Caravan brings aid to strikers, enlightenment to students

By BARRY KAPLAN

A huge string of automobiles wound its way through the Magic Valley Easter Sunday bringing aid and enthusiasm to the beleaguered strikers in Starr County. The weekend was one of long driving, stops in unscheduled places, fried fish and potato salad, and more driving.

The Houston group, 15 cars strong at the outset, left the U of H at 7:30 Saturday morning amid rush hour traffic and intermittent drizzle. The traffic and the weather improved steadily as the morning passed, and by the time the caravan left Rosenberg, the sun was shining, and the train was hanging together at 50 miles per hour.

On through the towns of highway 59, stopping at churches to collect the donations of the citizens of Wharton, El Campo, Edna, and Victoria, the caravan arrived at Corpus Christi at 7 pm, right on schedule.

There on the approach to the causeway and bridge were the 34 or so cars of the group that had left Austin that morning. The entire caravan made its way into Corpus Christi behind the police escort, and proceeded to a rally and fish-fry at the Ben Garza Gymnasium.

After much singing, speechnifying, and food, the group broke up into groups as people went about getting acquainted with their fellow caravanistas and having a good time generally.

More Join

At 7 the next morning, Easter Day, the caravan left for Kingsville, where the strength was augmented by several cars from Texas A&I and more donations swelled the contribution to the strikers. After a brief stop in Falfurrias, the caravan proceeded to Edinburg, where a rally (with speeches and songs) and lunch were held.

From Edinburg, the caravan wound its way deeper into what could only be felt as enemy territory. An impressive sight with about three miles of automobiles with headlights burning, the caravan stopped in La Joya, the first stop of last summer's march to Austin.

After a picnic of soul food and more speeches, the group finally entered Starr County.

La Vicioire

Driving slowly past the gate of La Casita Farms, the caravan was greeted by the people of the county, some with scowls or curiosity, many with smiles and the traditional "V-for-Victory" salute.

Driving slowly, making a maximum of noise with horns and shouts of "Viva la Huelga!" the reverse march entered Rio Grande City at 4 pm and went to the courthouse square, where the caravanistas were addressed by Eugene Nelson, the leader of the United Farm Workers in the Valley.

More singing, this time directed as a serenade to the prisoners in the county jail (La Carcel de Rio Grande—the inspiration for one of the most stirring songs of the movement), and then a spontaneous march of a little over a mile to the Union Hall, where, after more speeches, the caravan dispersed.

Powerful Experience

Simply told, as this has been, the story of the Easter Caravan does not have the punch or the vigor of the tales of the labor movement of the past. But there is no way to convey in words an event that was largely an emotion.

It is extremely difficult to convey the quiet dignity of the strikers, who ask consideration as human beings in a land where their presence as labor has brought about an unwindingness of their feelings by employers who have come to think of them as mere commodities.

There is no way to put into words the feelings on both sides as huelguistas greeted caravanistas with cheers and embraces, or the surge of pride in the spirit of man felt when a man imprisoned by a system beyond his comprehension waves a shirt out the window of his jail cell.

The food was delivered, and the songs were sung. The long miles had been driven and one headed home with the feeling that a bridge had been established between fellow citizens of a state that has tremendous potential to be great.