

“For farm workers, the achievements of a union will mean an end to the long history of being the most underpaid and exploited section of the Canadian workers, of being denied human dignity, of being unable to carry on organized struggle of their rights as workers”

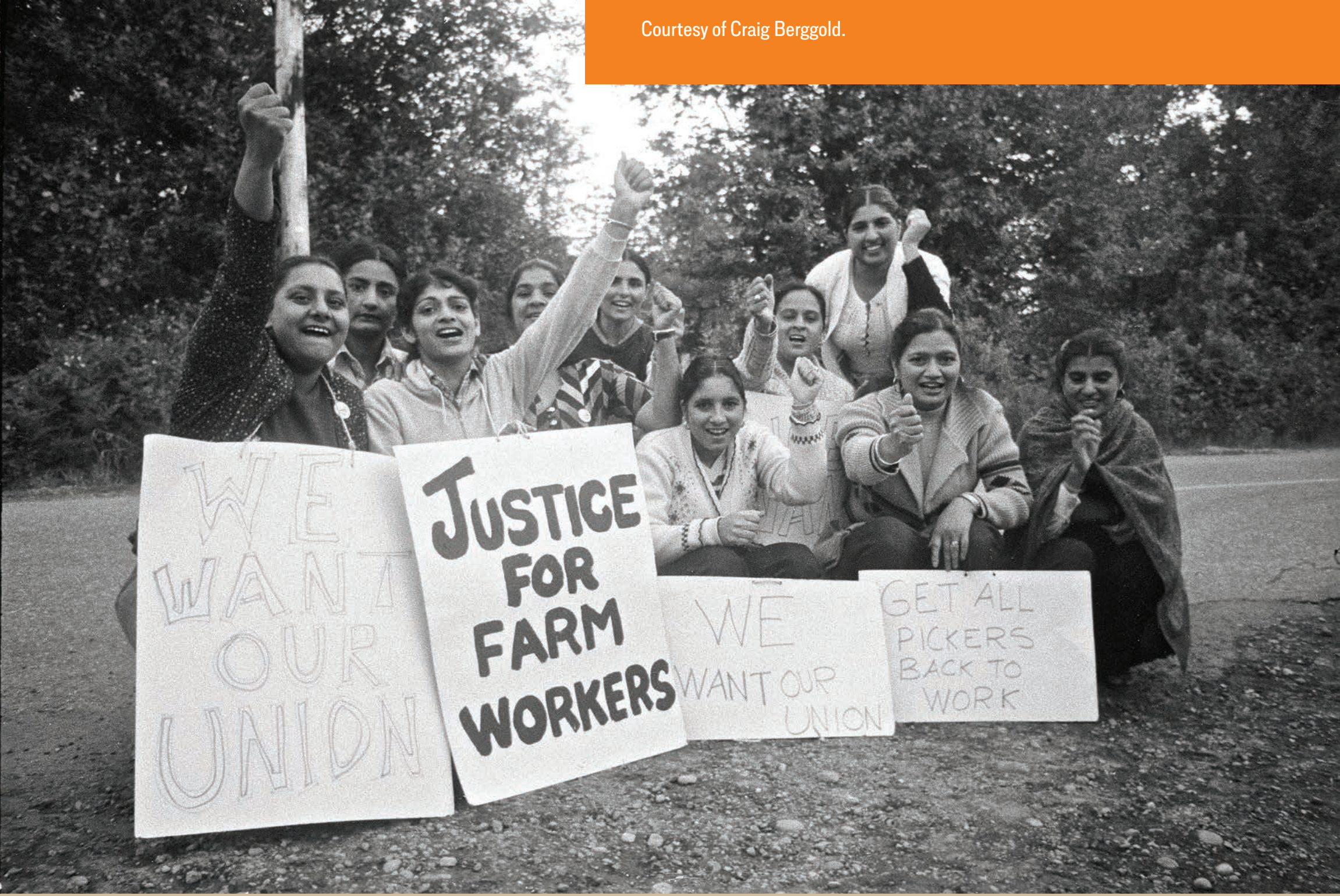
- Raj Chouhan

“ਖੇਤ ਮਜ਼ਦੂਰਾਂ ਲਈ, ਇੱਕ ਯੂਨੀਅਨ ਦੀਆਂ ਪ੍ਰਾਪਤੀਆਂ ਦਾ ਅਰਥ ਕੈਨੇਡੀਅਨ ਮਜ਼ਦੂਰਾਂ ਦੇ ਸਭ ਤੋਂ ਘੱਟ ਤਨਖਾਹ ਵਾਲੇ ਅਤੇ ਸ਼ੋਸ਼ਿਤ ਵਰਗ ਹੋਣ ਦੇ ਲੰਬੇ ਇਤਿਹਾਸ ਦਾ ਅੰਤ ਹੋਵੇਗਾ, ਮਨੁੱਖੀ ਸਨਮਾਨ ਤੋਂ ਵਾਂਝਾ ਕੀਤਾ ਜਾਵੇਗਾ, ਮਜ਼ਦੂਰਾਂ ਵੱਲੋਂ ਆਪਣੇ ਅਧਿਕਾਰਾਂ ਲਈ ਸੰਗਠਿਤ ਸੰਘਰਸ਼ ਜਾਰੀ ਰੱਖਣ ਵਿੱਚ ਅਸਮਰੱਥ ਹੋਵੇਗਾ”

- ਰਾਜ ਚੌਹਾਨ

Picket line at Mukhtiar Growers Ltd. in Clearbrook, BC in 1979. Raj Chouhan on far right.

Courtesy of The Canadian Farmworkers Union (CFU).



Hoss Farm Mushroom Strike in Aldergrove, Langley, BC on May 27, 1984.

Courtesy of Craig Berggold.

## Farmworker rally knocks conditions

More than 200 people attended a Canadian Farmworkers Union public meeting Sunday in Abbotsford, and called on the government to improve working and living conditions for farmworkers.

Union spokesman Judy Cavanagh said the meeting was held to publicize the fact that farmworkers have no protection from pesticides, or through Workers' Compensation Board schemes.

"The prevention of injuries and diseases in Canada is affected by federal and provincial laws and regulations, and the farmworkers' union is fighting to improve the existing working conditions of farmworkers," she said.

"One aspect of this fight is to put pressure on the government to ensure that farmworkers are covered by laws extended to other workers, and to ensure that all these laws and regulations are enforced."

Speakers at the meeting included Verna Ledger, safety

director for the regional council No. 1 of the International Woodworkers of America and Raj Chouhan, president of the farmworkers union.

Chouhan said: "For over two years, we've been stressing the need for daycare facilities for farmworkers, and four children's deaths in July were due to lack of

daycare facilities.

"The demand for daycare facilities for farmworkers was one of the main recommendations in our brief to labor minister Jack Heinrich. We demand the B.C. Government enact legislation to force growers and contractors to provide free daycare for workers with children."



**CANADA FARM LABOUR POOL**

Sub-offices located in Chilliwack and Cloverdale will be closed for the season on August 29th.

Please call Abbotsford office at 853-7471 for your requirements.

With no access to day care, children as young as 8 years would work alongside their parents. Free daycare was one of the CFU's first demands to improve working conditions for themselves and their families.

Chilliwack Progress, August 27, 1980

## Farm union meeting draws 1 50

A lengthy, and at times bitter, organizing campaign throughout the Fraser Valley last year was capped on Sunday by the formation of the Canadian Farmworkers Union, Local 1.

Raj Chouhan, the union's 31-year-old president, told 150 farm workers at the founding meeting in New Westminster that "we can expect trouble."

"I say it very clearly to the membership: our fight will be a long one and we should not expect miracles overnight. We are very aware of what happened in California. . . . We have just tried to make our membership aware that we can't let the farm owners and contractors intimidate us.

"For farm workers, the

achievements of a union will mean an end to the long history of being the most underpaid and exploited section of the Canadian workers, of being denied human dignity, of being unable to carry on organized struggle of their rights as workers.

"Not only will the union be able to phase out the labor contractor who is greatly responsible for the oppression of the farm worker, but it will enable the farm worker to wage successful struggles for legal protection and better working conditions."

The way for the newly-formed union was paved by the Farm Workers Organizing Committee in 1979, which responded to complaints of

low wages and poor living conditions.

Holding meetings in Abbotsford, Mission and Chilliwack as well as demonstrations at several farms, the committee grew to 1,400 members (half of them farm workers).

Of B.C.'s 11,000 farm workers, an estimated 7,000 work in the Fraser Valley. Chouhan hopes to sign up 6,000 in the union's first year.

But activities will not be confined to the province.

"We hope to organize throughout Canada, as there are hundreds of thousands of farm workers in Canada," he said. "Hopefully, the Canadian Farmworkers Union will be one of the biggest unions in

Canada in the next few years."

In an effort to further strengthen itself, the CFU will apply for affiliation with the Canadian Labor Congress. Bill Smally, CLC representative, indicated that support would be more than moral by contributing \$40,000 to the union fund.

Among the first resolutions the new union passed was one calling for repeal of the Unemployment Insurance Commission regulations that a person must work at least 20 hours a week or make \$79.50 to earn a week of insurable earnings; and that farm workers must work for a single employer 25 days before being covered by UIIC.

Chouhan said that farm workers rarely meet these conditions.

The union also called legislation protecting agricultural and domestic workers; the same protection offered the majority of other workers under the labor code and Minimum Wages Act.

Besides Chouhan other officers elected were: Jowala Singh Grewal, vice-president; Charan Gill, secretary; and Sarwan Boal, treasurer.

To celebrate their founding, the union has invited Cesar Chavez of California, president of the United Farm Workers, to be the guest speaker at a dinner April 26.

## Canadian Farmworkers Union: A Fight to End Labour Exploitation

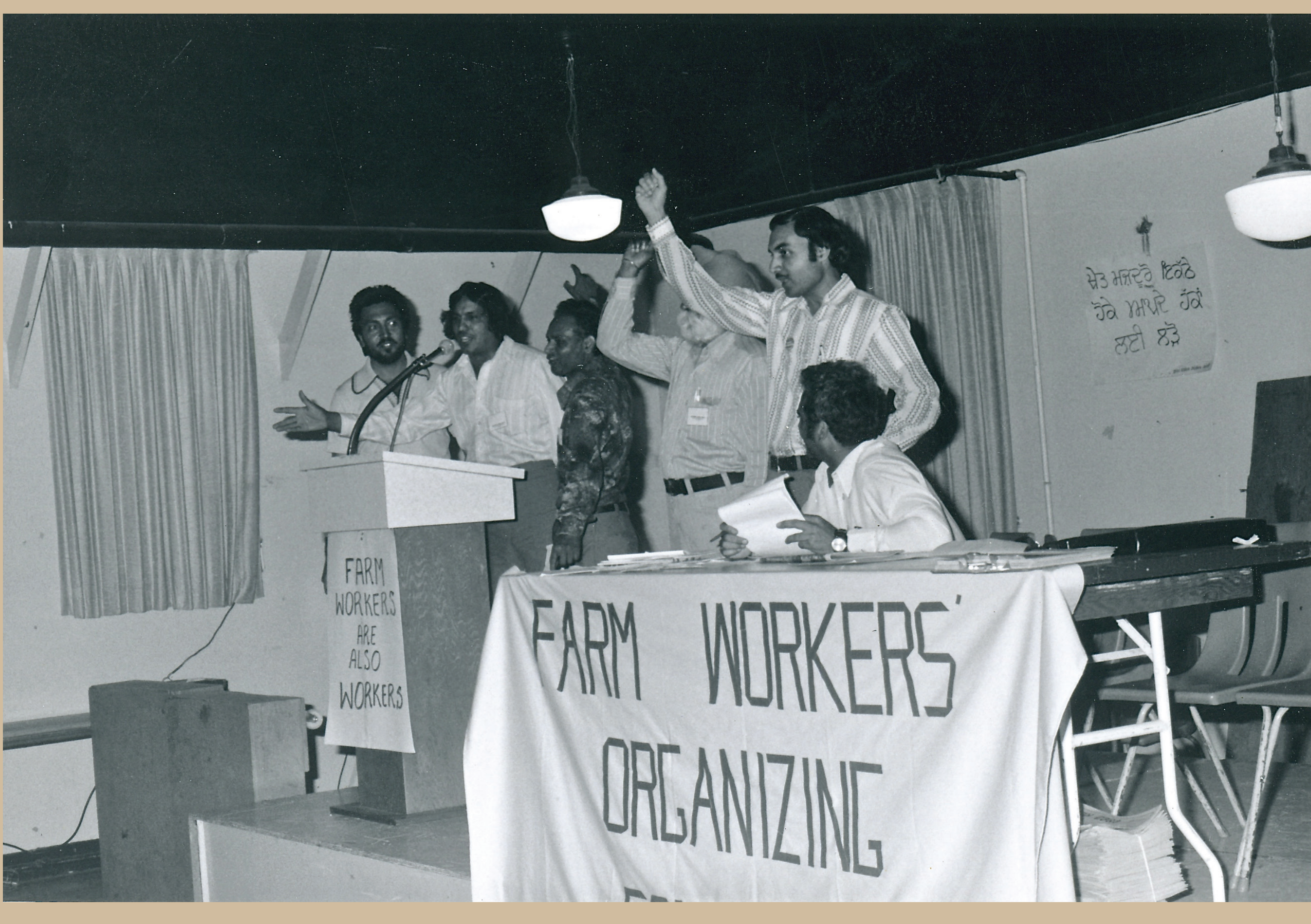
Farm work is known to be difficult, with long hours and manual labor. Now imagine you return from a hard day's work to a converted barn to rest your head each night. There is no running water and no toilet. To make matters worse, you have not been paid a fair wage for your days' work. In the 1960's and 70s, destitute living and working conditions like this was the reality for many South Asian farmworkers.

Fed-up with mistreatment and exploitation, farm workers organized and fought back. In April 1980, Raj Chouhan, a young Punjabi immigrant, led the official establishment of the Canadian Farmworkers Union. This was Canada's first union formed to improve agricultural working conditions.

## ਕੈਨੇਡੀਅਨ ਫਾਰਮ ਵਰਕਰਜ਼ ਯੂਨੀਅਨ: ਕਿਰਤ ਸ਼ੋਸ਼ਣ ਨੂੰ ਖਤਮ ਕਰਨ ਲਈ ਇੱਕ ਲੜਾਈ

ਖੇਤ ਦਾ ਕੰਮ ਔਖਾ ਮੰਨਿਆ ਜਾਂਦਾ ਹੈ, ਜਿਸ ਵਿੱਚ ਲੰਬੇ ਘੰਟੇ ਅਤੇ ਠੰਢੀ ਮਿਹਨਤ ਹੁੰਦੀ ਹੈ। ਹੁਣ ਕਲਪਨਾ ਕਰੋ ਕਿ ਤੁਸੀਂ ਇੱਕ ਸਖ਼ਤ ਦਿਨ ਦੀ ਮਿਹਨਤ ਤੋਂ ਬਾਅਦ ਹਰ ਰਾਤ ਆਪਣੇ ਸਿਰ ਨੂੰ ਆਰਾਮ ਦੇਣ ਲਈ ਇੱਕ ਫਾਰਮ ਬਿਲਡਿੰਗ ਤੋਂ ਬਦਲਾਏ ਹੋਏ ਕੋਠੇ ਵਿੱਚ ਵਾਪਸ ਆਉਂਦੇ ਹੋ। ਇੱਥੇ ਨਾ ਤਾਂ ਪਾਣੀ ਅਤੇ ਨਾ ਹੀ ਟਾਇਲਟ ਹੈ। ਮਾਮਲੇ ਨੂੰ ਹੋਰ ਵੀ ਬਦਤਰ ਬਣਾਉਣ ਲਈ, ਹੁਰਾਨੂੰ ਹੁਰਾਡੇ ਦਿਨ ਦੇ ਕੰਮ ਲਈ ਉਚਿਤ ਤਨਖਾਹ ਨਹੀਂ ਦਿੱਤੀ ਗਈ ਹੈ। 1960 ਅਤੇ 1970 ਦੇ ਦਹਾਕੇ ਵਿੱਚ, ਇਸ ਤਰ੍ਹਾਂ ਦੀ ਬੇਸ਼ਰਾਹਾ ਜ਼ਿੰਦਗੀ ਅਤੇ ਕੰਮ ਕਰਨ ਦੀਆਂ ਸਥਿਤੀਆਂ ਬਹੁਤ ਸਾਰੇ ਦੱਖਣੀ ਏਸ਼ੀਆਈ ਖੇਤ ਮਜ਼ਦੂਰਾਂ ਲਈ ਹਕੀਕਤ ਸਨ।

ਦੁਰਵਿਵਹਾਰ ਅਤੇ ਸ਼ੋਸ਼ਣ ਤੋਂ ਤੰਗ ਆ ਕੇ, ਖੇਤ ਮਜ਼ਦੂਰਾਂ ਨੇ ਸੰਗਠਿਤ ਹੋਏ ਅਤੇ ਵਾਪਸ ਲੜੇ। ਅਪ੍ਰੈਲ 1980 ਵਿੱਚ, ਇੱਕ ਨੌਜਵਾਨ ਪੰਜਾਬੀ ਪ੍ਰਵਾਸੀ, ਰਾਜ ਚੌਹਾਨ ਨੇ ਕੈਨੇਡੀਅਨ ਫਾਰਮ ਵਰਕਰਜ਼ ਯੂਨੀਅਨ ਦੀ ਅਧਿਕਾਰਤ ਸਥਾਪਨਾ ਦੀ ਅਗਵਾਈ ਕੀਤੀ। ਇਹ ਕੈਨੇਡਾ ਦੀ ਪਹਿਲੀ ਯੂਨੀਅਨ ਸੀ ਜੋ ਖੇਤੀਬਾੜੀ ਦੇ ਕੰਮਕਾਜੀ ਹਾਲਾਤਾਂ ਨੂੰ ਬਿਹਤਰ ਬਣਾਉਣ ਲਈ ਬਣਾਈ ਗਈ ਸੀ।



Founding meeting of the Canadian Farmworkers Union in New Westminster, BC on April 6, 1980.

Courtesy of The Canadian Farmworkers Union (CFU).

Indo-Canadian strawberry pickers with a young child harvesting in the fields. Fraser Valley, BC. c. 1970s.

Courtesy of The Canadian Farmworkers Union (CFU).