

TAPE ARC -19, TC 9:00:00

SOURCE: WSU

UFW PSA, FACE TO FACE

CHAVEZ, from United Farm Workers TV PSA:

9:00:11 CHAVEZ: We think we're developing the beginning of a very effective uh, consumer boycott. We're pressuring the stores not to sell the grapes. As you saw, as a consequence of that we're getting a lot of people who were helping us before who are coming back to something that's quite natural for them now, is not to eat grapes.

CHAVEZ, interviewed on TV:

9:08:15 HOST: ...Cesar Chavez, the man. How did you convince your eight children, your wife, that this should become your life?

9:08:27 CHAVEZ: Well, it's difficult to really know and say how it happened, but it's one of those things I must say that actually didn't take that much convincing. Uh, we all knew that this is what we had to do, and so we're doing it.

9:08:43 HOST: As a joint effort. How old is your oldest son. Is he involved with you?

9:08:51 CHAVEZ: My oldest son is 20. Yes, in the summers, he's in school now. But they're all involved, either after school, or in the summers, during the school vacation.

9:09:02 HOST: Now in addition to the commitment, obviously, of your total family, what has been the response and how have you gotten the response of all the people who are working with you in a very difficult and long, drawn out proposition?

9:09:29 CHAVEZ: Well, you see, I think what has happened, is that we have gathered, because of our struggle, and because it's such a unique way of organizing a union today, we've gathered around us many men and women, young men and women, who feel the same as we do that farm workers should have the same privileges and the same rights as most workers have in America today. And so we've been able to put together a very formidable, I think, uh, army of men and women who are dedicated to seeing that social justice be brought to these workers. And we have a very, very good combination of uh, men and women, not only farm workers, but also people who have come from the universities, and in many cases left their own jobs to join us. I think that this is one of the greatest uh, sources of strength is the fact that we have working with us all sorts of people.

9:10:26 HOST: The concept of non-violence which permeates your approach to this, do you think you will be able to maintain the idea of militant non-violence as you go all over where there are migrant workers.

9:10:42 CHAVEZ: I think that the, that the best assurance is one that uh, workers have come to understand that there is great power in uh, struggling non-

violently. They've come to understand that there's also a great compassion for them from the American public in general. And also a lot of support when they see lettuce workers using this great weapon of non-violence to overcome some of the injustices that they have been subjected to for so long. And a lot depends too on the uh, ability of the people to organize, and to continue to come up with new creative ways of overcoming the obstacles. Really what I'm saying is that non-violence uh, can work, it can work, and particularly when it demonstrates that it has so far for those who are seeking change.

9:11:40 HOST: Ghandi once made the statement that the reason why his concept of non-violence failed in India was that it takes tremendous energy to be non-violent. Do you think that Chicanos mostly, but other people, college students, all kinds of ethnic groups, who support your movement, will continue to have the energy to be non-violent.

9:12:04 CHAVEZ: Our movement is a very young movement, and be that I mean not only young in time, but young in composition, and so there's a lot of energy there, there's a lot of uh, determination. And uh, I think that uh, Ghandi, when he said that uh, his non-violent movement had failed, he's referring only that he's not been 100% successful. [All right...everything's relative?] ...Yes.

9:12:31 HOST: One of the criticisms that I read, and really I read so much about you I don't recall who said this, was that the fast, and I'm speaking of the 25 day fast which received all the publicity, although you had fasted before, when it was not highly publicized, that this was just a publicity stunt. Could you talk for a moment about the tradition of penitence, which is part of your religion and part of Mexico?

9:12:59 CHAVEZ: Well you see, I propose going back even before Christianity came to Mexico. The Indians there had uh, as part of their life, the uh, uh, penitence. And I think that when Christianity came to Mexico that served to strengthen that belief. On the one hand the culture with the religion merged and became a , infused the people with a very strong will to do penance. And so we as a, as a group coming out of this, coming together, if not practice it, at least knowledgeable. And of course in my own life, I remember during Lent that uh, we fasted, for instance we'd skip one meal as an example, every day, for forty days when we were kids, you know. And so, the fast wasn't really that difficult for me, the most difficult part was keeping the press out and keeping it from becoming such a public thing as it did. But I was prepared for it psychologically. And I had done all of my homework to be able to withstand all of the pressures of being on a fast. But I found that uh, that the biggest uh, the hardest uh, the most difficult thing in a fast of that duration, is the pressure that you receive from your loved ones who are very concerned, not knowing that uh, you're well and won't ...because you haven't eaten in so long. But as it turned out it was a I think a very good thing, we were able to once and for all say to everyone who wanted to listen say that when we spoke of non-violence you know we really meant it and were willing to do that much to prove it.

9:15:01 HOST: As I read about the fast, the experiences that you had while you were fasting came to me. We hear a great deal about mind-expanding, people are usually talking about drugs. What kinds of things happened to you during the fast?

9:15:16 CHAVEZ: Well, um, you see, after about the 17th day, I didn't have any hallucinations, and I didn't have any visions, but I did experience, for instance, a real sharpness of the senses. Uh, hearing was very, very clear. Memory was uh, retaining was extremely sharp. I didn't need much sleep. I was sleeping maybe three hours a day and I was working the rest of the, uh, twenty-one hours. Uh, uh, I even began to see, for instance, something I can't even experience today, when you see people eat it's a very natural act, but when I was off and I was in the fast, I began to see for the first time how singular an act it is for people to eat. It's uh, it seems like all of the senses, it's a deep, deep concentration. And these things just came as I was observing people eating.

9:16:41 HOST: A great deal of art evolved out of your fasting, you were doing the fast, they were doing the pictures.

9:16:44 CHAVEZ: Yes. ... uh, there were an awful lot of people who came to the fast, we must have met about 20,000, mostly farm workers, with many concerns, but also sharing the fast in their own way. And, we had a lot of religious objects brought to us, and people in many ways trying to join the penance in their own way. We for instance had, uh, many people bringing to us statues and pictures of John Kennedy, Our Lady of Guadalupe, and uh, and uh, a saint that is very famous, a black saint that lived in Peru [??], and we had many things brought to us. But I think one of the most unique thing that came to, that was given to us, was a handmade uh, statue of uh, uh, it's a, patron saint of the miners, and I don't recall the name now but it was made out of silver, it was about, almost 150 years old. But of course the most important thing was people were there and they were participating, and we had religious services every evening, and uh, afterwards, the services, people would come, and we had many of course would pray that I would

be well, and it just, it, it was a very powerful thing in that it was massive participation at all levels.

9:18:36 HOST: This fast occurred, and these people, and these religious objects, etc. all of this occurred in sort of a burgeoning oasis in the middle of the flat California land, the 40 Acres. What do you hope for those 40 Acres?

9:18:58 CHAVEZ: Well those 40 Acres you know are still pretty barren, but we have great dreams for them. We had hoped, and we still hope that we will be able to build on that plot of land, a uh, a headquarters for the work of the union, but also for the, the whole idea of bringing about social change, not only among farm workers, but among those who need and desire change, uh, non-violently. And we want to make it really like a spiritual center for uh, well uh, non-violent uh, activity, involving men of all faiths, of all creed, of all races, who really come to understand that really no real change can take place unless it's, unless, unless it takes place by non-violent means. That nothing is really changed if it comes about through violence and subjecting people.

9:20:06 HOST: I have to ask a question... Do you know how you have affected Chicano children?

9:20:26 CHAVEZ: No I don't. You know it's very difficult essentially everything we're doing not, its the public attention that we've caused. I don't uh, uh, I don't like it, I still have many, many uh, well, difficulties with it, I can't adjust to it. But I think that we've made a lot of friends and I think that we've been able to uh, to uh, get our message out to them. And we don't know how we have affected them, except that uh, here and there we have glimpses of uh, some of

the young children, particularly, who are, I would say somewhat impressed with the whole idea of uh, of uh, doing things without violence...

9:21:17 HOST: Do you think that perhaps Chicano children, in the field, out of the field, at every economic level, walk a little taller because Cesar Chavez exists?

9:21:28 CHAVEZ: No, I think I'm just, uh, and we in the union are just part of the whole *causa* -- there are many, many facets to it, and many other leaders have done and are doing considerably more than we ever hoped to do. And you know, in this society where uh, heroes are sometimes needed, some of us have been picked to play a role whether we want it or not. But I think that truthfully there are many, many people who have contributed more than we have.

9:21:59 HOST: Well, you're, I think you are right, we do need our heroes, particularly when we are very young, and very few of the people who become heroes seem to understand that they stand for other people, and part of what you are is that you do understand this, and that other people are contributing and that you're sort of in the spotlight, and I must say living up to this hero role in our view. You are very popular among the young people that I listen to, Mr. Chavez. What about racism now...Filipinos, Blacks, and Mexican - Americans...

9:23:07 CHAVEZ: Well I think that uh, one of the great contributions that literature can make to the whole question of racism, and in our case, in our union, is that we uh, uh, meet divisions when they come head on, and we're not afraid to be thrown out of office, or dispose our leadership, we in fact if we were thrown out of the union for our commitment to an end to racism I think would be a very good

issue to go on. But people follow only if you lead them, and the whole question of racism we are particularly anxious to lead and we're not afraid of, and if it should displease the majority of members then of course we'd be gone. But see, what has happened is that, it isn't really inherent in people to discriminate, particularly in a struggle like ours, where every man who comes to the picket line is our brother, immediately, regardless of color. It only sets in if the leadership begins to play politics with race, or the leadership is quiet and does not stand up to the call when such call should come. Uh, the greatest strength that we have in our union is the, the constant uh, policing of ourselves, and of the whole movement, that it should be free of racism, and not only that but that we all should understand and we all should share that the real strength is the strength of all the people together. And that part is the beautiful, beautiful experience to me. Because the employers for over 80 years have broken unions in fields, in agriculture, because placing one race against the other. But we have come, we have been able stand above that, and that I think is a great uh, achievement for all of us.

9:24:57 HOST: You don't have to answer this question if you do not wish to, but as I understand it, in spite of the fact that most, not all, Chicanos are Catholic, that the support that you have received from the Church does not measure up to its power.

9:25:18 CHAVEZ: No it's very inaccurate. What has happened see is that, particularly with the new changes coming into the church now is that we have a lot of support from the young priests, particularly the American born priests, and we have a lot of support from the sisters, at that level, and less support as we go up. So there's a lot more priests supporting us, and sisters than there would be bishops. But, uh, would is also coming about is that the Mexican - American is now

beginning to play, I think, a significant role in the Catholic Church, and they are going to be the uh, vehicle by which we are going to have the church involved in more of the social issues. I think that in time to come, the church will come to uh, I hope at least in the southwest, to be more concerned about the social issues confronting this very large minority group, but in some cases a majority of Catholics in the southwest.

9:26:21 HOST: Is there anything that your group can do to change Public Law 414, which makes it possible to have the green carders, which seems to me would undermine what you are trying to do.

9:26:37 CHAVEZ: This has been in our estimation the most difficult uh, question to resolve in the strike. If it were not, were not for Public Law 414 and the importation of people to come in from Mexico to break our strikes, we wouldn't have to be in the boycott, we could resolve the issue with the employers and our members because of the economic strength of stopping the production. We can't because of the importation of people from Mexico. I don't know, we are not going to be able to change it I'm sure with the, with this present administration, and we're going to have to wait I suppose, until we get either a change of administration, or a more, uh, or more awareness throughout the country of the tremendous difficulty in organizing workers because of the uh, the way in which people from Mexico have been brought in to, purposely to break the strike.

9:27:32 HOST: Is there any possibility of the Mexican government seeing some sort of negotiation with Washington as a good thing or a bad thing? If you are very poor in Mexico the green card is a good thing, is it not?

9:27:45 CHAVEZ: Yes, I don't think so, the Mexican government, they have wide unemployment, uh, any time that people from Mexico come here and work and then go home with the money, they carry gold across, and I think this would be their feeling to that economy and to the leadership in Mexico, so we don't expect really and move coming from Mexico, we have to do it ourself here.

9:28:11 HOST: Do you have the feeling that a significant number, pick your number, of Chicanos or whomever, who are now migrant workers, in migrant families, will choose, will urge their parents to settle in and stop following the crops, that this would happen soon and dramatically?

9:28:34 CHAVEZ: There are of course, some signs that this is already happening. In those areas where we have union contracts this has come very sharply and very suddenly. We have been able to stop, well, numbers of families immediately taking up residency, because they now have a job, they now have some sort of security. Also in the, particularly in the Midwest and the East Coast, uh, less farm worker families are being used to harvest the crops because of mechanization. And also, because of the great disparity of wages in the East Coast and the Midwest, people will go to a crop for two or three years, and then they somehow find a job in industry and leave the stream, but then there places are taken up by other people, there is an endless amount of people particularly coming out of Texas, to feed the migratory stream, both North and South.

9:29:36 HOST: Do you feel...that it would be possible to automate the grape picking?

9:29:47 CHAVEZ: I don't think it's going to be possible to automate it, and not because uh, technology cannot reach that far. I think that, you know, to automate, not only grapes, but most of the fruit, the machine has to be brought up to a certain level, and then you have to develop new plants to meet the stresses and the strains of the machine handling, and when you do that you invariably are losing color and taste and all of these things, and I don't think the consumer is going to stand for that.

9:30:17 HOST: Would this affect the quality of the wine?

9:30:23 CHAVEZ: I think so. I think that uh, a lot has to do, it would seem to me, for instance, today, with all the machines that we have and for instance in the tomatoes, it's very difficult today to get a tomato that tastes like a genuine tomato. You have a red ball and it tastes like alfalfa in many cases. This is the whole process. I think it has a direct effect.

9:30:46 HOST: If you were going to make a direct statement to the people of Seattle, what would it be?

9:30:52 CHAVEZ: Well, I would say that uh, we have, we are asking the city of Seattle and all of those who hear us, that they have a great stake in what's taking place in agriculture today. Because we as farm workers have for many generations produced the foods that they eat, at very cheap wages and very bad working conditions, and very patiently. Now we are saying that if we have fed them we want them to in turn feed us by not eating grapes.

9:31:18 HOST: Cesar Chavez, good health, and good luck. And thank you very much. [TO CAMERA] “When we are really honest with ourselves we must admit that our lives are all that really belong to us, and so it is how we use our lives that determines what kind of men we are. It is my deepest belief that only by giving our lives do we find life. I am convinced that the truest act of courage, the strongest act of manliness is to sacrifice ourselves for others in a totally non-violent struggle for justice. To be a man is to suffer for others. God help us to be men.” So spoke Cesar Chavez in the New Yorker. Good afternoon.

FACE TO FACE

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