

Jim Drake 1962–1978

Jim Drake, now deceased, wrote an essay for a book published by the National Farm Worker Ministry entitled, “75 Years – National Farm Worker Ministry, 1920 – 1995.”

Tom Israel, a colleague of Jim Drake, was kind enough to provide the Documentation Project with two of Jim’s unpublished manuscripts, one dated August 27, 1978, and the other, March 24, 1979. Mr. Israel has written a short biography of Jim Drake by way of introduction to these unpublished manuscripts.

- The Editor

National Farm Worker Ministry

“Cardinals, Perlettes, Thompsons ... these varieties of grapes were part of my growing up. Even my Sunday School teacher, Ben Laflin, was a grape grower. When I was in about the seventh grade, he introduced me to Hosea and Amos. Boy, was he sorry 18 years later! About 1967, in June’s 110° sun, Ben caught me picketing his field. “Jim, is that you! What are you doing working with that communist Chavez?” he asked. “Well, Ben, some of the kids were shooting spit wads when you talked about Amos, but I was sort of interested. I listened, and here I am!” I said. (Shortly after that encounter I heard that a few of the Session at Coachella Presbyterian were thinking of asking me to return the 24-volume set of the *Interpreter’s Bible* they had given me for seminary.)

It was sort of out of desperation that I came to work for the California Migrant Ministry back in the spring of 1962. Matthew Drake was born to Susan in November 1961. In December I finished my course work and thesis, and babe and mother flew to California. Always strong of body, and a little weak in the head, I figured I could just drive through the snow out to California. Ninety miles west of New York City, our little Renault blew up. I spent all of our money getting to the West Coast. Broke and sort of scared, I was ready to take any job that came my way. So I fell for the offer from Chris Hartmire in March 1962. I met him in Goshen, about 40 miles from Delano, and he offered me a shot at organizing the community of settling migrants. “Do you know anything about organizing?” Hartmire asked. Well of course I did. I knew everything. I took the job on the spot. The next day I drove to the Visalia Library. In the card file was one book on organizing, published by the United Nations. I stole it.

Chris thought I could learn a little from Cesar, so I was assigned to be trained by him. This meant that the rebuilt Renault and I went all over hell in California. I went to house meetings in places I never heard of. I like to pretend that I had something to do with the founding of the union. In truth, I was just a very good driver. But I did fall for it. I ended up sticking with it for 16 years. In those early days there were some extraordinary people who helped build the framework of the union. For example, Bill Esher showed up, lived in about half a trailer, and put out the *El Malcriado* in the other half. I never saw him have

more than some boiled eggs and potatoes to eat. He sacrificed to paste that newspaper together once a week. Dolores Huerta and Cesar's wife, Helen, were tireless also.

One man I got to know very early was Gilbert Padilla. He, David Havens, and I took money Chris had raised and started the Farm Workers Organization, with an office behind a barbershop in Porterville, 30 miles from Delano. We experimented in radical action a few years before the grape strike. After Porterville, Gil and I settled into the Woodville Labor Camp.

One day the Tulare County Housing Authority arbitrarily raised the rent on the condemned tin shacks from \$19 to \$22/month! I drove down to the camp not knowing this, and there was Gil under the water tank, standing and shouting on top of a car. By the time he got down, he had started a rent strike--300 families joined!

This led to a march from the Linnell Labor Camp near Farmersville to the Tulare County government offices. At the front of the march was 360-pound John Soria and a religious, Brother Gilbert. I didn't see John too often after that march, but Brother Gilbert metamorphosed into LeRoy Chatfield. I think the Christian Brothers felt leading marches was a little far afield for the assistant principal from Bakersfield.

I could tell a couple hundred stories. Some are true.

One favorite memory sticks out in my mind. Senator Robert Kennedy got into the grape strike during a hearing of the Senate subcommittee on migratory labor. He went after the sheriff of Kern County with the energy he'd shown in his attack on Hoffa. This confrontation got on film—Kennedy told the sheriff to spend the lunch break reading the Constitution, and the workers loved him for it.

I sensed that this nervous ball of energy was very courageous, and I hoped he would run for president. When he did make the move, the farmworkers went into high gear, but not without some initial nervousness.

One late night there was a long meeting at Forty Acres. Everyone had their say, but I was quiet. Finally, I decided I would make my point. It was one of the few times I hit the nail on the head. I said, "Kennedy might win without us. But then, he might not. If we sat it out, the chances are greater that he would lose than win. We should just make up our minds that we're going to L.A. and *make* him win." I was so sure of our movement, I knew we would infect everyone else.

Did we move the state? I don't know. But the fact that he won has always meant everything to me. We have to *behave* like we can move the world. If we don't act that way, we won't act at all. We are the difference."

Two Unpublished Manuscripts of Jim Drake

Introduction by Tom Israel

Jim Drake was a young seminary student when he went to work with Cesar Chavez in 1962. Over the next decade and half he was one of Cesar's most seasoned and experienced organizers in the United Farm Workers. He played a leading role in many UFW campaigns, training a generation of organizers and workers. Yet in the world of organizing, Jim was uncharacteristically soft-spoken and self-effacing. He was always behind the scenes, not in the spotlight.

When Jim first arrived in Delano, he was a freshly minted seminary graduate. Through his church, the United Church of Christ, Jim had been sent to complete his training with the California Migrant Ministry. To hear him tell it, the church thought he'd be doing "cookies and milk things" for poor, impoverished farmworkers.

Christ Hartmire, the director of the California Migrant Ministry at the time, had other ideas. Hartmire had met a young Chicano named Cesar Chavez through the Community Services Organization. Chavez was working at CSO. And the CMM was a funder and supporter. In 1962, Chavez left the CSO because it was unwilling to start a labor union for farmworkers, and moved to Delano. There he, Dolores Huerta, and a handful of other committed organizers struck off to build a farmworkers' union.

Hartmire got Jim assigned to work with Chavez's organization. He was one of the first staff to join Chavez's union-building effort. Drake spent the next 16 years of his life with the UFW. Through organizing campaigns, boycotts, strikes, marches, fasts, political campaigns, and bloody battles with the teamsters and the growers, Jim was a senior strategist and lieutenant in Chavez's relentless drive to build the United Farm Workers of America.

From Farmworkers to Pulpwood Cutters

In 1978, it was Jim's turn to strike off on his own. The United Church of Christ invited him to work with—and help organize—agricultural workers of a different sort. These workers were not in the fields of California and the Southwest, but in the woods of the rural South. By midyear, Jim had moved to Mississippi.

He started with just a handful of experienced organizers who followed him from the UFW. The next summer, they were joined by a group of idealistic college students who had been inspired by his speech in Rhode Island. Together, they set out to build a new movement of agricultural workers based both on the lessons of the UFW and the local heritage of the civil rights movement.

The largest agricultural crop in the Deep South is timber. From Louisiana to Georgia, tens of thousands of low-wage workers toil away harvesting trees for the Southern paper industry. At the time, corporations like International Paper and Georgia-Pacific dominated the industry. Their huge mills relied on a constant supply of pulpwood: millions of tons of raw logs and thousands of workers with strong backs to harvest and deliver them.

The workers at the base of the region's largest economic crop were, both economically and literally, the children of sharecroppers. The industry considered them "independent contractors," so they had no health insurance, no workers' compensation, no minimum wage, and no health and safety laws to protect them. They suffered a rate of injury virtually unparalleled in American industry. Like many of their parents, they worked "from can to can't" (from sunrise to sundown), but instead of picking cotton, they ran chainsaws and dragged logs out of the woods to the nearest woodlots. Many were quite literally indentured servants--permanently in debt to their wood dealers.

In the early 1970s there had been an independent organizing effort among these Southern woodcutters. The short-lived union was called the Gulfcoast Pulpwood Association (GPA). It fell victim to the leftist sectarian tendencies of some of its organizers and supporters in the Spartacists League. But it was the GPA that first brought the plight of Southern woodcutters to the attention of the United Church of Christ's board for homeland ministries. And it was this board that later supported Jim's move to Mississippi. In 1978, friends at the board challenged him to use what he had learned with the UFW to help build a union among Southern pulpwood cutters.

Jim spent only a few years in Mississippi, but the organizing he sparked continued. He cultivated a cadre of woodcutter leaders. Men like Willie Lee Little and John Eddy Foster. Workers who had spent their lives scraping out a living for their families. They stood together. They stood up to the power structure. They built an organization.

The United Woodcutters Association (UWA), the United Woodcutters Federal Credit Union, the United Woodcutters Co-op, and the Southern Woodcutters Assistance Project were all products of Jim's work in Mississippi. The UWA organized in more than 35 counties across rural Mississippi. They led strikes and work actions. They won a landmark campaign for the passage of a "fair scaling law" that stopped the rampant cheating of woodcutters who were routinely underpaid for their piece-rate work.

The credit union and co-op helped members meet immediate needs: low-cost chains and chain oil for their chainsaws, and honest credit to get out of debt to the wood buyers. There were parallels to the burial insurance and later the medical and legal clinics that the UFW provided to its membership over the years.

Reflecting on His Years with the UFW

It was during his first year in Mississippi that Jim reflected on--and wrote about--his experiences with Chavez and the UFW. These may well be among his most interesting unpublished manuscripts.

In 1978 Jim wrote a paper on negotiations. It is a fascinating glimpse into the UFW experience negotiating the first contracts with growers in California. From those experiences, he discusses the collective bargaining process and what community groups could learn from it.

The following spring, Jim was invited to speak in Providence, Rhode Island. Organized by student groups that had been working on the J.P. Stevens boycott, the conference was entitled "Contemporary Issues in the American Labor Movement." Jim gave the keynote speech: "Lessons from the UFW." Jim was an organizer who avoided the public spotlight, and this was one of the only times that he spoke in such a public forum about his work.

He used the opportunity to stress two themes. He recounted the organizing heritage of the UFW: tracing its roots through Fred Ross and Saul Alinsky to the likes of Woody Guthrie and Eleanor Roosevelt. For Jim, understanding the links and the connections between generations of organizing was part of understanding who we are and how we are part of a much broader and older movement for social and economic justice.

Jim also spoke about the fundamental building blocks of grassroots organizing that he had learned from Cesar, and as they both had learned from Fred Ross. He talked about the slow and unglamorous work of individual personal visits and house parties, and about how one did not need to organize all the workers, but to organize deeply among the 2% to 5% of the workers who will then have the commitment and dedication to stick with it until they win.

He talked about how critical it is not to organize around what people need (or what you may think they need), but around what people *want*. He also told his listeners that the most important thing about a house meeting is never to have too many people there. Five people are the maximum for a good house meeting, he said. If you want to organize workers in a hurry, maybe have six. Why? For Jim, organizing was a long, slow, steady process. It was about building trust and commitment. It was about building leadership.

Life After Mississippi

Jim was close to the Industrial Areas Foundation throughout his career. In California, the Community Services Organization--where Cesar Chavez and Fred Ross worked--was an IAF project. Once in Mississippi, Jim's organizations were something of a farm team for the IAF. The IAF allowed its staff to participate in its national staff training. But they also hired away some of its best organizers. By the early 1980s, Ed Chambers and Ernie Cortes finally persuaded Jim himself to come work for them at the IAF.

Initially, they sent Jim to the Rio Grande Valley on the Texas-Mexico border, to build a church-based community organization in the barrios of Brownsville. For Jim it was a return to the Chicano culture he had been immersed in for so long--and which he missed during his years in Mississippi. Later, Jim went to New York to build IAF's East Brooklyn churches' organization in the working-class neighborhoods of Brooklyn. Eventually, Jim moved to Boston, continuing his efforts building church-based, multi-issue IAF community organizations in low-income neighborhoods.

Jim never wanted to be in the spotlight. To hear him tell it, the UFW's grape boycott and his role in it was more accidental than strategic. When pressed, he would describe how Cesar and his closest staff were hunkered down, desperately trying to figure out how to win a grape strike that seemed to be going nowhere. No one could figure out what to do. The deck seemed stacked against them. Being the young, Good Samaritan seminary student he was at the time, Jim knew there were things called consumer boycotts. He piped up and said, "What about a boycott?" Cesar laughed and said, "OK Jim, sure, why don't you go see if you can set up a boycott," figuring it was an easy way to get this young kid out of his way. The rest, as they say, is history.

Jim died in 2002 after a lifetime committed to organizing the poor and the dispossessed. But he trained and inspired scores of younger organizers who have spread out across the country. From the likes of Fred Ross, through Cesar, and Jim, it is an organizing heritage that this next generation is privileged to carry on.

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The Chavez Style of Negotiating

August 27, 1978

Since 1962, when Cesar Chavez, his family, and a few friends dedicated themselves to organizing a self-sufficient and independent union of farmworkers, a number of people have remarked about the many "spin-off" results. Some Chicano studies courses carried different articles written by or about Chavez and his organization, and it wasn't unusual for Chicanos in East Los Angeles and other urban barrios to identify their movement with that of the campesinos. During the late 60s, a movement of young Chicanos calling themselves the Brown Berets developed, openly stating that "If Cesar and the campesinos can do it, so can we."

There is something most of these organizations share: they have either been disbanded or are in a condition barely identifiable with their original intent. What became of these energetic organizations and where are their leaders? That alone must one day be analyzed. But, without fully examining the question, I would suggest that, whereas many of the gifted organizers and leaders of the various youth and community action groups were well-

acquainted with the skill of confrontation, they lacked the skill of negotiation--the skill of confrontation resolution.

Cesar Chavez has taught a cadre of negotiators--those who bargain for the established, binding, resolutions to confrontation--the fruit of patient organization. Without these binding agreements, poor people living in this society of printed words would have little guarantee that the struggle they have mounted, the suffering they have poured into their organization, will amount to more than a few headlines, and perhaps, the public identification of their leaders.

It is in the art of negotiation--the compromise that knows no deviation from principle and bargaining for the possible--that Cesar Chavez excels. In his dealings with "authorities" who would advise, direct, or attempt control over the movement, Cesar Chavez has, for almost 30 years, exhibited a remarkable ability to come out on top. This ability grows more from the principle of negotiating for the possible rather than bulling ahead toward the impossible, always educating the people of the victories won through concessions from the opponent. Thus, though there have been setbacks, there has been a constant growth in respect for the leadership and organization of the United Farm Workers. The UFW *produces*.

Here is a brief description of the Chavez style of negotiating.

First, negotiations on behalf of trade union members by negotiators and leaders closely in touch with their members is basically no different from the same process when applied to community organization. Unfortunately, because most community organizations cannot hold accountable their leaders in the same direct and financial way unions do, there sometimes tends to be fuzziness about goals. This occasional fuzziness results from the weak hold that members of a community organization have over their leadership. On the other hand, the union leader operates under several glaring realities: First, he or she must deliver. If not, *out!* Second, union members vote on both their dues level and their contracts. No job, no dues, no contract ratification; these are the strings that bind the union leader. The more direct control community organizations exercise over their leadership, the clearer the targeted goals.

It cannot be emphasized strongly enough that fuzzy goals, outside money, and short-circuited democracy will keep attendance at meetings low, and will probably guarantee an early death to well-intentioned "grass roots" organizations.

Community organizations that can build a power base, identify achievable goals, produce fruitful confrontation, and negotiate with their opponents in a talented manner are bound to win concessions from those who temporarily wield power. Concessions won in negotiated settlements are the stuff from which victories are made, and it is from victories that organized people gain their confidence to break new ground, push ahead ... to new confrontations, new negotiations, new victories.

In the trade movement, the basic fundamental struggle has historically been for “recognition.” A great deal rides on that word for the trade unionist, signifying as it does the crossing of the bridge from organizing, striking, boycotting, enduring, and perhaps even dying, to the “promised land” called “the table.” It is at the table that union men and women want to be. It is at the table that hopes and desires are transferred into contractual agreements.

It is at the table that every community organizer and leader should want to be. Victories are won there, not in jail, on picket lines, or on the march. Don’t misunderstand. Victories without jails or marches are likely to be hollow. Thus, the goal is to be *recognized*, and to be dealt with in the serious way a family deals with a complicated purchase involving legal ramifications. Recognition carries with it both an emotional and legalistic connotation. Many organizers understand the struggle for recognition in the first sense. Just as crucial is the second, formal and legalistic sense.

Organizing For Recognition

Books have been written about the process leading to effective community organization. The process used by the United Farm Workers would consume many pages. Let me emphasize, however, that whatever technique is used, the understanding among the people must be that victory is not gained by the attainment of some specific bill of particulars. Expecting to attain x, y, or z, when perhaps “y” is realistically achievable, places leaders in untenable circumstances. This can lead to demoralization and such misunderstanding that even good leaders can be accused of selling out when they cannot deliver.

In its organizing calls to the people, the United Farm Workers generally emphasized that better specific conditions were targeted, but it also focused on the goal of “recognition of our union.” Recognition and negotiations in good faith are matters worth fighting for; these guarantee respect for the organization, and for each member of the group. The fight for *respect* builds more will-to-win than any fight for specific financial settlement or redress of grievance.

Immediately, however, I am reminded that one does not eat respect. Therefore, organizers from the beginning will emphasize to the people that upon sitting down at the table, “when our power is recognized” we shall want to bargain for x, y, and z.

The key to effective confrontation includes building the *threat* of action to a believable level. Ideally, if teeth can be bared but no bite taken, the result will be more perfect, for to actually bite leaves nothing to be imagined, and may reveal cavities in the teeth. Effectively organized people are terribly more fearsome than radical activists with no mobilized crippling power.

If the confrontation is one that, in part, depends on support from the consuming or voting public, then concurrent with grass-roots organization must be the organizing and

propagandizing of the public. I make this point to emphasize that the general public will also respond better to the struggle for recognition, respect, and “human rights” than it will for a bill of particulars. Furthermore, one never loses the fight for respect; the fight for a specific 20% increase, or other hard goal, may prove to be elusive. Organizers who want to negotiate should not limit the spectrum of possibilities by crowing to the press about specific goals.

Negotiating – Some Ideas for the First Meeting

Before approaching the table, skillful negotiators, leaders, and community representatives will carefully assess just what resources the opponent has to share. Drawing up demands that cannot be met is as sensible as getting on a train headed east when one plans a trip west. The key to meaningful demands is two-sided: research into the possible concessions within the reach of the opponent, and developing demands that satisfy the needs of the people.

There is a third, more difficult aspect to assess: In what state of mind is the opponent? Often, UFW negotiators who meet for the first time with growers who have, for a lifetime, said “No,” will prepare themselves and the people for a day of patient listening, of being firm but sympathetic to the moaning rancher. When the opponent has let off steam and sees you are still waiting to begin negotiations, he/she must reassess his/her position. Often this process leads to the spark of conviction on the part of the opponent that the people do want to negotiate and not destroy.

When a negotiator plans to succeed, a negotiator listens. Reading between the lines, one sees the real intentions of the opponent at the table. The first experience of sitting at the table, particularly if race is involved, is probably ghastly for the opponent. He/she is looking for a way to face-save on the golf course as often as offering ways to settle the dispute at hand. Listen, and patiently look for ways to get serious negotiations on track, realizing that the first meeting calls for diplomacy and even some abuse taking.

Negotiating – Real Collective Bargaining

The best negotiator is so well in command of the subject matter, and has such a feel for the mood and needs of the people, that he/she can be absolutely flexible. Pity the negotiator who feels unsure, and has constantly to be going back to large public meetings to get approval to make a minor move. There is a built-in protective device that every negotiator will want to help guarantee flexibility: the bargaining committee.

A committee of the people who attend every session at the table offers the necessary resource of information the negotiator needs to respond to offers or challenges from the opponent. Furthermore, the committee shows that the community is behind the negotiator. This same committee can serve as an interpretive link back to the people, helping to explain why the negotiator has done what was done.

As the committee becomes more experienced, it often develops into an effective troop of actors, expressing through its groans, nods, sighs, and calls for caucuses, just what the people think of the opponent's positions. Naturally, unless prearranged otherwise, the only spokesperson at the table will be the negotiator. Constant vigilance needs to be exercised to guarantee that the committee keeps secret the strategy of the negotiator.

One of the early actions of the negotiator is to request from the opponent full information that is relevant to the formation of the proposal or demand. Later, if such information is not forthcoming, the fact that information was not given can show that the opponent was not negotiating in good faith. Also, a first step on the negotiator's part is to establish a means of accurate, verbatim note-taking. A careful record of each transaction is crucial to moving toward a contractual relationship.

If the opponent is not willing to agree to a form in which agreed-upon proposals and counter-proposals are "locked in," there will probably be no final agreement. One way to accomplish this "locking-in" is to initialize paragraphs where agreement has been reached.

As negotiations proceed, the negotiator must begin to sense when the momentum is building to wrap things up. Quite often the opponent, having gotten over the face-saving, wants to wrap things up out of boredom. This is particularly true when the opponent is not an attorney being paid by the hour!

Sensing this momentum, there is a place for teeth baring in order to squeeze out the last key agreements. Patience is the proper virtue. Often, by holding out for the last nickel, or in the case of community organizations, the last concession, and showing a little muscle, the opponent will fold. If he/she doesn't, and you must give in, so what? Losing face at this stage is nothing to worry about for the people!

Finally, there are some demands that you, as negotiator, and only you, know you are going to throw away. These are blown way out of proportion early in the process and are fought for with loud voice and patient argument. But in the end, you give up on these two or three items in return for some concessions you have barely mentioned, concessions that you decided at the outset would be of great importance.

The negotiator who isn't confident that he/she can pull off this particular maneuver should wait a couple of times before trying it. It is dangerous, for one can confuse the people and end up with a battle for a throwaway issue.

Throughout all the above processes, the people must be kept informed. If the organization is to be democratic, they shall vote on the final agreement. But the negotiator must not fear the people. If, in good faith, one item or demand has been traded off for a concession, and the people decide they want *both* the traded demand *and* the concession, the integrity of the process must be protected. To return to the table and beg to return to a prior position compromises all the negotiator stands for.

The Uses of Collective Bargaining

Many of the above procedures of negotiating have been mentioned without full development. Within the United Farm Workers, negotiators usually receive a full year of intensive training before being set free to negotiate with a grower. What I have sought to do is open up the possibility that more serious consideration should be given to the confrontation-settlement process.

Looking around, it seems that most long-lived activist movements and organizations have endured as a result of constant struggle that has borne the fruit of negotiated settlements. This is, of course, most evident with trade unions, but can be seen also, for example, in the ongoing work of the Industrial Areas Foundation projects.

I suggest that the process of negotiated settlement can be applied more effectively by a larger number of organizations. Coming to mind immediately are parent organizations dealing with schools, tenant organizations, senior citizens clubs, consumer organizations, and the like. Certainly, the United Farm Workers has shown that it is not only for wages that a community bargains.

Lessons From The U.F.W., March 23-25, 1979

March 24, 1979

I am now working in a completely new situation for me--something that the United Church of Christ has set up. I happen to be a UCC minister and they have supported me for the last 16 years with the United Farm Workers. Now the United Church of Christ has done some research in a number of states in the South to see whether or not there is the possibility of a valid movement among workers who work in the pulpwood and timber industry. I haven't been with the UFW for about the past six months, though my heart is probably always going to be with them.

I am going to try to say something I hope is useful, drawn out of something that was really a gift to me and that was 16 years working with Cesar Chavez. I don't very often get a chance to do this, and certainly not in Mississippi. So I would just like to try to express some of the lessons I have learned from that man and from working with the farmworker movement over the number of years which I was blessed with the possibility of doing so.

I want to do at least three things. I would like to introduce you to the process that the farmworker organizing took from 1962 up to about 1975, because I believe that there is a model there. A model that we are trying to apply to rural workers in Mississippi. I believe it to be a model that might be applied in other organizing efforts among very poor workers. I am not talking about middle-class workers. It is only among very poor workers who need a lot of direct services and have a lot of personal problems that it may be a useful model.

Second, I would like to focus on some of the techniques of organizing that the farmworker movement has used. They are things that are usually not talked about too much because the union is not too anxious for the opposition to get hold of them. But in this kind of group I think it is something we can talk very safely about. I think they are techniques you may find useful in your own style of organizing and may be something you can apply. Then just a few words about the impact of organizing poor workers. That impact and the ripple effect can be seen in the farmworker organizing, particularly in the Southwest. If there is any time left I want to say just a few words about what we are doing in Mississippi and maybe I can persuade some of you to help us someplace down the line.

Cesar Chavez did not come to organizing farmworkers just out of the rural experience. He spent about 10 years working with the Community Service Organization, an Alinsky, I.A.F.-sponsored organization. But if you want to trace back beyond that, you have to go to Fred Ross. Fred now is about 65 or 66 years old, but goes back to the days of the old labor camps, like Grinnell and Woodville in the San Joaquin Valley. He used to manage one of the camps and would sit around them at night with Woody Guthrie. He goes back to the days when Eleanor Roosevelt came around visiting the farmworkers. Those old sheds that the farmworkers were living in until just a few years ago really come out of the 1930s. The organizing efforts that finally bore fruit with Cesar Chavez and the United Farm Workers of the 1960s have to be traced back to the 30s, and most directly traced back to the life of Fred Ross. Now I am not going to give you that whole life. It has to do with the resettlement of the Japanese-Americans after the war and a lot of things he was involved in clear up to the 1970s. One thing Fred Ross learned was that you have to listen very carefully to what the workers are saying before you begin giving your rap. Otherwise they are going to be here, and you are going to be over there. One of the people who learned that lesson best was Cesar. Cesar was an organizer under the direction of Fred Ross. Fred trained Cesar. We always feel that if you really want to train as an organizer you need to go to Fred Ross, because Fred will give you the best training in the United States.

Cesar learned, through 10 years of organizing with the Community Service Organization, that there is one basic rule: You don't bark if you are not going to bite, and you don't go out and try to bite unless you have organized first. So the rule of the United Farm Workers (and it is this rule that has been imprinted on the backs of our eyes) is that you never strike before your organize. You never use a strike as a means of organization. A strike is an effort to win. If you want the people with you, you better have the people organized, and you better not terrorize the people you are trying to organize with a strike. The strike has to grow out of the organization. It will never grow in the other direction. The organization cannot grow out of the strike. You are going to be too busy trying to feed the people and deal with the cops and deal with everything else that you will never get things organized. So organization comes first.

A series of steps that I saw Cesar go through were 1) research, or what we call submarine organizing; 2) secret organizing; 3) experimentation with confrontation—that is, not going out and blowing the whole wad during one big strike but trying it a little bit here and there;

4) mass confrontation, and then expecting, and making the workers understand, that there will be a long period of commitment; and 5) sacrifice, maybe for years. From the very beginning, Cesar instilled these ideas into leadership, as well as in those who would keep the strike going. We learned that it may be up to five years, even 10 years, who knows, in which we would invest our lives in this--the ultimate commitment to get the job done. So nobody would be surprised when it takes a long time. Then, eventually, 6) negotiations; and 7) contract ratification and those matters would result. Ultimately, 8) administration would be necessary to deal with all those new creations that come about when you have a union. When you do win, what do you do? Is that going to be it or how do you move from that onto the next step? Now all of that took 15 years, culminating in 9) legislation to really put the lid on everything. But I want to go back through it now and just tell you what some of the events were.

From 1958 to 1962, Cesar was working with the Community Service Organization, often in a more urban situation. Nonetheless, he began doing a lot of research into what happened during the 30s. The Communists, the CIO, and later the AFL, the meatcutters--all these groups came rushing through the San Joaquin Valley trying to organize farmworkers. That research led him to the basic understanding that you cannot use a strike to organize. That was the big downfall that everyone ran up against. The second thing he learned was this: In light of the fact that you are a minority in a bad situation, you had better commit yourself to nonviolence. So it was a tactical decision--a personal decision on the part of Cesar--but a tactical decision that the leadership on the picket line better understand that they had to keep things in line. The history of organizing farmworkers in California was full of incidents where the whole strike got locked up and they threw away the key. It is very hard to organize under those conditions. The third thing he came to understand was that one of the reasons that most of those strikes had failed in the past was probably because the responsibility was never spread across the whole nation. It always fell on the organizers and on the workers to try to win. That was really the key--understanding that we are all responsible for the suffering of our brothers and sisters. Ultimately that developed into the fact that if you eat you are one of our constituency because we are going to boycott something you eat. So you have to organize all of humankind in the United States in order to win. You better plan on doing that for any battle you have coming down the pipe, whether it is J. P. Stephens workers or woodcutters in Mississippi or whatever. You better understand that poor workers in this society are where they are because way up here in Providence, we left them there. Or way back there in the 30s we wrote them out of the Wagner Act. We did something that locked them into that situation, so it's all of our responsibility. Cesar was very good at going out and dragging the whole American public into the fray.

The second stage is the secret organizing. This went on from 1962 to 1965, mostly in the Delano area. One of the key things to remember from that period is that it is not the size of the group you have, it is the commitment that you have. It is not that you have all the workers organized, but that you have a core that is so committed that they infect all the workers around them. Concentrating just in one area is about the only way you can do that.

If you try to spread yourself among all the workers, in whatever workforce you are trying to organize, then you are going to do about 5% of organizing of maybe 20% of the workers. Forget about it, you are just never going to make it. Do 90% or 100% of organizing among 2%, maybe 5% of the workers. If you get 5% of the jewelry workers here organized, really organized, committed, willing to stick it out for 20 years if they have to, you are going to win. They have the drive and they will see to it that you win. We went all over the world telling people that there were thousands of grape pickers out on strike. We made it look like thousands, because we would move people around real fast. The ones who moved really moved. They would think nothing of giving up their homes and everything to go to New York or Chicago for the boycott. That is the commitment that won.

I talked about controlled experimentation with confrontation. There was a little strike back in 1965, which probably nobody remembers, called the J. D. Martin strike. Cesar was so afraid that it might spread that he did not even put up picket lines, he just pulled the people out to see what would happen. He took 60 people out of the fields just to see if we had infected the community enough, if just the fact that we were spreading the word was enough to keep people from going in. It was enough for everyone who lived in the Delano area, but one of the lessons we hadn't learned was that there was this whole Southern hemisphere just waiting to come north to work. It wasn't until we had tried it that we really learned what to expect in terms of the importation of workers from Mexico. That experimentation taught us very quickly that we had better buckle down for a long, long fight. Then there was the all-out confrontation in 1965. That was the Delano grape strike that lasted for five years.

One of the things that all of the lessons you learn does not really prepare you for is treachery. We never expected quite the dose that we actually got from the Teamsters. We would have written, signed, contractual arrangements—jurisdictional agreements—that were also good for starting your wood stove. They just did not seem to stop the Teamster organizers from breaking things up. If it had not been for that kind of involvement on the part of the Teamsters, farmworkers now would probably be five to 10 years farther ahead than they are now. Going through all that effort, not once but twice, to get the Teamsters out of there really wore a lot of people out, to say nothing of costing a few lives. Now I just want to talk a little about the techniques.

The technique is as important as the goal. Even if you have a really fine idea of what you want to organize, if you cannot get from here to there your idea remains just that—an idea. Let me review what we call the Fred Ross school of organizing.

To me, it starts with getting the focus. The key word is focus. One of the problems of conferences is there is no focus. So at the end of the conference you ask, what did we *do*? What was it all about? If the focus of the conference was just to disseminate a lot of information, then that is very good. But that cannot be the focus of organizing. The focus of organizing has to be on a hard, measurable result. You can get that only if you are like a

mule with blinders on. In other words, you have to block out all interference. You have to decide that this is what my life is going to be. My life is going to be dedicated to organizing workers to accomplish x, y, and z. For the next, nobody knows how many years, I may not see my children, I may not eat regularly, and I may not sleep regularly. I just have to decide that such is the way life is going to be. Another thing is to ask yourself: If I am going to do that, do I mean it? You are going to hurt a lot of people if you don't mean it. You really can hurt a lot of people if you don't mean that. You shouldn't put gas in the tank if you are not going to make the trip because it costs too much now. Don't get people geared up unless you are going to go and you are going to go all the way. Once you have made that decision, and you have got the commitment, and you are not going to muddy the waters for some other organizer coming down the road, then there are some very specific things that I think are helpful to do.

You should spend a little time researching the specifics of the industry. If possible, get somebody else to do that. Get a lot of people to do it. If you do this, you can usually find out what the industry is really like. One person usually has a bias and will only research one aspect of the industry. Get everybody to do some research, then put it all together.

When you get ready to actually do the organizing, before you jump in and say, "I have got this great organization," listen very carefully to what the workers have to say. And make sure you hear what they are saying. Here is a little story that I just ran into the other day: Does anybody know where Yazoo County is in Mississippi? The sheriff of Yazoo County was sitting around a wood stove when a fellow came in. The sheriff had a really nice hunting dog sitting next to him. The fellow said,

"Sheriff, does your dog bite?"

"Nope."

This fellow went over and started to scratch the dog's head and the dog just about bit his whole arm off. The sheriff and some of the other folks around there knew First Aid and they fixed him up just fine. The fellow came back to his senses and said,

"Sheriff, I thought you said your dog don't bite."

"That's not my dog."

That is just a little lesson in listening to what people are saying. If you listen real carefully—and there is a difference between listening and hearing--and you really hear what they are saying, then you are going to be able to put together your rap for your house meeting. This is something that you do not do lightly. It means talking to dozens of workers who you intend to organize down the line. Hearing them tell you not what they need (because you are going to have pretty much made up your mind about what they need, that's our job, right, as middle-class whites, to figure out what people need), but what they want. There is

no use trying to organize people around what they need if it's not what they want, because they may not know they need it. They will tell you what they want. Once you have got that little kernel of what they want, you are going to find out how quickly they respond when you have a house meeting and explain to them that what you are doing is exactly what they want.

House meetings develop out of what we call personal visits. The personal visit needs to be written down and discussed among the organizers so you can determine exactly what you are all going to say. There is nothing worse than for one worker in a plant to say, "Yeh, I talked to somebody who came over to my house and they said this and this and this," only to have another worker report that he heard it from somebody else, but they said "that and that and that." It is very important that everybody say the same thing in the organizing campaign.

Out of the personal visits you are going to get a house meeting. The important thing is never to have too many people at your meeting. Discourage people from coming. Have only five at the most. A meeting of five is the maximum that a useful meeting can handle. If you want to organize workers in a hurry ... maybe have six. If you have more than six, you are really going to get messed up. From the personal visits you are going to find that worker who is going to invite four or five other persons to his or her home. Then it is a whole different structure from a meeting like this where you invite everyone to come. If I invite everyone, and you are all workers in a plant, you don't really know each other in the room. You don't know whether you are free to speak. If you are all friends already, if all five of you know one another through the host or hostess, then you know that you can speak out. We tried this in organizing farmworkers, we tried it in organizing the boycott, and now we are using it to organize black and white woodcutters. It can be used in any organizing campaign. You use a house meeting when you start out with a group of friends.

You don't start the meeting out this way, "I don't suppose you all are interested in hearing about what we are doing ..." No, you do not start that way. You say, "Have you heard about the organizing campaign that is going on in your community?" Even if that is the first person you have talked to in that community, that is how you start the conversation. "No, I haven't heard about it." "You haven't! Well let me come in and tell you about it." You do the same thing when you get to the house meeting. "Have you all heard about the organizing campaign going on in your community?" "No." "No? Well, (you've been left out) let me tell you about it." The worst thing is to say, "I don't suppose you want me to tell you about what's happening, do you?" But I have seen organizers try to start out that way, kind of apologetic for bothering people.

Whatever your rap is in the house meeting, the key is to wind up with a commitment from that small group of five. This is the first commitment you are going to ask of the group. Those five workers are eventually going to be your international union. You may as well start then getting the commitment form them that you are going to expect all the way down the line. It is not going to get any easier, so start right at the beginning. What you

want from those five is five more house meetings. Each one of those workers has five other workers that they know. It sounds like you're selling Tupperware or something, but it works. Out of that group of five people, if you are fortunate, you will come up with 20 people who know each other. And after that 20, you start a chain. You see how it works.

That style of organizing cannot fail. It is foolproof, and you don't have to be an organizer to make it work. The whole international grape boycott was built on the shoulders of persons just as scared of what we are doing as you and me in this room. They all went out and did the same thing, held house meetings. They got women who had never been close to a picket line, on a picket line, leading them. Housewives, persons who were told they were good for nothing but being housewives, found out all of a sudden, through house meetings and the whole process, that they had a whole lot more to do in life than just those things. The proof that starting with this simple little house meeting and building workers is there. The proof is there in the form of an organization with more than 100,000 workers. It is something that a lot of people want to ignore. They want to jump over all that hard work in the first two or three years of building an organization. From those meetings you are going to get to the area meetings, or if it's a plant maybe it's a section meeting, or it's this floor, or maybe the whole plant meeting if you are ready for it. From that first meeting you are ready to start planning actions.

Meetings are for working out actions. People are not going to come to meetings very long just to get information or listen to somebody. People will always keep coming back to meetings if they are going to plan something where they are going to get even. If you get there and people are mad, tell them, "Don't get mad, get even."

The worker is not necessarily the one who is going to make the decision about what he or she is going to do, it is the family that is going to make the decision. All organizing needs to be family-oriented, whether it is organizing for the boycott to get people out to picket, or whether it is organizing workers to get out to strike. I think that is probably what is wrong with the trade union movement as it stands now. It is not community-based; it is not family-based. It is wrapped up in the heads, in the hands, and in the minds of some professionals. That is not what the union movement was made to be. It was made to be part of the community. As soon as it gets away from that, it is going to fail; it is going to get stale; it is going to get dry; and people are not going to come to the meetings. They are not going to plan anything because it is no longer part of life. It has disassociated itself from the heart of life, which is the family.

The last thing I want to address is the possible impact of organizing workers within the kind of society we live in. I do not know the answer to that from a very scholastic point of view. But I can see what has happened where workers have organized in California and some other areas, particularly if they are the really dispossessed in the community. We are very proud in America talking about the balanced society that we have. It all works on a fulcrum, it all teeters there, because it is balanced. We have a balanced economy. We have a balanced way of life. Everything is supposed to be modulated and even. That is our

greatest advantage in organizing: that everything is teetering there. The reason it is balanced is because the possessors of the dispossessed have got it just right. For instance, in the wood business they have it figured out that if they pay just this much per cord of wood, that they can keep those trucks and everything just right and just meet the bills. If the price of gas goes up they won't raise the price of wood enough to really make a change in the standard of living. They will raise the price just enough to pay for that little bit of gas just to keep the machine running.

Because everything is balanced and based on unemployment and on imported labor, and on poverty--because that is the way our system is balanced--it means that just a little organizing of the poor knocks it all out of kilter. You don't have to organize all the poor, because the system is balanced on an egg. Just organizing that little 4% or 5% of the farmworkers in California upset the whole political machinery--and they couldn't even vote! They weren't even citizens. They were really mercenaries, they would go out and work for other people's campaigns. I wouldn't say that they would go to the highest bidder, but they made sure they did not waste any time in anybody's campaign that they weren't going to get a hell of a lot back from, including the governor of California. When it came time for a piece of legislation, Jerry Brown screamed and squawked, but when it came right down to it he had to deliver because he was there thanks to the farmworkers.

There is a ripple effect of organizing that is much greater and is hard to measure in one lifetime. I was very fortunate when I finished seminary. It just happened that I came to California in April of 1962, the same time that Cesar left Oxnard to move to Delano. I was assigned to him for my training, doing cookies-and-milk things for farmworkers. That was what the church was doing then, cookies and milk. Chris Hartmire, the director of the new Migrant Ministry, decided that they had had enough cookies and milk, that it wasn't changing things, and that they would experiment and send somebody over to this guy Chavez and see what happened.

What I saw was the organizing going back to Fred Ross, the C.P., the C.I.O., the A.F.L., and the Filipinos who organized way back in the 20s. All of that had a ripple effect as far as agricultural labor was concerned. Had there never been that organizing, there never would have been a Fred Ross involved, and if there had never been a Fred Ross there never would have been a Cesar Chavez involved. It all ties together. No organizing is wasted. No organizing is ever wasted.

What we should do is look to organize the poorest persons, the poorest communities, the most dispossessed. The system needs them most to be in their situation. We can most easily knock the system out of kilter by organizing those at the poorest level. Farmworkers who can't even vote in California have tremendous influence politically. Just because of their energy, not because of their vote. I believe that is where you are going to find the most energy among the poorest workers.

I was really discouraged for a number of years, though I am getting out of it now. It seemed to me that kids during the 60s were up against it and they did not want to go to Vietnam. They were very quick to go to the workers and ask them to get behind the movement. They condemned all of the labor movement who would not get on the bandwagon to stop the war. Why? Because it was in their self-interest to stop the war. I am not saying that there was not a lot of idealism behind trying to stop that war. But there is just as big a crisis going on as far as people suffering and dying today as there was then. Where are the kids? It is not in their self-interest to organize anymore. We should all be damned for that fact. Just because it is not in our self-interest when someone starves someplace, that does not mean that we are off the hook. I happen to come out of that Judeo-Christian community where one guy, D.E. Niels, wrote a book called *The Preacher's Calling to be Servant*, which says that if you are going to call yourself Christian you have to be ready to place yourself at the mercy of other persons. That is what being a Christian is all about, being at the mercy of others, to act out that crucifixion.

I don't know if I believe all of that anymore. But I do believe that if there is any kind of salvation for humankind, it will come only when you and I place ourselves at the mercy of the dispossessed. Because right now they are at our mercy. Even though we feel that we don't have too many morality problems, we are just trying to cleanse ourselves of all our guilt, because they are really at our mercy. There is nothing wrong with being a student, just don't carry it too far. There comes a time when you have to place yourself at the mercy of working people, here or someplace else. You have got to decide whether what you are doing right now is better than placing yourself at the mercy of working people and correcting the abominable situations that we face.