

Dolores Huerta's allegations against Cesar Chavez and the political bankruptcy of the United Farm Workers

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31 March 2026

The public allegations made by Dolores Huerta on March 18, 2026 have brought renewed scrutiny to the historical record of Cesar Chavez and the organization he led, the United Farm Workers (UFW). Huerta, now 95 years old, and long regarded as Chavez's closest collaborator, described two specific instances of sexual violence dating back to the 1960s.

Her account emerged in connection with a multi-year investigation by the *New York Times*, which documented not only her experiences but a broader pattern of abuse involving other women and, most disturbingly, minors within the orbit of the UFW leadership.

According to Huerta, the first incident occurred in August 1960 in Southern California, where she states she was "manipulated and pressured" into sex by Chavez in a hotel room. At the time, she explained, she felt unable to refuse due to the immense power imbalance: Chavez was her superior, a revered mentor and the central leader of a movement to which she had already devoted years of her life.

The second incident, in 1966 during a work trip, was more openly violent. Huerta alleges that Chavez drove her to a secluded grape field, parked the car and raped her. She described the encounter as "forced, against my will, and in an environment where I felt trapped."

Huerta further revealed that both encounters resulted in pregnancies. In order to protect what she described as the "image" of the union and the broader farmworker movement, she kept both pregnancies secret and arranged for the children to be raised by other families. Only in early 2026, she said, did she disclose the circumstances of their conception to her children, now in their 60s, as well as to her broader

family.

These allegations are corroborated, in part, by the wider findings of the *Times* investigation. It documents the cases of Ana Murguia and Debra Rojas, who allege that Chavez began grooming and molesting them when they were 12 and 13 years old, respectively. Both were daughters of UFW organizers living at the La Paz compound, the organization's central headquarters. The investigation cites, among other evidence, a 1974 letter written by a 13-year-old Rojas to Chavez that reportedly documented ongoing abuse at the time.

That Huerta states she remained silent for decades "to protect the farmworkers" is itself an indictment, not only of Chavez as an individual, but of the political and organizational culture that prevailed within the UFW. Her account underscores the degree to which the apparatus subordinated the well-being of individuals, including its own leading members, to the preservation of its public image and institutional interests.

It is necessary, however, to reject the framework, already widely promoted in the corporate media, that presents these revelations as the tragic fall of a once-great civil rights figure. Chavez was not a progressive leader whose legacy has only now been tarnished by scandal. His political trajectory, methods and alliances placed him firmly within the orbit of bourgeois politics and the labor bureaucracy. The emerging evidence of abuse is entirely consistent with the authoritarian and anti-working-class character of his leadership.

Cesar Chavez rose to prominence in the mid-1960s amid intense agricultural militancy. The Delano grape strike and the 1966 march to Sacramento mobilized thousands of farmworkers and drew broad support from students and sections of the urban working class,

demonstrating the immense potential power of agricultural labor when organized collectively.

Yet Chavez responded to this upsurge by channeling it away from independent class struggle and into safe, state-sanctioned channels. He emphasized boycotts, moral appeals and media campaigns, while cultivating alliances with figures such as Walter Reuther of the United Auto Workers and Democratic Senator Robert F. Kennedy. These alliances secured limited gains and legal recognition, but at the cost of subordinating the farmworkers to the framework of American capitalism, which imposes the most barbaric conditions on agricultural laborers.

From the outset, Chavez advanced a strategy based not on class struggle but moral persuasion. Drawing on Catholic asceticism and nonviolence, he sought to pressure agribusiness and the state for reforms rather than mobilizing workers as an independent force. This outlook was bound up with his virulent anti-communism, expressed through purges of militants and the suppression of rank-and-file initiatives that challenged his authority.

As the UFW developed, these tendencies assumed increasingly authoritarian forms. Operations such as the “Wet Line,” attacking undocumented workers, deepened divisions within the working class, pitting workers against one another on the basis of their legal status, instead of uniting them.

With only modest success in organizing farmworkers, the UFW quickly fell into the steel grip of the capitalist state, the Democratic Party and their servants in the AFL-CIO. By the 1980s, the UFW had lost most of its contracts and membership, leaving behind an apparatus disconnected from the workers and increasingly resembling a failing family business, with an incessant struggle over income and resources. Chavez’s personal conduct cannot be separated from this process.

For a detailed history of Chavez and the United Farm workers, see “Fifty years since the Delano to Sacramento march: The myth of Cesar Chavez and the collapse of the United Farm Workers”



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