



Photo Kurt Ellison

Manuel Ybarra says dignity keeps him from breaking the strike.

## Rally focuses on effects of strike on schoolchildren

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The Watsonville strike is seen by most as a dispute between labor and management at local frozen food plants with the main issues revolving around money.

But, the people who spoke at an informational rally Saturday — although obviously concerned about finances — gave a different view of the situation, talking about the dispute as a struggle for dignity, a struggle that requires sacrifice.

They made it clear that, sometimes, that sacrifice includes a youngster's education.

That's quite a sacrifice, according to estimates that say the education of about 2,500 school-aged youngsters is being affected by the strike.

Which is just what Educators for the Welfare of Children, a group of concerned teachers who organized the rally, suspected. They staged the rally — which included testimonials from students, parents, teachers and other community members — to inform people about the effects of the strike on Pajaro Valley school district children.

A comical skit, put on by the teachers, portrayed what educators believe is the most tragic effect of the strike — a teenager dropping out of high school to help his parents.

Community activist Cruz Gomez, said she surveyed striking families to find out how many youngsters were being affected.

She said her figures showed 2,000 elementary and about 400 teenagers affected by the strike. She said she was surprised as she expected the figures to be higher.

One teenager who said her education is endangered was Luz Alvarez, a student at Watsonville High School. A letter written by Alvarez was read by a friend at the rally. Alvarez could not attend because she had to work.

Alvarez stated that she hopes to go to college, but because of the strike has cut her family's money supply, she may have to drop those plans. In fact she may have trouble finishing high school.

The friend who read the letter, Maribel Medina, said she has also felt strike effects but in a different way.

Medina was arrested along with several other students and a teacher for breaking the court injunction limiting the number of pickets at the plants.

Since she holds the office of Senior Class President at Watsonville High, she said she felt a lot of "heat" for her participation.

Her senior float plans were affected when some students who were supposed to help her

bowed out, even though she explained she was not representing the school at the time of her actions.

She received the loudest applause from the audience for her remarks.

Craig Baker, a teacher at H. A. Hyde and a spokesman for the Educators for the Welfare of Children, said people have to look at how the strike effects the whole community to understand how it effects school kids.

Standing in front of a yellow sign with multi-colored letters spelling out "We are Friends," Baker made introductions to the audience of about 300 people who gathered at E.A. Hall to talk about strike problems.

Baker said he and other teachers "went from concerned to involved" after having conferences with parents. Gloria De Ocampo, an H. A. Hyde teacher, who spoke at the rally, said that is how she also became involved.

She said teachers agree they have noticed three things in particular that signify the effects of the strike on kids.

One is apparent insomnia among children. She said they come to school tired, having been sleepless due to worry.

She said other kids show effects by demonstrating short concentration spans. They are apparently distracted by other

worries.

Another occurrence, that apparently takes on bigger significance, is that parents are sending kids to school with bag lunches or applying for free lunches.

OCampo said these kids would always pay for their lunch in the past and it pains parents to have to ask for free lunches.

Applying for the free lunches "hurts them a lot," said OCampo.

This supports the point made by others that the pride and dignity of working people in the "canneries" is being affected.

Jeff Solinas, an area doctor, said this pride also keeps some

strikers from seeking medical attention.

He said his clinic, Placita Medical Clinic, is attempting to provide care for those people.

He said he even knew of one person in particular who delayed going to the hospital because he was afraid he wouldn't be able to pay for health services. Luckily, the person was treated soon enough.

Area elected officials and representatives of Watsonville Canning and Frozen Food and Richard A. Shaw Inc. were invited to participate in the rally but did not show up.

Parents were also invited.

Isabel Garcia and Manuel Ybarra were on hand to speak about the strike effects. Both spoke with emotion.

Ybarra, a stiker, said he is a

father of five children and he is hurting economically, but will continue to send his children to school.

He said he has to travel 55 miles to work in order to do so. He also mentioned the theme of dignity, saying his pride keeps him from breaking the strike. He also drew applause.

Garcia said she is a mother of eight children and her kids ask her how come they can't visit relatives who are strike-breakers.

She said she tells her children if they want people to treat them with dignity and respect, they have to have dignity and respect for themselves too.



Teenager Maribel Medina addresses the rally.

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