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National California Grape Boycott Spreads

DELANO, Calif. (CPS - CUP)—"In the souls of the people, the grapes of wrath are filling and growing heavy, growing heavy for the vintage."

So runs the final sentence in a chapter of John Steinbeck's "The Grapes of Wrath". What was true almost 40 years ago is still true this month as a strike by California farm workers spreads into a nationwide grape boycott.

Farm workers in the U.S. are still forced to lead lives geared not to advancement but to bare survival. A California grape worker does not have to face the dilemma of whether to buy loafers or hush-puppies for his children—he must worry about having enough money to get shoes of any kind for the members of his family.

At present, many grape workers earn less than \$1,800 a year. Even if a worker were able to work 40 hours a week every week of the year, he could only earn \$2,386 annually — approximately one-half of the average wage for all Californians.

In the 1930's, America's workers won the right to organize and bargain collectively through the National Labor Relations Act. In 1968, farm workers remain excluded from this act. To overcome this handicap and win the benefits enjoyed by other workers—minimum wage, collective bargaining, fringe benefits — the farm workers of Delano, California voted to go on strike for union recognition three years ago this month.

Since the turn of the century, attempts had been made to unionize the farm workers in California, but all of them had failed. This time, however, under the leadership of Cesar Chavez, director of the United Farm Workers, farm workers have succeeded in winning collective bargaining agreements for the first time in history. Several major wine companies in California have signed agreements with their workers.

But the strike is now in its 43rd month, and the workers are still out. Some victories have been won, but the goal of total union recognition is still far in the future.

In an effort to put additional pressure on growers during September — the peak of the grape harvest — and to win nationwide support for the strike, the UFW is devoting most of its energy this fall to enlarging

and publicizing a nationwide boycott of table grapes by supermarkets, individuals and companies.

They have distributed posters for car and store windows telling consumers that every grape they buy denies a grape worker's child a meal. Workers have been sent to 26 U.S. cities and Toronto to talk in support of the boycott.

College campuses, which in the West were the earliest areas of support for the Delano strike, are a major target for the workers, who are being helped by local branches of the United Mexican-American Students (UMAS) organization, a new one on many campuses this fall.

UMAS groups are spending their time rallying campus support for the Delano strikers and picketing supermarkets that carry California grapes (with some results, apparently: one Denver supermarket chain now has signs telling shoppers the grapes "were picked by non-union workers").

Chavez and the strike have received support from Robert Kennedy before his death, Eugene McCarthy and Hubert Humphrey. Richard Nixon has not endorsed the strike. One of the workers' avowed enemies is California Governor Ronald Reagan, who last fall reportedly allowed growers to keep the children of workers out of school for two weeks in order to finish the picking, while other children were sent back.

The boycott, which began in earnest last year, has had some effect on the market. Sales in California are down 20 per cent, and grapes markets in New York, Boston, Detroit and Chicago are being closed down. Growers have begun routing their grapes to cities where the boycott is weakest.

A successful strike could change the status of farm labor well beyond the California valleys. Once the pickers are organized, the way will be open to unionizing all of California's 300,000 harvest hands. And once California, the "General Motors of agriculture" has been organized, the task of farm labor organizers across the country will be well under way.

The workers say they are seeking four things with the strike: a minimum hourly wage at all times of the year, sanitary working conditions in working areas, a seniority system to protect workers of long standing, and an end to harassment through the appointment of stewards who would represent any worker who felt he had been treated unfairly.

McGill: Eight Student Senators

MONTREAL (CUP)—Eight McGill University students will be sitting as elected representatives in open senate meetings this year.

Monday (Sept. 24), the board of governors unanimously approved the recommendation, only one of many dealing with university government changes at McGill.

In other moves, the board: opened its own meetings more than tripled faculty representation on sen-

ate (from 9 to 32) changed its own composition by making provision for five members elected by and from the senate • with student senators eligible • and added 24 members to be representative of the community served by the university "such as agencies of government, research, the professions, business, labor and the arts."

Since the number of governors will remain static at 36, recomposition will greatly change the corporation director image of the board.



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