

## **Bert Corona**

### **TAPE 48, CR 48, SR 23, TC 6:30**

06:30:21     What is your recollection of significant attempts to organize farm labor prior to the 50s and 60s?

06:30:30     Well in 1937 I was active in two movements one the CIO organizing in Southern California and the other one the formation of the Mexican-American youth movement which was starting about that time and in both they were very significant coincidences that the youngsters who were going to highschool and community colleges at that time they were called junior colleges were for the most part sons and daughters of farm workers who had been trying to organize in Orange County in San Bernardino and in parts of los angeles county ot organize agricultural workers, whose fathers were active and of course then their children were the ones who were most likely to finish highschool and try to go on college and I recall strikes and efforts to organize in Orange County around Westminster and outside of Anaheim and places like that, where they invoked the criminal syndicalism laws which was a threat and more than a threat it became a a very powerful tool in the hands of growers because actually men or women who tried to organize farm workers could be sent to jail, they were such a thing as criminal syndicalism, syndicalism means unionizing and so interwoven with the lives of these young people to finish just a very incipient higher education were the struggles of the parents in those towns of Orange County and Southern Los Angeles County San Bernardino and Rverside where there was an orange large orange growing operations.

06:32:30 What were the other obstacles to organizing labor?

06:32:35 well the the obstacles of course, had always been removal. Removal. If your seen the shots of the corporate strike where they packed up the strikers in trucks in just took the to the nearest railroad head and loaded them up and in in box cars heading back to Texas, removal deportation to Mexico, in fact some of those Southern California judges still .. we've had cases where a person has been arrested for driving under the influence a couple of times, or has been involved in a wreck or to his not insured where the judges order the person to leave or I will deport you from from this county.. in those terms you know, and Peter Shay who heads up the Coalition for Human Rights and Constitutional Liberties he's had cases where he's had to go and defend people in counties like oh King County, and north of that in Lindsey, Porterville in places like that and... judges in terms of California could not deport people out of its out its boundaries and ..in the same period of time we saw.. start again of organizing packing shed workers and cannery workers primarily by the United Cannery Agricultural and Packing Workers of America a union that was formed in those year 36, 37, 38 in the south a professor by the name of Leon Henderson was one of the organizers he organized tobacco, and sugar cane and cotton field workers in the south and then he came out here and tried to organize cannery and packing sheds, not necessarily picking as such but the shed would be organized and that would bring in also those who did the picking of the ... supposed to bring to the sheds, and very much involved in that of couse was Luisa Moreno a woman organizer I don't know if you've had if you have

material on her we have her life pre-United States life, we have a an album on her activities in Mexico and Guatemala

06:35:09 Why were agricultural laborers not included in the National Labor Relations act?

06:35:20 because of the power of the Western Federation of Growers, Western Association of Growers and powerful interest in agriculture that were closely linked to the railroad, the big railroads that had long lines into California also supported the growers efforts to keep unions out of the fields, and the big canners Levy and Swift and all kinds of cannery operations Del Monte, Calpac, Rosenberg all those played, Hunts, Wesson Oil, the Norton family all those forces were very active in in processing food grown in California, so they were very much interested in keeping the fields unorganized, thus keeping the packing sheds unorganized and the canneries but Luisa Moreno did finally succeed in organizing ninety canneries in Northern California before she had to leave for Mexico

06:36:20 in the 1960s was there something particular going on?

06:36:26 there were efforts in the sixties of course the United Farm Workers had formed the National Association of Farm Workers, NAFW, but there was the AWOC, Agricultural Workers Organizing Committee that was formed by the AFofL, with forces from other unions who came to California and joined with Larry Itliong, and the Filipino Workers Union and with the vestiges of old unions in Stockton and other cities where there were large packing and canning operations that were organized by the Longshoremans

Union. The Longshoreman remember had a long history of organizing caneries and packing workers here and in Hawaii, and so in early sixties that was what was going on in the Filipinos were moving and organizing and the AWOC were moving and organizing and Cesar was building the basis for an association that would then lead to a union, he felt that the unions were not able to mobilize intelligently the farm workers that could be organized and so he felt that there was a step that they had to take in terms of maturing and development and sophistication of how the organization could be used. There was also the tremendous threat of violence that was always heaped upon efforts to organize farm workers by the growers themselves, the growers would burn their sheds would put bombs in their warehouse and so forth, and attribute all this to the workers and of course they would also foment a very supermilitant voices amongst the ranks you know people that we can't win but lets burn t.. you know there was always that fifth column type of infiltration into efforts and to groups that were trying to organize workers legitimately for peace or collective bargaining purposes, so Cesar taking all these things into consideration, the need for preparation for development for education and the need for firmly establishing the concept and the strategy of non-violence was very important to him, and he felt that there should be a period where workers could be trained and could be developed to think in these terms and to aware of the dangers of falling prey to fomented violence from within and so forth that let to nowhere, and also just a simple question of building unity you know around not only just the need to confront the grower and the packer unitedly, but also united to become more self-sustaining empowerment self-empowerment by participating together they could obtain many other needs that had to be filled such as social services mutual aid assistance food clothing shelter so

forth medical care all those needs were very present in the minds of farm workers and also Cesar thought that it was important to address those needs through the association

06:40:03 Cesar and you were doing some of the same stuff in LA and CSO, prior to this, could you tell us about this?

06:40:12 well CSO and there was an organization called Alma that was active from the unions from the left unions of that time the international unions of mine and smelter workers from the activities of CIO unions here the furniture workers this gentleman who owns the house Gus Brown can tell you about his history

06:41:16 Tell us about the early days at CSO?

06:41:26 the main effort was to try and organize barrios, comunidades, communities in San Jose in Oakland, in Salinas, in Los Angeles, in San Diego in the Imperial Valley, and of course in and around Fresno and other agricultural towns in central California their effort was significant in as much as it sought to involve the people to build an organization that would serve them defend them and speak for them and great efforts were made to train the people on how to organize how to conduct the organization, which I think was different from what other efforts had been doing in the past, that were primarily efforts at waging the struggle but the CSO was involved in civil struggles as well against discrimination in housing against police brutality against discrimination in the schools and in employment and I think that it laid the ground work for much of what had taken place later on in the

building of MAPA I think that the fact the CSO existed along with with ANMA made it possible for MAPA to develop, to be Mexican American Political Association that by the end of the 60s reached as many as a 100 chapters in the state

06:43:08 Where did this the philosophy come from?

06:43:15 I don't think so, I think that he has very specific ideas, Alinsky, Alinsky and Fred Ross had, well some had specific ideas about moving people and taking advantage of the weaknesses and structures that were oppressing oppressing the Mexican people, such as chambers of commerce, employer associations, the civic leagues of entrepreneurs, and so forth and he was a good tactician and strategist I think though however that and Fred Ross was magnificent as an organizer, as a person that could impart and foment and inspire, people to move for themselves but I think that one must attribute also to the history of organization amongst the Mexican and other Spanish speaking people in the United States and in their home countries, the history that was laid down such as Flores Magon movement which for Mexico the Anaco Syndicalist movement that came into the United States about 1890? when the Magonistas were chased out of Mexico and they settled in many parts of the United States, Chicago, the far midwestern steel towns of the Manongahela (sp?) Valley in Ohio, in Kansas, in Texas, in New Mexico of course the whole Southwest, and they struck up acquaintanceship with other immigrant groups such as the Hibernia society which organized Irish groups, the central European groups, the Jewish groups they formed, the mutual aid societies, that could help each other to send the bodies of those who died send them back to Mexico, when people got sick they self help, or

mutual aid logias would then come to their aid and give some money some assistance to the to the people who were left without a breadwinner so forth. I think that we have to attribute part of the tactical successes and tactical direction to the strategy or organizing that came, that was enhanced by CSO enhanced by ANMA enhanced by MAPA to also the early history of self-help and self-movement in the part of Mexicanos. The research archives of universities here and some in Mexico are replete with the histories of these efforts by Mexicans to organize in the little towns where they lived segregated, Jim Crowed, and working at them most menial, most seasonal types of operations, in the steel plants, in packing plants throughout the country. Just to cite one one source of materials, of the, I think 17 books that Paul Taylor the professor at UC Berkeley had his students write, in going to to summer sessions with a masters degree and studying in these communities and writing their what they discovered there, and also the histories of the Flores Magon movement in the United States were they engaged in many strikes not only not over wages in many cases but over treatment, and so there is this history and even in Mexico now we're finding out that some of the figures that played the role in the Mexican revolution had been in the United States organizing sugar beat workers. Organizing agricultural mining, mining workers railroad workers, it's not as if all of a sudden the CIO came and brought organizations skills to the Mexicans, the Mexicans already had them from from decades before so it wasn't as if ANMA brought them or CSO or MAPA but that really those efforts are historical. Just to lend you just an example there was a fellow by the name of Refugio Martinez in 1950 who had been organizing back of the yards, for 20 years, organizing the workers in Chicago who worked for Armour and Wilson and Swift and Cudahee (sp?) lived in terrible, abominable conditions and he had

to have organizations there for all those years I knew him as far back as 1938 when he came to to be a participant in the Mexican and Latino Congress of Spanish Speaking Peoples that was held here in Los Angeles and and Saul Alinsky later on was telling me one day that he was instrumental in building the back of the back of the yards movement with the mexicans and so and so forth I didnt argue with him but I knew as far back as 1938 that Refugio Martinez and the Mexicans had been doing self help and that mutual aid orgnaization you know to sustain themselves and I remember living in El Paso

06:48:35 What were your earliest recollections of Cesar and his work as an organizer?

06:48:57 I think I met him in the forties late forties when he was organizing in San Jose and over issues over community issues and I thought that he was very very brilliant, in the fact that he understood that the Mexican people had to be moved that they had to be mobilized and that they had to be the ones to take responsibility for what's happening in the communities they were fighting over housing issues, they were fighting over police brutality and over discrimination in employment, and the tenacity that he had the persistance, the faithfulness, and indomitable spirit of struggle, and his honesty that he was not a man for sale to the powers that be in the towns in San Jose he was not trying to accomodate them but he was trying to strengthen the people who needed strength he was trying to improve their organizational skills and levels that's what struck me very much about Cesar.

06:50:02 Where did he learned those skills?



06:50:04 well I think he learned them as he went along, because he got into the struggle and you learn those skills from participating but I think that he had also been a barrio vato you know before Fred Ross ran into him he was already a leader in the community as such, and you see some of the old pictures where he's even dressed like a zoot suiter, you know he was identified with the strong people in the barrio with a high moral characteristic rather than being just as destructive as some of the kids were at that time, and I think that Fred Ross was instrumental in strengthening his skills about organizing going back and the persistence that Fred Ross inculcated in that there was a process that had to take place so that you didn't get discouraged because it turned you down when you ... door to door and Fred was great in teaching the process, so that people would understand that in going to organize door to door and bringing people together that you had to face divisiveness you had to face how should I put it an inability to see through the immediate problems that people had given them a long range view, that's important and showing people how to be determinant and stubborn about staying with the because because a defeat today it really meant a victory tomorrow if you stay with it, and I think that's very important in the life of a young person who is organizing to know that somebody else has had those experiences and that those experiences can be explained and can be understood and so that you take the long range view and I think that that was the great contribution that Fred Ross gave to Cesar and (PIC ROLL OFF) to everybody that he he reached besides being a very very competent direct organizer himself

TAPE 49, CR 50, SR 24, TC 7:30

7:30:12 in the 40s, 50s and 60s, did you see much change in Cesar?

7:30:20 yes I saw very very positive change and growth I'll just give you an example, through the period of the 50s, Cesar was organizing in CSO and had a lot contacts with people in the Democratic party begging with Governor Pat Brown on down, Allen Cranston and many of the leadership state wide of the Democratic party and even some nation wide, but his growth came in terms of the demands of the struggle. I saw this happen when he initiated the march to arrive on Easter day to arrive in Sacramento initiated a march from Sac from San Diego all the way to the state capital and there's a lot of criticism heaped upon the CSO and on Cesar who was now leader of the union, by some unions and many democratic leaders who felt that that Cesar had retrogressed in his understanding of politics because now he was going to confront the democratic establishment in Sacramento on this state wide march, pointed to try to force Governor Brown to be in Sacramento and wait and meet with the farm workers and their allies that they had gathered in the course of developing the march, because if we understand the situation properly historically, this was this march, although it started out in support of farm workers became a march of entire Spanish speaking people of the state confronting the government confronting the policies of Pat Brown confronting the policies of the democratic establishment the Democratic Party in terms of of of farm worker labor realtions in terms of supporting the boycott in terms of not bringing in any more braceros, and he was put under a lot of criticism. Many of the conservative trade unionists who wanted to help him and helped his a little

bit before but who had a lot of influence politically had put a lot of pressure on the farm workers not to carry out that that march

07:32:49 You think he was right?

07:32:50 yes he was Cesar was right, and he had the courage and he had .. many people laughed at him and many people felt that he was making a serious mistake but Cesar was very determined and that's in my estimation carrying out another characteristic of his that once he started on a course he could be very very determinative, he could be very strong in his support of the policy of what had to be done and no matter if they presented almost unsurmountable obstacles, if he felt that win or lose that's what had to be done at that moment to develop the course of the struggle, for his cause he would carry it out and he did carry it out even though he wasn't able even to be there because he was still organizing more and more people to come from Stockton. Herman Gallegos had to act as master of ceremonies to receive the people there at the state capital, but let me tell you he was he was a really a great success the farm workers were trying to negotiate something at Sierra Vista at the at the Seagram ranches and I was I was brought in by the teamsters in San Francisco a fellow by the name of Goldberger who used to represent Jimmy Hoffa, who we knew in San Francisco, was living there and organizing at that time, and his men stopped me on the freeway coming in from Oakland asked me to pull aside and to follow them, that Goldberger wanted to see me very important so I followed them when I got into the Teamster headquarters brought me into Mr. Goldberger's office and he was talking to Jimmy Hoffa, and Jimmy Hoffa was telling him that that Cesar Chavez had to put off the grape boycott from the wholesale liquor dealers,

liquor warehouses that the teamsters had organized in san francisco and up and down the state, and specially with Schenley and the other people that Schenley not Seagram, people that produced an awful lot of import liquor and it seems that some of the, while he was on the march, some of the people who lead the grape boycott in San Francisco began picketing the organized warehouses that the Teamsters had organized and that were carrying Schenley products you see

07:35:30     So what did you do?

07:35:32     well they told me that I better get a hold of Cesar, and and tell him that he better pull the people off from the boycott and so on an so forth and I told him I couldn't get a hold of him because I didn't know where he was and says "yes you know," they started this kind of argument while Cesar was marching on the march and finally we were able to convince Jimmy Hoffa that it was not that we were trying to avoid doing it or that Cesar didn't didn't want to respond, but we finally convinced him that Cesar was going to carry out the boycott come what may, so about an hour later we were in that room and Jimmy Hoffa called back alright I got an agreement if you guys pull the boycott off I think I can get Schenley to work out an agreement with you people we're putting a lot of pressure because we can't have this thing spread, it will destroy the entire fabric of our liquor warehouse organizing in the United States, you see, so Cesar understood that and Dolores understood that, and they played it and we got a contract out of that even, as a side side benefit from ta- carrying the march on what a brilliant result came and had another occasion to see how Cesar grew and developed and understood really fully what he was doing, now people

thought that they had to help him because he was not smart enough that he didn't understand some of these more ex-,older politicians and older trade union people, could not see how a young person a Mexican could give such brilliant leadership in terms of nationwide labor dispute, because that what this had become a nationwide labor dispute and that was when the farm workers needed support in Delano the strike was widening and the United Auto Workers had through Paul Schrade began to support and began to get close to the union, and they sent out a man who played a very important role at that time representing Walther Reuther, his name is Henry Santesteban who now lives in Washington DC, and Henry working for Paul Schrade and Walther Reuther came to Delano some of us had been in Delano since the strike opened up as volunteer supporters you know arms and legs people to what Cesar was doing, and it was finally announced to Cesar that Walther Reuther and the staff were coming to Delano to look over the situation themselves to talk to Cesar to find out what kind of an operation it was and to see if it warranted giving them the help that Paul Schrade advocated and some of the other UAW people had advocated to Walter Reuther that that the UAW should lend and give, so that the farm worker struggle could go on, and so a lot of people came right before Walther Reuther, and they were telling Cesar what to do how to handle him that he was pretty shrewd and so on and so forth, but Cesar listened very calmly listened but he had his own plan he understood the situation better and when Walther Reuther came Cesar had organized a parade all over the grape areas that were in the town, from one area to another and so when Walther showed up with Henry SantEsteban and and Paul Schrade we had a march going, and we put them in front of the march and he participated in this march all through the grape areas of Delano and it was just marvelous, marvelous idea, way to receive

the fellow that you expect to get their support he could not do but support him what else could Walther Reuther do? So that's just an example of the kind of great tactician that he was and how he grew in understanding and in insight as to what he had to do to strengthen his movement and to bring in all the forces that should be brought in, of course, which were the national labor unions involved in handling products that came out of Delano that came out of the grape fields.

07:40:43     Talk about the bracero issue and the operation wetback - how did Cesar deal with that?

07:40:55     well Cesar's position had always been to support the termination of the bracero program and all of us were united in that because it was a horrible exploitation of people who could not organize, they could not fend for themselves, they could not represent themselves they could not even become involved in doing something for themselves other than stop working striking and if they struck they would be bundled back up in buses and trucks and sent back to Mexico, so it was that kind of a situation. So we were all together in the fight to end the bracero program, the key element in that program was Adam Clayton Powell, Congressman Adam Clayton Powell was chairman of the labor, labor, Labor and Human Resources Committee of the house he had a lot of seniority he was the only black congressman and he was on our side, he did and the extinction of the bracero program in 1966 had to go to his committee for a due pass on extension and the only extension that was being requested was really that had hard hard request behind it was Stockton tomato growers who wanted 33,000 braceros brought in. We had pretty much between the farm workers and MAPA and

community organization, Cesar's organization and Dolores' activities we had pretty much killed support for the bracero program in many states nationwide campaign and of course in many parts of California. But now the growers really put on the heat they really wanted these 33 thousand because not the they needed them so much for that crop but they wanted to continue the bracero program and they felt this was a hard place to put a stop to our efforts, to put an end to the bracero program. And they convinced the Governor Brown that they needed those workers and we put a lot of pressure on Governor Brown and he wouldn't give in it was very hard for him to give in because he claimed that he he had received a lot of vote support in other legislation from the Western Association of growers, well it was up to the committee in congress and it was up to the chairman Adam Clayton Powell, to call the committee in session for purposes of evaluating the bracero program and the extension of public law 78, and they had a majority of his committee already sold on the idea of extension so he knew if he had a meeting he would lose so he took off for the Bahamas he had his girlfriend Hazel Scott, the famous pianist on one of those islands, he spent two months over there and they couldn't get him back into the states, and they were calling for impeachment growers out a lot of pressure on him. But he was very adamant he was very strong he was stuck to his commitment to us. And so then he called for a meeting to go some place in Guam or some place in the pacific and he was flying he flew and stopped in San Francisco for about an hour on this plane, and he had called us his his, White, Chuck White his, the representative legal aide or whatever legislative representative he called us together and we met him at the airport, and we asked him if he was going to stick by his guns and refuse renewal, and he says yes, I remember that Ernie Galarza at that time asked him what chances

do you see in extending the program, he said over my dead body, so he went, never called the meeting the committee for that whole year and that's how the program ended. So we were together, Cesar farm workers everybody was together on ending the program. As far as Operation Wetback and everything related to undocumented, Cesar always supported organizing anybody who was there anybody who was there. Many of the active people were people without documents active in the unions in the 60s 65 66 in the strikes and so forth. Cesar was not anti- the undocumented I mean it's been built up as as being that, as a result of things that were done by the union that were not understood or misinterpreted, there were it was doing the Coachella strike when in order to brake the strike of the farm workers against the Coachella growers in Indio and Coachella, and Cathedral City grape growing areas, the growers resorted very patently to tie in with the immigration service and permit anybody who wanted to come over and work in the strike to cross the border from Mexicali and from from San Vigio Colorado(sp?). It was, it was, I tell you we were working with Cesar we had leaflets to distribute at the border. MAPA supported the strike 100 percent and we had teamed down there at the border lead by a fellow Figueroa from the Blithe MAPA chapter. He took 15 men stationed about the border with leaflets, to give to anybody crossing not to come and break the strike not to come and cross the picket lines they were arrested by order of the immigration saying that they were obstructing the operations of the immigration service on the border they were jailed by the city council of of a of Mexical, of Calexico for nothing for really no base allegation could be established we had to fight that kind of collusion between the city governments and the immigration and the growers.



07:47:11 Did Cesar ever asked the INS to deport workers who were breaking the strike, did that ever happened?

07:47:21 yes I think that but I think that he didn't he did that primarily directing his criticism at the fact that they were breaking the strike not because they were undocumented. They had been recruited by permission of the immigration service by growers to break the strikes, and Cesar always felt that there should be legislation preventing strike breakers to be herded, strike breakers to be contracted, strike breakers to be to be organized, in order to pointedly break a given strike, and it was on that score that he took that action. But, but there were other people in labor who were anti the organizing of undocumented workers. Even to this day some unions don't support the organizing of undocumented of immigrants for many reasons primarily is that if they organize them and come into these unions they will bounce these leaders out of office and put in leaders that were more that would be more amenable and more sympathetic to the needs of immigrant workers. And so that's the other angle some of the labor leadership is afraid of the total organization of latino and hispanic, Mexican workers here, in Chicago, in New York, in the Southwest, because they're the majority now working in those industries and they would be the majority of the members and they vote in their own leadership, and and vote out some of these old, phony Anglo-saxon or European racist type of leadership, that's what the issue was all about. Cesar always supported the organizing of undocumented that they weren't very enthusiastic about leaving the border wide open is something else during a strike situation, nobody wanted that to happen, you know. In other words, our organization we were supporting the right of the undocumented to stay here and to work and to be given rights and to be

given visas not deportation. That was all our propaganda at that time, hermanda mexicana, in the late 60s in the 70s and in the 80s, but never never did we support the issue that they should be also permitted to break strikes. On the contrary, we felt that they should be dealt with as strike breakers and they should pay the consequences of whatever law or whatever public approbrium should be heaped upon them as strike breakers, not as immigrants. Unfortunately, other forces tied the two together

TAPE 50, CR 52, SR 25, TC 8:30

08:30:08 How was bobby helpful, what was the role he played?

08:30:20 helpful to me or to us? Bobby Kennedy was a senior member, a senator of the Senate Committee on Farm and Agriculture Relations, the chairman of the committee was Senator Harrison Williams of the East Coast and in that committee laid the power to hold hearings to do oversight over what labor relations in the agricultural areas or the United States were. And so very quickly Bobby began to use his position inside the committee to push Senator Harrison Williams and other members of the committee, some of who were very pro-grower by the way, but others who were independent and just had no opinion, or just honest men who did not understand the issues too well. So using his position he called hearings, he had the committee call hearings throughout the agricultural areas of California to find out the living conditions, the working conditions of farm workers, and the role that growers played and so forth and I remember that some grower associations resented very much the intrusion of the committee

08:31:46 Why?

08:31:47 well they thought that Bobby had shown a bias in favor of farm workers that he was too too much carried away with the being a do gooder for the poor, for the people who were in need in the farm worker areas. I have some pictures here that were taken when he was out there going to the fields to see families who were living in car wrecks, had no home, living in the fields in Salinas. His answer to that was “look, we give you 50 billion dollars worth of subsidies. This government that this committee represents gives farmers all over the United States 50 billion dollars worth to plant and not to plant, so we have a right to find out how you're spending some of that money.” And he was very strong, very very strong. To me he was the strongest candidate that we've ever had going for the presidency. He said to us one time said look look you're in my campaign, it's important that I get elected that I win because then we can carry forward all these issues. But besides that you fellows use this campaign to come out strong. Win or lose you should come out strong, the organization should be stronger, it should be fuller, it should be richer, it should have more members, doesn't matter that I don't win. He was that much committed because he felt that only through having strong organizations, self determination and self empowerment could the poor and the farm workers and the unorganized do well for themselves in this society. He really came to believe that

08:33:27 Why did he have this affinity for farmworkers?

08:33:36 I don't know I never heard him mention this. I think that what happened in his life was the assassination of Jack Kennedy, the assassination of Martin Luther King, so that he he came to see the situation as one where

the powerful, the mighty, the greedy were on one side and on the other side were us, the people who were poor, who were in need, who needed the protection of government if they could get it, and who needed to have beneficial legislation passed on their behalf, and he felt that he was on that side. He was on the side of people of color, people who were poor, who suffered discrimination, racial and economic discrimination and he viewed life as it was that there were two sides you know in contention. He advocated that both sides get together and work on the problems that was his whole advocacy but he understood only too well that those who had the power those who were accumulating the wealth that they had all the all the advantages on their side

08:34:52 How was Dolores as a strategist, as an organizer?

08:35:06 also a very great, very brilliant organizer. Very steadfast, very sharp. Had a lot of insight into what had to be done, what should be done, in legislative matters, in the use of political pressure and organizing political forces, I think that she's probably the outstanding person, outstanding woman or individual in the latino community of the United States. She understands the Washington scene. She understands what political pressure is how to build it and she's not afraid to go out, herself, and walk the precincts. She understands it from the ground up, that that we have no voice and no strength as a people, we're talking about the Mexicano and other latino people unless we organize ourselves to put together the necessary political power to produce changes and to force and to force the congress and the legislatures and the policymakers to do policy on the behalf of the poor and the downtrodden and the needy. I don't know of anybody who is

her equal, in terms of willing to sacrifice to work hard, you know, put in long hours and also in the ability to see what has to be done and see how the forces have to be mobilized. She's a wonderful advocate and a very tough contender

08:36:35 And in terms of style, how would you contrast her with Cesar?

08:36:41 well I think both of them shared the same qualities except that Cesar's style was different. He was a different type of individual and that's why you see differences, but basically they agreed 100 percent on what had to be done and how to do it.

08:37:00 There's seems to be a low in the union in general during the 80s, 90s, why was there a decline?

08:37:28 well as far as why we see a decline in farm labor organization it's very clear and very simple the amendments that were made to the Agricultural Labor Relations Act in California were disasterous. They took away all the power, they took away all the protection of of the power of the state in behalf of farm workers and the desire to organize. It took away the basis and the tools upon which farm workers could wage a defense of their interest in their efforts to build unions, to maintain the unions, and to bargain with the powerful growers with the unions that they had built so it only stood to rea only stood to reason that that with the elimination of those protections, of those rights, of that support coming from government the farm workers to organize. With the removal of those those forces on their behalf their contracts would disappear, which they did. Growers could

violate now right and left, the agricultural industry now it's like a factory where you can watch everybody all together at one point in one place, there's thousands of places in the fields and in the sheds and so forth where is very hard to inspect unless you have the money, the personnel, and the will on the part of the state to guarantee the rights of the farm workers under those laws, those laws are going to be violated, and they were violated, and that is the reason that the farm worker organization suffered. It's not that they were doing the wrong thing, it's not that they were not trying to organize, but nobody could overcome the kinds of difficulties that were presented to them when the ALRB was amended under the Republicans, and that if that can be corrected you will see the rise of the Farm Worker Union again very rapidly in fact was a matter of fact in spite of all the all the weaknesses it still in the law. The Farm Workers Union is getting contracts. They just got a big contract from people who grow roses up there in Oregon, they got a big contract from people here in in Kern County and they're moving they're signing contracts up now, as a result of a renewed and redoubled great efforts, not because the legislation its still favorable to them, and it's not that the playing field is leveled, it isn't, it's still loaded on the side of the growers. But because of the determinaton and the will that has been put into the lives and the feelings of farm worker leadership organizers as a result of the death of Cesar Chavez and in time time in itself eventually teaches people how to go around the obstacles. They're building the union like they've never built it before.

08:40:49      What was your reaction when Cesar passed away?

08:40:56 I first I thought it was a mistake because I knew he had been healthy. I had seen him, we had just had a fundraiser for them in a hall in South Central, in fact we're naming that hall now after Cesar Chavez the last fundraiser the last big meeting that the farm worker organization had the last presence of Cesar in los angeles was in that hall on Hill Street and I know he was healthy I had seen him a week or so before he'd come down to see us and talk to us in our office and I couldn't believe that he had just died in his sleep you know I just I just couldn't accept that reality but then as the news came through and and we called the union they told us yes it is a fact so I felt that it was a tremendous loss to not only the farm worker cause but the cause of all poor people in our country and the cause of latinos. Because nobody had developed that presence had developed that role of leadership in advocacy and of sincerity and of truthfulness and of consistency in supporting the cause of the the mexican and other latino peoples as workers and as poor people. There's a lot of people who are great leaders in the field of economic development there's CEOs there are profesionales this and that and the other but to me I put them all in the thimble. And Cesar Chavez represented the vast majority of the people and the basic needs that that vast majority had. Nobody else has been able to reach that role

08:42:49 What do you see in Cesar's legacy?

08:42:52 well those items that that I think are more manifest in his history, is commitment to stay on the issue of organizing the poor. That there can be no progress unless the poor are able to exercise their strengths that exist. That education is not enough. You can educate millions and millions of our people, that will not necessarily eliminate the problems and

the needs of the bulk of our people. I think that his legacy is one of consistency, loyalty to his cause, and willingness to suffer any and all consequences that might come his way if he was just, but he had to stick to his last, he had to stick to his, to his beliefs and stick to the determination of fighting on until victory.