

A PERSPECTIVE ON
The Farm Workers' Movement



PHOTO BY MERYL JOSEPH

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THE FARM WORKERS' MOVEMENT

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THE UNITED CHURCH BOARD FOR HOMELAND MINISTRIES

PRINTED BY WILEY-INTERSCIENCE

On October 31, 1968 the Board of Directors of the United Church Board for Homeland Ministries voted to adopt the following statement:

The United Church Board for Homeland Ministries is persuaded by overwhelming evidence that farm workers have long been denied basic human rights accorded other workers in our society. It believes that justice in agricultural employer-employee relationships requires that the employers recognize the rights of employees to speak through an effective and responsible organization and that the United Farm Workers Organizing Committee has proved itself to be such an organization.

Although a number of grape growers have signed contracts with the United Farm Workers Organizing Committee, a significant portion of the industry continues to resist the unionization of the workers.

Therefore, the United Church Board for Homeland Ministries reaffirms its support of the goals of the United Farm Workers Organizing Committee and calls upon all churchmen to demonstrate their concurrence by using their purchasing power in behalf of justice. This Board reports its action to all churchmen and requests they consider refraining from the purchase of all California table grapes unless it can be positively determined that such grapes have been harvested by union employees.

BASIC DATA ON FARM WORKERS*

1. There are approximately one million farm workers in the United States.
2. Wages
 - a. In 1970, the average hourly wage for farm workers was \$1.42. Annual earnings were less than \$1,500.
 - b. In 1970, farm workers earned 42% of the amount earned by factory workers. This compares with 46% in 1965 and 62% in 1948.
 - c. In 1966, amendments were made to the Fair Labor Standards Act which now guarantees a minimum wage of \$1.30 per hour for farm workers. This is 30¢ less than the \$1.60 granted workers in other industry. The law applies only to farms employing 500 man-days of labor during any quarter of the year. Only 2% of the nation's farms fall into this category.
3. Living and Working Conditions for Workers Not Under Union Contract
 - a. There are no paid vacations or holidays.
 - b. Workers have no health or pension plans.
 - c. No regular rest periods are provided on the job.
 - d. Children of farm workers are generally excluded from child labor and school attendance laws.
 - e. Toilets and sanitary drinking water frequently are not provided.
 - f. There are no established hours of work.
 - g. There are no established channels for grievances.
 - h. There are only minimal safety provisions. Farm labor ranks third in the nation (behind construction and mining) in terms of on-the-job accidents. Each year there are 850-1000 deaths from pesticide poisoning and 85,000-90,000 persons otherwise affected by such poisoning.
 - g. Housing is generally owned by the growers who deduct rent from wages. The vast majority of this housing has no flushing toilets, sinks, tubs or showers.
4. Health
 - a. The life expectancy for farm workers is 49 years.
 - b. The infant mortality rate is 125% higher than the national rate.
 - c. Maternal mortality is 125% higher than the national rate.
 - d. Influenza and pneumonia is 200% higher than the national rate.
 - e. Infectious diseases are 260% higher than the national rate.
 - f. Accidents are 300% higher than the national rate.

*Data collected by John R. Moyer from various sources—reference list provided upon request

AGRI BUSINESS*

1971 was the year in which the public became aware that something ominous was happening down on the farm. The invasion of agriculture by giant business conglomerates with unlimited economic and political power, threatened to drive out all but the largest independent farmers and to transform rural America into a vast zone of poverty and unemployment.

Corporate domination brought rising prices, declining food quality, and greater ecological hazards. Rural poverty proliferated as the government, which had paved the way for the corporate invasion, continued to give massive subsidies to the rich and the powerful, letting small farmers and farm workers fend for themselves.

Meanwhile, business empires...are getting into agriculture. These diversified conglomerate corporations control hundreds of thousands of acres of land; they have enormous amounts of capital, enjoy countless tax advantages, and receive the biggest federal subsidies...the conglomerates seek to achieve farm-to-market control of commodities. For example...the 34th largest corporation, which owns or leases more than a million acres in the West, plows its land with tractors manufactured by one of its subsidiaries, sprays its crops with pesticides from another, and processes, packages, and sells its produce through still other companies within the same corporate structure....

Big-scale agriculture does not mean cheaper food. Middlemen—the vertically integrated producers and the processors, marketers, and retailers—claim an increasing portion of what consumers pay for food. The prices that farmers get average only 7 percent higher than 20 years ago, while wholesale prices have increased 22 percent and average retail prices are up 44 percent. The average annual food bill for American families rose \$21 in 1971, and all but \$1 of the gain went to middlemen.

A network of government subsidies and programs nourishes giantism on the farm. Large farmers collect an ever greater share of acreage diversion and subsidy payments. Economist Charles Schultze figures that between 1968 and 1970 farm subsidies cost taxpayers \$5 billion a year in government outlays plus an additional \$4.5 billion in higher prices. The wealthiest 19.1 percent of the farms received almost 63 percent of total subsidies, while the poorer half got only 9.1 percent. The new \$55,000-per-crop subsidy limitation, passed by Congress in 1970, has been perverted. The wording of U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) regulations enables the large enterprises to evade the limitation. Senator James Eastland (D., Miss.) and his family met the limitation by dividing their 5,200-acre cotton plantation into eight business entities and picked up checks totalling \$159,925, the same amount as they received last year. Other large farmers leased their holdings to get around the limitation... (meanwhile) more than 100,000 small farmers are going out of business every year....

Wealthy landowners and farmers also circumvent the government's 160-acre limitation on the amount of federally irrigated land which can be owned by one person. In California, federally subsidized water has skyrocketed the value of millions of acres held by a handful of corporate farmers and landowners who exercise virtual monopoly control of the state's land and water resources.

An overwhelming percent of research conducted or financed by the USDA is made available to agribusiness free of charge, but problems of the small farmer and rural poverty are slighted. While groups of poor Southern farmers are trying to survive by raising labor-intensive, specialty crops like okra, tomatoes, and cucumbers, USDA is developing strains of the same vegetables which can be harvested mechanically. At the same time, the Department is withholding loan funds which these small farmers and their cooperatives desperately need....

*James M. Pierce, The Condition of Farm Workers and Small Farmers, Report to the National Board of National Sharecroppers Fund, 1971, pp. 1-5.

THE MEXICAN-AMERICAN AND THE CHURCH
by Cesar Chavez

The place to begin is with our own experience with the Church in the strike which has gone on for thirty-one months in Delano. For in Delano the Church has been involved with the poor in a unique way which should stand as a symbol to other communities. Of course, when we refer to the Church we should define the word a little. We mean the whole Church, the Church as an ecumenical body spread around the world, and not just its particular form in a parish in a local community. The Church we are talking about is a tremendously powerful institution in our society, and in the world. That Church is one form of the Presence of God on Earth, and so naturally it is powerful. It is powerful by definition. It is a powerful moral and spiritual force which cannot be ignored by any movement. Furthermore, it is an organization with tremendous wealth. Since the Church is to be servant to the poor, it is our fault if that wealth is not channeled to help the poor in our world.

In a small way we have been able, in the Delano strike, to work together with the Church in such a way as to bring some of its moral and economic power to bear on those who want to maintain the status quo, keeping farm workers in virtual enslavement. In brief, here is what happened in Delano.

Some years ago, when some of us were working with the Community Service Organization, we began to realize the powerful effect which the Church can have on the conscience of the opposition. In scattered instances, in San Jose, Sacramento, Oakland, Los Angeles and other places, priests would speak out loudly and clearly against specific instances of oppression, and in some cases, stand with the people who were being hurt. Furthermore, a small group of priests, Frs. McDonald, McCollough, Duggan and others, began to pinpoint attention on the terrible situation of the farm workers in our state.

At about that same time, we began to run into the California Migrant Ministry in the camps and fields. They were about the only ones there, and a lot of us were very suspicious, since we were Catholics and they were Protestants. However, they had developed a very clear conception of the Church. It was called to serve, to be at the mercy of the poor, and not to try to use them. After a while this made a lot of sense to us, and we began to find ourselves working side by side with them. In fact, it forces us to raise the question why OUR Church was not doing the same. We would ask, "Why do the Protestants come out here and help the people, demand nothing, and give all their time to serving farm workers, while our own parish priests stay in their Churches, where only a few people come, and usually feel uncomfortable?"

It was not until some of us moved to Delano and began working to build the National Farm Workers Association that we really saw how far removed from the people the parish Church was. In fact, we could not get any help at all from the priests of Delano. When the strike began, they told us we could not even use the Church's auditorium for the meetings. The farm workers' money helped build that auditorium! But the Protestants were there again, in the form of the California Migrant Ministry, and they began to help in little ways, here and there.

When the strike started in 1965, most of our "friends" forsook us for a while. They ran, or were just too busy to help. But the California Migrant Ministry held a meeting with its staff and decided that the strike was a matter of life or death for farm workers everywhere, and that even if it meant the end of the Migrant Ministry they would turn over their resources to the strikers. The political pressure on the Protestant Churches was tremendous and the Migrant Ministry lost a lot of money. But they stuck it out, and they began to point the way to the rest of the Church. In fact, when 30 of the strikers were arrested for shouting "Huelga," 11 ministers went to jail with them. They were in Delano that day at the request of Chris Hartmire, director of the California Migrant Ministry.

Then the workers began to raise the question: "Why ministers? Why not priests? What does the Bishop say?" But the Bishop said nothing. But slowly the pressure of the

people grew and grew, until finally we have in Delano a priest sent by the new Bishop, Timothy Manning, who is there to help minister to the needs of farm workers. His name is Father Mark Day and he is the Union's chaplain. Finally, our own Catholic Church has decided to recognize that we have our own peculiar needs, just as the growers have theirs.

But outside the local diocese, the pressure built up on growers to negotiate was tremendous. Though we were not allowed to have our own priest, the power of the ecumenical body of the Church was tremendous on the Church. The work of the Church, for example, in the Schenley, DiGiorgio, Perelli-Minetti strikes was fantastic. They applied pressure, and they mediated.

When poor people get involved in a long conflict, such as a strike, or a civil rights drive, and the pressure increases each day, there is a deep need for spiritual advice. Without it we see families crumble, leadership weaken, and hard workers grow tired. And in such a situation the spiritual advice must be given by a friend, not by part of the opposition. Thus, what sense does it make to go to Mass on Sunday and reach out for spiritual help, and instead get sermons about the wickedness of your cause? That only drives one to question and to despair. The growers in Delano have their spiritual problems...we do not deny that. They have every right to have priests and ministers who serve their needs. BUT WE HAVE DIFFERENT NEEDS, AND SO WE NEEDED A FRIENDLY SPIRITUAL GUIDE. And this is true in every community in this state where the poor face tremendous problems.

But the opposition raises a tremendous howl about this. They don't want us to have our spiritual advisors, friendly to our needs. Why is this? Why indeed except that THERE IS TREMENDOUS SPIRITUAL AND ECONOMIC POWER IN THE CHURCH. The rich know it, and for that reason they choose to keep it from the people.

The leadership of the Mexican American Community must admit that we have fallen far short in our task of helping provide spiritual guidance for our people. We may say, "I don't feel any such need. I can get along." But that is a poor excuse for not helping provide such help for others. For we can also say, "I don't need any welfare help. I can take care of my own problems." But we are all willing to fight like hell for welfare aid for those who truly need it, who would starve without it. Likewise we may have gotten an education and not care about scholarship money for ourselves, or our children. But we would, we should, fight like hell to see to it that our state provides aid for any child needing it so that he can get the education he desires. LIKEWISE WE CAN SAY WE DON'T NEED THE CHURCH. THAT IS OUR BUSINESS. BUT THERE ARE HUNDREDS OF THOUSANDS OF OUR PEOPLE WHO DESPERATELY NEED SOME HELP FROM THAT POWERFUL INSTITUTION, THE CHURCH, AND WE ARE FOOLISH NOT TO HELP THEM GET IT.

For example, the Catholic Charities agencies of the Catholic Church has millions of dollars, earmarked for the poor. But often the money is spent for food baskets for the needy instead of for effective action to eradicate the causes of poverty. The men and women who administer this money sincerely want to help their brothers. It should be our duty to help direct the attention to the basic needs of the Mexican-Americans in our society...needs which cannot be satisfied with baskets of food, but rather with effective organizing at the grass roots level.

Therefore, I am calling for the Mexican-American groups to stop ignoring this source of power. It is not just our right to appeal to the Church to use its power effectively for the poor, it is our duty to do so. It should be as natural as appealing to government...and we do that often enough.

Furthermore, we should be prepared to come to the defense of that priest, Rabbi, minister or layman of the Church, who out of commitment to truth and justice gets into a tight place with his pastor or bishop. It behooves us to stand with that man and help him see his trial through. It is our duty to see to it that his rights of conscience are respected and that no bishop, pastor or other higher body takes that God given human right away.

Finally, in a nutshell, what do we want the Church to do? We don't ask for more cathedrals. We don't ask for bigger churches or fine gifts. We ask for its presence with us, beside us, as Christ among us. We ask the Church to sacrifice with the people for social change, for justice, and for love of brother. We don't ask for words. We ask for deeds. We don't ask for paternalism. We ask for servanthood.

NATIONAL FARM WORKER MINISTRY*

"If anyone has the world's goods and sees his brother in need yet closes his heart against him, how does God's love abide in him...Let us not love in word or speech, but in deed and truth." (1 John 3:17-18)

The National Farm Worker Ministry (NFWM) is a movement within the churches to be present with and support farm workers as they organize to overcome their powerlessness and achieve equality, freedom and justice.

The NFWM is not the whole Church. It is one small part of the Church doing a specific task and seeking to point the way toward one form of Christian servanthood in our time. The NFWM will gather together those people and those resources that are committed to supporting the farm workers non-violent struggle for dignity and a measure of justice. (It is the hope of those who are active in the NFWM that other church men and women will be present with and support small farmers as they labor to gain a fair price for their products and to assure their own dignity as men of the land.)

The NFWM will seek resources for the following activities:

- 1) Provide subsistence support for men and women from the churches who want to work full-time in the farm worker's movement. (Included in the work might be teaching in a free school for farm worker children, working in the fields prior to and during a strike, organizing ranch committees at farms under contract, community organization, developing support for the boycott, etc.)
- 2) Identify the moral issues involved in the organizing efforts of farm workers and offer churches and church men and women concrete alternatives for becoming involved in those efforts
- 3) Recruit men and women from the churches to visit with farm workers in their struggles so that a wider group of Christians will become interpreters to their own constituencies
- 4) Provide emergency relief to farm worker families who are unemployed because of strikes or natural disasters or misleading recruitment by employers
- 5) Provide a way for younger people to be present with and support farm workers through a summer volunteer program

The NFWM is not engaged in organizing farm workers. Rather, the NFWM hopes to be present with and support farm workers who are, with competence and courage, doing their own organizing. The NFWM will be a link between the farm workers' organizing struggle and that group of Christians who believe that love means action for their brother and who also believe that social justice is one important way that love takes shape in the world.

* Continuing the National Migrant Ministry

MY DECISION TO GO WITH THE FARM WORKERS MINISTRY

Frederick D. Eyster

Editor's Note: The Rev. Frederick D. Eyster, who served as Associate Pastor at Christ Church, United Church of Christ, Bethlehem, Pennsylvania, recently elected to leave the parish ministry in order to join the National Farm Workers Ministry. The following statement is excerpted from his farewell sermon to the Bethlehem congregation.

I am very grateful for the opportunity to explain my decision at this time. For in a unique way, I feel called to the ministry for the first time in my life.

This ministry came into being within the last year as a successor to the Migrant Ministry. It is related to the National Council of Churches, supported by funding from denominations such as the United Church of Christ. The United Church Board for Homeland Ministries holds this ministry high in its priorities and is the largest denominational contributor.

Its purpose, according to one of its publications, is "to continue the religious presence with, and to ensure support for, farm workers as they organize to overcome their powerlessness and to achieve a measure of dignity and justice." The movement, or "La Causa," is best known as the United Farm Workers (UFW), the union headed by Cesar Chavez of California.

As most are aware, the farm workers are the only major segment of America's working population not covered by basic labor laws, such as the minimum wage, and therefore suffer undue hardships in their working life. Made up largely of minority groups—mainly Mexicans and blacks—these people are the poorest of the poor in America, the rather invisibly oppressed. Repressive legislation prevents them from organizing to make their needs known. Agriculture and business leaders conspire to keep them downtrodden.

What little progress has been made can be credited to Cesar Chavez and the UFW organization. You'll remember some notoriety was gained in the grape boycott of last year, in which California grape growers were finally forced to negotiate contracts with the unionized farm workers. Since that time, the popular understanding is that things are going well for them. That's deceptive! Approximately 99 per cent of America's farm workers are still without a union. So the organization has moved

into a new effort: the lettuce boycott.

As to the Farm Workers Ministry itself, I quote again from their literature: The purpose is "to provide subsistence support for men and women from the churches who want to work full-time in the farm workers movement. Included in the work might be teaching in a free school for farm worker children, working in the fields prior to and during a strike, organizing ranch committees at farms under contract, community organization, developing support for the boycott, etc."

We will be the eighteenth couple to enter this ministry which is presently working for the union. I emphasize that we will be paid subsistence wages, giving up our standard of living and adopting the style of the farm workers—room and board and a minimal personal allowance.

Cesar Chavez is directly involved in assigning us. He will make an attempt to place us where our skills and interests are most useful. We know that we have to be mobile and flexible, ready to go where we are needed.

Among the several attractions of this ministry are the charisma of a man like Cesar, the spiritual side of the movement, the Christian aspect to the work as people give their lives to serving their brothers. There is a family model governing the movement, in which Cesar is the head and concern is shared for all who work in the movement. We are told that it is very hard work, but that the support derived from this kind of community is very rewarding.

On a personal level, there will be an opportunity for Sue and me to work mutually, a dream we have always shared. There is now a chance for us both to share work and home duties. There is a chance for us to test our commitment to radical witness. We've done a lot of talking, marching, and writing of letters. Now we can put our hands and feet where our mouths have been. There

will also be the chance to try a new life style. For some time we have felt that the middle-class values are not so important to us and that a simpler way of life may be as satisfying. At least, as we now try to unburden ourselves of property and financial commitments, we know how easily one gets "trapped." However, the most important of the personal reasons for the present decision is the "call." We're aware that many people *could* do this ministry, but many *won't*. By virtue of our age, experience and interests, we are in a unique position to respond, and therefore we feel compelled to do so.

Of course there are serious implications for the Eyster family. This is a risk we take: it might not work out. It will be tough on the kids: so we've sought reassurance that there will be adequate health and educational coverage for their sakes. But at the same time there is the compensation of a new kind of life for the family: exposure to a different culture, a more inclusive home life for me. We see as many pluses as minuses in the implications for us.

There are also implications for the church. I hope this move of ours reminds you of the mission orientation of the church. Let me quote from a UFW newsletter: "Poor people organizing for change has been a traditional concern of the church. In the 1930's many church people supported the industrial unions in their early struggles. The major church bodies all have strong positions favoring the unionization of workers as a prerequisite to justice in an industrial society. . . . Cesar Chavez and the

United Farm Workers are among the pioneer Christian servants of our time. They are a powerful symbol of hope in our society. They have demonstrated that determined non-violent struggle can bring change. If we believe in non-violent change then it is imperative that we support such action when we see it."

I don't believe that we are leaving the ministry at all. If anything, we are becoming your missionaries on a new frontier.

There are even some practical suggestions for what you might do to support the movement. Educate yourselves to the situation of the farm worker in America. There is legislation, pending and already passed, which needs response and criticism from the public directed to legislators. You may support us financially, if that is possible. But in any case, please support us with your prayers. And finally, you may boycott lettuce. The present need is to bring economic power to bear on the growers who repress the farm workers.

Freedom and equality are values for which the Farm Workers Ministry struggles as a way of helping "God mend every flaw" in our country. I think it appropriate to lay these implications before you. To quote once more from the newsletter: "The National Farm Workers Ministry will be a link between the farm workers' organizing struggle and that group of Christians who believe that love means action for their brother and who also believe that social justice is one important way that love takes shape in the world."

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Farm Labor Organizing 1905-1967: A Brief History, an excellent historical survey originally published by the National Advisory Committee on Farm Labor. Copies are now available from the **National Sharecroppers Fund**, 112 East 19th Street, New York, N. Y. 10003.

Grapevine, January 1972 issue entitled "The Farmworkers Movement" is an excellent program piece for individuals and groups. Published by the Joint Strategy and Action Committee, Inc., 475 Riverside Drive, Room 1700A, New York, N. Y. 10027.

Journal of Current Social Issues, November-December 1970 issue contains a California interview conducted by John R. Moyer, entitled "A Conversation with Cesar Chavez."

Journal of Current Social Issues, Spring 1971 issue contains "A Continuing Conversation with Cesar Chavez," based on a dialogue at Riverside Church in New York City, in which Mr. Chavez answers key questions.

Matthiessen, Peter, *Sal Si Puedes—Escape If You Can: Cesar Chavez and the New American Revolution*, Random House, New York, 1970. One of the best books so far on Chavez and the farm workers movement.

Steiner, Stan, *La Raza: The Mexican American*, Harper & Row, New York, 1969. A study of Mexican Americans today.

The Condition of Farm Workers and Small Farmers, issued annually by the National Sharecroppers Fund, 112 East 19th Street, New York, N. Y. 10003. Contains the latest facts on small farmers, hired farm workers, government programs, cooperative developments, rural poverty, discrimination, and NSF's programs for rural America.

workers then, too, except that I wasn't organizing them into a union. But most of my work has been with farm workers. During that period with CSO, we were trying to organize them into civic action groups. But I always believed that the union had to come in order to bring some changes about. In fact, when I joined CSO back in 1952, the first thing I asked Fred Ross was, "What about the farm workers? I want to do something that will give the workers a union." Fred told me, "If CSO gets big enough, CSO will become a union." So I said, "Fine," and I joined. But, of course, it never did.

But to go back to your earlier question, there are other reasons why we were successful. We always believed that the growers weren't that powerful, and I could never subscribe to the theory that the growers were invincible. I realized that the growers appeared to be so powerful simply because the workers had no power. If they could gain some power, the growers wouldn't seem as invincible. Most unions in the past had attempted to strike and organize at the same time. Instead of doing the two massive jobs at once, we separated them. In Delano, we did the organizing first. When we went into the strike, we weren't quite ready, but the circumstances were such that a strike was unavoidable. We had fifty percent of the battle won when we went into the strike because we had an entity; we had people who knew each other and believed in the cause.

Moyer: How do you go about building an organization? What do you do at the beginning?

Chavez: Well, first of all, there has to be a need. Then there has to be someone who is willing to do it, who is willing to take whatever risks are required. I don't think it can be done with money alone. The person has to be dedicated to the task. There has to be some other motivation.

In this country, many have the idea that organizing people is very difficult, but it isn't. It becomes difficult only at the point where you begin to see other things that are easier. But if you are willing to give the time and make the sacrifice, it's not that difficult to organize. Maintaining an organization is much more difficult. I don't look at organizing as something which happens by chance, or as something very complicated. I look at organizing as a lot of hard work. I think that many organizers lose out because they don't have the patience. First of all, people think that you need to have one hundred percent participation to be successful; and secondly, they feel it has to happen right away. But really what happens is a chain reaction. If you put one worker together with another, that reaction is not going to be too noticeable. But when you put a hundred people together, that reaction is going to carry. And it multiplies. When you have people together who believe in something very strongly—whether its religion or politics or unions—things

happen. We are past the stage where it is difficult to get people into the union. That fight has been won. I think the fight right now is to convince the growers that the best thing for them to do is to sign with the union.

At the beginning, up until the strike, everything we did was very deliberate. We had all the time we needed; nobody was pushing us.

Another thing about organizing, you can't wait until you get everything organized and then give benefits; you give benefits as you organize. The group is organized for a purpose. If you tell the worker that he should come into the union, and once it is strong, he will get something—*forget it!*

Organizing is an educational process. The best educational process in the union is the picket line and the boycott. You learn about life. It's the same with education everywhere. When you learn by doing, you learn faster than by other methods. Once you have people who *see* what has happened, they become your best organizers. It's a question of having people turned on, not by gimmickry, but by concrete benefits that they receive when they become members.

Moyer: In the very beginning, when you first try to get people involved, how do you go about finding people? Is it a matter of talking to individuals?

Chavez: I play the percentages. I know that you can spend a lot of

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is the picket line and the boycott.
You learn about life!*

time "chasing the rat," going around in circles and not getting anything accomplished. The name of the game is to talk to people: If you don't talk to people, you can't get started. To establish contacts in a town, I do not believe in going to the "leaders." I want to build leadership loyal to the union and to no one else. I just go to the first house in the labor camp or town and knock on doors. I know there will be at least a few farm workers in every town or camp who will be receptive to me. I also know that you can sell anything you want to sell if you really want to sell it—whether it's good or bad! You knock on twenty doors or so, and twenty guys tell you to go to hell, or that they haven't got time. But maybe at the fortieth or sixtieth house you find the one guy who is all you need. You're not going to organize everything; you're just going to get it started. You are not really looking for members as much as for organizers. But people don't *know* they are organizers when they actually are. Some of the best organizers don't look upon themselves as such.

That's how the process gets started. The evolution of a group is very fast. Once you get people together, you have a different problem.

The other thing is, you don't know everything. And once you realize that, it makes you realize that other people have got to do things. Organizing is a gamble. I'll bet there are more failures in organizing than in any other endeavor you can think of. It's a very risky business. I'm not saying that organizing comes by chance. I'm saying that there are an awful lot of gambles you have to take almost daily. Well, if I'm willing to gamble, I'm willing to gamble on a human being and his ability to do things more than anything else. I like to see people do things, and if they make mistakes, fine, as long as they don't do it intentionally or get into an ego situation. If a guy gets out there and works his head off and draws a blank, fine. It's a learning experience and that will make or break that organizer.

All of us like to have accomplishments. In some cases it has taken us

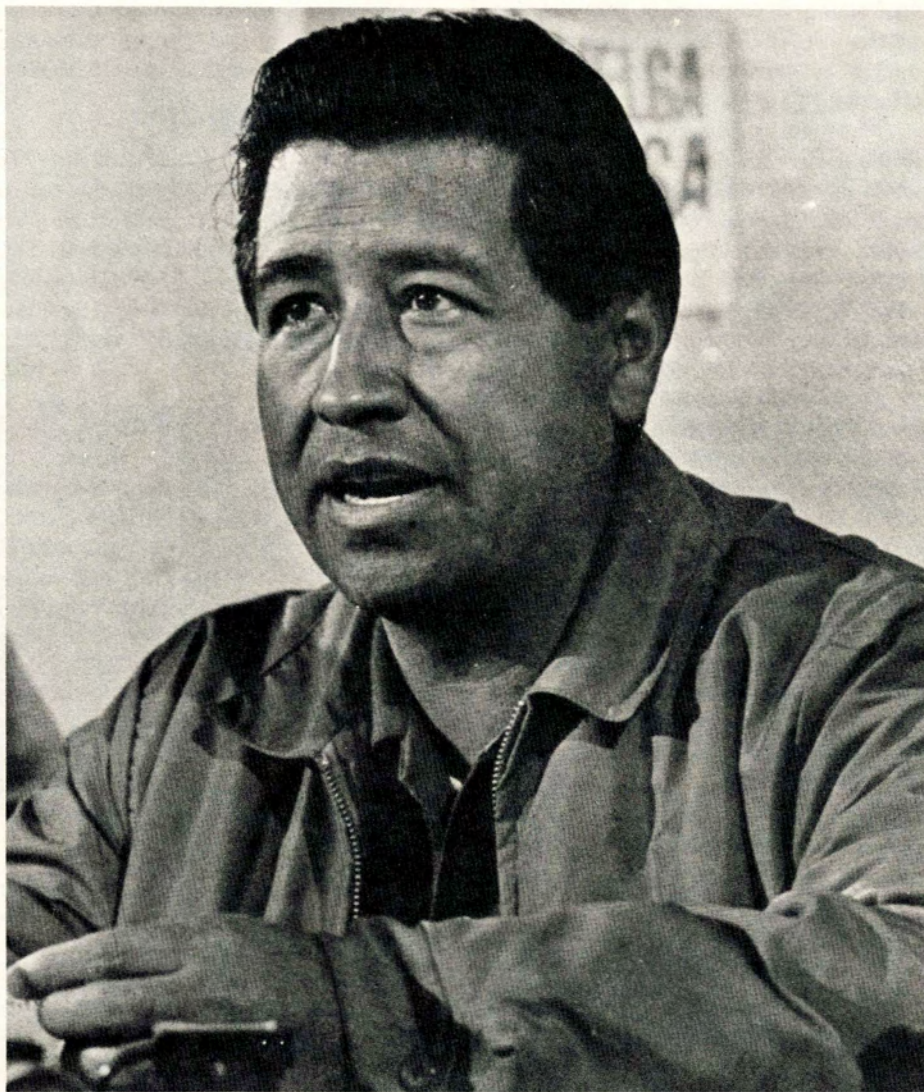


Photo by Bob Fitch

four years to find the right job for the right guy. You will see that someone is dragging and has all sorts of conflicts; he is not producing, he is coming in late. He is not producing because you haven't been able to find the job he can do best. But there is a job for everybody. There is something everybody loves to do.

Moyer: In other words, what happens to people in this process is very important.

Chavez: Sure. People are the raw material. In many cases I know that someone is going to make a mistake, and I point it out. If I get the slightest bit of opposition, I say, okay, let it

be an experience, either for him or for me. Sometimes I will say, "No, it won't work," and I'll argue a lot; but sooner or later I come to the realization that, hell, I don't know everything. Then the guy will go out, and if he fails, I will say to myself, "See, I told you." Then I try to help him see that we went through that road. But, even more important, I get surprised sometimes. I say that he shouldn't do it because he will fail, and I'll be damned if he doesn't go ahead with it and he *doesn't* fail. You never get to the point where you know everything.

Moyer: I sense that the style of life of people in the United Farm Workers

Organizing Committee is very important to you. What's going to happen to this as the union gets big? The union is gaining power.

Chavez: Well, power is not bad. Power is what the game's all about, but a lot depends on how the power is used. We are a long way from there. I think churches can have a lot of power. But I doubt if unions can have power to the extent that it is absolute. The forces working for the devil are not really that marshalled, and they haven't got that much to lose, anyway. But the forces working for the employers are well organized, and they have a lot to lose. So the opposition to labor is much more—it's like politics except that politics goes in a cycle and it hits a high spot every two to four years. In labor it is constant, day in and day out. I don't think labor unions really have that much power. I really don't, because if they did there would not be the repressive laws against labor. What has happened is that labor has not been able to keep up with involvement in the total community. You are never strong enough that you don't need help.

Moyer: What are some of the groups which have supported you?

Chavez: The unions, the church groups, the students, and individuals—not necessarily liberals, but just good, honest people who have some kind of love for farm workers and who would like to see something done about injustice. It is a very wide spectrum.

Moyer: What constitutes a good support group?

Chavez: Time is more important than money. An individual who is willing to give us his time is more important than an individual who is willing to give us his money. I think money would be number two. But time is the most important element. Everything you do is predicated on time. On the boycott, for example, if an individual is willing to give us his time, we can

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teach him and set him in a situation where he can multiply himself many times over in terms of support. That's why the students and the young people are so valuable because *they have time*. They are not involved in a lot of things yet; their lives are very young.

Moyer: In other words, the most important thing a support group can give you is people.

Chavez: That's right.

Moyer: How can you involve people around the country?

Chavez: We need people right now for the lettuce boycott. We also need people for other work that has to be done. Some work is being ignored because we are concentrating on the boycott. Getting volunteers is the first step. Putting them to work so they get a good experience is the second and even more crucial step. One of the things we have going for us is that we have people in most cases who are

satisfied with their experience because they work and they accomplish something. We operate from the theory that a lot of very good people get confused and can't follow because the leaders don't make it possible for them to follow. If I'm going to go on the boycott, I want it to be as simple as possible. So when people come, we say, "Look, that store over there has lettuce, and we want to get the lettuce out." We do this instead of spending time and money in some kind of elaborate orientation so that by the time we get to the actual job the volunteer is not so confused that he couldn't possibly make a contribution. I think that one of the great problems, probably in education, and I know in organization, is confusing people to the point where they become immobile. In fact, the more things people can find out for themselves, the more vigor the organization is going to have. Regimentation does not begin at the point where you ask people to vote for a resolution; regimentation begins when you say that this is the only way it can be done. People get attracted to whatever dominates the scene. If all of the activity of a union is in meetings, people get attracted to meetings and Robert's rules of order. If there is action, then they get attracted to action. And if they get attracted to action, they will then produce action.

Moyer: What are the implications of the grape strike victory? Will the union become a national movement?

Chavez: Yes, I think so. There is enough action going on in other areas by workers themselves that will make the union national, not because we have contracts but because we have people who look toward California and the experience we have had here and who want to do the same thing. So in that sense, it's national even now. But in a formalized, structural way, we are a long way from that.

Moyer: In Florida there are a lot of black farm workers. One of the things you often hear is that UFWOC is a Chicano organization.

Chavez: Well, it would be more correct to say that it is a Chicano and Filipino organization. I never subscribed to the theory that you had to be a Mexican to organize Mexicans, or a black to organize blacks. You can use this as an excuse. If you can't organize, you can come back and say, "Well hell, I can't organize Filipinos because I'm a Mexican," or "I can't organize Mexicans because I'm an Anglo and I don't speak Spanish." I don't buy those things. These are excuses. I subscribe to the theory that you've got to have a lot on the ball to organize anyone.

Moyer: How long do you think it will be before UFWOC becomes national?

Chavez: I don't know exactly what becoming national would mean. It will be some time before we have contracts in most of the states. In terms of how soon we will be sending organizers to other areas, it will be a very short time.

Moyer: There are many so-called movements among the poor today. What constitutes a legitimate movement?

Chavez: I don't want to pass judgment on what is legitimate and what is not legitimate. I think the best judgment one can make is what's successful and what's not successful. A movement may be very legitimate but be very poorly organized and not successful at all.

Moyer: I notice that the Ford Foundation recently identified some three hundred Mexican-American organizations in Los Angeles. One hears many articulate spokesmen for many organizations among poor people around the country. Many church people get "up tight" when they hear these people speak and make demands. How do you distinguish between the phones and the real leaders?

Chavez: I think what counts is not whether a guy is phony or legit.

I think what counts is whether the guy has the power. Most often, phonies don't get the power. If a guy goes around and is not willing to do the job and simply has a line of rhetoric and wants to play that game, sooner or later it catches up with him.

Moyer: Some of these guys are getting a lot of money from foundations and church groups.

Chavez: Well, they can keep going a little longer if they have money. If they don't have money their water is cut off sooner but, in either case with or without money—their days are numbered because no one can stand by himself. You've got to stand together with a lot of people. There is nothing phony about power, either you have it or you don't.

Moyer: Are there other organizations which are developing a power base with whom you could comfortably relate?

Moyer: When you talk about other organizations that are not poor what

Photo by Bob Fitch



*People have to understand that
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Chavez: Since we are poor, and since we are a minority group, we relate comfortably to poor people's organizations. But the other job is to relate to other organizations which are not poor and are not minority groups but are powerful, so that we can try to get them to turn around and to take care of some of these problems that they can be an instrument in solving.

Moyer: When you talk about other organizations that are not poor, what do you mean?

Chavez: A very good example is the church, with which we feel very comfortable. That's probably the best example of an organization with power but not yet involved with the things it should be involved in to bring about some change.

Moyer: Do you have any ideas about a future relationship with the church, or the churches? We're not really a monolithic organization yet, you know.

Chavez: I know. I think there are two levels at which we are involved now. We are involved at the philosophical level, and we're involved at the gut level where people in the church are either for us or against us. This second level is where we have some action—through either the strike or the boycott. And that kind of involvement is nasty. We're not involving the Na-

tional Council of Churches at Riverside Drive in New York City as much as we are involving Marcos Munos, boycotter from Delano, with Rabbi Miller in Boston. That kind of involvement is being repeated over and over in hundreds of places. You put all that together and it makes quite an involvement.

Moyer: The involvement you are talking about is more with individuals than with institutions, then.

Chavez: Well, we have to have the permission of the institutions to involve individuals and in most cases we have been able to get that permission. We place more emphasis on this than on those institutions where we get some money but we don't get anybody involved. As I said, the time of the individual is more important than the money.

Moyer: I understand.

Chavez: Not that we don't need the money!

Moyer: Cesar, a number of "liberal" politicians have asked you for support, but you have not given it. I'm thinking of people like Unruh, Tunney, and, after Bobby Kennedy's assassination, Eugene McCarthy. Why have you withheld support from people who at least seem to be sympathetic to your cause?

Chavez: I think one of the reasons is that we are just too involved with our own problems, trying to keep alive. Secondly, we don't want to get involved unless the people are involved. One of the big problems we are faced with in organization is that people will say, "Yes, I support you," and give their name and then don't do anything. If we are going to support someone, we want to get in and do a job for him, like we did for Bobby Kennedy. It isn't every day that we can do that job—one, because we are very involved in our own job; and two, because sometimes the people don't feel like they want to do it.

Moyer: Obviously the people did want to support Robert Kennedy.

Chavez: Right.

Moyer: I gather that you sense a difference.

Chavez: Yes, because it will be sometime before there is another public figure that the people want to support as they did Bobby Kennedy. I feel very strongly that we should not endorse people just because we are asked for our endorsement, or because they have a liberal tag. I think we endorse them because they do something for us. If a politician takes a stand for us at a risk to himself, then I think we have a moral obligation to stand with him. If a politician doesn't stand with us because he's afraid of losing something, then he doesn't merit our support.

Moyer: Are there any politicians today who, in your mind, seem willing to take the kind of risks that Bobby Kennedy took?

Chavez: There may be some, but we don't have anybody taking risks with us.

Moyer: You have been offered a number of awards by different organizations. I know that you have a policy of not accepting awards. Why?

Chavez: There are many reasons. One

is that, from a personal standpoint, the award is being offered for something I haven't done. Second, I don't have time. I'm too busy to get awards. Third, I think there is a certain amount of corruption in receiving a lot of awards.

Moyer: Corruption?

Chavez: I think so. I'm not speaking of criminal corruption. You can be corrupted in many ways. Being committed to groups because of awards limits your freedom, and that's a kind of corruption. I'm not saying it's a crime, and maybe not even a sin, but I'm kind of weird on that one, you know. I hate to get on a plane and leave the scene of action. Also, if I start holding all the awards, other people in the union will never get awards. The life of the union depends upon more people getting known, more people getting to share the limelight, because with the limelight also comes responsibility and with responsibility comes a little sharing of the load. It's much easier for me to have other people sharing the load. We haven't been able to educate the public to that, but we're trying. One out of a hundred organizations, when I say no, will present the award to another officer of the union, and when that happens we are very happy.

Moyer: What is the nature of your relationship to the AFL? I noticed a small article in *The New York Times* headlined, "Meany Calls Off Grape Boycott." How do you manage to maintain your individual style and your independence within the framework of a big labor organization?

Chavez: A moment ago, you said "churches" instead of "church." So we have "unions" instead of "a union." The AFL is only a federation of unions. The individual unions have a lot of autonomy. They're completely autonomous. But, beyond that, we've had a very good relationship with the AFL-CIO. They have assisted us in many ways, but, they have permitted us to do our job, because they know that we know best. It would be no

fun if we couldn't make decisions, right or wrong. That's what gives us the desire and the drive to continue working and to make the sacrifices, because we have the freedom to act. If we were goofing and fouling things up, I have no doubt that things would be different.

As for George Meany calling off the boycott, I asked him to do it. You see, two things are not generally known. One is that in 1939, Meany helped charter one of the first farm labor unions in California. The union lost the strike, but he personally got about fifteen thousand dollars for them. The other thing is that, of all the people I talked to, George Meany was the only labor leader who recognized that, in this modern age, a boycott is more important than a strike. So when we were ready to call off the boycott, I thought it was a good gesture to ask him to do it.

Moyer: So you are able to maintain the freedom you have always had within the larger framework of the AFL-CIO.

Chavez: Yes.

Moyer: Joining the AFL-CIO still gives you the freedom to disagree with top leadership positions? I guess there has been some disagreement on legislative positions, hasn't there?

Chavez: Yes. It was an honest disagreement. We feel that the present National Labor Relations Act is not going to give us the right to organize. We either want no law or we want the kind of law the other unions got when they were at the beginning stage.

Moyer: The fact that you differed with top AFL-CIO leadership on this does not in any way hinder your relationship?

Chavez: Oh, no. If you consider how many disagreements they have among themselves, this is nothing! There are honest disagreements among unions just as there are among church groups.

Moyer: Cesar, what kind of a society would you like to see in this country, and what might be the possibilities of building it?

Chavez: I've always maintained that it isn't the form that's going to make the difference. It isn't the rule or the procedure or the ideology, but it's human beings that will make it. Society is made up of groups, and so long as the smaller groups do not have the same rights and the same protection as others—I don't care whether you call it capitalism or communism—it is not going to work. Somehow, the guys in power have to be reached by counterpower, or through a change in their hearts and minds, or change will not come.

Moyer: You seem to be one of the few organizations among the poor today which continues to maintain, deliberately and overtly, a philosophy and strategy of non-violence. How do you manage to do this?

Chavez: Non-violence is a very powerful weapon. Most people don't understand the power of non-violence and tend to be amazed by the whole idea. Those who have been involved in bringing about change and see the difference between violence and non-violence are firmly committed to a lifetime of non-violence, not because it's easy or because it is cowardly, but because it is an effective and very powerful way.

Non-violence means people in action. People have to understand that with non-violence goes a hell of a lot of organization. We couldn't be non-violent in Salinas and win unless we had a lot of people organized around non-violence up and down the United States and Canada. We are organizers at heart. Most of us in the movement take great pride in being able to put things together.

Economic Justice



THE UNITED FARM WORKERS:

A Translation of American Idealism

John R. Moyer

In 1962 a former migrant farm worker, naval veteran of World War II, and past organizer and director of California's Community Service Organization moved his family to a small town in the center of the San Joaquin Valley and began knocking on the doors of the run-down houses of farm workers. As people came to the door he told them that the only way farm workers could gain justice and human dignity was to unite in an organization strong enough to enable them to bargain with their employers. He asked them to help him build such an organization, requested a small contribution of money for operating expenses as a sign of their commitment, and promised them nothing except years of hard work. Many told him to "go to hell." Many more shrugged their shoulders. But every now and then someone would join him in his effort.

The town was Delano. The man was Cesar Estrada Chavez. Today, after ten years of struggle against the most incredible odds, Cesar Chavez is the leader of an organization of more than thirty thousand farm workers who, within the coming year, will hold their founding convention, elect officers, and officially become the first successful union of agricultural workers in the history of this nation. The forces arrayed against this small union are as formidable as ever. Thirty thousand members represent a strong and viable organization, but they are a small percentage of the one million farm workers throughout the country who struggle to gain a living at a time when agriculture has become big business and is steadily replacing people with machines. One state, Arizona, has recently passed a law which will make it virtually impossible for farm workers to organize. California will vote on a similar law in November. Agricultural interests and related organizations continue to spend millions of dollars each year to discredit Cesar Chavez and the United Farm Workers. When President Nixon took office in 1969, one of his first acts was to instruct his Secretary of Labor to find a way to get farm workers covered under the Taft Hartley part of the National Labor Relations Act, an act from whose benefits farm workers have been specifically excluded by those who continually seek to invoke its penalties.

The issue is simple justice and hinges on one basic question. In a country which was built upon such concepts and ideals as freedom, justice, equality of opportunity, and the recognition of the dignity of human beings, should farm workers have the right to sit down and talk with their employers about such basic issues as wages, housing, and working conditions? For a hundred years they have been told that the answer is "No." They have been told "no" by the people they work for; they have been told "no" by their government.

It is senseless to reiterate here the conditions of exploitation under which farm workers live, the long history of their struggle to escape the bondage of misery, their specific exclusion from the realization of the dreams and idealism of this nation. All of this has been documented in the volumes of countless government studies and hearings, in thousands of newspaper articles, and in the books of some of our greatest authors. What is important is that Americans come to understand something of the nature of this new union of farm workers, its leader, Cesar Chavez, and the impact of both upon our society. This is particularly important at a time when so much money and effort is being spent by the multi-billion dollar agricultural industry to discredit the union.

What is the union known as "The United Farm Workers"? To begin with, it will not be an official union until the members elect officers at their founding convention during the coming year. The organization, in preparation for this convention, has dropped the phrase "organizing committee" from its official name, however, and in all but the most technical aspects the United



Photo by Meryl Joseph

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thing about this organization
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family-like style of life*

Farm Workers can be considered a union with a charter from the AFL-CIO.

In its first ten years, UFW has won over two hundred contracts, some of which have been re-negotiated. These contracts provide for wage scales, medical insurance, holidays, vacations, a hiring hall, health and safety precautions ranging from toilet facilities and drinking water to the regulation of the use of dangerous pesticides. The union has a medical insurance plan which has paid out over \$60,000 in benefits to workers, a clinic staffed by nurses and doctors, a life insurance program, a credit union which will lend any member up to \$300 at one percent interest, and a service center which provides services for members in need of help and advice on legal, financial and other matters.

The bulk of the membership in the United Farm Workers comes from California, Arizona, Texas, and Florida, but the union has organizers in more than thirty states and offices in every major city in this country. While the majority of members are black or Mexican-American, its representation includes members of most racial and ethnic groups found in America. Few people remember that the grape strike, which brought national visibility to the movement, was begun by Filipino farm workers who were later joined by Cesar Chavez and his Mexican-American followers.

Members of the United Farm Workers pay dues of three dollars per month which only partly underwrite the cost of the services provided by the union, the rest coming from contributions by many organizations and individuals. Growers constantly point out that farm workers are forced to pay dues, that on ranches under contract they are confronted with a closed shop, that union members have no say in the conduct of the affairs of the union, and that they do not elect their own officers. The point of such accusation is to demonstrate that UFW is not democratic. It is academic to all but the totally uninformed that dues and a closed shop are essential to the growth and survival of any union and that neither is ever questioned today in other industry except by the most fanatical proponents of "right-to-work" legislation. But the accusation with regard to the un-democratic operation of the union's internal affairs is more serious because few people know the union from the inside.

In a recent issue of *El Malcriado*, the newspaper of the union, members were notified of their right and obligation to vote on a referendum which, among other things, will enable union members to decide whether or not to allow the present leadership to remain in office until the founding convention when new officers will be elected. Until now, Cesar Chavez has been the director of the United Farm Workers Organizing Committee. The purpose of an organizing committee is to organize a union, and during the basic organizing stage it is essential that the leadership be consistent and continuous. While some may argue that this is not democratic, it has been the basic procedure in the development of every successful

union in this country. The organizer must have the loyalty and commitment of his followers until such time as the organization is established.

But let's examine the structure of the United Farm Workers. UFW has a board of directors made up of union members. Every major policy decision is voted upon by the members with lesser decisions being voted on by specific groups of workers who will be affected (e.g., whether to strike at a given ranch). But the real key to the structure of the union lies in the local ranch committee. Each ranch committee elects its own officers and decides its own program. What is more, each committee appoints a specific person to relate to each of the overall programs of the union. One person is appointed for the sole purpose of seeing to it that the medical plan works for every member of his ranch committee. Another does the same for the credit union; another for the service center. In point of fact, the structure of the union has been specifically devised to decentralize power and spread the act of decision-making as widely as possible throughout the national membership.

Finally, the criticism is levied that farm workers are denied the choice of union representation and that the United Farm Workers are opposed to secret ballot elections for the purpose of deciding who will represent them in labor disputes on specific ranches. One grower from the state of Washington has gone to great lengths and considerable expense to tell the American people that Cesar Chavez is unfair and opposes secret ballot elections for union representation. What he does not tell his audience is that in 1970 a secret ballot election was held on his own ranch and that his workers voted 105-4 to be represented by the United Farm Workers. He then decided that his workers must have made a mistake and has since set up his own company union with his chief foreman in charge. In point of fact, since 1965 over fifty certified, documented elections have been held and, with one exception, the UFW has won each by an overwhelming margin.

Perhaps the most unique thing about this organization of farm workers is its family-like style of life. A visitor to any of the organization meetings or even to the picket line in the midst of a heated struggle is immediately struck, in both cases, by the presence of whole families from the smallest babies to grandfathers. There is much singing, chatting with friends, and a feeling of general closeness even when the most crucial decisions are being made at a meeting or the issues of life and death are being fought out on the picket line. Cesar Chavez takes the family style very seriously as essential to the quality of the life of the organization, but it doubtless would have emerged in any case. Unlike workers in other industries, farm workers have had to take their whole families into the fields to earn enough money to make ends meet, and onto the roads to seek work elsewhere when there is none locally. It is ironic that the beauty and strength of integrating the whole family into the union should arise

from the tragedy of the condition of the workers.

The union has a staff of approximately six hundred people. The number varies from time to time because of the fluid situation. Each staff member, including Cesar Chavez, submits a personal or family subsistence budget to the board of directors. Such a budget will include only those items basic to essential needs of the family or person such as food, clothing, housing, medical expense. Once the budget is approved by the board it is allocated with the addition of five dollars per week spending money for each family member. Mr. Chavez has made it clear that he considers the discipline of such a policy and its uniform application to all members of the staff, including himself, to be essential to the integrity of the union.

This leads us to consider Cesar Chavez himself and the need to "separate the man from the myth." There are in fact many myths about the man, good and bad, spread abroad by workers and growers. Whatever else may be said about him, he is first and foremost an organizer, probably the best in the country. The basic skill of the organizer lies in his ability to help other people to work together to accomplish something. The very nature of such work provides the organizer himself with very little personal visibility. The reward he receives is often the credit other people get. While Mr. Chavez has been organizing farm workers for many years, it is only very recently that he has become a public figure, a role which he has assumed very well but which he often wishes he could relinquish so that he might return to basic organizing. He was well into his task before he recognized that to complete his work he would have to give up grass roots organizing and assume a leadership role. More than once he has seen younger organizers go out from his office and felt that slight hint of nostalgia.

But basic to being a good organizer are the tangible and intangible qualities that make up a certain kind of person. These vary from person to person and, in the case of Cesar Chavez, might best be described here through a random series of incidents and events experienced by this writer. Three years ago I spoke with a California farm worker who said to me, "Cesar taught me that I am a man, that I am free to make my own decisions and free to make my own mistakes." I was speaking to this man in Boston where he was organizing New Englanders to support the grape boycott. He and his family had driven all the way from California. They were Mexican-Americans who had spent their lives since they were small children working in the vineyards. They spoke broken English and could not read or write the English language. A few minutes later, Marcus Muñoz was standing before two thousand white, Anglo-Saxon, Protestant churchmen telling them why the farm workers union

VIVA LA CAUSA

16mm • color • sound • 26 minutes

An outstanding motion picture produced by the United Church Board for Homeland Ministries, "Viva La Causa" interprets the efforts of transient farm workers to organize, and features Cesar Chavez, president of the United Farm Workers, AFL-CIO.

The film—produced, directed, and photographed by Robert Newman—was recently awarded a place on the program of the 26th International Film Festival at Edinburgh, Scotland. It is expected to have wide distribution among church organizations, campuses, unions, civic groups and similar audiences.

Details on rental or purchase are available through the *Journal* Office of Publication.

had meant so much to his family and why he was asking for their support. He was surrounded by young people from the Boston area who had never known a farm worker before but who looked to this man as their leader. Today he is living in the slums of Jersey City doing the same thing for the lettuce boycott—because Cesar Chavez taught him that he was a man!

In the early days of the grape boycott I walked into a meeting of a hundred farm workers in Delano. In the middle of the room a man was sitting on the floor with a bandage on his head. That afternoon he had been beaten by a guard at one of the ranches where he and others were picketing. Another farm worker had tried to restrain the guard by grabbing him. While the workers sat in this meeting for two hours in absolute silence, Cesar Chavez lectured to them quietly, *not* about the injustice of the beating received by the man with the bandage on his head, but about why it was *wrong* for the other worker to physically attempt to restrain the guard. "If we return the growers' violence with our violence, we will lose," he said.

Some time later at a meeting of churchmen in New York City, Mr. Chavez was asked, "In the face of all the violence perpetrated on you and the farm workers, how do you manage to remain a non-violent man?" The reply was as remarkable for its perception of human nature as for its integrity. "I am not a non-violent man. I am a violent man who is trying to be non-violent."

On the subject of non-violence, I must recall a conversation I held with Cesar Chavez and which was printed in these pages two years ago (*The Journal*, Vol. 9, No. 3). In that conversation he said, "Non-violence is a very powerful weapon. Most people don't understand the power of non-violence and tend to be amazed by the whole idea. Those who have been involved in bringing about change and see the difference between violence and non-violence are firmly committed to a lifetime of non-violence, not because it's easy or because it is cowardly, but because it is an effective and very powerful way. Non-violence means people in action. People have to

understand that with non-violence goes a hell of a lot of organization. . . . We are organizers at heart. Most of us in the movement take great pride in being able to put things together."

At another meeting with national churchmen, the concern was raised by Mr. Chavez himself about the future of his union. "Even if most of agriculture becomes mechanized," he said, "there will still be enough work for 250,000 workers. That is enough for quite a sizeable union. Some day this union is going to get big. When it does there will be a tendency for it to become corrupt. It always happens. We are glad to have the support of the church now while we are struggling, but I want to know what you in the church can do to keep us honest, to keep us from becoming corrupt." He has expressed this concern many times in different ways. One of Cesar Chavez's greatest fears is that the union will some day lose the kind of family-like style with which it has grown up.

The place of the family in the movement is very important to him. At a meeting of New York area supporters which included students, working people, suburban housewives, teachers and others, he made a comment which once again indicates the depth of his perception of human nature. "When you become involved in a movement such as ours you are going to become a changed person. It is important that you involve your husband or wife at the same time so that they understand why you are changed." Cesar Chavez lecturing middle-class whites on marriage and the family! Yet he has seen the strain that total commitment to a struggle can put upon the family.

One could go on forever describing events such as these. How do you describe Cesar Chavez? One minute he will be immersed in a furious argument with his staff who, when it is over, will defend him with their lives. In the next minute he will be agonizing over how to find the right job for a staff member who is not doing well because he or she is not happy. "There is something everybody likes to do, but sometimes it takes us four

years to find it!" A minute later he is in a press conference answering questions he has answered over and over again, patiently trying to explain while his supporters grumble at questions to which the answers should be obvious. He is patient, perceptive, persistent, and above all a man who has faith in the goodness of his fellow human beings. As one of his closest associates said recently, "He lets us be completely independent. We go out on our own, blunder into the very mistakes he warned us against, and then he forgives us. The only thing he won't forgive is fooling around when there is work to be done. If a guy fools around, he's out. Period." His faith in human beings extends even to his enemies. "I don't hold anything against the growers," he will say. "I just don't think they understand us. Some day they will understand us, and then we will get along."

Cesar Chavez is not a philosopher who articulates his beliefs and convictions in a system of concepts or a credo. He is a man of action whose basic philosophy of life and deep inner conviction is revealed by what he does, how he treats people in his relationships with them, what those who know him say about him and how they are affected by him. The overwhelming evidence is of a man who believes deeply in the freedom and dignity of man, his right to receive justice and to have the opportunity to live a decent life like any other man.

It may be too early to assess the impact of Cesar Chavez and the United Farm Workers on this nation, but no one can doubt its reality. In some ways, this impact is obvious as in the prominence given the lettuce boycott at the Democratic Convention and the presence of "I Eat Lettuce" buttons at the Republican Convention. It has been difficult for any major political candidate to avoid taking a stand with regard to Cesar Chavez. The other obvious impact which this movement has made is with respect to farm workers themselves. Contracts have been won. Conditions are being changed, not widely, but increasingly. People have learned about the conditions of farm workers; the fact that most of them work for big business operations rather than family farms, that farm workers have been killed by pesticides sprayed on the foods which we eat and that the union is changing this, that small farmers are hurt more by pressure of large agribusiness concerns than by a union of farm workers. People have also learned that some of the biggest farmers in America are the Dow Chemical Company, Tenneco, Purex, the Bank of America, and the Penn Central Railroad. The impact this makes on our nation is direct and obvious.

But the UFW has had a much deeper impact upon this nation which is not so obvious. Large numbers of people have been changed and motivated by this movement in ways that have implications which extend far beyond the

movement itself or the people it was designed to serve. Cesar Chavez never mobilized people for the purpose of protest or demonstration. He organized people so that they could work together to change a system that was exploiting them. His was not a crowd of people gathered to hear speeches and vent emotions against the evils of this system; his was an organization of people with a strategy for action and a commitment to change a system which runs deep within the political and economic fabric of this nation.

When people become involved in such a movement, something happens to them. Farm workers who had lived their lives in poverty and despair, resigned to the injustices perpetrated upon their families, suddenly discovered that they themselves had the power to do something to change this condition. When a person makes such a discovery he becomes a very different person from the one he was when he was simply bending his back for long hours, resigned to the idea that all he could do was work to survive.

But the union has also organized thousands of other people around this nation who support its cause and involved them in concrete action which has in itself given new meaning to their lives and a new attitude toward their nation. These people come from literally every walk of life in this country: housewives, teachers, students, hard hats, politicians—you name them—some at least are involved. During the grape boycott a few years ago, a retreat was held for boycott leaders in the northeastern United States. It was mid-winter and a slack time for grapes. It would be four months or so before grapes would again be hitting the Eastern markets. The problem was how to keep the support groups alive during this slack period. So teachers, student radicals, labor organizers, and housewives sat around tables in small groups discussing the question of what turns people on and keeps them motivated. What other movement has brought these hitherto diverse groups together with a common concern?

It could well be argued that the farm worker movement is the most important thing happening in America today. Rather than talking about change, the movement has involved people in the process of creating change. No other movement in our nation's history has developed such a broad base of support from so many diverse groups of people. But what is even more remarkable is the form in which this support is given: more often in the form of personal commitment than anything else. This is no accident. Cesar Chavez is a man who believes that people can work together to build a just society for everyone, that there is a job for everyone to do, that people can and should be motivated, that people should be treated with respect and given the freedom and opportunity to build decent lives and live with dignity. This is the kind of idealism on which this country was founded, and today Cesar Chavez is the leader of a movement which is a very real translation of that idealism.

THE LETTUCE STRUGGLE

The events are complex, but the issue in the lettuce strike and boycott is simple: Will farm workers have the right to build a union of their own or will their employers choose a union for them? The workers in the Salinas and Santa Maria Valleys organized quietly and waited patiently for a victory in Delano. But the Salinas growers ignored their workers, sought out the Teamsters Union and signed "back door contracts" without consulting the workers and without offering any kind of election or ratification procedure. When the contracts were announced, the workers were frustrated and angry. On August 24, 1970, they went on strike.

On December 13, 1972, Teamster officials announced that they intended to renegotiate their lettuce "contracts." The Teamster-Grower contracts have not been enforced. The workers have not been protected. Lettuce workers are still struggling to throw-off the Teamster-Grower yoke and to gain their own farm workers union. Some of the key dates are given below.

- July 23, 1970 Grape strike and boycott coming to an end; lettuce growers decide to "feel out" Teamsters about contracts for field workers.
- July 28, 1970 Teamster-Grower contracts announced.
- July 29, 1970 Victory in Delano. Giumarra and all Delano growers sign contracts. Workers march in Salinas, hold rallies, organize UFW committees at each farm, go on strike at selected ranches and in other ways express desire to have their own farm workers union.
- Aug. 1-23, 1970 Cesar Chavez asks for elections to avoid strike; growers refuse.
- August 24, 1970 7,000 lettuce workers strike to protest Teamster contracts and to gain representation by United Farm Workers.
- Sept. 16, 1970 Judge Anthony Brazil receives no evidence that Teamsters represent farm workers, but he still issues permanent injunction against all UFW strike activity in the Salinas area. Workers decide to take their cause to the cities, and the lettuce boycott begins.
- March 26, 1971 Teamsters and UFW sign a 3 year jurisdictional agreement (counter-signed by Fitzsimmons and Meany).
- May-November, 1971 Lettuce growers and UFW negotiate, but negotiations fail (while negotiating, growers work on future projects to stop boycott: Arizona law, National Labor Relations Board restriction of boycott, Prop. 22).
- March-November, 1972 NLRB is stopped in its effort to restrict boycott; Arizona law passed. Cesar fasts in Arizona. Recall begins; Prop. 22 defeated in Calif.
- December 12, 1972 Frank Fitzsimmons, President of the Teamsters, crosses UFW picket line in L.A. to speak to the annual convention of American Farm Bureau Federation. L.A. Times headline: "Teamster President Proposes Alliance with Growers Group."
- Dec. 13, 1972 Teamsters announce intention to activate lettuce contracts.
- Dec. 14, 1972 Dolores Huerta appeals to friends of farm workers to intensify their support for boycott. One reporter asked: "The boycott will put economic pressure on the growers, but how will that affect the Teamsters?" Dolores' reply: "The growers invited them in and the growers can invite them out."

THE LETTUCE BOYCOTT

On December 30, 1972 the California Supreme Court threw out a two and a half year local court injunction prohibiting strikes and picketing against California lettuce growers. The court found that lettuce growers had, in fact, entered into "sweetheart contracts" with the Teamsters without attempting to find out whether their workers wanted to be so represented. With the finding, the court has ruled that strike action, picketing and the boycott may be resumed.

The boycott of non-UFW iceberg lettuce from California is being extended to include a secondary boycott of Safeway and A&P Food Stores.

It is important to remember that farm workers are not covered by the National Labor Relations Act which prohibits secondary boycotts.

The Reverend Wayne C. Hartmire, Jr., Director of the National Farm Worker Ministry, made the following appeal:

"As usual the farm workers are faced with difficult odds. Opposing them in the days ahead will be the most powerful agricultural corporations in the country, the American Farm Bureau Federation and its right-wing allies, the officialdom of the 2,000,000 member Teamsters Union, Safeway, A&P and most other large chain stores. The United Farm Workers cannot win unless all of us support the boycott of head (iceberg) lettuce.

What you can do right now:

- 1.) Write a letter of protest to Frank Fitzsimmons, President, Teamsters Union, 25 Louisiana Avenue, N.W., Washington, D.C. 20001.
- 2.) Avoid head (iceberg) lettuce grown in California and Arizona unless you see the UFW's black eagle label on the lettuce. (Other kinds of lettuce are okay, e.g. romaine, red leaf, butter, etc.)
- 3.) Please don't shop at Safeway Stores (2200 stores) and A&P Stores (4400 stores). The United Farm Workers have decided to concentrate their boycott energies on these two giants of the industry. It will take months, maybe years of work and non-violent pressure, but in time these chains will agree to help farm workers by purchasing only UFW lettuce.
- 4.) Spread the word in your own constituency about the "No on Safeway" and the "No on A&P" campaigns. If you or your friends have questions about the value or morality of the farm workers boycott, please write. (1411 W. Olympic Blvd., Rm. 511, Los Angeles, California 90015).

If you are tired of the crises of the farm workers' movement, think for a moment of Cesar and people with him who have accepted responsibility for building the farm workers' union and who have given their lives to this justice struggle. They need our prayers!"

THE ROLE OF THE PASTOR

By Rev. J. Lloyd Knox

Recently I was asked to write something to help pastors understand the present farm-labor situation in Florida. In no way do I pretend to be an expert in the field. I am not now and never have been a farm worker or a grower.

As Christian ministers, we all have a deep concern for the grower and the farm worker alike, with special preoccupation for the migratory laborer.

In this day of amazing affluence in our nation, most of us seek, and almost take for granted as basic U.S. rights, at least two things—well-being and security.

Well-being includes having an adequate home. Sanitary conditions, proper food, mobility, a certain degree of freedom, good schools, year 'round work and dependable income. Security usually means hospitalization insurance, adequate retirement benefits (including social security), disability protection, workmen's compensation, unemployment compensation, and a number of other safeguards which insure that we and our loved ones do not become helpless due to injury, illness, or age. A good bit of time at sessions of the annual Conference is taken up with standards for parsonages, hospitalization and life insurance, retirement benefits and minimum salaries. With any degree of empathy, we can understand those desires.

Read the facts about Florida farm workers and farm labor legislation. Now let your imagination run and try to place yourself in the shoes of a migrant who has little schooling or training, no job security, and infrequent opportunities for getting out of the trap. To compound the problem, his children are also caught, and this augurs poorly for our country which needs strong, healthy, educated, creative sons and daughters.

Many farm workers are excluded from workmen's compensation, adequate housing, proper child care, unemployment and retirement protection, a minimum wage, pesticide control (how well do you wash your fruits and vegetables?), and a number of other things to which American workers are entitled. This is discriminatory.

Our country has an incredibly confused marketing system which puts the grower at the mercy of the brokers.

Manipulation by the big chains and the growers' own "rugged individualism" are often detrimental to him. He takes risks with the weather and is often unsure of his labor supply.

The small or middle-size grower may soon find himself in the same dilemma as the migrant, who, in some cases, owned his own farm, was a sharecropper or a tenant farmer. A growing number of people feel that "agribusiness," not the farm worker, will squeeze the smaller growers out. The farm worker is fully aware that his own well-being depends on the well-being of the grower. The farm worker is not out to destroy the grower. No one is.

Florida's \$4,000,000,000 per year agribusiness has become a stock market item, as big alcoholic beverage companies, large railroads, chemical companies and other huge corporations continue to buy into Florida agricultural land. The smaller grower may well be threatened. The whole affair is quite complex. We are in a technological revolution.

In most cases the grower's plight is not of the same personal magnitude as that of the farm worker. Most growers have seen to their continued well-being and security. They diversify their crops. They invest in non-agricultural concerns. If they have to sell their land, they can usually get a good price for it.

They are given help through the Departments of Agriculture, the U.S. Corps of Engineers, federal farm subsidies, a host of factory workers who make their machines, county agents, university extension services, chemists, inventors, scientists, banks and a good God who provides the land, sunshine, rain and growth.

Since many pastors in Florida have growers in their congregations, it seems that it would behoove a concerned pastor to do several things if he is to be an effective agent of reconciliation.

First, he might pray fervently that God will make him a free man, so he won't get "up tight" about the whole thing.

Then he could become a good student on the issues. Books, pamphlets, publications, etc. are available from the Florida Christian Migrant Ministry and Florida Citrus Mutual and Farm Bureau and other sources. "Fruits, Vegetables and People" is a filmstrip available from the Conference Film Library, P.O. Box 70, Lakeland 33802.

The minister should be a pastor to the grower. He should be genuinely concerned and do his best to understand the growers' problems. If people know their pastor loves them, they are often able to understand when he must fulfill the seemingly opposite role of the prophet.

Become a teacher to your people. Help them understand that the church is responsible for what happens in society and that God holds us Christians responsible in a special way for correcting injustices and for reconciling men to God and men to men.

As a teacher, help the grower to see that he has accepted many new ideas, such as air conditioning, T.V., super highways, automation in farming, modern medicine, etc. Why not new ideas in cooperative marketing so as not to be at the mercy of buyers?

What about a growers' union? Off season alternative industries which would keep farm workers more fully employed, thus negating the necessity of migrating, could be a wholesome and profitable innovation. If we can figure a way to go to the moon, why not this?

It may never have occurred to the grower that Henry Ford didn't fold when he got unionized. Many say the nation is more prosperous as a result. Some growers in California have even discovered that union hiring halls work better than the notorious labor contractors who exploit their own people. Just as many of us have automobile liability insurance because of conscience (if I injure anyone I want to see that he is cared for), so many farmers carry workmen's compensation insurance out of conscience, not of necessity. New ideas can benefit all mankind.

Finally, a minister is called to be a prophet—for his people's own good. He must be effective, creative, wise and skilled, but he must be a prophet.

For their own salvation, the people must know of the dangers of selfishness, pride, self-righteousness, materialism, insensitivity to human need, and the living of life as if there were no judgment.

Only God is sovereign, and man is called to be a steward of his possessions, talents and life. Nihilism and materialism have caused many people to forget that God is still the Lord of history and that His justice and righteousness will prevail. All that we are, all that we have, and all that we hope to be are His.

A study of the Old Testament prophets will show that the Bible is as modern as Future Shock. We must convince our people of the absolute Lordship of Jesus Christ and of the necessity of living the Christ-centered life in servanthood to God and man... "pursue justice and champion the oppressed..." (Isaiah 1:17)

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