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Eight-Day, 100-Mile Desert Trek Ends for Grape Strikers

BY RUBEN SALAZAR

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CALEXICO—An eight-day, 100-mile march across the heat-blistered Imperial Valley in support of the California table grape boycott ended here Sunday.

About 700 farm workers and their supporters, including U.S. senators and congressmen, were met at the end of the march by Cesar Chavez, head of the United Farm Workers committee which organized the boycott and march. A severe back ailment prevented Chavez from taking part in the march.

Sens. Edward M. Kennedy (D-Mass.), Ralph Yarborough (D-Tex.), and Walter Mondale (D-Minn.) as well as Reps. James G. O'Hara (D-Mich.) and John V. Tunney (D-Calif.) took part in the last stage of the walk and were to address the workers in a rally Sunday night.

Tunney said the congressional delegation was on hand in support of the strike as "the best example of nonviolent protest in America."

While taking no position on the issues involved in the strike, the Riverside congressman said he supported the workers and their "right to organize and strike."

The workers and their sympathizers marched from El Centro to Calexico Sunday on the pavement of California 111 through sweltering heat of 106 degrees.

The purpose of the march was to gain support of Mexican workers who commute from Mexico to work on U.S. farms. The union says the workers are being used as strike-breakers by growers.

"They (the Mexican nationals) come here because they need the jobs, but we want them to join the union so that they will get the protection they need," Chavez said.

The march ended at what is called El Hoyo (The Hole) at the border, where farm labor contractors pick up commuters, or "greencarders," for work in the Imperial and Coachella valleys.

The number of marchers reached its peak Sunday after a low of 35 last week as the group braved the intense heat of the low desert.

At Heber, about 10 miles from the

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border, the marchers were greeted warmly at a Catholic church by a band and a crowd of local people.

But eight women in a station wagon led by a grape picker, Mrs. Dolores Mendoza, rode in front of the church with signs condemning the strike, Chavez and the union.

One of the signs read,

"Delano (the town where Chavez started his movement) jobs are dying for women because of Chavez."

Mrs. Mendoza said that ever since Chavez started organizing farm laborers "it is more difficult for women pickers to get jobs in the field."

"In Delano, about 500 women used to work in grapes but, since Chavez

started agitating, the growers have stopped hiring women to avoid trouble," Mrs. Mendoza said.

Chavez, Sen. Ralph Yarborough (D-Tex.) and Sen. Walter Mondale (D-Minn.) were slated to speak at the border rally Sunday.

The Rev. Dr. Ralph Abernathy, who marched with the group on Saturday, left late Saturday and was not present Sunday.