

AGAINST VIOLENCE IN THE MOVEMENT!

Denver Crusade for Justice broadens its threats against movement activists

[The use of violence as a way of resolving political differences within the movement is an issue of concern to all who favor social justice.

[The following materials relate to recent incidents of violence and physical intimidation by members of the Denver Crusade for Justice against movement activists with whom that Chicano organization has differences, most of these materials are reprinted from the *Militant*.

[The "Declaration Against Violence in the Movement" printed below has been signed by more than fifty people, including leaders and activists in the Denver Chicano community and prominent national leaders of the Chicano, Puerto Rican, and Black movements. The declaration calls on the Crusade leadership to repudiate the use of violence against opponents within the movement.]

By Olga Rodríguez

The latest issue of *El Gallo*, publication of the Denver Crusade for Justice, contains threats of violence against movement activists who signed an appeal calling on Crusade leader Rodolfo "Corky" Gonzales to renounce violence as a way to settle differences within the movement.

The "Declaration Against Violence in the Movement" was circulated following an unprovoked assault on SWP leaders Fred Halstead and Steve Chainey in the Crusade's headquarters in early October (see the *Militant*, October 15, 1976). It has been signed by more than forty prominent movement activists, including many in the

Denver Chicano community.

In addition to the threats in *El Gallo*, there have been acts of vandalism and further threats against the Socialist Workers party and Young Socialist Alliance in Denver.

Olga Rodríguez is a member of the National Committee of the Socialist Workers party.

On October 23, book displays were upset and the glass door kicked in at the Militant Bookstore and SWP headquarters in Denver. On October 26, the tires on the car of YSA organizer Bruce Farnsworth were slashed while his car was parked near the building where the Metropolitan State College YSA office is located.

There were no witnesses to this incident. However, witnesses to the vandalism at the SWP's offices said the man who kicked in the door shouted that SWP and YSA members would be attacked again if they continued to associate with Elfege Baca. The man has not been identified.

A member of the YSA, Baca has been threatened by Crusade members.

The issue of *El Gallo* (dated September, but printed in late October) is filled with outrageous and irresponsible slanders against Baca, the SWP, the YSA, and signers of the "Declaration Against Violence in the Movement."

Five out of twelve pages in *El Gallo* are devoted to articles and "letters" of this type. Included in the paper is a large cartoon on page 2 labeling the YSA, the Mafia, CIA, and FBI as "Birds of a Feather."

A "letter" on the same page accuses the YSA of being "pig apparatus

organizations," and talks about "the opportunity" the "Chicano movement" now has to "rid ourselves of these pests and parasites."

The same kind of verbal violence is directed at signers of the "Declaration Against Violence in the Movement," a number of whom are nationally known leaders of the Chicano, Black, Puerto Rican, and peace movements. They are labeled "poverty parasites," "agents of the system," supporters of informers, and "people who will go jack up another Chicano over a dime bag of weed."

The "letter" concludes by addressing the following threat to signers of the declaration:

"Maybe we have been too occupied in facing the fascists and have neglected those within our own circles who are as dangerous as the criminals against who we are struggling.

"Violence? As revolutionists we are working toward the day when violence

will be a negligent part of human activity but until that day we will continue to be ready to confront the enemies of the people and the enemies of the progressive movement of our people.

"If you can't do anything for the movement," the writer concludes, "don't do anything against it because . . ." The closing dots are in the original.

In an obvious attempt to provide themselves some cover, the editors of *El Gallo* print this threat under the heading "Letters/Cartas." There is no signature on the "letter," which is prominently laid out to occupy almost a full page.

Another article in the paper contains a series of slanders directed at Elfege Baca, against whom the Crusade has a particular vendetta. An example of the accuracy of these tales is the following claim that last spring Baca "tried unsuccessfully to have a petition signed to prevent Rodolfo Corky Gonzales from speaking at La Alma Park, Cinco de Mayo."

Cinco de Mayo (May 5) is a tradition.

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Bookshelves were overturned and pamphlets scattered in October 23 attack on Denver SWP headquarters.

'Declaration Against Violence in the Movement'

Disturbing reports of the use of physical violence by members of the Crusade for Justice have come to our attention. This underlines the urgent need for decisive action to deescalate tensions in the movement and to ensure that physical intimidation does not interfere with the free exchange of political views.

Recent public revelations about the FBI have shown that fomenting violent conflicts within the movement is one of the government's favorite disruptive tactics. This is all the more reason for us to work to bring such incidents to an end.

We hope you will take a stand in favor of the simple democratic right to express a point of view without fear of physical reprisal from anyone, including those who may disagree within the movement. Taking such a stand certainly does not mean repudiating the right of self-defense against violent attacks. It means making clear that differences among those fighting for social justice cannot be resolved by fists or other

weapons. Any attempt to do so simply provides openings for police and other enemies of the movement to tear us apart.

Further, it certainly does not help us oppose the government's use of violence against us if some of us use it against people who may not agree with our point of view.

The forces opposing progressive social change in the United States are very powerful. The unity necessary to overcome these forces can only be achieved if we respect each other's democratic rights.

Robert Allen, editor, *Black Scholar*; Miguel Angel, chairperson, ethnic studies, Laney Community College, Oakland, California; Geraldine Armijo, student, Metro State College, Denver; Lamberto Armijo, instructor, Chicano studies, Community College, North Campus, Denver; Chuck Aragón, chairperson, MEChA, Community College, Denver; Muriel Ashmore, community activist, Denver.

Elfege Baca, student, Metro State College, Denver; Tony Baez, Milwaukee Bilingual Parents Committee; Phillip Berrigan; Karen Buzis, Union of the Poor, Salt Lake City; Ted Buzis, chairperson, Union of the Poor, Salt

Lake City; Peter Camejo, 1976 SWP presidential candidate; Sherry Carter, board member, Twin Cities NOW; Margarita Carro, Salt Lake City.

Ann Chavez, community activist, Denver; Everett Chavez, Chicano studies, University of Colorado, Denver; Phyllis Crawford, NOW, Denver; Abelardo Delgado, Chicano poet; Darlene Domínguez, community activist, Denver; Mahmoud El-Kati, coordinator, Minnesota Committee on South Africa; Luis Fuentes, former director, Utah Society of Ex-Offenders.

Luis Fuentes, former superintendent, New York City School District One; Vera Gallegos, chairperson, United Mexican American Students (UMAS), University of Colorado, Denver; Cecilio García-Camarillo, editor, *Caracol*, San Antonio; Adolfo Gómez, director, Auraria Community Center, Denver; Barbara Goodman, coordinator, University Community Feminists, Minneapolis; Dr. Armando Gutiérrez, vice-chairperson, Texas Raza Unida party; José Angel Gutiérrez, Raza Unida party, Zavala County, Texas; Luz Gutiérrez, Raza Unida party, Zavala County, Texas; Vickie Herrera, community activist, Denver; Armando Juárez, Salt Lake City.

Severita Lara, Crystal City, Texas; Helen Lindgren, member, Women's International League for Peace, Denver; Benjamin Lovato, student, Metro State College, Denver; Frobén Lozada, chair-

person, Chicano studies, Merritt College, Oakland, California; Alicia Lucero, community activist, Denver; Patricia Anne Madsen, attorney, Denver; Daniel Martínez, student, Metro State College, Denver; Edward Martínez, president, University of Texas MAYO, Austin; Pedro Martínez, chairperson, Raza Student Union, Merritt College, Oakland, California; Peter Nuñez, member, Communications Workers of America, Local 8050, Denver; Karen M. Olsen, student body president, University of Minnesota.

Juan José Peña, chairperson, New Mexico Raza Unida party; Miguel Penedás, Socialist Workers party, Denver; Carlos Pérez, community activist, Denver; Josephine Pérez, community activist, Denver; Marie Quintana, Salt Lake City.

Kandy Romero, United Farm Workers Support Committee, Salt Lake City; Kathleen Roybal, Denver; Mateo Torres, UMAS, University of Colorado, Denver; Teresa Trujillo, student, Metro State College, Denver; Albert Valdivia, former instructor, Escuela Tlatelolco; Rodolfo Valdivia, community activist, Denver; Naima Washington, KPOO Radio, San Francisco; Dr. Wolfgang Yargrau, history department, Denver University; Mike Zárate, National Executive Committee, Young Socialist Alliance.

(Organizations listed for identification purposes only.)

Open letter to Rodolfo 'Corky' Gonzales

[The following open letter was sent by Fred Halstead of the Socialist Workers party to Rodolfo "Corky" Gonzales, leader of the Denver Crusade for Justice.]

Denver, Colorado
October 2, 1976

Dear Corky Gonzales,

Around 2:30 p.m. on October 1, Steve Chainey, the Denver Socialist Workers party organizer, and I went to the headquarters of the Crusade for Justice in Denver. We had been requested to do so by the national offices of the Socialist Workers party and the Young Socialist Alliance.

The purpose of our visit was threefold: to offer any assistance we could in the Crusade for Justice suit against government police agencies; to invite you to speak on your suit at a coming public rally in Denver; and to speak to you about a threat of physical violence made by a member of the Crusade for Justice against a member of the YSA.

We had been told that Ernesto Vigil, a leader of the Crusade, made a physical threat against Elfego Baca, the chairperson of the Metro State College MEChA who is also a member of the YSA. It is common knowledge that there are disagreements between members of the Crusade and the leadership of the Metro MEChA. In itself, there is nothing unusual about disagreement, but we are concerned about rising tensions and the threat of physical violence.

We intended to ask you to join us in discouraging violence over disagreements in the movement.

When we entered the Crusade headquarters we were told you were not there but that we could speak to Maria Serna. When we told her of our concern about the threat, she said we should speak to Ernesto Vigil. She sent for him.

Vigil entered the office accompanied by another man whose name I do not know. When I told Vigil about my concern, he did not deny having threatened Elfego Baca. He simply said it was none of my business. Throughout the conversation both Steve Chainey and I were calm and used a friendly tone. At no time did we threaten

violence or make any movements that could have been interpreted as threatening.

Vigil ordered us to leave the building. As we left the office on our way out of the building, I paused to say that if Elfego Baca was harmed we would be obliged to make public the previous threats.

Vigil's response was to punch me repeatedly in the face while the other man punched Steve Chainey. Neither Chainey nor I made any attempt to strike back. We simply attempted to leave the building. Nevertheless, they continued punching. By the time we were able to get out of the building both of us were bleeding profusely. Chainey had a bloody nose and a cut lip. My nose was broken and I had cuts on my face that required several stitches.

As we were walking away from the building, people outside expressed concern about the blood on our faces and asked what had happened. I heard someone shout from behind me, "That's

what you get for threatening people's lives." This was an obvious attempt to justify a completely unprovoked assault.

We made no physical threats while we were in the building and we make none now.

We are completely opposed to the idea that violence can be used to resolve any dispute among those fighting for the oppressed. Such violence simply provides an opening for the police and police agents to divide us and turn us against ourselves. FBI documents that have come out over the last year or so show that one of the first tactics they use is to try to get movement groups fighting among themselves.

If you allow physical intimidation to become a trademark of the Crusade, it will be a grave disservice to all those fighting for a better world.

I strongly urge you to take all the necessary steps to see that this kind of violence is not repeated.

I await your response with great concern.



SWP leaders Steve Chainey (left) and Fred Halstead immediately after attack.

Militant/Bruce Farnsworth

...against violence

Continued from preceding page

al Mexican holiday also celebrated by many Chicanos. Last spring Baca, along with more than forty other Chicano students from three Denver campuses, signed a petition that stated:

"We understand that Cinco de Mayo activities were to be a mutual tri-campus endeavor of concerned Chicano students wanting to create an effective and useful presentation of an event of historical significance to the Chicano people. Therefore all monies utilized to carry out the activities for this event were to have the approval of all concerned and not any one particular group.

"The decision to grant \$1,000 to one speaker by MECHA, Metro State College with 13 voting yes and 6 voting no, did not represent our mutual agreement of cooperation with all campuses taking part in the decision-making process. The fate of this issue should have been voted on with all three campuses participating, which did not take place. . . .

"The issue was not even a topic of discussion on MECHA's agenda and was brought out and voted on before the official meeting began. We the undersigned feel this maneuver is not in keeping with the principles of consideration and respect between peers, and is an obstacle to the spirit of cooperation."

Nowhere did the petition object to Gonzales as a speaker, but simply to the procedure by which a very large speakers fee was decided upon.

Baca was later elected chairperson of the Metro MEChA chapter on a slate not supported by the Crusade. This is

the source of the vendetta against Baca.

In September Baca was physically threatened by Ernesto Vigil, a Crusade leader. Two hours later, at a regular MEChA meeting and without previous notice, the Crusade launched an attempt to impeach Baca as chairperson. The attempt failed and the atmosphere was tense.

Because of the physical threats against Baca, SWP leaders Fred Halstead and Steve Chainey, at the request of the YSA, went to the Crusade's headquarters October 1 to try to speak to Gonzales and ease tensions. There they were physically assaulted.

The Crusade leadership uses the September issue of *El Gallo* to reaffirm its refusal to do the one and only thing the signers of the "Declaration Against Violence in the Movement" call on them to do: to state clearly and unequivocally that the Crusade and its leaders are "in favor of the simple democratic right to express a point of view without fear of physical reprisal from anyone, including those who may disagree within the movement."

On the contrary, this issue of the paper is an attempt by the Crusade leadership to justify the slanders and threats against Baca as well as the beating of Halstead and Chainey.

For example, the paper also reprints the open letter by Maria Serna, the secretary of the Denver Chicano Liberation Defense Committee, who was present in the Crusade headquarters when Halstead and Chainey were assaulted. (See the *Militant*, November 5, 1976).

In her letter Serna does not even

claim that the two SWP leaders initiated the violence that occurred. She simply accuses them of making "intimidating threats" as they were on their way out of the office.

"It is true a physical confrontation resulted," she states, "and that both Steve Chainey and Fred Halstead were ousted from the Crusade premises—again not because they are members of the SWP, again not because of the political differences, but because they were intolerably insulting, pompous, and obtrusive in their conduct."

Leaving the accuracy of the description aside, it is clear that the Crusade leadership considers it justified to physically assault anyone they think is insulting, pompous, or obtrusive.

The seriousness of this stance can be judged from another article printed in this current issue of *El Gallo*, an open letter from Corky Gonzales to all those who signed the "Declaration Against Violence in the Movement." In it Gonzales states, "By your presumptuous chest pounding and self-righteousness you are joining hands with those biased and reactionary forces who are no doubt pleased by your attempts to create divisionism, factionalism, disunity and confusion with the Chicano Movement. . . . You pompously have become judge, jury and prosecutor based on misinformation, ignorance, spite, guilt, or provocation."

Are those who "pompously" signed a declaration condemning violence within the movement targets for the same kind of treatment the "pompous" Halstead and Chainey received at the hands of Crusade leaders?

The message is clear. Those with whom the Crusade leaders have differences are warned to keep their mouths shut or they too will be subject to the vilest slander and physical intima-

tion. And those who come to the defense of anyone who is slandered or assaulted will also become targets.

The use of such methods by forces who are fighting for social justice and progress represents a cancer. If it is not halted it can only lead to the total isolation and eventual destruction of any group that employs such methods.

But more than the groups that resort to slander, violence, and physical intimidation are affected. It becomes the concern of every organization and individual in the movement. Everyone has a responsibility to speak out against it, to try to halt its destructive spread.

Violence against political opponents opens the movement wide to exploitation by government provocateurs who like nothing better than the opportunity to ply their trade while covering their tracks and attributing responsibility to some social movement they are trying to discredit.

Anyone who has read the story of the FBI's Cointelpro operation against the Black Panther party and other Black organizations can easily draw the lessons.

Only by unequivocally rejecting the use of slander and physical intimidation against opponents within the movement can an atmosphere be created in which political alternatives can be discussed and decided on their merits. Establishing and maintaining those most elementary norms of democracy in the workers movement, the struggles of the oppressed nationalities, the women's movement, and the student movement, is the concern of all who are fighting for social progress.

This is the stance taken by the "Declaration Against Violence in the Movement."

That is the stance we hope the Crusade for Justice will adopt.

Statement by Rudy Lovato

Victim of beating speaks out

[All of the materials contained in these four pages are reprinted from the Militant, with the exception of the abbreviated version of the statement by Rudy Lovato printed below. Lovato was himself the victim of a beating last summer by a Crusade member.]

[Subsequent threats against Elfego Baca were also related to the fact that he was present when the beating occurred, as Lovato explains.]

This statement is being made in response to the October 8 article by Maria Serna in the Chicano Liberation Defense Committee newsletter which was later reprinted in the September issue of *El Gallo*.

Very few have heard my side of what happened in connection with the arrests of Ernesto Vigil and Tony Marquez. I write this statement to refute what I feel is a desperate attempt to cover up the facts with lies and vicious attempts to slander my character and the character of Elfego Baca.

Maria Serna says that on August 5 at La Raza Park Tony Marquez "confronted a drug pusher about trafficking drugs in the barrio park, had threats made on his life, and a fight resulted in which the pusher was not the victor." I am the person being called a "pusher," and I later filed charges against Tony Marquez for assault.

Here is my side of the story.

At La Raza Park on August 5, I met Elfego and a brother by the name of Askia who is a Metro student and a member of the Black Student Union there. We were eating burritos and listening to music when Tony and

Ernesto approached us. Tony came up to me and *without saying a word* kicked me twice on my right side as I was lying down propped up on my elbows. Kicked out of breath, I turned to see for what reason I was being attacked. Tony said, "I heard you was gonna get me, so I'm gonna get you now."

Tony knelt down and punched me several times in the face. He stood up and kicked me again in the ribs. He backed up and told Elfego, who was beside me sitting down, "And you better be cool, 'cause you'll be next."

As Tony and Ernesto were leaving, Ernesto told me to get out of the park. I said I would as soon as I cleaned the blood off my face. When they left, I asked Elfego what type of injury I had, and he described where and how big the cuts were on my face. I told Elfego and Askia my ribs were also in pain and that I was leaving, and I left the park.

This assault was not the first by Tony against me, but the second. The reason for these attacks is not that I am a "drug pusher." The real reason is that I witnessed some friends of Tony's beating up on young Chicano brothers at La Raza Park on two occasions. Several people in the park, including me, stepped in to stop this senseless violence. They tried to justify the beating on one occasion by saying that the young Chicano was the brother of a drug pusher.

I have lived on the north side of Denver all my life. Since I was a kid I have been going to La Raza Park. Because of these attacks against me and the harm caused physically, emotionally, and to the dignity of me and my family, I see no other recourse but

to pursue this matter through the courts as the best way to protect myself from further abuse by this man.

The slanderous charges that I am a dope pusher are just not true. I am against the use of harmful drugs. I have a responsible job and a family to support. I work as a plant manager of a chemical corporation. I do not take dope or sell it, and I have never been arrested or convicted for the stuff.

If Ernesto and Tony are interested in stopping pushers, they should attack the source, that is, the Mafia, CIA, and the big drug corporations. They should educate the community so that there is support.

Maria Serna in her article says that I told the police that Elfego told me that Ernesto Vigil had a gun, and that this resulted in Ernesto being jailed.

This is not true. I read the police report at an open courtroom hearing and it said nothing to this effect. Elfego did not say anything about Ernesto having a weapon to me or anyone else. If there is such a statement about Ernesto he created it, not me or Elfego. The charges against Ernesto were dropped by the district attorney's office. The district attorney had no case on Ernesto because he had no gun, nor did anyone say he did.

This court action was decided by me and no one else. Elfego had nothing to do with my decision to file charges against Tony Marquez, nor did Elfego even know that I would file charges, and I support Elfego not wanting to get involved.

I have no quarrel with the Crusade, and if Elfego is critical of the organization, he should be able to express himself without threat of violence or intimidation.

Rudy A. Lovato, November 8, 1976.

...interview with Baca

Continued from back page

political party that's opposed to the Republicans and especially the Democrats.

"I've voted for all Raza Unida candidates locally and on a statewide level."

Baca's active support of the RUP is a matter of public record. While a student at Metro State, Baca drafted a letter urging support to the Chicano party. He got leaders of the United Mexican American Students (UMAS—the predecessor of MEChA) to sign the letter, along with a number of Chicano professors. The letter was printed in the *Denver Post*.

Baca has also been a leader in support activities on the Metro campus for the United Farm Workers union. He is an activist in the Concerned Citizens for Equal Education, a coalition organized to fight racist attacks on bilingual-bicultural education, school desegregation, and affirmative-action hiring programs in Denver schools.

Perhaps one of the chief reasons for the Crusade's vendetta against Baca is that, in its growing sectarianism, it has almost completely abstained from these important Chicano community struggles.

Nationalist & socialist

While a student at Metro State, Baca also worked closely with the Young Socialist Alliance. He joined the YSA last January. "I finally decided to join," he said, "realizing that being part of the *movimiento* was much of what my life was about."

He had attended several YSA conventions. "I felt that I could utilize my time and energy more constructively and creatively by being part of the YSA," he said. "I was a socialist and I was a nationalist, and I felt that the YSA expressed the relationship between the two really well."

It was after he joined the YSA that things came to a head in MEChA. A number of students began to develop criticisms of the Crusade's role in the student group. While the participation of the Crusade was welcomed, Baca emphasized, the students didn't want the Crusade to dominate MEChA to the exclusion of others.

An opposition slate developed in the elections with Baca running for chairperson. This slate won nearly all the posts.

Since that time, in their effort to oust Baca, Crusade members have engaged in a steady campaign of intimidation, causing tensions to run high at the MEChA meetings. In late September, Crusade members in MEChA tried to impeach Baca on the charge that he was late to the Crusade-sponsored September 16 Mexican independence activities, and other such spurious charges.

'Democratic process'

Differences of opinion are bound to develop in the movement, Baca pointed out. "I feel that the best way to deal with these problems is with an open mind and a sense of the democratic process."

"There's no need to create a lot of animosity and violence simply because we disagree with each other. The best way to fight a wrong idea is with another, better idea."

"We have to learn to accept criticism and build a better movement from criticism."

The slanders against Baca are so vile and outrageous that they discredit the Crusade more than their intended victim. Unless this campaign of lies is repudiated by the Crusade, it can only contribute to the decline of what was once an organization that inspired thousands of Chicanos—including Elfego Baca—to fight against their oppression.

More Crusade threats, insults

[This cartoon and letter appeared together on page 2 of the September issue of 'El Gallo,' newspaper of the Crusade for Justice.]

I recently read a petition addressed to Corky Gonzales and the Crusade For Justice. The petition requested that the Crusade be nice and non-violent. I would like to make a few comments about that petition, the Young Socialist Alliance, the Socialist Workers party and those who support the petition.

Are the Y.S.A. pig apparatus organizations? They claim to have been around for many years and yet they seem to have never encountered the legal hassles Chicano movement people have encountered. Why are both organizations so infiltrated with provocateurs and informers? When have they ever been in the front lines of confrontation or police attacks? Theirs is a history of spreading confusion, division and attempts to gain influence and leadership of the Chicano movement in the Southwest. If they as they claim, have been so active for so many years where is the progress and product of their work?

Their condescending and patronizing attitude towards Chicanos indicates their lack of appreciation for the fact that Chicanos are fully capable of understanding economic and social sciences and fully capable of developing and directing our own revolutionary struggle. If the Y.S.A. and S.W.P. want to help in the world-wide struggle for liberation let them go to Gates Rubber Co. or Coors and spread the



Birds of a feather. . .

message to the workers there. We as Chicanos do not need their help but they need ours. They can accomplish nothing on their own.

Now that they have staged this confrontation with the Chicano movement it will give the Chicano movement the opportunity to rid ourselves of these pests and parasites. Historically their involvement in the Chicano Labor movement has always led to disruption and temporary stagnation.

To those people who gave their names in support of the petition I address the following questions and remarks. Some of you are individuals who are actually poverty parasites. You have never done anything more than dispense tranquilizers and aid the system by confusing issues and diverting constructive progress. Sure you are

agents of the system why don't you petition the pigs to quit inflicting violence on your Chicano brothers and sisters? Why don't you petition your government to stop inflicting violence on oppressed people throughout the world?

To those brothers who gave their names to the petition I ask why do you support informers and divisionists? And why all of a sudden are you so anti-violence. You are the same people who will go jack up another Chicano over a dime bag of weed. When it comes to confrontation based on principle you suddenly become ignorant and confused. When it comes to confrontation based on character you suddenly become self-righteous and become a judge. When it comes to confrontation based on political and philosophical position you run to the man, to alien self proclaimed leaders and protectors of the Chicano people.

In reality maybe the Chicano movement has been too lenient with divisionists disruptors y habladores. Maybe we have been too occupied in facing the fascists and have neglected those within our own circles who are as dangerous as the criminals against who we are struggling.

Violence? As revolutionaries we are working toward the day when violence will be a negligent part of human activity but until that day we will continue to be ready to confront the enemies of the people and the enemies of the progressive movement of our people.

If you can't do anything for the movement, don't do anything against it because . . .

Interview with Elfego Baca

Chicano activist stands up to Crusade slanders

By Miguel Pendás

DENVER—If there is one person who has become the central target of the Crusade for Justice in recent months, that person is Elfego Baca.

The Crusade, whose central leader is Rodolfo "Corky" Gonzales, recently went on a drive to oust Baca, a member of the Young Socialist Alliance, from his post as chairperson of the Metropolitan State College MEChA, the campus Chicano group.

Last month Baca lost that post by a vote of fourteen to thirty-one in a special election. Crusade members in the MEChA spearheaded the recall effort. The election, which was agreed to by Baca, was held in an atmosphere of tension and intimidation.

In its drive to remove Baca from his MEChA post, the Crusade has resorted to slanders, insults, and lies. Crusade members have even made threats of physical violence.

In early October, when SWP leaders Fred Halstead and Steve Chainey went to Crusade headquarters to discuss these threats with Gonzales, they were beaten by Ernesto Vigil and other Crusade members. In response, more than forty movement activists in Denver and throughout the country signed a statement calling on the Crusade leadership to repudiate the use of violence to settle differences in the movement.

The Crusade's newspaper, *El Gallo*, recently wrote, "Is Elfego Baca an agent provocateur, a puppet in an SWP anti-Crusade campaign, a drug traffic sympathizer, or just a very disturbed person. . . ?"

Crusade leaders know as well as

anyone that Baca is none of these. He has for many years been a dedicated activist in Denver's Chicano community.

Fishermen's meetings

It was at the weekly Crusade gatherings called Fishermen's meetings that I first met Elfego Baca about five years ago. Socialists were welcome there and I attended the meetings regularly.

On one occasion, however, some persons in the audience red-baited me. Many, if not most, of the Crusade members present did not agree with this. But only one person had the nerve to speak out in my defense. That was Elfego Baca.

From that time to this, I have known him to be a person who is not afraid to fight for what he believes in, even when he is in a minority.

I interviewed Baca recently to find out more about his background and his involvement in the Chicano movement.

Baca, twenty-eight, grew up in a working-class family in Denver's impoverished Near West Side barrio. His father worked for twenty years as a machinist in a steel mill "until he just wore out," Baca says.

As a small child, Baca—like most other Chicanos—was the target of racist insults because he was "dark," "Mexican," and "different." Those painful experiences were the seeds of his nationalist consciousness, he says.

As a high school student in the early 1960s, Baca became interested in the Black civil rights struggle. One of the most important moments in his political life came when a friend took him to a Fishermen's meeting at the Crusade

around 1968 or 1969.

Baca liked what he heard there. He became a regular at the meetings, where Corky Gonzales often spoke. What attracted him to the Crusade?

"They were speaking on issues that concerned the Chicano community," he said. Corky Gonzales and others were saying that "Chicanos had to develop strength and stick together to solve their problems. They also talked about our culture and our history and about the Vietnam War."

Capitalist 'justice'

Like many other Chicano youths, Baca has had run-ins with "the man." At the age of nineteen, he landed in the reformatory at Buenavista for robbery. This experience only deepened his conviction that he lived in a racist society.

"While I was in there," he said, "because of my contact with the Crusade, I began to talk with other Chicano brothers about our culture and heritage and Chicanos working together."

Before long, Baca was organizing meetings that drew up to thirty-five inmates. So the authorities transferred him to the state penitentiary at Canon City.

After spending more than two years in jails, Baca got a job at the mammoth Coors beer plant. He was soon fired, however, for missing one day of work. He had traveled to Los Angeles that day in August 1970 to march with 30,000 other Chicanos in the Chicano Moratorium against the Vietnam War.

Cuba visit

After this, Baca decided to visit Cuba with the Venceremos Brigade. He spent two months there, working in the cane fields, attending classes, and "checking things out."

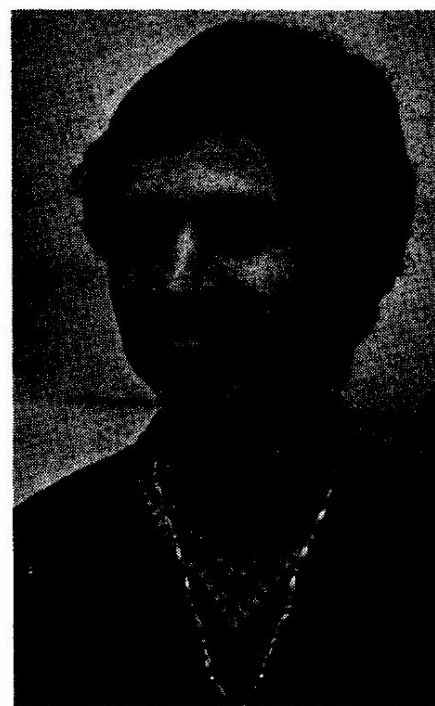
"I was really impressed by Cuba in a lot of ways," he said. "I wasn't totally convinced that everything they were doing was correct. But I felt that the kind of socialist economy they were putting together was much better than the conditions that the *cubanos* were living under prior to the revolution."

When he returned, he encouraged others to go to Cuba, and helped raise funds for their trips.

Movement artist

One way Baca has expressed his commitment to the struggle for Chicano liberation has been through art. Along with Manuel Martínez, another Chicano artist, he painted a mural at Mestizo Park. He has drawn and designed several posters for Crusade-sponsored activities as well.

Baca also did the artwork for the



Militant/Miguel Pendás

ELFEGO BACA

Escritor del Pueblo, a community newspaper edited by Freddie Granado. Granado, a well-known student activist and a Raza Unida party candidate, was murdered along with several other Chicano activists.

Develops differences

Despite his active participation in the Crusade for several years, Baca, along with other community activists, began to develop criticisms of the organization. The use of violence and intimidation by the Crusade became a serious problem. When a conflict developed between the Crusade and leaders of the Chicano community on the West Side, some Crusade members tried to settle it by assaulting one of their opponents.

When Baca spoke out against such methods at a subsequent Fishermen's meeting, he was applauded by people from the community.

Recently, the Crusade's desire to discredit Baca has led them to spread outright lies. I asked Baca about a slanderous charge against him contained in the most recent issue of *El Gallo*. The paper asserts that in 1971 Baca fire bombed a Raza Unida party headquarters in Denver.

First of all, Baca explained, the RUP headquarters referred to in the article was never bombed. But, he added, "it's ridiculous to make such an irresponsible charge, knowing that I've been a strong advocate of the Raza Unida party. I supported the concept of Chicanos creating an independent

Continued on page 3

To add your name to the declaration against violence...

The use of violence to settle differences within the movement is a matter of concern to all serious activists. The recent developments in Denver—especially the Crusade for Justice leadership's refusal to speak out against the use of slander and physical intimidation, their broadening of the threats to include signers of the 'Declara-

tion Against Violence in the Movement'—make it all the more important to take a stance in opposition to such methods.

For further information clip and mail the following coupon to: Socialist Workers party, 916 Broadway, Denver, Colorado 80203; or call, (303) 837-1018.

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