

Introduction by LeRoy Chatfield

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El Malcriado – “La Voz del Campesino”

Cesar Chavez sought to empower farmworkers through the organization of a union – his National Farm Workers Association (NFWA). He believed that if farmworkers were organized, they would be powerful enough to bargain with California agribusiness employers about their right to form a union, what wages they should be paid, and under what conditions they should work – in short, farmworkers would have some say and control about their lives as farmworkers.

One step in this organizational process was to give the farmworkers a “voice” – thus was born the newspaper, “El Malcriado, the voice of the farmworker”. The meaning of El Malcriado is difficult to translate into English but Cesar Chavez interpreted it as a “malcontent”, or “ unruly child”, or a “brat.” Whatever, the exact translation, El Malcriado would give vent to the outcry of farmworkers about the injustices they endured.

Every newspaper worth its salt must have editorial cartoons to focus the attention of the reader on the issues that affect the readership – thus was born, Don Sotaco, Don Coyote, and El Patroncito – all created by artist Andy Zermeno to tell the story of the plight of farmworkers. Lovable Don Sotaco was the simple, sometimes bumbling farmworker; sleazy Don Coyote was the labor contractor who bought and sold and cheated farmworkers; and greedy El Patroncito was the bloated, arrogant, and all-powerful agribusiness employer.

El Malcriado began in 1965 and was laid to rest in 1976. Bill Esher, a pre-Delano Strike volunteer from Berkeley, was the first editor and he slaved away for several years publishing the newspaper, under the “independent” auspices of The Farm Worker Press. As you can imagine, in a movement crisis-to-crisis situation, the unrelenting pressure of deadlines, the primitive tools available to create and layout the copy, dealing with a printer a hundred miles removed from the scene, publishing in two languages, Spanish and English, the lack of money to pay for even the essentials, the inevitable questions of editorial control and content – all drove a series of editors to the brink. Looking back, it is amazing the El Malcriado lasted as long as it did, and became so popular among farmworkers, volunteers, and movement supporters.*

The Farmworker Movement Documentation Project has not been successful in locating every issue; you will see that what has been posted to the Website is mostly the English version, but I daresay that at least 90% of the editions (English or Spanish) are here. (If you have an edition that is not on the Website, and you loan it to us, it soon will be.)

The Documentation Project owes the following former UFW volunteers a sincere “THANK YOU” for loaning us their issues of El Malcriado so they could be scanned and posted to the Website. SPECIAL THANKS to: Nancy Elliott, Doug Adair, Ruben Montoya, Terry Vasquez Scott, Mike Miller, Richard Ybarra, Tom Dalzell, Sam Trickey, Ed Frankel, and the San Francisco State University Labor Archives.

The financial cost to the Farmworker Movement Documentation Project – \$5,000 – to put the El Malcriado online - blew apart the 2008 budget, but I have no regrets, it was worth every dollar spent.

El Malcriado tells the story of the farmworker movement from 1965 to 1976 – these newspapers are the ultimate primary sources that document the farmworker movement. They are priceless!

*Victor Aleman, UFW volunteer from 1981-1991, writes to say the El Malcriado resumed publication in the early 1980’s but was soon supplanted by a new publication, which Cesar Chavez called, “Food and Justice” and had a monthly distribution of 135,000 copies in the U.S. and Canada. (If/when the money can be raised, the Documentation Project will post these 1980’s farmworker movement publications to the Website – LeRoy Chatfield)