



Cesar Chavez, president of United Farm Workers of America, AFL-CIO

Can Chavez Win?

Fred Ross, San Francisco Bay Area director of the United Farm Workers Union, leads the way up a narrow, winding flight of stairs, his long legs taking two at a time. On the third floor he turns left, strides down a long, carpeted hallway peering into rooms on either side, looking for a comfortable place to light long enough for an interview. The reporter trailing him pokes inquisitively into a few of the rooms we pass. Each is little more than a cell — high ceilings, one window — and each is spartanly decorated with posters and leaflets advertising UFW activities. A bed and small dresser comprise the furniture in most rooms.

The building, now known as “Boycott House,” was designed to be spartan. A former residence for seminarians, it’s a four-story, slate grey con-

crete blockhouse hunched comfortably in the shadow of San Francisco’s St. Paul’s Church. Where once the complex echoed with Irish brogues and muted Latin, it now rings with lilting Spanish and the polyglot American-English-street dialect common to all urban cores. But the seminary spirit lingers on; the young people who live in Boycott House seem infused with the religious fervor and discipline of the seminarians who preceded them. *La Causa* is more than a union, more than a social movement; at times it is a religion of its own.

Finally settling into a squat, upholstered chair in one corner of a large common room, Ross begins an easy, flowing discourse on the United Farm Workers and the continuing boycott against table grapes, lettuce and Gallo wines. His direct brown eyes are red-

rimmed, mementoes of a sleepless night spent in Alameda County jail. Ross and 11 others were released just hours before, after sitting-in around the grape counter at an Oakland Safeway store. Ross calls it an “escalation of tactics,” a symbolic gesture signifying that the UFW is again on the move, still powerful and still convinced of eventual victory.

As he speaks insistently about the “good fight” being waged in the fields and on the picket lines, about the intransigence of growers and the day-to-day scrambling to survive, there is an overwhelming sense of *deja vu*. Wait, the reporter thinks, didn’t we — the collective “we” who hit the streets and the supermarkets, the picket lines, and the courtrooms, and the jails — didn’t we *win* this one? Didn’t our combined energies culminate in the victorious

by Rick Beban

signing of contracts with table and wine grape growers in 1970?

Yes. And no. Victories are often ephemeral. It seems the righteous moral victories are often the most ephemeral of all. Turn your back to face another battle and the position you think you've gained on solid rock crumbles like clay. So it has been with the United Farm Workers. The supporters who assumed *La Huelga* had been won are needed back. The methods of the opposition have grown more sophisticated; the power of the opposition has increased geometrically, while the UFW's has declined arithmetically.

[LOCKED IN BATTLE]

1970 was a banner year for the UFW's Aztec eagle. It was also a year in which the spectre of possible defeat was first manifested. After decades of sporadic attempts to organize California's estimated 400,000 farmworkers, Cesar Chavez' fledgling United Farm Workers Union had, in five grueling years, hammered out contracts which gave the union representation over the tiny percentage of farmworkers who toil in the grape vineyards. It was a sweet victory, a victory achieved in the fields, at the bargaining table, and in the marketplace with the help of hundreds of thousands of boycott supporters and sympathizers. It was a triumph that gave the workers their first taste of self-determination, the first inkling that an individual *did* have power over his own life and working conditions. As Fred Ross recalls, "It was just . . . really . . . *impressive* to see that mechanism at work. And it's a powerful — if you can imagine — it's just a complete change in their lives. No one *ever* asked the workers to take part in their own working conditions."

With 182 vineyard contracts, representing 90 percent of the growers, firmly in hand, the Chavistas moved, late in July 1970, to follow up on organizing efforts begun in the lettuce fields around Salinas. The international grape boycott was over and the union was strong, assured, confident. "We barely had 24 hours to celebrate," Ross recalls, when the UFW was struck a near-fatal blow. The 200 lettuce growers in Monterey County

announced that they had signed contracts giving the 2 million plus member Teamster Union jurisdiction over the lettuce workers — the result of years of covert and overt warfare by the Teamsters to control the food supply in America from fields to market.

Following the growers-Teamsters announcement, 7,000 lettuce workers walked out of the fields in a strike which has continued to this day. A Monterey County court order, which severely limited picketing and strike activities on the grounds that the lettuce strike was actually a "jurisdictional dispute" between the UFW and Teamsters, was overturned by the California Supreme Court in December 1973. The opinion pointed to the fact that the growers did not attempt to find out who their workers wanted as representatives and that "at least a substantial number and probably the majority of the applicable field workers wanted to be represented by the UFWU rather than the Teamsters."

While the lettuce strike continued, the Teamsters and UFW representatives met throughout 1970 and 1971 to attempt to settle jurisdictional questions. The UFW, as a good faith measure, suspended the lettuce boycott they had begun during the strike. But by 1972 it had become obvious that the Teamsters were not negotiating with equal good faith. The time they were buying for the growers was precious time that could have been channeled into the lettuce boycott. Negotiations between the unions broke down and the boycott was rekindled.

But the growers had put the time to good use. Representatives of growers associations gathered signatures on a "Farm Labor Relations Initiative" petition and succeeded in having an anti-UFW measure placed on the 1972 California ballot. Proposition 22, as it was designated, would have eliminated the right of the UFW to engage in secondary boycotts (against Safeway Stores, for example, and all markets which handled boycotted lettuce) and would have crippled the union. Energy which could have been directed toward the continuing lettuce boycott was channeled into the defeat of Proposition 22.

1973 was the worst year yet for UFW losses. In addition to renegotiating contracts with the lettuce grow-



United Farm Worker member

ers, the Teamsters raided the vineyards. The hard-won contracts giving them right of representation over contracts signed with the grape growers in 1970 were expiring. Now the Teamsters came up with contracts to represent field workers in 181 of the 182 ranches previously represented by the UFW. In addition, the Teamsters signed contracts with Gallo and Franzia wineries, Gallo being America's largest wine producer and Franzia being a Gallo family holding. Strikes erupted all over California and \$65-a-day Teamster Union goons created violent incidents wherever picket lines existed. The table grape boycott was revived and a boycott of Gallo products was instituted. AFL-CIO President George Meany, outraged at the union-busting tactics of Teamster President Frank Fitzsimmons, authorized \$1.6 million from AFL-CIO members to help the affiliated UFW pay strike benefits and stay alive.

Late 1973 and 1974 was a time of regrouping for the embattled UFW. In addition to the Teamster raids, the union had to handle internal complaints about dues structure and hiring hall practices and the continuing threat of "illegals" — Mexican laborers who pour across the border and find work in the fields. The *bracero* program, which until 1964 had allowed large numbers of unemployed Mexicans to work in American fields, had long provided a pool of ready-made strikebreakers. Only after the program expired was the UFW able to launch



Farmworker housing near Stockton

an organizing drive with any chance of success. It is bad enough that the Immigration and Naturalization Service has been criminally lax about the illegals. A return to the *bracero* program — and there is talk of doing so in exchange for some access to Mexico's newly discovered oil fields — could quickly kill the UFW.

["A GOOD FIGHT"]

Most of the national press was running articles concluding sadly that Chavez and the UFW are beaten. But Fred Ross, speaking for the UFW, disagreed. Conceding that the union is in trouble, he predicts a resurgence of interest by boycott and union supporters, based on recent organizing efforts. He says that full-time organizers, who work for room and board and \$5 per week, are taking up the Aztec eagle banner in greater numbers than before. The difficulty over the hiring halls and dues payments are being ironed out, as the strikers and activists who built the

union become experienced administrators who can run it.

Ross agrees with the reports that show the reduction of UFW members *under contract* to 10,000–12,000, but points out that the figure does not reflect the total membership. There are, he says, well over 60,000 members in California alone. Some have accepted Teamster affiliation in order to work, he claims, but the Teamsters are having a difficult time collecting the \$8 per month dues from the majority of their "members." The Teamsters don't have the persistence to stick it out, Ross believes. "I think when it gets too distasteful for them, when it becomes, in practical terms, too much of a financial and political liability, I think they're going to drop out."

Ross is also heartened by signs that the boycott against Gallo wines seems to be having some effect. "The product boycott — the brand name — is the easiest one to run. It's just taken off; it seems to have a life of its own." Various sources, from the *Washington Post* to the *Wall Street Journal*, have

reported that Gallo's share of the market has fallen off and that sales are down between nine and 20 percent.

Clearly feeling the pressure, Gallo has opened up a counterattack against the United Farm Workers boycott. In letters sent to religious leaders, groups, and publications across the country, Ernest Gallo says "My brother, Julio, and I are distressed by the position taken by some religious groups on the jurisdictional dispute between the United Farm Workers of America and the Teamsters Union." Gallo goes on to charge that statements being made against his company were "so patently lies, distortions and exaggerations that few would believe them" and encloses "a pamphlet and a few articles which I know you will read with an open mind." The pamphlet offers responses to short quotes taken from UFW literature and other sources and seeks to refute each one.

Gallo has sent similar letters and enclosures to mayors of cities over 25,000 and to student organizations and newspapers which have supported

the UFW boycott. In addition, Gallo public relations man Dan Solomon, who works directly under Ernest Gallo, has prepared an advertisement, to run in publications that have run UFW advertisements, offering a rebuttal of UFW charges. The Gallo ad reprints the UFW ad, circles key points and attempts to refute each with notes in the margin.*

While the possible reinstatement of the *bracero* program could lead to disaster for the UFW, Ross says the union has sounded out Congressional and Senate support against the possibility. "We're on top of it," he insists. In fact, "we're on top of it" is the theme which runs through Ross' comments. Other UFW members, who did not wish to speak out for attribution, privately wish, as one put it "That Fred didn't sound so damned optimistic. It makes organizing difficult."

But Ross says the UFW has a strategy for the future mapped out and getting into high gear. "Within the next eight months," he predicts, "we're gonna run the Teamsters right out of California." The California

*See page 7.

scenario, as Ross explains it, hinged on the election of Edmund "Jerry" Brown as governor. With Brown now on his way to the governor's mansion, the UFW plans to reintroduce legislation narrowly defeated in California last legislative session which would give farmworkers the right to supervised free elections but would not take away the right to secondary boycotts. The growers have maintained that they would like free elections "under the National Labor Relations Act," but the UFW has resisted inclusion of farmworkers because the NLRA prohibits secondary boycotts. (The NLRA, after all, largely covers unions which have already organized their industry - in part through the successful use of secondary boycotts.) The farmworker bill would parallel the NLRA, but without what they feel are its restrictive provisions. With Brown in the governor's chair and a new, Democratic legislature, Ross feels they can pass the kind of bill they have been pushing for, hold elections in the fields, and thus "chase the Teamsters right out of California."

In the meantime Ross emphasizes

the importance of continuing the boycotts and the need for continuing financial and political support. The union chapters and boycott committees in 40 states are going strong, he says, but still require more backing from the public. He remains tremendously optimistic. "We're finding that people *want* to get revived. They might have dropped away a year ago, two years ago, but we find they're coming back. We're having more fundraisers, for example, among the kind of people who were supporters in the early days. Now they're looking for a way to get back and involved."

There is an evangelistic tone to Ross' voice; an almost Old World civilized quality to his demeanor. The two-by-two grape stakes the Teamsters used to beat farmworkers, the years of hot, backbreaking stoop labor in the fields, the many sleepless nights of tedious meetings: these are all transitory spectres, fleeting bad memories that pale before the ultimate triumph of *La Causa*.

Rick Beban is an editor for the Pacific Sun (Mill Valley, California).

Below are two sets of buy/don't buy lists for the UFW boycott. Tear out, carry with you, post on refrigerator, support the boycott.

BOYCOTT Gallo

Gallo Boone's Farm
 Paisano Spanada
 Thunderbird Red Mountain Tyrolia
 Carlo Rossi Madria Madria Ripple
 Eden Roc Sangria Andre
 Wolfe & Son (Strawberry Ridge)

*Also, any wine which says "Modesto, California" on the label is Gallo. Gallo does not appear on all labels. Gallo is the only wine company with headquarters in Modesto.

Guild

Winemaster's Guild Old San Francisco
 Tres Grand Parrot V.S.
 Cooks Imperial Director's Choice
 Roma Reserve Guild
 Cribrari Reserve Tavola
 Jeanne d'Arc Mendocino
 La Boheme Famiglia Cribrari
 Ceramony Garrett
 Versailles Alta
 Cresta Blanca C.V.C.
 Saratoga Lodi
 J. Pierot Guild Blue Ribbon
 Roma Ocean Spray Cranberry Rose
 St. Mark Vin Clogg (Parrot & Co.)
 Citation

Franzia

Table Vermouth
 Desert Louis the Fifth
 Sparkling Private labels

* Also, any wine which says, "made and bottled in Rippon, California." All Franzia products have #BW3954 on the label.

BOYCOTS have been an essential part of past farmworker victories. To help protect farmworkers rights DON'T BUY THESE LABELS.

BUY

Novitiate
CHRISTIAN BROTHERS
 Christian Bros. Mont La Sette

ALMADEN
 Almaden Le Domaine

PAUL MASSON
 Paul Masson

ITALIAN SWISS COLONY

Annie Green Springs Gambarelli
 Balli Hai Devitto
 Zappale Margo
 Sangrole Greystone
 Lejon Cella
 Petri Vasi Bros.
 Santa Fe Vasi Bros.
 Mission Bell Betsy Ross
 Jacques Bonet Italian Swiss Colony
 Gambaolo

PERELLI-MINETTI CALIFORNIA WINE ASSOC.

Aristocrat A.R. Morrow
 Greystone L & J Calum F.L.
 Victor Hugo Guastri
 Ambassador Ambassador Vermont
 Fino Eleven Cellars Vino Fino

INGLENOOK BEAULIEU

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INGLENOOK BEAULIEU

SUPPORT THE FARMWORKERS

Saigon's Corruption Crisis:

The Search for an Honest Quisling

South Vietnam is once more in ferment, with street demonstrations protesting the high cost of living, official thievery, police state violence, and the government's refusal to abide by the Paris Peace Agreements. Many of these protests have involved personal attacks on Thieu himself, and there is a widespread belief that his days in power are numbered. The immediate causes of the crisis are the acute economic difficulties besetting the Saigon regime, resulting in large part from the continuing drain of war and gross mismanagement, the flooding caused by bombing and extensive logging operations, and the refusal of the regime to permit the return of refugees to agricultural areas under PRG administration. The situation has been further aggravated by the world-wide inflation and rise in import prices, internal economic stagflation, and the cutback in U.S. spending and "aid." The cost of living virtually doubled in Saigon over the past year. Mass unemployment, recently estimated at 3.5 million, coupled with police state terror, has assured that the money wages of those employed would not rise proportionately. Living standards are deteriorating even for the upper 10 percent, who had formerly benefitted from the American invasion and selective largesse. For the 90 percent of the population that has borne the brunt of decades of counterrevolutionary violence, the situation is far more threatening. While the urban upper class suffers a reduction in living standards, the rural population, refugees, and urban dispossessed are faced with malnutrition and literal starvation. The Saigon press reports that in the Central Provinces 60 percent of the population faces starvation and that even in the Mekong Delta, people lack rice.

A year ago, demonstrations of the sort now taking place in Saigon, Huế, and elsewhere would have been prevented or abruptly terminated by beatings, imprisonment, and torture. The seriousness of the economic disorder and the spread of disaffection to the ranks of respectable, hard-line supporters of the Thieu regime have made unrestrained terror less feasible. An equally important factor in the turbulence and the somewhat muted Saigon government response is the delicate matter of U.S. aid. Congress has become an important determinant of the volume of dollars flowing to Saigon — the "corruption dividend," to coin a term modeled on the concept of the "growth dividend" in the U.S. Anti-war Congressmen may be able to persuade their colleagues that "aid" to a regime of terror and

robbery is "wasted" even from the narrow standpoint of efficient pacification. Given the decline of conservative and Pentagon enthusiasm for propping up this distant and expensive client, budget allocations for Saigon are vulnerable. The Congressional cut from \$1.45 billion to a mere \$700 million in military aid was a traumatic lesson for Saigon. A new image may be required to persuade Congress that "free Vietnam" deserves its unqualified support.

The current malaise in South Vietnam has its deeper roots in the 25 year long effort of the U.S., still in force, to impose governments of its choice on the states of Indochina. Since any such government must fend off a powerful tide of revolutionary nationalism, the U.S. has been forced — as elsewhere in the world — to rely on reactionary minorities whose main qualifications have been their readiness to assist the U.S. in resisting their own countries' struggle for independence. This unremitting counterrevolutionary intervention by the U.S. is, of course, regularly described as a generous effort to guarantee "free choice" and "self-determination" for the populations under siege. But the reality is understood among the upper echelons of policy makers: the choice is ours, not that of our victims; and self-determination is incompatible with the rule of the clients we have imposed.

Thus, we find a General Maxwell Taylor ruminating in 1964 that "we could try again with another civilian government . . . [or] invite back a military dictatorship on the model of that headed of late by General Khanh." Or, in the words of the late pacification chief John Paul Vann in an internal army memo of 1965, "a popular political base for the Government of South Vietnam does not now exist . . . [and a] reorientation necessary to appeal to the majority of the population will not occur voluntarily at the top." As Vann further pointed out: "The existing government is oriented toward the exploitation of the rural and lower class urban populations" and is "a continuation of the French colonial system of government with upper-class Vietnamese replacing the French." Nothing essential has changed since.

Despite such acknowledgements of the obvious, and the murderous and corrupt quality of the Thieu regime, Congress continues to grant it aid on the grounds that "we would not want to abandon the South Vietnamese!"

Given its role, the unreformable "top" referred to by Vann may appropriately be dubbed the "Quisling faction."

by Noam Chomsky and Edward S. Herman

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