

## Politics & Law

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#### **Forty years later, grape boycott still a huge accomplishment**

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Forty years ago, workers in the United States won a great victory.

On July 29, 1970, the United Farm Workers of America (UFW) ended its successful grape boycott when the growers agreed to sign the first contract with the union.

It seemed like an improbable outcome, as the battle pitted a mostly Mexican as well as Filipino immigrant workforce against powerful agricultural growers in California.

Led by the late Cesar Chavez and tireless Dolores Huerta, the UFW was founded in the early 1960s in response to the inhumane working conditions for farmworkers in California and other states, such as Arizona, Texas, Florida and Washington state.

While many American workers during this period enjoyed the right to organize, 40-hour weeks, minimum wage and relatively safe working conditions, farmworkers lacked these basic rights and protections.

In an effort to seek justice, dignity and respect in the rural fields of America, UFW leaders, its members and sympathizers organized and joined picket lines and marches, signed petitions, supported labor laws, lobbied elected officials, distributed educational flyers, produced documentaries, penned songs, performed plays, held teach-ins and generally supported the nationwide boycott.

The charismatic Chavez — who graced the cover of Time magazine on July 4, 1969 — engaged in numerous and lengthy hunger strikes to draw attention to the cause.

As was the case with the civil rights movement, many UFW activists were beaten up and a few were killed for the simple act of supporting the right of farmworkers to organize a union and negotiate for fair labor contracts.

But the rightness of their cause prevailed.

So inspirational was it that Barack Obama, when he was a candidate for president, adopted the group's slogan: "Si, Se Puede" ("Yes, We Can").

Now, 40 years later, farmworkers continue to toil under harsh working conditions.

To draw attention to this, the UFW has launched an innovative campaign called "Take Our Jobs."

The "Take Our Jobs" campaign encourages unemployed Americans to work in the agricultural fields to pick fruits and vegetables as a means to educating the public of the importance of immigrant

labor issues and desperate need for humane labor reforms at the national level.

As part of this campaign, UFW President Arturo Rodriguez appeared on “The Colbert Report,” the popular cable show, to shed light on the plight of “los de abajo” (those on the bottom).

The best way to honor this 40th anniversary of the UFW’s landmark success would be to support humane labor law reform for farmworkers and to strengthen the right to organize.

Si, Se Puede!

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