Father Frank O'Loughlin: ...When I met the farm workers that was clear. You were either going to be a big part of these lives or you are not going to at all. The work thing was so absolute. The dominance of crew bosses, it's a given that what defines farm workers is powerlessness. Nobody knows what time you are going to work in the morning until the boss toots the horn outside the door. Nobody knows if you are going to work in the morning. They won't do you the ordinary courtesy of letting you know if there is work tomorrow, where it is and when you get on the bus you do not know where you are going. You neither know for how many hours you are going. From day one, from the time people put themselves in the hands of the coyote to come up, that's the thing that defines them. The crew boss was really the only figure and defined everything. I was having situations where, in terms just of church things, where the crew boss didn't release the bride to come to her own wedding. Where, when we were going to baptize kids, the crew boss would show up as the padrino, the godfather all the time. People had to go to the crew boss to be the godfather and that might have been immediate kind of economic benefit. That he'd pay for whatever kind of a celebration they'd have afterwards. But more than that, it was the idea of what the compadre relationship means. It doesn't even occur to us how much it means. Compadre, like when people greet one another, when the father of the family greets the guy who is the godfather to one of his children from that day on he always calls him compadre. They are no longer friends. They are in a relationship that we don't have anything reflecting that at all in our society. And so
obviously the attempt involved in trying to make a crew boss a compadre was an attempt to protect your family, to protect your kids. I remember it went along for a little while until the crew boss said to me one day, as we were just finishing he starts this whining and he is dressed to kill, he says, "Father, what's the matter with our people, what is the matter with our people? I've got all these slouches over there guzzling beer in the camp. What don't they pick themselves up together? What is going on with the young men?" I just flipped out. What role model do they have except a son-of-a-bitch like you. So I just went completely over the top. (Laughter) So that was the end of this guy coming in as the (Pause). He was running the blue camp as they call it now. He was running that housing on the other side of the tracks there, the double decker thing, keeping crews there for an outfit that at that time was called American Foods. Just absolutely, totally dominated the people's lives. One of my first little marks of success was a nice one. We had an open air dance in front of the church there. It was Mexican Independence Day which was really dumb on my part. During the night people started firing the pistols. So I had the guys run around and put an end to it. When it came to midnight they just went crazy and all night long the crew boss sat there in a deck chair with a bottle on the ground beside him and presided. When he got up to dance people stood and watched. It was astonishing to see that, a ( ). When the guns really started going off I went over to the band and said, "It's over, goodnight. Finish this tune and we are out of here." Then he set in on me. "You see who wrecked the evening, these young
Turks whom you've got sucking on your thumb." All this vile comes out. I was thrilled. It was the first time. It had never occurred to me that we had actually impacted the system at all until that moment. Then he starts with all of his resentment about the fact that just having this little service center in town had undercut his authority and how do they do it? In the smallest ways. It just meant that a fellow with a family who fell out with a crew boss had no recourse, nowhere to go. With just this little service center there you could afford to fight with him. It was all mighty small stuff but it had that.

Robert Korstad: Sometimes those little things like that that change those relationships show people that other things can be changed too. Those are the things we are struggling for sometimes.

FO: Exactly. I was the guy who went up there thinking the union was it and until we had the union we had nothing. Then something like that comes along. When I got the two nuns I'd been there twelve months. As luck would have it, on the same day two pairs of nuns showed up. One pair were these activist sisters who were working with the farm workers, Pearl McGivney. You've got to meet Pearl McGivney and Alicia ( ). They lived with the farm workers, worked as farm workers and were totally dedicated to the unionization. Pearl had spent a lot of time working in California with UFW. They were looking me over to see if they would consider working with me. On the same day these two sisters of the Sacred Heart came in, now the sisters of the sacred heart were running the poshest Catholic schools in the nation and were terrifically
well educated. This was a complete innovation for some of them to be doing this kind of work. To my own astonishment by the time the day is over, I wanted the two Sacred Heart sisters and not the two union people. I don't know if the two union people would have come to me anyway. But the reason was, in the course of twelve months I had decided that the (    ) powers and the policy (    ) and all the rest of the folks inside that community who had some kind of a vision for the place were necessary to the whole thing and that the purely adversarial thing wasn't going to do it. That was one piece of it. Another piece of it was that as things panned out, of course, there was no future here for the union anyway. Giving credit, Cesar Chavez was really upfront about that always, never ever gave anybody in Florida the impression that he was the answer to Florida's problems. But somewhere in around that same time he stayed with me one time and he was the one who would be dismayed to see when people started laying hopes on his program, that he just knew they could never deliver. He said it cost twenty thousand dollars, twenty million dollars to get us set up in California, paid by the big unions. It would cost forty million dollars in Florida. There are no big unions who are going to pay it. It's not going to happen.

RK: What was the problem? Was Florida any different than California or say Texas other than just the resources were greater? Was there something different about the workers or the jobs?
FO: The workers are a lot different in Florida than California. When I first went down to Texas Valley I was astonished to find that there were Mexican Americans at every level. When I first met Mexican American social workers I was surprised. But they are there at every level of society. In Florida, no such thing existed. Just the elementary levels of development, of community leadership didn't exist. Then we were a right to work state. We had a legislature that actually contemplated making it a crime to advocate farm worker organizing. They actually discussed a bill. I remember one time we sent thousands and thousands of letters to a fellow called Tucker who was the Speaker of the House at the time. Everybody was amazed that we were able to muster. This was still at the stage when people like Teddy Kennedy were getting up addressing the Democratic Convention as fellow letters boycotters. We were able to generate massive amounts of mail and sent it to Tallahassee which gave the impression that there was a lot more organization there than ever really existed. You are going to talk to somebody else about the prior attempts at unionizing, right? ( ) completely disastrous. The crew bosses took the money and upped the piece rates as long as the money was there. Then the whole thing was all over. There was no Jerry Brown in Florida. I don't know that there ever would have been a union in California if it hadn't been for Jerry Brown.

RK: You had a middle class out there that would intervene.
First of all, he gave them a piece of law they could work with which one jerk too many took it away and weren't able to survive. Anyway, Cesar was not holding out any real hopes at all. There was no pretense that it could be done. (   ) believing, but you quickly got passed the stage. I used to go to meetings where what we did was bash everybody who wasn't a union organizer. Bash everybody else who purported to be interested in the welfare of farm workers and ask them, "Why are you working at that job when you ought to be organizing?" That had happened with the ministers and the Protestant church groups that were doing farm worker ministries. They had gone over to that. It was a time when all the small churches, like all the Methodist churches and so on, in rural areas were all committed to Florida farm worker organizing. The farm bureau club just did an excellent job of reorganizing and taking over all of those church women united groups under (   ) and straightening all of that out pretty well. There is a remnant of it still in Karen Woodall. Do you know Karen? I think of Florida Impact is a Protestant lobbying group in Tallahassee. Up to a couple of years ago Karen Woodall was the one who ran it. She's still a farm worker lobbyist in Tallahassee. She is going to run for office right now. But if you are in touch with Rob Williams, you'll be in touch with Karen Woodall. Nobody could do better at giving you the legislative history than her. (Pause) Where in the hell was I going with this?
RK: Let me back up a little bit. There's one thing I'm interested in, however much you want to talk about it. When you were growing up, say when you went to seminary, did you envision this kind of role for yourself?

FO: Tomorrow I have a confirmation here for forty-five Irish tinkers, itinerants. I don't know how many generations it's been since they left Ireland but they continue to be itinerants. They are not gypsies in that they do not belong to those European gypsy nations but they have always been around. The very first Sunday morning that I stood in front of the church here which was down Military Trail here, West Palm Beach and at that time it was the absolute western edge of the town... Up out of the parking lot appear these blazen red heads over pasty white faces with big freckles. I looked and I said geeze, they are tinkers. (Laughter) Where did they come from? It was just instantly a reaction thing. Sure enough they were. There was a wonderful fellow called Tom Riley. It was his family coming in. I kind of had of had a little bit of contact with them ever since. So they are gathering now from all over the place around the southeast here tomorrow night and about forty-five of them are going to receive their confirmation because they are pretty much outside the structure. They have towns of their own. There's a place called Murphyville in Georgia where they check in. The young people still get married very, very early and nobody fights them on that. Like the church here gives people such a hassle now. It
is hard for somebody to get married in the Catholic church anymore. They put you through so many loops before they say yes.

Nobody argues with them about these early marriages or anything else because the community life is such that all of this stuff works. They really take care of one another. When they're on the phone they'll talk about somebody's sick out in Texas and everybody in Florida is all worrying to death about somebody out in Texas and making provision for him. They are on the roads. How in the devil anybody can live, can you imagine an Irish (    ) living on the roads? They refused to be settled down. There have been all kinds of programs all throughout my lifetime trying to get them to settle down. Housing has been built. At the first ray of sunshine in spring they are on the road again. (Laughter)

So, rural Irish people. . . Ireland's changed radically since I was (     ). Irish people would never say no to a tinker. It was a religious matter. When this lady and her shawl with a baby under her arms knocked on a farm house door and asked for flour she walked off with half the flour in the house or sugar or whatever. Now I grew up, born in 1941, I grew up in what was a really, really tough postwar climate there, where there was still a lot of rationing and all the rest of it. But it would never occur to somebody if a tinker woman knocked on the door and asked for tea not to give her half the tea in the house and tea was very toughly rationed, expensive, or half the sugar or whatever with full knowledge that another one may show up the next day. I think
that means something. My crowd wasn't that rural or anything and they weren't necessarily that, they certainly weren't kind of traditional but the climate was there everywhere. The down side of all of that was that at the end of the market day type of thing, cops would go out and just absolutely brutalize these people and drive them off the streets and drive them out of town with a terrific show of brutality. They were beating drunk men over the heads as they just fell and bled right in front of them.

I remember that as part of it. When occasionally I have had an argument with somebody, some of my confers around the place about bothering people with this quote "social gospel" kind of thing and all the rest of it, I've often found myself taking a guy out and saying where in the hell did you get your religious thing? It wasn't from devotions and pieties, it was from this real stuff that people like your father and mother took for granted. So there is a bit of that stuff or something like that. In my case it was all pretty accidental. I arrived into that church down at West Palm Beach and farm workers began to show up there. I had no context at all for any of this, no idea.

RK: You were young.

FO: I was twenty-three years old. I looked like I was seventeen. People were coming in and some guy was bringing his wife in for marriage counseling and he was dropping dead when he saw this kid sitting behind a desk. (Laughter) People were coming up to the church and it sounds a little overdramatized but
they were coming with dead babies in those early days because that was the era of the uncapped wells and the parathium poisoning in the camps where there was storage of chemicals and so on and it was all very badly handled so there were a lot of problems.

RK: So these were people coming in from the migrant areas?

FO: They were Mexicans. I was just south of Southern Boulevard down here and there were people living right out on Southern Boulevard in camps. So I was just beginning to get the hang of it. I didn't have the language really. I didn't have anything to offer them. I had no clue what was going on with them. I remember the kind of figure who I'd meet at the funeral home and I remember the figure who would pass the hat and collect the money to pay the funeral home and all of that kind of thing. Then people weren't allowed in town then. This was September, 1965 I arrived. They were discouraged from being in town and there was no missing the car with the tassels around the windshield. (Laughter) So the cops would just run them out of town all the time. That was a reflex with Delray Beach, Boynton Beach. Up along the way there they would just chase them out of town. It was rather like my Irish tinkers here. Then you began to gather that the preference of the crew bosses was for having people do company store stuff. They liked to supply not only the housing and so on but the food and that was all part of their leverage over the people. The rule of thumb was that as little money as possible should change hands. But now I wasn't really
into the thing. I began to do little bits and pieces. There was a community in Westgate which is the south side of Okeechobee Road here and I know a Pentecostal minister who had a lot of housing there, no electricity, no water - just desperate but it was outside the city. When the people came back off the stream they'd come to us for their initial rent payments and so on. It was twenty-five dollars, which then was a good deal. I was getting a hundred a month myself. So we would always pay the twenty-five dollars and at the same time I'd always call the health department to make a complaint about the sewage running down the street, this kind of thing. They'd give them a couple of days notice. The wife of this guy would walk down the street with a couple of bottles of Clorox or something and pour as she walked down the street. That satisfied the county. Part of that housing is still there. They have had fires in that thing relatively recently.

Then it was a nun called Aquinus. Aquinus was also Irish in a community of Americans down here. But Aquinus was just constantly with these people. She couldn't drive and so she always had to hustle a ride. She would come after guys like me for help. She would go around and browbeat parish priests into giving money and old clothes and this extraordinary single handed kind of a thing by this Mother Theresa figure. She just became very big for me. She would round me up then for visits to the people's home and trying to do church stuff with them. I wasn't good at it. First of all I didn't have the language.
RK: These were mostly Hispanic?

FO: Yeah. I wasn't well disposed to walk into one of these hovels where the smell of urine was absolutely overwhelming and to stick to everything you touched. You could sit in a chair and know that you were going to stick to it. I never in my life picked up a baby in a house like that that didn't pee on me. It never failed. I wasn't a bit happy to be offered food. (Laughter) And Aquinus was just marvelous at breezing through this and organizing kids from the Catholic high school called Cardinal Newman down there, organizing those kids to take care of after school activities with them, do a little bit of homework and so on with the kids. Just really kind of pioneering all that kind of stuff because nobody knew it and nobody had any handles on what ought to be done or how to do it.

RK: Kind of learning as you go.

FO: But she was the great presence of the thing. She finally got herself a station wagon at some stage, came out of a meeting and was followed out the door by this terrifically authoritarian bishop we had at the time, Coleman Carroll. As she was about to back out of her slot she saw him standing there looking at her so she reverses directly into the car behind her, goes forward into the car in front and knocks out three cars in a matter of a minute because she couldn't drive at all. He was shouting, "Get that woman out of that car!" (Laughter) And of course he's paying for the insurance. That was how she did. One
day she goes in because she was having trouble with her vocal cords of some sort and the doctor says, "I can't operate on her because this woman is so exhausted physically that she is a ninety year old." She was probably fifty. She had just completely spent herself in what wasn't very organized stuff but just being a presence with the people. Then I had a few folks myself who would do some other kinds of things. There was one woman Anna Haney who was a Cuban, a Cuban who had lived her entire life in the United States. Her family owned hotels here or something. But just a desperate alcoholic and then in between bouts she would do a lot of good stuff and so organized. We would go out Southern Boulevard and she had people who'd go out there in the mornings. When the kids were supposed to be getting on the school buses they would get out there ahead of that and meet the kids and put clothes on them because a lot of the migrant kids would come out of the housing ostensibly to go to school but when the bus came along they would turn shy and they would hide in the ditch and not get on board because they didn't have shoes or they didn't have whatever or because they were going to be ridiculed by the other kids. There was that informal kind of stuff. Carrying around in the trunk of the car and just putting it on the kids right then and there. Then they would proudly get on the bus and go on into school. Nobody had any big philosophy about this but we were just responding to people. In the case of any of those people, myself included, it is religious. It is a sense of ... If I have an
overriding kind of thing, this whole arrangement is a lie about life. In the farm workers' situation, that's what you are saying to people. You are saying, "This is a damn lie about life! This is a lie about you. This a lie about God. This is a lie about everything." We just have to show faith of God in this and do something. So I don't have any really fancy collaboration sort of a thing.

RK: That is a pretty sophisticated one.

FO: That's a gut thing and you go on. It all changes when you are around the people and it takes on other kinds of dimensions all together. I started off, I went from West Palm Beach into Miami, Hialeah. What I was doing was the advocacy stuff. I met the UFW people and the very first day that I met them they had a program on Channel 2, public television, a half hour call-in program. I met them at lunchtime and that evening their hot shot who was at that time Cesar Chavez's right hand man was supposed to do the program and I went with him to the studio for the program and he didn't show up and the organizer, a young American woman, he was a Chicano, Robbie Jaffey was this young ... typically that period when she had become involved with him at the university and she had come to Miami to be the organizer on this spot in Miami with the assistance of a few farm workers who had come in from California. So Robbie put me on the call-in show. I remember just taking off all of the propaganda material that I had seen for the first time at midday and spreading it out on the desk
in front of me. They had a set of photographs. A fellow at the Palm Beach Post had won a Pulitzer for photographs of migrant workers in (   ). These things were put on an easel and they were just, the camera focused on those as an intro and they were just tipping off these. While that was going on I was reading off farm workers statistics off the notes. (Laughter) The very first draw was against the Department of Labor who crunched me whatever kind of question he had. I remember like that instant where his statistic is the fine years and you know and you are going to come off like a liar right away. Then saying, "Well is it true that and is it true that and is it true that?" The guy certainly disappeared off the air. (Laughter) So I was into this thing. I started going around doing that, trying to build up a constituency for the whole farm worker thing. It was marvelous. The biggest problem I had with it was that you could really browbeat people with the stuff. I'm afraid I am prone to doing things like that.

I would be standing in front of a group, the Miami Business Women's Association or something, doing this stuff and it turned out there was a cinch to get everybody to jump in their purse and come up with five or ten dollars. What we were trying to do was to get them to join the boycott and make resolutions supporting the boycott and send notice back into the kitchen that was just serving the meal that they wouldn't have the lettuce, thank you. (Laughter) But I found that it was very tough. They had a lot of burnout among their people. We had these long discussions and I
was always saying to them, "This is a nonviolent movement, you know. If we don't do violence to people, we'll last." We have got to be more careful about how we present the whole thing and not browbeat people and try to offer them avenues where they can have a real response. But the truth was, that's pretty thin soup going around doing advocacy stuff. We had great successes when we had thirty-five thousand people turn out for Cesar Chavez rallies.

Of course, I loved the crowd, the people who were working with us. I loved being around all of these young idealistic people who had picked up on this thing. That was the only kind of nurture in it. It was not by a long shot - and there were big mistakes in that the farm workers would arrive in from California, entire families, at one stage like ten or fifteen families at once to work on the boycott, bringing with them all the bloody tensions and problems and everything else that that kind of thing entailed, being stuck into very inadequate kind of housing arrangements. I can spend time doing this if you want me to because it was a big piece of that whole strategy. It was romantic as the devil that initially people just got on trains out of California and rode them to wherever the grapes were going or the lettuce was going and found themselves unloading in Boston or unloading in Chicago and getting off at that point and going right out and starting to organize the boycott. It was pretty amazing stuff but the upclose reality of that kind of thing when you have whole families, some of them living in church basements or the nearest things to
basements, was terrible. People experienced real difficulties and what do you when in the middle of your model families you find you've got a wife beater? It was really quite extraordinary.

RK: This is their kind of organizational structure or the means they were using?

FO: That was the UFW thing. Some of it was marvelous. Old Cesar himself riding around the country on these endless fasts. His back very ... he had a bad back from the work to begin with and his back very badly deteriorated because of the fasting. Actually riding in a hammock in the back of a van constantly, only standing up long enough to speak. It had a very unreal side to it. You can talk to some of those people still. There's a guy called Jerry Brown at FIU who was part of that.

RK: So that strategy, I mean, after a while that kind of strategy didn't seem like it was going to be...

FO: Then I used to go up into the fields and I was really hilarious in the fields. I'd show up in a town where ostensibly farm workers were organized and you discover there's a hiring hall. People are coming through the hiring hall every morning and being dispatched. When they come up to the counter they hand in their name, a different guy every morning handing in the same name. The crew bosses were just running people through. The thing was a bit of a farce. Now it is coming up to a stage where you are going to need a vote at CocaCola and nobody has any assurance at all of how this thing is going to go because the fact
is you don't actually have a solid workforce. So then it's start
going out into the fields and talking to the workers. By then I
could be understood in Spanish and could pretty much understand
what they were saying to me but American black workers couldn't
figure out what the hell they were saying. It was fine while I
was talking but when they asked me a question I didn't know what
to say. (Laughter) Marvelous. It was great. As a kid I would
listen to the boxing matches on the radio which meant in Ireland
that you stood up all night to listen to the fight. I was full of
this Muhammad Ali, Sonny Liston kind of thing and Sonny Liston's
hands which were bigger than hams. I'd go out into the groves and
a guy shakes my hand and my hand feels like a pencil in his and
his callouses are bigger than my fingers. I'm watching these guys
picking oranges. I remember them just knocking them off the
trees, just bringing them all down and then just picking them up.
Where I would be going two, three, four, five into the bag these
guys were going (Swish) a dozen oranges at the time. It was just
extraordinary, just magnificent. So loving the guys, full of all
kinds of amazement at them and awe, and feeling like you were
pretty much on the same wavelength about all this kind of thing,
but not ... rather difficult decision and do the kind of thing
that you want to do there which is hear them out, listen to their
stuff. I missed a lot. I missed the whole business where you
could have had a very rich kind of ... these guys could have put
in this marvelous rich stuff ... It was easier with white farm
workers obviously and there were still plenty of white farm workers around. Then it began to be easier with they Hispanic crowd. It is one of the marks of this whole thing that you have a guy here and chances are if some coaches get their hand on his son that they are going to have run-in with the Olympics. Just magnificent, incredible human specimens out there picking damn oranges and is a mule or is valued less than a mule. And then he is displaced the very first time that a more exploitable worker appears. He's off, he's finished. It's time to go. He hasn't a ghost of a chance of hanging onto his job when a five foot Guatemalan shows up for whom it is sudden death to go up a thirty foot ladder with ninety-five pounds of oranges hanging around his neck. But the guy has no recourse against that because the measure of desirability in the groves is your vulnerability to exploitation.

RK: That's interesting.

FO: The latest study must be cockeyed. There is a Department of Labor study, a very recent one on the makeup of farm workers in the country right now. It has to be crazy because everybody in the study is Mexican. Once you go up to Fort Pierce and all the way up to Apopka you will find there are tons of black farm workers still there. One of the things they tried to do a few years ago was to try to get people to fight H-2. H-2 is the program under which people come in to cut the sugarcane. Workers are brought in to do a specific task which ostensibly no American
is willing or able to do with an H-2 visa which only lasts as long as their employer wants them and they are sent back and Belle Glade is the H-2 town. ( ) Belle Glade which is now an Immokalee, the really labor intensive vegetable thing. But the post-Castro sugar company town where the Americans were just thrown out because a more vulnerable worker was available. I was going around for a long time trying to say to any black organization that would listen that the expansion of H-2 was going to be a terrific disaster for Florida rural blacks. The thing is there isn't anybody interested in organizing and working for Florida rural blacks, Jesse Jackson type program there or one of your ( ). The typical type black caucus guys in Congress, they are not interested in it. I was having (End of Tape 1 - Side 1)

Tape 1 - Side 2

FO: ...where people either make their income at harvesting or they supplement their income anyway at harvesting. But H-2 expansion hasn't actually happened. We keep waiting for them. In the grand scheme that's what the industry imagines it will do. But at the moment it is just one of those things like mechanization, it is one of those things that seems inevitable. It always seems inevitable but they haven't crossed over yet because this year the expenses don't merit it. And those fellows have been displaced by the most recently arrived people. During
my time, somewhere in the seventies, a few breakthroughs were made in terms of minimum wage for farm workers. When I started off they did have the special farm worker minimum wage which applied in special circumstances. When they were brought in under, the regular men were, workers protections came along for farm workers thanks largely to Florida rural legal services guys. That's when they began to emerge, the industry simply switched off using American workers. The citrus combines, the juice to recruit actively in Mississippi and Arkansas and all over the place simply stopped going there. And initially the thing was that they were going to Texas Valley instead which is a euphemism for bringing in illegals. From the beginning the people I had known from down here were Tex-Mex and then there were more Mexican workers coming in. The crew bosses that I knew were Tex-Mex and Chicanos. In those days I wasn't around for vagrancy laws. Somebody will have to take you through the vagrancy law where crews were rounded up by the sheriff's department and then the employers went and bailed everybody out and took them. Well, I think I was around for some of it in relation to Immokalee but I don't have any clear stuff about it. But I remember Immokalee with winos on the streets trying to get back to Miami. They would have been taken out of Miami when they had been picked up on a drunk. They'd have done it a few weeks out in the fields by now and now they would have drifted back into town in Immokalee and would be trying to get back home. So I do remember that part of it. You don't see them
on the streets in Immokalee now as then but Immokalee still has - you'll go to Immokalee right? You've got to because I think that's the old fruit and vegetable town that Belle Glade was when (     ) captured it. The sisters up in Immokalee run this big soup kitchen which has got to be the biggest soup kitchen there is in terms of the numbers. I used to go there and you could spend half of your day just making sandwiches for people. Anyway, I think I basically missed that whole vagrancy law bit. But then came a similar role to my mind by the border patrol which would show up to move people along. Not deport people but give them extended roundtree departure. When they grabbed them they would simply have them sign the roundtree departure papers and the people would go, which isn't extended (         ) roundtree departure. So they would agree to be out of the country in three weeks which only meant move up the road. That was the only time I think that they saw them. But I don't remember that there was any other real border patrol activity except that kind of shuffle them along there and get them moving. The big change came with Reagan and a campaign called Operation Jobs. Early in the Reagan era when the economy took a downturn the line was that Americans were losing jobs to these workers who were coming to Florida. The automobile workers in Detroit beat up the Chinese guy they met on the street and killed him because they were angry at Japanese cars. That was an extraordinary era. Rob Williams would describe it well for you. He would describe Immokalee well. People
didn't come out of their homes for a week because the border patrol was in town. It was just this terrific brand of terror. People were putting their kids to bed at night and then they were going out and sleeping in the woods in anticipation that the border patrol would come and kick in the door in the morning. In Indiantown people would come and get you when something was going on. Go down to the Roach Palace and they would have roused everybody out of bed, would be loading them into the vans. I remember a woman screaming at this big, tall Texan, border patrolman, you know, "How did you get into a filthy line of work like this?" (Laughter) He says, "Beats the hell out roping cattle in Texas, lady." (Laughter) That's one whole piece of any study of the thing. The uses of immigration law to keep a group of people who were probably, whom it is anticipated anyway, will be upwardly mobile from leaving these lower echelon jobs. The whole game, we went through this entire business of the writing of that vast immigration reform and control act. The clear ambivalence of the country about what it's to do with the thing, they know they need not less than half a million young workers a year and probably higher than that. They know that the only argument is about on what terms they are supposed to come in. The question is whether you are going to allow them to. If they are going to have papers they are not long for agriculture, not as agriculture is set up now. So the California growers and their course of all that they never wanted anything else but what they
currently had which was this informal flow of workers back and forth. The Florida growers were in different camps. One was the Florida Fruit and Vegetable Growers Association view. They are the people who bring in the H-2 cane cutters and apple workers further up the east coast. Of course, that's their business to bring in these people. They are inclined to ... you will probably talk to them. Will you talk to them?

RK: It is conceivable, yes.

FO: Walter Cates will talk to you about long term plans for farm workers, big companies using the same workers year-round, still migrating to their farms in the north and coming back down. I have had long, long conversations with him about all of this, with paid vacations and pension plans and all the rest of it. (Laughter) He has got a ways to go before he convinces anybody in the industry. George Zorn is the real boss of the outfit and Walter Cates is like the number two. Anyway, that was their view of the thing. They would have liked to see the amplification of their program by just a huge... There was talk, I don't know if you remember any of this, but there was talk about contracts with various countries to send laborers. I think like Red China offered a terrific deal with a foreman for every ten men. There was a brief period there where countries were falling over one another to send workers. I thought the thing was going to go haywire. The head of the presidential select commission that Jimmy Carter set up to look at the whole immigration scene was
Father Hesberg, the president of Notre Dame who had been running the civil rights thing right from the beginning, all the way through until Nixon came. Well Carter brought him back now to do the new civil rights thing which was the one for immigrants. I mean I was nobody in this thing but when I did get to talk to Hesberg I was trying to solve the Palm Beach county picture like we are the people who know H-2 and we are the ones who know that this is the worst brutalization all together of people than the worse that happens in the informal thing with the crew bosses and the coyotes. And when this bill passes we've got to kill H-2. Hesberg was saying that, "No bill without H-2 and you've got to give us time to do these things." And it took ten years of lawmaking to put teeth in the civil rights act. And it will take a few years of lawmaking to make this new immigration act work. In the course of that, we'll get rid of H-2. And I'm saying, that would be nuts. Like you give them H-2, you'll never take it back. There is no way in the world you will take it back from them. But I was convinced at that stage that H-2 was going to just take over the whole deal. But it has its own deficit which is you've got to house the workers and nobody wants to go back to being responsible for the camps. When I came to town there were big, big farm labor camps in Florida. Then they became, they just won't bear scrutiny so nobody wants to go back. There are camps everywhere but nobody acknowledges that there are camps and their crew bosses have them rather than the growers. That was a piece,
that's one of the things that stops them. (Pause) Anyway, where am I going with this?

RK: One thing I need to do is...

FO: Because it's small you can, it has some kind of manageable dimensions and you can see a few people and they can be models of some of the things. But it has never been you know as devastated as say Belle Glade or Immokalee has been. It also has this difference, it is no small growers. It is all corporate. The Immokalee thing is more, Immokalee is in Collier County. Collier is Collier's Magazine once upon a time and all that kind of thing and it's the Collier County Corporation. They make up the whole county. There are only two families of Colliers left as far as I know involved there. What they do, then, is they lease the land to these growers and they supply them with all their seedlings and that kind of stuff. Even the gas stations in a place like Immokalee may belong to the corporations. Anyway, what are the farmers doing? They are speculative farmers. Nobody cans Florida vegetables. They are too expensive. They grow them for peak market periods. They target and if they miss their targets then they plow them under. So they may not be worth the cost of harvesting. That bears a lot on the workers because that's the reason that you want a massive pool of workers around who have no claims on them suddenly the day that you want them. Then on the same day everybody else in town wants them. Formerly when I first started on this thing, there was plenty of workers and one of the
things they were fighting about was short handled hoes and all that kind of stuff. Well, there's no hoeing at all now. It is all grown in plastic. There is no room for, you will see vegetables growing in plastic just as you pass the turnpike on your way out now, there is no room for working between. That all adds to the problems of the workers. The old formula of having a hiring hall would reduce, radically reduce the number of workers in an area at any one time waiting for jobs and give regular work to the ones who had seniority. To stabilize everybody would mean that people would then require a home. It would mean that the kids would then go to school. Just completely change the whole thing. This big free floating pool was one of the disasters of this thing. So free floating that they will take workers all the way from Fort Pierce down to Devil's Gardens near Immokalee to pick lemons in a day and they probably pick up fifteen bucks a piece. Just full of all kinds of craziness. But to put shape on it, I suppose you do things like that. Why does the industry behave the way it does? That preference for this big, big pool is a piece of it. That comes out of that very strange speculative thing. A guy may make a couple of million dollars in a field of strawberries or he may miss the market and not make anything.

RK: So it is really important to kind of almost keep these people impoverished in a way so that you can get them when you need them and they can't make any demands on you the rest of the time?
FO: Right. Once they start acquiring any kind of protections the system begins ( ) cut softly. Now what happens when someone comes along and offers daycare? What do you do now? This is, the wage work out in Pahokee was kind of a (         ) and would just be right upfront about it. We have daycare, where are we going to get our poor ignorant workers? Straight upfront with it. We were in Tallahassee last year doing the lobbying this access to farm labor camps. Are you familiar with that? There was a bill to try to allow access for advocates and so on to farm labor camps. It was solemnly defeated. I was going around the day after the vote appealing to people to rethink it for next year which was this year but it was defeated again this year but not in the same way. Anyway, people were offering to help. There is one guy there who is a prominent legislator and he said I want to carry that next year. I want to work with you. He is a big grower himself over in Monticello. The whole thing was going along swell and they were great and I'm coming down to see you and you are going to take me out and you are going to show me. With me I have three farm workers because when we were doing that kind of lobbying... One of them was a Spanish speaking woman. Every time that we headed out that day she always went with me. I didn't get why at the time. She can follow the conversation but when she speaks she has to speak in Spanish herself. Another woman, Margarita Simmons, translates for her. All her interventions are always terrific. I am delighted with her. But
she says something to this guy and he is suitably impressed and then Margarita Simmons goes on to say you know, her daughter is the first kid in our whole area in Ruskin, Florida in the Hispanic farm working community, she is the first kid ever to finish high school. And he swings around in his chair, his back was almost to me, swings around in his chair and says, "There you go, you son-of-a-bitch. That's you right to the hilt. Everyone of these people have got to go to college right?" That's always there. You've done all of this nice guy talk with all of these people and he just absolutely flipped out and said, "And you are going to take our farm workers away from us."

RK: Try to make these people into something.

FO: "And send them all off to college." Now that was 1991.