

DIRECTOR'S REPORT TO NFWM BOARD

November 14—16, 1977

"The main thrust of the work has to be consolidation of the gains we have made...The ALRA has changed everything. It has affected everything we do, even our way of thinking...We now are faced with trying to find out how to maintain the vitality we had, so that it goes beyond shouting 'Viva la Huelga'...We have to find a way of enduring."

(Cesar Chavez, SOJOURNERS, Oct.1977)

"(In the past) we had a kind of community. We were united because the persecution made us united...we had an urgent cause. But in fact, we were not really united in terms of staff and in terms of community..."

(Cesar Chavez, SOJOURNERS, Oct.1977)

"Yesterday's successes always linger on beyond their productive life. We must seek out those sacred tasks of the past that drained needed resources and scarce time, and prune them ruthlessly so we can focus on the future." (Cesar Chavez, UFW Conv. 8/26/77)

The quotes by Cesar are clear enough. The union has moved into a wholly new period in its life. *"What has worked for 12 years is no longer adequate."* The old is being cast off in favor of new methods, new people and new priorities.

Inside the union the changes are radical and unavoidable. The UFW is going through a shaking time, a mini-cultural revolution. People outside the union most likely experience changes around one or more of the following issues and/or events:

- (1) Staff reduction: At the conclusion of Proposition 14 nearly every staff person was interviewed carefully by the union's leadership. Only those people who clearly matched the union's priorities in the field offices, administration and the boycott were asked to stay. Organizing ability, longevity with the union and Spanish language skill were important considerations. Some people were asked to leave. Others left because their friends did not get assignments. The boycott was sharply reduced in size.
- (2) Staff firings: Over the years, the union has had a number of bad experiences with infiltrators from the right and left, i.e., staff people who have their own agenda and who have organized within the staff to promote that agenda. Most of these bad experiences have been in the boycott. But unity prevailed because of gigantic, threatening outside forces which tended to drive people together in a survival struggle. That threat is diminished (at least, for now). Unity is more important than ever and is harder to come by. The leadership made a hard decision last year to identify people who were, by their actions, undermining the morale and work of other staff. Some of these people were asked to leave staff. Others were transferred. The effort has continued for more than a year. Everyone knew that some mistakes might be made. In fact, very few people were actually fired. Most of the people who have left UFW staff have resigned in response to the firing of a friend or co-worker (there are, of course, a certain number of staff who want to leave for other reasons and who latch onto the nearest rationalization).
- (3) Staff recruitment: It is much more difficult to join staff today. The application procedure is more complicated and takes more time. Personal interviews by union leaders are required. A new staff person must have a minimum one year commitment. In some jobs, a longer commitment is requested. Emphasis has been

placed on recruiting farm workers and children of farm workers. Boycott recruits must join a 3-month summer or winter program; at the end of the program they may or may not be asked to join staff.

- (4) The Philippines event: Cesar's trip was clearly an act of leadership on behalf of an internal goal coupled with a willingness to risk the loss of external support--particularly among church groups. The meeting in Delano, October 15, 1977, was focused on Filipino farm workers and much less on supporters (4 p.m., Saturday afternoon in a High School Auditorium).
- (5) Fewer Calls for Help: There are not only fewer boycotters, but there are fewer calls for help from the union to supporters. In recent months, no midnight phone calls to get people to the California picket lines the next day or "by Tuesday at the latest..." Fewer farm workers and boycotters in jail...Fewer emergency calls for money...Fewer "action mailings"...etc., etc. 1978 may be much different, but the summer and fall of 1977 were the most even-keeled in 12 years. (And, Cesar made a long delayed trip to the Philippines!)

I think most of you have experienced one or more of these happenings. They are not the result of decreased drive, energy or work by the UFW staff; instead they reflect the radically changing times. There is still too much work for too few people: Cesar is still going 7 days per week and dragging a lot of folks with him. But the priorities have changed. The emphasis now is on community life, unity, management by objectives, training staff for negotiating and contract administration, recruiting people who will stay a long time and keeping people longer—all within the context of subsistence and \$10 per week (raised from \$5 to \$10 on July 4, 1977).

I have been spending 3-4 days per week at La Paz working with Cesar on "Community life". Leo and Mary Jean Friel-Nieto are helping with this task. Included in that broad category are the following items:

- | | |
|--|---|
| (a) housing assignments | (h) celebrating union history and religious festivals |
| (b) union seniority | |
| (c) religious life | (i) celebrating marriages, birthdays, weddings, anniversaries, baptisms, etc. |
| (d) improved living conditions | |
| (e) counseling | (j) welcome & orientation for new people |
| (f) regular community meetings | (k) Saturday work-day (everyone does physical labor instead of office work) |
| (g) dealing with interpersonal & group conflicts | (l) and more.... |

The UFW Convention and two recent field office conferences at La Paz were planned by La Paz staff, using Management by Objectives (MBO). The results were impressive. The union is establishing a new collective bargaining department which will include: negotiations, contract administration, arbitration, field office administration and conflict resolution. A farm worker institute has begun at La Paz with the first training program focused on negotiations.

Cesar is increasingly asking the question "What is our union business?" "What is our main task? Are we a social movement or a 'bread and butter' union? When the two conflict, what do we choose? Can we be militant in enforcing contracts through slow-downs and work stoppages and expect to sign more contracts? If we keep strik-

ing, what do the growers gain by signing with us? Why would anyone sign with us if we don't honor our contract pledge not to strike and boycott?"

These thoughts and questions and the related changes may come as a shock (or surprise) but the reasons behind them are pretty clear and getting clearer. As of November 1, 1977 the UFW has 88 signed contracts covering approxiamtely 20,000 workers at peak season. In addition the ALRB has certified 113 UFW election victories; negotiations are in varying stages with those growers. The UFW has won an additional 51 elections and is waiting ALRB certification. When you consider the fact that the largest of the 88 contracts expire in December 1978 (will the growers re-negotiate or...), it is not hard to understand the union's concentration on internal life and work. The issue of survival continues to be real and present in California. And the UFW is in a hurry to become solidly self-supporting in California so that the struggle can be carried to Texas and Florida and the rest of the country.

The Rev. Wayne (Chris) Hartmire
NFWM, Executive Director

