



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

Peter Shapiro

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On September 9, 1985, one thousand mainly Mexican women workers in Watsonville, California, the “frozen food capital of the world,” were forced out on strike in response to an attempt by Watsonville Canning owner, Mort Console, to break their union. They returned to work eighteen months later. Not one had crossed the picket line. A moribund union has been revitalized, and Watsonville's Latino majority emerged as a major force in local politics.

At a time when organized labor was in headlong retreat, the Watsonville Canning strike was a dramatic show of the power of women workers, whose struggle became a rallying point for the Chicano movement.

Apart from its sheer drama, the strikers' story illuminates the challenges facing a group of ordinary working people who waged a protracted and ultimately successful struggle against seemingly insurmountable odds.

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