

PETE MATURINO

TAPE 77, CR 107, SR 51, TC 15:30:00

15:30:13 You were with the teamsters from '72 to '77 can you describe the ambiance at that time from your point of view, what was going on with organizing and ...

15:30:24 Basically in 1970 is when the Teamsters actually came in to the valley, then they left in '71. At that time of course I was out there just working as a student in Ag. cutting broccoli, loading celery, loading lettuce, and then back in 1970, is when also the United Farm Workers came in. And I was working at Sun Harvest, in those days was Inter-Harvest. And there's basically no unions, anywhere here in the valley, there, the UFW came in and said "do you guys need a union and, would you like holiday pay, would you like vacation pay, and health and welfare?" And I said sure, you know, of course I was only 17, 18 years old at the time, but we did and we all walked out of the valley here, including all 3500 workers at Inter-Harvest and I was the first contract here in the United Farm Workers. And then in '72 the Teamsters, I was out there cutting broccoli and the Teamsters offered me a job, and I said sure. And at the time I didn't really know what kind of job I was going to be doing, because I never really, thought about organizing or talking to people or representing people, especially here in the valley. I knew and I worked almost every employer here, Merrill Farms, Harden, Salinas Farmers Coop, all the old companies. And the unions basically didn't exist until '73 when all the contracts started coming in with the Teamsters Union and then, the contracts with the United Farm Workers. So that's when the kinda like

the conflict started happening between the United Farm Workers and the Teamsters Union it was '73, '74, '75.

15:31:56 What was the feeling around here, two unions fighting for the same workers

15:32:04 There was a feeling of belonging, either to the United Farm Workers or to the Teamsters Union. There was a division of course, everybody within the Teamsters Union thought the Teamsters were the greatest, the members from the United Farm Workers thought they were the best, and there was kind of like a competitive feeling. The United Farm Workers would get ten cents, 15 cents in their contract increase, so the Teamsters would shoot for the same thing. So what we saw was an increase in wages and benefits and working conditions, there was no existence of let's say CRLA and those kind of agencies because there wasn't any, there wasn't any need for those kind of agencies. And the contract covered everything from the toilets and the facilities in the fields, to the wages and working conditions and benefits. So there wasn't really any need for workers to go anywhere except to rely on the union contracts whether it be the UFW or the Teamsters Union.

15:33:04 So you feel that the competition between the unions was a good thing, obviously Cesar didn't feel that way

15:33:09 Well I think the competition was healthy because, it gave the workers what we were looking for, both the United Farm Workers and ourselves. Our goal was to give workers good working conditions, the best wages possible. And I think by doing what we did, back in the '70s, '74, '75 being competitive with each

other, I think it helped the worker. But I guess the United Farm Workers through Cesar, felt in 1977 that that only one union belonged in the field. And so he signed a contract, with the Teamsters Union at the time. And of course we down here at the local level didn't, didn't and were not aware of the signing of the contract until after the document was signed, that the Teamsters Union had signed a contract saying that they were going to leave the fields.

15:34:01 What effect did the signing of that contract had?

15:34:04 I think the signing of the so called peace pact agreement was the most devastating thing that ever happened in farm labor. Because the end results were basically was and is, where we're at now. That we went from representing 70 percent to 80 percent of farm labor as we knew it then in California, between both the both unions to representing about 15 to 20 percent among 3 or 4 unions that we have now.

15:34:35 What was behind the signing of this peace pact from your point of view

15:34:40 I wasn't I wasn't privy to none of the conversations and things but I would have to say now that I look back at it and talking to Marshall Ganz and talking to Jerry Cohen and those kind of people is that I think they they took a gamble, and I think they lost. The gamble was, the Teamsters were out of the way in '77, that leaves the farm workers only one choice, that would be the United Farm Workers or no union. The problem with that is that the farm workers as a whole decided no union. And it's reflected, let's say in the grape industry, where the United Farm Workers got started, there's no union, whatsoever. And during

through the years, the UFW lost a lot of their contracts. The teamsters, well they walked away, they walked away from 80 thousand members, they walked away from 220 contracts and it was devastating.

15:35:34 Why would the teamsters walk away from 80,000 members?

15:35:41 I think the decision was beneficial for both parties, at the time. The thought was the United Farm Workers, the Teamsters are out, we don't have to compete with them, farm workers have to choose us over the non union. As far as the Teamsters were concerned, they got rid of, at that time and I feel now, that they got rid of the Hispanic or the Mexican end of the Teamster organizers, farm workers. And I don't think they really wanted to represent farm workers at that time. And they saw us, I think as a threat, because we were the largest local, and the way the structure is within the Teamsters Union, is that you have local autonomy. And every other local in the Teamsters Union has a jurisdiction of around maybe one or two counties within that state. Our jurisdiction in farm labor was 13 western states, there's basically no jurisdiction, there was just the Western Conference of Teamsters. And we had 80 thousand members versus your average Teamster local at around 6 thousand members or 3 thousand members, and it gives you a lot of delegate vote, in the conventions, it gives you a lot of a lot of power that you can delegate.

15:36:48 So briefly what was going on in the organization with all these Mexican numbers here.

15:36:55 We didn't see it at the time because I was really young, I was only 22 years old 21, and, but what was happening is that we were getting the experience,

we were getting the exposure, we were getting trained, by the union itself and the work force basically to move up in the ranks, and I think they saw it as a threat at that time.

15:37:14 When this peace pact was signed... what was your reaction, what happened to you?

15:37:23 Our initial reaction, not only my self but the other board members that were on the executive board at the time, was disgust, was, we were angry. So what we decided to do was, form other unions, independent unions like this one here, Independent Union of Ag. Workers, the International Union of Santa Maria, Campesinos Independientes in Yuma, Arizona. And we tried to spread it out, and history will show you and the people that were in charge of these unions were all ex -Teamster business agents. And basically we wanted to give the people out there, farm workers another choice. If it wasn't the Teamsters Union, then it would be one of these other independent unions.

15:38:08 What's the situation now in Salinas, the Teamsters have few contracts, the UFW has few contracts, what's the situation for people working in agriculture in Salinas?

15:38:21 In Salinas, in Salinas itself, Salinas, the UFW does not have any lettuce contracts. Now mind you that they do all have certifications. They are certified under Derigo Brothers which is a large corporation here in Salinas, lettuce company. Bruce Church is another large company. For whatever reasons they may have, they have not negotiated a contract, with these companies in 14, 15 years. And I know that they're trying to do some organizing now within here in

Salinas, same as we are, and same as the Teamsters Union. The Teamsters themselves only have Bud of California, they have Yorter Brothers which was an old contract, it's ag. considered ag. and they have a small farm here out of Soledad, which is Tractor Drivers and Irrigators. But other than that it is Bud of California. And now it's Dole and it's about 3,500 workers. But that's been with the Teamsters since 1961, other than that that's the only thing we have.

15:39:17 What about conditions

15:39:19 The conditions as farm workers as a whole, have deteriorated to the point of maybe, the late '60s early '70s when the nonunion basically existed, the bracero days when there was labor contracted forces. And I think the braceros had more benefits, then than our people do now. The braceros at least were guaranteed employment for one year, were guaranteed medical, were guaranteed housing, meals, and the people are not now.

15:39:54 What was going on in your opinion with Cesar, when he walks in and he says we're the only union that should represent farm workers?

15:40:07 I think it started that way, and

15:40:15 In the '60s I guess it started that way, with the Filipinos starting the labor movement in farm labor, getting together with the United Farm Workers and forming UFWOC. And I think it started with with Cesar being the only union around, to represent farm workers. And I do agree with the Teamsters Union when they came in '70, '73, '72, were signing contracts with the employers. Not just signing them, but we would go out to the fields and sign people up and if we had

the majority, we would tell the employer we have the majority of your people, there was no law. So the the employee would sign a contract with us, but the way I saw that, the UFW saw it as sweetheart contracts, this in the in the 1970s early, we saw it as a benefit to the people. There were people that didn't have any representation, the UFW didn't pick them up in the '70s, [CAM ROLL OFF] early '70s. They basically came in signed up some, Inter-Harvest and they left

CR 108, SR 52

15:41:22 We're talking about Cesar and the UFW being the only game in town, were they comfortable, what was going on there

15:41:31 I think like any other union, you know you want to organize everything, and you want to represent the whole industry whether it'd be SCIU in the service industry, whether it'd be United Farm Workers in the ag. industry, and I think that's the way it started. When they combined forces, in the early '60s with the Filipinos I think that was the whole intent. And I don't think there was any other union at the time anyway interested in organizing farm labor. Of course the teamsters had Bud of California, but that was back since 1961, and but there wasn't any other union. And I think they got to the point where they had up to a 100 thousand members and they thought they could control or organize everything there was to organize under farm labor. And they wanted to do that, so they preached Una Sola Union, one union only. And whoever called in the Teamsters Union for whatever reason, whether it was the growers, whoever, I don't think anybody counted on the Teamsters were going to get an organizing group like ourselves. We had about 80 business agents, and we were servicing the contracts, we were negotiating contracts, we were trained, we were doing the job, and I don't

think anybody counted on that. And that's one of the reasons I think that the law was enacted, because the Teamsters were just signing too many contracts.

15:42:56 What law are you referring to?

15:42:59 The Agricultural Labor Relations Act, that was enacted in '75. Basically what the law says, we're going to give the workers a right to choose now, if they want to be represented by the Teamsters Union, no union, or the United Farm Workers. And at the time when the elections took place, it wasn't, the thought wasn't whether I want a union or not, it's which union I want. And I, I think again, the United Farm Workers, whoever was at the time that was there, miscalculated and they thought that by having the law that the workers automatically, being farm workers, and that the history behind the UFW, would automatically organize all farm labor and all workers were gonna vote for the UFW. The problem is that it didn't turn out that way, and in '75 the Teamsters were winning a lot of elections, as a matter of fact, the majority of elections in San Joaquin Valley, were won by the Teamsters Union.

15:43:51 Their allegations of sweetheart deals of people coming in and, of the Teamsters coming in and signing up workers and saying these workers ... with the union, without the workers even voting on it, what was going on there

15:44:05 Probably true, and it's probably true, I mean I was there

What's probably true

15:44:09 I was there, I mean in 1973, we were allowed access. There was no law in effect. The Teamsters Union were allowed access into the fields of the of

the growers, and they said talk to our people and if they want a union, then we'll sign a contract. I mean it wasn't the Teamsters going in to a growers, a company office and saying, here sign a contract. It was going out to the workers, and having them sign union cards first and explaining to them what it meant, what would you get for signing the union card. Automatically you'd get a 60 percent increase in wages, you would get holidays, you'd get vacation, you'd get medical, whose not going to sign a union card? And then we get those cards and we give them to the grower in front of a neutral party and then we compare the signatures to the workers signatures, and the growers said ok, yeah the majority of my people signed up, where's the contract? And we'd sign the master agreement. You know, like the United Farm Workers had a master agreement, we had a master agreement, and then the growers started signing under that master agreement after we signed their people up.

15:45:12 ... farm workers say oh, yeah the reason that we're loosing ground is because the teamsters came in and signed sweet-heart deals with the growers, how do you respond to that?

15:45:24 They can call it what ever in the heck they want to call it, all I know is that people benefit by signing a contract with the Teamsters Union. You can call it sweetheart, you can call it anything you want, did the workers benefit from the signing of those contracts between the Teamsters and the growers at the time? You know, that's the question, if they want to call it a sweetheart contract, call it a sweetheart contract, and that's fine with me. All I know is that we signed up people first and then we signed the contract with the employer. And not all the employers wanted to sign up, not all the people wanted to sign up, but if we got the majority, then we'd sign the contract. Then in '75 when the law was enacted

because supposedly these charges that too many sweetheart contracts were being signed by the Teamsters and the growers, the UFW thought by entering into the the law, then the workers would have a chance to decide really, by vote, by secret ballots, which union they wanted. The problem is by 1977, these Teamsters still had 80 thousand members, this is 2 years after the law. So something went wrong there as far as the UFW was concerned, so they had to go back to the drawing board, and think of something else. And I think what came out of it was, the peace pact, basically saying hey Teamsters, you're gonna get out of the fields and they just walked away from 80 thousand members.

15:46:44 So you think that was a mistake?

15:46:47 That was the, like I said, that was the worst mistake that anybody could have done. You know the Teamsters really didn't care at the time. The head of the Teamsters Union then. The United Farm Workers all their thought was, eliminating the competition. But I think when you eliminated the competition, you eliminated the representation for 80 thousand farm workers. And there's no way you were going to pick up 80 thousand farm workers. The employers got smart enough where they told the workers, you don't need a union. Here the Teamsters walked out on you, this is what unions are all about. The UFW, well you know what they're about. So what we'll do is, we'll keep the same benefits, same wages, same everything, as if there were a union here. And the growers were smart enough that they continued to do that, for the following 3, or 4, 5 years. Until slowly but surely they started bringing down the wages, they started bringing in labor contractors, they started changing the whole structure of the ag. industry.

15:47:43 What's the role of the labor contractors

15:47:57 Well they are the bad guy because, just like this grower here recently, that got organized by the UFW in the strawberries. It's one guy that gives the rest of the industry a bad name. There's some good labor contractors, there's some bad labor contractors, it's like in everything else, in every other industry. But contractors are created by the employers, the Nunes Company for many years employed their own people, but the wages got so high, at 7.45 minimum wage, 7.45, you know, in 1987, that they said they had enough. So they terminated all their employees. And the employees didn't even have a chance to bring in a union, it was just from one day to the next. And the following year, all 1500 people of the Nunes Company in 1987 were working under a labor contractor. So the employers create the labor contractor, as a matter of fact there's employers now, Merrill, Nunes and all these companies they hire 4, 5 labor contractors, so the labor contractors can compete against each other. And if they compete against each other as to who's gonna do it cheaper, the one who is affected by it are the workers themselves because they lose on wages, benefits, working conditions, and then the threat of loss of job, it the biggest one. That's one of the main reasons you go talk to a worker now and he says I don't want to make any problems, I just want a job, at 5.50 dollars, 4 dollars an hour, I just want a job.

15:49:21 You have your own union, what's changed, what's different now?

15:49:28 The difference is that we maintain or try to maintain, the best wages possible, and right now it's seven dollars an hour within the ag. industry and the lettuce industry. I have some contracts at 6.50, 6 dollars an hour but most of my contracts, are over 7 dollars an hour. But from 19, let's say 1985, to 1990 we had to stay at 7 dollars an hour. We could not get any wage increases out of our

employers here at the independent union, just recently we signed, re renewed our contracts and we got 10 cents, 15 cent increases for the next 3 years so we're going to be going up to 7.30, 7.40, 7.45. But we're, we're slowly making some movement forward, and that's because the employers that I have under contract our employers are saying, we want to pay decent wages, but we don't want to be out of business also, and that's not my my object to, is to put this employer out of business.

15:50:26 There 3/4 of a million ag. workers in California yet it seems that the Teamsters and the UFW were always fighting over a fraction of them, what was going on there?

15:50:40 And you're right, and and we're always talking about it here within ourselves in the union, as to there's so many thousands of workers out there that are not unionized. And then you have the teamsters union with with more money of course than this union, a lot more money, the United Farm Workers a lot more money, a lot more experience offices in, I got 28 offices, I think they boasted they had. Why not go out there and organize the unorganized? You know, why try to organize something that I have, or something that we're both trying to organize. Why not help each other? But we don't do that, and why I don't know. We don't have the communication. And I think that the people that end up losing again are farm workers in general, farm workers in San Joaquin Valley, Imperial Valley, Yuma, Arizona. Those are the people that need organizing, and yet nobody is out there doing it.

TAPE 78, CR 109, SR 52. TC 16:00:00

16:00:10 In the late '70s and early 80's the Teamsters were out of the picture, and the UFW seemed to stop organizing, what was going on there

16:00:19 As far as the UFW is concerned when, after the peace pact, I think they slacked off. I think they felt the workers were going come to them instead of them going to the workers, since there was nobody to compete with, but the grower himself, and they felt the grower basically wasn't smart enough to convince the workers, to stay or go no union instead of staying union, by the teamsters leaving, and I think they were wrong. They should have gone just right out there, right after the peace pact. As a matter of fact, I think part of the peace pact should have been that the (ring)

Q' repeated

16:01:12 There wasn't any organizing because, I still think that the United Farm Workers felt that the farm workers were gonna come out in droves and sign up because they had just barely been with the teamsters union. They knew what a union contract was. They knew that without the union contract there would be problems. And I think they counted on that, and I think they made a mistake. I think they should have gone out, right away, right after the peace pact, and talked to these people. As a matter of fact, I think it would have been better as part of the peace pact and it would have been hard, but I think it would have been better to get some kind of deal going with the ex-Teamster organizers to go out with the UFW organizers and talk to the workers about going into the UFW, you know. But none of that happened, and I think they didn't count that the employer, the grower, had enough sense to talk to the workers and convince them to stay non union. But it happened, they stayed non union. And then the UFW, got caught up in the grape

boycott, and other things. And then they had their internal problems, and so they had to deal with that. So there was a lot of situations that, I think stopped them from actually going out there and grassroots organizing like they were doing. Everything was fine until up to that point of the peace pact.

16:02:33 What's the most important role of an agriculture union

16:02:43 Well I always go back to our bylaws that says that we're supposed to use supposedly all the moneys that come into this union from dues, initiations and things like that, for the union, for the betterment of the union. And to me that means organizing, because the stronger the union is, the the more membership it has, the more clout you have when you're organized and when you negotiate a union contract. If you're a small union like this is, you try to negotiate the best thing you can for the workers without going on to a strike or things like that. Because it's a small union. Now I think we're in a position here with this small union that the UFW was in the 60s. Now they're the Teamsters Union and we're the the UFW, because they are the bigger union. They've been around 20 some years, they have millions of dollars, they're not this poor little union that used to be in the 60s, they're very organized, they have a direct mail, through the nation, they know which organizations to hit for grants, for donations, they still get quite a bit of funds. So all these moneys are not being funneled for organizing purposes. There's a lot of it going on now, with Artie Rodriguez taking over the union, there've been some changes from what I understand, within the structure of the union. And you can tell. You can tell that they want to make the appearance at different places throughout the state of California. Dolores Huerta is more active than she was for quite a few years. I think they're trying to make a change. I think they're trying to organize. But it's different. The work force is different than the

'60s and the '70s. The work force has gone into other industries, whether is because of IRCA or whatever reason, they've gone into the restaurant, hotel, construction anything but farm workers. And so we've had a big change in farm labor. We have people that have only been here 10 years or 9 years and that makes a difference. They don't know what the struggles were from the '60s and the '70s, all they know that right now I'm getting 4.50 an hour. And so, and right now we have like here in Salinas, we had 20 or 30 percent more farm workers than what the industry needs, so any time there's an abundance of workers, the grower or the labor contractor gets to choose, and gets to say, well I'm only gonna pay you five dollars and if you don't like it go somewhere else. So the worker takes it because he knows that jobs are few right now.

16:05:10 What were the major differences between the teamsters and the UFW...

16:05:20 I think the structure of the Teamsters has had a hiring hall. The truck drivers had always had a hiring hall here in Salinas. I don't think they wanted to deal with it, because you were talking, you know, a thousand truck drivers versus 30 thousand farm workers, and I don't think they were ready to deal with it. The United Farm Workers had a hiring hall, but even the hiring hall in the UFW, there was some problems because they got so big that I don't think they had any really control over what was going on within the hiring halls. And I think that was one of the things that backfired at the time in the late '60s or late '70s. One of the things that backfired on the UFW was the hiring hall. I think the workers had a lot of complaints about the hiring hall and I think they eventually got rid of it. And there's some contracts that they still have, that have a hiring hall. And there's a benefit to the hiring hall, because me, I would love to have a hiring hall. But to get

our employers to agree with that, something else, because there's a lot of workers out there that we can try to get in, to work that are ex members of this union and those are the ones that you want to give employment to, the people that are out there that don't have a job that are your ex members.

16:06:38 What do you think it was decisive ... was the single biggest strategic error that the UFW made?

16:06:52 I think one of the biggest mistakes I think was, that they were too confident that the workers were automatically choose the UFW over non union. And I think they misjudged the growers and the grower industry and all the non union consultants that popped up after the teamsters left. And I think they just misjudged it. I think that's why they had a hard time afterwards trying to get back into the game. I think they concentrated more on the boycott trying to get a master agreement, in the grape industry and it didn't work. They went 8 to 10 years in the boycott and nothing happened, the grape industry has flourished and it's selling more grapes than it ever has. I think the boycotts are good, and they're good at boycotting, but I think they have to choose an employer at a time and go after him and they will take him under. But when you take on a whole industry, that's different. When you tell all of America you have to boycott all grapes, it's very difficult, because people are working out there. You're telling them boycott these grapes without even going out to talk to the people and see if they want you to boycott those grapes. So if you go out and you organize a worker in (??) in Delano and he doesn't want to sign a contract with you then take him under, take him with the boycott, and it'll work.