

## *Chapter 4*

# FARM WORKERS AND THE UFW: GAINING ADMISSION

This chapter treats the first five years of the decisive decade, 1965–1969, which cover the founding of the UFW by Cesar Chavez, the beginning of the Delano Grape Strike, and the expansion of community organizing tactics to include devices employed by the civil rights movement — marches and boycott. During these years there was a rapid recruitment of liberals and intensive media coverage. The personal charisma and religious values of Chavez were brought to a focus in his fast for disciplined nonviolence.

In the next five years, liberal criticism of Chavez, which had been muted and isolated, became more prominent and concerted. Chavez and the UFW had to contend against the success of their contract signings with Delano and Coachella Valley growers, which disclosed severe weaknesses in the UFW's ability to carry out its contractual obligations to help administer the labor supply. More difficulties arose in the Salinas Valley, where Chavez at times appeared intransigent and the UFW's major target reasonable and accommodating. Salinas also pitted the UFW against a skilled, well-financed, unscrupulous rival union in the Teamsters, and the UFW lost a series of contests for worker support. Chapter five will deal with this latter half of the decisive decade. (The UFW often had acrimonious

relations with its putative liberal-supported ally, the California Rural Legal Assistance program. Since CRLA won a series of major court cases for farm workers, the UFW's conflicts with CRLA made Chavez and the union appear to many to be seeking personal and organizational glory and power rather than serving the farm workers' cause.)

Nonlocal groups and individuals were largely responsible for creating and sustaining the organizations that presented the greatest challenges to the community control exercised by growers and their allies prior to 1965.

Cesar Chavez, in turn, got his start with help from a nonlocal organization with institutional connections to the left wing of the labor movement. That assistance came from the Industrial Areas Foundation of the Community Service Organization, the brainchild of political activist Saul Alinsky.<sup>1</sup> In September, 1947, Saul Alinsky hired a man named Fred Ross away from the American Council of Race Relations, headed by the sociologist Louis Wirth, to organize in Mexican-American neighborhoods in the Los Angeles area.<sup>2</sup> From Los Angeles, Ross moved to San Jose where he met Cesar Chavez in June, 1952. When Ross met Chavez he recorded the following in his daily record of activities: "To carry on a hard-hitting program of civic action and militancy, you must have people who are of a certain temperament, who just cannot live with themselves and see injustice in front of them. They must go after it whenever they see it, no matter how much time it takes. . . . 'I think I've found the guy I'm looking for.'"<sup>3</sup>

Having "discovered" Chavez, Ross recruited him, then schooled him and promoted his career as a community organizer. The two projects that Ross concentrated on in San Jose were voter registration drives and citizenship classes. Chavez worked in both over a period of six years.

In 1958, Ross asked Chavez to take on a project suggested by Alinsky and Alinsky's friend, Ralph Helstein, president of the United Packinghouse Workers of America (UPWA). The Packinghouse Workers had been organizing in the lemon houses in Santa Barbara and Ventura counties.

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<sup>1</sup> Andrew Kopkind, "The Grape Pickers' Strike: A New Kind of Labor War in California," *The New Republic*, January 29, 1966, 12-15.

<sup>2</sup> Peter Matthiessen, "Organizer: Profile of Cesar Chavez," *The New Yorker*, Part 1, June 21, 1969, 42-85.

<sup>3</sup> Jacques E. Levy, *Cesar Chavez: Autobiography of La Causa* (New York: W. W. Norton Co., Inc., 1975), 95.

They had won elections in most of the houses, but in every case had failed to conclude contracts with management. The lemon companies had simply refused to come to terms with the union, and as a consequence, the union's new members were drifting away.<sup>4</sup>

The trio of Helstein, Alinsky, and Ross had only a vague idea of what Chavez could do to help the union. They simply thought that a lot of community organizing would be useful in some way. The union had enough confidence in the outcome of Chavez's proposed community efforts, however, to invest \$20,000 in non-union organizing focused on the Ventura County community of Oxnard. As Helstein told Chavez, "Oh, well, you organize the CSO (Community Service Organization). We're interested in organizing farm workers. Maybe it will help there. If it doesn't help there, hell, it's helping the community anyway."<sup>5</sup>

In Oxnard, Chavez demonstrated the tactics he had learned working under Ross. Chavez's approach was to build a network of small groups based on personal contact, democratic participation, and service, then move to political action. The political action was aimed at creating an institutional opening for the particular and personal grievances shared by farm workers. In conducting house meetings, Chavez quickly found that jobs taken up by braceros were the main issue among farm workers in the community. Farm workers in Oxnard complained that braceros were taking jobs away from them. By law, braceros were supposed to be brought in only when there was a labor shortage and were not to be used to displace American workers, so Chavez organized a campaign to inundate the Farm Placement Bureau in Oxnard with requests by American farm workers to be hired, and the CSO lodged complaints with Governor Edmund G. Brown, Sr., Senator Alan Cranston, and appropriate state officials. Several investigations were started.<sup>6</sup> The situation heated up as job applicants and community members led by Chavez and the CSO staged protest marches. Chavez and a group of protesters seized an opportunity to picket Secretary of Labor James Mitchell at the Ventura airport. Chavez forced the issue to the point that growers agreed to hire people at the CSO office, which

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<sup>4</sup> Dick Meister, "Still in Dubious Battle," *The Nation*, September 24, 1960, 178–80.

<sup>5</sup> Levy, *Chavez*, 126.

<sup>6</sup> Ellis W. Hawley, "The Politics of the Mexican Labor Issue, 1950–1965," *Agricultural History* 40, no. 3 (July 1966): 171–72.

was turned into a kind of hiring hall. Chavez claimed that after thirteen months of activity every farm worker family in Oxnard was tied into the operation in some way.<sup>7</sup>

Under the glare of publicity, William Cunningham, Southern California director of the Farm Placement Service, was accused of taking bribes and dismissed. He was just short of retirement age and thus lost his seniority and his pension. Edward Hayes, head of the Farm Placement Service, was forced to resign as well. Shortly thereafter, Hayes got a job working for the growers' association in the Imperial Valley.<sup>8</sup>

Chavez wanted to build a union on the fertile ground he had cultivated in Oxnard, but the CSO would not allow it. The CSO's president even went to Oxnard to stop Chavez from creating a union. The CSO was not willing to risk its relations with labor in a jurisdictional dispute.<sup>9</sup> The operation was left to the UPWA, and Chavez was appointed national director of CSO and transferred to Los Angeles. Within ninety days the operation in Oxnard had fallen apart. In Chavez's words, "When I left Oxnard, two guys were hired as organizers. But soon after I left, a factional fight started which destroyed the effectiveness of that CSO chapter. We also left the operation to the Packinghouse Workers Union, and in ninety days . . . the whole thing was lost. Talk about factions — there must have been as many factions as there were workers."<sup>10</sup>

Chavez was most unhappy with the CSO's decision not to let him organize what would in effect have been a labor union. His anger smoldered. After a few years, he resolved to leave the CSO and try it on his own. In 1962, he left what was a well-paying job and went to Delano, California, where his wife's relatives lived. The choice of Delano was a practical one. He had a family and no money coming in. In Delano he could rely on relatives for his and his family's subsistence while organizing his National Farm Workers Association (NFWA).

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<sup>7</sup> James L. Vizzard, "The Extraordinary Cesar Chavez," *The Progressive*, July 1966, 16–20.

<sup>8</sup> Hawley, "Mexican Labor Issue," 174.

<sup>9</sup> Levy, *Chavez*, 138–44.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 143; and, as Chavez summed it up later: "The CSO meant well, but it didn't have the heart and courage that were necessary if something was going to be done for the farm workers." Cesar Chavez, "Nonviolence Still Works," *Look*, April 1, 1969, 55.

Chavez was a most effective agitator in the early stages of the formation of social unrest among farm workers in the early 1960s. A reasonable man who communicated with people in terms that they could easily comprehend, he pointed out the injustice of existing social institutions, creating among the people a focal point for the development of social unrest.<sup>11</sup> He would visit workers in their homes and simply discuss “conditions” with them. He would ask them what their biggest problems were, getting them to specify the service goals of an organizing drive. Then he would ask them what they thought of a union. He would collect stories of how individual workers had been mistreated. Everyone it seems had a story to tell. Then he would try to win them over to active participation in his association. Chavez used the same tactic on members of his own family when he recruited them. Cesar’s cousin, Manuel Chavez, explained,

I kept in touch with Cesar by letter, but I didn’t see him again [after a year that Manuel and Cesar Chavez worked together in northern California’s lumber industry] until he called for help [in organizing his National Farm Workers Association, later the United Farm Workers Union, asking his cousin to work without pay]. When I said, “You’re crazy, I’m not coming to work for nothing!” Cesar started organizing me.

He said, “Don’t you remember when they left us in Corcoran, the contractor, and he didn’t pay us?”

“Yeah, I remember.”

“Remember when we were working with D’Arrigo in 1940. He was paying us thirty cents an hour, and that man died because he was all wet?”

I said, “Yeah, I remember. We were mad.”<sup>12</sup>

Thus was Chavez able to involve many who, for one reason or another, had been bystanders and did not want to get involved.

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<sup>11</sup> Matthiessen, “Organizer,” Part 1, 42–45; Chavez, “Nonviolence Still Works,” 52–57.

<sup>12</sup> Levy, *Chavez*, 164; Chavez’s tactics were not new. They had been advocated and even published by Henry Anderson when Anderson was Research Director for the AWOC, AFL-CIO, in 1961, and they were reprinted in 1966: Henry Anderson, “To Build a Union,” *Citizens for Farm Labor*, *Farm Labor* 4, nos. 4–6 (1966).

Three years after Chavez broke away from the CSO and established his own organization, what came to be known as the California Grape Strike started when approximately 800 AWOC workers led by the AWOC's Filipino organizers, Larry Itliong and Ben Gines, struck a number of Delano vineyards, including the huge holdings of the DiGiorgio Fruit Corporation.<sup>13</sup> When the AWOC went out on strike, Chavez's NFWA had only 200 dues-paying members. On September 16, 1965, notwithstanding the apparent weakness of the Chavez union, the NFWA voted to join the strike and to extend it to two other large growers — Schenley Industries, Inc., and Giumarra Vineyards, Inc. On September 20th, 1,100 more workers walked off the job.<sup>14</sup>

Chavez, seeking funds and volunteers, spoke at a number of colleges, including the University of California at Berkeley, just one year after the free speech struggles there, San Francisco State College, Mills College, and Stanford University, and appealed to CORE and SNCC for people with experience in confrontations to act as picket captains until the farm workers could be trained.<sup>15</sup> One of the SNCC volunteers was Marshall Ganz, the son of a rabbi and, as it turned out, one of the UFWOC's most important leaders. The response to Chavez's appeal, however, was mixed. At public meetings, he would be asked when he had last paid dues to the Communist Party. Once, he was actually pelted with eggs and tomatoes, but he kept right on with his speech, and before he was through the booing had changed to applause. Besides SNCC and CORE people, a number of clergymen of all faiths came to man the picket lines, and there also were volunteers from other groups, such as Students for a Democratic Society and the W. E. B. DuBois Clubs.<sup>16</sup>

Delano Mayor Loader responded to the strike with an offer to act as a middleman for growers and farm workers, but his offer was premature and naive. Growers soon let him know that his offer was not appreciated. Loader subsequently turned against the farm workers and supported growers

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<sup>13</sup> Kopkind, "Grape Pickers' Strike," 12–15.

<sup>14</sup> Thurston N. Davis, "Viva la Huelga!" *America*, April 23, 1966, 589–90.

<sup>15</sup> "Viva la Huelga!" *Newsweek*, April 18, 1966, 42–43.

<sup>16</sup> M. Vincent Miller, "Workers on the Farm After the Grape pickers' Strike," *Dissent*, November–December 1966, 645–55.

to the hilt.<sup>17</sup> Growers and their agents reacted in anger. Many hostile incidents were reported. One small group of pickets reported that a grower had pointed a shotgun at them, threatened to kill them, set their picket signs on fire, and blasted their signs with shotgun pellets. Loaded shotguns were fired into picket signs and over the heads of the strikers. Pickets were shoved and hit. Fistfights broke out along the picket lines. Growers drove their trucks directly at strikers, then swerved at the last minute, covering them with dust. Episcopal Bishop Sumner Walters reported being a victim of one of these attacks.<sup>18</sup>

Local police cooperated with growers, though some officers did not like what they were doing. Various investigations were launched into the suspected violations of the health, building, and fire codes at UFW headquarters in Delano. Chavez reported that the fire marshal “hated the politics of his assignment and told us so on more than one occasion.”<sup>19</sup> The license number of every car that stopped at union headquarters was noted. Drivers were often stopped by local police and questioned. Police followed Chavez everywhere he went during the early days of the strike. After a few weeks, every striker on the picket lines was photographed and a field-report card was filled in on him or her.<sup>20</sup>

Chavez knew the strike would be crushed if growers were able to contain the controversy locally. He was continually developing strategies for countering local concentration of power. An early move was to contact a small group of liberals in Bakersfield and have them flood Delano authorities with complaints about the expense involved in official surveillance and petty harassment of UFW members: “[T]he first two years of the strike I [Chavez] spent most of my speaking engagements and my time getting support to get the growers and cops off of our backs. It worked. We once had over a hundred telegrams and maybe 300 phone calls to the Delano Chief of Police in a three-day period.”<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> James L. Vizzard, “Grape Strike,” *Commonweal*, May 27, 1966, 295–96.

<sup>18</sup> “Victory in the Vineyards,” *Time*, April 15, 1966, 59–60.

<sup>19</sup> Levy, *Chavez*, 189.

<sup>20</sup> “Victory at Delano,” *America*, April 23, 1966, 579–80; Ronald B. Taylor, “Huelga! The Boycott that Worked,” *The Nation*, September 7, 1970, 167–69.

<sup>21</sup> “Victory at Delano,” *America*, 579.

One of Chavez's first actions was to visit college campuses throughout the state. He spoke at UC Berkeley where memories of the Free Speech Movement disturbances of the previous year were still fresh, and he contacted CORE and SNCC seeking experienced organizers to work as picket captains. Chavez did not meet with unqualified approval wherever he went, of course, despite the fact that he began recruiting outside help by going to those groups thought to be most sympathetic to the farm workers' cause. But he did win many people over: "We're getting help beyond our wildest hope. The labor movement, the churches, the civil rights movement, student groups, are all getting behind us with physical, financial, and moral support."<sup>22</sup>

At first, Chavez concentrated on Schenley Industries since the Schenley name was known nationwide. Chavez and the NFWA launched a boycott of all the company's products. Big labor tended to look askance at Chavez and the NFWA, but it did begin to provide support for the strike. In October 1965, the San Francisco longshoremen respected the Schenley picket lines and, at an AFL-CIO convention in San Francisco, Paul Schrade of the United Auto Workers persuaded Walter Reuther to visit the strike. Reuther came to Delano to present a check for \$5,000 to the NFWA. Chavez actually tricked Reuther into marching through the streets of Delano in defiance of a local order and, in a move that hinged on embarrassing Al Green of the AWOC, got Reuther to pledge \$5,000 a month to the NFWA until the strike was over.<sup>23</sup> Other unions, notably the Garment Workers, the Seafarers, and the Packinghouse Workers, took up collections for the strike and contributions came in from churches, student groups, and other liberal organizations.<sup>24</sup>

In the spring of 1966, the Senate Subcommittee on Migratory Labor was persuaded to conduct a day of hearings in California. The chairman of the subcommittee was Harrison A. Williams, Jr., a Democrat from New Jersey, who had been supporting the interests of farm workers in Congress since 1959 — the year the subcommittee was established — and he was accompanied by Senator Robert Kennedy of New York and Senator George

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<sup>22</sup> "Council of Growers' Statement on Delano," *California Farmer*, January 15, 1966, 11.

<sup>23</sup> Ronald B. Taylor, *Chavez and the Farm Workers: A Study in the Acquisition and Use of Power* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1975), 154.

<sup>24</sup> Miller, "Workers on the Farm," 645-55.



Murphy, a California Republican.<sup>25</sup> Kennedy recognized the NFWA and spoke at one of its meetings.<sup>26</sup> Chavez said the following at the hearings:

Although we appreciate your efforts here, we do not believe that public hearings are the route to solving the problem of the farm worker. In fact, I do not think that anyone should ever hold another hearing or make a special investigation of the farm labor problem. Everything has been recorded too many times already, and the time is now past due for immediate action. Or, some people say education will do it — write off this generation of parents and hope my son gets out of farm work. Well, I am not ready to be written off as a loss, and farm work could be a decent job for my son, with a union. But the point is that this generation of farm labor children will not get an adequate education until their parents earn enough to care for the child the way they want to and the way the other children in school — the ones who succeed — are cared for. . . . All we want from the government is the machinery — some rules of the game. All we need is the recognition of our right to full and equal coverage under every law which protects every other working man and woman in this country.<sup>27</sup>

Chavez was referring to the fact that growers, unlike most other employers, were under no legal obligation to bargain with their employees, since farm workers had been specifically exempted from the terms of the National Labor Relations Act, and only a few farm workers have been affected by federal minimum-wage legislation. In the course of the hearings, Bishop Hugh A. Donohoe of Stockton expressed unanimous support for the strikers on the part of the eight Roman Catholic bishops of California and made an eloquent appeal for full collective bargaining rights for farm workers. The bishops' support for Chavez and the NFWA was extremely important. Not only did the bishops officially support the unionization

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<sup>25</sup> Hearings were conducted in Sacramento, Visalia, and Delano, California, as well as in Washington, D.C., and San Antonio, Texas. U.S. Congress, Senate, Subcommittee on Migratory Labor, "Amending Migratory Labor Laws," Hearings on S. 1864–1868, July 1965, and March–April 1966, 89th Congress, 1st and 2nd Sessions.

<sup>26</sup> Matthiessen, "Organizer," Part 1, 68.

<sup>27</sup> Peter Matthiessen, "Organizer: Profile of Cesar Chavez," *The New Yorker*, Part 2, June 28, 1969, 43–71.

effort, they publicly defended Chavez when Red-scare tactics were used against him. For example, Monsignor George Higgins, an important staff member of the Bishops' Committee, involved, not as official mediators, but as agents in bringing growers and the union together, was quoted as follows: "The Bishops' Committee totally disassociates itself from the view that Cesar Chavez is a communist organizer. [Chavez is] an honorable and dedicated man in the field of trade unionism." Higgins went on to say that the head of the committee, Bishop Donnelly, had been active in exposing and undercutting the communist caucus in the old CIO. Trading on Donnelly's unimpeachable credentials, Higgins asserted, "[N]o matter what paper makes such charges against Chavez, the Committee finds him to be a good and sincere advocate of social justice."<sup>28</sup>

On March 17th, the day after the hearings, Chavez set off on a widely publicized workers' march — or *peregrinación*, as he called it — from Delano to the steps of the Capitol in Sacramento.<sup>29</sup>

Sacramento had become the planned destination for the march the month before when William Bennett, a consumer advocate and member of the State Public Utilities Commission, had spoken in Delano condemning the California Fair Trade Act for underwriting Schenley Corporation's profits from the sale of liquor in the state. The *peregrinación* was inspired in part by the freedom march from Selma, Alabama, that had taken place a year before; but, like a fast that Chavez undertook two years later, it had a religious connotation as well. Its emblem was the Mexican patron saint of the *campesinos*, *La Virgen De Guadalupe*, and the *peregrinación* was to arrive at the Capitol steps on Easter Sunday. Chavez had suggested that the march

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<sup>28</sup> Bishop Floyd L. Begin of Oakland put the farm workers case most succinctly in asserting that all the growers needed to do was agree to "impartially supervised elections." Continued refusal, Begin asserted, "can only question the integrity of the growers' contention and induce more and more people to support the boycott." "Churchmen and Table Grapes," *America*, January 4, 1969, 4; "Bishops Support Cesar Chavez," *America*, May 30, 1970, 574; another strongly worded statement is the following, recorded in "California Bishops and the NLRA," *America*, August 30, 1969, 764: "We feel strongly that genuine, lasting peace will never come to farm management labor relations until farm workers are included under The National Labor Relations Act."

<sup>29</sup> Mark Day, "The Clergy and the Grape Strike," *America*, August 30, 1969, 114-17; "150 Striking Pickers, Delano, California, Begin 25-day, 300-mile Protest March to Sacramento," *New York Times*, March 18, 1966, 78; "March Continues," *New York Times*, March 19, 1966, 60.

should be penitential, like the Lenten processions of Mexico — an atonement for past sins of violence on the part of the strikers, and a kind of prayer.<sup>30</sup>

The growers had a different view of the march. Martin Zaninovich of Delano, for example, called the “pilgrimage” “a parade that is nothing more than a publicity stunt for the benefit of the news media.”<sup>31</sup> Meanwhile, Al Green tried to get the AWOC not to have anything to do with the march. After it was underway, Green moved to Porterville and set up an office next to the Teamsters.<sup>32</sup> Sixty-seven strikers set off on the 300-mile march to Sacramento, where they hoped to meet with Governor Edmund G. Brown, Sr. The progress of the *peregrinación* was slow and ceremonial. As Chavez had anticipated, it received a good deal of support and participation from people along the way, in the form of food and shelter for the marchers. The mayor of Fresno, Floyd Hyde, actually arranged a special luncheon for the marchers with Chicano leaders in the town.<sup>33</sup> At one point during the march, Al Green engineered a local front-page news story to the effect that AFL-CIO members were boycotting the march.

Angered, William Kircher, national director of organizing for the AFL-CIO, contacted Green with the following curt order: “When this march reaches Modesto tomorrow, I want to see a massive AFL-CIO welcome. That’s your home base, that’s where you’re from. I’ll judge how much influence you have in the labor movement by what kind of reception there is for the marchers.”<sup>34</sup>

The biggest rally along the march route was in Stockton. Five thousand people attended. That night Chavez got a call from Schenley representative, Sidney Korshak, who wanted to talk.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> Davis, “Viva,” 589–90; “Religious Motives in Demonstration,” *New York Times*, March 25, 1966, 28.

<sup>31</sup> Vizzard, “The Extraordinary Cesar Chavez,” 19.

<sup>32</sup> Ronald B. Taylor, “A Romance Rekindled,” *The Nation*, March 19, 1973, 366–70; “Pickers Report They Set Up Strike Committees in Towns Along Route,” *New York Times*, March 23, 1966, 48.

<sup>33</sup> Levy, *Chavez*, 213–14.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, 213–14; “Union President Chavez Lauds Kircher Role,” *New York Times*, April 7, 1966, 1.

<sup>35</sup> “Battle of the Grapes,” *Reader’s Digest*, October 1, 1969, 88–92; “Marchers Rally, Sacramento,” *New York Times*, April 11, 1966, 18; “Schenley Industries Agrees to Bargain with Pickers Union,” *New York Times*, April 7, 1966, 1.

After twenty days on the road, walking from Delano to Sacramento, one of the marchers reportedly said, "If we get to Sacramento and Cesar says we go on to Washington, I say, 'okay,' I go to Washington."<sup>36</sup> The march lasted twenty-five days, and when they arrived on the Capitol steps, in the rain, on Easter morning, they were joined by thousands of supporters and some notable figures from politics and labor. Governor Brown had forsaken notables and *originales* alike in favor of a weekend at Palm Springs with Frank Sinatra. The occasion did not lack a climax, for it was then announced that Schenley had agreed to negotiate a contract. Schenley, it seems, gave in to Chavez and the union mainly to protect its nationally known brand name, but a widely accepted rumor had it that Robert Kennedy worked behind the scenes to get Schenley to sign a contract with the NFWA. The contract, which was signed in June 1966, provided an hourly wage of \$1.75 and a union hiring hall.<sup>37</sup>

With the Schenley success, the strikers turned their attention to TreeSweet, S&W Foods, and the DiGiorgio Company, whose Sierra Vista Ranch occupied 44,000 acres near Delano. Suddenly the Teamsters union, which had provided important support for the strikers in the fight against Schenley, announced that it was prepared to represent the DiGiorgio workers, and the company quickly arranged an election in which workers could choose the Teamsters, Chavez's NFWA, or no union at all. William Kircher personally broke up a press conference arranged by the DiGiorgio Company to announce the election and sought a court injunction to prevent the use of the NFWA's name on the ballot, but the election was held anyway on June 24th. Chavez told his people not to vote.<sup>38</sup> Kircher and Governor Brown came up with the idea that an independent labor arbitrator should look into the situation. Governor Brown ordered an investigation of the situation by Ronald W. Haughton of the American Arbitration Association, and Haughton recommended that a second election

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<sup>36</sup> Vizzard, "The Extraordinary Cesar Chavez," 16.

<sup>37</sup> "Victory at Delano," *America*, 579–80; "Schenley Pact and DiGiorgio Plan," *New York Times*, April 9, 1966, 24; "Schenley Industries Sign 1-Year Pact with NFWA," *New York Times*, June 22, 1966, 33.

<sup>38</sup> Jerry J. Berman and Jim Hightower, "Chavez and the Teamsters," *The Nation*, November 2, 1970, 427–31; "DiGiorgio Corp. Polls Vineyard Workers at 2 Ranches," *New York Times*, June 25, 1966, 31.

be held.<sup>39</sup> Meanwhile, Governor Brown and Senators Robert Kennedy and Harrison Williams asked the DiGiorgio Company to hold off on negotiations with the Teamsters. The NFWA sought a court order to block negotiations between DiGiorgio and the Teamsters. Though both sides had agreed to accept Haughton's proposal and the rules laid down for conducting the election, two tense months of accusations, violence, reprisals, injunctions, and arrests followed. Just a few days after the DiGiorgio Company agreed to elections, the company laid off 190 NFWA people and Teamster muscle men allegedly beat up several people. Kircher called in some musclemen of his own — members of the Seafarers union — to protect NFWA pickets. Among those arrested was Chavez. Having persuaded ten workers to walk off the job at DiGiorgio's Borrego Springs property, northeast of San Diego, Chavez and two clergymen, one Protestant and one Catholic, accompanied them into the ranch to retrieve their belongings and were arrested for trespassing. All of them except the Catholic priest were stripped naked and chained together by some zealous sheriff's deputies.<sup>40</sup>

The Teamsters was the only union that had supported the retention of the bracero program, and, as Chavez saw it, the Teamsters had entered into an alliance with DiGiorgio to work out what is known as a "sweetheart" contract — one that would almost certainly benefit the union and the employer but not help the workers. Under these circumstances, Chavez concluded that he had no choice but to merge NFWA with AWOC, under the banner of the AFL-CIO.<sup>41</sup> Chavez became head of the new union, the United Farm Workers Organizing Committee (UFWOC). One of his first acts was to dissolve AWOC contracts with labor contractors in Stockton. He also made AWOC organizers work for \$5.00 a week — the amount of money NFWA organizers had received. Larry Itliong was the only AWOC organizer to stay on.<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> Berman and Hightower, "Chavez and the Teamsters," 427–31; "Labor Expert Will Probe Farm Election," *Los Angeles Times*, June 30, 1966, 27; "New DiGiorgio Vote by Aug. 30 Urged in Report," *Los Angeles Times*, July 16, 1966, 3.

<sup>40</sup> Jerome Wolf, "The Church and Delano," *Commonweal*, April 29, 1966, 168–69.

<sup>41</sup> "AFL-CIO Granting of Charter to United Farm Workers Organizing Committee which includes NFWA," *New York Times*, August 24, 1966, 26.

<sup>42</sup> AWOC organizers were not the only ones to leave when the two unions merged. In fact, NFWA supporters were divided on the merger issue. A number left when the NFWA joined the AWOC and became the UFWOC.

The merger took place in August, before the second election at DiGiorgio, and the last phase of the battle with the Teamsters was extremely vicious. The AFL-CIO, which had expelled the Teamsters in 1957, charged that the Teamsters were controlled by gangsters; and the Teamsters countered that the new organization, the UFWOC, was influenced by an international communist conspiracy.<sup>43</sup> Prevented from picketing at the Sierra Vista Ranch, the strikers held nightly vigils outside the labor camps, at a shrine set up in the back of Chavez's old Mercury station wagon. The workers, some of whom had been recruited by DiGiorgio from as far away as Juárez, Mexico, were proselytized when they came to pray. The second election was held at Sierra Vista on August 30th, and anyone who had worked there for fifteen days or more during the previous year was eligible to vote. The Teamsters already had a large California membership of workers directly dependent on agriculture, and the workers in the packing sheds voted 94 to 43 to join the Teamsters. But the field workers, some of whom had heard about the election in Mexico and had come back at their own expense, voted for the UFWOC by 528 to 328.<sup>44</sup> Martin Luther King, Jr. sent the UFWOC a telegram:

As brothers in the fight for equality, I extend the hand of fellowship and good will and wish continuing success to you and your members. The fight for equality must be fought on many fronts — in the urban slums, in the sweat shops of the factories and fields. Our separate struggles are really one — a struggle for freedom, for dignity, and for humanity. You and your valiant fellow workers have demonstrated your commitment to righting grievous wrongs forced upon exploited people. We are together with you in spirit and in determination that our dreams for a better tomorrow will be realized.<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> Russell W. Gibbons, "The Teamsters," *Commonweal*, August 10, 1973, 426–31; "AFL-CIO Aide Kircher Hints Company Favors Teamsters," *New York Times*, August 28, 1966, 58.

<sup>44</sup> "DiGiorgio Corp. Representation Election," *New York Times*, September 1, 1966, 25; "American Arbitration Association Reports UFWOC Won Right to Bargain for Field Workers at 2 DiGiorgio Central California Ranches," *New York Times*, September 3, 1966, 14.

<sup>45</sup> Levy, *Chavez*, 246.

After the DiGiorgio contract for the Sierra Vista ranch was negotiated the NFWA pushed for elections at DiGiorgio's Arvin ranch as well. The Teamsters opposed the NFWA's move, but the NFWA got a majority of workers at the Arvin ranch to sign a petition calling for an election, then presented it to Governor Brown on statewide television. The DiGiorgio Company did not respond. Chavez then came up with the idea of getting Brown to sign a letter to the Arvin workers stating that he had done all he could and suggesting that they take the matter up with the DiGiorgio Company directly. Governor Brown was campaigning against Ronald Reagan at the time. The NFWA did get Brown's signature on the letter, which was then sent to forty of the workers who had signed the petition. They were then called to a meeting and arrangements were made to transport the workers to DiGiorgio Company offices in San Francisco where they would be backed up by a picket line and demonstration when they met with DiGiorgio officials to request an election. The workers met with Robert DiGiorgio and two of his assistants who refused elections on the grounds that the workers were simply being stirred up by outside agitators. The workers who had come to petition for elections stayed in the DiGiorgio offices. They were joined by labor people from San Francisco. Finally, what Chavez had hoped for happened. They were arrested for trespassing, bailed out of jail, went back to the DiGiorgio offices, and were arrested again.<sup>46</sup>

On November 4, 1966, the DiGiorgio Company agreed to hold elections at its Arvin Ranch. The NFWA won the election, but winning only gave them the right to negotiate. Contract negotiations took several months. The contract then went to an arbitrator and was finalized, but enforcement of the contract became a huge problem. Over 100 grievances were filed in the first three months of the contract, many were never resolved.<sup>47</sup> In December 1967, the DiGiorgio Company started selling off its holdings in the Delano area and by 1968 had divested itself of all its holdings there. Consequently, the union lost its contracts.<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> "United Farm Workers Wins Representative Election at DiGiorgio Ranch, Arvin, California," *New York Times*, November 6, 1966, 47.

<sup>47</sup> Harold T. Rogers, "On the Labor Front," *American Fruit Grower*, November 1968, 12-13.

<sup>48</sup> "DiGiorgio Fruit Sells Agricultural Holdings, San Joaquin Valley, California," *New York Times*, April 20, 1969, 56.



Nine days after the election at DiGiorgio's Sierra Vista ranch, the field workers walked out of the vineyards of A. Perelli-Minetti & Sons, demanding to be represented by the UFWOC. But the company signed a contract with the Teamsters who escorted three busloads of scabs onto the Perelli-Minetti grounds.<sup>49</sup> After another inter-union struggle, lasting 10½ months, in the course of which a UFWOC picket, John Shroyer, was beaten up, the Teamsters reversed their policy and came to terms with Chavez. In July, 1967, the appointment of Einar Mohn, director of the Western Conference of Teamsters, to the University of California Board of Regents by Governor Pat Brown in 1966 was alleged to have been part of an understanding that the Teamsters would not challenge the Chavez union jurisdiction; and, indeed, though the Teamsters gave the UFWOC trouble, they did not commit themselves to an all-out battle against the UFWOC in Delano.<sup>50</sup> Under a jurisdictional agreement mediated by Father Eugene Boyle, Episcopal minister Richard Byefield, and Rabbi Joseph Glazer, the UFWOC gave the Teamsters representation of certain shed workers in return for representation of all field workers, including those at Perelli-Minetti, whose union contract was at once transferred to the UFWOC.<sup>51</sup> After these developments, Gallo, Almaden, Christian Brothers, and the other large California wineries presented very few difficulties for Chavez. The big wineries, which sell their products under their own nationally advertised brand names, were especially vulnerable to a boycott, and by September of 1968, when the Paul Masson vineyards signed, almost all of them had contracts with the UFWOC.

Meanwhile, the growers of table grapes, who were less vulnerable, continued to resist, and they were unquestionably heartened in November 1966, when Ronald Reagan, who had spoken out against the grape strike from the start of his campaign, was elected governor. In that same month, the UFWOC won another representation election at the vineyards of Mosesian-Hourigan-Goldberg, a relatively small firm in Delano, by a vote of 285 to 38.<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> "American Farm Labor Replaces Braceros," *Christian Century*, February 1, 1967, 133.

<sup>50</sup> "Breakthrough for la Huelga," *Time*, June 27, 1969, 18.

<sup>51</sup> Gibbons, "Teamsters," 430-31.

<sup>52</sup> "UFWOC has won Accords with Several Big Companies which Process Grapes into Wine," *New York Times*, October 2, 1967, 43.



After the Perelli-Minetti struggle, the UFWOC went after the table grape growers, starting with the largest, John Giumarra. The UFWOC organized among the workers and when it felt strong enough, started sending letters to Giumarra, requesting a meeting. Ralph Duncan of the State Conciliation Service got Giumarra to send a representative, Philip Feick, to a meeting in Bakersfield. Feick did not budge. The UFWOC initiated a strike August 3, 1967. Four days later Giumarra got an injunction against the UFWOC limiting pickets to two at each entrance to Giumarra property and preventing masses of people from congregating on the road most visible to workers in the fields. The injunction helped break the strike. With the strike broken, the UFWOC turned its energies to a boycott of Giumarra fresh grapes. Giumarra fought back by changing labels and multiplying the number of labels used on his fruit. In violation of Food and Drug Administration rules, Giumarra used the labels of other growers in an effort to circumvent the boycott.<sup>53</sup> It was then that the UFWOC decided to boycott all California fresh grapes, except DiGiorgio's HiColor brand. The boycott was an offensive tactic without the emotional stimulus of immediate action or direct contact with the opposition, but as will be shown, it was an effective economic weapon. In 1968, however, the UFWOC was making little headway. The first wave of representative elections had died out. The table grape growers were stonewalling Chavez and Chavez's followers were debilitated and demoralized by the apparent lack of progress.<sup>54</sup> There was also talk of violence among UFWOC members.

Chavez decided to engage in a ritual act of purification, a fast. At a meeting of the union at union headquarters in Delano, Forty Acres, Chavez announced that he was fasting until such time as everyone in the union ignored him or until union members rededicated themselves to nonviolence and started pulling together again. Chavez's announcement created an uproar. A number of people in the Chavez organization, including the union's

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<sup>53</sup> Mary Lou Watson, "Boycott Seeks to Aid Grape Workers," *Christian Century*, June 5, 1968, 769-70; "UFWOC 2-year Strike Centers on Boycott of Giumarra Vineyards Corp. Products," *New York Times*, October 2, 1967, 43.

<sup>54</sup> The plan growers formulated to take advantage of the UFWOC's stalemated position was reported in *Farm Quarterly* in 1970. It diagnosed the union's problems as they existed in 1968, "The Farm Worker," *Farm Quarterly*, Spring Planning 1970, 56-58.

secretary-treasurer, Tony Orendain, were offended, thought Chavez was playing “Jesus Christ,” and left.<sup>55</sup>

Saul Alinsky was one of a number of liberals and leftists who were embarrassed by Chavez’s decision and found it difficult to explain to allies of the farm workers’ movement.<sup>56</sup> Chavez assessed the fast this way:

After about three or four days, the spirit was definitely there. The Filipino women and the strikers painted the co-op windows with bright colors. They looked like stained glass. Things began to get cleaned up. Everybody began to get things done on their own. They began to think how to help. The rest was just like a miracle — not the fast, but the things that it did to people. It jolted everybody around. We got more than I ever bargained for. The good effects were way beyond my dreams. The work schedule began to pick up, dedication increased, and the whole question of using violence ended immediately.<sup>57</sup>

On the twelfth day of the fast, Chavez had to appear in court in Bakersfield on a contempt of court charge. Marshall Ganz and several of the ranch committees — organizations representing workers on the farms that had contracts with the UFWOC — organized a demonstration at the courthouse. Three to four thousand singing and praying workers entered or surrounded the courthouse. Judge Walter Osborne was reported to have said, “If I kick these workers out of this courthouse, that will be just another example of goddam gringo justice. I can’t do it.”<sup>58</sup>

Robert Kennedy attended the last of the daily masses — the one that marked the end of the fast — a full twenty-five days after Chavez had stopped eating. Kennedy’s visit brought national television coverage. Just six days later, Kennedy announced his candidacy for president. Paul Schrade called Chavez and asked if he would endorse Kennedy and be a delegate to the Democratic convention.<sup>59</sup> The AFL-CIO had come out

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<sup>55</sup> Levy, *Chavez*, 272–78.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, 272–78.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, 275.

<sup>58</sup> “Chavez is Charged with Violating Picket Restrictions,” *New York Times*, February 29, 1968, 20.

<sup>59</sup> “Chavez, Upon Urging of Doctors, Agrees to End Fast,” *New York Times*, March 6, 1968, 16; “Sen. R. F. Kennedy Backs Spirit of Movement,” *New York Times*, March 11, 1968, 22.

strongly in support of Johnson. Chavez not only accepted Schrade's offer, but actively campaigned for Kennedy in the rural areas and in East Los Angeles, the Mexican-American neighborhoods of that city. Chavez, in fact, diverted a significant portion of his staff to a voter registration drive for Kennedy. After Nixon was elected, the UFWOC claimed it was "shut out by the feds."<sup>60</sup>

In 1968 the growers tried to back a company union to oppose Chavez, the Agricultural Workers Freedom to Work Association, AFWFA. By that time most growers had resigned themselves to the idea of working with a union of agricultural workers, but they did not want to work with Chavez's union. Most downright hated the man.<sup>61</sup> Jerry Cohen, a former CRLA attorney who had gone to work for the UFWOC and become its general counsel, worked with government people to try to have the AFWFA investigated, because the AFWFA had evidently been funded by growers, the John Birch Society, and the National Right to Work Committee through a dummy organization called the Mexican American Democrats for Republican Action (MADRA). Fear of a federal investigation ended MADRA.<sup>62</sup> Meanwhile, the table grape strike and the boycott were still underway.

The growers suffered severe damage in the course of the boycott. In the Coachella Valley, in five years the action reduced the number of growers from some 200 to around 60, and the acreage from 13,000 acres to 7,500.<sup>63</sup> "It took several years for the boycott to be that effective," recalls Lionel Steinberg, a Coachella Valley table grape grower. "It just gradually closed in like a noose around the necks of the vineyardists."<sup>64</sup> Steinberg was a longtime liberal activist as well, cochairman of Farmers for Kennedy and Johnson in 1960, and an appointee of both President Kennedy and Governor Edmund G. ("Pat") Brown to administrative posts having to do with

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<sup>60</sup> "Pres. Candidate Nixon Urges VP Humphrey to Withdraw Endorsement of 'Illegal' Boycott," *New York Times*, September 6, 1968, 32; "VP Candidate Agnew Scores Nat'l. Labor Boycott," *New York Times*, October 1, 1968, 30.

<sup>61</sup> "More than 100 California Growers and Shippers File \$25-million Suit Against UFWOC," *New York Times*, July 13, 1968, 28.

<sup>62</sup> Taylor, "Huelga! The Boycott that Worked," 167–69; "On the Labor Front," 12–13.

<sup>63</sup> "Contracts in the Coachella," *Time*, April 13, 1970, 21.

<sup>64</sup> "Effectiveness of Union's Boycott in 1968," *New York Times*, June 19, 1969, 32.

agriculture.<sup>65</sup> Through their mutual friend, Congressman Phil Burton, Chavez expressed an interest in meeting with Steinberg, who had favored a grower settlement with the UFW. Late in May 1968, the meeting took place. One can only conjecture about Chavez's feelings as he noticed, in Steinberg's home, that the liberal grower had a collection of pre-Columbian art objects. It may have seemed that Steinberg was expropriating the past and culture, as well as the present labor, of the Hispanic farm workers. (In any event, Steinberg was deeply offended when in a later picket line confrontation, a clergyman supporter of Chavez retorted to Steinberg's statement that Chavez had conversed with Steinberg in his home: "Chavez is not interested in pre-Columbian art!"<sup>66</sup>) At the May meeting, Chavez proposed a unilateral agreement between the UFW and Steinberg, and the latter declined. Steinberg later charged that some of the leadership apparently mistook his conciliatory approach for weakness, and that on a "weakest link" theory his property and workers were singled out for abuse and harassment, threats, and sporadic violence, over the next several weeks. "[A]pparently Chavez didn't appreciate the effort," Steinberg noted dryly. "He was only interested in the end result, which was a contract. And anything else was not helpful. And he had his mind set on one thing — that was winning the battle, winning the strike, not making friends."<sup>67</sup> What is remarkable in this evaluation is not only its naivete. It represents the increasing ambivalence and disaffection of many liberals with Chavez in mid-1968. It represents the utter inability of many of the liberals who questioned Chavez's tactics to understand his hedgehog mentality, his single-minded moral intensity and strategic focus. And it provides a statement of characteristic liberal attitudes: soften and resolve social conflict through friendship, and by calling upon an "old-boy network."<sup>68</sup>

Steinberg reports that although he was forced during this period to sell some of his land and heavily mortgage the rest, he never doubted that the controversy would eventually be resolved to the satisfaction of both

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<sup>65</sup> "L. Steinberg and J. J. Kovacevich Say they will Recognize Union as Collective Bargaining Agent," *New York Times*, June 15, 1969, 58.

<sup>66</sup> Levy, *Chavez*, 298.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>68</sup> Joseph Berman and Arthur J. Vidich, *The New American Society* (Chicago: Quadrangle Books, 1971), 63–115.

sides. He and others continued to press for ongoing talks through Representative Burton, Governor Brown, Senator Tunney, and Senator Edward Kennedy (heir to his now dead brother's interest in the issue). In 1968–69, the Delano table grape growers tried to arrange negotiations with Chavez through various state officials: Allan Grant, chairman of the State Board of Agriculture and president of the California Farm Bureau; Earl Coke, state secretary of agriculture; Jerry Fiedler of the State Department of Human Resources Development; and Ronald Reagan, who offered the services of the State Conciliation Services, but Chavez rebuffed them. As the year passed, those critical of Chavez came to include AFL-CIO President George Meany, Harry Bernstein, labor correspondent for the *Los Angeles Times*, and many of the church groups supporting the UFW table grape boycott.<sup>69</sup>

It was through a working group appointed by the national Catholic Bishops' Conference that talks were resumed. Archbishop Timothy Manning of Los Angeles, and Bishops Hugh Donohoe of Fresno, Joseph Donnelly of Hartford, Connecticut, Humberto Madeiros of Brownsville, Texas, and Walter Curtis of Bridgeport, Connecticut, made up the group, with Monsignor Roger Mahoney of Fresno serving as local secretary and Monsignor George Higgins of Fresno as staff person. The climate of opinion did not seem favorable. Larry Itliong, assistant director of the UFWOC, predicted that the men who had offered to negotiate would "be subject to scorn from certain growers who are determined to destroy the union at all costs."<sup>70</sup> The bishops, nevertheless, met "endlessly" with growers, one to one, and in small groups of various sizes. Meetings were also held with Chavez and his staff. The bishops took the position that they favored trade unionism and collective bargaining, but at the same time that they had no formula for settlement and would not serve as mediators within the bargaining process. The growers, wary of confrontations and media events, mindful of Chavez's access to the general public, were gradually brought around, reassured by the bishops' willingness to sit in on the talks as observers. Talks were resumed, first in the Coachella Valley, then in the Delano region, with Chavez seeming to observers to take evident satisfaction

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<sup>69</sup> National support for Chavez and the UFW was widespread in 1969, and yet, important criticisms began to be voiced by the UFWOC's supporters.

<sup>70</sup> "Breakthrough for la Huelga," *Time*, June 27, 1969, 18.

in the fact that it was the growers who had sued for peace, and that the authoritative conciliatory stimulus and presence was not provided by the administration of Governor Ronald Reagan, to whose officials the growers had repeatedly appealed, but by the church, outside the official legal process, as the farm labor movement had been, and wielding moral authority on behalf of society, the authority to which Chavez had so often sought to appeal.

It was perhaps fitting that the talks be resumed under their form of community sponsorship, since the success of the boycott did not rest upon any demonstration of equivalent strength between the two contesting sides. The structure of support grew gradually but steadily. In some cases, the union forces even managed to drive a wedge between groups traditionally allied within the local community.<sup>71</sup> Church groups and college campuses were used to recruit people to picket markets and leaflet neighborhoods. Letters were written to newspapers. Churches and labor unions provided space for shelter and office quarters. Political candidates and public officials were lobbied to publicly endorse the boycott. Railway union members identified scab shipments. Teamsters refused to handle hot cargoes. A variety of local “secondary boycotts” sprang up, directed against markets and chain stores that handled boycotted grapes, including picketing and sympathy strikes by butchers’ unions. The mobilization of the community was significant. Table grapes are very popular, particularly in California, but at the same time a specialty food that any household could forgo without hardship. Awareness and support ran high. The boycott, as Lionel Steinberg ruefully noted, “literally closed Boston, New York, Philadelphia, Chicago, Detroit, Montreal, Toronto, completely from handling table grapes.”<sup>72</sup>

With the bishops as the crucial link between growers and the union, the UFWOC managed to sign K.K. Larson, Bruno Dispoto, and the Bianco Fruit Corporation, and ended up signing all of the Coachella and Arvin growers. Tenneco Corporation, which had been buying up table grape

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<sup>71</sup> Lawrence T. King, “The Unjolly Green Giant,” *Commonweal*, July 28, 1967, 461; James Lipson, “Victory,” *Labor Today*, May–June 1970, 5–6.

<sup>72</sup> Ronald B. Taylor, “The Boycott and the NLRA,” *The Nation*, May 12, 1969, 591–93.

orchards at a rapid rate, also signed with the UFWOC.<sup>73</sup> Strike fever hit the orchards and ranches throughout the Central Valley. When it looked as if the Delano growers would crack too, the UFWOC geared up for the lettuce crop in Santa Maria and Salinas.

Simultaneously with the successful end of negotiations with the twenty-nine Delano table grape growers, the UFWOC received word that IBT truckers, who had just ended a strike against lettuce growers in the Salinas Valley, were contemplating moving in and organizing field workers there. On July 24th, it was announced that the Teamsters had signed thirty contracts with growers covering field laborers in the Salinas Valley. With the Salinas Valley growers' coordinated action, what was to be a successful strategy of containment emerged full force. Before turning to the Salinas Valley phase of the struggle between farm workers and growers, however, the UFW's ideology will be discussed since it was so important to the organization's ability to widen and nationalize the conflict.<sup>74</sup>

The ideology that animated the United Farm Workers cannot be separated from the person and philosophy of Cesar Chavez, his upbringing, his religious faith, and his experience as a community organizer with the CSO. Ideology in this situation meant a set of beliefs, infused with passion, which sought to transform the conditions of life of a large and distinguishable group of people. It is the yearning for the triumph of a cause, implying the satisfaction of deep moral feelings, which for Chavez had taken practical definition from his work with Ross.<sup>75</sup>

Chavez is not an intellectual, much less a systematic thinker. Yet he is a keen observer, the possessor of strong opinions, tersely articulate, and inclined to cast his experience, as his mother did, in the form of lessons,

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<sup>73</sup> "UFWOC and 2 Coachella Valley, California, Growers Sign 1st Labor Contract Covering Table Grape Pickers," *New York Times*, April 2, 1970, 29; "UFWOC and 26 Growers Sign Contracts," *New York Times*, July 30, 1970, 1; "Labor, 1970," *The Nation*, September 7, 1970, 162–63.

<sup>74</sup> Allan Grant, "The Farm Worker Needs More than Unions," *Farm Quarterly*, Spring Planning 1970, 56–58ff; Don Curlee, "Shattering Table Grape Experience in 1965–66," *Western Fruit Grower*, January 1966, 19ff.; Allan Grant, "California Grapes and the Boycott — The Growers' Side of the story," *California Farm Bureau Monthly*, January 1969, 8–10.

<sup>75</sup> Nicholas C. Mills, "The Whip and the Bee: Diary from the Grape Strike," *Dissent*, Spring 1973, 203–4.



*dichos*, sayings or maxims.<sup>76</sup> In this form, the form in which he communicated his beliefs to his staff and supporters, it is worthwhile to examine the main contours of his ideology.

First, Chavez is a firm believer in the amplitude of time, and the need for that prime virtue of the poor, patience. He understands the large motionless landscape of poverty. At the same time, the patience he favors has two faces. One is passive, or more exactly a willingness to endure in the sense of the suffering servant, for the sake of what is right. The second face is linked to action and struggle on behalf of the right. It may be said that if Chavez does not believe in the inevitability of justice, he does believe that efforts on behalf of justice, even if immediately unsuccessful, do always produce consequences in the amplitude of time.

A second lesson Chavez learned and taught was the need for power to accomplish justice. "I have always had, and I guess I always will have," Chavez said, "a firm belief that if you muster enough power, you can move things, but it's all on the basis of power. Now I seldom like to go see my opponent unless I have some power over him. I'll wait if it takes all my life."<sup>77</sup>

A third counsel was the sharp distinction, and indeed opposition, between power and violence. Chavez recalled for an interviewer that his mother was illiterate, but a firm opponent of violence in all forms, that his father never fought, that his own research into his family tree could uncover no example of a soldier. His own nonviolence, he indicated, was, like his mother's, something he took for granted. He asked for a nonviolence vote and pledge before the first organizing strike of NFWA. When it was pointed out to him that some left-liberal religious spokesmen defended ghetto rioting as insurgency necessary to change the system, Chavez responded: "I don't buy it. How in hell can you get a theologian to accept that one or two or three lives are worth giving up for some material gain? It doesn't stop there; it's just the beginning." Nor was Chavez willing to distinguish between levels of violence: he roundly condemned anti-Vietnam protesters who would resort to even a limited use of violence.<sup>78</sup>

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<sup>76</sup> Levy, *Chavez*, 19.

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*, 109.

<sup>78</sup> Bob Fitch, *My Eyes Have Seen* (San Francisco: Glide Publications, 1972), 72; see also Cesar Chavez, "Creative Nonviolence," *Catholic Worker*, June 1969, 4.



A fourth *dicho* is the need for faith. “Today I don’t think,” he reflected, “that I could base my will to struggle on cold economics or on some political doctrine. For me the base must be faith.”<sup>79</sup> Since Chavez was a devoted Catholic, does this mean that for him the base was some sort of orthodoxy? Not exactly. Chavez seems to stand on a boundary between church and world, a boundary that runs through his own life and allows him to judge the world in terms of the church, and the church in terms of the world. Of the church, Chavez says that it was slow in coming to the succor of impoverished farm workers, in providing specifically for their needs from its spiritual and economic treasuries. The Protestants, through the Migrant Ministry, were in the fields first, and faithfully. Yet in a profound sense Chavez contends, the Church is its people, and it is therefore the people’s duty to demand the rightful use of Church resources, and to protect those whose courage as clergy or laity endangers them with Church authorities. “We don’t ask for more cathedrals,” Chavez said in remarks prepared during his twenty-five-day fast. “We don’t ask for bigger churches or fine gifts. We ask for its presence with us, beside us, as Christ among us. We ask the Church to sacrifice with the people for social change, for justice, and for love of brother. We don’t ask for words. We ask for deeds. We don’t ask for paternalism. We ask for servanthood.”<sup>80</sup>

Several of Chavez’s lessons for life can be grouped under the rubric, “The dimensions of solidarity.” First, he was convinced that people could be bound together through mutual aid. “Once you helped people,” he observed, “most became very loyal.”<sup>81</sup> At another point, he said, “I think solving problems for people is the only way to build solid groups.”<sup>82</sup> Second, he believed that if the people themselves define the major goals of an organization, they will make it theirs. Policy participation cements solidarity. Third, an organization should recruit its leadership from new, freshly committed members “at the bottom.” “Fred taught me in organizing,” he recalled, “never to go to the so-called leadership, but to go to the grass roots and develop leaders there. Then we had people who hadn’t sold out.

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<sup>79</sup> Levy, *Chavez*, 27.

<sup>80</sup> Cesar Chavez, “The Mexican-American and the Church,” *El Grito*, Summer 1968, 9–12.

<sup>81</sup> Levy, *Chavez*, 111.

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*

We got a whole crop of leaders just as we did in the union later.”<sup>83</sup> Fourth, a fellowship in poverty had the positive advantage of freedom from attachment to material goods and gain, and the motive of fear of loss that possession brings. At the same time, the sacrifices required of the poor are real and immediate, and less subject to sentimental falsification.<sup>84</sup>

A second series of Chavez’s *dichos* can be viewed under the heading of “Leadership.” Chavez saw the office of leadership in terms of morality and psychology, as well as power and strategy. Chavez spoke of the place of both shame and moral emulation, the negative and the positive functions of conscience, in exercising leadership. A good way to get people to do something is to shame them into it, he observed. Conversely, he asserted that the leader should never ask the rank and file to do anything the leader would not do. The leader should be willing to make any sacrifice, including that of his life. Willingness to sacrifice is a direct measure of commitment to a cause, is intuitively perceived by the rank and file, and hence is a true index of a group’s vitality. The leader should be willing to absorb the attacks of others, Chavez believed, noting shrewdly that it can provide excellent opportunities for organizing. Here Chavez approaches Sigmund Freud’s observation that a society’s “cultural super-ego” is made up of the ideals of its despised and slain leaders and heroes. Chavez surely gained much attention and support as a man of peace who walked at the brink, a friend of two assassinated national leaders, who drew upon himself threats and gunfire and the hazards of fasting. One of the signal advantages of the UFW was that Chavez was the only major personality to emerge from the California farm labor organizing struggle — the growers had no comparable spokesman or champion. As Chavez himself lamented, people are drawn to a fight because of its analogy to violence, and miss the meaning and moral drama of principled nonviolent struggle.<sup>85</sup>

Chavez was very sensitive to the problem of goal displacement and organizational sclerosis. From one point of view, this might be seen as a compensation for his always casual and sometimes arbitrary attitudes toward group administration. His appreciation of the problems of an unresponsive organizational bureaucracy, however, goes far beyond lip-service. Indeed,

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<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*, 117.

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid.*, 5.

<sup>85</sup> Cesar Chavez, “Letter from Delano,” *Christian Century*, April 23, 1969, 539–40.

he sees the triangular relationship between group goals, leaders, and members as the ultimate form of the question of the meaning of the UFW. Organizations are always tempted, Chavez says, to substitute economic and skills resources for commitment, and to expect the former to generate the latter. They are tempted to seek early and easy resort to protection of the state: "When you get into legislation you're playing with a borrowed bat."<sup>86</sup>

If the UFW remains a meaningful organization, it will see that *la causa* is only part of the large cause of social justice. It will refuse to recline silently on its own accomplishments, but will become "a sort of in-group gadfly," he said. It will see social consciousness as an instrument, carrying a responsibility for its use on behalf of other poor and disadvantaged groups. Perhaps the images that Chavez represents might be characterized as a diamond rather than a triangle: group leaders, group members, a range of goals and values that always lie beyond immediate or complete attainment, and alliances with other organizations whose members and leaders share concerns of social equality. Chavez noted that he was a frequent defender of unions, churches, and other reform groups, because of the good things that only organized groups can accomplish. "I've always been kind of — well, the word is not 'religious,' but church-related. I dig it. And so whenever they [the Migrant Ministry] had any meetings, when I could I would slip away and go to their meetings and be with them. It was relaxing. Besides being good people they were very committed and very strong. It was a joy to be there."

As will be shown in the next chapter, UFW ideology was challenged by claims that Chavez and the UFW were leading a social movement, not a legitimate labor struggle, and were thus incapable of efficient administration of the contracts they had won in the San Joaquin and Coachella Valleys.

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<sup>86</sup> Fitch, *My Eyes Have Seen*, 71.