

Mexican Americans. Gifts of money and food for the embattled strikers poured into Delano from several other labor unions, from church groups throughout California, and from many other sympathizers with the civil rights movement.

The dock workers in the San Francisco Bay area refused to load grapes from the struck vineyards, of which the largest were owned by Schenley Industries and the Di Giorgio Corporation. Nationwide boycotts were launched against Schenley wines and liquors, against Di Giorgio's S&W canned goods, and against stores that sold them. In the spring of 1966, executives of Schenley concluded that the adverse publicity was counteracting the effects of the large sums the company spent to advertise its products. In this light, the much smaller amounts the company saved by refusing to raise wages in its vineyards were obviously poor economy. On April 6, 1966, Schenley Industries made the historic announcement that it had agreed to recognize the National Farm Workers' Association as the sole bargaining representative for its field-workers—the first recognition of a farm workers' union by a major California grower.

The next day the Di Giorgio Corporation announced that it would permit its workers to decide by ballot whether they wished to be represented by a union, and if so, what union. The victorious allies, Itliong's AWOC and Chávez's NFWA, merged to form the United Farm Workers Organizing Committee. In the election in August 1966, although the Di Giorgio Corporation had always insisted that its employees did not want to be unionized, its field-workers voted overwhelmingly for the United Farm Workers (UFW).

Several northern California growers of wine grapes then signed contracts with the UFW, but the great majority of California producers of table grapes held out. They were encouraged by the election of Ronald Reagan, a vigorous opponent of farm unions, to the governorship in 1966. In 1968 the UFW launched a national boycott of all California table grapes. This move captured the attention of the whole country and became a burning social issue. Although Governor Reagan and presidential candidate Richard Nixon condemned the boycott, the mayors of San Francisco, New York, Chicago, and several other large cities announced their approval of it. The boycott became so effective that the growers were threatened with ruin. At last, in July 1970, most of the large California table grape growers agreed to union contracts with the United Farm Workers.

Dolores Huerta, who served as vice president of the UFW from 1970 to 1973, played an important role in the successful negotiations that ended the grape boycott. She came from a middle-class background and began her professional career as a teacher in the San Joaquin Valley. "I couldn't stand seeing kids come to class hungry and needing shoes," she later recalled. "I thought I could do more by organizing farm workers." Soon she devoted herself to improving the lives of the underprivileged. As her biographer Richard García has noted, Huerta consistently followed "a pragmatic non-ideological approach to life and change." In later years she became an outspoken critic of the "feminization of poverty" among California farm workers. Mechanization in the fields increasingly allowed growers to reduce the number of their male workers and to employ women at lower wages.

Chávez's next move was against the lettuce growers of the Salinas Valley, but as soon as those growers learned that the grape producers were about to surrender, they



Union organizers César Chávez (1927–1993) and Dolores Huerta at a meeting of the United Farm Workers (UFW) in 1969. (Courtesy of the Walter P. Reuther Library, Wayne State University.)

hurriedly negotiated contracts with the Teamsters Union in order to forestall the UFW drive. One maverick Salinas lettuce grower, Bud Antle, had included his field-workers in his contracts with the Teamsters since 1961. Now there was a rush to imitate him because, said a Salinas growers' representative, "the Teamsters are a trade union; Chávez's union is a civil rights movement." Chávez denounced the Teamsters' agreements as *sweetheart contracts*, privately arranged between employers and union officials to benefit themselves at the expense of workers.

In March 1977, after several years of struggle and periodic negotiation, Chávez and the Teamster executives signed a 5-year jurisdictional agreement. The UFW was to represent all field-workers in future contracts with the growers, leaving all cannery workers and some truck drivers to the Teamsters.

Equal Protection of the Laws

Until 1966 agricultural labor was specifically excluded from the provisions of virtually every federal and state law that protected the rights of other workers. Minimum wages, unemployment insurance, social security, collective bargaining—all were guaranteed to others and specifically denied to farm labor. The rationalization for this was always that "farmers had special problems." The truth was that they had special political power. Agricultural employers were heavily overrepresented in Congress and in almost every state legislature, whereas the interests of farm workers were almost totally unrepresented until the 1960s.