

## HISTORY OF THE FARM WORKER MOVEMENT

(As told by Fred Ross, Sr. in Dayton, Ohio,  
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### Part I BACKGROUND

The early groups of immigrants were enticed by the big growers to come to California. As soon as each group began to organize to improve conditions in the fields, their strikes were crushed by the growers and cops, and they were replaced by other groups.

The Japanese were among the earliest to be treated in this way. They began to work in the sugar beets, and they were very independent. Soon they began to organize and not only that, they began to buy land. They were great farmers, as we know. The growers had two (2) reasons for getting rid of them. First they were making demands; and second, they were buying land and the growers feared the competition. Eventually the Japanese got control of a large portion of the vegetable market, even though they only had a small percentage of the land.

Next the growers enticed the Mexicans to come; the great majority came during World War I and thereafter. They organized, and had a very strong trade union among farm workers in the early days, originally located down in the Imperial Valley. It was a strong union until the collusion between growers and cops, etc., broke it and deported many of its leaders.

During the Depression the Mexicans started applying for relief like a third of the nation was doing, and were told, "Yes, you can have relief, provided you go back to Mexico right away." Both aliens and citizens were shipped back.

Just about the same time as we began to force the Mexicans to return to Mexico during the Depression, the growers started enticing the Filipinos. The Filipinos, in some ways, were the most pathetic. When they were enticed to come, they were told that within four or five years of coming over here they would go home rich men. So, only 5 per cent were permitted to bring their wives. That was part of the deal – 95 per cent had to come as single men; we would not take them otherwise. The Japanese had pulled a fast one. When the alien land law was passed preventing the Japanese from buying sub-marginal land and competing with the growers, the Japanese transferred this land, in many cases, to their citizen sons and daughters. The law applied only to aliens. So, to prevent the Filipinos from doing the same thing, our government refused to permit them to bring their wives or family. We also fixed them with the anti-miscegenation law, which prohibited them from marrying anyone except other Orientals. So, for the most part, Filipinos couldn't marry at all, as there were not many available Chinese or Japanese women. When a Filipino even looked at another woman, he was run out of town, beaten up, and, in many cases, killed,

for he was “mixing the blood.” Race riots began over this one issue. This was from 1927 through the Depression. The anti-miscegenation law lasted until 1946, until the end of the war when the Filipinos were our allies. The result of this is that there are many old, single Filipino men today without families, without income, etc. They are alone and too old to work. This is the reason for the Agbayani Village just completed in Delano for retired Filipino men. You should use the case of the Filipinos when you want to really paint a bad picture.

Arabs were probably brought to this country during the strike of 1965.

On the outline we tried to show the power breakdown with relation to the ranch itself, where the grower was all powerful, because of being able to have complete control over the labor market; and how in the rural community, the grower was all powerful, because he is the one who had all the money that controlled all the elections, all the politicians, and all the judges and police. But the farm workers for the most part were not citizens and therefore could not vote. Without the vote, they didn't have the voice to counteract the power of the grower in the community. So they were caught in a double bind. If there was anything the grower couldn't do to the worker on the ranch, then he could do it to them in the community, or vice-versa. He had total power. The concept of “ranch nation” is simply that a ranch is like a small country in terms of the way it is operated. The grower is the king, with absolute power, and has his own private army of people who enforce dictates (supervisor, foremen). Those who step out of line get capital punishment (fired and evicted from housing).

The Pixley Cotton Strike occurred during the valley-wide cotton strike of 1933. It was the largest single strike that ever occurred in California. It didn't take place all at once, but it kept moving up the state by sections. (The lettuce strike of 1970 is the largest strike that ever took place all at once, but the cotton strike is the largest one that took place over a long period.) On this day in Pixley (20 miles north of Delano, California) in 1933, the workers were having a meeting in their union hall, which was right across the street from the police station. Inside the police station were some policemen who had just arrested about 19 farm workers, both Chicano and Oklahoman. All of a sudden 12 growers converged on the union hall in their pick-ups. They got out of their pick-ups with their guns and leaned their guns on the fenders of their trucks and fired into the union hall. Naturally, the workers came rushing out, and as they came out the growers just stood there and picked them off like rabbits. They killed two people right then and there and wounded many more. Another Chicano was killed that same day in Arvin by the growers. This is one of the ways they thought they would break the strike. This was all done in full view of the police across the street and in full view of those 19 farm workers who had just been arrested. The growers were taken to court and were acquitted because of insufficient evidence. Eleven of those growers are still alive today in Pixley. Author Ron Taylor is just completing a book in which he describes all of that and interviews the growers to find out what they think about the situation this many years later. This is just an example of what the everyday situation was during these days out in California. Usually, it didn't happen

right in front of the police station, but the growers had it so much their own way, they didn't really care if it happened in front of the police station or not. This did not stop the cotton strike, but it inflamed it more. Workers got violent also.

There was an active grower vigilante group in the 30s in Salinas. They hired an ex-Army general to come in and take over command of the city of Salinas and he had it organized like an army which sent out commandos all over the place. The District Attorney at that time, named Anthony Brazil, is the judge there now.

## II – CESAR AND THE BUILDING OF THE UNION

I had been working with Saul Alinsky and the Industrial Areas Foundation in Los Angeles for about five years prior to the time I went up to San Jose. By far the most notorious case that that organization worked on was known as the "Bloody Christmas" case. It involved seven young men, most of them of Mexican descent, who were beaten up at intervals of several hours all night long on Christmas Eve in the Lincoln Heights jail in Los Angeles. It was done by drunk cops who would go into their cells and wish them a Merry Christmas, and beat them and kick them and push lighted cigarettes into them, etc. Two almost died. When our organization got to the, one only had enough blood to live on and had concussion. Another had a ruptured kidney, and so on. Fortunately, they didn't die. We took the case and got a Grand Jury investigation, and later, five of the cops involved were sent to jail for from one to ten years. That was the Community Service Organization's main claim to fame. (The CSO) It was realized that if the Chicanos were to gain any power and move forward both socially and politically, it had to become a statewide organization and eventually a national organization.

So I went up to Santa Clara County (San Jose), which is the second largest Spanish-speaking county in the state. A young priest took me around to meet various people in his congregation and also a Mexican nurse helped me meet people. I was able to meet quite a number of working people.

One day this nurse, named Elias Hernandez, said she was going to take me to meet Mr. Cesar Chavez. Helen Chavez met us at the door and said that Cesar was not there. We said we would come back. We returned the next night, and Cesar was not there again. We went back the third night, and there were a lot of people there. We went in and the house was crowded, but we got a cold reception, even from Cesar. I began telling them why I was there and the experiences I had had in Southern California. I had worked in the citrus belt down there before I went to Los Angeles. I began to get into a description of "Bloody Christmas," and up until this, no one would even look up at me. Several were interested in what I was talking about, which was building power in the barrio by getting everyone together first, for numerical visible power, as well as political power by getting them registered to vote. Ninety per cent were not registered. The philosophy up until them was "why should I give a guy a monkey wrench to hit me over the head with; let him get his own." At one point, a couple of men kept interrupting me. It seemed to me that they'd

been drinking and were not interested in my story. Finally Cesar took them outside and came back without them. Cesar and Richard (his brother) had a lot of questions. I had another meeting that night and Cesar offered to take me there. He continued to ask a lot of questions.

Ten years later, I found out where Cesar was on those nights when he wasn't here. He had thought I was someone else. You see, Sal Si Puedes (which means "Get out, if you can") is the barrio of San Jose where the Chicanos live. It is in the stream of students that come down from Berkeley and those that come over from Stanford. They all write their Master's theses about Sal Si Puedes. They've been doing it for years. Students come, the Health Department comes, professors come, etc., and they all go back and write their theses and they never help the people. They ask very insulting questions, like, "How come the Mexican people have very large families?" and "How come they all eat beans and chili?" and on and on. Cesar had had it with this kind of insulting stuff and never anything in the way of help for his people. They were just a bunch of bloodsuckers, sucking the life out of the barrio and getting fat with their thesis, so they could become professors and teach their students how to go down to the barrio and do the same thing. Cesar thought I was one of those professors, except that I had an old, beat up car. But Cesar was still suspicious. He was really home when I came to visit, but was across the street, sitting, watching and laughing. Cesar had organized the group against me, and told them to give me a bad time.

Cesar Chavez soon became the outstanding leader of the people in that area, and the following year. I got Alinsky to hire him. He traveled around and organized, and stayed in each area four months to organize a barrio-wide organization. They were civic action organizations. He did it all over California, except in San Diego County and Orange County. Eventually, Cesar was selected to organize the farm workers in Oxnard. In an effort to help out the packinghouse workers who were trying to get a contract. Oxnard had the largest bracero camp in the United States within its city limits. When he came there, he thought the main problem was the braceros coming in and driving the wages down. But he found the main problem was that they were driving the local people out of work. Most of the locals were having to go out and pick carrots, which is a very low-paying job, while the braceros were given the better jobs in tomatoes, etc. So Cesar began to meet with farm workers exclusively and, as a result, that CSO Chapter became one of the most powerful in the state because of the good job of organizing down there. He got over 500 people into citizenship classes and voter registration.

The main job he did was to get the government to come in and make an investigation concerning collusion between the head of the employment service in California and the growers. He was able to do this by sleeping four hours a night, because he had to constantly ride a circuit between the bracero-herding operation down there and back to the office to write up affidavits to send to Sacramento. Finally, after five months of this, it was proven that the growers were in collusion with the farm employment service. The head of the farm employment service was fired; the next day he got a job as the head of the

employment service was fired; the next day he got a job as the head for the growers' association in Imperial Valley, and finally got on the right payroll.

This is where Cesar Chavez began to prove to himself that he could organize farm workers, which everybody said couldn't be done. Then he became the state director of CSO and tried to get that organization to devote its full energies to organizing farm workers. But they refused to do so. There were many other people in CSO who used to be farm workers and had gotten out of that and didn't really want to deal with it any longer. So Cesar resigned as director. He had been getting good money, so it was hard with a wife and eight kids. They drove up into the valley and settled in Delano. Cesar's brother Richard was there. They had no money; Helen went to work fulltime at DiGiorgio, picking grapes, and Cesar worked part-time and organized the rest of the time. Three months later Dolores Huerta, who had been with CSO in Stockton, California, joined him.

The biggest resistance that Cesar ran into when he started organizing farm workers was the farm workers themselves; they were resisting being organized. One of the main reasons for this was that they had been sold down the river too many times before. Another reason was because they were afraid and hopeless. I was at one of these meetings. Cesar started out about like this, "I guess we all know about our own problems. We know how it is in the wintertime when we have to go down and run up a big bill of credit at the little grocery store, pay those high prices and spend the rest of the year paying off the debt. But maybe someday we'll be able to have our own association to do something about that. Maybe we might even have our own credit union to tide us over the winter." Cesar went on, "We all know what it's like when one of our loved one dies and we don't have the money to bury him and we have to go from door to door begging money to bury him. We know how we feel when we have to do that." The people all agreed, for they had all done it. He said, "Maybe someday we'll have our own association and our own burial insurance plan." They thought that was a good idea too. Then he said, "We all know how hard it is to live on the wages that the growers give." The others agreed but were not interested in talking about that. Cesar said, "What do you think we ought to get?" At that time they were getting about 95¢ an hour and they said maybe they ought to get \$1.25. Cesar was very disappointed when they said that, because he expected them to say at least \$2. He later found out that they were being realistic and he was being the dreamer, because they knew that if they waited long enough and worked hard enough, that someday they might be able to get \$2 out of him. So, as the people were leaving, Cesar was standing at the door, shaking hands with them, and they were saying, "It sure is a good idea, Mr. Chavez, and I wish you good luck. The problem is that it just isn't going to work." Cesar asked why. They said, "The growers are just too powerful; we've tried it all, we know how it is." He was very discouraged then, because they all felt the same way.

A couple of nights later, when he had his next house meeting, he was ready for them; he wasn't going to be taken by surprise again. When they told him "Good luck, but it won't work; count me out," Cesar said, "I know that nobody in this room is going to help;

I know that. Probably nobody in Bakersfield will help. But I know that I am going to be able to find one man in this county that will help. That is all I need, just one man, because that man is going to help me gradually find a few other people that have the guts to come out and begin to work for all of us.” That is how we’ll get started. Don’t worry. I’ll be back.’ And he came back!!

He and Dolores and Manuel (his cousin) spent eight months traveling the valley and passing out cards for the workers to fill out their names and addresses and how much they thought they ought to get paid. It was like a survey, but actually, it was a way to find where the people were and to find out who was really interested in doing something. The more interested ones put a stamp on the card and returned it. Some wrote encouraging notes on their cards like, “Good luck,” or “I know you can do it.” Cesar made a point to visit these particular people. He gave them a stack of cards and asked them to be in charge of their own towns and pass the cards around.

Different times while he was traveling, Helen and the children would go with him. Often when they saw workers in a field near a road, they would jump out of the car and hand the workers cards and pamphlets explaining them, and then they would hurry back to the car before the foremen would catch them. Then in the next town, Helen and the kids would leaflet the town door-to-door about someone coming to meet with them, while Cesar would go to the local stores and places where farm workers congregated and begin talking with them.

At the end of this time, and with the cards that had been returned, they pulled the people together in the founding convention of the National Farm Workers Association (NFWA) in Fresno in 1962. This was the original name of the UFW, because the workers were afraid of calling it a union; hence, “association.” They didn’t want to talk about strikes, either. They had been burnt too many times before.

The Agricultural Workers Organizing Committee (AWOC). AFL-CIO, which was also supposed to be organizing farm workers at that time, was headed by an ex-auto worker named Normal Smith, who knew nothing about farm workers. His idea of organizing farm workers was to organize the labor contractors. Then the contractors would force the workers to join AWOC or there wouldn’t be a job for them. Also, Smith would send his men to try and disrupt Cesar’s meetings, but they didn’t know that all the people already knew and loved Cesar from CSO. Cesar had helped the old people get their pensions from the state, and they remembered him. Smith’s tactics really turned people toward Cesar rather than away from him.

Cesar’s biggest problem as he traveled so much was hunger. He was spending all his money on gas, so there was little left for food. Friends gave his family leftover commodities that no one else wanted, or fresh vegetables in season, which helped, but often it wasn’t enough. One night as he was holding a house meeting, he noticed a big plate of fried chicken on the stove in the kitchen. He hadn’t eaten in a couple of days, so

he could hardly concentrate on the meeting. After the meeting he got into his car to leave, but he couldn't bring himself to start the car. He went back up the door and pretended like he forgot his pen. He hid the pen in his hand, but pretended like he found it on the floor over near the stove where the chicken was. As he came up from the floor, he smelled the chicken and commented on how good it smelled. At that point Mrs. Hernandez knew he was hungry and invited him to share the meal. He then learned that very often it isn't what you do for people that establishes the bond as much as what they do for you. They have some kind of vested interest in you by feeding you or doing something else for you. So he began to learn to dispense with that kind of pride when he was hungry. If he was at someone's house during mealtime and he was hungry, he would ask them to feed him.

At the Fresno convention, Cesar introduced a huge huelga flag for the symbol of the association. For the program, he brought all the ideas that he had gotten from the house meetings to the convention—the credit union and a group death benefit plan. The wives were especially interested in this, so they went along with paying a little each month toward this. They started to charge the first dues--\$3.50 a month, part of which was to pay for a death benefit plan. It was sort of a gimmick to get them going on the idea of paying for their own union. Cesar knew if the workers wanted their own organization, they were going to have to pay for it. It wasn't going to be anything like when a powerful union with money comes in and calls a strike and pays the workers more to strike than to work.

It was hard to get the money. He had to forget about feelings. You've probably read the story of the time when Cesar went to collect \$3.50 from a man who wanted to become a member of the association. When Cesar got there the man said he only had \$5 to last the family for the week. Cesar said he knew what that was like because he had been in that situation many times before. But he told the man, "If you want to move forward, then we all have to sacrifice." Cesar knew if he gave in on that one, then he would give in again and again and they would never have a union.

They tried to stay away from strikes for a long time. Instead, they worked on things like trying to get back pay for workers who had been cheated out of it. They worked on workmen compensation cases and everything that had to do with the workers except the all important thing of pulling a strike. They never talked about wages, because that meant a strike and they really feared that. No grower they had ever heard of gave an increase in wages without a strike, and very few with a strike.

The Filipinos walked out on strike in Coachella for better wages, but did not go for a contract. They got a raise in wages, but no contract. When they came to the Delano area and expected the same kind of wages they had gotten down in Coachella Valley, the growers laughed at them. So they went out on strike, and the Mexican workers that were in NFWA refused to cross their lines. That is how the whole thing began.

Cesar knew they didn't have money for strike benefits, so he went on a fundraising tour. He went to Berkeley and talked to thousands of students who agreed to give their

lunch money for a week as a down payment with the promise that they would continue to raise money. Cesar went to colleges and churches with the help of the Migrant Ministry and was able to keep it going. Walter Reuther came, and he and Cesar led a march down through the center of Delano. That is when we started getting money for the Auto Workers. Then Cesar and a group of strikers went on a 300-mile march to Sacramento. The main reason for the march was to call national attention to the strike and also to help organize the workers along the way as to what the strike and the union were all about. They covered 26 different towns along the way. They sent advance men to set up housing and a town meeting with the local workers before the marchers got there.

Before they finished the march, the Schenley Company gave in and recognized the union, which was the first step toward a contract that came several months later. This, however, was primarily the result of a boycott—the first boycott. The idea of a boycott came after many months of picketing and following trucks and trains and not being able to stop the grapes. Jim Drake said, “Why don’t we try a boycott? What have we got to lose?” The Blacks used to boycott stores that wouldn’t hire them. So we decided to try it and sent teenagers and college students back to the east coast to boycott. Schenley gave in and everyone came back from the boycott in time for the end of the march. About 10,000 people showed up on the capitol steps in Sacramento that day.

At the same time, the DiGiorgio Company said they would be willing to have an election, which had never happened before in the whole history of agriculture. But DiGiorgio was laying down all kinds of rules, mainly that he would supervise the election and that there could be no strikes or boycotts. These kinds of things were out of the question, so we started a boycott against his products, S&W and Treesweet. Soon DiGiorgio agreed to a legitimate election which was to be overseen by the American Arbitration Association.

At that time, our authorization cards were white. These are cards that the worker signs, authorizing the union to represent him. One day someone came in with a green one, which was a Teamster authorization card. This was the first time the Teamsters appeared on the scene. The foremen were given orders to get the workers to sign Teamster authorization cards. The Teamsters didn’t think about the sweetheart contracts; they were actually going to do it legitimately. But we had made great inroads with a number of the foremen, and while the growers thought the foremen were passing around Teamster cards, many were really passing around our cards. One, Ofelia Diaz, who was a forewoman at DiGiorgio for 25 years, was caught and fired on the spot.

This is when Eliseo Medina and Marshall Ganz entered the picture. Cesar had asked me to train these and several other organizers. Soon we were holding house meetings all over the Delano area. DiGiorgio had eight (8) different camps. We would go at noon and talk to the workers while they ate. Our nightly house meetings were with the workers who lived in the small towns surrounding Delano. The reason for the daily meetings at the camps and the nightly house meetings was to convince the workers to vote for the NFWA,

since DiGiorgio had agreed to an election. We also sent people down into Texas, Mexico and all over California to find workers who were eligible to vote because they had worked the year before, but weren't there. We found about 100 of them eventually and got them to come back for the election. One bus arrived all the way from Mexico after the polls closed.

We won the election 530 to 331. This was the only time the Teamsters have ever been willing to go up against us in an election. The Teamsters got their votes largely from among the Anglo workers and from year-round, non-field workers. They had people like cooks and secretaries voting, which we later challenged. DiGiorgio had tried to turn it into a racist thing, like, "You want to belong to that Mexican union?" etc.

The day of the election the Teamsters came down from the Bay area in big limousines and rode through the town and all through DiGiorgio's property—he let them in wherever they wanted. As they were coming out of the women's camp, Eliseo was just going in. They stopped the car, and four big goon-type men jumped out and smashed Eliseo in the mouth and hurt another worker very badly that night.

We had the location of each worker pinpointed on a map and had it planned so that people would be picked up and taken to polling places. What happened however, was that the workers didn't wait for rides, but came in on their own. National newsmen were there, and in order to get both sides, they visited Bill Grami of the Teamsters office. They found him sitting alone, having complete faith that the Teamsters would win. Later, he met with Dolores and me and told us that that was the last time this sort of thing would ever happen.

The following month, we were supposed to have another election against the Teamsters at the other big DiGiorgio ranch about 20 miles away at Arvin. But of course, the Teamsters refused. They were trying to get a sweetheart contract out of DiGiorgio, but he refused and also refused the election. So we sat in at his business office in San Francisco. We, including some important state labor people, were arrested and released, and we returned to his office the next day and were arrested again. In the meantime, we were getting great press coverage – here were a handful of DiGiorgio's workers who had come to ask Papa DiGiorgio a favor – an election. It was a very democratic thing to do. Finally, he gave in and there was an election between "no union" and the NFWA. We won by a substantial margin.

The workers at Perelli-Minetti, a wine grape grower in Delano, went on strike and came to the farm workers for representation. We agreed to represent them, and put up a picket line. The Teamsters came right through the picket line and signed the first sweetheart contract. A sweetheart contract is a company union contract, signed to the advantage of the grower rather than the worker. We began a boycott of Perelli-Minetti products. We threatened to boycott Manaschevitz because it has some Perelli-Minetti Wine in it. After five months of boycott, we were able to bring enough pressure on Perelli-Minetti that they

worked out an agreement with the Teamsters to turn over the contract to the farm workers. It was a lousy contract and we had to wait two years until it expired to get a good one. But it set a precedent. If they could turn over one contract, they could turn over more. Anytime management agrees to do something, the Teamsters also agree. The reason for this is that the Teamsters want the same thing that the growers want: total control over the lives of the workers. At this time, also, the first jurisdictional pact was signed. We would stay out of the trucks and canneries, if the Teamsters would stay out of the fields. This was the first of several pieces of paper that we signed that meant nothing. It simply shows how the Teamsters have tried to trick us.

After Perelli-Minetti, we made a survey of all the big grape ranches to see who we would concentrate on next. We thought we would pull a "Walter Reuther" and single out one big company and go after it like he went after Ford or General Motors. We picked Giumarra, who had the largest table grape ranch of all. It was a tightly organized strike. Giumarra had about 30 crew pushers, each of whom had a truck that had been bought for him by Giumarra. They were indebted to Giumarra for this and that is why we were never able to win them over to our side. The crew pusher's job was to go around in the morning and pick up the workers, take them to the field and then be the foremen all day and push them.

About 200 workers showed up for the strike meeting. That took guts on the part of the workers because Giumarra had spies there to see which workers would come. Cesar had the people divide up into their various crews and he put an organizer with each crew. This way, they had an organizing crew within each working crew. These workers went to the homes of the crew pushers at 4 a.m. on the morning the strike was to start. The workers put up a picket line in front of the crew pusher's house, and most crew pushers just went right back into their houses and didn't go to work that day. There were over 1200 workers in the fields before the strike, and only 50 in the fields 4 days after it started.

Giumarra got an injunction, and 100's of illegal scabs; we got a boycott. But we soon found that there were no Giumarra brand grapes on the market. We found out that Giumarra had gotten labels of u70 other growers and was putting them on his boxes. This is how he was fooling the housewife. We decided to attack him at his biggest market, which was New York. Fifty farm workers drove a school bus from Delano, California to New York to work on the boycott. Dolores and I went too, but we found it just wouldn't work because we couldn't tell which grapes to boycott. We had a hearing and accused Giumarra of misrepresentation, but they wouldn't do anything because he was out of state. So we decided there was just one way and that was to boycott all grapes.

In February 1968, we started the big table grape boycott. Eliseo took a group of farm workers from New York to Chicago, and Marcos Munoz took a group and went to Boston. We scattered all over. The boycott got more and more effective and spread eventually into Canada and western Europe with two full time organizers there. Eventually, with additional pressure of a good strike in Coachella, we drove the price of

grapes down to a point where the growers finally realized they would have to settle—the image of table grapes was just getting too black.

One thing we learned from that boycott is that you have to really tighten up. We were getting tighter and tighter during the last year of the boycott. Eliseo cracked the Jewell chain in Chicago and Marcos and Dolores cracked A&P in New England. LeRoy Chatfield put 85 organizers in front of the Ralph's chain in Los Angeles. He was the last to get his organizers, but when he did and Ralph's agreed to sell only UFW grapes (by now we had some Coachella contracts, July, 70), that did it. It was the final straw.

Soon after Ralph's gave in, Giumarra came home from his vacation and knocked on Cesar's door in the middle of the night. They spent the rest of the night calling other growers and getting them together to sign contracts.

The most important result of the 1970 contracts was the effect on the workers. It began to turn the situation around and bring some democracy into fields. Because of provisions in the contracts that guaranteed the worker his job, he didn't have to worry when he went to work in the morning whether he would have a job that night. Therefore, he wasn't afraid to complain. He didn't have to worry about seniority. Women didn't have to worry about giving their bodies to labor contractors – labor contractors were out and the hiring hall was in. There were other benefits also. But we don't want to give the idea that suddenly there was democracy out in the fields. Rather, the real struggle began right then, because the workers were struggling to gain the power which was contained in the contract. But the growers were trying to hold onto what had always been theirs and wanted to prevent the workers from taking it away.

### III. GROWERS' ATTEMPTS TO DESTROY THE UNION

The way the growers went about this was to continue the abuse as far as they could go, and to try in every way to turn the workers against the union. They had a campaign of dirty tricks to undermine the union. They would not report a worker's hours to the medical plan, so that when workers would go and expect to get medical care or medical bills paid, they would be told they lacked the required hours. This would make the workers very mad at the union. They would over-deduct dues from workers' paychecks. When the workers would complain the growers would tell them to go talk to the union about it. Then the workers would get mad at the union. Most of the growers refused to pay into the Martini Luther King Fund. WE had to take most of them to court to collect. This was the money that was used to build the retirement village. One grower even refused to accept grievances. They would over-order or under-order workers, which would in turn make the workers mad at the union. So, there was this constant tugging and pulling to gain the power. The growers hated and despised this because they had been in control so many years.

There was no time to set up strong ranch committees or union stewards to deal with these problems. As soon as the grape contracts were signed, even before we had a chance to celebrate, we got the word from our lettuce organizers in Salinas that 65 growers had just signed sweetheart contracts with the Teamsters. Every body had to drop everything that had to do with the table grape workers, and rush over to start organizing against the Teamsters and growers in the Salinas Valley. So all that could be done at that point to help the grape workers was to help them ratify their contracts and set up ranch committees of vive people. Ideally, each crew should have its own steward.

We intended to go over to Salinas, got the contracts back from the Teamsters and come right back and continue the work of setting up stewards in the table grapes. Ha! The Teamsters signed another pact with us—we stay off the tracks and they stay out of the fields. They pretended they were going to try to get the growers to rescind the contracts, but they didn't do it. Only two—InterHarvest and Freshpict—rescinded their Teamster contracts and signed with us. These two companies were more vulnerable than most to a boycott, because of products other than lettuce. Purex is a product of Freshpict and Chiquita bananas are part of InterHarvest. They are much more important than all the lettuce in the world, and the companies did not want these names blackened.

Thus, the lettuce boycott began. Then as now, most of the leadership of the union was out working on the boycott in the cities. We couldn't get back to the table grapes until 1971. When we finally did get back we went crew by crew and had elections for stewards. The workers also voted as to whether they wanted a clinic. This took three months of intensive work. For the first time, the workers saw what they could do with some power in each crew. Delano was the only place we were able to build this kind of organization. It showed up in 1973 during the strike when the Delano workers held out longer than any other workers.

There were legislative attempts in over 20 states to get laws passed that would outlaw the secondary boycott and the strike at harvest time, in return for some kind of phony election procedure. In the most important states of California, Washington, and Oregon, all attempts were defeated by the union members coming together in mass at the state capitol and putting pressure on legislators, etc. When the opposition couldn't win at the legislative level, they went to the Initiative procedure in California in the form of Proposition 22. The union defeated too. We defeated them at the ranch level, where they tried to get workers to turn against us. When that didn't work, they went to the legislatures, and then to the voters at large. We beat them there too. Finally, there was the California Supreme Court decision of 1972, which proved that the Salinas lettuce strike was not a jurisdictional dispute between the UFW and the Teamsters, but was rather the ultimate form of favoritism on the part of the growers toward the Teamsters. To put it simply it was grower-Teamster collusion to destroy the UFW. So, we beat them in the courts, too.

Then came 1973!!