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Familiar Scene?

In a moody scene strongly reminiscent of campaigns in the Argonne Forest of France, Cambodian soldiers slog through the monsoon rain in a campaign to open a road in the area of Kirorom, Cambodia. (RNS Photo)

Five-Year Grape Impasse Fades with Accord

By GERARD E. SHERRY
(NC News Service)

Delano, Calif. — The United Farm Workers Organizing Committee (UFWOC) achieved its biggest success in the five-year California farm labor dispute when growers representing 50 per cent of the table-grape industry signed labor contracts covering more than 6,000 pickers.

The victory was made sweeter by the fact that the 26 growers went for the July 29 signing to union headquarters in rural Delano, the little town where

the original grape strike began in 1965. Delano is tucked away in the lushness of the vast San Joaquin Valley, 140 miles northeast of Los Angeles.

More than 400 farm workers and supporters jammed the white-painted union hall, where a crucifix and a madonna on the walls reflected the Catholic religious traditions of the economically struggling Mexican-American field hands.

The hall was decorated with banners like one lettered "Poor Men Do Penance Daily."

Auxiliary Bishop Joseph F. Donnelly of Hartford, Conn., chairman of the U.S. Bishops Ad Hoc Committee on the Farm Labor Dispute, presided at the signing. The workers present applauded, cheered, laughed and sang.

The work of the bishops committee has been credited as a major element in getting growers and workers together to negotiate their troubles—spiraling inflation for the growers and low wages combined with primitive living conditions for the workers.

Congratulating both sides, Bishop Donnelly said it "brings

to a happy conclusion five years of strife and turmoil in the fields of this rich and verdant valley of abundance."

John Giumarra Jr., spokesman for the growers, most of whom had consistently refused to deal with UFWOC leader Cesar Chavez until now, said the signing "brings a new era to agriculture." Giumarra pledged that his group would do everything possible to make the agreement work.

Chavez said the settlement was proof that "social justice can be gotten through non-violent means."

The July 19 agreement, combined with the first contracts worked out through the bishops committee last April and others since, mean that close to 80 per cent of the table-grape industry is now unionized. Chavez made

it clear that a worldwide boycott of non-union table grapes would not be called off until the remaining 20 per cent of growers have signed.

Holding out are grape growers in Fresno and Tulare counties. The major breakthrough with the Delano growers, however, could induce the others to enter contract negotiations swiftly.

"We are happy," said Giumarra, "that peace has come to this valley. The eyes of America are on Delano. If unionization works here, it can work elsewhere. That is the fantastic sense of responsibility on both sides."

"There is always a first step in a thousand-mile journey. I wish you well on the rest of

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