

REPORT TO THE SECOND CONSTITUTIONAL CONVENTION
AUGUST 15, 16, AND 17, 1975
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Our First Constitutional Convention convened two years ago amidst a vicious attack on our Union by the forces that oppose farm workers and other poor people in America. Newspapers and television broadcasts were filled with predictions that the farm workers movement would soon die, buried by the combined might of the grower-Teamster alliance.

Much concern was voiced for our survival, even among many of our friends and supporters and some of our brothers and sisters in the trade union movement.

A few less determined followers dispaired that farm workers would ever belong to a free and representative union. But the farm workers never lost hope. They kept the faith and as a result we have not only survived, we have prevailed. What appeared to be a total rout in 1973 has been turned around and we stand today on the threshold of total victory in the fields of California.

As the membership left this very hall two years ago, we resolved to work and sacrifice until we built an effective democratic union. At this date we are closer to that goal than at any time in our history. When California's Agricultural Labor Relations Act goes into effect on August 28, we will keep the promise we made to each other in Fresno and prove to the world that the United Farm Workers of America, AFL-CIO is the true representative of the interests and aspirations of farm workers in this land.

We have survived jailings, beatings, professional goons, biased judges, racist law enforcers and the violent deaths of two of our brothers. We have learned to match our opponents' riches with our blood, sweat, dedication and hard work. For all their money and sordid influence, the growers and Teamsters have not been able to destroy our movement. Now our time has come.

Our Union stands prepared to meet the challenges of the upcoming elections campaign and defend our victories once elections are held and won. When we met in convention two years ago, we vowed to update the administrative operations of the Union to prove to the world that farm workers are capable of running an involved and diversified union organization.

Many changes have occurred since 1973. At our national headquarters at La Paz the Union's administrative departments have been updated and streamlined. The Office of the President, which monitors and coordinates the activities of all other central administrative departments operates at a busy pace. It has received and answered much of the correspondence sent to the Union, maintained communication with the members of the National Executive Board, overseen the receipt of all volunteer applications and assigned new staff to proper department and job locations and assisted the President in fulfilling his administrative and constitutional responsibilities.

We have modernized our accounting and record keeping services. The staff has been increased to deal with the enormous volume of letters and messages received every day and record and verify the financial transactions of the Union. Inter-union communications have been updated to tie together boycott, field, elections and organizing offices' financial activities and a strict accounting for the

overseen typing, mass mailings and related functions and operated copier, mimeograph, ditto and other machines. The department now also receives and routes the tremendous amount of mail received at La Paz.

The Legal Department has taken the Union's case before the highest court in California and has opened an attack on the growers and Teamsters on a broad front. More than 400 cases have been filed by Union attorneys ranging from suits on behalf of workers who have been fired for union activities to cases designed to establish workers' constitutional rights in the rural areas.

In addition, five Union cases are now pending before the California Supreme Court. The United Farm Workers of America v. Superior Court of Santa Cruz County seeks to abolish the use of temporary restraining orders against the Union without first giving the workers notice of the proceedings. It also seeks to protect our First Amendment right to enter growers; labor camps for legitimate organizational activities. The state high court is also considering the case of Bradley v. Church, where the Union is challenging the sweetheart contracts entered into between the growers and Teamsters. In Chavez v. Fitzsimmons, the Supreme Court has before it a major anti-trust case against the California lettuce industry that was filed by the Union's legal department.

It is our belief that the courts do not only belong to the growers and their agents. We will continue to use the judicial process to win justice for our people and the Union's legal staff will continue to press the Union's cause whenever and wherever possible.

Our fight against the growers takes many forms. We respond to the employers on a broad front that includes strikes, boycotts, work stoppages and slowdowns, work interruptions, dues revocation actions, refusals to pay dues, sick calls, declines in work quality and legal actions, all aimed at bringing the growers to the negotiations table.

Strikes continue to play an important part in our union program. In 1974, a year when our critics claimed the Union was about to die, we engaged the growers in more strikes covering more geographic areas and more workers than at any time in our thirteen year history.

Through the summer and fall of 1974, Arizona farm workers struck Yuma and San Luis lemon growers demanding representation by our Union. Though the strike was difficult and costly to the Union, it had a devastating effect on the growers and demonstrated once and for all the workers' determination to have a union of their own.

As the Arizona strike progressed, farm workers in tomato and melon fields in a four county area in Northern California walked out on strike under the Union's black eagle banners. Growers in Yolo, Solano, Sutter and San Joaquin Counties were crippled by the walkouts and in desperation turned to local courts and law enforcement agencies to break the strike.

In 1974, the Union engaged in walkouts in unchartered areas where it had not been active previously; melon strikes in the Imperial Valley, apple walkouts in the Watsonville area, mushroom strikes in Santa Clara County and a major walkout in the strawberry fields in Ventura County.

On April 10, 1975, farm workers walked out on strike at Egg City, the world's largest egg farm located outside Moorpark, California. The Teamsters signed a sweetheart contract with the company in 1970 after the workers demanded representation by our Union. Egg City replaced its striking employees, many of whom had worked for the firm for as long as fifteen years, with strikebreakers imported from Mexico. When the Union organized the strikebreakers, the company resorted to a new trick in the arsenal of grower anti-union tactics. With assistance from the Teamsters Union and Food for the Hungry, Inc., the company is replacing its work force with large numbers of Vietnamese refugees recently arrived from Southeast Asia. We find it intolerable that our government has transported political refugees half way around the world to break a poor people's strike in California, and we have called for decisive action by state and federal officials to remedy this disgraceful grower move. The Egg City strike is a classic example of grower-Teamster collusion to deny workers true union democracy.

Last month, in an illegal maneuver to influence the elections, the growers and Teamsters signed new contracts to cover workers in the vegetable industry. These phony contracts gave workers wage increases representative of wage levels contained in our 1974 contracts. In an effort to legitimize their new contracts, the Teamsters called the first public meeting they have held in the five years they have been in the Salinas Valley. 1200 workers packed a school auditorium in Salinas, many of them waiting outside of the building. As soon as Teamster officials opened the meeting, all but fifty of the workers removed black eagle flags from their coats and shouted "Chavez Si, Teamsters No" for more than an hour. Similar scenes were repeated in Santa Maria and Delano.

The boycott remains our most potent non-violent weapon and the surest means of achieving total victory for our Union and restoring peace to the fields. We have accomplished in a very short time what it took us many years to do in the original grape boycott. More people from different walks of life support the boycott than ever before.

Information received from boycott cities across the United States, Canada and Western Europe and from field offices around California report increased support for the boycott and corresponding declines in grape sales and production. Coachella grower K.K. Larson left a full fourth of his crop hanging on the vines and invited senior citizens to pick free fruit because he could not find a market for the boycotted product. In Arvin-Lamont, one grower picked only his best grapes and left the rest to rot on the vines. In Delano, some major growers picked perletts for only three days and then began shipping table grapes to the wineries because the table grape market is so poor. Reliable information reaching the Union indicates Coachella grape growers have lost \$1 per box this season while Arvin-Lamont growers will lose as much as \$3 per box in 1975.

Victories over large and small chain supermarkets and liquor stores are reported every day and the black eagle banner has flown from city halls in Providence, Rhode Island and Toronto, Canada. The Honolulu City Council passed a resolution asking that all city institutions honor the boycott.

A reorganized boycott office at La Paz coordinates and monitors boycott activities around the world. In the fall of 1974, we toured ten European nations, generating support for the boycott of U.S. grapes and lettuce wherever we went.

The Union has affiliated with the International Federation of Plantation, Agricultural and Allied Workers, headquartered in Geneva, Switzerland and full time boycott staff have begun work in England and Germany with volunteer committees underway in Sweden and Norway. 100,000 Germans have signed petitions asking major importers to refuse to handle non-union grapes and recently an importer of American-grown grapes. The Japanese Confederation of Labor has sent messages of support for the boycott and the Confederacion de Trabajadores de Venezuela has volunteered its assistance. We have experienced a tremendous groundswell of support in Canada and the grape market in that country has been cut back considerably.

This year we produced a beautiful one hour film documentary on the 1973 grape strike that has been shown throughout North America and Europe.

After nine months and thirty meetings to renegotiate our contract with Coca Cola in Florida we have not made real progress towards a new agreement. It may become necessary to begin an international boycott of Coca Cola if the company maintains its current negotiating position.

Of one thing we can be sure: the boycott will continue until the ink is dry on our contracts.

Before the enactment of the Wagner Act in 1935, industrial workers struggled unsuccessfully for generations to build their unions. The Wagner Act signalled the rise of America's great industrial unions. The law recognized the right of industrial workers to organize and compelled employers to recognize and negotiate with them once elections were held.

For eighty-five years farm workers fought to have a union. Chinese, Japanese, Mexicans, Filipinos, Blacks, Arabs, Puerto Ricans, Anglos and Chicanos all tried and failed to win recognition from their employers. Now farm workers also have a law that protects their right to organize and bargain collectively.

The passage of the Agricultural Labor Relations Act represents two years of hard work by farm workers and their supporters and tenacious lobbying efforts led by General Counsel Jerry Cohen and the legal staff of the Union.

The law provides for state-supervised secret ballot elections in California, grants migrant workers the right to vote, outlaws racial discrimination in the fields and provides sanctions against growers who attempt to interfere with the elections process.

The law came about because of your efforts and your blood and sweat and toil. It came about because of all the jailings, beatings, shootings, hospitalizations and deaths. The law is a great victory for the workers. It will resolve once and for all the issue of who represents farm workers in California. However, winning the right to vote in elections is only the first battle. A union can be recognized to death and never sign a contract. Unless the workers have the economic tools with which to force the growers to negotiate in good faith, we will never sign contracts. The law protects the right of workers to boycott and the boycott will continue to be the key to winning strong and effective contracts after elections take place.

We are experiencing one of the most exciting periods in the Union's history. Thousands of workers have already been organized and thousands more will sign authorization cards and pledge themselves to the Union before this elections campaign is over.

When it became clear that California would have a farm labor law this year, we began to make plans for what we knew would be an intensive elections campaign. The state has been divided into geographic areas where we know elections will be conducted under the law and we have recalled much of the Union's leadership and most of the National Executive Board to work on assignment in California. The Union has augmented its regular organizers with hundreds of farm worker volunteers recruited out of the fields to work full-time organizing their co-workers at ranches where they labored for years. In addition, thousands of workers have become part time organizers at ranches where they are employed.

An intensive training program for new organizers was set up at La Paz and hundreds of farm workers have passed through it and been sent back to their home areas to do the work that has to be done.

In addition to our own recruits, the Union has received organizers assigned from the United Auto Workers and the AFL-CIO has pledged staff and financial support for the upcoming battle.

It was our hope that the employers would permit the workers to vote freely in fair elections. Unfortunately, that hope is quickly evaporating. Growers have used local law enforcement agencies to arrest and harrass Union organizers who attempt to talk with workers in fields and camps during non-working hours. At the same time, the employers have invited the Teamsters into their fields and in many cases are assisting the Teamsters in direct violation of the law. If the past months are any indication, the growers and Teamsters will use every dirty trick to subvert and sabotage the free elections.

Our Second Constitutional Convention comes at a crucial crossroads in our struggle. The law takes effect in less than two weeks and we are ready for what lies ahead. Because this period marks a turning point in our movement, we wanted to make a special effort to bring all who serve the Union to Fresno for three days of solidarity and companionship. Four buses were added to our fleet to transport boycotters and staff from across the United States and Canada and special arrangements were made to house and feed the additional guests.

On July 1 we began a 1000 mile pilgrimage through the agricultural areas of the state to take the message of the law to the workers, talk to them about their rights under the Act and encourage them to take full advantage of it. We began our march July 1 at San Ysidro on the Mexican border. Walking north along the Pacific coast and the coastal vallies of the state, we have met with farm workers in San Ysidro, Hemet, Oceanside, La Habra, Cucamonga, Oxnard, Carpenteria, Santa Barbara, Lompoc, Santa Maria, Guadalupe, Oceano and Grover City, San Luis Obispo, San Miguel, San Lucas, San Ardo, King City, Greenfield, Soledad, Chular and Salinas, where 10,000 workers attended a rally on August 3.

On August 4 we began the second leg of our journey with a mass on the steps of the State Capitol in Sacramento. Thus far we have visited with workers in Woodland, Sacramento, Lodi, Stockton, Tracy, Modesto, Livingston, Merced, Madera and Fresno. After the convention adjourns, we will walk down the rest of the great San Joaquin Valley with rallies and meetings in Sanger, Selma, Parlier, Reedley, Dinuba, Cutler-Orosi, Visalia, Lindsey, Porterville, Earlimart, Delano, Wasco, Bakersfield, Lamont, and Arvin. We will end the march at our headquarters at La Paz in early September.

The pace has been difficult but the response from the people has made it all worthwhile. Everywhere we go workers are excited about the law and look forward to participating in elections. Farm workers join the march for as long as they can. Sometimes it is only for an hour or a day or two days. But regardless of how much time they put in, they come away with the feeling that they have contributed to the victory that they feel is on the horizon. The law and the march have exposed us to workers we never touched before. We have been in towns and valleys where the Union was never active. And yet, the same hope we have seen on the faces of our veteran members we have seen on the faces of those workers who are new to the Union.

The law opens the entire state to organization and we do not intend to pass up this opportunity.

Farm workers are very different in 1975 than they were in 1962. The Union has compelled the growers to drastically raise wages and upgrade working conditions over the past thirteen years. When we started building our Union, workers were earning 85¢ per hour. Now many average \$2.50 per hour and our contract wage level will rise to \$3.10. But more important than wages and working conditions has been the changes in the attitude of the workers. The workers have lost their fear of the employers and we have replaced that fear with a newfound sense of independence and self-respect. The growers do not seem hardly as formidable as they seemed thirteen years ago. Workers have found their new strength and are not afraid to use it.

Much has been accomplished in the past few years and much remains to be done. Our immediate goal is to continue the struggle to organize workers we began thirteen years ago in California. We will also continue to press our organizing efforts in those states where we have on-going organizing activities. The task before us is immense. Farm workers await the Union in Florida and the South, in the richcroplands of the midwestern states, the Pacific Northwest and on the migrant trails running through the Atlantic states.

Our jurisdiction is by no means limited to workers who labor in the fields. We will organize in the nurseries, chicken and egg farms, dairy ranches, feed yards, and agricultural sheds. We will organize wherever there are farm workers who want to do something about their poverty and powerlessness.

Our Union is not limited to any one ethnic group or race. We will continue to organize Indians, Arabs, Anglos, Blacks, Filipinos, Puerto Ricans, Mexicans, Chicanos and any other people who do labor on the land. We are all brothers

under the skin and though the Union will respond to the special needs of various worker groups, we will never close our Union to any worker because of his race, color, nationality, religion, ethnic origin, or residence status.

As workers we share a commonality of interests, aspirations, subjugations and exploitations. We have a common foe and a common goal. Adequate wages, decent working conditions, quality medical care for ourselves and our families, ample housing, education for our children, protection from dangerous pesticides and from arbitrary grower actions, a good and full life. These are things most Americans have enjoyed for decades and these are the goals the United Farm Workers of America, AFL-CIO has pledged to win.

This we pledge and more,

We will continue to press our legislative program on the state and national levels. We need legislation patterned after the Norris-Laguardia Act to restrict the power of biased rural judges to enjoin legitimate farm worker strikes. We will push for extension to farm worker organizers of the same access rights and protection against trespass arrests industrial organizers enjoy for organizational activities. We will continue to fight for pesticide reform and we will continue to educate both farm workers and consumers on the dangers of agricultural poisons.

We must campaign for legislation in Washington, D.C. to grant the full privileges of citizenship to all legal residents with a three year good record and they must be afforded the right to vote in their own native language. We must fight for a law to grant amnesty to all illegal workers so they, too, can enjoy the freedom from fear and oppression that we seek to win for legal residents. If the growers can import illegal workers to exploit them, then we can organize workers to liberate them.

We pledge to beat the hell out of the growers and Teamsters in elections this year. If the growers wish to permit the workers to vote free from intimidation and coercion, the elections will be held and the issues resolved in short order. However, if the employers choose to litter the fields with unfair labor and unfair elections practices, then we will fight them for 100 years until the final victory is ours. The choice is up to them.

We pledge to liberate all farm workers in the United States and once that is accomplished to help liberate all farm workers who suffer regardless of where they live.

Our movement is an affirmation that our work is important work and our people are important human beings, important to the wives who love us, the children who depend on us, the communities we are a part of and the nation and world which we feed and keep well and alive. It is a great irony of our time that the men, women and children who sweat and toil to feed America and much of the world do not have enough food for themselves.

With our hearts filled with the suffering our people have known and with the future of our children tied to our struggle, we shall continue to work for the Union that we love until we gain the victory that we seek or perish fighting for our dignity and honor

Viva la Causa! Viva la Huelga!