

Thousands rally for UFW

Demonstrations

By TRACY L. BARNETT

Sentinel staff writer

WATSONVILLE — He walked just a few paces behind the Rev. Jesse Jackson, who walked arm-in-arm with UFW leaders Dolores Huerta and Arturo Rodriguez at the head of a sea of chanting, banner-waving supporters. And the Salinas strawberry picker's beaming face said it all.

"*Ahora no tenemos miedo* (Now we are not afraid)," said Javier Zamora. "Now it's time the growers will respect our dignity."

Behind him, a two-mile line of between 15,000 and 25,000 marchers strung out across the streets of downtown Watsonville to rally to the UFW's latest cause. "*Freseros, unidos, jamas sera vencidos*" (Strawberry workers, united, will never be defeated). Zamora joined a contingent of several hundred Central Coast strawberry pickers from a variety of companies who took up the lead. Their white T-shirts bore the union's latest slogan: "*Con union se vive mejor* (With the union, you live better)."

After 25 years of experience in the fields, Zamora supports his family of five on an \$8,000-a-year salary. He says he's never had a raise. And he is ready to risk his job for a change.

Jackson's words were balm to Zamora's ears.

"We will not stop in Watsonville; we're going on to Washington," said Jackson. "Chain by chain, store by store, church by church, school by school, we will carry the message."

Before the march Jackson reminisced about a visit with the late UFW founder Cesar Chavez. Jackson talked about help-

'We will not stop in Watsonville; we're going on to Washington. ... This is a landmark struggle today, and we



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Left, Main Street in Watsonville is a sea of red United Farm Workers banners as thousands press through downtown during the march.

Below, AFL-CIO president John

will win.'

— Jesse
Jackson

Union, to meet with presidents of grocery chains across the country and apprise them of the battle to organize strawberry workers. Already, some 1,000 individual grocery stores and several large chains — among them A&P and Ralph's/Food-4-Less — have signed on to the strawberry workers' cause.

"What is for these workers suffering with earned labor is for others the luxury of a delicacy," said Jackson. "This is a landmark struggle today, and we will win — because we are morally right, and because strawberries perish quickly."

Carey's involvement took on a special significance given the decades of sometimes bloody strife between the two unions. The Teamsters traditionally have represented the drivers and the packers of produce, while the UFW has represented field workers. The UFW's leaders long contended that the Teamsters and the grocery workers union undermined their effectiveness. Those days are history, said Carey.

"Today the Teamsters and the UFW are standing together to achieve the kind of union Cesar Chavez started," said Carey. "When we are divided, working people lose and greedy corporations win. We will never let that happen again. Whether you work in the fields or in the coolers, in the apple orchards or in the

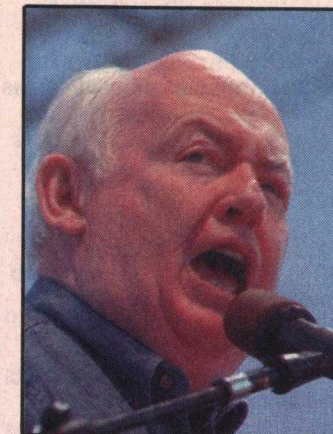
ing Chavez end his last over the grape boycott. Now the civil rights leader has joined with national labor leaders like Teamsters president Ron Carey and Doug Dority, president of the United Food and Commercial Workers

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Sweeney rallied the crowd. Unions from many industries came from across the country to participate in Sunday's rally.

Dan Coyro/Sentinel photos



UFW
president
Arturo
Rodriguez,
left, and union
activist
Dolores
Huerta, right,
flank Jesse
Jackson at
the front of
the march.



Few problems, no gridlock

By BOB LINNEMAN
Sentinel staff writer

WATSONVILLE — Watsonville police had prepared for "Operation Strawberry." As it turned out, though, it was a smooth day at the office for law enforcement. There were no major incidents and traffic was not nearly the nightmare expected.

"We're happy everything went off as well as it did," said City Clerk Lorraine Washington, who served as public information officer for the event. "It was real orderly, and the UFW monitors did a good job."

Only one arrest was made and it had

nothing to do with the march or the UFW, Washington said. A man on Locust Street was arrested early Sunday morning for brandishing a firearm. Other than that, the day went as expected: they came, they marched, they went home.

Crowd estimates differed depending on whom you talked to. The union estimated more than 25,000 marched while the city figured between 15,000 and 17,000. The city, Washington said, did not account for spectators or those who remained in the football stadium. Including those who stayed in the stadium, the union estimated some 30,000 turned out for the event.

"Everything went terrific," Lt. Jim

Brown of the Watsonville Police Department said. "There was no police action."

Traffic wasn't too bad, either. Highway 1 remained clear and downtown city streets, while crowded in the morning and late in the afternoon, weren't much of a problem for the most part. "The union didn't get the people coming in cars that they expected," Brown added. "The car count was way down."

He didn't provide exact figures for the number of cars that rolled into town, but it was well under the 3,000 estimated. Most marchers came by bus.

Parking the buses in the morning was

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March

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packing sheds ... this is a fight for our communities, a fight for our families, a fight for our futures ... and I can see from the looks on your faces that this is a fight we will win."

They came from Canada and Mexico City, New York and Florida, Wisconsin and Missouri, and from every trade group imaginable: roofers and plumbers, nurses and teachers, firefighters and newspaper workers, and field workers representing a banquet of crops. There were presidents of numerous labor organizations, including the leader of them all — John Sweeny of the AFL-CIO. There were members of Congress and celebrities, such as Martin Sheen and Eleanor Smeal of the

Feminist Majority Foundation.

"I feel like crying," said Elfina Torres, 76, an Italian immigrant who has picked grapes in the Hollister area since she moved here more than 30 years ago. "This is a very strong thing for me. I have marched in Sacramento and Salinas and Watsonville since Cesar began this movement, and I have never seen anything like this."

UFW president Arturo Rodriguez stirred a massive cheer when he told the crowd, "Today we make history; this is the biggest farmworker march ever." In fact, he added, it was the largest event supporting any American labor organizing campaign in recent history.

Religious leaders from around the country began the day with an interfaith service emceed by Teatro de Campesinos founder Luis

Valdez.

"We will begin with a couple of *vivas* to open the clouds and let the sun come in," Valdez rallied the crowd in the misty morning, with a "*Viva Cesar Chavez! Viva la causa! Viva la union!*"

And as the rich tones of the gospel choir Angelic Voices of East Oakland Faith Deliverance Church filled Geiser Stadium, Defensa de Mujeres director Blanca Tavera wiped a tear from her eye. Tavera, like many Watsonville residents who have worked their way from the fields to professional careers, was there as more than a spectator. She picked every crop imaginable from the time she was 5 until she was 13, she said.

But strawberries were by far the hardest, she said.

"By the end of the day, your back just burns," she recalled. "If

anything comes out of this, I hope people are educated to the plight of farmworkers."

Mandy Spitzer of Pajaro Valley Unified School District's Migrant Head Start program stood on the sidelines of Lincoln Street, wearing a red UFW hat and cheering. Moments before she had stopped and chatted with several parents of her students.

She saw them standing on the sidelines, watching the happy throng march by with muted hope and apprehension.

"They're saying, 'What's going to happen after they're all gone?' It's what they want, and they know that what the union is saying is right. But they wonder: Is the union going to give me a job when the growers plow under the fields?"

Police

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hectic as not enough spaces were provided. But alternate parking spots were found. Most of the traffic problems occurred in the 200 block of Main Street before the march started and on Riverside Drive at Main Street afterward.

And once the day's events were over, marchers and union supporters exited town in a peaceful manner. Watsonville High's Geiser Field, where the rally was held, was empty at about 4 p.m.

Washington added that medical personnel treated only a "couple of small things."

Police directed traffic in several

areas around downtown — particularly at the corner of Main and Maple. It was congested as people were heading for the buses parked nearby, but it was manageable. "I don't know what the numbers were; it got tight at times, but things went pretty good," said Detective Randy Pesce.

Officers from Watsonville police, the Santa Cruz County Sheriff's Office, California Highway Patrol and other organizations were on hand to keep proceedings orderly.