

MINUTES

Report on Delano Farm Workers Strike given by Wendy Goepel
New York SNCC office
December 6th, 1965

Present: Wendy Goepel of Farm Workers Association, Delano; Lou Aronica, National Sharecroppers; Dick Greeman, Columbia CORE; Bob Hooeigh, Catholic Worker; Joyce Ravi tz and Joe Piszarevsky, SDS; Prathia Wynn, Eve O sman, Elizabeth Sutherland, Mary Britting, SNCC.

DELANO: THE GRAPE INDUSTRY

Delano is in the central part of California — one of the largest and richest farm areas of the state.

There are primarily 2 kinds of grapes grown in the Delano area:

1. Table grapes: give a higher return on the investment, must be handled by skilled workers. Table grapes that have been picked unskillfully or that have been too long on the vine are sold, at a loss, as wine grapes. By and large, only Filipino workers pick table grapes.
2. Wine grapes: have a lower market value but can be picked by "less skilled workers, i.e. Mexican-Americans. Working conditions are worse for these pickers — they become covered with juice, the areas are dirty and thick with spiders.

Grapes in Delano are picked and packed in the field. Field packing makes union organizing more difficult than when packers work closely together in a central packing house.

There are 9 separate operations involved in grape production. Picking (during Sept., Oct., and Nov.) and pruning (during Dec. and Jan.) require experienced workers. During the seasonal high points, 2500-3000 workers are employed in Delano. Workers receive an hourly wage of \$1.15 to \$1.20 plus a bonus of 10¢ per box, or 2¢ per man on a 5 man team.

THE UNIONS

1. FWA: an independent union headed by Cesar Chavez. The strength of the union lies within its membership among non-migrant Mexican-American workers. Total membership is about 3500 families.
2. AWOC: an AFL-CIO affiliate headed by Al Green. Membership is primarily among migrant Filipino workers.

THE STRIKERS

AWOC struck early in the summer for higher wages in Stocton, then Coachello. Their demands were met and wages were increased from \$1.51 to \$1.40/hour. About 50% of the workers in Delano are the same people who had struck in Stocton and Coachello and then followed the crop to Delano. For that reason, members of AWOC were already well organized when they arrived in Delano.

Filipino workers are preferred by the growers. They are supposed to be better workers than Mexicans, their short, broad-shouldered physique is said to be more adaptable to the fields. When they walk on the field, they automatically receive 5¢ more per hour than Mexicans. The overwhelming majority of Filipino workers are single men, living in the growers camp on the growers property. Most Mexican-American workers are married, have large families to support and live year-round in Delano in their own homes. Competition between Filipinos and Mexicans is encouraged by the growers.

HUELGA: STRIKE CRY

The first people to strike were Filipino field packers on Sept. 8th, 1965. The growers were immediately forced to call on the local Mexican population to scab. These Mexicans were members of FWA. Eight days later, on Sept. 16th, 1000 Mexican-Americans voted to strike in sympathy with AWOC. The strike involved 32 small growers as well as 2 large owners: Scheneley and De Georgio.

Union strategy:

AWOC attempted to involve Teamsters, ILWU, railroads and packing house employees by asking them to honor the strike. They picketed to gain the sympathy of other labor unions. FWA picketed fields where scabs worked. Roving pickets surveyed the fields from 4:30 to 5:30 am, located scab fields and then sent pickets.

Grower strategy

The growers went to other towns to recruit Mexican-Americans. The union followed them with leaflets and rallies explaining the strike, the demands, the absolute necessity for unity. The workers succeeded.

The growers went further -- to Fresno, Bakersfield, L.A. to hire "skid-row" unemployed. The union followed and picketed buses used to transport scabs. Again, a union victory -- people soon refused to board buses.

For the first 3 weeks the strike was solid. Then the growers imported 68 people from Old Mexico, advanced them \$33 to work. The scabs moved into the work camps that the striking Filipinos had been evicted from. It was difficult to reach them because they never left private property. The growers went as far as Southern Texas recruiting. When they could no longer recruit Mexicans with visas, they brought people in illegally.

After 4 to 5 weeks, people began to flood in. The unions tried either to get them jobs elsewhere (many Delano workers were working outside the strike area) or to convince them to return to their own areas. There were 3 places where some alternative work was available. Some people took other jobs, others left the area.

The strike lasted for 10 weeks. In an area which is generally worked by 2500 to 3000 people, an estimated 5,560 people refused to go into the fields. AWOOC set up a soup kitchen which fed 200 pickets daily. FWA, which had \$200 in the bank on Sept. 16th, began fundraising and collecting food and clothing. A store was opened which was stocked by contributions from all over the state. Real community feeling developed among the strikers.

THE SHIP: CONCRETE VICTORY

About a month after the strike began, a member of the Teamsters Union in San Francisco came to Delano. He advised the unions to picket the docks (from which grapes are shipped all over the world).

FWA sent 2 spies to San Francisco who watched departing freight 24 hours a day. They spotted 1200 cartons of Delano grapes being loaded on a luxury liner. Pickets were immediately sent up from Delano. When they arrived, 160 cartons had been loaded on the vessel. When the pickets made their case clear, the Seafarers Union walked off the ship, refused to remove the grapes and refused to board till the grapes had been removed. No union would touch the grapes. Someone unloaded the cargo and the scab grapes were put back into cold storage in Delano. Last Wed., Dec. 1st, a large grower moved 3800 cartons of scab grapes to San Francisco. Almost the total shipment was returned to him.

The victory of "the ship" had far-reaching effects. Growers were absolutely amazed at the strength of the union. Strikers had a real psychological victory. The press, for the first time, gave important coverage to the strike. Possibilities for further union activity were opened.

BEHIND THEM

The workers have created unity -- the most vital element. They have gained confidence in themselves and in the willingness of others to respect and aid the unions. The growers have suffered real economic setbacks as a direct result of the strike: the cost of transporting scab workers long distances and sloppy picking has greatly decreased the value of Delano grapes. Their lower market value represents a substantial loss.

AHEAD OF THEM

Pruning begins on December 15th. This work requires the highest degree of skill. During normal times, only Filipinos prune. If the vines are not pruned, picking next year will be more difficult and more than ordinary skill will be required. If the vines are pruned incorrectly, the crop could be ruined for one or more seasons.

Needless to say, strikers continue to be harassed and persecuted by local police, county officials and courts. The incidents of false arrests on illegal charges makes one think of the South and the Negro civil rights movement. Certainly many parallels can be drawn -- police controlled by the growers, phones tapped, sulpher sprayed on pickets, prejudiced juries.

The growers have refused to negotiate with the unions. The primary union goal is to obtain a CONTRACT which will guarantee better working conditions and wage increases.

1. for table grapes - from \$1.20 per hour and 10¢ per carton to \$1.40 per hour and 25¢ per carton
2. for wine grapes - from \$9. per gondola every picking - to \$12 per gondola on the first picking - \$16 on the second picking and \$22 on the third. (The vines are picked 3 times, each time requiring more labor with less produce.

THE ROLE OF EASTERN SUPPORT AS WE SEE IT:

1. Possibility of attempting to extend the picket line to Hoboken, New Jersey where Delano grapes are unloaded and win union sympathy and cooperation.
2. Meet with Schenley in their New York Headquarters to discuss the reasons why they have refused to negotiate with the Union. Ask for negotiations. This meeting will be arranged by SNCC people within a week.
3. Meet with large chain stores in New York who sell Delano grapes and inform them of the "HUELGA" in Delano. Ask them not to handle Delano grapes. These buyers can easily buy grapes from Coachello, Fresno and Stockton, though Delano grapes are selling cheaper because of their poor quality.

The people at the meeting generally felt that picket lines at grocery stores and at Schenley headquarters would be effective in the event that either or both proved to be unyielding to our demands.

For further information, phone:

Mary Britting - SNCC - 989-1313
Joyce Ravitz SDS - 889-5793
Cesar Chavez - FWA - 805-725-9908
Bob Hoolegh - CW - OR 4 - 9812

Recorded by Mary Britting

file

BOYCOTT SCHENLEY!

Dec. 24, 1965

Dear friend,

Out in the San Joaquin Valley of California, over 3000 grape pickers have been striking since last September. The second largest grape ranch being struck belongs to Schenley industries, which -- along with other growers -- has been using SCAB WORKERS. Schenley distributes wines made from the grapes as well as some well-known liquor brands. The enclosed flyer will tell you more about the strike and the boycott against Schenley.

We are calling for nationwide support of the boycott. Here in New York, this is what we ask you to do now:

1. If your organization has not already endorsed the boycott, get it to join the list of sponsors NOW. Please inform us of this immediately.

2. Come or send a representative to a meeting on boycott action, this TUESDAY, DEC. 28 at 6 p.m., at the Inter-Church Center, 475 Riverside Drive (enter on Claremont Ave., near 120th St., where the room number will be posted).

3. Do not buy any Schenley products for your personal use, for office parties, etc. Tell your friends and associates not to buy. Write to the Schenley national office (1290 Sixth Ave., NYC) and tell them you are doing this.

4. Visit your liquor store and tell the manager about the strike; ask him to urge customers to buy other brands.

5. JOIN A DELEGATION (OR SEND SOMEONE) TO CALL ON LIQUOR STORES IN VARIOUS NEIGHBORHOODS THIS WEEK. The delegations will ask managers to --

take all Schenley products off the shelves
telephone or wire the Schenley distributor and report doing this
put a poster in the window which urges customers not to buy Schenley
accept a supply of leaflets for display on the counter

If a manager does not comply, an informational picket line will be set up outside his store. This is not a picket against the store itself; however, the manager will not want anything which might discourage customers during the holiday season. 20 LIQUOR STORES IN BROOKLYN HAVE ALREADY COMPLIED WITH ALL DEMANDS.

Schedule for Liquor Store Calls

Monday, Dec. 27 -- Greenwich Village YU 9-1313
Meet at SNCC office (100 Fifth Ave.) at 6 p.m.

Tuesday, Dec. 28 -- Harlem UN 4-8809
Meet at CORE office, 307 West 125th at 7:30 p.m.

Wednesday, Dec. 29 -- same as Tuesday

Thursday, Dec. 30 -- Lower East Side
Meeting place to be announced

This is only the first phase of action to support the strikers. We expect the strike to go on for some time, and plan to support it in other ways. HELP US TO FIGHT SCAB LABOR...HELP THE STRIKERS.

Yours in freedom,

George Wiley
George Wiley

CORE National office

Elizabeth Sutherland
Elizabeth Sutherland
Director, N.Y. office of SNCC



Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee

100 FIFTH AVENUE, NEW YORK, NEW YORK 10011 • YUKON 9-1313

February 27, 1966

Mr. Mark Vincent
Farm Workers Association
c/o CORE
38 Park Row
New York, N.Y.

Dear Mr. Vincent:

I am writing to confirm the support of this organization for the grape strike now being waged by the National Farm Workers Association and others in the area of Delano, California.

We also support the national boycott of wines and liquors distributed by Schenley Industries, whose ranch in Delano is one of those being struck. As you know, we have picketed Schenley in New York and are willing to do so again at any time in support of the strike.

Freedom,

Elisabeth Sutherland
Director, N.Y. office

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"One Man, One Vote"