

= Larry Itliong =

Larry Dulay Itliong (25 October 1913 ? 8 February 1977) , also known as " Seven Fingers " , was a Filipino American labor organizer . He organized West Coast agricultural workers starting in the 1930s , and rose to national prominence in 1965 , when he , Philip Vera Cruz , Benjamin Gines and Pete Velasco , walked off the farms of area table @-@ grape growers , demanding wages equal to the federal minimum wage , that became known as the Delano grape strike . He has been described as " one of the fathers of the West Coast labor movement . "

= = Biography = =

Itliong was a native of Pangasinan Province in the Philippines . One of six children of Artemio and Francesca Itliong , Itliong only had a sixth grade education . He immigrated to the United States in 1929 and joined his first strike in 1930 ; Itliong was only 14 when he came to the United States . Itliong was an excellent card player , and avid cigar smoker , who spoke multiple Filipino languages , Spanish , Cantonese , Japanese , and taught himself about law . Itliong married six times , had seven children , and raised his family in the Delano area and in the Little Manila community of Stockton , California

As a farmworker Itliong worked in Alaska , where he organized cannery and agricultural unions , Washington , and up and down California ; he also worked in Montana and South Dakota . While living in Alaska , he helped found the Alaska Cannery Workers Union (which later became Local 7 of the United Cannery and Packing and Allied Workers Union , then Local 7 of the International Longshoreman 's and Warehouse Workers Union) . He lost three fingers in an accident in an Alaskan cannery , which earned him the nickname , " Seven Fingers . "

Some of the labor organizers whom Itliong met in his early days had ties to the Communist Party . Filipinos in California lead the way in unionization efforts among farmworkers in the 1930s and 40s . During World War II , Itliong served on a U.S. Army transport ship as a messman . After the war , he settled in the city of Stockton in California 's Central Valley . In 1948 , Itliong (along with Rudy Delvo , Chris Mensalvas , Philip Vera Cruz , and Ernesto Mangaoang) became involved in the 1948 asparagus strike , which was the first major agriculture strike after World War II . Itliong served as the first shop steward of International Longshore and Warehouse Union Local 37 , in Seattle , and was elected its vice @-@ president in 1953 . He served as secretary of the Filipino Community of Stockton from 1954 to 1956 . In 1956 , Itliong founded the Filipino Farm Labor Union in Stockton . In 1957 , he was elected president of the Filipino Voters League in Stockton . By 1965 , Itliong was leading the AFL ? CIO union Agricultural Workers Organizing Committee ; the majority of members of the committee were Filipinos who had in the 1930s arrived in the United States .

A vote was held on 3 May 1965 in which the committee voted to strike against Coachella Valley grape growers . Although the strikers weren 't able to negotiate a contract with the growers , they did succeed in winning higher wages . Following the success in Southern California , on 8 September 1965 the Agriculture Workers Organizing Committee voted to strike against grape growers in Delano , California , where the grape season starts in September . This strike became the first time Mexican workers , due to the decision of Cesar Chavez , did not break a strike of Filipinos ; later , on 16 September 1965 , Chavez 's National Farm Workers Association joined the Agricultural Workers Organizing Committee on the picket lines . These strikes occurred around the same time when younger Filipino Americans began a period of political self @-@ reflection and awakening .

The Agricultural Workers Organizing Committee and National Farm Workers Association merged to form the United Farm Workers ; Itliong was skeptical of the merger , as he believed that Mexicans would become dominant over the Filipinos when the organizations merged , and that improving work conditions would come at the expense of Filipino farmworkers , but Itliong kept those feelings to himself at the time . In 1966 , the California Rural Legal Assistance was founded as part of President Lyndon B. Johnson 's War on Poverty , with Cesar Chavez , Dolores Huerta , and Itliong sitting on the founding board . Itliong served as assistant director of the United Farm Workers under Cesar Chavez , and in 1970 he was appointed the United Farm Workers ' national boycott

coordinator . In 1971 , Itliong resigned from the United Farm Workers because of disagreements about the governance of the union ; another reason for resigning from the United Farm Workers , was that Itliong felt that the union was not willing to support aging Filipinos . Alex Fabros , a doctoral candidate at University of California , Santa Barbara , called the merger " devastating for the Filipinos who participated in the UFW . " .

After leaving the United Farm Workers , Itliong assisted retired Filipino farmworkers in Delano , and was a delegate at the 1972 Democratic National Convention . Together with Vera Cruz , Itliong worked towards building a retirement facility for UFW workers , known as Agbayabi Village . Although no longer in the United Farm Workers , Itliong continued to support others in the organized labor movement , such as helping others plan a strike against Safeway supermarkets in 1974 . Itliong also served as President of the Filipino American Political Association , a bipartisan lobbying organization . He died in 1977 at the age of 63 in Delano of Lou Gehrig 's disease .

= = Legacy = =

Most history books mention Chavez and the United Farm Workers , but do not include a mention of Itliong or other Filipinos . Speaking about Chavez and his father , Johnny Itliong said , " Larry was militant . Cesar was non @-@ violent . Cesar had handlers . Cesar had lawyers . Cesar was a dictator . "

The first public art memorial honoring Filipino American farmworkers was unveiled on June 24 , 1995 in LA's Historic Filipinotown with Larry Itliong and Philip Vera Cruz as its most prominent historical figures . Itliong was posthumously honored in 2010 by inclusion in a mural at California State University , Dominguez Hills . In 2011 , Los Angeles County recognized Itliong with Larry Itliong Day on 25 October ; this follows the City of Carson which became the first city in the United States to recognize Larry Itliong Day in the United States in 2010 . In mid @-@ April 2013 , the New Haven Unified School District renamed Alvarado Middle School Itliong @-@ Vera Cruz Middle School in honor of Vera Cruz and Larry Itliong ; this school is the first school in the United States to be named for Filipino Americans . There was a vocal opposition to the name change , some of whom waved Mexican flags , who said that the name changing disrupts the neighborhood 's tradition . The middle school was originally named for Juan Bautista Alvarado , and the name change will not take effect until 2015 . This occurred after a 13 @-@ year effort to rename a school for the Filipino American leaders , after several other schools had been named to reflect the city 's diverse population , including Cesar Chavez Middle School , where 20 % of the population is Filipino American . In late April 2013 , a Filipino business and a Filipino Community Center were targeted with graffiti vandalism ; the graffiti was investigated as a hate crime . In 2014 , an overpass over the Filipino American Highway was designated as the " Itliong @-@ Vera Cruz Memorial Bridge " .

Itliong will be portrayed by Darion Basco in the 2014 film about Cesar Chavez ; the film will not include other Filipino American farm labor leaders such as Vera Cruz . A documentary titled The Delano Manongs : Forgotten Heroes of the UFW was made to highlight the role of Filipinos in the farm labor movement , including Itliong ; the documentary was released in 2013 .

The Filipino Hall in Delano , California houses a collection of memorabilia .

The Larry Itliong Papers are housed at the Walter Reuther Library at Wayne State University in Detroit .