



DELORES HUERTA

Viva La Causa!

By PAT PETRASKE

"Viva!" The crowd gathered at the University of Rochester echoed the call for unity shouted by the California farm worker, Delores Huerta, as she recounted the story of the United Farm Workers' struggle.

"Si se puede!" Clapping and cheering, the first woman vice president of the UFW explained that the theme of a nearly ten-year battle had become "It can be done." She urged her listeners to join her in clapping, a sign "that shows the world we're organized."

The United Farm Workers half-hour movie "Viva La Causa" which opened last Thursday evening's presentation featured the leader of the cause, Cesar Chavez, president of the UFW, whose merits as "devil or saint" have been debated through the Courier-Journal in recent weeks. Mrs. Huerta had nothing but praise for the small, soft-spoken Mexican labor leader. "The main thing he has promised us is 'I will be with you the rest of your life.'"

"The message we want to bring to the people is the same kind of courage and faith," said Mrs. Huerta, who sported a bright red poncho with a large black Aztec eagle, the union symbol found on UFW products.

At the heart of the dispute now are two unions pitted against each other in an attempt to organize the California lettuce and grape workers. The newly formed union of primarily Mexican-Americans gained almost 100 contracts representing some 60,000 grape pickers. Now, three years later, the contracts have expired and the growers have signed up with the Teamsters Union.

A bitter strike and boycott ensued. The strike was broken after thousands of UFW picketers were arrested and two members of the union were murdered. But the boycott of stores continues.

Mrs. Huerta stated that the strike was broken by the use of such tactics "as calling in Hell's Angels and paying them \$70 a day to beat up workers. They were told to attack the women and children." She described the working sites as a "camps of terror."

Negotiations with the Teamsters union produced an agreement in which the striking workers agreed to stop the lettuce boycott. But the agreement was never signed. "So we're right back where we started," Mrs. Huerta said, adding that the boycott against lettuce was still on.

"Whether the people have enough to eat, whether they have an education depends on whether the boycott works," she exclaimed. The farm workers favor the UFW union because they will then have a union of their own and elect their own representatives, according to the petite Mexican worker who

compared the situation with Israel's fight for "a country of their own."

"We're like a mosquito on an elephant's back; we're not taking anything from anyone so why is there such a great opposition?" she asked. The problem has been called a "jurisdictional dispute by Teamster officials," Mrs. Huerta said. She feels the Teamsters are only trying to "confuse the people. They do not care about the workers."

According to a New York Times report, workers themselves oppose Chavez's use of a hiring hall, claiming that officers "showed favoritism, split families who wanted to work together, and did not allow the workers choice of where they would be sent." (New York Times, June 27, 1973)

Tony Yiannakos, chairman of the volunteer boycott committee in Rochester, maintained that one advantage of the hiring hall is that it is "farm worker run" and called the use of a labor contractor "degrading."

The use of labor contractors also perpetuates abuses; in a hiring hall, the growers must negotiate directly with the union rather than with a third middle man, interjected Bernie Duffy, a seminarian from St. Bernard's. He added that the hiring hall has also instituted a seniority system of placement for workers.

Degradation is a key complaint of many of the workers and it has affected the women the hardest, prompting them to be in the forefront of protest picket lines. The lack of adequate toilet facilities in the fields is one area of contention.

It is also the presence of women and their children that has helped the workers stick to Chavez's policy of non-violence, said the union leader who has ten children. Mrs. Huerta credited the pressure and presence of the clergy on the picket line with stopping much of the terrorism.

Locally the boycott is being manned through volunteer support groups such as the Rochester Farm Workers Support Committee, who sponsored the presentation. Duffy who spearheads the group reported that store checks and a workshop in the situation are being conducted.

One of the major thrusts of the group has been to ask people not to buy Gallo wine including Ripple, and Boone's Farm which is produced from Teamster union picked grapes. Thus far, the groups have pressuring local stores such as A&P and Safeway to stop carrying non-union lettuce and grapes, Yiannakos said.

The migrant farm workers have also shown a sign of unity with striking Farah workers who are battling for the right to unionize. The farmers' Spanish expression hurled at the Farah Co. translates, "Down with the pants."

Father James Weckesser

'Fear' A Result of Chile's Coup

Maryknoll, N.Y. — The parish of San Alberto, lying on the outskirts of Chile's capital city, Santiago, "is most distinctive because of its size," according to the statement of a Maryknoll priest there.

— that one might try to get even with the other."

However, he knows of no actual reprisals within the area, and thus far, "It seems to be a fear only."

Typical of many missionary priests to whom the unusual has become a way of life, it's an understatement. The "distinctive" size of San Alberto, explains Father James Weckesser, MM, measures "about three miles long and a mile wide. The population is now estimated to be around two hundred thousand."

Of these, at least 185,000 are Catholics.

The missioner said that at the time of the recent military coup he was in the Maryknoll Society's Center House, located in mid-Santiago. "Because the first two days were placed on a twenty-four hour curfew, I remained there," he said.

Asked what he thought was the most noticeable change in San Alberto in the weeks following the coup, Father Weckesser replied: "Fear. People who supported the past government and those against it are living close together," he explained. "And they're afraid of each other

He further pointed out that among those in the "poblaciones," housing projects, political sentiments are often determined by which government initially organized the development. Therefore, the inhabitants of a poblacion set up by the Popular Unity government of the late Salvador Allende may be at political odds with a neighboring poblacion organized by the Christian Democrats a few years earlier. In addition, even within a development, sentiments can be split.

Father Weckesser, from Rochester, has served for 18 years in Chile, the last nine in San Alberto. Despite the burden of one of the highest parishioner-to-priest ratios in the world, there is no other place in the world the 45-year-old priest would rather be.

The majority of San Alberto's 200,000 are working class people. A good number are "campesinos," peasants, who have left the countryside hoping to im-

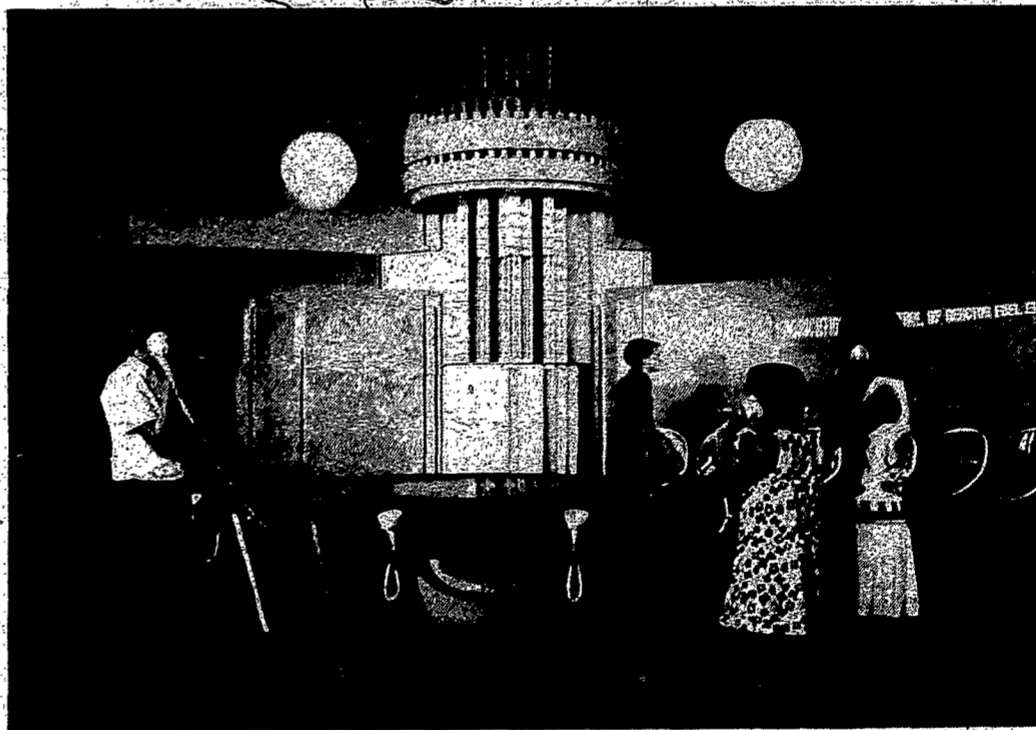
prove their economic condition in the city. Their migration has swelled the numbers in San Alberto enormously in recent years. "When I got there nine years ago," Father Weckesser said, "the population was about 60,000."

Although there is "an older part of the parish near the main church that's middle class, school teachers, white collar workers, bank employees," the dominant feature of San Alberto is its poblaciones. Some are considered permanent; others are purely emergency housing. All poblaciones are for the working class, and most are terribly crowded.

"The poblaciones vary in size," the missioner said. "Some house fifteen to twenty thousand, others maybe just two hundred." Whatever their size, the developments form the natural divisions of the parish and "Basic Christian Communities are set up within them," Father Weckesser said.

Whatever its turmoils, Father Weckesser earnestly wishes to continue his work among the people of Chile. More than ever, the mission that is his "first love" can benefit from the message of Christian community.

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