

# Grape boycott supporters speak at Unitarian church

By HAROLD GRIFFITHS

Deborah Miller and Virginia Sanchez, organizers for the Farm Workers Union, gave a talk and showed a film at the Lakeshore Unitarian Church, Sunday, Oct. 6th, titled "Why We Boycott."

The film described the events which led to the strike in California and the boycott of the sale of grapes and lettuce.

There are in the U.S. three million farm workers including 800,000 children, average income is \$2,700 for a family or four or five people. Life expectancy is 49 years. It is common for children to work with their parents in the fields. The problem of farm workers is the seasonality of employment. They are mainly itinerant, following the harvest from place to place and working under extreme conditions at low pay.

## HISTORY

The current strike in California led by Cesar Chavez and his Farm Workers Union is the culmination of a lengthy history of labor exploitation problems in that part of the U.S., starting with the Spanish using Indian labor prior to statehood.

Following the Gold Rush days and continuing to the present Chinese, Japanese, Hindu, Sikh, Armenian, Filipino, Mexican and European laborers were or are involved.

At the time of the Mexican Revolution of 1910, refugees provided a source of cheap labor. The growers in California have a history of pitting groups against one another to obtain the cheapest labor. In the 1920s it was Filipino against Mexican. The labor problem was compounded by the arrival of the Okies and Arkies of the Dust Bowl Days of 1931.

## STRIKE

Cesar Chavez, a farm worker himself, attempted to organize the grape pickers in the early 1960s. In 1965 the Filipino workers went on strike and were joined by the Mexicans. There followed a two-year strike. In 1967 Chavez made the boycott international, extending it to Canada.

Finally, in 1970, the United Farm Workers won contracts with the growers, an historic first which abolished child labor in the fields and provided benefits to the workers. Hiring was done through union hiring halls and not by labor contractors.

In 1973 the contracts expired and the growers announced that the Teamsters Union now represented the grape pickers. The UFW challenged this move and the California courts ruled that the UFW had jurisdiction over

the grape pickers, not the Teamsters.

The strike, however, continues and Deborah, Virginia and their fellow organizers and workers are attempting to publicize the conditions and problems of the grape workers and to explain the boycott.

The U.S. National Labor Relations Act of 1935 (The Wagner Act) excludes farm workers.

Next Sunday there will be a

family service "Giving Thanks."

This will be an opportunity for all the children and adults to celebrate Thanksgiving together.

A Sukkoth booth (a traditional harvest symbol in the Hebrew culture) will be used to receive gifts of food which will be distributed to people in less fortunate circumstances.

The Church is located at 4 Cedar Ave., Pointe Claire.