

The American Child

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POVERTY AND DESTITUTION IN FARM LABOR CAMPS

THE official diagnosis was malnutrition when ten babies of migrant farm workers died in San Joaquin Valley, California, last December. This was before unemployment in the valley reached the acute proportions predicted for the period between January and April. The New York *Times* recently carried a series of special articles on current conditions in the valley. The author, Gladwin Hill, said in his first article from Bakersfield, California, on March 16: "In hundreds of farm labor camps, shanty towns and small rural communities, tens of thousands of people are living on the ragged edge of poverty. At dozens of distribution centers they are lining up for doles of Government surplus foods—potatoes, apples, powdered eggs, powdered milk and honey. . . . Persons of three years' residence in the state and one year in a county are eligible for county work relief projects, paying up to \$115 a month in cash or groceries. . . . A thousand mile tour of the valley in the last few days indicated that, while tens of thousands of these unemployed farm workers are living from hand to mouth, none, as far as welfare officials know, is starving. If any were known to be, they would be given Federal surplus food or other assistance, regardless of their residence status, officials said."

In the meantime, conditions in Arizona made the headlines when a United Press dispatch on March 9 reported that 100 children were found starving in a farm labor camp near Phoenix. The cause? No work and therefore no pay and no food. The destitute condition of the migrant families in this camp was described as follows in the United Press report published in the *New York Post*:

RUSH FOOD TO 100 STARVING CHILDREN IN FARM LABOR CAMP

Authorities rushed emergency food supplies today to a farm labor camp where 100 children were found starving in "Grapes of Wrath" conditions.

The families in the camp, unable to get work because a freeze spoiled the crops, are living on a diet of biscuits and lard, authorities said.

Juvenile officer John E. Thompson found six children who hadn't eaten in 10 days.

"This is the worst case of mass destitution I have seen," Juvenile Judge Thomas J. Croft said, in ordering emergency food and medical supplies distributed in the camp.

"There are almost 100 children in a starvation condition. Many of them have distended abdomens."

One family of four had had no food for most of 30 days, he said.

One father was selling his blood to get food for his children. Another reported the last dollar he earned was when he and his two sons spent a day picking up cotton that had fallen from trucks. One walked from farm to farm for 16 miles seeking work. He didn't get any.

Most of the families don't qualify for state relief. The community relief fund in nearby Tolleason was swamped. Local merchants have been carrying some of the families on credit, but said they couldn't afford to do so any more.

"The bland and unashamed request of us for aid are pitiful," Thompson said. "Most of the families have sold everything. They have taken their old cars apart and sold them by parts for food.

"Now they have nothing."

There are about 100 one-room tin shacks in the camp, Thompson said, and none of them has any electricity or running water.

"The houses used to have crude furniture, but that's all sold now. Now everybody sleeps on the floor," he said.

"The kids all run around barefoot although it sometimes

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Dinner Meeting of NATIONAL CHILD LABOR COMMITTEE

at the

NATIONAL CONFERENCE OF SOCIAL WORK Atlantic City, New Jersey

Date: Tuesday, April 25, 1950

Time: 7:00 p.m.

Place: Hotel Jefferson, Auditorium

Subject: SCHOOL CHILDREN NOBODY KNOWS

Presiding: Edward C. Lindeman, Chairman, Board of Trustees, National Child Labor Committee

Topics and Speakers

The Truant, Charlotte Carr, Director, Citizens' Committee on Children of New York City, Inc.

The School Leaver, William D. Wilkins, Ph.D., Associate Professor of Education, New York University.

The Migrant Child, H. L. Mitchell, President, National Farm Labor Union, AFL

tes, bowling alleys and similar non-manufacturing establishments and employment in commercial agriculture, previously unregulated as to hours, will be included in the occupations to which the 40 hour week applies. This bill was initiated by the National Child Labor Committee.

Another New York bill proposes to transfer, from the Youth Commission to the Department of Agriculture, the responsibility for the furnishing of care for children under 14 whose parents are seasonal workers.

The bills to breakdown the 14 year minimum age for employment in agriculture by permitting growers to employ 12 year old boys and girls in harvesting berries, fruits and vegetables met strong opposition and died in Committee.

Rhode Island

A bill has been introduced to add business and mercantile establishments to the places in which minors between 16 and 18 are forbidden to work between 11 p.m. and 6 a.m. (now applies only to factories, manufacturing and mechanical establishments).

Door Joy

at Easter or Passover will be greater —

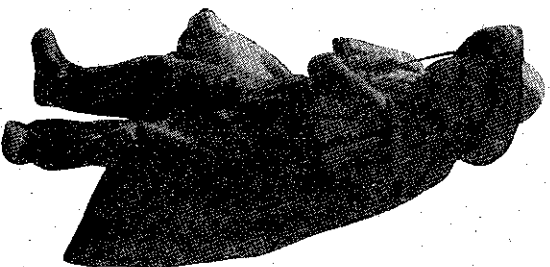
if you join the drive for deliverance of the children of farm migrants.

Most of them live and work in the bondage of degrading misery.

Help our drive for better laws, better enforcement, better housing, health, child day-care centers, better school facilities.

Please send special gift

to



5 year old cotton picker

NATIONAL CHILD LABOR COMMITTEE

419 Fourth Avenue New York 16, New York

Please detach and mail

To the NATIONAL CHILD LABOR COMMITTEE

419 Fourth Avenue

New York 16, New York

I am glad to enclose \$..... as a special gift to help your drive for better conditions for American children.

Name.....

Address.....

RECOMMENDATION TO DENY

DENIAL of Western Union's application for permission to employ messengers at a 65 cent hourly rate, instead of the new 75 cent minimum rate, was formally recommended to Federal Wage-Hour Administrator William McComb by Miss Isabel Ferguson who presided at a hearing on this question. A 15 day period was allowed by the Administrator for Western Union and other interested parties to file briefs in support of or in opposition to the recommendation before it becomes final.

Six days of hearings were held between December 22 and January 4 on Western Union's application for permission to pay foot and bicycle messengers a subminimum wage (see *The American Child*, January 1950). This application was filed under special provisions of the Wage-Hour Act which give the Administrator of the Wage-Hour and Public Contracts Divisions authority to fix subminimum wage rates for messengers primarily engaged in delivering letters and messages. Such an authorization is predicated on a satisfactory showing that the payment of subminimum wages is necessary to prevent curtailment of opportunities for employment.

The National Child Labor Committee presented testimony at the hearings in opposition to Western Union's application and filed a supplementary statement with the Wage-Hour Administrator urging that the recommendation to deny the application be sustained. In its testimony, the National Child Labor Committee pointed out that Western Union's claims, in 1938 and 1944, that it would have to dismiss messengers if it had to pay the legal minimum wage rates then in effect did not materialize when its applications for lower rates were denied but that, on the contrary, the number employed had actually increased for several years after 1944. The latest annual report of Western Union, made public on March 15, appears to confirm this argument that Western Union would not dismiss messengers if it had to pay the 75 cent minimum. Though it has been operating at a loss, its profits on messenger errand service alone, this report shows, increased 19% in 1949 over 1948, to a post-war high of \$1,235,461. Dismissal of messengers would not seem to be good business.

POVERTY AND DESTITUTION

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gets pretty cold. They don't go to school, because they don't have the clothes to wear.

"To show you how destitute the place is, somebody stole the camp safe, but it only had \$1 in it."

The camp, 14 miles west of Phoenix, originally was built by the Federal government. It is now operated by the Arizona Farm Bureau Federation.

Most of the men are cotton pickers who normally spend this season harvesting citrus fruit. There was none to harvest this year because of a severe January freeze.

Thompson said few had been in Arizona for the three years necessary to qualify for relief. Some of those who have, don't meet a second requirement, that they be physically unable to work.

Croft ordered a square meal for everybody in camp immediately. He called a meeting for tomorrow of representatives of the Farm Bureau and the State Welfare Agency to find a solution.