

THE GRAPE SOCIETY

The annual harvest of America's agricultural crops has been described as a, "Harvest of Shame." The conditions which hold farm laborers in the grip of poverty are found in the San Joaquin Valley of California. Here the grape pickers have been striking for six months to obtain for their families the minimum human needs which most Americans take for granted.

The California labor laws regarding working and living conditions are ignored by the large fruit growers. The results are long hours of work for little pay, inadequate benefits, and squalid living conditions. In 1964, the huge \$3½ billion fruit industry in California realized a profit of more than \$1 billion. Yet in a state with a median family income of \$6,726, the striking laborers earn only \$2,000. The growers can afford to pay the workers more.

Last September the AFL-CIO farm labor organizers, joined by the National Farm Workers Association called a strike in The Valley. Worker response to the strike was so effective, that growers were forced to import scab labor from Mexico. These pickers, supplied by the grace of Labor Secretary Williard Wirtz, were admitted through the machinery of the officially dejured Braceros program. These actions have seriously impaired the chances for the success of the strike.

Furthermore, the police, courts, and growers have created added pressures in an attempt to defeat the strike. Among these pressures are the spraying of picketers with insecticides and fertilizers, the issuing of phony traffic violations; and the setting of expensive trials. The courts have even served an injunction to the strikers, prohibiting shouting in the picket lines.

The demands of the grape pickers are not excessive. They presently receive \$1.20 per hour, plus 10 cents per box of grapes. They ask \$1.40 per hour plus 25 cents per box. The workers also seek enforcement of the state working standards: six rest periods, toilet facilities, and drinking water in the fields.

The strikers ask not only better wages and living conditions, but the right to organize and bargain collectively. For years this has been a recognized right of American workers. In short, the workers ask a voice in the decisions which affect their daily lives. To date, this voice has been denied.

The conditions of the Delano Laborers have aroused the indignation of prominent leaders in many fields. Their feelings typified by the statement of a group of eleven Protestant, Catholic, and Jewish clergymen, who visited Delano last month: "Those who labor on our California Farms deserve the same active support that Christians and Jews have given to the basic demands for justice for Negroes in the South."

The demands of the grape pickers will be realized only if sufficient political and economic pressure is put upon the growers.

The success of the strike depends not only on the strikers of Delano, but the buyers of Madison. The grapes of the San Joaquin Valley are used by the Schenley Corporation to produce Cresta Blanca and Roma Wines. We can aid the California laborers by refusing to buy these products. Liquor store owners can help by refusing to stock these brands of wine.

We in Madison, who are aware of this "Harvest of Shame," can no longer subsidize injustice by the purchase of Schenley products.

Contributions for the striking workers are desperately needed. Send any aid to:

Farm Workers Association
P.O. Box 894
Delano, California

Students for a Democratic Society