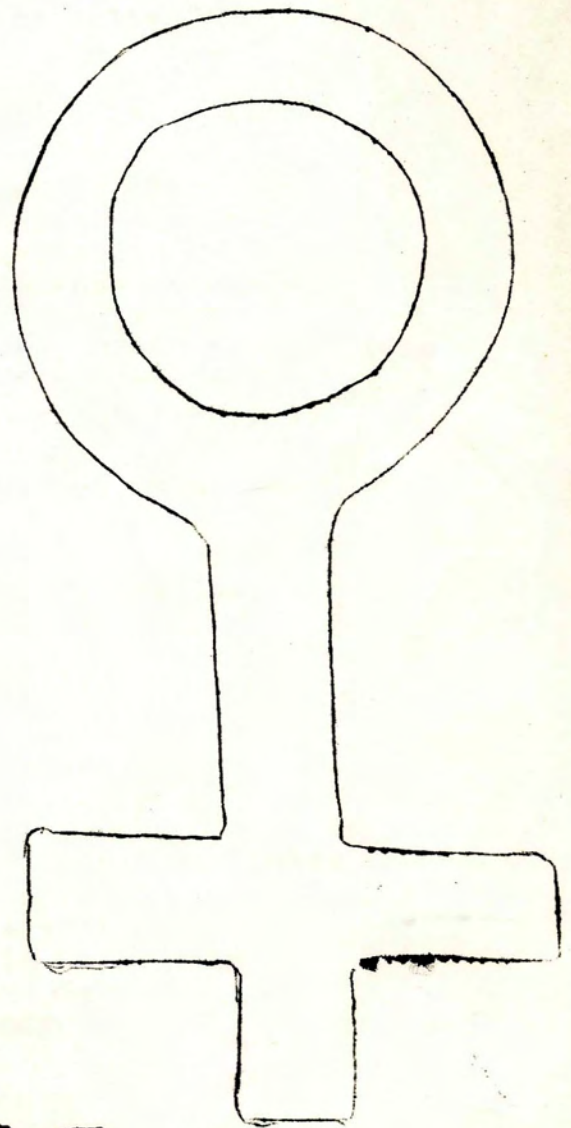


# FEMINIST COMMUNICATION COLLECTIVE

Montreal Feminist Magazine VOL. TWO, NO. 4

## INSIDE:

WOMAN REJECTS DEGREE.....	2
SPORTS SECTION.....	15-17
STUDY ON WORKING WOMEN.....	16
RADICAL REVIEWER.....	18
WOMEN WORK UNDER MEDIAEVAL CONDITIONS	19
POETRY SECTION.....	21
DOLORES HUERTA: A UNION WOMAN.....	3
INFO, CLASSIFIEDS.....	6
NEWS FROM WOMEN'S CENTRES	6,7
A SHORT HERSTORY OF THE BOSTON WOMEN'S HEALTH COLLECTIVE.....	8
RAPE: FIVE EXPERTS.....	10 and more!



NOVEMBER '74

35¢

# DOLORES HUERTA:

## A UNION WOMAN

"Women have to fight a lot harder to push their point across."

Dolores Huerta, the first vice-president of the United Farmworkers union (UFW) said that in 1970, after her union signed the first contracts with California grape growers. And she should know--she negotiated many of those contracts with some of the most powerful men in American agribusiness.

Huerta was in Montreal October 25th and 26th to encourage the Montreal UFW support committee in their work in the boycott of American grapes and head lettuce. She led a picket-line at a Montreal Dominion that virtually emptied the store, spoke at a mass rally, attended a workshop at McGill, spoke to students at Loyola, and still made time to attend an informal pot-luck lunch with the boycott's more active supporters.

At the luncheon, she gave a brief history of the Union's organization.

The first person ever to organize Chicanos (Mexican-Americans) was Fred Ross, she said. He had worked as a social worker with the Okies who went to California during the depression, then with the Chicanos in Los Angeles.

In Los Angeles, he organized the Mexican-Americans into a pressure group, starting by speaking to a small group of people in one home. Then, some one at that meeting would hold a meeting at his or her house, and somebody at that meeting would volunteer to host a third meeting.

"These house meetings are the best tool you can use in organizing. When you have a little meeting, people who have a doubt will ask a question, where they won't at a large

meeting. And, at a small meeting, you can ask someone to do something, and it's easier to get a commitment, because people are more at ease than they would be at a large meeting."

Ross spoke at many house meetings in Los Angeles, and finally, called one large meeting.

"Four Hundred Mexican-Americans showed up at this meeting. That was a tremendous step, because other organizers, and sociologists had all said that you couldn't get a dozen Chicanos in a meeting together, let alone a hundred."

A new organization was formed at this meeting, the Community Services organization (CSO). It's first project was to get Chicanos registered to vote.

"There's no law to prevent Mexican-Americans from voting, but, first of all, the voter registration office was only open from nine to five. When the Chicanos did go to register, they had to take time off work, and when they got there, they were hassled with complicated literacy tests that white people never had to pass. So finally, they said, 'why bother to try?'" Huerta said.

Ross persuaded the voter registration people to go into the Chicano neighborhoods and register voters from cars and trailers. Thousands of Chicanos in Los Angeles registered for the first time.

With the power of the vote, CSO was able to force the government to improve roads and community services.

They also forced a grand jury inquiry into police brutality. Los Angeles police had been beating young Chicanos, intimidating them, and ignoring their complaints.

Finally, a few days before Christmas in the early sixties, two teenagers were beaten, and CSO had a clear case. The two boys almost died, and CSO, led by Ross, caused so much publicity, that the government was forced to investigate.

"As a result of that investigation, 14 policemen went to prison, and about 40 altogether were removed from the police force," Huerta said.

Huerta was working for CSO at the time Cesar Chavez, now the president of UFW, first met Ross.

Ross had gotten Chavez's name from a public health nurse who told him that 'Cesar is different from the others; he reads the newspaper from the first page to the last.'

Ross went to Chavez's house several times to talk to him, only to find that he wasn't at home.

"Fred didn't know it then," Huerta recalled, "but Cesar was standing across the street, sizing him up." Finally, Cesar and a group of Chicanos met with Ross. They had planned to heckle him and try to embarrass him.

"You know, the Chicano neighborhoods were distrustful of men like Fred Ross. There were always college professors and sociologists coming down to 'study' us, and they thought Fred Ross was the same," Huerta said.

"Fred told Cesar and the other others about CSO in Los Angeles, how they had organized, how they had registered voters, and how they won their fight with the police. Cesar didn't look up, he wasn't interested, until Fred mentioned the police investigation. Mexican-Americans in rural areas had experienced the same kind of treatment from the police, but they thought there was nothing they could do about it."

Huerta herself was not a farmworker. "I was kind of a middle-

class Mexican-American, I guess. I had been to college, and I was a registered Republican. I first saw Fred and Cesar at a house meeting. I went because a friend (who is no longer a friend) called me up and said these guys, Cesar Chavez and Fred Ross, were Communists.

"So I went to the meeting, and I was sitting there eyeing them very suspiciously. At first, I didn't believe a word they were saying, until Fred Ross showed me a picture of a meeting with 400 people--I couldn't believe my eyes! I had never seen more than 15 Mexican-Americans at a meeting. Then he showed me the newspaper clippings, and I saw that it was all true.

At this time, Chavez and Huerta were still working for CSO. Chavez was beginning to organize the farmworkers, and had asked CSO for support. CSO, not wanting to alienate the small businessmen, turned him down, so he resigned in order to devote more time to organizing the farmworkers union.

"At first," Huerta said, the workers were afraid to be seen with the organizers. Other unions had come in, with lots of money, and there had been big strikes, and then the unions pulled out, leaving the workers holding the bag."

Before the union, farmworkers had no job security, poor working conditions, and no protection from pesticide spraying. The whole family had to work to bring their total income to just over \$2,000.

"We didn't tell people any lies," Huerta said. We just said, 'if you want an association, let's form it together,' but we weren't going to do it for them. We had house meetings all over the San Joaquin valley, and then all over the grape-growing region, I in the north, and Cesar in the south.

"Finally, we had one big mass meeting. The Mexican-Americans at that meeting voted to form the union, gave it a name, voted in the first temporary officers, the dues system, the medical plan. Then the real work began.

The union first sought contracts with the grape growers. When the growers refused to talk with Chavez and other union representatives, the members of the union voted to strike. Growers thwarted the strike by bringing in illegal Mexican Immigrants. The union countered with an international boycott of non-union grapes.

In 1966, when the first of the growers signed contracts with the union, Huerta was put in charge of negotiations. Then she was sent to New York to organize the boycott there. Ten months later, she returned to Delano, Cal., to work as a negotiator.

In the late 1960's, she was elected vice-president of the union. She had been the negotiator on several contracts, organized picket lines and boycott activities, and had been arrested six times.

"It's a terrible thing to go to jail," she said after the first strike ended in 1970. "More people should go to jail to realize how unjust it is. Only poor people go to jail. Now I see it as an honor to be arrested.

When the two-year contracts expired in the fall of 1972, the Teamsters, an American truckers union, known for its strong-arm tactics, moved in and signed "sweet-heart" contracts with the growers, without consulting the workers they're supposed to represent. So the United Farmworkers are again on strike, and have been for almost two years.

Huerta is now the first vice-president of the union, the highest office achieved by any woman in the American labor movement. There are many women in leadership positions in the farmworkers union, Huerta said, because its leader insists that they participate.

"Cesar encouraged me to run for vice-president. The women work in the fields with the men, so they should be represented in the union.

"There are plenty of women in the union who really work hard. The director of our credit union is a woman. The directors of our three medical clinics are women, and about half of the regional boycott directors are women.

"I guess poor women are a lot stronger. It would be a waste of talent if we didn't have these women in the union."

Huerta said the concept of house meetings encouraged women to speak up and give their opinions. "That's why, the same system we used to organize the union, we're using now to organize the boycott.

"People have been lied to so much, and they're so insecure, you'd lose a lot of people in such a large gathering, but the small group, well, it's like having your friends in for a talk."

---

A free service to artists, musicians, & craftswomen. Send ad copy, written out as briefly as possible, to our Post Office address. Please indicate your name and phone number, even if it is not to appear in the ad.

POTTERY COURSE: Individual instruction—classes are limited to 3 people per class. Course is 3 hrs a week, for 8 wks. Apart from learning to form clay, we will explore the fundamentals of glaze and firing. For info, call Paula, 845-2965, 84 Villeneuve E.