

Union Lettuce Worker Shot Dead In Clash With Nonstriking Pickers

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LOS ANGELES, Feb. 11 — A striking member of the United Farm Workers of America was shot to death yesterday in a riotous clash between strikers and non-strikers in the Imperial Valley of California.

Growers requested Gov. Edmund G. Brown Jr. to call out the National Guard to restore order in the increasingly vio-

lent, 23-day strike against 10 lettuce growers, but officials in Imperial Valley said they believed the Guard was not needed at present.

According to the Imperial County Sheriff's Department, the shooting occurred when striking members of the union stormed a lettuce field where replacement workers, recruited in other parts of the state, were picking lettuce.

Three men were arrested for suspicion of murder, but Lieut. Richard Wilson of the sheriff's department said the three would not be named or charged until more details were known about the incident in which Rufino Contreras, a 27-year-old Mexican national, was fatally shot.

Dispute Involves Wages

Two of the men arrested are employees of one of the lettuce growers struck by the farm workers union and the third was an informant for the farm-labor contractor that had supplied nonstriking workers to the growers.

In a dispute over wages that began Jan. 19, the farm workers union has shut off about one-third of the lettuce production in the Imperial Valley, which is situated on the Mexican border 100 miles east of San Diego. Normally, it produces about 90 percent of the nation's winter crop of iceberg lettuce.

Cesar Chavez, president of the farm workers union, appealed today to his members for restraint and calmness. He declared a period of mourning and a moratorium on picketing until after the funeral of Mr. Contreras.

Several dozen sheriff's deputies used tear gas to quell another confrontation between strikers and newly recruited lettuce pickers yesterday at a different ranch. Deputies asserted that striking farm workers punctured the tires and broke the windshields of several of the buses that had been used to bring replacement workers to the fields.

There were different versions today of how the fatal shooting incident began. Spokesmen for the union called the shooting "cold-blooded murder" and contended that it was an example of how growers had started earlier incidents of violence. But growers contended that the incident was part of an effort by the union to intimidate workers brought in to pick their crop.

Lieut. Wilson said Mr. Contreras was shot after he and approximately 75 other union members climbed a fence next to a lettuce field and began running at a group of approximately 60 of the workers who had been brought here by the grower.

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