

QUESTIONS & ANSWERS ON THE UNITED FARM WORKER MOVEMENT

What is the current situation with UFW?

Two strikers were killed in mid-August and Cesar Chavez call off all picketing in the table grapes until Federal officials would guarantee the safety of the picket line. So far there has been no response from Attorney General Elliott Richardson. The farm workers are not sitting and waiting. On August 31, 1973, 571 farm workers and their families headed East in a car caravan to strengthen the grape and lettuce boycott. More farm workers will be going to Western boycott cities later in September. The focus of the farm workers' struggle is now, more than ever, on the boycott of non-UFW grapes and head lettuce and Safeway Stores.

Are the Teamsters still involved in the grapes?

Most of the table grape growers in Coachella, Lamont-Arvin and Delano have signed with the Teamsters Union. Two growers in Coachella (Larson and Steinberg) negotiated new contracts with UFW. Other growers let their contracts expire and have not signed with the Teamsters. Frank Fitzsimmons, President of the Teamsters Union has repudiated the 30 Delano contracts (just Delano) but the growers say they have valid contracts with the Teamsters and therefore do not need to negotiate with UFW. George Meany is still trying to bring about a broad settlement between the Teamsters and UFW. The UFW is willing if the Teamsters agree to leave the fields. There is no way of knowing at this time whether a settlement is possible.

Have the Teamsters signed with any wine grape growers?

Yes! Franzia Wines and the huge Gallo winery have signed with the Teamsters after having good relations with UFW for 7 years. The Teamsters are apparently eager to have more wine grape picking machines in the fields with no consideration of their impact on seasonal workers. UFW definitely has contracts with Almaden, Paul Masson, Christian Bros., Heublein (Videl, Vinifera & Italian Swiss Colony).

What about violence in the strikes?

In Coachella, Lamont-Arvin and Delano the Teamsters sent in hired thugs to attack UFW leaders, intimidate people on the picket line and attempt to frighten away the strikers. There was so much public exposure of this Teamster violence that they eventually called off their "goons".

There have been newspaper reports of UFW picket lines entering the fields, throwing dirt clods, harrassing strikebreakers, etc. Supporters need to understand that the farm workers are fighting for their union against tremendous odds. They take the risks of going on strike, and they see the growers bringing in people from far away to break their strike. When they are unable to talk with them directly because the work is so far away from the public road, then some strikers have gone into the fields to talk with the strikebreakers. In most of these cases the police have jumped in with excessive force and beaten people and caused genuine melees in the vineyards. There have been isolated incidents of rock and dirt throwing. The picket line puts all kinds of verbal pressure on the strikebreakers to try to reach their consciences. Through all this the UFW leadership has maintained the commitment to non-violence, has disciplined people who lose control of their tempers and has in some cases called off the picket line to avoid injury. It is amazing and admirable that there has been so little violence during this very tense and anxiety-ridden summer.

What is the relationship of the UFW to the AFL-CIO?

From 1966 to 1972 the UFW was an organizing committee of the AFL-CIO. In 1972, the

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AFL-CIO granted UFW a charter as an independent union. On September 21-23, 1973 the UFW will adopt their own constitution, elect officers and establish their own United Farm Workers' Union affiliated with the AFL-CIO.

Why do farm workers need to organize?

Seasonal and migrant farm workers are among the poorest workers in our country. They have been without the basic legal protections enjoyed by other workers. Most farm workers in our country do not know about overtime pay, vacations with pay, job security, grievance procedures, rest breaks, etc. When farm workers are abused or cheated on the job they have had to swallow their humiliation in order to feed their families. Farm workers need a union for collective bargaining with their employers and as a vehicle for participating in the political processes of their community, the state and nation.

What difference does it make which union represent farm workers — UFW or Teamsters?

The Teamsters could (if they wanted to) negotiate with growers and gain strong contract protections for farm workers. But they do not intend to enforce the conditions of those contracts. Teamster contracts are like pieces of paper without meaning. The Teamsters have filed no grievances on behalf of lettuce workers in Salinas even though they have held contracts there since 1970. In the grapes the Teamsters have turned the fate of farm workers over to labor contractors, who have for generations exploited farm workers for their own economic benefit. Already small children are again working in the fields and workers have no grievance machinery of their own to turn to. (UFW has an elected steward in every crew and an elected ranch committee on every ranch that have the responsibility to know the contract and see that it is enforced — the Teamsters have had no worker participation in negotiations or in contract enforcement.)

The Teamsters have not tried to organize and represent farm workers. They have contracts because the growers prefer their "relaxed style" of contract negotiation enforcement. The most basic answer to the question is: farm workers want their own union; they want to participate in that union and they want to choose their own leaders. Cesar Chavez has challenged the Teamsters and the growers to have secret ballot elections in grapes and lettuce. So far the response has been negative.

What about the hiring hall and the administrative skill of Cesar Chavez and the leaders of UFW?

The hiring hall is the only viable alternative to labor contractors. Without it, crew bosses and labor contractors are going to maintain their unilateral power over farm workers and enforce that power by the way they hire and fire. The hiring hall has worked in other industries; it can work in agriculture. The new UFW contracts with Larson and Steinberg included a grower-Union hiring hall committee to work out rules and procedures for the hiring hall that will be satisfactory to both parties.

Cesar Chavez and the leaders of UFW have done what no one else could do. They have built a farm workers' union that is run by and for farm workers. They are not perfect but they work hard to improve the field offices, the hiring hall, the medical plan, the service centers, etc. and at the same time carry on the struggle to bring the union to farm workers in Texas, Florida and other parts of the country. Those who struggle with the trivialities and imperfections of institutions like the Church, the schools, etc. should easily understand the institutional struggles of the farm workers.

What is the relationship between Mexican Nationals in this state, legally or not, and the UFW?

Most farm workers in California are immigrants to California from Mexico who have either become citizens or who are still legal resident aliens ("green carders"). They are of course active members in UFW. In addition there are hundreds of thousands of illegal immigrants in the Southwest (people without papers). Illegal aliens are not dispatched to jobs from UFW hiring halls. It is almost impossible for them to join UFW picket lines because they then become visible to authorities and risk deportation.

Where, other than California is UFW actively involved?

In Texas, the UFW has a service center in the Lower Rio Grande Valley. In Florida, the UFW has hiring halls and service centers to service 2 contracts in citrus and an organizing effort among sugar workers. In Arizona, the farm workers have a hiring hall and service center to service a lettuce contract and a continuing organizing effort in grapes. In Colorado, the UFW has an organizing effort in lettuce. In Washington, the UFW has an organizing effort in the Yakima Valley.

There are full-time boycott staff in every major city of the country.

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Wayne C. Hartmire, Jr., Director
National Farm Worker Ministry
Los Angeles, Ca 90015
213/ 386-8130

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