Massacre in Oceanside

Farmworkers Ambushed by Anglo Youth

by Frank Gormlie

Imagine the local press coverage of a massacre of two white La Jollans by a small group of Mexicans waiting in ambush ... It would be outrageous, right? On the front page for weeks ... Probably. Now what would be the coverage if the roles were reversed? Let's say, two Mexican farmworkers gunned down in an ambush-style slaying by several Anglos ... Almost nothing, right? Right.

The media in San Diego reflect the dominant values and ideology here. So when farmworkers with no papers are shot to death by Anglos, the establishment press response only mirrors the climate of oppression that surrounds our undocumented workers.

Massacre at Dusk

At dusk on February 5th, a group of undocumented farmworkers were walking along a road of a large farming estate bordering Oceanside. As they reached a crossroads close to North River Road, the calm was shattered by the sounds of a semi-automatic 22. Waiting in ambush, a group of Anglo youths opened fire on the farmworkers, shooting them from behind.

Four workers were hit. In the chaotic moments following the massacre, other farmworkers rushed the attackers. The blond youth with the gun was about to reload when he and his two accomplices jumped into a car and sped off. Two men lay dead or dying. For Juvenal Vava Uribe and Dionisio Camacho, it was their last sunset. Two others, Pablo Martinez Toledo and Raul Mejia Garcia, were wounded and rushed to Tri-City Hospital. All the men shot were in their late teens or early 20's and all had come north from the Mexican state of Queretaro. Their current home was among the brush shacks of the makeshift camps near the fields of the Kawano Brothers Growers.

A week later Oceanside police arrested three local Anglo youths for the murders: Michael Oryall (age 16), who owned the rifle recovered, Brian Spots (15), and Ralph Crenshaw (17). All lived less than a mile from the shootings in a racially mixed 'lower middle class' neighborhood bordering the Marine base at Camp Pendleton.

As of this writing, both Oryall and Crenshaw have been ordered to stand trial as adults for murder and attempted murder, while the younger Spots may, under the same charges, make California history for being the first person to have a jury trial as a juvenile. The trials will begin in June and will most likely be held at the Vista Courthouse. Oryall, the blond of the three, is being held on $1500,000 bail.

The Motive?

So what was their motive? The attitude of the police and the prosecution is that these youths are some of the local toughs who regularly prey on the field workers by robbing them of their hard earned cash. Undocumented workers in the fields represent an easy target because of their "illegal" status and fear of going to the police. Robbery is the official motive, although authorities admit they aren't certain.

Given the massacre nature of the ambush, though, and the racist prejudice surrounding undocumented workers, we have to look further.

According to an observer of the case, these same Anglo teenagers had just a month before the shooting attempted to kidnap a farmworker. They were discovered by a Mexican security guard marching a farmworker at knife point toward an automobile. The knife was dropped and kicked under the car seconds before the guard made a citizen's arrest and called in the Oceanside police. When the police did arrive to make the official arrests, they failed to report the kidnapping attempt or the knife. As a result the youths were convicted of trespass and placed on probation. At least one of their probation officers had never been told of the kidnapping or of the weapon. The Oceanside cops apparently ignored the Mexican guard's description of what had transpired.

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Substitute Teacher Barred

Substitute teachers do not have many rights. Roy D. Rogers knew this before he started subbing in the Escondido High School District. But he didn't realize just to what extent until he was barred from teaching last January for allowing his students to discuss 'socialized medicine.'

Roy, an artist by profession, had been substitute teaching three or four times a week for the three high schools in the Escondido district when he was called in for a senior class at San Pasqual High. After the completion of the assignment he had given the 26 students in the class, Roy, true to his style of teaching, tried to engage the students in discussing several topics. They included 'politics in general,' 'death,' 'the environment,' 'health,' and 'socialized medicine.'

Near its end the ensuing discussion evolved into the pros and cons of current medicine and socialized medicine. One student seemed highly defensive and offended by the dialogue. Suzanne Douglas, the daughter of an affluent orthopedic surgeon, angrily defended the current system. When the class was about to be dismissed, Roy explained that the discussion was "all for fun," that no one should take anything personally. He apologized to Suzanne in the event she had been offended. Four or five students stayed after class to continue the discussion.

Mr. Rogers substituted for another week or so. And then nothing, ... no calls from any of the schools. Puzzled, Roy telephoned the District headquarters and was informed by the personnel manager that his services were no longer needed. Why not? Roy asked. The reply: the District didn't have to tell him.

Roy then called the schools themselves. Orange Glen High reported that

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Haydee Torres Returned

San Diego is a long way from Puerto Rico. So Federal authorities must think, for they have moved a Puerto Rican freedom fighter back to the Metropolitan Correction Center. During the first week of May, Haydee Torres, one of 10 suspected members of the FALN (Armed Force for National Liberation) of Puerto Rico, currently in U.S. prisons, was taken from her cell in Pleasanton, California, and moved to San Diego.

Last year a massive country-wide letter campaign forced the government to move Haydee out of the MCC to Pleasanton because of serious health problems. Now without explanation, she is back. Haydee considers herself a prisoner of war in the struggle for Puerto Rican independence.

Disarmament: The Vandenberg Chapter

by Ruth Rominger

"There are no penalties this court or government can give that could possibly stop this movement." After two days of processing arrestees in the Vandenberg Air Force Base junior college gym, these were the sentiments of the presiding U.S. Magistrate. She had spent over thirty hours arraigning non-cooperators who gave their names as "Emma Goldman," "Karen Silkwood," or no name at all. Over 800 arrests were made. 550 were booked as John or Jane Doe.

Vandenberg Air Force Base occupies 100,000 acres along the California coastline 60 miles north of Santa Barbara. The land is sacred to the native Chumash Indians and the U.S. military. Small farming communities sit sparingly around the base perimeter. Within the base is a self-contained community with schools, shopping center, military business district, housing developments and supportive services, like an autobody shop. Surrounding the small population pockets are woods, hills, canyons, pasture land, chaparral, and the ocean. Along the immediate and exquisite coastline, within a quarter of a mile from the breaking surf, are the test launching sites of the Minuteman and the MX missiles. The borderlands of the base are under constant surveillance by armed guards posted on hilltops and along roads. No unauthorized personnel can be on base property when the missiles are shot off towards their coral reef target 500 miles away.

The coral reef is in the midst of the Kwajalein Atoll, part of the Marshall Islands, 2500 miles southwest of Hawaii. It is the home of many Marshallese. The U.S. took control of the islands after World War II and relocated thousands of Pacific Islanders in order to test transcontinental missile accuracy. Sixty-six nuclear weapons tests over the previous fifteen years has left these people with widespread fallout, disease, and genetic mutation. Miscarriages and birth defects are deplorably common. Radioactivity is building in the food chain. Six islands have been completely obliterated. The native culture and economic system are in ruins. The one island that has all the amenities of the western industrialized world: hospital, shopping center, golf course and tennis club, is the home of U.S. military personnel. It is strictly off limits to all natives but those who commute there daily to prepare the occupiers' food, scrub their toilets, and collect their garbage. They are not allowed to use the services in which they work.

But the Pacific Islanders are in revolt. They are re-occupying their islands against the forces of the U.S. military. They want their land, and future. The Vandenberg occupation was planned in solidarity with the native Pacific Islanders and the native American Indians who want their homes back.

Civil Disobedience: The Defense of the People

More than 2500 people gathered around Vandenberg Air Force Base March 21st to "turn around" the nuclear weapons buildup by obstructing the missile testing business of the United States Government. The protesters included forty-year veterans of the Peace Movement and fourteen year old novices. Participants came to blockade the main entrance, travel overland into the heart of the base, and coordinate the sup-

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Massacre continued

Other questions abound. What were our kidnappers going to do with their victim? Were they thwarted from carrying out another execution just a month before the shootings? Given this earlier incident and despite official denials, we have to ask, were the shootings racially motivated? And if so, why? What or who would drive these Anglo teenagers to ambush undocumented workers?

Climate of Racism

Living in the virtual shadow of one of the largest Marine bases in the country, where thousands of young people (not much older than our young ambaushers) are being trained to kill, and living just down the freeway from where the Border Patrol stops vehicles with undocumented people, Oryall, Crenshaw, and Spots grew up in a racist, militaristic environment. These young men live in a region where the local press hysterically report Border Patrol "body counts" and local politicians openly call for raids on farmworker camps. All the while the outrageous conditions of the undocumented workers go unheeded and their contributions unrecognized.

Within this climate of racism, perhaps these youthful killers fell into the white-supremist colonial mentality of the press and politicians—not to mention more hard-line ideologies. The Ku Klux Klan has its regional center just a few miles away in Fallbrook. And although there is no evidence of Klan involvement in this particular case, the Klan's history in Oceanside is well rememberd.

In 1976, the Klan openly recruited at Camp Pendleton. The Pendleton 14 case became a cause celebre when 14 Black Marines assaulted a group of white marines who were Klan sympathizers. Two years later Oceanside was the site of a clash between hundreds of anti-Klan demonstrators and a group of Klansmen. A Klan leader obtained 13% of the popular vote when he ran in the Congressional District that includes Oceanside. This same leader had repeatedly called for the establishment of a military corridor on the Mexican-American border and that undocumented workers crossing that territory "should be shot."

The trials of these young men are approaching, yet the underlying impulses behind the shootings may never be revealed. We can only speculate. But given the nature of the massacre, 'attempted robbery' as a motive seems very stretched. And the near blackout of press coverage (the one exception being Oceanside's *Blade-Tribune*) around this case will continue to ensure that the truth remains concealed.