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THE BLIGHT ON THE COUNTRYSIDE

America's hired farm workers are the
forgotten orphans of the affluent society

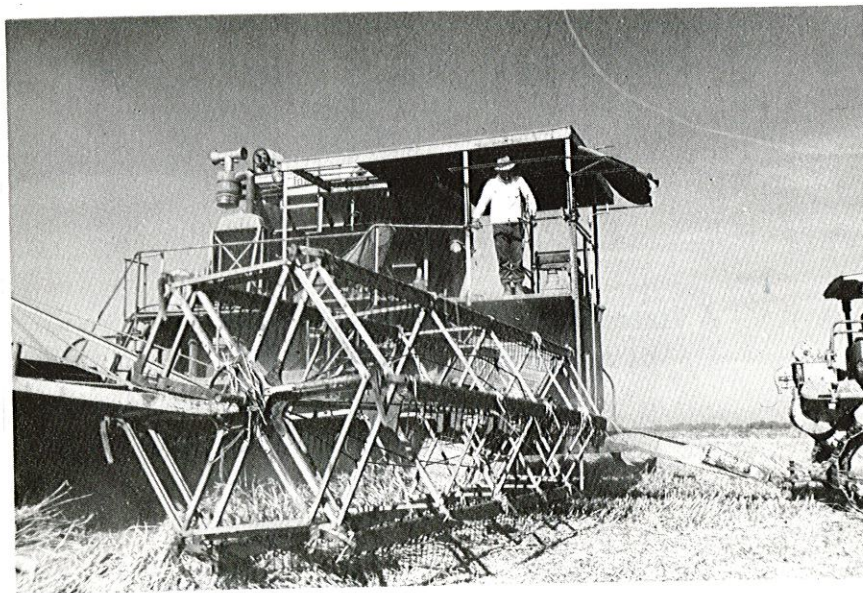
A Brief Illustrated Over-view
of a National Problem

NATIONAL AGRICULTURAL WORKERS UNION
2022 P STREET, N. W.
WASHINGTON 6, D. C.

Photos by Harvey L. Richards
Atherton, California



This man should disturb your sleep. He is entitled to a place on your conscience. He is one of the two million wage workers on the nation's farms. He and his family are the worst off people in America. His industry has the highest fatality rate in the nation. He is not much better off than the most miserable people in the world. His annual family income is less than \$900 a year.



Many hired agricultural workers no longer manipulate wooden handled farm tools as they stoop over crops. Instead they operate machinery which costs tens of thousands of dollars. With this machine, for example, one man does the work of thirty. But the one man gets no more in wages than before. The new technology has not made life any better for his wife and children. They still live in poverty.



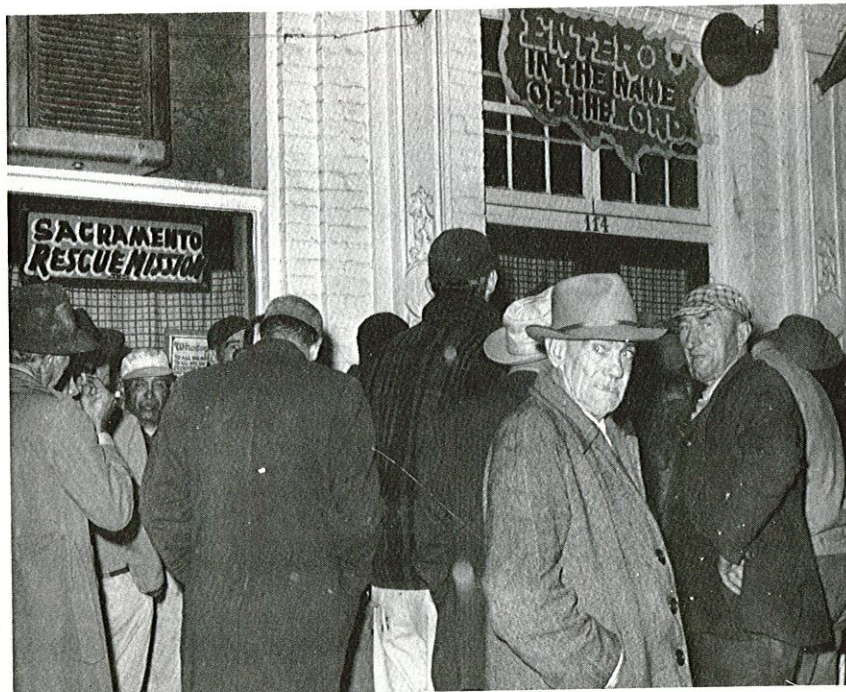
Some modern farm operations combine stooping and the most advanced machinery. In this lettuce harvesting operation, 60 men do the work formerly done by 600. The gain? Higher profits for the farm factory corporation. Fresher lettuce in the supermarket. Longer periods of unemployment for the farm workers.



This is 1959. At the beginning of the 19th century, Lord Byron denounced child labor in the House of Lords. In 1938 the Fair Labor Standards Act almost abolished child labor in the United States--but not quite. The Fair Labor Standards, like many other fine laws, never reached the hired farm worker or his children. These children still work when they should be in school. They are crippled and maimed by the industrial machinery used on farms. Their supervisors don't beat them with rods today--but can you be sure of that?



Inside story. This is the face of poverty most American families never see. "God Bless Our Home Sweet Home," one placard on the wall says. This is "Our Home Sweet Home" for the four people who sleep here. Yet for the men and women and children who work in the blue sky sweatshops these are good living conditions.



Enter in the name of the Lord. Yes, no one can deny them their place in heaven. But about their place on earth. Are they not entitled to social security, to unemployment compensation when they are out of work, to compensation and rehabilitation when they are injured on their jobs, to the minimum wage that is the rule of the land? To the protection of maximum hours and minimum wage legislation? Should there be an untouchable caste in the United States denied the right to organize into unions of their choice and to bargain collectively over their wages and working conditions? In the name of the Lord and the Constitution are they not entitled to an entry into citizenship as well as into heaven?



This scene has nothing to do with the hired farm worker--directly. This has to do with the family farmer. This is an auction of a farm that belonged to a family farmer who could not stand up to the competition of giant corporate factory farms that pay sweatshop wages to their hired workers. American workers are not compelled to compete with coolie wages in foreign countries. Should American farmers be compelled to compete with the coolie wages on America's open air agricultural sweatshops?



Outdoor automation produces boxes on the spot where the lettuce is grown.



The outdoor automation is linked to al fresco assembly lines. The mountain indeed has moved to Mohammed. This assembly line sorts, cleans, and packs the lettuce for shipping.



The back still has its uses. Almost as fast as they make engines in an automatic factory, the lettuce has been processed from plant to package and loaded onto trucks.



Now a vacuum cooling process chills the lettuce for shipment. Material handling equipment replacing dozens of laborers load the lettuce onto trains or trucks. Within hours the lettuce will be the substance of hundreds of thousands of salads. A lettuce green prospect for consumers but a grim outlook for lettuce workers. A tenth as many jobs as formerly with the standard rate for highly seasonal work less than 90 cents an hour.



Technology on the farm has created the same problems in agriculture that automation has generated in industry--plus some complications.

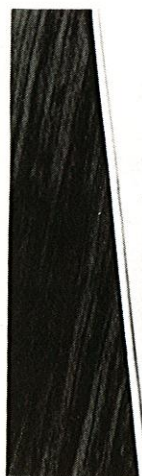
As in the economy at large the farm outlook is increasingly dominated by giant corporations. Approximately 50 percent of the two million farm wage workers are employed on farms 1900 acres or larger--huge stretches of land run by city businesses for profit.

The consequence is that family farmers are gradually losing out. Since 1952, 600,000 farms have been sold out, four million Americans have been driven off the farm.

But the grim machinery grinding out this tragic destiny has one additional gimmick--contract labor.



Notice! Watch out for the farm animals. Pay no attention to the men. These are contract laborers, Mexican nationals, brought to the United States under the operation of Public Law 78. Other workers are imported from the British West Indies and Japan. Before contract laborers may be imported, the law requires the Department of Labor to certify there are no American workers available at the prevailing wage. The law also is supposed to assure minimum working and living conditions. But the law is not enforced.



Per day employer payment to worker for subsistence under contract provided
 Por día cantidad que se cobra al trabajador

Per day employer payment to worker for subsistence under contract provided
 nishes meals:
 Por día subsidio que paga el patrono al empleado en los casos en que, de costumbre,
 éste debe cubrir sus propios gastos de alimentación:

The undersigned parties have read this Contract consisting of five pages and
 Los suscritos han leído este Contrato que consiste de cinco páginas y contienen

Date and place of signing of this contract } EL CENTRO, CALIF.
 Fecha y lugar donde se firma este contrato }

Signature of worker
 Firma o huella del trabajador

Contracting under the supervision of the U.S. Department of Labor
 Contratación bajo la supervisión del Departamento de Trabajo de los Estados Unidos

Representative of the Mexican Government
 Representante del Gobierno Mexicano

3 of 5

Los que subscribimos en este testigo de las palabras dadas
 otros por el Sr. GAVACHO, Coo. de Quinones
 de que no podía pertenecer al Sindicato. "Los Braceros"

masiaj Sepúlveda = Contract # 2.80
 Flores Flores
 Ramon Zaragoza Guiniga - Witness Rosa
 Perez Rodriguez - Witness Juana Garcia
 Luis Rodriguez M.
 Luis Hernandez M.
 Juan Reyes Carrasco

Illiterate immigrants are worked cruelly long hours. They are shipped to their work places like cattle in trucks so hazardous that each year many die in needless highway accidents. They are forced to sign yellow dog contracts by which they agree not to join unions. Their living conditions are evil and their hours are brutal.

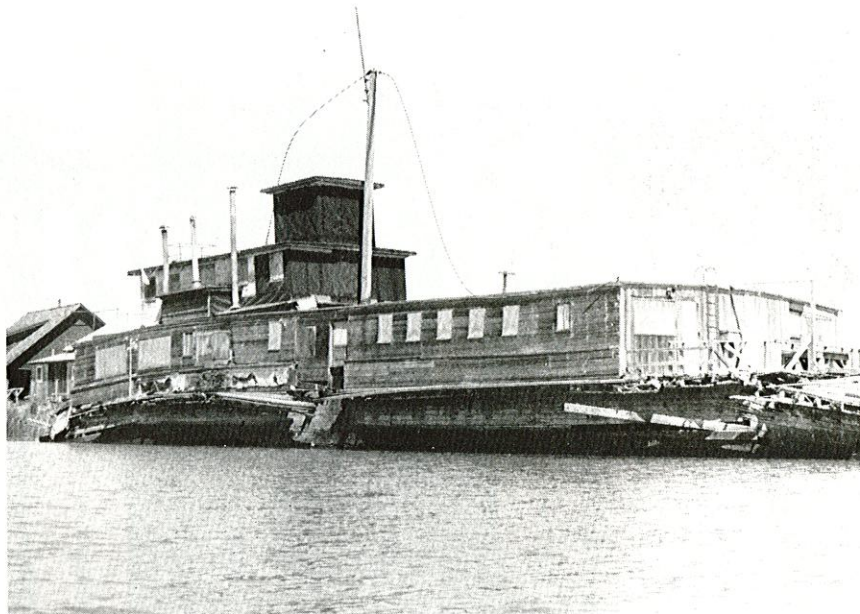


There are four million Americans already refugees from farm liquidations.

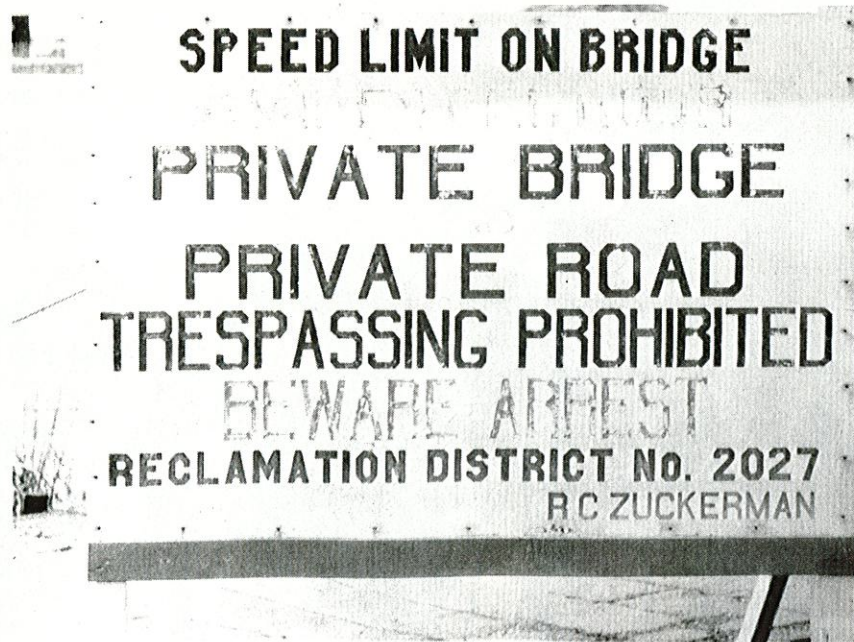
Four million Americans unwillingly stand in the ranks of the unemployed.

Day by day technological advance on the farm reduces employment opportunities for the available supply of hired farm workers.

Given these circumstances it is fortunate indeed that the Mission where the breadline forms is next door to the Farm Placement Service.



If Public Law 78 was enforced and a proper prevailing wage determined at public hearings in each situation there would be no need to carry on an international traffic in coolie labor. If there should be actual shortages of agricultural workers, certainly they should not be housed in floating joss houses like this death trap.



When it is necessary to bring workers to this country, the responsible government agency should enforce the law relating to health, hygiene, wages, hours, and working conditions so that it is not necessary to seclude them from the world behind no trespassing signs and warnings of arrest.



Not everyone has forgotten his responsibility to the orphaned outsiders in our nation who make up the nation's hired agricultural work force. Many religious workers like Father McCullough of the Mission of Our Lady in the Fields, Catholic and Protestant, work today to open up the gates to full citizenship for these economic and social pariahs who are our brothers and sisters.



Challenged by this survival of 19th century poverty into the 20th century, a Committee of Distinguished Americans led by Dr. Frank Graham is working on a program to help achieve justice for America's forgotten families.

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