

18. Back in the Public Health Department

Henry: Last time, Eugene and I were talking about the period of time between the farm labor organizing conference that I was responsible for in the town of Strathmore in Dec 1961, and my being fired from AWOC in Apr 1962. For several months after that event, I was at liberty, so to speak. Actually, I rather enjoyed it, because I was able to live on unemployment insurance for a time. I had had enough of fighting with the bureaucracies within the Univ. of California, and then the bureaucracies within the labor movement. I was a free spirit, and was able to do some painting, writing, making home movies, and taking it easy. But, there came a time when I was about to run out of unemployment insurance ...

David: Can I interject a question?

Henry: Yes, you may.

David: Your firing from AWOC -- do you think that was due to that one particular incident, or was there perhaps an accumulation of smaller things as well?

Henry: An accumulation.

David: So, that was pretty inevitable?

Henry: It was absolutely inevitable.

So, I began to look around for something else to do that might be socially useful. It came to my attention that a fellow at the state ...

David: Hey, we covered this last time, Henry.

Henry: Oh, we talked about ...?

David: Yeah, we got as far as you being hired as a sort of interim ...

Henry: ... a temporary public health sociologist. Yeah, OK. Well, that ran out in Sep 1962, and I found that all that was available in the department was a job as an associate public health analyst in a project on chronic illnesses of aging, under the leadership of Dr. William Mandel. I took it, and there began what I would call one of the dark ages in my career. Mandel was [*chuckle*] ... man, he was too much. He had 2 or 3 other experienced people in the field of public health working under him. We would write memos and drafts of things for him. The aim of the project was to do a survey of the resources available to the aging population of the Bay Area (most of whom had chronic illnesses of one sort or another, or combinations), and present a concluding section of recommendations. So, we would go around and make site visits to various organizations in San Francisco and elsewhere. Those of us under Dr. Mandel would go back and write reports on what we had seen, and our opinions as to whether they might be improved in one way or another. Then, he would completely rewrite them all, frequently saving

not so much as a single paragraph.

So, as time went by, we all became demoralized and began to feel that it wouldn't make any difference if we just goofed off. He would always end up by doing everything himself. Well, I can't say that I didn't goof off some. I became involved in the local branch of the socialist party, and [*chuckle*] undertook to write a script for a play, which I visualized might be produced over radio station KPFA, where I had some contacts from my farm labor days. I wrote a play called "The 90-lane freeway", based on something I read in the S.F. Chronicle predicting that if the current trend of traffic on the Bayshore Freeway were to continue without some change taking place, within 20 years or so there would need to be a 90-lane freeway in order to accommodate all the traffic. I wrote this up as an absurdist drama, and showed it to a few people. They all tried to say something nice about it [*chuckle*], but I knew it was hopeless.

I tried to keep up, at a distance, with what was going on in the field of farm labor. AWOC still existed, but was devoted entirely to trying to get out the vote for Governor Pat Brown in the Nov election against Richard Nixon. It had nothing to do with farm workers. They still had Norman Smith on the payroll, and he spent every morning down on Skid Row talking with his friends in the [*unintelligible*]. But they didn't vote, so they didn't get involved in what was really going on under the direction of Al Green. Much more importantly, as things turned out later, Cesar Chavez by this time had cut his strings to the community service organization, because it was concerned primarily with urban problems such as police brutality and voter registration. Chavez was out in the grassroots at small house meetings or organizing his independent farm workers association. In the fall, they had a convention in Fresno, at which they formalized the name of the organization, and the leadership, and they even designed a flag with a black "thunderbird" on a red background.

By the end of the year, the so-called "chronic illness in aging" project came to a merciful end and a report was issued that was written entirely by Dr. Mandel. Then the rest of us looked around for something else to do. Like the others, I went from one bureau to another within the Public Health dept. to see what they might have available. There was one guy in charge of a heart research project-- I don't recall exactly the nature of the research to be done. This guy liked the cut of my jib, so he practically offered me a job. I said "Well, I appreciate that, but in all fairness, I've made appointments to talk to several other people". I went to Dr. Breslow. If I remember the structure, Breslow was the head of the Division of Adult Health, which included the heart study, and also the chronic illness in aging study. Breslow also had under his overall aegis something called "farm labor health services". The immediate director of that division was a guy named Paul O'Rourke, whom I knew from our contacts in the farm labor days. I talked with him, and he would have been happy to have me on his staff, but he said that I should talk with his boss (Breslow), before he could make any commitment.

So I went to see Dr. Breslow, who had been on my advisory committee for the bracero study at the UC Berkeley School of Public Health. He was the only member of the advisory committee who was from outside the school -- he was from the CA State Dept. of Public Health, across the

street. Well, I thought that Breslow was my friend. At least as far as I knew, he had not been involved in any way in the decisions first of all to shorten the duration of my bracero study, and eventually to trash the resulting report. To my surprise and disillusionment (because I had been greatly encouraged by what I thought was Breslow's broad outlook in the field of public health - that it was going to be almost all-inclusive, all social ills), I was quite dismayed to find that he still felt that I was intemperate, reckless, and lacking in judgment for having written the memo to the American Friends Service Committee that got me in trouble with the university. He said, in so many words, that he would not consider putting me on the staff of the farm workers health service project within his division of the state health dept., because the enemies of the farm labor movement would find about it and start sniping at his dept.

That was very disillusioning indeed. I was at the point where I was willing to go back to the Bureau of Records and Statistics where I had begun my work with the state health dept. way back in Nov 1952, and where I found it absolutely mind-deadening. The same guy was still in charge of it who had been back in those days. He had taken a dislike to me, for reasons I had never understood. He had sat for a whole year on my getting a promotion from junior public health analyst to assistant public health analyst. That was normally automatic after a 6-month probationary period, but he didn't let me have it. So, here I was asking him [*chuckle*] if he had a job for me. He said that it would be at the associate level, which was all that I could have hoped for. I said I would consider it.

I was rescued by a call to see Dr. Breslow again. Breslow didn't exactly apologize for having been rather curt during our first meeting, but he acted totally different -- very amiable -- and said he had a job for me in the field of medical care research. That was significant in two ways: (i) my degree from the School of Public Health was in "public health and medical care administration"; (ii) it reflected the fact that Breslow himself was very interested in getting the state dept. of public health more involved in studying the field of health care. In the past, there had been something close to a "firewall" between public health and medical care. If the public health dept. had dared to suggest that it had anything to do with the way medicine was practiced, it would have been taken by the American or the California Medical Association as evidence that the dept. was advocating socialized medicine. So they didn't dare touch it -- they didn't dare even use the term ...

David (*incredulously*): So the public health dept. had to stay away from medical care?

Henry: Yeah, they had to [*David laughter*]. Well, they could investigate sewage disposal plants. They could give advice to pregnant women to drink orange juice, and things of that sort.

Eugene: Food safety?

Henry: Various things they could do. They did all right in that limited area. But Breslow was always looking for ways to think outside the box and call it by different names. It seemed that he had some money to do a study in Santa Cruz County of people 65 or older, for the purpose of ascertaining how much they had to spend out of pocket for their health care. There were

various programs operated by social welfare depts. and others, whereby in theory people could go to county hospitals. The purpose of this study was to find out how much they were [*unintelligible*] paid for from other sources. There were at that time some health insurance plans available to those who could afford them, although the plans were nowhere near as extensive as they later became. A lot of people simply had to pay out of pocket, or went without health care entirely.

Anyway, the study wasn't going to address the question of whether [*chuckle*] they were dying prematurely from the fact they were having to pay out of pocket, or anything judgmental of that sort. It was supposed to be a totally objective study. It had already been started a year or two before I had this talk with Breslow, but had run out of funding. He had just obtained enough funds to finish it up. What it would consist of was me making sense out of the data that had already been collected by others, and writing up the final report.

I thought that was a worthy challenge, and I accepted the offer with pleasure. Breslow dropped a broad hint that he was working on the possibility of this leading to other studies in the field of health care -- particularly if Gov. Brown were re-elected, rather than being replaced by Richard Nixon. So, I worked on that project in Jan 1963.

David: They had computers back then, right?

Henry: They were starting to.

David: What form were these data in? Were they just written on paper?

Henry: It was a grab bag. I guess there were some official sources, from hospitals. There might have been some survey-type interviews -- standardized questionnaires -- that sort of thing.

David: Well, if you wanted to do something like find correlations between variables, would you have to do that manually with adding machines? Or were there computer systems that could do the statistics for you?

Henry: I'm not sure they were that advanced yet. I don't recall that our final report had any coefficients of correlation [*chuckle*].

As I indicated, my interest in farm labor was always in the background. Around Mar 1963, among other things, an organization in Los Angeles called the Emergency Committee to Aid Farm Workers had received a \$50,000 grant from somebody to lobby on behalf of farm workers, and specifically to lobby Congress on the subject of Public Law 78, which was the enabling legislation for the bracero program. Once again, PL 78 was coming up for revisiting by Congress. It had to be refunded every couple of years, and this was one such year. There would have to be a series of congressional hearings, and it would have to end up with both Houses voting up or down on PL 78. If it were to be voted up, how long would it be extended, how much funding would it get, etc. The Emergency Committee in Los Angeles had this money to lobby against the

extension of PL 78.

I had thought long and deeply about the bracero program, and had jotted down some of my ideas here and there as time went by. Of course, I had written this long tome which had never seen the light of day, but I also had some shorter pieces. I had the idea of pulling my thoughts together in a booklet which would be an indictment of the bracero program. I started writing that in my spare time, besides writing the Santa Cruz report. Somehow, I worked them both in during the months of Mar and Apr 1963. By the end of Apr I had finished the monograph, which I called "Fields of Bondage", and I dated it May 01. I had a certain fondness for assigning things with significant dates. For example, I dated my big bracero study Dec 14, 1959. I guess I'm the only one who ever read it who knew that was a significant date for me [*chuckle*]. May 01 is significant for those in the labor movement. It's sometimes called "International Labor Day" and is recognized as such by every other civilized country in the world. The U.S. is the only country that has its own Labor Day, as far as I know.

"Fields of Bondage" was about 100 pages long. I was able to get it "multilithed" -- a method which is much superior to mimeographing, as you may possibly remember from those days -- or maybe you don't. It was pretty good stuff. I knew somebody who knew how to operate a multilith machine and had access to one at her job. That person was none other than my great and good friend Ellen, whom I have mentioned as being one of the reasons I was fired from AWOC, although by no means the only reason. By this time my personal relationship with Ellen was no longer as great as it had been, but we were still good friends. In short, we weren't living together. I provided the manuscript, and she turned out 150 copies of this monograph, which were bound -- with glue.

David: A v

Henry: It was pretty good-looking ...

David: Where did she work exactly? A printer?

Henry: No, there was a publication called the "Liberal Democrat" with an office on Bancroft Way which had the equipment. The owner and operator was sympathetic to the purpose of our using the equipment at night.

I sent copies of the monograph to key people in Washington DC, particularly in the House of Representatives, where I thought was the best chance of getting PL 78 voted down. One member of the House, Jack Shelley, had been head of the California State Federation of Labor before he was elected to Congress, and later became Mayor of San Francisco. He was a good liberal Democrat. I sent him a copy of the booklet, and got a reply saying that he liked it so much that he wanted to share it with some of his colleagues, and could I send him another 2 or 3 copies? Of course, I was delighted to do so. It seemed that the House would be taking a vote later in Jun, and he felt that this booklet could sway some votes.

I waited until I learned the results of the vote, and, by golly, for the first time in its 12-year history (it had first been voted into effect in 1951), PL 78 was voted down.

David: I thought it started in World War II.

Henry: That was the bracero program in a different version. The one that started in 1951 was the one that I studied. In some ways it was better than the anarchy of the earlier version, but in some ways it was worse.

In any case (and this will be the end of my peroration for the day), I felt once again in the course of my checkered career that I had been of some effect. I don't have any idea how many votes I may have influenced, but I like to think that I did some good. So endeth the sermon for today.

David: One question: was that monograph ever published elsewhere?

Henry: No.

David: What was it called, again?

Henry: "Fields of Bondage".

David: Now, when I search for your name on Amazon, two publications come up: "So Shall Ye Reap", and something else. I guess it wasn't "Fields of Bondage", though.

Henry: No, it wouldn't be there. It is a true collector's item.

Eugene: You have a copy?

Henry: Oh, I've got a copy or two.

I guess I neglected to send two copies to the Library of Congress, so they probably don't have it. Maybe it's not too late [*chuckle*]. Some of it is pretty interesting reading. Some of it is actually almost humorous, in a satirical way.

Relevant web pages:

Norman Breslow: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Norman_Breslow

Paul O'Rourke: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Paul_F._O'Rourke

Jack Shelley: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/John_Shelley

Public Law 78 (the bracero program): http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bracero_program