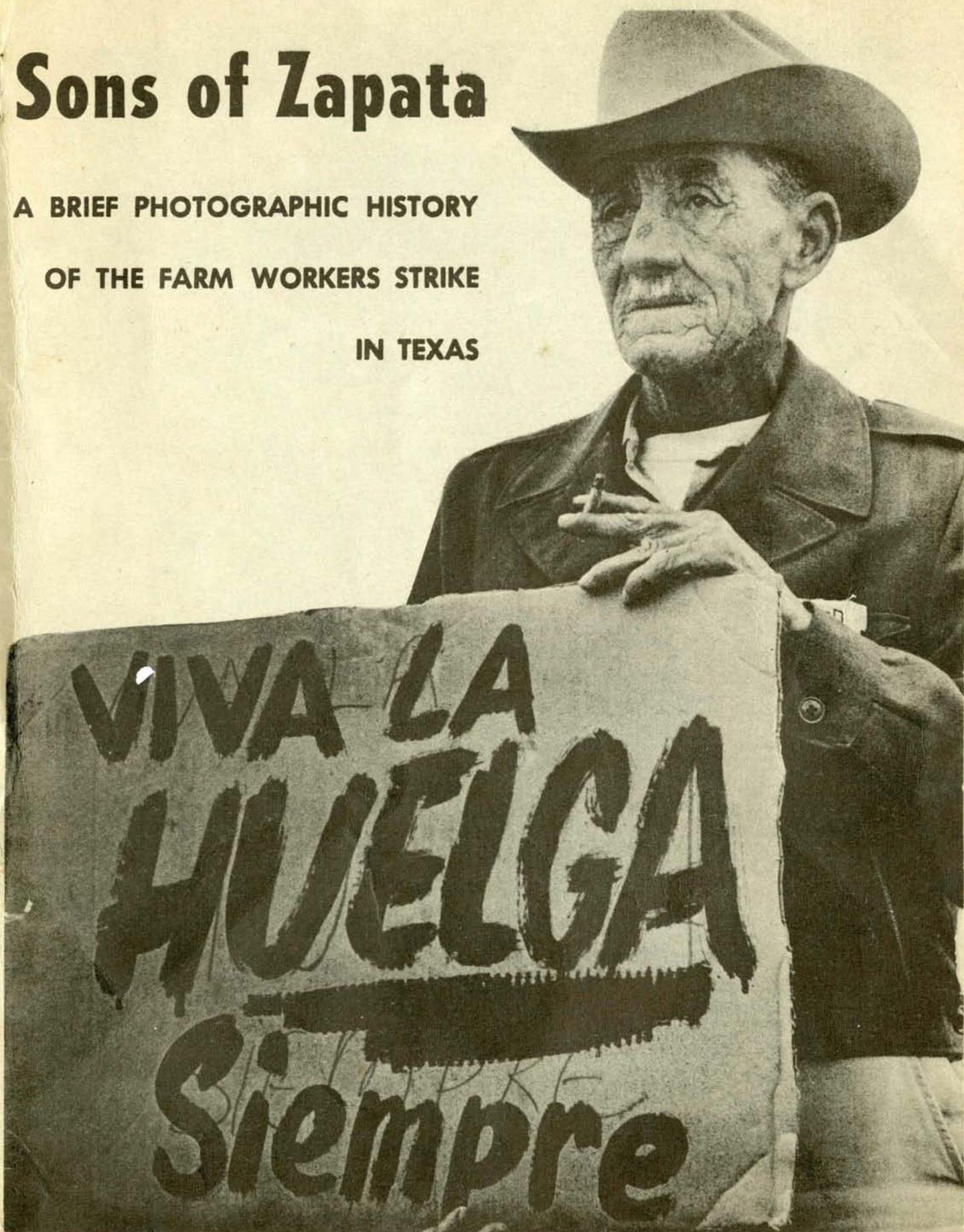


Sons of Zapata

A BRIEF PHOTOGRAPHIC HISTORY

OF THE FARM WORKERS STRIKE

IN TEXAS



SONS OF ZAPATA



ZAPATA

Electricians: \$6.00/hour
 Plumbers: \$5.50/hour
 Mechanics: \$4.50/hour
 Carpenters: \$3.50/hour
 Truck Drivers: \$2.95/hour
 Waiters: \$2.00/hour
 Farm Workers: \$0.50/hour

WHY?

ASOCIACION INDEPENDIENTE DE TRABAJADORES	
	POR HORA
ELECTRICISTA	\$ 6.00
PLOMERO	5.50
MECANICOS	4.50
CARPINTEROS	3.50
CHOFERES	2.95
MESEROS	2.00
TRABAJADOR CAMPESINO	.50

¿ POR QUÉ ?

The Underdogs

In order to appreciate the sacrifices made by the Sons of Zapata in their struggle for dignity and justice, it is necessary to know something of the land in which they live and the manner in which they have been ignored by their fellow Americans.

The average tourist, whose destination is Old Mexico and who passes through south Texas only incidentally, does not enter Starr County for it is not on the usual tourist routes. Starr County is an isolated backwater, outside the mainstream of American life. Virtually its sole distinction is that its 17,000 people, 90% of whom are of Mexican descent, are among the least well educated and the most unspeakably impoverished of any in the entire United States.

Except for a few oil and natural gas wells, industry is non-existent in Starr County. The only important means of livelihood available to the people is farm work, (prior to June, 1966, agricultural labor in Starr County drew 40¢ to a maximum of 85¢ an hour) and offers year-round jobs to but a few. The scarcity of jobs and the meagerness of the pay accounts for the large number of residents who migrate to other parts of the country in search of farm work during the summer of each year. From the valley of the Rio Grande, Mexican-American farm workers travel in their rickety old cars and heavily laden pick-ups to gather in the harvests of Arizona, California, Oregon, Colorado, and other states. They return to Texas in the fall, and try to get through the winter on the strength of their summer earnings.

The single most important reason for the disparity between the several dollars an hour paid to industrial workers in America and the 40-85¢ an hour paid to farm workers is that industrial workers are organized into labor unions. The National Labor Relations Act, which is regarded as a bill of rights for industrial worker organizations, specifically excludes agricultural workers from its provisions. This means that employers are under no obligation to bargain collectively with their employees, even if every one of them has signed an authorization card. There is no way in which an employer of farm workers can be forced to hold a representation election. In addition to the exclusion of farm laborers from the NLRA, the organization of agricultural employees in Texas is made even more difficult by the failure of state law to protect workers who sign authorization cards from being discharged or discriminated against by their employers. Organizing any union in Texas has always been difficult; organizing a farm workers union has been thought impossible heretofore.



Portrait of Starr County

According to the U.S. census of 1960, almost one-third of the 3,339 families residing in Starr County had annual incomes of under \$1,000. About 70% earned less than \$3,000, which was the cut-off level for defining the poverty-stricken when the "War on Poverty" was launched in 1964. The average *per capita* income in 1960, \$534, was so small as to rank the county as seventeenth poorest in the United States and as the most impoverished in Texas.

An estimated 22% of adult Starr County residents are illiterate in both Spanish and English. The average number of years of school completed by Starr County citizens is considerably less than the 6.7 years attained by adult male Texans of Mexican descent as a whole. By comparison, Californians of Mexican descent have an average of 10.8 years of schooling.





Rally in San Juan Plaza,
Rio Grande City, May,
1966.

Eugene Nelson addresses workers at a rally in Rio Grande City in late May, 1966. "You must be brave. . . You are the sons of Zapata," he said. "In the tradition of the American and Mexican Revolutions, and as citizens of the United States, you should stand up for your rights."

"All We Want Is Justice"

Conditions in Starr County made a strike inevitable. In the spring of 1966, many workers were saying, "Now is the time." Then, in May, 1966, Eugene Nelson moved to Mission, in the Lower Rio Grande Valley to help farm workers organize. Nelson had been a picket captain in the successful Delano, California, grape pickers strike.

Several workers from Rio Grande City suggested that Nelson come up to Rio Grande and speak to the workers about the Union. Over 60 workers showed up for the first rally. Several hundred signed cards authorizing the Union to negotiate a contract for them. Demands were modest. . . \$1.25 an hour and the right to bargain collectively. "All we want is justice" became the workers' cry.





Melons are the biggest crop in Starr County. The 1967 harvest exceeded \$5,000,000. La Casita Farms, a subsidiary of Hardin Farms of Salinas, California, grows a quarter of the total harvest for the county.

The Growers Answer, "Never!"

The majority of the farm workers in Starr County work for five major growers. Through letters, phone calls, and personal visits, the workers and their representatives called upon the growers to agree to the \$1.25 wage and to recognize the Union. The growers were just beginning to harvest their multi-million dollar melon crop, where profits sometimes exceed \$500 per acre. Wages ranged from 40¢ an hour to a high of 85¢. But the growers were unanimous. "We will never recognize the Union," they replied. One grower bragged that he would rather see his crops rot and the workers starve, than recognize the Union.

Major growers in Starr County include: La Casita Farms, whose melon harvest exceeds \$1,000,000 a year; Griffen & Brand (Trophy Farms), owner of several thousand acres in Texas and the Southwest; Starr Farms (Los Puertos Plantations); Sun-Tex Farms; Margo Farms; and Elmore & Stahl.





HUELGA!

Over 400 workers voted to go on strike against the melon growers of Starr County on June 1, 1966. Many workers immediately sought work outside the strike zone. Others began their yearly migrations to other states, leaving a month earlier than usual. The growers immediately began recruiting strikebreakers in Mexico. And wages began going up, as La Casita announced a new wage of \$1 an hour and other growers began paying 70¢ or 80¢ an hour. Over 80% of the work force quit the first day, and every packing shed in the County was shut down.

LA CASITA FARMS INC.

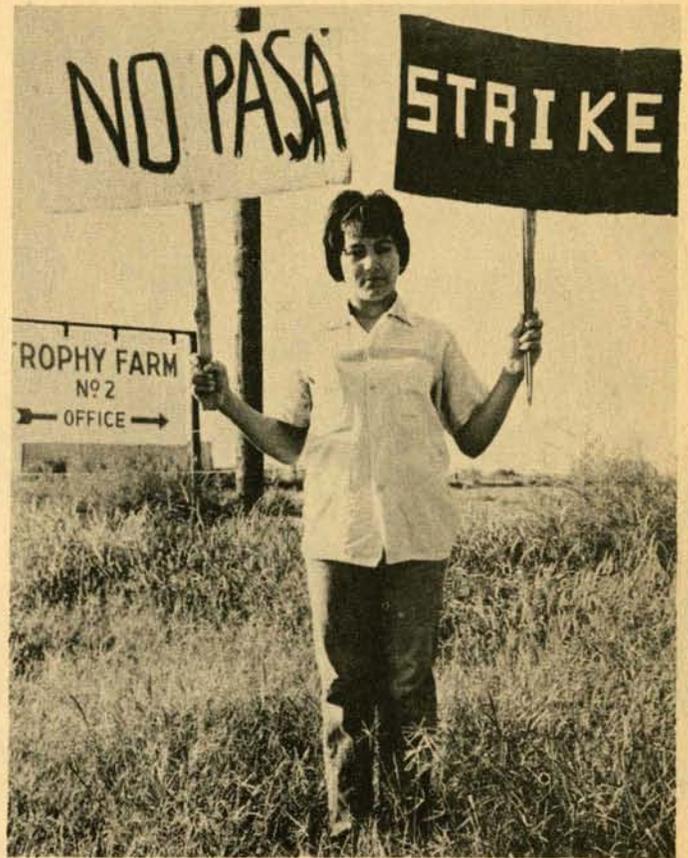
SONS OF ZAPATA/7

The First Day ...

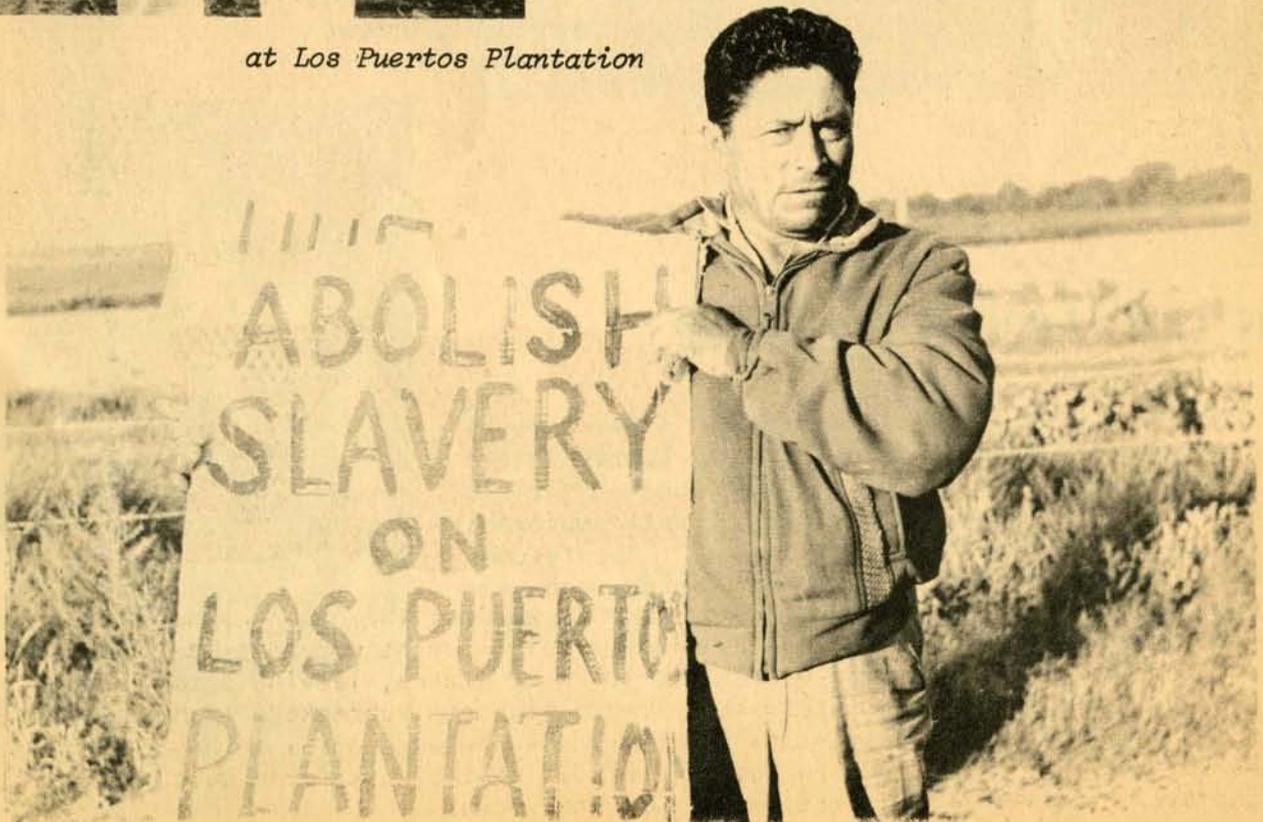
at La Casita

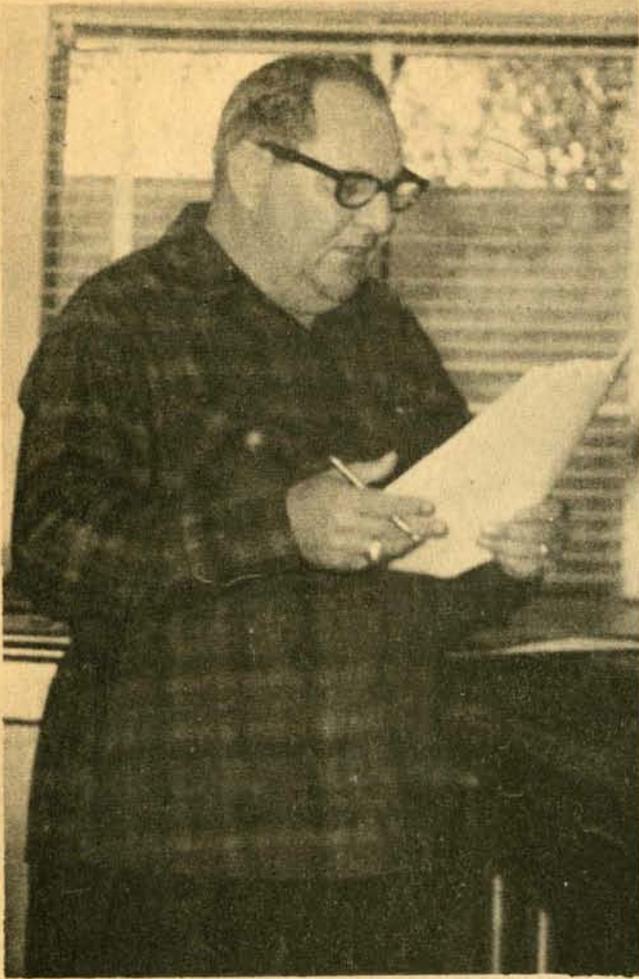


at Trophy Farms



at Los Puertos Plantation





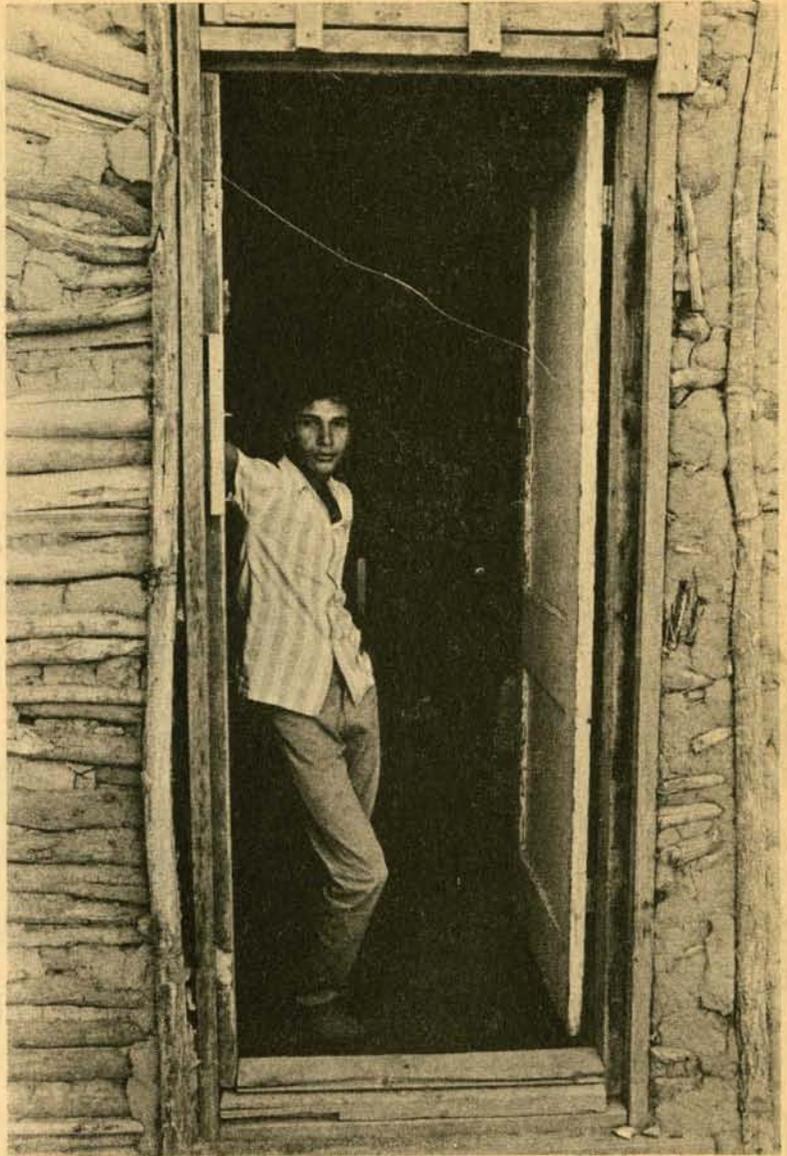
Randall Nye (left) is County Prosecutor. He is also an attorney for Starr Farms. Roberto Pena (right) is a deputy sheriff, and has participated in dozens of arrests of union members on trumped-up charges. Ranger Jerome Preiss (below) was the first rinche in Rio Grande. He arrived the first day of the strike, and immediately arrested Eugene Nelson.

"The Law" Against the Strike

The Starr County political machine ("New Party") immediately sided with the growers. The County Attorney, Randall Nye, and the Judges and County officials actively tried to break the strike. County employees sprayed union members with insecticide. County cops forcibly pushed workers into the fields, and made threats to keep them there. One District Judge outlawed all picketing.



Guillermo De la Cruz was 15 when he joined the strike. He was arrested at the Roma bridge on October 24, 1966. Charges were not brought against him. He and his wife live in this house, which they built.



Faces of the Strike

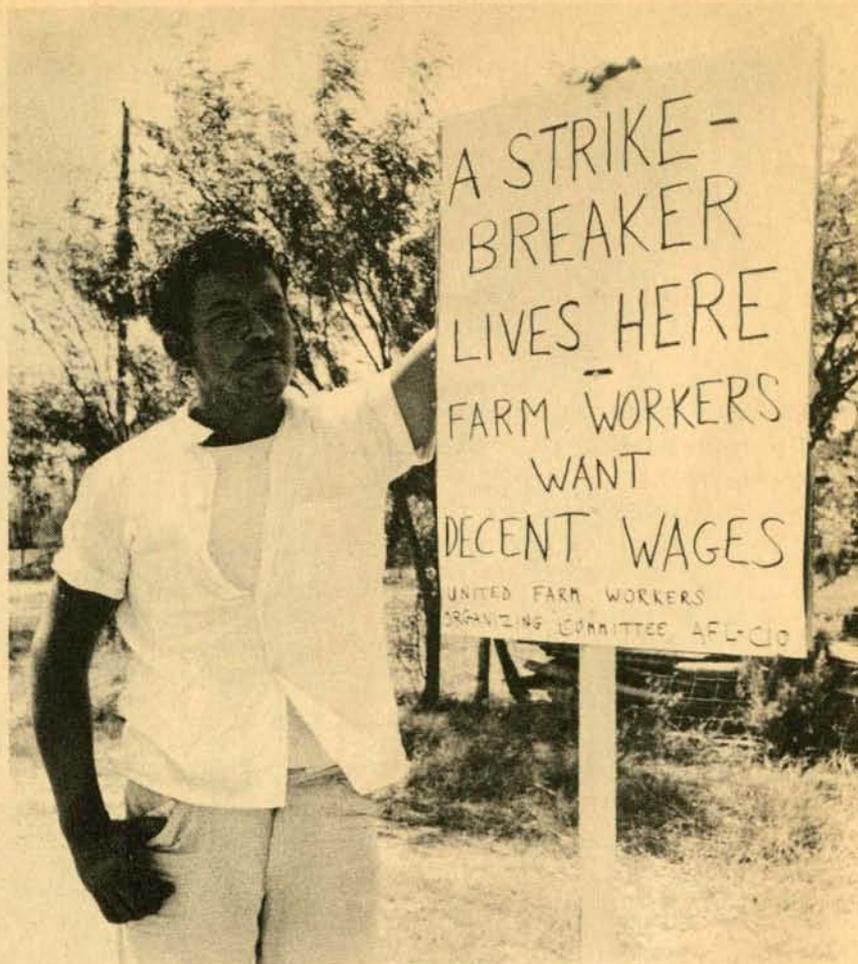
Rafael Trevino, picket captain, talks with Albina Garcia on the picket line.

Faces of the Strike

Librado de la Cruz (right), 27, has been arrested 7 times, more than anyone else in the Union, since the strike began.

Strikers (below, left) Gabriela Rosa, Emma Alaniz, and Sebastiana Lopez.

Domingo Arredondo (below, right) is strike chairman and local leader of the Starr County farm workers.



Eugenio Gonzales (right) is the custodian of the Union burro, named "\$1.25 an Hour."

Mario Vera, (below), 21, holds his two-year-old daughter Maricela.



Faces of the Strike



Chief cook Tomasa Mejorado (above) was one of the few members to march the entire 490 miles to Austin. Constanancia Lopez is an assistant cook in the strike kitchen.

Faces of the Strike



Ismael Diaz (left), 23, burned his hand while attempting to turn off an insecticide-oil spray machine which was directed toward the participants of a rally in San Juan Plaza in June, 1966. He was working at La Casita when the strike began.

→ Pedro Morin, Mrs. Morin, Roberto Arredondo, Pablo De la Cruz, and Pedro Rios.



United We Stand

The workers in Rio Grande voted to join their Independent Workers Association with the National Farm Workers Association, led by Cesar Chavez. Then in August, 1966, the NFWA merged with the Agricultural Workers Organizing Committee to form a new union, the United Farm Workers, AFL - CIO. Now all farm workers were united in one strong union, and the movement was gaining strength throughout the nation.



Gilbert Padilla (above), National Vice President of the UFWOC, has led the strike in Texas since early 1967. Tony Orendain (left), National Secretary-Treasurer, led the strike in the fall and winter of 1966. Cesar Chavez (below) is the leader of the farm worker movement in America.



"We Must Let the Whole World Know!"



The melon harvest ended in mid-June, with growers blaming their poor harvest on the weather and strikers claiming a partial victory. But no contracts were in sight. The workers decided to make a pilgrimage march, as had been done in California, to dramatize to the state and nation the conditions and wages and suffering that farm workers must endure, and to rally support for the cause among other farm workers and sympathizers.

Marching across Texas



Rest Stop on La Marcha

Mayor Al Ramirez of Edinburg greeted the marchers when they arrived in Edinburg. Ramirez, injured in a car wreck, had his hospital bed wheeled to the park to meet the workers.



Marchers arrive at Shrine of San Juan.

Friends Join Our Cause

As the March wound through South Texas, thousands of farm workers joined in for a mile, a day, a week. Mayors of Roma, Grulla, La Joya, and Edinburg endorsed the demands of the strikers. Bishop Humberto Medeiros greeted the farm workers in San Juan and held a special mass for them in the shrine there. Then the marchers set out for Corpus Christie, San Antonio, and finally Austin. Joining the farm workers were members from almost every union in Texas, religious leaders from all major faiths, and thousands of sympathizers.

Bishop Humberto Medeiros says a special mass for farm workers in the shrine at San Juan. The Bishop endorsed the strikers' demands and defended their right to organize a union. Archbishop Lucey of San Antonio suggested that \$1.25 was "ghastly recompense for the work and conditions of farm labor."





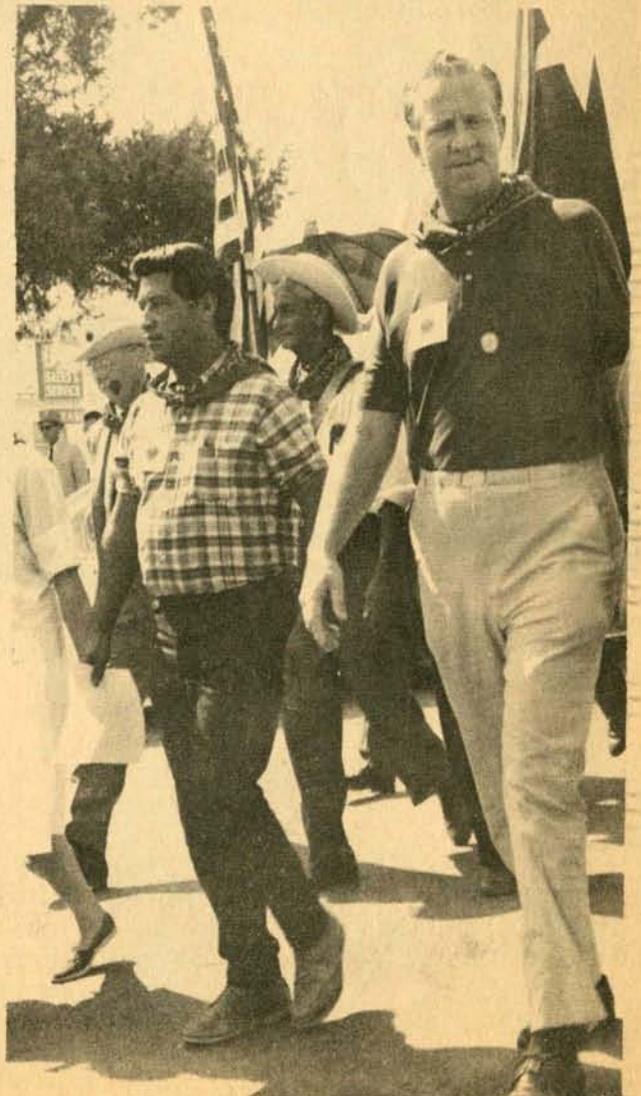
La Marcha Ends an Era...

La Marcha ended in triumph on Labor Day, 1966. Over 15,000 people joined in the final day. The leaders of the farm workers, Domingo Arredondo, Eugene Nelson, and Cesar Chavez; leaders of the AFL-CIO and unions throughout the state and nation; public servants; Mexican - American groups; and thousands of rank and file workers from every walk of life joined in that final glorious day.

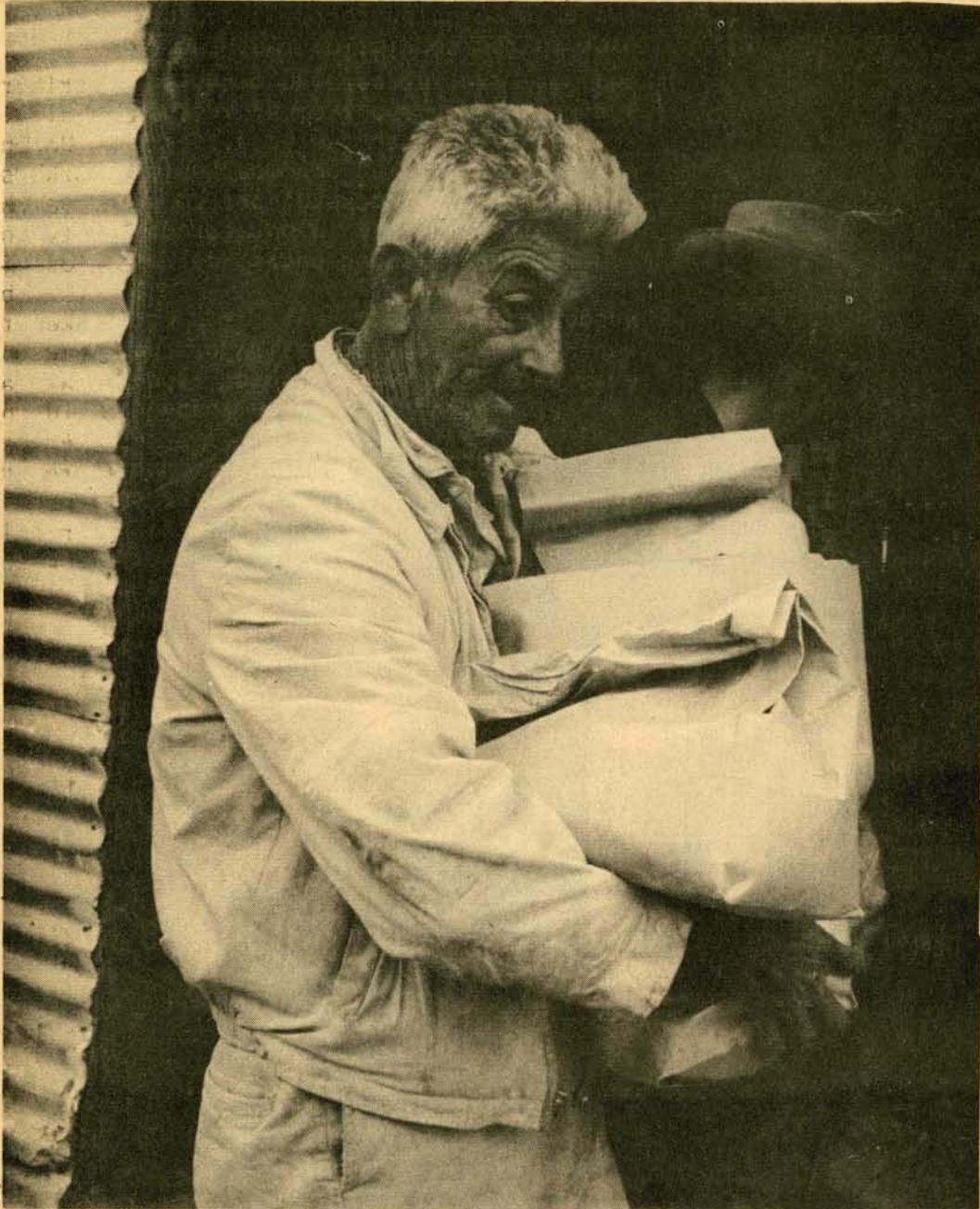
The March did not win any contracts, or even State passage of a \$1.25 minimum wage. But it ended forever the myth that Mexican-Americans were "happy, contented, satisfied" with second - class citizenship and a life of poverty. Political upsets that fall showed that Mexican-Americans would no longer blindly accept a corrupt political machine that opposed their interests. Thousands of workers began organizing and joining Unions throughout the State, and the whole labor movement was the beneficiary of this new spirit. La Marcha was symbolic of and contributed to the ever-quickenning awakening of the Mexican-Americans in Texas. It was symbolic of the end of an era. But the hard task of organizing farm workers of building a democratic Union and a new social order of justice lay ahead.



Marchers enter the state capital in Austin (opposite page) on the final day of the 490-mile march, Labor Day, 1966. Over 15,000 people joined in the final rally (right). Cesar Chavez (below, left), National Director of the United Farm Workers and Bill Kircher, head of the organizing department of the national AFL-CIO, walk in Austin. Chavez and Kircher had just celebrated the victory of the Union in the August 30 representation elections at the DiGiorgio Corporation in Delano, California.



The Support That Sustains Us



Vidal Lopez carries bags of groceries out of union warehouse during weekly distribution of donated food and clothing to families of strikers.

"¡Gracias!"

Our struggle in Starr County could not have survived were it not for the support and assistance of innumerable outside individuals and organizations. The list of our supporters includes labor unions, civic and veterans groups, churches of all denominations, individuals in all the foregoing organizations, and individuals with no organizational affiliation. For fear of being unable to mention all those who have helped and because words alone cannot express our gratitude, we have thought it best to issue a collective "*Muchas gracias.*"

Back to the Valley



During the fall, the strikers returned to the long, slow, difficult task of building their Union, of organizing their fellow workers. Migrants, who had left before the strike, returned to Starr County and learned of the Union. In cafes, in bars, in door-to-door efforts, the message of our cause was taken to every *barrio* and hamlet in the county. But the county political machine, fearing a n y change in the *status quo*, began an all-out effort to break t h e strike and scare the people. And the growers turned to Mexico f o r workers for their fall crops.

E l Teatro
Campesino...
A visit to
Rio Grande.



Rallies, like this one in Rio Grande City, raise support and food for the strikers, and give people in other towns a chance to l e a r n of our struggle.

"An Army moves on its stomach." The strike kitchen in Rio Grande City.





"Green card" commuters, who have just crossed the international bridge at Roma, Texas, step onto a La Casita Farms, Inc. bus. They will be driven the 23 miles from Roma to the La Casita farm for a day's work and will be returned to the bridge in the evening.

Imported Strike Breakers

The single most effective tactic used by the growers to combat the huelga in Starr County has been the employment of Mexican "green card" commuters. The "green card" (or Alien Registration Receipt Form, I-151,) is an immigration visa granted to aliens who desire to immigrate to this country. Although Congress clearly intended that green card recipients should reside in the United States proper, the immigration authorities have chosen to so administer the regulations as to permit green carders to live in Mexico and commute daily to jobs in the United States.

Food, clothing, and housing are all considerably less expensive in Mexico. Many commuters evade payment altogether of federal income taxes even though their place of employment is within the United States. Because their cost of living is so much lower, green card commuters have proved willing to work as strikebreakers for wages with which American residents cannot maintain a decent standard of living for themselves and their families.

The United Farm Workers, in objecting to the employment of green card commuters, has always tried to make clear to the public that it does not object to the immigration of Mexican nationals or other aliens to this country. What it does object to is the clear violation of the spirit of the law by the immigration officials in permitting "immigrants" to reside outside the territorial boundaries of the United States, and their employment as strikebreakers.



Picket line by members of the UFWOC at the Roma International bridge on October 24, 1966.

Showdown at Roma

In order to focus public attention on the problem of "green card" commuters, members of the UFWOC placed a picket line on the international bridge at Roma on October 24, 1966. Cars of green carders working at struck farms were persuaded to turn around. Cars containing visitors and others not employed at struck establishments were permitted to pass. When Eugene Nelson was arrested for no apparent cause by sheriff's deputies, the picketers sat down on the bridge and blocked all traffic in protest. Thirteen were arrested in all. Three (Eugene Nelson, Bill Chandler, and Tony Orendain,) were found guilty of obstructing a bridge (a traffic violation), and fined \$25; charges against a 16-year-old minor, Guillermo De la Cruz, weren't pressed; and charges against the remaining nine adults were dismissed by the judge.



Deputy Sheriff Adolfo Ramirez arrests picketers who have blocked the bridge to protest the unwarranted arrest of Eugene Nelson.



Picketing at La Casita.

A Spring Full of Hope

The strike entered 1967 full of hope and promise. Many workers in the packing sheds had joined the Union. Union members were learning how to convince the workers, even green carders, to join the cause. The growers and county officials retaliated by deputizing over 40 new sheriff's deputies, including the assistant manager of La Casita. And the arrests began again. "Disturbing the peace" includes saying the Lord's Prayer in Starr County (two arrests). Five priests and 5 workers were arrested for trespassing and using "abusive language" (saying "viva la huelga"). Arrests included 10 on January 26, another 10 on February 2, and selective arrests of Union members, organizers and leaders throughout the spring. In spite of this, as May and the big melon harvest neared, the Union was hopeful of a great breakthrough. If only the green carders could be prevented from taking the jobs. . . .

(Below, left to right) *Reynaldo, Guillermo II, Librado, and Guillermo de la Cruz I, and Leonel Lopez.*



Pedro Rios



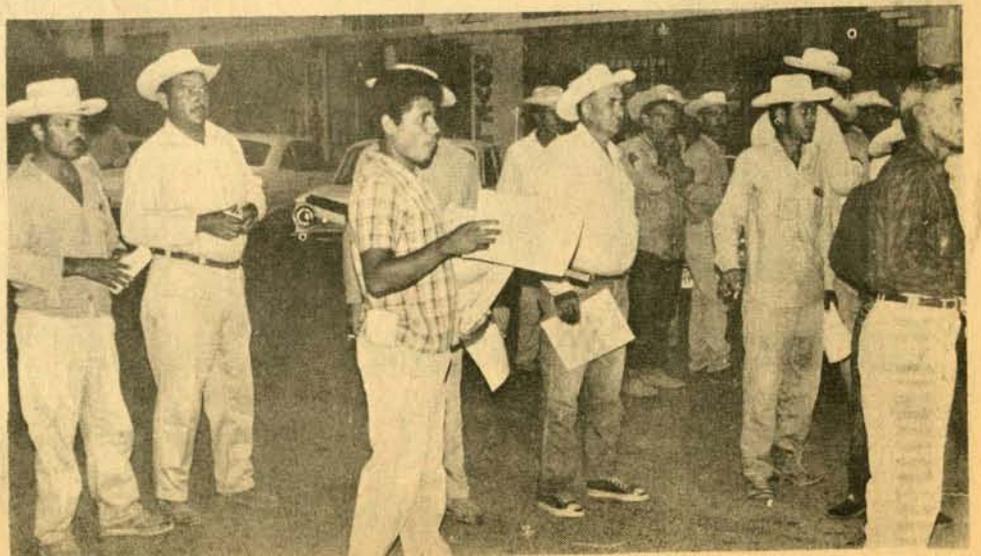
International Unity

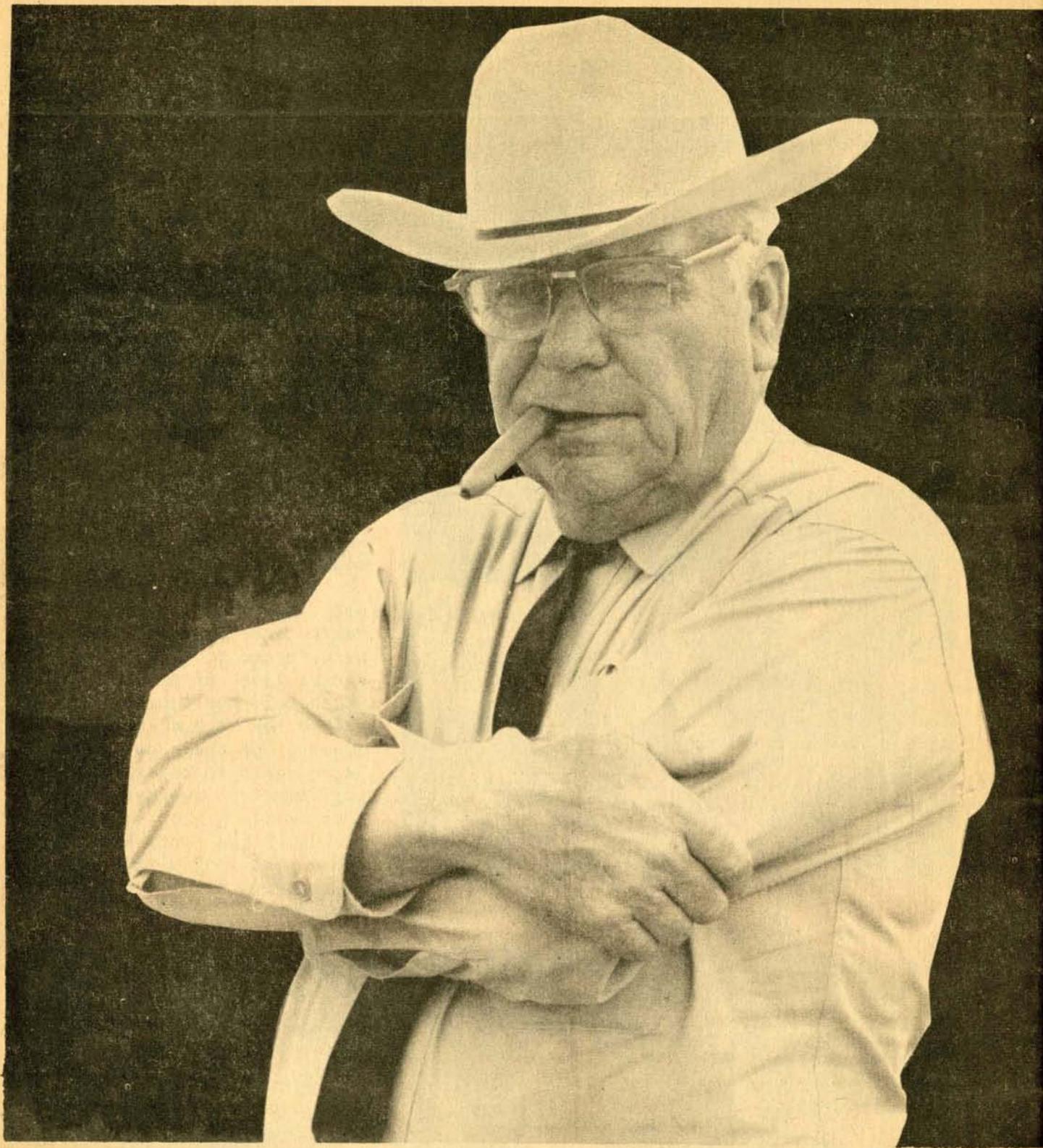
On May 11, 1967, the Confederation of Mexican Workers (CTM) put up a picket line on the Mexican side of the Roma and Camargo Bridges, while over 70 strikers picketed on the American side. The melon harvest had begun that week. The International picket line was 100% effective and not a single green carder crossed the border that day. Months of quiet talks had preceded this international picket line, as leaders of the state



and national labor confederations worked out details for cooperation. And the local workers on both sides formed close friendships to solidify the solidarity. But politics got involved, especially in Mexico, and the Mexican workers were forced to take down their picket line after two days. Green card Mexican nationals, driven by the hunger and poverty of their own country, began again to cross the river and American workers became less willing to leave the fields, since they knew that there were unlimited numbers of Mexicans to break the strike and take their jobs.

(Top) Antonio Rivera, Secretary General of the Brick Workers Union of the Miguel Aleman CTM, discusses how the CTM members can aid their brother workers across the border. (Middle) CTM picket line, May 11, 1967. (Bottom) Mexican union members give leaflets to Mexican farm workers, urging them to aid in the Starr County strike.





“Get Those Melons Through!”

Captain A. Y. Allee, commander of a company of eight Texas Rangers assigned to break the strike during the melon harvest of May - June, 1967. They were asked to come to Starr County by the large growers and the County Sheriff. Several mass arrests of union members resulted from the unilateral intervention of the Rangers on the side of the growers.

(Infernophoto--One World)



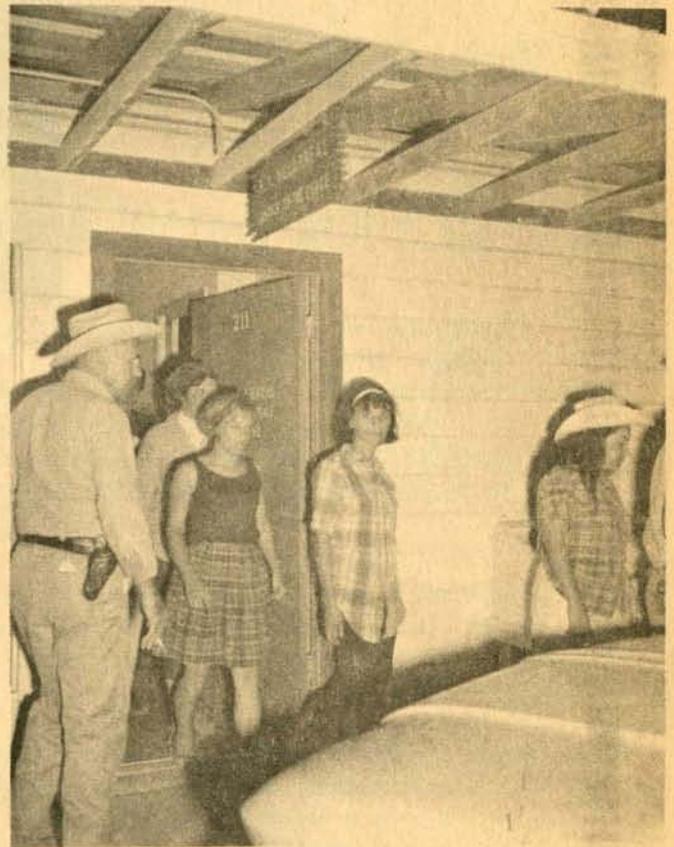
Captain Allee lectures strikers.

Rangers Bash Heads,

"Keep Peace"



(Left to right) Cathy Lynch, Kathy Baker Rodriguez, Daria A. Vera, and Irene Chandler leave the office of the justice of the peace after being arrested on May 26, 1967, in Mission by officers of the Texas Rangers. Although charged with unlawful assembly (charges were later changed to illegal picketing), they had been standing on public property, were stationed at least fifty feet from one another, and carried picket signs which were clearly marked: "This is an informational picket." They had gone to Mission in order to inform railroad employees and the general public that a trainload of scab melons from Starr County was passing through the city.



Magdaleno Dimas being released from the hospital where he had been a patient for several days as a result of injuries when arrested and beaten by officers of the Texas Rangers on the night of June 1, 1967. Dimas sustained a cerebral concussion, a severe scalp laceration requiring several sutures to close, and extensive contusions. A formal complaint was filed with the Department of Justice by the UFWOC charging that Captain A. Y. Allee used unnecessary and excessive force in carrying out the arrests of Magdaleno Dimas and Benito Rodriguez.



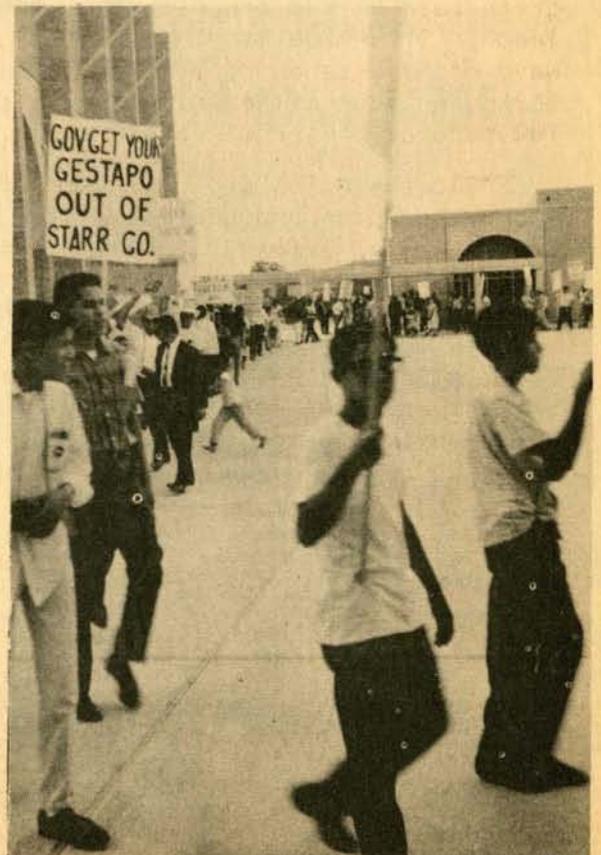
Parade in Rio Grande City on June 3, 1967, protesting the use of Texas Rangers in Starr County as strike-breakers.

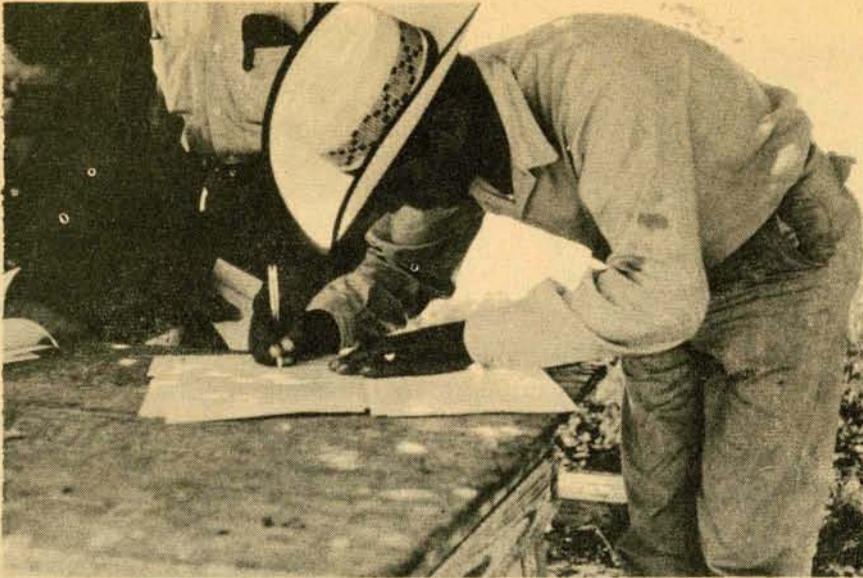
"¡Es Mejor Morir de Pie que Vivir de Rodillas!"



Rally in San Juan Plaza of Rio Grande City on June 3, 1967. The demonstration was attended by about 300 people who were particularly outraged by the beating administered to Magdaleno Dimas two days earlier.

Rally in Laredo on June 9, 1967. The demonstrators were protesting the arrests without just cause of numerous members and officers of the UFWOC. Governor John Connally, who has legal command of the Rangers, had a speaking engagement in Laredo that day.





Domingo Arredondo, local president of the Starr County farm workers, signs the recognition agreement with one of the growers, Virgilio Guerra.

A Victory and a Contract

The strikers were thwarted in their primary objective of stopping the melon harvest and forcing the major growers to sign contracts. The uninterrupted flow of green card strike breakers from Mexico after May 13 assured the growers of adequate labor. This made it difficult to convince American workers to quit their job. The wave of arrests and terrorism in May and June, 1967, disrupted the organizing efforts, exhausted the Union physically and financially, and intimidated all but a few hundred of the workers.

But the Union did claim some victories. One grower, Virgilio Guerra, recognized the Union and agreed to sign a contract for his 60 workers. Because of the farm workers' efforts, the Immigration Department finally issued a ruling (on July 10--too late to affect the harvest) forbidding the recruitment of foreigners to break a certified strike. The Department of Labor certified the strikes against the six major growers in Starr County. This new ruling will help all organizing efforts along the entire border. And the events of May and June were so shocking to the nation that four U.S. Senators came to the Valley in late June to investigate the problems there.





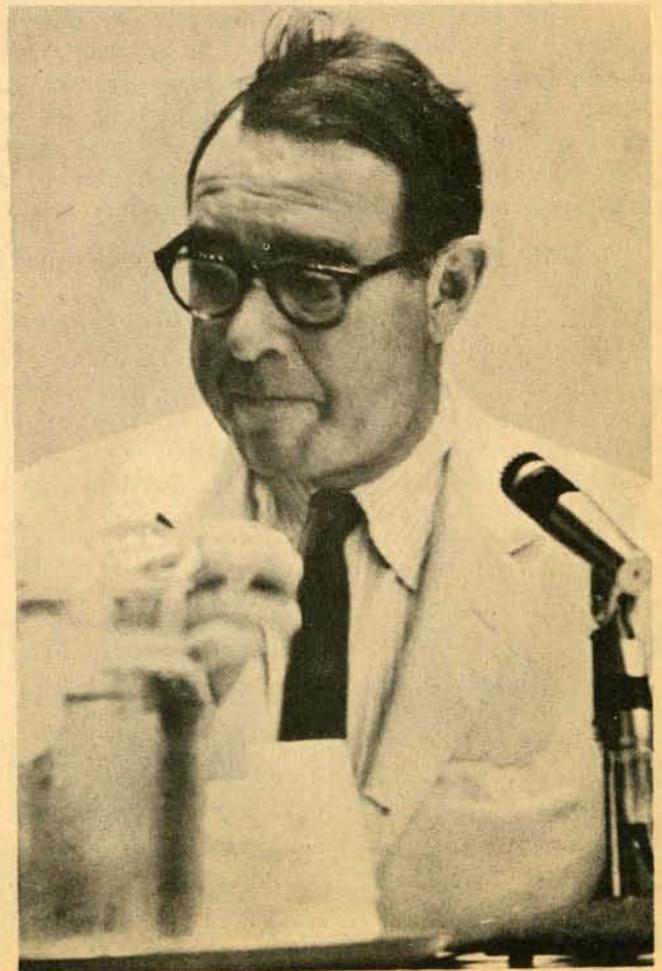
Seated (left to right) are Senators Paul Fannin (Ariz.), Harrison Williams (N.J.), Ted Kennedy (Mass.), and Ralph Yarborough (Tex.).

Senator Harrison Williams, Chairman of the Senate Subcommittee on Migratory Labor.

New Hope from Washington

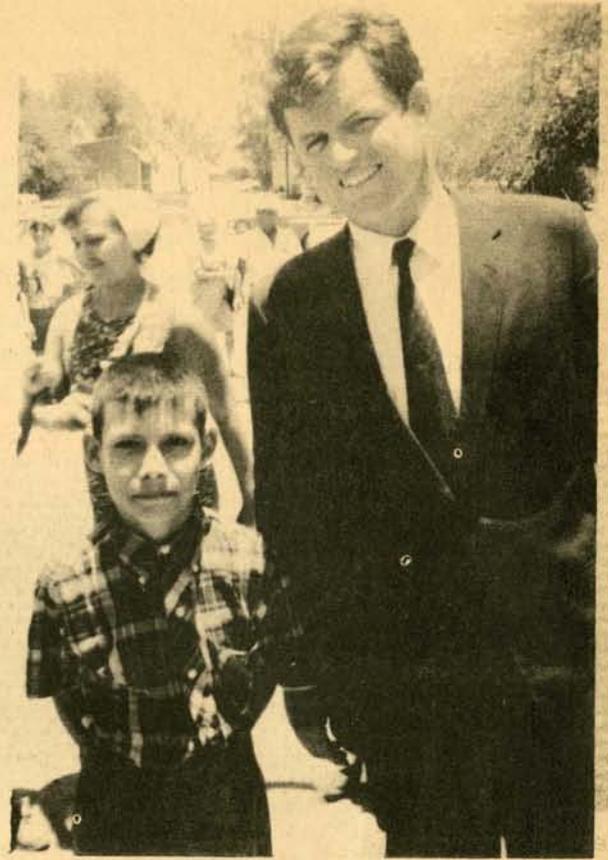
On June 29, 1967, the first official hearing of a committee of the United States Senate to ever take place in Starr County was convened in Rio Grande City. On that date the Senate Subcommittee on Migratory Labor heard testimony concerning the broadening of the National Labor Relations Act so as to bring farm workers under its provisions. Senators participating in the inquiry included Harrison Williams of New Jersey, Chairman, Edward "Ted" Kennedy of Massachusetts and Ralph Yarborough of Texas (Paul Fannin of Arizona joined the panel on the second day, June 30, in Edinburg).

Union witnesses described the



difficulty of organizing farm workers into unions because of the absence of official procedures or guidelines by which labor and management can be brought to a conference table for mutual negotiations. They also testified about the employment of "green card" commuters as scabs and the intervention of the Texas Rangers in the dispute at the request of the growers, and on their behalf.

Support for the inclusion of farm workers in the National Labor Relations Act was voiced by a spokesman for Archbishop Robert Lucey, representatives of the Texas Council of Churches, speakers from the Texas State AFL-CIO, and even Starr County Attorney Randall Nye. In a closing statement summing up the impact of the two days of testimony, Senator Williams noted that it was "the most powerful testimony this subcommittee has ever received as to the need for extending National Labor Relations Act coverage to farm workers."

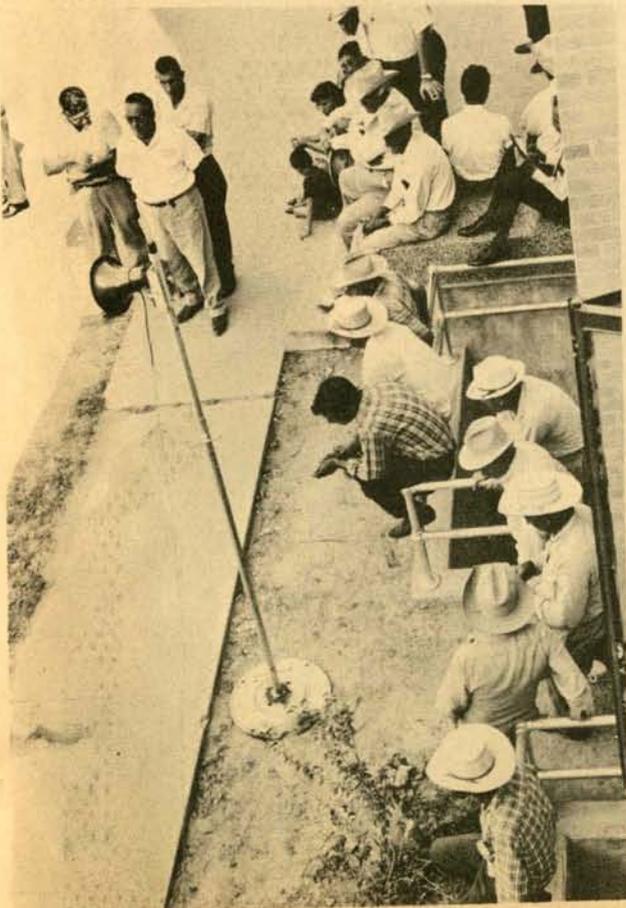


Jose Serma, Jr., of Rio Grande City, and Senator Ted Kennedy.

Equality at Last?

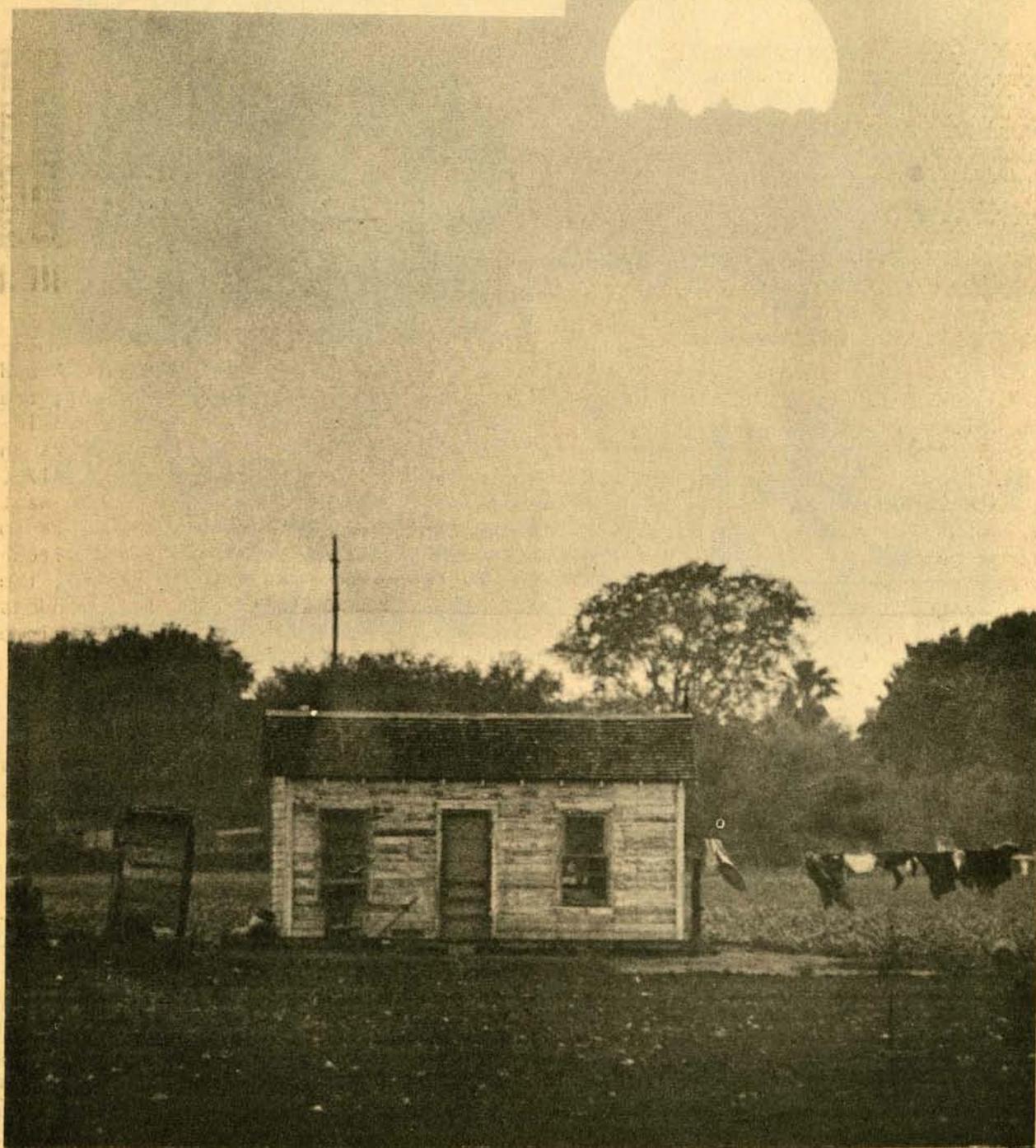
Part of the overflow crowd of spectators who attended the hearings in Rio Grande City. For those who did not understand English, simultaneous translation of the testimony in Spanish was relayed to loudspeakers positioned on the courthouse lawn.

Overflow crowds in Edinburg.



The farm workers of Starr County and the farm workers all over America ask only to be made full partners of America. They ask for reason instead of chaos. They ask for justice instead of greed. They ask for peace instead of turmoil. They ask that the legislators of America treat them at last like Americans. They ask for the right to collective bargaining, so that the nightmare of the past year in Starr County, Texas, need never again make a mockery of the American Dream.

—GILBERT PADILLA





Building a Union

It has always been difficult to build Unions in Texas, even in those industries protected by the National Labor Relations Act. And no Union has ever been successful in the harsh climate of Starr County. The UFWOC petitioned for an election at the Starr Produce Packing Shed, which is covered by the NLRA, and it was the first representational election ever held in Starr County. The result was a 14-14 tie, with three challenged ballots. The Union claimed massive interference and unfair labor practices by the bosses and County officials, including the assigning of a supervisor as a poll watcher and the patrolling of the polling place by anti-union County cops. The NLRB is studying the case.



"With the strike, you don't play around."

Farmworkers do not have even the minimum protection and rights of the NLRA and of other workers. For this reason, the labor movement has, in the past, considered the organization of farm workers an impossible task. But we must organize. And we must organize now. We cannot wait for better laws, which might take years to pass. We cannot wait for an "ideal situation" to organize. For this reason, the strike must go on against the tremendous odds that now face it. We will continue and steadily increase our drive to organize the packing sheds of Starr County.

Similarly, we refuse to be disheartened by the callous greed of the growers and the wanton brutality of their Texas Ranger allies.

We have pledged ourselves not only to remain steadfast in our struggle to organize the farm workers, but to expand our effort by assigning our most able and dedicated members to the sole task of visiting workers in the fields, in their homes, and on the streets in order to win them over to the conviction that the union is the only solution to the oppression and poverty of the agricultural laborers of this county and of this country.



We Need Your Help

The quest of the Sons of Zapata for a place in the sun had a beginning but does not have an end. Our struggle moves forward and will continue to do so until the other America grants farm workers the justice which is rightfully theirs.

We call not only upon all Texans but all Americans to support the cause for which we have been battling in Starr County for more than a year. We desperately need your help to carry on this struggle. The farm workers themselves have suffered and are suffering, but suffering alone cannot achieve victory. We appeal to you to help sustain this effort. Send your contributions today and continue to send them on a weekly and monthly basis to the following address:

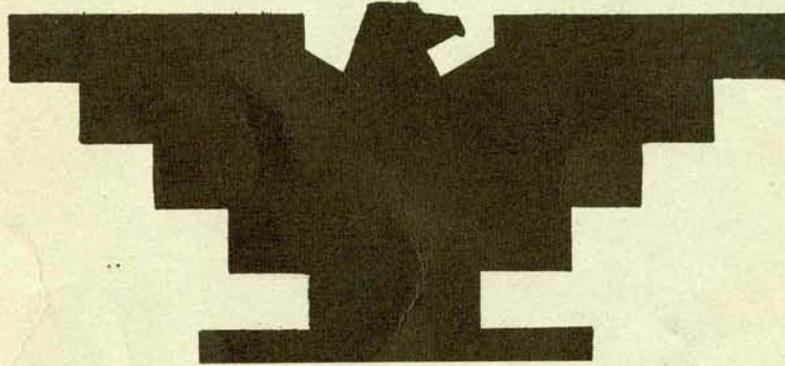
UNITED FARM WORKERS ORGANIZING COMMITTEE, AFL-CIO

BOX 54

RIO GRANDE CITY, TEXAS 78582

We wish to thank the Edinburg *Daily Review* for permission to use numerous photos from its extensive files. We want also to thank George Tuley for his invaluable assistance with the processing. Several of the photographs were taken by George Ballis and Emmon Clark. This volume was edited by David M. Fishlow.

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