

1972-70

## AN ANALYSIS OF THE ARIZONA ECUMENICAL COUNCIL'S "TRUTH SQUAD" REPORT

On May 31, 1972, the Arizona Ecumenical Council appointed a committee, the "Truth Squad," to study the farm labor situation in Arizona. The report of the Truth Squad was made public on September 28, 1972. However, it is full of inaccuracies and lacking in documentation. The method used in preparing the report was inept; its contents are shallow and inconsistent; and the objectivity and fairmindedness of Truth Squad Chairman Paul Gaston are seriously in doubt.

### A Narrow Study

In preparing their report the Truth Squad failed to draw on the experience and contacts of these churchmen and women who have a long history of involvement with Arizona farm workers. Church Women United, for example, has maintained a ministry to farm workers for years. Yet no attempt was made to involve this group in the preparation of the report. After the Truth Squad had completed their work a statement from the Chairwoman of the Farm Labor and Indian Ministry of Church Women United, Tucson area, was secured and placed in the Appendix of the Truth Squad Report.

The Arizona Ecumenical Council itself maintains a Farm Labor Ministry, yet the Truth Squad study was not entrusted to Father Henry Wasielewski, head of the A.E.C. Farm Labor Ministry. Instead, the A.E.C. appointed a novice in the area of farm labor, the Rev. Paul Gaston, a United Church of Christ clergyman from Tempe, Arizona, who served as Truth Squad Chairman.

Other church people who were not consulted by the Truth Squad include the staffs of the California Migrant Ministry, the National Farm Worker Ministry and countless pastors, priests and nuns who work directly with farm workers in Arizona.

### A One-Sided Investigation

In gathering material for the report, Truth Squad Chairman Gaston took part in meetings in Delano, California which had been arranged with the purpose of discrediting the United Farm Workers Union. On June 14, 1972, Rev. Gaston made a trip to Delano to study the farm labor situation there. His first stop was a luncheon at the Delano Elks Club. Those present included a number of persons who have been long-time opponents of the United Farm Workers. In his report Gaston records the allegations and charges made against the UFW by this group.

After the Elks Club luncheon, Gaston writes that he "obtained permission" to visit farm workers on Jack Pandol's ranch. Though Gaston quotes the charges made against the UFW at Pandol's ranch, he gives no indication to the reader that Pandol is one of the leading anti-union growers in California and a key figure in California's "Right-to-Work" Committee. Nor does Gaston consider the possibility that workers who are interviewed on the ranch where they work might feel pressured to make charges against the United Farm Workers Union.

Gaston visited a labor camp and interviewed workers in the presence of their foreman after the foreman had said the workers should tell Gaston what was wrong with the union! Gaston dutifully quotes the accusations made against the

UFW in this setting.

Gaston also visited with Dolores Mendoza and fourteen other persons she had brought together in her home in Delano. Though Gaston quotes their criticisms of the union he fails to inform the reader that Dolores Mendoza is the wife of a labor contractor, who made a lot of money supplying workers to growers until UFW contracts put him out of business.

#### Arizona Legislators Present During the Interviews

All of Gaston's interviews in California were conducted in the presence of two Arizona legislators who had accompanied him "by coincidence." Both of these men, State Senators Lee Corbet and Scott Alexander voted in favor of Arizona's new farm labor law (HB 2134) and both have voiced public criticism of the UFW; Gaston seems unaware that the presence of these men on his Delano fact finding mission might undermine the credibility and objectivity of his survey.

#### Lack of Adequate Documentation

Many of the allegations reproduced in the Truth Squad Report are impossible to document. For example, a man named Jose Montenegro, referred to as "a farm worker and ex-union official" is quoted several times in the report. Yet Appendix I (also called Folder No.1) which is given as the source for those quotations, makes no mention of a Jose Montenegro.

A number of statements attributed to farm workers are actually not the results of field interviews. Instead, the Truth Squad has simply reproduced information made available to them by the Arizona Farm Bureau. For example, "Bitter Fruit in the Vineyard" is an article which appeared in the Chamber of Commerce publication Nation's Business. Though this article is over two years old (February, 1970) it is cited six times to document charges made against the United Farm Workers Union. Another example is a pamphlet, "Battle for the Vineyards," by Cletus Healy, S.J., Contributing Editor of Twin Circle. This pamphlet, a 1969 compilation of Twin Circle articles, is used as documentation in the Truth Squad Report several times. Twin Circle is a well known right wing publication, which has been publically attacked by the Roman Catholic Bishops' Committee on Farm Labor for its irresponsible reporting on farm labor issues.

When the Truth Squad decided to base a portion of its survey on written materials, why were virtually all the excellent books and articles on farm labor avoided? The Truth Squad did not use any of the works of Ernesto Galarza, John Colas, John Gregory Dunne, Father Mark Day, Ron Taylor or Truman Moore. Peter Matthiessen's history of the United Farm Workers, Sal Si Puedes, is listed as a source but it is not cited in any footnotes or any place else in the report.

In only one instance has the Truth Squad made use of the eight-volume study, Migrant and Seasonal Farmworker Powerlessness (U.S. Senate Sub-Committee on Migratory Labor, 1969, 1970). In a widely circulated defense of the Truth Squad Report, David Reed, Executive Director of the Arizona Ecumenical Council

has written that this multi-volume government study "is unfortunately rather old material and there is very little in it which deals specifically enough with Arizona to have proven helpful to the committee's task of researching the Arizona situation." The fact is that, with the exception of two newspaper editorials from the state of Washington, none of the published material used to document charges made against the UFW is more recent than 1970 and none of it makes any mention of Arizona farm workers.

#### Sloppy Research

The Truth Squad's method of collecting information was generally sloppy and one-sided. For example, the report takes up the charge that fewer jobs are available to workers due to UFW organizing activity. Yet the only documentation offered to substantiate the charge is: (1) a speech by the Communications Director of the American Farm Bureau Federation, (2) an article from Nation's Business, official voice of the U.S. Chamber of Commerce (2/70), (3) a pamphlet published by Twin Circle in 1969, and (4) a statement entitled "To Eat or Not to Eat Grapes, That is the Question." by Rev. James G. McDonald. (Rev. McDonald's visit to Delano in 1969 was financed by the food industry and his report was discredited by his own constituents.)

The Truth Squad's analysis of Arizona's farm labor law (H.B. 2134) concludes that the impact of the law "will depend on the functioning and decisions of the agriculture labor board" which is appointed by the governor. The report states that "one would hope the Governor would select those for board membership who are truly representative of their publics, are able, objective, and respected."

The Truth Squad Report fails to mention that in mid-August Governor Williams announced his appointments to the board. Of the two labor representatives one is president of the Phoenix Joint Council of Teamsters and the other is a member of Packinghouse Workers Local 78-B. Neither of these two unions represent any workers who come under the jurisdiction of the Arizona law. In addition, Jerry Breshears, executive secretary of the Packinghouse Workers Local 78-B has charged that his union is not represented on the board. Breshears said that the governor failed to appoint a union member selected by the union and instead appointed a union member recommended by the Western Growers Association. Breshears said on August 19, 1972 (Arizona Republic, p.22), "In light of the obvious limitations the board allows for labor's voice to be heard, it is foolish for any working man to trust it. It is merely an extension of the growers' power and a tool of Governor Williams." None of this information is available to the reader of the Truth Squad Report.

#### Ignorance of the United Farm Workers Union

The Truth Squad findings display a general lack of knowledge about the UFW. For example, there is no evidence that Truth Squad investigators talked with UFW Ranch Committee members, farm workers who are elected by their fellow workers on each ranch and who are responsible for enforcing the contract.

The investigations of Paul Gaston and Truth Squad staff member Robert Washington are particularly notable for their ignorance of the UFW. Gaston writes that he visited "UFWOC Headquarters on Forty Acres." Actually, the headquarters of the United Farm Workers Union is located at La Paz in Keene, California. Robert Washington suggests in his Truth Squad field report that the UFW "perhaps could be helped through AFL-CIO and/or other strong technical assistance." Washington seems unaware that the UFW was in fact an "organizing committee" (UFWOC) of the AFL-CIO for seven years prior to receiving its charter as an AFL-CIO affiliate in February, 1972.

Robert Washington records the complaint of a woman who had not received her "unemployment allowance" from the union. Apparently Washington is not aware that farm workers are excluded from unemployment insurance laws and that there is no such thing as an "unemployment allowance."

#### A Language Barrier?

The Truth Squad Report states that "the Spanish-English barrier proved to be a very minor problem in the interviews." Yet Truth Squad Chairman Gaston states in his field report that he and the Arizona legislators with him were unable to talk to workers at the UFW Delano field office "due to language problems and the shortness of time." (Perhaps had they taken less time at the Delano Elks Club they would have had more time for the workers at the union field office.) Gaston admits to no language problem while talking to people critical of the union. Church women from the Tucson area who work actively with farm workers have testified publically that it takes months for Anglos to gain the trust of farm workers--not only because of language difficulties but also because of the painful experiences that workers have had with Anglo employers, salesmen, foremen and government officials.

#### Paul Gaston Displays Anti-union Bias

On a number of occasions Truth Squad Chairman Paul Gaston has publically criticized the United Farm Workers Union. During the time the Truth Squad Report was being prepared the UFW was cooperating in a statewide recall campaign aimed at removing Arizona Governor Jack Williams from office. Rev. Gaston strongly opposed the recall effort.

"Just slapping the hands of the union isn't adequate. It seems to me if something wrong is happening we ought to get into the action and stop it."

Gaston quoted in the Phoenix Gazette, Sept. 28, 1972 (date of the official release of the Truth Squad Report)

"I will stand with the Governor in this thing. If they (the Arizona Ecumenical Council) feel as I this is a bad, destructive thing happening in the state, I can't find any other way to respond to it."

Gaston quoted in the Phoenix Gazette, September 23, 1972 (p. 5)

"It is clearly evident to any observer that the people who lead the recall are Chavez men who have no other real interest in Arizona."

Gaston quoted in the Phoenix Gazette,  
September 23, 1972 (p. 5)

The Arizona Republic gives Gaston's views on Arizona's farm labor law (IB2134) and quotes him as saying the UFW "Will not give," and that the union is a "roadblock" to compromise on the law.

Arizona Republic, September 29, 1972  
(pp. 1, 29)

#### Truth Squad Credibility Destroyed by Premature Release

On July 10, 1972, a preliminary draft of the Truth Squad Report was presented to the Arizona Ecumenical Council by Paul Gaston. The A.E.C. voted to receive the report and ordered that it not be released to the public pending further study. On the following day the report was placed in the hands of a Phoenix public relations firm, Joanne Patton & Associates. Since that time the preliminary Truth Squad Report has been reprinted and circulated by various right wing publications, the grower press network and a number of political figures in Arizona. In California a long section of this report is included in a polished public relations brochure, which is being distributed to the press and to the public as part of the growers' promotional effort on behalf of Proposition 22. (Proposition 22 is a grower-sponsored initiative designed to severely restrict farm worker organizing activity in California. It is quite similar to Arizona's farm labor law, IB 2134.)

John Arena, grower representative to the Truth Squad, is the person who violated the instructions of the Arizona Ecumenical Council and released their report. Farm Bureau attorney, Jon Kyl admitted this at a meeting of a Young Republicans Club in Scottsdale, Arizona, on August 16, 1972. Arizona Ecumenical Council Executive Director, David Reed has also said that Arena acknowledged releasing the report.

Privately, a number of members of the Arizona Ecumenical Council have labeled the premature, incomplete Truth Squad Report "sophomoric," and "inaccurate." Yet when the preliminary document was leaked to the press on July 11, neither the A.E.C. nor the Truth Squad made any attempt to disassociate itself from the document. In fact, Rev. Gaston went to the Phoenix newspapers and defended the release of the report even though the A.E.C. had given instructions to the contrary.

At this point it became clear that the Truth Squad was incapable of preparing a fair and factual report. Appeals were made to various members of the Arizona Ecumenical Council to drop the entire project but no action was taken. John Arena continued to serve as Truth Squad advisor in spite of his betrayal of the A.E.C. and Paul Gaston continued to serve as Truth Squad Chairman. When the Report was officially released on September 20, 1972, A.E.C. Executive Director David Reed said, "The integrity of the committee (Truth Squad)

was never in question and is not now in question."  
(Phoenix Gazette, September 29, 1972, Second Front Page)

After the premature draft of the Truth Squad Report was leaked in July virtually all communication ceased between the Truth Squad and the United Farm Workers Union. "How could we trust them?" asked Gustavo Gutierrez, UFW organizer in Arizona. "We felt Gaston might distort any information we gave him and we knew they would reprint the allegations he had picked up in California and which had already been made public by the growers. We had no choice but to hope the report wouldn't hurt us too much. We hoped that church people would see through the Truth Squad."

#### Official Report Conceals Many of Its Defects

Many of the weaknesses of the Truth Squad Report are concealed from the reader of that report. For example, the individual reports of Robert Washington and Paul Gaston, which are used extensively to document the official report, are not available unless the reader is willing to pay \$15.00 to the Arizona Ecumenical Council for the "Appendix" to the Truth Squad Report. As the report is spread far and wide by grower and right wing publications it will be impossible for people to verify the documentation offered.

#### Conclusion

Our single conclusion is that the Truth Squad Report constitutes a disservice to Arizona churches and the people of those churches, to whom the report will be represented as "the truth" about Arizona's farm labor population.

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