

MARCH TO MEXICO BUILDS

CALEXICO, May 18--Over 4,000 farm workers and their friends joined together in this border town tonight in a show of international solidarity and unity forged between farm workers of the United States and Mexico. The rally, attended by two U.S. Congressmen, three U.S. Senators (including Sen. Ted Kennedy of Massachusetts), a delegation of movie and television stars from Hollywood, labor leaders from the U.S. and Mexico, and thousands of farm workers from the Coachella and Imperial Valleys and Mexicali, came at the end of a 100-mile march from Indio to the Mexican border. The march was organized by the United Farm Workers Organizing Committee, AFL-CIO, to demonstrate its commitment to improving wages and working conditions for all farm workers, regardless of race or nationality. The UFWOC led a strike in the grape vineyards of the Coachella-Indio area last year and another strike is about to break at the end of May of this year.

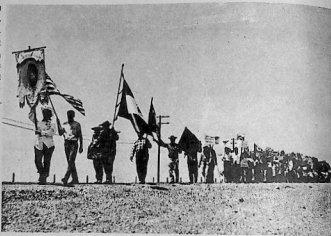
The march from Indio to Mexicali was through some of the richest, and hottest, agricultural districts in the nation. Temperatures

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rarely went below 100 and for most of the day hovered near 110 degrees. Outsiders expressed amazement that farm workers could put in a 10-hour or more work day in such heat. Yet farm workers' wages and working conditions along the border are usually the worst in the nation, and growers take cruel advantage of the poverty and unemployment in Mexico to force down wages and working conditions in this country. Last year Coachella Valley grape growers used thousands of Mexican nationals to break the strike. This year, UFWOC is hopeful that Mexican nationals will join with the residents of the Coachella Valley to make the strike victorious.

Some 400 Mexicans staged a march to the Mexican side of the border, and delegations of workers from both sides met at the border crossing to shake hands and pledge cooperation and solidarity. But Mexican government officials, perhaps under prodding from the Nixon administration, had done all they could to prevent a massive spontaneous demonstration on

the Mexican side of the border. Government officials made completely unfounded warnings about "impending violence" and warned Mexican residents with green cards that their green cards could be revoked if they participated in the rally.

At the rally in a nearby park, following the meeting at the border, UFWOC Assistant Director Larry Itling introduced many of the guests, which included William Kircher of the national AFL-CIO, Paul Schrade of the Auto Workers, Congressmen John Tunney of the Imperial Valley and John O'Hara of Michigan, and Senators Walter Mondale of Minnesota, Ralph Yarborough of Texas, and Ted Kennedy of Massachusetts.

Congressman Tunney was briefly booed when he spoke, since Tunney has refused to endorse the grape boycott. UFWOC Director Cesar Chavez motioned for tolerance, and later noted that Tunney's presence at the rally might serve to baptize him into the "boycott spirit". Senator Kennedy spoke of his

INTERNATIONAL SOLIDARITY

commitment to improving conditions for farm workers. A country that can spend \$30 billion a year on a senseless war, send men to inspect the wooders of the moon, and give farmers millions and millions of dollars in subsidies for crops that they do not grow, can afford to raise the standards for the farm workers who feed this nation, Kennedy said.

UFWOC Director Cesar Chavez spoke movingly of the suffering that farm workers must endure, and how the growers have traditionally pinned bracer and green-carder against resident worker, Mexican against Filipino, white against black, to divide the workers and break the unions and strikes of the past. Chavez, who as a young man lived and worked in Brawley and the Imperial Valley, noted the long history of unsuccessful organizing attempts in the Imperial Valley, which were usually met with bitter violence and suppression by the growers and public officials. Chavez stressed that this time the workers would remain non-violent, in spite of provocation and lack of protective laws. And he stressed again and again, as the main emphasis of his speech and of the whole rally, that the real enemy of the U.S. farm worker is not the Mexican farm worker, but rather the growers who refuse to pay decent wages.



Singing makes the miles seem shorter...



A rest stop along the way...

"V" for Victory...

