

KQED/TV NEWSROOM SCRIPT – 1973

FAST IN THE VINEYARDS

By Dick Meister

About 2000 members and supporters of the United Farm Workers Union gathered in Delano today to begin a three-day fast in memory of two union members who died by violence last week, and to plan the future course of their struggle to win union contracts from the San Joaquin Valley's grape growers.

They have called off, at least temporarily, the picketing at the vineyards which resulted in the fatal shooting, last Thursday, of a 60-year-old picket.

Authorities are holding a 20-year-old farm worker for the shooting and continuing their investigation. An investigation also is continuing in the death of a union member outside a bar frequented by strikers. Deputies claimed the man died during a drunken scuffle, by tripping and hitting his head on a curb. But the district attorney reported today that while the man had a high alcoholic content in his blood, the fatal wound was caused by a blow to the head – and union witnesses claim that blow was delivered by a deputy sheriff.

Other investigations are being conducted by the FBI and other agencies of the Justice Department, and people on both sides of the dispute are demanding that more federal agents be dispatched to look into the violence.

During the lull in picketing, groups of farm workers have moved into San Francisco, Los Angeles and other cities to intensify the union's boycott against grapes from the growers who have signed contracts with the Teamsters Union – and that means most growers, of most grapes.

The boycott is likely to continue as the union's major activity, as it was in the union's original battle to win contracts from the growers. Waging a successful farm strike is virtually impossible, for many reasons. But a very successful boycott can be waged, as the farm workers union proved in 1970...when the growers finally signed contracts, as a direct result of a boycott.

In another development today, President Harry Bridges of the International Longshoremen and Warehousemen's Union complained, in his union's newspaper, that his fellow officers would not support a proposal for the ILWU to withdraw from its alliances with the Teamsters Union.

Bridges said the ILWU should “view with great distaste the activities of the Teamsters Union and the fact that the union resorts to spending huge sums of money against the United Farm Workers Union, including the hiring and directing of goon squads.”

Further, Bridges said, the ILWU should urge the holding of government-supervised elections in which farm workers could choose between unions, and pledge its full support to settling the dispute between the Teamsters and the Farm Workers.

In the meantime, the ILWU would suspend its alliances with the Teamsters Union – meaning the formal alliance between the 15,000 Teamster Union warehousemen in Northern California and the 10,000 ILWU warehousemen, who bargain jointly and otherwise operate as a unit vis-à-vis their employers.

This proposal made Bridges' idea unacceptable to two of his three fellow officers – Vice President George Martin and Secretary Treasurer Louis Goldblatt. Both have been strong supporters of the Farm Workers Union, but they apparently felt the alliance with the Teamster warehousemen was formed for just one purpose: to get the best possible deal for all Northern California warehousemen.

And they are convinced it is doing just that, and that to dissolve the alliance would only hurt warehousemen, while not necessarily helping farm workers.

Others found it curious that Bridges had suddenly changed his position abruptly. He has never had very much to say on behalf of the farm workers union, but he has been a staunch champion of the Teamsters. Some people, anyway, attributed Bridges' change to the fact that he considers Goldblatt, who heads the warehouse alliance that would be broken under his proposal, as his chief rival within the ILWU.