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# Letters

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## **La Causa defended**

To the Editor:

First of all, let me say that I am totally and completely shocked that The Times, a publication that prides itself on printing only "news fit to print," would publish such garbage as Winthrop Griffith's article on Cesar Chavez and the United Farm Workers Union ("Is Chavez beaten?" Sept. 15). While one might be led to give Mr. Griffith credit for what appears to be an innocent job of reporting, the article is very cleverly written with the obvious intention of being misleading and harmful

to the whole struggle of the United Farm Workers.

I find myself compelled to write this letter—as a person who has worked 12 long, hard years to build a true democratic union for farm workers, you will have to understand my feelings after reading this article. There are many points to be answered in this racist-filled piece of garbage. Mr. Griffith goes to great pains, paragraph after paragraph, to degrade and subvert the United Farm Workers Union and its members, making its leadership and officers appear to be little less than clowns, while coming back, time after time, to praise the lily-white growers and the Teamsters for their intelligence, capabilities and power.

Mr. Griffith could have mentioned, out of decency, the many things that the U.F.W. accomplished in a short period of time—its five medical clinics, the Farm Workers Credit Union, the Robert F. Kennedy Memorial Health Plan, the Farm Workers Service Centers, the Farm Workers Coop, the Death Benefit Cooperative programs and the various training programs. Oh, yes, he did mention the Farm Workers Retirement Village, the only one of its kind in the country for farm workers. But he did not mention the miraculous change that came about in the lives of farm

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workers, how human dignity and working conditions were improved and workers were treated like human beings and not like agricultural implements. The United Farm Workers did that and nobody else.

By the establishment of a hiring hall, which Mr. Griffith ridicules, we ended the exploitive labor contractor system, eliminated child labor, and stabilized the nightmarish forced migration through a strong seniority and grievance procedure in our contracts so that farm workers could have roots in their communities. Pesticides were restricted and jobs became safer. The Teamsters have brought back all of these abuses.

If Mr. Griffith had been genuinely interested in how our halls worked, he could have spoken to me, as I was the field office administrator for the union. As to the effectiveness of the boycott of lettuce, grapes, or Gallo wine, or to measure the public support the boycott now has, he could have contacted our office and we would have been glad to furnish him statistics that have been reported in publications such as the Wall Street Journal, the Los Angeles Times, the Fresno Bee, the Washington Post, the San Francisco Examiner, and various agricultural journals.

But it was clear that his main intention was to prove our incompetence, our lack of support and ineffectiveness.

RICHARD E. CHAVEZ  
Executive Board Member,  
United Farm Workers,  
A.F.L.-C.I.O.; New York  
Boycott Coordinator  
New York City

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## Chavez not "beaten"

To the Editor:

The violence and deceit by which the Teamsters and growers have "beaten" Chavez and the United Farm Workers is as American as apple pie — and Wounded Knee, and Vietnam, and Chile, and "Southie" in Boston. Winthrop Griffith's resignation to this sad "fact" is in the best tradition of pre-Watergate apathy and post-pardon depression.

Chavez may or may not turn out to be a saint. Still, some of us share his vision of a Christ who was "beaten" (finished) but whose power overcomes all the hateful "facts" by the slow but en-

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during power of love.

Therefore, in the spirit of "the foolishness of God," some of us will continue to boycott scab lettuce and California table grapes and Gallo wines.

F. PETER SABEY  
United Christian Foundation  
Team Ministry,  
University of Massachusetts  
Amherst, Mass.

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## Bitter harvest

To the Editor:

Perhaps even more depressing than the apparent futility of the farm workers' struggle for a union of their choice is the fact that although it seems as if the only thing that could save Chavez's union would be an active consumer boycott, the consumers of this country have decided to withhold their support.

Whether this inactivity is a result of *La Causa's* lost fashionability or general political apathy, the result is unfortunately the same—we are only watching while the farm workers are being beaten once more. Unless we are ready to act in their behalf, we must see ourselves as the worst oppressors.

JANE GORDON  
Bronxville, N. Y.

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## Just beginning

To the Editor:

As an organizer in the Manhattan area, I can state as a fact that our boycott efforts are not just a "lonely vigil" but a growing movement. Right now the grape unloads into the New York City/New Jersey area are down 50 per cent from before the boycott, while six Manhattan chains and numerous independent stores are carrying no grapes at all.

We are just beginning a Gallo wine campaign which will concentrate on further damaging Gallo's market. With Gallo sales already down 9 per cent from last year, we expect to make rapid headway in confining Gallo to the cellar in the wine sales competition.

As a U.F.W. picket for two years, as a person who joined the U.F.W. nine months ago because *La Causa* was (and is ) the most important work around, and definitely not as an isolated example of U.F.W. support, I would report to Mr. Griffith that our posture

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is not sagging. But better yet, I suggest that the next time Mr. Griffith wants to check the posture of the U.F.W.'s "Anglo supporter" he do so from the vantage point of one of our lines. Then he might really learn that our cause is alive.

*Viva La Causa!*

JOHN BUDENHOLZER

New York City

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## **False impression**

To the Editor:

"Is Chavez beaten?" gives the false and dangerous impression that past supporters of the migrant workers' cause have fallen away.

As one of the millions of Americans who have been trying to help in this struggle for justice, I strongly object. Some members of the press may have moved on to newer, more "fashionable" issues (failing even to recognize the effective coalition among both old and new groups working for economic justice), but the supporters I have known and worked with since 1967 have not. If anything, we are now more numerous, better prepared for the length of this struggle, and more diverse. The opponents of Chavez and the migrant workers may choose to ignore or obscure this fact for their own tactical reasons—but if they themselves come to believe it, they do so at their peril.

GLORIA STEINEM

New York City

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## **New support**

To the Editor:

Winthrop Griffith is wrong in assessing the strength of the United Farm Workers. I hope he is also wrong in judging American society.

Obviously it is true that people, including priests and nuns, leave the farm workers for a variety of reasons. The issue however is momentum. Griffith mentions the A.F.L.-C.I.O. endorsement and the potential impact of its 13.5 million members. He fails to note numerous other new backers. For example, the Catholic bishops have unanimously endorsed the U.F.W. and the grape and lettuce boycotts, and they have a relatively obedient membership of 50 million. This new support comes not in the hopeful, active sixties, but during the discouraging, cynical post-Watergate days. In contrast, there is the Teamsters union. No religious body

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of any denomination, or any other group, has endorsed the efforts of the Teamsters on the basis of moral principle. One side gains new support every day. The other attracts no outside support and has conscience-stricken members within.

The question of truth, of who really is right, seemed to be virtually disregarded in the article. Recent events tend to make all of us more skeptical and callous. But if justice in America counts for as little as the author thinks, far more people are in trouble than the farm workers. Justice and truth are difficult to measure and balance against dollars and brute force. And that is what the U.F.W. struggle is all about.

Rev. JAMES T. RYAN  
Office for Social Action  
Villanova University  
Villanova, Pa.

## Man or myth?

To the Editor:

Congratulations on "Is Chavez Beaten?" This is the first article published at a national level that gives an objective picture of Chavez and his United Farm Workers Union. Only the myth that Chavez represents the farm workers has been told by the news media to date.

Chavez lost his battle solely because he failed to govern the farm workers (whom he had forced to join his union through the secondary boycott) with any degree of compassion. Those workers who worked under Chavez rule for three or more years will never go back to him. Slowly that fact is beginning to dawn on the general public.

GEORGE GANNON  
Mabton, Wash

## Stronger than ever

To the Editor:

As a reporter who has spent the past five-and-a-half years working on a biography of Cesar Chavez, I can understand how Winthrop Griffith failed to understand such a complex subject as the United Farm Workers' struggle to unionize, but the implication of his article that Chavez is beaten is wide of the mark.

There are many errors in the article, but let me deal with two of Mr. Griffith's basic premises: that farm workers are shifting their allegiance to the Teamsters, and that U.F.W. support groups are far weaker than in the sixties.

No one can prove which union the farm workers prefer since they have not been permitted to express their choice by secret ballot elections conducted by a neutral source. Three events Mr. Griffith ignored are significant:

(1) A proposed secret ballot election law that passed the

California State Assembly was defeated in the State Senate last month because of the combined lobbying of the growers and the Teamsters. The U.F.W. and the A.F.L.-C.I.O. strongly supported the bill.

(2) This summer, when Teamster President Frank Fitzsimmons came to Monterey to present a charter to Teamster Farm Worker Local 1973, the U.F.W. called a one-day work stoppage at ranches in the Salinas area with Teamster contracts. According to *The California Packer*, a grower publication that has always opposed the U.F.W., the work stoppage was 80 per cent effective.

(3) Last month, grape workers in the Gallo vineyards went out on strike demanding to be represented by the U.F.W. These workers were working under a Teamster contract.

Mr. Griffith also failed to mention that Teamster Local 1973 is in violation of the law since its leader, David Castro, is appointed, and the local's membership has never been given the opportunity to elect its own leadership. Mr. Castro has said it might be two years before such elections are held. And yet the Teamsters have had those contracts since 1970.

The problem the Teamsters face, of course, is that Chavistas might gain control of the Teamster local if honest elections are held.

As to the second major premise—that U.F.W. support groups are far weaker than in the sixties—Mr. Griffith again is wrong. Labor support is far stronger than during the five-

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year grape strike, for this time the U.F.W. has the wholehearted support of A.F.L.-C.I.O. president George Meany and the national A.F.L.-C.I.O. Executive Board, as well as the support of the United Auto Workers, the Mine Workers Union and other non-A.F.L.-C.I.O. unions.

Mr. Griffith says there are fewer priests and nuns working for the U.F.W., but the opposite is in fact true. The boycott also has the support of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, the National Council of Churches and the Synagogue Council of America. It is also endorsed by Governor Gilligan of Ohio, the New Jersey Legislature, the Massachusetts State Senate and several big city mayors.

The fact is that the U.F.W. has indeed suffered a severe setback and is fighting for its existence. But those who have studied the movement know that the odds against its success were astronomical when Cesar Chavez started the union in 1962. At that time, Cesar Chavez had no money and no allies, yet in eight years he had unionized the grape-growing industry.

This success was not, as Mr. Griffith suggests, the result of the climate of the sixties. Rather, it was the result of painstaking organizing of farm workers by Chavez and others he recruited to the cause, and similar painstaking organizing of boycott support.

It is the same painstaking organizing today that will determine the final results. But this time, the U.F.W. has a strong cadre of experienced leaders, some funds, powerful allies and a track record that the majority of its membership remembers and appreciates.

As Cesar Chavez has said so many times, "Time is our best friend." The farm workers have amply demonstrated their patience and tenacity.

JACQUES E. LEVY

Santa Rosa, Calif.

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## **Body blow**

To the Editor:

I've worked a long, hard time for United Farm Workers support groups and I've seen a lot of underhanded and vicious blows leveled at us through misinformation turned out by grower and Teamster

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agents, but I've never seen anything so subtly, effectively, and viciously misleading as Winthrop Griffith's article.

Don't you understand that The Times has social and editorial responsibilities? The misrepresentations in this article could strike a serious blow against the work of thousands of dedicated people—by making their efforts appear unsuccessful (and even pointless) to the rest of the public.

PETER BURTON  
Huntington Woods, Mich.

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## Winthrop Griffith replies:

Six months of careful research and thought helped prepare me to write the report on the battle between the U.F.W. and the Teamsters union. The research included long interviews with Cesar Chavez and many other U.F.W. officers and staff, with many present and former boycott participants and with scores of the individuals who provided the most valuable insights of all—the field workers. I remain confident of the accuracy of my factual reporting and the worth of the tentative conclusions expressed in my article.

It's sad, for me, that some U.F.W. officials and supporters are so moved to rage by my article that they must, as Richard Chavez did, call it "racist garbage." But the reaction is understandable. They are zealous advocates of the beleaguered *La Causa*, as they must be. I attempted to be a conscientious observer and reporter of a struggle which is indeed worthy. The perspectives are vastly different.

As to Mr. Levy's statements, if I spent five-and-a-half years with Chavez as he did, I suspect I'd be a disciple, not a reporter.

His letter is another example of the first point made in my report: how difficult it is for Chavez sympathizers to accept the reality of recent defeats suffered by Chavez's union.

My article made no forecast of total defeat for Chavez. If Mr. Levy cares to glance over it again—dispassionately—he might notice that it states: "Chavez and the U.F.W. are not completely vanquished," and later, "the U.F.W. is down—way down—but not out" and, finally, "perhaps they [Chavez and the U.F.W.] will win in some future year. . . ." ■

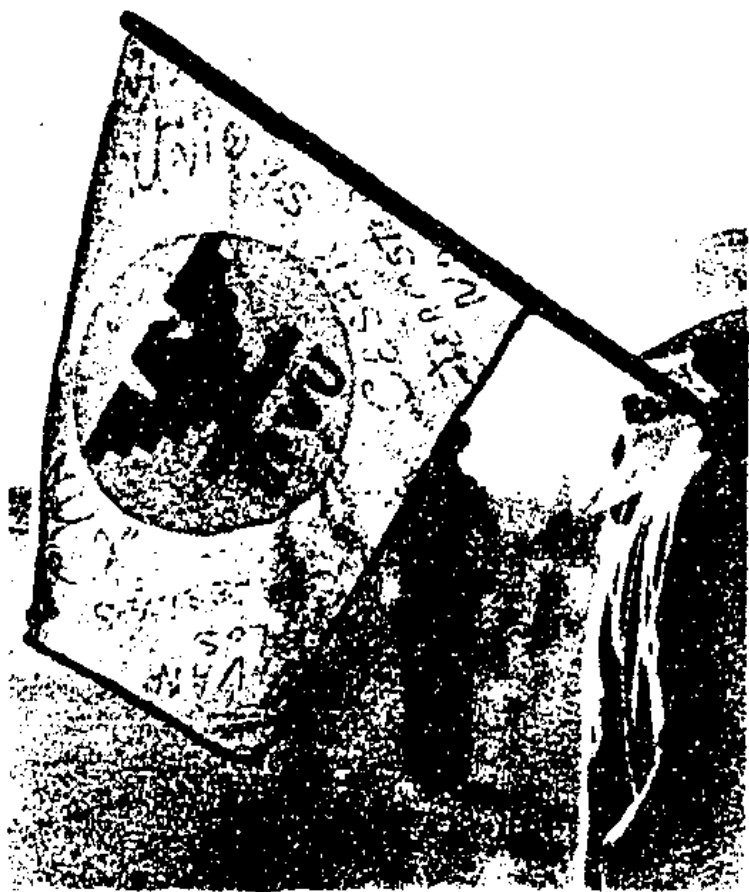


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