full report on what has happened, and to this day—well, most of the time—she still wants me to do this."

He recalled one Sunday when his wife succeeded in getting him to accompany the family on a picnic. There were so many workers coming to see him on their day off that he planned to leave very early in the morning to avoid refusing them. But a few arrived before he could get away and had to be left unattended to, and Chavez felt so miserable all day that he ruined the picnic for everybody. That evening, he told his wife that he was being pulled apart, that he had to give his full time to the people and just do the best he could with his own family. "It's lucky I have Helen there, because I'm never really home," he said. "I was home when two of the children were born and away for all the rest." He closed his eyes and massaged them with the fingers of one hand—a characteristic gesture of distress. "You know, I always felt that because I really wanted to do something for people this would be all right. But we talk about sacrificing ourselves and often we are sacrificing others. By the time Birdie came, Helen was pretty much used to it, I guess, but..." He stopped speaking for a minute, then opened his eyes, and when he spoke again his voice was harsher. "You cannot have it both ways.

Either you concentrate your attention on the people who have claims on you or you say, 'No, I have to help many more at their expense.' You don't exclude them totally, and they get more attention than anybody else, but they aren't going to get enough. You can't have it both ways. You cannot! Anybody who uses the family as an excuse not to do what he has to do..." He stopped again, then resumed, in a quieter voice. "I haven't been home in four nights. Sometimes I'm away for ten nights, maybe more. It hurts me not to be home with my family, you know—I

children. I know that. They don't like living in poverty, especially when they know that it's intentional on my part. And things get harder as they get older—it's harder to get nice hand-me-down clothes and everything. But they are great, they are just great!" He smiled. "I told them that they were better off than the migrants, that at least they had a purpose in their lives, and they understood this—they really did. Of course, they think I'm pretty old-fashioned. I tease Sylvia about always fixing her hair—the waste of time, you know. I told her that women are prettier the way they are made, that they should leave their hair the way it came. And I make a lot of fun of people who give their spare time to mowing the lawn, or washing their cars, or playing golf. To me, it's such a waste of time. How can you justify doing that sort of thing as long as all these other things are going on—the suffering?"

I said nothing, and a moment later, very quietly, he went on. "There's a saying in Spanish, '*Lo que no puedes ver en tu casa, lo has de tener*'—'That which you don't like you wind up having at home.' Sylvia finished high school, and I've asked her several times about registering for college, but she won't go. And Fernando..." He nodded. "My son is a good golfer. He is a *real* Mexican-American." This was the first truly bitter remark I had ever heard him make. He caught himself immediately. "Well, that isn't fair," he said. "By 'real Mexican-American' I mean someone who is just interested in material things. But Fernando isn't



that way at all. He had a hell of a time in school, you know—we finally had to take him out. One fight after another. There was one grower's son who was really out to get him.

Here I was, dedicated to non-violence, and my son fighting right and left." He managed a smile. "He always won. I think they finally had a great big fight that was supposed to settle things once and for all, and Fernando knocked him out." Chavez frowned a little, evidently to repress a small note of pride. "By that time, anyway, he had already lost interest in the strike."

Chavez was quiet for a while, and then he said, "I never once took him fishing or to a ball game, or even to the movies." His tone in judging himself had the same harshness that he

to the office or out on the picket line. He'd be interested at first, but after a while he lost interest. He still doesn't know what he wants to do. He's out of a job, and he's not really in school, and he's liable to the draft." Chavez rubbed his eyes again.

"My family is deprived," he said flatly, after a time. "And we're going to stay deprived until we can get education. I can't get them to read. If I could just get *one* of them..." He paused. "Maybe Birdie." Nodding, he repeated, "Maybe Birdie."

Between the Oakland suburbs and San Jose, a countryside of small truck farms and farmhouses has not yet been sealed over with asphalt and concrete. Chavez remarked on how pretty these small farms were in comparison with the huge food factories of Delano. "They have life in them," he said. "People still live here." Seeing men and women stooping in the fields, he talked about the short-handled hoe, which he regards as a symbol of man's exploitation of man. "You have to caress a plant tenderly to make it grow, and the short hoe makes you bend over and work closer to the plant," he said. "But a good man can work just as well with a long hoe, without the exhaustion." Stoop labor with the short hoe is so painful that in speeches to workers an attack on the short hoe brings a wild cheer of anger and approval every time he uses it.

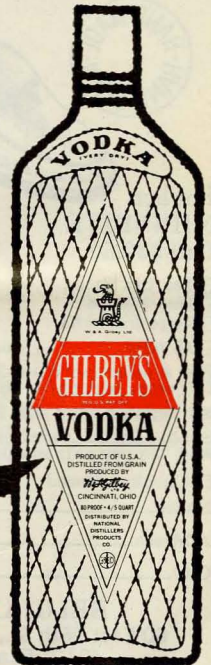
We left the freeway, turning east up the gleaming glass-plastic-neon boulevard that is San Jose's main thoroughfare; at the end of it low, bare ridges of the Santa Clara Mountains ease the eye. Toward the eastern edge of town is Sal Si Puedes. Of the many communities that Chavez has known since he left the Gila River Valley, he feels drawn most strongly to Sal Si Puedes, where he lived for long periods both before and after he was married. He pointed out a wooden church that he had helped to build. Sal Si Puedes was the first community that he organized for the C.S.O., and there is scarcely a house along those small streets that he hasn't been in. The part of the *barrio* where his parents live has a few trees and patches of lawn among the bungalows. We stopped at a mailbox marked "Chavez," and he went into the yellow stucco house to see if his parents were at home. When he came out to get me, he was tailed by two toddling nephews, and he was laughing.

Chavez's parents are about eighty, and they both have spectacles and snowy hair. The father, who must

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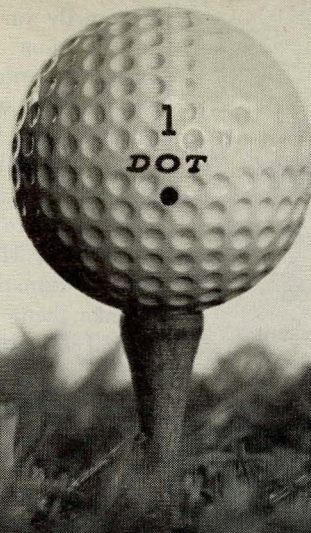


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have been a very strong, good-looking man, has been troubled for several years with age and weight and deafness; his wife is still very alert and active. After I had said hello to Chavez's parents, he introduced me to a niece of his, a pretty fifteen-year-old named Rachel, and to his son Fernando, a tall, strong-looking boy with a generous, open face and manner. Fernando held a golf iron in his hand.

Chavez, sitting on the couch with his mother in the living room, asked Rachel if she was coming to Delano the next summer to help in the strike, and she said enthusiastically that she would like that. I had the feeling that he was talking to his son, and apparently Fernando thought so, too, because he murmured mildly that he had meant to accompany Manuel to New York to help with the boycott and wondered why Manuel had not let him know that he was leaving.

Chavez looked at his son. "I guess you know we don't pay people to strike," he said in a flat voice.

"I know," the boy said uneasily. "I wanted to go anyway." He met his father's gaze.

"Well, it's never too late, I guess," Chavez said. He turned back to his mother.

Fernando glanced at me and smiled; the smile made no comment. I asked him about his golf, and he told me that he shared a bag of clubs with a friend and that he had once broken seventy.

Chavez spoke with his mother for all but a few minutes of the hour or so we spent in his parents' house; the pleasure he took in her company was a pleasure to see, and I doubt if her eyes left him once during the visit. His father sat quietly on a chair by the door. Chavez speaks warmly of his father, from whom he learned his contempt for that special kind of

male self-consciousness that Mexicans call *machismo*; unlike most Mexican-Americans, Mr. Chavez never considered it unmanly to bathe his children or take them to the toilet or do small menial jobs around the house.

Before we left, Chavez took his mother's fragile hands in his and said goodbye. On the way to the road, he knelt to talk with his small nephews, giving them ten cents each. He asked the older child his name, and the boy said he was Aguilar Chavez Junior the Third. Everybody burst out laughing except Aguilar Junior the Third, who

merely looked pleased. The boys said goodbye to "Tio Cesar," and he left them grinning broadly. "You see?" he told me. "Money talks."

In the car, I told Chavez that I thought Fernando had seemed sincere about going to New York, and he nodded. Apparently, Manuel had mentioned before leaving that Fernando wished to go along, but Cesar had not taken it seriously. Now he did, however, and for a while, as we drove south, he spoke proudly of Fernando. "We'll make a good organizer out of him yet," he said in a delighted tone. But then he caught himself and laughed. "I know," he said. "This time I'll let him come on his own decision, with no pressure. That will be best."

From San Jose, we continued south on U.S. 101, following El Camino Real—the Royal Way—which once connected the old Franciscan missions of California. Since Chavez had given up any idea of getting to the union meeting, he decided to visit one of the most beautiful of all the missions, which was only a few miles off our route. "Our time is our own for the rest of the evening," he said. "We can spend it as we like."

Along both sides of the road were pretty orchards, but Chavez took no pleasure in them. Belted in, shrunk down in his seat, he peered out at them through a corner of his window. "Oh, I picked a lot of prune, a lot," he said. "I hated it." Farther on, the orchards gave way to the soft, flowing golden hills of the small Santa Clara

Mountains, and here and there, like islets in the stream of golden grass, stood old, dark, sturdy oak trees. The oaks made him sit up again; he called my attention to the more beautiful ones as we rode along, and said that oaks—*los robles*—

were his favorite trees. With disgust, he pointed out a place where giant oaks had been hacked down to make way for a big raw-metal cistern.

At Gilroy, it was late in the summer day, though the light was still warm on the round crests of the low hills. On one of these hills, to the south, the Mission San Juan Bautista was founded, in 1797. Its hill overlooks a small valley and is overlooked, in turn, by higher hills. The mission is of white adobe, roofed with tiles of fine old reds, and the church, with the portico of its monastery, forms one side of one of the



oldest Spanish plazas in California. The plaza is fronted on two other sides by high adobe and frame buildings of the nineteenth-century West—the Golden West, to judge from the nugget color of their paint. The columns of the portico are three feet thick, and they reminded Chavez of the walls of the adobe farmhouse in the Gila River Valley. He laid his small brown hand on the old surfaces. "You can always tell when adobe walls are thick," he said. "Even from head on and far away. It's almost magical."

We walked the length of the empty portico. Dark was coming, but the light was so clear—we were far from the cities—that different reds could still be made out on old tiles of different ages. All was softened by ancient evergreens and crusting lichens, and under the caves violet-green swallows flitted out and returned. Chavez pointed out the old floor of the portico, which was a broken, weathered mix of stone, adobe, ancient brick, and concrete—anything that had come to hand over the years. He said that he longed to have such a floor in the buildings at the Forty Acres, the new union headquarters outside Delano, but that the members would never tolerate it. "They're real Americans," he said affectionately. "They want everything to look slick and expensive, to show the world that their union is a success." He laughed. "Well, we're going to put a wall around the Forty Acres, to make it a kind of cloister, like this mission, and the beautiful side will be facing *in*, so that the people who built it can enjoy it. If outsiders wish to come in and look, they'll be very welcome."

Our shoes whispered on old stones. Slowly, we walked around the mission in the gathering dusk. Chavez said that he liked to think his adobe buildings at the Forty Acres would weather as well as the old missions, but the state had demanded steel reinforcements; he said this as if steel, lacking the right spirit, might prove to be the weakest link.

"I can't remember when my interest in the missions started," he said. "It must have been very deep. When I got married, Helen didn't know very much about missions, so on our honeymoon we visited just about all of them, from San Diego north to Sonoma. What appeals to me is their ability to withstand the ages. Some are two hundred years old, you know. And this is for me a sort of symbol of what happens to people with the right attitudes. Everywhere else, they slaughtered the hell out of the Indians, all across the coun-

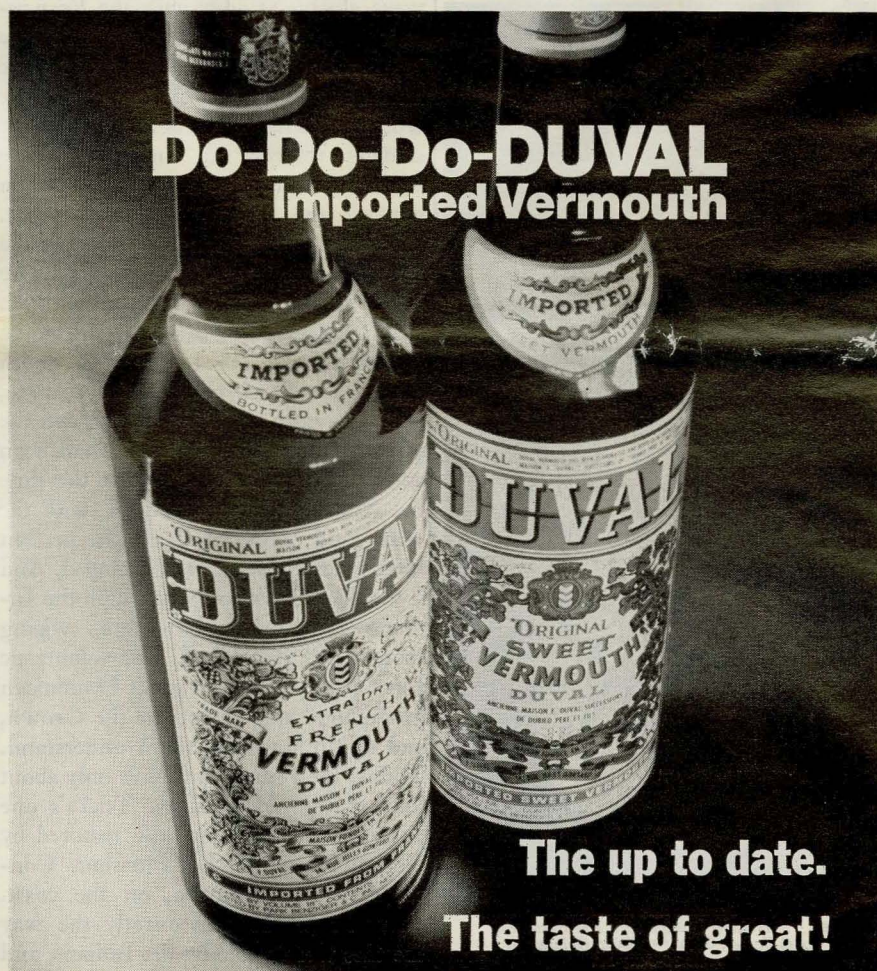


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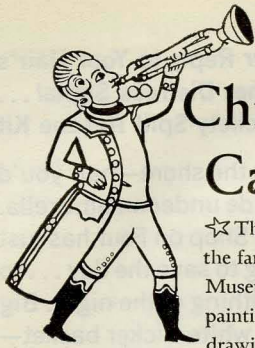
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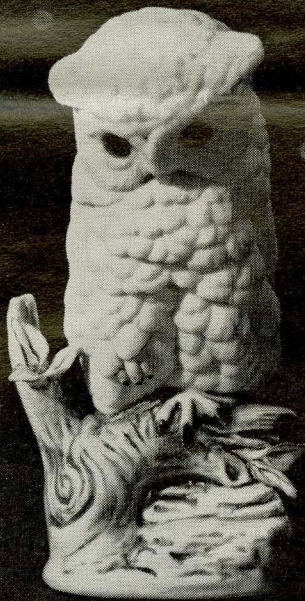
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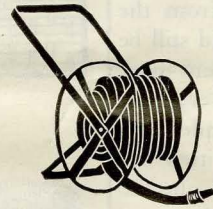
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ent. Everywhere else, the Indians were exploited—whatever religion they had was taken away from them and they were made Christians. Of course, the missions used them, too, but the whole spirit was different. The Mexican government perceived this, and that's why they wanted to destroy the missions. Oh, they were animals, some of those Mexican governors! They were *animals!* You see, it was really a Dark Age in terms of human life, but the missions gave sanctuary to the Indians, and it was a whole new approach to human beings. The Franciscans came and they said, 'These are human beings.' And the missions reflect this spirit—not just the architecture but the way they have lasted." He looked around him, and continued, "They are beautiful. They are peaceful. And I think that comes from a kind of crusading spirit, completely opposed to what was happening in the country before and afterward. There were few Indian uprisings here, very few. The big fight was between the Franciscans and the governments—first Spain and then Mexico—to keep the soldiers from rape and looting. Those Spanish soldiers were terrible. Hopeless. They were always at odds with the Franciscans, because the priests wouldn't give in on moral grounds. 'You can't abuse Indians,' they said. 'You can't abuse women.' The Franciscans made the soldiers respect the Indians. There were abuses on their side, too, but in general the moral force was great. Their history was long and most of the records have been lost, so the abuses by the Franciscans have been exaggerated. Most people don't realize what these priests did for the Indians—in South America and Mexico as well as here, and at great cost. They neutralized the governments. If the Church had been active in the United States at the time the Negroes were coming in, with the same kind of moral force, the present mess would never have developed. And it wouldn't have happened with the Indians—the mass slaughters, wiping them out." He sighed. "Bartolomé de Las Casas—he was a great Dominican missionary, and he fought the Crown, and finally he made them understand. Today, the Franciscans have only about four of the old missions. There's one mission that has been fully restored by the government—La Purísima Concepción, near Lompoc, on the coast. They made the tiles exactly the way the tiles were made by the Indians, and

it's beautiful, but it's empty. It's cold. If the Church is not there—the people—it loses its life. It dies."

When the United States acquired California, the Indians who were inherited from the mission farms were paid half of what other workers got, and their objection to this treatment was a factor in a general massacre that took place between 1850 and 1852, when Indian numbers in California, already low, were reduced from perhaps eighty-five thousand to about thirty-one thousand. This free-enterprise solution to the Indian problem caused a temporary labor shortage, but the advantages of the discriminatory pay scale in keeping labor groups at odds with one another were obvious, and the device has been used effectively ever since. For example, when the Filipinos arrived in force, in the nineteen-twenties, they



were paid even less than the Mexicans, who were already in a very poor bargaining position, since most of them had entered the United States illegally, as "wetbacks," and could be, and often were, deported before payday came around, or when they protested too strenuously about anything. Traditionally, Mexicans and Filipinos have competed for the available work—usually stoop labor, since preference in the tree jobs is given to the Anglos—and, despite Chavez's most earnest efforts, there is still noticeable distance in the union between the two groups that formed it in 1965.

"I hear more and more Mexicans talking about *la raza*—to build up their pride, you know," Chavez told me. "Some people don't look at it as racism, but when you say '*la raza*,' you are saying an anti-gringo thing, and it won't stop there. Today it's anti-gringo, tomorrow it will be anti-Negro, and the day after it will be anti-Filipino, anti-Puerto Rican. And then it will be anti-poor-Mexican, and anti-darker-skinned Mexican. We had a stupid guy who just wanted to play politics with the union, and he began to whip up *la raza* against the white volunteers, and even had some of the farm workers and the pickets and the organizers hung up on *la raza*. So I took him on. These things have to be met head on. On discrimination, I don't even give the members the privilege of a vote, and I'm not ashamed of it. No, the whole business of discrimination can't exist here. So often, these days, the leaders are afraid, and even though they feel strongly against racism, they

will not speak out against it. If the leadership is united, then it can say, 'All right, if you're going to do things that way, then you'll have to get rid of us.' You have to speak out immediately, the first time. Anyway, this guy was talking to people and saying he didn't like Filipinos taking over the union. So a small group came to me and said that a lot of people were very mad because the Filipinos were coming in. And I really reacted. I said a lot of people would be mad if Negroes came in in large numbers like that, and I said they were going to accept the Filipinos if I had to shove them down their throats." Chavez paused, as if surprised at his own violence. "I told them, 'That's the way I feel.' And so they left. A couple of days later, they said they wanted a big meeting. And I said, 'O.K., let's have a big meeting.' So at the big meeting they said they wanted to discuss discrimination—in other words, they wanted to take a vote to discriminate. And I said, 'Over my dead body. There will be no such vote taken here, and, furthermore, before you get rid of the Filipinos you'll have to get rid of me.' 'No vote?' they said, and I said, 'It can't be done. Those of you who don't like it, I suggest that you get out, because you're not doing anybody any good. Or, even better, I'll get out. I'll join the Filipinos, and we'll build a trade union.' Well, I'd say ninety-five per cent of the audience stood up and applauded. And this small group felt isolated. The employers, of course, have used this for years and years—one group set against the other. I explained this to the audience, and I told them that the Filipinos would be a tremendous asset—new people, new ideas. That's what a union is. *La raza* is a very dangerous concept. I speak very strongly against it among the *chicanos*. At this point in the struggle, they respect me enough so that they don't emphasize *la raza*, but as soon as this is over they'll be against me, because I make fun of it, and I knock down *machismo*, too. Oh, I heard a sick, sick speech by a Mexican the other day. I don't like to see any man discriminating. But when a Mexican discriminates—*ooh!*" He winced. "That *really* cuts me. As a Mexican-American, I expect more of them than of anybody else. I love them, and I guess I'd like them to be perfect."

SEVERE back pains that had been dragging Chavez down for months finally forced him to take some time off last autumn, and he went to St.

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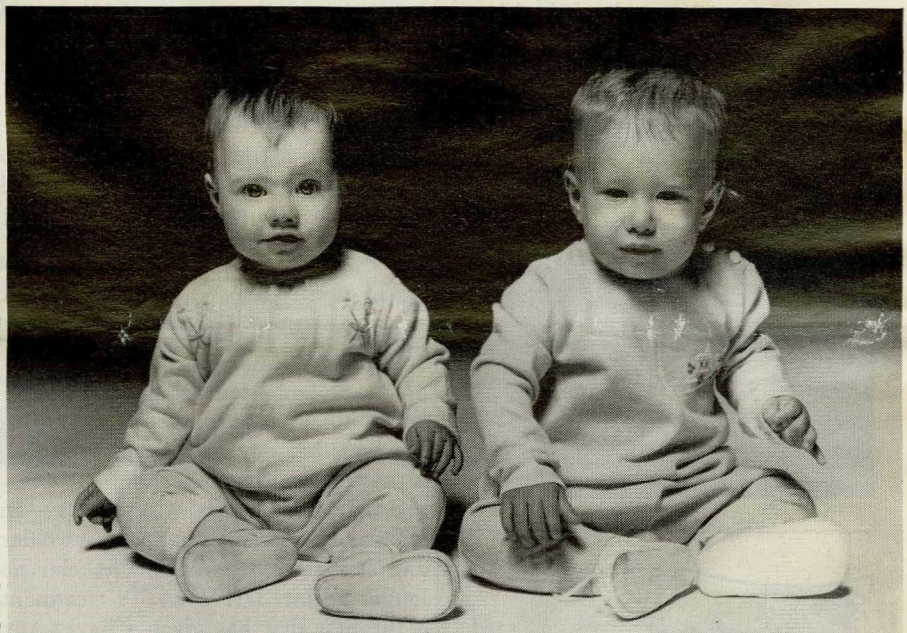
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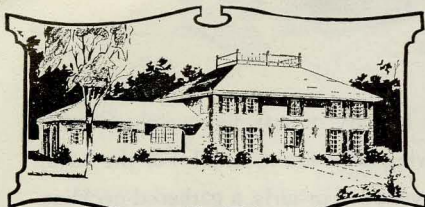
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Santa Barbara, where he could have daily therapy at a hospital. I found him flat on his back in bed. In crisp white pajamas, he looked small. He greeted me cheerfully but made no effort to sit up when he took my hand, his drawn face patched with gray from months of pain. Over his head, three rosaries hung from an extended bar, and with them a Jewish mezuzah on a silver chain, which he always puts on under his shirt when he goes out. "I'm sure Christ wore a mezuzah," he said, with a grin. "He certainly didn't wear a cross." On a wall of the room, as in his office in Delano, there was a Mexican straw crucifix. It was a small room, and the bed, a washstand, two stiff chairs, and a small bureau filled it. On the bureau was a borrowed tape recorder, with tapes of some flamenco music by Manitas de Plata and songs of Joan Baez. There was also a framed photograph of Gandhi.

There had been some bad news from Delano. Mack Lyons, the workers' representative at DiGiorgio, had found two groups of non-union pruners working in DiGiorgio's Arvin vineyards, and when the pruners were questioned they said that the vineyards had been sold. Since the union had been unable to obtain a so-called successor clause in the contract with DiGiorgio, guaranteeing that the contract would bind a new owner, this was a serious blow, and Chavez had called an emergency meeting to discuss how to handle the new threat. The next phase of the long battle was clearly going to be a difficult one, and Chavez would need all his strength for it. (In March of this year, Dr. Janet Travell, who treated President Kennedy, concluded that Chavez's back trouble was not a degenerative-disc condition, as had been thought, but a muscle spasm caused by the fact that one of his legs is shorter than the other and one side of his pelvis is smaller—an imbalance to which, as he grows older and less resilient, his muscles can no longer adjust. Dr. Travell's treatment is the first that has given Chavez any real relief.)

Last fall in Santa Barbara, there was speculation that the long fast Chavez had made earlier in the year might have aggravated his back condition, and in the sun on a porch outside his room I talked with Helen Chavez about the fast. She told me that at the beginning he had kept it secret for about three days. At home, he would pretend that he had already eaten or

that he wasn't hungry. Then one day Manuel said to her, "Is he still fasting?" After that, she offered Cesar all his favorite foods, and still he would not eat. Finally, she confronted him in his office, and when he admitted he was fasting she got very upset; she was sure he would harm himself. "The kids were already worried," she said. "And when I told them, they said, 'Dad looks awful. Will he be O.K.?' But after another day or so we got used to the idea and went along with him."

Not everyone went along. The fast, which lasted twenty-five days, split the union down the middle. Mrs. Chavez and Richard and Manuel knew that he had been fasting before he announced it, but even they were stunned by his intention of prolonging the fast indefinitely. So was LeRoy Chatfield, who still speaks with awe of the speech in which Chavez announced his decision. Chavez had called a special meeting for twelve noon on Monday, February 19, 1968, at a hall in Delano, and the strikers and the office staff as well as their families were there. Several acts of violence had been committed by union people, and he talked for an hour and a half about non-violence. He discussed Vietnam, wondering aloud how so many of his listeners could deplore the violence in Asia and yet promote it in the United States. He said that the Mexican tradition of proving manliness—*machismo*—through violence was in error. *La Causa* must not risk a single life on either side, because it *was* a cause, not just a union, and had to deal with people not as membership cards or Social

Security numbers but as human beings, one by one.

"Cesar took a very hard line," Chatfield told me. "He said we were falling back on violence in the strike because we weren't creative enough or imaginative enough to find another solu-



tion—because we didn't *work* hard enough. One of the things he said in the speech was that he felt we had lost our will to win—by which he meant that behaving violently or advocating violence, or even thinking that maybe violence isn't such a bad thing, is really losing your will to win, your commitment to win. This seems like a very idealistic position, but there's truth in it. Anarchy leads to chaos, and out of chaos rises the demagogue. That's one of the reasons he is so upset about *la raza*. The same Mexicans that ten years ago were talking about themselves as Spaniards are coming on real strong

these days as Mexicans. Everyone should be proud of what he is, of course, but race is only skin-deep. It's phony, and it comes out of frustration—the *la raza* people are not secure. They want to use Cesar as a symbol of their nationalism. But he doesn't want any part of it. He said to me just the other day, 'Can't they understand that that's just the way Hitler started?' A few months ago, a big foundation gave some money to a *la raza* group—they liked the outfit's sense of pride, or something—and Cesar really told them off. He feels that racism will destroy our union faster than anything else—that it plays right into the growers' hands if they can keep the minorities fighting, pitting one race against another, one group against another."

In his speech that day, Chavez discussed the civil-rights movement and how, in its recourse to violence, it had made black people suffer; black homes, not white, were being burned, and black sons killed. The union, he said, had raised the hopes of many poor people. It had a responsibility to those people, whose hopes, along with all the union gains, would be destroyed after the first cheap victories of violence. Finally, he announced the fast. It was not a hunger strike, because its purpose was not strategic; it was an act of prayer and love for the union members, because, as their leader, he felt responsible for the acts of all of them. There would be no vote on the fast, which would continue for an indefinite period, and had, in fact, begun the week before. He was not going into seclusion, and would continue his work as best he could. He asked that the people in the room keep the news entirely to themselves. Since it was difficult to fast at home, and since the Forty Acres was the spiritual home of the union, he would walk there as soon as he had finished speaking, and remain there until the fast was done. "His act was intensely personal," Chatfield told me. "And the whole theme of his speech was love. In fact, his last words to us before he left the room and started that long walk to the Forty Acres were something like 'I am doing this because I love you.'"

Helen Chavez followed Cesar from the hall, and everyone sat for some time in silence. Then the meeting was taken over by Larry Itliong, the assistant director, who said straight out that Brother Chavez should be persuaded to come off the fast. Manuel Chavez then declared that Cesar was an Indian, and therefore stubborn, and that once he had made up his mind to



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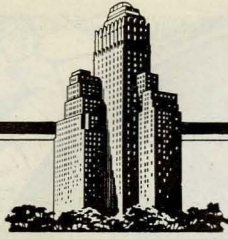
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do something, nothing anyone could say was going to stop him. Other members made many other comments. One man, for example, dismissed all the talk about striker violence as grower propaganda, and therefore saw no reason for the fast. Some of the Protestants and agnostics in the union, white and brown, still resented the Catholic aura of the Sacramento march of the year before, and now they felt offended all over again. They were supported by some Catholics, who felt that the Church was being exploited, and also by most of the white volunteers, the Jews especially, who disliked any religious overtone whatever. For the first week or so, almost the whole board of directors was against the fast. On the other hand, the membership, largely Catholic, accepted it in apprehensive faith. The people complied with Chavez's request that no one try a fast of sympathy on his own, but he learned later, from the candidly expressed annoyance of their wives, that three young men had taken a vow of chastity for the duration of the fast, and held to it. He speaks of this sacrifice with awe and regret, but it seemed to him a moving example of the farm workers' new spirit.

There were many misgivings and many doubts about what Chavez was trying to accomplish. "When we visited Cesar in his little room at the Forty Acres," Chatfield told me, "he would point at the wall and say, 'See that white wall? Well, imagine ten different-colored balls, all jumping up and down. One ball is called Religion, another Propaganda, another Organizing, another Law, and so forth. When people look at that wall and see those balls, different people look at different balls, and each person keeps his eye on his own ball. For each person, the balls mean different things, but for everyone they can mean something.' I began to see what he meant. My ball was Propaganda, and I kept my eye on that. I could therefore be perfectly comfortable, and understand the fast completely in those terms, and not negate the nine other balls—Organizing, say. And, as a matter of fact, we never organized so many people in such a short time, before or since. The fast gave the lie to the growers' claim that we had no following. Some people came every night to attend Mass at the Forty Acres—came sixty-five, eighty-five miles every night. People stood in line for an hour, two hours, to talk with him. Cesar saw it as a fantastic opportunity to talk to one man, one family at a time. When that person

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leaves, he goes away with something. He's no longer a member, he's an organizer. At the Sunday Mass, we had as many as two thousand people. That's what the growers don't understand—we're all over the state. In fact, there's nowhere in this state or anywhere in the Southwest where the people don't know about Cesar Chavez and the United Farm Workers. And they say, 'When is he coming? Are we next?'"

As the fast wore on through February and into March, many of the farm workers became worried, and a number of strikers came to Manuel and swore that they would never be violent again if he could just persuade Cesar to quit. Other union members were made increasingly uncomfortable by the religious implications of the fast, especially after the seventeenth day, when Chavez asked his brother Richard to construct a simple cross—the materials cost a dollar and a half, according to Richard—which was later burned by vandals. The cross was the ultimate affront to at least two volunteers. One dismissed the entire fast as "a cheap publicity stunt." The other, who had once been a priest, accused Chavez of having a Messiah complex. Both soon quit the United Farm Workers for good.

At a Mass of Thanksgiving that concluded the fast, Chavez was too weak to speak, and a brief speech was read for him, in English and in Spanish. After describing the purpose of the fast, he concluded as follows: "When we are really honest with ourselves, we must admit that our lives are all that really belongs to us. So it is how we use our lives that determines what kind of men we are. It is my deepest belief that *only by giving our lives do we find life*. I am convinced that the truest act of courage, the strongest act of manliness, is to sacrifice ourselves for others in a totally non-violent struggle for justice. To be a man is to suffer for others. God help us be men."

—PETER MATTHIESSEN

(This is the second of two articles on Cesar Chavez.)

Motorists driving between West Jefferson and Mechanicsburg-Urbana apparently will have to use the detour for a while. For how long is the highway department's secret. Evans said, "There will be no peace abroad and little security at home."

—Columbus (Ohio) Dispatch.

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