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UFW Rally: Amnesty for workers, a New Apple for Teacher
by Walt Stawicki 7:30am Mon Aug 6 '01 (Modified on 12:57am Tue

Aug 7 '01)

International solidarity of Unions brings a crowd to near the 5,000 level. The fair Trade Apple is coming. Procedures and timeline for becoming "documented" is streamlined. International labor representatives to tour Eastern Washington centers where workers live in squalid conditions.

Farm workers have always been at the bottom when it comes to safety and accommodations. The pay has been exempted from minimum wage legislation. Growers have gotten away with not providing sanitation in the fields. Retirement often depends on the children carrying older parents.

Washington has had accident rates 50% higher than the national average among its tree fruit workers. Farm workers are 1% of the labor force, but suffer 6% of fatalities. Growers and workers have historically been on opposite sides of the negotiating table.

Change is afoot. Monday a march of some 5,000 was held in Yakima, Washington. Canadian representatives of the large civil servant unions of B.C. and of Ottawa came. United Farm Workers representative from the national headquarters, Other delegates from Mexico and Brazil came as part of larger tours across the United States. Solidarity was expressed by local trades unions and some from the Washington coast/Seattle area.

The march covered a route over 3 miles long. It went through the heart of this medium sized city. Traffic was held up. Some honked support. Others had no clue even with the thousands of placards and UFW flags.


The march was part of a full day's speeches and entertainment in Miller Park. The assembly heard workers and unionists tell of the tribulations and passions that they brought to this long overlooked social issue.

As part of an extensive weeks agenda, there will be stops in Mattawa, Brewster, Topenish and other locales where farm workers have traditionally been housed.

Significant is the realignment of interests. Feeling the effects of globalization, it is becoming obvious than the old, family orchrd is becoming less viable. The huge industrial players are here and they are squeezing. Prices are low. Now a new alignment of small farmers and their labor are trying to maintain a viable resistance to the corporate push to the bottom- to lower wages, lower prices, less safety...

The worker is no longer an isolated, uninformed shaddow at the edge of America. He is coming to the table like other labor that is vital to the quality of life we all desire.

add your own comments

 Local News Ignores Huge Farm Worker Rally?
by Linda Jansen 11:18am Mon Aug 6 '01
ljansen12@excite.com

Are my eyes deceiving me or did both the Seattle Times and Seattle PI (together w/what passes for local t.v. news) miss the largest rally of farm workers in

Washington state history? Since not everyone from Seattle can travel to Eastern

Washington for such an event, it is extremely important that local news cover it.

Seattle needs to be aware that changes first thrust into its line of vision by the WTO

are continuing. Globalization is forcing all workers to fight back against its ravages and agricultural workers are in the front lines. They are a great example for all of us involved in this struggle. Thank you, IndyMedia for making this information available to your supporters. Once again we are reminded why your services are so necessary to keep Seattle informed of the real world (e.g., outside of Seafair). Si se puede. Linda Jansen

Yakima Newspaper Coverage
by Gail in Yakima 12:06am Tue Aug 7 '01

FYI, I am pasting in the local corporate newspaper coverage in Yakima (Yakima Herald-Republic this morning).

Thousands Fill Yakima Streets

Published in the Herald-Republic on Monday, August 6, 2001 By
MARK MOREY
YAKIMA HERALD-REPUBLIC

YAKIMA -- Shouting "It can be done," an estimated 4,000 farm workers and union supporters marched through Yakima to promote their campaign for immigrant amnesty and better working conditions.

"On this day all of you made history because this is the biggest march ever in the state of Washington," said Arturo Rodriguez, national president of the United Farm Workers of America and the son-in-law of legendary labor leader Cesar Chavez.

The crowd -- estimated at between 3,000 and 4,000 marchers -- followed a three-mile route from Miller Park, down Yakima Avenue and back to the park. Along the way, a chorus of cheers arose in support of union solidarity. A truckload of injured workers led the procession.

After the march, speakers at a rally in the park voiced their backing for legislation introduced Thursday in both chambers of Congress to allow widespread amnesty for undocumented workers and their families in the United States.

For too long, speakers said, politicians have ignored working conditions and the reality that illegal immigrants perform much of the field labor in the country.

"It can't stay that way. We want change in the futures of our children," said Tereso Ramirez, a fruit packer from George in Grant County.

Hundreds of other workers traveled by bus, van and car to join the rally from throughout Washington and Oregon. Labor leaders also attended from Mexico, Canada and Brazil.

Rodriguez encouraged the workers to obtain associate memberships in the United Farmworkers. Applications would give lawmakers a solid indication of support for the amnesty bill, he said.

"They need to see your interest," Rodriguez said.

Mexico ranks as the No. 1 importer of Washington apples. Marketers expect retailers there to buy 10 million boxes this year.

For that reason, Mexican unions plan to launch an information campaign asking shoppers in that country to avoid U.S.-grown apples "so that they don't buy apples that are grown in unfairness," said Marco Torres of Mexico's Confederation of Democratic Workers.

Two leaders in the state Democratic party, Reps. Frank Chopp and Phyllis Gutierrez Kenney, also recalled their connections to immigration and the fields.

Chopp told the crowd in an interpreted speech that his uncle was an undocumented coal miner in Roslyn, part of that town's early Croatian community. Instead of resisting immigrants, lawmakers of the era changed laws to accommodate the influx, Chopp noted.

Kenney recounted her childhood as a farm worker and mentioned that the state Legislature had made \$16 million available for improvements in farm worker housing.

But that's not enough, Kenney said.

"It's been a long time and the struggle is the same. We can't go backward anymore," she said.

The crowd kept a positive view of the chances for general amnesty. The proposed law would allow workers in the country for at least 90 days since 2000 to apply for residency and keep working. Their direct families would also be eligible.

"I have a lot of hope that it will happen," Sunnyside resident Martin Rios said.

Rios is general secretary for the union that represents about 250 workers at the United Chateau Ste. Michelle wineries in Central Washington. It is the only Farmworkers unit in Washington, Rodriguez said.

Organization radically improved wages and benefits at the wineries after workers signed a contract following a contentious boycott, Rios said. Both workers and the company wanted to keep themselves in business, Rios said. "I think it will happen this year, because so many people need it," said Ramirez, the George worker.

Ignacia Diaz, another Yakima fruit worker, said she also thinks the bill will pass soon. It would guarantee more job security for many whom she knows, Diaz said.

But Antonio Balderas -- an announcer for Granger's KDNA-AM, "The Voice of the Farmworker" -- offered a more moderate opinion of the amnesty legislation's prospects in Congress.

"Immigration politics are a mess," Balderas said in a brief radio interview at the park. He warned that some form of partial amnesty seems more likely.

March organizers first estimated that between 5,000 and 6,000 would attend. But they were pleased with the somewhat lower turnout, said Guadalupe Gamboa, the United Farmworkers' regional leader in Sunnyside.

The rally only begins an effort to pass the legislation and improve labor conditions, speakers said.

"We have to keep fighting for justice," Rodriguez said.

Yakima hit by political stiring
by A3M 12:57am Tue Aug 7 '01

Locals snoozing. No coverage in evidence by cable n.w. your eyes and ears are not decieving you. stay tuned indy.org