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DICK MEISTER

TONIGHT, in the first of my new, shorter commentaries, let me talk ~~about the issue of~~ about what has become a very controversial issue among members and supporters of the united farm workers union.

THAT issue involves what has been charged to be support by UFW president cesar chavez for the marcos dictatorship in the philippine islands.

THE issue arose ~~when~~ <sup>WHEN</sup> chavez visited the philippines this july and august at the invitation of philippine president ferdinand marcos, supposedly to look ~~into~~ into the condition of farm workers in the islands.

WHILE in the philippines, chavez was quoted ~~in the~~ <sup>IN THE</sup> washington post ~~as~~ as voicing support for marcos. Now marcos, as you undoubtedly know, runs one of the tighter dictatorships in the world.

AMONG other things, marcos has imposed martial law that includes bans against strikes and picketing, ~~in the philippines~~. And though marcos has not outlawed labor unions, he treats them as arms of the state, <sup>USING THEM</sup> to further his <sup>OWN</sup> interests. ~~to do what he wants done in the philippines, not necessarily to do what the members of the unions want done.~~

<sup>so</sup> any supposed support by chavez for such a political leader was bound to draw a strong negative response from members of his extremely democratic union and from the UFW's many liberal and radical supporters.

*[Handwritten signatures and scribbles]*

CHAVEZ flatly denied he had expressed support in so many words for marcos. Chavez claimed the ~~washington post~~ misquoted him. But though there was no reason to doubt chavez' word that he was misquoted, his denial did not quiet the controversy, ~~that was raised by the post story appeared.~~

FOR while perhaps believing chavez, many UFW members and supporters who had not previously known of his visit to the philippines wondered why chavez had even accepted an invitation from the dictator. They felt that in itself could be interpreted as support for marcos, whatever chavez had actually said ~~or not said~~ about marcos.

THE controversy got hotter when chavez invited marcos' secretary of labor to speak to the UFW's biennial convention in fresno this august, just after chavez returned from the philippines.

IT was the polite thing to do, I suppose. But it seemed more than ironic to have a chief representative of marcos, a dictator who had banned strikes and picketing, welcomed as a friend to the convention of a union whose very existance depend<sup>s</sup> on the rights to strike and picket. ~~And it was a convention, further, that resoundingly adopted a resolution condemning the somoza dictatorship in nicaragua and otherwise showed  strong distaste for oppression abroad. . . except, of course, for the oppression practiced by marcos in the philippines.~~

CHAVEZ and other UFW officers were quite polite to marcos' secretary of labor ~~although a few of them, anyway, weren't too happy about it.~~ But some rank and file convention delegates, ~~blame them,~~ were not so polite.

~~MARCOS' spokesman got the usual standing greeting given guest speakers. But probably half <sup>of</sup> those in the audience pointedly remained seated. Nor did they join in the applause led by chavez.~~

THEY didn't seem much impressed with the secretary of labor's ~~assurance that marcos quote, has great respect for Cesar chavez and the sense of the united farm workers union. Nor were they much impressed with his insistence that one of marcos' primary aims is to help farm workers, by breaking up large land holdings and redistributing the land to workers, and by outlawing absentee landowner.~~

A FEW of the critical UFW delegates rose to ~~challenge the speaker from the philippines.~~ They denounced the marcos dictatorship, and demanded that ~~the secretary of labor tell marcos~~ end martial law.

THAT led chavez to call marcos' representative back to the microphone, to make an utterly unconvincing assertion that martial law is doing wonders for farm workers in the philippines. And why? Because it has brought about "stability".. one-man rule being a hell of a lot more stable than all that messy give and take of democracy, *of course.*



AND, oh, yes, ~~we~~ <sup>MARTIAL LAW</sup> has kept down those enemies of the state who would destroy it. And who are they? That's right .. you guessed it. They're called communists. But of course, said the secretary of labor, martial law will end soon, and free elections will be held -- just as soon as "long-term stability" is assured.

IT was, in short, the standard line of every dictator who ever ruled. And while chavez ~~may have~~ <sup>APPARENTLY</sup> felt compelled to accept that tired, glaringly transparent line, for political reasons I'll get to in a few moments, many UFW members and supporters would not accept the marcos line.

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BEFORE I go on, let me pause ~~5~~ briefly and remind you ~~5~~ I'll be taking phone calls in a few minutes if you'd like to talk ~~about~~ <sup>LABOR</sup> about farm ~~workers~~. The number is 848-4425. That's 848-4425, if you'd like to talk in about five minutes or so.

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ANYWAY, as I was saying, there were a lot of members and supporters of the farm workers union who were most definitely offended by chavez' seeming support for the marcos dictatorship in the philippines.

THE complaints from liberal clergymen and other influential UFW supporters finally became so serious chavez called a meeting to try to defuse the anger. ~~The union had a lot of serious problems to overcome, and it was ridiculous to divide its forces over the question of whether~~ <sup>CHAVEZ</sup> ~~did or did not support fernand marcos.~~

~~ABC~~

THE meeting was held in delano about three weeks ago. More than 500 people from all over the country were there, led by liberal catholic and protestant clergymen.

CHAVEZ did not voice support for marcos in so many words <sup>(at the meeting)</sup> And he reiterated that reports that he had done so previously were based on an inaccurate story in the washington post.

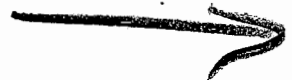
BUT that was not enough. Many at the meeting in delano demanded that chavez specifically denounce marcos. And that chavez would not do.

CHAVEZ begged off by claiming to have no great knowledge of the political situation in the philippines. He said only that he was convinced marcos was sincerely trying to help farm workers, ~~and in fact, had promised to allow farm workers in his country to vote for a union to bargain for them ... more, it should be said, than jimmy carter has done.~~

<sup>Also</sup> CHAVEZ said he had talked with hundreds of farm workers in the philippines who said they were making progress under marcos.

~~XXXXXXXXXXXX~~

TO try to underscore his points, chavez called on three union leaders from the philippines. Not unexpectedly, the filipinos told the meeting that marcos was indeed doing wonderful things for workers. They said, too, that the UFW and its supporters should not presume to tell another country how to run its internal affairs.

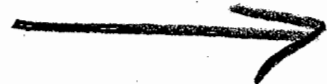


HOWEVER ... chavez' hopes that this would end the controversy were futile. The filipino union leaders were immediately challenged by clergymen and young filipino activists who claimed marcos is NOT helping workers ... ~~that, among other things, his supposed land reform program is NOT working as advertised ... that it is NOT transferring land from absentee owners to farm workers. And how could marcos be pro-labor when he has banned strikes and picketing?~~

THE critics said chavez obviously had not talked with a truly representative group of workers when he visited the philippines. *OTHERWISE, he would not have heard such favorable reports about Marcos.* And they said the filipino union leaders who addressed the meeting obviously were agents of marcos, there to speak on his behalf. How else would they have been allowed to leave the philippines to attend the meeting in delano?

YET still chavez would not relent. His concern, above all, is to build a strong union of farm workers in this country. And chavez obviously felt that denouncing marcos would not further that goal overall, even though it ~~would anger~~ *MIGHT CALM DOWN* some of the union's members and supporters *who were unhappy at the moment.*

THERE are two important ~~points~~ *POINTS* to consider here. One is that the UFW is trying very hard to attract filipino farm workers. The other is that the ~~UFW~~ *UFW* is trying to keep itself free of ~~the~~ self-styled revolutionaries to whom ~~organizing~~ *UNION* ~~is merely the means to a broader political end.~~

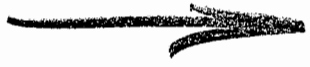


FILIPINO farm workers have been complaining for years that the UFW is purely a mexican union unconcerned with filipinos. The filipinos <sup>HAVE</sup> noted, for instance, ~~that~~ that chavez has frequently visited mexico -- most recently to confer with mexico's president -- and they <sup>HAVE</sup> pressed him hard to also visit their homeland.

~~THE~~ <sup>So</sup> chavez felt he had no choice but to seek marcos' invitation to visit the philippines. The UFW is trying to put together a union that will include ALL farm workers -- not just mexican-americans -- and chavez saw the philippine visit as a way to help convince filipino farm workers that the UFW <sup>15</sup> ~~could~~ be their union too. Chavez was especially moved by the fact that filipinos have been voting against being represented by the UFW in recent elections under california's farm labor law.

MOST of the older men who make up the core of the UFW's filipino membership enthusiastically supported chavez' decision to visit the philippines. They generally are a-political. Or, while perhaps opposing the marcos regime, they were far more interested in having <sup>CHAVEZ</sup> show evidence of concern for filipinos by visiting their homeland -- ~~HOWEVER IT MAY BE GOVERNED AT THE MOMENT.~~ ~~HOWEVER IT MAY BE GOVERNED AT THE MOMENT.~~ They would have considered it an insult under the circumstances for chavez to accept the invitation of marcos that they wanted him to accept and then turn around and denounce marcos.

HOWEVER ... there are a lot of younger filipinos, in the union and outside, who are very much concerned with just who is governing the philippines, and how. Their main concern seems not to organize farm workers. It is to use the farm workers union as a tool to bring about political reform or revolution, in this country and in countries abroad, including the philippines.



CHAVEZ Was not interested in placating these people. He sees them as a hinderance to efforts to organize a union run by and for farm workers .. a union devoted primarily to meeting the farm workers' needs and desites. Chavez does not want farm workers to be used by political activists for their <sup>ACTIVISTS'</sup> own purposes.

CHAVEZ, in fact, has been trying to weed these activists out of the union's staff and to keep them from having too great an influence in the activities of the union's outside supporters. Hence chavez was not at all interested in meeting their demands ... to denounce marcos or whatever.

AND I don't blame chavez. Too many unions and other organizations are being plagued these days by members of the progressive labor party and other moronic neo-marxists.

IT'S a different story, however, with some of the UFW's genuine ~~supporters~~ supporters who also demanded that chavez denounce dictator marcos. These supporters -- liberal clergymen and others -- could not see how support of any kind for marcos could help farm workers. They were legitimately unhappy over chavez' visit to the philippines and <sup>HIS</sup> subsequent refusal to denounce marcos.

I AGREE with them. <sup>IT IS ESSENTIAL That</sup> ~~but I agree with~~ chavez ~~that~~ showing an interest in filipino farm workers ~~is essential~~ if the <sup>UFW</sup> ~~United Farm Workers~~ is to gain the strength it needs to give ALL the country's farm workers what they need to realize their full potential as human beings. BUT

There has to be a better way of doing this, ~~than~~, than playing footsie with ferdinand marcos.