

Vigilantes Again Block Organizers

By Jackson Rannells

Sheriff's deputies arrested four members of a shotgun-wielding vigilante group near Stockton yesterday following a scuffle at a tomato field after the citizen "posse" had turned back United Farm Workers Union organizers for the second straight day.

One officer suffered a minor concussion when the vigilante leader stumbled and his shotgun accidentally fired, deputies said. There were no other injuries.

State AFL-CIO leader John F. Henning called for Attorney General Evelle Younger to help the San Joaquin sheriff disarm the vigilante group.

Younger told reporters that he is satisfied that the sheriff "has things under control. If he calls for help, we'll give it," the attorney general said.

The Stockton incident was the only major disruption as the state started accepting petitions for secret ballot union elections on farms in the state's major grape and lettuce producing areas.

The United Farm Workers Union filed 39 petitions — mostly at ranches where the Teamsters

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Union has secured contracts without elections in recent years.

The Teamsters filed seven petitions yesterday, including on for the Gallo wine vineyards — the hottest point of conflict between the unions since 1973.

Under the new law, elections must be held within seven days after the petitions are filed.

The hassle between San Joaquin sheriff's deputies and the vigilante group, Posse Comitatus, occurred in mid-morning at the Western Tomato Field two miles south of Stockton.

The paramilitary group, including gun-toting teenagers, had blocked United Farm Workers Union organizers from entering the field Monday and they repeated the action yesterday.

The union organizers had left, but about 40 vigilantes and 15 sheriff's officers were still present when the scuffle occurred.

Sheriff Mike Canlis said the shotgun blast occurred when inspector Dan Delfatti approached citizens' posse member Francis Gillings to serve him an outstanding traffic warrant from Turlock Municipal Court.

"Gillings backed up. He yelled 'Back me up' to his people and a couple of them leveled guns at our fellows," Canlis said. "Then Gillings stumbled and his gun went off right in Delfatti's ear."

Officers wrestled Gillings to the ground, and several other vigilantes joined the melee, Canlis said.

Gillings, 44, a former Tracy service station operator, was booked for assault on a peace officer with a deadly weapon, brandishing a weapon and contributing to the delinquency of a minor.

Norman Brown, 55, was booked for assault on a peace officer with a deadly weapon. George E. Hill, 45, was charged with resisting arrest. A teenage boy also was arrested and referred to juvenile authorities.

Gillings and Brown were held in lieu of \$5000 bail each and Hill in lieu of \$1000 bail. Gillings was transferred to San Joaquin County Hospital in the afternoon for treatment of what deputies described as a diabetic condition.

Gillings opposed Canlis for sheriff two years ago and has been a leader in the vigilante group.

The group, Gillings told

Chronicle reporters earlier this year, belongs to the National Association to Keep and Bear Arms. He claimed its goals include protecting members from tax liens, keeping peace officers from serving eviction notices, making citizens' arrests of suspected lawbreakers and campaigning against Canlis.

Posse leaders told reporters yesterday they had been asked to protect the tomato field by its owner, who opposes the new state ruling letting union organizers enter fields before or after work or during lunch breaks.

Vigilante member Gene Brown told a deputy district attorney at the scene of yesterday's trouble that "This is private property and they're not coming in here—not until we all go to jail."

"I'm protecting everybody's property rights when I keep those people out of here," Brown said.

The new agricultural labor relations board's ruled Friday that field organizing was permitted, but the ruling was not filed with the secretary of state until yesterday.

The board's general counsel, Walter Kintz, said steps are being taken to enforce the organizers' access rights through injunctions.

In Fresno, however, the Nisei Growers League filed a suit in Superior Court in an attempt to block the state's enforcement of the field access rule.

The new law requires secret ballot elections for union representation — even though a union contract may be in effect if petitions are signed by 50 per cent of the work force. A second union can get on the ballot by obtaining signatures of 20 per cent of the work force.

UFW leader Cesar Chavez said his union plans to submit 40 to 50 petitions immediately and add others in the next few weeks.

The new state agency "couldn't handle it if we gave them all the petitions today," he said.

State officials said they hoped elections for some of the smaller farms can begin Friday. It will take the full seven days to certify eligibility to vote at some of the larger farms, which have several thousand workers, they said.