

Grape Strikers Assaulted: Courage Faces Violence

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Summary: Contrasts Cesar Chavez' stand on nonviolence with the violent tactics of the Teamster's Union against the farm workers in California. Calls for continuing the boycott of grapes and lettuce, picketing, and demonstrations—forms of practicing voluntary poverty and “a peaceful revolution.” (DDLW #531).

In the last issue of the farm Workers' paper **El Malcriado** (which means “those accounted by the world as the least of God's children”), there are horrifying accounts of the violence which has been inflicted upon the farm workers by the Teamsters, who are attempting to crush the United Farm Workers' Union. Right now one struggle is in the vineyards of the Coachella Valley near the Mexican border. Further north in Lamont in the San Joaquin Valley, forty Teamsters, or those hired by them, attacked a union picket line with pipes, grape stakes, chains, brass knuckles and clubs. Little protection is offered by local police officials, and for a while, after months of such violence (during which men, women and children suffered brutal attacks), the local field offices of the UFW called off the picket lines for fear a death would result.

But the strike grows, and there is a threat of a general strike thru the valleys.

Frank Fitzsimmons, President of the International Brotherhood of Teamsters, sent fact finders into the Coachella Valley who reported that **they** had been threatened and also subjected to violence at the hands of the man who is heading the Coachella Valley operation; and other Teamsters blame Ralph Cotner, area supervisor of the Western Conference of Teamsters, for the wide-spread violence.

In The Face of Violence

Cesar Chavez' stand on nonviolence is known all over the country, indeed all over the world. (He was invited to speak at an international meeting of peace leaders in India a few years ago.) He has said the Teamsters are deliberately trying to provoke the farm workers to violence (self defense). Homes of the strikers have been burnt down, then cars smashed up, and it is the victims who are being thrown in jails all over California.

In the July 13th issue of **El Malcriado**, a last minute bulletin came that William Grami, director of the Western Conference of Teamsters, had telegraphed Cesar Chavez saying that Teamster “guards” would be withdrawn from the Coachella, San Joaquin and Salinas Valleys.

As Cesar said once—“There are good Teamsters and bad Teamsters.” Certainly these “goons,” to use strikers language, are not good people.

To speak personally, I find it hard to understand why Mary Lathrop (our worker-scholar who helped start a house of hospitality in Salt Lake City with Ammon Hennacy, and who worked in the fields round Stockton, California before the UFW started), is compelled to be a member of the Teamsters Union to earn money **cleaning offices** at Fordham (from which famed college she just graduated), partially working her way thru. (Her brother is a doctor at the clinic which the UFW maintains at Calexico, California, doing his c.o. alternative service there.)

Years ago, I was dumbfounded to find many of our Seattle Catholic Worker volunteers who ran a house of hospitality compelled to be members of the Teamsters Union whether they worked as secretaries at Sears Roebuck or in a beauty parlor.

Right now the workers who truck out the produce and work in the packaging sheds are “Teamsters,” and those who work in the fields are Farm Workers.

We all must keep ourselves informed—keep the boycott going. Boycott lettuce, boycott grapes, boycott A. & P., boycott Safeway. Buy a bundle of **El Malcriado** for \$5.00 for fifty and inform yourself, and pass around (or sell) to friends. Address: Box 62, Keene, California 93531. Put your savings in the UFW Credit Union. It may help some Farm Worker family from being evicted, or enable them to buy a second-hand car to travel the long valleys for work.

Or just send a contribution to keep the soup kitchen going. By sharing and by boycotts you are practicing voluntary poverty. Contact your local UFW office and help in office work or picketing or demonstrating. It is a peaceful revolution which is going on.

Eds. note: The farm workers are about to face another critical test. In late July all of the grape contracts for the Delano region must be re-negotiated. Strong support of the grape boycott will be an incentive for Delano growers to renew their contracts with the farm workers.