

The American Child

Published by the NATIONAL CHILD LABOR COMMITTEE, NEW YORK CITY

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8074

Vol. XXXIII

MARCH, 1951

No. 3

MIGRANT WORKERS—WHAT WILL BE DONE FOR THEM? Some Findings from California, Wisconsin and Minnesota Reports

MIGRANTS were in the news last year and now they are appearing in reports which examine the facts behind last year's headlines. Two Governors' Commissions have issued reports—the California Governor's Commission to Survey the Agricultural Labor Resources of the San Joaquin Valley and the Wisconsin Governor's Commission on Human Rights. Conditions in Minnesota have been examined and reported in a study by the Migrant Committee of The Minnesota Council of Churches and The Home Missions Council. The Report of the President's Commission on Migratory Labor is due any day now.

There is nothing much that is new about the working and living conditions of seasonal farm laborers—the facts are very much the same today as they have been for many years—but recommendations for action need to be based on up-to-date findings such as these reports provide, and on Federal social security and minimum wage legislation which did not exist when *The Grapes of Wrath* introduced the migrant to a large proportion of the American people.

The California Report

Agricultural Labor in the San Joaquin Valley is a preliminary report by the Governor's Committee but is the most important of the three reports because it presents a comprehensive series of recommendations for action based on extensive fact finding by the Committee. The detailed results of the fact finding will be published in a final report.

The Committee was appointed by Governor Warren in March 1950 when acute unemployment among agricultural workers had brought on such desperate conditions and so much unsavory publicity that growers, as well as labor, civic and county organizations urged the appointment of a fact-finding committee. The members of the Committee, on which agriculture, labor, education, state and county government, religion, veterans and minority groups were represented, were instructed by the Governor "to make an over-all study of the seasonal worker problem and to recommend such action as may be necessary and appropriate to provide these workers with a better standard of living."

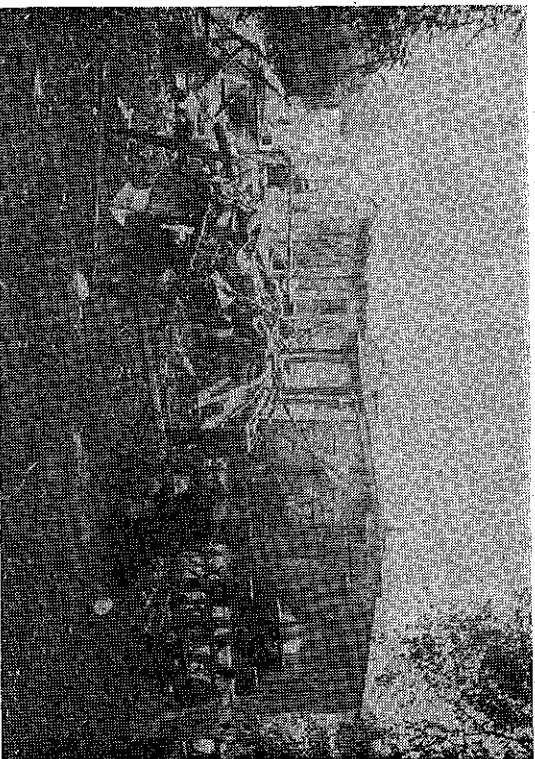
The fact finding on which the recommendations are based included an extensive research program, in which the aid of research personnel in State

Departments and faculty members of universities and colleges was enlisted, public hearings, and independent study, investigation and observation by Committee members.

The thirty-five recommendations in the preliminary report deal with the major problems of employment, relief, housing, education, physical and mental health and were unanimously endorsed by the 15 members of the Committee despite the many controversial issues in the seasonal labor problem. Lack of adequate income, due to irregular employment (the average annual earnings of seasonal workers in the San Joaquin Valley are \$1,200) being the basic problem, the Committee recommended unemployment insurance for all agricultural workers on a national basis and also inclusion of them in old age and survivors' insurance as immediate steps. Measures to provide year-round employment to increase earnings and security, such as diversification of crops, public works and local industries to rotate with crops, were considered but were found by the Committee to involve many difficulties requiring further study before action could be recommended.

Mechanization will rapidly replace hand labor, particularly in cotton harvesting; the Committee found, and "a program for retraining and rehabilitation of temporarily

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Migrant housing—"Cash Crop" animals often have better quarters

Migrant Workers - What Will Be Done for Them?

NATIONAL CHILD LABOR COMMITTEE
419 Fourth Avenue, New York 16, N. Y.

Renewed as second-class matter, May 8, 1942, at the post-office at New York, N. Y., under the Act of August 24, 1912.
Accepted for mailing at special rate of postage provided for in section 1103 Act of October 3, 1917, authorized on July 10, 1918.

Yearly subscription two dollars

NEW CONSULTATION SERVICE

A NEW service, Social Welfare Consultants, has been established by Shelby M. Harrison, Edward C. Lindenman and Walter W. Pettit. The founders are pooling their extensive and varied experience in the social welfare field to offer consultation service, on a fee basis, to both private and public welfare agencies. They are prepared to conduct studies leading to the establishment of new services, the reorganization of existing services, the correlation of functions and services and to make appraisal studies of current programs of work. For more information, write to Social Welfare Consultants, 30 Jones Street, New York 14, N. Y.

A FILM TO SEE

MIGRANTS are people, not diseased animals, says the stirring new film, *Again . . . Pioneers!*, produced by the Protestant Film Commission. Combining a story of one community's reaction to a growing "Shacktown" on its fringe with documentary glimpses of migrants living in the "shacktowns" and working in the fields, the film is both moving and authentic. It was designed to inform people how this country treats its migrant families and to stir the consciences of the complacent and the thoughtless who believe that migrants become migrants because they are "no good anyway" and should be "kept moving to some other place because we don't want them to settle here." Nobody who sees this film can remain complacent — the human story is too gripping and too revealing of typical community antagonisms to migrants and the migrant problem in general to let anyone escape with his complacency intact. Whether the film is seen in a community which has migrants, or in one which does not, its powerful impact will bring conviction that the plight of migrants and their children is an ugly sore in a free and democratic society and that discriminating against migrants and pushing them around is a shocking violation of religious and ethical principles to which so much lip service is given. The film can be used effectively with civic groups, social agencies, school and college groups, as well as with church groups. Its message is just as relevant to that neglected slum in the city or "across the tracks" as it is to migrant "shacktowns."

Prints (16mm. Sound, 68 minutes) can be rented for \$12 per day, plus transportation costs both ways, and can be obtained either through the Board of National Missions, Presbyterian Church, U.S.A., 156 Fifth Avenue, New York City, or through denominational bookshops in cities throughout the country. A number of denominational groups cooperated to finance the production of the picture.

RICAN CHILD

March, 1951

MIGRANT WORKERS—WHAT WILL BE DONE FOR THEM?

(Continued from page 1)

displaced workers must be provided." Emphasizing that a sound employment policy would provide optimum employment opportunities for available local labor and that "such a policy must eliminate the use of Mexican 'webbacks' and unlicensed labor contractors, provide preferential local hiring and diminish excessive recruitment," the Committee made the following recommendation on reducing illegal entrants: "To decrease the current flow of Mexican illegal entrants, it is suggested that the Governor, in concert with other western governors, request the Federal Government to increase their border patrol. A better integrated state and Federal program is desirable, since it is a problem of mutual concern." Use of Mexican Nationals under the Mexican-American Treaty was left open as they might be needed "to meet abnormal labor shortages in the future." None were requested by agricultural employers in the San Joaquin Valley in 1950, the Report states.

To meet the problem of relief for unemployed resident and non-resident workers (Federal Government surplus foods were the chief means of fending off starvation between January and April 1950), the Committee made the following recommendations for county, state and Federal action:

The counties have a definite responsibility for their eligible resident indigents who are agricultural workers, and the financial burden for that group should be assumed locally.

Intercounty agreements should be promoted for reciprocal financial reimbursement for any aid rendered to those needy agricultural workers who are normally residents of other counties within the State.

It is recognized that the State should assume financial responsibility in some measure of assistance to counties in providing aid to nonresident unemployed agricultural workers and families. This group would include, among others, those who have not maintained sufficient residence in any one county to qualify for general relief.

It is urged that the Governor, in concert with other western governors, explore the question of acquiring Federal aid to assist the interstate migrant in need.

The valley counties should arrange a cooperative program with the State Department of Social Welfare to the end that child welfare services are made available during the migratory labor season.

Housing recommendations call for changes in existing laws to provide for more regulation and inspection of labor camps and of sub-standard individually owned dwellings, expansion of public housing for farm workers, and establishment of public camp sites for their use. The Labor Camp Act should be amended to permit enforcement of health and sanitation requirements whether or not the occupants are employed, should be geared to total occupants instead of only to "employees," and should provide for revocable permits and for prior registration and approval of temporary camps to check plans, site and water supply before construction. Sub-standard individually owned dwellings, found in a survey of 25,000 dwellings to lack bathing facilities in 50% of the dwellings, sewage disposal in 33%, satisfactory garbage disposal in 34%, should be brought under regulation by providing for extension of the Housing Act to unincorporated areas. To expand public housing

the Committee recommended "that local public housing authorities should utilize Federal funds now available under the Public Housing Act, to expand existing housing facilities and establish new housing facilities for agricultural workers in rural areas." Public camp sites would help to eliminate ditch bank camps, shaktowns and jungles.

Recommendations on education apply to children, adult workers and growers. For children, "Establishment of a special program within the State Department of Education to cope with the special handicaps confronting migratory children in securing equitable educational opportunities is recommended. . . . The personnel of this specialized division would work closely with local school districts to develop better techniques of integration and assimilation of migrant workers' children into the school community. It is also suggested that increased aid be provided to those school districts with large enrollment fluctuations." For adults, "The recently expanded program of the Agricultural Extension Service with respect to seasonal agricultural workers should be placed on a continuing and more comprehensive basis. A minimum of one full-time home advisor in each county, with exclusive responsibility for integrating and working with these adult and youth groups is advisable." Also, "School adult education programs should be utilized to enable greater participation by agricultural workers." Homemaking, nutrition, dressmaking, food preparation and health education can be taught successfully in groups and through home visits and demonstrations. For growers, "The Agricultural Extension Service and California Commission for Vocational Education, should develop programs to bring to farmers, through teaching and lectures, the latest techniques in improved labor utilization, and in better labor relations. . . ."

Expansion of the school lunch program and extension and expansion of the child care center program are recommended. Contributory state subsidization for those meals served without charge to the child is needed for expansion and all rural schools are urged to avail themselves of the school lunch program. Expansion should include kindergarten children and children in double or triple sessions who are not usually included in school lunch programs. Appropriations for the child care center program should "be extended beyond February 1951" (the expiration date) and such centers should "be expanded in rural agricultural areas." The New York State system, under which farmers and parents meet part of the cost, with the State meeting the major part, is cited as feasible to establish centers on farmer-provided areas.

To eliminate child labor, ambiguities in the Labor Code need to be cleared up to remove conflicting opinions as to whether age restrictions and work permit requirements in the law apply to children employed in agriculture. In addition to ambiguity, "lack of enforcement of existing laws governing minors is due to some extent to insufficient personnel of the Division of Labor Law Enforcement, and the Governor is requested to give consideration to increased personnel to the extent that he may deem appropriate." At present four deputy labor commissioners and one inspector are responsible for enforcing "a multitude of labor laws in 15 counties" and cannot possibly "patrol the fields during harvest season" to enforce the child labor law. School attendance officers are equally short-handed and not in a position to take vigorous action. Therefore, says the

Report, "enlargement of the staff of the Division of Labor Law Enforcement to provide additional investigators for this purpose is essential if children of migrant workers are to be protected from premature employment, and to receive the benefits of the educational opportunities to which they are entitled."

Health, another major problem, requires, first, more sanitary and less congested living quarters and second, expansion of medical facilities and medical care to make them available to all agricultural workers and without regard to residence requirements "because disease recognizes no geographical boundaries." Decentralized facilities (mobile clinics, local clinics in camps and elsewhere) to enable local health departments to bring their services to remote rural areas are recommended and special services such as maternal and child health clinics, health education, treatment and control of communicable diseases, and public health nursing available to all workers. To implement this program, the Committee recommends "that the Governor appoint an appropriate committee to consider development of a program so that proper medical care may be made available to all agricultural workers. A planned and organized system of medical care on a state-wide basis is essential if agricultural workers are to receive adequate medical care; particularly in view of the fact that many agricultural workers are not county residents."

For the mental and moral well-being of the agricultural worker, there are recommendations for organizing community recreation programs and for integrating the farm worker—both migrant and non-migrant—into the community through community projects sponsored by local veteran, religious, civic, social welfare, farm and women's groups. The farm worker and his family should be made to feel that they belong to the community and are important to its economy, and should know what community services — health, welfare, educational — are available to them in areas where they reside temporarily. Children of migrants need special attention for, "by being deprived of normal activities which other children . . . enjoy through school and other social programs," the Report points out, they develop hostile feelings which block development into an emotionally and mentally healthy adult if nothing is done to give them a feeling of belonging.

To carry out the recommendations and to provide for a continuing study of agricultural labor problems and the development of long-range programs for solving them, the Committee recommends the establishment by statute of an independent agency to be known as the California Agricultural Resources Labor Board. A Board of 15 members is called for, to be appointed by the Governor and to be composed of representatives of state departments concerned with agricultural labor, county supervisors, growers, labor and the general public. A single unifying agency, similar either to New Jersey's Migrant Labor Board or New York's Interdepartmental Committee on Farm and Food Processing Labor, is essential, the Committee states, to integrate and coordinate activities of various agencies, publicize the nature of the problem, assist in enforcing regulations, investigate conditions and plan for solutions.

The recommendations, if acted on, could do much to improve the lot of seasonal farm workers in California. How much action will be taken remains to be seen.

The Wisconsin Report

The Report by the Wisconsin Governor's Commission on Human Rights, *Migratory Agricultural Workers in Wisconsin: A Problem in Human Rights*, examines the problems and brings together existing information but does not spell out a detailed program of action as this would require more extensive fact finding than the Committee was able to undertake. The number of seasonal farm workers used in Wisconsin (the majority are Latin-Americans from Texas) is small compared with California and other states—8,700 in 1949. The Commission found no indication that the number was likely to decrease in the near future either through increased mechanization or greater availability of local labor willing to do "stoop" work. On the basis of continued need for seasonal labor, the Report sets forth the problems which need attention. The problems are familiar: over recruitment, dependence of the migrant on the crew leader; poor and overcrowded housing, lack of sanitation, safe water supply, garbage disposal and screening, with occasional exceptions; parents and children with little or no education; discrimination and ostracism in the community. "The problems of these people are pressing on all fronts—consequently such things as education, housing, sanitation, health, conditions of recruitment, social security, workmen's compensation, wage and hour laws, and discrimination must be dealt with systematically if their lot is to be improved. . . . Effectively to correct a situation of general abuse of the rights of migratory laborers would frequently require the participation of several state and local (and possibly, Federal) agencies, for each of which the migrant worker's problem is in some sense a special case."

Like the California Report, this Report recommends the establishment of a unifying public agency for migrant labor in Wisconsin along the lines either of New Jersey's centralized Migrant Labor Board or New York's Interdepartmental Committee on Farm and Food Processing Labor.

The Minnesota Report

Minnesota and Her Migratory Workers is a report of a field study made by Dr. and Mrs. David E. Henly in the summer of 1950 at the request of The Migrant Committee of The Minnesota Council of Churches and The Home

Missions Council of N.A. Migrant conditions in Minnesota are similar to those in Wisconsin in terms of crops, number of migrant workers that continue to be needed for "stoop" labor, composition of the migrant group (mostly Latin-Americans from Texas) and length of time they remain in the state (about six months). In six months a migrant family with four workers, able to work steadily on various crops, might make a gross income of from \$1,200 to \$1,800 but the "combination of family size, skill and luck in health, weather and crops may cut this estimate disastrously." Also "hourly wages are substantially lower for adults where children are regularly employed."

Housing was the usual mixture of a few good barracks, a few good new houses and plenty of bad housing in poor and overcrowded barracks and abandoned farm houses and other buildings. Child labor was plentiful and nobody seemed to know anything about laws or who was responsible for enforcement. Children get little or no education during their six months in the state, a fact that the Wisconsin Report also pointed out. Since the Report was prepared for church groups which work with migrants, its recommendations stress the need for more community activity on behalf of migrants but also emphasize the need for better state laws and better enforcement, and more Federal legislation for migrants including extension of social security, grants-in-aid and special aid for education of migrant children.

LEGISLATIVE NOTES

A FOURTH measure to undermine the agricultural provision of the Fair Labor Standards Act, introduced by Mr. Mahon of Texas (HJR 208), is now before the House Committee on Education and Labor. This would permit children of any age to harvest any basic agricultural commodity during school hours. No hearings have been scheduled as yet on any of the four bills.

Numerous breakdown bills have been introduced in surprising places, some of which seem to be "special interest" bills rather than emergency bills. A New York bill which has passed the Legislature will, if signed by the Governor, wreck an important part of New York State's migrant program which has received so much commendation from other states. The bill specifies that migrant children are not required to attend school if they leave the State by September 30th, which means that instead of going to school as long as they are in the State in the fall, they would not go at all. The period would be too short to carry out the school attendance program which the State Education Department, the State Labor Department and local school authorities have cooperated to develop, including transportation which would no longer be provided. The children deprived of schooling by this bill could not work either, under the Federal law which prohibits employment in agriculture under 16 while schools are in session. The passage of this bill, while the bill to establish a 40 hour week for children under 16 in industry and agriculture was promptly defeated, reflects a discouraging reactionary trend.

The New Jersey bills to lower night work and permit standards during vacations have been amended but not killed and if passed will permit boys of 14 and 15 to work until 10 p.m. (instead of 6 p.m.) during summer vacations and boys of 16 and 17 to work at seashore and other summer resorts without permits.

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To the NATIONAL CHILD LABOR COMMITTEE

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