

# Senate Probes Army Grape Orgy

WASHINGTON, July 15--The U.S. Senate Sub-Committee on Migratory Labor began a two day hearing today on testimony from the United Farm Workers Organizing Committee and the Department of Defense on the skyrocketing purchase of California table grapes by the Defense Department.

The hearings were called to study the DoD's recent admission to a massive increase in its procurement of table grapes.

In an official policy statement issued on June 10, the DoD said that, "The basic policy of the Defense...is to refrain from taking a position on the merits of any labor dispute...From the diverse opinions that have appeared in various news media, it is quite apparent that the dispute over California table grapes falls in this category."

Since the boycott of grapes began, the DoD has maintained its "neutral" position by purchasing enough grapes to supply EVERY GI in Vietnam with eight pounds of grapes, and has increased its purchase of grapes by 700%.

At the hearings, UFWOC Vice-President Dolores Huerta made a brief statement challenging the DoD to account for its involvement in the grape dispute. Why have they ignored their own guide lines and actively taken sides in this dispute, she asked. Why have they used taxpayers' money to help the growers resist an effort by poor people to get decent wages and living conditions? Why won't they now refrain from such purchases, she asked.

Mrs. Huerta pointed out that the DoD's present level of table grape purchasing (which represent 2.5% of all US fresh table grape production) has been enough, in an extremely sensitive market, to give an extra boost to the price of all grapes, thus enabling many growers to continue their resistance to the farm workers' request for Union protection. By taking advantage of lower prices brought about by the suffering and sacrifices of many striking families, the DoD is only helping to prolong and intensify the struggle that has already gone on for four long years now. At a time when the boycott seemed to be bringing the growers to the bargaining table, the DoD stepped in and threw the growers a life saver in the form of massive grape purchases.

William Kircher, speaking for the national AFL-CIO office, directly labeled the Defense Department as a "strikebreaker" and called for an immediate halt in its purchases of grapes.

DoD officials only reiterated their claim that it is a policy in such matters to remain "neutral" and that the reason for the increase is due to "increased troop acceptability".

Mrs. Huerta answered by saying, "It seems that the DoD is violating its own policy and is endangering its working relationship with labor."

Mrs. Huerta also brought up the issue of pesticides, pointing out that residues of DDT and other pesticides have been found on grapes in every study made by investigating agencies so far this year.

"Welcome to the Military-Industrial Complex"



When the question of troop intake of DDT through grapes was brought up by the Senators, the DoD representatives fell back on bureaucratic security, claiming that they just bought the grapes and weren't responsible for distributing them.

Senators also asked the Generals if it is proper to spend taxpayers' money on grapes produced by people who daily violate the law of the land. Grape growers have been

found guilty of violating the minimum wage law, child labor laws, health and sanitation laws and numerous other laws relating to safety, health, working conditions, and anti-union activities. Again, the DoD claimed that it is only a purchaser and doesn't investigate the growers from whom they buy the grapes.

When asked with which growers they deal, and how much each grower was paid for the grapes pur-

chased, the Defense Department claimed that there were no available records on this subject.

The boycott is the only real non-violent weapon that the farm workers have in their fight for social and economic justice. Mrs. Huerta concluded her official statement by saying, "It is an outrage to the millions of American taxpayers who are supporting the farm workers struggle for justice by boycot-

ing table grapes. How can any American believe that the US Government is sincere in its efforts to eradicate poverty when the military uses its immense purchasing power to subvert the farm workers' non-violent struggle for a decent living wage, and a better future?"

Just whose way of life is the Defense Department trying to protect?