Fair Weather Farmers

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In connection with an article by Tina Rosenberg [“Farm Workers Don’t Have to be Poor,” April], an editor at The Washington Monthly interviewed me in order to update information I had furnished Rosenberg earlier. I stated that I did not know very much about the new immigration law. However, I offered some information about the impact of immigration on migrant workers planting trees for large timber companies in the South. I never stated or implied that this process is applicable to the situation here.

Moreover, you cite me in order to support the claim that “these extra rights haven’t made much difference” (presumably because the workers ultimately pay for them). But even if workers do trade off gross wages for old-age pensions, unemployment insurance, and workers compensation, these newly vindicated rights are very important.

Although Rosenberg has put her finger on an important truth in saying that, “Farmers pay poorly not because they have to, but because they can,” it is probably equally true that they will never have to until farmworkers organize strong unions.

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