

Philosophy and Reflections of Jim Drake

Introduction by LeRoy Chatfield

I liked Jim Drake very much, and I am sorry he is not alive today to discuss his role and contribution in the development of the farmworker movement, especially in 1964 and during 1965 and 1966, the first two years of the Delano Grape Strike - he was the administrative right hand of Cesar Chavez. On his own initiative, and with the bemused support of Chavez, Jim organized the first farmworker boycott, which probably made the difference between winning and losing. Trust me.

Unfortunately, Jim is unlikely to ever receive his historical due – certainly no one to date has stepped forward to research or write about Jim Drake. Not that Jim would have minded, he was a very humble and self-effacing person, and he was present in Delano to serve the needs of farmworkers, not to create a personal or historical legacy.

But Jim did make a difference – a big difference – in the history of Cesar Chavez and his farmworker movement, and now in his absence, the Farmworker Movement Documentation Project will do what it can to preserve the historical record about Jim Drake.

In 1985, eight years after Drake had left the UFW, Pat Hoffman interviewed him for a book she was writing about the influence/role of churches in the farmworker movement. He gave a long interview, which devolved into a discussion of his philosophy about organizing workers and leadership, his own work with farmworkers, and some bittersweet reflections about his involvement with the movement. You will find this interview in the Oral History section. In addition, Jim gave a couple of lectures about various aspects of the farmworker movement, and he wrote a piece for the celebration of the 75th Anniversary of the National Farm Worker Ministry – these are included here. I have also included an eulogy written by labor writer, Dick Meister.

Not very much, I admit, for an academic to use as the basis for a book, but it is a start, and there are still dozens of people alive that could be interviewed about Jim Drake and his immense contribution to Cesar Chavez and his farmworker movement.