HUELGA

By Eugene Nelson

THE FIRST HUNDRED DAYS OF THE GREAT DELANO GRAPE STRIKE

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FOREWARD

"The verdant San Joaquin Valley, California's 'fruit bowl', has again become the principal battleground in organized labour's decades-old fight to organize the workers in the fields. Unlike the bitter clashes of the late 1930's between the Communist-led farm labourers and the entrenched gentry which exploited them this confrontation is between the mammoth American Federation of Labour-Congress of Industrial Organizations and the shadowy but sophisticated and equally powerful family corporations which have inherited and consolidated the valley's agrarian wealth until they control the economy of Central California.

"But although the agricultural workers are not being rousted from their shacks in the dead of the night by armed mobs of vigilantes and American Legionaires as they were before the war, and in spite of the absence of the Communist agitators, the new conflict reflects the same basic struggle that John Steinbeck chronicled in 'The Grapes of Wrath' and 'In Dubious Battle'.

"The battlecry is 'huelga' (Spanish for 'strike') a word which is now heard not only in the fields, but also in boardrooms and banks, where it has assumed great meaning in the vocabularies of the men who control the destiny of America's largest agricultural State.

"The focal point of the unions' organizing drive is Delano, an unattractive vineyard community of about 11,000 in northern Kern County. Situated between Fresno and Bakersfield, it straddles US Route 99, a ribbon of motorway which traverses California like a concrete backbone.

"The town is divided by the highway—and by the huelga, which began September 8 when 3,000 Mexican-American and Filipino-American grape pickers walked off the job. The stoppage resulted from the refusal of the growers to recognize their collective bargaining agents, the AFL-CIO Agricultural Workers' Organizing Committee and the National Farm Workers' Association. The two unions had jointly asked for a wage increase from $1.20 to $1.40 an hour.

"Most of the workers in the Delano grape harvest are members of migrant families who eke out marginal livings by 'following the crops' around the United States. They live in primitive rented quarters in employer-owned labour camps, and, in many instances, are forced to purchase their food from farm-owned stores.

"In Delano $1.40 an hour will buy 3.2 gallons of low-octane petrol for a dilapidated second-hand car or four loaves of factory bread, or a quart of sulphurous cheap wine.

"The growers, better organized than the unions, speak through 'protective associations' such as the Agricultural Labour Bureau, the Council of California Growers, and the California Farm Bureau Federation. All have steadfastly refused to deal with the unions as lawful representatives of the workers, and their members have methodically set about the task of breaking the strike. But the time-honoured anti-labour practices which proved so effective 30 years ago don't seem to work any more.

"The first step was the wholesale eviction of the strikers from their rented homes. Immediately, caravans of food and clothing and donations of money from other AFL-CIO unions flowed in, and alternate housing was found for most of the families.

"In spite of the fact that non-union workers have been able to harvest the fruit from the vineyards, the growers have found their markets are dwindling and some transportation has been strangled. Twice in two weeks, for instance, export shipments of table grapes were turned away from the docks in San Francisco and Oakland by longshoremen sympathetic with the strike.

"Another, unexpected blow to the growers has been the mounting pressure brought against them by the Churches. Any attempts at intimidation have been thwarted by the presence of dozens of clergymen, joined by university students and labour leaders who have helped to man picket lines around ranches and vineyards.

"At a recent conference in Fresno sponsored by the San Joaquin Valley Presbytery and the Northern California-Nevada Council of Churches, spokesmen for the growers' association complained bitterly of clerical interference.

"'We must be aware of the urgency of our time,' responded church council president Dr. Richard Norberg of San Francisco. 'This problem is not an isolated one. It is touching the whole world'.

"So far the strike has affected only the food grape crops raised in the Delano district. It has not spread to the lush wine vineyards of Northern California or to the millions of acres of orchards, cotton fields, and vegetable farms which employ thousands of migrant workers in California every year. By concentrating all of their resources on winning the Delano strike, and by not scattering their efforts throughout the State as in previous, ill-fated attempts, NFWA and AWOC seem to have sharply improved their chances of success."

--MANCHESTER GUARDIAN--

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from the Grape Strike

This book is dedicated to all those members and supporters of the National Farm Workers Association and the Agricultural Workers Organizing Committee (AFL-CIO) for whom "Huelga" has become a way of life;

and to Mssrs. Cesar Chavez, C. Al Green, Ernesto Galarza, Henry Anderson, and Norman Smith, who have given their lives to the farm worker;

and to the memory of Jack London, who, fifty years after his death, played a magnificent role in this strike.

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THE DOVE SEASON
IN DELANO

Pre-dawn, September 20, 1965 in a small California town. All is silence. Then the long lines of cars begin to move out through the morning dark, their headlights truncating the rows of vines that seem gently to strangle the small community they support with their luxuriant growth.

An intersection at the edge of town. Our headlights strike a black sign whose white letters bear the mysterious inscription "HUELGA." The sign bobs back and forth on a sea of darkness as we pull to the side of the road. Behind the sign we see a woman. She is blonde, svelte, beautiful, out of place in this cold early-morning scene. "Go back," we hear her saying to some people in a car that has just stopped beside her. She is met by silence, as shadowy brown faces peer out in puzzlement. "Hay huelga aqui," she goes on in Spanish. The driver of the vehicle nods uncertainly, puts the car in gear, and it turns down a side street and is gone.

The blonde girl comes over with her sign. She is twenty-five year old Wendy Goepel, former member of Gov. Brown's poverty program staff. She has been standing her alone in the cold night flagging down cars, talking to their drivers, explaining about a new word that soon may become a part of the English language: Huelga.

"How are you doing?" a soft voice intones. A new form emerges from the darkness. A small dark man of thirty-eight, with large friendly eyes, a deceptively casual manner. It is Cesar Chavez, director of the National Farm Workers Association.

"There haven't been many cars so far. About half of them have turned back. Some don't stop," Wendy tells us, shivering.

I look at my watch. It's 5:20. About half an hour till dawn.

"You had better get out to your stations," the small dark man named Chavez says.

I get back in my car and drive off through the darkness, away from the city, through the long rows of vines, past more "Huelga" signs floating toward me on the darkness like strange apparitions. Three cars follow behind me, others turn off down side roads to left and right. Some of the passing cars are friends, some are foes. I drive slowly, squinting through the darkness. Then I see it, a sign that says "Bianco Farms," and I pull to the side of the road.

The other cars pull up behind. Their occupants get out, brown-skinned shivering men whose faces all bear the same look of uncertainty, determination and excitement.

"Is this it?"

"Brrr!"

"Where are the scabs?"

We stand milling about for a moment in uncertainty, as more and more cars approach through the darkness.

"Alfonso, how about watching that entrance down there? You and Chuy, how about covering the entrance up there to the east? Yell to us if anyone starts to drive into the vineyard."

Forms drift off through the darkness, and we are left, four of us, Eugenio and Francisco and Jose and myself, to watch the main entrance. We pace back and forth warming ourselves in front of a small white frame house, unsure of what to expect—fear, anger, a shotgun blast from a window—who can say? But the house sleeps on in silence.

A car comes slowly through the darkness and we hold up our Huelga signs. It slows, its occupants peer at us curiously. They have lunches beside them on the seats. We shove leaflets at them, leaflets explaining why we are here.

"Haven't you heard about the strike? Everybody is going out. Yes, everybody. Todos van a salir. We're asking for $1.40 an hour and 25¢ a box. Nobody's going to work until the growers sign contracts and raise the wages…"

We crowd about the car windows, jabbering at them in English and Spanish. Yes, one of them has heard about the strike, but he wasn't sure it really was coming off until now. Sure they'll help us. Yes, it was about time the Mexican-Americans stood up for their rights. Sure, they'd come by our office and talk to us. We give a cheer as the car makes a U-turn and heads back to town.

Other cars pass, then a grower's truck whose driver seems to peer at us in disbelief. We spot some of our own cars, going out to pre-arranged locations, and exchange greetings: "Huelga! Huelga!" It also means "Hello." And we feel less alone in the cold darkness.

It seems dawn will never come. Then there is a hint of light over the mountains to the east. Where are our scabs, our very own scabs, the ones who are supposed to work in this vineyard next to us? Will they appear at all? Can we keep them out? Will they listen to reason? Will we be the only ones to fail?—or the only ones to succeed? We have been told by a Mexican-American foreman who works here that he will talk to the men and urge them to join the strike. Has he, and will they?

Then one of the cars begins to slow and turn down the entrance road we are guarding. We feel one another's tenseness as the big test comes. It's just a matter of saying a few words but they have to be the right words, and whether they are effective makes all the difference. A few words or gestures at the right time can win or lose this strike. WE try to flag the car down urgently with our signs and arms. It's going in—our hearts sink as we wave at its occupants fervently. No, it's stopping! We catch up to it with relief, and stand beside it as the three brown-skinned men inside begin to roll down their windows. As the dawn lightens we see their dark faces; they seem to register surprise and curiosity—has the foreman not then kept his promise?

Now the windows are down, and we explain to them, and push our leaflets at them. "There's a strike here, nobody's going to work."

"A strike?"

"Yes, a strike, haven't you heard?"

"Well, somebody said something, but—"

"Well, there's a strike all right—read about it here. We are asking for a raise to $1.40 an hour, and if everybody refuses to work for a few days we'll get it. How about it?"

"Well--" The men seem to shrug, look at one another in puzzlement. One says something rapidly in Spanish.

"Gracias." The windows go up and the car moves in toward the vineyard.

"Are they going to work or not--?" Our hearts sink again as the car moves away.

"Well they said--"

Then the car starts to turn and we smile and wave at the striking workers as they come back past us and head back to town.

"Hey, how about that?"

"By gosh, it works!"

"Do you suppose the foreman really talked to them, or did they turn back because of what we told them right now?"

"Quien sabe? Who knows?"

We slap one another on the back and prepare for the next encounter.

Another car comes along and we go through the same routine again. And it too heads back toward town.

"Uuuuuiiiii!" Jose gives a little yell of triumph. "We have the magic touch. The strike is won already!

Then a third car turns in, and its occupants agree to every thing we say, but it nevertheless goes on into the vineyard. It is almost light now, a soft blaze over the vineyards. We see it pull up behind the white house and its occupants seem to be talking to someone, perhaps the foreman who had said he would help us.

Another car comes and we turn it back. Another comes, and goes in. We flash our signs at others that pass on the highway; some slow to get a better look, some stop to hear our message and read our leaflets, some turn back, and some go whizzing by contemptuously. Big men in growers' pickups give us puzzled, outraged, or nasty looks. A truck for hauling wine grapes passes and we take down the name of the trucking company and its license plate number. More of our pickets pass and we exchange greetings and hold up our hands in V-for-victory signs.

A big Negro, about thirty, alone in his car, starts to drive in, then stops his car uncertainly beside us.

"Are you going to pick grapes?"

"No, I'm just goin' in to talk to somebody for a minute," he says in a rather puzzled, somewhat frightened manner. He halfway smiles and drives on into the vineyard. A few minutes later he comes back out, and pauses again next to us, as if he thinks it obligatory.

"You weren't looking for work?"

"No, I don't do farm work," he says.

"Are those other people in there going to pick grapes?"

"No, I don't think so," the Negro says and drives off.

Sure enough, a few minutes later, the two cars that had entered the vineyard emerge from behind the house, and we crowd around as they stop beside us.

"You're not going to work?"

"No."

"You're going to join the strike?"

"Si, si!"

"Are all the men going to stop work?"

"Yes, all the men."

"You're not going to work anywhere else, are you?"

"No, no, we're going out on strike."

"You're going home?"

"That's right."

"Who was that you were talking with—the foreman?"

They nod. So he had talked to some of his men after all, and asked them to support us. We ask the men in the cars to come by our office, and they promise they will, then head back toward town.

"Viva la causa!" we shout as they drive off.

"Viva la causa!"

As they return our yell we feel exultant, overjoyed, and we slap one another's arms and backs in congratulation.

Then the foreman drives out and waves at us, speeding by us as if he had no time to praise or idle conversation, and we give him a cheer. Why had he sided with the workers? we wonder. Some long-standing grudge with his boss, or was he really on the side of the pickers? Would he be fired now? Had he been the real hero, or had we really persuaded some of the men ourselves? No matter, the important thing is that they aren't working, and we feel exultant as we stand side by side in the first thin rays of sunlight.

What will happen now? Won't angry field bosses approach at any moment? No, the house behind us sleeps on in silence, the vineyard behind seems as still as death.

What to do now? Where to go? Cesar Chavez had said to scout through the countryside until we found another objective—people working in a vineyard. But where?

As we stand pondering what to do next, Eugenio, an amiable, soft-spoken, intelligent man of forty, points to the other side of the road. "Mira. Look!"

Flushed with victory, and hungry for more action, we see to our delight three groups of men in the vineyard opposite feverishly tossing bunches of grapes into gondolas, long low tanks drawn through the rows by tractors, in which wine grapes are hauled. We yell to our fellow pickets down the road to left and right, and almost as if compelled, rush across the road to pounce upon our new prey.

One of the gondolas is about twenty yards down the row from the road, the others fifty to a hundred yards in. We hesitate, wanting to rush into the field to talk to these men with bandanas tied about their heads as they pause to look up at us in surprise. But we remember the "Rules for Pickets" we had been issued the day before: "Keep off all private property. The property line is generally marked by the telephone poles."

We hesitate just outside the property line, waving our signs. "Huelga! Huelga!" we shout in jarring cacophony. "There's a strike here. Come over here and talk to us. Hay huelga aqui!"

We stand for three minutes, four, five, and our hopes begin to sink, but we keep our running invective. Suddenly we see the men by the closest gondola have stopped working, they are walking slowly toward us.

Then they are beside us, their brown faces regarding us curiously in the soft sunlight.

"There's a strike going on here," we tell them. "Everyone is going out on strike for better wages. All the men on that ranch across the road just left," Eugenio and Francisco

explain in Spanish in a mild yet urgent, reasonable and persuasive manner, and I am amazed by the calm reasoned intelligence of these working men.

The perplexed looks on the pickers' faxes slowly disappear as they seem to understand what it's all about. Soon they are nodding and smiling, "Si, we'll take the gondola back and leave. Si, we understand, we're on your side."

We still are dubious as they turn and walk back to their gondola; but sure enough, they climb up onto the tractor and gondola and head rapidly down the unpicked row toward the distant farmhouse—or more likely a foreman's house, since few growers live on their ranches in this era of "agribusiness."

"Look, the others are leaving! Everybody's leaving!" we shout to the other workers. They look toward us into the sunlight, stare a moment at us and then at the departing pickers, and in what seems a memorably dramatic and emotion-charged moment, toss their picking trays as if in one spontaneous accord into the partially-filled gondola, hop joyfully onto the gondola and tractor, and bounce merrily away down the row after their striking fellow workers. A moment later the third five-man gondola crew follows suit, waving at us in departure, and we are moved deeply with feelings of triumph and compassion at what seems the beginning of a great wave of victorious exodus.

"Viva! Viva la causa! Viva la huelga!" we shout as the bobbing heads of the workers seem to drift away across the tangled sunlit vines. And we walk back to our cars in a fresh flush of victory as the bright read sun clears the Sierras to the east and turns the full force of its late September warmth upon us.

Where to now? The whole valley seems a mass of ferment, of awakening, rising, outpouring workers as we drive slowly eastward through the vines. We spot pickets driving to and fro, looking for locations, hauling new converts back to town: they wave and flash their Huelga signs at us. We pass other cars, and pickups, driven by scowling angry growers and their henchmen; they have reason to be upset.

"When do you think the strike will be over? Do you think it will be today?"

"No, tomorrow or the next day."

"No, at least a week," says someone else.

"Do you think the growers will sign?"

"Of course they'll sign, they'll have to sign."

We pass workers along the road talking to pickets, others still picking, others who have gotten into their cars to leave the vineyards. We pass Browning Road, we turn down Driver to the south. Long rows of vines, gleaming yellow-green in the sunlight. Fat purple grapes ready for the plucking. But no more pickers. Have they all left work already? Is the strike really over? We pass Woollomes Road, drive on past the huge Tudor Ranch to Schuster and then Pond. Driving at random, we turn up Pond to the east.

In the distance we see a crowd of people at the side of the road. Is it an accident? A Riot? A fight between pickets and scabs? We hurry on, the gray blob separates into individual figures, cars are scattered along the roadside, faces become recognizable, arms waving, fingers pointing.

We park and hurry up to the milling figures, still in the dark as to what has happened here. Will they welcome us, will they attack us? We see a police car down the line, then another. Then we spot husky Reverend Jim Drake of the Migrant Ministry, one

of our picket captains, and big smiling Julio Hernandez, head of the Corcoran office of our own National Farm Workers Association—and our doubts turn to joy. They are talking to milling grape pickers, handing them authorization slips to sign which as the Farm Workers Association to represent them as bargaining agent. "If you sign these, then the Department of Employment can't send more workers to take your place," they explain to the men about them, and some of them begin to sign.

They see us and smile. Five minutes before, they explain, the two of them had come upon these people picking grapes in the adjacent fields—over fifty of them. They had stopped, merely held up their strike signs, and the whole gang of workers had come streaming out to join them at the side of the road. "It was as simple as that," the young Reverend Drake laughs, and Julio nods agreement. "Our pre-strike pamphleteering did its job—they were just waiting for us to put in an appearance."

The workers, both men and women, mill about, smiling and joking.

"Now that you have them, what are you going to do with them?"

"Have them sign these authorization cards, and then I guess they can go home."

"Why don't we take them with us to picket?" someone asks. Strike strategy is being formed on the spot.

"It's okay with me."

I turn to half a dozen people standing nearby. They agree to come with us, four middle-aged men and the cubby good natured wives of two of them. Others have driven off, others are still signing authorization cards.

"Are you coming too?" I say to Reverend Drake and Julio.

"Hell, we have our own group of pickets down near McFarland. We got a hundred men out of the fields there. We were just scouting around for our next location when we spotted these people and decided to show our signs as sort of a joke."

We get out new recruits to follow us in their old Fords, and we're off scouting again, six cars in the group now.

We sweep through the warm early morning countryside—eight-thirty by now—and there is a very good feeling in the air, a feeing of vast surging movement, of healthy ferment like the ferment of grapes, a heady wine of victory mingled with visions of a bright new future for all these people. Other people back there in the town are just getting to work, and we already have set giant wheels of progress in motion, have tampered with the ancient bogged-down mechanism of the whole valley, removed broken parts, oiled its bearings, begun the vast overhaul job that had to be done. We pass more Huelga signs, more people streaming out of a field, exchange more shouts of victory, and: this is something new in strikes we suddenly realize as our mobile striking force moves along—we are in on something like a revolution in the farm labor movement.

We turn down a side road, and "Look!" Eugenio says. We see off to our right thirty or forty people picking, fifty yards' or so down the long rows. The tops of their cards are visible back in the field behind them; the growers are devising defense tactics already: hiding their workers' cars back in the fields.

We slam to a halt on the wide sandy shoulder and our caravan pulls up behind us, its members leaping out of their cars to the fray with what seems a wild surging joy, the new recruits seeming anxious to get more to follow their lead. "Huelga! Huelga!" fifteen

pickets begin yelling across the vines, and waving their signs wildly, and the distant pickers look up in surprise, seem to talk among themselves, then self-consciously return to picking grapes.

The new women prove to be magnificent—fat, jovial but hardy Mexican women who aren't about to be slaves for anyone if they see any way out. At first they merely shout "Huelga," or beseech the stubborn pickers in a friendly manner, but gradually they become more fiery.

"You—you with the stringy hair—come over here and hear what I've got to say! Si, Usted! You want to be a slave all your life? We're trying to help you people get decent wages. We just walked off a vineyard down the road—come out here and listen to us! What has the grower ever done for you—has he invited you to his house? Will he be seen with you in public? Wipe that stupid look off your face and come out here!"

The pickers seem to talk among themselves, hesitate, return to their picking covertly, walk back and forth, return to picking again. This one is not going to be so easy, we decide, as we continue yelling our message across the shimmering vines.

It gets hot. Half an hour passes. People come and go. The group has mysteriously swollen to twenty people, then twenty-five, thirty, thirty-five. Some of these new pickets we have not even seen before. A flashy new car suddenly swerves up, and a tough-looking fellow of about twenty-five with a goatee leaps out carrying a shotgun, followed by a man with some kind of long metal rod in his hand. They walk threateningly towards us, and we quake for a moment, but refuse to give ground. They see we are not going to budge and change course before they reach us, walking back and forth muttering between us and the pickers. The pickets step up the tempo of their yelling in the face of this brazen threat.

Angry at seeing he cannot scare us off, the man with the shotgun gets back in his car and drives it between us and the vineyard, stops and turns on his car radio full blast in an attempt to drown us out. We only smile and yell louder, as the driver sits tapping the steering wheel nervously, the shotgun in the seat behind him.

"Get the flag! The flag!" somebody says. A car is dispatched to the office. A few minutes later it arrives with our giant red and white banner with its large black thunderbird in the center, and we unfurl it proudly atop a car, Wendy Goepel holding up one edge, I the other. The pickers stare curiously, the men in the car leap out and gawk up scornfully.

"Hey, the Russian flag!" the goateed man with the shotgun says.

"Where's your swastika?" one of the strikers retorts.

The two growers strut back and forth uneasily. "Hello, baby," the one with the shotgun says suggestively to Wendy. "Hey, buddy—is that your wife? Nice ass," he asides to his companion. "Hey, baby, how about having dinner with me tonight?"

Wendy ignores him and continues shouting to the workers in the field. More people join us. The action is hot and heavy on the line now. Reports and rumors fly back and forth, and we try to separate fact from fancy. A camp has been burned down, someone says. A bomb found in a field. A grower has shot a picket. Two hundred people have just walked off a ranch near McFarland. We listen in wonder and turn back to our objective: the stubborn scabs who continue their picking a stone's throw away.

Then the miracle occurs: we see people standing in a group talking. They are going back to work! No! They are walking towards their cars! A cheer arises from forty hoarse

throats. They growers leap into their car and in a swirl of dust drive back into the field, their radio blaring loudly.

But we see the tops of the pickers' cars moving now across the sea of vines; they turn a corner, they are coming out toward us! We continue to cheer as they emerge from a dirt road a few yards away and park alongside us. We rush to greet them, press leaflets and authorization cards into their hands.

"Arabs!" someone says.

"Arabs and Mexicans!"

I am surprised to learn there are many Arabs living and working in the area. I suddenly realize why the man behind the wheel of the station wagon with whom I am trying to communicate can talk fluently in neither Spanish nor English, and I notice for the first time that his nose is slightly hooked. I look at the name he is writing with difficulty on the authorization card: Taleb Alli Mohammed.

"Will you come to our office to help us make a strike sign in Arabic?" I manage to get through to him, and he nods yes.

The newly-reformed scabs drive off and we give them a departing cheer. Then we see the grower's car shoot out of the vineyard; it almost hits some of us as it roars off down the road. The middle-aged man who had been brandishing the metal rod turns to yell back: "I'm gonna unload some buckshot into your ass!" And they speed off down the road and disappear.

Where are the police? we wonder. We have red that the Kern County Sheriff's Department has assigned twenty extra men to the strike area. (They are billeted at the Stardust Motel, the town's finest, with a view of the freeway.)

The exultant pickets get in their cars and we start out again, new vineyards to conquer. There are twelve cars now, a good fifty of us. We turn a corner and a question is answered: there is a sheriff's car, almost in the right place at the right time. We stop to tell the deputy at the wheel about the shotgun incident.

"It's true, there are a few guns in these growers' cars and pickups, but you'll have to remember it's the dove season," the officer tells us.

"And the picket season," someone mutters as we drive away.

Meanwhile, at another vineyard a mile-and-a-half away, an even more dramatic scene is transpiring. Two of our Mexican-American members arrive at the C.J. Lyons Ranch and hold up their Huelga signs to the workers nearby.

A man comes strutting rapidly toward them with a shotgun (yes, strutting; do these growers go to a special finishing school to learn how to walk like that?) as if he owned not only the vineyard, but the shoulder of the road and the road as well. It is the grower's son-in-law, ranch foreman Raymond Kay.

"You can't picket here—get the hell out of here!" he yells into the faces of the two Mexicans, who stand dumbfounded before this brash onslaught.

Before the two men can react, Kay has snatched the sign from the hands of one dismayed picket, slammed it to the ground, and blasted it full of buckshot; some of the buckshot ricochets and bounces off the startled picket's chest; more hits the pickets' car.

"Now get the hell out of here!" Kay screams like a man possessed. With a wild gesture, he raises the shotgun to the sky and lets go a second deafening blast, and the frightened men scurry to their car and drive off.

They drive to the nearby Farm Workers Association office where Cesar Chavez calmly directs the whole vast operation, amazingly unruffled as he takes reports from the field, makes decisions, talks to reporters, seemingly does a dozen things at once. He takes the frightened men at once to the police, and the police return with them to the vineyard. Kay, apparently sharing the growers' opinion that they are immune to laws that apply to the populace in general, stands triumphantly by a small bonfire he has made from the remains of the blasted sign. But even in Kern County terrifying people and destroying their property with shotgun blasts is not condoned, and Kay is arrested and bail set at $276.

10:30. We are at the Caratan Ranch on Zachary Road. The great mass of men, pickets, scabs, growers, police, whirls about us as the late September sun blazes down hotly now. It is difficult to believe it is still the same day, so many things have happened. The police are more in evidence now—a police car and an ominous big paddy wagon from the Kern County Sheriff's Department sit nearby. A young picket rushes up to the gleaming white paddy wagon and says to the chubby deputy behind the wheel, "I'll take two orange popsicles and an ice cream bar…" The cop doesn't think it's a very good joke.

Before us, the field. Mexican-Americans, Filipinos, and Japanese, about fifty workers in all. We are surprised to see the Japanese. We suspect they are over here from Japan on a government-sponsored program, and if so it is illegal for them to be working here as scabs, and earning less than the $1.40 an hour set as the wage for foreign workers by Secretary of Labor Wirtz. We try to talk with them, but apparently they don't speak English. And it is difficult to try to speak to the nearby workers, when young Milan Caratan keeps bobbing back and forth in front of us making insulting remarks and trying to snap our pictures—or faking it—with his Polaroid camera.

And something else is new. Security guards. They apparently have just brought them in. Forty-three dollars a day they say they earn. Money that could be going to pickers. And all this wild insulting talk of Caratan's that could be reasonable discussion over a bargaining table. The security guards say nothing, even when we ask them gently if they realize what they are doing, just stand silently facing us with their guns on their hips—do they shoot doves with pistols too? Old stone-faced men with any flicker of life they once may have contained gone from their eyes. They apparently don't' realize what it's all about—or don't care to.

"Watch out!" someone yells.

I see, seventy or eighty yards down the road, a pickup heading towards us at full speed. It suddenly veers off the pavement onto the wide shoulder, making a bee-line directly for me. The driver's purpose seems obvious, yet I am frozen by disbelief. Can he really still be heading directly for me? People just don't' do things like this in strikes anymore—at least not in California, U.S.A. Surely he's going to swerve, I think, and I'm afraid to move to left or right. But no, he comes straight on, and at the last moment I leap out of the way as the pickup brushes within inches of me and skids to a stop beside Milan Caratan thirty yards beyond.

Everyone has stopped to stare. I look down at where the skid marks begin a few feet beyond me, confirmation that I would have been run down in cold blood if I had not jumped. After a moment I unfreeze, and indignation and anger well up within me, stronger than fear or reason. I walk tremblingly to the pickup—there is a police dog in the back—and take down its number, then walk around to the driver's side to get the name of the registration. "W.J. Gamboni," I read over the shoulder of the swarthy, coarse-looking man at the wheel, who is talking with Milan Caratan at the opposite window.

"What the f--- do you want?" the driver asks.

"When someone almost runs me down I want to know who it is," I snap back, trembling with both anger and fear.

"Why don't you get the f--- out of here? You're no farm worker!"

"How do you know? It happens I have been a farm worker. You've never seen me before in your life, and you almost killed me. What are you so hot about? All we're asking for is a raise of twenty cents an hour." I finish writing down the name on the registration and start to move away.

"I wouldn't give you the sweat off my balls!" the driver sneers.

The pickup drives off, the man who almost hit me gives me the finger as he accelerates to sixty. I stand looking after him until he disappears.

I turn and look about for the police. But they have disappeared. We resume picketing, with a will. After a few minutes a car with a huge dog in it comes along. It stops and the driver begins taking movies of us. I walk over. It is Frank Winston, Jr., of TV channel 29 in Bakersfield. Yesterday he had been to our office, talking like a friend of the farm worker, and I greet him and tell him what has happened.

"The dog is useful," he apologizes. "Not many people try to grab my camera away from me when he's along." He asks us to resume picketing so he can get some shots of us, and we oblige.

Ten minutes later a sheriff's car comes by, and I flag it down and tell the deputy what has happened.

"I'll make a report," he tells me. "It'll be at the substation in an hour or so. If Mr. Chavez wants you to file a complaint you can come by and pick it up and take it to the judge."

If Mr. Chavez wants me to file a complaint! Is he trying to discourage me? I wonder. Here I've almost been murdered, and he says "If Mr. Chavez wants you to file a complaint…"

"I don't care what Mr. Chavez wants. I was almost run down, and I intend to file a complaint," I tell him, and he drives off.

But I discover it is not as easy to file a complaint as I had thought. Two hours later I stand before elderly Judge Kitchen as he slowly reads the police report with seeming perplexity, then pauses to scratch his head.

"Well, since he didn't actually hit you--" he begins.

"If I hadn't jumped I'd be dead now!" I remonstrate.

"How many witnesses did you say you had?"

"Four who saw exactly what happened."

"Well--" the judge hems and haws, and I remember some of the accounts I've read of "justice" in the South and other backward areas. "Well, since it appears to have been an attempt on your life, that wouldn't come under my jurisdiction"—the old judge finally manages to evade the issue. I am to take my report to the District Attorney's office in Bakersfield, thirty-three miles away.

I drive to Bakersfield, infuriated by missing the afternoon's picketing, but even more infuriated by the inhuman actions of Mr. Gamboni. A dapper deputy District Attorney, Arthur Fisher, reads my report and tells me he will send an investigator up to the strike area to look into the matter. "I'll let you know what develops in a week or so."

A week or so, I think, as I walk out of Kern County's lavish new court house. How many people can be run down and killed in a week or so?

Back at the small tumbledown office of the Farm Workers Association all is chaos—but happy chaos. People are writing leaflets, registered letters asking them to sit down with us and bargain are being sent out to the growers. People stumble back and forth past one another, volunteers come rushing in, scabs just out of the fields, a multitude of wildly chattering people discussing just one subject: Huelga.

Reports keep coming in: thirty-eight men out at one ranch, fifty at another, nineteen at another. Amid it all is Cesar Chavez, calmly smiling, patient, optimistic as ever.

I edge my way through the happy crowd, striking my head on a low two-by-four: this office definitely was designed for Mexican-Americans, and not for tall gabachos. Shaking my head, I see a sign someone has just put up: "I picket, therefore I am." There's something to it, all right, I think; although exhausted, I feel more alive than in years, perhaps more than in my whole life.

And outside the office, across the wide expanse of countryside, the men and women keep streaming out of the fields.

At last it is evening, evening of what has been the longest day in this valley in many a year. We take time off to find a TV set, to watch the program of the friendly newsman, Frank Winston, Jr. His program comes on, we sit forward and watch eagerly as we see our picket lines of a few hours before. But something is wrong, it's not coming out the way it really was at all. We see the Caratan Ranch, ourselves walking back and forth with our Huelga signs.

"After growers complain they were trespassing," Winston says, the pickets "return to the road" to continue their "lonely vigil".

Trespassing? It's the first we've heard of it. We didn't hear anyone accuse us of trespassing! And Winston makes it sound as if we had been trespassing! And not a word about almost being run down by a maniac in a pickup. What is Winston trying to do? Is this a sample of the treatment we can expect from the news media?

But no matter. The spark has become a flame. The largest agricultural strike in California fields since the 1930's is underway, and neither Winston nor anyone else can stop it.

BACKGROUND: WHY A STRIKE?

Like many things about California, its agricultural industry has been sick for a long time, and there are few sections of the country where the one-time ideal of Jeffersonian democracy has been more remote. A brief summary of the state's agricultural history will give the reader some idea as to why the present average income of farm workers is about one-fifth that of workers in the automobile and steel industries, even though their work is certainly as difficult and its end product indisputably more important to society than that of any other group of laborers. Of all the major industries, agriculture is the only one which has consistently failed to secure a work force through a free labor market responding to the ordinary laws of supply and demand, but has depended instead on alien or deprived groups, often with the help of "socialistic" government intervention.

In view of the present day concern for the farm worker by certain elements in the Catholic Church, it is rather ironic that it was the Franciscan missionaries who started the feudalistic ball rolling in California's early history by pressing into service local Indians to work in their crops. With the Spanish land grants, many of the Indians were incorporated into haciendas where they received only half the wages of a mestizo or white man. Because of the huge size and unmanageable nature of the haciendas, many of the Indians retained a kind of de facto ownership of their own land, but when California became independent from Mexico and later a part of the United States, even these people soon lost their lands under the new American laws and were forced to work at disgracefully low wages for the new owners. The situation of the dispossessed aborigines has been dramatically described in Helen Hunt Jackson's well-known novel, "Ramona."

With the cheap labor supply, huge farms sprang up, and the Indians soon were too few in number to do all the work, and began to be more and more dissatisfied with their discriminatory pay scale. In the 1850's and 1860's the railroads brought almost 50,000 Chinese coolies to the western U.S. to build the roadbeds. When the railroads were completed, thousands of these men entered the agricultural labor market, and the availability of this cheap, culturally isolated labor force gave further impetus to the planting of huge new acreages. But in 1882 labor organizations and other interests brought about the passage of the Chinese Exclusion Act and by the turn of the century the number of Chinese farm laborers had dwindled considerably.

Next the growers turned to Japan, and Japanese contract laborers were brought in by the thousands. Although excellent workers, the Japanese began the annoying practice of forming themselves into "associations." At first the associations seemed to be merely for the purpose of finding and coordinating work in the fields, but soon, in the hands of these "tricky Orientals," they developed into a kind of labor union, and the Japanese began staging "quickie" strikes and slow-downs to protest their ridiculously low wages. Again, the growers began to look elsewhere.

In 1910 the Mexican Revolution began, and many starving Mexican peasants began to cross the border to work in California, especially after World War I created an agricultural boom in the U.S. It became virtually a policy of the U.S. government to allow

these people to enter the country illegally to work on farms, and they proved to be more tractable and, partly because of their illegal status, les apt to form themselves into unions than other alien groups. Wages stayed low, and huge ranches grew and prospered, while the number of small farms dwindled. When the depression began in 1929, however, many of these early "wetbacks" were deported.

Meanwhile, because of this constant threat of deportation, growers began to tap another source of cheap labor: the Filipino. In 1923 growers started importing thousands of Filipinos, at that time U.S. citizens, into California, and they proved to be excellent workers. But they too soon rebelled at the disgracefully low wages and poor working conditions, and began to stage strikes that were disastrous for the growers. A growers' spokesman stated that the Filipinos "proved to be the more disturbing and more dangerous than any other Asiatic group that has ever been brought into this state." The Philippine Island Independence Act of 1934 limited immigration, and in 1935 many Filipinos took advantage of a U.S. Government offer of free transportation back to their homeland.

Beginning in the 1930's, Dust Bowl refugees began flocking to the fields of California, and the immigration of over 200,000 poverty-stricken workers kept down wages and was initially welcomed by growers. But this new group proved to be more readily accessible to labor organizers, and the 30's was the decade of the largest and most bitter agricultural strikes in the state's or the nation's history. Only World War II brought an end to the chaotic situation.

As farm workers entered the Army or flocked to the factories, the influx of wetbacks from Mexico increased once more. And in 1942, the U.S. and Mexican governments agreed to the contracting of thousands of Mexican Nationals or "braceros" to help harvest U.S. crops.

Once the war had ended, it might have been assumed that this subsidy to the American farmer would be ended, and the former facsimile of a free labor market restored. But the growers of the Southwest now made the preposterous claim that they could not find enough American workers to harvest their crops, and the Bracero Program was continued and formalized in 1951 by Public Law 78, enabling growers to keep wages artificially depressed and stifling the efforts of farm labor unions through the use of foreign, transient workers patently impossible to organize. (It is a paradox that the termination of the Bracero Program is the only way in the long run of helping <u>Mexican</u> as well as American workers. While the program existed, wages were kept depressed in both countries. Now that the Mexican workers can no longer work in the U.S. in large numbers, the Mexican Government is being forced to accelerate aid to them in Mexico.)

Under the Bracero Program, 200,000 to 300,000 workers a year came to the U.S. to do work formerly done by Americans. These were augmented by an increasing influx of hundreds of thousands of wetbacks. (95,000 were arrested in May of 1954 alone.) Many Mexican-American and other farm workers returning from the war found their jobs taken by braceros or wetbacks earning less than they had earned four years before; if jobs were open, the pay scale had been artificially depressed to the point they were forced to become migrants, seek work in the city, or seek help from welfare agencies.

It was in response to this unnatural and disastrous situation for the American farm worker that the Agricultural Workers Organizing Committee was formed by the AFL-CIO in 1959, with offices in Stockton. In spite of the difficulty of organizing workers in the face of the Bracero Program, AWOC had an immediate response among the workers, and enrolled several thousand members. Largely due to its influence and a number of strikes it staged, coupled with threats of strikes, farm wages in California over the next few years were in many areas raised from eighty, to ninety, to a dollar and ten cents an hour. The elusive goal of a union contract with growers was never achieved, however, and large growers remained so firmly possessed of their medieval fear and hatred of unions, that a rancher near Stockton named Podesta lets his cherry crop rot at a loss in the hundreds of thousands of dollars rather than negotiate with striking AWOC.

In September of 1962 a new force to be reckoned with entered upon the farm labor scene when Cesar E. Chavez organized his predominantly Spanish-speaking National Farm Workers Association, and it rapidly established offices throughout the southern San Joaquin Valley and in some adjoining areas as well. Chavez had been director of the Community Service Organization, a social service group with branches throughout California, and resigned this job, as well as later turning down a $21,000-a-year job with the Peace Corps, in order to help farm workers. The Farm Workers Association under Chavez' direction became more than a union in the usual sense, but a social service organization designed to help its members with their problems in general, and its attractive features include an insurance plan, a credit union (first for farm workers anywhere), and a consumers' cooperative. By the time the present strike started, Chavez and a hard core of loyal supporters had built the NFWA into a healthy grass-roots organization of several thousand members.

1965, from the beginning, seemed a natural year for something big to develop in the farm labor movement. First, in a surprise development, Congress at the end of 1964 failed to renew the long-standing Bracero Program, and Secretary of Labor Wirtz at first insisted that agriculture, like other industries, make an effort to recruit American workers. When growers claimed their feeble efforts in this direction were inadequate, Wirtz, encouraged by Governor Brown, finally backed water and allowed several thousand braceros to enter California under a special arrangement guaranteeing them a wage of $1.40 an hour, and specifying that they could not be used unless similar wages were paid local workers.

Growers in many areas of California, intent on keeping the Bracero Program going, paid the $1.40 to both braceros and domestics. Contrary to their predictions, the retail price of their products was not altered. (Only three to five per cent of the retail price of produce goes to farm labor.)

One place where growers did not raise wages in order to get bracero help was in the Coachella Valley southeast of Los Angeles. AWOC leaders justly thought it ridiculous that Mexican braceros should be getting $1.40 an hour in other parts of the state, while American workers were getting less. In a case of brazen discrimination, Mexican-American grape pickers in the Coachella Valley were getting paid $1.10 an hour and Filipino-Americans $1.25—but both less than the $1.40 paid to aliens.

Accordingly, in May of this year, AWOC determined to remedy the situation. When efforts to contact growers and their representatives failed, three large vineyards in the Thermal area were struck, and 1,000 workers left the job. AWOC effectively used the technique of first winning foremen and contractors to its side, and they in turn would win their crews over to the union cause. After ten days the strike proved so costly to growers that they agreed to raise wages of both Mexican-Americans and Filipino-Americans to $1.40 an hour. Due to various factors, the union and the growers did not sign a contract, but the strike was at least a partial victory for the union.

When the grape harvest began in the late summer in the Delano area in the southern San Joaquin Valley, some of the same growers who had raised wages to $1.40 an hour in the Coachella Valley continued to pay the old rate of $1.20 an hour on their ranches farther north. The situation seemed patently ridiculous and unfair, and since AWOC had many Filipino members in the Delano area it seemed both mandatory and propitious to go on strike there as well.

As the grape picking season opened, the workers around Delano fumed at the injustice of the situation; day-by-day the tension grew as they were forced to work for less than, not only aliens, but other Americans in almost every part of California. By early September things had reached the breaking point. Something had to give.

The evening of September 7th as the staff members of the Farm Workers Association met in their tumbledown five-room office at the southeastern corner of Delano, strike seemed to be in the air. We had, in fact, just finished a small strike at the Martin Ranch near Earlimart which had left us itching for more action, even though the NFWA's purpose was to achieve its goal of a decent life for the farm worker without strikes if at all possible. In the case of the Martin vineyard, sixty leaf-pullers had decided to go out on strike independently and then asked the NFWA to support them, and the NFWA did not feel it could let them down. The dissatisfied workers were getting $1.25 an hour, and asked $1.40 for the leaf-pulling, a vital process which consists of removing leaves from around the bunches of grapes, enabling the grapes to ripen more quickly, develop a higher sugar content, and be picked more easily. After workers went on strike the vineyard was empty for several days, then Martin began bringing in scabs at $1.38 an hour, but due to the Association's efforts never succeeded in getting more than thirty strikebreakers to replace the strikers. The leaf-pulling was slowed down by at least two weeks, and Martin was estimated to have lost several thousand dollars. Association pickets and staff members gained valuable training in talking with scab workers, persuading them not to break the strike, and in writing and distributing leaflets attacking scab labor contractors which resulted in keeping two of these contractors from bringing men to the vineyard.

As we sit in our small conference room discussing plans for a fall membership drive, Eric Schmidt of the Emergency Committee to Aid Farm Workers in Los Angeles chances to drop in with a copy of Jack London's colorful "Definition of a Strikebreaker." The famous author had minced no words in his description of a scab, and Bill Esher, brilliant editor of the Association's bi-weekly newspaper, EL MALCRIADO, pounces upon the pungent literary tidbit and decides it must be printed in the paper. It is also translated into Spanish and displayed prominently on the front wall of the office.

Rumors have been flying all day as people have come and gone. AWOC organizers are in town, we hear. Famous long-time Filipino organizer Larry Itliong, and Ben Gines, who organized the Coachella Valley strike. Meetings of hundreds of Filipinos. Then we hear something concrete: all the workers in a camp on the Lucas and Sons Ranch near Earlimart have quit work and the camp has been closed. Speculation has become reality.

Next day, September 8th, the rumors are even more abundant—and the realities. The strike has taken hold. Over 1,000 workers are out on ten ranches. Over twenty labor camps are involved. Thirty-six men have just left the camp at the Dispoto Ranch near Richgrove, over a hundred men have stopped work at Caratan—the reports come in thick and fast. Ten new deputies have been moved into the area by the Sheriff's Department, we hear, then later ten more. There seems to be confusion about who is waging the strike. A newspaper reporter calls on us thinking we are involved. At noon a Sheriff's car stops in front of our office and a deputy takes a photograph of it, then drives off. Do they assume we are planning to enter the strike and that they can scare us off? Or are they as confused as the reporter?

We go out for a drive, in search of the action. Dozens of pickets walk back and forth with their strike signs in front of the packing sheds and cold storage plants along the railroad—brave Filipino men with determined looks on their faces. We wave at them and they smile and wave back, then return to their picketing. It is the same all across the countryside: many empty vineyards and the determined Filipino men—most of them are single because they cannot afford families—bravely pacing back and forth before the packing sheds of their former employers.

September ninth. The action grows, and the bitterness. The police are out in force now. They drive back and forth past our office all day, as if they expect a revolution to break out. More Filipinos walk out—2,000 men on strike now. We hear, and read in the papers, of men being evicted from their camps, men who had lived and worked there for twenty years, merely because they asked for a twenty-cent-an-hour raise. At one camp the men are locked out just before dinner; they are forced to cook alongside the road. A cop comes along and kicks their cooking pot over. Suitcases and other gear are dumped out on the road; workers are afraid to return for their cars for fear of being arrested for trespassing. At other camps all the utilities are shut off, but the determined strikers stay in the camps: if they leave they will have no place to go, and if the boss can fill the camp with scabs the strike is endangered; they decide to stick it out in the face of the threats of armed security guards, one of whom has already shot at a striker who did not move fast enough.

What is the Farm Workers Association going to do? everyone asks. And we ask ourselves. Should we become involved? Is it strategically desirable? Do we have a moral obligation? Is a strike at this time the best way to help the workers in the long run? Will it help strengthen our organization and the position of the farm worker as a whole? If the strike is lost—what? We try to contact Larry Itliong of AWOC but are unsuccessful. And along the sidewalks and in the crowded little Mexican and Filipino and Arab cafes and bars along the railroad everyone is talking just one subject: strike, huelga. The working people are now on the move. Something is rotten in Delano, and they're going to see to it that the stench is washed away.

September tenth. The strike grows. And the growers' wrath. The Sheriff's Department reports all the striking workers are evicted from another Caratan camp. Our members being streaming into the office asking about the strike: is it their strike too? Should they honor the AWOC picket lines? "Of course," we tell them. Can we undermine the efforts of our fellow workers? The working men must stand united. And we write a leaflet urging our members not to cross the AWOC picket lines:

"Attention, farm workers:

> Ninety per cent of the Filipinos working on the ranches near Delano have gone out on strike, asking for an increase to $1.40 an hour and 25¢ a box. The Union of the North is on strike against ten growers. The Farm Workers Association asks of all Mexicans: HONOR THIS STRIKE. DON'T BE STRIKEBREAKERS!
>
> The growers have thrown the Filipinos out of their camps, shut off their lights, water and gas, and even locked up their kitchens. DON'T WORK FOR THE FOLLOWING GROWERS: Lucas and Sons, Dispoto, Lucich, Caric, Radovich, M. Caratan, A. Caratan, A. & N. Zaninovich, V. B. Zaninovich, M. Zaninovich."

The next two days are spent in fervent thought and planning, and in tying up many loose ends that have to be taken care of in case we enter the strike. Cesar Chavez states in a press release, "Now is when every worker, without regard to race, color or nationality, should support the strike and must under no circumstances work in those ranches that have been struck." We offer our unconditional support to AWOC and anxiously await their reply.

Meanwhile the office is in tumult as a strike issue of EL MALCRIADO, "the voice of the farm worker," goes to press, urging all workers to honor the AWOC strike. We work past midnight, and the paper comes out in time. In addition to strike news, issue number 19 is distinguished by the Jack London "Definition of a Strikebreaker"—later to play an important role in the strike—and by some telling excerpts from the writings of Pope Leo XIII, including the following:

"It is beyond doubt that it is just to seek aid if the employers place unjust burdens upon the workers, or degrade them with conditions which are repugnant to their dignity as human beings…If a man falls, he should be helped up by another man. Therefore it is desirable that associations of workers multiply and become more effective."

September 14th we hold a special staff meeting to decide whether to take a strike vote among the general membership. In typical democratic fashion, Cesar Chavez asks the opinion of each member in turn. Vice-president Gil "Flaco" Padilla is there, hero of the Martin Ranch strike and one of the best talkers ever to grace a picket line; fiery Dolores "Welfare Mary" Huerta, another vice-president, a mother of seven children who has written speeches for congressman and lobbied for farm labor in both Sacramento and Washington; El MALCRIADO editor Bill Esher and assistant Norma Redman; Doug Adair, already a victim of strikebreaker fists; and others. We discuss the pro's and con's; we weigh the issue carefully; then comes the crucial vote, and its result: we will hold a strike meeting.

Our work is cut out for us, and time is of the essence. It is decided that Thursday, September 16th, Mexican Independence Day, is to be the date of the meeting. We have just two days to get ready, and a flurry of preparations ensues: leaflets to be written and ground out on our dilapidated mimeograph machine, an agenda devised, phone calls to be made, musicians contacted, press releases released. We search frantically for a hall, and find there are not too many landlords sympathetic to the union cause, but we finally rent the large salon adjoining the nearby Catholic church.

Cesar Chavez is in constant motion. Next morning at five, after four hours' sleep, we work on radio announcements for the meeting. Not many field workers can afford TV sets, so they listen to the radio instead. I assume we are to sit down at a desk and carefully type them out. But no, there is not time for that—Cesar dictates them as he drives frantically to Bakersfield, thirty-three miles to the south, in a borrowed Volkswagen. They have to be worded carefully, because some of the Spanish language radio announcers are sympathetic to the growers, and there is some doubt whether they will be accepted. We arrive at a station, prevail upon an announcer to loan us a typewriter, and type out the scribbled spot announcements for the meeting. The announcer reads them somewhat puzzledly, demands cash in advance; we don't have it, and the deal is off. Another announcer reads our announcements—we wonder from the look in his eyes if he is fighting an inner battle: his status in the American middle class versus his heritage as a Mexican—and he accepts them. A third announcer, a popular female disc jockey, asks suspicious questions when she reads the announcement: "What is the meeting for? Is it closed to the general public? May I come and take notes?" "Of course," we tell her. She debates, then finally decides to broadcast it; a crucial battle is won.

Back to Delano. The Sheriff's office already seems to know what we're up to; they call asking us to let them know if any violence occurs, and if we bring in any additional personnel to work for us, and who they are. They seem unnecessarily nosey, but we agree to cooperate. There is a flurry of activity in the office as we run off thousands of leaflets about the strike meeting, then send out our staff in its small fleet of dilapidated cars to blanket the northern half of Kern and the southern half of Tulare counties: Delano, Earlimart, Richgrove, McFarland, Corcoran, Wasco—everywhere we have members. But the leaflet is addressed not only to our own members, but to all farm workers who wish a decent life, and we ask ourselves anxiously: will they come?

September 16th. We listen to the spot announcements on the radio. Soon everyone is talking about the big strike meeting of the NFWA. How will the workers vote? Everyone seems certain they will vote to go out on strike, but then anything can happen. AWOC seems to feel we have already joined them, and its Filipino pickets wave at us even more merrily than usual as we drive along Glenwood Street in front of the packing houses, where the packing of grapes has been slowed but not stopped.

From two different church groups we get good and bad news. Father Alabart, who has rented us the hall, comes to us with a worried look on his face, seeming to regret his decision, to want to back out of it. All day he has been getting calls from growers trying to pressure him into refusing us the hall: the growers making their power felt already. But a Catholic priest is a man of his word, and the farm workers will have a place for their meeting.

In the afternoon we get news of an even more vital nature. Big Reverend Jim Drake of the Migrant Ministry comes in beaming. For a long time the California Council of Churches has been trying to help the farm worker. Dynamic Reverend Chris Hartmire, head of its Migrant Ministry, decided after much investigation that the best and most effective way to do this was through Cesar Chavez and the Farm Workers Association, and Reverend Drake and Reverend David Havens have been working with the NFWA for over a year. The assistance program was just up for renewal, and Reverend Drake tells us that at a meeting in San Francisco the Council of Churches has just agreed to support the project for another year: valuable help when it is needed most. As a first step, Drake turns over to vice-president Gil Padilla an only slightly-used Ford station wagon to replace the old rattletrap he has been driving on union business.

We distribute more leaflets and find time to reconnoiter the ranches. At some of the struck vineyards strikebreakers have been recruited; if we are to go out on strike we must work fast. The situation seems to ebb and flow; at some ranches more workers leave, at others more scabs enter. A Mexican-American girl who is one of our members dashes in to tell us triumphantly that she and all the other workers at the Frank Lucich Ranch near Earlimart walked out at ten a.m.; our support for AWOC has taken hold already.

Evening nears, and we are tense with expectancy as we put the final touches on the Catholic hall and wait for the people to arrive. Will they come? How many will there be? We are agonizingly conscious that in the next two or three hours the strike can be won or lost. We nervously make last minute changes—shift our huge thunderbird banner a little to one side, move a little higher the portrait of Emiliano Zapata that adorns one wall and Jack London's "Definition of a Strikebreaker" on the other.

They begin to come, from all over the countryside, families in all manner of vehicle from bicycle to motor scooter to old rattletrap to late model car; families on foot, women pushing strollers or nursing babies at their breasts. People of all colors, Negroes and Mexican-Americans, Anglos and Arabs and Puerto Ricans and blond Mexicans from Mexico. They have one thing in common: they are all farm workers and they are all working under poverty-level conditions.

The great hall fills; five hundred chairs are occupied and people begin sitting on tables, windowsills, standing or squatting in the aisles. A great buzz of excitement fills the large auditorium and a great smell of humanity fills the air. People are lined up outside, and still more come, and our tension relaxes. A woman reporter enters and we offer her a front seat and a translator, but she seems to look about her at the great seething mass of working men and women with a somewhat distasteful, apprehensive look and decides to come back after the meeting for her report. Why, these wild Mexicans might do anything!

Gil Padilla rises behind the long speakers' table placed before the great banner and the crowd hushes. He introduces Father Alabart, who gives the invocation, asking that we be guided by the Lord in all that we do. The Father leaves and the murmur of the crowd rises; it is tense, expectant, restless, it seems to be aware that momentous things are to happen here, things that will shape the whole course of the future, determine whether children have enough to eat, enough milk to drink, make the difference between living in a shack or a decent house, working in pride or accepting charity in shame.

The first speaker is introduced. "Mr. Cruz, President of the Association of Puerto Ricans," Gil Padilla intones, and the crowd applauds. Cruz is a short swarthy man of about thirty-five, nondescript-looking, attired in work clothes, and he seems to speak in an almost indifferent monotone, but what he says! "We are brothers fighting together for a great cause…We must not use violence; violence can accomplish nothing…If we suffer, we'll all suffer together; in union there is power…The word campesino means a great deal to me. There are those who are ashamed of it; I am proud of it. We campesinos work hard. If we win this struggle, tomorrow we can live a little less submerged…" (A man in the audience cries, "Viva la causa!" and the crowd echoes his words: "Viva la causa!" till the walls shake.) He ends, "Many thanks, and I hope that in your minds there may be illuminated a star which will show you the way to do the things that must be done, as we know how to do them." The casual manner, the rather slouchy bearing, make the poetic words seem somehow doubly sincere, and the crowd explodes in applause.

Gil Padilla motions to the small raggle-taggle band and it plays first a Puerto Rican favorite, and then the Mexican National Anthem, and the crowd surges up proudly, misty-eyed but determined, as the ragged but magnificent music with its frequent false notes reverberates from the walls. Shouts of "Viva la huelga! Viva la causa!" thunder deafeningly as the music ends and the crowd is reseated.

The next speaker is Refugio "Cuco" Hernandez of AWOC, a genial somewhat roly-poly Mexican-American, distinguished by a gay wide-brimmed sombrero he perennially carries, and it is a surprise to some to discover that the "Union of the North" has Mexicans working for it too. His manner is gentle, supplicating, like that of a mother hen caring for its brood of baby chicks. His words, even when fiery, seem to caress the huge audience into agreement. "A Mexican who is a real Mexican refuses to be taken advantage of…To be on strike is a sacrifice, a great sacrifice, but it is for our children…" He talks of the brotherhood of all working men and of the brotherhood and common goals of the two unions, and the crowd applauds its agreement.

Then more music, as the excitement and tension build. A man with a press camera darts back and forth taking pictures of the speakers, of distinguished guests, he is famous crusading labor editor George Ballis of the VALLEY LABOR CITIZEN.

Then Cesar Chavez is introduced and the crowd bursts into prolonged applause. Chavez rises, calmly surveys the audience as he waits for the clapping to subside. He is attired in a nondescript sport shirt and work pants; there is nothing flashy about him; he gives above all an impression of cool intelligence modified by an occasional warm smile; he is above all practical and to the point.

"You are here to discuss a matter which is of extreme importance to yourselves, your families and all the community. So let's get to the subject at hand. Because there are many people, and I know there will be many opinions, let us proceed to reach an agreement…Two years ago in this area the growers paid more than in any other part of California. In other areas they paid ninety cents an hour—here they paid a dollar ten. Why is it that this year they are paying less? In the Imperial Valley this year they are paying a dollar forty, but here only a dollar ten or a dollar twenty. Therefore, this meeting…

"A hundred-and-fifty-five years ago, in the state of Guanajuato in Mexico, a padre proclaimed the struggle for liberty. He was killed, but ten years later Mexico won its

independence…(Wild bursts of applause) We Mexicans here in the United States, as well as all other farm laborers, are engaged in another struggle for the freedom and dignity which poverty denies us. But it must not be a violent struggle, even if violence is used against us. Violence can only hurt us and our cause. The law is for us as well as the ranchers. We have certain Constitutional guarantees—for example, freedom of assembly, which enables us to assemble here tonight…The strike was begun by the Filipinos, but it is not exclusively for them. Tonight we must decide if we are to join our fellow workers in this great labor struggle…"

More bursts of applause, shouts of "Viva la huelga! Viva la causa!" as Chavez asks for those in the audience who wish to express an opinion to raise their hands.

A man gets up to speak, a simple working man of forty-five or fifty who still has the look of rural Mexico about him. "We do not have enough money," he says in faltering country accents. "Our children are hungry. We have no rights, no minimum wage like other workers, we are the only workers not covered by the laws of—how do you say it?—collective bargaining. This is not just…" He says his few words and sits down; the crowd applauds as if he had delivered a great oration.

Another man is recognized. Felipe Navarro, a light-skinned graying man who has spent many years in the fields. He is fifty-five or sixty now, and there is something noble about him as he rises to address the crowd, a look of long-suffering, of idomitability, of prevailing against all obstacles. He has lived in the Valley many, many years, and he turns to reminisce about the bitter farm labor strikes in the 1930's; tears come to his eyes. "There was nothing to eat in those days, there was nothing. We just wanted to earn enough money to buy food for our families. I saw two strikers murdered before my eyes by a rancher…And we're in the same place today, still submerged, still drowned…"

The crowd listens intently, galvanized by the old man's ringing words, then applauds with solemn intensity as he sits down. Other hands are raised. Speaker follows speaker as the enthusiasm of the crowd grows. "Who is here from Jalisco?" Cesar Chavez asks. "Who is here from Michoacan?" A man from Tanguancicuaro rises: "What have we to lose by going on strike?" he asks, and the audience roars its approval: the Old Country being heard from now, the green-carders up here just for the harvest season who everybody said would refuse to join the strike. "Who is here from Zacatecas?" And, "The strike is a just cause," a man from Zacatecas says. Men from state after Mexican state rise to pledge the aid of those from their part of the homeland, followed by cries of "Viva Chihuahua! Viva Nuevo Leon! Viva Tamaulipas!"

A Mexican-American woman rises. "At the ranch where I was working this morning there was a man with a rifle. But we were not afraid of him. We all left work, all the Mexicans and Filipinos…" She gets the loudest cheer yet. It seems we are on strike already…

Another man from Mexico gets up. "I am from Tamaulipas. The people think that we who live part of the year in Mexico have no understanding of the problems here. We have to change that bad impression. It is an honor to come here and we must not abuse it. We have to aid our brothers and Filipinos. We are all humans. This is a just cause. Let's go out on strike!"

The crowd is going wild. Cesar Chavez finally quiets them, he calmly explains the sacrifices in going on strike, the uncertainty. "We are a poor union, we do not have a strike fund to care for our workers like other unions…"

But "Strike, strike!" the crowd is yelling now. "Huelga, huelga, huelga!"

"All right, we'll take a strike vote then. Everyone who is in favor of going out on strike, raise your right hand…"

If there is a hand not raised, we do not see it.

"Opposed?" The question seems rather foolish by now.

"Que viva la huelga! Long live the strike!"

And, "Viva!" the whole auditorium erupts in chorus, till the place seems about to tumble down upon our heads.

The cheers continue for a good ten minutes, as pandemonium breaks out: "Viva Mexico! Viva Puerto Rico! Viva la causa! Viva Cesar Chavez! Viva la union!"

The die is cast.

When the uproar has died, the relatively undramatic questions of when to go on strike are voted on (the following Monday, if the growers have not met our terms by then), and how much of an increase in wages to ask for ($1.40 an hour, 25¢ a box, the same as AWOC's demands, and $12.00 a gondola).

Then, a final appeal by Cesar Chavez for non-violence. "Are you in agreement?" he asks.

"Si!" the crowd choruses in what seems total and universal approval.

Finally, a meeting to discuss final strike plans is scheduled for the following Sunday at a meeting place to be disclosed later (the grower pressure has been too great; we cannot use the church hall again).

Then, "Musica!" someone says, and the band strikes up a triumphant march as the crowd surges out to the street.

Afterwards we celebrate by having a late supper at a Chinese restaurant on busy Glenwood Street. (But the business has shifted from the packing sheds on the east side of the street to the cafes on the west side, where everyone is talking about the strike as they try to make beer or coffee money stretch further in case of a long siege.) As we go in I notice for the first time that Cesar Chavez looks very Chinese with his large round head, and somewhat East Indian too—a benevolent Buddha. I learn he is a great admirer of Ghandi, hence the non-violence comes natural.

Dinner is a time for relaxation and joking; there will be little enough of it now. Someone opens a Chinese fortune cookie and reads, "You will meet a beautiful woman to whom you will give money—our cashier." Cesar opens another: "Help! I am a prisoner inside a Chinese fortune cookie factory!"

"What is purple and conquered the world?"

"Alexander the Grape—I thought everyone knew that," Cesar laughs.

Afterwards there is some confusion about the check. We take up a collection and end up by having to borrow money from some fellow strikers whom we spot in a nearby booth. Truly, it is not a rich union.

The next days are hectic ones in the ramshackle office at 102 Albany. Reporters and TV cameramen come and go, people snap pictures, police pass in droves, volunteers

stream in from everywhere, rumors fly to left and right: the headlights of a grape truck have been smashed, two fires set last night in stacks of boxes in the vineyards. And, "Is it true that the NFWA is going to merge with the AWOC?" someone wants to know.

Reverend Dave Havens of the Migrant Ministry arrives. There is something dashing and captivating about this brilliant young minister with his battered Citroen, which Cesar refers to as "the anteater." He has just returned from an important church conference in Texas, and reports more church support for the union.

There is a meeting of credit union officers—the regular business of the union and its services to members cannot stop because of the strike—and everyone passes around an article about our successful credit union in the September issue of the national Credit Union Magazine: first credit union for farm workers.

A hundred things remain to be done. A meeting is arranged between Cesar and Al Green, head of AWOC, for Sunday the 19th, two days hence. People set to work putting out leaflets, making hundreds of HUELGA signs, instructions for pickets: "This is a totally non-violent strike." Picket crews are organized. A special strike issue of EL MACRIADO is prepared, the bustling office seems about to burst at the seams.

All kinds of people stream through: smiling, boyish Chris Hartmire, director of the Migrant Ministry; blond, handsome Brother Gilbert of Cathedral High School in Los Angeles, who has helped us immensely; Father Salandini, a long-time friend of the farm worker, who is to go to Washington to lobby in our behalf; our legal consultant, Howard Richards of Santa Barbara; a new volunteer, Chuck Gardinier of Oakland, ex-$15,000-a-year public relations man, whose new blue Volvo is our first really dependable car; we get offers of help from the Student Non-violent Coordinating Committee and the Congress of Racial Equality.

And our policy of non-violence soon stands the test: in nearby Earlimart one of our members, a Mr. Huerta, is kicked, knocked down and beaten up by a notorious strikebreaker while he is distributing leaflets: he refuses to fight back and his assailant is arrested.

We hear that a grower named Pagliarulo is willing to meet our demands of $1.40 an hour and 25¢ a box, but that other growers pressure him not to negotiate with us.

The George Lucas and Sons Ranch, badly hurt already, asks the courts for a temporary restraining order "to prevent mass picketing and alleged threats of intimidation against its workers."* (How does one threaten to intimidate someone?) More security guards are employed and the countryside is beginning to look like a battlefield. And, Who is going to be the first person to be killed? some people begin to ask with disturbed looks.

In Fresno, J.G. Brosmer of the Agricultural Labor Bureau, who it seems has become a sort of spokesman for the growers, claims in a press release that Mexican-American scab packers hired to replace striking Filipinos are doing a superior job of packing grapes. This is patently untrue, as packing grapes properly is not a skill learned overnight, and this is an obvious move to cause dissension between the two groups.

Sunday comes, and the crucial meeting with Al Green of AWOC. The historical meeting takes place in a room of the Stardust Motel, and police are much in evidence. The

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* The Fresno Bee, September 18, 1965.

two giants of farm labor come face to face, our Cesar Chavez, with his quiet, warm, businesslike manner; and Green, still an enigma to us, a heavy-set ruddy-faced middle-aged man whose steely blue eyes and alert watchful look seem to tell the story of his many long years of battle in the labor movement. Like Chavez, he is down-to-earth, amiable, unpretentious, as he removes the ever-present cigar from his mouth and invites us to sit down.

The two groups agree to the same wage demands and to cooperate unreservedly on the present strike—a thing many skeptics said could never happen—and a joint strike committee is set up and a joint press release written. The two leaders have their picture taken together for the press. The strike has become unique: two unions and several ethnic groups working together in harmony.

Then, as Al Green bids us good-bye, he gives us what is perhaps the best news of all: we are invited to eat at AWOC strike headquarters at the Filipino Hall as long as the strike lasts. We thank him and leave, beaming. The sun is bright, our hopes are high.

It is not only an army that moves on its stomach.

3

THE PICKET LINE

It is our third day on strike. Confusion reigns in the four hundred square mile area of the strike. Hundreds of people have come out of the fields, yet the growers stubbornly refuse to negotiate with us, and the registered letters we have sent them are returned unopened. Various raises have been reported at some of the ranches, from ten to twelve or fifteen cents a box, from a dollar twenty to a dollar twenty-five an hour—but still short of the dollar forty an hour and twenty-five cents a box we are asking. And many of the scabs lie to us about their earnings, we discover, to justify themselves in breaking the strike. At some ranches workers have gone on strike, gone back to work, then gone out on strike again. We observe that the few new scabs who have replaced the people on strike generally are not skilled at picking or packing grapes, and often cause the growers more trouble than they are worth. There are little harassments: a radio station informs us we cannot use the word "strike" in our radio announcements informing people about the situation. And big ones: the police begin following us everywhere, taking thousands of pictures, with movie and still cameras both, seemingly trying to get something on us—is it trespassing or obstructing traffic or what? We have not been guilty of any crime we know of—and they succeed in scaring off some of the more recent arrivals from Mexico who do not know their supposed rights.

There is so much uncertainty: we hear that the Teamsters and the rail unions are supporting us, but are they? We still see trains being loaded and grape trucks driving to the loading docks and cold storage plants. Are those teamsters driving them? We wave at them and yell "Strike" or "Huelga" and they look self-conscious and drive on. Some say the teamsters drive the trucks as far as the picket lines at the packing sheds, then company men come out and drive the trucks on in. There are security guards everywhere now—"rent-a-fuzz" our people have begun calling them. Some of them are not very bright, and we know there will be trouble sooner or later.

Dawn. We spread our pickets out along the various entrances of the huge Tudor Ranch on Driver Road. A blue pick-up comes along and enters the ranch. "Hey—that's Maximo Martinez, the labor contractor—that dirty fink!" one of our men yells, and stares down the dirt road through the vines. "We asked him to cooperate and take his men somewhere else, and look at him—betraying his own people!"

The sky lightens. An old car loaded with Negroes comes along, starts to turn in, but we wave it down. We press leaflets at the six occupants, explain about the strike. "We are trying to bring up the wages so everyone can make a decent living and so we can get a union contract. If everybody will just stay off the job for a few days the growers'll have to sign with us and raise the wages. Can't you folks hold out for a few days?"

The people in the car seem to understand right off. Had they already heard about the strike? Were they undecided till now, did it take just this little extra push to convince them? It was impossible to know. "Hell, we can hold out longer than that," the man at the wheel says with what seems genuine enthusiasm and purpose, and starts to turn the car around. We thank them and wave as they drive off. Are they really going back to town?

We watch for several minutes to see if they turn out toward the country. No, we see the tiny speck of their car turn west on Woollomes Road, back toward town.

Some men in a white pickup truck are watching us now with what seems consternation from a cleared area nearby as we flash our Huelga signs at passing cars. A car loaded with Mexicans approaches and is impervious to our signs, and the men in the pickup gloat as it goes by them into the ranch. Another carload of Negroes comes by and they stop to talk with us. They too, are receptive, and turn back toward town. The men in the pickup seem to fume with rage. The police have found us now too, and a deputy's car sits nearby with its occupants scrutinizing us.

Another white pickup comes along. The driver slows, stops to talk with us. He introduces himself as the owner's son-in-law, a ruddy-faced man of about forty. "I just hope you fellows know what you're doing," he half-smiles.

"Well, it's nice to meet a friendly grower for a change." we return his overtures.

"I'm not friendly," he says, shattering our illusions. "I just wanted to stop and talk to you fellows and find out if you really know what you're here for."

"We know what we're here for."

"Do you know that we operate on about one per cent profit per year? We could make more money if we had our money in a savings account in the bank," he seems almost desperate in his pleading tones.

"Why don't you put your money in the bank then?" someone says.

And, "Every other industry has had to bargain with unions, why not the growers? In other industries if the business can't pay decent wages and still support itself, it goes under to make room for more efficient competitors. That's free private enterprise—why shouldn't the grower have to play by the same rules as other industries?"

He evades the issue. "I had a camp full of Filipinos, men who have lived there for twenty or thirty years. The wife of one of them used to take care of my children. They were like members of our family. We gave them a place to live all year long. And now they're sitting there in the camp on a sit-down strike—I can't understand it." There almost seem to be tears in his voice, as if he really thinks he can win us over to his side with this feudalistic sob story.

"We're not asking the impossible, just a twenty cent an hour raise. You realize there's nothing personal in it—we have nothing against you…"

"We'll let the grapes rot first," he says and drives off. He drives back into the vineyard, and the Sheriff's car follows him in, and he and the deputy have a half hour conversation back in the vineyard.

An hour before, when it was still dark, five miles to the south, a different scene was unfolding. The pickets drive up slowly in the pitch blackness, they are spaced out carefully along the various entrances to the field, they wait tensely for dawn to come. And, Where are the scabs? they mutter among themselves. Why aren't they coming? Have they come into the vineyard through another entrance on the other side?

Then dawn comes, a tiny wisp of light in the east. The leaves of the vines begin to emerge blurrily, to take on form and substance like visions form the subconscious. And slowly, truth dawns too: the leaves are not right somehow, these vines strangely stunted, grotesque. The anxious pickets strain their eyes; the negative of the night develops,

becomes the photograph of the day. And, "Oh, no! A cotton field!" someone yells. "We're picketing a cotton field!"

Carloads of pickets come and go, huge bands of workers merge with one another, split up, merge again. All across the countryside there is a great feverish movement of people and cars, and one never knows what to expect from one moment to the next: dynamite can explode at any moment.

We find ourselves sweeping across the countryside northward into Tulare County. We hear that our fiery vice-president, Dolores Huerta, is here someplace with a hundred pickets, that she has just brought 150 workers out of the field.

And then we turn a corner and see her, standing dramatically atop the "perrera" (a battered panel truck we call the "dogcatcher") waving her slender arms and yelling through an improvised megaphone made from a rolled-up copy of EL MACRIADO. The people in the field stop work, listen awhile, then return sheepishly to their picking.

We drive down the road to another group of pickets, in time to see a startling scene unfold before our eyes. Our editorial assistant, shy, soft-spoken Norma Redman, is talking gently but persuasively to some nearby workers. "Come out," she is saying. "Factory workers make two or three times what you people are making. Why? Because they learned to cooperate and form themselves into a union and they refused to work until they got decent wages. Why don't you people do that too…?"

A brawny man in his middle thirties drives up; he has been rushing frantically back and froth through the fields like a desperate line-backer at a goal-line stand. He jumps out of his pickup and stalks up. "You f------ Communist!" he explodes into Norma's face, waving his arms threateningly, and follows this outburst with an even more insulting accusation.

Norma is speechless for a moment, as are the pickets about her; this is a new low. Then she gathers her wits and her witnesses and drives in search of a deputy sheriff. She asks that a report be made, that a complaint be issued. But the deputy, in spite of the witnesses, apparently does not consider it objectionable that a woman should be reviled publicly in the basest and falsest of terms by a complete stranger. He adamantly refuses to lift a finger, to make a report, to do anything. Norma is forced to take her witnesses and drive to the district attorney's office in distant Visalia, and there too she fails to obtain justice. There is nothing to do but swallow the insults and fume inwardly, and figure out how to defeat underhanded tactics with civilized ones. Apparently the discharge of firearms is the only thing that makes much of an impression on lawmen in these parts…

But wait—there is some justice after all—if not the police's, perhaps it is God's: the workers, if not the grower, have some sensitivity when it comes to women and the way they are treated; before the morning is over the seventy Filipinos in the fields have made up their minds once and for all and come streaming out to join the civilized side.

I take some of Dolores' pickets with me and we drive off, scouting through the countryside, five carloads of us. It is ten o'clock. The sun is bright, the air is warm, there is an air of adventure and jubilation about the little group, of growing enthusiasm and optimism. We are stirring up things, that's for sure, and how long can the growers stand it? The air seems to sing as we whiz along, and we sing too, spirited Mexican songs of a people that don't take defeat lightly.

We turn a corner, onto Driver Road, and "Aha! Aiiii! Esquiroles!" sharp cries of joy fill the car as we spot a crew of twenty-five or thirty Puerto Ricans picking right alongside the road. Just our meat! And we slam to a stop and pounce upon them before they know what hits them.

The men, who are only a few yards inside the vineyard, immediately stop working and stare expectantly at us, as if to say, "We have heard about you, about your daring new tactics, now let's see what you can do!"

We start pouring it on, talking for all we're worth. It's always better and more satisfying when the men are close up like this—yelling can be more nerve-wracking, but it's when you can convince men with gentle reason that you've really got them.

We are polishing our techniques and arguments all the time, learning from one another, and we are getting better and better. We have no instructions, no pat prepared arguments, we learn and improvise as we go along.

"Puerto Ricans, why are you selling yourselves so cheaply?" young Apolonio Lucio says to the nearest man—expert knowledgeable talkers some of these Mexican-Americans at seventeen or eighteen. "Why are you selling yourselves? Why don't the working people stick together? If no one works the growers will have to meet our demands—what other choice will they have? It is your hands that make them rich. Hundreds of other men have left the fields already. When we win the strike do you want to feel that you are getting better wages because of what someone else did—because someone else fought your battle for you…?"

The workers listen, mumble among themselves, start to pick, pause and listen again. There is a striking figure among them—a swarthy man of about thirty-five with a noble brow and intelligent eyes. He seems to sift what we say carefully, his conscience seems to be bothering him, he is debating now, he begins to explain our position to the other workers.

Then, "Watch out!" someone says, and I wonder: where have I heard that before? The growers are still acting like maniacs apparently, and I wonder if it is Mr. Gamboni again for whom the workers are rapidly moving aside. But no, it is a new Dodge sedan this time that comes swerving dangerously in towards us, cutting within a foot of me and the man beside me, and I catch a glimpse of a new face behind the steering wheel—not just a hothead this time, but a handsome man of 38 whose look seems one of calculated arrogance as he suddenly yells out, "Get outa the way or I'll run over you!" and pulls to a halt 15 feet beyond.

The newcomer apparently has parked, and I turn back to the field and hold up my Huelga sign, anxious to press the attack now that the men in the field seem to be seriously considering what we are saying. Then next thing I know I am flat on the ground—this new maniac has backed up and knocked me for a loop! I find myself in a half-sitting position, the bumper of the now-stopped car protruding a foot or so over my left leg, as I shake my head and try to grasp what has happened. I try to rise and my right knee cries out in pain and refuses—so I remain where I am, withdraw pencil and paper from my pocket and scribble down the number on the license plate above me in case the driver tries to drive off. "Don't move," someone says. "Wait until the police arrive," so I make no more attempts to rise.

The crowd gathers about me. And the man in the car now has gotten out and comes strutting around the rear of the car (in the usual cowboy boots) not to ask if I am hurt, but to snort contemptuously, "What an actor! Look at that faker!" and he walks past me to join the ubiquitous Milan Caratan and his Polaroid camera a few feet away. Bruno Dispoto, someone says he is called, this arrogant man who resembles Aly Kahn, as he swaggers by again to hurl more insulting remarks my way. (It is significant that the vineyard is owned by a neighbor of these men. The growers repeatedly accuse us of butting into other people's business. But the welfare of the workers is undeniably the union's business, whereas it is questionable as to whether the problems of other growers are their business.)

Suddenly there is a murmur of excitement a few feet away, and "They're coming out!" someone yells. I twist my head to see the whole crew of workers walking out of the field, led by the man with the intelligent eyes, and I am tempted to believe that God has already punished this brutal man for his reckless and murderous actions. Again violence has backfired on the growers; they continually underestimate the intelligence and sensitivity of the workers, and fail to realize they are capable of being revolted by their coarse actions. When will they realize that fear won't work on these people? I am overjoyed, I forget the pain in my knee for a moment as I watch the faces of these humble working people as they come to peer at me and to sign authorization cards.

"He knocked him down, just like that!" one of them is saying.

"The strike is really getting violent! What will they do next!"

"This is too much for me—this decided me once and for all—I'm with the union!"

The men are signed up; the man with the intelligent face, who is named Gregorio Amaro, says he will bring his men and come picket with us.

By this time some deputy sheriffs, who had been parked down the road for some time, come walking up. They tell me I can rise, and I untwist my leg and manage to get to my feet-apparently nothing was broken, but I still feel pain in my knee, and limp a little when I walk.

"Not you again! Why does this happen to you so often?!" one of the deputies says sarcastically—he is the same deputy who had taken the report when Mr. Gamboni had tried to run me down two days before. "You must not be very agile or something," he continues with wry sarcasm. "This makes the third time this has happened to you!"

"No, but the growers are agile drivers," I'm prompted to retort. "And it isn't three times, it's two times." (Subsequent questioning reveals that he was confusing me with yet another of the pickets who had almost been run down earlier in the day.)

It is too much. First the indifference and insults of Mr. Dispoto, and now the sarcasm of the police. It is altogether grotesque, I think: is it not only human to show some concern about the welfare of someone who has just been run down by an automobile?

The deputies decline to take a report; they will call the Highway Patrol, they tell me, and they will do it. The reformed scabs drive off and we give them a cheer. I stand talking to the officers. Suddenly I look around and notice Mr. Dispoto has moved his car twenty-five feet or so up the road, and over onto private property—no doubt an effort to make it look as if I had been standing on private property when he hit me.

I turn back to one of the deputies. "Shouldn't his car have been left where it was when he hit me?" I ask, concerned.

This is one of the friendlier and more honest deputies. "That was my idea," he tells me in a confidential voice. "But I was overruled."

Lighting strikes in my brain and I see it suddenly, what everyone has been suspecting and talking about, but which I refused to accept as fact until now; it's rigged, the whole thing is obviously rigged; the cops are on the side of the growers and we don't stand a chance. It is almost as stunning a realization as the discovery that you've been knocked over by a murderous maniac in a car. It leaves me feeling helpless, exposed, angry and impotent. Now I am suddenly determined to stay here until this strike is won, it if takes the rest of my life—which might not be very long.

After 45 minutes the Highway Patrol arrives. Almost every one has left by now except for a couple of deputies, a handful of strikers, and Dispoto and his only witness, Milan Caratan. The Highway Patrol officer takes our reports, but strangely fails to talk to my witnesses, whereas he listens carefully to both Dispoto and Caratan. They tell their version out of my hearing—apparently they don't' have the gall to lie in my presence.

Cesar Chavez comes along in a Volkswagen. He had heard about what happened and rushed right out, concerned about my safety. He insists I go to the doctor for an X-ray, and takes me into town. What had a little while ago been a strange battleground now is just a deserted vineyard, with only Dispoto and Caratan telling their grotesque lies to the police.

A quick visit to the doctor. He takes X-rays, gives my leg an electrical treatment, and bandages my knee—the skin had been broken slightly, but I can walk almost normally now and the pain has diminished somewhat. As I leave the office I encounter a young Filipino with a broken nose being brought in—and I catch rapid-fire descriptions of his being attacked by a scab outside a packing shed. The poor blood-bespattered fellow looks awful, and I stop to express my concern, but he is quickly led into an inner room to be treated. Violence on all sides, and it is getting worse; this is no laughing matter.

At the Highway Patrol office in Bakersfield, thirty-three miles to the south, I actually have to pay two dollars to get a copy of the report to take to the District Attorney's office: it's expensive to be run down. Of course I know in advance almost what Dispoto's version of the affair will be: he got out of his car and saw a man on the ground who had fallen against his car.

I feel rather foolish calling upon Deputy D.A. Fisher again for the second time in two days, even if it is a reflection on the growers' calculated campaign of terrorism rather than on my "lack of agility" or accident-proneness as the police have inferred. "Yes," Mr. Fisher agrees concernedly, "you certainly do have reason to want to file a complaint." He keeps nodding his agreement as I describe the event. But when I ask to sign the complaint: "Well, of course we'll have to send an investigator up to check into things. I'll let you know what develops in a week or so. Or maybe you'd better call me."

"And the Gamboni incident?"

"I don't know yet what's been done on that—I haven't seen a report on it yet."

I thank him and leave. A week or so.

It is mid-afternoon by now. I drive north to the strike area, back to the picket line. More people have come out of the fields. And there has been more violence. I encounter two frightened Mexican-American men who have almost been hit by a pickup; in broken English they attempt to tell me what has happened.

"I…right by road…this man he almos' hit me…I run behind telephone pole…if no run behind pole he hit me…" Any lingering doubts that my two incidents had been exceptions, coincidental, have evaporated completely by now: this is an organized campaign of terror.

"Do you want to make a complaint to the police?"

"Yeah, sure, I make complain'…"

Gil Padilla and I take the two men to the Sheriff's substation in Delano. Hulking Sergeant Dodd, in charge of the special detain for the strike, greets us. He is friendly in a rather studied, conditional way.

"Well, gentlemen, you'll have to realize," he says after the men have told what has happened, "we can't arrest everyone that drives close to one of the pickets. It would be impossible to arrest everyone that breaks the law. We're trying to make as few arrests as possible in this strike. If we wanted to, we could arrest you people for driving your cars in caravans. But we don't do that, and by the same token we don't expect you people to try to file a complaint every time some grower drives a little close to you…"

"But Sergeant Dodd," Gil Padilla interjects passionately, "it wasn't a matter of just 'driving close' to these men. They were almost run down and possibly killed!"

"Do you have proof of that?"

"They have witnesses."

"But unless the men were actually hit, unless you have definite proof of some kind…"

"But Sergeant Dodd—you mean to tell me that you can trade off 'caravaning' against the growers trying to run down our pickets? You mean you can place those two things on an equal plane…???"

"Now, listen, Mr. Padilla, I'm not going to sit here and argue with you; I told you the way I feel about it and that's it…"

It is clearly useless.

We walk back to our cars.

Kern County is beginning to look more like Mississippi all the time.

Back to the fields for more picketing; 350 men out of the fields today. Everything happens so fast, cars coming and going, vast movements of men, the fascinating cast of characters: the outraged and grotesque growers; the police, sometimes perplexed, sometimes annoyed, sometimes indifferent, sometimes belligerent; the scabs, cowed, afraid, indecisive, or hardened and scornful; and the strikers, men of all colors and shapes and sizes, with their looks of gentle determination or high purpose. I am awed by the rush and sweep of it all, it is beautiful and frightening and inspiring; it is the most thrilling and important thing that has ever happened to most of us, and the happenings of every minute hold import for ourselves and for hundreds of thousands of others. We are brothers of all races working together, shaping our own destinies and those of our children, changing the world—things will never be the same again after what we are doing here.

Five o'clock. Exhausted, we head in to the Filipino Hall on Glenwood Street—AWOC strike headquarters and our new mess hall. We pass the cars and pickups of growers at the Elks Club half a block away and some of their occupants jeer at us—it is strange having the two camps in such close proximity. And then we are at the large hall itself, on busy Glenwood Street of the packing sheds and bars, and dozens of cars line the streets and fill the parking lots, and hundreds of workers come and go. It is stirring, this atmosphere of friendly determined working men, of different unions and different races working together; it is heart-warming to see the Filipino men greeting the Mexican-Americans as brothers. They are lonely sad men, most of them, these Filipinos, too poor to marry, or unable to find female counterparts of their own race: the cruel contracts under which most of them came to the United States made no provisions for wives, and there are few Filipinas in California. They are humble and gracious in their loneliness, and unbelievably hospitable; it is doubtful if there is a more hospitable and charitable people on the face of the earth.

But they know how to fight for their rights too, and once they know someone is against them he had better watch his step. And right now as we go up the steps they are fuming with anger, these small lonely men.

"What's wrong?" one of us asks. We wonder if it is about the fellow whose nose was broken by a scab.

"Look at this, look at this!" one of them waves a newspaper at us.

We look at the article. It seems that the Philippine Consul General in Los Angeles, Alejandro Holigores, has been invited to speak on the strike by a local Filipino businessman, Andrew Escalona, and that their countryman has called upon the striking workers to return to their jobs.

"What? He spoke here?"

"Here! He wouldn't dare enter here!"

"The newspaper article gives the impression he spoke here…"

"I know it does—that makes it even worse! He wouldn't have the courage to face us—he spoke on TV in Bakersfield! It was all arranged by the growers—our own Consul betraying us!"

"Are you going to do anything about it?"

"Do anything about it? Look!"

We stare down the street. A block-and-a-half away we see pickets walking back and forth in front of a private home.

"It's Escalona's house—and we're picketing his liquor store too! And we're sending a carload of men to picket the Philippine Consulate in Los Angeles too! And Larry Itliong is wiring President Macapagal asking that Holigores be recalled—that dirty traitor!"

We enter the hall—it is a chaotic mess of men muttering, arguing, waving newspapers, with dumbfounded, outraged or perplexed looks on their faces—truly they have been betrayed, and watching them, we feel certain Holigores will rue the day he spoke out against his own people—as soon he is to do.

We pass through the huge crowd to the dining room, warm greetings are exchanged, fellow workers pat one another on the back, the few busy, efficient gracious Filipino women dart back and forth feeding the multitude; it is truly a heart-warming sight.

How do the growers expect to defeat this? I wonder. At the door of the dining room is chubby, witty Bob Rita from Hawaii, half-Filipino and half-Portuguese, always breaking us up with his hilarious verbal onslaughts against the growers.

Then we are in the chow line, huge hot cauldrons of rice, meat, strange but delicious vegetables; and then at the long tables where the conversation flows hot and heavy and colorful, as we exchange exploits with other groups of pickets we have not seen since early dawn.

Dolores Huerta is there, talking a mile a minute even as she eats, a veritable dynamo. A dozen conversations are going on at once. We catch snatches of what she is saying to the people around her: a grower named Stanley Jacobs waved a shotgun at her threateningly; he was arrested for disturbing the peace and bail set at $56—and we wonder again why a shotgun pointed at you is considered so much more illegal and dangerous than a car running you down.

We catch our bits of news between bites: AWOC has over ten valid labor disputes now, and I am delighted to hear that one of them is with Bruno Dispoto, the man who ran me down just a few hours before; the Department of Employment may refer no more workers to his ranch. And ten more disputes are being investigated—the State investigators are interviewing the workers who left the fields and signed our authorization cards. And they are investigating our disputes now, and we hope soon to have certified strikes of our own—a friendly competition emerging.

And there is more bad news too: the courts have issued temporary restraining orders to the Lucas and Pagliarulo ranches; we can have no more than five men per entrance at their vineyards, and no unnecessary shouting. We'll have to be on our toes now not to have too many pickets at the wrong ranch. The battle ebbs and flows.

Back to our own shabby office a mile away. It is frenetic as always, the mimeograph whirling, grinding out leaflets, more strike signs being made, the twang of a guitar from somewhere, people coming and going. A gang of people go out to make house calls, urging the few local people still scabbing to join us.

I draw a different sort of assignment: I am to go in search of Maximo Martinez, the scab labor contractor, and ask him not to break our strike. If he insists on betraying his own people we will picket his house.

It is a fascinating but slightly frightening assignment; to go off alone to plead with a man I know nothing about, who is our enemy, from whom I have not the slightest idea what to expect. I get in my car and start off.

I find his café, the Taco House, on the main street of the town. It is a small place with a counter and a few booths. I pause outside, gathering my courage. How should I act? Tough, conciliatory, how? I realize for the first time that this is a strike being waged by amateurs—but determined, idealistic amateurs—and I push through the swinging door and go on in.

A few Mexican-Americans sit at the counter. I make up my mind they will not intimidate me. But what if they are his friends? Will they attack me, beat me up, throw me out?

A Mexican man and woman are behind the counter, a couple in their middle or late thirties. The man certainly doesn't look tough, I note with relief; in fact he takes on look at

me and beats a hasty retreat to the kitchen—can it be that he knows who I am and what my mission is?

I order coffee from the woman and ask to speak to her husband.

The woman is more fearless. "What do you want to see him about?" she asks in somewhat less than friendly English.

"I'm from the Farm Workers Association"—I show my union card—"and I'd like to speak to him."

His wife stiffens. "He doesn't speak English."

"That's all right. I speak Spanish."

The men nearby at the counter seem to catch the tension and sit silently, half-watching, half-listening.

The woman turns to the kitchen and mutters something. Her husband comes out, seeming almost boyishly shy, his head hanging—is this the man who has openly defied us?

I introduce myself, and Maximo Martinez extends a limp hand.

"As you must know, there is a strike going on, and we're asking that you take your men somewhere else to work until it's over," I say in Spanish.

He just hangs his head and says nothing.

"We need the money; we are in debt," his wife says coldly.

"But the strike extends only ten or fifteen miles north and south of here; you could take your people somewhere else and still make money."

"It would cost more for gas."

"But surely a little extra money for gas is better than breaking the strike and betraying your own people. We are only trying to help the workers get decent wages."

Maximo still will not talk; he hangs his head shyly and lets his wife speak for him—I recall a book in which Oscar Lewis explodes the myth about the Mexican husband always being the dominant one.

"We are in debt; we can't afford it," his wife repeats stupidly.

I continue to plead; always the same monotonous answer.

"I'm sorry, but we are going to picket your house then."

Silence.

"You understood, didn't you? WE don't want to have to do it, but if you refuse to cooperate, we are going to picket your house.

Again, silence.

I pay for my coffee and walk out. A strike can be an unpleasant business. But it is even more unpleasant to be poor, without hope, without enough milk to give to your babies.

I park in front of the office, discouraged and exhausted. A mile-and-a-half across a cotton field blink the lights of the Voice of America towers. Inside the office Bill Esher and his small staff burn the midnight oil to put out the next edition of EL MACRIADO: the real Voice of America. Will it be heard? I wonder. How soon will it be heard?

4

WHO IS CESAR CHAVEZ?

It is the year 1943 in the city of Delano. A young man in his late teens is home visiting his family after working in a distant part of the state, and he decides to take in a show. He walks to a local movie house, buys his ticket, and enters the crowded theatre. As he stands at the rear of the aisle and his eyes become accustomed to the dark he observes that the people on one side of the aisle are almost all dark-skinned, Mexican-Americans like himself, while all the people on the other side of the aisle are white, Anglos.

He starts down the aisle. Of course he had known before he went away from home that the theatre was segregated, but now after being out in the broad world it hits him as never before. Why? he wonders, walking down the aisle, looking for a seat. Was he not an American citizen like these Anglos? Was he not as intelligent and as well-mannered as most Anglos? Was he not living in a country where all men were supposed to be equal? Had he not paid the same price to enter the theatre as Anglos paid? Why then should he be told he could not sit in a certain part of the theatre where others were allowed to sit?

He finds a seat and sits down.

It is only a minute before an usherette taps his arm. "I'm sorry, but you'll have to sit on the other side of the aisle."

"Why? What's wrong?" the young man asks.

"I'm sorry, but Mexican people have to sit on the other side of the aisle."

"Why?"

"I'm sorry, but that's the rules."

"I'm not bothering anybody, why can't I sit where I want to sit?"

Several people are turning to look now at this young Mexican-American who apparently thinks he is as good as white people.

"Look, if you don't move, I'll have to call the manager."

The young man says nothing, and continues to look at the movie.

The manager comes; his pleadings are of no avail. He in turn goes for the police.

The young man feels a rough hand on his shoulder. He looks up to see two burly policemen standing over him in the darkness.

"All right, buddy, let's get going."

"What's wrong? I didn't do anything wrong, I didn't break any law."

"You broke the law of this theatre, now let's get moving."

"But I didn't--"

"Look, are you coming with us, or do I have to use a little persuasion?"

The young man suddenly finds himself yanked up out of his seat, pushed toward the entrance and on out to the sidewalk, taken to the local police station—and all because he accepted literally the proclamation that in America all people are created equal.

It is twenty-two years later, September 23, 1965. The fourth day of the strike. We drive along busy Glenwood Street, Cesar and I. The center line of the street is like the center of no-man's-land on a battlefield. On one side of the street are the little Filipino and Mexican cafes filled with strikers. On the other side the railroad and the packing

sheds, not very busy now that we have almost emptied the fields of workers, and a few company men give us scathing looks as we drive past.

As I drive along, Cesar seems deep in thought. I wonder what he is thinking, what the hundred problems are that are on his mind, no doubt tricky and involved legal processes involving unions that I not even faintly understand—the pressure he must be under!

"Look," he says with a sudden grin, "that little girl."

"I turn to see a six-year-old Mexican girl bobbing away from us along the sidewalk, her pigtail swinging from side to side like a clock pendulum gone berserk; as she hurries onward on her unknown mission it seems almost to lift her skyward like the whirling blades of a helicopter. So these were the momentous thoughts!

He's always noticing little things along the road that escape me—and writers are supposed to be observant. Is this a great man's way of relaxing? Perhaps it is one test of high intelligence to be able to throw one's self whole-heartedly into a cause, and yet still have another part of the mind free to live a normal life with all its concerns and sensations. Other times he surprises me during moments of high import by discussing a multitude of things that have no bearing on the strike: women, the duties and necessities of marriage, child-rearing, the passing scenery. Or when problems are pressing, he takes time off to practice zany judo chops with his young sons, "Birdie" and "Babo."

Then, as we drive along, almost as an afterthought: "Oh yes—we must picket Maximo Martinez' house tonight."

Perhaps the two incidents cited about give some hint as to the diverse and seemingly contradictory aspects of Cesar Chavez' personality. A man with a healthy sense of his own worth and with a correspondingly intense drive to see that he and his kind are treated as equals, he yet has a disarming simplicity, down-to-earthness, and interesting the ordinary things of life that have an ingratiating effect on almost all people with whom he comes in contact.

Cesar Estrada Chavez was born in Yuma, Arizona, thirty-eight years ago, into a family of five children which barely eked out a living on their father's small farm near the banks of the Colorado River. When he was ten years old his hard-working father finally went broke, and there was no alternative but to take to the road, doing the only thing they knew how to do—farm work. They became migrants, and entered the stream of workers that followed the crops from Arizona to northern California and back, barely scraping by as they endured the scorching heat of summer and the bitter cold of winter in ramshackle huts or their broken-down car. School was, to say the least, irregular and haphazard. When the perpetually impoverished family finally settled in Brawley, and managed to establish that as sort of a home base for a few years, young Cesar was to suffer the humiliation of segregated schools with second-class equipment. In spite of these humiliations, he liked school, was an alert and receptive student, but the necessity of helping support his struggling family forced him to drop out during the eighth grade to work as a migrant.

But the learning process for Cesar Chavez did not stop there. He continued to read avidly when he was not working, and most of all he kept his eyes open and learned many social lessons that are not taught in public schools.

"Those early days when we first came to California were rough," Cesar recalls. "We were really green, and whenever a labor contractor told us something, we fell for it hook, line and sinker. We didn't know the ropes yet and we got hooked every time. I remember the first year we ended up in the fall picking wine grapes for a contractor near Fresno. They were bad grapes, there were very few bunches on the vines, and we were the only family working in the field. But we were too green to wonder why we were the only ones, you see. After the first week of work my father asked the contractor for his pay. 'I can't pay you yet because I haven't been paid by the winery,' the contractor told my father. But we were broke, absolutely broke with nothing at all to eat, so the contractor finally gave us twenty dollars, and said we'd get a big check later when the winery paid him. We worked for seven weeks like that, and each payday the contractor said he couldn't pay us because the winery hadn't paid him yet. At the end of the seventh week we went to the contractor's house and it was empty—he owed us for seven weeks pay, and we haven't seen him to this day.

"We were desperate. We ran into another labor contractor in Fresno. 'There is lost of money in the cotton near Mendota,' he told us. It was late November by now and it was cold and raining almost every day. Because of the rain, there was almost no work at all. That winter of 1938 I had to walk to school barefoot through the mud we were so poor. There was a school and there was an annex. The Mexican-American kids went to the annex—it was just another name for a segregated school. After school we fished in the canal and cut wild mustard greens—otherwise we would have starved. Everyone else left the camp we were living in, but we had no money for transportation. When everyone else left they shut off the lights, so we sat around in the dark. We finally got a few dollars for some relatives in Arizona and bought enough gas for our old Studebaker to get us to Los Angeles. Our car broke down in L.A. and my mother sold crocheting on the street to raise the money for enough gas to get to Brawley. We lived three days in our car in Brawley before we could find a house we could afford to rent.

"Next winter we were stranded in Oxnard and had to spend the winter in a tent. We were the only people there living in a tent and everyone ridiculed us. We went to bed at dusk because there was no light. My mother and father got up at 5:30 in the morning to go pick peas. It cost 70¢ to go to the fields and back, and some days they did not even make enough for their transportation. To help out, my brother and I started looking along the highway for empty cigarette packages, for the tinfoil. Every day we would look for cigarette packages, and we made a huge ball of tinfoil that weighed eighteen pounds. Then we sold it to a Mexican junk dealer for enough money to buy a pair of tennis shoes and two sweatshirts.

"Two days before Christmas a Mexican-American woman who owned a few small shacks near there saw our tent in the rain and felt sorry for us, so she let us live in one of her shacks. Every Christmas this woman put on some Christmas skits in her home, and this Christmas she asked my mother and father to play two of the parts in a skit about the Christ child, in place of the man and woman who usually played the parts. My father and mother played the parts, and the other man and his wife were so angry they never spoke to the woman again.

"Well, we finally learned the ropes. We learned where the crops were and when they needed workers, and we learned little tricks like living under bridges and things like that. Once we'd learned the ropes, we began helping other green families like we had been, so they wouldn't have it as rough as we did.

"About 1939 we were living in San Jose. One of the old CIO unions began organizing workers in the dried fruit industry, so my father and my uncle became members. Sometimes the men would meet at our house and I remember seeing their picket signs and hearing them talk. They had a strike and my father and uncle picketed at night. It made a deep impression on me. But of course they lost the strike and that was the end of the union. But from that time on my father joined every new agricultural union that came along—often he was the first one to join—and when I was nineteen I joined the National Agricultural Workers Union. But it didn't have any more success than any of the other farm workers unions."

After he left home Cesar continued to follow the crops. He mingled with whites and learned that they had problems too, and that prejudice was not an inborn human quality but something which could be overcome; he gained a new devotion to working people of all races and beliefs. In Delano, he met and married a Mexican-American girl who shared his dedication to the cause of the farm worker, and they worked together in the fields up and down the state and began to raise a family as best they could.

In 1950 they went to live in his former home of San Jose, where they worked in apricot and prune orchards. It was here that Cesar Chavez was to meet one of the two men who were to change his life radically. It was a fateful day when scholarly Father Donald McDonnell of the nearby mission church knocked on the Chavez door on a routine round of visits to the poor people living in his neighborhood. Cesar recalls that Father McDonnell, an expert linguist who spoke not only English and Spanish, but Chinese, Japanese, German and Portuguese,"…sat with me past midnight telling me about social justice and the Church's stand on farm labor and reading from the encyclicals of Pope Leo XIII in which he upheld labor unions. I would do anything to get the Father to tell me more about labor history. I began going to the bracero camps with him to help with Mass, to the city jail with him to talk to prisoners, anything to be with him so that he could tell me more about the farm labor movement."

It was Father McDonnell who one night in 1952 introduced Cesar to Fred Ross of the Community Service Organization, a new social service group of predominantly Spanish-speaking people which was trying to educate needy people to help themselves with their social and economic problems. Ross was struck at once by young Chavez' engaging personality and leadership qualities, and hired him at a salary of $35 a week to help organize CSO chapters throughout the state.

Ross' confidence was not misplaced. In a comparatively short space of time Chavez had helped build CSO into a powerful organization with chapters in both California and Arizona, and by the late fifties he had become General Director of the entire organization.

As head of CSO, Cesar Chavez involved the organization in a direct head-on confrontation with the power structure that gave it real meaning and which threatened to shake the foundations of the feudalistic elements in California's economy. Learning that

local farm workers in Oxnard were not able to get jobs because growers were illegally using braceros instead, he daily over a period of several months led a group of workers to the office of the local growers' association, and daily filed a complaint with the California Farm Placement Service when they were not hired, filing over 1,100 complaints in all. He finally succeeded in getting an inspector from the Labor Department to force growers to hire local workers instead of the Mexican Nationals. But as soon as the inspector left, the locals were fired and the braceros taken back again. After this ridiculous process had transpired time and time again, Chavez finally one day led a huge group of local workers to the fields, and arranged to have the march covered by the newspapers and TV, as he provided documentary evidence that braceros were being used while available local workers could not find jobs. This incident triggered a complete investigation of the Farm Placement Service, its chief and two other men resigned under pressure, and an assistant chief was dismissed when it was proven he had accepted bribes from growers. One man—and a Mexican-American at that—had caused a statewide upheaval in California agriculture.

But inevitably, when people are helped to advance themselves in society, some of them forget or ignore their past, and some of the CSO members whom Chavez had helped to elevate themselves in the community later balked when Chavez, at a CSO convention, proposed that the CSO continue to use its influence to help poor farm workers. When conservative elements in the CSO refused to support him, Chavez in 1961 resigned his position as director in order to devote all his efforts to helping farm workers. About the same time, he also turned down an offer of a $21,000-a-year job with the Peace Corps as director of the Corps for four Latin American nations. If no one else would help the farm worker, how could he ignore him?

Instead, Chavez took a $1.25-an-hour job pruning grape vines in his wife's home town of Delano, and began spending all his spare time traveling up and down the San Joaquin Valley talking to farm workers, getting their opinions, laying the groundwork for the establishment of the Farm Workers Association.

By September, 1962, he had contacted thousands of farm workers, mostly Mexican-Americans, and felt at last that the time was ripe to call an organizational meeting. But his long service with the CSO had taught him that the poor farm worker had more problems than just the size of his salary, and the new organization was to be based upon a new and broader concept of a union as an association of workers to help the member with all his needs, social as well as economic. The new organization proposed to provide insurance for its members, a credit union (the first for farm workers), and to help them with such problems as translation from Spanish to English, securing welfare and other benefits due, medical problems, etc. The Farm Workers Association had an immediate grass roots appeal, and since its organizational meeting on September 26, 1962, has been growing steadily and spreading its influence throughout the entire state of California. Cesar Chavez, with his $50-a-week salary as General Director, became the only farm labor organizer in California's history whose salary was paid directly by the workers he had organized.

What is the secret of Chavez' success in a field where national unions with hundreds of thousands of dollars behind them have failed? Scott Fitzgerald, in an autobiographical novel, once wrote that he didn't have the two assests most valuable to a

man, animal magnetism and money, but that he possessed the next most valuable, intelligence and good looks. Cesar Chavez goes him one better, for he undoubtedly has a great deal of personal magnetism which is probably the single greatest key to his success, as well as an undeniably keen intelligence and exceedingly pleasant if not handsome appearance. There is something arrestingly candid about him when one first meets him, a convincing lack of affectation and what seems an undeniably sincere interest in the other person's problems; he is one of those persons one feels he has known all his life.

He has an extremely tactful and considerate manner of giving orders so that one finds himself almost doing the thing required as if he had thought of it himself: "Why don't' you take this down to the post office and mail it? Why don't we have the volunteers distribute leaflets this afternoon? It might be a good idea if you picketed the Caratan Ranch tomorrow…"

Next to the quality of personal magnetism, probably the most remarkable thing about him is his coolness under pressure. I have never once seen him lost his temper and explode in anger, in spite of the extreme pressure he is under, although I am told he once kicked two high-ranking government officials out of his home when they persisted in wasting his time with proposals detrimental to the farm worker.

He has an excellent and very boyish sense of humor, and really seems completely devoid of any feeling of superiority or of being part of a special elite. Tennessee Williams, in reply to an interviewer's question, once said that a person couldn't help being changed by fame and publicity, and it is difficult not to agree with him, but in the case of Cesar Chavez the signs have not become evident. If this is an act, it is a magnificent one.

Of course he is not perfect—assuming people could agree on what perfect is—and by definition a person who is intensely partisan is intolerant of certain things. In Cesar's case, as more than one person has observed, he tends to be intolerant—because he is so intensely committed himself—of people who do not fight as hard as he is fighting to improve economic and social conditions, and to fail to be sympathetic when they are not willing to have their families undergo certain privations for "la causa." I remember an occasion upon which he subtly reprimanded me in a restaurant for ordering an expensive breakfast of sausage and eggs while he had more modest fare, when I felt it was none of his business.

Whether Cesar Chavez will become the Martin Luther King of the Mexican-Americans remains to be seen. While he has penned no brilliant essays like King's, he has demonstrated remarkable leadership qualities, and there is no one else of his stature in sight in the Mexican-American community.

Of other labor leaders, the one he says who has impressed him most is John L. Lewis; of contemporaries, his favorite is Walter Reuther. As for himself, he says he never has visualized himself as a great labor leader, nor does he plan to stay on indefinitely once his mission has been accomplished and the farm workers have union recognition and can earn a decent living like other workers.

"Even when our work succeeds, I don't want to hang on forever. What I would really like is to be alone somewhere—in Mexico, or in the mountains—and have time to read all the classics that there are in English and Spanish."

5

MAXIMO'S HOUSE

Dusk. September 23rd. The sun in the west is a flat red in a sky devoid of clouds. All the sunsets are like this these autumn days in Delano, as stark as the level fields that stretch without interruption to the horizon, closing each day with a monotonous finality that in a way becomes rather eerie and dramatic.

Everything seems sharp and final here, with no soft edges: the sharp property lines that divide the pickets and the growers, that divide impunity and arrest; the sharp division in men's thinking—you are either for the strike or against it; the sharp demarcation here at the edge of town near Maximo Martinez' house where one side of the street is houses and the other is fields with no gradual trailing off, as if the world ended there.

It has been a long day in the fields, we have gotten hundreds of men out, but there still is work to be done, and there are tired but determined men to do it. It is not pleasant to picket someone's house, it is more personal and intimate than picketing a vineyard, but it is necessary if that is the only way we can appeal to contractors who take dozens of men into the fields to break the strike.

The three forms move back and forth in front of the modern stucco house with their upraised signs: "A strikebreaker lives here—un esquirol vive aqui." At the head of the line is Reverend David Havens, a proud and determined look on his face as he paces steadily along the curb; there is no sidewalk here, and one cannot risk stepping on private property. Next comes the small form of Israel Garza, a young member from Monterrey, Mexico, one of the green-carders they said could never be organized. And bringing up the rear is hulking, a miable Julio Hernandez, head of our Corcoran office, veteran of three long years of organizing.

Cars pass slowly and their occupants either wave and cheer or sneer and hoot—all in accordance with their sympathies. A crowd begins to gather—first two or three people, then a dozen, two dozen, fifty, a hundred, two hundred—still they keep coming, and the pickets plod proudly on. But from inside the house there is not a sign that anyone is aware of what is happening.

Then other forms appear, leaping suddenly out of flashy new cars, grotesque threatening forms, they seem to waver strangely as they knife across toward the pickets.

"You call yourself a minister, you phoney two-bit clown! What church do you belong to—Brothel Mission?"

The air is suddenly full of alcohol and jabbing elbows and stamping cowboy boots as Dispoto and company crowd upon the pickets, hurling insults and crude threats, picketing the pickets, stepping on their feet, nudging them in the ribs.

Our men manage to hold a hurried conference, and Julio is elected to go in search of help and the police; he manages to evade an outstretched foot meant to trip him and makes a dash for his car.

Back at the office we are folding leaflets around the big table in our conference room, the six of us who are not going out from door-to-door. When Julio rushes in

sweating, a worried look on his face, and begins babbling at us in his somewhat broken English, it takes a minute for us to realize what is happening.

Then, "Let's go!" and we dash for the front door, return hastily to grab picket signs, and pile into cars and drive off.

When we arrive back at Maximo Martinez' house the crowd has swelled to over a thousand. A police car has arrived now, and two officers sit surveying the scene, but not lifting a finger to impede the rude assaults of the eight growers who lurch elbowing them in the ribs as before.

We park and dash across the street with our signs to join the picket line. It is an honor to be here, and it is a proud sight to see Reverend Havens and Israel bravely walking back and forth as they are pushed and trampled by the eight intoxicated growers.

"Hey, Gorgeous George!" Bruno Dispoto yells. "When are you going to take a bath? Phew!" He grabs his nose and at the same moment lurches towards me and elbows me viciously in the ribs. The police do nothing, and there is nothing to do but walk on, back and forth, pretending the growers do not exist. It is the first major test of our non-violent policy, we realize, and we cannot afford to be tricked into defending ourselves.

Milan Caratan is there too, bobbing about cockily, and with a sneer he elbows Reverend Havens in the ribs and walks across my foot, then passes on down the line, elbowing each of us in turn.

This is incredible! I think. Grown men behaving like members of a street gang in New York. No one would believe it without having seen it. My own father had been a grower, and I confess I had had a certain stereotyped picture of growers as being men who were at least halfway civilized, with a year or two of college at least, men a cut or two above the law of the jungle—but these men are nothing but plain hoodlums!

No, the growers are not all plain hoodlums—Mr. Tudor's son-in-law is there, Maximo Martinez' employer, standing apart from the rest, refusing to participate in this grotesque savagery. "I'm surprised to see you here,' he says in a friendly but sanctimonious voice as we pass, as if we were the ones committing the acts of brutality. "This is just too low—picketing a poor man's house—he has to make a living—this man is in debt."

"That doesn't excuse a man for living off the sweat of others, for keeping down their wages—he could take his workers someplace else—or you could negotiate with us."

"Never," he says and turns away.

We walk back and forth, suffering the blows and insults of the growers. More people arrive, they line the street for two blocks. And another police car arrives, but its occupants show no more interest in protecting us from the drunken assaults of the growers than the police already there.

"Hey, Reverend: take that, you creep! Don't any of you creeps ever take a bath? Why don't you go back wherever you came from and crawl in your holes? You f------ bird-brains! Oh, pardon me, Mex. Why don't you watch where you're going, stupid? Take that, you goddamn troublemaker!" The insults continue, and the blows; we wonder how long we can endure it.

Ahead, I see Milan Caratan elbow little Israel Garza in the stomach, causing him to double up and fall to the pavement. Caratan struts on with a sneer on his face, elbowing others on down the line as his cohorts laugh. The police do nothing.

The murmur of the crowd is louder now, it encroaches gradually upon us, as the police strive to hold it back. It is almost dark now, the street lights are on, throwing grotesque shadows across the walls of Maximo's house—he still does not appear. Someone has run to the Filipino Hall and told what is happening and our fear lessens somewhat as we look across the street and see a vacant lot filled with a huge throng of our Filipino brothers, ready to spring to our aid if we give the sign.

And now Cesar is there, talking with the police, trying to get them to put a stop to the farcical scene. But when Milan Caratan knocks down Israel Garza before their eyes again, they do nothing.

"You miserable fairy!" Bruno Dispoto gives me a particularly vicious blow to the ribs and it is too much: "You're a real prince!" I explode with vicious sarcasm, and Cesar comes over to caution me and to remind me of our policy of turning the other cheek.

The farce continues. The Filipinos and the rest of the crowd surge closer, while Gil Padilla tries to keep them back. Insults fly to left and right now between the growers and their few sympathizers, and the rest of the crowd, which is almost solidly behind us; and those who had been neutral are won to our side by the vicious antics of the growers.

A real riot seems about to erupt as police captain Al Espinosa, a Mexican-American, drives up. Even though he is also a contractor and allegedly not sympathetic with the strikers, Cesar immediately goes up to him to appeal to his sense of humanity: "Can't you please do something, Captain? One of our pickets has been knocked down twice. I'm afraid there's going to be real violence if you don't stop the growers from assaulting our pickets."

The captain sizes up the situation, seems to debate; he turns to his men: "All right, I want the next man who gets out of line arrested!"

Milan Caratan, seeming to share the growers' opinion that they own the police—as they perhaps do to some extent—lets another elbow fly at poor Israel—why can't he pick on someone his own size?—and the Mexican youth again falls to the pavement. The Filipinos move closer.

Caratan gives a startled look as he feels the grip of a police officer on his arm. "All right, Milan, let's get in the police car." We see him protesting feebly as he is led away through the crowd by the officers—"But I'm a grower, this can't happen to me, are you confused or something?"

"He is being taken into protective custody," someone tells us as the police car disappears around a corner and is gone.

Now Captain Espinosa is pleading with the astounded growers, standing cowed and perplexed by the incident. He talks with them for a minute and comes back to Cesar. The growers have agreed to leave, and he wants to know if we will leave too. Cesar agrees—the bizarre scene has served its purpose; everyone knows by now that Maximo Martinez is a scab labor contractor, and everyone knows that the growers—or many of them—are a pack of uncivilized hoodlums. Cesar's quick action and the belated cooperation of the police have averted what soon might have been a bloody and tragic riot.

We walk to our cars as the crowd begins to break up. One of our members who had been standing across the street informs us that there had been over a hundred Filipinos with drawn knives waiting to spring to our aid if it became necessary. The

Filipinos accept the non-violent approach of the strike leaders, but if someone's life is threatened they are ready to defend themselves and their brother strikers.

The crowd disperses. We drive back to the office. Non-violence has met the test and triumphed. But we are not joyous as we drive along through the night—the strike has taken on a new dimension of fear, reached a new low in baseness and depravity, and there is nothing the least bit amusing about it. What outrage will the growers commit next? we wonder. When will someone, perhaps someone in this car, be seriously injured or even become the strike's first "martyr"? It is not a pleasant thought.

Across the fields wink the Voice of America towers. What are they saying? Do they tell the story of what happened here tonight?

Next day Reverend Havens and I take young Israel to the judge. His assailant was not even arrested, we learn, but only taken to the police station and "talked to." Elderly Judge Kitchen is no more anxious to accept this complaint than the previous ones, even though the Delano police found it necessary to take the accused into custody. After much insistent persuasion, the judge agrees to accept a complaint. He tells Israel Garza that he will be notified of proceedings in a day or two. But when Israel has to leave Delano to work in another area a week later, he still has not heard a word about the case.

A newspaper article describing the incident the day after it occurred reads as follows:

> "The pickets appeared about 7 p.m. Not long after that a group of ranchers turned up and began picketing the pickets. The police said there was no disturbance, but about an hour later <u>when one picket fell down</u>, the officers dispersed them all."[*]

The "Fresno Bee" stringer in Delano claims this is the version she got from the police.

Kern County is rapidly becoming what newspaper editor George Ballis is soon to describe as "Mississippi West."

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[*] "The Fresno Bee," September 24, 1965. Underscoring mine.

6

DISPOTO & COMPANY

Support for the strike grows. Toward the end of the first week there arrive three superb additions to our staff: witty, handsome Bob Solodow, fresh from two months on a Mississippi prison farm, and Bob Fisher, whose trial is pending regarding a sit-in at a Los Angeles drugstore, both of the Congress of Racial Equality; and Rodney Freeland of the San Francisco office of the Student Non-violent Coordinating Committee.

Aid begins pouring in from all over the state: food, clothing, money, volunteers. Some people are beginning to say that the strike has become a movement. In issue No. 19 of EL MACRIADO, editor Bill Esher writes:

"What is a movement? It is when there are enough people with one idea so that their actions are together like a huge wave of water which nothing can stop. It is when a group of people begin to care enough so that they are willing to make sacrifices.

"The movement of the Negro began in the hot summer of Alabama ten years ago when a Negro woman refused to be pushed to the back of the bus. Thus began a gigantic wave of protest throughout the South. The Negro is willing to fight for what is his: an equal place under the sun.

"Sometime in the future they will say that in the hot summer of California in 1965 the movement of the farm workers began. It began with a small series of strikes. It started so slowly that at first it was only one man, then five, then one hundred.

"This is how a movement begins. This is why the Farm Workers Association and the strike it is engaged in are more a 'movement' than a 'union' and a 'strike.' Once a movement begins it is impossible to stop. It will sweep through California and it will not be over until the farm worker has the equality of a living wage and decent treatment. And the only way it will be done is through organization. The farm worker must organize to fight for what is his.

"What is a movement? It is the idea that someday the farm worker will be respected. It is the idea that someday he will earn a living wage.

"It is when the silent hopes of many people begin to become a real part of life."

By the fifth day of the strike almost twenty valid labor disputes have been certified, and AWOC organizer Larry Itliong announces that 90% of the normal work force is out. A newspaper headline proclaims: "Sixty Farms Hit by Walkouts," and we begin to see rotting grapes along the roads on many farms now as we sweep through the countryside searching for the scabs that are becoming more and more difficult to find. A whole crew leaves the Tudor Ranch, and we wonder if our picketing of Tudor's contractor, Maximo Martinez, had anything to do with it. In turn, the growers are becoming even more vicious and vindictive—apparently the only response they know—and at the Marko Zaninovich camp striking workers are evicted and doors nailed shut behind them as an armed guard prevents entrance to the camp.

The community is beginning to feel the effect now, too, and the "Fresno Bee" of September 25th announces: "Merchants reported a sharp decline in business since the strike began…The fall harvest season is usually the most active period of the year in the business

district." Small businessmen begin confiding to us that they hope we'll win. And why not? The more the farm workers earn the more they will spend in their stores. But the growers spend their wealth in distant San Francisco or Los Angeles or Las Vegas.

Friday morning we are up at 4:30. It is coming to seem the normal thing now to grab three or four hours sleep and roll out of our sleeping bags at the crowded office in the freezing cold. Our target for today is the Dispoto Ranch, Cesar announces, and the members of our group eye one another significantly, with varying degrees of relish and apprehension.

We grab our picket signs and walk to our cars; the five caravans of pickets spread out in different directions, Dolores Huerta with one group, Gil Padilla with another, Reverend Jim Drake with another, Wendy Goepel with another. Our car is an old Packard with a peculiar history: a friendly farmer had donated the ancient vehicle to our Los Angeles friend, Brother Gilbert, and Brother Gilbert, feeling no strings were attached, in turn donated it to us. Some prying growers, noticing it was not yet registered in our name, reported it as a stolen car; the police checked on it, and its original donor was something less than satisfied to learn in whose hands the car had ended up.

We hum through the dark countryside, strange now and quiet, and it is difficult to believe it is the same land of daylight tumult and shouting. There are three carloads of us. With me in the old Packard are Bob Fisher, Jose Pena, Eric Schmidt, Bob Solodow, and Cesar's sixteen-year-old son, Fernando. A sense of eeriness encroaches as we pass through the grotesque nighttime shadows, grape vines transformed into claws, threatening fists, all manner of apparitions explode in the darkness. We pass out County Line Road, that divides Kern County to the south and Tulare to the north (the Tulare County of Frank Norris' "The Octopus"—there have been troubles here before); past the sprawling DiGiorgio Ranch where guard towers still stand as bizarre reminder of a wartime detention camp; past the Schenley vineyards and winery, and on northeast into new and alien land. As we near the mysterious ranch which we have never seen there is a feeling of passing into a more remote and frightening terrain; farther away from the safety of town, into the kingdom of a man capable of knocking people over with his car as if they were so many tenpins and he a feudal lord.

We reach the area of the ranch, we consult our rough map, yes, this is it. We tool along slowly now past the dark tangled vines, we stop and consult with those in the cars behind in low voices, we spread our men out along the various entrances of the huge vineyard. All around a faint mist rises like a venomous emanation.

Now we are alone in the old Packard, Bob Fisher and I; we hum along quietly toward distant buildings half-concealed in a clump of trees, expecting we know not what, but something, and something not very pleasant. We slow cautiously to a stop across the road from the clustered buildings—two long structures of what appears to be a camp, other buildings, a large yard and a large old house. Is it just our imagination, or is there something extra sinister about this place? There is a strange sense of something beyond, of other concealed buildings back there in the darkness, of bizarre processes taking place. The whole place has about it the aura of a feudal baron's medieval estate, and we almost expect to see a moat and a drawbridge.

It is almost dawn now, and the largest building has lights on inside; it seems to be a mess hall. We get out of the car and cautiously cross the road, to stand on its further shoulder. We see four or five men inside, apparently all that is left of the large Filipino crew that walked out at the beginning of the strike.

A man comes out and begins to cross the open area between buildings far back from the road.

"Hello," we call. "Are you going to pick grapes?"

No answer.

"Do you know there is a strike on here?" we ask in both English and Spanish.

The man replies something in Tagalog, a Philippine dialect, and we are at a loss to reply. He disappears in the shadows.

Another form emerges from another building far back and stands eerily in the entrance peering at us. He raises his arm suddenly and then we see them, rushing at us through the dark mist, the incredible sight of three Doberman pinschers leaping towards us with nightmare speed in what seems a caricature of sinister menace. Can this be real? We stand transfixed, we turn and beat a hasty retreat across the road, the long lean hounds yapping at our heels, their fangs exposed. We barely make it to the car and slam the door behind us as they snap at the open windows. We roll up the windows and drive off, with a great mutual sigh of relief, with exchanged looks of disbelief. Dispoto and Company are not disappointing us.

We check the other groups of men spread out around the giant vineyard and drive back to take up our station at the corner near the buildings. It still is not light. We park across the road from the ranch and sit watching it, the dark cluster of buildings. In another fifteen minutes, when it is light, we will get out with our Huelga signs.

Suddenly a spotlight strikes us from somewhere in the maze of buildings. A moment later a truck is roaring towards us murderously. Suddenly it is there on top of us, the big pickup truck, with its rooftop spotlight glaring down into our eyes.

"Get the hell out of here!" explodes a massive voice, massively angry. "Get the hell out of here! This is private property!"

It is Charles Dispoto, brother of Bruno, a brawny man built like Rocky Marciano, and twice as deadly-looking.

We look about us uncertainly. Perhaps Dispoto is right; we notice for the first time that on the side of the road we are on the cross street becomes a dirt road. I put the car in gear and we move around the corner to park at the edge of the public road; though the ranch across the road where we were parked probably does not belong to Dispoto, there is no use in taking chances, and we don't feel too much like challenging this angry hulk of a man at the moment.

Dispoto follows us around the corner in his pickup, the spotlight still flooding over us, blinding us. "You're gonna be pushin' up daisies if you don't watch yourself!" he explodes as he leans through his window as if about to leap at us.

"There's a gas chamber at San Quentin," Bob Fisher replies icily, and Dispoto looks at him a moment scrutinizingly, with what seems an agonizing effort at concentration, like a small spoiled boy who has just been reprimanded, then slams the pickup in gear and shoots off down the road with a screeching of gears.

"Obviously a madman," says Bob Fisher, and I nod agreement. We sit quietly for a few minutes before getting out to flash our Huelga signs at passing cars.

Now as the dawn approaches we see another car slashing through the mist; it is the new Dodge Dart of Bruno which had knocked me down three days before. Bruno yells something indistinguishable and gives us the finger as he screeches around the corner and disappears in the haze.

Fearing harm may come to some of our other pickets, we get back in the old Packard and follow up the road. Bruno is gone now, but a quarter of a mile up the road Cesar's son Fernando and Eric Schmidt are engaged in a confrontation with our recent assailant, Charlie. As we park, the latter is engaged in a deadly game: running his pickup back and forth, trying to hit our pickets, or at least terrorize them. Eric and Fernando are on either side of the dirt road leading into the vineyard, but in no way blocking the way, and they refuse to give ground.

For the third time, as we walk up, Dispoto brings his pickup to a screeching halt inches short of the pair. "You goddam m-----f------Communists!" he yells, yanking open the door and leaping out. (It is apparently the only accusation the growers know. They are only too willing to accept socialistic Big Government subsidies such as braceros and free irrigation water, but unwilling to accept the older and less socialistic institution of the union.)

"You f------ Communist!" Dispoto repeats, strutting up to bespectacled Eric and shoving his shoulder. "I'm gonna knock you little four-eyed face in! Now get outa my way—you're blocking the road!"

Eric refuses to give ground. "I am not!" he answers, and we see the anger in his face, standing up bravely against this brute who must weigh half again as much as he does.

Dispoto returns to the truck, fuming, and screeches toward Eric, who holds his ground, defiantly raising his Huelga sign toward the advancing pickup; the truck brushes Eric and skids into the vineyard and is gone.

Events follow one another with patternless chaos. Suddenly Cesar is there, on a reconnoitering trip through the vineyards, and a colorful little four-foot-eight-inch AWOC member named Ramon Caballero. Then Bruno's car skids up; he swerves past us, stops just beyond, and spends five minutes spraying sand at us with his rear wheels, alternately shooting forward, backing within inches of us, then shooting forward again; the circus becomes more bizarre by the moment.

Then he parks and struts over to us, arms akimbo; it is difficult to decide which is more the maniac, he or his brother Charlie.

"Come on, I'll take on all of you!" he taunts. "You guys don't scare me—come on!" He apparently doesn't recognize Cesar, or doesn't care to. "Come on, I'm not afraid of you!"

When we fail to accept his ridiculous challenge he struts forward, hands in his pockets, and methodically elbows one after another of us in the ribs and walks across our toes with his cowboy boots. Brave little Roman Caballero refuses to be cowed by this strutting giant of a man, and stands up to him, thrusts his face against his, holds open his toothless mouth with both hands and sticks out his tongue at Dispoto, an inch from his face. Dispoto recoils, is taken aback by this gesture of defiance from a man who is scarcely

half his size. Snorting disgustedly, he gets back in his car and disappears into the vineyard. And back through the vines we see his dogs, the Dobermans, low, lethal, impatient.

Charlie reappears. And with him a Mexican-American driving a sulphur spray rig. What will their twisted ingenuity come up with next? Now they proceed to drive the spray rig along the edge of the vines, enveloping us in choking fumes. Soon we are coughing and rubbing our eyes, but refuse to be driven off. Seeing this new tactic is of no avail, after ten excruciating eye-watering minutes Dispoto orders the spray rig off and drives off angrily to vent his wrath on one of our other groups of pickets.

It is almost light now. We drive around the vineyard to check on our other pickets—two Mexican-Americans yell out trembling to tell us they had to dodge behind a telephone pole to avoid being hit by Charlie Dispoto's pickup. The situation does not look good to us, we are frankly afraid of these two maniacs, but how can we desert our cause and admit defeat? We leave reinforcements with the two frightened men and drive back toward the camp, Bob Solodow and Bob Fisher and I.

We pull up just off the pavement in front of the camp. Now we are more determined than ever that Dispoto's badly decimated crew will not break the strike. The five or six men are just leaving the mess hall. As I pull to a stop, Bob Solodow starts to get out of the car in an attempt to talk with them.

But there is not a dull moment at the Dispoto Ranch; Bruno's car now screeches around the corner a hundred yards in front of us and makes a bee-line for us, skidding to a stop inches from the front of our car. Like a shot he is out of his car, and darts toward us in an attempt to grab Bob Solodow. Bob gets back in the car in the nick of time and locks the door. Now Dispoto dashes around to my side and yanks open the door, all the way open, in an attempt to do what?—grab the keys, or grab me? I put the car in reverse, back rapidly away. Bruno is dragged along running wildly after us, his hand still on the door handle. Miraculously he does not fall, this agile giant of thirty-nine, but finally after twenty yards or so the door is jerked loose from his hand as we continue to accelerate in reverse.

"You were trespassing!' he yells after us. "I place you under citizen's arrest!" Although the charge is patently untrue—we were a good ten feet from the property line.

The chase is on. As Bruno dashes back to his car I drive ahead again, anxious to rejoin Eric and the others. I round the corner; Bruno by now has made a wild U-turn and is close behind us. As we round the corner a sight meets our eyes that makes our blood run cold: as if in some mysteriously planned coordination, Charlie Dispoto is now headed directly toward us on the wrong side of the road in his pickup; we are on the verge of being blocked in, one Dispoto behind, the other in front, and have sickening visions of being systematically dragged out of the car and beaten. The pickup nears; a head-on crash seems inevitable. Then at the last moment I swerve to the left, out around the pickup, missing it by inches, and drive on up the road.

To our relief, we see a Tulare County Sheriff's car parked forty yards up the road near our pickets, and we pull up beside it.

"I guess you saw what happened," I tell the deputy behind the wheel.

"All I saw was Charlie drive out of the vineyard a minute ago," the deputy says unconvincingly.

"You mean you didn't just see him drive down the wrong side of the road towards us right in front of your eyes?"

"Nope," the deputy nods his head.

We are stunned. We know the sickening feeling one has when he realizes the cards are stacked against him and there is nothing he can do about it, nothing at all. If Kern County is "Mississippi West," then Tulare County must be "Alabama West."

A gray light suffuses the vineyard as we drive around to the other side to check on the other pickets. We can see Dispoto's small crew of six or seven men now working back in the vineyard and I join our gang holding up picket signs at the edge of the road and shouting to the workers. "Come out! There's a strike on here! Join your brothers who are out on strike! The strike is for <u>you</u>, to raise the wages—don't be strikebreakers!"

Down the road to the east, across from the Dispoto Ranch, is the huge Caric packing house, with a group of Filipino pickets in front of it. Down the road to the west is the Radovich Ranch with its "Mother" brand grapes, with five more Filipinos picketing its packing shed.

A strange and rather moving, if ludicrous, thing occurs: Mr. Radovich (at least someone says that's who it is) drives by in a luxurious car, a dignified-looking white-haired man who must be in his sixties, and with great aplomb satirically tips his hat at us, holds it in the air for several seconds, then replaces it deftly and drives on. A few minutes later eh appears again in front of his vineyard, parks, descends from his car, and performs a bizarre ritual: he sinks to his knees, removes his hat, bends his head in prayer—or mock prayer—replaces his hat, gets back in his car and drives off. What a sense of drama! If the growers insist on entertaining us, how preferable old Mr. Radovich's antics are to the coarse brutality of the Dispoto Brothers.

We continue to plead with the workers in the field, but they seem deaf to our best arguments—perhaps they speak only Tagalog. But how can the Dispoto's ever get their grapes picked with such a small crew—feeding and maintaining them probably cost more than they're worth. There is no doubt the Dispotos are in very bad shape—no wonder they are angry—for we see many dried-up grapes—"vine-ripened raisins" as EL MACRIADO calls them—in the bunches along the road.

Suddenly we see an engine and three refrigerator cars chugging towards us down the tracks that lie thirty yards away to the south, en route to the Caric packing shed and cold storage plant down the road. We wonder again: is it true, this rumor that the Teamsters and rail unions are supporting us? Why then is this train coming to take out grapes?

With a sense of disappointment tempered by curiosity, we walk closer to the tracks to hold up our Huelga signs. The engine nears. Then we see a strange sight: the man running the engine has on a business suit! It dawns on us: he is a company man! The rail unions are helping us after all! We return to picketing with renewed vigor.

The other pickets remain across the road, while I venture across to Dispoto's side of the pavement, and stand on public property at the roadside holding up my sign to the pickers in the field. After a minute I see a disturbing sight: Charlie Dispoto's pickup roaring toward me down the road. And the police not in sight. It approaches rapidly, it crosses over to the wrong side of the road and heads directly toward me—this is becoming

a deadly ritual. It comes on; I quaver. It slams to a stop within inches of me and its driver explodes in murderous wrath:

"Get outa my way! I want to get to my vines! Move across the road!" There is nothing remotely funny about his tone; he veritably seems on the verge of apoplexy. But I am on public property, at least five feet from the telephone poles that mark his property line, and engaged in a perfectly legal activity; how can I surrender to his threats?

"Move across the road, I said! Are you gonna move or do I have to make you?"

"I'm not doing anything wrong—I'm on public property. You don't own this road." I hold up my strike sign to the workers, quaking.

Dispoto inches the pickup closer; I stand where I am. He lunges out and comes toward me, his massive hand is against the camera I have about my neck. "If you don't move across the road I'm gonna shove this camera down your goddamn throat!"

Now he is pushing me across the road; I brace myself but he is too strong. Shouting obscenities in my face he shoves me little by little across the road. When I am almost across, he turns and struts back to his pickup; I have no choice but to walk back to my former position on his side of the road and hold up my picket sign once more. My friends watch from across the road tensely, wondering what to do, waiting for me to say something to them. Dispoto starts to get in his pickup, sees I have returned to my former position, and the ludicrous scene is repeated. He keeps shoving me across the road, I keep walking back to my original position. After the scene seven or eight times over a period of as many minutes, and his anger and violence mount steadily, and my fear, I at last yell to the group of five Filipinos picketing two blocks away: "Filipinos! Filipinos!"

The distant forms stare towards us for a moment, then pile into their car and head our way, and I think: blessed Filipinos!

Dispoto, with a cowed look in his eyes, hops into his pickup and drives off rapidly.

"Look!" someone says, and points to the sky. A two-engined plane swoops low over us. "It is Bruno," one of the pickets says.

We watch as the expensive aircraft returns to swoop back and forth over us, and we almost expect a machinegun to cut loose at any minute. What next? we wonder. Someone says the plane is worth over fifty thousand dollars—a nice toy for this land baron who resembles Aly Khan—and the growers say they cannot afford to pay higher wages! We hold our Huelga signs skyward in defiance as the plane dips toward us for the last time and then heads away over the vines.

Charlie does not return. We consult our watch: 7:45. Again, we are amazed by what has happened in so short a space of time. The Dispotos, verily are something else. We stand with our raised Huelga signs discussing them incredulously as the sun begins to beat down upon us warmly. There is something pathetic about them really: they are such caricatures, such ludicrous caricatures, slipping so neatly into the role of the villain. And there are thousands against them, with only perhaps a handful of growers who share their grotesque loneliness. In a way they almost arouse my pity, these two big brutal men from New York with their twisted brains.

We drive around to the opposite side of the vineyard in search of the police. The same deputy's car is there, and I tell its driver what has happened. He promises he will make a report on the incident so I can file a complaint. "It will be in the office of Judge

Carter in Porterville on Monday morning," he assures me. "You can pick it up there." I thank him and return to picketing.

Sulphur is in the air today.

It is an hour later, and we have moved into another ranch nearby, our group has merged with another, and there are a good one hundred pickets spread out along the road striving to talk with the hundred-and-fifty or so workers. Chuck Gardinier is there, Reverend David Havens, and the lively debate with workers is in progress. But it is a rather ludicrous-appearing dialogue, inasmuch as the fearful grower has erected plastic walls shutting off the pickers' view of us, and we cannot see our fellow conversationalists; when the workers reply to us we put our ears to the plastic curtain, and it is as if we were priests listening to Confession. Judging by their conversation the workers are beginning to waver, and we see the grower and his son carrying on a worried-seeming dialogue down the road aways, while three carloads of police sit talking idly and watching the scene with apparent amusement.

One member of the line is one of our most colorful and effective pickets, Mexican-born Epifanio Camacho, a dark-skinned, jovial, high-spirited man whose remarkable body and movements suggest the grace and strength of a panther. Nearby is his old and equally colorful car, adorned with such inscriptions—in Spanish—as, "I too was a virgin once"; "To wander is my destiny"; "When I go, I really fly"; and "I am not one to be taken lightly"—in the true style of Old Mexico.

When Camacho speaks, the workers stop talking and listen:

"Come out from behind your plastic curtain, you pigeon-brained sons of Satan! Why don't you foul spawn of demented chimpanzees understand what it's all about? Open up your ears, groveling pigs! Would you sell the souls of your children as well as your own to these grower swine? Don't you have brains enough to know when someone is trying to help you? Are you Mexicans or what are you? This isn't Russia—don't be slaves! Come out and join us and fight for your rights, you second-rate imitations of female jellyfish!"

Down the road the grower's son stalks off angrily into the vineyard, then emerges a few minutes later driving a jeep-mounted spray rig. As police watch indifferently he with grim deliberation drives out onto the road, approaches closer and closer, then as he passes within less than a foot of our assembled pickets turns on the sulphur and the machine shoots a blinding cloud of spray directly into the eyes of our unsuspecting group. For ten seconds he keeps up the gushing outpouring of spray, passing rapidly down the road and spraying each man in turn. Some of the pickets turn away in time, others cry out in pain, others press protective hands to their eyes and at the same time let loose with a deafening chorus of "HUELGA!"—our perpetual answer to the most craven and unscrupulous of the growers' attempts to intimidate or injure us.

Reverend Havens has been sprayed directly, within six inches of his face, and covers his face and cries out in pain. Camacho's eyes are red and streaming with tears as his head emerges from the toxic cloud, he is half-blinded, but instinctively runs after the speeding spray rig—there is a limit even to non-violence—and has to be forcefully restrained by the rest of us from leaping up and seizing its demented driver.

Bob Solodow runs immediately to the nearest police car and demands that they spray rig's driver be arrested, and finally spurs the reluctant deputies into action; they go after the surprised grower's son and detain him for questioning.

But, "We can't arrest him ourselves—we'll have to call the Highway Patrol," the police explain.

The Highway Patrol finally arrives, and a patrolman explains that since he didn't see the incident happen, he can't make an arrest on the spot. He'll make a report and take the names of the witnesses, and we can pick up the report later to file charges.

Our eyes are all burning now, streaming with tears, and the vision of Reverend Havens and Epifanio Camacho is not normal until next day.

Finally, a few days later, the driver of the spray rig is arrested, on a traffic charge: operating a spray rig on a public highway.

We wonder what the growers will attack us with next, and with what degree of impunity.

On Sunday, September 26th, we have a massive parade through the streets of Delano,* in which over 1,000 Mexican-American and Filipino marchers display their unbreakable and unprecedented unity in what is the largest workers' parade in the city's history. Student volunteers begin to arrive, Anne Draper of the Amalgamated Clothing Workers comes from San Francisco to pledge her support, a huge truckload of donated food arrives from the Bay Area, and the huge choruses of "Viva la Huelga!" that emerge from the overflow crowd that gathers to hear Cesar Chavez speak in Ellington Park set to rest any doubts anyone might have had about the strike's gaining momentum.

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* Later the city council is to pass a special resolution, obviously aimed at us, with the ridiculous and unique provision that a parade permit must be obtained twenty days in advance.

7

THE DUSTY BISHOP

"You're a pig! You're a pig!"

"Be reasonable now. All we're asking--"

"You heard me: you're a pig, a *pig*!"

"What are you so angry about? We just--"

"Why don't you come over here and fight me? Come on! I'm not afraid of you! Come on over here and fight!"

It is the second week the Farm Workers Association has been on strike. An aerial survey of the fields reveals that the work force has been cut down from 4,500 to less than 500 men, more and more grapes are seen rotting on the vines, and the growers are getting angrier and angrier. But instead of sitting down and thinking over things rationally or even meeting to have an unofficial discussion with the strikers, the growers almost uniformly keep reacting like Paul Pagliarulo, a wiry irascible man in his late thirties who resembles the Jack Palance variety of movie villain, as he stands at the edge of his vineyard threatening our Chuck Gardinier.

"Come on over here and fight, you pig!"

His sunken porcine eyes leer our maliciously—it is a clear case of projection—and the man seems on the verge of a genuine madness that makes the Dispoto's continuing antics seem like play-acting. Now he makes an incredibly obscene gesture at Chuck, in spite of the Mexican-American women working in the field behind him, and they register shock and hesitate in their picking.

Chuck, a victim of unprovoked physical attacks on the part of police and other racists in the South, remains unruffled before this demented onslaught, and calmly begins explaining labor history to the astounded grower. This calm reaction to his maniacal outbursts seems to catch him off guard, and he listens with open mouth as Chuck explains the justice of the workers' cause and the inevitability of their victory. Do those sunken eyes actually comprehend something? For a minute the hard look almost softens into agreement, to a conciliatory mildness.

When Chuck has finished Pagliarulo hesitates for a minute, as if trying to digest what he has just heard. Then, with a rather ludicrous half-hearted venom which seems more an attempt at saving face than genuine anger:

"I still say you're a pig…"

The other pickets and I watch the scene unfold with puzzlement. It seems like a grotesque, incredible circus. And yet it is happening before our eyes. We have read and heard stories of violence in other strikes, of fistfights and even murders, but for some unaccountable reason this particular strike tops all for bizarreness—perhaps partly because it is such an anachronism, the last-ditch fight of a feudalistic way of life which in other industries disappeared long ago.

Pagliarulo retires a few feet and stands leering at us. We renew our gentle remonstrations to his workers, who clearly have been disturbed by their boss' savage display. One woman who before had refused to discuss the situation with us now agrees

to come to our office after work to talk things over. Donations of food have been coming in from all over the state, and we offer to give her food for her needy family.

We wonder about the sly smile on Pagliarulo's face as he watches us malevolently; then we see the reason for it: a police car stops nearby, and three officers approach us with some official-looking documents in their hands. "Gentlemen, we'd like you to read this…"

The documents are a restraining order which has been declared to be in effect, and the terms of a permanent injunction whose legality has not been ruled upon yet.

We attempt to plow through the several pages of complicated legal language. "What exactly does this limit us to, officer?"

"You can see it right there," and the deputy points out a paragraph limiting us to five pickets per "location." "You can't have more than five men here." In the background, Paul Pagliarulo snickers.

Our two "field lawyers," Bob Fisher and Bob Solodow of CORE, take exception to the officer's interpretation: "Pardon me, officer, but <u>those</u> are the terms of the injunction, and the injunction isn't in effect yet. <u>These</u> are the terms of the restraining order which is in effect now:" and they point to a passage limiting us to an unreasonable number of pickets.

The officers nod their heads in puzzlement; they have been ordered to serve the papers, and they don't seem to have the faintest notion of what they are about. They attempt to cow us into obeying their own—or the grower's—interpretation, but have no luck, and finally are forced to admit Fisher and Solodow might be right.

"So how many pickets may we have then? What is an 'unreasonable number' considered to be?"

Again the officers nod their heads in puzzlement. "I guess that is for the judge to decide," one of them says uncertainly.

"So we may picket here then until the judge decides…?"

"If I were you I'd take off," one of the deputies says with an implied threat.

They are not in the least pleased with us for refusing to be scared off, and seem to be inwardly fuming. At the same time, the judge's interpretation could be disastrous for us, and when lunch break comes a few minutes later we are glad of a chance to leave so that we may consult with Cesar about this new development. At least we are glad of this sign the growers are being hurt; they assuredly would not go to the legal expense of obtaining restraining orders and injunctions if the preposterous claims of their spokesman, J.G. Brosmer, that they are not being hurt were true.

We drive to another location. We are followed by the ever-present police. They have asked us to give them our destinations, and we cooperate. They will find us anyway, and why should we make the taxpayers put out more money for their gas? According to the "Fresno Bee" of September 29th, "Kern County sheriff officers reported Monday that 2,085 man hours had been spent on strike patrol duty…" A lot of extra pay, a lot of extra gas. When will the tax-payers rebel at the growers' stubborn refusal to sit down and talk like reasonable men?

The police continue taking our pictures, thousands of tem, with both still and movie cameras—we feel like movie stars. Every Kern County deputy has his own camera now, bought especially for the strike, and they seem to take positive delight in making us

feel self-conscious. What are they trying to prove? They seem particularly anxious to snap us when we are walking across the road, and the theory evolves that they plan some massive move designed to shut down our activities altogether on the grounds we are a hazard to traffic. So we get a picture of five police playing games flipping coins in the middle of the road.

It is an interesting conundrum: where do they stand? We cannot claim they are as bad as police in the South, there has been no police brutality, and yet it seems pretty obvious most of them are on the side of the growers.

At the second location we get eighteen scabs out, and the police seem as disappointed as the irate grower when they leave. One sarcastic officer tells us frankly: "There are two unions involved in this strike. One of them conducts the strike in a normal way a strike should be conducted. But you guys are different…"

We feel flattered without knowing what he means. Does he mean because we employ roving bands of pickets while most of the Filipinos have stationary pickets? There is no doubt that we have invented a new type of mobile striking force which must terrify unwary growers, and we are proud of the reputation we are gaining for flair and dash. We drive on to another location and the disgruntled police follow—thirty-four more workers out of the field.

On the other hand, when I say to one cop, a Mexican-American, "Tell me, seriously, don't you think these workers should earn more money?" he replies, "We'd all like to see them make more money, but we've got to be impartial when it comes to enforcing the law." And he snaps our picture for the hundredth time.

The strike continues to have its humorous side too: one cold dawn we get mistaken instructions from our scout which send one carload of us out beyond the border of the vineyards and shooing up into the Sierra foothills. Seeing Holly, the chubby driver of the paddy wagon, following us, we drive on a few miles out of pure curiosity, and he continues doggedly after us. It seems hilarious, a huge paddy wagon after five innocent lost pickets. We wonder if he will follow us all the way into Nevada. But after five or six miles we relent out of pity, and exchange greetings with the befuddled deputy as we make a U-turn and pass him on our way back to the vineyards.

As September blends into mellow October the strike gains in momentum, and the flow of events rushes on at a dizzy speed. We have almost emptied the fields, and we have become aware of a new phenomenon now: just because the workers don't leave while we are there doesn't mean we don't have our effect; we have discovered by checking the next morning that many of them don't return to work the next day; they leave the area to look for work elsewhere or decide to stick out the strike at home. A new volunteer who is unknown to growers hears some of them talking in a café: one complains he has a whole field rotting; another wants to sign, but fears the big shots who control marketing and financing.

And there is hunger now too. We help as much as we can with the increasing food supplies that are coming in from churches, civic groups, and other unions from all over the state, but it is not enough. An appeal is made to Governor Brown to intercede, but nothing is done.

Everyone asks, Are the Teamsters helping us? We send a man to meet with them in Sacramento, but for some mysterious reason the meeting never comes off. What at first was just rumor has been confirmed now: the Teamsters are refusing to cross the picket lines, but relinquish their trucks to company men who drive them on into the loading docks or cold storage plants. We send people off to speak to the locals, to appeal to the rank-and-file.

In the bustling Filipino Hall, People's Café, all the places strikers gather, there are passionate discussions now provoked by the appearance of all the civil rights volunteers streaming in to help us. They come from all over, CORE people, SNCC people, ministers, people who have never belonged to an organization but who know a clear-cut humanitarian issue when they see it and want to help. From distant Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania comes incredible six-foot-six-inch Ron Caplan, poet, expert guitarist, a Paul Bunyan of a man whose mere appearance on a picket line sometimes sends scabs running out of the fields. He in turn brings girl friend Barbara Howe, former worker with the domestic peace corps, to supplement our office staff.

Who are these people? Is the strike a Movement? people want to know. Or just a strike? Is it a civil rights issue? And if so, why?

"Of course it's a civil rights issue. Civil rights means equality of opportunity," Ron Caplan explains to a skeptic. "And farm workers don't have equality of opportunity. They don't have a minimum wage, they aren't provided with collective bargaining under the National Labor Relations Act, they don't have—" and he enumerates the many ways farm workers, the nation's most vital work force, are discriminated against.

And Wendy Goepel adds, "This has been a civil rights issue since the first Negro was brought to America to work in the fields as a slave."

And the growers are aware the strike has become a Movement too, and they are afraid; they begin driving back and forth by our office at night in apparent attempts to spy on us and intimidate us.

My efforts—and those of others—to file complaints against the growers for their assaults turn into a tragic-comic farce. I make seven phone calls to Deputy D.A. Fisher of the Kern County D.A.'s office and never find him in his office.

In Tulare County I fare even worse, and am given the devil's own run-around when I try to file charges against Charlie Dispoto for assaulting me. When I call Judge Carter's office in Porterville the following Monday as I had been instructed, his secretary knows nothing about the case and has not seen the report that was supposed to be there. I am referred to the D.A.'s office in Visalia. Two days later, at the first available opportunity, I drive the forty miles to Visalia to see the District Attorney. He tries to discourage me from pursuing the matter, and finally refers me to Deputy D.A. Gafkowski at the sheriff's sub-station in Porterville, thirty-seven miles away. I make several phone calls and one futile sixty-mile trip to Porterville during the next few days without being able to locate my man. When I finally find Gafkowski two weeks later he is unable to find the deputy sheriff's report on the incident in the files—apparently one was never made. He admits to knowing Dispoto, and turns down the complaint on the grounds it is "stale" by now! And because the D.A.'s staff is "overworked"! Justice in action in Tulare County is matched only by its notorious counterpart in Mississippi.

Two weeks on strike, and 4,000 workers out of the fields! We are tired, and we take a night off and rent a hall for ten dollars and have a banquet of delicious Mexican food, and see a film. It is about the successful ILWU agricultural workers' strike in Hawaii—after a year on strike the workers finally won, and now farm workers in Hawaii get $2.48 an hour, and can live like human beings and are respected members of the community. And after the film we have a party: our people play as hard as they picket, their spirit is truly unconquerable. One of our officers, Roger Terronez—brother of the famous prize-fighter—strums passionate and tragic Mexican songs on the guitar while his wife Gloria sings them with all the wild spirit and abandon that only the Mexican ranchera song conveys. And we dance, late into the night, and already little friendships and romances are beginning to bud among our multi-racial members and volunteers. We are a unique community within a community, we are a Movement par excellence, we are the New America, the promise of our founding forefathers at last coming true.

The outside world is taking more and more interest in what is happening in Delano. Late in September Migrant Ministry director Chris Hartmire brings representatives of the Northern and Southern California Councils of Churches to visit the strike area. The distinguished group includes Episcopal Bishop Sumner Walters of the Diocese of San Joaquin, Reverend George Spindt of Messiah Lutheran Church in Redwood City, Reverend George Wilson of the First Presbyterian Christian Church of Visalia.

After two days in the strike area, Reverend Spindt comments, "Tensions are rising as strikers watch their jobs being taken by new workers brought into the area…Violence could break out at any time. It is apparent that face-to-face talks between worker and grower representatives would help relieve the tensions."

But the growers will not talk. They would rather "let our grapes rot first."

We take the bishop and the other distinguished visitors along on one of our pre-dawn stake-outs. Our target: the 4,500-acre Schenley vineyards, next to DiGiorgio's Sierra Vista Ranch the largest in the area.

It is our largest single operation to date, and eighty-five pickets in a single group, led by Cesar himself, file out through the dawn to encircle the huge spread. There never ceases to be something poignant and thrilling about these commando raid-like early morning operations: the mystery of it all, the element of surprise, the sense of the unknown, the thrill of vast groups of men working in cooperation, the David-and-Goliath daring and brashness of the humble farm workers attacking and—who knows?—perhaps even injuring a giant like Schenley. We are told by workers who have already defected that it is one of the worst outfits to work for of all, and this knowledge gives us special pride and purpose in our mission.

The men spread out in the darkness to guard the various entrances—at least twenty in all—and then prepare for the incoming scabs. We set up a system of flashlight signals to coordinate our activities about the huge quadrangle, and see lights flashing off through the mysterious dark.

The sky lightens. And then they come, the caravans of workers' cars. They are turning in—no, they are going by! The surprised scabs drive from entrance to entrance, only to be met by our Huelga signs at every turn, by outstretched hands waving leaflets, by

hurriedly shouted explanations about the strike. "Don't work here! Don't go in! Don't be traitors to the race! Join us! We have food for the people out on strike! Don't sell your labor cheaply!"

The cars dart back and forth like frantic ants looking for their hole. Some go back to town, some finally drive desperately by our pickets and disappear into the gray vineyard.

It is light. We hear the tractors starting now, the tractors that will pull the gondolas back and forth through the rows. We see seven or eight crews working—thirty or so men—fifty yards back in the vineyard. The bosses are wise now, they let the grapes along the road rot rather than risk losing their workers to our persuasion. We drive around the vineyard to pick up our pickets, and concentrate the whole huge group near the working scabs. Our huge banner is there too, flying proudly from atop the "dogcatcher," and it makes an impressive sight our proud black eagle. Bishop Walters shivers and watches expectantly.

We warm up with a few "Huelga!" choruses, and the eighty voices make a magnificent and stirring wave of sound across the golden vines. We are developing infinite variations: we sing it, we chant it, we spell it out letter by letter: H-U-E-L-G-A: HUELGA! The workers venture a little closer, and we let loose with the half-shouted arguments which we are continually polishing and perfecting:

"Join your fellow workers who are out on strike! Don't betray your brothers. Think things through. If everyone will only go out on strike together, the bosses will be forced to pay decent wages; they don't have any choice. All it takes is cooperation. In Hawaii the farm workers all went out on strike together, and now they are earning $2.48 an hour. They have a good life and dignity like you people should have. People in factories make two or three times what you do, but you work just as hard. Why don't you help us change all that? All it takes is cooperation…"

The response is silence. Are we doing any good, can we really hurt this giant cooperation which sells its products all over the world? No doubt they will just ignore us, like an elephant a fly.

But no, the giant carcass is moving, we have touched the quick, Goliath is accepting the challenge! In the empty field across from the vineyard, along whose edge we are standing (the Highway Patrol has asked us to stay on one side of the road or the other, and we are cooperating), we see heading towards us two giant tractors which seem to be driven by Schenley foremen. Can we believe our eyes? They seem to be heading directly at us, pulling murderous rows of discs behind. The grim-faced men atop the tractors leer at us malevolently, and we wonder: can they really love their bosses enough to hate us this way, or is it their bosses and themselves they hate because of the inhumanity of what they are about to do? For they keep coming on, then when they are three or four feet away they turn and drive alongside us as closely as they possibly can, spraying us with a tremendous cloud of dust. They dash back and forth, driving like maniacs, and the roar deafens us and the dust blinds us. I look down from where I am holding the flag with one hand and a handkerchief over my nose with the other to behold the poor unsuspecting bishop covered with dust, but grinning bravely.

It is truly a ludicrous spectacle, and labor editor George Ballis rushes about making it immortal on film. In a matter of minutes our car looks like bedded-down camels in a

Sahara dust storm, and Mexicans and Anglos alike are uniform dull brown. The expressions on the faces of the tractor drivers seem to harden even more as the cruel comic opera progresses, to harden into masks of rock-like hatred and disdain. But for our part, we have not let the ridiculous spectacle dampen or sully our spirits for a moment, and below me the throng of pickets is shouting its message of hope louder than ever: "Huelga! Come out! If they treat us this way, how will they treat you? What kind of men are these? Can you have pride in working for bosses like this?

Again, the growers' spite has backfired on them. After almost an hour, when we are almost unrecognizable with dust, and our throats are hoarse with yelling and choking, we see the thrilling sight of a worker's car heading towards us through the vines.

"They're coming out! They're coming out!"

It is truly the most thrilling moment of the strike for us: to snatch victory like this out of despair, and a stirring wave-like cheer arises from the mass of pickets. More cars follow the first, we see five in all, the whole picking operation has stopped, and as they reach the edge of the vineyard we swarm all over them with cheers and handshakes for their begrimed occupants. They smile and acknowledge our thanks, and their admiring looks seem to say: after seeing what you went through, your persistence in the face of all that, it was impossible not to join you. We press authorization slips into their hands, they sign willingly, then we direct them to our office for food for their families.

Across the road, the grimy bishop smiles and wipes dust from his brow. Behind him in the field the two foremen sneer and give up the battle.

It is a time of heady triumph. A few days later we are to have our own first valid labor dispute certified with the giant Schenley Corporation. Also, a few days later, we are to let the world know of our triumph when, with the help of Anne Draper and fifty Bay Area volunteers, we carry the battle to Schenley's very doorstep in San Francisco and picket their main office.

God seems to be taking a greater interest in things all the time. The first day of October we learn that Reverend Francis Geddes of the Religious Research Foundation in San Francisco plans to lead a group of Bay Area clergymen in a visit to our picket lines, in an effort to "reduce the possibility of intimidation and violence from growers."

It is a pleasure to have the visiting clergymen in our picket lines, and those who wear their collars bring many a second look from the remaining vineyard workers, and on more than one occasion help bring them out of the fields. Growers, we surmise, at least will treat clergymen with respect, but we are dismayed to learn that many of them respect nothing apparently, and more than once insult them to their faces.

One evening about this time someone sympathetic with the growers reports seeing a carload of men with a rifle in the back seat. A rifle is no novelty, as the growers go about armed to the teeth, but the police, who have been stopping strikers senselessly on mere routine checkups for apparent harassment purposes, pounce upon the report and track down the car with amazing efficiency. It turns out to be a carload of visiting ministers. And the rifle: the pole of an American flag rolled up in the back seat! The police retire red-faced and apologetic.

In spite of the diminished number of workers, there is not a dull moment as the strike enters October. When we begin to lose interest, there is always something new and

unexpected, as the day when two Japanese "farm aides" working for Milan Caratan leap out of the vineyard and begin snapping our pictures with cameras they have no doubt brought from Japan. Quite a twist, as it is usually the police, Caratan, or occasionally ourselves, who do the picture-taking.

Now, with almost all of the local workers who live in town out on strike, we begin concentrating on the camps, where workers from outside the area live. Dolores Huerta and her group find a field full of men from far-off Texas who lend a sympathetic ear to Dolores' rapid-fire patter, and invite her to come for them at one of the Caratan camps when they get their checks the following week-end. Dolores appears, is invited into the camp by the men, is assured it is all right, and gingerly begins to enter to discuss their plans with the dissatisfied workers. Promptly she is apprehended by the angry camp manager, lying in wait, who complains to the police and has our poor vice-president arrested for trespassing. But it is worth the sacrifice; the men leave, and Dolores gets her first good night's sleep in three weeks in the Tulare County Jail, to be released next day on bail.

And it is worth the sacrifice in another sense: we hit upon the new principle of helping scabs find work elsewhere, and transport the grateful workers to other camps sixty miles north to work in the olives: there is more than one way to descab a vineyard.

And the first week in October we have another victory: one early morning Wendy Goepel walks to the edge of one of DiGiorgio's five Sierra Vista camps—the only one accessible to the road-yells "Huelga," and all forty-three men in the camp come rushing out to join her. They had been dissatisfied with low wages, poor food, and drunken labor bus drivers racing one another on the way in from the fields, they explain to us as they throw in their lot with the strikers and we take them into town for a hot breakfast at the Filipino Hall.

The strike is growing daily, and the weekend of October 2nd and 3rd almost fifty students from the San Francisco and Los Angeles areas come with food, money and to volunteer for picket duty. Included in the group are two Negro girls who lead us in singing "We Shall Overcome" to the strikebreakers. It is a truly moving sight, the workers are visibly affected, and it is not long before they come out to join us.

The fields are almost empty of pickers now, we see row after row of rotting grapes, and on Sunday we celebrate what seems must be our imminent success by a huge barbeque in Delano Memorial Park where Cesar cooks for his exhausted brood of pickets, then is interviewed under the tree by half a dozen radio announcers and reporters.

The first week in October the strike begins to enter a new phase, as we begin to become aware of more and more scabs from outside the area working in the fields. We have knocked out the local work force, so the desperate growers have gone afield to break the strike. We see, among these new strikebreakers, winos, incompetents, people who don't know how to pick or pack grapes, and children. Labor editor George Ballis features on the front page of his newspaper, the "Valley Labor Citizen," a startling photograph of two six-year-old boys picking grapes while a deputy sheriff watches indifferently. When we try to get police to check the ages of these working children who should be in school, they at first balk, finally do it unwillingly, in some flagrant cases refer the case to the juvenile authorities, whereupon it is out of their hands and we hear no more of it.

In spite of the comparative incompetence of these new scabs, the growers slowly are starting to get their grapes picked again. Where are the growers getting these new workers? We hear radio announcements from Bakersfield denying there is a strike in the area, in direct and dishonest contradiction to our own spot announcements advising people about the strike. A popular Spanish language announcer, having to read the contradictory announcements, reportedly is so disturbed by the situation that she breaks down in tears.

We are forced to change our tactics. We ascertain that the growers now are recruiting scabs in Bakersfield, thirty-three miles to the south, and in the Tulare area, thirty miles to the north. We begin diverting some of our picket force from the pre-dawn stake-outs in the vineyards to zoom off through the dawn to the shape-up areas in these adjoining cities. It is an exciting new phase of the strike as we mingle with the manswarm in the early morning working men's cafes, rub shoulders with potentially violent scabs, hand out leaflets and beseech them not to break our strike, which is for the benefit of them too. Then as the buses along the street begin to warm up we go out and stand by their doors, plead with the workers again, reduce the scab force further as formerly full buses head out with five or six workers aboard. The Bakersfield police harass us by demanding our identification, and we refuse to show it on the grounds we have committed no crime; they withdraw in confusion and let us alone.

In the evening we meet with volunteers at Bakersfield's Friendship House, a poverty program project headquarters directed by Anand Prasad, and Negro, white, East Indian and Mexican-American neighborhood workers begin to give us massive support, talking to scab labor contractors, canvassing workers' neighborhoods to explain about the strike, joining us in our early morning picket of the shape-up areas. Local SNCC worker Marshall Ganz joins the cause, and Migrant Minister Boris Guru from British Guiana.

In Delano we begin picketing freeway exits, thirty or forty of us flashing our strike signs at the surprised scabs as they exit from the freeway after their long trip north. And we hit the small skid-row shape-up area in front of the Babalu Café, where old Negro and Anglo workers, many of them winos, now are lining up at five AM to take the places of the local workers on strike. One morning Epifiano Camacho, almost single-handed, dissuades every single worker from entering two buses of a labor contractor named "Filipino Dick" Estorba, and the empty buses return to their parking place, where they are to remain for the remainder of the year. As soon as the befuddled growers begin bringing in this new second rate work force, we begin to whittle it down too. Where will they turn next?

The news blackout of the strike which mysteriously prevailed for the first two weeks now begins to dissolve—it is too big now to be ignored, and newsmen begin streaming into town, from Newsweek, Time, dozens of newspapers and periodicals. Delano is beginning to become a name—whether a proud one or a shameful one remains to be seen.

And more and more help and volunteers from outside keep pouring in too. One night at Filipino Hall big checks from half-a-dozen outside unions are announced, and truckloads of food and clothing begin streaming in from San Francisco and Los Angeles. The Filipino Hall is a bustling place these days as one rubs elbows with people from all over the state—reporters, union leaders, religious dignitaries, all kinds of people from all kinds of places.

And at our own FWA headquarters the volunteers keep streaming in too, and our staff's new permanent members include Silvia Kalitinsky and Ida Cousino, who prove to be superb on the picket line; Peggy McGivern, a badly-needed registered nurse; and Mike Sayer of SNCC, who is later to play a prominent role in boycott activities.

We are expanding fast, and we need more room. A large house behind our office becomes available, and we rent it and christen it HUELGA HOUSE and gird ourselves for the struggle ahead.

8

POVERTY & POLITICS

We have just arrived at the huge Giumarra Ranch at the northern border of the strike zone in Tulare County. The scab workers look up in surprise and guilt as we pull to the side of the road under the hot mid-morning sun. As we descend from our cars a cocky young security guard—or "rent-a-fuzz" as we call them—comes strutting over towards us to throw his weight around. He carries a shotgun at the ready and seems to be spoiling for a fight.

"Hey, get goin', you can't picket here!" he brusquely addresses young Doug Adair, first of our pickets to hit the line.

But Doug, a spirited young man who once was knocked down by a scab, turned the other cheek, and subsequently talked his assailant out of scabbing, is not about to be frightened off by this punk kid in the uniform who apparently is bucking for a promotion—or is just a natural-born sadist.

"What do you mean I can't picket here? I'm here, I'm on public property, there's a strike on here, and there's nothing you or anybody else can do to stop me from picketing here!"

"You better get outa here—I'm gonna shoot your f------ brains off!"

"You'd better calm down and--"

Then: POW!

We halt momentarily and blink our eyes with disbelief, then look again to see if Doug is still alive as the enraged young security guard discharges his shotgun into the air above his head. Doug's glasses fall to the ground and he stands trembling incredulously as the young security guard, apparently startled by his own brash actions, now recoils slightly and stands looking dumbly at the pickets, with what seems a feeble mask of unconvincing menace.

Jailed is Arnold R. Baxter, twenty-three-year-old merchant patrolman from Bakersfield; bail is set at $500.00.

Earlier in the day, back in Delano, labor contractor Joseph Ramirez unlimbers a rifle and holds it point blank against picket Chala Zavala as the young Mexican girl and others peacefully picket his home as he leaves to take scabs to the fields.

Then tension in the strike grows as we systematically whittle down the new forces of scab laborers the growers have desperately brought from Bakersfield and Tulare, and finally Los Angeles, Indio, far-off San Francisco. We had anticipated that in response to the non-violence of the unions the violence of the growers and their henchmen would taper off, but tempers continue to flare as the growers are hurt badly, and more table grapes rot in the fields or are converted at the last minute into wine at one-fourth the price.

The strike gains momentum in other areas too: in Los Angeles Philippine Consul General Holigores, after the consulate is picketed by outraged AWOC members, now reverses his stand and sends letters to major growers asking them to see the light of reason and grant wage increases to the striking workers.

The battle ebbs and flows in strange patterns; old battle lines dissolve and new ones are formed. As outside support grows, a hard core of local opposition solidifies fanatically. The Richgrove and Delano chapters of the Community Service Organization (CSO), once headed by Cesar Chavez, issue a statement to the effect that neither chapter is supporting the strike. The reason is not difficult to discover: several of their officers are labor contractors. Against the rising tide of statewide support from church groups, the Delano Ministerial Association, no doubt strongly influenced by growers, announces that it "does not encourage demonstration or interference in the farm labor situation and that it looks with disfavor upon any church or clergy making such expression." We foresee battle lines being drawn from neighborhood to neighborhood, street to street, house to house, even within families: it is a messy and unpleasant prospect.

Meanwhile the roving bands of pickets continue to scour the fields, huge groups roam the countryside, ranging in number from twenty to a hundred pickets. It is a proud sight to come upon them with their great banner waving behind in the breeze, like armies of the Lord converting the misguided to the path of right thinking; and it is even a prouder sight to see their converts come streaming out of the fields to join them and be welcomed by the embrace of truth and salvation.

Just as the work force has changed with the disappearance of the local workers and now has a liberal sprinkling of old men and women, winos, children and other new elements, the tactics of the pickets have evolved and changed too, and there are a dozen innovations: balloons with Huelga painted on them flying gaily over the vines: new and more provocative signs: "A crime against God and man," "Think," "United we stand; divided we fall"; red-and-black Mexican strike flags whose mere appearance suffices to discourage prospective scabs in Mexico; new and more effective leaflets; boxes of food for needy strikers displayed atop cars; and dazzling and highly effective new songs and chants employed by Ron Caplan, Bob Solodow, Chuck Gardinier and company:

"Walk…walk
right out of that
Field…field;
Walk…walk
Right out of that
Field…field…"

and

"I wouldn't scab on my brother—
We shall not be moved;
I wouldn't scab on my brother—
We shall not be moved;
Just like a grape that's hanging in the vineyards—
WE SHALL NOT BE MOVED!"

and

the beautiful strains of "We Shall Overcome," "Freedom," and many other spirited and moving songs of the labor and civil rights movements.

Another new technique is the use of spies and "inside agitators"—a risky assignment—but many of our members volunteer eagerly to be hired by the growers, then when we appear with our pickets they lead the scabs out of the fields, a tactic which is employed over and over with resounding success.

But the best deterrent to scabbing is still gentle argument and the power of reason, and at every opportunity we picket where the workers are close to the edge of the field, though the enraged growers try to discourage us by turning on tractors full throttle inches in front of us to drown out the voices, or erect various types of barricades between us and the workers.

Now a curious phenomenon arises: maverick bands of pickets who as far as we know belong to neither union, composed of young field workers or students who simply have a desire to help, and who join us for a while and leave, go off to join another group, or picket by themselves as sort of a third force.

And some of the younger Filipinos, who at first served only as stationary pickets, now from small roving bands of their own, and we come upon them flying through the countryside with their own flamboyant style that rivals or excels our own, or they join us on the picket line in their often fashionable or rather flashy attire. And with their own Tagalog yells, which we welcome so eagerly when we happen upon some of the few Filipino scabs still defying the strike: "Mag labas cayo, cabayan!: Come out of there, countrymen!" or "Owag cayo mag trabajo!: Don't anyone work here!"

The growers have their new weapons too: grower Jack Pandol, a sort of middle-aged civilized version of Milan Caratan, who with his own camera good-naturedly travels from place to place harassing—or attempting to harass—our pickets. Except for Mr. Tudor's foreman, he is the only halfway "friendly" grower we have met, and it is something of a pleasant novelty to meet this smiling and joking press agent of the growers on the line for the first time as we picket a Schenley vineyard one day.

"What are you guys striking for—do you know?" he asks with good-natured sarcasm (or what is an imitation of good-natured sarcasm) as he lifts his camera and jokingly implores one of our female pickets to strike a sexy pose for him. "You're not a worker—you've never picked a grape in your life!" he says to a college student volunteer. "Do you know what you're down here for? You ought to be ashamed of yourself! There, that's it, hold that pose. I'll bet you've never seen the inside of a labor camp. You ought to see my camp—I treat my Filipinos real good. I give a banquet for them every now and then and they really enjoy themselves. I fought side by side with the Filipinos in the last war on Luzon…"

"Why don't you have some compassion for them here, then?" the college student asks.

And, "Did it ever occur to you that treating people well means more than giving them a party—it means having some respect for their desires as human beings," a fiery young Filipino who has just joined our ranks says in broken English. "And the desire of the field workers is to have a union to represent them!"

Mr. Pandol has nothing to say in answer to this unanswerable broadside of words, and covers his retreat by jokingly taking more pictures, as if he really thinks he can make us feel self-conscious or shake us up with this cheap gimmick.

And he has no answer when we ask him the price of his two-engined plane which, with Bruno Dispoto's, forms the growers' air force and almost daily is scouting our picket locations or perhaps trying to scare us off with its low swooping forays over the fields, in violation of federal altitude regulations.

People come and go, people from everywhere and of all types—volunteers, newsmen, priests, ministers, and even a few beatniks. One day a long-haired barefoot young with earrings and a huge abalone shell about his neck appears on the scene—and we suspect a store of narcotics too—and we as tactfully as possible manage to get rid of him. A personable but very practical-minded former organizer with one of the seamen's unions spends a few days with us and regales us with stories of bloody waterfront fights with recalcitrant scabs, and leaves disappointedly when we refuse to heed his call to violence. But not before the arrogant son of grower George Lucas one day grabs his collar on the picket line, and he says between clenched teeth in the most icy voice imaginable, "You let loose of my collar this instant or I'm going to kill you!" with such startling effect that Lucas immediately goes scrambling for safety.

An old-time former labor organizer tells us of the days when he and his men went into the fields and hauled scabs out bodily and manhandled them in no uncertain terms, and he shakes his head sadly when we explain non-violence to him, and returns to where he came from. But we have seen with our own eyes that non-violence not only is moral but that it works, we have seen the growers' own violence backfire upon them with disastrous effects, and we know that our approach is the only correct one.

On October 6th Big Politics enters upon the strike scene for the first time. In March the FWA had applied for a grant from the Office of Economic Opportunity (Poverty Program) to administer a program of self-help training in citizenship and money management for migrant farm workers of Mexican descent. Thirty-one farm workers were to receive instruction over a two month period, and in turn pass on their training to thousands of needy migrants. FWA vice-president Dolores Huerta took the application personally to OEO headquarters in Washington, D.C., and OEO officials began studying the proposal.

The OEO found that the Farm Workers Association was the only effective, grass roots level organization capable of administering such a program to Mexican-Americans, and about the time the strike began in early September it began to appear that the application for the poverty grant would be approved. Knowing that once the strike began growers would raise a storm of protest over such a grant, Cesar Chavez requested that the grant not be announced or funds advanced until after the strike had been terminated.

However, on October 6th, Poverty Program Director Sergeant Shriver announced that the FWA would receive $267,887 for the administration of its proposed project over a one year period. As soon as he learned of the announcement Cesar Chavez phoned the OEO and again requested that the funds be withheld until the strike was over, since the FWA obviously was so deeply committed to help farm workers with the strike that it was presently in no position to administer the grant. After several phone calls and conferences,

it was arranged that the grant would be withheld until after the strike. All this was as yet unknown to the general public and the press, however.

As was to be expected, the growers and their cronies protested to high heaven when the $267,000 grant was announced. The Delano City Council, obviously sympathetic with the growers all along, now came out in open and hostile opposition to the FWA and the strike for the first time, and adopted a resolution asking the OEO to review the grant. The councilmen even stooped to a personal attack on Cesar Chavez in the resolution, stating that Chavez "…is 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 administration of the grant." The city council proposed that instead the program be administered through the local high school. This proposal was almost laughable, as the high school had few Spanish-speaking personnel, and little experience or connection with the problems of migrant farm workers.

Responding to pressure from the city council and growers, Representative Harlen Hagen of California's 18th district, embracing Kern, Tulare and Kings Counties, now got into the act by asking Sergeant Shriver that the grant be suspended. Hagen gave the impression in news releases that he had already had the grant suspended for further review. To make back-stabbing complete, Republican Senator Thomas Kuchel, although having no first-hand knowledge of the FWA whatsoever, now climbed on the pro-grower bandwagon and also asked for the suspension of the grant.

Confusion reigned as false and misleading reports spread like wildfire. Did the FWA have the money or didn't it? Had it been suspended or not? A local gas station operator who had honored FWA credit cards refused to fill pickets' cars with gas, explaining, "I'm sorry, but Cesar Chavez has gone broke."

Finally, after several days' confusion, the OEO dispelled the haze of misinformation about the controversial grant by revealing that after consultation with Cesar it was being held up pending the termination of the strike, but that the grant itself was still very much in effect. The whole business at least had the air-clearing effect of showing where everyone stood, and now the battle lines were more clearly drawn than ever, even as they extended as far as Washington, D.C. It became evident as never before that power and money were supreme where politics was concerned in "Mississippi West," and that everything the poor people won would have to be by a hard uphill fight, and the strikers dug in with more grim determination than ever before to win the strike and better their condition of life. Also, local political opposition to the farm worker was definitely out in the open now, and around the FWA office and Filipino Hall speculation began to arise about the unions' running candidates for local office next election. Every battle has its lesson.

Again, after the treachery of Hagen, Kuchel and company, the growers' short-sighted greed backfires. Now, as never before, popular sentiment throughout the state begins to swing behind the strikers, and volunteer workers begin setting up aid-for-grape-strikers committees throughout the state for the purpose of sending money, food, clothing and volunteers.

And the aid comes. And the volunteers. The weekend of October 9th and 10th more student volunteers than ever before swarm in from the University of California in

Berkeley, UCLA, USC, San Jose State, and the College of Marin. More ordained and student ministers than any single two-day period of the strike are on the picket line. The parking area outside the office looks like a used car lot now, and the office like a seminary.

One night, I take two late-arriving middle-aged ministers to Huelga House, we step gingerly across sleeping forms, I bed them down in a dark bedroom next to two dark shapes in sleeping bags. Next morning, as I am to find out later, the startled gentlemen of the cloth are astounded to wake up next to two of our female staff workers! Such is the pleasant price of chaos.

9

THE GHOST OF JACK LONDON

As the strike becomes more effective and the bitter lines of battle are more clearly drawn, the growers become even more vicious and vindictive in their losing struggle; and as the growers go, so go the police. Cops in both Kern and Tulare counties are more open in their hostility and discrimination towards us than ever before, and it is an almost daily occurrence now for police cars to park between us and the hesitant scabs, often inside the vineyards themselves, in an obvious move to frighten the strikebreakers into staying where they are, or at the very least give the quite correct impression that the police are on the side of the growers. Something definitely seems to be in the air, some blow designed to maim us and render us ineffective, but no one can guess quite what it is to be.

There are more damaging and clearcut repercussions to our growing success. On October 11th, a few days after it becomes evident that the growers have not succeeded in robbing us of our Poverty Program grant, crippled AWOC volunteer Hector Abeytia is brutally beaten on the streets of Delano by Charles Dispoto. (It is interesting to speculate whether Abeytia would have come to harm if the Tulare County D.A.'s office had not refused to accept my complaint against Dispoto a few days before; perhaps now they at last believed the truth about Dispoto.)

The case becomes a classic farce of police inefficiency and partiality. A passing police officer sees Dispoto attacking Abeytia—whom he had kneed in the groin during a heated discussion on the picket line a few days before—and fails to stop. Instead he notifies another officer, who finally drives to the scene after Abeytia has been knocked down and his eye blackened, and his assailant has driven off. Although both the blood-spattered Abeytia and his witness George Gonzales identify Dispoto as the assailant, the police report falsely states that the assailant is "unknown," and no arrest is made.

When news of the vicious and unprovoked attack reaches AWOC Hall a few minutes later, 25 Filipino pickets rush down to reinforce their brothers already picketing Dispoto's nearby cold shed. A rock fight breaks out in the shed parking lot, and police swarm the scene. Dispoto, enraged, is now strutting back and forth in front in front of the entrance, threatening pickets in his usual inimitable style. Whereas Dispoto himself was not arrested for brutally beating a man, a 4-ft. 10-inch tall Filipino who now waves his hand back and forth in front of Dispoto's face is immediately hustled into a waiting police car and taken away. Such is justice and police efficiency in Delano.

But Dispoto has at last committed a blunder in attacking Abeytia, a one-time member of Governor Brown's committee on farm labor. The vicious and unpunished attack begins to have repercussions. When after three days Abeytia is still unable to have Dispoto arrested, influential friends in the Mexican-American Political Association and other dignitaries begin protesting to Governor Brown and Attorney General Thomas Lynch. A special agent of the Attorney General's Office, V.G. McElhaney, comes to Delano to investigate, and a full week after the attack, Dispoto is finally arrested for assault and battery.

Influential representatives of the workers finally get slow action. But when I attempt to talk to McElhaney regarding my own complaints, which the Kern County D.A.'s Office has refused to take action on in spite of four trips I've made to Bakersfield, he bluntly refuses to listen to me.

His boss, Attorney General Lynch, is no more sympathetic. When AWOC complains to him about the shocking lack of law enforcement in Kern and Tulare counties, he declares that there is "no police brutality" in the strike area. No police brutality! Who was complaining about police brutality?? To obscure the issue, Lynch has set up a straw man and conveniently knocked him down, as crusading labor editor George Ballis promptly points out in an open letter to President Johnson regarding cop bias in "Mississippi West."

To further obfuscate the real issue of the strike, growers and their spokesmen, growing more frantic and hysterical as time passes, rely more and more on the ridiculous blanket condemnation of "Communist." "Hey, Oswald," a passing grower yells from his new Cadillac. "Why don't you go back to Russia, you f------ Communist?" The absurd charge ceases to be amusing, and in EL MACRIADO #21 editor Bill Esher announces:

> "1,000 REWARD. EL MACRIADO will pay a cash reward of $1,000 for information leading to the arrest and conviction of any person or persons referring to the National Farm Workers Association, its leaders and officers, or EL MACRIADO and its representatives as 'Communist,' 'Communist-led,' 'Communist-inspired,' or any similar statements. Such references are false and illegal, and we intend to punish anyone saying these things to the full extent of the law."

The pressure of the growers and the police continues to grow. On October 15th fiery Dolores Huerta is leading one of her groups of roving pickets through the countryside, and has just angered growers by pulling 75 men out of a Tulare County field. She goes in search of more scabs, comes to a paved road leading north, and turns down it. The other cards in her group unsuspectingly follow her, as do two police cars that are tailing the pickets. Seconds later she comes face to face with two burly growers who wave down the police and demand her arrest. Our unsuspecting vice-president has unknowingly turned down a paved road which, though unmarked and a continuation of a public road, is on private property! The growers demand her arrest with relish, and that of the whole group. Bail for Dolores and her group as a result of their simple mistake is set at $276 each, and they are forced to spend the night in jail while bail is being arranged.

Contrast this with the following incident:

The following day, Saturday, October 16th, I take visiting Reverend Richard Roe of Stanford and ten students he has brought with him to the John Dulcich Ranch east of Earlimart. We park and cross the road to explain about the strike to a group of twenty-five or thirty scab workers picking and packing grapes along the roadside. We exchange friendly greetings with a security guard and begin talking in normal speaking voices to the interested workers.

"Do you people know there's a strike going on here? We're striking for $1.40 an hour and 25¢ a box, and for a union contract so farm workers can earn decent wages like factory workers. Almost all the other workers in the strike area have left the fields and

gone someplace else to look for work. That's the only way we can win the strike—if you'll all cooperate and refuse to work for low wages, the growers won't have any choice but to raise your wages. Why don't you join your fellow workers who are already out on strike?"

Across the narrow space of no-man's-land that separates us, the workers hesitate in the packing of the Maruska brand grapes before them, pause to consider what we are saying, hesitantly begin working again.

A ranch wagon suddenly screeches to a halt a few feet away; a burly blond man descends from it and races toward us.

"You can't picket here!" he tells me in a threatening tones uttered with a faint Slavic accent.

I am taken aback, but realize the possibility that a new restraining order may have just been added to the six we already know about.

"Do you have a restraining order or an injunction to prevent us from picketing here?" I address him in polite business-like tones; there is no use in antagonizing the man.

But the words seem to enrage him. "I'll give you something better than an injunction to keep you from picketing here!" he explodes; as he does so he retreats across his property line and begins to take off his jacket as if to fight me. The minister and his group, and a Negro girl and a Mexican-American fellow who have accompanied us watch uneasily.

"Come on over here! Come on over here and fight!" the grower taunts, seemingly beside himself with rage, but not so much so that he is above the trick of trying to lure me onto his property. And I am reminded of the Paul Pagliarulo of a few days before.

"I'm sorry, I'm staying right here."

This seems to enrage him further; his blue Slavic eyes peer out maniacally. "Come over here! I'll knock your goddam face in! Come on!" He has thrown his jacket to the ground and stands ready to lurch at me.

What to do? I feel I must make some answer, but what can I say that won't antagonize him further? "I'm staying right where I am."

Then, seemingly beside himself with rage, and crossing over his own property line as well as the line between cunning and insanity, he leaps toward me with the ferocity of some wild jungle cat, grasps me by the neck with both his huge hands, and begins to choke me.

I am stunned and helpless. I feel his fingers digging into my throat, I see his eyes like a maniac's peering into mine, I feel my breath coming short; involuntarily I raise my hands to try to remove his strangling grip. Then after five or six seconds that seem more like hours, I am aware of the form of the Filipino security guard behind him, pulling my attacker off, pleading with him, finally loosening his death grip on my neck.

It has happened so suddenly I am speechless. I notice the strap on my camera case has been broke by his strangling grip, and my camera has fallen to the ground. The pickets and the workers stand looking towards us aghast and speechless. My assailant has recoiled a few feet now; we stand looking at each other with the dumb look of men who find themselves suddenly enemies, without knowing quite how it came about. Out of the corner of my eye I see that the deputy sheriff's car that had been parked 60 yards down the road is edging toward us with cautious and maddening slowness.

Then, though not a word has been spoken, the husky blond man has lurched toward me again; the scene repeats itself; I feel his hands again digging murderously into my neck, and again the security guard pulls him off.

By now the police car is only a few yards away. My assailant, as if just realizing what he has done, makes a leap for his ranch wagon, and drives off furiously down the road and is gone, like a rude intruder in some bizarre melodrama.

Reverend Roe and his flock gather about concernedly, gazing incredulously at my reddened neck and offering assistance.

Recovering myself, I walk to the car of the deputy, who still has not descended.

"The man in that car just tried to strangle me—would you please follow him?" I manage to gasp, pointing after the disappearing ranch wagon.

The officer sits unconcernedly behind the wheel, and I am astounded by his apparent lack of interest.

"Couldn't you please follow him?"

"I know who he is," the stolid deputy finally answers unhappily, as if he is being asked to chase down his own brother. He gets out of the police car lazily, as another carload of officers arrives, adamantly refusing to go after the man he must have just seen trying to strangle me. Nor will he tell me my assailant's name, nor his own, and I have to be content with his badge number.

Reverend Roe and his flock gather around. After much questioning and persuasion on our part, I am allowed to write a report of what has happened.

"How do I go about making a complaint?"

"I'm sorry, it's Saturday and the D.A.'s office is closed."

I remember Charles Dispoto, and the complaint that was turned down because it was "stale"—I explain it to the officers.

"Well, if you want to, you can drive to Judge Del Re's house in Tipton," I finally worm out of the recalcitrant officers, who are eyeing my report skeptically—as if I were the criminal.

This time I am not going to be given the run-around. Reverend Roe and I load our pickets in our cars and drive the fifteen miles north to Tipton. We catch Judge Del Re a little bleary-eyed—it is still only 9:30 in the morning—and at first he seems, like all the others, reluctant to accept the complaint. But then I introduce Reverend Roe, who has his clerical collar on, and the personable judge finally agrees to drive to his office to make out a warrant.

We accompany him into Pixley Justice Court. He hems and haws, and at last makes out a warrant for the arrest of George Dulcich on an assault and battery charge—at last I know my attacker's name. He toys with setting bail at $550, then comments hesitantly, "I think I'll release him on his own recognizance—I know him and I know he won't leave."

Well, I have been buzzed, knocked down by a car, mauled and strangled, and finally a grower is arrested! That is something! Not much, but something. But contrast the two incidents: Dolores mistakenly drives down an unmarked, paved private road and bail is set at $276 and she spends the night in jail, but I narrowly miss being choked to death by a

homicidal maniac, and <u>he</u> is released on his own recognizance! Such is justice in Tulare County.

And to make matters worse, the deputy who took the report tells me outside the court that he can understand how a man who is worried about his grapes rotting could resort to such violence. Great police in this part of the country! And can he understand how he can pay slave-labor wages too?

The pressure is on—and from all sides.

We drive back to Kern County—or from Alabama to Mississippi as we have come to think of it recently. My neck is still tingling unpleasantly when Sergeant Dodd of the Kern County Sheriff's Department stops us to inform us gloatingly that a new directive has come through: no more shouting along the roadside will be allowed in Kern County.

"But Sergeant Dodd—when the workers aren't near the road that's the only way we can let them know there's a strike on!"

"Everyone knows by now there's a strike on, and there's no need to disturb people's peace by shouting at them."

"But everybody <u>does not</u> know there is a strike on, because we talk to scabs who've just been brought in from outside the area every day; and as for shouting, what is shouting at the roadside comes out as a normal speaking voice at the place it's directed to back in the field…"

"You heard me; there'll be no more shouting, and the first man that shouts will be arrested. That's all I have to say to you."

If the attack by Dulcich was stunning, this news is paralyzing in its effect. If we are not allowed to shout "Huelga" at workers deep in a field, our effectiveness will be cut down to almost nothing. Especially since as of late the growers have gotten smart and almost invariably let the grapes along the road rot rather than run the risk of having their scabs pulled out. There is not the slightest doubt remaining now whose side the police are on. The strike is in deep jeopardy, and we drive back to the office to impart the unhappy news to Cesar and the staff.

It is the following day, Sunday morning, the 17th of October. A pleasant autumn breeze ripples the tops of the mellowing vines as we stand at the edge of the Midstate Ranch on Cecil Avenue, near Richgrove. Some thirty workers, whites and Negroes, what appears to be the bottom of the work-force barrel, are at work in the field before us. The grapes they are picking are almost raisins, and one worker confides that the grower will have to sell them for jelly. "I've been in the union myself. I wouldn't have come out here if I'd knowd there was a strike goin' on. I'm gonna work just one more day an' then go back up t' Oregon."

We stand spread out along the road, seventeen of us, trying to converse with the workers. Some refuse to answer, some reply grudgingly, almost all seem frightened and at the same time unaware of just what is going on. We try to explain in elementary terms what a strike is, what this particular strike is all about, and what being a scab means. Across the street the ever-present paddy wagon and a police car sit ominously.

"In case you people don't know what you're doing, I'm going to read to you something that will explain to you just what it means to be a scab, and what most people think of a scab," volunteer George Gonzales explains to the workers. He holds before him

the latest edition of EL MACRIADO, VOICE OF THE FARM WORKER, and begins to read Jack London's famous "Definition of a Strikebreaker."

At his side in an instant is towering Sergeant Dodd of the Kern County Sheriff's Department. He looks as if he has gotten on the wrong side of the bed this Sunday morning.

"You read that to the workers and I'm going to arrest you!" he points an accusing finger at Gonzales.

"What's the trouble?" I ask in as conciliatory manner as possible.

Dodd turns toward me massively. "I have read that definition, and I consider it to be threatening and vile. I see no reason in getting these people stirred up. Now, do you?"

"Well, Sergeant Dodd, it seems to me that this is just a rather colorful piece of writing explaining to people what society thinks of a scab, in case they don't know what it means to be a scab.

"You heard me—the first man who reads that—that piece of trash—is going to be arrested!"

George Gonzales lowers his copy of EL MACRIADO. I begin to pace restlessly up the road, trying to make up my mind whether Dodd's edict should be challenged. First we cannot yell to workers in the field, now we cannot read a celebrated literary tidbit which has traditionally been read through the decades during labor disputes. It is too much to bear.

I spot Reverend Dave Havens a few yards up the road talking to a small group of workers, and explain to him what has happened.

"I'll read it then," the personable young minister says with instant decision. "Why don't you move the other pickets across the road first so the police can't say they were involved in it."

I am struck with admiration by the likeable young minister's immediate and courageous decision. I usher our other pickets across the road, as Reverend Havens calmly walks over to Sergeant Dodd to inform him of his decision, and the Sergeant immediately raises his arm to summon the police car parked down the road.

The curious men in the field gather about, sensing that something of importance is about to transpire. Reverend Havens raises EL MACRIADO, and with stirring magnificence addresses to them the celebrated definition: "After God had finished the rattlesnake, the toad and the vampire, He had some awful substance left with which He made a strikebreaker. A strikebreaker is a two-legged animal with a corkscrew soul, a water-logged brain, and a combination backbone made of jelly and glue…"

The men in the field watch in awe, a glimmer of something perhaps not far removed from comprehension seems to flicker in their eyes, they seem in spite of themselves to regard the striking and courageous figure before them with admiration. The police car has pulled up beside the road now, and its driver and Sergeant Dodd seem beside themselves with self-righteous consternation as they wait for Dave to finish reading. As we watch from across the road the giant spirit of Jack London, that valiant champion of the working man, seems to hover somewhere over the fields…

"…When a strikebreaker comes down the street men turn their backs and angels weep in Heaven, and the devil shuts the gates of Hell to keep him out…Judas Iscariot was

a gentleman…compared with a strikebreaker…The modern strikebreaker sells his birthright, his country, his wife, his children and his fellow men for an unfulfilled promise from his employer, trust or corporation…There is nothing lower than a strikebreaker."

Reverend Havens lowers the paper; his eyes meet those of the workers with a level look of scrutiny. True to his word, Sergeant Dodd orders him into the waiting police car, and he is whisked away and disappears down the road, through the rotting acres of grapes.

I walk over to Dodd. "Where are you taking him?"

"To the Kern County Jail."

"What is the charge?"

"It'll probably be disturbing the peace."

"You don't know?"

"You can find out if you want to at the Kern County Jail. By the way," he hesitates. "I'd like you to talk to whoever wrote that 'Definition of a Strikebreaker' too."

"I'm afraid that's not possible, Sergeant Dodd. He died in 1916."

"Oh yeah? Who wrote it?"

"Jack London."

"Oh? I read some of his books when I was a kid." He says it with what seems sort of befuddled admiration.

Apparently he hadn't read the definition very carefully if he hadn't seen Jack London's name clearly printed at the bottom. Had he read the definition at all? I wonder, as I walk back to join the other pickets. Or had this been one more form of harassment at the request of the growers?

At any rate, Kern County is looking more like "Mississippi West" every minute, and it is with feelings of deep disturbance that we drive to nearby Richgrove to phone in a report of what has happened to the office.

Jack London has gotten us into a lot of trouble, dead or alive, and we must work fast to extricate ourselves from it before it is too late.

10

FORTY-FOUR

An emergency meeting is called that night at Huelga House. There is no longer freedom of speech in Kern County, it is threatening to ruin our strike, and something has to be done about it. To make things even worse, Tulare County police, now seeing an opening to increase their own harassment of us, inform us that they too are going to enforce the suddenly-conceived rule forbidding us to shout to workers in the fields informing them of the strike.

Cesar Chavez conducts the meeting, and the opinions and ideas fly back and forth. Finally a consensus is reached that a test case has to be made of the no shouting edict, for if it is to go unchallenged we are not only surrendering our Constitutional rights, but seriously and perhaps fatally jeopardizing the strike and the welfare of the thousands of workers involved.

It is decided that the test case will be conducted the following Tuesday, two days hence, and volunteers are asked for. Every man and woman in the room raises his or her hand. To show that the Church is solidly behind the farm workers in their struggle for justice, Migrant Ministry director Chris Hartmire summons to Delano Reverend Francis Geddes of San Francisco and eight other prominent ministers for a "Conference of Christian Concern", and the ministers decide to risk arrest alongside the farm workers in the test of freedom of speech in the fields.

Tuesday comes, October 19th, a balmy day of Indian summer. The forty-four volunteers, including nine ministers and twelve women, head out to the fields in a long caravan of cars. The police seem to suspect that something special is up, and the press too, and we are followed by several representatives of both, including the omnipresent paddy wagon which has yet to be used for the purpose for which it was built.

Our scouts have come in with reports; they have found a perfect situation at the Camp Ranch three miles southeast of Delano, where pickers are working just far enough back in the fields to justify shouting. The pickets' cars arrive at their destination one by one and park along the opposite shoulder of the road, and the police and the press are in attendance. They get out of their cars—tall, dignified Reverend Geddes; boyish, likeable Reverend Chris Hartmire; FWA leader Tony Mendez and his lovely wife; towering Ron Caplan; Chuck Gardinier; Bob Solodow; Cesar's wife Helen; Norma Redman; and twenty-four more. They walk across the road with their Huelga signs. All the elements are there, everything is in readiness. Will the police really arrest these men and women simply for telling the workers in the field there is a strike in progress?

The workers look up curiously, the press watches expectantly. Then, the long line of pickets erupts in magnificent chorus of sound as "HUELGA" rings out over the vines more dramatically than ever before. The brave men and women stand proudly side by side, the stirring sound is repeated. It is a brave and historic moment.

Across the road Sergeant Dodd raises a loudspeaker to his lips with the exaggerated brusqueness of a man driven to greater forcefulness by the unpleasantness of his task and his own inner doubts and fears and confusions.

"If you fail to disperse now, you will be immediately arrested."

And: "HUELGA" the stirring chorus replies.

"I declare this to be an unlawful assembly and in the name of the people of California order you to disperse immediately."

"HUELGA" is the courageous answer.

"I place you under arrest!"

Sheriff's deputies now are across the road, and the brave ministers begin walking one by one across to the paddy wagon—pressed into service at last—as the deputies single them out. Reverend Geddes is erect and magnificent, his head held high as he looks levelly into the evasive eyes of the police. Reverend Chris Hartmire, executive director of the Migrant Ministry, who had not taken part in the demonstration at all (he was merely watching from the other side of the road), nevertheless is arrested with the others, and straightens up disdainfully as a deputy pushes him brusquely.

It is a shameful and depressing and yet a proud moment as one by one they climb into the cold, impersonal paddy wagon and are taken away.

The stirring scene is over. The long roadside is left empty.

In Berkeley, 260 miles to the north, Cesar Chavez is addressing an overflowing crowd of hundreds of students at the University of California. Midway through his dramatic speech, Wendy Goepel steps to the podium to deliver a telegram which has just been brought to the huge auditorium. Cesar interrupts his speech to read it, then announces its contents to the mass of students:

"I have just received a telegram informing me that 44 of our pickets have been arrested for yelling 'Huelga' to scabbing workers in a field…"

A furor erupts in the vast auditorium. Shouts of "Huelga! Huelga!" ring out from hundreds of voices, as if the students have taken up where the 44 brave pickets left off. If the crowd has been receptive to Cesar's words, now it is overwhelmingly enthusiastic almost to the point of frenzy. After the speech Cesar is swarmed upon by admiring and outraged students, and over two thousand dollars is donated to the cause.

The police have not disappointed us. Delano IS Mississippi West. At last it has been made overwhelmingly clear.

The Kern County Jail is dismal and strange to the 44 men and women who have never been behind bars before. But when we visit them the following day they greet us with the happy pride of people who have obeyed the dictates of their consciences.

Below, outside the jail entrance, we pray and sing, the relatives and friends and children of those behind bars:

"I'm not afraid of your jail
'Cause I want my union
Want my union
Want my union;
I'm not afraid of your jail
'Cause I want my union
Want my union
Now."

There is a great cry of "Huelga!" and Reverend Jim Drake comments, "I think it is significant that here in the heart of Bakersfield we can shout 'Huelga' and nothing is done to us, yet when we do it in the country miles from the nearest house, we are arrested…"

Inside the jail there is lots of time for thinking. Manuel Rivera, a middle-aged farm worker and FWA member who cannot speak English, pens the following lines in Spanish:

> I told them I was not guilty, because I know that there is freedom of speech here in the United States, and freedom for the worker. For that reason I say that I am innocent.
>
> If at this time there is no freedom for the worker, then perhaps I shall be found guilty—but I do not believe that that is true. According to my understanding the police say that we broke the law by shouting "Huelga"—by defending our rights as workers, by asking a mere ten cents an hour raise—this they call breaking the law.
>
> Is it not true that the growers break the law—and much worse than we do? They spray us with insecticide with their spray rigs on public roadways, and they spray dust upon us with their tractors; they try to frighten us off with their cars and pickups, even to the point of running us down. They accuse us of being Communists merely because we ask for a raise of ten cents an hour and a contract so that we may be sure they will not lower our wages, as they did last year…
>
> We, the poor people, have against us not only the growers, but also the police. Because I know that the moment one does anything to help at all with the strike, the police begin taking pictures of him, and then go to the growers and ask them if they wish to sign a complaint against him. On the other hand, the growers have pushed and shoved us in front of the police, they have threatened us with guns, and the police do not have the right to arrest them. Why? Because they have money, because the workers make them rich with the work they do for them? And because the workers are poor, because they are the slaves of the growers? Because discrimination exists? This I do not call freedom…

The reaction to the mass arrest is immediate and widespread. Telegrams of protest stream into the Kern County authorities, telegrams and letters and donations pour in to the FWA office from all over the country. If there was once a press blackout, it now definitely is over, as we get calls from the "New York Times," "The Chicago Tribune," "The St. Louis Post-Dispatch," "The Kansas City Star," and from other papers and magazines from coast to coast. Assemblyman Phil Soto of La Puente demands an investigation of police bias in the strike area by the Attorney General's office. Ministers, and students from a dozen campuses begin streaming in to do duty on the picket line, and bring donations from their churches and student committees. Growers seem more infuriated than ever at seeing how their desperate tactics have backfired, and we begin to hear rumors of angry discussions between growers and police.

In the meantime, in spite of our decimated picket force, action on the picket line continues hot and heavy. We observe the ridiculous no-shouting rule in Kern County, but in Tulare County we read Jack London's "Definition of a Strikebreaker" repeatedly in the presence of police and they do nothing, and we gradually raise the decibels of our calls to

scabs when the occasion arises, and police pretend to ignore us or go elsewhere. It is obvious they want nothing to do with the sort of embarrassing and costly problems Kern County is faced with.

A new and potent picket force emerges when Wendy Goepel takes an all-woman crew to the fields to talk predominantly female crews (so desperate are the growers for workers) who often have pathetic babies beside them as they pick, and the girls begin pulling workers out like veterans. Another startling and heartening development occurs when Father Lucas and Kenney of Sacramento, who have been outraged by the mass arrest and come to offer their services, calmly walk into a field and emerge a scant few minutes later with the entire vineyard full of workers at their heels.

Three days after the mass arrest, 22-year-old FWA staff member Tony Medez, one of the sharpest lads ever to walk a picket line, is strolling along Delano's Glenwood Street; he and his wife have just been released on bail. Amazed at the huge support that the mass arrest has attracted, and by the huge influx of volunteers, food and money, he asks himself: what if the volunteers keep streaming in like this, what if a thousand students from San Francisco and Los Angeles come to picket—or two thousand? We would surround every vineyard in the strike area, we would literally strangle the fields. Or: they would fill the jails to overflowing, they would create an impossible problem for us. Or: what if two thousand students don't come, but the growers THINK they are coming? What then?

Tony gets in his car and drives to the house of his father, a foreman at the Steele Ranch north of town. His father, like some other foreman sympathetic with their men and their aspirations, had gone on strike, stayed on strike for a month, but finally gone back to work and been hired back by his desperate former boss. Tony casually drops in on him now—although one is a striker and one a scab they still are father and son—and the subject of the strike inevitably comes up.

"How do you think the arrest of those 44 pickets will affect things?" his father wants to know.

"Oh, man--" Tony shakes his head with an ecstatic smile "—that really did it. They cut their own throats when they did that. Now everybody in the country knows about the strike. Do you realize that there are two thousand students coming down here from Berkeley this weekend…?"

"Two thousand students? Are you sure—two thousand?"

"Two thousand students. The arrangements have already been made to bring them down…"

Tony's father whistles in amazement. When he leaves a few minutes later and the scab father and striker son bid one another good-bye, Tony has a slight hunch that this information will get passed on to his father's boss, and—who knows?—perhaps even to the other growers as well.

Saturday morning arrives, October 23rd. Eighty student volunteers have come in during the night. Not two thousand, but still, a sizeable supplementary picket force. The scouts go out in the pre-dawn darkness. They go west, east, north, south, they scour every road in the 400-square-mile strike area. But where are the scabs? In the entire strike area there is only one 15-man crew working, way at its northern fringe. Tony Mendez' colossal hoax has worked! Fearing an inundation of two thousand avid student volunteers, the

growers have shut down their entire grape-picking operation! A rumor has accomplished, for a period of two days, what the combined power of two powerful unions could not completely bring about. The mass arrest of the 44—plus the imagination of a Mexican-American boy—have cost the growers thousands of dollars.

The strike gains momentum as never before. We have twenty-three strikes certified now, and there is not a rancher in the area who has not been seriously hurt by the two unions. We hear reports of bickering among the growers, of growers who want to sign contracts browbeaten and threatened by those who would out of spite rather let their crop rot, who are so rich they can hold out for years; of arguments between growers and police, between growers and the city fathers of Delano who are sensitive to the sharp fall-off in business, of the black eye the small city is being given throughout the state and even the nation.

The Sunday after the arrest of the 44 there is a special Mass in Ellington Park in behalf of the jailed mothers, attended by hundreds. Film crews come from NBC, from UCLA, from the ADA to make films of the strike. Money pours in from churches, civic groups, schools, famous people all over America. Short wave radios are donated by SNCC, three cars are given us by private donors, food caravans arrive almost daily. We have an office manager, Sal Gonzales. And in the fields the grapes rot, rot, rot. Those among us who can find takers are betting the growers will sign by Christmas.

11

AND THE RAINS CAME

Early November. Mid-autumn. "Season of mellow fruitfulness." As we drive leisurely through the tepid countryside which we have come to know so well the vines about us are changing color—"yellow and black and pale and hectic red…pestilence-stricken multitudes…": lines from famous works come to mind. "To burst joy's grape against the palate fine"—Keats again. And, "Our vines have tender grapes." But no, something is wrong here, "something is rotten in" Delano. The tender beautiful grapes that God created have become "the grapes of wrath…" There is a cool breeze from off the tops of the vines, we keep looking for rain clouds now; if it rains and the grapes are not picked soon after, they will rot; and the only way they will be picked is if the growers come to terms with the workers. We look for rain, but the teasing whiffs of cloud gather, hover for a while, and go scudding off down the sky like frightened scabs.

When will the growers sign? Is the question foremost in everyone's mind. How much longer can they hold out? First we took out the local crews, so they went to Bakersfield and Tulare for scabs; then we knocked out the scabs from Bakersfield and Tulare and Fresno, and we learn they are going still further afield: Indio, Arizona, El Paso, Texas—frantically spending thousands of dollars they could be using to pay decent wages to the local people.

One day in the first week of November we are picketing in southern Tulare County. Six workers have left the field in response to our shouted appeals, and in the foreground a curious sight is unfolding: workers are building a portable toilet. There were almost none when the strike started, but now they are springing up all over as a result of the strike. Yesterday when we were picketing here, women were crossing the road to relieve themselves in an orange grove. We threatened to complain to the authorities, as portable toilets are required by law in fields employing women; tomorrow the women will have restrooms. Even if the growers haven't signed contracts, the strike has helped workers in many ways already.

It is four PM, and the lowering sun is throwing crazy shadows through the tangled vines. A labor bus passes, and the workers riding in it yell at us gaily in Spanish and give us a cheer.

"Let's follow it!" insists Ron Caplan, and we swing into action. In five seconds our picket line has dissolved and we are off on the trail of the speeding bus. It is not often that scabs cheer us; usually they cringe in shame.

We catch up to the bus, follow it to its destination—one of the Caratan camps east of Earlimart, old decrepit buildings that are hardly suitable to house animals, let alone men. The bus disappears into the camp, and we park along the road, careful not to step across onto private property.

"Amigos!" we yell, and slowly the men come around the building and walk out to meet us. We stand face to face in two long lines, like enemy soldiers greeting one another after an armistice. The men tell us that they have been recruited in distant El Paso, that they had to pay $33.00 for their transportation here, and that they had been promised

fifteen cents a box and are getting only ten. They are angry, lonely, homesick and disillusioned.

One of the Caratans drives up angrily. He exhorts and pleads with the men, but he knows little Spanish and they little English and the discussion becomes a farce. Some of the men drift back into the camp, others drift out to talk with us. They finally tell us they will come with us, as soon as they get their checks. If workers are fired, they must be paid immediately, but if they quit the employer has seventy-two hours in which to pay them, and growers have a peculiar tendency to wait until at least seventy-one of those hours have expired.

We go to town in search of Dolores, our expert persuader, and she comes back with us, along with three cases full of sodas for the men. By this point two of them have been fired outright for encouraging the others to leave, and we take them to town for a hot meal at Filipino Hall and to assign them sleeping quarters at Huelga House. The others join us two days later when they get their checks and we ferry the disillusioned men to town, whence they will return to their home in El Paso, much wiser about the lies of the growers and the fortunes of scabs.

A new figure has captured our attention on the picket line: Mary Ruiz, wife and partner of a labor contractor, a statuesque, well-filled-out woman of infinite wiles who galvanizes the gaze of strikers and scabs alike as she prances back and forth along the roadside in her flashy boots and gaudy close-fitting attire. Her flaming red hair under a lavender bonnet tosses liltingly from side to side as she coaxes us coyly or lets loose with a stream of invective almost to rival that of our own Dolores. We take turns trying to guess her age, and the estimates range from thirty to forty-five.

"Oh, you! Are you out here giving me a bad time again!" she will pout flirtatiously. "You're too cute to be a striker—why don't you come over here and work for me? You know you don't want to bother me like this!"

"We're not bothering you, Mary, we're just trying to get you to pay these people decent wages."

"But you <u>are</u> bothering me—you know you're bothering me! You and those be-oo-tiful eyes! Why don't you forget about this nasty old strike and take me out to dinner sometime?" She has the same line for all of us.

"After the strike is over, Mary."

We keep after her workers, mostly Mexican men and women, and old Negroes from the cities, and an occasional child working under age—efficient workers are hard to come by these days.

"Why don't you people join us? See that man?" I indicate Chuck Gardinier who is next to me on the line. "He went down to the South to help your people—he was beaten up by police in Mississippi to help you. And now you people up here won't even try to help yourselves when we show you the way."

Jack Pandol's two-engined plane flies over.

"See that plane? It's owned by a grower and it costs over fifty thousand dollars. You're sweating here in the hot sun for only $1.25 an hour so he can live like a king!"

Someone reads Jack London's "Definition of a Strikebreaker," and then some figures from a booklet indicating the vast difference between earnings of workers in other

industries and those of the farm worker—doing the nation's most vital work, but at the bottom of the pay scale.

It has its effect: a brave Negro man comes out and grabs one of our Huelga signs and stands facing the scabs who had until a moment before been his companions.

Farther down the huge field another labor contractor challenges us with: "You leave these people alone—I know how to handle my Mexicans!"

And another carload of people comes out to join us, and drives into town to our food warehouse to get food for their families.

We resume our picketing and look at the sky—when will

We are at the huge Lucas Ranch east of Earlimart, first to be hit by the strike. Louie Lucas, the owner's son, is facing us across the line as we talk to the workers packing grapes along the road.

"Do you guys really know what you're doing out here?" he asks. "Do you realize that my father was a working man once, that he started out picking grapes?"

"What's that got to do with it?"

"Do you realize that we make a very small profit, that we can't afford to give these people a raise?"

"You can afford to hire security guards. If you spent the money you spend fighting the unions trying to get more of the farm dollar and cutting down the slice the middleman takes you could afford to pay better wages."

"Fighting the middleman how?"

"Back in the Midwest the farmers are starting to form marketing associations, and they hold out until they get a good price."

"You mean to tell me I should join a marketing association and sell my grade-A grapes for the same price some guy down the road sells garbage for?"

"There's no reason that just because there are marketing associations the grapes can't be graded…"

Louie has no answer, because there is no answer, and he turns and walks off in disgust.

His brother, George Jr., whom we have nicknamed "Baby Hughie," drives up in his new Chrysler. With his usual blank-coy look he walks casually over to the picket line, all 6-feet-two of him, and calmly walks across the toes of picket Mark Vincent in his heavy cowboy boots—a favorite trick.

Mark looks at him scathingly and does nothing. It's not easy to be non-violent sometimes.

The strike becomes even more bizarre. A grower accuses Ida Cousino, one of the most alluring pickets ever to grace a line, of using unfair feminine wiles in luring out a sixteen-year-old scab; of course the charge is absurd, and no action is taken. The same day one of the pathetic scabs working at the Caratan Ranch who desert their hard-pressed master and join us is a 60-year-old Indian woman from San Luis Potosi, Mexico, and we take her in for a hot meal at the Filipino Hall and make arrangements for her to return to her home in Mexico. We hear the strange rumor that a group of counter pickets is about to picket our office; a half-dozen ridiculous middle-aged women gather down the street, but the befuddled would-be pickets can't seem to make up their minds, and retreat in

confusion without carrying through their plan. And we look to the sky for rain, but no, the clouds gathering in the east have dispersed and become only a thin haze over the vineyards: the weather man is wrong again.

A new volunteer has come to join us, beautiful Rosemary Quiroga of Santa Barbara, daughter of Yaqui Indians, with a master's degree in sociology. She is one of the fieriest pickets we have ever had, and rivals our own Dolores Huerta in her picket-line acumen. We are picketing the Radovich Ranch, where women struggle to pick grapes and at the same time watch their three-and four-year-old children. Stacks of "Mother" brand grapes sit ironically along the roadside.

"You should be ashamed of yourselves," Rosemary remonstrates. "If you were really concerned about the future of your children you would join with us and force the growers to pay decent wages—then you wouldn't have to bring your poor little children out in the fields with you like this. Why don't you come with us and we'll give you food for your families and arrange for you to get work outside the strike area and arrange for babysitters for you?"

A woman with a two-and-a-half-year-old baby hesitates in her picking, seems on the verge of tears, goes back to work again.

We have been following pickers home after work in attempts to talk with them, and the plan has had considerable success; over half of them do not return to the fields the next day. (There is no law against following another car so long as one does not follow so closely as to create a traffic hazard.) When 5:00 comes and the weary workers quit, we each follow a car home, and Rosemary, Peggy McGivern and Epifanio Camacho happen to follow a scab car going to distant Wasco. The car they are following stops at a house, the driver goes in, while Rosemary and her crew cruise around the block. Next thing they know a police car has pulled in behind them, flashes its red light, and asks them to pull over. The officer demands to see their identification. "Why?" Rosemary asks. The officer will not say, only that they will be arrested if they do not show it. Reluctantly, they show him their I.D.'s. He releases them and they drive off, still not knowing for certain what it is all about.

Next day the two Catholic priests from Sacramento, Father Keith Kenny and Father Arnold Meagher, fly to Delano in Father Kenny's private plane, another indication of the Catholic Church's growing interest in the strike and its basic issue of justice and dignity for the farm worker. They fly over the vineyards with Cesar Chavez, telling workers below through a loudspeaker, "Join the strike. Respect the picket lines. Don't be strikebreakers." Interviewed later by the press, Father Kenny states that he and Father Meagher came to help the strikers because "human dignity is involved. Where the poor are, Christ should be, and is."

The following day as we are emerging from lunch at the Filipino Hall a fantastic and grotesque sight meets our eyes: the counter pickets, at last having summoned up their courage, now come marching down the street, seven or eight curiously rotund middle-aged women who waddle back and forth like frightened geese, carrying irrelevant and strident signs such as: "Win in Viet Nam" (the farm workers unions have taken no stand whatsoever on Viet Nam, nor have their officers); "Go Home Outsiders" (is there really such a thing as an "outsider"?—the volunteers from other areas account for a very small

percentage of the strike force); "We are Christians—We Don't Need Migrant Ministry"; and "Delano Is No Selma" (who said it was?).

As the women appear, two hundred Filipinos and Mexican-Americans empty out of the hall to greet them with shouts of "Huelga" and to unleash a stirring chorus of strike songs.

As the women beat a hasty retreat down the street to their cars we are aware of TV cameras grinding all about us, and of the police—many police. The coincidental arrival of all these elements seems too pat—something more is up than meets the eye.

Then we find out what it is: rash Sergeant Dodd enters the Hall (police seem to have forgotten there is such a thing as a search warrant) and place under arrest on a disturbing the peace charge startled Rosemary Quiroga, as our old friend Frank Winston grinds away gleefully on his TV camera. She is hustled out to a waiting police car as the astounded crowd gathers around in alarm. The police push their way through the assemblage, through the dozens of Huelga signs raised in protest, leading frightened Rosemary, still in the dark as to what her crime has been. Frank Winston hangs upon her like a leech, shooting directly into her face as she is placed in the back seat of the car. Pickets Silvia Kalitinsky and Louie Campos thrust their Huelga signs forward in protest, and Winston, seeming to think the signs have gotten in the way of his camera, explodes in wrath, "Get the hell out of the way!" biting furiously on his cigar; then, seeming about to succumb from apoplexy, "<u>You'll never do that again</u>!" as the police car whisks Rosemary away.

We have not seen Winston's program on channel 29 lately, and we are told he has been fired by CBS, but he claims he still works for them. We phone his superiors in San Francisco and they say no. Just who <u>is</u> Winston working for, anyway? The puzzle is solved a few days later when he begins giving speeches at service clubs attacking the strike, and we wonder just how much the growers have to pay for such an enthusiastic supporter.

The pettiness of the opposition as usual gains them nothing but trouble, and next day is a banner day in the fields as forty men leave the Dulcich Ranch while NBC films the exodus for the Huntley-Brinkley Report. Sixty more men leave the Divizich Ranch, and Gil Padilla and his crew pull out a hundred more at another ranch down the road.

And everyone keeps looking at the skies and asking: when will it rain?

Events rush on at a dizzy speed, with a crazy unpredictable ebb and flow. November 7th Cesar flies over Tulare County fields again with his priest friends and is arrested for allegedly violating a county ordinance regulating the use of loudspeakers, after Bruno Dispoto files a complaint. But three days later in Kern County we are granted a permit to use a bullhorn in the fields! It doesn't make sense. No doubt Kern County officials are trying to soften the blow for their colossal unconstitutional blunder in arresting the 44 pickets. Or is it just that they cannot legally deny us use of the bullhorn? Legal interpretation can be tricky and subject to whim—or pressure—or public opinion.

Our strategy is changing. What scabs remain are for the most part hardened ones, and we try a new tack: tying up the shipping of grapes at the waterfronts in San Francisco and Los Angeles. Since the Teamsters and Longshoremen officially have not given us much help to this point, we decide to appeal to the rank-and-file. Dolores and Cesar and Gil Padilla go off on speaking tours, address cheering throngs of responsive workers in

union halls and all over the state. We get donations and promises of help, and send out teams of pickets to the docks, and dispatch fleets of cars to follow the grape trucks wherever they may go.

On November 15th young Tony Mendez and his wife, and Sergio Tumbaga of AWOC go off to San Francisco to organize the picketing on the Embarcadero—the same Embarcadero that Jack London walked a half century before. A shipment of Pagliarulo grapes arrives at pier 50, and the night of November 16th they picket all night in the rain. It is a lonely vigil, but a victorious one. Next morning when a van arrives to unload at the dock it is surrounded by protesting longshoremen and teamsters who have rallied to the cause of their brother workers. All San Francisco watches on TV as a mysterious thing occurs: in a matter of moments the scab truck's tires go flat, "SCAB" is scrawled over its sides, it is rendered immobile. And on the docks the longshoremen refuse to move a single box of scab grapes destined for Hong Kong. The ship sails without them, as a wild cheer of victory goes up from the workers. Jack London would have been proud of them.

Support for the strike grows as never before, as what the growers feared most has finally happened: the refusal of teamsters and longshoremen to move their grapes. A few days later another shipment destined for the SS Burrard is stopped. Frantic growers have the grapes shipped from San Francisco to the docks in L.A. But the teamsters are with us now, the "grapevine" is a fast and reliable one, and we know ahead of time what pier the grapes are bound for in San Pedro. Dolores Huerta and a crew of pickets beat them there, and stop them again as the Burrard reaches Los Angeles two days later. The growers are frantic, they are tearing their hair, and when next day labor editor George Ballis arrives for a scheduled interview with grower Jack Pandol, the latter is so irate he cancels the interview and kicks him out of his office on general principles.

And in Delano, at last, there is rain, beautiful rain, rain to deal the death blow to the growers' hopes, and we sleep late for the first time in two months.

12

HUELGA MEANS MORE THAN STRIKE

Now that the strike has spread to the waterfronts of San Francisco and Los Angeles, it has captured the attention of the State and the Nation. It has become the concern of not just two unions, but of workingmen and of right-thinking people everywhere. It has become truly a Movement, the long-dreamed-of Movement of the forgotten farm worker, and of the Mexican-American and the Filipino-American. What is happening in Delano has significance for the entire nation.

Throughout November support grows for the strike as never before. Frank Paz of Los Angeles sets up an Emergency Committee to aid strikers, and comes to Delano with a caravan of sixteen cars and trucks bringing food, clothing and volunteers. Other caravans bringing aid arrive almost daily. Financial contributions flow in from all over the nation. Donald Wyman of Saratoga makes one of the most memorable ones, when he donates one share of IBM stock valued at $550. Two cars and a Volkswagen bus are donated. Medical students Ron Levant and Gary Bowman of San Francisco organize a medical committee, and help nurse Peggy McGivern set up a clinic for ailing strikers, and arrange for Bay Area doctors to visit Delano once a week. A child care center is established, to take care of children while their mothers are on the picket line. Sociology professor Dave Williams and social worker Anita Palm travel to Delano to help needy strikers try to obtain welfare benefits, and they put out a manual in English and Spanish to aid prospective clients. (Kern County, unlike some counties, does not consider being on strike a valid reason for not working.) The American Friends Service Committee agrees to contribute thousands of dollars to help destitute strikers pay their rent and utility bills. The influential Mexican-American Political Association (MAPA) comes out solidly behind the strike. At a statewide CSO convention the dissenting Delano and Richgrove chapters, dominated by labor contractors, walk out as the delegates vote to endorse the strike. Hundreds of civic and church groups pledge their aid. A brilliant young playwright, Luis Valdez of the San Francisco Mime Troupe, sets up a strikers' theatre group, and begins entertaining workers with hilarious and satirical skits depicting events of the strike. Even the press comes around, and Ron Taylor of the "Fresno Bee" writes a find series on Cesar and the strike in which the growers incriminate themselves by refusing to be interviewed. Also there are fine pieces by Harry Bernstein of the "Los Angeles Times," Dick Meister of the "San Francisco Chronicle," and William O'Brien of the "San Francisco Examiner," and an appraisal of the Migrant Ministry in Time.

Cesar Chavez, laid low with flu by his strenuous 18-hour-a-day schedule, continues to direct the vast operation from a sickbed, as the picketing of the docks continues. From the docks the picketing spreads to the produce terminals, and again the ghost of Jack London must have smiled as we keep grapes from being unloaded at the Oakland produce market at the edge of Jack London Square.

November 23rd we have another victory at the trial of Reverend David Havens, which has aroused nationwide interest. The police of Kern County may be biased, but the courts prove to be eminently fair, when Judge Gerald Davis dismisses the disturbing-the-

peace charge against the young Migrant Minister for reading Jack London's "Definition of a Strikebreaker."

In a written decision, Judge Davis cited the verdict in Edwards vs. South Carolina, which declares that "…the function of free speech under our system of government is to invite dispute. It may indeed best serve its high purpose when it induces a condition of unrest, creates dissatisfaction with conditions as they are, or even stirs people to anger…That is why freedom of speech…is…protected against censorship or punishment…There is no room under our Constitution for a more restrictive view…"

Judge Davis concludes, "The court finds that there was no 'clear and present danger' involved…No persons were about to riot nor was any form of civil disorder incipient…The court must hold that no violation of section 415 (Disturbing the Peace) has occurred under these circumstances. There was no shouting, no vulgar or obscene language and no tumultuous or offensive conduct, and hence no violation…The criminal complaint is dismissed."

As the handwriting on the wall becomes more and more clear to the growers and their cronies, they resort to more and more ridiculous forms of retaliation. As we picket the Logrecco Brothers vineyards on November 28th, crude signs facing us read: "Workers—ignore the Communist and pinko agitators," and "Ministers should be preaching in the pulpit, and not agitating on the picket line." We have a rash of flat tires, and find nails tossed on our parking lot at the office and in front of members' houses. The son of a grower and city council member and another teen-age boy and girl show up in an intoxicated condition at our office, try to pick a fight with Cesar Chavez, and we are forced to call the police to get them to leave. Officers find 14 cans of beer in their car and place them under arrest.

J.G. Brosmer, the growers' spokesman (an "outside agitator" from distant Fresno) tells a church group that the growers are willing to negotiate with a "voluntary committee of workers." But when Cesar calls his bluff and agrees to let the Association stand aside to permit such a meeting, he backs down.

As grapes continue to rot in the rainy weather and more shipments are stopped at the docks and produce terminals, tension reaches the breaking point. The Delano City Council, under tremendous pressure from all sides, on November 29th risks the anger of its grower friends and asks State Labor Conciliator Duncan to do something about the "bad name" Delano is getting. Duncan tells the city fathers that the obvious thing to do is to arrange a meeting of the growers, and the meeting never materializes.

The pressure continues to build. There begin to be chinks of light in the dark wall of inflexibility of the growers. The "Delano Record" of November 30th describes a Kiwanis Club meeting at which, in reply to a growers' spokesman who claims vineyard workers are adequately paid, a grower by the name of Sam Lipoma bravely replies: "I think you are being unrealistic. Frankly, I hire a lot of people too. These people are not getting enough money…I think we have to uplift the whole industry so we can afford to pay more wages…But we do not have to break strikes. Let's negotiate."

At last it is out in the open! There are growers who want to negotiate, who have wanted to negotiate from the beginning of the strike! But once again, they are browbeaten

into submission by the feudalistic mentality of richer men who would rather see their fellow growers ruined than recognize the inevitability of progress.

But there are other heartening signs that the wind is shifting: passing growers wave at pickets in the fog; a grower's wife stops to ask shivering pickets why they don't build themselves a fire to keep warm.

And we are no longer quite so poor as formerly: we rent a former labor camp to house our expanding operation, with our own dining hall, a food warehouse, rooms for office space.

And a November 30th newspaper headline reprimands the growers for their refusal to raise wages: "Cost of Living Reaches New High."

The growers' desperation is reaching pathetic new lows. Scouting through the fields one hazy late autumn day Roger Terronez and Cesar's brother Richard Chavez come upon several trucks bearing the name of Tijuana, Mexico, trucking firm. They stop to strike up a conversation with the drivers, who are loading some boxes of mushy-looking grapes that would never sell in an American grocery store. It turns out the desperate grower, who had given up the grapes for lost, is letting the Mexicans pick all they want for practically nothing. Although the pathetic-looking grapes would not pass muster in an American market, they can be sold in Mexico.

"May I see your permit from the union to buy grapes here?" Roger tries a bluff.

"What? You need a permit here?" The truck drivers gather about apprehensively, as Richard begins to inspect their trucks, the license plates, the lights, the registration.

"What do you mean, do you need a permit. Of course you need a permit! Don't you know there's a strike going on here? Everything has to be cleared through the union!"

The Spanish-speaking truckers eye one another concernedly, they stop loading the trucks.

Roger walks over to Richard. "I think we'd better call the office and get the inspectors out here to look at these trucks. Also we'd better notify our contacts with CROC (a Mexican labor union) in Tijuana."

Richard calls the office on the car's short-wave radio, and two "inspectors" hurry out, armed with an official-looking clipboard and a copy of the California Penal Code. By the time they arrive the truckers have worried themselves into a stew and are sitting on the roadside arguing concernedly among themselves.

When the "inspectors" arrive and begin giving the trucks a going over, and ask for the truckers' identification, they make up their minds: "I'm sorry, Senores, we did not know about the strike and the special permits. With your permission we will not return to Tijuana."

And the truckers pile in their less than half-loaded trucks, start the engines, and begin driving south. Roger and Richard and the others follow them for five miles, then radio a car in McFarland to take up the chase. When last seen they are still speeding south, hurrying south from Bakersfield like frightened rabbits, their appetite for scab grapes completely satiated.

The growers are hard to figure. When the strike started they were almost uniformly hostile. Now some are friendlier and some seem more stridently, hysterically pugnacious than ever. On December 2nd when EL MACRIADO editor Bill Esher spots some badly-

packed grapes being dumped into gondola trucks to be made into wine, and tries to take a picture of the disastrous process for the paper, an irate company man chases him to his car, follows him down the highway, and tries to run him off the road; Bill barely escapes with the valuable and revealing photo. Later that night Cesar and Manuel Chavez are riding through the countryside near the northern boundary of the strike area, and Cesar makes the mistake of identifying himself over the short-wave radio. Within minutes a pickup truck comes along and in a desperate chase tries to run him also off the road, and the two Chavezes barely escape with their lives. Next day, while picketing the railroad tracks, Gil Padilla's wife Dolores is nearly run down by a speeding car, and escapes only when Julio Hernandez pulls her out of the way at the last minute. Later that night Rodney Freeland is bombarded with eggs as he too pickets the railroad. Although in two of these cases license plate numbers were taken down, the police came up with nothing.

Tuesday, December 7th in Pixley Justice Court is another "day of infamy," as George Dulcich's trail for choking me on the picket line turns into a travesty in which the prosecuting attorney doesn't even bother to exercise his prerogative to have jurists who admit to knowing the accused replaced by more impartial jurors. The defense attorney presents a ludicrous picture of a poor farmer who had seen people shot down on the streets of his native Yugoslavia by Reds moved to defend America against "outside agitators." And Dulcich is found "not guilty"—a reminder of the same sort of "Pixley justice" which prevailed in 1933 when 11 growers arrested for the brazen murder of two strikers were also exonerated.

As for my other complaints, for almost being run down by W.J. Gamboni, and knocked down by Bruno Dispoto's car—after having me make six trips to the D.A.'s office in Bakersfield, and interviewing three of my witnesses, the D.A.'s office decides not to accept them.

It is December 8th and the grapes still have not all been harvested. Ordinarily the season is over by the middle or at least by the end of November. The growers claim in their propaganda that they have not been hurt, that they have harvested more grapes than ever. But we know different—we have seen the fields of rotting grapes, the table grapes turned to wine, the badly-packed boxes being opened and their contents dumped into gondolas. And if they are not hurt—then why the propaganda? Now in some fields the pruning has already started, and as we sit in Filipino Hall over lunch a group of AWOC pickets comes in with 28 scabs, freshly reformed and ready for a hot meal, and a big cheer goes up in the auditorium as they file humbly through on their way to the dining room.

As it nears the 100th day, the strike is going nationwide. The forgotten farm worker has made his voice heard at last. On December 12th the Student Non-violent Coordinating Committee announces a cross-country boycott of Schenley products and Delano area grapes, and a few days later the boycott is to be joined by CORE, the United Auto Workers and other influential groups. Growers openly admit the boycott will hurt them, but stubbornly refuse to negotiate.

December 13th the most impressive group of church dignitaries ever to visit the Delano area arrives for a two-day inspection of the strike zone. The distinguished group includes Father James Vizzard, S.J., director of the National Catholic Rural Life Conference; Lester C. Hunt, executive assistant of the Bishops' Committee for the Spanish

Speaking; Rabbi Erwin L. Herman of the Synagogue Council of America; Robert McAfee Brown, celebrated professor of religion at Stanford University; and seven other noted clergymen. The growers' ire and bad manners know no bounds, and they snub the distinguished clergymen after agreeing to a noon luncheon meet. Claiming a misunderstanding, they finally meet with them in the late afternoon for a chaotic and unproductive conference punctuated by insults to the visiting clerics.

The clergymen release a joint statement to the press, in which they affirm that "The right of churches and synagogues to engage in such action (studying the strike situation) is absolutely clear to us. We reject the heresy that churches and synagogues are to be concerned only with so-called 'spiritual' matters. We believe that this is God's world, which he not only made but continues to love. Consequently, whatever goes on in his world must be our concern, particularly when his will for the well-being of any of his children is being violated…We are not permitted to leave such considerations in the arena of pious generalities. They must be made specific, and for us they have become burningly specific in the Delano grape strike…Certain things are clear to us. We are not ignorant of, nor callous to, the economic pressures on small farmers in this area and in the state and we expect the churches to stand with these farmers as change is thrust upon them. But the suffering of farm workers and their children cries to heaven and demands the attention of men of conscience…"

Before leaving Delano, Father Vizzard reveals that Senator Harrison Williams of New Jersey is considering conducting farm labor hearings in Delano, and predicts that farm workers would have a minimum wage within a year and be covered under the National Labor Relations Act within two years.

Next day, in an incredible act of petty harassment, the local police refuse to renew our permit for the incinerators we use to warm ourselves by on all night picket duty in the freezing cold along the railroad tracks, and confiscate the containers. Our pickets are forced to stand out in below freezing weather.

But as often has been the case throughout the strike, the pettiness of our opponents is followed by a windfall for us. In this case it comes in the form of Walter Reuther of the United Auto Workers, and the endorsement of the AFL-CIO, which has just held a national convention in San Francisco. If we felt certain before that we ultimately would win the strike, now we are doubly certain.

Arriving on December 16th, the 100th day the FWA has been on strike, Reuther leads hundreds of workers on a march through the streets, proudly carrying a Huelga sign as he walks beside Cesar Chavez of the FWA and Larry Itliong of AWOC. Even now the growers cannot act civilized, and the march is marred when an intoxicated rancher is arrested for assaulting Migrant Ministers Dave Havens and Jim Drake.

Pandemonium breaks out as Reuther enters the crowded Filipino Hall; the large auditorium is overflowing with a standing-room-only crowd. Cesar Chavez speaks to a tumultuous ovation, and then the applause of the crowd soars even louder as Reuther stands up to speak.

"This is not your strike, this is our strike," he begins, and the crowd erupts in wild applause, punctuated by choruses of "Huelga!" and "Viva Reuther!" "There is no power in the world like the power of free men working together in a just cause. If General Motors

had to change its mind because of the auto workers, then the growers will have to change their mind, and the sooner they do, the better for them, the better for you and the better for the community. We will mobilize every weapon we have and fight back, we will put the full support of organized labor behind your boycott and this is a powerful economic weapon. You are leading history, and we march here together, fight here together and we will win here together."

The crowd goes wild again, as the magnetic, forceful UAW President pledges $5,000.00 a month to the two unions for the duration of the strike, asks for a U.S. Senate investigation of conditions in Delano, and promises to ask Congress for a two-dollar-an-hour minimum wage, unemployment benefits for farm workers, and inclusion of farm workers under the National Labor Relations Board's collective bargaining laws.

After the historic and tumultuous meeting, Reuther is whisked off to an unprecedented secret meeting with growers arranged by Delano's mayor, Dr. Clifford Loader, which well could be a first step in breaking the ice and leading to negotiations. For it is a certainty that with the combined forces of organized labor, organized religion and the nation's civil rights group behind the farm worker, the growers realize by now that they can wage at best nothing but a delaying battle. How long it will last, no one can say.

In case worse comes to worst, the brave men and women of the National Farm Workers Organizing Committee are prepared for a long grim struggle through the winter, and if necessary, through the spring and the summer and the summer after that. For as Cesar Chavez has said, "This strike will last until we win, be it this year or next year of the year after. This strike will not end until the workers have a union contract and can live like dignified human beings." Something remarkable has happened in the town of Delano, something which a scant few months ago no one foresaw. A pattern for a New America has emerged out of the chaos of a bitter labor dispute, the pattern of people of all races and backgrounds working and living together in perfect and unprecedented harmony. Idealistic people in other parts of America talk about this ideal; in Delano today it is working. When the strike began last September "Huelga" meant only that: "Strike." But something has happened along the way; "Huelga" has come to mean something more than "Strike"; it has come to mean cooperation, brotherhood, Love. The brotherly love of men working for a single high ideal; the healthy self-love of men fulfilling the dictates of their consciences. In Delano a new spirit is emerging, a spirit that may sweep over the earth, the spirit of brother-help-brother instead of dog-eat-dog. The growers or no one else can resist the spirit.

It is dreary and cold along Glenwood Street now as the pickets pace back and forth. But as they face the long winter the brave farm workers have more hope in their hearts than ever before.

December, 1965.

DEFINITION OF A STRIKEBREAKER
by Jack London

After God had finished the rattlesnake, the toad and the vampire, he had some awful substance left with which he made a Strikebreaker. A Strikebreaker is a two-legged animal with a cork-screw soul, a water-logged brain, and a combination backbone made of jelly and glue. Where others have hearts, he carries a tumor of rotten principles.

When a Strikebreaker comes down the street men turn their backs and angels weep in Heaven, and the devil shuts the gates of Hell to keep him out. No man has the right to be a Strikebreaker, so long as there is a pool of water deep enough to drown his body in, or a rope long enough to hang his carcass with. Judas Iscariot was a gentlemen…compared with a Strikebreaker. For betraying his master, he had the character to hang himself…a Strikebreaker hasn't.

Esau sold his birthright for a mess of pottage. Judas Iscariot sold his Savior for thirty pieces of silver. Benedict Arnold sold his country for a promise of a commission in the British Army. The modern Strikebreaker sells his birthright, his country, his wife, his children, and his fellow men for an unfilled promise from his employer, trust or corporation.

Esau was a traitor to himself. Judas Iscariot was a traitor to his God. Benedict Arnold was a traitor to his country. A Strikebreaker is a traitor to himself, a traitor to his God, a traitor to his country, a traitor to his family and a traitor to his class.

There is nothing lower than a Strikebreaker.

In September, 1965, in the shabby California town of Delano, began the movement which has shaken the state's brutal system of agriculture to its base.

This is the story of a strike without parallel, a strike involving the long-dead writer Jack London, a strike involving bishops, a strike where management has its own private air force. Out of the tumult and confusion of this long overdue bid by America's poorest workers for freedom and dignity comes this outstanding book.

Nelson, the author, writes from the very heart of the Delano crisis. The result is an "insider's" account which is compelling and often brilliant. This is the first book to come out of the very beginnings of a genuine people's movement. It is not only an entertaining piece of reportage, it is a document of social importance.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Eugene Nelson, 36, is the son of a Modesto grape rancher. He came to the Farm Workers Association by way of Mexico, where he spent several years writing. He is author of "The Bracero" and other books about Mexico and Mexican workers. He has free-lanced extensively for "Ebony," "Mexican Life," the "San Francisco Chronicle," and a number of literary magazines.

Nelson served as a picket captain during the earliest part of the Grape Strike. This account, "Huelga," is an individual report and not an official history.

Nelson now makes his home in Delano, where he lives with his wife and daughter.

ABOUT THE FARM WORKERS ASSOCIATION

The National Farm Workers Association was founded in 1962 by a few hundred farm worker families, mostly Mexican-Americans, who were searching for a way out of the brutal trap in which they found themselves as a result of the poverty imposed on them by California's corporate agriculture.

The Association made its headquarters in Delano, the center of this state's richest farming region and poorest farm workers. Under the leadership of Cesar Chavez, a broad program of social services and insurance was developed, and a credit union and a newspaper. The Association was supported entirely by dues from its membership, which grew to several thousand families. In 1965 the Association saw its first strike action against the state's rose industry, centered in nearby McFarland; and later against the vineyards of J.D. Martin, millionaire Tulare County rancher.

In September 1965, with the cry of "Huelga," began the chapter in the Association's history which is not yet finished: the Great Delano Grape Strike.

The need for strike funds in continuous. Contributions may be sent to FARM WORKERS RELIEF FUND, PO Box 894, Delano, Calif.

ABOUT THE FARM WORKER PRESS

The Farm Worker Press was founded in the winter of 1964 by Cesar Chavez with the aid of a $200 gift toward a typesetting machine and a layout table built by his brother. Its first task was to challenge the elaborate power structure of California's central valley, with a newspaper for farm workers which could afford to tell the truth. That paper, EL MALCRIADO, is now published in both Spanish and English and is fast becoming famous throughout the state for its fearless and articulate style.

HUELGA, by Eugene Nelson, is a small beginning on the second project of the Farm Worker Press. The purpose is to popularize the just cause of the farm worker with a series of informational books publishing the facts on issues such as the Delano Grape Strike, and a series of picture books giving the feeling of what it is like to live and work in 20th century America under feudal labor conditions.