

12. More AWOC; Cherry picker's strike

David: November 10th, 2014, episode ...

Henry: Let me think. Isn't it number 12?

David: Episode 12? Could very well be, and, on the air.

Henry: Oh, we haven't filled the water glasses.

David: Go ahead, Henry.

Henry: Well, you ... at the end of the last session, you asked me in so many words, whether there wasn't anything that could have been done, about what I call the "burning of the books". That is to say, after a hundred copies had been mimeographed, of this 750-page tome, and they were ordered destroyed by my mentor (if that is the right word for), Dr. Edward S. Rogers, M.D.

David: Because of one or two sentences that might not have even been in there, right?

Henry: No, that's not right. There was a chapter called "The Social Structure", which he, I don't believe, ever read, but thought was an impassioned plea on behalf of organizing farm workers, and to get rid of the bracero program. And there was absolutely nothing like that in there.

David: Why did he think that?

Henry: Because he was still paranoid about the ... the purple prose of my 10-page screed, yeah. And, as he put it in one of the sessions in which he tried to be fatherly, or, avuncular, or whatever, he said that my problem was (what's the word?) *infricanem philia*, which is Greek for love of the underdog – he thought I had that sickness. Well, certainly there is something to be said for that. But, anyway – to get back to the reason why I don't believe I fully answered your question – one of the reasons I didn't, at the time at least, make any real protest about the burning of the books, is what happened at a meeting, the final meeting of the advisory committee of my research project. I don't believe I went into any detail on that subject, but it took the heart out of me, because there was nobody on the entire committee, who said so much as "well if the that chapter is out of place, or objectionable for any reason, why not just excise it?". Because it was not crucial to the purpose of the study, which was to answer the question of whether braceros, being in this country for a period of months, was having any effect on their thinking about how to maintain health and what to do when you get sick. Everybody on the committee went along with Rogers' edict, which was, to destroy the entire thing. Well, it was particularly hurtful that, uh, my old friend from the University of Hawaii, Herbert Bloomer, who by then was the chairman of the Sociology Department at Berkeley, agreed that I went beyond the proper subject in discussing the power structure at work, that accounted for the existence of the bracero program. Well, I didn't want to get into an argument with Herb Bloomer at this meeting, but at the very first meeting of the advisory committee, way back in the summer of '56 (and here it was 1960) he himself had said, that I should put the

whole subject of the bracero program within a social context, so I thought I was just following his instructions. But the fact that I didn't have a single defender, just, as I say, took whatever fight there might have been, out of me. It wasn't until some years later that (*laughs*) I entered the fray again.

Anyway, so much for the subject of my 750-page report, which brings us to May of 1960, in which a number of other things were going on, within the farm labor movement and within AWOC, in particular, because of course, during the months up to that point, I had been splitting my time between two virtually full-time jobs, one working on this manuscript, and the other my duties as director of research for AWOC.

Well, in the spring of 1960, as happens every year, the cherries come, become ripe, in the Stockton area. And Stockton is the – at least at that time, was the – nation's number one producer of Bing cherries. It had a virtual monopoly on the national market. And of course, this was one of my arguments in a number of my AWOC research papers, which was if only the growers of these various crops would band together and take advantage of their potential power in the marketplace, they could very easily give whatever the growers considered a living wage. But the growers competed among themselves, and never did take advantage of their potential powers.

But in the spring of 1960, a voice was heard from a source that hadn't been before, and that was, the workers who call themselves fruit tramps. They also called themselves rubber tramps because they went from one fruit harvest to another by automobile, and they were sometimes known as ladder tramps, because that was their place within the farm labor hierarchy. They specialized in fruit crops which required that you climb up ladders, which brings into play two skills, neither of which is simple, as I know from personal experience. One is how to place and work from ladders without falling off and hurting yourself, and placing it in such a way that you can reach the maximum number of ripe fruit before you have to move the ladder again. And then secondly, it takes even more skill, in recognizing the distinction between fruit that is not quite ripe and that which is ready, and there's particular skill in the case of cherries, because you have not only to recognize the ripeness of the fruit, but you have to pick the fruit with a stem attached to it, otherwise it will spoil rapidly and your fruit will be thrown out by a grader before you would get credit for picking that particular bucket.

So, these very highly skilled fruit tramps – and believe me that is not a term of denigration; they call themselves that – fruit tramps, ladder tramps, rubber tramps, all the same thing – they are the elite of farm workers. The growers have found – growers of that time, and this was of course the time in which growers were trying to use braceros the greatest extent possible – growers tried using braceros in some of these fruit crops, and found that they were no great bargain, because they would damage the trees, they would pick fruit that was not ready for picking, and it to be thrown out, and so it was to their advantage to continue to use fruit tramps year, after year, after year.

And in the spring of 1960, because there was in existence in the Stockton area, a union, the fruit tramps talked among themselves and they said, what's a union for, if not to represent us and

get us an increase in the pay we get for picking cherries. And so, they essentially organized themselves, and came to AWOC and said, we want representation, and Norman Smith, who was nominally in charge, said, OK what do you want? And they said we want a dollar ten cents a bucket instead of a dollar, and that certainly sounded reasonable. So AWOC said a strike was in effect.

And on the side the workers, was another element which hadn't been really a factor in the past, and that was a state agency called the Mediation and Reconciliation Service [1] of the state Department of Industrial Relations, which exists for the purpose of bringing together workers and employers, to at least talk with each other, as the name of the organization suggests. They had no powers to enforce an agreement, but they did serve to try to get people conversing at least. And so they came into the cherry harvest of San Joaquin county, and they did in fact get some of the smaller growers talking with the union, with the understanding that they weren't being required to sign contracts; all they were being asked to do was pay \$1.10 a bucket for picking cherries. And a number of them went along with that.

But the biggest cherry grower in the county (and probably in the country, maybe the world), was a guy named Fred Podesta, [who] had 900 acres of cherries and he said, Oh no, it would let the camel's nose inside the tent and it would end up with our being forced to recognize the union and there'd be no end of it. So he drew a line in the sand, as they say, and held out paying no more than a dollar. And he wasn't able to get workers. And he lost a big chunk of his crop, I don't know, a hundred-thousand dollars, or whatever. I suspected that he might have been helped with his losses, by his friends in the cherry-growing business and perhaps other fruit-growing businesses, because it lent weight to their claim that without an adequate supply of labor they were going to be forced to let crops rot in the fields – that was the mantra that they used. So he did let a lot of cherries go to waste. And of course, took all the advantage that he could in the popular press that here was good food, this highly desirable food – people love cherries. And they thought, they thought, they were getting ... they thought they were getting good publicity out of the fact here was the union forcing them to let good food waste.

Anyway, this was a time of considerable stress for Norman Smith, the director of AWOC, and in fact he turned over the running of the strike to Louis Krainock, who was sort-of self-designated (I mean he created the title for himself, of) Director of Public Relations and Training, so he had charge of training the organizers, as well as handling the relations with the press and the public. And he ran the union, because Norman Smith suffered what he claimed was a flare-up of his diabetes, and he went to the hospital. But Krainock always told us that Smith was simply out of his depth in trying to cope with the press and went the hospital to avoid the problems of dealing with the strike. In so many words, he claimed that Smith was simply chickening out. I did not have any great ... I had no respect for Krainock, then or later, because he was an opportunist, kind of an Iago-type figure, behind the throne, manipulating, and stabbing Smith in the back every way he could.

The crop ran its course, and as usual, the union had nothing lasting to show for it. As part of my job, I was told to calculate how much extra money went into the pockets of the cherry pickers

because of the fact that most of the growers did go along with their wage request of \$1.10 a bucket. I was able to come up with a plausible figure of some millions of dollars. And Smith always liked to use those kinds of data to show that the union was a great success. But there was no guarantee that any such benefits would continue in future years; sometimes they did, sometimes they didn't.

Now, another development of some interest and another reason why Smith came close to having a nervous breakdown, was the revival of an old problem that began in the 1940s, with an effort, back then, to organize farm workers under the aegis of a union called the NAWU, the National Agricultural Workers Union, which in its own way was the successor of the Southern Tenant Farmers Union, way back in the 30s. Sharecroppers tried to organize themselves. And ... I can't go into the history of all of this. But in the late 1930s, yeah, that's ... no: the late 40s, the NAWU tried to organize the DiGiorgio Fruit Corporation, probably the biggest single grower in the state of California and therefore in the country, and probably the world. It had holdings up and down the San Joaquin Valley, of various kinds. Their main base of operations was in Kern county, and the NAWU struck their home ranch, under the leadership of Ernesto Galarza, whom I later became a very good friend of (the only PHD ever to be an officer of a national union, so far as we know), a very brilliant guy, but didn't know much about the practicalities of farm labor.

He knew a lot about the economics of agriculture, but not the nitty-gritty. So he went about the organizing in a traditional way, just set up picket lines, at the entrances of the DiGiorgio ranch, and there are a number of entrances on a huge, multi-acre ranch of that sort, so they were at some pains to have enough pickets to maintain any kind of showing. But they tried to get all the advantage of the David versus Goliath metaphor; here they were a tiny little union, against the biggest agricultural corporation of them all. And they tried to keep up these token picket lines, enough to attract a certain amount of attention; they attracted the attention of the left-wing of the motion-picture industry.

And those friends of the labor movement put together a documentary called *Poverty in the Valley of Plenty*, which found no difficulty in going into the fields and taking pictures of bad housing and workers stooping over all day in the hot sun, and kids in rags, and so forth and so on, all with the implication that these were the conditions on the DiGiorgio ranch. And in fact they weren't even allowed access to the DiGiorgio property and if they had been they probably would have found that the conditions on the DiGiorgio ranch were not all that bad. But the DiGiorgio Fruit Corporation sued, under libel laws, that they had been defamed by this documentary. And they had a lot of money for high-powered lawyers and the union didn't have any, and so DiGiorgio won. They had sued for two million dollars. I don't think they collected any monetary damages at all, but they did obtain a court order, that the union had to gather up all existing copies of this documentary and turn them over to the company, to which the union agreed, including Galarza as an officer of the union.

Come 1960, Krainock, as Director of Public Relations and Training, of the staff of AWOC, got hold of a copy of this supposedly non-existent motion picture, and started showing it at meetings of AWOC, wherever he could organize them, and I went to one myself. I didn't think it was a

particularly good documentary, but there weren't very many good documentaries about farm labor organizing (I don't think there were any). So, Krainock showed it rather widely, until DiGorgio heard about it (*laughs*), and prepared by having a number of his personal witnesses attend one of these public showings. It was held in a farm labor camp, but they were open to people without having to show any IDs and these guys probably put on their – the closest thing they had to – working men's clothes.

So they took notes on exactly what was said, and the fact that the movie had been shown in its entirety, etc., etc., etc., and went back to their corporate headquarters in San Francisco and prepared a lawsuit, very similar (almost identical, I think) to the one that had been filed back in 1949, again asking for two million dollars in damages and naming Norman Smith as the principal defendant, Ernesto Galarza as the second, the organization AWOC, and the organization the NAWU, as organizational defendants, and then a number of John Does, which would consist of the staff members who had attended these showings. I was never named as a defendant, although I was a staff member who had attended at least one of the showings. But somehow or other, I escaped their net.

Now, ironically enough, Galarza himself had retired – had resigned – from his position with AWOC, in January of that year, because he was so disgruntled with Norman Smith, and the relationship between the way the farm workers and the packing house workers were being treated under the charter of AWOC. On paper, AWOC was supposed to sign up field workers for membership in the NAWU. [*Phone call interrupts*] And anybody who was a member of the packing house workers – anybody engaged in the packing (sorting, and crating and packing), of produce – would be turned over to the packing-house workers union.

In actual practice, Norman Smith didn't divide anybody into either one of them, he kept all the dues paid into a trust fund, to be fought over later, and it essentially meant the starvation of the NAWU, and Galarza considered his primary loyalty to that organization, and so he resigned from AWOC. And he got himself dismissed from the lawsuit, on the grounds that he was totally uninformed about the fact that this motion picture had been shown, and would have opposed it if he had known about it, because he knew that this court order was still in existence – that it was not to be shown, by anybody. But, Norman Smith was still on the hook for two million dollars, at least in theory, and that lawsuit dragged on for months, and months, and months.

Well, I was trying to continue functioning in my writing of research papers and whatever I could do to make myself useful. And then, on Thursday, the 30th day of June, of 1960, there occurred another one of the watershed events in my career, my whole life, and at this point I would like to go off the record.

[Discussion of the separation from Pam]

Henry: Now, I didn't know how long any of this was going to take this afternoon, and therefore I don't have an agenda to fill out the rest of the time. I would be prepared to go back on the record if I had anything particular to say about ... OK, here's something I can say. I forgot to mention: during the course ... we're back on the record now.

David: OK.

Henry: During the course of this cherry workers strike – and I call it the workers strike rather than the union strike, because it was really, essentially, the idea of the workers themselves, which dragged the union along with them – somehow (I think it was unplanned), a television crew from CBS, which had a big chunk of money to do a documentary which was going to be part of a series, to be narrated by the famous broadcaster Edward R. Murrow. They were going to do a documentary about the plight of the migrant farm workers, as they called it. And they even had a title picked out; it was going to be called “Harvest of Shame”. And they were going to prepare this documentary to be shown at the Thanksgiving season of that year. And somehow or other, they had it so that their television crew was there in Stockton, at the very time of this cherry strike. They could not have known about it in advance, so as I say, it was fortuitous, or if you prefer, providential, whatever.

To his credit, because he was pretty good at this sort of thing, Krainock put together a rally of a lot of these fruit tramps; I can’t recall exactly what auditorium he arranged for them, but he had a goodly crowd there. He also had the services of a fellow named Ernie Mars (I mentioned Ernie Mars at the last session), a friend of Pete Seeger’s, who wanted to be the Pete Seeger of the current generation, in appearing at union rallies, and he had his big moment. He sang at this particular rally, a song that he himself invented for the occasion: “Keep Your Eye upon the Dollar and a Dime for Every Pail”, set to some well-known tune, I can’t remember exactly which tune; I remember those words.

And as you know, I guess, when a crew goes into the field and takes pictures of this sort of thing, 90 or 95 percent of it ends up on the cutting room floor, but they saved that portion of the rally, that featured Ernie Mars, and it was the high point of his life. And the documentary itself attracted a lot of attention when it showed at the Thanksgiving season of that year. It wasn’t particularly good, in my opinion, because, in fact, most farm workers were not migrants, and the repetition of this cliché “the plight of the migrants” was rather misleading, in my opinion. But, not only did it attract attention that year, but it kept being shown for many successive Thanksgivings. I don’t know what ever became of it, but I’m sure you can still get copies of it from Amazon if you’re so inclined. So that was a big development; I give Krainock some credit for doing that, because all of this was during the time that poor Norm Smith was in the hospital.

If I have another ... well, I do have another few more minutes, I want to say a few more words about Norman Smith himself. He was very, very kind and generous to me, after the cataclysm in my own life. I wasn’t able to spend any time at Ramona Avenue at all, so Norm Smith had me sleeping on the floor of his apartment, as long as I wanted. So I had a sleeping bag and I made myself at home, to whatever extent was possible. And it was no problem with Smitty himself because he was always up and out, way before I woke up, to (*chuckle*) harangue his friends down on skid row. I don’t know what he did with his evenings, but he was ... I almost never saw him in his apartment. But he was very kind to me, as he had been, in allowing me unlimited time to continue my work with the bracero study for the University. I guess, well, part of it is

that he didn't really know what a director of research might otherwise be doing, as I think I have said before, he essentially let me define the job for myself.

As for his ideas about organizing – how to organize farm workers – all he knew was what might be called the collective approach, was to try to get a crowd, and orate, and with the power of the spoken word, perhaps magnified by a bullhorn, outside of a factory gate or something of that sort, you might be able to move a number of people, all at the same time – that's one approach. He was very good at that, if he had ever been able to find an analogous situation to a factory gate in agriculture, but he never was able to find one. And the other basic approach was one-on-one, which he had also used to good effect, and that's how he had recruited his boss, John, or Jack, Livingston, who became director of the entire department of organizing for the AFL-CIO. But he never had had any experience with the ... between those two opposite extremes, was a small group – the house meeting – which was what some of us had hoped he would use, as the basic technique in the organizing of farm workers. So he wasn't to be blamed for the fact, he had no feeling for it, he just had never seen it in actual operation.

And thirdly, I became ... I had fellow feelings for Norman Smith, because he was in a situation very similar to the one I had put myself in, as the head – the titular head – of the student body at Paly High. Norman Smith, had had the right to tell Jack Livingston, he didn't know enough about farm workers, at the age of 62, and he was an old dog, he wasn't capable of learning new tricks and therefore "Thanks for thinking of me, Jack, but I'm just going to continue serving as foreman of a crew at the Fontana steel works until I retire in three years, and I'll make do with my memories of the glory years in the 1930s." He had the ... he had the right, to turn his back on the job of director of AWOC, but he hadn't done so. And he was trapped, in something that he *knew*, he knew he wasn't doing a good job of it and it made him miserable, but he was stuck with it. So I felt for him, I felt very sorry for him; he and I became friends.

He never ... I never had the (*laughs*), I never had the opportunity to say what I thought about any of his activities or his proposals. If I had had such a chance, he might have listened to them, but he wouldn't have paid any attention to them. I had an effect later on and we'll come to that, in time.

As I say there was a considerable period in which, the real power of the organization was held by Lou Krainock, and it's a very interesting fact that every history of the farm labor movement, and there've been many and there continue to be many, and every one of them, is entirely missing in this aspect: that the power behind the throne for a considerable period of time, was Louis F. Krainock. He's a forgotten man, and as far as I'm concerned he deserves to be. But, if I were ever to write my history, he would be there, for better or for worse, he deserves to have, because of his influence. As it is, Galarza is always mentioned, more prominently than he should, I think – he had really no impact at all, upon AWOC. And Smith is mentioned, of course, but, all of the histories are deficient in my opinion. It's a little late in the day now for me to write a book about it, but

That's it for today, unless you have any questions.

Eugene: I think maybe that song, the refrain is “keep your hands upon the throttle and your eyes upon the rail.” [2]

Henry: There you go!

Eugene: I don’t know the rest, do you know that?

David: No I don’t.

Eugene: OK, it’s a folk song.

Henry: I’ll look into that.

David: OK, thanks very much.

[1] The Mediation and Conciliation Service, now the California State Mediation and Conciliation Service (SMCS), part of the Public Employment Relations Board (PERB). See

<http://www.perb.ca.gov/csmcs/smcs.aspx>

<http://www.lcwlegal.com/82204>

[2] “Life's Railway to Heaven”, attr. to Eliza R. Snow, ref. attr. to M. E. Abbey, c.1890. See

http://library.timelesstruths.org/music/Lifes_Railway_to_Heaven/

<http://www.hymntime.com/tch/htm/l/r/h/lrheaven.htm>

http://www.hymnary.org/text/life_is_like_a_mountain_railroad