

10. Hired by AWOC

Henry: Because I might forget it at the end, I'll hand out these which you asked for last time.

David: This is the screed?

Henry: Yeah, but no peeking now. We have other things to talk about.

At the end of the last session, someone asked if that document had its intended effect, which was to influence the executive board of the northern California branch of the American Friends Service Committee (AFSC), to get them to get off the fence and take a stand on the bracero program. Well, I have before me a letter dated Jul 24, 1958, from an official of the Bureau of Employment Security in San Francisco, which was responsible for authorizing all the braceros on the Pacific coast. This is a memo from him to the national director of the Bureau of Employment Security, in which he passes along a copy of that statement, and he writes "The executive director of the committee [that is, the AFSC] has advised us that the statement in no way represents a policy of American Friends".

So, that will perhaps answer your question. It certainly answered my thinking about the AFSC, which was that they were gutless, and didn't realize the need, at certain times, to give up the Quaker doctrine of taking no action unless there's unanimous opinion. There are some social issues so important (I believe) that the difference between black and white is so great that you have to take a stand. Anyway, I was therefore disillusioned on that score.

I'm not sure that anything I've said previously makes it strong enough that I was so disillusioned with the University of California, which preens itself as being the world's greatest public university. Not a single person in that entire structure, from my immediate colleagues at the School of Public Health to the president of the entire university, did one thing to support my right to an opinion about a social issue. At the time, I was so depressed that I thought I must be in the wrong; I couldn't be the only person who thought I had a right to express myself in that way. But [*chuckle*] as the years have gone by, and I have read it and re-read it, I don't think it's very well written, but I still think I was perfectly within my rights in expressing myself in that way to a limited audience.

Anyway, it was indeed a watershed in my entire life, because the way things were going it looked very much as though I would end up with 2,500 interviews, and that I would be able to draw statistical relationships between a number of different variables, and answer the starting question of whether braceros were undergoing any changes in their thinking about health, well-being, and medical care as a result of their experiences in this country.

David: Can I ask a question?

Henry: Yes.

David: These days, in that situation, there would be various left-wing media outlets like the East

Bay Express or something like that, that would run stories like this. Was there anything like that back then, and did you consider going to the media with all this?

Henry: No, I didn't. I had a friend, Ernesto Galarza, who was an official of the National Agricultural Workers Union, and had made a career out of fighting the national bracero program. He did his best to get the media interested, and was never able to do so. He was a much better writer than I am, and an even better speaker, but he wasn't able to crack the world of media. I considered the American Civil Liberties Union, but at that time they didn't have any interest in farm labor. Later on, they would have, but not at that point.

So, I felt very, very alone. Everything was different in 1958. You have to remember that the politics of the entire country were different. Eisenhower was President, Richard Nixon was Vice-President, and it was an era of "good feeling" in which almost everyone was happy with the way things were and didn't want to rock the boat. There was no Ralph Nader. There were no whistle-blowers of any kind. I think I was a kind of early whistle-blower. To the extent that there were whistle-blowers later on, they found more often than not that they were punished for blowing the whistle. As I say, I didn't see any way out. So, I just caved in and accepted the compromise. I still don't know whose bright idea it was to compromise between what the bracero users would have liked (which was to have me summarily fired) or to let me deal with a truncated sample, and write it up, and get rid of me as soon as they could, which they probably thought would have gone on for another year.

Anyway, I continued the project as long as I could with my interviewer working -- I don't know how much of this repeats what I said last time. We did what little we could during the month of October, but then I had to let my interviewer go. That hurt me greatly because he had worked very hard and well for me, and I had (in a way) guaranteed him at least a year's employment, and I wasn't able to give it to him. I felt very badly about that. But I then did what I could with the data already in hand, and tried to keep in touch with what was going on in the field of the bracero system as a whole. Things were happening which gave me some reason to believe that maybe the bracero lobby was not all-powerful, and there were things that could be done working within the interstices of the system. I'll just give you a few examples.

One was a program under the general direction of the Community Service Organization (CSO), which had on its payroll a young man named César Chávez. I don't know whether we've talked about the CSO. It was a self-help, grass-roots community organizing effort largely devoted to the Spanish-speaking. It was not devoted exclusively to farm workers, but actually mostly to the urban Spanish-speaking. The CSO got a small grant to sponsor a pilot project in the little town of Oxnard, Ventura County, which was the center of the lemon industry. Lemons are almost unique in agriculture in that they are a year-round crop. Oxnard had been a place in which Mexican-Americans could settle down and make a living for themselves and their families without having to become migrants. The lemon growers found that braceros were more docile, and less likely to ask for another 10 cents a box for picking lemons, or anything of that sort. So they began taking in braceros, and by the fall of 1958 the lemon crop was being harvested virtually 100% by braceros in the town of Oxnard. Chávez got this grant to see if he could

organize the Mexican-Americans who remained in the town, trying to live off whatever they could -- it was mostly their wives who worked in the lemon packing sheds, where lemons were put in crates to ship across the country, or whatever. Chávez started working in the way that the CSO in general favored, which was to start with small groups in private houses, and then move on from there in a kind of cellular division pattern. The people who went to the very first meeting would be encouraged to hold a house meeting of their own, and so it would grow. Chávez was successful in that. It was his first work in farm labor. He had been an organizer for CSO in the urban community, registering voters etc., but this gave him his beginning in the farm labor movement. By the spring of 1959, they had succeeded in replacing all the braceros in Oxnard with local workers. That was a major chink in the dike of the bracero power.

Another development of some importance was the election for governor of California in the fall of 1958, in which "Pat" Brown (Edmund G. Brown, Sr., the first in the dynasty) was elected against some Republican I can't remember [*transcriptionist note: it was U.S. Senator William F. Knowland*]. Among other things, he said he was going to clean house in the farm placement service, which had become almost nothing but a conduit for the importation of braceros, even though technically it was supposed to be placing American citizens in farm jobs.

At the national level, there was the creation of something called the National Advisory Committee on Farm Labor. It was actually a transformation of an older organization called the National Sharecroppers Fund, which was largely an attempt at reform of labor practices in the South. But this was to be a national organization led by Eastern liberals such as Norman Thomas, the 6-time presidential candidate of the Socialist party, Eleanor Roosevelt, and A. Philip Randolph -- head of the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters, who later organized the march on Washington made famous by Martin Luther King's speech. This National Advisory Committee was really run as a public pressure group to try to bring pressure on organized labor to do its job in organizing farm workers.

One of the ideas that the leadership of the Advisory Committee had was to hold a public hearing in Washington DC at which people interested in the farm labor problem were to give testimony -- kind of a counterpoint to a congressional hearing. There was never a shortage of hearings on farm labor held by congressional committees which, however, were always chaired by southern Democrats because they held seniority. Under the seniority system, they were able to run the hearings just as they wanted, so they always stacked the hearings in one direction. The National Advisory Committee [*chuckle*] was going to have a witness list of a different persuasion.

Now I have to return for a moment to something I believe I said at our last meeting, which had to do with my encounter with Clark Kerr, the head of the UC system. I asked his permission (if that be the word) that I give testimony at a congressional hearing. At that time, I was not aware that there would be this countervailing hearing of a different nature, and that was the one I was really interested in going to. I thought that I would have a very welcoming reception from Clark Kerr because he himself was a member of the National Advisory Committee on Farm Labor. At that time, he was still a liberal, I think you could say. When I asked him about my giving

testimony, he thanked me for reminding him, but said that he was going to resign from the National Advisory Committee -- which he did.

As I said, their purpose was to bring pressure to bear upon organized labor, which at that time had recently undergone a merger between the old conservative AFL (American Federation of Labor) and the more recent, more progressive CIO (Congress of Industrial Organizations) -- the AFL-CIO. The CIO branch of the AFL-CIO was headed by Walter Reuther. Reuther's philosophy was that workers who were already organized into unions had a responsibility to help unorganized workers organize themselves. George Meany, who was head of the AFL, had a very different philosophy, which was that if unorganized workers are really good material for a union -- if they really want a union -- they will organize themselves. In the case of the building trades, that seems to have worked over the years. But it never worked in the case of the unorganized workers because they were so dispersed, and as a rule they had less education, for various reasons.

But now, under the merger, Walter Reuther had been allowed to set up a Department of Organizing. There were various trade-offs that he and Meany had to make in the process of this merger. The Dept. of Organizing was Reuther's baby. Those of us who were interested in farm labor thought that this would be a very logical place for that new department to be in operation, and this whole process of the public hearings and papers that were given -- I submitted a paper; I wasn't able to go back to testify in person -- but the whole point of it was to steer the new Dept. of Organizing in the direction of farm workers, which was by far the largest group of unorganized workers in the country.

By far the most important development in this period between my termination (well, I can't really call it a full termination; I was still working at my project) -- during this gray period in which I didn't have a long-term commitment to the university (I had no intellectual commitment at all) -- the development that interested me most took place primarily under the inspiration of two Catholic priests. One of them was Father McDonnell in San Jose -- whose name I may not have mentioned before, but who in some ways may be thought of as the most important single figure in the whole long history of farm labor in California, because it was he who first recruited César Chávez to the CSO, and that led to Chávez's development in a way that led to Delano. Father McDonnell was a genius at coming up with creative ideas. He was an idea man above all else. He was also a brilliant linguist. In fact, he taught a group of fellow seminarians during the time that they were studying to become priests. He took it upon himself during their leisure hours -- and there weren't very many leisure hours -- to learn Spanish, because he knew that the Spanish-speaking in the southwest were largely neglected by the Mother Church, even though the majority of them were nominally Catholics. They were not practicing Catholics because the services were conducted in English.

Anyway, Father McDonnell recruited Chávez. Chávez went back to the urban centers because that's where CSO was concentrated. McDonnell wanted to do something about the farm workers who had been displaced by braceros. Many of them lived in the slums around towns like Stockton and San Jose, living from hand-to-mouth with odd jobs. If their wives were able to

work in canneries or packing houses, they were able to live that way. When the seasons ended for those industries, their wives were sometimes eligible for unemployment insurance. McDonnell got the idea that there were things the displaced farm workers themselves could do despite the existence of the bracero program. He had the idea of organizing groups which would work on common problems but wouldn't call themselves a "union" at the outset because they had no hope of direct confrontations with the agricultural industry. They would do things like cooperative buying of basic commodities. They could buy beans or corn meal in 100-pound sacks, rather than in 1-pound sacks at a corner grocery store where they would have to pay 10 times as much. He was going to call this organization an "agricultural workers' association". The acronym would be AWA, pronounced "ah-wah", which (as you may or may not know) is how you pronounce the word for "water" in Spanish. [Chuckle] I thought that was kind of clever.

McDonnell was more of an idea man than a man of actual practice, because it isn't so easy to translate these great visions into reality. However, that was the strong suit of his colleague and fellow seminarian Father McCullough, who was located in Stockton. Father McCullough started his Local II of AWA on the model of small house meetings to start with, which gradually spread. They would talk about problems including child care, automobile repairs, etc. -- whatever problems were uppermost in their minds. By January 1959, enough of these groups were meeting in small homes that they were able to have overall meetings in the gymnasium or social hall of the local Catholic church.

I became acquainted with that development. One of the prime movers was Dolores Huerta, whom I had met some time previously when I was pre-testing the questionnaire for my study of braceros' attitudes toward health. She became an officer of the Stockton AWA. Father McCullough never held office because he thought that wouldn't be appropriate for a man of the cloth. By February 1959, the Stockton group had progressed to such a point that they needed full-time leadership. I had a long talk with Father McCullough about my situation and their situation. He said they needed an executive secretary who would be able to keep books, etc. As soon as they arrived at a consensus on what should be their dues structure (up to that point they hadn't had any), he visualized that there would be at least 100 families who would want to become dues-paying members, that they could afford \$2/ month, and they could therefore hire somebody for \$200/ month to serve as executive secretary, or whatever the position would be called.

He asked me if I would be interested. [Chuckle] Oh, man, I was interested all right, but there were a number of practical considerations. One was that the amount would be about half of what I was getting from the university; another was that I spoke almost no Spanish. Well, he said -- actually I think it was my idea -- I said that it would be only a half-time position, and that the other half I would go out and work in the fields. [Chuckle] He said "Do you have any idea what you might be getting into?" I said, well, I had picked apricots, because at one time we had a 5-acre orchard in Los Altos. Well, he had to laugh. It's true that in the Stockton area there are tree crops for a good part of the year. At other times of the year, there are nothing but row crops that involve stooping all day long. He said he himself had tried cutting asparagus, and

although he was in fairly good physical condition, he could barely stand at the end of the day. As for the language problem, he said there could always be a volunteer in the office, if there was a telephone call, or somebody with a problem who didn't speak any English. He pointed out that my wife was pretty fluent in Spanish, and I could hope to get a little assistance from her, although she would be busy because of the fact that she had three small children. He also pointed out that he was a member of the executive board of the local public housing agency, and that he could guarantee to get me housing in one of the public projects at a very, very low rent, because the rents would be based upon income, and my income would be at such a level that it was almost off their scale.

So I began dreaming about that quite seriously, and discussed it with my wife. She wasn't wildly enthusiastic -- in fact, she thought I was kind of nuts, which in fact I probably was [*chuckle*]. But I then went back to where we were living at the time, Claremont, and began working on a prospectus of how I visualized the AWA over the long haul -- all of this at the same time that I was having to keep up with my obligations to the bracero study. These involved a lot of driving back and forth to Westwood where the computer work was being done, and also writing the text that was going to have to go along with the large number of complicated tables that were in the process of being cranked out.

In April 1959, I finished a 6- or 7-page prospectus for the way I hoped the AWA could be developed into a functioning organization, and sent that off to Father McCullough, feeling quite differently from the last letter I had sent to him, which was on the same day that I mailed his out, in which I had premonitions that there would be repercussions.

Let's see if I'm skipping over anything worth mentioning. For many of these details, I have a fallback in which I can become quite precise. For example, I know that it was on March 8th that I had this long discussion with Father McCullough, because I have travel vouchers which show that I was in Stockton on that day. But in other cases there are gaps in which I don't have written records, or I can't find them. I know I must have some correspondence in my archives, but I can't put my hand on them at the moment.

Sometime in the period in April, after I had sent this long prospectus to Father McCullough, I must have heard from someone; it might have been my old friend Ernesto Galarza, who as a nominal officer of the National Agricultural Workers Union would logically have been informed of developments in the AFL-CIO structure, and he may very well have communicated with me by telephone. In any case, I must have had straws in the wind that the AFL-CIO was in fact going to make a move in organizing farm workers, and the name of Norman Smith must have been mentioned -- because it did not come as a bolt completely out of the blue that I had a phone call from Norman Smith himself on May 7th, saying that he wanted to come to Claremont and see me. That did in fact happen.

He was [*chuckle*] a very interesting person. He was in his 60s, and he began our talk by filling me in on his history. He loved to talk about himself, and how much he had labored for the cause in the 1930s, when he was organizing automobile workers, who were totally unorganized at that time in history -- they were rough times. He loved to carry around a photograph of

himself after he was beaten up by goons -- I guess they were goons from the Ford Motor Co. He had blood running down his face; it was his badge of honor. He had to admit that he knew little, if anything, about agriculture, or about the efforts of others to organize agriculture. He said he had made the acquaintance of Norman Thomas at one point, and Thomas was very interested in southern tenant farmers. One way or the other, he figured that he could pick up on whatever might be needed to do the job. He was not at all bashful. He was very overweight.

He finally got down to cases, and asked me if I would be interested in becoming Director of Research for the Agricultural Workers Organizing Committee (AWOC), which is what he had been designated to head. It seems that the head of the entire Dept. of Organizing, which in turn was part of the CIO wing of the merged super-union, was an old buddy of Norman Smith's named John Livingston (known as Jack), who had been recruited by Norman Smith himself to join the autoworkers' union back when Livingston was even younger than Smith. Livingston was finally repaying that favor by looking at Smith for this new job, even though Smith had no connection with any union -- in recent years he had become a foreman in a steel mill, and as a foreman was not eligible to be a member of the steelworkers' union.

Anyway, we had to talk turkey. I mean, we had to talk about certain details, some of which were fairly uncomfortable. For one, I had this obligation to finish up the research project and a written report. It was going to be months before I was able to finish it. He wanted me to come to work on July 1st. I asked whether I could work part-time on my bracero paper, including the need to go from time to time to Berkeley to confer with people there. He said "No problem; yours will not be an 8-to-5 job". He also said that the pay would be \$75/week, which is what he was going to be paying all the other members of his staff -- including his secretary, who was going to be Dolores Huerta. He didn't want there to be jealousies among the members of the staff, even though he realized that I had been making more than \$75/week, and I had incomparably more education than any of the others. I said that was OK. I would also be allowed 5 cents a mile for the use of my car on union business, which is exactly what I had been getting from the university for the use of my car on research project business -- so that was an even-up.

The whole idea of AWA had become moot. That was obviously the reason why McCullough had not seen a necessity of reacting to the prospectus that I had sent him, because there was no way that it was ever going to be acted upon. There was no way that AWA could continue to exist in the same town as AWOC. In fact, at the earliest opportunity that they had a general meeting, they voted to go out of existence and urged everybody to join AWOC, where the dues were also going to be \$2/ month. So, it seemed to me self-evident that Father McCullough, who had been involved in discussions with Smith himself, told Smith about me, and that I had certain abilities, and that Smith could make good use of a Director of Research. Smith all but conceded, in many things that he said or didn't say in his discussion with me, that he didn't know what to do with a Director of Research -- he had never had one in his days of getting beat up by goons on picket lines in the auto industry [*chuckle*], which is why he was all too willing to let me spend time on my bracero monograph.

So, it looked as though I would have the best of both worlds; I would be hip-deep in helping to organize the unorganized, and I would also have stability. I would have assurances. It looked as though everything was going for the best. I asked Father McCullough to start looking for a place for us in the public housing of Stockton, which he did. I looked for something to do with the house in Claremont, which I had bought directly from the seller at a nice price, but with a fairly large loan. There, I had to turn for assistance to my own mother, who was at that time teaching retarded children in Sacramento. They did not call them retarded, they called them developmentally disabled.

Eugene: That's what they call them now.

Henry: Well, I don't know. In any case, they didn't use that word. They referred to "special education" to lump together the teaching of gifted children and children who were not so gifted.

We're just about winding things up. I had just accepted a position as Director of Research of the AWOC, to be located in Stockton, and I had to report for work on July 1st, 1959, working for a man named Norman Smith whose background had been entirely in the auto industry. He knew nothing about agriculture, and he knew nothing about research.

David: He was as qualified as most bosses, then. So, now, where were we living during the period that you were doing the study? Were we in Berkeley that whole time?

Henry: No, no, no. You guys moved to Claremont in February of 1957 because that was closer to the location of bracero camps, and it was where I had access to faculty advisors in the Dept. of Sociology and the use of their equipment ...

David: In Los Angeles?

Henry: No, Pomona College is in Claremont. We began in a small cottage on Dartmouth Place. That was a rental. After Rachel was born, I bought a house on Doane Avenue. Three bedrooms.

David: I remember living in an apartment in a complex that was next to a field of some sort. What am I thinking of? I was maybe 3 at the time, something like that.

Henry: Well, we moved to Doane Avenue in 1958. You would have been 3 in October 1958.

David: That's the last place we lived in Claremont?

Henry: Right. Then, in Stockton -- I'm sure you wouldn't remember this, because it was quite brief -- for a brief time we lived in public housing. That was before I bought a place on Ramona Street, in which we lived until June of 1960, when everything changed.

Eugene: You said you got help from your mother?

Henry: Oh, yeah. She was not teaching in the summer. She had certain rentals that she herself

managed in the Sacramento area, but was able to break away long enough to find a renter for the place in Claremont. She was very good at that. She found that there were a lot of houses in suburbia around places like Sacramento where veterans had bought houses under the GI Bill which allowed them to put down virtually nothing, and they got loans at very low interest rates. As the years went by, these fellows were able to either move along to someplace better, or simply walk away. If they went bust, or got fired, or divorced, or whatever, they could simply walk away from these GI loans without losing anything, since they had no money invested. My mother would then be able to buy those places for very little down, and rent them out. That's how she made a livelihood after she retired from teaching the developmentally disabled children. Eventually, of course, she had to give up those rentals and move down to this area. But she was pretty good at her version of real estate.

Because Norman Smith made very little demand of my time (he had no idea what a Director of Research might do), I took it upon myself to do things like write research papers which showed that the asparagus growers of San Joaquin County around Stockton had a virtual monopoly on the production of asparagus in the entire country during certain key periods of the year, and were therefore able, if they were able to use their leverage, to pay a reasonable wage to the guys who were out in the fields cutting that asparagus, rather than leaning on bracero labor at the very bottom wages. That sort of thing, I produced research papers every week or two.

Smith also gave me as much time as I felt I needed to finish writing up my report on the bracero study. Our secretary at AWOC was none other than Dolores Huerta, and she was a very good secretary. She typed my research papers flawlessly, but she chafed (to say the least) under Norman Smith. However, that is getting ahead of the story. I propose to begin with that at our next session, because Father McCullough also enters the equation. He was responsible for my getting the job in the first place. It becomes very interesting, in my opinion -- two forks in the road. At the very least, my fate was sealed that I was destined down the path that did not lead to a PhD -- let's just put it that way. If I hadn't sent out this paper, my path led toward using the bracero study as a basis for my PhD dissertation. The head of the Sociology Dept. at Berkeley at that time was Herbert Blumer, whom I knew from his visiting professorship at the Univ. of Hawaii. Everything seemed fated toward my joining the group of you that all have doctorates -- but that was never to be.