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Edgar Z. Friedenberg, PhD'46, a professor emeritus at Dalhousie University, died June 1 in Halifax, Nova Scotia. He was 79. A scholar of education and gender studies, Friedenberg left the U.S. during the Vietnam era. His 1959 book, *The Vanishing Adolescent*, a sociological study of teens, has been reprinted ten times and translated into several languages. He was active in the Canadian Civil Liberties Union.

Another America

By Edgar Z. Friedenberg

In September, 1965, there began in Delano, California, a strike whose impact on the evolution of labor relations in this country, and on the quality of American democracy, is likely to be out of all proportion to the number of people, strategic importance of the industry, or bread-and-butter issues involved. This is the strike called against the local grape growers by the independent National Farm Workers Association, and the AFL-CIO Agricultural Workers Organizing Committee. Both are new organizations. Though the most active leaders of AWOC have grown old in the labor movement, AWOC itself was founded in 1959; NFWA was started in 1962 by Cesar Chavez, a native Californian from Brawley, in the Imperial Valley, whose childhood and youth were spent in a series of agricultural labor camps.

Agricultural workers are today the most helpless and deprived labor force in the country, and by a margin that readers accustomed to present-day industrial conditions can hardly imagine. These workers have never been effectively unionized. Partly for this reason, they have been excluded from nearly all legislation that guarantees the rights of workers and establishes collective bargaining machinery in industry. Agricultural workers are still treated under law as if they worked on family farms, under the genial supervision of the farmer and his bountiful wife. This is not justifiable in any part of America today; in California, where agriculture has been big business since long before Steinbeck wrote *The Grapes of Wrath* and Carey McWilliams reported on *Factories in the Field*, it is absurd.

Added to their legal disabilities are those imposed on agricultural labor by the way it is recruited, administered, and housed—limitations which, however, are less applicable to the grape industry than to the "stoop-labor" crops of truck gardens like melons or lettuce. In these crops, which are highly seasonal, workers are usually not employed directly by the grower at all, but by labor contractors who recruit them through publicly operated employment offices, or simply hire them off the streets of Skid Row at dawn and load them into trucks or old school buses for the trip to the fields. For longer or more remote jobs the workers are lodged in camps located on company property and inaccessible except by trespass or the owner's permission.

The difficulties of organizing agricultural workers and getting them into a position to improve their lot are therefore enormous. They are usually disfranchised and virtually unschooled—Chavez, who got as far as the eighth grade by heroic efforts, attended forty schools to do it.¹⁴ Organizers cannot approach them either at work or afterwards, since the camp may be their only home. They are politically powerless and often apathetic; the growers have great political influence at all levels.

Administratively, too, the problems are overwhelming. As Henry Anderson, Chairman of Citizens for Farm Labor—an organization including labor and civil rights leaders, university professors, and other Californians—observed in a broadcast on KPFA last December 3rd:

...a strike presupposes the existence of some sort of framework, some sort of ground rules, for negotiation. It presupposes the existence of collective bargaining machinery. There is no such machinery in agriculture. Not more than one in a hundred California farm workers is represented by anyone, in any meaningful sense. There is no way to find by whom farm workers would like to be represented, if anyone. No one has a list of workers who are "attached" to the grape industry; where they live; or anything which needs to be known if there is to be any sort of contract covering them. These are some of the consequences of the fact that agriculture is excluded from the Labor-Management Relations Act of 1947 (Taft-Hartley) and from the jurisdiction of the National Labor Relations Board.

The grape industry, however, presents several features that make it a promising place to begin trying to organize agricultural workers. Grapes are not quite as seasonal as most truck garden crops. Like all crops, they have to be harvested; but they also have to be pruned, and sprayed, and sprayed, and sprayed throughout the growing season. Even the six vines I have in my back yard have become impossibly demanding, and I have about let them go to seed. This means that grape-production relies, in part, on a comparatively stable, less migratory labor force, with potential political power if the workers can be got to register. The grape industry makes little use of labor contractors; growers hire directly, which means that negotiations will be that much simpler if they can ever be got under way. Grape-tending, by and large, requires skill and dependability. It is not a job for casual laborers; "winos" may depend on the grape industry to keep them going, but the industry cannot depend on them to keep it going. This makes workers who strike more difficult to replace.

Striking under these conditions amounts primarily then to trying to persuade grape-workers not to work for the struck growers. This task has two main aspects. First, it is necessary to build *esprit de corps* among local groups of workers and potential workers; then, it is necessary to picket the fields in order to try to dissuade new recruits, or old employees who have decided to remain loyal to the employer, from scabbing. Building group spirit, however, requires great resourcefulness when dealing with a labor force as ethnically varied as grape-workers, who are primarily of Mexican and Filipino stock, but who also include

more exotic elements, like one camp full of Yemenites I observed, whose quarters were festooned with highly decorative signs in Arabic.

Picketing is likewise difficult when the workers are brought directly to the employer's property in his own trucks and lodged in its midst; and when the growers find it comparatively easy to obtain restraining orders from familiar and understanding local authorities, even though these orders may be vacated at the next level of appeal. I observed one such picket; and found it an extremely moving experience but not, I should judge, a particularly effective one in getting anybody to quit pruning grapes. Picketing begins at dawn, when workers move out into the fields; but the pickets move in motorcades from one operation to another. At the location I observed, two miles or so out of Delano, about a dozen picketers were drawn up on the far side of a narrow county road while workers' and growers' automobiles were parked on the field side. This picket had been dispatched from Chavez's organization, and bore NFWA'S splendid barbaric device—a black eagle on a scarlet ground, with the single word HUELGA (strike). There were some banners, but most of these were circular, wooden signs on long rods which looked like the emblems carried in the grand procession in *Aida*. The young men who composed the picket marched slowly and with great dignity; while a stout and forceful young woman addressed the fields across the road in Spanish through a portable loud-hailer.

BUT ONLY three or four pruners were visible in the field—whether because the strike was succeeding there, or because the field-bosses had moved the pruners back onto the land and out of earshot, as they often do when a roving picket arrives, I do not know. The growers' representative, a young man in a black sombrero, paced up and down the roadside opposite and tended his own public address system, which was being run from the battery of his car and played light music. The intent was to drown out the speech the young woman was giving; but the effect, I thought—since I couldn't understand it, anyway—was rather to set it off, like the musical portion of the sound track of a foreign movie. But what contributed most to the emotional impact of the scene was its saturation by police. To protect the peace of Tulare County (Delano is in Kern County, but this was just over the line) from these ten or twelve people who glowed with composure, restraint, and determination, there was a deputy sheriff in his paddy wagon—which here, as is usual in California, is an ordinary station wagon made sinister by removing the inside handles of the rear doors and erecting a heavy metal screen above the front seat—and two cruising patrol cars that drove back and forth along this tiny stretch of road. They were accompanied by two little unmarked red trucks which the picket captain told me belonged to the grape corporation, whose function I cannot grasp unless it was to remind the police to do their duty impartially. The deputy sheriff, an unusually civil servant, did walk over and bid the pickets a genial good morning, observing that it was going to be a nice day, which it was, in many respects. (On other occasions, several of the pickets informed me, the day had been marred by considerably more aggressive behavior by some of the sheriff's colleagues.)

To plan and conduct this complex enterprise, making the most of limited resources and avoiding the continual danger of internal conflict, requires leadership of a very high order, and self-discipline among a great many hard-pressed people. This is particularly true because of the severely contrasting styles of NFWA and AWOC. Both are chaired locally by impressive and able men. But Cesar Chavez designed and built his own organization, and its approach is something new to American labor. Larry Itliong, the courtly regional director of AWOC, bears the burden, and occasionally receives the support, of the entire structure of American organized labor. So far, organized labor has behaved rather ambiguously about the grape strike. Walter Reuther has delivered \$10,000 to the Delano strike fund, and pledged to support it in future at the rate of \$5,000 per month. Longshoremen have immensely heartened the Delano leaders by refusing to load grapes from struck vineyards on ships for export. But the Teamster's Union would have given the strike far more decisive support if it had refused to truck the grapes out of Delano; and it hasn't. Drivers sometimes observe the picket line *pro forma*, parking outside it and leaving the actual crossing of the line to be done by employees of the grower who bring the grapes out to the truck. And, indeed, there is a question whether such refusal by the Teamsters would be illegal under the Taft-Hartley Act, complicated by the fact that agricultural workers are excluded from it.

What the AFL-CIO has provided unstintingly is a procession of dignitaries giving speeches. AWOC'S headquarters are in the Filipino Hall, a shabby, battleship-clean building with an auditorium, a few offices, and a soup kitchen. During the day, idle workers sit around watching television or chatting; there are grave, curious children; and a crew of women preparing delicious and abundant food which they graciously invited a friend and myself to share. The atmosphere is precisely that of a church social; even the sign at the entrance to the chow line advising that "none will be turned away," though active pickets have precedence, is written in gothic script. The hall fills for the evening meal, with gentle, dignified Filipino farm workers. Then, at six-thirty, the meeting begins, and goes on till nine o'clock—and, suddenly, the audience, though addressed by Mr. Itliong from the chairs as "Brother—" or "Sister—", finds itself at the equivalent atmospherically of a Democratic rally in the Bronx. Inspirational greetings are given by the heads of Ethnic-American Associations, down from San Francisco on a visit, along with an official from the SNCC office, or a young civil-rights lawyer, in blue-jeans. Mr. Itliong's superior in AWOC, Al Green, also down from the city, comes on as the horny-handed veteran of the labor movement that he genuinely is, reminding one how times have changed. The favorite daughter of the Delano strike, Mrs. Anne Draper, Regional Director of the Union Label Department of the Amalgamated Clothing Workers of America, AFL-CIO, speaks unabashedly to the workers as her children—"the best children any mother could have"—and they are utterly delighted. No one has worked more devotedly for *La Huelga* than Mrs. Draper, and she is both indefatigable and very bright. To an ex-Brooklynite like myself, her style suggests rich chicken-soup in an inexhaustible cauldron of tough, shiny, stainless steel. This sort of meeting goes on nearly every night, and most of the distinguished guests tell the workers they can't lose. The effect is of watching a new play of Bertholt Brecht, more ironical than most.

AT 102 Albany Street, in a little grocery store converted to offices at the corner of two dirt roads southwest of town, Cesar Chavez has established the very different headquarters of the National Farm Workers Association. The address will, I think, be a historic one; any reader who wishes to be sure to retain it might do well to write it down in some secure place, like his checkbook. NFWA also runs a meal service for its pickets, and pays those on actual duty; stockpiles food and clothing for them and their family, and pays rent and, when it can, car payments. It runs a credit union for its members, who pay \$3.50 a month and publishes, for \$2 a year, a sprightly illustrated fortnightly called *El Malcriado* in two editions, Spanish and English. It supports a satirical troupe called *El Teatro Campesino*, which puts on sketches and playlets. But its most notable accomplishment was to obtain from the Office of Economic Opportunity a grant of \$267,887 for "a plan for sending out cadres of trained workers to collect basic facts about farm workers' lives and also to instruct the marginal workers in better money management and developing their communities."^[2] Chavez, on being informed of the grant, immediately requested that the money be withheld until the strike had been settled, so that NFWA could not be accused of using it as a war chest; and this has been done. Nevertheless, the Delano City Council has officially complained of the grant, characterizing Chavez in a Resolution as "...well known in this city, having spent various periods of his life in this community, including attendance at public schools, and it is the opinion of this Council that he does not merit the trust of the Council with regard to the administration of the grant."^[3]

This opinion of the Delano City Council differs, apparently, from that of Stephen Spender. On a bulletin board in the barren outer office at 102 Albany there is pinned, along with maps and instructions to pickets, and a list of grocery and laundry items needed for the strikers' depot, a holograph copy of a poem by Spender inscribed "for Cesar Chavez" and reading, familiarly;

*I think continually of those who were truly great
Who from the womb remembered the soul's history...*

It is strange that the Delano City Council should have advanced an argument that tends to establish Chavez as a home-town boy, since real resentment of the strike centers, as with the Civil Rights Movement in the South, on the issue of outside intervention. Thus, the *Delano Record* for January 11, 1966 has two headlines: DEMAND FOR DELANO GRAPES JUMPS ("Delano area grape grower Jack Pandol says national publicity from union efforts has helped to boost the sale of Delano grape products....") and CATHOLIC BISHOP SCORES PRIEST FOR "PERFORMANCE" HERE—an account of the condemnation by the Bishop of Monterey-Fresno of the Reverend James Vizzard, S.J., Director of the Washington, D.C. office of the National Catholic Rural Life Conference "and his intrusive associates" for coming to Delano and speaking in support of the strike. A broadside sheet entitled FACTS FROM DELANO, bearing no date or attribution, which was given me by a grower on my request for publications expressing their viewpoint,

features a statement signed by the Delano Ministerial Association and even Protestant ministers individually stating that the Association...has not fostered nor does it encourage any ecclesiastical demonstration or interference in the farm labor situation." This sheet also reproduces a report from the *Delano Record* that the Delano chapter of Community Service Organization:

...deplores sincerely the civil rights movements that has become the prevailing issue in the former local labor dispute in our community. We sympathize with the plight of the farm worker or any other worker in those areas where poverty exists and where they are exploited, but we feel that these conditions are not prevalent in the Delano area. Delano CSO through experience knows that living conditions of farm workers in our area are far more adequate than those of the poor living in the ghettos [sic] of our large cities. We feel that the outside elements invading our city are performing a dis-service to the well-being of our community by creating adverse conditions and feeling of animosity among the citizenry that have not existed in our city for the past 25 to 30 years.

This statement created a hassle when it was published; for Cesar Chavez was trained in various CSO operations, and left the organization amicably when he felt that it was emphasizing urban problems too much to provide scope for his interests in farm labor. CSO is primarily a Mexican-American social action group that functions in California along the self-directing lines laid down by Saul Alinsky; and at a special meeting in Fresno.¹⁴ the organization repudiated the action of its Delano chapter by endorsing the grape strike. Nevertheless, the Delano chapter's statement about working conditions in the area seems to me justified. Chavez's choice of Delano as a proving ground for his approach to the organization of agricultural labor follows the highly sophisticated revolutionary principle that successful revolt starts with the richest of the poor—the poorest are too abject, vulnerable, and apathetic. Even around AWOC I heard few expressions of discontent with the money grape-workers were now earning, which comes close to the \$1.40 per hour they want—though there was widespread belief that wages would immediately fall if the strike failed.

ON MY WAY north from Delano, I stopped in the neighboring community of Earlimart to interview Mark Zaninovich, Jr., who, two years earlier, had been vice-president of the student body at the University of California, Davis, and who is some twenty years my junior, but who recently took over from his father the management of one of the major grape companies in the state, which is regarded as a leading opponent of the strike. I had not previously met Mr. Zaninovich, and he clearly perceived that I was sympathetic to *La Huelga*. But he received me with flawless, though formal, courtesy and spent more than two hours at the close of an exceptionally busy day driving me over grape fields—his own, and those of other growers—showing me anything I cared to see. He was plainly torn between his conviction that I would be suspicious of anything he selected to point out and his shrewd hunch that I was too ignorant to know what to ask him to show me. But once I got

used to the idea of riding over unmarked dirt roads in a beat-up pick-up truck with a mobile telephone in it and a sticker reading "I fight poverty; I work" on the bumper, we got along well enough.

What I wanted to see was the camps the workers are lodged in; and Mr. Zaninovich showed me three, all different, with different owners. I found them appalling; but not because they were physically squalid. None was that. And none suggested any form of oppression—though one did bear on its woodwork the marks of a recent firebomb which had rendered two bedrooms uninhabitable.

What was appalling was the conception of the kind of life that is good enough for a human being, which underlies the very design of these camps. The first one Mr. Zaninovich showed me belonged to his own company; and he apologized for its age and shabbiness. As soon as his company could afford it—and, despite the strike, they were running a little ahead of schedule on their operations—they planned to build one like the next camp he would take me to; his company didn't own it, but it was brand-new and a model of what such a camp might be.

It was a horrible place. The Zaninovich camp had not been bad; it was weathered, but clean, and rather suggested an old-fashioned tourist court of the early days of motoring. The new place was air-conditioned and centrally heated; steam burst aggressively out through the doors of its ample shower rooms. But it was still a long, concrete building whose central corridor was lined with doors that do not reach the floor. Each little room houses two men. Nobody had turned on the electric light in the corridor, which was illuminated only by the light of dusk coming under the stall-like doors. This is not, in the ordinary sense, a temporary dwelling. Migrant workers move from one such camp to another, following the crops; many have no other home than such a camp all their adult working lives. This, as Mr. Zaninovich truly said, was one of the best in the country; but nobody accustomed to an ordinary American life—even a poor man's life—could design such a structure for the use of other human beings unless he believed that they ought to accept a pattern of life so impoverished as to suggest a different species. In the next, and last, camp that we stopped at, Mr. Zaninovich asked one of the workers he knew and was on friendly terms with if he would mind showing me his room. The man at first demurred with a giggle because he had "awful things" in it; then flung the door open. The walls were lined with commonplace nude pin-ups and the bed had a cheap scarf on it with a similar design. The only awful thing was that the man was in his thirties, and this was the best he had, except when he made a visit to his home, in Yemen. Meanwhile, he was saving his money to retire there ultimately, a wealthy man. It was, as Mr. Zaninovich said, a classic example of a man bettering himself economically by his own efforts.

I THOUGHT of this man; comparing him to the people I had been with earlier on the picket line; and it occurred to me that they seemed the only people I had seen in months

who seemed positively happy and free from self-pity. In their response to me, they had been friendlier and more open, by far, than most of the people I meet; though my speech and manner must have struck them as very unlike their own. I wondered why they had trusted me; then I realized that, of course, they hadn't. It was themselves they had trusted; such people do not fear strangers. Whether he wins *La Huelga* or not, this Cesar Chavez has done; or rather, has taught his people to do for themselves. Nothing I know of in the history of labor in America shows as much sheer creativity as NFWA, as much respect for what people, however poor, might make of their own lives once they understood the dynamics of their society. The cardinal sin of labor leaders, indeed—their special form of *accidia*, not of pride—is pomposity. If NFWA becomes sinful, it will be in quite a different way. I don't know the exact title of this sin; but an example of it would be restoring to all of us our common speech, and reconstructing the Tower of Babel.

Notes

^[1] Truman E. Moore, *The Slaves We Rent* (Random House, 1965), p. 130

^[2] *San Francisco Sunday Examiner and Chronicle*, Sec. 1, p. 7, October 17, 1965

^[3] *The Movement* (published by SNCC of California) Boycott Supplement

^[4] *El Malcriado*, 25, p. 4