

Hijinio Rangel 1968–1973

In the days that I came to know Cesar Chavez, I became a member of the National Farm Workers Association. I was working for Giannini Packing as one of its steady workers. I was residing in one of Mr. Giannini's ranches. I was treated okay. I drove the tractors and was in charge of the distribution of the water to his fruit fields. Even though I was treated fairly, I still felt that something was missing for the farmworker because I didn't have a voice or a vote. Farmworkers were at the mercy of the labor contractors.

When I met Cesar personally, he explained to me his economic and political plans in detail and he showed me how they would benefit the next generation. I was impressed with what I learned from our conversation and felt that Cesar had what it took to be a good leader. That very day I told Cesar that I wanted to do something for the movement. He asked me to organize a meeting with farmworkers in my area.

During this time, Senator Robert Kennedy had started his campaign for the presidency. I began organizing a meeting with some local farmworkers. I was able to borrow the Maya Theater in Dinuba, California, and I invited Luis Valdez's Teatro Campesino. The meeting took place on April 3 and, according to the local newspaper (the *Dinuba Sentinel*) and the police department, more than 1000 people were present to hear Cesar Chavez. Cesar was very impressed and pleased with my work.

About two years prior to this, I had purchased a store in Oroquieta, California, named Tortelleria El Progreso. I attended to my work with the union and my store that I had bought for \$25,000. Months later Cesar sent Alfredo Vazquez to talk to me. I was asked to start working for the movement under the California Migrant Ministries. To do this, I would have to make a great sacrifice and it would change my family and my life. I would have to leave my job and my business and persuade my wife (which was not so easy) to move. My wife and I came to an agreement and we packed our stuff and left everything we held dear behind to join the work of the California Migrant Ministry.

I began working with Chris Hartmire and my first assignment was working on the presidential campaign of Senator Robert Kennedy. I found myself motivating farmworkers to vote for Senator Kennedy.

My second assignment was the boycott of grapes in Portland, Oregon. We arrived in Portland on a Thursday around 8 p.m. Manuel Uranday and a volunteer teacher from San Jose came with us. We had only one friend in Portland when we arrived—a cousin of Dolores Huerta. When we arrived at his house, he and his wife were very gracious to us. On the following day, Friday, we went in search of an apartment and when we returned in the evening, we were told by Dolores's cousin that a Labor Day rally would be held in a park the next day, Saturday. He told us that 2000 people would be present. We knew this rally would be very important for us because we would be able to tell everyone there about the farmworker movement (*La Causa*) of California.

Our resources were limited, but our friend lent us his telephone to make any calls necessary. We didn't have any contacts and it was already 8 p.m., so we had only a couple of hours to make an information flyer. I got the telephone directory and started calling local organizations. On the seventh call, a Catholic priest answered. I spoke to him about our need to make an information flyer for the next day. He told us to come down to his office to see what we could come up with.

We went to his office, where he lent us his printer. By 1 a.m., we had 2000 flyers to be distributed at the rally. The priest was also able to get us a space and a time slot at the rally to give our presentation about the information we were distributing. That is how we started the grape boycott in Oregon. After a few months we were called to return to Delano to reorganize our national strategies.

My third assignment was to replace Sister Lupe Anguiano in Detroit. At the time, the temperature was -11 degrees. When we arrived, my wife and our eight children—Luis, Manuel, Elena, Domingo, Christina, Tony, Margarita, and Linda (aged 18 to 1)—and I organized a march from Ann Arbor to Detroit with 5000 people. The march ended with a rally at Kennedy Square downtown. After the rally, we started a hunger strike and announced picket lines against three grocery chains: AM-PM, Kroger's, and Farmer John's. After 11 days of fasting, Senator Roger Crain, Reverend Bob Baldwin, and I won an agreement with the three chains: They would stop selling grapes. We had to continue to pressure the stores to stop selling grapes from California. At this time I went with a delegation to Mr. Andrews, who was then the owner of the biggest fruit terminal in Detroit. His terminal distributed Giumarra grapes (which came from 25 California ranches) to Canada, Michigan, and Ohio. We asked Mr. Andrews to support our cause by not receiving or selling grapes from California. He laughed at me and said, "Mr. Rangel, I sent Jose Serda and Lupe Anguiano back to California and the same is going to happen to you. You will go back on your knees." I answered him directly by stating, "Mr. Andrews, I came to stop the sale of grapes and you will hear from me."

I organized a meeting with the managers of Kroger's grocery outlet. I made a small presentation detailing the petition that the farmworkers had and what actions we were going to take to solve this problem. I explained to them the reason for our boycott against the grapes, and the response from these managers was negative. After this meeting, I organized a group of around 20 persons. The group included Father Jose Meltor, Sister Rose and three other nuns, two seminarians, Reverend Bob Bowland, and my family. We entered a Kroger's supermarket where I proceeded to ask the manager to support our boycott because the store was supporting the ranchers in California with the sale of their grapes. He stated that he had no interest in our cause. Next our group split up in the store and started to take different items. We left the store without paying for the merchandise. We stood on one side of the entrance of the store and waited to see what would happen. About a half-hour later, a police bus came and we were arrested for civil disobedience. Because my children were minors, my sons were sent to a seminary and my daughters to a

convent. This happened at about noon on a Saturday. One hour after being booked on these charges, five attorneys arrived: one from the AFL-CIO, one from the UAW, one from the steelworkers union, one from the carpenters union, and one from the electrical workers union. They took us into court that same day to be arraigned. A judge arrived, still in his shorts because he had been cutting his lawn. At 3 p.m., the judge began hearing arguments from the attorneys representing Kroger's. After hearing both sides of the case, the judge's verdict was that the case was dismissed for lack of evidence. At this time, the courtroom was filled with about 1000 people. We were released victoriously at 6 p.m. On Monday we received a call from Kroger's stating their decision to discontinue the sale of grapes in their 25 supermarkets. With this action, other stores rejected the sale of grapes as well.

After this we planned our strategy and organized 24-hour-a-day picket lines. After six days we had 500 volunteers boycotting wherever grapes were being sold. We had 150 volunteers surrounding Mr. Andrew's terminal, and he was feeling the pressure. The around-the-clock boycott was too much for him. Nine days into the boycott, I told all 150 of our volunteers to go to the entrance where Mr. Andrews arrived every morning. When he entered, they should run to the front office so he would think that there were more boycotters present than really were. That same day at 7 a.m., Mr. Andrews called me to his office. I went with a delegation of four: two men and two women.

In his office he asked me, "Mr. Rangel, how many do you have out there? Three hundred?"

I stated, "About that many."

He continued, "Mr. Rangel, I have a trainload of grapes coming from California. Let me sell them and then I'll discontinue selling grapes until your matter is resolved in California."

I said, "This is not acceptable, Mr. Andrews. Send a telegram to Mr. Giumarra requesting he take the grapes back. I want a copy of the telegram. Also I want permission to inspect your terminal every day until further orders."

Mr. Andrews said, "All right, Mr. Rangel, I accept."

Days later, Mr. Andrews stated to one of our inspectors who happened to be my son, Manuel, "Tell your father that I have much respect for him."

And that is how we negotiated a contract with 25 ranchers in California.

I have a high respect for my family, especially my wife, for her total support when I left our business and fieldwork to go with the movement under the leadership of Mr. Cesar Chavez.