

26 Grape Growers Sign Union Accord; Boycott Nears End

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DELANO, Calif., July 29 — Farm workers and table grape growers signed an agreement in this dusty rural town today that both sides said would bring a "new day" to American agriculture.

The agreement signified that, after decades of struggle, some of it violent, farm workers were now well on their way to securing the rights and benefits long enjoyed by other workmen.

Twenty-six grape growers, representing 35 per cent of the industry, signed contracts with the United Farm Workers Organizing Committee, the first successful union in the history of agriculture.

This meant that 65 per cent of the growers were now unionized. The rest, centered in the area around Fresno, are expected to sign shortly.

When those growers do sign, the union will end its nationwide boycott of nonunion grapes. "Then all grapes will be sweet grapes again," said Cesar Chavez, the union leader.

The ceremony today marked the turning point in the efforts of Mr. Chavez and the union

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26 Grape Growers on Coast Sign Pact With Union

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to organize the poor migrants, most of them Mexican-Americans, who pick the nation's fruits and vegetables.

Almost five years ago, the union first struck the vineyards of this area of the vast San Joaquin Valley, 140 miles northeast of Los Angeles. But the strikers, hampered by the opposition of local law enforcement agencies and their own poverty, made little impact.

Two years later, Mr. Chavez turned his major effort to a boycott of grapes. Eating grapes became a great cause for liberals throughout the country, and it was ultimately their power that brought the growers to the bargaining table.

"We said from the beginning that we were not going to abandon the fight, that we would stay with the struggle if it took a lifetime, and we meant it," said Mr. Chavez, a slight, soft-spoken former farm worker who became a national figure during the campaign.

"I think that gave hope to people around the country who were supporting us."

John Giumarra Jr., a spokesman for the growers, acknowledged the power of the boycott.

"It was seriously affecting the market," he said today. "We were concerned that it would actually destroy a number of farmers, particularly the smaller ones."

Today's ceremony was a victory above all for the campesinos, the farm workers, who suffered tremendous economic hardships during the five-year strike.

Hundreds of them today crowded the union's new headquarters, whose walls were covered with banners reading, "Poor Men, They Do Penance, They Do Penance Daily" and "First, Relieve the Needy."

They crowded in, faces burnished by the sun, hands roughened by the earth, backs bent by endless days of toil. And their eyes, their proud dark eyes, filled with tears of joy.

As they waited for the ceremony to begin, they sang the songs of "La Causa," as they call their movement. "Nosotros venceremos," they sang, "We shall overcome." And then they shouted, Viva la huelga, Viva the strike, the strike that is almost over.

'A New Relationship'

This spirit of conciliation extended to the growers, rough-hewn men in open-necked sportshirts who looked rather ill at ease among the people they had fought for so long. Mr. Giumarra was applauded when he was introduced. He is a young man whose father and uncles started as fruit peddlers in Los Angeles and built one of the largest farms in the valley.

"We are starting a new relationship here," he said, "a relationship that's going to be a very important one. Our businesses and your jobs depend on it. We have to work together and respect each other and go forward for a better life for everyone."

The hostility toward the growers was not completely submerged, however. "You're learning," one farmworker muttered at Mr. Giumarra's speech. Another said, "The great white father speaks."

In his speech Mr. Chavez paid tribute to the idea of nonviolence.

"When we see so much violence in our midst," he said "this event justifies the belief of millions that through the theory of nonviolent action social justice can be gotten. We are proving this here every day."

Then the two men signed a contract calling for a wage of \$1.80 an hour plus 20 cents for each box picked. Before the strike began, workers were receiving about \$1.10 an hour, but in recent years union pressures moved wages up to \$1.65 an hour.

Health Plan Gets Aid

In addition growers will contribute 10 cents an hour to the union's health plan and 2 cents for each box to an economic development project. The contract also includes stringent safety requirements on the use of pesticides.

The agreement was hammered out in two weeks of vigorous negotiations. As with previous contracts in the industry, members of the Bishops Committee on farm labor helped to mediate between the two sides.

In a statement he read to the audience today, the Most

Rev. Joseph F. Donnelly of Hartford, chairman of the committee, said:

"Still, this is really only a beginning. What is needed now is a thorough evaluation of the whole process of farm labor-management relations, spelling out the rights and duties of both sides. We need Federal legislation offering protection for both sides, but especially the farm worker, who has little or no protection as of now."

Even as the contracts were being signed, the union was getting involved in several other battles. Thirty farmers in the Salinas Valley, including such giants as the United Fruit Company and Purex, signed

contracts earlier this week with the teamsters union.

The farm workers' union charged that they are "sweetheart" contracts, which do not call for any wage increase, and announced that it would file a suit against the teamsters.

Jerome Cohen, the farm union's lawyer, said that the teamsters did not represent the workers. Moreover, he said, the teamsters signed an agreement with Mr. Chavez several years ago in which they promised not to organize farm workers.

"We will make it so miserable for those growers that they will have to do something," Mr. Chavez vowed. The

Salinas farmers grow mainly lettuce, celery and strawberries.

While concentrating on table grapes in recent years, the farm workers union has also won contracts covering workers in such crops as melons, plums and peaches.