**Dolores Huerta**

*U\*X\*L Hispanic American Reference Library* , 2003

**1930-**

**Mexican American labor leader and activist**

As cofounder with the late **César Chávez** (see entry) of the United Farm Workers (UFW), Dolores Huerta has been at the forefront of the American labor movement for well over thirty years. Her goal has always been to obtain fair wages and decent living and working conditions for those who pick the grapes, vegetables, and citrus fruits in American fields. Huerta's tireless efforts on their behalf have made her a hero to Hispanic Americans and a near-legendary figure among migrant farm workers.

**Early Life**

Huerta was born in New Mexico to parents whose families originally came from Mexico, but she grew up in Stockton, California. Her mother and father divorced when she was very young, so she and her brother and sister were raised mostly by their mother and maternal grandfather in a loving and happy household. Huerta only occasionally saw her father, who earned a living as a miner and migrant worker. Yet his political and labor activism later proved inspirational to his daughter.

As was the case with many Americans, the Depression years of the 1930s were a struggle for Huerta's family. But the 1940s brought a new prosperity that made it possible for them to enjoy a more middle-class lifestyle. Young Dolores went to Stockton College after graduating from high school. She interrupted her studies to marry and raise two daughters, but the marriage soon ended in divorce. Huerta then returned to school and earned her associate's degree. Dissatisfied with the kinds of jobs available to her, she resumed her education once more and obtained a teaching certificate. Once in the classroom, however, Huerta quickly grew frustrated by how little she could really do for those students who didn't have proper clothing or enough to eat.

**A Community Activist**

Huerta's frustration eventually found an outlet in a Mexican American self-help group known as the Community Service Organization (CSO). The CSO first formed in Los Angeles after World War II and then spread across mostly urban areas of California and the Southwest. Huerta joined up during the mid-1950s. She became very active in the CSO's many civic and educational programs, including registering voters, setting up citizenship classes, and lobbying local government officials for neighborhood improvements. (Lobbyists try to influence public officials to support certain legislation—in this case, legislation that would benefit city neighborhoods.) Huerta was especially successful at lobbying, so it wasn't long before the CSO hired her to lobby for the group at the state capital in Sacramento.

During the late 1950s, Huerta found herself particularly disturbed by the plight of Mexican American farm workers, so she joined a northern California-based community interest group called the Agricultural Workers Association. It later merged with a similar union-affiliated group known as the Agricultural Workers Organizing Committee, for which Huerta worked as secretary-treasurer.

**Joins Forces With Chávez to Organize Farm Workers**

It was around this time that Huerta first met César Chávez, a fellow member of the CSO who had also taken an interest in migrant laborers. Together, they tried to persuade other members of the CSO to expand the group's focus to address the concerns of farm workers. When these efforts failed, they left the CSO and began their own organizing efforts among this overlooked segment of society. September 1962 marked the birth of the National Farm Workers Association, or NFWA (later known as the United Farm Workers, or UFW).

The task Chávez, Huerta, and the others who joined them set out to accomplish was especially difficult given the nature of the migrant worker. Most could not read or write. They were easily bullied by the growers, who warned these already desperately poor people that they were risking their jobs if they tried to unionize. And because their work kept them constantly on the move, they were not easy to keep track of and organize into a group. But with Chávez as president and Huerta as vice president, the NFWA slowly managed to attract people to their evening meetings across the agricultural heart of California. At those meetings, they talked of an aggressive but nonviolent "revolution" that would achieve justice for farm workers.

Throughout the 1960s and 1970s, the NFWA, and then the UFW—as it came to be called when it became affiliated with the AFL-CIO—staged a series of successful strikes, marches, and boycotts that focused national attention on the low wages and terrible living and working conditions migrant laborers endured. While Chávez became identified with fasting (going without food) as a method of protest, Huerta led countless picket lines and served as the union's chief contract negotiator. She firmly held her own against hostile Anglo growers who resented the fact that *any* Mexican American—and a woman, no less—would dare challenge them and the way they chose to do business.

Huerta was a forceful speaker. In September 1965, the up-and-coming farm workers' union (which by then claimed about two thousand members) voted to join Filipino grape pickers in their strike against growers in California's San Joaquin Valley. To reinforce the impact of the strike, César Chávez also called for a national boycott of table grapes. It was a move that quickly made headlines across the country, bringing national attention to the struggle that popularly came to be known as *La Causa.*

A few months later, in the spring of 1966, the NFWA organized a march of nearly three hundred miles from the California town of Delano to Sacramento. The purpose of the march was to dramatize the farm workers' determination to continue the strike and keep media attention focused on their efforts. On April 10, as demonstrators rallied to mark the end of the march, Huerta addressed the crowd. An excerpt from her speech is reprinted here from the April 28, 1966 edition of the *Delano Record.*

This is the first time in [the] history of the United States that farm workers have walked three hundred miles to their state capitol; and the governor of this state [Edmund G. Brown, Sr.] is not here to greet them.

But this is not surprising. This is in keeping with the general attitude that the governor and the people have had toward farm workers. I can assure you that had doctors, lawyers, auto workers or any other organized labor group marched three hundred miles, the governor would be here to meet them....

The governor's **indifference** to our pilgrimage ... demonstrate[s] that we should not be taken for granted by any political party. As of this moment we wish to inform the Democratic party of this state that we will be counted as your supporters, only when we can count you among ours. The Democratic party does not have us in its hip pocket.

The leaders of this association do not want to meet with the governor in a closed-door session. We have met with the governor and his secretaries before in a closed-door session. We are no longer interested in listening to the excuses the governor has to give in defense of the growers, to his apologies for them not paying us decent wages or why the growers can not dignify the workers as individuals with the right to place the price on their own labor through **collective bargaining.**

The governor maintains that the growers are in a competitive situation. Well, the farm workers are also. We must also compete—with the standard of living to give our families their daily bread.

In 1959, the CSO and organized labor tried the first legislative efforts to give the farm workers minimal social legislation needed to **ameliorate** their terrible **oppression.** At that time the farm workers were not aware these attempts were being made and were therefore not there to testify and lobby in their own behalf, except for a delegation that César Chávez brought up from Oxnard [California].

In 1961 and 1963 through efforts of the CSO, National Farm Workers Association and the **herculean** efforts of then Assemblyman—now Congressman—Phil Burton, we were able to obtain welfare legislation that would ameliorate some of the terrible suffering of the farm workers in the off-season.

And the growers are still complaining and fighting adequate administration of that law. Gus Hawkins also passed disability insurance for farm workers. That was eight years ago and we still have yet to see the needed legislation for a minimum wage enacted in this state.

But this is 1966.

Farm workers have not been driven down to a small closed-door session to see what the state can dole out to us in welfare legislation. The grape strikers of Delano [California] after seven months of extreme hardship and deprivation have walked step by step through the San Joaquin Valley—the valley that has been their "Valley of Tears" for them and their families. Not to beg, but to insist on what they think is needed for them.

The difference between 1959 and 1966 is highlighted by the **peregrination,** it is revolution—the farm workers have been organized....

César Chávez began ... [by] going through the San Joaquin Valley as a pilgrim inspiring the workers to organize; giving the confidence they needed through inspiration and hard work and educating them through the months to realize that no one was going to win their battle for them, that their condition could only be changed by one group—themselves.

He refused contributions and did not solicit money from any area. César felt that outside money was no good, and that the workers had to pay for their own organization and this was accomplished.

The National Farm Workers Association prior to the strike was supported entirely by its membership through the dues they paid. Furthermore, the members of the National Farm Workers Association put forth the programs that they felt were needed immediately, such as a credit union, a service program, a group life insurance plan—the credit union so they could save their money and borrow when necessary, a group life insurance plan for their families that would take care of emergencies that arise from sudden deaths, and the service program for their complaints of nonunion wages, injury and disability cases, etc., and other daily problems in which they are exposed and undefended.

Each worker that was helped by the association's program became an organizer and the movement has grown in this manner with each worker bringing in other members to make the union stronger. The foundation was built by César Chávez through his dedicated efforts and the successive sacrifices of his wife, Helen Chávez, and their eight children, and their relatives who assisted them during this crucial organizing period when financial aid was not forthcoming.

April 10, 1966, marks the fourth year of the organizing efforts of the National Farm Workers Association. And today our farm workers have come to the capitol of Sacramento.

To the governor and the legislature of California we say: You cannot close your eyes and ears to our needs any longer, you cannot pretend that we do not exist, you cannot plead ignorance to our problem because we are here and we embody our needs for you....

The agricultural workers are not going to remain **static.** The towns that have been reached by the pilgrimage will never be the same. On behalf of the National Farm Workers Association, its officers and its members, on behalf of all the farm workers of this state, we unconditionally demand the governor of this state, Edmund G. Brown, to call a special session of the legislature to enact a collective bargaining law for the farm workers of the state of California.

We will be satisfied with nothing less. The governor cannot and the legislature cannot shrug off their responsibilities to the Congress. We are the citizens and residents of the state of California and we want to have rules set up to protect us in this state.

If the rules to settle our economic problems are not forthcoming, we will call a general strike to paralyze the state's agricultural economy, to let the legislators and the employers know we mean business. We will take economic pressures, strikes and boycotts to force recognition and obtain collective bargaining rights.

The social and economic revolution of the farm workers is well under way and will not be stopped until they receive equality.

As *La Causa* became a national movement, Huerta headed east to direct the table grape boycott in the New York City area. Later, toward the end of the 1960s, she coordinated similar activities all along the East Coast at major distribution points for California produce. Under her leadership, the farm workers' drive to obtain decent wages and conditions expanded to involve activists of all kinds—religious, political, student, union, and consumer. Their efforts finally paid off in 1970, when the Delano growers agreed to contracts that ended the five-year-old strike.

Huerta spent much of the early 1970s back in New York overseeing UFW boycotts against other grape-growers as well as lettuce farmers. Again, the emphasis was on maintaining nationwide pressure to force changes in California. This required Huerta to travel extensively and share the UFW message anywhere she found an audience willing to listen, from college campuses to union halls.

In New Orleans, Louisiana, Huerta delivered the keynote address at the annual convention of the American Public Health Association. In her remarks, delivered October 21, 1974, Huerta focused on a topic she thought might be of particular interest to those in attendance—the unique health problems facing migrant workers and steps the union had taken to address them.

She also touched briefly on the problems the UFW was then having with another union, the Teamsters, which was trying to conduct its own organizing efforts among the farm workers. This bitter (and sometimes violent) battle was not resolved until 1977, when the two reached a settlement granting the UFW sole bargaining rights. Huerta's speech is reprinted here in part from a copy in the archives of the Walter P. Reuther Library of Wayne State University in Detroit, Michigan.

I wish to bring you greetings and a hope for a very successful convention ... to all of you who have dedicated your lives to making life better for the world, for America. I think that your goals are very much like the goals of our union. We got into the business of organizing farm workers for mainly health reasons. It is no accident that farm workers have an average life span of forty-nine years of age. And those of you who have worked in rural communities I think know the reasons. Those of you that don't, I just want to give you a little picture of what health is like for a farm worker in a place where he does not have the United Farm Workers to represent him.

In Delano, California, I remember three specific instances. One, a worker who had his hand broken on the job ... was sent to his local doctor, who, by the way, is also a grape-grower. The doctor prescribed some ointment to put on his hand. The worker's hand started swelling. He came later to use our x-ray machine, which at that time was just a small trailer. We had this old x-ray machine from the year one, and we found out that his hand was broken. There was another farm worker [who was ill], Chala Savala, who another local grape-grower doctor said ..., "Why, you're pregnant." About six months later she found out she wasn't pregnant—she had tuberculosis. But by that time she had to have a lung removed. Farm workers who are poisoned with pesticides are told they have sunstroke. And it's always the same thing—you have no money, the doctor can't see you.

When we first won our contracts as a result of our first strike and our first grape boycott, we made some very fantastic changes. I'd just kinda like to ask, how many of you didn't eat grapes between 1965 and 1970? Raise your hands. Well, I'm glad to see that there were a lot of you. And I'm going to tell you some of the changes that you brought about in health for farm workers in Delano, California, this very same place that I'm talking about.

The first thing that we got when we got our contracts was a medical plan. And we named it the Robert F. Kennedy Medical Plan after our good friend [U.S. Senator and 1968 presidential candidate] Robert Kennedy. The plan was paid for by the growers. We made them pay ten cents an hour for every hour that the workers worked.... And the workers decided that they wanted doctor's visits paid for, they wanted maternity benefits, they wanted hospitalization benefits, they wanted x-ray [and] lab, they wanted prescriptions paid for under their medical plan.

And so we developed a really fantastic medical plan. Because every migrant worker, his wife, and all of his children are covered under our medical plan. If they only work fifty hours for the migrant medical plan they were covered for a nine-month period. Nine months, no matter where, they can make a medical claim and get paid for it. And the money goes directly to the worker. Our major medical plan is two hundred and fifty hours. Under this plan they get hospitalization, and surgical benefits, ambulance benefits, a minimum dental and eyeglass prescription care. Again, no matter where they are at.

See, the beautiful thing about our medical plan and the reason that we were able to do this fantastic medical plan for ten cents an hour is because we did not go through an insurance company. Now when we first tried to get this plan passed, many of the growers were very upset about it. They said you have to go through an insurance company. We are very lucky that César Chávez is a grammar-school dropout and he hasn't been educated to think that insurance is a way of life. He said he wasn't going to give any of his money to an insurance company, any of the workers' money.

So the way that our medical plan works is that the money comes in and it goes out directly to the workers. It's a nonprofit plan, and it's administered by the farm workers themselves....

But once we got the medical plan, we found that that really didn't stop the abuses, because the doctors were still not giving the workers good health care. So the next step was then to build a clinic. So the workers started to build their clinics....

I think our clinics are unique in that we call them people's clinics. The people built them, we raised the money for them. There is no government money at all in our clinics. And the kind of work that the clinic does is primarily, first of all, educational. And we don't have Mickey-Mouse clinics. Our clinics are really beautiful. I mean there is good medicine in our clinics. The workers are taught about nutrition, to combat diabetes, which is very common among farm workers. They are given prenatal instruction to have healthier babies and healthier mothers. They are taught about inoculations....

Our health workers go into the labor camps. They've done a vast service on tuberculosis and on other diseases that are contagious. And when we find a sick farm worker, someone that has tuberculosis, someone that has another disease that shouldn't be in the labor force, we take that farm worker out of the labor force. And he is put on some kind of disability compensation so that he doesn't have to work until he becomes well again. We do home visits. We have a team approach with the doctor, the health worker, the nurse, and we go right into the homes of the farm workers.

Needless to say, this kind of preventative medicine that we are now undertaking has saved so many lives that the statistics of Tulare County in California have changed. Last year I had my tenth baby in a hospital in Tulare County, and the doctor who was delivering my baby—who happened to be a specialist—along with our own doctor from our clinic told me that our health care was so good that we had actually changed the statistics of Tulare County. I think that's pretty fantastic, because our doctors are so dedicated, and because their medicine is so good.

Now, some of you might wonder how come I have ten children, right? One of the main reasons is because I want to have my own picket line. But all kidding aside, it's really nice to be able to go to a clinic when you are pregnant with your tenth baby and not have people look at you like you are kind of crazy, or like you don't know where they come from, or put pressure on you not to have any more children. Because after all, you know, Mexicans are kind of poor people, and you shouldn't have all that many kids. So that's another good thing about our clinics. Because unfortunately, that pressure not to have children translates itself in county hospitals and places where people have no power into dead babies because those babies aren't taken care of, and into very hard labor for mothers because they are trying to make it as hard on the mother as they can to have another one. And I guess I feel a little bit strongly about that because I've been in situations where I've seen children die, babies die, because somebody there thought they shouldn't have been born in the first place.

Now another great thing about our clinics is that we train farm workers as lab assistants, lab technicians, nurse's aides, we train farm workers to do the administration of the clinic.... So what we're doing is we're not only just giving good health care—fantastic health care—but we are training our own people to be able to do the health work and to administer the program.

The amazing reason that we have been able to build these clinics in such a short period of time is because our clinics are nonprofit. The doctors that come to work with us work the way that we do. We work for no wages. Our doctors get a little bit more for some of you out there that might be interested. But nevertheless it is a sacrifice. And that's important. Because you can't help poor people and be comfortable. You know, the two things are just not compatible. If you want to really give good health care to poor people you've got to be prepared to be a little uncomfortable and to put a little bit of sacrifice behind it.

Now there [are] other ways that the union has changed things in terms of health care. And I'm going to talk a little bit about the pesticides, because ... we raised the issue many years ago and a lot of people have been concerned about [it], but it was sort of a no-no. Nobody could talk about it openly. What we have in our union are ranch committees. Where we have a contract we elect a ranch committee. The workers elect their own committee. That committee is responsible [for making] sure that no pesticides that can be harmful to them or harmful to the consumers can be used in that ranch. They check out to see what kind of pesticides are going to be used, what the antidotes are, what the re-entry periods are, everything that there is possible to know about that pesticide.

Do you know that we were amazed to find out you can get all kinds of information about what's harmful to a pet, but you can't get any information about what's harmful to a farm worker? Because there has been very little research done in this area....

When we were negotiating contracts—I was in charge of the contract negotiations for the union—we called up a friend of ours who worked with the Los Angeles County Health [Department], and he gave us some information on one of the organic phosphates that we wanted to know. Well, one of the growers who was in on the negotiations tried to get him fired for giving us that information. And this man worked for the Los Angeles County Health Department. But this shows you—and I'm going to talk about that a little bit more—about the kind of repression that I know a lot of you are faced [with] when you do try to make real changes or when you try to get into those controversial areas where you have conflicts of power.

In our contracts, we banned DDT, Aldrin, Endrin, 2,4-D, 2,4-T, Tep and many of the other—Monitor 4—many of these other pesticides. We banned these pesticides in our contracts starting from 1970. It is interesting that just recently, the government has come out against Aldrin and Endrin. And the Farm Workers Union banned these pesticides many years ago. We find that the only way that you can be sure that the so-called laws are administered, that the so-called laws are carried out, is when you have somebody right there on the ranch, a steward, a ranch committee, somebody that can't get fired from the job, somebody that has the protection of a union contract to make sure that these things are carried out.

All of these great things that we were able to do—and all of you that didn't eat grapes helped us to accomplish—are being wiped out now. And they are being wiped out because last year, as many of you know, we lost our contracts. The growers brought in the Teamsters union, they signed backdoor contracts with them, fourteen thousand farm workers went out on strike. Four thousand farm workers—this was not a war, this was a strike—four thousand farm workers were jailed for picketing, two hundred farm workers were beaten and injured by Teamsters and police, and two farm workers were killed. It is sad for us to report this, but the clock has been turned back and California agriculture, with the exception of a handful of contracts that we still hold, we now have the labor contractor, the crew leader system back again, we now have child labor back again.

There was a bus accident—to talk to you about health standards and safety standards—there was a bus accident in Blythe, California, on January 15. This was under a Teamster contract. Nineteen farm workers were drowned when their bus turned over into an irrigation ditch. This was a school bus. It had no business transporting people seventy miles to work. The seats of that bus were not fastened to the floor. The people got tangled in the bus. They couldn't get out of the bus. They were crushed to death and they were drowned. Among those that were drowned was a thirteen-year-old child and his fifteen-year-old brother. There were four women that were drowned. The labor contractor who owned that bus got a fifty-dollar fine for the deaths of nineteen farm workers. I'm sure that many of you didn't read about it in your local newspapers because this is common among farm workers, these kinds of accidents. Twenty-five farm workers have been killed because of [the] lack of safety precautions in the fields since the Teamsters took over the contracts.

We now have a return to pesticides—forty thousand acres of lettuce were poisoned with Monitor 4. This lettuce was shipped to the market. In California, it was sold as shredded lettuce in Safeway stores. That's nice to have Monitor 4 with your shredded salad, huh?

And we have a return back to the archaic system that we had, [a] primitive system that existed before and still exists, where we don't have United Farm Workers contracts. People working out there in those fields without a toilet, people working out there in those fields without any hand-washing facilities, without any cold drinking water, without any kind of first-aid or safety precautions. All of this has come back again.

The California Rural Legal Assistance just did a spot survey of about twenty ranches in the Salinas and the Delano area just a couple of months ago. And [in] every single instance they found either no toilet or a dirty toilet.... And this is something consumers don't understand—that that lettuce, those grapes are being picked right there in that field. If there's a dirty toilet, it's right next to the produce, and that produce is picked and packed in that field and shipped directly to your store. The way you see grapes in your market, the way you see the lettuce in that market, it comes directly from the field. It doesn't go through any cleansing process. It's direct.

I remember talking to the head of the Food and Drug Administration in San Francisco. You know, I found out that there was a law that says no produce can be shipped for interstate commerce if it has been picked or packed in a way that it might become contaminated. Well, if you've got a field where you've got several hundred people or a thousand people working, and there's no toilet, that produce can be contaminated. You know what he told me? He said, "I've got to enforce the Food and Drug Administration law in four states. I can't go out there and check every field to see if there is a toilet or not, or hand-washing facilities." You know, these are these little tiny things that are kind of overlooked. And they're so serious. But I'll bet that if any public health person brings this up, there are going to be repercussions because they bring it up.

The Teamsters have brought back illegal aliens. And now when I say this, I want to tell you what's happening to these people. Today, President [Gerald] Ford is meeting with [Mexican President Luis] Echeverría in Mexico. And they're going to talk about a *bracero* program, which is a slave program for workers, for Mexican workers. And Mexico needs this because they've got a fifty percent inflation rate in Mexico, and they've got a thirty or forty percent unemployment rate. So they want to get rid of the people. They want to get rid of the problem.

But what does it do to people over here? They want to bring in one million Mexicans from Mexico. We've already got close to a million people here illegally. And how are they being treated? They are paying three hundred dollars each to come over the border. They are being put in housing where you have thirty or forty people in a room without any kind of a sanitary facility. We have one report of an illegal alien who was picking peaches on a ladder; the ladder was shaky, [and] it broke. The ladder went right through his anus. And they didn't give him any medical attention. Luckily, one of our members found out about it and brought him to one of our clinics for treatment. We're having illegal aliens who are coming in, who are being blinded by pesticides, for treatment. This is slavery. And it's wrong. And we've got to see what way we can stop this.

We can't really wait for legislation. You know, there's a lot of things that we can do right away. I think that the one thing that we've learned in our union is that you don't wait. You just get out and you start doing things. And you do things in such a way that you really help people to lay the foundations that you need.

We don't have to talk about a charitable outlook. You know, people come in with a lot of money and they give people charity. We've got to talk about ways to make people self-sufficient in terms of their medical health. Because when they go in there with charity and then they pull out, then they leave the people worse off than they ever were before. We've got to use government money to help people. And I don't think that this is so radical. Lord knows that the growers are getting billions of dollars not to grow cotton, all kinds of supports and subsidies. Well, if any money is given for medical health, it should stay in that community. It shouldn't just come in there at the pleasure of the local politicians and be pulled out at the pleasure of the local politicians.

And I don't think that public health people should be repressed. It worries me when I see a clinic in a farm-worker community that is afraid to put out a Farm Worker flag or put up César's picture because they are afraid that they are going to get their money taken away from them. And yet this has happened. And this is wrong. But the only reason it happens is because we let it happen. We've got to take the side of the people that are being oppressed. And if we can't do that, then we're not doing our job, because the people in that minority community or in that community are not going to have any faith in the medical program that is in there if you can't take their side. They're going to suspect you. We've got to be able to stand up and fight for our rights. We can't any longer cooperate with any kind of fear, any kind of bigotry, any kind of racism, anything that is wrong. We've got to be able to stand up and say, "That is wrong." And it's going to take that kind of courage, I think, the same kind of courage that César has taught the farm workers, to make the kind of changes that are needed.

Health, like food, has got to be to cure people, to make people well. It can't be for profit. Food should be sacred to feed people, not for profit. Health has got to be a right for every person and not a privilege. You would be sad to know that many farm workers—before we had our clinics—had never been to a doctor. And I'm sure like farm workers, there are many, many other people who have never been to a clinic or to a doctor. And many times that is even out of fear because they see the doctor or they see the medical person not as their friend but they see that person as their enemy.

Now I hope that what we have done, our experience, will serve some use to what you're interested in and what you're doing. I hope that you will help us get back what we have lost, which are our union contracts, so that we can continue this fantastic health program that we have that we started in California. And you can do this very easily just by not eating any grapes until we win, by not eating any lettuce until we win, and by not drinking any Gallo wine. And I'm saying that lightly. It's not light. It's a very serious situation.

Within the next year they are spending millions of dollars to destroy the United Farm Workers. They are spending millions of dollars to tell what a bad administrator César Chávez is. Have you seen these articles in the *New York Times* and *Time* magazine? They say César Chávez is a bad administrator. What they really mean is he is the wrong color.... Can you imagine five clinics, a medical plan, a credit union, a retirement center for farm workers, fantastic increases in wages, the removal of the labor contract system—all of this César did in a few short years. What would he do if he was a good administrator?

We have a booth here ... where we're giving out information about our clinic. I implore all of you, if you can give up a year of your life or two years of your life, drop out and come and help us. The only reason we haven't got more clinics is because we need doctors. In our Delano clinic right now, we only have one doctor working. Please come and join the people and help us build health care for everybody, and we will give you a little bit of money, not too much. But we all work for five dollars a week. None of us gets paid. Even César gets five dollars a week for his personal benefit. We get five dollars a week for food. We live off of donations. All of the money that we need to run our boycott and our strikes. We have a button table where we invite you to buy a button. And please wear our button. As I say, all the contributions that you can give will be greatly, greatly appreciated, because we do need money very desperately.

We're also going to be showing a film, the film of our strike, of the bloody strike that we had in California last summer.... I'd invite all of you to come and see the film. You'll never forget it. And you will really see—when we talk about the principle of nonviolence, you will see it in action. Because you will see farm workers getting beaten and killed, and you will see that the farm workers do not fight back with violence. We are using a nonviolent action of the boycott, so we really need your help in that.

Let's say a few *vivas* now, OK? You know what *viva* means? That's what you're all about—long life. Long life. And we always say that in the Spanish community, we say *viva,* which means "long life." So we're going to say a few *vivas,* and we're going to say some *abajos.* You know what *abajos* are? That means "down." And then we will say one other thing—*Si se puede.* Can we have this dream that we are talking about? Health for everyone, brotherhood, peace? "It can be done"—*si se puede.* And we'll all do the farm workers' handclap together to show that we're united in thought and action and in love. The farm workers' handclap starts out very slow, and then it goes very fast.

So let's try it. We're going to say first *"Viva la Causa,"* which is the cause of labor, peace, and health, *"Viva la justicia,"* which is justice, and then we will say *"Viva Chávez,"* for César, may God give him long life. And then we'll say "down with fear," *abajo,* and "down with lettuce and grapes," *abajo,* and "down with Gallo wine." Because Gallo is on the boycott, too. *Abajo....*

OK, let's try it now. All together! I'll say, *"Viva la Causa!"* and everybody yells *"Viva!"* really, really loud, OK? *Viva la Causa! Viva!* Ugh—that was very weak. This is very important. This is like kind of praying together in unison, so it's really important. Let's try it again: *Viva la Causa! Viva! Viva la justicia! Viva!* Now—so César can hear us in the hospital where he's at and the growers can hear us where they're at: *Viva Chávez! Viva!* OK, now we'll try *abajo.* Down with fear! *Abajo!* Down with lettuce and grapes! *Abajo!* Down with Gallo! *Abajo!* You know, this really works.... Can we live in a world of brotherhood and peace without disease and fear and oppression? *Si se peude,* right? OK, let's all do it together. *Si se puede.* [Clapping.] *Si se puede, si se puede....* [Clapping.]

Thank you very much.

In 1975, Huerta played a key role in yet another UFW triumph when California passed the Agricultural Labor Relations Act. This was the first law to recognize the right of farm workers to take part in collective bargaining. During the last half of the decade, she turned her attention to running the union's political department, which once again called upon her talents as a legislative lobbyist.

More recently, however, the UFW has seen its influence decline due in part to changes in the economic and political climate at both the state and national levels. The death of César Chávez in 1993 also dealt a blow to the organization, which is struggling to keep his spirit alive as well as increase membership. But the UFW still has a fighter in Huerta, who remains active in the ongoing struggle to achieve justice for farm workers.

In 2002, at the age of 71, Huerta was touring the nation, speaking about women's rights, amnesty for undocumented workers, and bilingual education. The same year, a congressional resolution paid honor to Huerta for her "commitment and dedication" in promoting the rights of farm workers.

* [Huerta, Dolores](http://ic.galegroup.com/ic/suic/DocumentDispatcherPage/DocumentDispatcherWindow?action=1&javax.portlet.action=doForward&windowstate=normal&documentId=GALE%7CEJ2210061215&mode=view)
* [Dolores Huerta looks on as Gray Davis signs into law Senate Bill 984](http://ic.galegroup.com/ic/suic/DocumentDispatcherPage/DocumentDispatcherWindow?action=1&javax.portlet.action=doForward&windowstate=normal&documentId=GALE%7CEJ2210064514&mode=view)
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* [Huerta Speaks about UFW work](http://ic.galegroup.com/ic/suic/DocumentDispatcherPage/DocumentDispatcherWindow?action=1&javax.portlet.action=doForward&windowstate=normal&documentId=GALE%7CEJ2210062998&mode=view)

**Further Readings**

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