

TAPE ARC -12, TC 4:00:00

ABC NEWS, REEL 204: "CESAR CHAVEZ STORIES"

CESAR CHAVEZ, interviewed by reporter:

4:00:33 CHAVEZ: ...credibility, and it was a turning point, it was a turning point for us, and I count that as one of the milestones in the union, I count that as one of the, uh, periods, you know, there aren't too many in any movement, that makes a difference...

4:00:52 CHAVEZ: ...it was at that meeting. I wasn't uh, I sat by, you know, but I was very weak and I was taken away in a car. But our people stayed there managing the crowd, because it was about a 15,000 crowd, a farm worker crowd mostly. They were going to ask him to run for office, to run for President, he would say "no", you know. But uh, one, Jim Drake tells me, one of our organizers tells me, that they did, they had trapped him against his car, cause they wanted to touch him, you know, so they had him trapped against his car and he, well he couldn't open the door because there was so much pressure, people trying to, basically just touch him. But some lady came in, some elderly lady, and says, "you gotta run for President." And he looks at her and said, kind of quietly, and there were a lot of people there, thousand, but kind of privately, said, "you really think so?" She says, "yes, I know so." And he didn't say, "I will," but he said, "well, that is something to think about." But we took that to mean, maybe he will, you know. So when he ran, we were the first to endorse him, we were the first union in

the country to endorse him. And we got a lot of hell from other unions, for, because you know they had other candidates.

4:02:09 REPORTER: When you heard that he was running, what did you feel?

4:02:12 CHAVEZ: Oh, I felt, I was elated, I thought it was great, he couldn't be a better, couldn't be a better uh, uh, I saw it as a continuation of what his brother was trying to do, you know, I thought, well gee, we can pick up right where we left off. I saw a lot of hope. But also, I think, looking back, we had a meeting that night when he was running, he never asked us for the endorsement, we did it, you know. We met and we considered we were going to be kind of oddball in the labor movement, doing an endorsement that soon, you know. We also thought, if we're going to help him like he helped us, we got to do it right away. And it was at that meeting, after we had said that we were going to do it, and we planned how to deal with the flak, we got around to, it was a very curious thing, we got around to just uh, someone raised the, well about the danger you know, and so it kind of hit us that he was really in danger by doing it. You know, it didn't go out of the room, it just passed and we went on with our work you know. But after the uh, the tragedy, we went back and reconstructed our relationship with him, and I remember that evening after we had planned the, how to do the endorsement, that that had come into the discussion. So...

4:03:40 CHAVEZ: ...Yeah, uh-huh, I think that there were similarities there, at least in the religion and in the, well fasting is something ...would do in Ireland, so fasting wasn't anything strange to, to, you know his culture...

RAFER JOHNSON, interviewed by reporter [about Robert Kennedy?]:

4:04:38 JOHNSON: ...the victory, in that long walk, which turned out to be the last walk, which is something I'll never forget, and it's painful even today just uh, thinking about what went on that evening.

4:05:14 JOHNSON: ..but very well accepted, large crowds all along the way... it really, I think of all the time during the campaign, I mean I was really, I was literally floating in California. Seeing, uh, the way he was accepted, and uh, people just mobbing him everywhere we went, it made our job a lot tougher here, just keeping him in the car so that he could respond. It was very difficult, just holding him on, in fact I remember once sprinting down...

CESAR CHAVEZ, interviewed by reporter:

4:06:01 REPORTER: The fast then, that came afterwards, didn't it?

4:06:04 CHAVEZ: The fast was afterwards, yes. Uh, we were uh, well, we were into the fast about two or three days before he got wind of it. By that time we had developed a very good relationship we'd write letters or we'd call, we'd call him for help, or... And, he uh, found out that I was fasting, so he sent me a letter, suggesting, it was very good because he wasn't saying "get off the fast" but just suggesting that uh, have I taken every precaution, like saying it's a good thing, but

like just, you know, be careful. And uh, then we were planning uh, what to do at the end of the fast, and uh, someone, I forgot who it was in the union, said why don't we call Bobby to come. And we said, oh, he'd never come, you know. So we called him and he said, "sure I'd like to come." And so, of course he came and it was another big event for us.

4:07:19 REPORTER: ...remember his presence, do you remember anything about him at that time.

4:07:23 CHAVEZ: [LOT'S OF WIND IN MIC] Oh, yes, well, he was very at home you know, there isn't really that much difference between an Irish Catholic and a Mexican Catholic, there isn't really, there's a lot of similarities. He was right at home. And the service was there and uh, uh, he's uh, his uh, speech, he was sitting by me and he gave me part of the bread, you know, when we had communion, and of course, the Spanish, with the accent, with the Boston uh, with the Boston uh, [Accent?...] with the Boston accent...

MAN AT DESK[??], interviewed by reporter:

4:08:09 MAN AT DESK[??]: It's a uh, an incredible excitement, almost a frenzy, uh, feelings had been so corked up for so long, in people, it was, that campaign probably was more than just Bobby Kennedy. It was a backlog of frustration over Vietnam, it was something active that people could do for the things they believed. While certainly Bobby lent his name and magnetism to that it was a campaign that had a lot of excitement even without the charm and magnetism of a Kennedy.

[REMAINDER OF TAPE, TEAMSTERS PROTESTING ETHEL KENNEDY'S
PRESENCE OUTSIDE CESAR'S JAIL CELL]