

Report To Church Leaders by Chris Hartmire

October 8, 1965

Dear Friends:

There is a major agricultural strike taking place right now in the Delano area of Kern and Tulare Counties. More than 2,000 workers have walked off their jobs in the grape harvest. Over thirty (30) employers are involved. The farm workers are being represented by the AFL-CIO affiliated Agricultural Association (FWA). The workers are asking for a negotiated contract with their employers which would include improved wages and working conditions. To date, agricultural employers have refused to acknowledge that their workers are organized and represented. Under these circumstances collective bargaining is impossible. Churchmen have been on the scene to encourage negotiations between the parties in the dispute. Following is a brief chronology of events:

- 1) September 14 – Filipino workers in grape harvest asked AWOC to represent them in a labor dispute with their employers. They asked for union recognition and \$1.40 per hour plus 25¢ per box for harvesting grapes.
- 2) September 16 – 700 Mexican-American workers met in Delano under auspices of FWA and voted to support the Filipino workers in their strike.
- 3) September 19 – AWOC and FWA agreed to work together in a general strike in grape harvest.
- 4) September 20 and following – Some staff of California Migrant Ministry and United Church of Christ on hand in Delano to assist the FWA.
- 5) September 22-23 – California Church Council Fact-Finding team on the scene. Members were: the Rev. George Spindt of Redwood City, Bishop Sumner Walters of Stockton, the Rev. George Wilson of Palo Alto and the Rev. Howard Fowler of Visalia.
- 6) September 29 and following – Churchmen from Northern and Southern Calif. on hand (as individuals) in Delano to support workers in their efforts, talk with growers and local churchmen.
- 7) From the beginning there have been incidents that were violent or bordered on violence.

All of the churchmen involved have related primarily to the FWA. They have been deeply impressed with the effective, non-violent leadership of Cesar Chavez, who is director of FWA.

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The strike continues with no negotiations in sight. Grapes are being lost and the families of farm workers are without food.

The farm workers involved in this crisis are looking to the churches for support and assistance. Several things are urgently needed:

1. Food for the families of the strikers.
2. Money to support the organizing effort.
3. Churchmen to be present in Delano in a mass demonstration of concern for justice in agricultural employment.

Your help is needed now! Food should be delivered to the FWA office, First & Albany in Delano (Kern County). Money should be sent to the FWA, Post Office Box 894, Delano, California. Men and women who want to identify by being on the scene should contact the Rev. James Drake at the FWA office, area code 805, phone number Delano 8661.

Please don't turn this appeal aside. Working men who have been humiliated too long are asking for your help.

Your brother in Christ,

Wayne C. Hartmire, Jr.

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