

VIDA

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From every corner of California came supporters of the United farm Workers sponsored Bill SB1736 to the steps of the state capital building in Sacramento. Some 7,000 joined a trek started in Merced by pilgrims who retraced César Chávez's 1966 march to Sacramento.

Present in spirit, this march was led by César Chávez's successor, Arturo Rodríguez and UFW co-founder Dolores Huerta. Many marched stages of the eleven days through the Central Valley of California including original marchers from 36 years ago and the children and grandchildren of César Chávez.

In spite a life threatening condition just a year ago, Dolores Huerta marched the entire 165 miles.

The successful arrival paraded through the streets of Sacramento with chants of "¡El pueblo unido jamás será vencido!", "¡Viva César Chávez!", and "Sign the bill!"

"The bill" is SB1736 which had just passed the state Assembly and Senate and now will be presented to Gov. Gray Davis. If signed by the governor, the bill will estab-

lish an arbitrator to break the common stalemates between agricultural workers in California and the growers, agribusiness.

According to many, typically the agricultural industry has relied on seemingly endless appeals and delays to stamp out any organized call for better working conditions and benefits. "One company which spurred the call for reform was the Pictsweet Mushroom plant of Ventura which has refused to negotiate a contract for 15 years," said one of the workers.

"Companies take advantage of the high turnover rate found with agricultural laborers. By delaying the process year after year agribusiness has kept wages, benefits and working conditions at a

substandard level compared to other industries" said one union member.

UFW President Arturo Rodríguez said most workers live in poverty, 75% of farm workers make less than \$10,000 each year. Farm workers in 1975 were granted the right to organize and bargain for contracts. The United Farm Worker report that out of 428 successful elections, only 185 growers have signed contracts. Jesus Torres, a Pictsweet Mushroom worker of Ventura, said he has picked mushrooms and strawberries for the same company for 23 years but has no medical insurance, pension plan or guaranteed raises. Instead, employees have gone without a contract for 15

years because of "game playing" by Pictsweet.

No law yet has forced the company to seal the deal with its workers, Torres said. "A contract will mean a better life for workers and for their families," Torres said. "I can vote, my children can vote. It will be a very ugly thing for a democratic leader not to sign this into law."

Arturo Rodríguez said to the crowd gathered that agribusiness is claiming that the passage of this law will break them, hurting small family farms. "They have said that every reform of the past would break them. Portable bathrooms, and an end of the use of a short handle hoe was also to break them."

"Agribusiness is controlled by large companies. For too long the industry has complained that a few small family farm families would give up their profits, while the countless small family field working family has been kept in poverty," said Dolores Huerta. "SB1736 will address the problems hundreds of thousands of field worker families have faced for generations."

In the Sacramento Bee, A.G. Kawamura, chairman of the growers association said. "They don't understand the burden agriculture is under in a global world today."

Even though all called for the Democratic Governor to sign the bill, it was uncertain if he would heed the call. Some claim that agribusiness has lobbied and given hundreds of thousands of dollars in donations to influence Governor Davis to veto the bill. Many others have said that agribusiness has used money and the field workers have used people marching in the sun to press their point to Governor Davis.

*A friend is
one to whom one may
pour out all the contents
of one's heart, chaff and
grain together, knowing
that the gentlest of hands
will take and sift it, keep
what is worth keeping and
with the breath of kindness
blow the rest away.*

