

'WE WANT CHANGE IN THE FUTURES OF OUR CHILDREN'



PHOTOS BY KELLY GLASSCOCK/Yakima Herald-Republic

Elias Guzman's homemade pro-union sign calls for the right to organize and for fair wages during Sunday's march.

Thousands Fill Yakima Streets

Farm workers, backers call for amnesty, better working conditions

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 work-



Luis Ortiz displays the United Farm Workers flag during Sunday's march in downtown Yakima.

ers 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