

self-defeating when directed at a power with a monopoly on armed force. On the other hand, the idea of turning the other cheek, while praiseworthy as a Christian ideal, was calculated to preserve the status quo. It was essential, he felt, that the oppressed unite and assert themselves, using a variety of nonviolent strategies to gain their ends. In the case of farmworkers, those objectives were better working conditions, including higher wages, and recognition of their union. Unlike many other militants of the time, Chávez believed that the American middle class was basically responsive to the needs of poor people and would support them if given the opportunity.

During the long struggle, Chávez recruited help from various disparate sources. These included the trade union movement, especially the AFL-CIO, with which he affiliated in 1966; Christian organizations, both Protestant and Catholic; radical student associations, including the Students for a Democratic Society (SDS); and other civil rights groups. Aside from alliances, he relied, too, on demonstrations, prayer sessions, marches, and fasts. His basic tactic was the strike, the *huelga*, the time-honored weapon of organized labor. Eventually, though, he discovered that a work stoppage had limited potential in small agricultural towns like Delano, where powerful growers could generally count on the support of the local citizenry, including the Mexicano petite bourgeoisie, and even many of the farmworkers themselves.¹⁴ Beginning in 1968, Chávez came to rely on the boycott, a consumer strike, which meant that his success would depend to a large extent on winning support in urban areas throughout the country. His boycott of nonunion grapes in 1968-1975, the first nationwide boycott of any kind, was highly successful. Some 12 percent of the adult American population (17 million people) honored the appeal, effectively wiping out grower profits. Still, the strike was long and hard. It finally ended in 1970, when growers reluctantly agreed to recognize the union and sign contracts with it.

Flushed with victory, the UFW had visions of organizing farmworkers throughout the country. Inspired by Chávez's example, a campesino strike had already occurred in the cantaloupe fields of Starr County in Texas in 1966, the beginning of Chicano militancy in that state. Chávez immediately dispatched Antonio Orendain, an able lieutenant, to mobilize the farmworkers of South Texas.¹⁵ Similar developments would soon take place in Arizona, Colorado, Washington, and other states. Even the Midwest felt repercussions. In 1967, the Toledo-based Farm Labor Organizing Committee (FLOC) was founded by Baldemar Velásquez, a native of Pharr, Texas, to fight for the rights of migrant workers.¹⁶ Concentrating its efforts on Ohio and Michigan, the FLOC achieved its most notable victory in 1986, after an eight-year strike and boycott of the Campbell Soup Company. In neighboring Indiana, the Farm Labor Aid Committee (FLAC) was established by a small coterie of activists, including Gilbert Cárdenas, later an eminent Chicano