

## **17. ACL/CIO conference in Miami; fired by AWOC**

**Henry:** The last time we adjourned when a group of 4 farm workers had been set off by automobile to represent AWOC at the biannual convention of the AFL-CIO in Miami Beach, FL. They were going to try to lobby to get funding for AWOC restored after it had been cut off by George Meany, the head of the AFL-CIO.

It was a couple of weeks, at least, before those of us in the Stockton area heard the results because all four of the delegates (well, there was an official delegate who had the right to vote in the convention and an alternate delegate who could vote only if the full delegate got sick or something, and then the other two were chaperones), because Maria Moreno was the full delegate and the alternate was a guy. The members of the conference at Strathmore said it wouldn't look fitting if an unmarried man and woman were to travel across the country unchaperoned in an automobile. So anyway, the four of them representing the farm workers were all from the Tulare County area and it took a while for the word to get back to Stockton as to what had happened in Miami Beach.

When we did get word, we got varying reports. It was kind of like witnesses to an automobile accident in which the more persons the information passes through the more the story can be changed. According to one report, Maria Moreno was given the privilege of the floor of the whole convention and she made an impassioned speech which moved the whole convention to rise up in effect and demand of George Meany that he restore funding for AWOC. Another version was that in fact the most that she could get was a hearing at a caucus of the CA delegates and that she had moved them to do as much as they could working with their friends in the other delegations.

A third report was that in fact she hadn't gotten beyond speaking to individual delegates during breaks in the halls and that they in turn would then talk to others eventually, and that only by word of mouth did she have an effect, but that then in the end one way or the other the convention did approve a resolution asking Meany to loosen the purse strings and revive AWOC from its status in which it was operating solely on the basis of volunteers. I and one other guy were the only two staff members left. Then we waited another couple of weeks or so before we got word as to how this new funding was to be expected. Now it got to be really interesting.

**David:** Weren't there telephone reports? If you were the only two people in AWOC at that point...

**Henry:** I don't remember exactly at that point. I can't tell you...

I had a friend from the garment workers who had been a delegate there and she told me that there's no way that Maria Moreno could have been the privilege of the floor, that that was totally scripted and controlled by the iron fist of Meany himself, that nobody would have been able to deviate from the agenda. As for the way in which the resolution calling for restoration was to be implemented, the delay can be accounted for by the fact that there was going to be a total restructuring. I'll try to tick off some of the ways in which it was all going to be different.

To begin with, in the top echelons of the total ALF-CIO, Meany was not willing to let the Department of Organizing continue to be in charge of AWOC even though logically it should have been. In practice, the head of the Department of Organizing was a guy named Jack Livingston (I may have mentioned him from time to time in the past of this series). He was a close personal friend of Norman Smith. Norman Smith had recruited him through the Auto Workers Union back in the 1930s. Livingston had risen through the ranks to his present position whereas Smith had kind of been lost in the backwaters. Livingston had appointed Smith to head the AWOC only to reward him for their past friendship and to try to make up for the fact that he, Livingston, had risen and Smith hadn't. It was Smith's opportunity to have gone out in a blaze of glory, which unfortunately he didn't.

Meany could see that Livingston [did Henry mean Smith? – ed.] was not the man to head AWOC or to be in charge of the leadership of AWOC, so Meany set up what amounted to a board of overseers in CA, to be headed by the State Federation of Labor (a guy by the name of Thomas Pitts). He had no background in agriculture and was a very conservative labor bureaucrat. The other members of the Board of Overseers were also very solid and substantial old labor skates as we used to say. Some would use the term "pie cards," meaning that they were freeloaders, but in any event they were not going to allow any more adventures of the type that Smith blundered into in the Imperial Valley which led to 10s of thousands of dollars in legal fees and resulted in absolutely not gains whatsoever.

Smith himself was kept on in a kind of pensioned position, nominally he was called the Assistant Director, but the new Director was a guy named Al Green, whose background principally was in the Plasterer's Union, a building trades union, which like all AFL unions (as distinguished from CIO unions) was conservative. More recently, Green's entire contributions to the labor movement were as head of what they call "COPE," an acronym that stands for Committee on Political Education. In actual practice, it meant not educating workers so much as rounding them up to vote in whatever way the leadership wanted, which usually meant voting Democratic.

At that time, we're now talking about January 1962, what was shaping up in CA was a gubernatorial election. Pat Brown, the incumbent, was running for re-election and it looked very much as though the leading candidate for the Republican nomination was going to be none other than Richard Nixon. Nixon had run for President against Kennedy in 1960 and lost, but he had not lost his appetite for political office. He wanted to be governor and he had lot of friends in the Republican Party and so it looked as though he was going to be the nominee.

Green was appointed head of AWOC not in order to do any organizing of agricultural workers but in order to get out the vote for Pat Brown. At least this is what I figured out as I got to know him and observe his activities. It didn't look as though he had anything particularly for me to do so he wanted me to go around with him as he was getting set up to regularize the vote in the way that he wanted it to go by the right kinds of equipment. He wanted modern office equipment to handle large scale mailings – an addressograph machine is one thing I remember, a modern type of copying machine (the only thing we had at AWOC was some very old fashioned style of copier that used a heat process that I don't understand, but it was very

out of date). I didn't know anything about office machines. I was seeing a woman – her name was Ellen – and you may possibly remember her because she and I were very close friends, and she knew a lot about office machines. She had a job operating a sophisticated machine that was better than a mimeograph machine (I can't remember the name of it). Between the two of us we went around with Al Green to places in SF and whatnot, and we all worked getting along quite well.

At just about that time, around February, the house right across the street from the headquarters of AWOC became available for rent. As it happens, the landlord was a major grower from the Stockton area. It wasn't being handled by a realtor, it was being handled directly by the owner. I recognized his name, so when I told him I was interested in it, I think he recognized my name also and he knew that I was with AWOC. I thought that that cooked my goose and that he wouldn't want to rent to me, but an agribusiness man is above all a businessman and I guess he figured that I could be counted on to pay the rent and so he rented this house to me. At least I didn't have to sign a long term lease.

Then there came a time when it looked as though I could make myself useful as (I guess I was still called) the Director of Research. It seems that there was going to be a very important public hearing. It might even have been a series that went on for a couple or three days, chaired by a labor committee of the State Legislature on the subject of agricultural labor. The star witness from the liberal side was going to be the head of the State Federation of Labor, Tom Pitts. Tom Pitts, as I have said, knew nothing about agricultural labor, so I was asked to prepare his speech. I had been preparing speeches for Norman Smith for a couple of years so I did so. I knew a bit about how to avoid the use of long syllable words and high blown metaphors and fine writing like that. I tried to make it as down to earth as possible. So I did that, and then it began to occur to some of us that all of the scheduled speeches were going to be people with job titles representing some organization or another rather than individuals speaking only for themselves. Particularly absent were any farm workers speaking as farm workers with no affiliation one way or another.

On our own (now I guess I'm speaking of Ellen and myself), we began talking about lining up a few workers known to us personally as being reasonably articulate and able to break away for a day from whatever they might ordinarily be doing and willing to speak in public. In fact, we did get 3 or 4 lined up. The hearings were to be held in April and naturally there was probably not too much going on in terms of harvesting at that time of year. These people were very able and willing to take part. We weren't able to get them on the printed agenda but when the great day came (at least the day in which it would have been most appropriate for these farm workers to have spoken for themselves), I had a tape recorder and I was going to be busy operating that, so Ellen took it upon herself to find a moment with the chairman of the day's activities and asked him if at the end of the prepared speeches it would be possible to add a few minutes for these workers to speak. The guy said "yes."

So that's what happened and it went fairly well with the exception of my tape recorder, which misbehaved and began making a screeching noise at intervals that were so disconcerting that eventually I had to turn it off. But otherwise, I thought that the workers did very well and Pitts

stuck to my text a lot closer than Norman Smith ever had, so I thought that was somewhat of a success.

Two or three days went by when I got a message to report to Norman Smith's office, which was directly across the street. I had no inclining about what it might be about. When I got there he was looking very serious and in one corner of the room, sitting without saying anything but looking very serious also, was Al Green. Smith said, "Well, Hank, I hated this day, but it guess it had to come. We're going to have to let you go." I think that's pretty much verbatim what he said.

I guess I was silent for a moment or two or three and I guess I then said something to the effect of, "Any special reason?" Smith said, "Well, for one thing, Pitts was absolutely furious that you let those workers steal his thunder. He though he was to be the voice of California farm workers, period. You brought in 3 or 4 others that he had not been asked about." I could understand that. I didn't agree with it, of course, but I could understand it.

Then Smith said there was also the problem that you can't control your friend Ellen. I didn't pursue that because I had a pretty good idea about what he meant. It all came down to the fact that she had, when she was much younger, I guess in junior high school or possibly high school, joined an organization called the Young Pioneers. The Young Pioneers were what is known as a fellow traveling organization of people under the age of 18, who were too young to be members of the older fellow traveling organizations, which were dominated by the Communist Party. I don't know what the Young Pioneers did, but I'm pretty sure they didn't sit around talking about overthrowing the government by force and violence. The older folks in fellow traveling organization didn't sit around talking about that, either. They talked about helping refugees from the Spanish Civil War and things like that.

There was a period of history called the McCarthy Era. There was a Senator from Wisconsin named Joseph McCarthy who created a panic in liberal circles by making accusations of communists being rampant in the State Department and in the U.S. Army and everything you can possibly think of including some that were absurd on the very face of them. He succeeded in terrorizing a lot of left wing groups and a lot of them folded their sails including the Labor Movement. The AFL kicked out a number of its unions on grounds of being infiltrated or whatever might be the word. Even the CIO, although it was less inclined to be stampeded, if it found that one of its constituent unions did have a presence within its leadership, of people who looked kindly upon the Soviet experiment, they also were expelled. The ILWU, for example, was for a time expelled. The fact that my friend Ellen had at one time been a member of a group called the Young Pioneers League made her suspect, I guess for the rest of her life, and her friends suspect, including myself.

I can't recall but I think I was given a very short period of time to get my stuff cleaned out. I do remember that I was given such a short period that I didn't have time to go through documents in the AWOC headquarters do which I thought I had a right, including lots of stuff I had written, including memos and whatnot. On the last night Ellen and I spent the better part of the night copying everything that had my name on it from the master files of AWOC, using this archaic

copying device. The quality of the reproduction was very poor and also the very nature of this heating process, I think, meant that most of it must have faded away and been totally unusable eventually. I haven't had a chance to go back through it all. That would be one reason why I've never had the courage or the guts or whatever you might say to attempt something that I've always believed was needed, but no one has ever done, and I myself might have been able to do but haven't...and that is that history of the AWOC. It did play a role, for better or for worse, in the chain of events that eventually led to Chavez and his movement.

There would not have been the Chavez movement, at least in the form that it eventually assumed, if it hadn't been for the survival of AWOC. Those of us in the volunteer period kept it going. I think it would have disappeared entirely from view if we hadn't been there and if we hadn't had that Strathmore Conference, and if we hadn't sent back the 4 workers to Miami Beach and all the rest of it. We made a difference. I don't know exactly in what ways the history would have been different, but it would have been different. I've always regretted that the history of AWOC during those 2 or 3 years has never been attempted. Maybe it's not impossible, even now, if somebody was sufficiently interested in it and sufficiently young and vigorous. I am neither.

I didn't know what I was going to do after getting "cashiered." I thought that I was entitled to unemployment benefits since AWOC had been paying into the insurance fund. I knew enough about the system to know that if you're fired you're not entitled to benefits unless you want to go to some kind of administrative judge and argue that you were unjustly fired. But Norman Smith like me - he always showed that he did in various ways; he let me sleep in the floor of his apartment for months on end, and he would frequently take me out to lunch with him - and so he allowed me to give as the reason for my becoming unemployed that the organization was no longer able to afford the position of Director of Research.

So then, when I went to the Unemployment Office, I was able to put down as looking for another job as Director of Research for a labor union (laugh). Not bloody many of them. Therefore if I wanted the maximum of 6 months of benefits I could have had it because there were no other jobs. In fact, I didn't look seriously. Technically, I had to go to local unions of one sort or another, or write letters. I didn't have to go beyond a certain radius. There were all kinds of regulations. Mostly I was willing to lick my wounds for a while... and maybe feel a little sorry for myself and a little angry. I goofed off by making some home movies. If I look at the dates of those home movies that I made with you guys I believe, for example, that we made the pie showing movie during that period, and probably a few others.

**David:** Had you moved to Berkeley by that point?

**Henry:** By this time I had, of course, given up that rental right across the street from the AWOC headquarters, and moved back to an apartment on Kittredge in downtown Berkeley. A one bedroom apartment where I was living with Ellen. In fact, that was where the pie throwing movie was made.

**David:** I remember that. You were painting a lot during that period, too.

**Henry:** Yes, very good point. The living room was a mess, filled with paintings (laugh) and boxes and boxes.

**David:** You moved there only after you were canned by AWOC?

**Henry:** I think so.

**David:** There was a long period when you were visiting us once or twice a week, but you were still living in Stockton?

**Henry:** Well, now, that would have been difficult.

**David:** Long drive.

**Henry:** I thought that there had never been any substantial deviation from the every other weekend business. Early on, I had settled into taking you to Sacramento.

**David:** OK, just sort of the default thing to do...

**Henry:** Anyway, there came a point at which I wanted to make myself socially useful again, so I began to make inquiries about returning to the State Department of Public Health, where I was still in good repute. When I left the State Department of Public Health, in 1955 I guess it was, in order to go to the School of Public Health at the University, I was in good repute (in other words, I had never been fired from the State Department of Public Health). As I say, I began to make inquiries. I learned by the grapevine, that there was new director of the Department, a man named Lester Breslow. I may have possibly mentioned his name before and if not I should because he is a very important figure in my life. He had been a member of my advisory committee when I had been doing the bracero study for the School of Public Health. He was now the Director of the State Department of Public Health. He was one of the few members of my advisory committee on that ill-starred research project who liked what I was doing, although I don't think he was ever involved in the Statement of Opinion of Conscience that got me into trouble.

Anyway, I heard through the grapevine that Dr. Breslow, as one of his innovations at the Department of Public Health, was that he was looking for somebody to combine the fields of Behavioral Science and Public Health. He was looking for somebody competent in sociology or anthropology or social psychology. The position called for a PhD, which I didn't have of course. I guess I didn't speak to Dr. Breslow directly at that point. I had another acquaintance in the hierarchy who was kind of his assistant and I asked him (his name was Dr. Clark) if, on a temporary basis, would you consider me because I have a graduate degree in sociology, if not a PhD, and I had actually a year or a year and a half of study toward a PhD, even though I didn't finish it. So how about taking on me as a temporary while you're looking for somebody to fill the job permanently?

I will end this day's memories by saying that I was given that temporary assignment and in the next installment I will talk about it, but for now, that's it.

**David:** Good night and good luck.

**Henry:** Yes.