

El Malcriado 1968-1970

David Fishlow, Doug Adair, Mark Day, editors

In December, 1967, I returned to California for a family and social vacation. When I went up to Delano, Dolores Huerta told me that the Executive Board wanted to resume publishing the *Malcriado*, but that Cesar Chavez wanted it as an official part of the Union. I was the last remaining signer on the checkbook, so in a sense I was the legal "owner" (?) of the Farm Worker Press. Would I be willing to turn over the assets, copy rights, etc. of the Farm Worker Press, and help get the paper going again as a department of the union? I answered, "Of course", so she set about organizing a meeting with the Board.

The meeting turned out extremely stressful for me. Most of the leadership of the Union was there, Chavez, Huerta, Tony Orendain, Phillip Vera Cruz, Jerry Cohen, Jim Drake, others. Jim did much of the talking --- Under my stewardship of *El Malcriado*, he charged, the paper had become "shrill," off-message; had generated law suits which cost the union time and money and resources. The Perelli-Minetti law suit had cost each and every worker at the company 5 cents an hour in wages given up to settle the suit. The paper had embarrassed Chavez with supporters that we needed to mollify.

The proposal of the Board was for the paper staff to be housed in a new little building that had been moved to the Forty Acres. We and the Clinic people would be the only ones out there at first. After every issue had been written and pasted up, the final copy with headlines was to be submitted to Jerry Cohen for legal approval. I retained an independent check book, but Tony Orendain would be the overseer of our department and he had final approval of our budgets and expenses. The union would assign staff.

I took the criticism to heart, and had no problem with the loss of independence and union proposals. I, in turn, asked if I could try to recruit David Fishlow, an old high school and college friend, fluent in Spanish after service in the Peace Corps in Panama; and a professional journalist after employment with the Orange County Register. I had coaxed him to visit us in Texas, where Gil Padilla and I had gone to work to organize and recruit him to the movement. I also requested *Malcriado* veterans Marcia Brooks (Sanchez) and Rudy Reyes for the staff. The union also assigned Fred Hirsch, a plumber and union activist with a progressive outlook; and Sebastian Sahagun, who had worked for over 30 years in the Delano vineyards before helping launch the original strike in September, 1965.

We were also enriched by many temporary workers, Tom Dalzell and Freddie Chavez, who took over distribution and advertising that summer; Lisa Lee, an artist from San Francisco who did the beautiful calendar of *Malcriado* covers (we also added Christmas Cards to our "line" of products); Jaime Reyes, a student from South America; and many others. When Chuy Campusano, a young artist from San Jose, stayed to help us, some other departments complained that we were always recruiting staff "without authorization". But we saw anyone who stepped through the door as a possible worker.

During 1968 and until he left after a bad auto accident, Fishlow did most of the writing and much of the typing. When Jaime Reyes joined the staff, they shared these chores and Jaime translated articles written by the rest of us. The rest of the staff helped in typing and paste up. Sahagun was in charge of up-dating addresses and subscription for mail order. I handled orders for books and posters (including a new one of Pancho Villa), which generated more income than we were spending. As I remember, we generated over \$40,000 in income (not counting donations) in 1968, with only \$20,000+ in expenses.

Fishlow got along well with both the membership and the leadership. He hit it off with Orendain, an excellent writer in his own right, and encouraged him to submit articles. He interviewed Larry Itliong and Phillip Vera Cruz and incorporated the Filipino viewpoint in his writing. He even picked up a little Tagalog and Ilocano and could joke with the manongs. And he had a good working relationship with Chavez, and would meet with him to discuss themes to focus on (in addition to "The grape boycott grows stronger, day by day" in almost every issue...). For some time after the fast in 1968, Chavez was bed-ridden, and his time was very restricted, but Fishlow tried to involve him in every issue while he was in town.

After Fishlow left, Jaime Reyes and Fred Hirsch and Marcia Brooks Sanchez and I continued to write and put together the paper through 1969 and into 1970. We had inherited some ancient (but larger) addressing equipment, and had scored a new IBM selectric typewriter, a huge step up in typing. Then, when Cesar was out of town, Fishlow had gone to Orendain for approval to buy a \$3000 "Justowriter" machine, which typed up copy in neat columns. Chavez was apparently unhappy that such a big expense had been approved without his knowing, but seemed to blame Orendain as much as Fishlow. In general, he seemed pretty happy with Fishlow's overall performance. After Fishlow left, I made the effort, but had much less contact with Chavez.

An interesting service to the union came with the abortive negotiations with a handful of Coachella Valley grape growers in 1969. After gaining publicity for "negotiations in

good faith" and selling their crop, the growers announced that they were canceling negotiations, and called a press conference in L.A. to explain why it was the union's fault that no contract had been signed. I supplied Jerry Cohen with a copy of our California Highway Patrol Press Credentials, and we went down and crashed their press conference. After the growers gave their spiel, we got up and began asking pointed questions. Then the other reporters began directing questions to Cohen, ignoring the growers (who had rented the room). The growers were furious and threw us all out into the hall, where Cohen continued to take questions from the mainstream press and promote the grape boycott.

The *Malcriado* staff also took over purchasing and distribution of office supplies for the entire union after other offices moved out to the Forty Acres.

By the early months of 1970, we all realized that we were very close to winning the grape boycott, that a final push would bankrupt the industry if they refused to negotiate. Departments were to be stripped of personnel and I was to be assigned to Philadelphia. Mark Day was assigned to head *El Malcriado*, and he and Marcia Brooks Sanchez, with a skeleton staff, continued to put out the paper, in the same format, until the lettuce strike broke out in the summer of 1970.

During the 1968-70 period, the *Malcriado* staff, as part of the union, still retained considerable autonomy, and also retained its "malcriado" attitude -- irreverent, open to all the voices of farm workers, but also very aware of the demands of the boycott organizers in winning support. After the fast in early 1968, we became more and more vocal about the "non-violent" aspect of the struggle, but remained almost silent about the war, not wanting to alienate pro-war supporters among the unions, Democratic Party, and Catholic Church. We did have an article on Everett Alvarez, an early P.O.W. who was a relative of Andy Zermeno. After Hubert Humphrey was nominated in 1968, we all knew the union would be endorsing him for the November election. At the Delano meeting where we took the vote, Dolores Huerta gave the speech in his favor. I spoke up to urge that we be honest with the membership, that I thought he was a war criminal, that he had been Vice President for four years and had never visited Delano or spoken out for farm workers' rights. Rachel Orendain got up and denounced Humphrey in even stronger terms. The vote of the Delano staff was for "no endorsement". Votes from other offices and membership gave Humphrey a majority, and *El Malcriado* gave him tepid endorsement.

During this period, there was an explosion of activity in the student and especially Chicano communities. A steady stream of folks came through our office, hoping to start their own newspapers, asking for help. We would include them in layout and paste up chores, gave them permission to cut and paste cartoons and stories from our

papers and books, even ran ads in their papers to help them with finances (and sell our posters and books). We also had an easy relationship with the radical and alternative press. Folks who could not get an official interview with Chavez or Jim Drake would show up at the *Malcriado* office, where we could give them a radical spin.

In spite of our proficiency in Spanish under Fishlow's editorship, the paper was much more geared to promoting the grape boycott, in the English edition, than organizing farm workers through the Spanish edition. But we did serve the membership with articles on new contracts, details of the new health insurance plan, and other issues directly relevant to their lives. The paper had a circulation of over 10,000 copies at its peak, the majority being in the English edition.

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Doug Adair, 7/16/2009