

DiGiorgio Struck Huelga! Join By Not Buying

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Summary: Reports on the farm workers strike against the DiGiorgio corporation and lauds the non-violent social movement to give “birth to the new order, the new heaven and new earth in which justice dwelleth.” (DDLW #841).

Although the National Farm Workers Association has managed**to win recognition from Schenley Industries and the Christian Brothers, the strike against the DiGiorgio Corporation, which is the largest grower and distributor of grapes and tree fruits in the world, with net sales last year of two hundred and thirty-two million dollars, is still going on. Anyone who has read such early novels of John Steinbeck as **The Grapes of Wrath** or **In Dubious Battle** will have some idea of what the struggle is like.

From the beginning of the strike students, civil-rights workers, church groups, and our own Catholic Worker people in Oakland and other parts of California have assisted the farm workers by picketing the piers from which the produce is shipped, stores that sell the products of these corporations, and the growers themselves. They have also brought money, food, clothing and medical services to the rural communities involved. But everything ultimately depends on the workers; they are the ones who are giving birth to the new order, the new heaven and the new earth in which justice dwelleth. Here is an excerpt from their manifesto, known as the Delano Plan:

This is the beginning of a social movement in fact and not just in pronouncements. We seek our basic, God given rights as human beings. Because we have suffered and because we are not afraid to suffer—in order to survive we are ready to give up everything, even our lives, in the fight for social justice . . . Our revolution will not be armed, but we want the existing social order to dissolve; we want a new social order. We are poor, we are humble and our only choice is to strike in those ranches where we are not treated with the respect we deserve as working men where our rights as free and sovereign men are not recognized. We do not want the paternalism of the ranchers; we do not want the contractor; we do not want charity at the price of our dignity. We want to be equal with all the working men in the nation; we want a just wage, working conditions and a decent future for our children.

A few communications from readers in the area would have made the best news account of the strike. But I am afraid that the reportorial instinct is not very strong in **Catholic Worker** readers. Or perhaps they are busy helping the farm workers; many tend to be doers, activists**in the good sense of the word, and they often do not realize the value of a short letter or post card describing the situation at first hand.

Strangely enough, I received the latest news of the strike in our local weekly newspaper, which covers Red Hook and Rhinebeck, New York, which are small cities surrounded by fruit farms. There are hundreds of small migrant camps scattered throughout the wealthy counties of Dutchess and Columbia. We have a migrant ministry in the area, and much of the housing is of the kind that caused farm workers in Tulare County, California, to conduct a rent strike.

Torture, California Style

The editorial, entitled “How Not to Do It,” told of the arrest of eight striking grape pickers and two clergymen “who were arrested for trespass on the Borrego Springs property of the DiGiorgio Corporation. They were stripped, searched, handcuffed and chained together for a long ride to a San Diego jail. After release on bail, those arrested said that they had been kept standing in a company truck for four hours pending the arrival of the sheriff’s deputies.

“One cannot fairly prejudice the case; the facts will presumably be brought out at the hearing. But what is known of the story at this stage provokes thought.” Perhaps editors and readers will now begin to think about conditions here on the East Coast, some of which have been described in previous issues of the **CatholicWorker**.

For further news of the non-violent revolution that is taking place (and I count the Poor People’s Corporation and the cooperatives and strikes in Alabama and Mississippi as part of this revolution), subscribe to **El Malcriado**, the Voice of the Farm Worker, which is published in Spanish and English (Box 1069, Delano, California; two dollars a year). There are first-rate drawings by Mexican artists, excellent cartoons, news accounts and letters from people directly involved. According to my dictionary, **malcriado** means ill-bred, rude, uncivil, spoiled. And so these farm workers must seem to the DiGiorgio’s and Schenley’s of this world, daring**as they do to challenge them. But the strikers are using the word in the sense of St. Paul, who boasted: “We are fools for Christ’s sake. . . we are weak. . . we are without honor. . . we are made as the refuse of this world, the offscouring of all, even until now.”

Our Lady of Guadalupe figures prominently in this revolution, as she has in Mexican revolutions in the past. But this revolution, non-violent as it is, must be especially dear to her heart. “The flesh of Jesus is the flesh of Mary,” St. Augustine said. And she knew in her heart, as Jesus did in His, the sufferings and the sweat of the worker, the exile, the poor man.