

Violence triggers new reactions

Police plan to step up patrols; Company says it won't bargain

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STAFF WRITER

Violence is getting worse in the four-month-old frozen-food strike, and this morning all parties concerned are reacting with independent plans that may increase tensions in the strike.

While city police said they would step up patrols to guard against violence, strike supporters held a press conference this morning charging discrimination against the strikers. And at the same time, Watsonville Canning officials have called off further talks until all violence stops.

The number of strike-related disturbances decreased during the holidays. But the incidents that have occurred have been violent and include beatings, arson attempts and, recently, shootings.

In response to the three shooting incidents that happened over the weekend, the president of Watsonville Canning said today he has broken off talks with the union until all violence stops.

"I am thoroughly and totally disgusted with what has happened. I am at a point of no

return with the union," said Smiley Verduzco, president of Watsonville Canning. "I will not sit down with any of those sons of bitches under any circumstances."

Verduzco said he notified Robert Crall, the federal mediator who schedules and moderates talks, that he would not return to the bargaining table "until the union comes to grips with the problem."

From his San Francisco office Crall said he has been on the "phone all morning trying to deal with the situation." Crall said no talks have been canceled, but that he had hoped the two sides would meet soon.

Union officials condemned the acts this morning and denied the assumption that striking frozen food workers should be blamed. However, Local 912 president Leon Ellis, said "frustration is magnifying among the strikers."

A Friday night incident, in which the son of a striker was charged with assault, prompted members of the Strike Support Committee to denounce how city police are enforcing the injunction that limits movement around the plants.

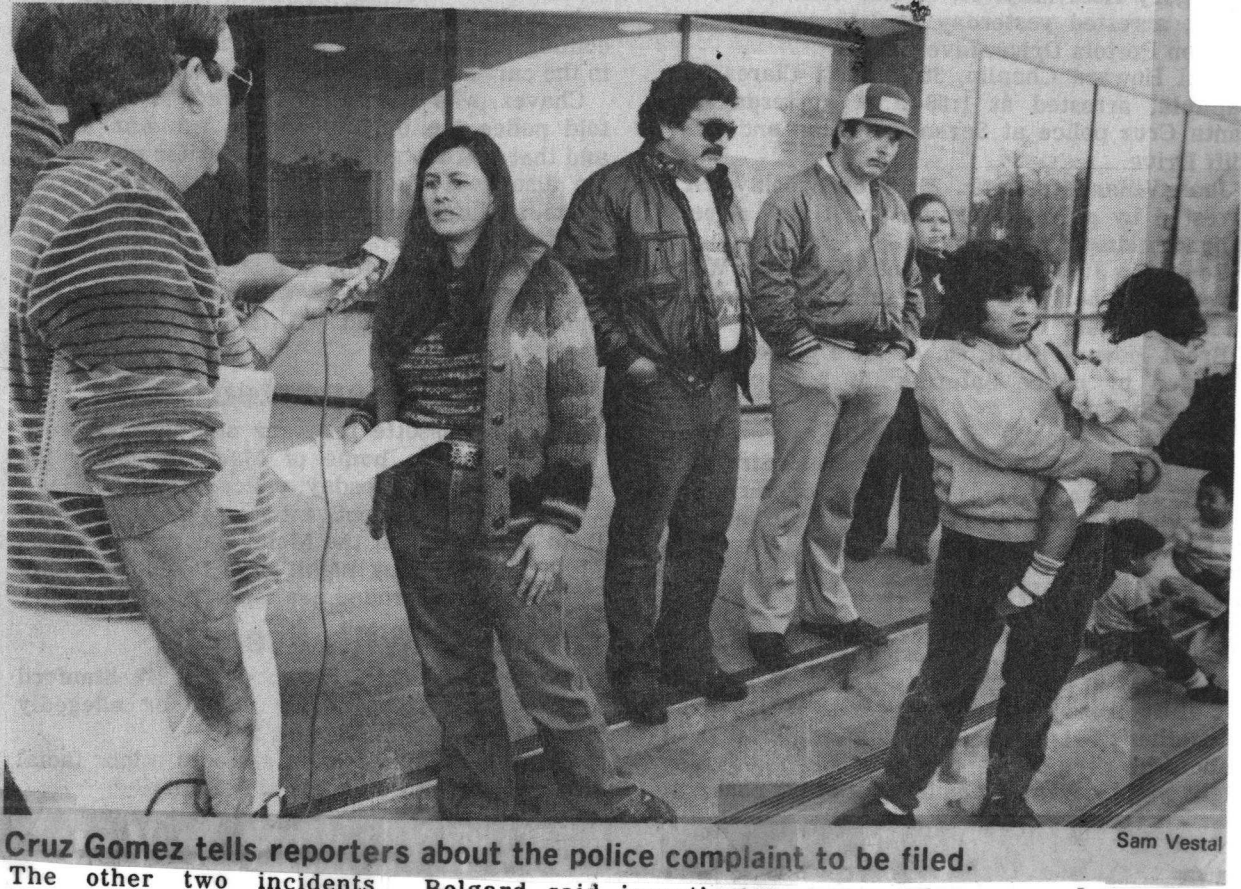
Cruz Gomez, of the Strike Support Committee, marched from the union hall on West Lake Avenue to the police station this morning to bring attention to what she said was excessive use of police force and a lack of impartiality in how the department operates. Gathered with Gomez outside city hall were about 15 strikers, who claimed they have treated unfairly by police.

Gomez said the group would be filing its first inter-office brutality complaint against the department this afternoon. A legal complaint against the city was filed in November, but no citizen complaints have been brought to Police Chief Ray Belgard.

Belgard said police are still investigating the three shooting incidents that occurred early Saturday morning.

A third incident occurred around 4 a.m.

Two Watsonville Canning workers told police that someone followed them as they walked to their car near the plant. Several shots were fired, they said. Two shots struck the workers' car.



Cruz Gomez tells reporters about the police complaint to be filed. Sam Vestal

The other two incidents occurred about an hour later. The home of a Watsonville Canning manager was shot at, and a car that was carrying three non-striking workers was shot at near Harkins Slough Road and Green Valley Road.

No one was injured in any of the incidents.

Verduzco said Watsonville Canning has a 24-hour private security guard on duty outside the home of the manager where a shooting occurred Saturday morning.

Belgard said investigators have ruled out no one in that case, and that the department is "also looking into some avenues that are not strike related."

Evening patrols around the plants had been reduced by city police, but Belgard said he would increase plain clothes patrols during evening hours.

"Patrolling a strike is new to us. All the unknowns in the strike leave us guessing from day to day," said Belgard. "We

will be increasing patrols in the evening and someone may find us stopping them at 2 or 3 in the morning. We want to know who's moving around out there and why."

REFERENCE

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