

21. More KPFA; Free Speech Movement; Cesar Chavez and FWA

Henry: Last time I spoke about a distraction from the various other balls I was juggling, namely the responsibilities I had taken on as the head of an organization ("Citizens for Farm Labor") that was supposed to keep the public informed about developments in the field of farm labor, because AWOC wasn't doing it, and Cesar Chavez at that time was laying very low. I was the head of the organization, and editor of its magazine, which we tried to put out monthly. I was also doing a monthly commentary on KPFA. All of this in addition to a full-time job with the health dept., in which I was head of a project down in the town of Capitola, surveying elderly people about their health care costs.

All of this was interrupted by the fact that a crisis arose at KPFA, in which the director of the Dept. of Public Affairs (Elsa Knight Thompson) wanted to become the station manager, and stirred up the engineers and technicians to strike. I became involved to the extent that I thought this was not a classic labor/ management fight, because there was no profit motive on either side, and there was a third party involved that did not take part, although I thought it rightly could have and should have, namely the subscribers. KPFA was a listener-supported station, the first of its kind in the world. I think at this point it was fairly successful, but the listeners did nothing more than pay a monthly fee. I felt that they had a right to do more if they wanted to, for example to take part in the performance of various programs themselves -- as I was doing in the form of these monthly commentaries.

So that was my contribution: that listeners, rather than taking sides between labor and management, could simply submit contributions to the station in the form not of money, but productions of their own. I did become involved, in something we called the Subscribers Interim Committee, which for some time met and talked about what we could do. But then it was taken over, frankly, by some of the same community "red-hots" who tried to take over the local consumers' co-op and various other things. I did not want to become involved with them, so I withdrew, and the whole thing collapsed.

The distraction of the strike at KPFA did have one virtue, and that was to get me freed from the necessity (if there ever had been one) that my commentaries on the station be limited to various aspects of the farm labor issue. When the strike was over, I felt under no requirement to return to being the station's one-man voice of agricultural labor. I embarked upon something totally unrelated. Around this time (Jun 1964), there was a concerted movement of liberals from the North to "liberate" the South (as they saw it) and take an active part in the civil rights movement down there. I commented on that subject, and did so in a way that I tried to carry on through the end of my tenure at KPFA -- namely, to look at a social problem from a slightly different angle than the other commentators. I had a problem with the station because it was quite predictable. They were "politically correct" before the term was coined, to apply to what might be called "knee-jerk liberals" who took a certain point of view on every issue that came along, and followed it without deviation.

I looked at this "invasion" of well-meaning liberals from the North down to the South to aid the movement to help blacks get the right to eat at lunch counters, or vote, or whatever. I took as my point of departure the Children's Crusade of the Middle Ages, when they (with every good intention) tried to liberate the Holy Land from the Muslims, without any preparation. They were clad in the "raiment of righteousness", and thought that would prevail over everything.

I thought that the well-meaning liberals from the North (all of whom were white, incidentally) should have prepared themselves by learning a little about the culture of the South, into which they were moving. They seemed to take the view that the blacks in the South were just like themselves except for the color of their skin, whereas in fact the blacks in the South were carriers of a culture very different from that of the North in many respects, of which race relations were only one part. So, they went down there ill-prepared. Just as the Children's Crusade of the Middle Ages was decimated (either killed or taken into sexual slavery), some of the "crusaders" who moved from the U.S. North to the South were killed, and I don't know how much good they did. In any event, they did not take any courses in sociology or anthropology, which I thought might have helped. I was just taking a bit of an offbeat view that was not being expressed by anybody else in the stable of KPFA commentators.

We were continuing to put out the farm labor magazine, almost (but not quite) every month.

In Sept 1964, all hell broke loose on the UC Berkeley campus. I think it began around Sep 20. It became known as the Free Speech Movement. It had to do with the fact that various political activist groups on campus set up tables and tried to recruit new members or sell or give away their publications. The Chancellor, an elderly professor of philosophy named Edward Strong, said it was contrary to campus rules and regulations, and forbade it, but the student activists refused to obey. A lot of them were arrested, and the struggle went on for weeks.

This reminded me that I had once been involved in a free speech movement of my own, in a manner of speaking, involving a paper I had written about the bracero system, which I thought had really nothing to do with the campus. I didn't identify myself as a member of the campus community, I didn't distribute copies on the campus, and I limited it to a small group of Quakers (I thought). But it leaked out, and as I understood the sequence of events the Quakers distributed copies to the proponents of the bracero system, thinking [*chuckle*] to educate them, I suppose -- I don't know what they had in mind. Anyway, the Farm Bureau took great umbrage, and complained to the head of the agriculture division of the university. Somebody in the chain of command devised a way to shut me up, which was to order an end to the field study I was conducting, of the ideas and practices of braceros regarding health care. I was obliged to stop the field work entirely, dismiss my interviewer, and limit myself to writing up a report of what I had already gathered, which was about half of the number of interviews I thought were necessary to draw any conclusions. I eventually produced a 750-page monograph which was rejected by my superior because I -- well, the rationale given was that I included a chapter on what I called the social structure of the bracero system, which included mention of the groups that were in favor of it and those that were opposed to it, and that was all. But I was told on

the QT that the real reason was that the Farm Bureau had told the head of the agriculture division that when they came before the legislature the next session to ask for a budget to keep the university going, they would ask embarrassing questions about having some firebrand working against their best interests, and they would cut the university's allotment for agricultural purposes.

Well, that was all back in 1958, but I thought it was of some relevance to the whole question of academic freedom and free speech on campus. I thought it was a perfectly subject for me to use for a commentary. I conceived the idea that it was also an opportunity for me to bring out of mothballs the stencils of my 750-page monograph, which had (in its original edition) been recalled and destroyed. I would use the mimeograph machine that we had purchased for the use of the Citizens for Farm Labor, to put out our magazine. It was a pretty good quality machine. I would run off copies which I would then sell to members of Citizens for Farm Labor, or other interested people, and I would mention it in the conclusion of this KPFA commentary that I planned to do on the history of that whole episode.

I wasn't able to get all these ducks lined up in time for a commentary during the month of Oct, but I was able to do so for my Nov 13 commentary, entitled "Who will guard us from our guardians?". I announced that a copy of the monograph could be obtained for \$3.95 to cover our costs for paper, mimeograph ink, and postage. I was able to get volunteers to assemble it. We made 100 copies, which [*chuckle*] came out to 75,000 pages, or 150 reams of paper. We pretty much took over the house at 1624 Grove St, and my wife was relegated to the back bedrooms with the two kids, while we spread out these hundreds of copies. People would assemble them in teams, each of which would be responsible for ~20 pages, and eventually they were all put together into big, thick volumes. We managed to sell almost all of them. I set aside ~6 to donate to repositories such as the Bancroft library, and the Library of Congress. I wish I had kept more, because they're quite a collector's item today.

That was by no means the end of the story -- [*chuckle*] I don't know if it ever will be. It seems that one of my listeners took it upon herself to write a letter to Clark Kerr, the president of the entire university system, asking for his reaction to my commentary. I must admit that I had made a bit of a leap -- an assumption -- that because he had told me at one time that he himself had read my statement to the Friends about the immorality of the bracero system, that he was the "Solomon" who made the even-handed decision on one hand to resist the Farm Bureau's request that I be fired, but on the other hand to terminate my field work and lead me to the writing of the report. I now think, in retrospect, that it was not his idea, rather that it was the idea of somebody down the chain of command, and they passed it in front of him with the right of review. He had the right to say whether that Solomon-like decision would stand, or whether there was some other way of dealing with it. He let it stand. But in the commentary, I made it sound as though it was his decision. That was probably a mistake on my part.

Anyway, Clark Kerr wrote a reply to this woman, which was quite interesting in its own way. In the meantime, they had arrived at a rationale. In his letter, he said that pressure from whatever

source had nothing whatever to do with the university's decision; that it was solely a result of the fact that the U.S. Dept. of Labor, which operated the slave market in El Centro through which all the braceros coming into California had to pass, had denied me and my interviewer the right of access to braceros at that location, and that made it impossible for me to continue the field study. It's true we were denied access, which probably in itself could have been challenged if we had gone to the ACLU or something like that. But we didn't think it was necessary to interview at that location, because there were any number of bracero camps in the Imperial Valley, where it was possible to interview men on the weekends or evenings. Even if we had been denied access by the operators of those camps (which never happened), there were braceros on the streets of Calexico in the evenings and weekends, shopping for work clothes or whatever, and they were perfectly amenable to being interviewed. In fact, my interviewer obtained a good deal of information in that way. Anyway, the story was just a fabrication that Clark Kerr came up with to justify the "truncation" of the project -- let's put it that way.

Now I have to get a little bit out of chronological order, because I need to skip to something that is directly related. In Apr 1965, I heard (probably by phone call; I haven't been able to find anything in writing) that I was invited to appear before the UC Senate Academic Freedom Committee. I was given a time, place, and a number to call if I wanted to accept the invitation. I did accept, because I was curious to see what they wanted from me. I thought there might be a possibility that they weren't entirely satisfied with the official university explanation, that it was all the fault of the U.S. Dept. of Labor, and that pressure from any source, including the Farm Bureau, had absolutely nothing to do with the decision to truncate my UC research project.

I showed up in front of this "Senate Academic Freedom Committee" of ~6 professors. It turned out all they really wanted was to get a retraction from me for what I had said about Clark Kerr. They wanted to absolve Clark Kerr of any involvement whatsoever, and to absolve the university as a whole of any involvement that would cast any stain upon its reputation as a citadel of academic freedom. If I had known that was their intention, I would have brought along somebody else who knew something about the situation and was more articulate than I. Under pressure, I become very inarticulate. I stammered, hemmed, and hawed, and said that surely there was more to it than the fact that the U.S. Dept. of Labor said we couldn't come to the bracero reception center anymore. They were not satisfied, and I wasn't satisfied, so it ended up with us going our respective ways, and I becoming more jaundiced than I had been before [*chuckle*].

Meanwhile, back at Citizens for Farm Labor (CFL), we were doing quite well. There was a lengthy period from Sep 1964 to Jan 1965 during which we were able to put out the magazine every month, because we were attracting a good many volunteers -- people who would write articles for us, help with the scut work of typing stencils, maintain our records of who was paying their annual membership fee of \$5, who was subscribing to the magazine without actually becoming a member of the organization, help recruit speakers for our monthly

meetings, etc. We were making our presence felt at public hearings and legislative hearings. It was kind of the "golden age" of CFL, in part because things were brewing down in the lower San Joaquin Valley, specifically in the little town of Delano. As I mentioned, Cesar Chavez had been laying low for a while, quite deliberately operating "under the radar" as they say nowadays, organizing something he called the Farm Workers Association (FWA) -- not to be confused with the Agricultural Workers Association (AWA) in Stockton, before the emergence of AWOC. AWA was largely the handiwork of Father Thomas McCullough, and Dolores Huerta was also involved. It was supplanted by AWOC after ~6 months, but it was quite a going concern for a while. I almost became its Executive Director.

Anyway, Chavez, in the fall of 1962, began very quietly organizing the FWA, scrupulously avoiding any mention of the word "union" because people had the idea that a union was something that existed [*chuckle*] just for the purpose of going on strike. Chavez had a totally different concept -- FWA was to be something that conferred a lot of other benefits and did not require direct confrontation with employers at all. It had a credit union, a health plan of sorts, various kinds of co-op ventures whereby people would help each other with odd jobs (carpentry, auto repair), working together at whatever they could within their confidence, to get to know and trust each other. They sacrificed a little bit, because they had to pay dues to FWA. The FWA began putting out a publication, which was very different in tone from our more formal, serious, and intellectual-sounding magazine. The FWA's publication, called "El Malcriado" (freely translated, "The Bad Boy"), was very outspoken in its opinion of growers. It had a lot of humor, satire, and cartoons -- we didn't have those things.

The volunteers who helped us at CFL frequently became attracted by the activities down in Delano. We lost a fellow named Bill Esher, for example. He was a very good associate editor. He moved down there and became the editor of El Malcriado. We lost another of our most faithful volunteers, Kathy Lynch. She went down there to help with their secretarial tasks, and married a farmworker. So it went. We became sort of a conduit to the Delano group, and were happy to have it happen that way. We existed as a stopgap measure during the period of time when there was nobody speaking directly on behalf of farmworkers. The beauty of the FWA was that it was headed by people who had all been farmworkers themselves. The guiding spirit of the AWA in Stockton had never been a farmworker.

All of this leads up to the big events that took place in fall 1965. This is a logical time to stop for today, and leave you in suspense for the next time, when things really get exciting.

Relevant web sites:

Children's Crusade (~1965): https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Children%27s_Crusade

Free Speech Movement (UC Berkeley campus, 1964-65):
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Free_Speech_Movement

Clark Kerr: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Clark_Kerr

El Malcriado: www.library.sfsu.edu/exhibits/cultivating/intropages/elmalcriado.html