



The Rural Imprint

by Richard J. Margolis

Scholar on the Ramparts

When Ernesto Galarza died last June in San Jose, Calif., the world lost a brilliant writer and farmworkers lost a courageous friend. Galarza was that rarest of combinations—a scholar on the ramparts, a man equally at home in libraries and atop battlements.

A fiery orator and shrewd organizer, Galarza in the 1940s helped found the National Agricultural Workers Union, which he served as director of research ill 1963.

A subsequent teaching appointment at San Jose State University gave Galarza time to exercise his analytic and literary talents. There followed a remarkable trio of books on farmworker struggles, among them the incomparable *Farm Workers and Agri-Business in California—1947-1960* (Notre Dame University Press, 1977).

"He was very mild and very modest, but also iron-minded about social justice," recalls James Murray, a California attorney who often worked with Galarza on behalf of farmworkers. "He was probably our most distinguished Mexican-American. I can't think of anybody who would surpass him in scholarship."

Another close friend, Herman Gallegos, now a trustee of the Rockefeller Foun-

ation, thinks Galarza "can best be described as an extraordinary person for whom the Mexican-American community owes a debt of thanks for his many contributions. He was our preeminent Chicano scholar and organizer," Gallegos adds.

Galarza's story is both inspiring (for his extraordinary achievements) and discouraging (for the world's failure to accord him suitable recognition). He was a man fully committed; he harnessed his talents to his principles. At one point Galarza and his wife Mae forsook a comfortable life in Washington, where he had been working for the Pan American Union, to assist Bolivian tin miners in their long and costly strike. The Galarzas donated several years of their life and all their savings to the strikers.

He was born in 1906 in a mountain village in the state of Nayrit, Mexico. A few years later his family fled the Mexican Revolution and eventually settled in a barrio in Sacramento. By the time he was 12, Ernesto was already an experienced field worker, picking fruit and living in a labor camp alongside a polluted ditch.

In the winter months he attended school and worked as a part-time messenger boy for Western Union. One of a handful of Chicanos back then who made it through high school, Galarza won a



Ernesto Galarza

scholarship to Occidental College where he graduated with honors. A master's from Stanford University and a doctorate from Columbia University completed his formal education.

Galarza's farm labor organization efforts pre-dated those of Cesar Chavez by about two decades. "It seems to me he was the John the Baptist in the farm labor wilderness," says H.L. Mitchell, whose own organizing successes in Southern cotton fields paralleled Galarza's in the

orchards of the West. "Without the years of Ernesto Galarza's devoted work and the angry denunciations of the stupidities of bureaucrats, there might never have been a march of Delano strikers or the emergence of a Cesar Chavez . . ."

Years ago, I have been told, when Chavez and his young minions were full of hope and ignorance, Galarza made an unbidden pilgrimage to Delano. He wished to put his experience and knowledge at the disposal of the new leadership.

Chavez's office door was guarded by a young union official. "Who are you?" he asked.

"I am Ernesto Galarza. I wish to speak with Cesar Chavez."

"He's busy," snapped the young man. "Don't you know we're organizing a movement? Come back some other day."

It can be said that the world lost this great man twice—once through death, and earlier through indifference. Our task now is to "read" his life as well as his works. Ernesto Galarza still has much to teach us, if we're willing to listen.

Seedbeds and Harvests

Art Cuelho, the indefatigable editor of Seven Buffaloes Press, has written to say he is collecting a poetry anthology on the American farmer, the contents of which "are somewhat suggested by the tentative title, *From Seedbed to Harvest*."

The book, he goes on, will be published in the winter of 1985 and "focus on the *workstyle* of a farmer from season to season. . . . I am seeking material from all 50 states, but there will be certain major agricultural regions that will have separate section headings, and a lot more space will be devoted to show their depth and diversity in crop production and their personal feelings about watching things grow and their ownership of land."

Cuelho already has published an astonishing array of contemporary rural poetry, including some of his own. In his introductory poem, "You Can Go Home Again," pretty well sums up Cuelho's publishing philosophy. As he explains elsewhere, the poem shows "that anyone having a rural origin seldom breaks his rural ties throughout his life. Time proves that no urban concrete jungle ever destroys a man's basic love of nature."

Anyone wishing to contribute to the "Seedbed" anthology may write to: Seven Buffaloes Press, Box 249, Big Timber, MT 59011.

Mountain Life

The poets of Appalachia, meanwhile, continue to write up a storm. Some of their latest efforts can be enjoyed in the May/June issue of *Mountain Life and Work* ("the magazine of the Appalachian South"), which focuses on writers of the region.

The poems one finds there are both classy and class-conscious. In "Longings," for example, Jenny Galloway Collins uses just six lines to set straight our upwardly mobile values:

*In front of me
in a sleek Cadillac
a sedate graying driver
lends a wistful look
at the bearded, laughing youth
flying by in an old Ford.*

Mountain Life and Work comes out 10 times a year and is always worth reading. For a \$10 annual subscription, write to the Council of the Southern Mountains, P.O. Box 1188, Clintwood, VA 24228. ■