



# San Antonio Alamo Area Local Legislative Updates

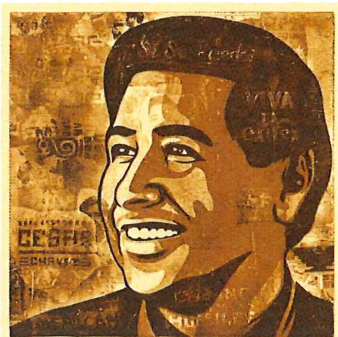
Letty Alejandro – Legislative Director  
LD0195@att.net



Alex Aleman – President, San Antonio Alamo Area Local

Volume 2 No. 9

March 25, 2016



## CESAR CHAVEZ

*"Preservation of one's own culture does not require contempt or disrespect for other cultures"*

César Estrada Chávez was born in March 31, 1927 in Yuma, Arizona. During the Great Depression his family lost their farm and moved to California where they became migrant farm workers. When he was 15

years old he began working in the fields picking lettuce and beets to help support his family. During this period Chavez encountered the conditions that he would dedicate his life to changing: wretched migrant camps, corrupt labor contractors, meager wages for backbreaking work, bitter racism.

His introduction to labor organizing began in 1952 when he met Father Donald McDonnell, an activist Catholic priest, and Fred Ross, an organizer with the Community Service Organization, who recruited Chavez to join his group. Within a few years Chavez had become national director, but in 1962 resigned

to devote his energies to organizing a union for farm workers and along with Dolores Huerta, another former CSO organizer, co-founded the National Farm Workers Association (NFWA).

A major turning point came in September 1965 when the fledgling Farm Workers Association voted to join a strike that had been initiated by Filipino farm workers in Delano's grape fields. Within months Chavez and his union became nationally known. Chavez's drawing on the imagery of the civil rights movement, his insistence on nonviolence, his reliance on volunteers from urban universities and religious organizations, his alliance with organized labor, and his use of mass mobilizing techniques such as a famous march on Sacramento in 1966 brought the grape strike and consumer boycott into the national consciousness. The boycott in particular was responsible for pressuring the growers to recognize the United Farm Workers (uflw; renamed after the union joined the afl-cio). The first contracts were signed in 1966, but were followed by more years of strife. In 1968 Chavez went on a fast for twenty-five days to protest the increasing advocacy of violence within the union. Victory came finally on July 29, 1970, when twenty-six Delano growers formally signed contracts recognizing the uflw and bringing peace to the vineyards.

Believing that the only permanent solution to the problems of farm workers lay in legislation, Chavez supported the passage of California's Agricultural Labor Relations Act in 1975 (the first of its kind in the nation), which promised to end the cycle of misery and exploitation and ensure justice for the workers. These promises, however, proved to be short-lived as grower opposition and a series of hostile governors undercut the effectiveness of the law.

Despite skepticism from some labor leaders, Cesar was the first to apply boycotts to major labor-management disputes. Millions of people across North America rallied to La Causa, the farm workers' cause, by boycotting grapes and other products, forcing growers to bargain union contracts and agree to California's pioneering farm labor law in 1975.

By the 1980s, the UFW had helped tens of thousands of farm workers gain higher pay, medical care, retirement benefits and better working and living conditions. But relations between workers and growers in California worsened under a new state government. Boycotts were again organized against the grape industry. In 1988, at the age of sixty-one, Mr. Chavez began another hunger strike that lasted for thirty-six days. The fast was to protest the pesticide poisoning of farm workers and their children

On April 23, 1993, César Chávez died in his sleep at the age of sixty-six in Arizona. Over 50,000 people attended his funeral in Delano, California where the cause was born. A year later, President Clinton awarded him the Presidential Medal of Freedom, the highest civilian honor in the United States.

\*\*\*\*\*

Please Join the APWU membership on the 20<sup>th</sup> Annual César Chávez March for Justice is this Saturday, March 26

The Community Program begins at 9 a.m. The stage is located on the corner of Guadalupe and S. Brazos Streets. March to the Alamo will begin at 10 a.m. SAAAL Members, Families and Friends will meet at the Corner of Guadalupe St. & Brazos St.