



The Creation of a Community . . .

During the last fifteen years, one of the most remarkable demographic changes in Washington State history has taken place, and continues to take place. . .

Yakima county since the 1920's has been among the United States' ten most productive agricultural counties. The labor needs of the valley's growing farms have drawn large numbers of marginalized Chicano and Mexicano workers from the Southwest and Mexico and more recently other Latino Political refugees from Central and South America. Many were actively recruited and transported by the mushrooming agricultural industry throughout the state. In the mid sixties a technological revolution followed on the heels of farmworker strikes. Marches, rallies, hearings and other efforts to organize a response to the deplorable wages and working conditions, were met with brutal beatings, jailings and deportations. The technological changes replaced hands on farm after farm while herbicides took over the weeding and other labor intensive work. Through the 1950's, 60's and 70's, farm laborers who had migrated to this state decided to stay, to "settle out".

With the number of farm labor jobs decreasing year by year, increasing number of the new residents were compelled to move to the urban areas to find work, notably Yakima, Spokane, and the Puget Sound. In the 1950's, the Boeing Company offered twice the farm wage rate for unskilled or semi-skilled work. This and other incentives made Interstate 90 from Yakima Valley and other areas to Seattle the most popular migration route in the state.

Many of the people migrating to urban areas were unable to make a halfway decent living in the city, as had been the case in the agricultural areas. In 1970, in response to strong community struggles, an English as a Second Language Program was established at Seattle Central Community College, geared to orient our people to survive in a hostile environment. This program formed the nucleus around which El Centro de la Raza, "the center for the people", was founded in October, 1972.

El Centro de la Raza Was Forged Out of the Struggle Against Racism and Exploitation . . .

In 1972 El Centro de la Raza was founded by the peaceful occupation of an abandoned school building on Beacon Hill. People of all races voluntarily renovated the old school at 2524 16th Avenue South with their own sweat and developed programs to attempt to meet the social, educational, cultural and political needs of the community. The community itself had grown to over 40,000 people in King County by 1975.

The organization now operates a variety of programs to serve the Chicano/Latino/Mexicano community, which includes permanent residents from all over Latin America. It also serves poor and working people of Seattle's Beacon Hill, Rainier Valley, Georgetown, and West Seattle neighborhoods. Programs are established to serve the community by providing necessary education, training, and support and

development services. To try and meet the needs we manage and are gradually renovating one square city block with a large building which otherwise would be decaying or sold to the highest bidder. In an attempt to exercise the political rights of our community El Centro de la Raza participates in coalitions with other organizations in Seattle, in Voter Registration and Education campaigns, coalitions for better services, and activities with our sister organizations in the minority communities and non-minority communities state-wide. The principles of El Centro de la Raza include the necessity to organize ourselves for survival and continued development. This work has been the key to our survival and development over the past decade.



The Need...



El Centro de la Raza's programs have experienced a steady and dramatic increase in the use of basic survival services from 1980 to the present. Our Food Bank and Emergency Feeding program served an average of 2,000 people per quarter in 1982. By 1983, the number of people needing food climbed to 9,600 per month. The need for food is not declining, nor leveling off, but increasing within the context of the economic decline of the nation. The Chicano/Latino Community, as well as other minority and poor communities, face worse hardships in the predictable and periodic recessions which are a basic characteristic of our economic structure.

El Centro de la Raza has documented economic and social conditions in our community which are worse than the official government statistics. One of every ten people is unemployed by the government figures when it is actually three in every ten people who cannot work to support their families. Less than one third of our Youth graduate from Seattle Public High Schools where the discipline procedures and other policies "push out" the future of our community. Conditions are even worse in the Yakima, Skagit, Tri-Cities and Moses Lake areas.