

LABOR RALLY

May 13, 1967

by Lupe Zamarripa
Laredo, Texas

A University of Texas professor, the state president of the AFL-CIO, and a former managing editor of The Daily Texan urged striking workers in Laredo Saturday to fight against low wages and join labor unions.

Dr. George I. Sánchez, professor of Latin American Education at the University, told about 400 Laredo residents to continue their protest against low wages and not to cower in their fight for justice.

H.S. (Hank) Brown pledged the support of the labor groups only if the Laredo residents united and asked for it. The state labor president told the crowd, assembled at a playground of a Laredo elementary school, "to clean out the den of political inequity that has existed in this town (Laredo) for too long."

"Clean out the ward healers who use pesos on election day to buy your body and soul," Brown said.

Brown told the group they were the only ones who could help themselves.

"We have supported the Valley workers and we will continue to do so as long as they keep fighting for justice; and, we will do the same here," Brown said.

David Lopez, a former managing editor of The Daily Texan, the University's student publication, criticized Texas Rangers for roughing strikers in Starr County.

Lopez, currently with the American Confederation of Laborers, told the crowd a deputy was guarding each Starr County family who was picketing.

Referring to Gov. John Connally, Lopez said, "Either send the Rangers out of Starr County, or we will send you out." He urged the group to write to the governor.

The "labor rally" was jointly sponsored by the Webb County Central Labor Council, the AFL-CIO, and the VIDA organization.

VIDA (Voices in Democratic Action), a low-wage protest group, was inspired by VISTA volunteers assigned to work in Laredo's deprived areas. Two of the VISTAS (Volunteers In Service To America) have been dismissed because of their leading roles in the movement.

Although the rally included a three-mile parade through the city's streets, about 10 persons crowded into the back of a 1951 Ford pickup bearing protest signs.

Signs of "Down With The (political) Bosses," "Up With Justice," "We Want Voting Machines," and "Are You Going To Support The Worker, Mayor?" could be seen in the dusty rally area.

In the past the commuter problem has hindered unionizing Laredo, Brown said.

AFL-CIO officials have met with the labor leaders of the Confederacion de Trabajadores Mexicanos (The Confederation of Mexican Workers), Mexico's powerful labor union, to formulate plans to unionize Laredo.

"We don't want to stop people from crossing the bridge to work here. We want to raise the living conditions on both sides of the river by working with the CTM," Brown said.