

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 documentaion. 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