

## Background Information on the Boycott of California Table Grapes

Farm workers are America's forgotten men. Debarred from the provisions of the National Labor Relations Act, unprotected by Federal child labor regulations, left out of most minimum wage legislation, they receive no unemployment insurance or disability compensation either. They are burdened by low wages, inadequate educational opportunities, substandard housing, and intermittent work, and their exclusion from social legislation has left them powerless to defend themselves. After years of an existence devoid of security, dignity, and reasonable comfort, farm workers are now taking their destiny into their own hands. They aim to organize into civic and labor organizations that can deal peacefully with the injustices that afflict them. The international boycott of California table grapes is the latest phase of their epic struggle.

The Delano Grape Strike began in Sept. 1965, when wine-grape workers of all racial and ethnic backgrounds united to ask their employers for an election, in which they would certify their desire for union representation. Denied this right, and unable to invoke the legal support of the NRLA (which established federal machinery for union representation elections), they expressed their allegiance to the union in a different tally: they voted to strike for recognition. Under the leadership of Cesar Chavez, they gained the first contracts in farm labor history. These victories, providing the best wages and working conditions in American agriculture, confirmed the workers' conviction in the union's desirability. UFWOC victories in all ten subsequent elections held give overwhelming proof of their continuing support. In the summer of '67, the United Farm Workers Organizing Committee (UFWOC) began a drive to organize the table grape industry, centered around the largest of the growers, the Guimarra Corporation. When the workers' requests for elections were refused, they again voted to strike. 950 of Guimarra's 1000 workers walked out, but the company (with the cooperation of the State Dept. of Labor and the compliance of immigration officials) illegally replaced them with foreign strikebreakers. The strikers' picket-line activity on the sprawling ranches was limited by court injunction, and they were subject to vicious attacks by grower agents, Although Guimarra was thus able to cripple the strike, an effective boycott was launched against the corporation.

The rest of the industry, which had been unanimous in rejecting union invitations to bargain as well as efforts at mediation by the Bishop of Fresno, the California State Conciliation Service, and the mayor of San Francisco, united again to foil the boycott. Guimarra flooded the market with its products under its "competitors" labels, in violation of FDA regulations. The union was then forced to extend the boycott to all California table grapes. Bitter experience has taught the farm workers that the consumer boycott is the only effective, non-violent, legal weapon which remains to them in their fight to bring the growers to the bargaining table and justice to American fields. (The law, which otherwise aids the farm worker so little in his plight, does not prohibit boycotts such as the one UFWOC is conducting, wherein the public refuses to buy grapes, and the housewife asks her supermarket not to handle them until the growers recognize the union.) For this reason, farm worker families and union members have gone to cities across North America to organize the boycott.

But the few precious victories that spur them on and the growing pressure of their boycott owe much to the support from all over the world of trade union, religious and civic organizations and individuals. The AFL—CIO, the Teamsters, the International Longshoremen's and Warehousemen's Union and the UAW, as well as the Inter-American Regional Association of Workers (ORIT), the Transport and General

Workers' Union (TGWU) in Britain, the Swedish Transport Workers and the Canadian Labor Congress stand behind their brothers in America's fields. The National Council of Churches, the Jewish Federation Council and other established groups who back the boycott have been joined by many action committees formed expressly to support it. The L.A. and San Francisco County Boards of Supervisors endorse the boycott. The list of individuals includes the late Sen-Robert Kennedy and his brother Sen. Edward Kennedy, Sen. Jacob Javits, former Sec. of Labor, Willard Wirtz, and the mayors of N.Y., Boston, Chicago, Baltimore and 14 other major U.S. cities.