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ITLIONG QUILTS

By Dick Meister

Larry Itliong, the assistant director of the United Farm Workers Organizing Committee since its very beginnings under director Cesar Chavez, resigned today with a great deal of anger, and in circumstances that could have serious repercussions in union circles and within the many non-union groups which have come into the farm workers movement.

Itliong disclosed his plans to resign to reporter Ron Taylor of the Fresno Bee, and then went into seclusion -- but not before voicing some very bitter words about the way he says the Organizing Committee is operating.

Itliong's most devastating complaint, surely, was a charge that the organization does not really represent farm workers anymore -- that it has strayed "from the thinking of farm workers," a charge that the Organizing Committee's grower opponents have been making from the very beginning, in the face of fierce and frequent denials from Itliong and others.

Itliong said he had no complaints about Chavez. "I have the greatest admiration for him," said Itliong, "and I am not quitting to make things harder for him."

Itliong's criticism was directed instead at Chavez' close advisers -- a group of lawyers, clergymen and other intellectuals who have devised and carried out so many of the Organizing Committee's frequently brilliant tactics. Itliong attacked this brain trust, as he called it, for having far too great an influence on Chavez, when the major influence on him should come directly from farm workers.

Instead of trying to understand the problems of farm workers as farm workers, Itliong charged, He, Chavez "is swayed by the grandiose thinking of these people, who have created this monster organization on behalf of the farm workers."

Those advisers to Chavez to whom I talked said they were mystified by the whole thing. Chavez said he had no idea Itliong felt that way. And the Organizing Committee's Board of Directors accepted his resignation with "sincere regret," praised Itliong's efforts for farm workers and promised to support him in his new efforts, which will be to try to develop low-cost housing for his fellow Filipinos.

Itliong gave some other reasons for his resignation, other than his unhappiness with the so-called Chavez brain trust. He said he was angered as well over the questions which the Organizing Committee's board has raised recently over continuing to pay him \$550 a month to support his wife and seven children, in addition to the \$5 a week which he received in salary as a union leader.

Itliong was unhappy as well over the lesser role given in Committee operations to Filipino farm workers. In the beginning, when the new drive to organize farm workers began in the

vineyards of Kern County six years ago, it was an organization of Filipino farm workers led by Itliong that dominated things.

It was the Filipinos who called the first strike in the vineyards back in 1965, only to be joined later by Chavez and his organization of Mexican-Americans. Later, the two groups merged. But it was Chavez and the Mexican-Americans who dominated the merged group, with Itliong and the Filipinos in a secondary role.

In recent years, in fact, Itliong really had very little to do except make occasional speeches as a substitute for the often ailing Chavez. And so now he's gone. But whether his leaving will be quiet or extremely noisy is still uncertain.