

Patrick Deagen 1971–1973

I was recruited to work for the UFW boycott while a student at Portland State University. Joe Digman and Jeanne McNasser had a table in the hallway of one of the school buildings. They invited me to join them at the boycott house to get involved in a letter-writing campaign concerning the Nixon appointees to the NLRB. I recall this being in the winter of 1971. I wrote letters, then went out to get them signed. I enjoyed the humor and the friendship of the boycott staff in Portland, including Kate Barton and Don Orange, in addition to Jeanne and Joe. I agreed to picket on weekends and sometimes on weekday afternoons. My attachment was to these friends, who appreciated my efforts. I made other friends who were not on the staff but were fellow volunteers. I recall a distinction between volunteers and staff who worked full time. This distinction was that I controlled my own time, which was primarily given to studies. Others had outside jobs. Staff worked on the boycott as their primary activity. I also knew of two field staff in Oregon who were working in my hometown, Woodburn. This is in the lush Willamette Valley. Their work was organizing field workers, which was going on in three Pacific Northwest states.

I recall carloads of field workers driving to Portland on several occasions to picket stores with the city boycott volunteers. A church offered its hall and kitchen facilities, and we had a big meal after a long day picketing. I recall one or two field workers, experienced cooks, preparing a meal for maybe 60 people: rice, beans, tortillas, and a main dish. We sang, told stories of the day's successes. We may have performed a skit. I recall a staff member calling Marshall person to person collect and he would call back. We would have a report on national news and gossip of the successes. I recall coffee, and after a long day's work, maybe a bottle of Almaden mountain burgundy.

The people I met in Portland were as a family. Laughter, teasing, encouragement were always near the surface. Some men and women were in their 60s, although the majority seemed to be in their 20s. Picketing involved handing out flyers and talking to shoppers as they drove into the store. We also talked to them as they entered on foot. If a car drove on by or decided not to shop, this was a success. We were very successful. The weather was the cold rain characteristic of Pacific Northwest winter. Many store chains agreed to cooperate. I also volunteered in Seattle. I got to meet Dale and Jan Van Pelt and the dynamic sisters Nancy and Sarah Welch.

In the state capital, Salem, the field staff had organized a campaign against a farm labor bill that was vetoed by Governor Tom McCall. We felt an immense victory. The name Jerry Cohen was on people's lips.

One of my heroes at the time was Jim Conroy, who was a priest and organizer. He worked with the charismatic Fred Ross, Jr. as a field organizer.

Later I met Graciela Cisneros. She then headed the field operations with the assistance of the research team of Bob Purcell and Steve Sady. We shared a youthful energy that made

the challenges of work a joy. I recall voter registration and several field walkouts for higher piece rates. One organizer I recall in the Yakima Valley of Washington was Lupe Gamboa.

I graduated from school. In the fall, Fred Ross called Bob Purcell to work against Proposition 22 in Los Angeles. Later I also went to Long Beach to work on the campaign. I handed out flyers morning to night. I recall handing out copies of the farmworker-consumer reporter that contained the Catholic bishops' and labor opposition to Prop 22. LeRoy called a meeting in Los Angeles and informed us that we were not reaching enough voters with our leafleting efforts. We then were organized into human billboard teams. I held a large sign that sometimes was caught by the wind. I recall endless egg salad sandwiches. If we were short on signs, others would point to direct attention to the signs. We won that one. I recall the victory party and my disappointment that McGovern had been defeated.

Later I moved to Oakland, California, to join the boycott staff for the first time. Bob Purcell was the able director. He reported to Fred Ross, Jr., the Bay Area director. I was the fifth staff person in Oakland at that moment. In the couple of years ahead we grew to perhaps 20, including eight or nine Gallo strikers. I received \$5 every week. We lined up and the money was handed out. The other \$5 was put into an envelope to buy food. I did not have bills. I recall spending money at the nearby Laundromat. And I saved money. I recall picketing. I recall training sessions with Fred Ross, Sr., who taught the house-meeting organizing techniques at the San Jose boycott house. We had Bay Area get-togethers to keep our spirits up and have joint endeavors. I talked at homes, churches, union halls, and schools to recruit volunteers. I would then call a list to get a picket line for the weekend. Relaxation was a movie or a trip to Bishop's coffeehouse. We would have rousing weekly meetings with all who helped with the boycott. I recall skits and singing. These were high-energy, creative meetings. Bob Purcell had gifts for managing a large family so that each felt respected and appreciated. I know I did, and we were successful in keeping a positive energy growing. We did not win agreement from Safeway. I picketed months at Oliver corners in Hayward. I recall the store manager offering me employment. My approach was persistent, direct, and polite.

Over time I probably picketed every Safeway in the county. One stint was in San Leandro. Sometimes I rode a donated bike with my sign and flyers to the BART station. I recall picketing Lucky stores, Fry's markets, and lots of liquor stores. Two political campaigns I worked on were for Father Boyle in San Francisco and for Bobby Seale, who was running for mayor of Oakland. Fr. Bill O'Donnell helped me out a couple of times when I was improperly arrested. The volunteers and staff in Alameda County were great. I recall skilled writers, musicians, labor leaders, ministers, teachers, students—just many friends. Actual victories were slow or minor, but our efforts and spirit were afire. After a couple of years I was offered work at the health clinic in Salinas, which I took. I had a short but exciting time there that ended with my own personal difficulties. I took time off.

I rejoined the staff for Proposition 14. I worked in Sacramento. I did not work to get the

issue on the ballot, but registered voters and did campaign work. I helped with a pre-election poll in the Central Valley. We lost that one. I recall maybe two trips to La Paz for meetings. I did leave at this time to travel to Mexico. I did not concern myself with leadership issues of the union. I felt they could take care of themselves. When I heard Cesar, or Dolores, or Philip, or a dozen others, they spoke well and clearly. I always remember hearing the words "thank you" or "it's because of you," or "we have work to do." On a personal level, I saw the evil side of capitalism. I saw the strength of joining together to fight for justice. I saw life with better days ahead and worked to make it happen. Thanks.