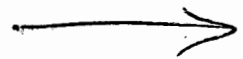


ANYWAY, what I'd like to talk about this afternoon is the death, back on february eighth, of union organizer larry itlliong ... the man who played such a crucial role in the unionizing of california's farm workers. Outside of a brief notice on the chronicle's obituary page -- three days after the fact -- I saw no mention of itlliong's death locally.

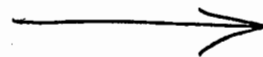
THE handling of ~~the~~ itlliong's death, I suppose I don't have to tell you, was typical of the local media's treatment of important stories on labor and a lot of other public affairs these days.



BUT I guess there's no point going into that. There just doesn't seem to be much we can do about it -- as I certainly have found out myself, the hard way. So let me at least try to brief you on one of the thousands of important stories that have been ignored or mis-reported lately.

LARRY Itliong, as I said, died on february eighth ... at ~~his~~ his home in delano, where itliong had done so much to help establish what has come to be the united farm workers union... the vehicle that finally brought unionization to california's farm workers, after nearly a century of struggle.

ITLIONG got involved in that struggle very early in life, not long after he arrived here in 1929 as a 15-year-old immigrant from the philippine islands, where his father operated a small farm.

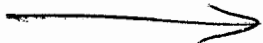


ITLIONG was among some 31,000 young single men who came to california from the philipines in the late 1920s, ~~and~~
~~and~~ They migrated throughout the state doing farm work, in much the same manner as the immigrants from mexico and other poor countries who had preceded them, isolated from the rest of society and discriminated against because of their race.

THE filipino immigrants ~~had been~~ ^{were} lured to california with the promise of work that would enable them to escape the terrible poverty of the philipines. Many came with expectations of earning enough to return home in a few years. Others hoped to establish families here by sending home for brides, or by marrying local women.

BUT the filipino's lack of non-agricultural skills confined them to low-paying farm work. And discriminatory laws and practices limited the immigration of filipino women ... prohibited ^{FILIPINOS} ~~them~~ from marrying caucasians ... kept them from buying land ... and barred them from integrating into the community at large.

THE filipinos, in short, were perhaps the most isolated of the groups of penniless workers which growers imported from poor countries, purposely isolating them from all but their fellow nationals to keep them from joining in a movement to demand better conditions.

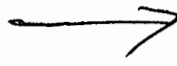


THIS situation, however, caused the filipinos to draw very closely together among themselves. They lived together in farm labor camps which became their own well-organized communities. They formed extremely efficient work crews, ~~directed by their own leaders,~~ to travel the state doing the most highly skilled work in several crops *under the direction of their own leaders.*

AT times the filipinos ~~and~~ even formed their own unions, forcing concessions from growers who relied heavily on their skills and ability to out-produce most other crews.

THE filipino crews included a group based in the kern county town of delano. That group worked almost year-round in the state's vineyards, picking grapes as well as doing much of the specially skilled work of pruning and vine-tying that preceded the harvest.

THE harvesting season for grapes ~~was~~^{is} short. But growers, who often operated vineyards in several areas, planted them so they ~~would~~ mature at different times in different places. This assured^s them an adequate work force and the highest possible market price.

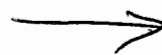


THE picking season ^{BEGINS} ~~begin~~ in may, in the coachella valley about 100 miles from Mexico. When those grapes ^{are} ~~were~~ picked, the filipino crews and others move~~d~~ north to other vineyards as the later maturing grapes became ready, finally ending up in the vineyards around delano in september.

THE coachella valley growers ^{are} ~~were~~ under heavy pressure to get their crop out quickly, before grapes in the other areas ^{can} ~~could~~ mature. So ~~they~~ ^{in the past in those days when the Mexican Bracero program was still operating} frequently called for the government to provide them with imported mexican braceros to speed the work ^{in those days before} ~~the bracero program was terminated~~.

THE growers were under especially heavy pressure in 1965 because of weather conditions that were causing grapes in northern vineyards to mature unusually early. The federal government had ruled, however, that the growers could not qualify for mexican bracero help unless they offered domestic workers at least the dollar-forty an hour they were required to pay the imported braceros.

THAT was 15 cents more an hour than growers offered the filipino crews when the coachella valley season started. So the filipinos demanded ~~\$1~~ a dollar-forty an hour. When the growers resisted, the ^{FILIPINOS} ~~they~~ struck under the leadership of larry itliong, who was then working for the afl-cio's agricultural workers organizing committee.

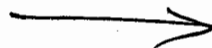


THE growers were unable to qualify for bracero help to fill in for the striking crews, ^{because of their refusal to pay the filipinos the same 1-40 an hr that they would have to pay the Mexicans. And} and anticipated, further, that they would want supplemental mexican help later in the season. So they were forced to agree to the strikers' pay demands within ten days.

THE filinos carried their pay demand north to the 400 square miles of rich vineyards that fanned out from delano through kern and tulare counties. But mexican braceros generally were not employed in this area. There usually had been an abundance of poor, locally based pickers willing to work on the growers' terms.

⁹ THOSE terms in september of 1965 were a-dollar-twenty to a dollar-twenty-five an hour plus 10 to 15 cents for each box of grapes picked, take it or leave it. There were about 1500 filipino workers, and they were an important part of the growers' work force. But they were critically needed only during pre-harvest operations.

SHOULD the filipinos strike over their demand for base pay of one-forty-an-hour ^{FOR PICKING} growers were confident they could find more than enough extra pickers among the 3500 mexican americans in the harvest work force. They didn't need to call for mexican braceros, so, unlike the coachella valley growers, they did not have to meet the filipinos' pay demand.



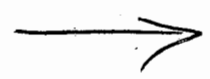
THE growers easily forced the filipinos back to work on the growers' terms after a brief strike in the arvin vineyards, just south of delano. And they were certain they could do the same ^{THING} in the delano area.

GROWERS had an additional advantage in delano. The labor camps in which the filipinos lived were their winter homes, loacted inside the vineyards and owned by the growers.

THE filipinos decided to strike nevertheless, ~~and~~ Once again ^{They} called in larry itliong, who had been organizing in the delano area for the past five years.

ITLIONG was reluctant, but ^{he was} willing to help. He understood the deep anger and frustration that motivated his fellow filipinos. "They are getting older," he said. "They have been here in this country for a number of years and they had not got anything to show for their labor. So what have they got to lose?"

ITLIONG'S understanding was based on his own long experience. When he first came to california from the phipines, he had worked briefly on a railroad construction crew, losing three fingers from his right hand in ^{a job} ~~an~~ accident, ~~on the job~~. Then he turned to farm work, ~~and~~ ^W within a year -- still in his teens -- ~~ITLIONG~~ was involved in an unsuccessful tomato pickers strike in washington state.



AFTER that, itliong worked in the field^s of california. There, he once recalled, "I began to see minority workers being discriminated against in pay ... being discriminated against in employment chances, and not having any kind of a right at all."

"THIS of course amazed me," said itliong, "because while I was in the philipines we heard and read about the kind of government that this country had and the kind of system that the united states has in a lot of things that are beneficial to its citizenship."

"BUT I found out differently," he said. ^{"I FOUND OUT"} That if you are in a minority group, you don't have any kind of chance to help yourself."

SO "from year to year," Itliong "traveled all over the state trying to get a job that I could make money on. "In the meantime, ^{He} had forgotten about going to school. ^{He said he} never made enough money, and whatever money I made from one job was not enough for me to live on until I got to the next job."

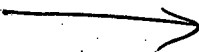


"I LEARNED also," said itliong, "that other farm workers have the same kind of problem. I began to learn the causes of the problems of the farm workers. I learned that if you do not have any kind of an organization, if you have any complaint, your complaint is going to be heard in one ear and it passes through the other ear."

"LIKE if you said to your employer that you wanted some cold water while you are working for him during the hot season, he was going to tell you that you must bring your own jug. He has no time to bring any water to you."

ITLIONG did not have the intellectual and philosophical bent of cesar chavez, ^{did he share} Nor ~~chavez~~' deep distrust of outside unions and their orthodox tactics. But itliong was as convinced as chavez of a need for union ~~organization~~ ^{organization} And the depth of his conviction made itliong a natural leader among the filipinos.

ITLIONG first began trying to organize the filipinos as early as 1933, when he worked with radical organizers in the salinas valley. Itliong continued to work in the fields, in canneries, aboard fishing boats and at a variety of odd jobs up and down the west coast. But he also worked as an organizer periodically, notably among cannery workers in alaska and southern california.



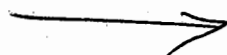
ITLIONG was working in stockton when the afl-cio created the agricultural workers organizing committee in the late 1950s. ~~HE~~ ^{HE} was readily hired to try to organize the numerous crews of filipinos in the area's asparagus fields, and to work among filipino workers generally.

FOR THE Agricultural Workers Organizing Committee

THE strike which itliong led in delano began more as a sit-in. Despite their anger, the filipinos were reluctant to picket the property where some of them had lived and worked for as long as 30 years, and to risk losing their homes for doing so. They simply stayed in the grower-owned camps at 10 vineyards and refused to report for work.

HOW many actually took part in the work stoppage was never clear. Their employers, at any rate, refused to ^{even} consider their demands. It didn't matter to the growers that the filipinos had worked for them for decades without raising serious complaint -- that they had been "our boys," as the growers were fond of calling them.

NOR did it matter that they ^{filipinos} were seeking no more than a pay raise of 15 to 20 cents ^{an hour}. The growers would not negotiate with itliong. Instead, they ordered the filipinos to report to work or leave the camps. Those who ignored the order were forced out, their belongings piled on the roadways.

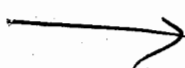


ONE camp resident recalled that "one day they cut off the water... then the electricity...and then, in another two days, the gas, and we had to cook outside. Then they padlocked the doors and we had to sleep under the trees."

SOME of the protesting filipinos gave in to the pressure and returned to work. ^{OUT} Others began picketing--up to 1200 by the union's reckoning, a few hundred, according to growers. No ~~striker~~ picketed the particular vineyard where he worked, however. They still feared to confront their ^{OWN} bosses directly.

THE growers refused to publicly acknowledge the existence of a strike. They recruited mexican-americans to replace the *filipino* strikers and continued the harvest uninterrupted, certain that the picket lines would disappear within a few weeks ~~for~~ lack of support.

FOR despite itlliong's activities, the afl-cio's primary interest was not in conducting strikes, but in adding to its dues-paying membership by organizing labor contractors who gathered together ^{WORK} crews for growers in the area around strockton, far north of delano.

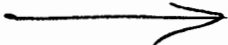


GROWERS also relied on animosity between mexican-american and filipino workers, caused in large part by the growers' practice of setting up separate camps and work crews for various racial and ethnic groups. It was a calculated attempt to keep the work force divided and, as a strike leader noted, it fostered "suspicions, fear and racial hatred."

BUT cesar chavez, who was then forming the national farm workers association in delano for mexican american workers, did not hesitate when itlliong asked him for help. Chavez did not feel that his group was organized nearly well enough to strike itself. But neither would it play the growers' game of divide and conquer.

SO THREE days after the filipinos struck, the farm workers association circulated leaflets urging its mexican-american members to honor the picket lines. Yet if they weren't to work, chavez and his members began asking themselves, why shouldn't they make demands of their own?

THEIR pay and working conditions were no better than those of the filipinos. Their aspirations were no lower. If the filipino workers won, all workers would win. If they lost, it would strengthen the growers' power over everyone. Five days later, the members of the national farm workers association did the inevitable. Prepared or not, they voted unanimously to also go on strike.

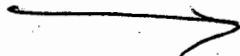


THAT was the strike, of course -- the grape strike of 1965 -- that ultimately led to the unionization, at long last, of california farm workers. And though it was the tactics and activities of chavez and his organization that drew the most attention and were most responsible for that victory, it was larry itliong and his filipino followers who launched it all, and who played a crucial, indispensible role throughout the struggle.

WITHOUT them there could not have been a strike. Without them, there could not have been the victory of unionization ...the right of the incredibly exploited and oppressed farm worker to bargain as an equal with his employer.

WITHIN a year of the strike's launching, Chavez' and itliong's organizations merged to form the united farm workers organizing committee, later winning an afl-cio charter as the united farm workers union.

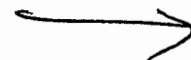
ITLIONG was made a vice president of the merged group, and two other filipions were ~~named~~ also named to the union's executive board. But control of the organization rested with chavez and ^{its} the far more numerous mexican-americans *members*.



ITLIONG never really ~~accepted~~ ^{accepted} this ~~and~~ ^{he} finally resigned from the union's executive board in 1971. He complained that the union's outnumbered filipinos "were getting the short end of the stick" from the anglo lawyers, clergymen and other activists who served as chavez' chief advisers. They devised tactics based largely on their ^{own} ~~experience~~ and ^{based on} ~~broad~~ social goals and on the cultural and religious background of the mexican-americans who dominated the union.

ITLIONG said he had "the greatest admiration" for chavez. But he protested that chavez had been "swayed by the grandiose thinking of a brain trust of intellectuals." Non-farm workers, said Itliong, "seem to have more influence on what has to be done than some farm workers. I couldn't get through to him."

ITLIONG clearly preferred the more orthodox tactics of the afl-cio group he had led into merger with chavez' association. He didn't seem to realize that it was the unorthodox tactics of the farm workers association that had finally led to unionization ... the boycotts, non-violence, use of religious and student groups and all manner of help from outside the labor movement. ^{The labor movement} ~~which~~ had failed in many previous attempts to organize farm workers precisely because it used orthodox tactics, ^{those tactics have been} ~~that~~, while effective among urban building tradesmen and factory workers, ^{but they} were utterly ineffective in agriculture.

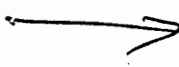


BUT this is not to detract from the terribly important role that Itlliong had played in bringing farm workers a union of their own. He may not have clearly understood the need for new tactics, different from those he had learned within the rigid structure of the afl-cio. But he most certainly understood the paramount need of farm workers for unionization, and he devoted most of his life to seeing that they finally got it.

AND much of Itlliong's unhappiness with the farm workers union, as I noted, stemmed from his deep devotion to his fellow filipinos. He served them all his life.

AFTER resigning from the union's executive board, Itlliong joined a project to develop desperately needed low-cost housing for the union's retired filipino members. Most of them were aging bachelors who had been able to save little from the pittance growers had paid them for their years of sweating in the fields of california to harvest the food that sustains us all, at great profit to the growers.

FEW had families to shelter them now that they could no longer work and so were no longer welcome in the grower-owned labor camps that had been their only homes for decades. They faced living in ~~broken down~~^{SAVALID} little rooms on skid row, lucky if they got enough to eat, far away from the fellow farm workers who had been their only family.



ITLIONG was determined that they would have decent housing. And he helped them get it by playing a key role in construction of a retirement village on union-owned land in delano. Here they live among their friends in clean, comfortable rooms, with plenty of food, recreational facilities and medical care.

LARRY itliong, suffering from parkinson's disease, was only 63 when he died on february eighth ... just 12 days before cesar chavez and other leaders of the farm workers union and the afl-cio were to hold a testimonial luncheon for him in delano. The event had been arranged, in part, to help raise money for itliong to visit his birthplace in the philipine islands.

LARRY itliong left behind a wife, seven children ... and thousands of farm workers whose chances for a decent life were improved immeasurably because of the cause to which larry itliong devoted his life.

-0-

THIS has been dick meister. Thanks very much for listening.

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