**The Farm Worker Movement**

*Cesar Chavez, himself a former migrant worker, and Dolores Huerta established the National Farm Workers Association (NFWA) in 1962 to bargain for higher wages and other benefits. This is Chavez's account of the NFWA's first strike.*

We had our first strike in the spring of 1965. While we didn't win, it gave us a good indication of what to expect in other strikes, how labor contractors and police would be used against us.

Epifanio Camacho, a farm worker from McFarland, just south of Delano, came and told us of all the abuses in the rose industry there. We worked with those workers for more than a month until we had them tightly organized.

Grafting roses is highly skilled work. Grafters crawl on their knees for miles slitting mature rose bushes and inserting buds at top speed. The slightest miscalculation means the bud will not take and the bush will be useless.

Although they were promised $9 a thousand plants, injertadors – grafters of roses – were actually getting between $6.50 and $7 a thousand.

After a series of meetings to prepare the strike, we chose the biggest company, Mount Arbor, which employed about eighty-five workers, not counting the irrigators and supervisors. We voted not to have a picket line, because everyone pledged not to break the strike.

We had a pledge ceremony on Sunday, the day before the strike started. Dolores held the crucifix, and the guys put their hands on it, pledging not to break the strike.

Early Monday morning we sent out ten cars to check the people's homes. We found lights in five or six places and knocked on the doors. The men were getting up.

“Where are you going?” we asked them.

Most of them were embarrassed. “Oh, I was just getting up, you know.”

“You're not going to work are you?”

“Of course not!”

The company foreman was very angry when none of the grafters showed up for work. He refused to talk to us. Thinking that maybe a woman would have a better chance, we had Dolores knock on the office door about 10:30.

“Get out, you Communist! Get out,” the manager shouted.

I guess they were expecting us, because as Dolores was arguing with him, the cops came and told her to leave.

A day or so later, we had a hunch two or three workers living in one house were going to break the strike. So Dolores drove up to their driveway in a green truck, killed the motor, put it in gear, set the brake, locked the windows and doors, took the keys, and hid them so they couldn't drive out. Even though she was alone, she refused to move.

Then a group of Mexican workers from Tangansiguiero helped break the strike. Everybody was angry, and we sent a letter to the mayor of Tangansiguiero denouncing them. In those little Mexican towns, they have an old building where people go to read the news. On one side they list things like stray animals, and on the other they have a list of criminals.

The mayor was so upset, he put our letter on the side with the criminals, in effect classifying them as such. We got immediate reactions from the workers. People came and said, “Don't be like that. You're giving me a bad name in my community when I go back.”

And I said, “Look, you broke the strike. You deserve that and more.”

**Questions:**

1. **Why did the NFWA decide to organize a strike against Mount Arbor?**

**How did Chavez and Huerta try to keep the strike from being broken?**

**Do you think that strikes and boycotts effectively promoted this cause? Why or why not? Cite evidence from your textbook to support your opinion.**