

TO: NATIONAL EXECUTIVE BOARD  
UNITED FARM WORKERS OF AMERICA

November 14, 1976

FROM: Nick Jones, Director, UFW BOYCOTT DEPARTMENT

Virginia Jones, UFW Boycott Administration Department

We are deeply concerned about what we perceive to be serious internal destruction of the United Farm Workers of America, AFL-CIO. We feel so deeply about this that we are hereby resigning from our positions in the Union so our concern might be heard objectively and constructively.

After twenty years of combined full time service to the UFW, we are deeply hurt and saddened by the circumstances leading up to this serious decision. We had fully hoped and expected to spend our entire working lives with the Union.

In resigning, we hope that our action will help correct an acute problem existing within the UFW concerning accusations and firings of full time staff based on the flimsy say-so, whims and innuendo which the accuser(s) are not held responsible to substantiate. We hope that our leaving will result in the Executive Board establishing written guidelines for handling accusations and grounds for firing full time staff.

Our decision is the result of incidences, all seemingly related, that have occurred since the UFW Executive Board meeting in September, 1976. They can best be summarized by saying that we feel we are no longer trusted by the UFW leadership and are seeing the disruptive and damaging results of that mistrust. There have been accusations of our harboring "leftists" and disrupters in the Union, the firings of staff suspected of being "subversives" and the transfer of some staff out of La Paz who are on the suspect list.

At the September NEB meeting, the first edition of the UFW's Union newspaper was criticized with the writer/editor and manager present along with officers and department heads. After some heavy criticisms concerning the new edition, Joe Smith, whom we helped recruit into the UFW four years ago, was accused of deliberately sabotaging the UFW by screwing up the articles in the new edition. Towards the end of the meeting Cesar asked for comments from the officers and department heads present. When it came my turn, I explained the necessity of checking out articles with officers of the Union before printing the paper and told how damaging the old union newspaper had been two years previous because it was constantly attacking AFL-CIO union and we had a difficult time explaining that to union officials in our boycott cities. I ended my criticism by defending Joe Smith's integrity saying that I had never been given any reason to suspect him of being a disrupter or spy. The union paper was shut down and the staff sent out to work on the Proposition. At personnel meetings recently, Joe Smith was again accused of being an "agent" and on November 13th, 1976, he was fired.

On October 6, 1976, Cesar phoned me at La Paz and among other things, accused Charlie March, the Northeast Division Director, of sending five volunteers to the Proposition Campaign in order to disrupt the Union. Cesar said that the five volunteers were either on their way or had recently returned from Red China and that they were going to attend some 'communist' school in Chicago. As far as we know, there has never been any effort made to require the accuser(s) who gave this information to Cesar, to be responsible for and substantiate this accusation. This is not to say that these volunteers should not have been terminated but that they, and others, should not be irresponsibly slandered. We recruited Charlie March three years ago in New England and know that he has no different ideology than UFW officers. He has never done anything detrimental to the Union and has provided faithful, above average, leadership to the Boycott Department. I answered Cesar's phone call by a memo on October 7th; a copy of which is attached to this resignation statement.

I requested a meeting with Cesar last week and we met for about an hour on the above subjects. I told Cesar that it was obvious that he and maybe other officers no longer trusted Virginia and me. He said that was true. He told me how people had infiltrated the UFW and were doing a lot of screwing up. He mentioned a woman from the Health Group and Joe Smith as examples. He thought that I knew the woman but I didn't. He said that I fell into one of three categories: a) I was one of them and leading the group of "leftists"; b) I was naive in letting the "leftists" into the Union; and c) I wasn't part of them but using them to gain some political advantage inside the UFW.

I told Cesar how we had always defended the officers and Union in our ten years on every issue and had always brought staff working under my direction into line on issues such as illegals, dropping the secondary boycott and the Israeli support statements. I told him that we had always fought negative sniping at the Union by any staff member. He said that he felt that I was responsible for bringing the spys into La Paz and that "time would tell if we were guilty." He told me how I had kept him informed about "splinter groups" but never "mainliners". He was referring to Communists and I told him I had never been given any reason to since I had never had any problems from communists. I told him that had I become aware of anything detrimental to the UFW stemming from communists, I would have informed him.

During a review of staff from the Proposition, Larry Tramutt said that Steve Rivers, who we recruited in New England, had acted strangely and was "always listening in on other people's conversations in the Proposition office and had screwed up Dolores' schedule during the campaign. He said that he shouldn't be trusted and as a result is being sent out of La Paz to the Boycott. Other staff from La Paz, some we worked with, have been transferred or fired in the past week.

All of the above happenings point out a serious and damaging problem that exists within our Union that have to be solved if we are to grow as a principled, effective Union. To any of our brothers and sisters who learn of the reasons for our resignations we will urge them to continue their dedicated service to the United Farm Workers Union as the only Union for U. S. farm workers. To the officers and leadership of UFW, we urge you to begin ending the real disruption by setting guidelines for fairly and responsibly weighing each staff member's work instead of basing decisions on chisme and cheap accusations.

To bury our heads concerning these problems and not deal with them will only slow our progress in building a union of and for the benefit of all farmworkers.

Our prayers and our active support will continue to be with you and the United Farm Workers of America as the struggle for dignity and justice and improved working and living conditions for farmworkers and their families continues.

  
Virginia Jones

  
Nick Jones

December 28, 1976

We are writing you all one more time because we are concerned about damage that might be caused to the Union stemming from our resignations. We were shocked to see our statement written up in the Los Angeles Times and cannot understand anyone turning it over to the press. It is hard to believe that anyone could have considered that act to be principled or helpful in solving internal problems within the Union. Our resignation was not a newsworthy event - it mattered to no one except people working within the Union.

The genuine and spontaneous response from staff to the firings and transfers speaks to the love, respect and concern that men and women working with the Union have for it. We are grateful for the many letters that we've received - they helped see us through a difficult time. Some people believe that the staff letters to the Board were organized by us - they were not and we hope that the Board will understand that some day.

Our point in resigning was made and there are signs that the Board is moving to establish guidelines which should prevent this kind of problem from turning into a major upheaval again. We had intended to promote a petition calling for staff rights in the form of a constitutional amendment - it was never printed nor distributed. We felt that such a move would be harmful to the Union at this time.

Now is the time to pull together and continue building a strong union for farmworkers. There will be a tremendously hard year ahead in winning field elections and building the boycott to win good contracts.

We are aware that the leadership of the Union is reacting very strongly to our resignation but if our action is to have any positive meaning then all staff must get behind the leadership and expect the best from them in terms of decisions and trust. The Union is under severe pressure because it is a decent union and it deserves the trust and respect from all of us.

We wish our best to Cesar, the staff and membership for 1977 - the year to build!

Viva la Causa!

*Nick Jones*

*Virginia Jones*