

(2) Telegram from Cruz Reynoso to Cesar Chavez. May 1970

Western Union Telegram

May 13, 1970

Mr. Cesar Chavez, Director
United Farm Workers Organizing Committee
Garces Highway
Delano, California

Dear Cesar:

I am sending this telegram to let you know the results of our considerations of your demands.

As you know, these demands were presented to California Rural Legal Assistance during a series of meetings with the United Farm Workers Organizing Committee. These meetings were initiated as a result of your accusation that a CRLA staff member in our Santa Maria office had been involved in collective bargaining on behalf of local farm workers. During the course of our three meetings, it was mutually agreed that CRLA had no intention of engaging in any union activity and that the event in Santa Maria was the result of a misunderstanding. Unfortunately, however, it has become clear from subsequent demands that the alleged Santa Maria incident was not the primary source of the Union's dispute with CRLA.

I regret that these demands have taken a form which, due to the terms of our contract with the office of Economic Opportunity and the Canons of Professional Ethics, we are unable to accept.

We cannot agree to the following demands which you have made:

- (A) That we hire and place in your service center offices, under your control, sixteen (16) employees — eight community workers and eight secretaries — and pay, with federal funds, for their salaries, travel, supplies, typewriters, and other expenses.
- (B) That we extend to your lawyers power to control filing of CRLA farmworker litigation, control the writing of pleadings and conduct of lawsuits, and that we place one lawyer and one secretary in your Delano Headquarters to facilitate your exercise of this control

- (C) That CRLA requires its secretarial staff to travel to the Union service center in Delano and to Union members' houses to be oriented on three or four separate occasions to Union policies and objectives, with CRLA paying for the travel expenses of its secretaries and for consultant fees for your employees conducting the orientation.

We can't agree to the above demands for two reasons. First, one of the terms of our contract with the Office of Economic Opportunity provides that we, as a legal services organization, may not provide legal representation to the Union. OEO recognizes, as do we, that the Union has its own attorneys.

Second, as lawyers we are bound by the Canons of Ethics of the legal profession, which provide, in part, that an attorney must fully represent the interests of his client without allowing the interests of third parties or other organizations to influence this attorney-client relationship. In other words, as much as our attorneys agree with the objectives of the Union, we recognize our responsibility to independently represent the wishes and rights of our clients, and not to permit those clients' interests to be affected by what we, or others, might consider to be the best interests of the Union. In the vast majority of cases, of course, there is no possibility of conflict between these goals.

We have consistently defended the integrity of the attorney-client relationship throughout the past four years. Last year, you may remember, CRLA attorneys, as well as thousands of other people throughout the country, successfully opposed an attempt by Senator Murphy to empower governmental organizations to veto particular cases brought on behalf of indigent clients.

For the past few years we have both been involved in representing farm workers and rural poor: UFWOC provides the hope, economically and politically for farmworker self-sufficiency and achievement while CRLA provides legal services on issues under existing law. Our goals, while different in a technical sense, are, we trust, complementary.

We are confident that you will continue support of legal services for the rural poor and do not take the position that CRLA should be terminated because of our present differences.

During the meetings which we have had with the Union representatives, we have expressed our strong belief that collective bargaining with agricultural employers is the concern of the Union, and of no other organization; that CRLA has not in the past, and will not in the future, become involved in such negotiations; that CRLA is a legal services organization providing representation to people in rural areas who are unable to afford private attorneys, whether or not those people are Union members.

In every meeting which we have had with the Union, we have discussed how CRLA can fully represent clients in rural areas and at the same time positively insure that it will not adversely affect the interests of the Union. This is our goal. It will remain our goal. We are eager to resolve the differences which have arisen and to enter into a signed agreement approved by the Union and by myself, representing the CRLA staff, by the CRLA Board of Trustees and by the Office of Economic Opportunity. We look forward to our next meetings.

Yours very truly

Cruz Reynoso
Director, CRLA