TEXANS ON

Farmworkers in Texas are on the march. Since the first of June, at least 4 big marches or parades have been held, in cities over 800 miles apart. And now a group of 9 pilgrims has started a 387 mile march from San Juan, Texas to the state capital in Austin. They hope to get there on Labor Day, September 5th.

The first march was for 8 miles, from Rio Grande City to Garciaville. It was directly connected with the melon strike in Starr County, in Southeastern Texas, where farmworkers are demanding $1.25 an hour. At present they usually get under 80¢ an hour and sometimes get as low as 40¢. The strikers wanted to show their unity and determination. Over 1,300 joined in that march and in the mass and rally held in Garciaville that followed the march.

The melon strike was the spark that has started a new revolution among the 2,000,000 Mexican-americans in Texas. This revolution is demanding an end to the poverty, the starvation wages, the inferior education and the many-sided discrimination that oppresses the Chicanos in Texas.

What has followed has been an amazing upsurge of determination on the part of the Texas farmworkers to carry on and win their struggle. And the Catholic Church, other labor union, civil rights groups, and all the Latin-American organizations have enthusiastically supported the melon pickers' strike and the struggle for justice.

Priest on 400-mile march

BISHOP JOINS FIVE-DAY MARCH

From July 4th to July 8th, farm workers in the Rio Grande Valley held a 5-day, 48-mile pilgrimage, which ended at the Shrine of Our Lady of Guadalupe in San Juan. On the final day, Bishop Humberto Medeiros joined the Pilgrims and held a special mass for the farm workers. The Bishop and two other Texas bishops, Archbishop Lucy of San Antonio and Bishop Metzger of El Paso, called for decent wages for farm workers. Bishop Medeiros, whose southeastern Texas diocese includes Starr County and the lower Rio Grande Valley, said that $1.25 an hour is absolutely necessary for a worker to support his family. The Bishop officially endorsed the strike after growers absolutely refused to pay $1.25 or even sit down and discuss wages with the workers and their union representatives.

THE MARCH

400-MILE MARCH

A group of 7 farm workers and two priests have begun a 400-mile march from San Juan, near the Mexican border, to Austin, state capital of Texas. Leading the march are Father Antonio Gonzalez, a priest from Houston; Rev. James Navarros, a Baptist minister from Houston, and Gene Nelson, a leader in the Farm Workers Association in the Rio Grande Valley. Though the heat has often been 98-105 degrees, the little band of pilgrims grows each day, as the "originals" are joined by workers, townspeople, and others who support our cause. Al Ramirez, mayor of Edinburg, left a hospital bed to greet the pilgrims. Other hundreds, old and young, turn out to watch the little band pass by.

EL MALCRIADO SAYS: Nearly 2000 years ago, St. Paul set out on foot to bring a message of hope and faith to hundreds of little towns that had never before heard of Christ. In many ways, the Texas pilgrims are like St. Paul, inspired by that same faith and hope, and eager to spread the news of our cause to their brothers all over Texas.

STRIKE FORCES WAGES UP

The strike of melon pickers in the Rio Grande Valley has already won some victories. Eight small growers have already signed contracts. Now the biggest grower of all, La Casita Farms, has agreed to raise wages to $1 an hour, an increase of 15¢ an hour. But the union will continue the strike until the wage is $1.25 an hour and until the growers sign a written contract. Only then can we be sure that the Patrón will not lower the wages as soon as everyone is back at work.

INTERNATIONAL PILGRIMAGE

On July 11, a three-mile pilgrimage was held from the Sacred Heart Church in El Paso, Texas, to the Cathedral of Our Lady of Guadalupe in Juarez, Mexico. Hundreds joined in the march, carrying the Mexican and American flags and banners of the Virgin of Guadalupe. Tony Orendain, a leader of the NFWA and its representative in El Paso, explained that the pilgrimage was se seeking "the intercession of the Virgin of Guadalupe in protecting the farm workers, and asks her help in obtaining justice for workers from the large farming corporations."