

United Farmworkers Strike, 1973 GREAT PHOTOS! ©2025 Seth Foldy

I had graduated high school in May, and was working nights as a as a busboy downtown and mornings as a tutor for Cleveland Public Schools. It was a busy, hot summer that included watching Richard Nixon resign the presidency on TV and climb aboard a helicopter for his last official ride. I had been a correspondent for WIN (Workshop In Nonviolence) Magazine since 1969, and a member of the War Resisters League (WRL) National Committee since 1970. I definitely planned to attend the WRL 50th anniversary conference in Asilomar, CA in early August. Since I was going to ride a Greyhound all the way to California and back again, I wrote Joan Baez's Institute for the Study of Nonviolence in Palo Alto and asked if I could learn with them for a couple weeks before returning to Cleveland for college. They said "sure." ([WRL 100th Year log](#))



See below for more great pictures!

The first Delano Grape Strike by farmworkers had been started by Filipinos like Philip Vera Cruz, and joined by Cesar Chavez, Dolores Huerta, and other dedicated organizers as the United Farm Workers Organizing Committee (UFWOC, later UFW). Farm workers had been excluded from national labor protection laws of earlier decades. It had taken five years of striking and international boycotts to win that struggle with a series of labor contracts in 1970. Just three years later the same growers abruptly signed sweetheart contracts with the then-corrupt Teamsters Union under Frank Fitzsimmons, who was appointed interim president when the prior president Jimmy Hoffa was jailed. According to Wikipedia (accessed Nov 28, 2025):

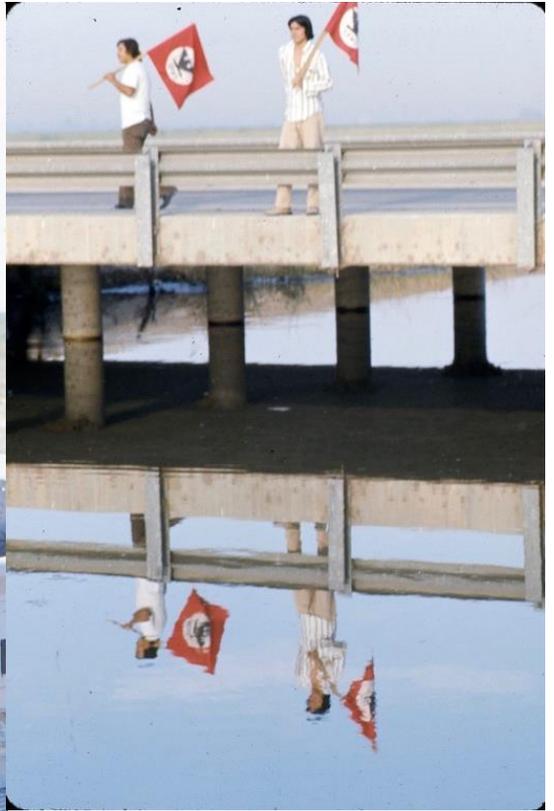
Fitzsimmons engaged in a notorious jurisdictional and organizing dispute with the [United Farm Workers](#)(UFW) from 1972 to 1977, [raiding](#) the smaller union and establishing a new national farm workers' union to compete with it. The series of raids and counter-raids, repudiated contracts, and public-relations attacks began in December 1972 when Fitzsimmons ordered a 1967 no-raid and organizing non-compete agreement with the UFW to be dissolved and Teamsters contract negotiators to reopen contracts.^[28] The UFW sued, the AFL-CIO condemned the action, and many employers negotiated contracts with the Teamsters, rather than with the UFW.^[29]

The Teamsters were not the Farmworker's only problem. When UFW workers went on strike, county judges issued severe injunctions on picketing, making it extremely difficult to recruit unaware strikebreakers to join the strike. UFW refused to comply, resulting in over 3500 arrests. Among those arrested were Cesar Chavez and Catholic Worker co-founder Dorothy Day (then 74 years old). They promptly went on a hunger strike in jail, and over 50 Asilomar attendees drove to support the strikers. Meanwhile, strikers were allegedly sprayed with pesticides, Teamster agents were attacking picketers with impunity, and some growers shipped grapes bearing the UFW union label to mislead consumers.

About a week later two strikers were killed, one beaten to death by a Kern County deputy, the other shot by a strikebreaker. Large numbers remained jailed, including Chavez and Day. UFW called the Institute and requested an emergency team to support the strike lines. I was privileged to join the trip south. I took the following photos that illustrate conditions on the strike lines. Upon returning to Cleveland I

created the Case Western Reserve University Farmworker Support Committee, which successfully forced the university's (very resistant) commercial food service to avoid all non-union grapes in 1974. Chavez visited us on tour that fall (my mother never tired of telling people "Cesar Chavez slept in my bed!"). UFW contracts were signed by the grape growers only after California passed its own Agricultural Labor Relations Act in 1975; the signing of new Teamsters non-compete agreements in 1977, and elections held in 1978 and beyond.

On the strike lines Aug. 1973: As day breaks, teams of pickets gather along rural roads waiting for scouts to find accessible strikebreakers who might be convinced to join the strike. Songs keep morale high as the Central Valley heat builds.

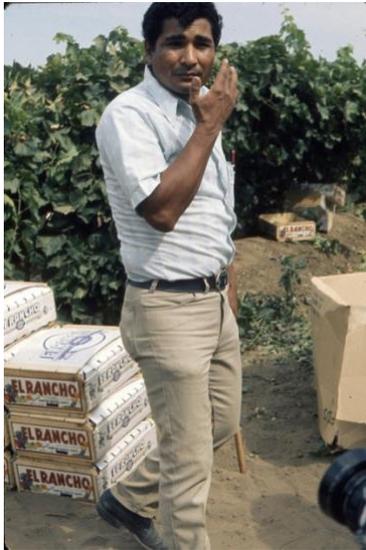


A radio report with directions to strikebreakers in the fields sets the team in motion. The message of the strike is conveyed by loudspeaker...



... and then gentle but urgent conversation if the strikebreakers are within range. But it isn't long before the owner, the sheriffs and the Teamsters find us and try to hold us off. (No one was hit or arrested during this encounter.)





Success! Workers leave the fields and are signed up for strike benefits while the owner races off in frustration.



During peak heat we gather at the owner's packing plant for a morale-boosting show of numbers. The owner shows his disrespect, and his sheriff friends are quickly there.



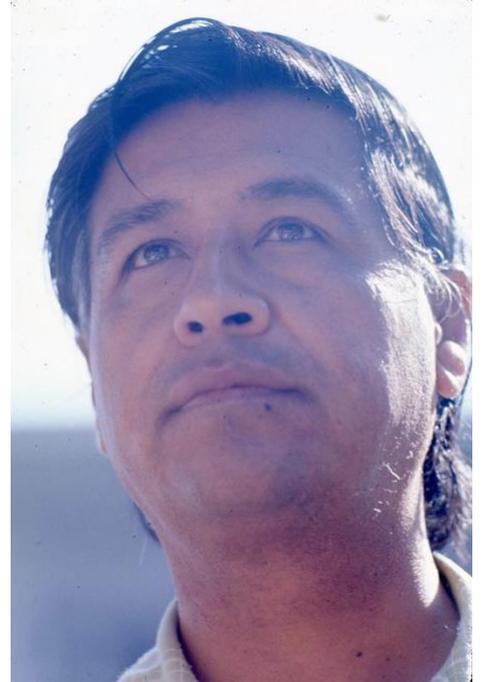
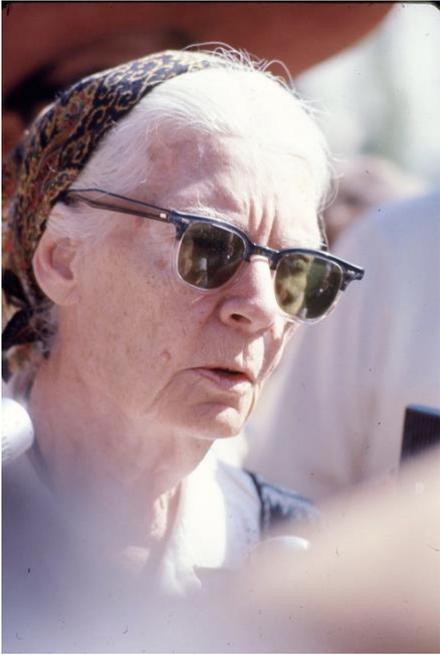
In the evenings picketers gather in Bakersfield's town square for one last show of non-violent force and music, music, music.



We ended each day at UFW's cooler higher altitude headquarters 40 Acres, sleeping on a floor. Below, health center, Dorothy Day chilling with Philip Vera Cruz.



Finally, jailed picketers, including the long-fasting Dorothy Day and Cesar Chavez, are released to a huge crowd in Bakersfield. Day, below, shows off her prison blouse signed by her co-prisoners.



An extraordinary time with such brave, creative, tireless and photogenic activists! They achieved farmworker labor representation through non-violent action and coalition-building after other efforts had been brutally suppressed for over a century.

