

## Reading

# Excerpts from “Andrew G. Imutan 1965–1974,” Essays by UFW Volunteers

Andrew Imutan joined the Agricultural Workers Organizing Committee (AWOC), a farmworkers' union, in 1965, saying that his reasons for joining were “the low wages, bad housing facilities, lack of protection from labor laws, antiquated working conditions, unsanitary working facilities (drinking water and lack of toilets in the field), and a union contract.” In the following excerpts from his essay on the subject, Andrew discusses the events that led up to the Delano grape workers' unanimous strike in 1965.

In the period leading up to the strike, AWOC members made the decision to send letters to the growers demanding an increase in wages, which were ignored. Imutan recounts the union members' responses at the meeting that would lead to a strike of Delano's grape workers.

September 1, 1965. The meeting was called for 6 o'clock, but by 3 o'clock Filipino Hall was full. There were Filipino, Mexican, Puerto Rican, African American, and a few white farmworkers crowding the space in the hall. More than 80% of them were Filipinos. The workers were noisy and excited because they knew they needed to make a major decision that could affect their lives . . .

He [Larry Itliong, the leader of the AWOC] then got the returned letters, still unopened, and raised them for everyone to see. “The growers ignored our letters of demand for an increase in wages from the present \$1.20 a box to \$1.40 plus 25 cents a box. . . . You have to make your decision about what we have to do about it here. Those who want to say something, please raise your hands and as I recognize you, please approach the mike in the middle of the hall,” Larry said.

There was some commotion as more than 30 members formed the line to take turns in presenting their views. The first one to speak was Jimmy Aimes, crew boss for Caratan, and he spoke in his dialect. “I suggest we strike them as we did in Coachella. The rate we are asking for is not really very high. In fact, I think we should ask for more,” he said.

Bob Armington, also a crew boss, followed. “I believe we are not being treated properly. When they ignored our written demands, it only means they do not respect or care about us. They should realize by now that the workers are no longer satisfied with the very low wages they are giving. We should follow what the Coachella workers did—teach them a lesson again,” he said.

George Catalan, a worker, spoke next. "Yes, I think we need to do what the Coachella workers did; it is about time we stand up for our demands for better wages, better living and working conditions, and a union contract," he said. . . .

"If that is what you want, we should ask for a motion to strike the growers because they have continually ignored our demands. Who wants to make the motion?" Larry asked.

"I move that we strike all the table growers in Delano, Arvin, and Lamont or everyone we sent the letters to, for ignoring our written demand," Bob Armington said.

"I second the motion," said Fred Abad.

"I want those in favor to please stand up with your hands raised," thundered Larry into the microphone.

Everyone in that hall stood up with their hands in the air; it was a unanimous decision to call a strike against the grape growers in Delano and vicinity . . .<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> "Andrew G. Imutan 1965–1974," Essays by United Farm Workers Volunteers Collection, FMDP, 2, accessed April 6, 2023.