

Tape 92  
CR 136, SR 65

23:00:06 Mr. Arnold let's start off right around 1970. What did you and the Salinas growers think about when you saw what was happening with the grape boycott and grape, I mean grape contracts? Do you think you were the next target?

00:19 Oh no. Absolutely not. No certainly were not the next target in my estimation. Uh, but obviously the grape boycott scared the heck out of the farmers. All of us.

00:30 Um, well let, let me put it this way if you didn't think you were the next target then why did the Salinas growers uh, make such a quick deal with the teamsters in 1970?

00:39 Well I think they were, they saw what was going on. They didn't think they were the next target but they were trying to bypass...

00:44 Hold on for a second. Um, we're not going to use my questions in the interview. So when I say why did the Salinas growers uh, sign teamsters I need, need to say.....

00:48 So why did the Salinas growers sign with the teamsters in 70?

00:50 Well the Salinas growers saw what was happening in the grape boycott. Uh, the Salinas growers saw what was happening in the grape boycott. They had been dealing in their sheds and packing houses with the Teamsters union and they thought if they could sign a contract with the Teamsters union uh, it would forestall Cesar trying to come in and taking over uh, that industry.

01:14 Now what happened was everyone signed with the Teamsters the farmworkers came to time and then something happened in Fresh Pick who you worked for changed your mind. Why did you change and end up with the farmworkers?

01:25 Well the, the Fresh Pick Foods and as I, and as you know I was not the president of Fresh Pick. Howard Leach was. So I was down in the south at that time. But uh, they uh, felt the Teamsters were the best organization to represent the farmworkers in the area. The problem was that Cesar decided that he was gonna take on the Teamsters union because they'd signed the lettuce contracts and felt that the farmworkers were theirs. So consequently he threatened a secondary boycott against United Fruit which was Chiquita and against Purex uh, bleaches and all. Well ten percent of uh, Purex was only agriculture and they were not going to take a secondary boycott against all of their products to, to protect the ten percent of agriculture. So at that point in time they, even though they signed a contract they asked to get out of the contract with the Teamsters union along with United and, and negotiate a contract with uh, United Farm Workers.

02:37 Then when, when Inner Harvest and Fresh Pick broke ranks as it were with the Salinas growers you got a response from the other growers didn't you?

02:45 Oh terrible response. Absolutely. Uh, they were picketing in the other, they were picketing uh, Inner Harvest and Fresh ? Pick when they finally signed the contract.

02:56 I need to say, I need something that says like the other growers were picketing Fresh Pick 'cause we don't know who they is. We'll start over again. What kind of response did the other growers?

03:06 Well the other growers actually the other shippers and packers uh, were terribly negative against the contract that Fresh Pick and Inner Harvest signed. Course at that time as you know the two heads of Inner Harvest and the two heads of Fresh Pick myself and Howard Leach all resigned because it was a contract that we felt agriculture could not live with and part of the prerequisites was that we would stay as long as agriculture could live with the contract but if they signed a contract as to protect against the secondary boycott that we would not participate.

03:44 And you just felt that, that farmworkers were too restrictive or did you know what, what the UFW contract would be like?

03:49 Oh no that was after. This happened after we signed the contract. Uh, the contract uh, was already negotiated and signed and with our opinion the rest of agriculture and proved to be true that agriculture couldn't live with the, with the contracts.

04:08 Um, now during that period um, uh, the Teamsters were there in the fields and the Teamsters were there with some muscles. What describe the situation. It was violent wasn't it?

04:18 Oh. Well I don't think it ever got to be violent except they, the goon squad. The Teamsters had a goon squad in there uh, and also uh, the United Farm Workers had a goon squad in there facing up against each other and yes could be violent.

04:36 Now when you said....

CUT

Um, let's, let's go back to this period

CUT

04:56 Um, I wanted to go back to 71 when the decision was made to sign with the Teamsters. Did you think at that time that farmworkers should be unionized?

05:05 Uh, I certainly was not a pro-unionization of farmworkers. Uh, but certainly was not the anti-unionization of the farmworkers. So I was kind of neutral at that point in time.

05:19 But you know responding to the situation it seemed like you can...

05:24 Well obviously, obviously when you had a choice between the United Farm Workers and a union that you had worked with previously whether it be the AFL-CIO or the Teamsters, you're gonna choose people that had

negotiated and worked with before. And that's what I'm sure the growers in Salinas did.

05:44 Now the farmworkers called those contracts "sweetheart" contracts. That is they said the Teamsters didn't represent the workers. Was that an issue?

05:51 Oh that was what was the contention that was the easiest contention. Uh, probably the best thing ever happened to the farmworkers was the fight between the Teamsters union and the United Farm Workers as each one of 'em tried to out do the other one by get a better contract and the growers were caught in the middle so in order to stay non-union they had to beat 'em both. So from the farmworkers standpoint the best thing ever happened to them was having the fight between the two unions in my estimation for the farmworkers.

06:18 Now let's switch gears a little bit. Um, you dealt with Chavez, you met him a few times and you certainly had some ideas about him. Give me some reflections on him, on what kind of person he was.

06:28 Cesar Chavez I think he was somewhat of a used individual. In my estimation is the standpoint that Cesar really wanted the trade union. I think, I think he also was in the social side of it to but Dolores Huerta and the group on the other side had no desire to become a trade union. They had the social movement in, in tow and I think the chief negotiator Jerry Cohen he certainly, he, he was getting paid by United Auto Workers, he certainly wanted a trade union. He was working to become a union. But he was, but I think Cesar was caught between the two elements those that wanted a social movement, those when they signed a contract tried to take over the companies and not uh, help the companies that signed the contract. So I think Cesar was kind of, I wish Cesar were alive today and where he could reflect back and answer that question himself.

07:27 But I mean you looked at what happened in Fresh Pick once there was a contract how what happened under a UFW contract?

07:32 Oh it, it was horrible. Uh, I mean under the United Farm, under the United Farm Workers after we the contract was signed uh, for instance I went in to the field right afterward and there were UFW flags all over the place and Teamsters flag. I ordered all flags be taken down and to go back to work and work under the contract. Dolores came out and demanded that all of the UF flags be put back up and be displayed or uh, else. And I stopped all the work and said okay then we're not working at all. So it wasn't a standpoint of trying to solve a problem after the contract was signed it was far worse after the contract was signed because the power of the union then it was before. Consequently uh, it was than the decision made by Purex to get out of the business of agriculture. Sign the contract and quit.

08:33 Well looking at it the other way, if people like Cesar as you say who wanted a real union had prevailed do you think they could have established a relationship with Purex that would have allowed that?

08:43 Oh without a doubt. Ye, oh yes absolutely. I, I don't think that uh, uh, Purex Corporation or United were non-union companies. They had companies all through their own uh, uh, other businesses. It was a standpoint that they wanted labor peace because they signed the contract. All they got was labor war.

CUT

09:13           Talk to us a little bit more about these differences of approach between Cesar and Dolores. Who were you dealing with? What kind of union was it?

09:19           Well I think that was the bigger problem. Cesar was more dealing with the political side of it, the uh, Kennedys and the money that was required and not the day to day operations of the field. Dolores Heurta was dealing with the field. And that's where the problem was obviously was in the field and whether or not Cesar could control Dolores I question. Uh, but I there's no question that Cesar was not involved in the field. He would come out to the fields when all the problems were over and was not involved when the problems were going on.

10:00           Now that brings up another interesting thing. You remember Cesar was in jail and all the sudden Ethel Kennedy shows up in town. What did you folks think about that?

10:08           Well obviously it was strictly political...

10:10           I need a sentence. When Ethel came...

10:12           When Ethel came out and to see him in jail I think Robert Kennedy came out too I believe I'm not sure.

10:17           No just Ethel.

10:18           Just Ethel? Ok when Ethel came out it was obviously...

CUT

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10:47           So talk to us a little bit about what it would be like to sit down and talk with Cesar as opposed to what it would be like to try and sit down and talk with Dolores.

10:53           Well when I talked to Cesar and I think I eluded to that earlier that with Cesar I think he was torn between a trade union and the social and trying to work both ends. Uh, consequently when I'd sit down with Cesar we'd talk about the trade union. Talk about the unionization. Talk about how I felt that if they're going to expect other people to go in to the United Farm Workers they had to protect those contracts that they were and go after the people that were not uh, in contracts. The total opposite was Dolores. Dolores the ones she hated most I think were those people that signed the contract 'cause she felt she could control them then. She had 'em and she was gonna dominate 'em and it was gonna be the peoples union not a trade union. And that was a total difference. You couldn't talk to Dolores. She always was very mad because I would not sit down and debate Dolores. I said you want number two I'll give you number two. You want me to debate I'll debate Cesar and nobody else. And that made her very unhappy that I wouldn't debate a woman.

12:02           But you were, you must have been sort of puzzled by this you know about aren't we talking about unions and didn't you think that was what?

12:07 Well I thought that's where it stood at but I said originally because of the union 'cause where I was uh, the far right wing was trying to get in to my act. I said hey I'm not trying to get in to the act to fight against unionization. I'm fighting for the growers to be able to live under a contract, a union contract. And there's no question in my mind that Cesar did a lot to help the farmworker.

12:35 Talk a little bit about that. How do you think, what, what effect did he have?

12:38 Oh Dolor, oh Cesar had I think great effect. He increased the wages. He increased the working conditions. He did great things. Dolores killed the farmworker movement in my estimation because nobody could live under the contract and they lost all their contracts. What they were fighting to get. But the farmworkers came out better even today where they're non-union their far above uh, any other farmworkers I think probably in the country. Because of what Cesar and the United Farm Workers did.

13:10 Now let's switch gears a little bit. Tell me, tell me what you thought when you heard Ethel Kennedy was coming to visit Cesar in jail.

13:16 Kay, when Ethel Kennedy was gonna come visit Cesar in jail obviously we knew it strictly what it was. It was strictly a political move and if anything Cesar had it was charisma for politics and for raising money and doing that end. That's where I said earlier that he was outside doing his thing raising huge amounts of money and bringing in politicians and uh, the Catholic Church and he did a great job of bringing those people in. So uh, Ethel Kennedy was nothing more than another political move for the Kennedy's political advancement in my estimation.

13:58 But it also was part of how Cesar manipulated or treated the media, right?

14:02 Well sure. He'd done a good job of manipulating...

14:05 Say it over again. Cesar did...

14:06 Cesar did a good job of manipulating the union. For instance if he could...

14:10 You said Cesar manipulated the union.

14:13 Ce, I'm sorry. Cesar manipulated the press and the, the political figures when he would go out in to a field they had already rushed through the field got the workers out. Now standing on the side of the field then they let Cesar come and show the charisma of the nonviolent situation. We have enough proof over everything that it was not a nonviolent movement on either side.

14:44 Do you think he personally was nonviolent?

14:47 Yes I think Cesar was personally a nonviolent person and I think that's the way he wanted to leave it. However again and I'm talking about other people on the other side, they were certainly not nonviolent.

CUT

15:18 Cesar was nonviolent. Was the farmworkers movement nonviolent?

15:21 Oh absolutely the farmworkers movement was not nonviolent. Uh, but Cesar I think was nonviolent. The problem your in to is that when, there was only a strike when you had unhappy workers. So unhappy workers in one field would not necessarily be other fields. The only way that Cesar could get the worker. Not Cesar I'm talking about the United Farm Workers could get the workers out of the field was to get unhappy workforce and then rush the other fields to get the workers out of the field to stop working and so they'd be too scared to go back in and work again. So there was the difference between uh, where Cesar I think wanted to be and some of his goon squads and Teamsters had goon squads too so absolutely not glued to either one the only way I could protect those work in the field was make the growers recognize that they were going to rush the fields and for them to go out and stand in the fields themselves, which for them the workers would feel better about re, working.

16:25 But you pointed out some of the lessons that you think the Farm Workers union should have learned. What do you think in general the industry farmers learned from the process of dealing with this unionization?

16:35 A lot. And I think that was what was good. The, there was no question that the farmers learned a lot from the United Farm Workers effort. They found out how to deal with their workers and with the unions. They found out that they had to give the workers a voice. They found out that they should have somebody, a worker, true worker in the field that could come in and give grievances to them what their problems were to solve. It wasn't always dollars. It wasn't always money. It might be where the restrooms were. It might be the working hours. It could be the piece rate. It could be a lot of things other than just salary. Obviously salary's one big thing but I think the, what Cesar did and the United Farm Workers did was make the worker more uh, a part of the company that was hiring 'em working together. And I think if you look at all unions around the United States today I think you'll find I think for instance like United uh, Airlines has done where actually they own part of, of the company. Or Chrysler Corporation uh, I think I told you that Doug Frasier was uh, became a very close friend of mine head of United Auto Workers. We had long talks about United Farm Workers and, and where they should've gone and how they should've done it. And I think that Chrysler's union probably, or Chrysler and United Auto Workers proved the point.

18:05 Let me ask you one other question too. California's really interested in this stuff, you were part of the industry you were interested in it. Why do you think this is an important story for the whole country?

18:14 Well I think it's an important story for the whole country because California probably been more involved certainly in the unionization of farmworkers than anywhere else in the United States. Maybe if the story would be told that some growers and I'm talking against my industry. But some growers deserve unionization. Other ones do not because they're probably equal to or even doing better than the union contracts do but that is true in every industry. It is agribusiness now it is not just agriculture. And once the growers across the United States recognize and realize that it becomes agribusiness and you better recognize it as such, I think the country will be better off and certainly the farmworkers will be better off.

19:04           And begin treating it like a business.

19:05           And be treating like a business. Treat, treating agriculture as a business as you negotiate with your contracts. We probably have more contracts in agriculture in California, the packing houses, truck drivers, uh, on and on and on than maybe any other state in the union. And we certainly get along just fine uh, with those unions in negotiations.

19:27           Because the old model was the farmer had his little world and it was his empire and he controlled it and no one was gonna tell him what to do and that's changed hasn't it?

19:35           Well it has absolutely changed and they've changed in the world of farmers uh, they have treated farmers all together different. Withholding for instance on income tax. Uh, there's no reason today that the farmworkers shouldn't be withheld on income tax.

19:51           Um, I think we've covered everything do you have any final thoughts?