

TAPE ARC - 42, TC 12:00:00

**GEORGE MEANY ARCHIVES; "BIRTH OF A UNION" -- B&W
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SEVERAL OF THE SEQUENCES WHICH FOLLOW BEGIN AS VOICE -
OVER (INTERVIEW MATERIAL, NOT NARRATION), AND MAY OR MAY
NOT HAVE A SECTION WHERE THE SPEAKER IS SEEN ON SCREEN.

MALE VOICE, UNION ORGANIZER? [VOICE OVER only] :

12:02:10 I don't know what, how much you folks know about organizing, but
an organizer is always, always searching for a man among men, for a man that can
feel the thing so deeply, so strongly, so intensely, that uh, once he gets in to it he
just can't help but eat, sleep and breathe organizing.

CESAR CHAVEZ, interview, he is seen at a desk later:

12:02:37 [SOT]The idea of organizing farm workers, at least the idea was to
keep it in such a way that the workers themselves would make the decisions. And
also, uh, our first objective was to try and stimulate and interest as many workers
as possible, so that [ON SCREEN] through a monthly dues they would be carrying
on the, uh they would care for the expense of organizing, instead of getting money
from the outside. We felt that if we couldn't accomplish this very first necessary
step then we felt it was almost useless to go any further. [SOT] Delano was uh one

of those places that we came to in the early winter, on our way back to Brawley, we stopped here, in those days they were still picking cotton by hand, so this became one of the others that we made, uh. I was here for, on and off, since 1937, and the Second World War came and, I uh, volunteered and went into the Navy served my hitch and came back and about a year or so I was out and I married, uh...

12:03:48 [ON SCREEN] my wife, is a native of Delano. And uh, I kept doing farm work until about 1950 when um, the Community Service Organization was beginning, was trying to organize Mexican-Americans into a civic action group, with emphasis on citizenship and voter registration and uh, legislation. It was here that I met uh, [SOT, over image of Fred Ross] Fred Ross, who was the organizer for the Community Service Organization.

FRED ROSS, interviewed:

12:04:23 And I saw him in operation for many years, I worked right beside him for the last two years, uh. And then I knew the wonderful job he did organizing farm workers by himself over in Oxnard. The first real thrust that had been made against citrus, and uh, against the growers in that area. And uh, after that, and after seeing him in operation heading up the whole CSO movement, in this state, there wasn't any question in my mind that certainly he was the best Mexican - American organizer in the United States.

DICK MYER, personnel boss for DiGiorgio:

12:05:49 We have, for some time, felt that uh, if at any time there was an expression of desire on the part of our workers to be unionized that we certainly wouldn't be against it. We have uh, contracts with uh, many unions, with our S & W, and Treesweet, and uh, their subsidiary companies. So we certainly don't have any objection to unionization. Our winery's unionized, has been for some time. ["Of course your field workers have never been unionized..."] No, there has never, there has never been an impression from the workers themselves that this is what they wished. I think even right now that uh, if they do vote that they want a union, I think that they have maybe been pressured into a situation. Actually the only thing that the NFWA has done is uh, during the last nine months, aggravated the workers by their harassment and bothering them when they are trying to get the job done. ...

12:07:09 ...They've sometimes been exposed to this profanity and the insults for eight hours at a time, they would just, the agitator would just follow the worker down the county road, using bullhorns.

CESAR CHAVEZ, interviewed:

12:07:53 Uh, we built a uh, organized a credit union whereby the members would get uh, make small loans at very low interest rates. Something that was, not only served them this way but also something that would get people together, get

people to understand uh, how to work cooperatively, which is one of our major goals.

DICK MYER interviewed by reporter:

12:09:51 REPORTER: Are you required to tell new employees that there's a strike going on here?

12:09:59 MYER: Any employees that we recruit sign a statement to the effect that they have been informed that there is a labor dispute here.

12:10:09 REPORTER: Is this required by law that you tell them that there is a labor dispute?

12:10:12 MYER: That's correct, it is.

12:10:14 REPORTER: And do you tell them?

12:10:16 MYER: Yes, we do.

FARM WORKER interviewed:

12:10:19 REPORTER: When did you get in here?

12:10:21 FARM WORKER: Right now.

12:10:22 REPORTER: Just this morning?

12:10:23 FARM WORKER: You mean this office?

12:10:28 REPORTER: No, I mean to DiGiorgio, when did you come up?

12:10:30 FARM WORKER: About 15 minutes ago.

12:10:32 REPORTER: Did they tell you there was a strike on before you came?

12:10:35 FARM WORKER: No, we didn't know anything about it.

CESAR CHAVEZ [SOT]:

12:10:41 A lot of the workers that are brought in to break our strike, uh, are brought into camps that the growers have. Those camps are, in all cases, almost prisons, uh, in as much that we cannot even get near them....

12:11:41 ...See, the uh, problem that we have here is that there are unlimited number of people that can be brought in from Mexico, from Texas, and other states where the wages are what 60 cents an hour now, can be brought into the Delano

area without being told that a strike is in progress and then use them to break our strike or use them to do whatever work they can with them. This has been the history of the strike. There's no law, uh, in California, to prohibit employers from breaking strikes by importing strike breakers, either across international boundary lines or across state lines, or even county lines.

FARM WORKER interviewed:

12:12:20 REPORTER: Would you have come up if you knew there was a strike on?

12:12:22 FARM WORKER: Well, I couldn't tell.

12:12:27 REPORTER: Do you have any feelings about scabbing?

12:12:30 FARM WORKER: Well, some.

12:12:34 REPORTER: What are you going to do, are you going to stay?

12:12:36 FARM WORKER: I don't know, we'll just see, what will develop.

CESAR CHAVEZ [SOT]:

12:13:34 We had to improvise, and do things differently from for instance, what unions do when they strike a plant. Uh, a lot of thought was given to this even before the strike started. We had to cover, in this strike in Delano, we've had to cover for the last 8 1/2 months, almost 450 square miles. It's a very large area to cover, so we had, we hit on the idea of having a roving picket line, a line that would go and try to communicate to workers wherever they were closest to the road where we could communicate with them.

DICK MYER tape recording played in the fields:

12:14:35 This is Dick Myer, whom I think a few of you know. I am director of personnel for the DiGiorgio Fruit Corporation. I started working in Delano over 30 years ago. I like the community and I also enjoy my work with DiGiorgio. Even though at that time I only made 25 cents an hour. But still I didn't strike and I worked for 30 years and almost raised my family and I've enjoyed meeting the hundreds of people...

12:15:03 ...I'm going to talk about the National Farm Workers Association, and some of the people in it, their beliefs, or at least how I evaluate their beliefs, if anyone can, and what they are trying to accomplish, which certainly isn't a labor union.

LUIS VALDEZ describing a scene from Teatro Campesino [SOT]:

12:16:01 The name of the act is “La Consciencia del Esquirol”, which means “The Conscience of the Scab.” Felipe Cantu is portraying the Esquirol, and he’s one of the many types of scabs that we find in the fields, this one being the type that is just barely learning the meaning of “huelga” which means strike, and “esquirol.” And so the, the conscience has been waiting for him out here in the park, and so the Esquirol comes staggering home and runs into his Conscience, and he begins to bug him again, and so in order to tell him what a scab is, the Conscience is reading the definition of a scab translated into Spanish, the definition of a scab by Jack London. And this definition is read in the fields, almost every day, every chance that we get now, it’s been very important to the strike. And the striker, I mean the scab reacts to the definition, it’s too much for him, and so he rejects the life of the scab and becomes a striker.

12:17:16 [ON SCREEN] At the present time we are doing a tour of farm worker towns across the Valley. We’ve performed, uh, as far north as Yuba City, and as far south as Indio. And we go to wherever there are strikers, uh, farm workers interested in hearing about the Delano strike, and uh, we hold a rally as such, and present the acts, talk to them about the strike and so on, etc. It builds up the spirit and shows them the spirit of the Delano strike.

BRUNO DISPOTO interviewed:

12:15:51 Definitely there have been a tremendous amount of outside agitators

12:15:53 REPORTER: Are these communists?

12:18:54 Well, to say they're communists, all of them or a few of them, we have names of a few uh, who are known communists, but to say that all of them are, I wouldn't, I'd hesitate to make the comment.

12:19:05 REPORTER: What is the roll of the uh, Catholic Church been in the conflict?

12:19:09 Well, uh, so far it's been a very active roll. It's been very discouraging to see the position they've taken. Uh, we, we assumed that at first it was a few self-appointed crusaders, but of late we have found that it was the general thinking among the hierarchy of the Church.

FATHER FRANCIS ALIPART, Our Lady of Guadalupe Church speaks:

12:19:28 ...Officially the Church, I, and the authority of the parish have not been involved, but my people... because part of the parish belongs to the strikers and part to the opponents. Because of their jobs being different, or because if the strike should win, they may be hurt, it's all personal point of view, but my people are involved. The strikers really need some spiritual comfort, these are big trials they are going through and they need some moral support, and I think the ministry, at least to some extent, are helping them.

REVEREND FLOYD REED, the First Baptist Church speaks:

12:20:20 The California Migrant Ministry as it's operating here in Delano is not doing what the Migrant Ministry is supposed to be doing. In it's inception it was set out to... migrant farm workers. It was to promote child care centers, health centers, spiritual advice, and what have you. But these uh, migrant ministers in Delano are not doing that. Nor are they doing any part of that. They, the only thing that they seem to be doing is agitating and promoting a strike. As far as the race problem is concerned, we have no race problem in Delano. It has been referred to many times as the little United Nations. We have an Oriental that's the, President of our School Board. We have, uh, uh, Negroes that are members of our civic organizations, in fact Reverend Moore, the Negro pastor in town is a member of the Kiwanis Club, of which I am President this year.

REVEREND MOORE interviewed:

12:21:26 ...it's less than we have in any town in America, so we can't say, I can't say how much discrimination...

12:21:34 REPORTER: Is it true all the Negroes in Delano live over on the West side of the highway, the others live on the right?

12:21:42 No, not necessarily, we live here because we chose to live here. But, one of the men who do yard work here, and his wife is the secretary of this church,

was asked by the mayor to rent one of his apartments, because of knowing he pay his bill well. You can live anywhere you want to in Delano, and work any place you desire.

12:22:02 REPORTER: But most of the Negroes here would prefer to live on the West side...?

12:22:06 Most of them prefer it because this is where they born. Most Negroes are over here because they born over here.

MIGRANT MINISTER, JIM DRAKE:

12:22:12 ...organized Christianity, the church in the San Joaquin valley has for decades gone beyond a ministry that it should be involved in in this valley. It has defended the position of the status community, the establishment ... this has gone on for years and years. Now, what has happened, the churchmen, the good growers of the valley have realized, is that God is not wholly on their side, they don't have the church firmly in their pockets. So now they make certain claims to the fact that now the church has gotten out of the spiritual realm into the uh, secular. But in reality the church has been in the secular all along, because it has ministered to one side of the picture, to the growers side, and has defended their secular interests for so many years. Now they're shocked that maybe other secular interests have uh, importance in the eyes of the church.

12:23:17 [SOT] Maybe what happens when a pastor, when a “collar” is on the picket line, suddenly the police seem to recognize their responsibilities much more clearly, and the growers seem to edge off the violence, and a more sane situation, closer to an equal balance of power takes place on the picket line.

CHICANO POLICE CAPTAIN, AL ESPINOSA:

12:23:40 Uh, I’m also aware of the non-violence, non-violent tactics these people use, uh. They may call it non-violence but they do cause stress, and uh, emotionalism.

12:24:03 REPORTER: Captain, do you own a labor contracting business?

12:24:06 Yes, I do, I uh, in this sense, I am mostly a bookkeeper and payroll master of the company. My partner, who is also been here for several years, takes care of everything in the field. He hires, and uh, he contacts the farmers and the growers, and I take care of the payroll and the bookkeeping.

12:24:27 REPORTER: Could you explain to me what the roll of the labor contractor is, how does he function, how does he get paid, what’s his responsibility?

12:24:36 Well, the labor contractor of course is sort of a middleman between the laborer and the grower. The labor contractor of course takes of the responsibility of taking care of all your deductions, your payroll tax, uh, and hiring

the people, and transporting them to the field, and supervising them, and seeing that they get back home. This takes away quite a lot of responsibility from the grower himself. All the records are kept by the contractor, so that the grower does not have to deal with this type of problem.

12:25:20 REPORTER: And how does the labor contractor get paid?

12:25:26 Well it varies, he makes his living from commission, you make it on volume.

DOLORES HUERTA speaking:

12:25:36 [SOT] The labor contractors are, have a very bad reputation in the community, as exploiters of people. It's pretty well known that no one that has any respect for himself ever gets into this role. [ON SCREEN] ...and he doesn't contract in the way that a building contractor does, for materials and goods, and this sort of thing, he contracts people. Now, he does fill a need, I imagine, for the employer, because he acts as a go-between. The employers don't really take on the, I'm talking about the growers now, they don't accept their role as employers, in that they abscond this responsibility when they hire a labor contractor.

CESAR CHAVEZ speaking:

12:27:35 [SOT] Well, uh, in the beginning, they didn't understand us, they didn't know what we were trying to do and uh, didn't know if we were a union or a civil rights movement. I think that they have come to realize that we are a union in fact, and the only thing different is that we have a lot of imagination, we're doing a lot of things that have never been done before, but we're out there to get contracts and establish a union.

