

RELIGION INSPIRES GRAPE MARCHERS

Coast Workers End Week of Their Walk to Sacramento

By LAWRENCE E. DAVIES

Special to The New York Times

PARLIER, Calif., March 24 —A colorful column, banners flying, moved along back highways in the San Joaquin Valley today, past pruned vineyards, tomato and cotton fields and rich plowed land.

In the vanguard trudged the proud bearer of a silk and velvet tapestry depicting Our Lady of Guadalupe, a national and religious symbol of Mexico. On either side fellow marchers carried United States and Mexican flags.

Behind them a dozen big red banners, each decorated with a black thunderbird in a white circle, were thrust high above the shoulders of a band of pilgrims on an unusual mission.

The thunderbird is the official symbol of the National Farm Workers Union, an unaffiliated family association. The paraders were 70 or so members of the union—men and women, fat and thin, mostly Mexican-Americans, but with a sprinkling of Negroes and whites.

Some wore red ponchos, with the thunderbird and the Spanish word "Huelga," meaning "strike," inscribed across the back. All, despite blistered and aching feet, were bent on reaching the state Capitol in Sacramento on Easter Sunday, April 10, for a rally after a 300-mile trek from Delano, center of a grape pickers' strike that began on Sept. 8.

Party is Relaxed

This was not a taut, emotional group of singers. It was a relaxed party, reflecting patience and determination, well-ordered, quiet for the most part but occasionally chanting "Viva la huelga" [long live the strike] to the time of a guitar or accordion. Accompanying state highway patrolmen and sheriff's deputies have had nothing to do except keep the sightseers moving on Sunday.

The workers' pilgrimage, dedicated to "seeking our basic, God-given rights as human beings," has heavy religious overtones.

The marchers are attempting to bring the hired hand on California farms into organized labor. Implicit in the strike, and in the organizational structure of the march, is the threat of a general farm labor strike, depending on the success of a contemplated one or two-day work stoppage in the central valley this spring or summer.

The big grape growers of the southern San Joaquin had labeled the Delano strike pure fiction eight days ago in testimony before a Senate investigating committee headed by Senator Harrison A. Williams, Democrat of New Jersey.

Criticized by a Grower

Only yesterday, when the striking column walked 17 miles from Cutler to Parlier, a leading Delano grower, Martin Zaninovich, told the California Grape and Tree Fruit League's annual meeting in San Francisco that the public had been "treated to a monumental snow job."

"The so-called strikes," he declared, "are pure myth, manufactured out of nothing by outside agitators who are more interested in creating trouble in the United States than in the welfare of the farm workers."

Today marked the end of the first week of the march, led out of Delano by Cesar Chavez, soft-spoken, self-assured, 38-year-old director of the National Farm Labor Union. Mr. Chavez, who has lived in Delano "off and on since 1937," led a hard core of what he says is 2,000 or so member families toward Sacramento on a pilgrimage of "penitence and revolution."

"This is different from former organizing efforts," Mr. Chavez explained over a picnic dinner of beans, potato salad, tortillas and chili peppers with soft drinks and coffee.

Limping badly from a pulled muscle that had sidelined him from the march for a few days, he talked in the city park at Cutler on Tuesday evening.

Previous Attempts Failed

"All attempts in the past have been made by outside organizers who tried to organize and strike at the same time," he went on. "This didn't work. We have an organized, dues-paying membership—monthly dues over \$3.50 cover the whole family—and if we were to lose this strike, something I don't think will happen, we have got to be strong enough to survive."

The same theme had been picked up earlier on the march by Manuel Vasquez, a lean, thin-faced heavily sunburned Mexican-American, 32 years old, from Earlimart, near Delano.

"Many people," he said earnestly, "think this is like other strikes—on and off. When they see this strike is lasting seven months and they see us, they will have the courage to join. We're bringing it to the areas where people are afraid."

And Manuel Sanchez, 35, of Delano, the chubby, round-faced driver of a union truck who was prevented from marching by a stroke, told of his birth amid poverty and said of Mr. Chavez, with whom he grew up:

"I've known Cesar all my life. He will give up his life for the poor people. All the people believe in Cesar."

'Gentle, Religious Nature'

A similar feeling infects some of the accompanying clergymen supporting the strike and the march. One of those captivated by what he called "the gentle and religious nature" of Mr. Chavez, said to a reporter, "This country doesn't deserve men like Martin Luther King and Cesar Chavez heading minority movements."

The wife of a grape grower in this area who never had met

or seen Mr. Chavez had a contrary view.

"What an awful man he must be," she said.

Here in Parlier last night, as in Cutler the night before — towns in a sun-warmed region dotted with post-office names like Selma, Dinuba and Reedley — a candlelight parade took the marchers through La Colonia, the Mexican-American workers' quarter. A meeting, combining education and entertainment, serious discussion and laughter, followed.

When a clergyman — so far a Protestant minister or Catholic priest — is along the rally opens with a prayer. The Teatro Campesino (Farm Workers Theatre) is a highlight of the evening. Louis Valdez, a Delano-born, former member of the San Francisco Mime troupe, has put together, with several of his colleagues, a series of skits, reflecting bitter social and political satire.

At the Cutler City park several hundred appreciative farm workers and city dwellers cheered a dialogue between a grower, wearing a pig-faced mask, and a Mexican-American strikebreaker.

An actor playing the role of Gov. Edmund G. Brown was brought into a skit in this election year along with the Digiorgo Corporation and Schenley Industries, two of the big employers in the Valley. The union has a nationwide boycott underway against Schenley.

A 6-Point Program

At every meeting a four-page, six-point Plan of Delano is read to the audience in Spanish.

"This is the beginning of a social movement in fact and not in pronouncements," it begins. "Because we have suffered — and are not afraid to suffer—in order to survive, we are ready to give up everything, even our lives, in our fight for social justice. We shall do it without violence because that is our destiny."

It pledges suffering "for the purpose of ending the poverty, the misery, and the injustice with the hope that our children will not be exploited as we have been."

It emphasizes religion and says the strikers "seek, and have, the support of the church in what we do; we ask the help and prayers of all religions."

The strike and the march have had the backing of the California Migrant Ministry, a largely Protestant group, headed by the Rev. Wayne C. Hartmire of Los Angeles. The Rev. Thomas Fry of San Jose, a Roman Catholic priest who spent several days with the marchers as one of the representatives of Archbishop Joseph T. McGucken of San Francisco, said:

"It's ironic that the Migrant Ministry is taking the lead in the frontline, full support of the Delano strike. We Catholics came in late but we're in to stay now."

A monthly contribution of \$5,000 from the United Automobile Workers, headed by Walter Reuther, is divided equally between Mr. Chavez's union and the Agricultural Workers Organizing Committee of the American Federation of Labor and Congress of Industrial Organizations.