

T H E Y A R D S T I C K

Catholic Tests of a Social Order

By

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DE TOLEDANO VERSUS CHAVEZ

This is the second of two columns on a new paperback entitled "Little Cesar." The book is a vicious diatribe against Cesar Chavez, Director of the United Farm Workers Organizing Committee. Written by a Washington journalist, Ralph de Toledano, it is being distributed under the trade name of a publishing firm, Anthem Books, which exists only on paper, if at all. Anthem Books, as reported in last week's column, is a poorly camouflaged front for the National Right to Work Committee, which, for lo these many years, has been carrying on a relentless, but not too successful, campaign against the so-called union shop.

Mr. de Toledano is perfectly free to lend his reputation and his journalistic talents (which by the way, are not very much in evidence in "Little Cesar") in support of this continuing campaign against any and all forms of contractual union security. But since he prides himself on being more ethical than some of his colleagues in the Fourth Estate, he might have been expected to come clean with his readers and let them know about his tie-in with the organization which is spearheading and financing the campaign.

Before this column appears in print, other reporters may and probably will have released more detailed stories on the hidden connection between Anthem Books and the National Right to Work Committee. My only purpose in referring to the matter again at this time is to call attention to the fact that, while Mr. de Toledano aims most of his fire at Cesar Chavez, he is really gunning for much bigger game.

In other words, "Little Cesar," written as it was under the auspices of the National Right to Work Committee, is an attack not only on Chavez and the United Farm Workers Organizing Committee, but also on AFL-CIO President George Meany and the officers of all the international unions affiliated with the AFL-CIO and of all the major independent unions (the Teamsters and the Auto Workers, for example) which are presently not affiliated with the Federation.

Be that as it may, Mr. de Toledano's pathological disdain (I almost said hatred) for Cesar Chavez as an individual literally knows no bounds and is spewed forth, page after page, with an utterly reckless disregard for the ethics of the reporter's trade.

Mr. de Toledano stoops down all the way into the gutter in a frantic effort to plant the totally false impression that Cesar Chavez was deliberately lying to the public when he claimed not to have taken any solid food during his 25-day penitential fast in the early stages of the California grape dispute. The slippery way in which de Toledano goes about "proving" this thoroughly indecent allegation is almost beyond belief. His only "proof" that Chavez was putting on a great big act and was deliberately conning the public about his celebrated fast is a completely unsubstantiated--and, to my personal knowledge, completely false--rumor relayed to him as a fact by an anonymous reporter.

Mr. de Toledano, in commenting on this unbelievably silly rumor, says very lamely that "this may be the bitterness they feel towards him speaking--or it may be true." This is a totally irresponsible statement coming from a journalist who,

earlier on in "Little Cesar," complains that coverage of the California grape dispute was badly distorted (in favor of Chavez, he maintains) and that one of the victims of this was "the ethics of the mass media, caught with its bias showing and a smug look on its face."

This strikes me as being, ironically enough, a perfect description of what has happened to Mr. de Toledano himself in just retribution for his disingenuous non-coverage of Chavez' penitential fast. He has been caught with his bias showing and has a smug look on his face.

It obviously makes no difference whatsoever to Mr. de Toledano whether the nasty little rumor referred to above is true or false. So far as I can judge from the record, he really couldn't care less. In other words, it is quite apparent that he never bothered to investigate the truth or falsity of the rumor and that his only purpose in reporting it, with poker-face impartiality, was to put the knife into Chavez once again and to do so with enough technical finesse to avoid getting involved in a costly libel suit.

Mr. de Toledano also leaves the impression that Chavez is an extremely dangerous Marxist-oriented revolutionary who, by deliberately cultivating a phony veneer of piety, has bamboozled naive churchmen of all faiths into thinking that he is really a peace-loving labor statesman. Here, too, he moves in on his hapless prey, quite characteristically, with just enough fancy editorial footwork to protect him against the charge of libel. In any event, even if he isn't guilty of libel in the technical sense of the word, he is certainly open to the charge--by the non-legalistic standards of ordinary human decency--of having tried repeatedly, and by the use of some rather scurvy tactics, to destroy the reputation of a man in comparison to whom he stands as a pigmy next to a giant.

Cesar Chavez is a great labor leader and a man of conscience and compassion. Like the rest of us, of course, he has his faults and imperfections and is certainly open to objective criticism.

Mr. de Toledano, incredibly enough, has never met the man and, in fact, seems to have gone out of his way to avoid meeting him.

But among those who know Chavez personally he is almost universally regarded, with deep respect and admiration, as being a very constructive figure in American society and a great credit not only to his own people, but to the nation as a whole. He will be remembered long after Mr. de Toledano and his unscrupulous diatribe against him are forgotten.