

"The farm workers fight is as close as your dinner table." So said Dolores Huerta, first vice-president of the United Farm Workers, AFL-CIO, on her recent two-day tour of Montreal. "We ask you to fast a little — to fast from U.S. grapes and non-UFW head lettuce — so that the farm workers that feed us can someday have enough food to feed their own families."

Ms. Huerta came to Québec to raise support for the U.S. grape and lettuce boycott after Cesar Chavez, United Farm Worker President, was hospitalized with back trouble and exhaustion.

A high point of her visit was a picket line, attended by over 300 persons at the Dominion store on Rachel and St. Denis, Montreal. The boycott has focused on the Dominion chain because Dominion is the largest distributor of U.S. grapes and lettuce in Canada. Dominion stores in Montreal, Toronto, and across Canada have been picketed.

A procession from Dominion to a rally at St. Louis de France Church, Montreal, followed the picketing. Ms. Huerta noted the importance of Montreal to the success of the boycott. Montreal ranks as the fifth largest market in North America for California grapes and lettuce. Most of the iceberg lettuce and 95% of the grapes sold in Canada are from the U.S. As the boycott has gained strength in the U.S., Canada has been used as a dumping ground for the boycotted produce.



**Montreal boycott director, Stephan Roberson, with Dolores Huerta, UFW first vice-president.**

The boycott was begun by the United Farm Workers in an attempt to win recognition for their union from California growers. The growers are mainly large corporations, like the Tenneco oil company.

The workers are mainly Mexican-Americans and members of other minority groups. One-quarter of the workers are children under the age of 16. Workers are paid miserable wages and are exposed to dangerous pesticides as they work. They are not even provided with toilets and safe drinking water in the fields.

Farm workers under the leadership of Cesar Chavez and Dolores Huerta first organized in the early 1960's to change these conditions. After a five-year grape strike and boycott, the United Farm Workers won union contracts from grape growers in 1970. For the first time, farm workers had a measure of justice and dignity in the fields where they labored. But in April of 1973,

## Boycott of U.S. Grapes and NON-UFW Lettuce Urged

growers refused to renegotiate the three-year contracts and announced that they had signed contracts with the Teamsters Union. These sweetheart contracts were negotiated behind the workers' backs and provided big benefits for growers and Teamsters, but no benefits for the farm workers. The UFW, labour and church leaders called upon growers and Teamsters to hold secret ballot elections. The growers and Teamsters refused. So workers began a strike in the grape fields again.

Their non-violent picketing was met with violence. Men were paid \$67 per day to harass, intimidate and beat workers. Growers called upon their friends in the courts to obtain restrictive injunctions that limited pickets to one every 100 feet. Farm workers and other supporters who broke the injunctions were faced with beatings from local sheriffs. In August, 1973, the violence reached its peak as two farm workers were killed: one shot by a strike breaker, the other beaten by a Kern County sheriff. To prevent more murders, the picketing was ended and Cesar Chavez announced a renewed boycott of California grapes. Once again, consumers were asked to stand up for justice for farm workers.

The boycott of U.S. lettuce that does not carry the UFW black eagle label also continues. Lettuce growers also hold sweetheart contracts with the Teamsters Union.

It is apparent that the grape boycott has been gaining strength. Ms. Huerta announced that grape sales in Montreal were down 38% in September. At the height of the first grape boycott in 1969, for October 15th, growers had 5.2 million boxes of grapes in cold storage. For October 15, 1974, they have 7.2 million boxes in cold storage.

The next few months will be the most critical in the farm workers fight. Growers have hired a New York publicity firm to run a grape ad campaign. Montreal has been targeted as a key city. Ms. Huerta predicted that the Teamsters will launch a massive campaign to discredit the UFW and the grape boycott. As part of this campaign, there will be many rumors spread by the Teamsters and by growers that "Cesar Chavez is a nice man, but a bad administrator of a union", to counter-act this rumor, she noted the gains farm workers made under the UFW contracts in just three short years:

- Child labour was abolished
- Five medical clinics, a farm worker service centre, and a retirement village were established
- Restrictions were placed on the use of dangerous pesticides
- Toilets and fresh drinking water were provided
- Hiring halls replaced labour contractors
- The wage rose from 80¢ to \$1.95 per hour.

Under Teamster contracts, most of these benefits have been lost. You can help farm workers regain their contracts by not buying or eating U.S. grapes or non-UFW head lettuce.

Many groups and individuals are supporting the boycott, including the P.A.P.T. which has provided office space for a UFW representative since early September. Other supporters have donated food, shelter, and clothing to support the eleven UFW staffers in Montreal who earn \$5 per week. More full-time volunteers are needed in Québec. Interested persons are encouraged to contact the Montreal UFW Office.

Much help is needed in Montreal and in Québec to counteract the grower/Teamster campaign. If you can help in any way or if you want more information, contact Deborah Miller, UFW representative, at the P.A.P.T., 695-7791, Local 35 or Stephan Roberson, Montreal boycott director at United Farm Workers, 1196 Alexandre de Séve, Montreal, 525-3936.