26 Grape Growers Sign Union Accord; Boycott Nears End

By STEVEN V. ROBERTS
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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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to organize the poor migrants, most of them Mexican-American, on the farms. It was John Glumarsa, the name given to the union, first struck the vision of the first dipper in the valley near the eastern border of Los Angeles. But he tells the story of how the opposition of local law enforcement, fear of the farm workers, and their own poverty, made little impact.

The formation of the union, Mr. Chavez said in his major effort to bring more grapes to the growers in 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 farmworker who became a national figure during the campaign that gave hope to people around the country who were consigned to desperation.

John Glumarsa 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 the growers, 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. 

A crowd of thousands today crowded the union’s new headquarter, a building where the walls were covered with banners reading, “Protest! They Do Penalties! They Do Penalties Daily!” and “First, Believe the Need!”

“They were in, faces bunched, the sun, brightness by the earth, basking best by endless days of sun. 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. 

“Drum, you men, you sang, ‘We shall overcome, we shall overcome, Viva la huelga!’”

Visit the strike, the strike that is over now.

“A New Relationship”

The peace of conciliation extended to the growers, rough-hewn men in soiled sportshirts who looked rather ill at ease among the people they had fought for so long. Mr. Glumarsa was applauded when he introduced. He is a young man whose father and uncle 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 is going to be a very important one. Our bitterness and your job 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 quoted at Mr. Glumarsa’s speech. Another said, “The great white father speaks.”

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

“We have seen much violence in our midst,” he said. “When I think of millions of millions of millions that through the theory of nonviolence and the justice of our cause, we have a right to every day.”

Then the two men signed a contract calling for a wage of $1.80 per hour plus 20 cents for each box picked. Before that the farm 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 after 16 months of intermittent negotiations. As with previous contracts in the industry, members of the Bishop’s Committee on Farm Labor helped to mediate between the two sides.

In a statement he read to the audience today, the Rev. Joseph F. Donnelly of contracts earlier this week with Salinas farmers grow mainly mustard, chairman of the com the teamsters union, lettuce, celery and strawberry.

The farm workers’ union

“This is really only a charged that they are ‘sweetened’ by a thorough evaluation of the call for any wage increase, and the whole process of farm labor, among others, that the farmers and workers covering contracts with workers in such crops as melons, peaches and plums.

We will make it no more so the Salinas Valley, including for those growers that much plants as the United Farm they have to do and Company and Purex, signed this October,” Mr. Chavez vowed, the Copyright © The New York Times