

The American Child

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EDUCATION OF CHILDREN OF MIGRATORY WORKERS

Statement by Gertrude Folks Zimand to the House Sub-Committee
on Appropriations for the Federal Security Agency

THE National Child Labor Committee appreciates this opportunity to appear before your Committee. We are here to speak on one item in the budget for the U.S. Office of Education. This is the relatively small but highly significant item of \$181,000 to enable the Office to cooperate with educational institutions and State educational agencies in developing plans for the education of children of migratory workers.

The National Child Labor Committee is a voluntary organization founded in 1904 and incorporated by Act of Congress in 1907. It has concerned itself with the problems of agricultural migrant children and rural child welfare almost since its inception.

I. The children of migratory agricultural workers without question constitute the most educationally neglected group in this country.

Studies of migrant farm labor by official and voluntary agencies have uniformly revealed a lack of schooling among migrant children that is shocking. The most recent survey made by the National Child Labor Committee was conducted in Colorado in 1950 under the direction of Professor Howard E. Thomas of the Department of Rural Sociology of Cornell University. The findings of this study are similar to those of many others and are cited merely as one illustration of the almost incredible lack of schooling among migrant children.

Data on 354 school age children (7-16 years) in 262 migrant families revealed that:

Twenty-seven children (8 per cent) *had never been in school*. Eight of them were over 10 years of age.

Ninety-one other children (26 per cent) had left school permanently.

Most of the children who had left school, including the 14, 15 and 16 year olds, had not gone beyond the first or second grades.

Eighty-two per cent of all school age children were retarded from one to eight years.

Practically all children 11 years of age and over were retarded three years or more.

No one knows how many children there are in migrant farm families. Estimates vary from 250,000 to nearly half a million. Whatever the exact figure may be, the important fact is that many thousands of our boys and girls are growing up *with practically no education*. Both for their own sakes as children growing up in this land which cherishes the individual, and for the sake of the nation in which they

will soon be expected to exercise intelligently the rights and the duties of adult citizenship, these little nomads of the crops should be provided the opportunities for education which America seeks to give to all within its borders.

II. The problem is not only serious. It is complex—one which requires specialized study and planning.

Expert assistance is urgently needed from the Office of Education—the agency of the Federal Government which was created expressly to study educational problems and to “promote the cause of education throughout the country.”

Since 1946, the National Child Labor Committee has urged the establishment in the Office of Education of a specialized unit to study and advise on this problem. In June, 1951, a conference on the Education of Migrant Children, called by the U.S. Office of Education and attended by representatives from educational institutions and agencies in many parts of the country, unanimously recommended that the Office of Education should become active in this field. Heretofore, however, funds for this purpose have not been available to the Office of Education.

The National Child Labor Committee is especially gratified that, in recommending the inclusion of such an item this year, the President's budget states that it will enable

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A public school in Colorado which helps Spanish-American migrant children learn English — and American ways of doing things.

EDUCATION—AN AMERICAN HERITAGE

We, the people of New York State, believing in the equality of opportunity for all and realizing that education is fundamental to our democratic way of life, do hereby recognize and accept these basic premises:

- that every youth shall be afforded the opportunity to obtain at least a high school education;
- that every youth shall have the fullest opportunity for moral and ethical development in keeping with our American heritage;
- that every youth has certain needs and responsibilities that are common to all youth and to the perpetuation of our democratic society;
- that every youth, as a person of inherent worth, differs from every other young person in respect to health, mental ability, interests and background.

Since these premises are self-evident to those who have faith in our democracy, it becomes necessary that our high schools provide:

- a program of studies in general education that will insure the unity of our people for the common good;
- diversified experiences and educational services that will meet the educational, vocational and avocational needs of our youth;
- a variety of standards flexible enough to permit each to succeed according to his own ability;
- counseling that will help young people make intelligent choices beneficial to self and society;
- those services that will assist youth to be physically and mentally healthy;
- qualified teachers, extended research and expanded facilities to meet more effectively the changing demands on education.

Recognizing that the school is but one segment of our complex society requiring the full support of the community, we conceive it our duty as citizens of New York State to provide for the full support of these schools to guarantee each youth his American Heritage.

Credo adopted by New York Regents Council on Readjustment
of High School Education—Nov. 9, 1951

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the Office of Education to cooperate with educational institutions and State educational agencies in working out a program to meet the problem. This approach is basically very sound.

Close cooperation with state educational agencies and institutions is essential — both to find out the facts and to develop realistic and practical programs. For the problem differs radically in different states and even in different communities within the same state. A program must take into account many variable factors: the number of migrant children in a local area and the proportion they constitute of the regular school population; the length of time they remain in the community; whether they are "one crop" migrants who spend a considerable part of the year in a fixed place of residence or whether they follow the crops for the greater portion of the year; their knowledge of the English language; their prior educational experience; the educational background of their parents; the degree to

which they are retarded; and the attitude of the local community towards schooling for these "outsiders."

It follows that no one "program" or system of schooling for migrant children can be devised which will meet the needs of all communities, nor can a study of the situation in one or two areas indicate the type of approach needed elsewhere. Through utilization of the services of state educational institutions and departments, the Office of Education can carry on a more extensive inquiry than it could through its own resources. It can thus develop the basic factual data on which sound educational programs for migrant children, adapted to different conditions and circumstances, can be developed.

III. *The education of migrant farm children is peculiarly a concern of the Federal Government.*

Many of these children are what might be called an "interstate" problem. They spend the school year in two or three or even more different states. Studies of the needs of migrant children have emphasized the need for exploring the possibility of an interstate regional approach to the problem of their education — with the possibility of an inter-

change of school records and the development of a core curriculum in order to facilitate continuity in their schooling as they move from place to place.

The Congress has already expressed its intent that the children of migratory workers should be in school by its adoption in 1949 of an amendment to the Fair Labor Standards Act setting a 16-year minimum age for work on commercial farms during school hours. The Federal Government cannot require their attendance at school but it has, in this law, removed the chief cause for non-attendance. The strong efforts being made to enforce this law are making local communities more aware of their responsibility for the education of the children of workers who have come temporarily into their districts to help harvest the crops on which the economy of their area depends. But school authorities, while beginning to recognize their responsibilities, are groping for a solution of the difficult problems presented and are eager for advice and assistance. The Office of Education should be enabled to help them meet this problem.

DR. HOWARD E. THOMAS TO STUDY MIGRANT EDUCATION

The item in the budget for the U.S. Office of Education, on which Mrs. Zimand testified, is an outgrowth of the conference on the education of migrant children called by the Office of Education last June. The group attending this

conference, at which Mrs. Zimand represented the National Child Labor Committee, expressed the hope that the Office of Education might add to its staff a Specialist on Migrant Education who could advise states and local communities on desirable procedures.

This project has already been inaugurated by the Office of Education for the balance of the fiscal year. Dr. Howard E. Thomas has been employed, on a leave of absence basis from Cornell University until July 1, 1952, to get the program started. Dr. Thomas who made the National Child Labor Committee's study of migrant farm labor in Colorado, will visit states in which migrant farm labor is used to study the special educational problems and needs of migratory children in consultation with state educational agencies and educational institutions. Thus a considerable amount of necessary factual information and suggestions for state and local measures to deal with this complex problem will be available to as a foundation for the program for which Congress has been asked to appropriate \$181,000 for the year beginning July 1, 1952.

PHILADELPHIA DOCUMENTS RISE IN YOUTH EMPLOYMENT

YOUTH employment has been rising steadily in Philadelphia since the summer of 1950. Each month from July 1, 1950 to October 1, 1951 more employment certificates were issued than in the corresponding month of the previous year, the Employment Certificating Service of the School District of Philadelphia reports.

The increase in certificates for full-time jobs was 84% for the year ending June 30, 1951 and 77% for part-time jobs. The increase in certificates for full-time jobs included 5,309 more 16 and 17 year olds who entered the full-time labor market for the first time during the year ending June 30, 1951 than during the previous year. These new full-time workers were evenly divided between boys and girls. Over half were 16 years old; 29% were high school or vocational school graduates; 71% were drop-outs, of whom 50% had completed the 9th or 10th grade.

In the period from July 1, 1951 to October 1, 1951 more employment certificates were issued each month than in the corresponding month of the previous year but the percent of increase was not as great as it had been earlier in the year—a peak increase of 180% was reached in April 1951. This probably reflected a decline in employment as a whole in the Philadelphia area which began to be evident in May and June as a result of such factors as curtailment of orders, swollen inventories, material shortages and reduction in demand for consumer goods. Some shifts in the industries and occupations in which young people obtained jobs were probably caused by this decline as there was evidence of decreased employment in certain types of manufacturing work and of increased employment in clerical occupations and wholesale and retail trade in the certificates issued between July and October.

That employment for young people has remained high, however, is evident from the fact that 3,677 more boys and girls under 18 were legally employed full or part time on September 30, 1951 than on the same date in the previous year. About one half of the total of 15,798 legally employed young people were working part time (7,157) and nearly 1,000 of these part-time workers were on one of the school-work programs.

ON THE ROAD

This man, wife and baby hitchhiked for six days from Arkansas to California to get work picking fruit.



Photo by David Myers

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 migrants and their children.

Name.....

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