

How the “yes” appeared in “Yes we can!”

By Wendy Greenfield

Narrator: It was the year 1972. In the state of California, the grape workers already had already been working for two years under labor contracts that guaranteed their rights. It hadn't been easy to win these contracts. The grape workers were on strike for five years; they refused to work in the grape fields until the growers signed contracts to raise their salaries and treat them fairly.

Workers: (Carrying “Strike” signs) Brothers, sisters, come out of the fields!
Don't work there anymore! They barely pay us enough to buy beans! Come out of the fields! Strike! Strike! Strike!
(Workers leave the fields)
¡Qué viva la huelga! Long live the strike! ¡Long live the United Farm Workers Union!

Narrator: In addition to striking, the workers had organized a boycott, asking support from people around the whole country by not buying grapes until the growers signed contracts where they promised to treat their workers well.

Worker: Excuse me ma'am, can you listen to me for a minute? We've come here, far from our homes, to ask for your help in not buying grapes. Where we work, in the grape vineyards, they don't pay us well. Many of our children have to work in the fields instead of going to school.

Second Worker: They spray pesticides on us that make us sick.

Third Worker: They don't give us water to drink after working for hours under the sun.

Housewife: That's terrible, but what can I do? I'm a housewife. Who's going to listen to me?

Worker: Ma'am, you actually have a lot of power. If you and everyone you know stop buying grapes, the growers won't have money and they'll have to listen to us and give us a contract.

Housewife: OK. I won't buy any more grapes until you tell me that the growers have signed contracts. Will you give me a sign?

Workers and Housewife: Boycott grapes! Boycott grapes! Justice for farmworkers! Boycott grapes! Boycott grapes!

Narrator: That's how it was for five years: strike and boycott and more strike and boycott, until the Farmworkers Union finally won and signed contracts with the growers.

Dolores Huerta: Sisters and brothers! Great news! Look what we've won with our years of struggle! Read this contract!

(Dolores shows everyone a gigantic contract which they read together.

Workers and Dolores: Better salary, controls on pesticide use, no child labor, cold water to drink, bathrooms, rest breaks, a medical plan...and a lot more.

Farmworker Negotiator: ¡Qué viva la union! Long live the union!

Workers: ¡Qué viva!

Farmworker Negotiator: ¡Qué viva Cesar Chavez!

Workers: ¡Qué viva!

Farmworker Negotiator: ¡Qué viva Dolores Huerta!

Workers: ¡Qué viva!

Narrator: And so in California the grape workers were happy with their victory. They had learned how to struggle and how to win. But in the neighboring state of Arizona, it was another story.

First Worker: Have you heard the news?

Second Worker: I just left the fields. I haven't heard anything. Give me a little water, friend. I'm tired.

First Worker: Drink, but listen. This is important. The legislature – the government of the state of Arizona – has just crushed us!

Second Worker: What are you talking about, friend? The only thing that's crushed around here is my body, which aches from my head to my feet.

First Worker: I know, I know. For that very reason you need to listen. They just passed a law that prohibits farmworkers from going on strike or calling for boycotts. Did you hear me? If we go on strike or boycott they can take us to jail! In California, the grape workers won contracts with strikes and boycotts. In Arizona, without strikes and boycotts, how will we win? (They shake their heads and look down.)

Narrator: But not everyone was ready to give up. Dolores Huerta, Cesar Chavez and other organizers from the United Farmworkers Union arrived.

Cesar Chavez: Friends, I know that you feel discouraged because of the new law that just passed. The growers here are very rich and powerful, and today they got their way. But it won't always be like that. I'm sure that together we'll find a way to carry on. The important thing now is to be together and feel our unity. Today I'm starting a fast. I won't eat; only pray and talk with our friends who have dedicated themselves to the struggle and to non-violence.

Dolores Huerta: Let's go friends! Come accompany Cesar Chavez while he fasts. We need to be together at this difficult moment.

First Worker: But why, Dolores? What's the point of being together if we've already lost everything?

Second Worker: We can't go out on strike. We can't boycott. We can't struggle.
We're beaten before we start.

Dolores Huerta: No brothers, we're only beaten when we give up. As long as
we continue to struggle, we haven't lost.

Third Worker: You don't understand, Dolores. This is Arizona, not California.
We can't win here – we can't win.

Dolores Huerta: Brothers and sisters, listen to me. We CAN win here! We CAN
win! (She looks at the audience.)
Children, these farmworkers need your spirit. Can you help us? Say it with
me: Yes we can! Yes we can! ¡Sí se puede! ¡Sí se puede!

Narrator: The farmworkers got their spirit up and went with Dolores to be with
César in his fast. They sing the first verse of “De colores”:

*De colores, de colores se visten los campos en la primavera,
De colores, de colores son los pajarillos que vienen de afuera.
De colores, de colores es el arco iris que vemos lucir.
Y por eso los grandes amores de muchos colores me gustan a mí
Y por eso los grandes amores de muchos colores me gustan a mí.*

Narrator: After many days, Cesar stopped his fast and said:

Cesar Chavez: Friends, thank you for your support. It's time to take action.
We're going to march throughout the state of Arizona and tell everyone
that they should register to vote to change these unjust laws.

Dolores Huerta: We have a long struggle ahead of us, but we're ready because
we're united. Friends, can we do it?

The workers march behind César and Dolores. They hold signs and shout:

“Sí se puede!” “Yes we can!” “Register to vote!”

They scatter throughout the audience and encourage them to shout with them.

