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New York, N.Y. 10014
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TO NATIONAL COMMITTEE MEMBERS AND ORGANIZERS

Dear Comrades,

The following is an excerpted and condensed transcript of a discussion in the Political Committee about problems we face in regard to the farmworkers struggle and the boycott campaign. The comrades have not corrected the edited condensation of their remarks.

The discussion was held on October 19, when it was still unclear as to whether the AFL-CIO was going to officially endorse the boycott.

The contents of the discussion should be shared with those comrades involved in farmworkers work.

Comradely,

Betsy Stone

Betsy Stone
SWP National Office

Britton:

I don't know if comrades noticed in yesterday's Times, at the end of a news article on the AFL-CIO executive council meeting, the section that deals with the farmworkers. It says, "The executive council, which met here today before the opening of the federation's biannual convention, authorized Mr. Meany and Mr. Kirkland to take 'whatever steps are necessary' to help the United Farm Workers Union with their national boycott of grapes, lettuce, and Gallo, Guild and Franzia brand wines."

The situation is unclear. We'll have to get further information and see what the AFL-CIO paper says as to what exactly they decided to do vis-a-vis the farmworkers boycott, but if it is true that the AFL-CIO is giving some form of sanction to it, this could be a big opening for the farmworkers.

This could give us an opportunity to project what the farmworkers should do to build an effective boycott campaign. Such a campaign has not been organized up to now by the farmworkers.

Our coverage in the paper has been weak on this question. We had good first-hand coverage from the fields when the strikes were taking place. We've pushed the boycott. But we haven't done enough to clearly project the type of steps that are going to be necessary to build a successful boycott campaign, a mass campaign.

We have seen, as we predicted, that there is tremendous potential for the boycott campaign, broad sympathy for the farmworkers, just waiting to be organized. But at the same time, there are certain greater built-in problems with the current boycott effort, compared with the earlier boycott campaign in the 1960s. At that time the boycott was just around the question of grapes. This time it's more complicated because it involves, in addition to grapes, lettuce -- a certain type of lettuce. Then, in many areas, the farmworkers ask that people not shop at all at certain chains such as A&P and Safeway.

In '65-70 it was more clearly, in the eyes of people, a question of the growers versus the union. This time you have what to many people is a complicating factor. There's another union involved, the Teamsters, playing a scab role.

So you have these additional problems. But with a real serious boycott campaign, these of course could be surmounted if the proper explanatory material was put out by the boycott committees, if efforts were made to really mobilize mass support for the boycott campaign -- mass meetings, mass rallies, mass picket lines at the different stores that were being boycotted and so on.

We don't have complete information on boycott activity in different parts of the country, but it's clearly uneven from area to area. The boycott nationally has not been projected as being a mass campaign of the type that's needed. And many areas have not been able to do much at all. Some areas have been especially bad. My impression is that New York is one of the areas where the official boycott committee has been most inept.

Many areas where the farmworkers have set up boycott committees, they have been organized sort of as communes. They have had these boycott houses where a number of young activists live. One characteristic of these activists has been that they saw this boycott as sort of a personal witness. They saw themselves not as organizers of what could potentially be a massive campaign, but

as individuals who would go by ones and twos to particular stores and talk to people to morally convince them to not go into the stores. In some cases, they didn't even think it was good to pass out leaflets or to have signs and so on because they didn't want to intimidate people and they wanted to relate to people on a one-to-one basis.

Barry reports that he noticed in a recent tour he made of the West Coast that there are a number of areas where there's a certain amount of demoralization among UFWU supporters and a lack of perspective. This is partly a result of the confusion over negotiations with the Teamsters. But there are also other factors involved, the elements of inexperience and inadequacies of the farmworkers' leadership. There is also disorientation bred by the AFL-CIO leadership's opposition to a genuine mass boycott campaign and the dependence of the farmworkers' leadership on AFL-CIO financial support.

So if it turns out that the AFL-CIO does sanction the boycotts, we should use that as a peg to project what we think could be done with the support, even if it's mainly ceremonial on the part of Meany.

The YSA in preparation for its convention is asking the locals to send in reports on what our work in the different areas has been and the problems we've run up against, so that we can get a more rounded picture. Given the fact that the YSA locals and party branches for the most part, have gotten involved in this boycott activity, it's important that we project more of a clear perspective for our comrades to push for.

We should consider projecting a special effort around the question of getting the farmworkers included under the provisions of the National Labor Relations Act covering the question of certification elections for unions. We have a perfect opportunity because there's a lot of liberal Democrats that claim to support the farmworkers. The Democrats control Congress and some heat should be put on the Congress to take action, for these Democrats to introduce legislation or whatever's necessary to amend the National Labor Relations Act, which excluded farmworkers from the very beginning. That would be another important thing that would give our work more focus.

Kerry:

Boycotts are very tricky, very difficult, probably the most difficult kind of action to carry through. One thing of course that the farmworkers have in their favor is that there is a great latent sympathy for them. There's been a lot of publicity about the discrimination and the exploitation, about the fact that they've been ground down in poverty. There have been magazine articles, television programs and so forth. This sympathy for them has been their biggest asset in the boycott.

That's why the grape boycott was successful. It was a very simple boycott: just don't buy grapes, don't eat grapes. It became generally known throughout the country and that section that was in general sympathy with the labor movement, the liberals and the militant activists, thought this to be a very small sacrifice, not to eat grapes. Even so, it was still five years, five years, before they were able to succeed.

Now the farmworkers are in a much more complicated situation than before. It's not only a question of making it known that people should avoid buying grapes or eating grapes. Now they've added lettuce and lettuce is a slightly different matter. Lettuce is a common staple of most families. And what's involved is a special kind of lettuce. It's not all lettuce. It's the iceberg lettuce. And now they've added certain brands of wine.

Up to now, up to the meeting of the AFL-CIO council, there was another factor and that is that the AFL-CIO has never endorsed the boycott. And even if they do decide to do it, there is the question of what this means. The impression I got is that they were trying to act very cagily, very warily, about the boycott, pending the action by the leaders of the AFL-CIO. I read their convention paper, for example, where they said nothing about a boycott of the A&P and Safeway.

Meany's concept of a boycott is putting somebody on the unfair list. That's what he means by a boycott. He doesn't mean that you go out and picket people, throw picket lines in front of stores. If you put a picket line around an A&P store, or a Safeway store, or some other supermarket, the clerks inside belong to a union. What should they do? Shall they go through the picket line or shall they honor the picket line? If they honor the picket line, the place would shut down. That's what you want to do, shut it down. But the clerks have a contract, and there's a law against secondary boycotts. It raises all sorts of complicated questions for Meany and Co. No, they don't want that kind of a boycott.

So we've got to recognize that if the Chavez leadership engages in the kind of a boycott that can be effective, they're going to come into head-on conflict with Meany and Co., and I don't know whether Chavez is prepared to do it or not. That remains to be seen. The way they've been conducting the boycott up to now has been in effect a farce. There's been no boycott at all. They're sending farmworkers from California to New York. To do what? To hunt down markets to picket. The only reason I can see for it is to make them feel that they're doing something and that they're engaging in some kind of an action. There would be no lack of pickets in the city of New York. If you have a real active boycott campaign here, and you're calling for pickets for action against an A&P or a Grand Union or a Daitch or some other store, you know you could have 300-400 pickets without importing them from California. That's not the problem. The problem is what sort of problem would you run into if the AFL-CIO doesn't support the pickets.

You also have the question of the Teamsters. The Teamsters are not a homogeneous organization. The Teamsters in New York probably couldn't care less about this gambit that Fitzsimmons is pulling out in California. They may find it a little embarrassing. Anyway, you put a picket line in front of these supermarkets, in addition to the clerks organized, you run into the organized Teamsters, all kinds of locals of Teamsters: the bread drivers, the egg drivers, and the vegetable drivers, in addition to the over-the-road drivers and the drivers in the big trucks.

But, from our point of view, Meany's type of a boycott is absolutely meaningless. We're not concerned with that kind of a boycott. We're interested in the kind of an action that we had in the fight against the Vietnam war. We'll run into these people

that want to give individual testimony. All right. They played a role in the antiwar movement, true. But our concept was to organize, to mobilize as large a number of people as we could, for mass action.

So, if you have 250 pickets available in the city of New York, the thing is not to send one out to each of 200 stores, but to put the 200 in front of one of the A&P stores, and you shut it down. That's the way you're going to get publicity. That's the way you're going to get recognition.

We don't have people inside of the United Farm Workers Union, unfortunately. We act in sympathy, with whatever support we can give them. But, if they're not carrying out an effective policy, the question is: Isn't it our duty to criticize this policy and to point out what would be an effective policy? If they demonstrated their incapacity to shut down production, to prevent working of the fields with scab labor, or non-union labor, then the only alternative is an effective boycott movement, however long it takes.

The UFW and the boycott supporters are up against some tough competition. The agricultural owners in California, they've been through these struggles from the very beginning.

We do have contacts in some areas with some of the organizers of the boycott. Maybe we could try to influence the direction of their politics. It's unclear what the AFL-CIO will do, but if they do sanction the boycott, this opens up, for example, an approach to all the AFL-CIO councils in every city in the country, once the national council goes on record to support the boycott, you can approach every union, every council. Not only every council, but every union affiliated to the council, or affiliated directly to the AFL-CIO council. You can ask for financial support. You can ask for pickets. You can ask for all kinds of things. When a picket line is going to be established, you contact a union and say, "Keep your members out."

Most unions, in order to get around the secondary boycott ban in the Landrum-Griffin Act, have written into their contracts a clause which provides that their members do not have to work under unsafe working conditions, precisely to get around this. And a picket line makes it unsafe for a worker to go to work if there's a picket line around the workplace. At any rate, I say it opens up all kinds of opportunities, providing they follow through with a militant policy and not with Meany's policy. Up to now, it hasn't been one or the other.

Just an illustration of how they've been conducting this thing: Three pickets showed up one day in front of the Daitch's that's right next to our apartment. One was lined up against the wall. The other two were the active ones. They were spelling each other off. They distributed a leaflet. The leaflet was something about "Boycott Daitch's, Boycott Lettuce." It wasn't clear whether they were asking you not to go into Daitch's or just not to buy the lettuce and grapes.

So I asked them, "What do you want people to do? Your leaflet isn't clear. Is it all right to go in if you don't buy lettuce and grapes? Are you just boycotting these products or are you boycotting the establishment?"

"Well, we prefer you don't go in," I said, "All right, I

won't go in. But do you know that you're in an area that's 95% Spanish speaking. Many of these people who are walking in and out don't read English. If you're going to have a successful action here, at least you should have leaflets in Spanish, asking them to support the farmworkers."

It's an indication that there's some ineptness and some incompetence in the way they conduct this sort of an action. And this can only lead to demoralization, that's true.

In either the farmworkers report of their convention, or in the Guardian, Chavez boasts that they have more money now than when they had all the contracts with the grape growers and the lettuce growers. That's through the donations, contributions, of the AFL-CIO, the Auto Workers and so on. More money, and they've got a bigger apparatus. For this type of an action you need a bigger apparatus than you do for conducting regular union activity confined to California and whatever other areas they have contracts in. But this is not going to last indefinitely. And they are completely dependent upon this source. If this is the kind of a campaign they're conducting, then they become completely dependent upon Meany and upon Woodcock and Co., and others who are giving money -- often a sort of conscience money. It doesn't mean very much to them to give a few hundred, a few thousand, a few hundred thousand, or even a few million or so for the AFL-CIO. It doesn't mean as much as, say, for the Retail Clerks to tell their clerks not to go to a picket line. That would be serious support. And that's the thing that's going to be decisive in this kind of an action.

Even if necessary -- we resorted to this I remember in the oilworkers boycott in California when the oilworkers local entered into opposition from the international. The international was opposed to a boycott. So we said, all right, you're not in a position now when you're in a life-and-death struggle with Standard Oil to take on a fight with your international. So set the boycott committee up as an independent committee. So the union doesn't take responsibility for it. At the same time, put a representative of the union on the committee, as a link. They you say, these people have set up this committee to boycott, to help us. We've got no control over it, what they do, their politics. That may be necessary if it's necessary to get around this problem created by the opposition, which I'm sure you're going to get from Meany and Co., for any kind of mass action, for any kind of an effective boycott.

I know that the only effective way to conduct a boycott will be the way the antiwar movement conducted its actions, even if on a smaller scale. The same people who were involved in the antiwar movement would mobilize, would rally, to an action that, if they saw it was a serious action, was in support of the United Farm Workers. There's no love for the Teamster bureaucrats and there is a lot of sympathy for the farmworkers. And this sympathy has to be tapped, and the only way to do it is by showing that you intend to conduct a serious campaign. Otherwise, you're going to demoralize your own people and you're not going to rally any kind of support.

Another aspect of it is one that Joel mentioned about the National Labor Relations Act, this monstrous injustice done to farmworkers. That was the deal Roosevelt made with the Southern Dixiecrats, because the South then was overwhelmingly agricultural.

They excluded the farmworkers from the National Labor Relations Act, from section 7a. Therefore, the Teamsters or anybody else can go in and sign these sweetheart agreements and they cannot demand a National Labor Relations Board election to determine who represents the majority of the workers.

It's the Democrats, even more than the Republicans, who have been in office ever since Roosevelt, that have been responsible for this omission, or for the perpetuation of it. From time to time some of them, I've noticed, have introduced amendments to get the act amended. But it's never been very serious and Meany and Co., never mounted any serious attempt at having it amended. Now the United Farm Workers have adopted a resolution at their convention demanding that this be amended. But they're not really putting the heat on people. When a Kennedy speaks there, they don't even put the heat on Kennedy.

There again, it would mean conflict with Democratic politicians and they're not very enthusiastic about that. That's a political issue and on a political issue it's not excluded, you know, to have a demonstration in Washington against both the Democrats and the Republicans around this sort of thing. I mean there are all kinds of possibilities, once you decide on embarking on a real boycott campaign, the kind of a campaign that's going to be effective. But otherwise, nothing's going to happen.

Lovell:

This thing took a new turn after those two farmworkers were killed in California. It was at that point that the UFW withdrew its pickets in the fields. What it amounted to was virtually calling off the strike. Then they dispersed the farmworkers all over the country to conduct the boycott.

There's a certain amount of demoralization. They don't get any direction from Chavez or from the central leadership. They're just told to go out and picket, and they just go out. Here in New York, they've been at the wholesale houses. They're concentrating on forcing some of these supermarkets to sign agreements not to handle the lettuce and grapes. And they've got a whole list of supermarket managers who have signed agreements not to handle lettuce or grapes. But it doesn't mean very much to have gotten these agreements because they are not able to enforce them.

Up to now, especially when the strike was going on, the local unions within the central labor councils, endorsed the strike, endorsed the boycott and gave money and have encouraged the farmworkers in many cities. Individual unions, especially where our comrades were able to work with contacts or where we had comrades in the unions, took actions in support.

They ran into trouble with the meatcutters in some areas and with the retail clerks, because of the problem that Tom mentioned. The unions ask, if you put a picket line up somewhere, should our members cross the picket line? Then there was another added consideration: they said the boycott is effective and it's putting some of our people out of work. It wasn't true. Some of their people were being put out of work, but for other reasons, not because of the picket lines. They used that as an excuse and, in the case of the meatcutters in some areas -- particularly Cleveland -- they were interested in maintaining friendly relations with the Teamsters union and didn't want to get involved.

We tried to figure out what we would do in this situation. We were operating with very small forces and with people over whom we have no control whatsoever. Our whole strategy was to try to get formal agreement with the union movement or some sectors of the union movement -- and we thought we had a cover when the AFL-CIO endorsed and gave money to the UFW -- to begin to move in whatever forces we could in conjunction with whatever students the YSA was in contact with, and to help establish picket lines wherever we could. That presumed that the farmworkers would work out the whole campaign in a particular area, would want to have big forces, would want to concentrate on something, a particular supermarket.

One of the top leaders of the UFW is here in New York and she's quite sympathetic to these ideas, but nothing is really done about them. In the meantime, there is a good deal of demoralization. I think one of the reasons for it is that they've given up the strike in California.

It's not true that what they're doing now is different than what they did in the '60s, in '63-63-64. They did exactly the same thing. They have more forces of their own now, but they don't attract the same forces in support of the boycott movement as they did in 1963. That's because the campuses haven't taken up the boycott in the same way.

They are also relying on some legislation. In California, they're trying to get state legislation passed to give them the right to an election. That's a long-term project for them. They say they don't want to get caught up in the NLRB, the Taft-Hartley provision, that prohibits secondary boycotts. The Teamsters are demanding that they be put under the provisions of the Taft-Hartley law that prevents such a boycott. So, it works both ways. They don't want to be under this provision of the law, but they would like to be covered by the other provision which allows for votes to determine who is the collective bargainer. Nothing much can come of that. Chavez writes letters to Cranston.

I think we should continue to attempt to influence the boycott activities in those areas where we have comrades who can be active in it. They'll certainly welcome any support they can get, if we can mobilize any support on the campus for them, if we can get any unions involved. It's no problem: you just make a motion and everybody says "aye." They'll vote for motions. They'll give money. All the union papers that I read carry reports about the farmworkers, about their convention, about the murders in the fields, about the strike, about the boycott. It's largely a problem of the leadership of the UFW trying to get their forces together in the fields to continue the strike and organize the boycott differently.

We can influence that to the extent that we have some forces to help them. Wherever we have comrades in unions, we have established a very good working relationship in several cities.

I know that as a result of our campaign, The Militant has a very high standing among the farmworkers. Many of them look to The Militant, from all reports that I get, and I think that it has impressed others in the milieu.

Jeness:

I think that part of our problem is that one of the key wea-

pons that this very weak union has is the boycott. The strike is a very hard thing to maintain in this situation. It is very difficult to have successful mass picketings in these types of fields. Pickets from other unions have to come many miles into the fields and so on. Whatever, the boycott is the economic weapon that they have chosen, announced. But they haven't really pursued it in any kind of serious way. As far as I know, there's no effective national leadership, they haven't made their paper into a national campaigner for the boycott. There's no national organizers sent out to really spark the boycott campaign, no dramatic actions that would give some kind of publicity to it.

I think the potential for this boycott is great. I think there's possibilities in terms of getting support from the union movement, for getting rank-and-file union members to participate, for getting big large-scale rallies to help publicize it. I think the objective basis exists now. The problem is the strategy and the line that the farmworkers are taking towards it.

You get the sense and the feeling that the central leadership is not really committed and serious about the thing. It makes it very difficult from a practical standpoint for us to get involved. Our involvement has been uneven depending upon the unevenness of the local leadership. Wherever there's a local leader of the UFW who's been a little bit more on the ball, they've done a little bit more, relatively. When I was in Boston last week, I asked the comrades how it was going there. They said that they've pretty much signed up the small chains and they were now picketing A&P. But there was no clear indication whether they were keeping the small chains bound to their contracts. I know in New York, they've been trying to do the small chains now, but I was told that there are some legalities so that they can't get signed contracts. They just make verbal agreements, no signed agreements whatsoever. So they say, "Yes, we agree. We'll do this." And then it just ends, unless you can have some kind of way of continually enforcing it, going in and checking and so on, which they haven't been doing in New York and probably it's very unlikely in other cities. It's not a serious way of organizing any kind of boycott.

So we've tried, through what influence we have, to give some kind of focus, that is, suggest larger scale picketing, rallies, get some speakers and use that to publicize the boycott and so on.

I think we have a responsibility to, not in a sharp polemical way or anything, but in some way to get out our ideas on this, because some of the people we're working with are very responsive. I think it would help in clarifying to people we work with and who might become demoralized -- who are becoming demoralized -- to explain why this is happening and what would be a better way. This would be all in the framework of total support for the boycott and the struggle.

Barnes:

I think we have to make some alterations in relation to the farmworkers struggle in the way we handle it in our paper and in our activity. I think we took a very important initiative in regard to this struggle and it was a correct move to make. What has transpired on the whole has more than borne out the way we thought about it, and why we wanted to get involved in it.

But there are real problems involved now. One is there's an

objective problem with the struggle, with the farmworkers. They are victims of gross misleadership. They are victims of the relationship of forces. They're victims of the whole way the labor movement has approached the struggle, including their leaders, who are simultaneously both misleaders and victims of the bureaucrats of the labor movement. I think there is a problem. I agree with Frank that part of it revolves around the character of the response to the shootings, which really more than anything reflected the capacities of the farmworkers' leadership and the labor movement and the relationship of forces rather than any big decision.

Secondly is the character of the boycott campaign -- what it's doing, what it's not doing. The involvement of some of the farmworkers families around the country is a double-edged thing. In one sense it could have been an aspect that could move the struggle forward if used right. If not used right -- as has generally been the case -- it becomes a further demoralizing factor.

The objective problem, as Tom outlined it, I think is correct. The character of the boycott and the results of the boycott are lagging behind what is needed, what can possibly lead to victory. That's one side of it. The other side is what we are doing. We've got a lot of people involved in this work and we've made recruits already out of this work and we've got friends, contacts, readers of our press, among some of the farmworkers, among some of the people who are boycotters and supporters of the boycott.

Our comrades are among the best supporters of, best builders of the campaign. But more and more we can get in a position of drifting along. When a new vegetable is announced to be boycotted, we say "Right." The Militant says "Right." Or when a new store is announced, "Right, right." And it starts drifting into making the record, a certain routine, a certain individual witness by people urging people not to do this, and it begins affecting us. We can become accomplices in the drift of the boycott and the inefficiency, and victims of it simultaneously.

I say this not because I think we've exhausted what we can gain out of this and what we can do in this, but because I think we have to make a turn. For a new life to be put into the struggle of the farmworkers, it has to move along the lines that Tom suggested. We agree on that. The boycott has to become more organized. It has to become more focused. And unless the character of it can be changed, unless it becomes more focused, unless the labor movement, other than individuals, can be drawn in certain ways to it, it's going to continue to drift.

Specifically, there's two things we should do. One is we can change what we're writing in The Militant a little bit. Find a way -- not to paint some grand strategy because it becomes a little pretentious and it doesn't solve the thing -- but find a way in the paper to say what could be done, to lay out the kind of campaign necessary. I don't see why it has to zero in on some attack on the farmworkers' leaders. No. There's a boycott that's supposed to be effective to contribute to winning this struggle. The Militant can certainly contribute to what kind of boycott could be effective and how to carry it out.

Maybe we can take the peg of clarifying what the AFL-CIO actually did at its convention. It's a peg. That is, if they're on the record now to win the boycott, to honor the boycott. We

can use that as the excuse for an article or two on how to use this, what this means, what it could mean.

The other possibility is that in one or the other of these cities where there is a more effective leadership, where we have more influence, etc., we review it a little bit, set a pattern of activities, do a couple things that are just the right model to pick up on a national scale, and report these in this way, as models. And we should start talking about some of the problems of the boycott, of the weaknesses of the boycott with other activists in the struggle.

Waters:

It strikes me that one of the very important things is finding some way to explain exactly what is the character of the boycott as a weapon, both its strengths and its weaknesses. I remember the first time I had heard this discussed was when we had the discussion around the question of the oilworkers boycott. I remember the discussion that we had around that in the National Committee and the PC at that time. I had never thought it through before and I'm sure that comrades are running into the same kind of questions around the boycott campaign on the farmworkers. Most of our membership, hundreds of comrades, have never had to think through this problem before, much less sympathizers and people who are active in the boycott movement itself.

I think that trying to deal with some of these questions in an educational way, explaining what are the problems with a boycott, why is it wrong to keep adding every few days a new product that you're boycotting, how that can sometimes weaken your fight rather than strengthen it, we can find ways to discuss these things within this context of support for and building the campaign.

Dobbs:

I think it's important to keep in mind several points that Jack made about our effort to mobilize support for the farmworkers. It took place within the framework of the development of the strike movement in the fields of California. We had here a section of the working class in motion on a struggle basis, where there was the minimum possibility of some kind of a give-away compromise on the part of the leadership to cut short the struggle.

It began with a body of workers who, in the last analysis, haven't got a thing to lose. I say that because even if they lose the fight, what are they going to be out of? They're going to be right back where they were when they started the fight. They've been at the absolute mercy of the corporate power, and all the agencies of government that operate behind them. They've been confronted with trojan indifference on the part of the trade-union bureaucracy. They've been confronted with the most flagrant kinds of disregard on the part of the capitalist government, as characterized by the fact that they have not been granted such minimal social concessions as for instance the right to elections on the question of union recognition or minimum wage laws that have been granted through federally enacted laws to the working class as a whole.

It's a qualitatively different form of struggle within the

working class at the trade-union level today than exists generally in the trade-union movement. We took that as a point of departure. The key thing was that here was a section of the working class that was ready to battle and make sacrifices. There's been a very deeply inherent capacity to struggle on the part of these workers.

They're misled. They're misled for more than one reason. They're misled in part because they're in the process of trying to throw up a leadership in the course of this struggle. Vacillation is not the only characteristic you want to give to Chavez. Greenness in leading struggle is also a very paramount characteristic. Even if he had all the fighting will in the world -- which he hasn't got -- he still hasn't got all the savvy it takes to lead a struggle. I pick Chavez just as an example. And if he's an example of it, it's safe to say that that's a general characterization of the forces in this movement of the farmworkers.

That becomes further complicated by the fact that they're being played fast and loose with by the AFL-CIO hierarchy. And it becomes further complicated by the fact that they're up against another section of the trade-union bureaucracy, the Teamsters, who are striving to cut their throats. And you got Meany toe-dancing around in this situation. You remember one of our points of departure in this campaign was that one of our key tasks was to explode the myth that the Teamsters were trying to generate that this was a jurisdictional fight. It's important to keep a very careful balance sheet on this question. How did we do on that question? How many people are there in this country that really believe that it's a jurisdictional fight? Hasn't it become a rather widespread matter of consciousness among the people that behind the facade of a claim of a jurisdictional fight, that the Teamster bureaucrats are working hand in glove with the corporation farmers in California to smash the farmworkers union? We weren't the only ones that contributed to that, but I submit that the efforts that we put in, the work we have done through The Militant, through all the diverse forms of contact that we have with broader layers of militants in the population as a whole, we've made a very important contribution to blasting that facade aside. And that step alone was very important in opening the way for the rise of some new consciousness in this struggle.

If it's not a jurisdictional fight, what's going on? What's it mean if one section of the movement is in collaboration with the bosses, is trying to destroy another section of the movement? Right away it tells you something about the mores of the whole top leadership of the trade-union movement today that opens the way for some new forms of education. I think we have made a certain advance in the course of this fight in showing more clearly to people who are beginning to think about it what the nature of a trade-union bureaucracy is and why rank-and-file democracy in the labor movement is so important. And I think there's not an inconsequential number of rank-and-filers in other unions that have got a new consciousness on this question.

The thing that has developed here with respect to a new consciousness about bureaucracy doesn't begin and end with the Teamsters either. Something very important has happened with regard to the AFL-CIO as Tom remarked rather cogently. Their notion of a boycott is qualitatively different from our approach to such an instrument. They look at a boycott primarily as a substitute for any other form of struggle. And I think one could safely make book

that in the minds of those bureaucrats gathered at that AFL-CIO convention, one of the things they're hoping is that by giving lip service to the idea of a boycott, they can help cool down this struggle that's led to shootings of pickets out there in California fields, which is the last thing in the world they want.

But then they begin to maneuver around. And some new consciousness develops out of that. We see for instance a Meany serving as a go-between with Fitzsimmons. And now, coinciding as it did with the Watergate thing, a number of interesting things have come out which told another aspect of the story: the relation between the bureaucrats and the Democrats.

I think it's important to keep these things in mind when you talk about this question because it's something more than just a question of whether a union can win or lose a fight that we're talking about and that we had in mind from the outset in this struggle. We were concerned with what can be done by a revolutionary party, commensurate with its forces and its resources, in the given objective situation that will (1) help these workers so far as possible to win their struggle, and (2) no matter how the struggle comes out, help the working class to have a little clearer consciousness of what the problem of the rank-and-file in the trade-union movement is. That is, education about what is needed in fighting for their rights and education about what these union bureaucrats are in their totality and why it's so very important to get this bureaucratic excrescence out of the labor movement and restore rank-and-file democracy.

Naturally, it doesn't follow from that that we're indifferent about the struggle. We want the farmworkers to win and we want to do everything we can to help win that struggle. But in addition to the question of how this particular struggle in and of itself comes out, there is the other question and, in the last analysis, in class terms, the larger question, of what can be done to advance struggle consciousness in the ranks of the American working class. Don't forget that the accumulated knowledge of the labor movement has not been gained entirely out of strike victories. Defeats have been a part of that. And even if the farmworkers struggle is defeated, there remains whatever residual consciousness that can be generated in such a fight. And that's an advance for the class as a whole, or for a growing section of the class.

I think it's with those thoughts in mind that we should approach this question of the boycott. Here I agree with Tom. We've got to have one aim throughout: what can realistically be done first of all, by such forces as are objectively at hand to bring some support to the farmworkers at this time. And then, two, what can realistically be done in terms of our forces and resources to intervene and try to set such broader forces as there are in motion.

How do we approach it? Well, we approach it in a certain sense much like we did in the case of the antiwar movement. We didn't start in the antiwar movement by printing a whole damned program: this is action A and we go to step B and step C, you got to do this and don't forget item C and so on. We didn't do that at all. We started in trying to (1) mobilize such forces as were extant, that were ready, able and willing to make a public protest against the Vietnam war. We mobilized those forces. We set some objectives for the struggle in our fight with the sectarians on the one side and the reformists on the other, about

what the key aim, the key slogans and so on in the fight should be. Then we began to look for opportunities for projecting actions that in and of themselves would not change things overnight, but would have a certain degree of significance, would be looked upon as a limited success, as a matter of not inconsequential significance in the struggle and in this way, try to develop an ascending pattern of momentum in support.

What makes this boycott movement qualitatively different from anything that the union bureaucrats even conceived is that it's a boycott based on a movement of support to a struggle, not a substitute for struggle, which is the bureaucrats' idea. And within that, if it's possible -- it remains to be seen, we don't know -- but if it's possible to really get some significant boycott actions going that would have a little bite, you'll see all kinds of crawling and squealing on the part of the bureaucrats. That ain't what they meant at all.

They'll make a lot of problems, but there's two sides to that too. While they can make problems in the building of the boycott movement, they also contribute to making some further advances in teaching young fighters what kinds of creatures they are, that they even try to crawl out and they sabotage when you try and carry out their own slogans.

About the leadership of the UFW, well, here, they're in battle. We try in every possible way we can to help them. We don't of course attack them like we would attack Fitzsimmons or any treachery on Meany's part with respect to mounting a boycott campaign for the farmworkers. We always make our criticisms within the framework of a consciousness that this is an embattled union and before everything else must have support and we make our criticisms in a somewhat more direct form in the sense of projecting what it means. And rather than projecting this in the form of criticizing them for not doing it, it seems to me that one of our tasks now is to see what we can do in the objective potential here, to get some things set in motion in the name of the support movement that the UFW should be doing.

Now, how much can we do? I don't know, I don't think anybody knows. But I submit that what is involved here is not a question of whether or not the boycott can save the strike. What is involved in the last analysis is not whether or not the strike is won, although we want to do everything we can to help win that strike. What is involved in the last analysis, is that we have played an important part in getting going the only kinds of things that can make it possible for these workers to win some kind of a victory. And, as the relationship of forces in the situation stands right now, it's only a support movement from outside the ranks of the UFW that can help them in a truly meaningful way against the way they've been snookered between the Teamsters on the one side and Meany and Co., on the other, and the weakness and wobbling of their leaders on the third side. It's the only kind of thing that can help them and it's worth a try. It's not only worth a try, but it seems objectively the thing to do from the point of view of this struggle itself.

Everything that applied from the outset applies here. The very least that will happen if we try to do a thing like this, we'll have the possibility of developing some consciousness a little more.

And, in the process of the whole thing, we'll pick up some sympathizers for ourselves, we'll recruit a member here and there in the process, and our press will become a somewhat more effective instrument than it has been because we'll be able to reach into some new quarters as we've been able to do thus far in the farmworkers campaign, and win some people who will become real friends of The Militant.

Kerry:

Chavez and his group have set out to do what has never been done in California. There has never been a stable organization of field workers in California. There have been many attempts by many different organizations and temporarily sometimes a strike has been won and a union set up.

We were involved in this when I first entered the party. One of my first assignments was in the agricultural workers strike in Los Angeles county, as vice-president of the workers alliance. And other comrades were involved. The Communist Party during its third period was successful in conducting extremely militant strikes of a limited character and establishing for a very limited time a temporary organization. But nobody's ever been successful. I think it was Jim who said at that time that it would be easier to have the socialist revolution than to have a stable union organization of the field workers in California. You're not fighting just the grape growers. You're fighting the whole financial structure in California. The whole financial establishment is intimately linked with the agricultural economy.

Chavez says, "Well, it took us five years the first time and if necessary we'll do it again." But there's not going to be the second time around of an analogous character as the grape boycott. They're confronting a united opposition not only of the grape growers and the lettuce growers, but of a whole agricultural economy and of the financial structure of California. The first victory was an anomaly for Chavez. Chavez never won it in a strike. He won it through the boycott. An anomaly. It's the first time in the history of the American labor movement and certainly in the history of the organization of the California agricultural fields that this was done. In order to solve the problem of the character of the labor as migrant labor, he had to establish a hiring hall. The hiring hall system was the only system that had been devised that can cope with the character of this labor force as a moving labor force.

The Teamsters organized the shed workers, the workers that worked in the packing houses or the sheds, and the cannery workers but no AFL-CIO union would even bother with the field workers. They weren't even interested, because it's nothing but a headache to them.

There can be no single repetition of the first boycott movement because this time they're prepared. It's like we say there's not going to be a repetition of the Cuban development in Latin America because this time they're prepared. They're not going to permit him to do it. If necessary, they're going to emulate what the newspaper employers do here, what the aviation employers do, that is, pool their resources and finance some grower who is being hurt by that kind of a boycott. It's going to take some doing, I can tell you, something that has never been accomplished in the

history of the American labor movement.

Nevertheless, in the course of conducting the struggle, we can build the type of movement that can contribute to what Farrell contributed a large part of his remarks to, the developing consciousness of the workers, and what it is they're up against and what kind of a union is going to be required.

There are two divergent perspectives that Chavez faces now. One is reliance on Meany and Meany's negotiations with Fitzsimmons. But that's not going to work because the growers have already announced that they don't care if the contracts with the Teamsters are abrogated. That doesn't mean they're going to sign contracts with the United Farm Workers. They say they won't. And there's only one way that the farmworkers can compel them to and that is to strike. But the farmworkers don't have the forces to win a strike because they're not only striking against the growers. They're also striking against the whole military structure of California: the deputies and the cops and the National Guard.

So they'll have to fall back again on the boycott. There is no other alternative for them but the boycott. The way it was done before, but not the kind of a boycott that was successful before. That is not going to go, and that's what we've got to say in The Militant. Yes, a boycott can do it, but a boycott of an altogether different character because here's what you're up against. These are the forces that are allied against you. This is what happens when you try to exercise your right to strike, your members are shot down in the fields by the armed gangsters that they call deputies.

I think that if we could develop a militant boycott movement, at least we'd give them a fight, even if it doesn't result in the organization or the establishment of a stable union, which to me is very doubtful. It would serve to contribute, not only to the development of the consciousness of the union members, but to the consciousness of these young militants, of the militants who were in the antiwar movement, of the students on the campus, of these young militants who support this struggle. It'll be a lesson for them of what kind of system, what kind of a class you're confronted with, where the most deprived, the most exploited section of the working class, just wanting a few more pennies, has to carry out a struggle of a revolutionary character. They have to carry on a revolutionary struggle for the most miserly reform.

We should try to feel that our role is not so much just to record what they say or record what is happening, but to analyze, to analyze what the problem is and what kind of a struggle is necessary to win.

There's a long history of struggle in that state, long and bloody. These weren't the first two workers who were killed. Many many workers were killed in the fields, shot down by these thugs. One thing is sacrosanct. You can organize the longshoremens. You can organize the Teamsters. You can organize everybody in sight. But stay away from the migrant workers, stay away from the field workers. Stay away from what is the backbone of the exploited labor in California.