

15. Strike aftermath; Bracero report revision

Henry: Well, I have spoken in the past about the ill-advised strike of the lettuce harvest in Imperial Country in the winter of 1960-61, with a lot of unintended consequences, one of which was the reassignment of my close friend and spiritual advisor, Thomas McCullough. But in the meanwhile I've remembered that there was another fallout, namely the departure from the AWOC staff of a fellow named Louis Krainock, who was sort of a Rasputin- or Svengali-like figure, who had a great influence on Norman Smith, the nominal director of AWOC, who was really a lost soul – he didn't have any idea how to organized farm workers, having had no experiences other than in the automobile industry of the 1930s.

But Krainock was always very self-assured, and that had an impact upon Smith, the he must know what he was doing. Well, in fact what Krainock was frequently doing was working against him, to try to subvert him in the eyes of all the rest of the staff, and I don't think that Krainock was ever in Imperial County on the occasion of that strike at all. I think that by that time he had already left in order to play footsie with a couple of other unions that he thought had a much better chance of making any headway with agricultural workers. One of them being the ILWU, which had in fact a number of contracts covering farm workers in the Hawaiian Islands, but Krainock was an equal-opportunity strict opportunist. He was also willing to make deals with the Teamsters. So he was trying to work out a deal whereby they would support him in his effort to start a rival agricultural worker's union, a rival to AWOC.

So he was out of the picture, which suited me just fine. I disliked him intensely. And according to my best recollection, I stayed in the Imperial Valley until late Feb, this in 1961, by which time it was clear to me that it was not only going nowhere, but that it was going downhill, with attempts to get braceros removed from their own health and welfare, by beating up a few of them and planting dynamite where the AWOC renegades would know it would be found by the authorities, and they thought that this would surely force the bracero users, or the government with was running the program, to withdraw the braceros for their own good.

Well of course it didn't work that way. What happened is that the conspirators were themselves arrested and this led to enormous legal expenses.

Well I went back to Berkeley late in February, and did some writing analyzing what had gone wrong with the adventure in winter lettuce. I made a speech on the Berkeley campus organized by a group called Student's Committee for Agricultural Labor, that I had good relations with, and I was glad to make myself useful in various ways, and poor old Norman Smith was really adrift without his Rasputin at his elbow telling him what to do. In fact he was being left to – what's the expression – twist in the wind by the higher-ups in Washington DC with the AFL/CIO, who were having to wrestle with these heavy legal expenses and involvements with jurisdictional disputes and all kinds of things going on, and it was entirely possible that the whole thing would be wiped out if George Meany himself felt it was nothing more than a headache, with nothing more to be gained.

So for months that was the situation. I would write an occasional paper – for example, I attended a state-wide convention of the Democratic Party – I guess this was in March, it was in Southern CA, and they were preparing a platform on which the party would be running in the forthcoming gubernatorial election. There was one coming up in 62, in which the incumbent, Edmund G. Brown, that's the father of the current governor of CA, was going to be running for another term, and it was widely anticipated that his opponent was going to be Richard Nixon, who had run for President in 1960 against Kennedy and had been defeated. But Nixon was still hungry for office, and it was widely assumed that he'd be running on the Republican ticket.

Anyway, at this state-wide convention of the Democratic Party, I was in attendance and I believe I testified on the Resolutions Committee, that they support a package of bills favorable to farm workers, including one calling for a minimum wage, of \$1.25 an hour. As a matter of fact, it was to be simply a bill calling for that minimum wage for all wage-earners in CA, with no exclusions. It might not even single out agricultural workers, they would simply be covered along with all others.

Well, that was voted down at that convention, and so I went back and wrote a screed about the faithlessness of Liberals.

But then, along toward the end of March, something emerged...

(interruption for phone call)

I was about to say something about Banquo's ghost, who appeared at an event organized by Macbeth, and this ghost appeared totally unexpectedly. Well, totally unexpectedly something showed up in my life that I had almost forgotten about, but not entirely, and that was the unhappy experience with my bracero study, and the long, long report which had been destroyed, except for 1 or 2 copies.

Well, I had a phone call from my old professor, named Edward Rogers. He said he wanted to see me again, in Berkeley. And he didn't tell me exactly what it was all about, but I got the impression that he had heard from the National Institutes of Health, which had financially supported my research, wondering whatever became of that study, which was a very good question since they had not received any of this 750-page monograph that had been destroyed. I guess Rogers wanted to talk to me about sending them something, and of course he had no power over me at this point, but I felt a certain obligation to the organization that had spent \$40,000 or whatever it was. So I drove to Berkeley and saw Rogers again, and sure enough he wanted to salvage a portion of my study, which would have implications for public health programs, and there plenty of such possibilities. I had not discussed any of them in my 750 pages because I thought I was supposed to be talking about facts and not making recommendations. I thought a lot of the facts spoke for themselves eloquently enough.

So anyway, we went back and forth, and what he had in mind was a greatly boiled-down version of what I had found about feeding practices, and housing, and transportation, and the medical care programs that the braceros were in theory covered by. All these sorts of things

would be taken up with the factual description of what I had found, to be followed by a set of suggestions and recommendations for things that might be done to make things better.

Well, I said I would do my best to give him something that would be useful. And there was to be no particular deadline, nothing was said about the approximate length that this truncated version might be. I was once again left pretty much to my own devices, but it was understood without needing to be said that I would not say anything at all about what I had said in my original monograph, about the social structure within which the bracero program operated. That is what he had found anathema in my original report.

So I went back to Stockton and told Norman Smith about this, and it was OK with him. He never had any objection to my working on that bracero study, because he didn't know what I might do that would be more directly relevant to his conception of farm worker organizing. So I began working on that, and even though I was under no time limit, I think that I had one that was self-imposed, and the reason I say that is that I wanted to get back to doing what I thought might become possible with Smith being adrift as he always was, and without the presence of Krainock, it might be possible for me start putting into practice some of the ideas which I and Father McCullough shared, and which I had shared with Dolores Huerta for that matter, as long as she was still on the scene.

It was my big fear that maybe George Meany, the head of the whole AFL/CIO, would simply pull the plug on the whole idea of AWOC, and without any of the AWOC infrastructure, it would be difficult if not impossible for me to carry out any of these ideas about grass-roots organizing.

So I really applied myself to working on this new version of my bracero study. I found it impossible to plagiarize myself. I didn't see any way to lift out big chunks of my original monograph. I had to rewrite everything, and a good deal of it was improved, I think, by boiling it down, whereas I had run on too long in many places in the original monograph.

To make a long story short, I ended up with 328 pages instead of 750, and I felt it was better-written, more concise, and I didn't sacrifice anything in the way of telling it like it was. I used plenty of quotes from braceros themselves to illustrate what was wrong with the existing provisions for medical care whenever they got sick or injured on the job, and of course all of the material about recommendations was brand new, and I felt free to tell it like it was when it came to those. Always without naming any names, so I didn't give the insurance companies that were making windfall profits out of the insurance that braceros were paying for themselves, and which theoretically covered them for all kinds of things.

The insurance companies were making a mint because the braceros either didn't know that they had coverage for their illnesses and injuries, or if they did know, they were afraid to ask for what they were entitled to, because they were afraid of being shipped back to Mexico. But as I say, I forbore from ever naming the names of any of the malefactors. I was always conscious of Rogers being afraid of getting in Dutch with the grower's lobby again.

So I did what I thought was a pretty good job, and dated it at the end July 15 1961, and took it over to the secretarial pool, and it was to be mimeographed once again and sent to appropriate

persons. And this time it was left entirely Rogers himself to decide who would get copies, though I guess I wanted one for myself.

In the end, he began by submitting a copy to a friend of his who was in the University school of Law, known as Boalt Hall, to ask the opinion of this friend of his whether there was anything libelous in this document. Reesenberg was the fellow's name. Rogers later told me that Reesenberg thought it was such a great piece of work that he thought it should be distributed widely.

What it was, in fact, was a piece of investigative reporting of a scandal-filled situation that was not public knowledge, and this legal expert on the matter thought it should be public knowledge. Well, Rogers was not going to accept that advice, but at least he let my draft stand as it was, without change. But he limited the distribution very severely. I think he essentially limited it to the various directors of public health in the various counties of CA that had public health departments of their own. And I guess he sent copies to the state public health department also.

David: You eventually published it as a book right?

Henry: Well, someone wanted to publish it, and I gave them permission.

So here was the language that Rogers insisted by on the front page: "This report is restricted to review and use by persons, organizations, and agencies with responsibilities for the policies and administration of the bracero program. It is not intended for further reproduction or circulation."

I took the precaution of copyrighting it myself, which if Rogers noticed he didn't have any objections to. So I thought that was the end of that. But like Banquo's ghost, in the fullness of time it proved to not be the end after all. But that was some years ahead of time.

So back to the story of my activities during the remainder of 1961, after my writing of it was finished in July of 1961. I then threw myself into trying to carry out some of the ideas about things which could be done at the grass-roots level, including what I called Harvest House. Now in fact something known as Harvest House was going on during the time when I was devoting full time to that writing. Sara Bellamy and Starry Krueger and Walt Chesby and Jefferson Poland, I think they all had worked out some arrangement whereby this big old house in Stockton would be used for their eating and sleeping and so forth, and there was also plenty of room there for visitors.

On weekends, groups from the University could come out for work camps in which they would try working in the fields for a day, and so forth and so on. Or at least driving around and observing things, that was quite frequent. So all of this went on until such time as I was able to devote full time, and so I then threw myself into things, like the conducting of a survey, I think we discussed that before, one of the first things that Father McCullough told me, Catholic priests always do when they go to a new parish – find out who the Catholics are, and what they're interested in, and so forth.

So we did that, and within a matter of weeks, I think by Sept 3 to be precise, we formalized a group in Stockton which we have the somewhat grandiose name "Northern CA Area Council" of the AWOC. And that was the time on which against my kicking and screaming they elected me chairman, which I insisted by modified to "acting chairman" until a bona fide farm worker would emerge who would become the real chairman.

But we did things like put out a newsletter, and became actively involved in helping a group of Filipinos in Santa Cruz county, who were being displaced by braceros who were willing to work in the Brussel sports for \$1/hour, whereas the Filipinos thought they were entitled to \$1.25 an hour, and we helped out as best we could, including working with the federal agency which had jurisdiction over that part of the state, which was much more friendly than the one had been in Imperial county. So we were able to get the wage rate increased to \$1.25 an hour, in which it turned out there were plenty of Filipino workers willing to work for that, and there was no need for braceros. That was quite a success, and that led to very good relations with the federal department of labor, including their new secretary of Labor, Arthur Goldberg.

And we had a welcoming, we called it a picket line, but it wasn't a picket line in the usual sense, when he made an appearance in San Francisco a little bit later in the year. We had a big banner saying "Welcome", and "Thanks to Secretary Goldberg", and so on.