

Cardinal Mahoney

TAPE 41, PIC ROLL 34, TC 22:00:00

22:00:18 Well I was a young priest ordained in just three years I had been sent to catholic university for social work degree and I'd been just returned to the diocese of Fresno, when actually the filipinos with Larry Itlion began this grape strike and within a week Cesar Chavez and his people then joined together with the filipinos and began what is now known as the Delano grape strike and I met him on that occassion very quickly because being director of catholic charities the bishop of the diesis said well this is kind of a social matter why don't you take care of it, and well and so I went down to Delano in this little tiny house that they had rented a little tiny place with three or four rooms was a very humble beggining of where this whole union and farmer strike began.

22:01:11 What was your impression of Cesar when you first met him?
What did you think of him?

22:01:14 Well when I walked into the room I'd never met him before, I didn't know which one was Cesar, because everybody was just so humble, and so self-efacing, everyone was in efect a farm worker. And so you had no perception of who was kind of incharge or the leader because this was a fledgely little group, so I, I was finally introduced to him and, and his humility and simplicity remained to the day he died. Were traits and characteristics that I think add to his greatness.

22:01:52 when you saw this group coming together, what were your thoughts, did you say to yourself, boy they've have a long ways to go, or your in trouble, what were your feelings?

22:02:03 Well when I first met them and saw their situation, I said to myself, you know this is very necessary for the farm workers to have this kind of effort but I really doubt they're gonna ever make it, because they don't have the resources that the growers have, the growers have associations they have law firms they have, you name it, they've got enormous amount of political power, specially in the San Joaquin valley and here are this poor little group, really has nothing so I was very doubtful at first, if they would, if they had the stamina to really endure

22:02:43 at what point did you begin to believe that they would succeed?

22:02:46 oh, I think after, after that first year of 1965 September through December, I think by December I really believed that they really were in this for the long haul that this was going to be a long term effort and they were going to succeed

22:03:05 what led you to believe that?

22:03:07 I think their faith in the movement, I think their ability to communicate with farm workers, I think their ability to tell farm workers, or have farm workers pause, and say to them is this really the kind of situation you want for your family, are this wages and and working conditions and lack of benefits is this really what you want for your family? and do you

want your children to inherit this future for themselves? and they're able to resonate quickly with the farm workers and that I think got quickly very immediate response as a rounding point, no we want change we want improvement

22:03:49 did that come from Cesar or from the people that were involved?

22:03:55 Well , I think ... was a very charismatic leader he had a way of speaking to the farm workers and which they knew instantly that he was a farm worker, that he had a vision, he could help shape a future and direction and bring energy to it, and he had the sense of optimism, seldom did I ever see Cesar in a negative or down mood, Cesar was always optimistic no matter what had happened, and they had a lot of adversities

22:04:31 you were in a very interesting situation, you were brought in to mediate disputes between the farm workers and the growers, how difficult was it?

22:04:43 It was awful, it was a terrible terribly difficult situation because virtually all of the growers and all of the farm workers were catholics. So what happened almost over night was both sides said, well since we're catholics the church must be on our side. Well the problem was we had both sides saying the same thing, and so it was an enormous tension I didn't experience it quite as bad at first personally, because I wasn't in a local parish as such I was in Fresno, I was head of catholic charities so I wasn't a parish priest or pastor in one of these towns. Where the priests really felt it

were in this farming towns where you had a couple of masses in English to which the growers went and a couple of masses in Spanish which the farm workers went and you had them in the same parish, in the same church, albeit different times, and I think that's where the tensions were very difficult and and basically people didn't know what to do. But the role of the church from almost day one, was to not take sides, which the demand upon us was to take sides. And we did not, we said no, that is not our role, but the workers do have rights and the growers have certain rights and our role really is to help protect and guarantee the rights of all parties, and to the extent that we can help mediate controversies, disputes and to see how we can resolve this matter peacefully

22:06:25 story on the delano ... situation you were a mediator... how did you go about doing that could you tell us a story

22:06:43 Well you got to remember that what actually brought that whole thing to the table in negotiations, was the table grape boycott in 1968, so this was in 1972-73, the settlement actually the announcement was in the summer or spring of ninety of 73. Actually the boycott pressure is what then put, put the people together, that was not an easy thing to get all these parties together. The I would say the most difficult aspect of this entire matter, if I may say so were all the attorneys, to the extent that we can get attorneys out of the room in this negotiations, we made progress. When you could get the farm workers and the growers talking to each other, we made enormous amount of progress. I remember one situation in that area, where the grower, it was a large operation and he was the only grower in negotiations with the

union, and his attorneys were in San Francisco, so they weren't there for the negotiation so all during these two days this grower and

22:07:57 excuse me we are going to start this again - ran out of film

seventy was the big one.. involved in

ROLL 35

story 1970 delano... continued

22:08:11 There were so many interesting things that happened, but attorneys were not always helpful, we found to the extent that we could get growers and farmworkers to sit down and talk to each other without attorneys, we made a lot of progress, and I remember one situation where it was a large grower by himself negotiating with Cesar and some of his people and we were involved as mediators in that. And it happened to be that this attorney's gro the attorneys for this grower were in San Francisco, they weren't there in Bakersfield, so about 330 that day the grower and the union reached an agreement, about 4 o'clock in come his attorneys, and so the grower said to his attorneys, we have reached an agreement all we need to do is to get the paperwork signed and we can sign this in the morning, and the attorney said oh that is absolutely impossible it'll take days weeks maybe to review this and get this ready. And I remember this grower put his arms around Cesar and he said, well Mr. Chavez this is one of the problems we have in agriculture, he said, but we'll have this agreement all typed by tomorrow morning or we'll have probably new attorneys. And I almost

applauded because we had so much difficulty, the they some how were always an obstable to getting something settled.

22:10:18 why is it that the church was brought in to mediate?

22:11:38 Well, it's one of the sad, sad commentaries on agriculture and farm labor, unfortunately, up to this day agriculture is totally excluded from National Labor Relations Act, an act of 1935 to protect the rights of workers and over the years almost every group of workers in the country have been added to that protection, except agriculture it is still excluded. The same with the state, and now the state does have now a California Agriculture Labor Relations Act which is I think quite good. But neither the state mediations service nor the federal mediation service actually had any jurisdiction in this. We were able to coerce, gently the state and the federal to do a couple of things, but they did it with great reluctance, and they just would not participate so they.. was nobody there who was able to step forward and be acceptable to both sides and serve as mediators so they asked the bishop's committee on farm labor of which I was secretary if they would accept that role

they the growers/farmers?

both both the farmers and the farm workers

What were your recollections of the teamsters?

22:11:56 Well that was a very sad chapter, actually several chapters in this. The teamsters had a contract with one large lettuce grower in Salinas and the growers then in my opinion, went to the teamsters with whom they had a good relationship. And tried to get the teamsters to force out the farm workers, because the growers, I think felt they could deal with the teamsters, more to their advantage than they could these grassroots farm workers group. And the teamsters said yes, and in fact we were involved with meeting with the teamsters several times it was very very unpleasant the teamsters put a lot of pressure on and I'd have to say sadly kinda lived up to the teamsters image of that period in history. We saw a lot of brutality and violence and things happening, I was really surprised. When I was with the farm labor board I I was surrounded by a hostile group of teamsters and had all the tires in my car slashed, it was a very difficult situation. So we tried to mediate this and work out a jurisdictional arrangement, that the teamsters would only be involved with certain commodities, with certain geographical areas, and that and that, that never went really well, however, in the other side of it, the teamsters did not have a lot of success in recruiting farm workers to join their union. So it eventually ended up in a kind of stalemate at first, the teamsters got a very few farm workers to join them, and got very few contracts then it kind of died out and came back again, a new effort and the new effort to was a little bit more successful for a while but eventually the teamsters finally just left

Do you consider Cesar a religious/spiritual person?

22:11:56 Well I personally think that his own spirituality, his own religious faith was the very core of who he was and where he really derived

his strength and his energy I never met a man of such faith as Cesar, Cesar would go to mass every day that he could, was actively involved with his faith, always had our lady Guadalupe in the center of anything they were doing, any march, had to be led by our lady of Guadalupe either a statue or a big banner. He would whatever they did with the farmer workers always had to have mass everyday, whatever they did. His own spirituality was extremely powerful, I think it is also what helped him, assisted him and his fasts assisted him with many many reverses, the deaths of farm workers, the difficulties they encountered, all of the opposition I was always impressed with that deep personal faith

how did that affect the group that he was leading

22:15:20 Oh well, it had an enormous effect because first of all it helped bring a calming influence to the membership especially when there'd been real adversity. And they had a lot of them, and he had a way of making sure that the movement stayed non-violent, and that was his primary goal in fact he said many times, if our union becomes violent then the whole thing is over. We quit we're not having it, because he would simply not allow violence to be a part of this effort. He felt that the integrity of the farm workers, what they were really striving for and their future, demanded this type of respect for each other even the other side

22:16:05 what were your feelings about Cesar's fasts

22:16:08 Well of course his fasts were from our perspective quite biblical, fasts are very well known certainly in the old testament, but as well

in the new testament. Jesus began his public ministry with a 40 day fast. Fasting was something very important in the whole christian history and still is, and of course Cesar saw it from two perspectives, his own christian perspective, as well as the non-violence of Ghandi the indian perspective, in which Ghandi himself had many fasts for non-violence. So Cesar really brought the two of them together, his christian spiritual religiosity in one hand as well as Ghandi's non-violence influence on the other hand

22:17:02 what is Cesar's greatest contribution and the ufw to society

22:17:10 Well I think the greatest contribution Cesar has made, is that farm workers' situation will never go back to what it was prior to 1965, that to the extent that the growers may not like the union or like the organization of farm workers, the very presence of the union and its continuing presence, and and their continuing winning of elections, by the way and contracts, continues to have a broad influence not only in California but other places as well. Because the influence is almost one of intimidation that is, other growers say if we don't bring our wages and working conditions up to the level that the union is negotiating with other growers, then we're going to be subject to a unionization effort. So in a sense even though Cesar's group has not organized all the farm workers in California or accross the country, organizing even a small number well with good contracts sets a a range and a standard a minimum below which people can't go, and so that influence has been very important

22:18:35 Was the agricultural labor relations working in the past? is it working now?

22:18:40 Well the agricultural labor relations board was a quite a daring venture by the then young Jerry Brown the governor, because within the first weeks really of his first term he started this effort. And and really helped get the growers and the union together to pass a piece of legislation that all could agree to, and so it's a very very important precedent is the only state legislation like it in the united states, it it mirrors very closely the national labor relations act except for things that are peculiar to agriculture, for example time frames, elections for example under the alra or california law, that occur within 7 days. Well in under the national relations act it could be weeks and months before election because they don't deal with the fast harvest turn over and that, but I I think it's very monumental piece of legislation, is it working? I think it has worked I would say up and down. I think it worked fairly well when we began it, we held enourmous numbers of elections got in to a lot of ... elections, got into a lot of interesting cases, and precedents many of them upheld by the courts because there are no precedents for agriculture, in the national labor relations act because they don't care for agriculture. So you can't find precedents so we were, the precedents in a sense, it depends on who's the governor, and who are the members of the board and who's the general council, and to that extent you have either a pro-active or less active board and we have seen, I think good boards, and weaker boards at this time I would say we have more of a weaker board, you seldom hear from them, now that the union is more active again and winning a lot of elections I'm hoping that the board will become more responsive and more helpful

TAPE 42, TC 23, PIC 36

23:00:12 what were your thoughts when you heard that Cesar Chavez had passed away?

23:00:17 Well of course immediate sense of sadness, at the loss of such a charismatic leader, and the real question came to my mind, is, is there somebody else who can step forward now and carry on the same vision offer the same dynamic and energy that Cesar had brought to this movement. I I think it was a concern for an immediate concern for his family obviously and their loss, but also a real concern about the union and the future of farm workers. And that was a great concern, but the more I thought about it and prayed about it, I felt well you know that the in the lord's providence this is going to work out ok, somehow the lord gave us Cesar for this number of years, and somehow and that providence there will be a future and a continuation that will be bright and I became more at peace with it. And even more so than at the funeral itself then I was really convinced seeing the outpouring of love, and concern, and support, and the commitment of people, at the funeral I said no the vision has been has been struck in stone and it is not going to fade

23:01:39 story- about the disappearing ballot boxes

23:04:10 Well it was interesting one of the tasks of the bishops committee at times was to conduct elections, when the growers, a grower at the ranch and the union requested it, again because the federal mediation services state mediation services wouldn't do it. So one time we had an

election on a ranch, and because it was an enormous large ranch there were several voting sites around the ranch, so because it was easier to have four or five voting places and let workers come to those rather than try to bus all of the workers into one place. Well what happened was that this ballot boxes weren't terribly secure I mean they were kind of home made, and I mean one could easily take the top off if you wanted to, well nobody had arranged on how these, these ballot boxes were to be protected and secured and got back to one place so we could count the ballots. So and, I was in one place I guess at the headquarters location. and at the end of the balloting I said well now how are the other ballot boxes going to get here under security and all that. Well and the grower said, oh, I've taken care of it don't worry about it. So after about half hour there comes this oick up truck and here's one of his foreman by himself, in the pick up truck, in the front cab are these four ballot boxes, and he he'd been gone, he'd picked them up, and had been gone for about forty five minutes with these boxes, and then shows up at the place where we're going to count the ballots, and I said wait time out, time out, I said where have you been for forty five minutes, by yourself with these ballot boxes. And he ... and I said, you didn't look in any of these boxes by any chance... and so I said, elections over, forget the ballots, but somehow they thought that they could get away with that kind of thing, that the foreman could take the ballot boxes, I guess he went to the ranch equipment shaft and maybe counted them or changed them or did something with them, but then showed up with these boxes,

23:04:10 was that an unusual situation or were there other stories like it?

23:04:15 Well that it happened several times, we learned quick though, you know we tried from then on to only have one ballot location, where you could have monitors on both sides and and members of our committee could be in one location so that all of the balloting was done under supervision. We wouldn't allow except for a rare case, that kind of other situation. What we actually did in other situation in the future was, we had two three hour balloting times we would all go to the location A for three hours then location B for three hours but we we removed out selves and the monitors with the ballot boxes together so

23:04:59 that's the only way

23:05:00 there there were some interesting interesting situations,

23:05:04 tell another story about the cantaloupe strike?

23:05:07 Well yes, there's a big cantaloupe strike going on both in Coachella and the westside fire bomb and... area and Cesar and the union were negotiating with one of the biggest growers, cantaloupe growers in the world, at the time, but it was a very messy strike and it was not it was not pleasant, a lot of violence and there were a lot of things going on. Well here we are down at an airport hotel Los Angeles international airport, carrying on these negotiations, and in the afternoon there was a break, and the break was over and I'd say there were maybe eight or ten farm workers and eight or ten members of these growers on the other side. So as we sit down at the table, in come these waiters with these trays, on the trays are halves of cantaloupes with a scoop of ice cream in them, as kind of a refreshment,

well I never saw Cesar get so upset in my whole life, jumped right off the chair when he saw these cantaloupes arrive here they're suffering this terrible terrible disaster in this strike and all kinds of violence and the workers are getting bashed around, and here these grower orders cantaloupes to be served at the end of the break and I never saw Cesar I don't think so angry, in all the years I knew him. One of the things, one of the great gifts of Cesar, Cesar could not swear, Cesar did not know how to swear, he never used any bad words so he didn't, so when he ever tried, it was funny because it never worked, and he tried to kind of swear at these fellows and, it it and but their insensitivity to not realize that with this terrible tension that the last thing in the world that you bring into the room are cantaloupes, and I think it just pointed out, the the big gap in even awareness of the two sides, the growers their lack of understanding that that this was even an issue, to be aware of the feelings and the sensitivities, and it just simply was part of the big gap, anyway we got rid of the cantaloupes and took another break and got cokes and everybody kind of settle down again

SR 16 -B

23:07:48 You and montsegnior Higgins were involved how did that work?

Well they established this committee of five bishops and then asked my senior George Higgins to be the consultant to the committee and myself to be the secretary, my senior Higgins was based in Washington D. C., as it turned out were always almost always, there for everything most of the time many of the bishops could not be present so it turned out that we were probably the main stays of the presence of the bishops committee throughout

all of these years, he was tremendous to work with because he had such an intense background in labor, very involved with the labor movement, knew unions inside and out and negotiations he was extraordinarily valuable. He was very incisive during negotiations, he had a way of of kind of summarizing outloud where he thought the parties were at this moment he was able to identify the outstanding issues, to help them prioritize those of which ones they could deal with quickly, which ones were the stumbling block He just brought a unique background and and gifts to the process and I just enjoyed him so much, he he was unique in his ex experience and expertise, and I I dont' think without my senior Higgins, I don't think much of the success would have occurred

23:09:29 any anecdotes about montsegnior Higgins?

23:09:38 Well I don't remember which negotiation it was, but I remember at one point, it was obvious that the negotiations were not going anywhere and it was pretty much a stalemate and he he would just kind of get up and say well it's a gentlemen let me tell you that the reality is that growers your position on friday is the same as it was on monday and unions the same as it was tuesday, and unless we can do something about that we might as well all go home, and he had a way of saying it that didn't make people angry, but kind of motivated them, and he said you know I got things to do in Washington and if you don't want to negotiate why don't you just say so and I can go home. And he he had a way of saying it, that that sparked a positive response or he would say, you know it's three o'clock friday afternoon I'm leaving tomorrow afternoon so if you wanna get serious about this, let's do it, if not let's just get out of here, and sure enough things

would start happening again, and pretty soon by three o'clock Saturday maybe the whole thing had been settled. He had a way of knowing when to say something and when not to say something, what to say and how to say it that accomplished a great deal

23:11:30 You had some differences of opinion with Cesar as to priorities, can you tell us about that?

23:11:38 Yes at times I wondered about the priority and the effectiveness of the boycotts, because it seemed to me that too much time, and effort and resources were being placed in the boycotts and I always wondered how much value they were getting in return. Now I understand that the 1968 table grape boycott, was quite effective and therefore resolved the 199 1970 signings, but then the dynamics in society began to change too, and I think the boycott in the last several years from my perspective was quite ineffective. And besides it was very confusing because here all through the winter months you had all these table grapes from Chile which were in fact not being boycotted, yet the labor conditions down there are far worse than they are up here, and we get to the spring and summer we have USA grapes being boycotted so the whole thing I thought was was the wrong focus

23:12:42 did you tell Cesar

23:12:43 Yes I told Cesar, and I'd have to say early on he thought that I was wrong and that the power of the boycott if done well was going to win and I said, but we don't have the same late 1960's early 70's groups and mentality in this country than we did then, and I said therefore you're dealing with a different different America in that sense. And so people aren't

responding to things like that in the same way. And but I noticed later on he, I I think he became a little bit more open to that and I think they began to emphasize more and more the organizational efforts, and in fact I encouraged them to do so, and in fact he was doing more of that the union today is doing a lot more of that and I think with great success. Now they still have the boycott going but they're not spending so much time and effort in the main people they're out organizing farm workers which is their great gift

23:13:50 What are your recollections of Helen?

Well, you got to remember Cesar Chavez himself is a very humble self-effacing person, and his wife's even more so, so it was very very difficult to ever get Helen into the forefront she felt that her role was not be a spokesperson not to be active, not to be out in front, but to be supportive of Cesar and everybody else, and she was wonderful of course they had their young children at that time in 1965 their children were in grammar school and going into highschool, so she had quite a bit of responsibility with the family, so wasn't easy for her to just pick up and leave, but she also had the same kind of deep faith as Cesar had, she also had a way of inspiring people too by just her faith and her simplicity she she wouldn't have to say much to gain enormous amount of respect and following really of people she was because she was so genuine, and her goodness and it was so obvious there was no nothing artificial about Helen just a very fine strong good woman, and and she still is and and again is the mainstay I think of the union

23:15:27 Story about the growers Jack Pandell

23:15:33 Well Jack Pandell is a very smart grower but also very volatile, Jack always, he loved every time he saw a television camera or a reporter ran over Jack Pandell's quoted in every story because Jack Pandel started talking to everybody well one time actually it was an election taking place in the Delano area in a ranch, and as the election was going on, there was also outside on the road a banner of our lady Guadalupe and I think what had happened was al ot of the farm workers who had voted had gone outside and were having some kind of a little prayer service around our lady Guadalupe from what I could tell from the building where I was in looking out that's what was happening. Well all of a sudden you hear all this yelling and screaming outside and I someone was being killed it was awful and all this racket and so I went outside and here's Jack Panel outside screaming and yelling, looking for me because he said those farm workers over there on the road they're having mass, and if they're having mass that's that's influencing the election and they shouldn't be doing this and get them out of here etc, etc, so I just I just laughed and I said jack if you'd been to mas recently yourself, you would know they're not over there having mass they're just saying a couple of prayers so, he even laughed at that he thought that was pretty funny. But we'd some interesting times with people, individuals like that.

23:17:16 what is it Jack Pandell, what is so special about him?

23:17:27 I don't know I don't know what it is but, he I mean he's very self assured, he thinks he's absolutely right about everything, he's very smart and he's been very successful. And it's so ironic and I always used to tell him

this, I said this is so ironic here you are u... these poor farm workers and yet you've got huge operations in Mexico where you're working hand in glove with all these mexicans and I said it's so ironic if people most people don't know about all those Mexico operations and and I he's working this whole thing from both angles. But he had a way of I would say explosive journalism that he would just yell and scream and get someone's attention... on the camera and he talked so loud that he thought the louder he got the more right he was, as if the volume indicated the the truthfulness of what he said, it was a riot I I just joked with him I never took him seriously and because but he's very very smart and he's very effective

thank you

AUDIO ONLY

23:26:00 He was a riot, he had a well he had this office I would say his personal office and I'm not exaggerating was at least four times the size of this room and his wife decorated it, and it was them most godawful thing that you'd ever seen, it looked like it looked like, use the expression, Fort ... Texas where house inside it was the most goddy velvet on the walls it was, and he was so big that, and he had this enourmous desk with a big half moon cut out so he could get up to it. Well at the signing he had peachesm huge peaches, and here they are out in front it was a Los Angeles Times reporter said, Hollis has his arms arm around Cesar, Cesar has disappeared in the folds of Hollis Roberts and and this reporter of LA Times says he says Mr. Roberts he said, you know, I've been following you for a number of years, you've been one of the ...

you've been one of the most outspoken opponents of Cesar Chavez ... you have called him the most vile names, and on and on, and he says and to and he's gotten all this quotes, and here today you got a big cigar in you mouth, you got your arms around Cesar, you've just signed a contract, what happened? And Hollis says well, he said I've come to learn over these weeks and months what and outstanding man this Cesar Chavez was I didn't know all about his personal qualities, etc, I didn't know about his efforts and ... I didn't know all these things. There's a long pause and he says, and besides I couldn't get my damn peaches packet... laughter, well everybody just howld because that was obviously what got the contract... I couldn't get my damn peaches packet.