

# DSA Honorary Chair Dolores Huerta Celebrates her 80th Birthday with Activism

By Duane E. Campbell

**D**SA Honorary Chair Dolores Huerta, along with Cesar Chavez, Philip Vera Cruz and others, created the United Farm Workers (UFW) union, the first successful union of farm workers in U.S. history. She can look back with satisfaction on this accomplishment and many more as she celebrates her 80th birthday on April 10, 2010.

Each of the prior attempts to organize farm worker unions was destroyed by racism and corporate power. Huerta and Chavez chose to build a union that incorporated the strategies of social movements and community organizing and allied itself with churches and students as well as other unions. The successful creation of the UFW changed the nature of labor organizing in the Southwest and contributed significantly to the growth of Latino politics in the U.S.

In 1965 the UFW launched a strike and national boycott against California grape growers who refused to recognize the union. Huerta became east coast coordinator of the boycott, a key to the success of the UFW in winning union contracts with the growers in 1970. Chavez said that Huerta “is totally

*“We showed the world that nonviolence can work to make social change...we have laid a pattern of how farm workers are eventually going to get out of their bondage”*

– Dolores Huerta

fearless, physically and mentally.”

Today Mexican, Mexican American and Puerto Rican union leadership is common in our major cities and in several industries. Hundreds of activists in labor, community organizing and politics owe their skills to UFW training and experience. This trained cadre of organizers remains a major legacy of the UFW.

Dolores Huerta was long the vice-president of the UFW and its chief negotiator of contracts, as well as the primary advocate for farm worker rights in the California legislature. Huerta continues her important education and organizing work today. She is the president of the Dolores Huerta foundation, a 501(c)(3) “non-profit organization whose mission is to build active communities working for fair and equal access to health care, housing, education, jobs, civic participation and economic resources for disadvantaged communities with an emphasis on women and youth.” The foundation was



Dolores Huerta at California State University – Sacramento.

started with funds received from a settlement after she was assaulted and severely injured by police at a 1988 anti-war demonstration in San Francisco and beaten so severely her spleen had to be removed.

Huerta has long been known for her political activism. She was recruited into DSOC (predecessor of DSA) by Michael Harrington. She serves on the board of People for the American Way and the Feminist Majority Foundation as well as being active within the Democratic Party. She speaks frequently at colleges, universities, and high schools from a Latina activist, feminist perspective, which is particularly valuable for young women in school and community groups. She is a recognized leader in civil rights and immigration issues.

Huerta openly acknowledges her socialism in her speeches, although being a socialist has some down sides. In March of this year the Texas Board of Education held hearings and adopted (over protest) new history /social studies guidelines that moved the textbook selection process of Texas significantly to the right. According to testimony by board members, Dolores Huerta was targeted for exclusion from the Texas version of history because she is a known socialist – a member of DSA. We are honored by her membership in our organization and wish her a very happy birthday. ♦