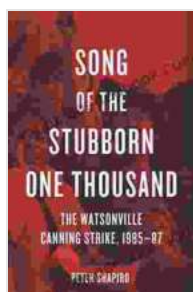


The Historic Watsonville Cannery Strike: A Catalyst for Farmworker Rights

The Watsonville Canning Strike of 1985-87 was a pivotal event in the history of farmworker rights in California and beyond. It was the longest strike in U.S. agricultural history, lasting for over two years, and it brought national attention to the plight of farmworkers and the need for improved labor conditions in the agricultural industry.

Background

Watsonville, California, is located in the heart of the Salinas Valley, a major agricultural region known for its production of fruits and vegetables. In the 1980s, the canning industry was a major employer in the region, with several large canneries employing thousands of workers. Many of these workers were immigrants from Mexico and other Latin American countries, and they often worked in low-paying, dangerous jobs with few benefits.



Song of the Stubborn One Thousand: The Watsonville Canning Strike, 1985-87 by Peter Shapiro

★★★★★ 5 out of 5

Language : English
File size : 1003 KB
Text-to-Speech : Enabled
Enhanced typesetting : Enabled
X-Ray : Enabled
Word Wise : Enabled
Print length : 237 pages
Lending : Enabled
Screen Reader : Supported



Working Conditions

In the years leading up to the strike, conditions for cannery workers in Watsonville had deteriorated significantly. Wages were stagnant, benefits were scarce, and workers were often forced to work long hours in unsafe conditions. There was also a lack of respect and dignity in the workplace, with workers often being treated as disposable commodities.

Unionization Efforts

In response to these conditions, workers at several canneries in Watsonville began to organize themselves into unions. They were supported by the United Farm Workers (UFW), a labor union founded by Cesar Chavez and Dolores Huerta that had been fighting for farmworker rights since the 1960s.

The Strike

On May 1, 1985, workers at the Watsonville Canning Company went on strike. They were demanding better wages, benefits, and working conditions. The strike quickly spread to other canneries in the region, and within a few months, over 10,000 workers were on strike.

Stalemate and Violence

The strike quickly reached a stalemate, as the canneries refused to meet the demands of the workers. The situation escalated in July 1985, when a group of strikers clashed with police in a violent confrontation. Several strikers were injured, and the incident drew national attention to the strike.

National Support

The violence in Watsonville galvanized support for the strikers across the country. Civil rights groups, labor unions, and religious organizations all joined the call for improved conditions for farmworkers. The strike also received support from celebrities and politicians, including Cesar Chavez, Jesse Jackson, and Democratic presidential candidate Walter Mondale.

Negotiations and Settlement

After over two years of strikes and negotiations, a settlement was finally reached in October 1987. The settlement included wage increases, improved benefits, and a grievance procedure to address workplace issues. It also established a joint labor-management committee to oversee the implementation of the agreement.

Impact of the Strike

The Watsonville Canning Strike was a watershed moment in the history of farmworker rights in the United States. It raised awareness of the plight of farmworkers and helped to improve working conditions in the agricultural industry. The strike also strengthened the UFW and inspired other farmworker organizing efforts across the country.

Legacy

The legacy of the Watsonville Canning Strike continues to this day. It is remembered as a symbol of the struggle for farmworker rights and the power of organized labor. It also serves as a reminder of the importance of social justice and the fight for fair treatment for all workers.

Additional Resources

* [Watsonville Canning Strike: A Chronology]

(<https://library.ucsc.edu/node/106748>) * [The Watsonville Cannery Strike: A

Struggle for Justice](<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rlyXj0dt7IY>) *

[Farmworker Justice: The Story of the United Farm Workers]

([https://www.amazon.com/Farmworker-Justice-Story-United-](https://www.amazon.com/Farmworker-Justice-Story-United-Workers/dp/0679727854)

[Workers/dp/0679727854](https://www.amazon.com/Farmworker-Justice-Story-United-Workers/dp/0679727854))

Image Credits

* Featured image: [Watsonville Canning Strike picket line]

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[72157628657091090/](https://www.flickr.com/photos/ufw/8370760864/in/album-72157628657091090/)) (CC BY-NC-ND 2.0) * Image 2: [Strikers clashing

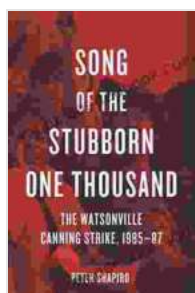
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[72157628657091090/](https://www.flickr.com/photos/ufw/8370761838/in/album-72157628657091090/)) (CC BY-NC-ND 2.0) * Image 3: [Cesar Chavez

speaking at a strike rally]

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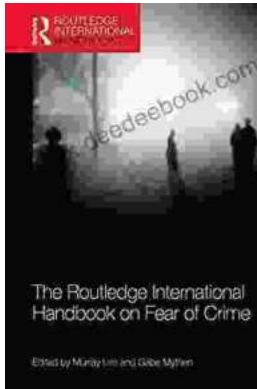
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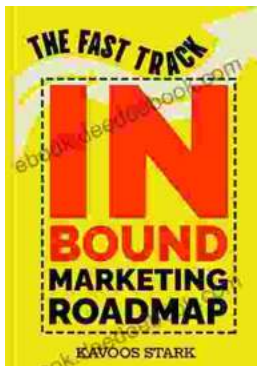
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