

by the United Farm Workers September 1988

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Message from Dolores Huerta

As this issue of *Food and Justice* is being written, Cesar Chavez is slowly recuperating from the punishing ordeal of a 36-day, water-only fast he started on July 17 and ended on August 21.

There can be no doubt that two of the three goals of his Fast for Life were fully realized: the first, an act of "purification of my own body, soul, and mind" in order to feel more deeply the "sufferings of farm workers and their children," and the second, "an act of penance for those... who know what is right and just, who know that they could or should do more, who have become bystanders and thus collaborators with an industry that does not care about its workers." It was painfully clear to those of us who observed his steady physical deterioration throughout the five-week fast that he had endured more than enough purification of himself and penance for others.

Remaining to be fulfilled is the third and last goal: that people everywhere "will begin a great movement of non-cooperation with supermarkets... who promote and sell and profit from California table grapes and who are just as culpable as those who manufacture the poisons and use them on workers, on our land, and on our food."

Signs of the potential fulfillment of that goal are presented in the last pages of this issue — the chain of fasting the Reverend Jesse Jackson and many others vowed to continue as well as a host of boycott actions people have begun carrying out in front of supermarkets across the country.

We join Cesar in his hope that millions of people "will resist, in a myriad of nonviolent ways, the presence of grapes in the stores where they shop."



In a dramatic moment at the conclusion of the Mass ending Cesar Chavez' Fast for Life, the Reverend Jesse Jackson accepts the 36th wooden cross, kisses Chavez' hands, and vows to fast three days before passing it to other leaders to continue the chain of fasting. Joining in the applause are Chavez' wife, Helen (far left), and, next to her, Ethel Kennedy. Only moments earlier, the late Senator Robert F. Kennedy's widow broke bread with Chavez to end his 36-day water fast.



For 35 Days, Water...

Two-year-old Nicole Chavez shares a few moments of silence with her grandfather during a meditation period at the daily evening religious service.

After struggling for several months against a "powerful urge" raging within him, Cesar Chavez finally abandoned resistance and on July 17 embarked upon a water-only fast that would not end until August 21, the 36th day, when Ethel Kennedy would break bread with him and the Reverend Jesse Jackson would vow to fast three days as the first link in a chain of fasting that would be carried on by others throughout the U.S., Canada, and Mexico.

The day before he started fasting, Chavez left La Paz, headquarters of the United Farm Workers near Bakersfield, and went to the UFW's Forty Acres in Delano, part of which is known as Agbayani Village, a home for retired farm workers. There he entered a simple room he would remain in for more than five weeks, leaving it only for an hour each day to attend an evening Mass or Jewish or Protestant services at a hall in the union's nearby field office.

There, in that little room for 35 days — sustained by water, immersed in solitude, kept company by the Bible and the works of Gandhi and Martin Luther King Jr., ministered to by his wife Helen, monitored by worried doctors, encouraged by compassionate visitors, and, most consoling, strengthened by the daily prayers of crowds of farm workers and friends — Chavez fasted.

It wasn't the first time. Twenty years earlier, also at Forty Acres, Chavez had fasted for 25 days in a do-or-die effort to get farm workers in his fledgling union to turn away from the temptation to use violence against those who were then, and are today, their most oppressive overlords — California table grape growers.

But this time the fast was undertaken to combat something more widespread than farm workers seeing violent resistance as the solution to their problems. This fast was aimed at shattering the apathy among his own staff and union members and jar-

ring the consciences of moral leaders and activists who could and should have been doing more to help relieve the suffering of farm workers and their families. This fast, he knew from the beginning, would require more purging and more penance than any he had undertaken before.

Chavez showed no reluctance to point the finger of shame first at himself. In a statement issued at the outset of the fast, he asked: "Do we carry in our hearts the sufferings of farm workers and their children?...Do we feel their pain deeply enough?" His answer: "I know I don't — and I am ashamed." The fast, then, would be first and foremost "for the purification of my own body, mind and soul." He also expressed shame for his own staff and union members for taking too lightly the dangers caused by "those who grow and sell the poisoned food we all eat."

From self-purification Chavez moved to penance. His fast, he said, would also be an act of penance for "those in positions of moral authority and for all men and women activists who know what is right and just" but who through inaction have allowed themselves to "become bystanders and thus collaborators with an industry that does not care about its work-

ers" as well as silent partners with "supermarkets who sell and profit from California table grapes and who are just as culpable as those who manufacture the poisons and those who use them on workers, on our land and on our food."

And so for 35 days, Chavez sipped the waters of purification and penance, meditated and prayed, felt his body gradually grow weaker from a loss of more than 30 pounds, patiently tolerated the repeated examinations of anxious doctors, watched with pangs of guilt as a loving wife and family suffered with him but did not try to dissuade him from what he felt compelled to do, met with notable visitors who promised support, acknowledged gratefully hundreds of letters and telegrams from friends and supporters, rejoiced at the growing number of farm workers and friends who came each night to pray with and for him, and, hard as it was, resisted the well-meant advice from many to end his dangerous fast by answering quietly but firmly, "When the time is right, I'll know."

After 35 days, Chavez knew the right time had come: time for the waters to subside, time for bread.



Throughout the fast, farm workers from near and far came to Delano to pray with Chavez and offer encouragement. Besides many priests who came to celebrate Mass, Jewish services were conducted by Rabbi Albert Lewis of Temple Isaiah in Los Angeles and Rabbi Jerry Goldstein of the Hillel Foundation at Cal State University-Northridge and Protestant services by the Reverend E. Garcia of nearby McFarland's La Iglesia del Buen Pastor. Other participants included President Olga Sierra Sandman and religious leaders of National Farm Worker Ministry.



On August 4, members of the late Senator Robert F. Kennedy family paid the first of two visits to Chavez. Pictured at a press conference with UFW First Vice-President Dolores Huerta are, left to right, Douglas, Kathleen Kennedy Townsend, and Kerry. Twenty years ago, just three months before his assassination, Senator Kennedy broke break with Chavez when he ended a 25-day fast for nonviolence.



After their visit with Chavez and the press conference, the Kennedys — Kerry, Douglas (obscured), Kathleen and daughter Maeve — join farm workers on a picket line in front of the Save Mart supermarket in Delano.

Every day of the fast, one of Chavez' grandchildren or a farm worker child — on one occasion, Jennifer Shepherd, a victim of leukemia from the cancer-cluster town of Fowler — placed a homemade wooden cross on the altar backdrop during the offering of gifts at Mass. At right, during the Kennedy visit on the 19th day of the fast, Kathleen Kennedy Townsend's daughter Maeve hangs up the symbol of suffering.



On August 8, a large contingent of celebrities visited Chavez on the 23rd day of his Fast for Life and then held a press conference. Several stars issued individual statements before answering questions from the media. Above, actor Martin Sheen invites the celebrities to stand and pray with him for an end to the pesticide poisoning that endangers farm workers and consumers. From left to right are Lou Diamond Phillips, Charles Haid, Mike Farrell (back row), Eddie Olmos, Eddie Albert, Ruben Blades (back row), Sheen, Robert Blake, Julie Carmen, Daphne Zuniga, and Carlos Palomino. Not shown are Emilio Estevez, Max Gail, Rose Portillo, and several other stars seated near the table.

Declaring his support for the grape boycott as the best means to restore farm worker rights and fight the pesticide menace is Eddie Olmos of "Miami Vice" and star of "Stand and Deliver." At his right are actors Julie Carmen and Lou Diamond Phillips.



Besides visiting Chavez and calling for boycott support at the press conference, the celebrities joined a picket line at a Delano supermarket and attended the evening Mass. Pictured during a meeting after the Mass, Luis Valdez, founder of El Teatro Campesino and organizer of the celebrities' visit, leads farm workers in singing the traditional Spanish birthday song, "Las Mañanitas," to Martin Sheen and Emilio Huerta on their birthday on August 8. Huerta is the son of UFW First Vice-President Dolores Huerta.



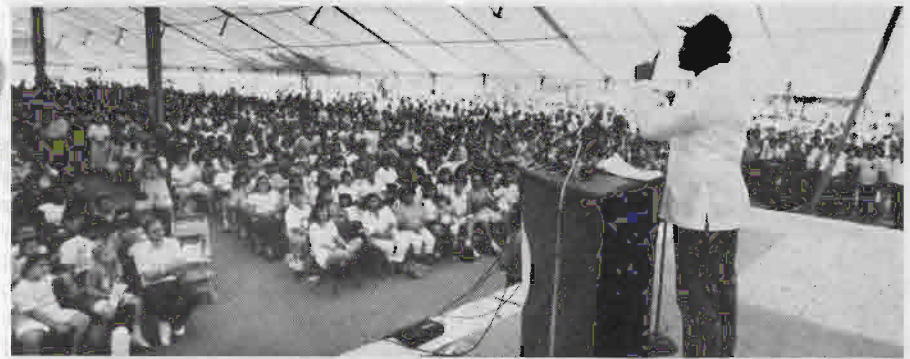
Hundreds of North American labor leaders sent messages of support, including Lane Kirkland, national president of the AFL-CIO. At left are two of the scores of local, state, and national labor leaders who were able to bring their message of solidarity

to Delano personally: John F. Henning (left), executive secretary-treasurer of the California State AFL-CIO, and Gerald W. McEntee, president of the one-million-member American Federation of State, County, and Municipal Employees (AFSCME). With them at their August 10 press conference is Dolores Huerta, first vice-president of the UFW.



On the 25th day of the fast, a group of prominent Canadian labor leaders visited Chavez and pledged to continue what they have already begun: drastically cutting the sale of California table grapes in Canada. At their afternoon press conference at Forty Acres are, left to right, John Shields, president of the British Columbia Government Employees and representing the National Union of Provincial Government Employees, Canada's largest labor union; Ken Georgetti, president of the B.C. Federation of Labour; Richard Mercier, secretary-treasurer of the Canadian Labour Congress; David Martinez, UFW boycott director in Canada; Julie Davis, executive vice-president of the Ontario Federation of Labour; Horace Singh, staff representative of the United Steelworkers; Dave Werlin, president of the Alberta Federation of Labour; and Wilf Hudson, president of the Manitoba Federation of Labour.

A large number of religious, minority, environmental, consumer, and community organizations sent delegations to Delano to show their support for the farm workers' grape boycott. Pausing during their picketing at a Delano supermarket with UFW First Vice-President Dolores Huerta are, left to right, leaders of several California women's groups: Anna Ortega, president of Comisión Feminal de Los Angeles; Billie Heller, representative of Women For; Gloria Allred, noted Los Angeles attorney; Huerta; and Dady Blake, president of the Los Angeles chapter of NOW.



Protected from the blistering desert sun by a huge tent erected for the Reverend Jesse Jackson's first of two visits with Chavez, several thousand farm workers and supporters roar their approval as he promises to fast three days when Chavez ends his fast: "I'll pick up the baton and carry it another lap; we'll keep passing that baton until justice comes to the workers!"

Brian Wilson, peace activist who only a year ago lost both his legs when run over by a train during a vigil at the Concord Naval Weapons Station, visited Chavez in mid-August and remained at Forty Acres for a three-day solidarity fast. He is pictured above on a picket line with Horace Singh, representative of the Canadian United Steelworkers, and Sister Camilla Verret, a member of the administrative team of the Sisters of Mercy in Silver Spring, Maryland. A few days before Wilson's visit, former entertainer Dick Gregory came to Delano and fasted in solidarity with Chavez.



Dr. Augusto Ortiz, center, who attended Chavez during his 24-day fast in Arizona in 1972, examined him on the 16th day of his fast and told reporters about the high levels of uric acid that tests on Chavez revealed. Ortiz is medical director of the Rural Health Office at the University of Arizona in Tucson. Flanking him at the August 1 press conference are Dr. Marion Moses, who attended Chavez throughout his first fast (25 days) in Delano in 1968 and who is a consultant for the UFW, and Dr. Fidel Huerta, on the staff of the Kern Medical Center in Bakersfield. Huerta is the son of UFW First Vice-President Dolores Huerta.



Barely able to walk, Chavez was assisted to and from the Mass by his sons, Paul, left, and Anthony. Behind and to the right of Anthony is Chavez' brother, Richard.

Early on Sunday morning, August 21, the first of thousands of farm workers and supporters began arriving at Forty Acres, filling up the seats under the huge white tent that a week before had been erected for the stirring visit of the Reverend Jesse Jackson.

At the same time, Carmen Penalber, one of a harried staff of UFW volunteers all trying to do five last-minute tasks at

once, jumped in a more-than-used union car, drove downtown to La Mexicana Bakery in Delano, picked up the small loaf of semita bread she ordered the night before, hurried back and placed it on a little offertory table in front of the spacious stage, the final addition to the simple gifts it already held: water, wine, and a small homemade cross of twigs, this one for passing on, not for pinning up next to

... and on the 36th, Bread

After the Gospel, Fernando Chavez delivers his father's end-of-the-fast statement (see page 14 for full text). In the background are the celebrants of the Mass (left to right): Revs. Jose Rubio, Eugene Boyle, Deacon Sal Alvarez, Rev. Ken Irrgang, Deacon Julian Ponce, Revs. Joe Tobin, Louis Vitale, and Lawrence Largente. Obscured behind the lectern are Rev. John Moretta and Monsignor George Higgins, prominent Catholic spokesman on farm labor issues for many years and now at the Catholic University of America in Washington, D.C. Bishop Alfonso Gallegos of the Diocese of Sacramento, who visited Chavez and later joined picketers at a Sacramento supermarket, was invited to be principal celebrant but was unable to cancel two scheduled parish visitations on short notice.



35 others already in place.

On the stage, meanwhile, a nervous priest fidgeted with flowers and candles and lined a series of communion bowls with white linen napkins before carefully filling them with several thousand round wheaten wafers. A few feet behind him, artist Barbara Carasco put the finishing touches on a mural depicting the goals of the Fast for Life, finishing just as the choirs of Our Lady of Guadalupe in Delano and Sacred Heart in Lindsay, joined by professional soloist Sister Rosa Marta Zarate, assembled on stage and began to rehearse.

Jumping on and off the stage checking amplifiers and speakers and microphones, Hub Seeger pierced the air with endless calls of "testing, testing," while near the stage in a roped-off section, Lorena Parlee patiently tried to fulfill all the requests of a growing number of photographers and journalists pressing for more facts and jockeying for better positions.

Across the hot, dusty field, away from all that noise and action, the atmosphere in Chavez' room at Agbayani Village was subdued. Near the door, Doctors Moses and Huerta, concerned about their patient's increased stomach cramps and vomiting the past couple days, quietly discussed how to handle whatever emergency might arise during Mass. Inside,

Prominent labor leaders and celebrities join hands for the "Padre Nuestro" ("Our Father") at the Mass. At the left, left to right, are Gerald W. McEntee, president, AFSCME; John J. Sweeney, president, Service Employees International Union; Kenneth Young, executive assistant to AFL-CIO President Lane Kirkland; John F. Henning, executive secretary-treasurer, California AFL-CIO; and David Sickler, regional director, AFL-CIO. At the end of the Mass, Chavez, with assistance, walked over to the labor leaders, shook hands with them, and thanked them for their presence and support. At the right are actors Martin Sheen and Eddie Olmos. Behind them, center, are Dolores Huerta, UFW first vice-president, and actor Robert Blake (partly obscured), who spent several days helping out at Forty Acres during the fast.



Flanked by Chavez and Jackson, 96-year-old Juana Chavez is pictured after the offertory when she presented the wooden cross symbolizing the 36th day of her son's fast.

Helen Chavez quietly helped her husband dress, buttoning up the ceremonial Filipino shirt he wanted to wear in honor of the Filipino farm workers who had sacrificed so much in the early days of the farm worker movement.

Shortly before 11 a.m., sons Paul and Anthony all but carried their father out to the car waiting to drive him across Forty Acres to Mass. There, under the tent topped with the fluttering flags of the U.S., Mexico, and Canada, the crowd had swelled to an estimated 8,000 and had just finished giving thunderous ovations to Ethel Kennedy and her children, Rev. Jesse Jackson, Martin Sheen and Robert





Dr. Fidel Huerta kept a close watch on Chavez' condition throughout the Mass.



Ethel Kennedy introduces her daughter Kerry to Helen Chavez before Mass begins.

Blake and several other celebrities, and prominent labor leaders. Moments later, a hush fell over the crowd as Chavez was helped out of his car and assisted to a brown rocking chair situated between his wife and 96-year old mother, Juana.

Then, at the opposite entrance, Aurora Rodriguez raised a cross high in the air, Lolo Flores and Ramon Trevino hoisted up a colorful banner of Our Lady of Guadalupe, and a procession of priests followed as the people rose and sang in Spanish the opening hymn, "Vienen con Alegria, Señor": "...singing with joy, seeking a more humane world, harboring no hatred or violence in our hearts."

The Mass was a series of touching moments. After the Gospel, Fernando Chavez read his father's end-of-the-fast statement, a message "my heart is too full and my body is too weak to read" (see page 14 for full text). At the offering of gifts, Chavez' mother, who had not been told about his fast until the night before, slowly mounted the steps to the altar with the help of Fernando and Rev. Jackson and presented the 36th and last wooden cross of the fast, a symbol her son would pass on to Jackson to signify the continuation of the Fast for Life. Later, sons Paul and Anthony would again be called upon to help as Chavez, in spite of near exhaustion, insisted on rising in reverence to receive Holy Communion.

Two even more dramatic moments oc-



Luis Valdez (center, right), founder of El Teatro Campesino and Master of Ceremonies for the program that followed the Mass, introduces Cesar Costa, Mexican singer and movie star.

Kerry Kennedy delivers a forceful speech and receives an enthusiastic response from platform guests and the huge crowd: "The day is coming when California grapes will no longer be washed with the tears, the blood, and the sweat of farm workers in the fields ... Don't buy grapes!" Seated behind her, left to right, are Rory, Chris, and Ethel Kennedy. Standing, left to right, are AFSCME President Gerald W. McEntee, Eddie Olmos, Lou Diamond Phillips, Martin Sheen, and Fred Ross Sr., from whom Chavez learned the techniques of organizing.



curred toward the end of the Mass. After Communion, the little loaf of semita bread, the same kind used to break Chavez' earlier fasts, was blessed and handed to Ethel Kennedy, who carefully broke off a small chunk and smiled as she handed it to him. Thanking her, he held it in his fingers for a moment or two, staring at it almost as if he didn't know what it was for, and then began to chew it. Shortly afterward, the 36th wooden cross was blessed and given to Chavez, who slowly turned and handed it to Rev. Jackson. Visibly moved, Jackson accepted it, kissed Chavez' hands, and softly repeated his promise to fast three days and keep the chain of fasting going until justice for farm workers is achieved. Then, sudden-

ly, the emotions that for an hour had been kept under control were released, the silence that had dominated the Mass was shattered. The huge throng rose and applauded, a burst of applause that was sustained until Chavez' sons again moved to his side to help him struggle back to his room — back to rest and recuperation, back to life.

The Mass was over.

So were 36 days of fasting.

But, in the heartening program of songs and speeches that followed, Jackson made it clear that the Fast for Life had only just begun: "Today, as I wear this cross around my neck, as I bear this cross on my back, the fast does not end. The fast continues...will expand...will grow!"

During the program after the Mass, the Reverend Jackson brings the audience to its feet with his impassioned promise to keep the fast going and his call to "stop the grapes and save the children." Joining in the standing ovation behind Jackson are, left to right, AFSCME President Gerald W. McEntee; Chris, Ethel, and Kerry Kennedy; and SEIU President John J. Sweeney.



"Today I Pass On the Fast for Life..."

During the Mass ending the fast on Sunday, August 21, the following prepared statement by Cesar Chavez was read by his son Fernando:

"My heart is too full and my body too weak to read this message. So I have asked my oldest son, Fernando, to read it to you.

"I thank God for the love and support of my family as well as for the prayers and hard work of the members and staff of our Union. I am grateful to the many thousands of people who came to be with me and for the millions who have kept me in their prayers and who have taken up our cause in their own communities. They have opened up their hearts, not just to me, but to the farm workers and the families who suffer from the unrestrained poisoning of our soil, our water, our air and our people.

"Many generous people have traveled long distances to be here during the fast. It is especially meaningful to me and all farm workers to have Ethel Kennedy and her children here on this day. Twenty years ago Bobby Kennedy stood with us when few had the courage to do so. We will always carry him in our hearts.

"Today I pass on the Fast for Life to hundreds of concerned men and women throughout North America and the world who have offered to share the suffering. They will help carry the burden by continuing the fast in front of their local supermarkets.

"The fast will go on in hundreds of distant places and it will multiply among thousands and then millions of caring people until every poisoned grape is off the supermarket shelves. And the fast will endure until the fields are safe for farm workers, the environment is preserved for future generations, and our

food is once again a source of nourishment and life."

The fast that Chavez said "will multiply" and the Reverend Jesse Jackson promised "will expand and grow" quickly began to do exactly that. After a stop-off to join a large group of supporters picketing a supermarket in Los Angeles, Jackson returned to Chicago and passed the cross for three days of fasting to the Reverend Joseph Lowery, president of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference. Then, during the commemoration of the 25th anniversary of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.'s 1963 March on Washington, Lowery passed the cross to actor Martin Sheen. Three days later, on August 30, Sheen passed it to fellow actor Eddie Olmos in Los Angeles.

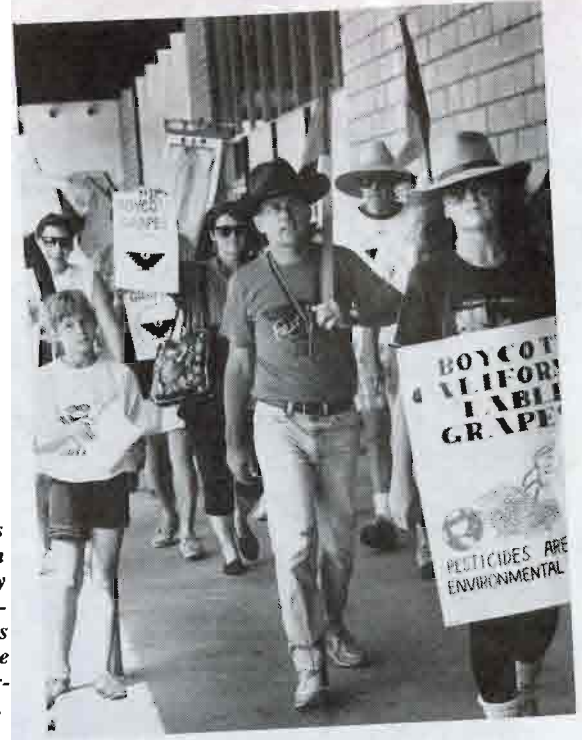
At this writing, plans call for Olmos to pass the cross and three-day fast to Emilio Estevez in Los Angeles, Estevez to Kerry Kennedy in New York, Kennedy to Lou Diamond Phillips in Boston, Phillips to Charlie Haid in Toronto, and Haid to Texas Commissioner of Agriculture Jim Hightower in Chicago. About 25 more well-known persons are presently scheduled to continue the chain of fasting throughout the U.S., Canada, and Mexico.

But it was not only celebrities continuing the fast, nor was fasting the only thing happening. Religious groups, labor unions, environmentalists, legislators, city councils, minority groups, and farm workers were initiating their own chains of fasting, were organizing marches, were picketing supermarkets, were sending delegations to supermarket owners, were banning grapes in schools and hospitals, and were beginning, as Chavez hoped and fasted for, "a great movement of non-cooperation with supermarkets," resist-

ing "in a myriad of nonviolent ways, the presence of grapes in the stores where they shop."

True, it was only a beginning, but already it was enough to make Bruce Obbink, president of the California Table Grape Commission, ponder the wisdom of having arrogantly derided Chavez, a few days after the fast had started, for futilely "wasting all his energy" on a fast when he could be doing something useful. ▼

Martin Sheen, wearing the cross of fasting passed on from Jackson to the Reverend Joseph Lowery and from Lowery to him on August 28 in Washington, D.C., leads 75 supporters in a seven-mile march from a Mayfair supermarket to a Hughes store in Malibu.



DOLORES HUERTA BEATEN AND HOSPITALIZED

Only hours before this issue of *Food and Justice* was to be printed, it was learned that Dolores Huerta, 58, first vice-president and co-founder of the UFW, was severely beaten by San Francisco police outside the St. Francis Hotel on September 14. Repeatedly jabbed and struck with clubs, Huerta suffered a ruptured spleen and three broken ribs. Her spleen had to be removed in an operation the same night. After the operation, doctors said she was in stable condition but would have to be hospitalized at least a week.

The beating occurred during a dem-

onstration against a campaign appearance by Vice-President George Bush. Huerta was not involved in the protest but had gone to the hotel to distribute to the media a press release responding to a vicious attack on the UFW and the grape boycott made by Bush at a campaign stop in the San Joaquin Valley earlier in the day.

A videotape of the police violence by Station KRON-TV clearly shows the attack on Huerta. That tape and additional testimony provide irrefutable evidence for investigations of the police and for legal action the UFW is certain to pursue. ▼

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