THE IMPACT OF THE BRACERO PROGRAMS ON A SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA MEXICAN-AMERICAN COMMUNITY

A Field Study of Cucamonga, California

By

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INTRODUCTION

The Problem

The United States has imported thousands of Mexican Nationals, also known as Braceros, to do farm labor. In 1942 by United States – Mexico agreements, the Bracero programs were instituted to replenish the United States' agricultural labor forces which had been absorbed by the Armed Forces and defense plants. The programs were partly discontinued for a period of two years after World War II but the shortage of domestic labor made it necessary to reestablish them on a larger scale as early as 1951. The number of Braceros under the new programs has nearly tripled its highest wartime total. Last year, for example, there were 450,000 Mexican Nationals distributed in 28 states. This year there will be from 150,000 to 180,000 in California alone.[1]

The purpose of this study is to find what impact the Bracero Programs have had on a Southern California Mexican-American community which has had constant contact with the programs since they were instituted. Special emphasis has been given to problems concerning labor

[1] Interview with Mr. Ray Orton, Manger of the Cucamonga Bracero Camp, July 17, 1957.

conditions (wages, for example), the standard of living, health, and job stability of the Mexican-Americans in this community as they were affected by the Bracero Programs.

Since it would not be possible to study the entire problem in California, the community of Cucamonga was chosen for two reasons: (1) It is a long-established community, primarily agricultural; (2) it is the site of a Bracero camp housing about 1,000 Mexican Nationals during the height of the season. Since the Bracero programs were first begun, Cucamonga has had constant contact with Mexican Nationals.

Definition of Terms

Bracero – Pronounced "Bra-say-ro," literally means "arm man" and comes fro the Spanish word "brazo" which means arm. A Bracero is one who offers his strong arm. He is a Mexican National who is in this country doing farm labor under the auspices of the United States-Mexico agreements.

Mexican-American – Those of Mexican descent and citizens of Mexico who have lived as aliens in this country since before World War II.

Mexican-American Community – A community inhabited by Mexican citizens and their descendants, the majority of whom are citizens of the United States.

Colonia – Literally a colony, a Mexican-American community. Most of the colonias are unincorporated areas adjacent to a town or city. It is invariably on "the other

side" of the railroad track, river bridge, or highway. About 80 per cent of the Mexican-Americans and Mexican aliens live in these colonias.

Wetbacks – Mexican aliens who have entered the United States illegally to work. A term originated in the United States and applied to those who swam across the Rio Grande into Texas in the 1920's.

Skips – Braceros who do not complete their contracts, but instead leave to seek employment elsewhere in the United States.

Locals – Descendents of Mexicans, and Mexican citizens who have lived in the United States since before World War II.

Anglo – Term used to differentiate between those of Mexican American descent and other members of the Caucasian race.

Mexican-National – same as Bracero.

A Brief History and Description of Cucamonga

The name Cucamonga comes from "Cucamongabit" which means "land of many springs." The Indians so named it because of the numerous springs in the area, the last of which stopped flowing in 1910.[2] The name first appears in a book of baptisms of the San Gabriel Mission which recorded that on March 11, 1811, four natives were baptized at the Mission

[2] Interview with Mr. Leonard Smith, resident of Cucamonga since 1908, August 12, 1957.

San Gabriel from the Cucamonga Ranchería. Until 1830 the Ranchería was under the jurisdiction of the Mission. In 1839, Tiburcio Tapia, a former military guard, successful merchant, and Los Angeles judge was granted the Ranchería of Cucamonga by Governor Alvarado of the California territory.[3] The grant gave Tapia a cone-shaped piece of land of 81 square miles, 12 leagues along the foothills and 3 leagues south of them. The natural advantages of the newly acquired land stimulated Tiburcio Tapia and his majordomo José Valadez. They proceeded to improve the land. Valadez peered into the future and saw the vast possibilities of vineyards. With five hundred sixty-four grape cuttings from the Mission San Gabriel which he set out in twelve rows of forty-seven vines each, he began the most important industry of Cucamonga.[4]

In 1850 the Cucamonga ranch was given to María Merced Tapia's husband, Victor Prudome, a French resident of Los Angeles, as part of her dowry.[5]

Until 1881 the land remained relatively undeveloped. That year the Southern Pacific Railroad established a railway station about four miles south of present Cucamonga and named it Cucamonga. That same decade the Santa Fe Railroad Company built a line about two miles north of the Southern

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[3] Interview with Mr. Henry Klusman, resident of Cucamonga since 1900, September 12, 1957.

[4] The San Bernardino Sun, October 16, 1936, p. 6.

[5] Klusman, loc. cit.

Pacific line and parallel to it. A station was built on the corner of Archibald Avenue and called North Cucamonga, which became the center of the town.

Cucamonga became a railroad boomtown until 1888 when a north wind literally blew it away. Because most of the vineyards were pulled up by the roots and had to be re-planted, it was about ten years before this section recovered from the damage. In the meantime, north of Cucamonga, along the foothills, the citrus industry began to flourish. Citrus ranches were first planted in the Hermosa colony and the surrounding area by R.A. Wagner and Adolf Petch. These men planted about 500 acres with citrus trees and started a new industry in the area.

After having heard of the quality of wines produced in this district, Secundo Guasti in 1900 saw a vision of vast vineyards; so he began acquiring land and planting vines. The Italian Vineyard Company, founded by Secundo Guasti, grew to be the largest vineyard in the world.

Two towns named Cucamonga created such a problem that about 1905 a committee of prominent people from North Cucamonga met with representatives from the Southern Pacific Railroad and they agreed to change the name of South Cucamonga to Guasti, the name of the proprietor of the land surrounding the town of South Cucamonga.

About 1908 Foothill Boulevard was constructed through the northern part of Cucamonga and the “Anglo” population of

North Cucamonga began to move toward the foothills. A new Cucamonga grew out of this development and became what is now the business section of the present town. The name of the old settlement was shortened to Northtown to avoid confusion and is still referred to by that name.[6]

Present Northtown is a typical colonia. It is within a fifteen minute driving radius of the wineries, citrus groves, packing houses, vineyards, and truck farms where the majority of the residents are employed. Today some 2,400 Mexicans live in the seven square blocks of Northtown. The population of all Cucamonga is about 12,000.[7] Northtown is composed of 400 houses (the majority of them small and run-down), three churches, five restaurants, thirteen stores, one theatre, and eleven bars (only seven are now in operation).

Organization of the Study

In order to get the complete background of the problem the author read the available material, consisting of unpublished materials, government pamphlets, unpublished studies, and pertinent newspaper and magazine articles. A series of questionnaires was compiled for the interviews with residents of Northtown, businessmen, the parish priests, employers, local politicians, representatives from the State Department of Employment, labor leaders, health

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[6] Smith, loc. cit.

[7] Interview with Mr. Osgar Raven, Constable of Cucamonga, August 14, 1957.

officials, and other persons in a position to have an overview of the Bracero Programs and their implications.

A field study was made of the three Bracero camps in Cucamonga, Ontario, and Irwindale to get first-hand information on the current Bracero Program and its workings. The author spent five months out of every year of the wartime period working with the Braceros in the San Joaquin and Pomona Valleys. Therefore, great emphasis has been placed on first-hand material such as interview data and personal observations.

CHAPTER II

A BRIEF HISTORY OF FOREIGN CONTRACT LABOR IN CALIFORNIA AGRICULTURE

Early Contract Labor

The foreign contract laborers have played an important role in the development of agriculture in California. If they had not appeared on the scene, California might have continued to be a grain and cattle country as it was prior to the Gold Rush and twenty years thereafter. When California entered the Union, it entered as a free state, thus denying itself slavery and a labor supply. It was not until 1870 that agriculture in the state began to assume a different character. Agriculture shifted from extensive to intensive and specialized farming. This shift was made possible because the Chinese immigrants who had been brought to this country to work in the mines began seeking employment in agriculture, thus supplying the labor force needed for this type of farming. An additional supply of Chinese workers was also made available to farmers when the transcontinental railroad was completed. As the new type of farming increased so did the immigration of Chinese. By 1880 they represented a third of the total seasonal and casual labor supply of the state. Two years later pressure

groups forced a ban on the importation of Chinese. This stoppage did not hinder the framers until 1902 because in the meantime the entire state had suffered a severe depression.[1]

This group of foreigners, as well as the other groups that followed, became contract laborers. Language barriers made an intermediary necessary for the operation of harvesting the crops; so the foreigners had to rely on one of their countrymen to find them employment as a group. They were bound to the intermediary by verbal contracts, and the intermediary was bound to the farmers by verbal or written contracts to provide the necessary men for the harvest operation. The intermediaries became foremen to the farmers and employment agents to their own people.[2]

By 1902 the farmers had recuperated from the depression and began seeking cheap labor again, but since the Chinese were excluded by then, the farmers had to seek elsewhere for their labor supply. After efforts to introduce the American Indians from Arizona and New Mexico, as well as Negroes from the South, proved unsuccessful, the Japanese began filling the gap. The Japanese used the contract system which had been introduced by the Chinese to their own advantage. Under the contract system they began gradu-

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[1] Lloyd H. Fisher, The Harvest Labor Market in California (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1953), pp. 4-5.

[2] Ibid., pp. 20-41.

ally to work their way from coolie status to farm owners, and in some area of vegetable and berry farming they had a virtual monopoly.

The Japanese were forced out of the contract labor field by the state anti-alien laws passed in 1913, 1920, and 1930. The main reason these anti-alien laws were passed is that the Japanese organized and demanded higher wages so that they were no longer a source of cheap labor to the farmers. The Japanese labor force began to resemble trade unions in their relations with employers as soon as they had eliminated competition from other groups through underbidding. They employed such union tactics as: (1) calling a strike when the crops were ready to be harvested; (2) limiting the number of men for each job; (3) manipulating competition among employers; and (4) boycotting farmers who discriminated against their nationals.[3]

As the supply of Japanese labor dwindled, Mexicans and Filipinos began replacing them. Of the two groups the Mexican became the larger and consequently the most important. By 1917 the Mexican labor supply was more than twice as large as the Filipino labor supply. The same year Mexican workers were allowed to enter the United States under an emergency waiver of the 1917 immigration law.

[3] Ibid.

About 72,000 such workers were allowed to enter between 1917 and 1921.[4] The Annual Reports of the Commissioner General of Immigration stated that during the same period a total of 149,331 Mexican immigrants entered the United States. Of this total, 56,638 emigrated to Mexico leaving a total of 92,639 in the United States.[5]

Mexican immigrants have been coming to the south-western part of this country since the early decades of the 19th century when it was still part of Mexico. From 1820 to 1917 a total of 176,077 Mexican immigrants entered this country. In addition to these were several thousand who annually crossed the border illegally. The United States Census for 1920 gives the total population of Mexicans in this country as 700,541. By 1930 it had increased by over 100 per cent, making a total of 1,422,533. This represented over one-twelfth of the total Mexican populations of the world at that time. Of this total California claimed 368,013.[6]

Since the bulk of these Mexican immigrants were employed principally in agriculture or as unskilled laborers, their importance in California should not be underestimated.

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[4] Report of the President's Commission of Migratory Labor, Migratory Labor in American Agriculture, (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1951), p. 37.

[5] Emory S. Bogardus, The Mexicans in the United States (Los Angeles: University of Southern California Press, 1934), pp. 14-15.

[6] Ibid., pp. 12-17.

It is estimated that there are 160 different crops in California in which Mexican labor, foreign and domestic, is still employed. In fact the importance of these immigrants has been so great that grower groups in California have repeatedly protested a quota for Mexicans, asserting that such crops as citrus in this state depend almost entirely upon Mexican labor, and that any restrictions on the labor supply would curtail crops, consequently causing the raising of food prices.[7]

The Bracero Program During World War II

The first suggestion to employ Mexican labor under contract for a definite period was made in 1928 by employers of farm labor, but the suggestion did not receive support because it was believed that it would throw adverse reflection on the Mexicans, and that Mexico would not accept it. Groups openly opposed to the suggestion felt that Mexican Nationals should not be expected to do work that was considered to be far beneath the level of "Americans." The idea of having foreign Nationals shipped from country to country in large numbers would result in their being treated like animals.[8]

Thirteen years later, in 1941, the same suggestion was made but this time it was presented in the form of

[7] Ibid., pp. 85-86.
[8] Ibid., pp. 85-86.

requests to the United States Government. The requests were prompted by the shortage of man power during World War II. The United States government was not as ready to respond to these requests and those from other grower groups that suggested the lifting of restrictions on the entry of Mexican laborers into the United States as it had been during the first World War.

The first request for the removal of such restrictions came from a cotton grower group in Arizona in July, 1941, and was denied after an investigation and recruitment program by the United States Employment Service filled their demands for laborers. Similar requests were made by groups in Texas and New Mexico in the summer of 1941 and were also denied.[9]

Other requests were submitted in a petition presented go the United States Immigration and Naturalization Service in September, 1941, according to a report published in the Associated Farmers of October of the same year. This petition asked that permission be given to import 30,000 Mexican laborers, the major portion going to California. The Governor of California urged in a telegram to the Service that the petition be denied.[10]

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[9] Wayne D. Rasmussen, A History of the Emergency Farm Labor Program, 1943-1947, U.S. Department of Agriculture, Bureau of Agriculture Economics, (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1951), pp. 200-201.

[10] Associated Farmers, October 22, 1941.

In the early part of 1942 additional requests were made to the United States Immigration and Naturalization Service by growers to New Mexico and California. They presented their request for limited immigration of Mexicans for areas affected by a shortage of man power.

Efforts were made by the United States Employment Service in California to fulfill the demands for additional workers. Finally on May 15, 1942, the California Employment Service certified to the Immigration and Naturalization Service that Mexican Nationals would probably be needed. This recommendation was not made until the California branch of the United States Department of Agriculture war board had requested that the Department of Agriculture investigate the possibility of importing Mexican labor.[11] This was done through informal inquiries which showed that Mexico looked with considerable disfavor upon such a proposal. Mexico's attitude did not change until after it, too, was involved directly in the war. (Mexico declared war on the Axis on May 22, 1942.) Negotiations between the two governments were begun in earnest after this date, and the Mexican government's attitude became optimistic that an agreement could be reached to help meet the farm labor demands of this country as part of Mexico's contribution to the war effort.[12]

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[11] Rasmussen, op. cit., pp. 200-201.

[12] Carey McWilliams, North from Mexico: the Spanish Speaking People of the United States (New York: J.B. Lippincott Co., 1949), p. 625.

It should not surprise us that Mexico would not immediately accept the proposals made by the United States. Mexico was reluctant to accede to the request for workers because of experiences which its nationals had had in the United States prior to this period. In 1942 aliens from Mexico in the United States numbered 421,165.[13] The 1940 census showed that there were approximately 1,440,235 citizens of Mexican heritage in the United States.[14] The Mexican government was well aware that the distinction between the native-born and the foreign-born was unrealistic, especially in the southwestern United States where the bulk of them live, and that as a group they were held in very low regard by the Anglo population.

An agreement was finally reached by the representatives of both countries on July 23, 1942, which provided for the importation of Mexican Nationals as agricultural workers. The agreement was made effective on August 4, 1942, by an exchange of notes between the two governments. The agreement, and those that followed, included four general pro-

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[13] Francis J. Brown and Joseph S. Roucek, One America: The History, Contributions, and Present Problems of Our Racial and National Minorities (New York: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1945), p. 346, Quoting the United States Department of Justice, Immigration and Naturalization Service, Alien Registration Division, Registered Aliens Born in Mexico Classified by State of Residence (Philadelphia: U.S. Printing Office, June 30, 1943).

[14] U.S. Bureau of Census, Sixteenth Census of the United States: 1940 Population, Series P-15, No.1, June 9, 1942.

visions, plus several specific clauses to implement these. The four general principles were: (1) that these Mexicans contracted for work would not be engaged in the military services; (2) that they would not suffer discriminatory acts; (3) that they should enjoy guarantees of transportation, living expenses and repatriation; (4) that they would not displace other workers for the purpose of reducing wage rates previously established.[15]

The specific clauses stated: (1) contracts between employer and employee would be made in Spanish under the supervision of the Mexican government; (2) transportation from place of origin to destination and return, as well as personal belongings of each worker to 35 kilos, would be paid by the employer (Farm Security Administration) and that the employer would be reimbursed in full or part by the sub-employer (the grower or association); (3) that the wages paid to the workers would be the same as those paid to domestic agricultural workers in the area, which would in no case be less than 30 cents per hours in United States currency, and also that piece rates should be set to enable the average worker to earn the prevailing wage; (4) a rate allowance of $3.00 per day subsistence would be paid by the employer for such time as they were unemployed under a period equal to 75 per cent of the pay period exclusive of Sundays.

[15] Rasmussen, op. cit., pp. 202-204.

Other provisions on housing, sanitation, jurisdiction by the Mexican council and a savings fund were also included.[16]

The actual operation of the program did not begin until September, 1942. During that year only 4,189 workers were transported to the United States. From 1942 through 1947, 219,546 Mexican Nationals were imported making a total of 233,961 employed during the wartime period. The difference in the two figures is caused by some who were imported in previous years staying over by renewing their contracts.[17] These figures did not include the 55,000 illegal Mexican aliens who were legalized in Texas in the summer of 1947 under a separate program of the Department of Agriculture.[18]

The wartime Bracero program placed Mexican Nationals in twenty-four states with the majority going to California. In 1943, 73 per cent of the Braceros came to California; in 1944, 53 per cent; in 1945, 48 per cent; in 1946, 53 per cent; and 45 per cent in 1947. This makes an average of 54 per cent of the wartime total coming to California.[19] Wayne D. Rasmussen gives complete figures from August 28, 1943 to July 3, 1947.

Legislation for the wartime temporary admission of

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[16] Ibid., pp. 202-204.

[17] Report of the President's Commission on Migratory Labor, op. cit., p. 13.

[18] Ibid., p. 39.

[19] Ibid., p. 226.

TABLE 1

THE WARTIME BRACRO PROGRAM TOTALS FROM
AUGUST 28, 1943 TO JULY 3, 1947[a]

State	Aug. 28, '43	Aug. 1, '44	Aug. 3, '45	July 26, '46	July 3, '47
Arizona	849	1,639	1,572	1,074	841
California	26,368	33,718	29,629	20,484	14,088
Colorado	1,086	3,319	1,926	717	595
Idaho	985	2,539	3,401	1,959	2,204
Illinois	.....	.....	538	170	375
Indiana	.....	60	205	87	84
Iowa	.....	1,178	1,467	1,378	188
Kansas	.....	297	97	212	190
Michigan	.....	2,193	3,129	2,164	30
Minnesota	381	803	1,027	1,088	1,989
Montana	878	4,195	3,327	1,158	3,209
Nebraska	154	820	1,191	839	1,035
Nevada	549	656	818	426	128
New Mexico	.....	.....	.....	23	.....
North Carolina	.....	.....	.....	.....	410
North Dakota	.....	1,727	1,182	.....	185
Oregon	3,138	3,631	3,730	1,625	883
South Dakota	60	297	573	297	350
Utah	.....	711	1,046	704	900
Washington	1,220	4,351	5,393	2,788	1,277
Wisconsin	.....	272	1,031	1,828	1,686
Wyoming	339	1,026	405	328	634
Total	36,007	63,432	61,687	39,349	31,281

[a]Wayne D. Rasmussen, A History of the Emergency Farm Labor Program, 1943-1947, U.S. Department of Agriculture, Bureau of Agricultural Economics, (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1951), p. 226.

agricultural workers was based on the fourth and ninth proviso of Section 3 of the 1917 Immigration Act.

> Waiver of the contract laws for the admission of skilled labor of like kind unemployed is not to be found in the United States; an authorization of the Commissioner of Immigration and Naturalization, with approval of the Attorney General, to issue roles and prescribed conditions for the temporary admission of otherwise inadmissible aliens.[20]

It became necessary that explicit authorization be given for the importation program which would also give the United States Government power to negotiate contracts, to officially supervise the terms of the contracts, and to officially limit the number to be admitted. This was done by the enactment of Public Law 45 by the Joint Resolution of April 29, 1943. Public Law 45 allowed the spending of $120,000,000 for the recruitment of Mexicans as well as other foreign nationals. This law was amended and extended by the Joint Resolution of December 23, 1943 and February 14, 1944.[21]

From March 1943 to April 1946, the United States and Mexico exchanged notes which changed the wording of the agreements between the two countries, and gave specific instructions for the administration of the program, but did not change the basic agreement reached in July 1942.

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[20] Papers Presented at the Round Table on Population Problems: 1946 Conference of the Milbank Memorial Fund, "Postwar Problem of Migration" (New York: Milbank Memorial Fund, 1947), pp. 91-92.

[21] Ibid., pp. 91-92.

In spite of the large spendings by the United States Government on the overall program it was of little significance in terms of the National farm labor force. During its peak year it amounted to only 2.7 per cent of the nation's total hired farm labor fource.[22] These statistics do not show that many crops were unquestionably saved by the timely assistance of the Mexican Nationals, especially in California.

The Postwar Period

The second and current program of employment of foreign workers in the agriculture of the United States represents a continuation of the wartime program, but under significantly modified conditions, as provided by Public Law 40, Public Law 893 and 78.

In April 1947 the 80th Congress enacted Public Law 40 which provided for the liquidation of the wartime program and the repatriation of foreign nations under contract by December 31, 1947. It also returned the authority for farm labor recruitment and placement to the United States Employment Service from the Department of Agriculture. Under Public Law 40, the United States Government would no longer subsidize the transportation, housing, subsistence, health and other costs of the program. The cost would have to be borne in one way or another by the participating.

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[22] Report of the President's Commission on Migratory Labor, op. cit., p. 40.

groups. The cost of transportation from contracting centers to the place of employment and back to Mexico would have to be paid by the growers and other associations who wished to employ Mexican Nationals.[23]

On June 30, 1949, the 80th Congress enacted Public Law 893 for a period of one year which authorized the recruitment of workers from the Western Hemisphere, when and if the United States Employment Service determined that adequate numbers of domestic agricultural workers were not available.[24]

The Postwar importation and contacting program for Braceros has been handled under a series of revised international agreements of March 10 and April 2, 1947; February 21, 1948; August 1, 1949; August 11, 1951; May 19, 1952; and March, 1954.

In February 1951 in an exchange of notes, Mexico stated its desire that a United States governmental agency carry out the contracting of Mexicans to prevent disagreements between employers and Braceros and to insure compliance with the international agreements. The Mexican government made it quite clear that if the United States did not agree, Mexico would terminate the agreement of August 1949. Since

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[23] "Employment of Foreign Workers in the United States Agriculture," U.S. Department of State Bulletin, July 18, 1949, pp. 46-47.

[24] Ibid., pp. 46-47.

the United States did not have any legislation which permitted an agency of the government to contract foreign workers, Mexico agreed to extend the August 1949 agreement to July 1, 1951.[25]In July 1951 Public Law 78 was enacted "for the purpose of assisting in such production of agricultural commodities as the Secretary of Agriculture deems necessary, by supplying agricultural workers from the Republic of Mexico."[26]

In March 1954 President Eisenhower signed Public Law 309 which clarified the need for the program and enabled the Secretary of Labor to perform the function of protecting and placing migrant workers from Mexico as their services were required. The President made it clear that legislation had existed for a long time which gave the Attorney General authority to admit Mexican workers under whatever conditions he alone would establish, but because of the working of the applicable legislation, the United States government had not been able to protect and place workers at any time when there should not be an agreement with Mexico.[27]

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[25] "Extension of Migrant Labor Agreements with Mexico," U.S. Department of State Bulletin. January 11, 1954, p. 53.

[26] Ernesto Galarza, Strangers in Our Fields (Washington: Joint United States Trade Union Committee, 1956), p. 6.

[27] "U.S. Mexican Agreement on Farm Labor: Joint Statement," U.S. State Department Bulletin, March 29, 1954, pp. 467-68.

In the March international agreements, Mexico made the following recommendations for the operation of the program: (1) wages – that the Mexican government could protest whenever there was proof that the prevailing age was not being paid to its Nationals; (2) contracting of workers – that the contracting procedures would not be interrupted while wages were under investigation; (3) subsistence allowance – the rate not be less than the cost established for the area of employment for diets which the United States Department of Agriculture considered necessary for a person doing that type of work; (4) off the job insurance – it would be paid by the Bracero; (5) discrimination – only individual employers, rather than entire counties, would be excluded from the program if found to be practicing discrimination against the Braceros; (6) migratory stations – Mexicali, Monterrey, and Chihuahua, Mexico, would be reactivated; and (8) a joint migratory commission would be established until October 31, 1954, and would present its recommendations for further programs, and such recommendations would be used after thirty days from the above date for any further negotiations.[28]

The powers and authority granted to the Secretary of Agriculture for the purpose of importing Mexican Nationals were again conferred by legislation (Public Law 319 of the

[28] Ibid., p. 469.

84th Congress) without substantial change. Under Public Law 319 the Secretary of Labor could provide transportation, subsistence, operate reception centers, assist workers and employers in negotiating contracts, guarantee the performance of contracts of employment with respect to wages and transportation and negotiate agreements with Mexico.[29]

The postwar phase of the program has presented more problems to both the United States and Mexico, because it has become more active than the original phase. From 1947 to 1950 a total of 314,143 Mexican Nationals were contracted.[30] Over a three year period form 1952 to 1954, about 700,000 contracts and 72,000 renewals were registered, more than doubling the previous three year period.[31]

In 1954 the Braceros represented 6 per cent of the total farm labor group in the United States, and by 1955 they represented better than 10 per cent of the total hired seasonal workers in twenty-four states. These figures do not give an accurate picture of states like California and Texas where the ratio was much higher. In working certain crops in California for example, Braceros represented more than 75 per cent of the labor force.[32]

In the fourteen year period that the Bracero Programs

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[29] Report of the President's Commission on Migratory Labor, op. cit., p. 30.

[30] Ibid., p. 30.

[31] Galarza, op. cit., p. 8.

[32] Ibid., p. 8.

have been in existence, 2,654,533 Mexican Nationals have come to the United States. The number of Braceros contracted has increased annually from the wartime high of 76,184 in 1943 to the present postwar high of 456,000 in 1957. The number of Braceros contracted in 1958 is expected to exceed the 1957 total.[33]

Since 1955 when the immigration authorities began making a round-up of "wetbacks and skips," over 90 per cent of the Braceros have been returning to Mexico by the end of December each year. During December of 1957 only 7,000 Braceros were contracted, so the contracting centers in Monterrey and Chihuahua, Mexico, were closed. Those that were contracted were sent through Empalme, Sonora, and on to California.[34]

The new contracting period for 1958 will begin the first of April, or shortly thereafter. The United States' farmers and grower's associations, under the directions of the United States Department of Labor, will by that time indicate to the Mexican authorities the number of men that will be needed this year. The present bilateral agreement between the two countries will terminate on June 30. 1959, but by the end of 1958 or during the early part of 1959, negotiations are expected to begin for its continuation.[35]

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[33] Galarza, op. cit., p. 8.
[34] La Opinión, January 10, 1958, p. 3.
[35] Ibid., p. 3.

The Bracero Programs have become Mexico's second greatest source of income, surpassed only by the tourist trade. The Bank of Mexico stated in September 1957, that the Braceros had sent their families in Mexico a total of 204,331,000 pesos during the first six months of that year. This amount surpassed the 1956 total by 24,000 pesos.[36] By December 31, 1957, the Bank of Mexico reported, the amounts sent by the Braceros to their families in Mexico had increased by 27 per cent over the 1956 total, thus making a total of 204,362,162.89 pesos for 1957. This amount is equal to 16,348,973.03 American dollars, making an average of 448.16 pesos or 35.85 American dollars sent to Mexico by each Bracero in 1957.[37] These figures do not include the amounts that are taken to Mexico by the Braceros when they return, but the amounts that are sent through the postal services and money orders that are bought by them before they cross.

Such is the background of the Bracero Programs. In the following chapters we shall see what impact they have had on the Mexican-American community of Cucamonga, California.

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[36] La Opinión, September 8, 1957, p. 8.
[37] La Opinión, January 10, 1958, p. 3.

CHAPTER III

THE IMPACT OF THE BRACERO PROGRAMS ON THE LARGE CONDITIONS, WAGES, AND THE STANDARD OF LIVING OF THE MEXICAN-AMERICAN COMMUNITY OF CUCAMONGA

Prior to the Bracero Programs

The Mexican immigrants who came to Cucamonga came as a result of direct or indirect labor recruitment, with the greatest number coming to Northtown between 1910 and 1929. They were brought to the area by the Southern Pacific and the Santa Fe Railroad companies to work on the railroads, and by the citrus and grape growers to pick the crops.

The railroad companies built section houses for these laborers and their families, which were usually made of railroad cars or very small shacks. There were sometimes as many as ten families living in one railroad car and three families in the small shacks. These section homes had no inside plumbing, no play area for children, and only one community washroom for as many as 100 families.[1] These conditions however, were not unusual in comparison to the homes and living conditions of the rest of the Mexican

[1] Interview with Mr. Pablo Domingues who was employed by the Santa Fe Railroad Company from 1910 to 1930 and lived in the section houses during that period, August 10, 1957.

laborers in the area, primarily because their homes were also provided by the employers who wanted to keep their operating costs at a minimum and their profits high.

In 1909 the wages of the Mexican population in the western part of the United States were very low in comparison to the wages of the rest of the population. The average daily rate dropped that year from a record high of $1.45 to $1.00. The Immigration Commission made the following report that year: "The Mexican's wage rate was found to be the lowest paid maintenance of day laborers in the West, and is lower than was paid to men of other races where such had been employed previous to securing Mexicans."[2]

By 1928, the peak year in California agriculture, the wages had risen to $.35 an hour and $3.00 a day, but his living conditions did not improve because the Mexican was not employed the whole year, but only during harvest time. Only a small percentage were employed full time.[3] The majority of the Mexicans from Cucamonga, as well as the rest of the United States, migrated each year to other sections of California, Arizona, Texas, and Oregon, and even as far as Montana, Nebraska, Colorado, and North Dakota in

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[2] State Relief Administration of California, Migratory Labor in California, A Report Prepared by the Division of Special Surveys and Studies (San Francisco: Special Surveys and Studies, 1936), p. 26.

[3] Ibid., p. 31.

order to find agricultural employment.

Most of these people had no real homes in Cucamonga or elsewhere, but they nevertheless returned to the small shacks which they rented for their stay in the area. The small number who owned their homes did not go far in search of work, generally to various parts of California. Their journey in search of work would begin in May with a migration to the Salinas valley for the lettuce crop. In June they would go to the Contra Costa County for the apricot and cherry crops, and from there they would either go to the Fresno area to pick grapes or to Merced County for the peach and early tomato crops. Most of them would return to the Cucamonga area in August or September for the grape season which would last until November. Some would rest for a few months after the grape season or start working in the citrus industry. Their movement was largely on a family basis with the entire family working in such crops as grapes, figs, prunes, and tomatoes. The majority of them followed a definite migratory pattern, except during the Thirties when competition from other racial groups made their journey in search of work erratic because of their fear of hunger and their feeling of economic inadequacy.

The wage rate dropped considerably during the early Thirties due to the Depression, and by 1940 it had not risen to the 1928 peak of $3.00. It was not until the outbreak of World War II that the Mexican farm laborers of Cucamonga,

as well as the other Mexican laborers in the United States, began to improving their economic conditions. Many of the crop workers began deserting the fields in search of factory jobs which became more plentiful after the Fair Employment Practice Committee investigated employment practices in the Los Angeles area in 1942 and found that Mexican-Americans were being refused employment in many war plants. Therefore, the Committee did all within its power to alleviate this situation, and by the fall of 1942 one shipbuilding company alone was employing 17,000 Mexican-Americans.[4] The barrier which had existed for Mexican-Americans in industry began to be broken down as a result of three things: these hearings, President Franklin D. Roosevelt's executive order of 1943 forbidding discrimination in war industries, and the desperate need for workers in the following years of the war.

During World War II

The aircraft industry opened new fields for many young men and women from Northtown. Aircraft plants were opened in Pomona and Ontario, as well as in other surrounding communities. In Cucamonga proper a welding company was converted into a war tank parts company. With the higher wages paid the younger population of Northtown,

[4] Wallace Stegner, One Nation (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1945), p. 97.

they began seeking a higher standard of living. Whenever possible this "new generation" moved to other communities having a higher standard of living or they used their excess wages to improve the living conditions in Northtown.

The older people of Northtown remained in agriculture either because advanced age prevented them from seeking employment in the war plants or because they felt more secure in agricultural work. Some of these people had never done anything out of the agricultural field of employment and preferred to remain in it. Furthermore, in agriculture they could use the entire family which in the long run would bring a higher annual income. This was especially true of the men who had large families of six or more children to support. However, as soon as the Braceros came to the area, the older residents found that they could no longer rely on as much employment as they had been accustomed for themselves and their families. The Braceros could produce much more work than the older locals and were naturally given preference. In addition to being able to produce more work because they were younger, the Braceros saved the employers a considerable amount of money for they did not have to adhere to the demands of higher wages by the locals. This was a direct violation of the international agreement which stated that the Braceros were not to be employed to displace other workers in the United States. The locals could not do anything about this violation because the

majority were not educated men and did not know how or where to voice their complaints. Those few who did voice their complaints did so to their crew leaders or field foremen, who, for the most part, did not care. Their jobs were secure; so the complaints went no further. Still a smaller number voiced their complaints to the State Employment Service where they were checked to see if they were legitimate. The State Employment Service generally found the complaints to be invalid because the overall number of domestic farm workers was not sufficient to handle the load of agricultural work. Consequently, a greater number of older locals began depending on the state and county welfare agencies for partial means of support.[5]

During this period wages increased in the area but not enough to pull the Mexican-American agricultural worker out of his poor living conditions, for his annual income was not sufficient for subsistence alone. In the Los Angeles area, where conditions were at least no worse than those of Cucamonga, surveys were made by the Los Angeles Co-ordinating Council in December 1941. It found that the median annual income of the Mexican family was not more that $790.00, and it is estimated that an average family of five persons

[5] Interview with Mrs. Martin, social worker in charge of applications at the State of California and San Bernardino County Welfare Office in Ontario, California, August 14, 1957.

required an annual income of about $1,300.00 for decent food and housing.[6]

By 1943 the cost of living had gone up to 23 per cent from the prewar level and wages had only gone up to about 15 per cent for agricultural workers according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics.[7] One hundred men interviewed from Northtown said their wages remained fairly constant from 1943 to the end of the war, whereas the cost of living kept going up and is still going up. Their maximum hourly wage during this period, as reported by the locals interviewed did not exceed $.80.

The younger men and women who had gone into the wartime industries were not particularly concerned with conditions in agriculture and hoped that they would never again have to be concerned with that type of employment. Their average annual income in many cases doubled that which they were making in agriculture. Unfortunately for some, when the war ended many of the industries that had employed them closed and they had to return to agricultural work. They were then confronted with the problems of low wages and competition from the Braceros with which the other locals had had to contend during the war. In addition, new competition

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[6] Ruth D. Tuck, Not with the Fist: Mexican-Americans in a Southwest City (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Co., 1946), p. 174.

[7] Ibid., p. 175.

arose from the numerous "skips" and "wetbacks" who had come in increasing numbers to the area, as well as to the other parts of the western States, during this period.

Bracero Wages

The Bracero's wage during the wartime period was considerably better than what he would have earned in Mexico. In many cases one day's wage was equal to or higher than his monthly income in Mexico. The Braceros were guaranteed the payment of wages established as the "prevailing wage" by the international agreement of 1942. In the Cucamonga area the prevailing wage averaged $.70 an hour during the wartime period.[8] In reality very few of the Braceros were making the established prevailing wage because the majority of them worked at a piece rate instead of an hourly rate. It takes several weeks for anyone to become proficient in picking oranges, lemons, and other crops for which these men were paid at a piece rate, making it very difficult for many of them to earn as much as the prevailing wage rate until late in the season. By this time the productivity of many of these crops had diminished.

The Braceros' gross weekly income for steady work for a 48 hour week at the rate of $.70 an hour, assuming that they worked for such a period and at such a rate, was $33.60. From weekly earnings the Braceros, whether or not

[8] Interview with 25 Braceros who had worked in the Cucamonga area during the wartime period.

the earnings amounted to the $33.60, had to pay $12.50 a week for board and from $.69 to $1.00 a week for non-occupational insurance negotiated for them by the Mexican government, leaving them with a net total of $20.10 a week. Not considering any additional expenses, the Braceros' income looks very good when it is compared with the wages in Mexico. In 1940 the average annual income of the Mexican worker in Mexico was 340 pesos and did not increase very much during the wartime period.[9] Using the rate of 8.50 pesos to one American dollar in international monetary exchange, his net weekly income was equal to 170.85 pesos. This is the type of logic that brought many of these modern fortune hunters who left their families to the United States. They were not alone in their thinking for many growers and associations felt the same way, either to justify the low wages or to keep the prevailing wage rate down. In reality the Braceros' venture was not as profitable as they hoped it to be because the majority of them had families to support in Mexico and debts to pay which were incurred by their trip. In order to make the trip to the United States, the Braceros had to borrow money from unscrupulous money lenders at a high rate of interest – enough money to secure a contract, transportation, and living expense for themselves as well as for their families while they were waiting to obtain a contract. The

[9] Frank Tannenbaum, The Struggle for Peace and Bread (New York: Alfred Knopf, 1950), p. 174.

contracts themselves were then free, and are still free, but the practice in Mexico during this period was to pay from 150 pesos to 300 pesos for a chance to register for a contract.[10] In many cases these men had to pay the usual "mordida" (literally means bite but in Mexico it means bribe) to many officials or persons with influence before knowing whether they were getting a contract or not. Some Braceros had to pay as much as 800 pesos or more by the time they finally obtained a contract. Over 75 percent of the men the author worked with during this period stated that they had to pay a "mordida" to get a contract. In addition there were the usual expenses for clothing, and personal necessities which they had to pay in American money during their stay in the United States.

In comparison to the wages of the locals doing the same type of work, the Mexican Nationals were better off financially than the locals even though there were many complaints by the Braceros that the locals were getting paid from $.10 to $.15 per hour more than they. The locals not only had to support themselves but also their families at a higher cost of living than the Braceros. The Braceros were provided with housing, transportation, medical care, occupational insurance, and a guarantee of employment for not less than three-fourths of the work days of the total period of their contracts. Furthermore, a Bracero with a family of

[10] Galarza, op. cit., p. 36.

seven children could support his entire family with as little as $10.00 a month. By comparison, the locals during the wartime period had to pay an average of $20.00 a month for rent, $13.00 for utilities, $10.00 for transportation, $10.00 for clothing, $10.00 a month for leisure time, $5.00 for medical care, and $10.00 a month for miscellaneous expenditures. The cost of food increased considerably during the wartime period so that even the cost of a meager diet of a local and his family of seven children increased from $40.00 to $80.00 a month by the end of the war. The locals did not get protection from either the state or the United States governments, and were not even guaranteed fulltime employment by the farmers. Instead some employers refused to hire many of the locals, because they did not want to pay the subsistence they were required to pay the Braceros if work were not provided for them. Many farmers not only provided the Braceros with employment in the field for which they were contracted but also provided them with semi-skilled jobs, such as operating machines in the grape and citrus industries. These semi-skilled jobs were originally held by locals. The matter of employment became one of the many sources of friction that developed between the two groups. This topic is discussed in greater detail in the following chapter.

Illegal Immigrants

The wartime period became the beginning of increased illegal Mexican immigration into the United States to an extreme that had never been reached before. The majority of these wetbacks were former Braceros. Some of these men were "skips" (Braceros who have broken their contracts) and other were Braceros who had returned illegally because of adverse working conditions in Mexico. Those who had been returned to Mexico had no desire to go through the long and expensive process of obtaining a contract; so they would pay someone who would smuggle them across the border. There was still another group of Mexicans that began to come illegally to the United States. It was composed of those men who had heard many stories of the better working conditions and higher wages in this country but could not afford to pay the usual "mordida" to get a contract, had been rejected for health or other reasons, or could not afford to wait the several weeks or months to get a contract.

The "wetback invasion" during the wartime period and after the war had a definitely harmful effect on the wages of the locals as well as on the wages of the legal Mexican Nationals. The wetbacks willingly accepted wages which the locals and the legal Mexican Nationals under contract would not consider. The wetback problem increased considerably in the postwar period when negotiations between the United States and Mexico for contracting Mexican Nationals

were temporarily discontinued.

The Postwar Period

California's agriculture continued to require large numbers of seasonal workers. Mexican-Americans returning from the Armed Forces as well as those who had left the agricultural fields for the more lucrative wartime Industries sought employment elsewhere after the war because of low wages and poor working conditions in agriculture. This created a shortage of domestic workers to plant, grow, and harvest the crops in many areas, inducing farmers interested in cheap labor to foster illegal immigration by hiring wetbacks. Farmers who employed the illegal immigrants justified it by saying that the work had to be done and that they did not care by whom as long as it was done. This was also true in the Cucamonga area. Many farmers preferred wetbacks to locals or Braceros mainly because the wetbacks worked twice as hard for half the pay. The Farm Bureau Federation and other farm organizations opposed the use of wetbacks and tried to encourage farmers to use only contract Nationals.

Until 1950 relatively little was done about the wetback invasion. It was not until 1952 that the immigration authorities began making full scale roundups of these men and imposing fines on farmers who were hiring them. From 1950 to 1954 it is estimated that over 500,000 wetbacks were entering the United States each year, but from

1954 to 1957 a tight control was put into effect by the immigration authorities, cutting the number of wetbacks and skips to about 45,000 a year.[11]

The American and the alien resident migrant workers suffered considerably from the wave of foreigners, both legal and illegal, because they both lowered the prevailing wage rate. The prevailing wage rate for an area is determined by the supply of labor on demand – when the supply is high the wage rate is low and when the supply is low the wage rate goes up. In actual practice the prevailing rate for an area is set by the growers months in advance of the harvest season. Wage rates in seasonal work, especially on a piece rate, are subject to considerable fluctuation from season to season, and from area to area, and quite often from farm to farm in the same area, especially if the farmers do not belong to an association. The wage rate is dependent on many things; field conditions, market and price situation, weather conditions, and the anticipated labor supply. Because of the unforeseen hazards and unstable conditions in the labor market, growers for an area growing the same type of crop meet prior to the harvest and establish common rates for the harvest operations. They also arrange to recruit additional workers in order to be assured of an adequate labor supply which at the same time assures them

[11] La Opinión, June 5, 1957, p. 3.

of keeping wages at a minimum. This type of collusive wage setting prevents the individual worker from bargaining with the farm employers.[12]

The Need for Alien Contract Workers

Each year since the war the large corporate farm organizations in this state and other states in the Union have insisted that there is a critical shortage of farm labor. Statements made as to the shortage are usually made in the local newspapers after the corporate farm organizations make their yearly predictions of dire labor shortages for harvest. The predictions are made four to six months before the harvest begins and are supported by the State agencies. In California the statisticians of the Department of Employment tell the State Board of Agriculture (composed of corporation farmers) what the labor demand is going to be for harvesting the various crops about the same time that the farm organizations make their prediction. This type of close cooperation assures the farmers of having a large supply of laborers on hand for harvesting their crops. In the Cucamonga area the Placement Division of the State Employment Service under the direction of Mr. Edward Wilson works with the grower's associations and other employer groups to

[12] U.S. Congress, Senate, Committee on Labor and Public Welfare, Hearings, on Labor and Labor-Management Relations, 82nd Cong., 2nd Sess., 1952, Part 2, p. 982.

determine the number of men that are going to be needed in the area. Mr. Wilson claimed that there have not been sufficient domestic laborers in the area to meet the demands o the farmers since the middle of the wartime period. In order to determine whether the demands of the growers were legitimate, Mr. Wilson made a survey in 1954 of the domestic workers that he had sent to fill the positions available. He sent 684 men, not all Mexican-Americans, to do citrus work in the area. Two hundred and sixteen men did not report to the employers, 22 refused employment, 17 were not hired because they arrived intoxicated to the jobs or because they were under 18 years of age. Of the 684 men sent by Mr. Wilson to do citrus work only 429 were hired. From this group 178 men did not report for work the next day, 36 worked one more day, 22 worked three days, 27 worked four days, and 139 worked one week. Not over 40 of the men finished the season. Mr. Wilson was asked by the author if he had investigated the reasons for the men's not working for a longer period. He stated that he had not, but that the farmers had reported that the domestic workers were irresponsible and undependable and that they preferred Mexican Nationals. He assumed that the main reason why domestic workers did not last longer in agricultural work was because they could make more money even as laborers in construction work. He quickly added that farmers could not compete with the wages paid in other industries. When Mr. Wilson was asked if he could

estimate the number of men of Mexican origin that were sent to do farm work by the Department of Employment, he said that the Department of Employment was not allowed to make a distinction between races, color, or creed, much less keep records of this type. He was also asked if he felt that the Bracero Programs would be discontinued in the near future, and to this question he emphatically stated that even if there were enough domestic workers, he agreed with the farmers that they were not reliable and that the farmers should not have to depend on them, consequently the Bracero Programs would have to continue if agriculture in the area were to prosper. Mr. Wilson also felt that the prices of agricultural products would increase considerably if the Braceros were not used.[13]

Present Impact

In order to determine the present impact of the Bracero Program on the wages and labor conditions of the Mexican-Americans from Cucamonga, 100 men were interviewed. The survey showed that 57 of these men, whose ages ranged from 18 to 63, are completely dependent on agriculture for their livelihood, 23 are working in construction or some other type of non-agricultural employment, 13 work in agriculture part time, and the remaining 7 are dependent on state

[13] Interview with Mr. Edward Wilson, Farm Labor Representative, State of California Department of Employment, August 14, 1957.

or county aid. All of the men that now work in non-agricultural employment were formerly employed in agriculture, but because of low wages and poor labor conditions left that type of employment. Mr. Jack Fletcher reported that there were 40 males and 80 females from Northtown on old age state aid because they could not find employment.[14]

Only 15 of the men who work full time in agriculture were employed the year round, 45 of the men were unemployed or migrated to other farm areas for three months during the summer when 311 Braceros who were housed at the Cucamonga Bracero camp were employed in the area. By comparison, only 5 out of 23 men in non-agricultural work were temporarily unemployed during the past year. The 13 men who work part time are employed during the height of the season only.

The majority of the men interviewed were strongly opposed to the Bracero Program and any additional Programs of this type because they felt that the Braceros took jobs away from them, as well as lowered wages in the area, or at least kept them at the same level year after year. They were also opposed to the working conditions and the demand placed on them by their employers in agriculture. They said that employers make demands on locals because the Braceros

[14] Interview with Mr. Jack Fletcher social worker in charge of old age state aid at the State of California Welfare Office in Ontario, California, August 14, 1957.

do not object to the same demands and working conditions. The following is an example of one of these demands as related by 10 of the men interviewed: Locals hired to pick grapes at a piece rate were also required in the 1956 and 1957 seasons to carry their full boxes to a central area and dump them on a conveyor three feet high attached to a truck. Before this method was adopted and used by the Braceros, the locals had stacked their full boxes at the end of the rows they were picking. The boxes were dumped on the trucks by men hired to do that type of work. The old method gave the people hired to pick the fruit more time to do the work for which they were hired and thus make more money. The way it is done now each man loses time in waiting for the trucks, by lifting the full boxes on to the conveyor, and in carrying the full boxes twice as far. The employers on the other hand prefer to new method because it saves them money by not having to hire additional men to dump the grapes on the trucks. The Braceros do not complain because if they complain, their contracts will not be renewed, according to the locals.

In order to find out how the Braceros felt about such working conditions and wages, 25 men from the Cucamonga camp were interviewed. All of the men were afraid of saying anything against the Program because they did not know whether any information they divulged to the author would be relayed to the manager of the camp. The men later

explained their reluctance to speak freely on the subject. When the author first visited the camp he was given a conducted tour by the manager, Mr. Ray Orton, who was very cordial. The author dined with Mr. Orton and his assistant Mr. Islas, a former Bracero, and spent several hours discussing the Bracero Programs with them. Consequently, the Braceros did not know whether the author could be trusted. It was not until the author convinced them that he was not a government employee or a representative of the growers association, that they explained their belief that if they complained about the Program, working conditions, wages, or any other aspect of the program that their contracts would not be renewed. They assured the author that they had spent a great deal of money to obtain a contract and did not want to endanger their chances of losing money if their contracts were not renewed. They all stated that when they first arrived they felt that they were going to get rich because the rate of monetary exchange is now 12.50 pesos to one American dollar. But after a few weeks, averaging about $25.00 a week at the rate of 8 to 10 hours a day, they realized that if they managed to support their families and pay the debts that were incurred by their venture they would be lucky. In order for the present Braceros to come to the United States they must prove to the Mexican government that they are unemployed, which is a greater restriction than

those placed on Braceros during the wartime period; since the men coming to this country are in worse financial condition than ever before. The present aspirants for contracts have to conquer a multitude of obstacles from the moment they leave their homes. The present obstacles are in many ways the same as those encountered by the Braceros of the wartime period except that the amounts paid in "mordida" have increased considerably.[15] The Braceros have to pay large sums of money in "mordida" from the moment they leave their hometown. The whole process of obtaining a contract costs them as much as 1,000 pesos.[16] These men have to pay "mordida" to obtain: (1) a letter from the mayor of their town stating that there is no employment for them; (2) a letter stating that their military obligations have been fulfilled; (3) a letter of good conduct; and (4) a medical certificate. They take their credentials to the Central Office of Emigrant Workers, branch of the Department of Interior. If their papers are in order, they may have to wait several weeks to several months before their names are called. When their names are called, they are told to report to one of the three contracting centers which are located in Empalme, Sonora: Monterrey, Nuevo Leon; and Chihuahua, Chihuahua. They have to pay their own trans-

[15] Juan Sánchez Sosa, "Los Braceros: Dolorosa Sangría de la Patria," Todo, May 16, 1957, pp. 22-23.

[16] La Opinión, December 1, 1957, p. 3.

portation to the centers as well as their own living expenses until they are finally contracted. These men have no assurance that they are going to get a contract at any time which makes them easy prey for the "coyotes" (unethical lawyers) who promise to get them a contract in exchange for exorbitant fees.[17]

Another reason why the present Bracero Program is not as lucrative as it was before is that only 45 to 60 day contracts are given now instead of the longer contracts given during the war. Braceros interviewed at the office of the Sindicato Nacional de Trabajadores Agrícolas, (National Syndicate of Farm Workers) in Mexico City stated that during each contracting period the aspirants have to pay some 35,000 pesos in order to obtain entrance into the United States. Consequently quite a few Braceros skip their contracts in order to make more money as free agents in agriculture or industrial workers. This is especially true of the Braceros going to Texas and the southern states where wages are considerably lower than in California.[18] Mr. Orton was asked what percentage of the men skip their contracts from the Cucamonga camp and he would not say. Each year from 50 to 75 men skip their contracts from Irwindale, a camp about 20 miles from the Cucamonga camp.[19]

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[17] La Opinión, loc. cit.

[18] Loc. Cit.

[19] Interview with Mr. Kennedy, manger of the Irwindale Bracero camp, September 10, 1957.

Present Wages and Cost of Living

The present hourly wage in the Cucamonga area for agricultural work is from $.80 to $1.00 for the locals and $.80 for the Braceros. Non-agricultural workers make from $2.00 to $2.50 an hour. The average gross weekly income for the locals is $43.20 for farm workers and $90.00 for non-agricultural workers compared with $38.40 for the Braceros. This is based on a 48 hour week for both local agricultural workers and Braceros and a 40 hour week for non-agricultural workers.

At the present time the local with a family of seven has to pay from $30.00 to $50.00 a month for rent, from $70.00 to $100.00 for food, from $15.00 to $25.00 for utilities, from $10.00 to $20.00 for transportation, from $20.00 to $35.00 for clothing, from $10.00 to $20.00 for recreation from $10.00 to $20.00 for medical care, from $10.00 to $25.00 a month for miscellaneous expenses, and from $5.00 to $25.00 a month for payments on furniture and other household goods. At the present time the local family of seven needs from $180.00 to $320.00 a month just for the minimum necessities. The annual income of the local agricultural worker ranges from $1,800.00, for a nine month period, to about $2,500.00 if he worked the year round. Non-agricultural workers average $4,780.00 a year. From these figures it is not hard to understand why the majority of the families

from Northtown literally almost starve for at least two months and live in miserable poverty the remaining ten months of the year.

The cost of living has more than doubled its pre-war high of 1939. In actual spending value, the dollar has shrunk to an estimated 48.8 cents of its 1939 purchasing power of 100 cents. This decline in purchasing power of the dollar has been constant since then. In 1945 its purchasing power had shrunk to 72.2 cents, in 1950 to 57.8 cents, in 1953 to 51.9 cents. Remaining at that level for three years, it dropped to 50.3 cents in 1956. It is estimated by the United States Department of Labor that the purchasing power of the dollar will decrease to 48.3 cents in 1958.[20] Organized labor has kept a close check on the rise in cost of living and the wages of all union members have risen along with it, but for agricultural workers, wages always lag several years behind the cost of living. In 1958 wage raises of $.05 to $.10 an hour are expected for factory workers and other members of organized labor, but for agricultural workers wages are expected to remain the same as for 1957, especially if the Braceros are brought into the area.[21]

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[20] "The Cost of Living How High Will it Go," U.S. News & World Report, January 3, 1958, p. 35, quoting 1939 to 1956 United States Department of Labor Statistics.

[21] "Pay Raises – Who'll Get Them," U.S. News & World Report, January 3, 1958, pp. 71-72.

The people of Northtown might be able to improve their conditions if they could move permanently to another area where the competition from the Braceros is not so keen, but they are forced to buy their food on credit at the local stores when they are unemployed, tying them to their creditors and to their poor living conditions. Theses people never manage to get out of debt; therefore, it is understandable that their standard of living has not improved and is not likely to improve if the ages and labor conditions remain as they are now.

CHAPTER IV

THE IMPACT OF THE BRACERO PROGRAMS ON THE HEALTH MORALS, AND SOCIAL CONDITIONS OF THE PEOPLE OF NORTHTOWN

Brief Background

Northtown became a typical "shacktown" after the Anglo population moved north of the present Cucamonga business district. As a shacktown it is composed of a variety of small homes built of adobe, scrap lumber, boxes, tin, tar paper and other scraps. Most of them do not have any inside plumbing and are usually built three to four on a lot. Northtown has become that way because it was set apart from the rest of the community and because its residents have lived apart, worked apart, worshipped apart, and even traded apart form the Anglo community to the north.

The poor wages of the residents of Northtown have given them little opportunity to improve their living conditions. As the community has become older it has become more and more run-down. These people, especially the children, have grown up in poverty, malnutrition, and hostility. Segregated schools in the past fostered an inferiority complex which blunted their desire for education. Poor health as evidenced by tuberculosis, dysentery, rickets,

and typhoid was not uncommon in Northtown, especially in the early thirties.

Conditions began to improve by 1940. During World War II the residents made considerable advances in their standard of living which, in turn, improved their health conditions. For the first time the offspring of the Northtown resident moved out of the community into a different life fostering in him a desire to improve. The young men going into the Armed Forces realized that they were fighting for a country which was as much their homeland as it was the Anglo's, and when they returned to civilian life, they began to seek a better and different life, taking advantage of the educational opportunities this country offered them and their children.

Theses opportunities paid high dividends for the war veterans of Mexican origin throughout the United States. The number of professional and technical workers increased from 1,265 in 1930 to 3,000 in 1940 and 30,000 by March of 1956.[1] Mexican-Americans throughout the United States began to emerge from isolation and poverty and the prejudice with which some other Americans once regarded them began to diminish markedly. Many more Mexican-Americans began displaying an interest in civic problems which was also effective in reducing prejudice. Prior to the war very

[1] "The Mexicans Among Us," The Reader's Digest, March, 1956, p. 44.

few Mexican-Americans would exercise their privilege of voting, and a very small percentage of the Mexican citizens who lived in this country for a long period would try to become naturalized American citizens, but after the war they were not only voting, but voting their compatriots into office. This was especially true in areas where they had the majority votes, such as in East Los Angeles, California.

In spite of the progress achieved by Mexican-Americans throughout the United States, there still remained many communities like Northtown whose residents had been poorly paid, poorly housed, and barely educated for such a long time that under normal conditions, without the Bracero competition in employment and the other harmful effects of the Program, it would have taken at least ten years for them to resolve their problems. The war veterans realized that one way to solve the problems was to leave Northtown but family ties preventing many from leaving, they did as much as they could to improve their conditions there.

Morality and Crime

Unfortunately for some of the veterans who had to return to Northtown, they found competition not only in employment but also a closer competition with the Braceros for the girls they had left behind. This became a great

source of friction between the two groups, especially by the end of the war when the Braceros were temporarily withdrawn and many girls were left behind. Many of these local girls were left with children, which unhappy circumstance infuriated the locals even more. Judge William B. Hutton of the Cucamonga District Court reports that during the period from 1944 to 1946 from 8 to 12 men, Braceros and locals, appeared before him every Monday morning on a knifing or shooting charge resulting from friction over the local girls or over employment.[2] The friction between the two groups increased considerably from 1947 to 1952. During this period another group entered into the picture, for wetbacks had begun invading the area. Judge Hutton reported that during this period assault charges increased to a point where the Cucamonga Bracero camp had to be closed down because the Mexican government would not risk the lives of its Nationals.[3] The Braceros were withdrawn on April 26, 1952, and were not returned until Mr. Ray Orton, who had just been hired as manager of the camp by the Growers Association, was able to prove to the Mexican government that conditions would improve. The Braceros were allowed to return on August 1, 1952.[4] Friction has lessened between the Braceros and the

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[2] Interview with Judge William B. Hutton, Judge of the Cucamonga District Court, August 12, 1957.

[3] Ibid.

[4] Orton, loc. cit.

locals since then, due mainly to the efforts of Mr. Orton. Mr. Orton tells the men as soon as they arrive that they should not go into Northtown, at least not alone, and provides the men with recreational facilities and a commissary where they can purchase most of their daily needs, as well as things to take back to Mexico. Even church services are held in the camp to avoid friction because the locals do not want the Braceros to worship in the same church.[5]

For a short time after the camp was re-opened, the Braceros did not go to Northtown and the businessmen from the community began to worry, especially the bar and liquor store owners; so they started encouraging them by providing them with transportation, and with women to entertain them. The number of bars and liquor establishments doubled from 1952 to 1955 and prostitution thrived.

In order to get a clear picture of conditions as they exist, the author visited all the bars in the community when the Braceros were making their weekend visits. All of them were filled to capacity, mainly with Braceros. In each saloon there were about ten women to encourage the Braceros to buy drinks, and also quarters for prostitution were made available by the proprietors. One of the saloon owners interviewed discussed openly the problem of drinking and prostitution in the community. He justifies his providing

[5] Interview with Father Valdez of the Cucamonga Catholic Church, August 6, 1957.

the Braceros with female companions by saying that the Braceros would look for them anyway so why not provide them with the companions in a place where they could not get into trouble with the locals and at the same time be protected from being "rolled" (robbed and beaten while under the influence of alcohol). In addition the nicer girls from the community are being protected by keeping the Nationals away from them. The proprietor was asked what type of woman has been hired at his bar and at the other bars. He said that some of them are women who were left behind by Braceros who promised to marry them. Because most of them have children to support, they have to find some type of employment. Since they have become outcasts in the community for associating with Braceros, this is the only type of work they can find. Some are young women who are attracted by the money which the Braceros spend on them. There is still another group of older women who travel from town to town.[6] The bars do over 90 per cent of their business with the Nationals and the rest with the younger locals. The locals that the author saw, as well as some of the Braceros, did not look old enough to be served liquor under California liquor laws.

From 1947 to 1957 there were 23 women who were impregnated by Nationals reported to the Public Health Nurse.

[6] Interview with the owner of a large bar in Northtown.

Five of the women were impregnated more than once, each time by a different National.[7] These women gave birth to 33 children that are now being supported by the state. At the present time the state is supporting 60 families in the area with an average of four children per family, including the unborn, with the majority of the children being fathered by Braceros who returned to Mexico or are still somewhere in the United States illegally.[8] From this record it can be deduced that the Bracero Programs have had a harmful effect on the morals of the community. It has also been, and still is, a burden on the rest of the taxpayers of this state.

Seven women who had married Braceros, or had lived with them, were interviewed to get their reaction on the moral implications of the Bracero Programs. All seven shared the opinion that the Braceros were just opportunists seeking a way to remain in the United States and marriage was the easiest way for them to gain this end. The Braceros had little or no regard for the children they had fathered, much less for the females that lived with them. The result was that these females were ostracized by the community as well as by their families. Three of these women reported

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[7] Interview with Mrs. Diggle, Public Health Nurse for the area, August 15, 1957.

[8] Interview with Miss Hunter, In charge of Aid to Needy Children at the Ontario Office of the State Welfare Agency, August 14, 1957.

that they had spent all their savings trying to get their Bracero husbands papers to remain in the United States, and when it had been accomplished their husbands had refused to live with them or to take the responsibility of supporting their children. Two of the females stated that they had asked for State Aid. Because it had been refused, they finally got a court order which forced the husbands to support the children. However, the support which they finally received was not adequate or constant.

One of the women reported that she had had three children from a Bracero while living with him as his common-law wife. He finally married her so that he would not have to go back to Mexico but he was sent back anyway. She spent all her savings and those of her oldest son (from another marriage) to get her Bracero husband papers to remain in the United States. Papers were secured but not until six months later. After two months of living with her, he left her and the three children. The court forced him to contribute to the support of the children; so he gave her $10.00 a week whenever he felt so inclined. She had not received anything for over six months when interviewed. He is now making over $100.00 a week working in a factory in Los Angeles. Even though he does not provide half of the support of the children, he claims them as dependents on his federal income tax return by forcing her to sign the returns every year. This type of situation is quite common.

In addition to the moral problems stated, the Bracero Programs have indirectly helped to increase the juvenile delinquency problems of Northtown by causing them to lose jobs which they formerly held. The majority of the teen-agers from Northtown, both boys and girls, have never gone beyond the eighth grade in school and have taken jobs in agriculture as soon as they are graduated from junior high school. Some leave school sooner and go to work. Now they are no longer employed except during the height of the grape season, leaving them too much time with nothing to do except get into trouble. According to Captain Mayers of the San Bernardino County Sheriff's Department, juvenile crimes have been on the increase in the Cucamonga area since the war. Captain Mayers feels that unemployment and the resulting vagrancy among any age group always creates social problems.[9]

Mr. Osgar Raven, constable for Cucamonga, Judge Hutton, and Captain Mayers were asked what is being done about crime, prostitution, and juvenile delinquency in Northtown. They all stated that there is very little that can be done until the residents themselves try to do something about it.

The only agency that has any jurisdiction over the unincorporated area is the Sheriff's Department, which has its closest station about ten miles away from Northtown.

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[9] Interview with Captain Mayers, San Bernardino County Sheriff's Department, Upland Sub Station, August 14, 1957.

By the time the sheriff's officers can get to the scene of any illegal activity it has already ended, and there are never any witnesses to testify. As for prostitution, the three men stated that it is very difficult to prove because the persons involved are always unwilling to testify in court. Judge Hutton feels that a lack of morals among most of the people involved in these crimes is the basic problem. He further stated that he personally does not think that the residents of Northtown know the meaning of the word morals; otherwise they would try to "clean up their own mess." However, the author feels that the prolonged periods of poverty have led to a breakdown of moral standards.

Health Problems

The prevention of communicable diseases has been a constant problem in Northtown, due to the poverty which has been prevalent for many years. In addition, the people of this community have always been superstitious and afraid of going to doctors. They call a doctor only when absolutely necessary, that is, only in case of death, or sometimes after a child has been delivered by a neighborhood Curandera (local mid-wife and herb doctor). Even now in some families the children are the only ones that ever come in contact with a nurse or a doctor.[10]

[10] Diggle, loc. cit.

Shortly before World War II the State Department of Public Health assigned a nurse to care for the members of the community. The nurse recommended some of her patients who were suffering from communicable diseases such as tuberculosis to the San Bernardino County Hospital. The nurse tried to teach the residents of Northtown how to prevent disease by establishing a clinic for mothers and their children, as well as for expectant mothers. At first the health program received little attention from the community, but by the end of the war considerable progress had been made. Tuberculosis and venereal disease began to decrease, but as the number of Braceros and wetbacks increased in the area after the war, these two diseases began to increase. At the present time there are 40 tuberculosis patients being cared for by the Public Health nurse in the community, 10 in the hospital, and 8 positive tuberculosis patients that should be in the hospital but because of the shortage of beds are allowed to remain in the care of the Public Health nurse. There are also from 12 to 15 females being treated for venereal disease. These females reported to health officials that they had contracted the disease from Mexican Nationals.[11]

In order to determine the probability of venereal disease being spread by the Braceros, Mr. William A. Whayne,

[11] Loc. cit.

communicable disease investigator for San Bernardino County and Riverside County, was interviewed. Mr. Whayne has been in contact with the Bracero Programs since 1942. He stated that in the early Bracero Programs, the Braceros were not given complete physical examination before or after they crossed the border. It was left to the State Department of Public Health to check the men for venereal disease. Teams of doctors and nurses would go into the camps and if they found that any of the Braceros reacted positively to the tests they would be treated periodically. The Public Health teams treated the men for about eight months if they were still in the camps, but the majority of the men did not get the complete treatment, either because they had been transferred to another camp or had terminated their contracts and had returned to Mexico. The main job of the Department of Public Health was to make the disease noncommunicable, not to give the men a complete cure.

During the course of the war the Department of Public Health began making spot checks of the Braceros as they crossed the border. Since rapid tests and rapid cures had not been developed, the men found with venereal disease were sent on with the hope that they would be cured when they reached their destination. The next step in the long process was to send a list of all positive cases to the contract doctors taking care of the Bracero camps so that they

could treat them. Also copies of the list were sent to the Public Health officer near the destination of the men.

In 1946 the Health Department stopped sending teams of doctors and nurses to the Bracero camps, feeling that with the advent of penicillin the men could be treated by an injection at the reception centers and an additional injection given by the contract doctors. The injections were given only to those men found with clinical symptoms, and the rest of the men were left to be checked by the contract doctors. It was not until August 1956 that more complete physical examinations were given to all the men at the reception centers. The Department of Public Health started giving all the men fast blood tests with the rest of the physical examination. Those men found positive were given an injection of 2,400,000 units of penicillin and were sent on to the United States. A copy of the results of the venereal disease tests was sent to the contract doctors for follow-up examinations. The Department of Public Health then tried to keep a close check on the doctors to make sure that the men were receiving treatment. However, the program was only partially effective, since the doctors never received some of the reports or the men were no longer at the camps originally assigned when the reports arrived. There were other men who did not get additional treatment because they had skipped their contracts by the time the doctors received the results of the examinations.

In April 1957 the California State Department of Public Health issued a memorandum to all health officers stating that the same program for the control of venereal disease should be enforced except that the whole process should be done at the reception centers, which for all men coming to California is El Centro, California. This memorandum was issued because there was not enough control of the men after they had been sent to the camps. At the processing center Luetic Serological tests were given to those men who had symptoms of venereal disease. Dark Field examinations were given to those with open lesions, and they were retained at the center until the lesions were healed. The same procedure of sending a list of the men with the disease to the Public Health Department for follow-up examinations conducted by the contract doctors was also to be continued.

The Department of Public Health reported that from 8 to 10 per cent of the men that came to California in 1956 had venereal disease, a decrease from previous years.[12] It is estimated that from 12 to 13 per cent of the men coming to the Cucamonga area have venereal disease, although not all of them in the communicable stage.[13] Mr. Whayne reported that it would be impractical to hold the men who

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[12] Interview with Mr. William A. Whayne, Communicable Disease Investigator for the Department of Public Health, San Bernardino County and Riverside County, August 17, 1957.

[13] Interview with Dr. Walter W. Wood, Contract doctor for the Cucamonga and San Antonio Bracero camps, August 18, 1957.

might have venereal disease in the incubation stage for the full period of incubation, from 10 to 13 days. They would have to be detained at the reception center, which would be costly, and in the meantime, the farmers would be suffering a loss due to the lack of manpower.[14]

Dr. Walter W. Wood, contract doctor for the Cucamonga and San Antonio Bracero camps, was interviewed to determine how communicable diseases are being controlled at the two local camps and also to find out how many Braceros arrive from Mexico with venereal disease and other communicable diseases in the infectious stage. Dr. Wood reported that he does not give the Braceros a physical examination when they arrive; therefore, he does not really know how many have any communicable diseases at that time. He added that the only time he gives them any medical treatment is when the men ask for it. As for the list of men sent by the Public Health Department, he complained that such lists do not reach him until the men have gone back to Mexico after having terminated their contracts with the local growers association or after they have been transferred to another camp. It is up to the Department of Public Health to see that additional records are sent on to the camps as the men are transferred. As to the type of physical examination given to the men at the reception center, Dr. Wood was not sure how complete it had been in the past or how

[14] Whayne, loc. cit.

complete it is now. He could only assume that from the type of cases that he treats that it was never and is not now very complete. He said that from talking to the men and treating them that not all the men are given even a chest X-ray before being sent to the camps. Last year Dr. Wood treated 20 men who had come to him with infectious venereal disease. He treated them with two injections of 2,400,000 units of penicillin per injection. These men had all had one injection at the reception center but this had not been sufficient to render them non-infectious for more than a month. Dr. Wood also treated about 20 cases of amebic dysentery last year and about the same number the previous year, as well as a considerable number of flu cases each year, with the majority of the men coming with the diseases from the reception center. Dr. Wood complained that a very small percentage come to him for treatment unless they are quite ill. In addition to treating the men for communicable diseases and industrial injuries, Dr. Wood reported that he had treated from 8 to 10 men a week for injuries received in fights with locals and at least one a week for injuries suffered in an automobile accident in the past year. These figures were about average in comparison with the past years.[15]

A large percentage of the younger Braceros buy automobiles very shortly after they arrive, a group of four or

[15] Wood, loc. cit.

five Braceros pooling their savings and buying a used automobile from some local. The automobiles that they buy are almost always junk because they know that they cannot take them back to Mexico and because they cannot save enough money in such a short time to buy good automobiles. These men endanger their lives as well as the lives of American citizens while they drive their so-called automobiles on the highways. The Braceros do not bother to get a driver's license or insurance for their automobiles, mainly because the insurance companies would not take the risk of insuring them. In order to get a driver's license in the state of California, a person has to be able to read and write English as well as to be able to drive. Naturally very few if any of the Braceros would qualify for such a driver's license. Consequently, when the Braceros are involved in accidents, they manage to return to Mexico leaving the American citizen without compensation. The managers of the three local Bracero camps were asked if they tried to discourage the men from buying automobiles, and they all replied that they had no control over the matter. They tried to discourage them by not renewing the contracts of the men who had been involved in accidents or who had been driving while intoxicated, but it had had very little effect on the rest. Because the majority of the Braceros have never owned or driven an automobile before coming to the United States, they never learn to drive properly, adding to the hazards which they create

when they drive. In addition these men use their automobiles for recreation only, which more often than not includes indulging in alcoholic beverages.

Dr. Wood emphatically stated that there was no question in his mind that the Braceros were in many cases responsible for spreading communicable disease to the residents of Northtown, as well as to the residents of other surrounding communities, but not in as many cases as the wetbacks who swarmed into the area from 1945 to 1955. There are few statistics on this matter because these men would not dare go to a doctor for fear that they would be reported to the immigration officials and would be sent back to Mexico. Dr. Wood felt that more rigid physical examinations should be given to Braceros before they are allowed to come to the United States, if for no other reason than to protect the citizens of this country.[16]

Dr. Walter Z. Baro, contract doctor for the Irwindale Bracero camp, was also interviewed so that the author could compare his findings with those of Dr. Wood. Dr. Baro was strongly against the entire program or the idea of contracting any foreigners to do any type of work in the United States. Dr. Baro said that he too was convinced that the physicals given the Braceros were not complete enough. He came to this conclusion after taking care of so many men

[16] Loc. cit.

shortly after they arrived. In order to remedy the situation he started giving all of the men a complete physical examination as soon as they arrived from the contracting center. When he found over 50 per cent of them physically unfit to do the jobs for which they had been hired, he recommended to the manger of the camp, Mr. Kennedy, that those not able to pass the physical examination be returned to Mexico. Mr. Kennedy refused to send them back because the association had already spent a great deal of money to get the Braceros here and it would take too long to get more men. Dr. Baro emphatically stated that over 90 per cent of the men that come to him for medical treatment have psycho-somatic illnesses and should return to Mexico. He boasted of having forced the association to return several men to Mexico, thus saving the insurance company that employs him a great deal of money. Dr. Baro made a statement to the effect that all the Braceros have an I.Q. of a one year old. He had come to this conclusion from talking to the Braceros. When the author questioned the doctor's scientific approach, Dr. Baro quickly reminded the author that he was a psychiatrist well-trained in his field.[17] Although recognizing each person's right to his own opinion, the author felt that the doctor's opinion was too biased to continue the interview,

[17] Interview with Dr. Walter Z. Baro, Contract doctor for the Irwindale Bracero camp, Irwindale, California, August 27, 1957.

On December 10, 1957, an interview with Dr. Carlo Gómez was published in the Los Angeles Spanish Newspaper, La Opinión, on the problem of tuberculosis among the Braceros, part of which follows:

> Several thousand men with incipient tuberculosis, which even they generally do not recognize, are sent annually to the United States contracted as "Braceros." Later they are not able to work with efficiency in the neighboring country; so they abandon their jobs, and find themselves unable to return to Mexico for lack of money. They live in a pitiful state, are victims of all kinds of discrimination and are finally deported to a border town where they beg public charity and become social liabilities away from their birthplace and their own people.
>
> The preceding was revealed to us by Doctor Carlo Gómez del Campo, who told us that it is due fundamentally to the lack of complete physical examinations which in the long run would, if they were given, he beneficial to both countries. The Braceros are contracted without being given a chest X-ray, that is to say without a complete chest examination. After being given superficial examinations they are permitted to cross the border.
>
> Dr. Gómez told us that of the 300,000 men contracted each year, approximately 30 out of every 1,000 become ill, that is to say, that nine thousand Mexicans are destined to die in a foreign land or at the border, when they could be saved if all the necessary precautions were taken.[18]

Mr. Whayne was also asked about tuberculosis among the Braceros. He said that it was not until 1956 that all the men coming to California were given a chest X-ray examination. He added that they are not given in all the states. Before 1956 the men all given skin tests instead of the X-ray examinations. This is a type of

[18]Translated from La Opinión, December 10, 1957, p. 8.

examination that is still being given in the state of Texas.[19] This is unfortunate, for skin tests given to adults are inconclusive because the majority of adults show a positive reaction. In order to determine from this method alone whether or not an adult has tuberculosis more than one test must be given in about a two week period.[20] It would not be practical to hold the men at the reception center for such a long time.[21]

Tuberculosis is one of the diseases that can become activated if a person with the disease does not eat properly, sleep properly, or if he works too hard. Almost all of these conditions exist for the Braceros, especially immediately after they arrive. It takes them at least two weeks to be able to eat the food which is served to them in the camps because it is too rich, and some never get used to it. The men do not sleep properly because they tend to worry about their families and all the debts incurred by their venture. With few exceptions, they are all hard working men and have been all their lives, but it is a different type of work. When picking oranges, lemons, and other citrus fruit these men must carry a load of fruit on their backs all day in addition to carrying a ladder from 8 to 16 feet long. So

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[19] Whayne, loc. cit.

[20] Interview with Dr. Roger Lawshe, Lake Arrowhead Medical Offices, January 2, 1958.

[21] Whayne, loc. cit.

it is not surprising that Dr. Gómez claims that 30 out of every 1,000 men become ill from tuberculosis every year.

Considering the thousands of Mexican Nationals, legal and illegal, in the Cucamonga area for over ten years, the effect of these men on the morals, health, and social conditions could not have been beneficial in the light of the evidence accumulated by this study. With the great number of Mexican Nationals who entered this country each year with communicable diseases, it is surprising that so few locals have been contaminated. Perhaps the friction that has existed and still exists between the two groups has been instrumental in keeping the disease from being spread by the Braceros. It must also be kept in mind that not all the locals who might have been contaminated would go to a doctor so that the disease could be diagnosed.

The 200 residents of Northtown interviewed, with the exception of the businessmen, all believe that their problems have been aggravated by the presence of the Braceros. They feel very strongly against the Bracero Programs and if a solution is not found soon, additional complications will result.

CHAPTER V

THE REAL PROBLEM AND AN APPROACH TO THE SOLUTION

The Real Problem

From the data presented in the foregoing chapters it would appear that the Bracero Programs have had a harmful impact on the Mexican-American residents of Northtown as well as on the other migrant workers in the states where the Braceros have been employed. The impact has been greater on the Mexican-Americans in the country than on any other domestic agricultural workers because the Mexican-Americans represent the highest contact seasonal and casual labor force in the states where the Braceros are employed. This is especially true of California. On the whole, seasonal agricultural work is not skilled and the bulk of American workers in this type of employment regard it as a temporary expedient until they can secure employment elsewhere. With the aid of discrimination existing in some states, especially Texas, which obstructs the entry of those of Mexican ancestry into non-agricultural pursuits, the Mexican-American will continue to be the largest contract casual and seasonal workers in some states.

The real problem is the plight of the agricultural worker who depends on seasonal work and has no protection

from unscrupulous contractors, farmers, or other agencies. Consequently these workers live in poverty in a land of plenty. The Mexican-Americans from Northtown make up a very small percentage of the total affected, and the Bracero Programs represent only one element in the number of forces working against them. However, since the Bracero Programs have been expanding from year to year and will probably continue to expand, the author feels that an attempt toward a solution which will help eliminate the Programs is merited. Any solution or solutions to the problem must be twofold because they must include a replacement for these men in the American agricultural labor market and also must provide a way in which these foreigners can be induced to stay at home. The latter is absolutely necessary: otherwise the wetback problem will reoccur.

Mexico's Solution for the Elimination of the Bracero Programs[1]

The Mexican Government has looked with disfavor on the Bracero Programs since they were started, and has tried to have them discontinued. However, pressure from the United States has forced their continuation. Mexico felt that during the war the Bracero Program was necessary as its contribution to the war effort, but feels that the later

[1] Interview with Mr. Eugenio V. Pesqueira, Mexican Consul in San Bernardino, California, January 29, 1958.

programs have been artificial and unnecessary for both countries. The Mexican people as a whole look at the Bracero Programs with disfavor and would prefer to have them discontinued. In order to understand the intensity of the attempt by the Mexican government to keep its people at home, a brief background of Mexico's geographical condition, agrarian problems, and its standard of living is necessary. Mexico is an extremely mountainous country with only one-third of its total land area being level. Of the land that is level only one-third is suitable for agriculture; yet over ninety per cent of the total Mexican population has to farm the land in order to live. The other two-thirds of the level land gets too much rain or is too dry for farming. Of the land that is suitable for agriculture four-fifths is seasonal farming land (dependent on rain), and even this land is so poor (due to its misuse and its hundreds of years without a program of conservation) that even with a normal distribution of population it could still not provide enough food to feed those farming it. Mexico does not even have a good river which would create proper irrigation for successful farming. Only the central core of the country gets an even distribution of rain; therefore, the majority of the Mexican population lives there. The total population of Mexico is about 30 million and is constantly increasing so that Mexico's problem of feeding its people is increasing year after year.

In the past ten years Mexico has been trying to redistribute its population and to provide some means of livelihood other than agriculture for its people. However it has not been successful because the Mexican is a creature of habit. For hundreds of years the majority of the population has depended on agriculture and cannot be persuaded to change. Even the men who come to the United States as Braceros and break away from their farms for a short time have but one goal, to go back to Mexico and buy the farms which they have been working for years or to improve the farms which they own. This desire persists in spite of the poor living conditions which they know prevail. Their wish to own farming land is natural considering that for centuries their ancestors had to farm someone else's land as peons without any hope of ever acquiring it or getting any of the profits. The peon was conditioned to conflict, hardships, poverty, and even bloodshed throughout Mexico's history while working for the owner of the land. It is, therefore, not difficult to understand why they want to own land. Mexico's unrest in the past one hundred years reflects the struggle of its people to obtain many reforms, especially agrarian, but even the most recent revolution did not satisfy them. It was not until 1935 that President Lázaro Cárdenas began making good on the demands of the masses for agrarian reforms. Lázaro Cárdenas redistributed over forty-five million acres of land, belonging to wealthy landholders, to more than three-quarters

of a million peasants under the "ejido system" (co-operative farms on a profit sharing basis), but the system failed because the peasants did not display sufficient agricultural skill or the organizational capacity for this type of endeavor.

Since 1940 the emphasis of the Mexican government has been toward industrialization. Mexico feels that she can feed her people by removing them from the land and producing manufactured goods for export. By the shift to industrialization, more and more Mexicans are being employed yearly in building factories, modernizing the railroads, building desperately-needed schools, and other non-agricultural pursuits. However the Mexican government realizes that a large percentage of its people will not shift from agriculture to industry; so it has been working on new systems by which to improve agriculture. The future plans for accomplishing this task include long-term concentration on irrigation, mainly in the northern part of the country, soil conservation, and new agronomic techniques.

Various agronomic engineers have made a study in the past year of different parts of the country, especially of the states of Querétaro, Guanajuato, Michoacán, Jalisco, and others in the northern part of Mexico. The purpose of the study was to determine how the Bracero Programs can be eliminated. They proposed that first of all the Mexican government must realize that the Mexican farmers are, above all,

individuals that require only a minimum of guarantees in order to be able to comply with their seasonal work in Mexico. The engineers proposed that new farming land be made available to these men at low cost or on homestead basis. A system of crop rotation with government subsidizing would make the land now being farmed richer, and eventually more productive. The engineers proposed a more extensive program of irrigation throughout Mexico which would include the construction of smaller projects to benefit more farmers instead of the projects that are now under construction. They added that it will be impossible to initiate any new methods in agriculture if a better education program for the rural area is not included. The education system should be extended to include new methods of cultivation, irrigation, and the introduction of new crops.[2]

In 1958 the Mexican government is making 1,300 million pesos available to the agricultural banks throughout the nation. In 1957 it made 1,100 million pesos available to these banks, which was far too little, but it was a step in the right direction. With the money made available, banks can lend money to the farmers at low interest rates for the cultivation of corn, wheat, beans, and other crops while providing the farmers with better seed.[3] The Mexican govern-

[2] La Opinión, June 2, 1957, p. 7.
[3] La Opinión, January 19, 1958, p. 8.

ment intends to increase the funds considerably, which will undoubtedly improve agriculture and raise the standard of living of the farmers, thus diminishing the desire of its people to come to the United State as Braceros.

Possible Solutions by the United States

Any solution by this country must include a method by which the wages and living standards of domestic workers can be improved in order to keep them in agriculture. Also some type of un-employment compensation insurance similar to that which is offered by the state of California to most non-agricultural workers should be included.

Several state and federal committees, as well as church organizations, have offered solutions to the problem of migrant workers in the United States. These solutions, if carried out, would eliminate the need for foreign contract workers. Almost all of the organizations made the same recommendations including: (1) the organizing of farm workers; (2) protection of wages through minimum wage legislation and/or public wage fixing; (3) unemployment compensation; (4) an organization recruiting program to distribute the labor supply; (5) improved sanitation and housing for migrant workers; (6) enforcement of child labor laws; (7) educational facilities for the children of migrant workers; (8) stricter regulations for labor contractors; and (9) an extension of social security benefits to include

farm workers. All of these proposals have been considered impractical because it is virtually impossible to carry them out without orderliness in farm employment.[4] Labor unions have tried for several years to organize seasonal workers in many states but have not been very successful. In California the American Federation of Labor tried to organize farm laborers as early as 1910 but with little success. Again in 1934 a branch of the same organization tried to organize the farm laborers but inadequate funds and a small membership made the attempt unsuccessful.[5] Other attempts by unions to organize migrant workers can be cited but the results were the same in all instances. The failure of the unions to organize migrant workers has been due to: (1) organized opposition by the farm growers who prefer to deal with contractors of individual farm workers. Producers argue that unionism is not suited to California agriculture because of the perishability of the crops. They claim that this factor would make them vulnerable to union pressure and work stoppages at harvest time; (2) competition of the contractors; (3) ineffective collective participation by the workers themselves. The migrant workers are independent, having no close ties except their own families;

[4] Fisher, op. cit., pp. 78-85.

[5] Carey McWilliams, Factories in the Field (Boston: Little, Brown, and Company, 1939), p. 190.

(4) migrant workers travel from area to area and never stay in one place for longer than the time needed to harvest the crops or to wait for the other crops to be harvested. This makes it difficult for unions to enlist the group action absolutely necessary to make a union successful.

Intervention by the federal government would be a solution to the problem but at the present time there is no agency fit to administer such a program of reforms in agriculture as previously mentioned. New legislation would be needed to establish such an agency. In the past the establishment of any agency which would intervene in agriculture met with violent opposition in Congress by farm organizations. Also in the past when the federal government intervened it was on the terms which the growers were prepared and willing to accept. This was clearly illustrated by the Sugar Act of 1937, the importation of Mexican Workers, and the promulgation of wage ceilings during World War II under the Wage Stabilization Program. In these three instances the intervention did not benefit the agricultural workers but it certainly benefited the producers. This must not be allowed to happen again. The federal government under the leadership of the executive branch of the government has the power and is probably the only governmental body which can create the agency required to administer the reforms needed in agriculture without being swayed by the farm pressure groups.

At the present time this country is going through a period of mild recession, with over four and one-half million persons unemployed and the figure is expected to reach the five million mark by June of this year.[6] In California alone 375,000 persons are unemployed,[7] meaning that many of these people may be forced to depend on agricultural work. If the recession continues there will be no need for contracting Mexican Nationals. The labor force which will be made available with the recession has been accustomed to higher wages than those paid now in agriculture and to a higher standard of living. If forced to do agricultural work, they may force the growers to pay higher wages by means of organized labor. Organization of this new labor force will not be difficult because the majority of this labor force has belonged to unions and understands their operation.

Secretary of Labor James P. Mitchell indicated in an exclusive interview to Nicolás Ávila, reporter for the Spanish newspaper La Opinión in Los Angeles, that a reduction in the number of Braceros is very probable because of the current economic condition of this country. Secretary Mitchell stated that many of the important labor leaders in the country have been putting pressure on the administration to limit

[6] New York Herald Tribune, February 13, 1958, p. 1.
[7] Los Angeles Times, February 19, 1958, p.1.

or discontinue the Bracero Programs, and since the entire country is going through a mild depression and employment shortage, the administration cannot but accede to their demands. Secretary Mitchell is attending at the present time a conference which is probing racial discrimination in industry, especially companies having government contracts. A permanent agency will be established in Los Angeles which will investigate any complaints of discrimination in the future.[8] The establishment of such an agency will create more non-agricultural employment for the Mexican-Americans.

If the recession does not continue, the solution may be found in the dwindling of the agricultural labor force through improved farm mechanization and the transferring of agricultural land to industrial projects. As the jobs are eliminated, agricultural workers would be forced into the industrial labor market. In Southern California thousands of acres of agricultural land are being subdivided for housing projects and industry every year. From 1909 to 1940 Los Angeles County led every county in the entire nation in farm wealth, but since that period over 50,000 acres of agricultural land has been urbanized. The Regional Planning Commission of Los Angeles County estimated that an additional 11,000 acres of Agricultural land will have to be urbanized

[8] La Opinión, February 20, 1958, p. 1.

each year for the next twenty years in order to meet the demands of the population growth.[9]

The citrus industry, which depends almost entirely on Mexican-American or foreign contract workers for harvesting, is also disappearing. In Los Angeles County there were 45,000 acres of oranges in 1936 and by 1956 there were only 18,000 acres. During the same period the acreage declined from 70,000 to 37,000 in Orange County. San Bernardino County was not industrialized as rapidly as the other two, but it undoubtedly will do so in the next twenty years, especially if the population continues to grow. A spokesman for the Los Angeles Chamber of Commerce estimated that the population of Southern California will continue to increase by 275,000 persons annually and will need about 27,000 acres of land each year for new homes.[10]

Whatever the ultimate solution to the problem is, it will probably take at least five years for it to be felt by the residents of Northtown and other communities that are in the same condition. During this period these people should encourage their children to take advantage of the educational opportunities available to them because only through education will their descendents be able to break away from agricultural work and seek other types of employment which will bring them a higher standard of living.

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[9] Los Angeles Times, November 27, 1957, pp. 1 and 3.
[10] Loc. cit.

CHAPTER VI

SUMMARY

Shortly after the United States entered World War II it was found that the agricultural labor force was being absorbed by the Armed Forces and the defense plants. The shortage of domestic labor made it necessary for the United States to seek help from its neighboring countries, especially from Mexico. The importation of foreign nationals was arranged by international agreements with the understanding that these would be terminated at the end of the war. However, pressure from the various farm groups in the states where these men were employed forced the continuation of the agreements. The postwar phase of the importation program became more active than the original phase, and will undoubtedly continue at the same rate for at least two years. Throughout the entire fourteen years that the Programs for importing foreign nationals have been in existence, very little consideration has been given to the impact which they might have on the citizens of the United States and alien residents who come in contact with the contract foreign nationals, or to the effect which these men might have on the citizens which they displace. In this study the

author has found that the impact on the Mexican-Americans of Cucamonga, California, has definitely been harmful in many respects.

Wherever the Braceros have been used the wage rate has remained fairly low, forcing domestic farm workers to other fields of employment. Unfortunately, the majority of the Mexican-Americans are not as well prepared to go into industry as other Americans so they suffer more than any other group, since they represent the highest percentage of farm laborers in the states where Braceros are employed. The Mexican-Americans have had no protection of wages or employment by governmental agencies, farm growers or even by member of their own group who contact them to do farm labor. This had kept them poorly paid for nine months of the year and unemployed for at least three. The situation forces them to live in miserable poverty in small shacktowns like the community of Cucamonga.

People tend to seek members of their own linguistic or national background while in a foreign country and the Mexican Braceros are no exception. For many Braceros this is not difficult to do because the camps where they are housed are near a Mexican-American community. Since these foreign nationals have close contact with the Mexican-Americans in the communities they tend to spread any communicable diseases which they might have, such as tuberculosis and venereal disease. The close contact is resented

by the males in the communities which leads to friction among the two groups, and usually ends in violence and bloodshed.

The elimination of the Bracero Programs is the ultimate solution to the problem. This however will not be accomplished until comprehensive studies are made by both the United States and Mexico. Mexico will have to discourage its men from coming to the United States by improving the living standards of its people. In the United States agricultural work will have to be made more attractive, through higher wages, and better labor conditions, to encourage domestic workers to remain in agriculture. By a re-evaluation of the plight of the agriculture workers, this segment of the American population will be able to enjoy the benefits which this land of plenty can afford all its citizens.

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