



Anita Siegel

## For Chavez—Fruits of Victory

MIAMI—"We shall win," chanted an elated, boisterous group of migrant workers here last Wednesday. "We can break the growers' power, gain our freedom while we learn. The union makes us strong." The workers—black, Mexican-American and white—had good reason to celebrate. Their leader, Cesar Chavez, had just signed the first labor contract for migrant workers in the Southeast, a three-year agreement between his United Farm Workers of California and the foods division of Coca Cola Company.

The agreement was reached after two months of bargaining that was—unlike most labor negotiations between growers and migrant workers—amicable. "It will not only drastically change the lives of the 1,200 workers for whom we have been negotiating," said Mr. Chavez, "but, as in California, it will benefit all agricultural workers in the state."

The new contract covers all full-time and seasonal employes and sets a pattern for Florida's agricultural workers, traditionally the lowest paid here and generally deprived of benefits that have been accepted as normal in other parts of the labor force. It gives regular employes a 25-cent-an-hour wage increase, boosting wage rates from a \$2- to \$3.45-an-hour range to \$2.25 to \$3.70 an hour. And it raises by 5 cents a box, to 40 cents, the price seasonal workers get for the fruit they pick. In addition, all the workers in Coca Cola's orange groves in south and central Florida—the company markets Minute Maid orange juice—will receive paid holidays, sick leave, vacations and other benefits.

For Cesar Chavez, signing the contract with Coca Cola had a special significance. It had taken him years of bitter and bruising battle to gain recognition in California and other Western states. It was only last month that the executive council of the A.F.L.-C.I.O. accepted his United Farm Workers of California into its ranks as a full-fledged union. But the Coca Cola contract gives his union a solid base in the Southeast.

He still has a long road to travel, however. The farm labor force in the state is estimated at 120,000, and many of the small and politically powerful Florida citrus growers have indicated that they will import seasonal West

Indian labor rather than yield to unionization.

—GEORGE VOLSKY

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