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New York, N.Y. 10014
July 20, 1973

TO ALL ORGANIZERS AND NATIONAL COMMITTEE MEMBERS

Dear Comrades,

Enclosed is a report sent to the National Office from Fred Halstead regarding support activities for the United Farmworkers Union in the Los Angeles area.

Comradely,



Lew Jones
National Office

Los Angeles
July 5, 1973

To: SWP N.O.

Subject: Report on United Farm Workers Union support activities
From: Fred Halstead

The United Farm Workers Union, AFL-CIO, headed by Cesar Chavez, is presently in a fight for its very existence. This union, based mainly on workers of La Raza, and the only union aside from local bodies which is led by Chicanos, is the only union in the history of American corporate agriculture to gain a substantial foothold in the fields and to actually obtain contracts covering some 50,000 workers. Most of this foothold is now threatened by union busting of the growers in collusion with officials of the Teamsters union in the current grape harvest now proceeding in California.

The first showdown test in this battle has been occurring in the grape fields of Coachella Valley, about 120 miles east of Los Angeles. The results of this first test have been mixed. The UFWU has been using the \$1.6 million donated by the AFL-CIO for strike benefits. In spite of this the UFWU strike has not prevented the picking of the scab grapes. On the other hand, the growers--except for the two who maintained contracts with the UFWU--are losing money on this crop. This is due in part to the grape boycott and in part to the lower quality of the scab grapes. The quality has definitely been affected by the strike which affected the pruning operations and pulled out a number of the more experienced pickers.

It is clear, however, that the growers are being subsidized by agribusiness and the fact that Coachella growers are losing money on this grape harvest is not going to stop the strike-breaking attempt as the harvest moves North to the San Joaquin Valley.

In this situation the support for the Farm Workers from the cities assumes a crucial aspect, and Chavez is counting heavily on the effectiveness of the boycott of scab grapes, and particularly on a nationwide boycott of Safeway, the country's richest supermarket chain, which has connections with the growers including a number of big growers on the corporation's board of directors.

In response to this situation a Farm Workers Support Coalition has been formed in Los Angeles which is recruiting volunteers to picket Safeway stores and which has called a mass march and rally in support of the UFWU strike and boycott for July 28, 1973, in downtown Los Angeles. One reason for the date is that on July 29 the contracts expire in Delano, the main base of the UFWU, and the growers are expected to refuse to renew, signing with the Teamsters instead and proceeding with a strikebreaking operation.

The Los Angeles SWP and YSA are members of this coalition and are playing an active role in the development of its activities. The Coalition was initiated by Milton Zaslow and Jesus Mena, a member of Zaslow's Socialist Union.

At first it was our opinion that the support activities here should go directly through the Farm Workers Union apparatus itself. The union does have an office here which is directing the national boycott, and a "boycott house" which does picketing of Safeway stores. We initiated discussions with Farm Worker officials in charge of the boycott and the response was friendly. But these official union agencies either had no concept of organizing broad support on a massive basis in the Los Angeles area, or were opposed to getting involved in organizing a broad coalition for this purpose. Instead they concentrate on sending their own fulltime staff to do the Safeway picketing, and decline to get involved in trying to generate massive response by hundreds or thousands of volunteers from the community.

In this vacuum Zaslow called together a meeting to organize a support coalition, and we sent observers. The meeting was fairly large and broad as regards the radical movement, and had Farm Worker staff people present, so we decided to participate.

Included in the coalition are persons from: International Socialist; the CP; the SWP; YSA; the Peoples Action Union (this is the Sarnoff split-off from the CP dominated PAC); some dissident Teamster members supporting the Farm Workers; a number of radical trade unionists; several branches of the Raza Unida Party; CASA; a branch of the ACLU; the Los Tres Committee; several community groups and some independent supporters of the Farm Workers.

The staff people from the UFWU who have attended the coalition meetings have declined to take direct responsibility, but have participated in the discussions. Their main concern seems to be to get whatever they can out of the coalition in terms of people on the Safeway picket lines. This is an entirely legitimate concern.

It seems fairly clear that the union takes a friendly attitude to the coalition as long as it does some effective picketing of Safeway and does not use the name of the union to collect money for the coalition, and as long as it does not become an embarrassment to the union.

With this in mind our approach has been to build the coalition as a single-issue united front to support the strike and boycott, on a nonexclusive basis, emphasizing two central activities: recruiting and dispatching pickets to Safeway stores, and organizing the mass demonstration which itself will advertise the boycott and recruit pickets for the Safeway boycott.

It is our view that the key to the success of this entire effort--and of the UFWU attempt to beat off the strikebreaking attempt--is the Chicano community, where the attempt to break

this union is a gut issue because it is a La Raza issue. This is a long term strategy and we are trying to do what we can around the demonstration and Safeway picketing to involve the broadest elements in the Chicano community. But this first demonstration will only be a beginning.

Initial endorsements for the rally and boycott activities include: Calif. State Sen. David Roberti; Congresswoman Yvonne Braithwaite Burke; Calif. Assemblyman Richard Alatorre; Andres Torres of San Fernando RUP; Bert Corona, CASA; Suz Rosen, ASUCLA President; several MECHA's; Mexican-American Labor Council (composed of Chicano AFL-CIO officials); Mexican-American Union Council (a national caucus of Chicano steel and auto workers headed by Manual Sierras); California Federation of Teachers, AFL-CIO; L. A. County Employees Association, AFL-CIO; Social Services Union Local #535; Laborers Local #300, AFL-CIO.

Initial experience has shown that endorsement are easy to get for this activity and we are trying to get groups like churches, priests, the CSO, etc. It is very likely that a very broad sponsorship will be forthcoming.

A friend has taken a keen interest in this activity and has been contacting old friends on the South Side and in the union movement with good results. He, Virginia and I went to Coachella to talk to old friends who are AFL-CIO officials assigned to work with the UFWU. They were cooperative and anxious to see the boycott activities in the city organized in a massive and efficient manner. Apparently some of the AFL-CIO staffers assigned to work with Chavez are under no particular special pressure from Meany, are more or less on their own, and are deeply concerned that the growers and the Teamsters not get away with breaking this union.

Just how massive the support movement can become remains to be seen, but at a minimum we hope to organize significant volunteers for the boycott picketing and carry off a rally of respectable size. Time is short for a big rally, however, but the picketing will continue for the indefinite future. If the strike stays in the news and if a spark can be lit in the Chicano community it is possible that all 120 or so Safeway stores in the L. A. area could be picketed most of the time.

Other implications in the situation are: lighting a certain fire within the AFL-CIO unions, particularly those with significant numbers of Chicano members; and the development of a more widespread opposition within the Teamsters Union than has arisen up to now.

The situation in the Teamsters is interesting. A knowledgeable friend characterizes this affair as Fitzsimmon's Watergate, at least potentially. There have been, he says, many local revolts in the Teamsters here, but each tends to be isolated from the other and is either snuffed out or kept in isolation from the others. But this, he says, is an issue that can unite all the decent oppositionists and cut across local considerations while not contradicting them. All that is lacking, he says, is the

organizational know-how, and this is not easily filled. The first stage must be generating widespread sympathy, understanding, and activity for the Farm Workers particularly in the Chicano community. Once that is operating, all sorts of other possibilities will materialize.