

## El Malcriado News Brief

### WEST FOOD MUSHROOM WORKERS VOTE UNANIMOUSLY FOR DOLE BOYCOTT

More than one hundred mushroom workers rose to their feet Tuesday evening, July 13 to vote unanimously for a boycott of their employer, West Foods, Inc., of Ventura and its parent company, Castle and Cooke, the giant multi-national food corporation. Among Castle and Cooke's subsidiaries are Dole, C & C Sugar, and Bumble Bee Sea Foods.

West Food was under a Teamster contract for five years prior to the late summer of 1975 when company workers came to the UFW Oxnard field office to ask the United Farm Workers Union to help them organize a union election under the Agricultural Labor Relations Act.

The ALRB election was held on September 8 and the workers voted UFW 136, Teamsters 39, and no union 9. After dismissing a Teamster appeal, the ALRB certified the United Farm Workers, AFL-CIO, as the official bargaining agent for the West Food workers on December 1.

The business of West Foods is the year round production of mushrooms and its farm workers have one of the worst jobs in agriculture. The mushrooms must be grown in complete darkness in chemically treated beds of steaming horse manure compost. There are eight beds, two on four different levels, in each of the eighty growing rooms. The beds fill the approximately 8,500 square feet of the room, leaving the workers barely enough space to squeeze between them. The bedding and harvest workers wear hard hats with lights attached, like coal miners, as they crawl around the beds to do their work. "Its like working in a dark, steaming, stinking cave," says UFW negotiator Liza Hirsch.

Sanitation facilities at the plant are inadequate. Some crews are only allowed to use the rest rooms at scheduled times. In some rooms the only drinking water available is the water the workers bring themselves in old plastic milk jugs. The jugs sit in the corners of the growing rooms uncovered and are shared by the entire crew.

The majority of the workers start their day at 4:30 a.m., working eight hours a day, six days a week, for wages varying from \$2.50 to \$2.95 an hour depending on their job classification.

A special health problem for the West Food workers is the company's extensive use of toxic chemicals. The mushroom beds are sprayed systematically with Dithane (Z-78) a very dangerous organo-phosphate. Vapona, a pesticide that is a known carcinogen (a cancer causing agent) is also used. The workers are required to use Santobrite, another dangerous organo-phosphate that can be absorbed through the skin, as a boot and tool rinse.

The West Food Teamster contract had never effectively dealt with any of these problems.

In April of this year, the West Food workers elected a thirty man negotiating committee representing every job classification in the plant.