

Report of Gene Boutilier regarding Student Summer Project. 1966

Report: Student Summer Project 1966

Sponsor: National Farm Workers Association
Co-Sponsors: National Student Association, SNCC, National Student
Christian Federation, Young Christian Students,
Students for a Democratic Society
Financial Support: National Council of Churches, California Migrant Ministry,
California Center for Community Development, National
Farm Workers Association

Background

The National Farm Workers Association was formed in 1962 in Fresno by a number of farm worker families led by Cesar Chavez. It operated at first as a self-help association, and added insurance, a credit union, social and legal services, a newspaper, medical clinic, a traveling farm workers theatrical troupe, and finally the features of a labor union. The association is predominantly Mexican-American, but reflects the total farm worker force in this region in its membership of people with varied ethnic, national or racial backgrounds. The California Migrant Ministry has welcomed the development of this association and worked closely with it.

In 1965, the union aspects of the association became most important, because the worst problems of the members involved very low pay for even highly skilled work, and the inability to bargain collectively or individually or improve working conditions in their employment. After calling a strike against the larger grape growers of the Delano region, the NFWA together with the predominantly Filipino members of AWOOC (Agricultural Workers Organizing Committee, AFL-CIO) led a strike which has now gone on for over a year.

This strike has resulted in extensive publicity, public and church controversy, and tremendous national impact. It has effected national legislative efforts for a minimum wage for farm workers, and also had very tangible results for local striking workers. Schenley Industries, one of the largest grape growers, has completely unionized under contract with the union and both company and workers are in a mutually profitable and satisfactory new era of relationships. In August of 1966 and again in October, the NFWA, now an AFL-CIO affiliate, won crucial farm worker elections on the huge farms of DiGiorgio Corporation,, one of the nation's largest agribusiness enterprises. The strike

against DiGiorgio is over and contracts are being negotiated and arbitrated. Several other smaller grape growers and shippers, including two (2) Catholic wineries, have agreed to unionize. As the Association has spread across the Southwest, and as sparks from this movement have dropped in other farm worker communities elsewhere in the nation, it has become clear that this union will organize America's field workers, the lowest paid employees in the nation, and will make a critical contribution to breaking the cycle of poverty.

Student Summer Project

A crucial period in the birth of this nation was the spring and summer of 1966. Large numbers of strikers were living on donated food, clothing, and funds. The growers were vigorously fighting the NFWA with a huge arsenal of weapons. One unit of the Teamsters Union was trying to break the NFWA, and frustrated by failure was turning to increasingly violent acts. Demands for services were being made by farm workers outside the Delano strike zone, where strikes against thirty-three (33) growers were in progress. The DiGiorgio boycott had to be of maximum effectiveness.

Students from California colleges, especially Cal. Berkeley, had been coming weekends and vacations to help with the strike. Approximately thirty-five (35) student-age volunteers, some of them "graduate school dropouts" on leave from Stanford, Pomona, and the University of California had been on the staff of the NFWA for some period of time during the fall and winter. At least fifteen (13) student-age volunteers had been volunteers for several months.

The leadership of the union decided that a student project patterned after the projects in the south needed to be developed. Among their reasons were the need for more talent and leadership in the strike – especially in out-of-town fund-raising contacts and office work, and regularizing of the contributions of students who were sure to come whether or not a program was provided; the need for aggressive, highly mobile, articulate, inexpensive, temporary staff to carry on a powerful boycott against DiGiorgio; the need to build on the Association's ideological role as a movement rather than only a trade union.

The project was announced to the thousands of students and others present at the Easter Sunday rally at the end of the 300 mile Delano to Sacramento Marcy by the farm workers and their supporters.

Leadership and Budget

From 1963 until April of 1966, the Rev. Gene Boutilier was serving a congregation whose leadership consisted of growers, bankers, and prominent persons in Fresno. Fresno is the hub city of the central agricultural valley of California. This Valley has highly centralized ownership and management of agriculture. Mr. Boutilier's identification with the cause of farm workers, specifically his picketing on a Monday in November, led to an intensive

passionately felt, controversial period of missionary education followed by his resignation. According to a plan worked out by him, with the NFWA and with Chris Hartmire, director of the California Migrant Ministry, he agreed to spend 20 weeks as coordinator of the student summer project. A budget of \$2,500 was agreed upon to be spent as follows:

<u>Expenses</u>	<u>Weekly</u>	<u>20 Weeks</u> (4/18-9/5/66).
Net Salary	\$50	\$1,000
Tax & Deductions	10	200
Travel @ 6¢ per mile (average 500 miles weekly)	30	600
Phone	25	500
Postage	2.50	50
Travel (out-of-town), contingency	7.50	150

This budget has been followed with the exception that the proposed mileage expense was inadequate for the 22,000 miles traveled in the twenty (20) weeks by the coordinator. Therefore, the mileage allotment was mostly not paid – gas and oil expenses only were paid directly by the Union. The money for this budget was advanced in equal portions by the California Center for Community Development and the California Migrant Ministry. It was disbursed by the CCCD on a regular payroll accounting basis. The money was not in either organization's budget and the raising of it is still to be done as of the date of this report.

It should be noted that the budget provides organizational expenses and a minimum subsistence for the organizer. The cost of housing, food, transportation and other expenses for the students was an expense of the NFWA for which contributions were raised by the Union. The Union provided paper, supplies, most of the postage, some food for the organizer and his family. The students paid an average of \$10.00 per person which covered all orientation living expenses.

Recruitment

April 19 through June 19 were spent in planning and recruitment. Recruitment efforts included mailing through the National Student Association to every college student government; mailing to the National Student Christian Federation roster, to every United Church of Christ and Methodist campus pastor, to strike support groups; displays at California colleges, student paper interviews, and interviewing and speaking by the coordinator and a volunteer assistant at over twenty (20) California colleges. Planning included a session with the National Council of Churches' staff person, Bruce Hanson, who coordinated the 1964 Oxford summer project orientation, as well as several conferences with staff of co-sponsoring organizations.

A large number of students made inquiry – perhaps 120 by mail. No record was made of those inquiring by personal contact. About eighty (80) students made a commitment to

attend in advance, and each of these had references checked and received orientation material. The orientation session was attended by about sixty-five (65) new volunteers in addition to about fifteen (15) long-term student-age volunteers. Of these students, about fifty (50) remained all summer, and were joined by about ten (10) new recruits during the summer. By November first, about twenty-five (25) student-age volunteers remain with the strike.

Orientation

Orientation began June 19, 1966 and ended June 26, 1966. The first part of the week was held away from Delano to provide basic information in a relatively calm atmosphere. The remaining five (5) days were spent in Delano. The students were housed in the striker's homes, and spent part of each Delano day on the picket lines and part of each day receiving additional training in a makeshift classroom at a dusty migrant labor camp created out of the remains of an illicit cock-fight ring. By fate the orientation week was a crucial week for the strike very tense and busy, and climaxed by the successful boycott by hundreds of farm workers of a phony representation election called by management (Di Giorgio) on a few day's notice.

Assignments

After orientation the summer assignments began. The majority of the students went to major urban centers to boycott Di Giorgio products, raise money, and win support for the strike and for legislation beneficial to farm workers. Students hitchhiked to New York, Milwaukee, Philadelphia, Seattle, Denver and Detroit. They were sent to every important California city.

Two students spent the summer in Texas as staff for the Rio Grande cantaloupe strike and marched to Austin, Texas. Three students were in El Paso attempting to prevent recruitment of strikebreakers for Delano. Several students were used directly in farm worker organizing in the Delano area. One student served as staff aid to a lawyer defending farm workers, two helped in the Farm Worker Health Clinic. Three organized their own child care center for the children of striking families, since so many parents, accustomed to leaving their children in cars at the fields while they worked, also found it necessary to keep the children in cars on the picket lines. A number of students worked in the offices of the Association at some time during the summer making use of letter writing and typing skills. Several students did research for the Association.

Evaluation

This project achieved its purpose. The student "shock troops" with their militancy, freedom from the niceties of protocol, and time pressure of wanting immediate results were very effective in the boycott. They provided interpretation to many civic and labor and church groups about the needs of farm workers and spoke out of their own intense

experience at the beginning of the summer. They were required to learn something about American labor organizations, whose distance from American students is unfortunately wide. Even on urban boycott assignment, it was possible for the students to have experiences with farm workers and minority people from farm worker backgrounds. These personal contacts are one of the major fruits of the summer. Some of the students will be doing research in farm labor problems or building student support groups this year. Some come back weekends, or plan to be back next summer. Everyone concerned this summer felt pride, excitement, adventure, in the opportunity to be in on the birth of a new national union. As in so many "movement" activities, perhaps the greatest unfortunate feature of the project was the damage or pain suffered by personalities unprepared emotionally for the intensity or the freedom or the exposure the summer afforded. Some students suffered badly from interpersonal crises, exhaustion, or problems of authority. The coordinator tried to help some of these problems, and hope that the difficulties moved the sufferers closer to maturity.

Prepared by:
The Rev. Eugene Boutilier
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