

THE MARCH TO SACRAMENTO

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ABOUT 2 OR 3 MONTHS BEFORE WE MARCHED, CESAR CHAVEZ CAME ONE NIGHT TO THE ORGANIZERS MEETING AND SAID GUYS WHAT DO YOU THINK IF WE GO SEE THE GOVERNOR ABOUT WHAT'S GOING ON IN DELANO ABOUT THIS STRIKE AND THE TREATMENT BY THE GROWERS AND THE POLICE! WE SAID, HELL YEAH! LET'S GO WE CAN LOAD UP THE FAMILY, STRIKERS, FRIENDS AND DO A CARAVAN OF CARS AND GO SEE THE GOVERNOR.! CESAR LOOKED DOWN AND SHOOK HIS HEAD AND SAID NO! I'M TALKING ABOUT WE WALK, MARCH TO SACRAMENTO! WE LOOK AT EACH OTHER, AND I SAID TO MYSELF THIS MAN IS CRAZY! MAYBE ALL THE PESTICIDES IN THE GRAPES HAVE AFFECTED HIS BRAIN! AND THEN HE SAID THINK ABOUT IT, WE WILL DISCUSS IT LATER AND HE LEFT.

THE MARCH (PEREGRINACION) TO SACRAMENTO WAS SCHEDULED TO START AT 7AM ON MARCH 17, 1966 AND END ON EASTER SUNDAY APRIL 10th. STRIKERS SIGN UP FOR THE MARCH, WE WERE TO WALK FOR 25 DAYS AND COVER OVER 400 MILES! CESAR PROPOSED THAT WE VISIT THE FARMWORKER COMMUNITIES ALONG THE WAY. OUR MISSION WAS TO GO SEE THE GOVERNOR AND COMPLAIN ABOUT THE TREATMENT OF THE STRIKERS BY THE GROWERS AND THE POLICE DEPARTMENT. THE GROWERS WERE REFUSING TO MEET WITH US ABOUT A UNION CONTRACT AND HOW THE POLICE WERE TREATING US AND ARRESTING US FOR NO GOOD REASON! BY VISITING THESE COMMUNITIES WE WERE TO LET THE WORKERS KNOW WHY WE WERE MARCHING AND TO INVITE THEM TO COME AND JOIN US. AND TO LET THEM KNOW WE STILL HAVE A STRIKE IN DELANO AND TO PLEASE NOT GO TO WORK THERE. WE VISITED 53 TOWNS AND STOPPED AND SLEPT OVERNIGHT IN 25 OF THOSE TOWNS.

BUT JUST AS WE STARTED THE MARCH AND WERE TO MAKE A RIGHT TURN ON TO GARCES HIGHWAY TO GO THROUGH TOWN WE WERE BLOCKED AND STOPPED BY THE DELANO POLICE DEPARTMENT. TWO SIDES OF THE ROAD WERE BLOCKED BY ABOUT 30 POLICE OFFICERS DRESSED IN RIOT GEAR. THEY WERE TELLING US THAT WE DID NOT HAVE PERMISSION TO CONDUCT THIS PARADE! "PARADE?" WE TOLD THEM THIS WAS A PILGRIMAGE NOT A PARADE AND WE DID HAVE PERMISSION TO MARCH THROUGH TOWN. ABOUT 3 TO 4 DAYS BEFORE THE MARCH WAS TO START, ME AND AN ASSISTANT LAWYER WENT TO TOWNS THAT WE WERE TO PASS THROUGH AND ASK FOR PERMISSION OR GET A PERMIT, AND DELANO WAS ONE THAT SAID NO PROBLEM WITH US PASSING THROUGH AND THAT WE DID NOT NEED A PERMIT. BUT THEY STILL SAID NO! SO WE WAITED AND WAITED UNTIL OUT OF THE BLUE I WAS TOLD THAT BOBBY KENNEDY WHO WAS STILL IN TOWN AFTER THE CONGRESSIONAL HEARING CALLED THE CHIEF OF POLICE AND SAID TO LET THE MARCHES PASS

OR THEY WOULD FACE A LAWSUIT AGAINST THEM FOR DISCRIMINATION! WITH THAT THE POLICE STARTED TO DISBAND AND CLEAR THE ROAD AND THEN WE STARTED THE MARCH AFTER 3 HOURS OF STAND STILL.

WE ALSO KNEW THE GOVERNOR (BROWN SR.) WAS NOT GOING TO BE THERE TO GREET US THAT HE HAD OTHER PLANS TO BE SOME PLACE ELSE! WE SAID THAT'S OK WE WERE STILL GOING AND WHEN WE GET THERE THAT WE WERE GOING TO KNOCK ON HIS DOOR!

SO THE MARCH TOOK US 25 DAYS TO GET THERE! WE STOPPED IN 25 TOWNS TO SLEEP OVERNIGHT. MOST OF THE TIME WE DIDN'T HAVE A BED TO SLEEP IN, PEOPLE DIDN'T KNOW US THAT WELL AND OUR UNION MEMBERSHIP WASN'T THAT LARGE YET. SO MOST OF THE TIMES WE SLEPT IN PARKS, CHURCH HALLS, UNION HALLS, ETC.

WE WERE EQUIPPED WITH SLEEPING BAGS, BLANKETS, PILLOWS, AND SO FORTH. ME AND MY ASSISTANT CAPTAINS AND THE MAJORITY SLEPT IN THOSE PLACES AND LEFT THE HOMES THAT WERE OFFERED TO THE LADIES OR COUPLES WHENEVER POSSIBLE.

OVER 400 MILES WE MARCHED, PASSING THROUGH 53 TOWNS AND AS MENTIONED EARLIER WE STAYED OVERNIGHT IN SOME OF THEM. DID YOU KNOW WE CROSSED THE FREEWAY (HIGHWAY 99) 3 TIMES? WE HAD TO IN ORDER TO REACH THE TOWNS WE SAID WE WERE GOING TO AND THE PEOPLE WERE WAITING FOR US TO GET TO THEIR TOWN! WE HAD 4 SCOUTS AHEAD OF THE MARCH TO TELL THE COMMUNITY WE WERE COMING, AND THAT WE WOULD NEED SHELTER, FOOD, WATER, AND SUPPORT!

SO EVERY TOWN WE ARRIVED A RALLY WAS PLANNED TO INFORM THEM OF OUR MISSION AND TO INVITE THEM TO JOIN US TO SACRAMENTO! SO EVERY TOWN WE STOPPED AT THE WORKERS WOULD JOIN US SOME ALL THE WAY OTHERS WOULD JOIN US ON THE WEEKENDS! SO THE MARCH GREW EVERY DAY! FROM 77 TO HUNDREDS TO THOUSANDS!

TO ME IT WAS A JOURNEY THAT I WILL NEVER FORGET! WALKING ALL THE WAY EVERY DAY AND IT WAS AN HONOR FOR ME TO BE NAMED CAPTAIN OF THE MARCH TO SACRAMENTO (PEREGRINACION/PILGRIMAGE).

ROBERTO, EL CAPITAN.