Soil and Health Library

ILL FARES THE LAND

Migrants and Migratory Labour
in the United States

by
CAREY McWILLIAMS

with a preface by
THE EARL OF PORTSMOUTH

edited by
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CONTENTS

Ill fares the land, to hast'ning ills a prey,
Where wealth accumulates, and men decay:
Princes and lords may flourish, or may fade;
A breath can make them, as a breath has made;
But a bold peasantry, their country's pride,
When once destroyed, can never be supplied.

THE DESERTED VILLAGE

EDITORIAL NOTE

When, in 1943, *Ill Fares the Land* was first published in the United States, it was a volume of approximately 175,000 words. If therefore it was to achieve in this country, at any rate in wartime, a circulation commensurate with its importance, its abbreviation was unavoidable.

In undertaking this task, I was at the very outset confronted with a choice of two alternatives. Either a selection from the book's many sections could be made, and the material in them presented more or less in its existing form; or the whole work could be pruned down, item by item, to what Kipling would have called 'its essential guts'.

From a stylistic point of view, the former course would have been preferable; it would also have been very much simpler. But it would have had the serious disadvantage of confining the author's descriptive surveys to a few regions only, whereas it is clearly one of his objects to demonstrate that the social revolution which forms his thesis is in fact nation-wide. Just as the 'dust-bowl' of the Great Plains is but one of the end-products of a process of soil deterioration that is now well-nigh universal, so the dramatic events in Oklahoma and California which were so vividly depicted in John Steinbeck's *Grapes of Wrath* and have been so fully confirmed by Carey McWilliams's researches are simply end-phases of a widespread process of social disintegration.

The second alternative thus seemed the better. But so direct is Mr. McWilliams's language, and so little addicted is he to the use of padding, that pruning has of necessity entailed the removal of much picturesque detail and corroborative evidence that, in other circumstances, might well have been retained. On one point, however, he may rest assured: his message is so clear and unmistakable that it cannot fail to emerge triumphant even from such rough usage.

Throughout I have endeavoured, within the limits set me, to preserve both the original style of the book and the most important of the documentary materials which it assembles in support of its main theme. Nothing has been added, and as little as possible taken away.

I have, however, taken the liberty of re-grouping certain of the chapters in such a way that each of the four 'books' now has a definite role, as indicated by the sub-titles which I have ventured to give them. This step will, I believe, render the English reader better able to grasp the immense significance of the story which the author has to tell and for which we are indeed most truly grateful.

JORIAN JENKS

PREFACE

by THE EARL OF PORTSMOUTH

America is so vast, her economy so glittering, her machinery and her technological progress so prodigious, that a book on U.S. farm labour problems, even when it shows the reverse of the medal, must seem to have little meaning for us in this small island; yet this book should be of great value to our own sense of perspective. To read most ministerial pronouncements and some of *The Times* correspondents about the future of British agriculture, is to read a series of lectures on efficiency. We (the farmers) are told we must be 'efficient' to compete with the world market—only so may we survive. Although British agriculture has been very much more in the public eye through the necessities of war, there is still a tendency to consider the farmer as a man who leans over a gate with a straw in his teeth and a perpetual grumble, because the Government does not do something for him which he should do for himself. Likewise there is a tendency to regard the farm labourer as somebody who has stayed on the land because he has not got the initiative to go out and ‘better' himself. And because of this, the townsman is apt to think of technical progress, or business efficiency, as belonging only to industry here and to agriculture overseas. The obvious implication is that we can survive by urban industry and exports and that home farming is a bar rather than a stimulus to our best efforts.

Few people with a long view of the land can really define what they mean by efficiency. Those with a short view decide that it is reflected entirely in a farm's cash returns and they suspect that the cash returns are somehow bound up with the largest use of mechanical equipment. But, whatever our views on this subject, we are apt to overlook the salient facts. First of all we are a nation of small farmers, yet for those who think in terms of machinery we are the most highly mechanized agricultural community in the world today. For those who think in terms of production per man, we were, even in 1937, reckoned by distinguished economists to have the highest production per head of active workers in the whole of Europe. [1].In size and in great fertile plains, the U.S.S.R. is the country in Europe most comparable with the U.S.A. In displacement of the small farmer and in machine-mindedness the U.S.S.R. is also comparable; yet the small farmers and the farm workers of the United Kingdom are reckoned to have a productivity per head five times as great as the farm workers of Russia. We were, as well, roughly equal in cash output per acre with Italy, Germany, France, and Bohemia, being only surpassed by the small highly intensive countries, such as the Netherlands and Denmark. Our yield per acre from cereal crops was very much higher than anywhere in the New World and compared favourably with our closest competitors in Europe. For instance, our average yield of wheat was more than double that of Canada or the U.S.A., which the economists continually hold up as an example of countries with whom we cannot hope to compete in cereal production. More important to the

[1] See Sir John Russell, *English Farming,* Britain in Pictures Series. The figures therein can only be regarded as indications and at best approximate. There are so many imponderables that no comparisons can be accurate.

economists is that the British farm worker, reckoned in terms of relative labour efficiency in 1937, was supposed to be above the U.S.A., Canada, and all the European countries and to feed more persons per head than any of those countries.[1]

Since 1940 the position, though it may not be gauged by statistics, is even more remarkable as regards British output, skill, and initiative on the land. For our net output in Great Britain was very nearly double for 1943 and 1944 the output of 1937. We have done this with less effective labour owing to the wartime call-up, we have done it in the face of transport difficulties, enemy action, and service manoeuvres, shortage of essential supplies and the virtual cessation of imported stock feed. Now, the interesting point about this is that before the war for reasons of autarchy and other politico-economic causes, European agriculture generally was stretched to the limit. It is probable that both Germany and Italy were producing more from their soil than was good for it, and that other countries had for the most part reached the limit of intensive production under their existing systems. Thus, the British increase in agricultural output both per man and per acre, would point to our being now the leading occidental country as far as farming and horticulture are concerned. Why then do we have the Sword of Extinction still suspended over the farmer's head on the thread of 'Efficiency'?

This book supplies a partial answer of great importance to ourselves. As a book it is particularly sane and courageous and, above all, it is documented with real authority. We are inclined to think that our problems are particular to ourselves and that therefore British agriculture must fight a losing battle. *Ill Fares the Land* is a picture of American conditions which we in England ought to know before we make any hasty decisions about our own agricultural future. We are a nation of small farmers and on the showing of the book we would do well to query the value of an efficiency merely measured in competitive prices.

We, for instance, consider that in 1939 our rural labourers were ill-housed in many cases; compare this with the picture in the U.S.A. of shanty towns and camps and biscuit-tin shacks of hundreds of thousands of migratory land workers in the pages which follow. We considered, and rightly, that our own farm workers were ill-paid in comparison to industry. Compare our own farm workers' permanent wages per head with the pitiful amounts often received per family by American mobile farm labour. Compare it indeed with the receipts of hundreds of thousands of share croppers and small farmers in the U.S.A., as shown in this book. We considered, and rightly, that our own rural health and education left much to be desired. Compare our education in the villages with the appalling conditions of ignorance and lack of opportunity to learn anything in many poverty-stricken districts of the U.S.A. and among the children of migratory farm labourers. Again, the story of the health of some millions of U.S. farm workers and their families must be a shocking revelation to ourselves. It is reckoned that half of the negroes picking New York's vegetables suffer from syphilis. To find that in most of the Southern States the net annual income of farm workers, when all perquisites are included, seldom exceeds $150, or

[1] O. J. Beilby, *Empire Journal of Experimental Agriculture,* April 1941. Again these statistics should only be taken as approximate.

about £30 measured in terms of our purchasing power, is a revelation to the average Englishman and indeed, to many Americans.

Until the turn of the century, and considerably later, the U.S.A.. was considered to be the Mecca of the unhappy and oppressed and the Land of Promise and Freedom, teeming with inexhaustible possibilities for farmer and city worker alike. To trace the decline of farm life from those days at the end of the nineteenth century until Pearl Harbour, is the successful purpose of this book. Some of those who read it will have had some inkling of the story. *The Grapes of Wrath* and even the bare statistics of the 'Dust Bowl' will to many be vaguely familiar. But the magnitude of the human catastrophe is brought out in the pages which follow more clearly than in any novel and even more poignantly. For we are apt to regard the novel as an isolated and over-emphasized instance and not as a general picture. Here is set out the misery brought to human beings and the destruction wrought on the soil where there is no allowance for humanity or respect for Nature. Those of us who sat down to eat our cheap imported food before the war were in fact too often eating ruined homes, ruined lives, and ruined soil. This tale could be told not only of food grown in the U.S.A., but in varying degrees of food grown in Canada and Australia and in nearly all of Eastern Europe.[1]

In *An Agricultural Policy for Britain,* published in 1941, Mr. Goddard Watts has the following significant paragraph:

'It is not sufficiently appreciated that farmers in this country were not the only ones in trouble before the war. At Sydney, Mr. Paul F. Bredt revealed debts amounting to $177,954,000 among farmers from all parts of Canada, with assets amounting to $126,499,842. The South Australian economist, Mr. S. F. Alford, showed that the interest charge on the farms he had analysed was 1s. 5d. per bushel of wheat, and the average price over nine years, 1930-8, had been 2s. 9d. per bushel, although it cost 3s. 4d. to 3s. 6d. to grow it. The Hon. F. Waite of New Zealand, stated that between 1928 and 1931 export prices fell by 43 per cent, but farm costs by only 9 per cent. At one period, breeding ewes in New Zealand were selling at half the price of pullets.

In such large cereal producing countries of Europe as Poland and Rumania, the average net output (not earnings) per active worker is under £30 a year. Thus it is no exaggeration to say that we were eating ruined homes, lives, and soil.

Now in Mr. Carey McWilliam's sociological survey the condition of the soil is only incidental, for it does not form part of this study. Yet the destruction of the soil coincides with the shattering of human lives. Messrs. Jacks and Whyte, the great authorities on soil science and erosion, have pointed out that 30 to 50 per cent of America's original soil fertility is gone and in one year a Californian desert advanced forty miles in places and destroyed no less than 2,500 farms. Intrinsically, the position in Australia is even worse, while Canada is facing comparable losses. Soil destruction is going on at a terrifying pace in many parts of Africa and so far as we can gather, in China and Russia. It is even menacing New Zealand and South America. There are few countries

[1] See Lamartine Yates and Warriner**,** *Food and Farming in Post-war Europe.* Oxford University Press.

in Europe not suffering from erosion in some degree or another. Thus, this tale of the destruction and waste of human and natural capital in America has a universal meaning for the rest of the world, but it has a more important meaning for us than for almost any other country.

It is vital that we realize what has gone on across America's land. Even in the U.S.A., as this book shows, the problem is only now realized by a small, unusually well-informed, thoughtful minority. The process has gone on unknown and until lately almost unnoticed. That America has not understood the tragedy until almost the final curtain is one of the salient points of *Ill Fares the Land.*

We can so easily produce parallel, if not exactly duplicate, results here unless we have our eyes open to avert them in the post-war years. So far, in spite of the Enclosure Acts, we have a rural community mostly comprised of small farmers and market gardeners. But, as new capital is called for to equip our land, we might easily become a California in the hands of a few food processing monopolists. Even if this were in the spirit of the times, it would mean the last bulwark falling before the onslaught of the slave state, where the individual, or the family, no longer matter. A sound, independent body of farmers and rural craftsmen are both our first and last defence against totalitarian tyranny.

So far we have wasted little of our soil by over-cropping and although we have been very careless of human happiness in our dealing with agriculture, we have never produced anything like the destruction of human capital that has gone on elsewhere. In other words, if we only realize it in time, we should have a flying start as regards post-war farming in our own country.

Perhaps it would be safe to say that the root of the evil has been to get crops for sale regardless of Nature, farmer, or farm worker. The original sin, in the U.S.A. at least, was mainly ignorance, so that the individual farmer exploited his land to get rich quick, not realizing the ultimate effects. There, even in this century, it seemed that there was always better land to be exploited beyond the horizon. The building of homes and settled life were not the goal for most. But meanwhile an ordered society grew; taxes had to be paid. This means that more has to be sold off the farm in order to pay for the intangible benefits of law, order, health, education, and defence. Defence has been the especial bane of Europe's peasants 'between the wars'. Once one gets high taxation and bad years, it means borrowing, and borrowing in its turn means selling ever more soil-exhausting crops, like wheat and cotton, off the land to pay interest on mortgage. So the vicious spiral of soil destruction and desolation mounts faster. But the intangible benefits of law, order, health, and education are denied to the very dwellers on the soil which paid for these things.

There is a curious parallel between the events of the last forty years in the U.S.A. and the earlier Enclosure Acts in our own country. In both countries the new industrial population demands food. In the U.S.A. the small individual freeholder, like the Commoner, who was once self-supporting between himself and a simple rural community, cannot compete in town markets with the bigger and more organized farms and business methods, which invade the village. The pressure of debt and *pari passu* exhausted

soil dispossess him and put his land into the hands of the big concern which turns him into one of a landless proletariat. The money-power gains control regardless of human conditions. The equivalent of the Enclosure Acts in Britain is foreclosure by the mortgagee in the U.S.A.

The story of the extraordinary monopolistic control interweaving in the big fruit and canning industries in California which Mr. Carey McWilliams has to tell, shows an amazing picture of the highest efficiency based on the lowest misery. Elsewhere there are the startling stories of happy communities of mixed and self-supporting dairy farmers being uprooted in favour of cotton monoculture, for the most part grown by large combines at the expense of the soil and human homes. To quote his own words, 'Gone beyond recall is the early self-sufficiency of Arizona agriculture. . . . An ideal dairy farming community, Arizona to-day produces only half the poultry and eggs consumed in. the State and much less of its requirements for butter and cheese. . . .' He goes on to quote 'The one-crop commercial farmer does not want to fool with cows and chickens. ...'

Then again there is another story, equally illuminating, of the Scioto Marshes in Ohio, being drained and then turned over to the monoculture of onions; and of the appalling results to soil and men of such a policy.

But the difference between the results of our own Enclosures in Great Britain, four and five generations ago, and the results of financial exploitation in America, is this. One hundred and fifty years ago and later, the Enclosures brought a sorry plight to the old Commoners and small yeomen, but although the human misery and degradation were writ large both in town and country, the future was still big with opportunity. At home new industry was expanding; abroad new lands were awaiting settlement. Now, almost the world over, we have reached the limits of opportunity, while in peace and war, the facilities for destruction grow ever larger. Moreover, in the heyday of British farming after the Enclosures, it was only the people and not the land, who were exploited. The quickened, fevered pulse of progress has now exploited both in the New World.

This is our own folly quite as much as that of the citizens of the U.S.A.. By forsaking our own agriculture in favour first of Industrialism and then of finance or usury-capitalism, we have been the spearhead of agricultural desolation throughout the world. How are the problems produced by this folly to be met? In *Ill Fares the Land* Mr. Carey McWilliams has given us a picture, but he has not given those of us who respect the family unit and who look upon the status and integrity of the individual as the foremost need in our world, much hope.

If we cannot learn from this, almost the most striking lesson of our times, there is little hope for the future of the world. Mr. McWilliams sees well enough that American farm labour should have the benefits of trade union organization; that the problem of the migratory worker may be eased, but not solved, by better roadside organization and collective management. He states very clearly the relief work (remember he was writing before Pearl Harbour) that could be done by providing better roads, farm buildings, and houses, and more especially the work that could be

done on afforestation and soil preservation projects. He estimates that three million people in the important areas of distress could get whole and part-time employment on such work.

Better medicine and education also receive their due. One is left with a feeling that, as important as these programmes may be, and indeed in regard to many items imperative, yet in the end they are only palliatives. It is in fact the Beveridgeization of the farm labourer. Health is more necessary than medicine; life and status than relief for a life that is not life. Mr. McWilliams is constantly calling in the Government, but in the long run Government help, on the vast scale envisaged, means new officials, more taxation, and therefore we come back to the original cause of distress, for this results of necessity in a greater sale of crops off the land, one of the points at the beginning of the original vicious spiral. He can see little more than political expediency in trying to preserve the small family farmer, in fact he quotes with approval, 'the chances of the small farmer seem about equal to the hand loom in 1800. . . .'

The inevitability of big money and big machinery and the almost megalomaniac efficiency of such bodies seem to obsess him. The word peasant seems to conjure up downtrodden serfdom rather than a possible and happy aggregation of self-sufficient family units. Far though the process of big business has already gone, as the reader will see as he turns the pages, yet I cannot believe that the American position is without hope. We have professed to fight this war against totalitarianism and the enslavement of man. We shall be judged in future by how we manage to restore dignity and status to the individual and economic freedom to the family. Otherwise our blood-letting will have been in vain, no matter how prettily we try to camouflage the methods of enslavement. It is only on the land that the rare flower of disciplined freedom can first be nurtured and it is only from it that the seeds can be spread.

Life must be supported from the land, yet usury and taxation have already beggared its soil and sold up its equipment. Paradoxical as it may seem, to that extent therefore the Government in some form or another must pledge the productive credit of the nation for its restoration. That this should be done without usury on the credit created need not be argued here. What is of importance is to see that this credit is not used to enslave man, but to restore to the family some measure of economic freedom.

It is not strange that the U.S.A., which is only just beginning to realize the magnitude of its rural problem, has evolved one of the most important projects in the world to-day for rehabilitation of some of its rural citizens. The vision of President Roosevelt and his faithful band of workers in the formation of the Tennessee Valley Authority is already bearing remarkable fruit. It may be criticized as both over-extravagant and over-usurious in that it rests on money borrowed at interest. But, for all that it is the most remarkable human experiment in our century. This River Valley, mainly mountainous, with as large an area as the whole of Great Britain and Ireland, has been transformed from land without hope, to a land of real promise. Its denuded forests are being replanted, its erosion countered, its rivers harnessed, and opportunity created for all its inhabitants. Here there has been no enmity between town and country, but mutual collaboration. There has been no compulsion of the farmer, but steady education in method and example in

co-operation, which has lifted him from his former poverty and helpless degradation. It has rebuilt homes that should survive as such. And, just as the world must learn from America's mistakes, so she should profit by her young fresh energy and vision.

I don't believe that the day of the small farmer and the family unit is over. I have received from America a most heartening book by two small farmers on the fringe of the Tennessee Valley. They describe their successful efforts at soil and social regeneration, for which they relied on the vigour of their own initiative and mutual goodwill between themselves and their neighbours.[1] It is a story of co-operation in the right sense—from the bottom, and not what now passes for co-operation—bureaucratic compulsion from above. That these things can happen in the face of all the opposite tendencies shows that there is hope if, both individually and collectively, we set our minds to the following aims.

First of all the farmer should produce good food for himself and his family and for those who work on his land. Throughout the world to-day there are literally millions of farm families who eat tinned food and sell their special crops away. In America the glaring instance is 'cotton up to the doorstep'; in England it is the dumpheap of the condensed milk tins in the heart of a dairy country.

Secondly, the tendency has been to atomize the family and to split up natural units of self-sufficiency in country districts. Yet the family is the natural unit for rural life; co-operation between families to their mutual benefit is its natural extension. That is what is meant above by the words 'disciplined freedom'. The family farm compels discipline for survival, while it can grant the freedom which comes from having enough fresh food, shelter, and clothing, the products of good husbandry. We have lost the old traditional order of living and must painfully reimpose upon ourselves a new order, based on mutual help and the acknowledgement that on the soil man's action can affect his neighbours, like the ripples of a stone travelling across a pool.

Third, it follows from this that farming must be based on a real ecology of soil and district. It must be based on what is best for the land and how best to use and not abuse natural resources in the community. No temporary advantage of easy sale should tempt men from that course.

Fourth, all primary producers should learn that their interests are complementary and not opposed. The immediate benefit of cheap food to the miner can and does produce distress and unemployment for the farmer, who will then not only cease to buy the goods which the miner's fuel helps to produce, but probably enforce cheap labour in the mine itself. On the other hand, if the farmer demands too much for his surplus products he will have to pay for ill-health and bad conditions in the mine. Altogether it is the primary producer the world over who has had the wrong end of the stick in the last fifty years. The medieval conception of the just price would restore the balance upset by the unproductive parasite who claims more than his fair share of goods for his sometimes redundant services.

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[1] Waring and Teller, *Roots in the Earth.*

All this requires education in right living in place of alien ideologies. The pure money motive, like the power motive, has failed the world. What is needed in its stead is a conscious lesson learned and re-learned until it becomes an unconscious part of our make-up, that we must regain an essentially religious regard for the biological values of Nature. We must cease thinking that we know better than God and realize that we are only part of a whole which cannot with impunity destroy life in soil or plant; in animal or man.

So with gratitude to its author I commend this book for having pointed out a lesson which is applicable to all of us and is unknown to many of us in our brittle pride of technological progress. I can only hope and believe that the British Commonwealth and the U.S.A. which have been the unknowing pioneers in such vast and disastrous mistakes, will together be the leaders in the way of recovery.

January 1945.. PORTSMOUTH.

AUTHOR'S INTRODUCTION

Across the broad acres of American agriculture, a shadow has been lengthening. It is the shadow cast by an army of migrant farm families uprooted from the land, which, here and there, merges with the moving shadows cast by processions of migratory workers following one of the established crop cycles. Although the number of families making up this migrant army has been rapidly increasing, it has only been of recent years that public attention has been focused upon the problem which they present. To-day, by a slow process of discovery, identification, and recognition, we have become aware, if not altogether visually conscious, of these shadowy figures on the highways. But we have not yet become fully aware of their significance; we are just now discovering the 'message' which they carry with them wherever they go. Their message is that a great change is taking place in American agriculture— that the industrial revolution has finally hit the farmer.

Many of the changes which have been taking place in American agriculture have long been 'concealed' and 'hidden' and 'unnoticed'. To our minds, the farm has remained a farm; once a farmer, always a farmer. Technological change in agriculture is, moreover, not so strikingly manifest as in industry. When a new process displaces several thousand factory workers, long established in one community, it makes a graphic and unforgettable impression. But when a new gadget attached to a tractor throws thousands of farm hands out of employment in the corn belt, we have difficulty, first, in comprehending the process, and second in imagining the consequences. For these hired hands are scattered about on different farms; they are not all dramatically bunched in one area; they just vanish, one by one, into an anomalous and shadowy obscurity. In the same way, a tenant who has been forced off the land in Iowa, by rising rentals and the consolidation of farm units, moves quietly out of the community in an effort to find a farm somewhere else. When the same tenant, with his relatively superior technical equipment and capital (limited as these are), displaces a farm family in Arkansas, and the family starts out for California, we do not connect the appearance of the Arkies in California with the revolutionary processes at work in Iowa farming.

Since the consequences of technological displacement are somewhat different in agriculture than in industry, we have tended to minimize the gravity of the problem. Technological change in industry frequently works in two ways: it reduces opportunities in one field and opens up new opportunities in another. But it is land that affords employment in agriculture, and land, by its nature, is limited. Workers trained by generations of experience to be farmers or farm workers have few, if any, alternatives to which they can turn once they are displaced in agriculture. With mounting agricultural surpluses and extensive crop-reduction programmes, it seems paradoxical to suggest that we have a land shortage in this country. While there is more than enough land to supply the commercial market, there is not enough land to provide farms for all who want farms.[1] Usually, as has been said, there is no 'elsewhere' for these displaced farm families.

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[1] Yearbook of Agriculture, 1940, p. 377.

Agriculture, particularly in the past, has been an economic 'shock absorber'. Displaced farm families can remain in rural areas for some time, eking out a precarious marginal existence, simply because the land provides sustenance. But, as the processes resulting in displacement become accelerated, population backs up in so-called 'distressed rural areas', and eventually overflows in the form of rural migration. It is difficult, therefore, to measure the extent of rural unemployment or under-employment. We do not think of land as the equivalent of a job. A displaced farm family may, for example, move into an abandoned shack in some Godforsaken district and by raising a few vegetables, continue to exist. But this family is actually unemployed and the mere fact that it may not have sought relief should not obscure this consideration. Between 1929 and 1934 there were about two million farmers who were so badly off that they had to work away from their farms (as farmers they were under-employed); in 1934 at least three out of four of these farmers were doing some non-agricultural work. Three and a half million rural households—more than one out of four of the families on farms and in villages—received assistance from a public or private agency at some time during the years from 1930 to 1937. Still we do not think of rural unemployment as being nearly as acute as urban unemployment.

It has been only, in fact, through the increasing importance of rural migration itself that we have become slowly aware of the industrial revolution in agriculture. And here, too, the process of recognition has been roundabout and delayed. When the bulk of our migrants were single men, they occasionally made themselves quite conspicuous; when thousands descended from boxcars in the Middle West to harvest the wheat; when they gathered in long lines about soup kitchens in the cities during the winter; when, as in California in 1914, they marched to Sacramento as part of Kelley's Army of the Unemployed. In moments of acute crisis, the tramp became an ominous symbol: the shadows merged to form clouds. But the clouds always dissolved, somehow, and we forgot about the shadowy figures along the roads and in the jungle camps.

But migrant families do not gather about soup kitchens, nor do they travel in boxcars or form improvised armies for protest demonstrations. They have, in fact, an extraordinary faculty for making themselves inconspicuous; they are the least noticeable of people and the most difficult to locate. Nor is their inconspicuousness accidental. They are forced, by circumstance, to be inconspicuous. When they stop overnight, it is usually in the cheaper auto and tourist camps or in some squatters' camp off the main highway. If they were deliberately avoiding detection, they could scarcely do a better job of concealing themselves. When they camp along the way, it is usually in a clump of trees or under a bridge or around the bend of a stream out of sight. They do not arrive in a community to the sound of blaring trumpets or noisy fanfares. It is rather that they drift into the community, not as a procession, but in single families, car by car, at different hours and by different routes. Many communities throughout the country, at the height of the season, are often wholly unaware of the presence in their midst of several thousand migrants.

Workers in a garment factory can be located; they can be interviewed and their earnings can be tabulated and analysed. But

the agricultural migrant generally has neither home nor address. In the vast majority of cases, his employer does not even know his name. He works not for a single employer in one area, but for many employers who are frequently scattered over several counties or, for that matter, several states. In California there are 5,474 private labour camps in agriculture, yet you can drive the main highways of the state, from one end to the other, and never see a labour camp. The owners who built these camps did not want them located near highways. So far as labour statistics are concerned, agricultural workers seem non-existent. There are few labour commissioners in the United States who can give you the number of agricultural workers employed, let alone information as to their earnings or hours of employment or wage rates. In no two successive seasons will the duration of the harvest, even when the acreage remains identical, be for the same period. Crop patterns change swiftly in response to weather and market conditions. Because of these highly variable factors, the number of workers required to harvest a crop may fluctuate widely from one season to the next. As a result, it has been difficult to measure technological displacement in agriculture. Since no-one knew how many workers were actually employed and for what periods of time, before mechanized processes became general, the number displaced, in many instances, remains problematical.

Even when single migrants congregate, as they do, in the skid-row sections of rural towns, it is quite possible to be grossly deceived as to their number. You can drive through a typical skid-row section—a combination slave market and tenderloin—and get no notion whatever of the number of men hanging around the streets, the pool halls, the beer parlours, the employment offices, and the cheap rooming houses and hotels. Late at night, the streets will be dark with the moving shadows of restless men; thousands of idle men will be moving about skid-row. But to get a definite notion of the number you must be there at five o'clock in the morning when the trucks roll in to recruit crews from the kerb. Gradually the trucks are loaded—fifty and sixty men to a truck—and pull out for the fields. By seven-thirty the section seems deserted, nor do these men return until after dark. During the day, a few stragglers drift back and new recruits from out of town arrive. No-one has an address in skid-row and no-one knows anyone else's name: people are known to each other as 'Slim' and 'Pete' and 'Fat'.

Not only is the agricultural migrant almost invisible, but he is voiceless as well. One can read the debates in Congress on agricultural legislation and never find a reference to agricultural workers. So far as social legislation is concerned, it would seem that agricultural workers do not exist. But within the last two years they have occasionally had a chance to speak for themselves and they have certainly made the most of the opportunity. When the Joads began to arrive in California by the tens of thousands (350,000 arrived in three years) they set in motion a chain of circumstances that forced public attention upon the problem of agricultural migrants. Fortunately they found in Mr. John Steinbeck a spokesman who, in 1939, dramatized their plight in terms that will not soon be forgotten in America. Following the publication of *The Grapes of Wrath,* the La Follette Committee came to California and, in the course of another investigation of violation of civil liberties,

discovered, more or less by accident, the industrialized farm and the processes that are rapidly transforming American agriculture. This investigation was followed by the creation of the Tolan Committee in 1940, the T.N.E.C. investigation of technological changes in agriculture, the W.P.A. monographs on displacement in agriculture (part of the monumental National Research Project), and by a wealth of special studies and papers which began to issue from the agricultural colleges and government agencies. The trail of inquiry spread from California across the country. Soon people in Florida, and Michigan and Texas, and Ohio, and Colorado, were being reminded of the fact that they too had a migratory labour problem; that something was happening to agriculture in their farming sections. Before the Tolan Committee had concluded its inquiry, it had established that, in the heart of such agricultural empires as Iowa and Illinois, the industrial revolution was working much the same havoc that had set thousands of farm families adrift in Texas.

This book is about two types of agricultural migrants: the depression or removal migrants—those who, like the Joads, have been displaced from agriculture and set adrift on the land; and the habitual migrant or migratory worker who, for years, has been following an established migratory route. Intimately connected and frequently overlapping, both groups are victims, in the last analysis, of the industrial revolution in agriculture. Throughout I have tried to emphasize the people themselves and their plight, rather than the processes which have made migrants of them. But to understand the people it is also necessary to know something about their background, about their lives before they became migrants, and about the processes which have resulted in their displacement.

Unnoticed in their former homes and after they took to the road, migrants soon attracted attention when, in California, they came into collision with a fully matured system of industrialized agriculture. Inconspicuous when on the march, they became all too conspicuous once gathered in settlement clusters where their poverty was mute evidence of displacement and the failure of farming 'as a mode of living'. Unfortunately, however, there is a danger that they will not continue to receive that uninterrupted attention which the problem they dramatize should most certainly receive. For they have been discovered and then forgotten in the past. The Commission on Industrial Relations discovered them in 1915, on the eve of another war, just as the La Follette Committee in 1939 and the Tolan Committee in 1940 also discovered them. Untouched by either of these investigations are the thousands of migrants about whom the nation has never heard or, having once heard about, has since forgotten; of the thousands of farm families who are now in the process of being set adrift and who, in a few years, will join the procession of the Joads. To most Americans, the 'migrant problem', as Dr. Paul S. Taylor has said, 'seems a long way off. But it isn't a long way off. The trek to the Pacific Coast is not just the product of a great drought on the Plains. That stream of human distress is the end-result of a long process going on from New Jersey to California and from North Dakota to Florida. It's the most dramatic end-result, and most Americans do not know how pervasive and widespread are the forces which produce it. Nor do they realize how close home and how deep these forces strike.' It is the purpose of this book to tell something about this dramatic 'end-

result' and the forces which have produced it—to demonstrate that, indeed, a shadow has fallen across the land.

When Oliver Goldsmith wrote *The Deserted Village* he was acclaimed as a poet but disparaged as a historian. Johnson regarded the poem as a piece of irrelevant pathos; Macaulay established the theory that Goldsmith had wilfully confused an English with an Irish village. But one hundred and forty-two years after the poem appeared, J. L. Hammond and Barbara Hammond, in their *Village Labourer,* presented a full documentation of what happened to the rural population of England during the decades of the Enclosure Movement and the beginnings of the Industrial Revolution. They found that it was difficult to unearth the facts from obscure sources, for the silence that shrouded these 'village revolutions' was almost unbroken. 'The class,' they wrote, 'that left brilliant records of its life in literature, art, and politics, left dim and meagre records of the disinherited peasants that are the shadow of its wealth; of the exiled labourers that are the shadow of its pleasures; and of the villages sunk in poverty and crime and shame that are the shadows of its power and pride.'

Our wealth and pleasures, our power and pride, have their own shadows; we, too, have our 'deserted villages' and our 'disinherited peasants' and our 'exiled labourers'; even our own enclosures. Once again the industrial revolution is uprooting a rural economy; but this time it is agriculture itself, not industry, that is being revolutionized. While this shadow of our pomp and circumstance has, in the past, tended to merge with the landscape itself, it has now become detached—just as the people themselves have been torn from the land—and is, therefore, discernible. What I have tried to do in this volume has been to sharpen our perception of the shadow itself—of the shifting shadows that mark the movement of migrants across the land.

BOOK I

MIGRANTS MAKE HISTORY

CHAPTER I

SENATOR LA FOLLETTE IN CALIFORNIA

On the 6th of December 1939 the La Follette Committee hearings opened in San Francisco in an atmosphere of tension, defiance, and considerable truculence. No sooner had Senator La Follette announced that the committee was in session than Mr. Phil Bancroft, Associated Farmers leader, arose and demanded that the Senator cease ‘giving aid and comfort to the Communists' and that he return to Wisconsin and mind his own business. During the week that the sessions opened, the Associated Farmers held their annual convention with over 2,000 members in attendance. Open defiance of the committee was voiced throughout the convention. Mr. John Steinbeck was warmly denounced as the arch-enemy and defamer of migratory farm labour in California, while I was referred to as 'Agricultural Pest No. 1 in California, outranking pear blight and boll weevil'.

After over a year of hesitation, the La Follette Committee had been induced to come to California to investigate violations of civil liberties and, more particularly, the denial of civil liberties to agricultural workers. For years the fields in California had been the scenes of periodic unrest—of violence, riots, and occasional bloodshed. (The story of what happened in the years up to 1939 is set forth, in some detail, in *Factories in the Field.)* But a new and troubling element had been precipitated into the already complex farm-labour problem in the years from 1933 to 1939, when approximately 350,000 'dust-bowl' refugees entered the state in search of employment. Concentrated in the rural areas, they had come into headlong collision with a type of agricultural economy as novel to them as it was to most people in the United States. In a moment of bewilderment and rage, Muley, in *The Grapes of Wrath,* shouts: 'Who do we shoot?' The migrants who testified before Senators Thomas and La Follette seemed baffled and confused in much this same sense. The great valleys of California were beautiful and indolent and inviting. Then, suddenly, they became the scene of pitched battles.

The hearings had not progressed very far before Senator La Follette had unearthed some important clues to the pathology of vigilantism. The source of the trouble, as he found, is not in the irate action of incensed farmers, but in the remarkable changes that have taken place in the relationships between various groups in agriculture and between agricultural groups and industrial interests. Before the hearings were a week old, the Senator was conducting a forum on the economics of industrialized agriculture. He had come, of course, to the right state, for these changes have become more apparent in California than elsewhere in the United States. But the relationships which he exposed in California are indicative of trends already apparent in other segments of American agriculture—as shown by later chapters in this book. When he lifted the curtain, ever so slightly, on industrial agriculture in California, he was

staging a 'preview' of what is likely to happen generally in American agriculture.

The tensions occasioned by the impact of the dust-bowl migration upon the agricultural economy of California were graphically outlined in an opening statement to the committee prepared by Mr. Henry H. Fowler, its counsel. Between the 1st of January 1933 and the 1st of June 1939—the years of greatest migration—approximately 180 agricultural strikes had occurred in the state. They had taken place in 34 out of the 58 counties: in every important agricultural community and in every major crop. The national significance of these strikes can, perhaps, best be appraised in light of the realization that California produces about 40 per cent of the fruits and vegetables consumed in the United States. Normally employing only 4.4 per cent of the nation's agricultural workers, California has been the scene of from 34.3 per cent to 100 per cent of the annual strikes in agriculture. Approximately 89,276 workers were involved in 113 of these 180 strikes; civil and criminal disturbances occurred in 65; arrests were reported in 39; property damage in 11; and evictions and deportations in 15. The year 1937, which marked the height of the dust-bowl migration, was also the year in which 14 'violent' strikes occurred.

In each of the pathological manifestations of vigilantism investigated by the La Follette Committee—which verified with a wealth of circumstantial detail and factual elaboration the general picture of conditions in California set forth in *The Grapes of Wrath* and *Factories in the Field*—the impact of the dust-bowl migrants upon an already explosive farm-labour problem was clearly indicated. The apricot strike at Winters, California, in 1937—of the incidents investigated by the committee—revealed a typical pattern of vigilante activity: evictions, the use of special deputies, the formation of an 'Apricot Patrol', and the usual 'rough stuff'. In this strike, some 3,500 or 4,000 migrants were involved. In investigating the strong-arm methods used by the Associated Farmers in Contra Costa County (where no-one works in the fields without first having been registered and interviewed by the sheriff), the same pattern was indicated. Here, in 1939, for example, 2,046 men and 626 women worked in the apricot orchards. Represented among them were workers from 43 states in the Union; and, in addition, 123 workers from Mexico and 31 Filipinos.

It would serve no purpose to detail the facts of the various strikes in which dust-bowl migrants were involved or to trace out, with the wealth of documentation now available in the transcript of the La Follette Committee, the systematic and thoroughgoing vigilantism practised by the Associated Farmers of California in order to keep agricultural workers cowed and intimidated. The importance of the La Follette Committee investigations in California consists in the discoveries which were made, so to speak, incidental to the main purpose of the inquiry. Just what, then, were some of these discoveries?

1. NEW STYLE

One of the first discoveries made by Senator La Follette was that a high degree of concentration has been achieved in California agriculture. Dr. Paul S. Taylor testified that 2,892 'large-scale'

farms, out of a total of 150,000 farms, dominate agricultural production. Constituting only 2.1 per cent of all farms in the state, they produced 28.5 per cent of agricultural produce of all kinds by value; they spent 35 per cent of the total agricultural wage bill; they employed the bulk of the 200,000 migratory workers. In 1930 one third of the farms in California reported that they employed no paid agricultural workers; in January 1935, 70 per cent reported the employment of no wage workers. Dr. Taylor presented a series of charts which showed that 10 per cent of all farms receive 53.2 per cent of the gross farm income; 9.4 per cent of the farms spend 65 per cent of all expenditures for labour; 7 per cent of the farms employed 66 per cent of all farm workers; 6.8 per cent of the farms, in 1934, held 41.6 per cent of all crop land harvested and, by 1935, 3.5 per cent of the farms, by number, held 62.3 per cent of all lands in farms. Nor was this concentration of control restricted to particular crops or types of farming. It applied generally in apricot, asparagus, cotton, hops, lemons, lettuce, olives, grapes, oranges, peaches, potatoes, prunes, rice, sugar beets, wheat, and even in the dairy and chicken industries. In 1938 2 per cent of the farms by number in California received 43.6 per cent of all forms of benefit payments under the A.A.A. programme. It is no exaggeration, therefore, to state that about 3,000 out of a total of 150,000 farms dominate California agriculture measured by any standard of appraisal. These 3,000 farms are the 'factories in the field' which, according to the Associated Farmers, are merely the figment of someone's 'diseased imagination'.

In the course of investigating a strike which occurred in Marysville, in May 1939, in which several hundred dust-bowl migrants were involved, Senator La Follette turned up some interesting facts about one of California's 'embattled farmers'. Here is what a typical farm factory looks like. The Earl Fruit Company is an operating company which, in turn, is owned by a holding company, the Di Giorgio Fruit Corporation. Earl Fruit Company operates, under a centralized management and as one unit, 27 farm properties in California, and leases 11 additional properties. It purchases, moreover, a considerable amount of fresh fruit grown by small orchardists. It owns 11 packing houses in California and packs and markets, for other growers, about a thousand cars of fruit each year. A typical modern industrial enterprise, it has reached out to control related lines of business. It owns a 95 per cent stock interest in the Klamath Lumber and Box Company (with a capacity of 25,000,000 feet of lumber a year) so that it does not have to pay a profit on the boxes and crates used in packing fruit. It controls two wineries in California, one of which is the largest in the United States. But Joe Di Giorgio is a fruit merchant as well as a fruit grower. So the Earl Fruit Company owns the Baltimore Fruit Exchange and has important holdings in fruit auction houses in Chicago, New York, Cincinnati, and Pittsburgh. During the last three years, the company has employed an average of 2,887 agricultural workers. It is, indeed, a new type of farm that employs 3,000 workers throughout the year and has an annual farm payroll of $2,400,000. To provide accommodations for this army of workers, a company town of 350 dwellings has been established with bunkhouse accommodations for 2,500 additional employees. Through still another subsidiary, the company owns 13,833 acres of

orchard lands in other states. In 1938 the book value of the land and improvements of Di Giorgio Fruit Corporation was $10,955,418.84; and it made annual sales of about seven million dollars. This is but one, of several, large 'farm factories' investigated by the La Follette Committee.

It would be a mistake, however, as Senator La Follette discovered, to conclude that big business in agriculture is synonymous with corporation farming or that its bigness can be measured in terms of actual land ownership. Concentration of control has been achieved by various devices and in different ways. A sample of the type of corporation which has acquired large acreages of farm land through foreclosure is California Lands, Inc., a subsidiary of Transamerica Corporation (Bank of America). The company boasted in 1936 that it had developed into 'the largest diversified farming organization in the world, owning and operating approximately 600,000 acres of land.'[1] In that year it produced 17 major crops totalling 4,121 carloads of produce. On the 31st of October 1939, the company owned 1,718 farms totalling 395,800 acres and valued at $25,000,000.[2] The company's income from farm operations in 1937 was $2,511,643. Nor do these figures include, of course, farm mortgages held by the Bank of America on 7,398 farms totalling 1,023,000 acres, representing a total indebtedness of $40,340,000. Nor do they include the amount of crop mortgages and advances made to finance various 'crop pools' and marketing programmes which, indirectly, give the bank a large measure of control over California agriculture.[3]

Another method by which concentration is effected is through 'multiple farm operations'. To space the flow of produce to the market, a shipper-grower corporation may lease land in six or seven different counties or it may hold a dozen leases in one county. Large landowning companies frequently lease their total acreage to large tenant operators. There is one concern in California which leases approximately 60,000 acres of valuable farm land to some 600 'floating' tenants who are transferred to a different farm almost every year. The committee was told of one operator in the San Joaquin Valley who consolidated 78 independent farms of 65 acres each into a 5,000-acre 'farm factory', as a result of which he was able to realize a management profit of $70,000 and the 78 independent farmers were 'out'. The same result is frequently achieved through leases rather than through outright ownership.

Still another method, commonly used in produce crops, is for a shipper-grower to contract, in advance of the season, to purchase the produce from a particular acreage and to finance its production. 'The vegetable industry,' as Dr. Paul Taylor has pointed out, 'has become highly integrated, not infrequently with a single corporation carrying on every phase from planting the seed to marketing the product in cities 3,000 miles away. Some corporations maintain extensive field and processing activities scattered all the way from Washington and Arizona to Florida. Ranch headquarters maintain direct wire services to sensitive Eastern markets, and have the

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[1] *San Francisco Examiner,* 23 August 1936.

[2] La Follette Transcript, vol. 62, p. 22778.

[3] See ibid., p. 22835, for a list of the holdings of twenty-seven major landowning companies in California.

appurtenances of a modern business office.' Frequently the same type of integrated operation, from field to packing house to market, is encountered nowadays in the fruit and orchard crops.[1]

To describe concerns of this magnitude is not to inveigh against them. In many cases they are models of industrial organization and efficiency. But merely to indicate the scale of their operations should demonstrate that their labour policies are quite different from those of the small-sized, family-owned and -operated farm. They are primarily interested in cheap labour. The farmer who does all his own work is interested in his 'living', which is really a wage. His labour is in direct competition, therefore, with the cheap labour of the large-scale farm in whatever form it may be organized. To indicate the scale of the operations of these concerns is, moreover, to demonstrate that something has happened to our concept of the farm. These are not farms in the traditional sense of the term: these are industrial enterprises conducted on factory lines.

2. THE FIELDS ARE INVADED

Senator La Follette discovered that, over a five-year period, California Packing Corporation either raised from other sources or donated from its own coffers $74,161.09 to the Associated Farmers of California. This sizable contribution represented, in fact, 41 per cent of the total receipts of the organization during the same period. Capitalized for $65,000,000, California Packing Corporation is the largest packing and processing concern of its kind in the world. It is principally concerned with canning and drying fruit; but, through its subsidiaries, it also sells fresh fruit, packs coffee, and cans fish (Alaska Packers Association is a subsidiary). The company operates some fifty packing plants in California, the Middle West, Utah, Oregon, Washington, Florida, New York, Minnesota, Illinois, and the Hawaiian and Philippine Islands. Sales offices are maintained in practically every city of importance in the United States, in addition to branch offices scattered throughout the world. Its annual gross sales total around $60,000,000. In 1939 it canned over 2,000,000 cases of peaches and over 600,000 cases of asparagus. But C.P.C. is also a 'farmer'. It owns rich farm lands in the Middle West, in Hawaii, in the Philippine Islands, in California it operates over 21,000 acres of orchard land. But the magnitude of its operations cannot be measured in terms of its own farm operations. It not only purchases fruit and vegetables delivered at its various plants, but it contracts, in advance of the season, to purchase crops in the field. In 1939, in California alone, it had contracts of crop purchase with 4,713 growers involving the produce from some 82,000 acres of land.

It is only by reason of a legal fiction that these crop-purchase agreements create the relationship of buyer and seller between C.P.C. and the growers; actually the relationship is much more like that of employer and employee. Under the typical contract, the company undertakes to harvest the crop; to advise about the type and quality of the produce grown; and reserves to itself the right to dictate the time and manner of picking. By means of these crop-

[1] See *The Country Gentleman,* 27 September 1919, for a description of the American Fruit Growers, Inc.

purchase agreements, the company assures itself a steady flow of produce, or raw materials, to its various packing and processing plants.

A company of this type functions in a dual capacity: it is both producer and processor, grower and canner. The typical small orchardist in California, on the other hand, is wholly dependent upon the price of fresh fruit. He cannot make money out of the canned or processed product, but only out of the raw product itself. C.P.C. can afford to conduct its farming operations at a loss, if necessary, if it makes money from its canning operations. Since the company purchases more fruit and vegetables than it raises, it is primarily interested in a low price for raw materials purchased. The small orchardist must go on producing regardless of the price of fresh fruit. But the C.P.C. can process fruit and vegetables or it can refuse to do so, as market conditions dictate. Not only can a concern of this type play both ends of the game, but its labour policy is sharply at variance with the policy that should guide the small orchardist. C.P.C. employs thousands of agricultural workers (4,918 with a payroll of $1,098,520); but the small orchardist employs few, if any. Since they are both competitors in production, the opportunity to employ cheap labour gives the company a decided advantage. Naturally, therefore, C.P.C. is interested in the work of the Associated Farmers and more than anxious to subsidize its vigilantism.

The La Follette Committee discovered that other canneries nowadays frequently operate numerous farm properties.[1] Fourteen canning, shipping, and sugar companies in California own 106,900 acres and lease 24,417 acres of farm land. Ten canneries in 1935 held contracts with 25,724 growers for the purchase of the produce from 97,237 acres of land.[2] The net result of these developments is that in many areas, and in many crops, the processing and distributive aspects of the industry have come to dominate the purely productive aspects. In these 'factory areas'—in sugar beets, tomatoes, and many other crops—the farm, through any one of a number of different types of financial control, has become a source of raw materials for a factory. It is tied to the factory by many ties, visible and invisible; it is a part of the factory, or, stated another way, the factory has invaded the field. Concerns of this type have invaded the province of agriculture; farmers no longer bargain with them, they work for them. Agriculture has become geared to the dictates of industry just as industry has become geared to the dictates of finance.

Many crops have come almost completely within the 'orbit of industrialism'.[3] While there are thousands of orchard and produce farms in California, there are only 78 canneries. The canneries, moreover, have a powerful trade association, the Canners' League, which has been in existence for over a quarter of a century. Rather than bargain with growers over the price of produce, they naturally encourage the grower to slash labour costs. The canners not only finance the Associated Farmers, but they have their own labour 'front'—California Processors & Growers, Inc.—for they must pool

[1] La Follette Transcript, vol. 72, p. 26728.
[2] Ibid., vol. 62, p. 22836.
[3] Ibid, vol. 62, p. 23803, for further details.

their own economic power to keep some 60,000 cannery workers in line. Just as the canners 'helped' the growers to organize against agricultural workers, so the canners were 'assisted' in the formation of their own labour front. For behind the canner stands the can company. While there are 78 canneries in California, there are only four important manufacturers of tin cans in the United States. The $144,795.61 budget of California Processors & Growers, Inc., was collected, Senator La Follette discovered, by the can companies levying an assessment against the canneries, while they themselves contributed heavily to its anti-labour war chest. Using precisely the same vigilante methods practised by the Associated Farmers, Processors & Growers, Inc., has cracked down, time and again, on cannery labour.[1]

Why should the tin-can companies be so eager to finance a labour front for the canneries? The answer is obvious. In December 1938, consumers paid at retail $4.08 for a case of 24 cans of peaches. For the 45 or 50 pounds of raw peaches that went into these cans, growers received 20 cents or about 5 per cent of the retail price. A wholly disproportionate amount of the actual cost was represented by the price of the can itself. In 1929, according to the Temporary National Economic Committee, 24 cents out of the consumer's dollar, used in purchasing canned tomatoes, represented the cost of the can to the cannery. Just as the canneries occupy a strong bargaining position in relation to growers, so the can companies are in a position to dictate to the canneries. Rather than have a monopoly-protected price structure affected by organized protests on the part of the canneries, the can companies prefer to encourage the canneries to 'take it out' of labour.

The disparity in bargaining power within each of these groups is most striking. Consider, first, the growers. Senator La Follette found that 4 per cent of all the canning peach growers in California in 1934 controlled 41.4 per cent of the total peach production. Then consider the same cleavage among the canners of peaches. In 1935 the four largest canners in California processed 34.6 per cent of the total volume of peaches canned in the United States. The large-scale grower (who may also be a processor) dominates production; the large cannery dominates manufacture; the can companies dominate the canneries. Back of the can companies, I suppose, stands the naked power of finance capital. Under this type of agricultural economy, the farmer becomes a pawn of industry; the farm becomes a sweatshop. At the lowest level of the pyramid, lost in sociological obscurity, is the migratory worker. Chugging along the highways in a broken-down jalopy, climbing the ladders in the orchards, living in a roadside squatters' camp, he has only the faintest notion of the complex of forces of which he is a victim.

3. 'ALLIED INDUSTRIAL INTERESTS'

Between the 1st of May 1935 and the 31st of October 1939, the state organization of the Associated Farmers of California (as distinguished from the county units) received in contributions $178,542, only 26 per cent of which came from 'farmers'. Some of

[1] La Follette Transcript, vol. 50, for a detailed account of the methods used to suppress a strike of cannery workers at Stockton in 1937.

the largest contributors from 1934 to date have been: Southern Californians, Inc. (a group of industrial employers); Southern Pacific Company; Santa Fe Railroad Company; Pacific Gas & Electric Company; Industrial Association of San Francisco; Canners' League of California; Holly Sugar Corporation; San Joaquin Cotton Oil Company; Spreckels Investment Company. Senator La Follette discovered that, in forwarding cheques to the Associated Farmers to finance its fancy vigilantism, most of these concerns took care to state, as one of them did, that 'our feeling is that it might be advisable not to let the name of this company enter into the matter in any way so that the association retains its proper designation as a "farmers" organization.'

Why should utility companies, railroads, and canneries show such a keen interest in supporting an anti-labour group of farm employers: why should they be so furtive? Was it merely to conceal the real character of the organization and thereby deceive the public, or was it to avoid the necessity of openly acknowledging the fact that industry dominates agricultural production? As a matter of fact the motive varied somewhat in each case, depending upon whether the particular concern was merely one of an 'allied industrial group' or was itself directly concerned with agricultural production.

Many of the industrial concerns which have contributed to the Associated Farmers fall within the category, defined by the California State Chamber of Commerce, as 'allied industrial groups'. Generally speaking the category embraces ‘any group that handles agricultural products on the way to market, such as railroads, and certain utilities furnishing power, and companies that furnish paper and other supplies that are used largely in agricultural work and boxes'. The nature of the alliance which these groups have with agriculture can quickly be demonstrated. The Crown-Willamette Paper Company, while not engaged in agriculture, has been a large contributor to the Associated Farmers; the company sells annually about $3,000,000 worth of paper products to Southern California growers. Utility companies have also been large contributors. One utility company alone levies an annual toll of $17,000,000 against farmers in California (with small farmers paying approximately two and a half times as much per kilowatt hour for irrigation power as large operators). The tax levied by the railroads is, likewise, enormous. It presents not only charges for transportation, by rail and by truck, but also heavy annual charges for icing and refrigeration. Local icing and storage plants, in many communities, are also heavily involved indirectly in agricultural production. The list of interests falling within the category might, in fact, be greatly expanded.

The economic interests of these concerns are opposed to, not in alliance with, agriculture. They are selling services and supplies to farmers. They share in the total agricultural income. Sensing the superior bargaining power which these groups possess, farmers have come to accept the various tolls which they levy on agriculture as a tax upon the industry—rigid, fixed, uncontrollable. Since the expense of these services and supplies cannot be easily influenced, the pressure upon a variable operating cost—namely, labour—becomes all the more intense. The 'allied industrial interests' are naturally friendly to any movement or organization that will direct farm unrest, not against them, but against labour. They are willing,

therefore, to finance vigilantism; to goad the farmer into a fury about labour.

The alliance formed between big business in agriculture and these allied industrial interests is really what is behind vigilantism in California agriculture. An examination of the boards of directors of the local Associated Farmer units demonstrates how the alliance is effected. On the board of the Kings County unit in 1938 and 1939 were a director of the First National Bank of Corcoran, a representative of the Boston Land Company (with farm properties in the county valued at $957,518), an agent of a packing company, and an official of the J. G. Boswell Company, an important cotton-ginning concern. In Kern County, the board of directors included representatives of Kern County Land Company, the Bank of America, Cotton Oil Company, Farm Implement and Engine Company, Earl Fruit Company, First National Bank of Delano, and San Joaquin Cotton Oil Company. In San Joaquin County, Hunt Bros. Packing Company (with farm properties valued at $503,016) and Anderson Orchard Company (with farm properties valued at $235,953) were represented on the board. An inspection of the board of directors of almost every county unit of the Associated Farmers will reveal, as the La Follette Committee established, the same situation. Consequently although many small farm owners are members of the Associated Farmers, and occasionally are used as 'front' officials, the large-scale farming interests and the heavy industrial contributors (sometimes the same interests) really run the show.

In whatever direction the La Follette Committee investigation turned, the same complex of forces was revealed. In all of those cases in which strikes had been ruthlessly suppressed and civil liberties grossly violated, the Associated Farmers had served merely as the coordinating mechanism of suppression—a foil for the real interests which masqueraded behind the false front of a 'farmer' organization.

Senator La Follette did not come to California to investigate the industrial revolution in agriculture, but it was impossible to understand what had happened to the Joads in California, or the savagery with which their attempts at self-organization had been suppressed, without laying bare the basic issues involved. As these trends were revealed, it became clear that profound changes had occurred in the pattern of ‘farm' operations in California; that forces outside the realm of agriculture proper were, through a complex system of economic relationships, dictating the pattern of rural social relationships. As the committee studied the plight of the Joads, it became apparent that, along with thousands of professional migratory workers, they were the victims of these revolutionary changes in agriculture itself. set adrift on the land by the process of industrialization in the southwest, they had come into conflict with a fully matured pattern of industrialized agriculture in California. The same forces which had uprooted them from the land also made it impossible for them to secure a foothold, much less a new start as farmers. When this fact became apparent, the staff of the La Follette Committee immediately realized that, in California, they had stumbled upon a great issue—a process which, in itself, was far more important than the fact that thousands of workers had been denied fundamental American liberties and that, in the course of

their misfortunes, skulls had been cracked and bones broken. The 'messengers'—the migrants—had brought to the attention of the nation changes of a revolutionary character destined to refashion our whole concept of farming and to raise issues that profoundly affect our entire national economy. It was a rather strange way to discover the industrial revolution in agriculture ; but once the discovery was made, the committee lost no time in pressing the inquiry further. As they did so, they discovered that their findings in California were, indeed, a preview of the future of American agriculture.

CHAPTER II
THE MESSENGERS ARRIVE

You people of Oklahoma,
If you ever come out West,
Have your pockets full of money,
And you'd better be well-dressed.
Okie Folk Song

Between the 1st of July 1935 and the 1st of July 1939, approximately 350,000 dust-bowl migrants—farmers and the descendants of farmers—crossed the Arizona border into California in search of an opportunity to carry on a tradition of which they were the living embodiment: the tradition of the yeoman farmer in America. This army of dirt farmers did not march into California e*n masse.* Though it represented one of the greatest mass exoduses of farm families in American history, even those who noticed the curious stragglers along the highway failed to realize that they were witnessing not merely a drama of human hardship and travail, but the disintegration of a system of farming—a type of agriculture—long regarded as the foundation fact in our American economy.

California itself was slow to grasp the significance of the 'message' which these migrants carried. Overnight the state awoke to a realization of the fact that an army of migrants had entered its gates and that these latter-day 'pioneers' differed, in many respects, from the migrants who had been moving westward for decades. The first reaction of the state was purely defensive : to protect itself against these ‘casualties of change'. But when they kept on coming by the thousand**,** despite border patrols and frantic protests, the state became highly indignant and attempted to drive the 'aliens' from its midst. When this tactic likewise failed, California looked beyond its borders and issued frenzied appeals to the federal government for assistance**.** No-one**,** however, seemed to want these refugees or to know just what to do with them.

In the course of the investigations that followed, however, it was discovered that a revolutionary change had occurred in American agriculture; that the land itself seemed to be in revolt; that these migrants were merely the first major army of the dispossessed; and that other migrant processions were forming and might, for that matter, already be on the march. The investigations would never, however, have been carried this far, nor the real issues at last have been explored, had it not been for the fact that the migrants occasioned a minor social upheaval in California.

For these migrant families, displaced in Oklahoma and Texas and Missouri by the processes of technological change in agriculture, soon found on coming to California that there was no longer any place for them in agriculture except as menials—as migratory casual labourers. Deeply attached to the land by generations of experience, they found it difficult to accept the fact—as witness the series of strikes investigated by the La Follette Committee. Just as the La Follette hearings provide a preview of American agriculture, so the conflicts and tensions occasioned by the impact of the migrants upon the industrialized agricultural economy of California

foreshadow the strife that, in other areas, is likely to result when the farmers of to-day find themselves the migrants of to-morrow. The 'incidents' that Senator La Follette investigated were, therefore, indicative of more than the mere fact that industrialized agriculture makes for industrial strife: these incidents were really miniature revolts of the dispossessed against a system of agriculture from which they had been excluded. It is for this reason that their initial protests, highly significant as social history, were doomed to failure from the outset. Before the battle was over, the migrants were 'captured' by the system against which they protested and put to work, not as farmers, but as migratory workers. In this circumstance, too, there is more than casual significance.

1. 'FARMING SOMEWHERE ELSE'

Most of the 350,000 agricultural migrants who came to California from 1935 to 1939 are from the Southern Plains states. At least one-half of them are from Oklahoma, Texas, Arkansas, and Missouri; the other half, for the most part, are from Kansas, Nebraska, Colorado, Iowa, and South Dakota, in the order named. While a large number of migrants have gone into urban centres, at least 190,000 went directly to one or another of the twelve counties in the San Joaquin Valley—the heart of rural California. Within a period of five years, 1935 to 1940, the population of some of these counties increased 40 per cent, 50 per cent, and, in one instance, 70 per cent. The relative impact of the migration has, therefore, been much greater in rural than in urban areas.

To appreciate this impact it is necessary to keep in mind that, for over a quarter of a century, there has not been much 'living space' in rural California. Agriculture there is predominantly large-scale, dependent upon heavy capital investment and high operating costs, and thoroughly industrialized in character. Although agricultural production has grown enormously during recent decades, the actual area in cultivation has shown slight increase. So far as its capacity to absorb additional rural farm population is concerned, California has long been hermetically sealed. Despite the fact that nearly two million people moved into the state from 1920 to 1930, the rural farm population increased by only two-tenths of 1 per cent;[1] it has never, in fact, constituted more than 10 per cent of the total population, although agriculture is the chief industry. Industrialized agriculture results in a constantly declining rural farm population; it creates few 'farm' opportunities. Faced with this situation, the prospective farmer has long found it difficult to mount 'the agricultural ladder' to eventual ownership; and when some 350,000 land-hungry migrants are suddenly catapulted into this type of rural economy, a sharp struggle naturally develops between the new comers and the vested interests of an essentially monopolistic agriculture.

There is not much doubt that the bulk of the agricultural migrants came directly to California in the expectation of finding a place for themselves as farmers. For the most part, the migration has been, so far as the people involved are concerned, direct, purposeful, and with a definite objective in mind. This is shown by

[1] Bureau of the Census release, 24 July 1935.

the fact that 60 per cent of these families came straight to California and were living, in 1939, in the county to which they had come upon arrival. They have shown slight tendency to drift about; most of them, on the contrary, have shown a marked inclination to settle in some particular area. A few of them, estimated at 5 per cent of the total, made one return trip to their former homes, usually for the purpose of collecting relatives, before settling permanently. Also, a small percentage abandoned California and returned to the Southern Plains area.[1] But, by and large, they have no intention whatever of returning; they are now permanent residents.

As a group, the population characteristics of these agricultural migrants are now well known. They are 'native White Americans'. Negroes, Mexicans, and foreign-born constitute less than 5 per cent of the total. They are somewhat younger than the resident population and have more younger children per family. Most of the heads of families are in their best working years. While educational levels among them, as a group, are not high, they are by no means illiterate**;** most of them have had some schooling. Their social adaptability is shown by the fact that, in the areas where they are concentrated, there has been virtually no increase in crime despite the poverty and suffering which have prevailed. Their eagerness to work, their desire to make an adjustment to their new environment, are obvious facts which, to-day, are generally conceded in California. But though they came to California to work, not to loaf, and are a highly adaptable group, they have not found a place for themselves as farmers in the state.

Unlike some earlier migrants, the dust-bowl refugees have lacked sufficient capital to get a real foothold in California. In one group of 1,000 families studied it was found that the net worth per family, at the time of arrival, was $265. Of this sum, $111 was in cash and $101 represented the value of a car; the remainder of the assets consisted of household furniture and personal effects. Unable to lease, much less buy, a farm with this limited capital, migrants have done the next best thing and purchased lots in cheap migrant subdivisions or 'shack-towns'. Wholly unplanned, most of these settlements have just 'sprung up'; they are, in essence, squatter communities. Land companies, quick to see a good thing, have opened new subdivisions and sold lots to migrants on easy terms. Many of the settlements are located in the most unlikely areas—on marginal land unfit for cultivation, on the sites of former jungle camps, near community dump yards. Not only is the soil bad in most of these cheap subdivisions, but many of them are located in areas where the drainage is poor or in which floods frequently occur. It has only been on these marginal islands or crevices that migrants have been able to settle.

Here they have squatted—by the thousands. The typical arrangement has been to make a $5.00 down payment on a $200 lot and to pay the balance in instalments. Once the down payment is made the migrants build some type of shelter on the lot. The progression is from tents and trailers, to lean-tos and shacks, and, finally, to little one- and two-room cabins. Built of knotty pine or boxwood, most of these cabins have not cost more than $75. The sanitation, in the shack-towns, is negligible: pit privies prevail; there

[1] See an Associated Press dispatch from Poteau, Oklahoma, 27 July 1940.

are no sidewalks or kerbs, and the roads are merely trails. Charges for water are frequently as high as the monthly payments on the lot. Because of bad soil conditions, garden farming is almost impossible. Most of the migrants, however, scratch the dirt a bit in a heroic effort to plant lawns and to raise flowers and shrubs. Naturally the results are not exactly encouraging. Every type of discarded lumber has been used —planks, boards, railroad ties, as well as sheet-metal, boxes, auto-mobile bodies, and car doors. Some of the migrant settlements are, moreover, good-sized communities, numbering from 4,000 to 8,000 residents. Since most of them are located in unincorporated areas, they have no local fire or police protection, nor, for that matter, any type of local self-government. They exist merely as satellite or fringe growths, potential rural slums, on the outskirts of important communities.[1] Coming to California in search of farms, migrants have been lucky to get a shack.

Not only has the industrialized character of California agriculture made it impossible for migrants to become assimilated, as farmers, into the economy of the state, but the same factor precludes the use of undeveloped land for resettlement purposes. The great Central Valley project in the San Joaquin Valley is primarily designed to supply water to lands already in production. In many of the irrigation districts to be served by the project, the percentage of corporately owned land is as high as 98.4. Ultimately some new lands will unquestionably be brought into production, but the project itself will not be completed until 1946. Besides, as Mr. Marion Clawson of the Bureau of Agricultural Economics has pointed out, reclamation projects are not ideal for resettlement purposes where, as 'to-day, farming is faced with a monetary economy'.[2] The amount of capital needed to rehabilitate or resettle a farm family on one of these projects is estimated to be $5,000. Land must be purchased, improvements made, and canals and irrigation laterals constructed. Neither public nor private lending agencies are at present in a position to provide the necessary capital for migrants to relocate themselves upon reclamation projects. So far as resettlement as farmers is concerned, therefore, the migrants have substituted a hopeless marginal existence in the Southern Plains states for a not-quite-so-hopeless existence in California. I seriously doubt if more than 1 per cent have found a chance to farm. They are still 'stranded farm families' just as they were in Oklahoma, Texas, Arkansas, and Missouri. They are stranded now, however, not in the midst of parched fields and barren granaries, but in the richest agricultural empire in the United States.

2. NEO-CALIFORNIANS

To view the dust-bowl migration to California in proper perspective, it is necessary to realize that it is but one phase of migration within the state. Prior to 1930, thousands of Mexicans were to be found as agricultural workers in practically every important crop area. They, too, impinged upon the rural economy of the state, and had a tendency to lower labour standards; they, too,

[1] See Tolan Transcript, part 6, pp. 2541-54, for a detailed description of migrant housing in California, which I prepared for the committee.

[2] Ibid., p. 2682.

were resented and despised. Nor could they get a foothold, as farmers, in California. They settled, like the migrants, in private labour camps, in the shack-towns and 'Jimtowns' that sprang up all over Southern California; always on the fringe of the community; never a part of the community. During the first year of the depression, however, an estimated 160,000 Mexicans left California.[1] As they were being expelled by the disastrous consequences of the depression, the migrants began to surge in. This is not to imply, of course, that the Mexicans moved out *en masse;* but it is generally estimated that close to 200,000 left between 1929 and 1939.[2]

Migrants were able to compete with, and to displace, Mexicans as migratory field workers in California largely because of the fact that the labour market has never been organized. Employer-employee relationships are highly impersonal in California agriculture. For years employers have sought to maintain a pool or reserve of unemployed labour to meet the seasonal or peak demands for labour. Nothing short of an absolute surplus of field workers will satisfy the 'needs' of the industry; anything less than a surplus is regarded as a 'labour shortage'. It is, however, always possible for the new worker to get *some* employment; he is, therefore, at no great disadvantage with the most experienced migratory worker. Already overcrowded in 1933, the labour market was reduced to utter chaos with the migrant influx. When crop acreages remain the same, the total amount of labour which can be employed is not subject to much expansion, but more and more workers can be employed for shorter periods of time. 'We didn't make any money picking peas,' testified one migrant, 'because I have seen 1,500 in one field and each one would get a hamper of peas and leave. I have seen them fight over rows, they wanted to pick peas so bad.'[3]

Up to a certain point, therefore, the migrant influx was thoroughly satisfactory to the large agricultural employers. They had, in fact, encouraged migration at the outset, since they were greatly worried over the exodus of Mexican field workers. But they soon became concerned over a situation for the creation of which they were themselves largely responsible. These latter-day migrants were not single men in search of seasonal employment; they were the heads of families in quest of permanent settlement. The large growers have always wanted a mobile labour supply; to this day they show a preference for the transient over the resident worker. A worker who is a resident, a voter, and the owner of a shack, has some economic security and, therefore, some bargaining power. It is always possible that resident workers may organize; also they are eligible for relief. Since no migrant worker can be self-supporting in California, the relief rolls naturally began to increase. Tulare County, for example, is the fourth richest agricultural county in the United States. Yet every winter during the years from 1936 to 1938, almost a third of its residents were on relief. In Kern County, where cotton is a basic crop, total relief expenditures for the fiscal year

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[1] La Follette Transcript, vol. 53, p. 19714.

[2] See *Tumbleweeds,* 1940, a novel by Marta Roberts, which recounts certain phases of this tragic exodus.

[3] Tolan Transcript, part 7, p. 2820.

ending the 30th of June 1939, were $4,280,000 as compared with $4,900,000, the value of the entire cotton crop'[4]

Naturally, therefore, the problem of providing for these agricultural migrants who, unlike the Mexicans, stayed in the community and acquired residence, soon began to worry the nabobs who rule California agriculture. Even so the system was not bad, from their point of view, so long as *they* controlled the administration of relief. For, when the season came around, relief could be suspended and the labour market flooded with workers. Since most of the state's funds came from a sales tax (53 per cent of the state's total revenue), the burden of relief, as such, did not fall upon agriculture. But the charges for increased school and hospital facilities came to be reflected in local property tax rates and here they did feel the pinch to some extent. It was not, however, until political control seemed about to slip from their hands that the revolt began in California.

A few quotations will serve to indicate how the migrants came to be *persona non grata* to the Associated Farmers of California. 'Is it possible to expect,' wrote Mr. A. S. Arnoll of the Los Angeles Chamber of Commerce in 1936, 'that these people—white Americans who will anticipate American standards of living—will be satisfied with the conditions which the agricultural practices of the State of California impose in labour needs? They are American labourers, susceptible to organization, unionization, and under the depressing circumstances which must result through lack of employment during winter in the agricultural employment field, will they not be the finest pabulum for subversive influence?'[1]

In a letter under date of the 15th of October 1935, Dr. George Clements of the same Chamber made what might be called a classic summation of the problem of agricultural labour in California: 'We on the land,' he wrote, 'have always recognized that California agricultural labour requirements made impossible to those people so. employed the full efforts of American citizenship and the possibilities of partaking of our normal standards of life.'[2]

Since they realized, however, that the Mexican field workers could not be recaptured, and since they were vitally dependent upon a large 'reserve' of unemployed labour, the large growers determined to gain control of the apparatus of state government and to force the migrants into the status of second-class American citizens. But once they had gained the upper hand in the affairs of state government they saw that the migrants could be used to displace even those Mexicans who still remained in the field. For it was the Mexicans, long familiar with field conditions in California, who showed the most determination to fight for a higher standard of living.

In the spring of 1941, Mexican citrus workers called a strike in Southern California. Unlike most agricultural strikes in the past, this one was well organized and solidly supported. The growers at first thought that it would be easy to break it, but they soon found that they were wrong. Days, weeks, and months passed and the Mexicans were still on strike. At this point, the growers evicted them

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[4] *Rural Sociology,* vol. 5, No. 2.

[1] La Follette Transcript, vol. 53, p. 19714.

[2] Ibid., p. 19544

from the labour camps and began to import 'Okies' from the San Joaquin Valley.[3] Once they had been imported as strike-breakers, the Okies promptly attempted to drive the remaining Mexicans from the fields. While the use of migrant families to displace Mexican workers has, at the moment, been quite successful, it is likely to cause the growers great difficulties in the future. For, in the long run, these 'White-American' labourers will, as Dr. Clements clearly foresaw, sooner or later demand an American standard of living. Living in the shack-towns which they have built, many of them have now gained a foothold as field workers in California. With the aid of miscellaneous non-agricultural employment and occasional relief payments, they manage to eke out a precarious existence. But they are still essentially 'migrants': in the community but not yet part of the community— Neo-Californians.

Before the migrants could be fitted into the groove of migratory labourers, however, the industrial interests who control California agriculture had first to regain control of the state government which, in 1938, seemed to have slipped from their hands. A number of events, all curiously part of the same developing situation, served to bring the 'migrant problem' rapidly to the foreground in 1939, with results that no-one could, perhaps, have anticipated.

3. THE STORM BREAKS

In the past there have been occasional insurrections of the 'natives' in California against the 'new-comers'. These earlier insurrections occurred infrequently and, generally, only during periods of depression. Preceding the Joads were the ‘Pikes' from Missouri, famous in local history and folklore.[1] California, in 1849, could afford to be amused by the Pikes; it has not been amused by the Joads. Early in its history, California revolted against the Chinese as it later revolted against the Japanese; and, in a measure, as it has revolted against the Mexican and the Filipino. But it was not until the arrival of the Joads that an attempt was made to drive out 'alien' American citizens.

A political upset is really what touched off the revolt against the Joads. For forty-four years prior to 1938, California had had only Republican governors. With the exception of the administration of Hiram Johnson, reactionary interests had long kept a close grip on the apparatus of state government. The Epic campaign of 1934, however, demonstrated that control was clipping from their hands. Over 800,000 votes were cast for Mr. Upton Sinclair in the campaign of that year, and in 1938 over one million votes were cast in favour of the Ham-and-Eggs ($30 Every Thursday) pension plan. Also, in 1938, the elements involved in the Epic campaign, with the strong support of organized labour, succeeded in electing Culbert L. Olson, a Democrat, Governor of California. During this election it was pointed out that the migrant vote (most of the migrants from the Southern Plains are, of course, traditional Democrats) was probably good for 200,000 ballots.

In January 1939 Governor Olson took office and it seemed, at long last, as though the common people of the state—those

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[3] See *Los Angeles Times,* 16 March and 25 July 1941, for full details.

[1] Clarence King, in a well-known chapter in *Mountaineering in the Sierra Nevada,* has described a typical 'Pike' family of the period.

thousands of migrants from every state in the Union—had finally gained control of the state government. The Olson administration had an important programme for farm labour. It proposed to give a liberal administration of relief; to eliminate 'work or starve' edicts; to set up a system of agricultural labour wage-rate boards; to safeguard the right of collective bargaining in agriculture; to consolidate the sounder parts of the production-for-use plan into a co-operative programme for the unemployed. But the Old Guard had anticipated just such a situation. They retained, for example, a strong grip upon the State Senate: Los Angeles County, with half of the population of the state, had but one Senator. Through their control of the legislature, reactionary interests soon demonstrated that they still ruled California. Virtually every item on Governor Olson's legislative programme was defeated and the people were robbed of the victory which they had won at the polls in 1938. To a considerable extent, this was accomplished by simply taking over the popular interest which had been aroused in the migrant problem and using it for the purpose of frightening timid legislators, panicking the public, and making an enormous bogy of the ‘dust-bowl influx'.

On the 14th of April 1939, while the Olson administration was still at loggerheads with the legislature, Mr. John Steinbeck published *The Grapes of Wrath.* Within a year after its publication, over 420,565 copies of the book had been sold. Appearing at this particular time, the book had the effect of a match being tossed into a powder keg. California had been in a state of considerable political tension since the General Strike and the Epic campaign of 1934; political tempers were explosive, political nerves badly frayed. Not only had there been much agitation over the problem of migratory labour from 1934 to 1938 and much agricultural labour unrest, but the migrant problem had, by 1939, become most acute.

The Grapes of Wrath was, in a way, the product of this earlier agitation. John Steinbeck was born and raised in the Salinas Valley. Working in the fields as a boy, he 'learned at least the motions through which the agricultural worker must go, came to understand something of the small hopes and fears and ambitions of the floating population on which California depends for fulfilment of its seasonal labour requirements.'[1] At the time of the Salinas lettuce strike of 1936[2] he had four books to his credit, none of them successful or particularly important. 'Now something happened under his very nose, in his own Salinas Valley.' While the migrant influx was at its height in 1937, Mr. Steinbeck was induced to write a series of articles on the migrants for the *San Francisco News* (later reprinted as *Their Blood is Strong).* The eventual outcome of this trip through the state was, however, *The Grapes of Wrath.* The appearance of the book and the subsequent release of the motion picture (27th of February 1940) aroused a storm of controversy which is still raging in California.

In partial explanation of the row which subsequently ensued, it should be pointed out that in January 1939 Governor Olson had appointed me Chief of the Division of Immigration and Housing, an

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[1] Joseph Henry Jackson, *Why Steinbeck Wrote The Grapes of Wrath,* San Francisco, 1940.

[2] See *Factories in the Field,* pp. 254-9.

agency of the state government which is directly concerned with the problem of migratory labour. Consequently, when *Factories in the Field* was published in July 1939, it appeared that a conspiracy had been formed against the Associated Farmers. As a matter of fact, I did not know Mr. Steinbeck was at work on *The Grapes of Wrath,* nor have I ever met Mr. Steinbeck. But to give the conspiracy a really murky atmosphere, the Steinbeck Committee to Aid Agricultural Workers had been formed in 1938, with the approval of Mr. Steinbeck, and I was elected its first chairman. Through my connection with the Olson administration, moreover, the Associated Farmers fancied that the appearance of these books could be traced directly to the Executive Mansion in Sacramento; nor did they hesitate to imply that the 'conspiracy'—the appearance of the two books at the same time—might have even deeper implications.

The Associated Farmers promptly denounced *The Grapes of Wrath* as obscene, vulgar, and immoral. In Kern County, they were successful in having its circulation banned in the public libraries. The attempted suppression of the book, of course, merely stimulated its circulation throughout the San Joaquin Valley. When *Factories in the Field* appeared, they immediately realized that they had selected the wrong issue upon which to predicate their attack on *The Grapes of Wrath.* For, as Arthur Eggleston pointed out in the *San Francisco Chronicle,* 'the attempt to protect the morals of the American reading public had to be abandoned in the face of this new, factual, historical and documented assault on the same problem which forms the central theme of Steinbeck's book.'

The Associated Farmers then raised a special fund of $15,000 to conduct a smear campaign against the two books and their authors. All sorts of curious press releases and so-called 'book reviews' began to issue from the Giannini Foundation at the University of California (financed by Mr. A. P. Giannini of the Bank of America). Canned editorials and special feature stories appeared in every rural newspaper in California. When the *Christian Science Monitor,* the *San Francisco Chronicle,* and the *New York Times* began to run special feature stories substantiating the charges set forth in *The Grapes of Wrath* and *Factories in the Field,* the Associated Farmers got busy and began to escort visiting journalists through the state under specially rehearsed and carefully planned tours.

Taking advantage of the excitement in California over the migrant problem, a skilful campaign was launched in 1939 to start a counter-movement back to the dust-bowl and, at the same time, to stop further migration to the state. As part of the same campaign, grand juries in the San Joaquin Valley, throughout 1939, made periodic investigations 'into the administration of relief'. In each instance, the investigation was headlined in the local newspapers and reported in such a manner as to threaten dire consequences to those who were applying for relief. When migrants who had not acquired legal settlement in California applied, they were in many cases promptly shipped back to the 'state of origin'.

When these stratagems failed to stimulate a counter-movement back to the dust-bowl, a vicious campaign was launched to slash relief appropriations in California and to increase eligibility requirements. To accomplish this objective, the 'Migrant Menace' was dramatized in the most lurid manner. Feature stories, carefully

timed and skilfully prepared, appeared in the major newspapers of the state, which implied that migrants were ruining the economy of California. The cumulative effect of such propaganda was utterly demoralizing. Relief appropriations were cut to the bone; the residence requirements for relief were raised from one year to three years, from three years to five years, and finally the State Relief Administration was abolished altogether. Under these circumstances, the migrants in rural areas in California did not have any alternative but to go to work in the fields at whatever rates were offered.

It is easy for demagogues to point to mounting relief expenditures and heavy migration and then to draw the conclusion that migration creates unemployment. While the migrant influx did lower wage rates in California agriculture, it by no means follows that there is a necessary connection between migration and unemployment. States which have been losing population through migration have, in several cases, more unemployed in relation to the total population than does California. The Department of Commerce estimates that the nation's population increased 5.3 per cent during the period from 1930 to 1937; during the same period the population of California increased 8.3 per cent. However, the average *per capita* income of California residents was higher in relation to the national average in 1937 than in 1929. In 1929 the national average *per capita* income was $685, while in California it was $955—45 per cent higher; in 1937, the national average was $547, that of California $837—53 per cent higher. Migration, as such, was not the sole cause of heavy relief expenditures in California; nor, obviously, was it bankrupting the state. Viewing the rapid increase of population in California, the National Resources Planning Board points out that 'the dual influence of population growth and business expansion were probably mutually reactive—the larger population created more business, while increased economic activity created more jobs and attracted still more people.'[1] The Board has also pointed out that 'California's population is barely reproducing itself. Without a continuing net inward migration or an unforeseen rise in the birth-rate, deaths would probably exceed births within the next two decades and population would then decline.' However obvious and persuasive such considerations may be to thoughtful minds, they count as nothing in the scramble of practical politics.

4. MARKING TIME

Now that most of the tumult and the shouting have died down in California, what has been accomplished for the migrants? What is their present position? Their outlook for the future?

It is unquestionably true that the publication of *The Grapes of Wrath* was largely responsible for the La Follette Committee investigations in California. As late as January 1939 Senator La Follette had announced that the committee had abandoned its proposed investigation of the Associated Farmers of California. Had it not been for the commotion which the publication of the novel

[1] See Tolan Transcript, part 6, p. 2313, where a similar argument is advanced by the Bureau of Agricultural Economics.

occasioned, it is quite likely that the invaluable material assembled by the committee would not be available to-day. It is also true that the same factors were responsible for the creation of the Tolan Committee in May 1940. It is as yet too early to predict what effect these two Congressional investigations will have in shaping our national agricultural policy; but already both investigations have focused public attention upon some of the basic elements involved and, through the two investigations, we have finally discovered the industrial revolution in agriculture.

It is also true that the immediate needs of migrants, as human beings, are being met to-day in California on a scale far beyond that of 1937. Most of the improvement has come about largely as a result of the work of the Farm Security Administration, which was, of course, strongly supported by both Congressional investigations. Through the Agricultural Workers Health and Medical Association, an excellent health and medical service has been provided for nonresident agricultural workers—the full expense of which is borne by the federal government. When a migrant dies in an F.S.A. camp in California, the federal government even reimburses the county for the expense of burial, as the counties recognize no obligation to bury 'these outsiders'. At times within the last few years, the F.S.A. has been supporting 30,000 migrants in California. In addition the F.S.A. maintains some thirteen migratory labour camps which accommodate, at full capacity, about 3,500 families (a small proportion of the total involved). Excellent as the F.S.A. programme has been, it is merely a stopgap affair—a form of relief, not of rehabilitation.

Supplementing the work of the F.S.A., the state government in California has assisted the migrants in some respects since 1938. The state employment service is now being reorganized in an effort to bring some degree of order out of the chaos which, at the moment, prevails in the labour market. The Department of Health has established mobile health units which have brought some medical care to thousands of migrants throughout the state. The Division of Immigration and Housing has managed to bring about a measure of improvement in the private labour camps of the state, of which there are, in agriculture alone, some 5,000 in California with a resident camp population of about 150,000 people. By comparison with the camps which I have visited in other states, I should say that these private labour camps are now among the best of their kind to be found in the West. This is not to imply that these camps constitute adequate housing or that they provide an ideal environment for workers. It merely means that some type of shelter, together with an adequate supply of good drinking water, some type of bathing facilities, toilets, garbage disposal, sanitation, and a measure of camp maintenance are provided. This improvement has been achieved in the face of an incredibly bitter opposition.

While migrants have found shelter, while they are now being provided with medical service and schools, while they are being kept alive, they remain as far removed from permanent resettlement as the day they arrived in California. The Joads have not become farmers nor are they likely to become farmers. Big Business in California agriculture not only has survived the impact of the migrant invasion, but is more securely entrenched than ever before. As for the migrants themselves, a study made in Monterey County

showed that a majority of them were somewhat better off financially than when they arrived, but that a third were in a worse position. While 90 per cent of the families stated that they intended to remain in California, their view of the future was 'generally coloured by pessimism'.

In the meantime, migration continues almost unchecked. In 1937, some 105,185 people in need of manual employment crossed the Arizona border into California**;** in 1938,85,166; in 1939, 79,246; and, in 1940, 80,200. The border count for January, February, and March 1941 is higher than for the same months in 1940, indicating that the rate of migration is once more increasing. There is every reason to believe that migrants will continue to move westward for many years and that the volume of migration will increase throughout 1941 and 1942. The National Defence programme has already noticeably stimulated migration to California by providing jobs for thousands of migrants. But no-one likes to think of what is going to happen once the present 'emergency' is at an end. Nor does anyone like to think of those basic issues raised during the course of the La Follette and Tolan Committee investigations—issues which, unfortunately, have not been settled. For California has temporarily suppressed—not solved—the migrant problem.

CHAPTER III

'GREEN PASTURES'

The influx of migrants to the Pacific North-west has been almost as spectacular as the similar movement to California. In some respects, the two movements have been quite similar; but there are important differences. The North-west is a younger, less developed region, offering greater opportunities for readjustment. To a drought-stricken people its green pastures must, indeed, seem like the promised land. But with all its possibilities for resettlement, with all its rich resources, migrants have not been able to get a much firmer foothold in the North-west than they have in California. If migration invariably worked an adjustment of people to resources, it would seem that here at least the validity of the theory might be demonstrated. But what are the facts?

1. 'CARAVANS TO THE NORTH-WEST'

Between 1930 and 1940 approximately 465,000 migrants have entered the North-west. It has been estimated that they arrive at the rate of 120 persons a day. Most of them have moved directly westward; 90.3 per cent come from the North Central and Northern Great Plains. Two important facts have been definitely established about these migrants which tend to disprove certain firmly held local convictions. They are, for example, neither wanderers nor drifters. There are few highly mobile people involved: 34 per cent had lived in only one state before coming to the North-west. Nor have they drifted about after arrival in the North-west. It is by no means a blind or random migration, but rather a direct and purposeful effort, on the part of thousands of people, to seek resettlement in a new environment.

The heads of the families of these migrants to the North-west are younger than the average either at the place of origin or at the place of destination. The families are, also, somewhat larger and with more younger children. Nearly 85 per cent of these migrants are under forty-five years of age; more than half fall within the ages of twenty and forty-five. The North-west has always had a rapid population turnover, with a continuous movement of people up and down the Pacific Coast. Nowadays, with the migrant influx, population turnover is rapidly coming to an end. Also, because of a high percentage of elderly people and remarkably low birth-rates, both Oregon and Washington have looked forward to a declining population after 1950. The age levels involved in the migrant group now make it possible for both states to develop a stable and self-sustaining population.

Practically every occupational group is represented in the current migration to the North-west (and the same generalization applies to the migration to California). By no means a predominantly agricultural migration, it represents a broad cross section of an entire population. The effects of drought and agricultural collapse fall first on farmers; but other groups are similarly affected. The only top-heavy representation is that for the professional group. As might be expected, there has been considerable reshifting of occupations subsequent to migration. The

professional and skilled labour groups have shown the least tendency to move into other types of work; whereas less than half the former farmers and farm labourers were employed in agriculture in the North-west in 1939.

The reasons which have prompted people to move to the Northwest are well known. In a study made by Dr. Paul Landis, the reasons which compelled migration were listed as follows: drought and crop failure, 52.7 per cent; unemployment and low wages, 24.4 per cent; dissatisfaction and a desire to change, 19.7 per cent; unsatisfactory climate and ill-health, 19.7 per cent; poor future outlook, 13.1 per cent; influence of friends and relatives, 4.5 per cent. Drought has been, of course, the most important consideration. The migrants interviewed by Dr. Landis had a tendency, he noted, 'to view their life in the drought area in retrospect as a nightmare'. Very few of them have ever returned to the homes where they were born and raised and in which they had lived most of their lives. They have fled from drought with their faces pointed west; and most of them have no intention whatever of turning back. They complain of the dust, the heat, the isolation, the drabness; they complain, also, of ill-health and insist that their children had 'dust-pneumonia' (although physicians contend that there is no such disease). Distances, in the sparsely settled Northern Great Plains areas, are much greater than in the North-west. In their new homes they are closer to town, closer to their neighbours, closer to important centres of population. Dr. Landis states that 'the advantages of living in Washington as expressed by the migrants are chiefly of a non-economic character'. They *like* the North-west: the land is green and beautiful and there are flowers and forests and lakes. These cut-over timber lands may be poverty-ridden but they are beautiful. They are infinitely easier to look upon than a waste-land of parched earth.

Like the original settlers, the latter-day migrants move in family groups. They not only travel together but they settle in the same localities. Whole rural communities have moved west almost *en masse* and are frequently to be found to-day in the same neighbourhood in the North-west. In Kitsap County, in Washington, over eighty people were found who had once lived in or near a South Dakota town of three hundred population. The leader who had blazed new trails for this group of South Dakotans was a 'dynamic Baptist preacher who had come out in 1933', looked about, and then returned for his flock. On the surface, therefore, the migration to the North-west would seem to be a normal process of population adjustment, highly desirable from the point of view of the future development of the region. But nowadays resettlement is not axiomatic; and, where migration is wholly unplanned and unguided, migrants encounter difficulties in effecting a readjustment that were not known a generation ago. In the North-west agricultural operations, except in the irrigated areas, are predominantly small scale, based upon the family-owned and operated farm. This factor has allowed for a greater latitude of readjustment in rural areas in the North-west than in California. The North-west also afforded greater employment opportunities in agriculture, since it did not have an accumulated labour surplus of the proportions that existed in California. On the other hand, it offered less in the way of industrial employment. Its major

industries— lumbering, fishing, and canning—are specialized and highly seasonal in character; they were, moreover, depressed when migration was at its height: in 1937, for example, there were 270,000 unemployed in the North-west. The unique factor of the current migration to the region lies in the lack of opportunity and in the increased difficulty of readjustment under modern conditions.'Conditions to-day,' to quote from a report of the Oregon State Planning Board, ‘are far different from those that greeted their pioneering predecessors. The desirable, rich agricultural lands have passed into private ownership. Most of the timber has been acquired by private investors or reserved by the federal government. For the great majority of prospective settlers there remain only undesirable stump lands and abandoned marginal farms, or developed farms that can be acquired only through investment of a large amount of money.

2. 'FARMETTES'

Where are these migrants to be found, to-day, in the North-west? The most populous areas, by and large, have attracted the most newcomers; migrants have followed established settlement patterns and drift, like the resident population, into the large centres of population. Nevertheless the impact of the migration itself has been felt most strongly in rural areas which have received proportionately somewhat more than their share of migrants. Migrants have been primarily attracted to the humid regions west of the Cascade Mountains and to the irrigated valleys; they have shown slight interest in the dry-farming areas east of the Cascades. The greener the land the more migrants. A noticeable development in the North-west, as in California, is the growth of shack-town settlements around the fringes of established towns.

Most of the migrants have, of course, arrived in the North-west without a cent to their names. One-fourth of those interviewed by Dr. Paul Landis placed the value of all property in their possession at the time of their arrival, including car, money, clothing, and personal property, at $100 or less. One family arrived with a gallon of gas and 63 cents. Eight per cent, or less, of these migrants had assets of $2,000 on arrival- (the amount estimated as essential for resettlement) . Practically none of them left property behind in the areas from which they came: whatever they had owned was sold before they left. What money they had was usually spent *en route* to the Northwest. In fact, a large number of the agricultural migrants had been on relief at the time they decided to move west.

Naturally migrants gravitate to those areas where a foothold can be gained at the lowest possible initial cost. A survey made by the Farm Security Administration of 20,917 recent settlers in the region disclosed that 24 per cent had obtained farms which had been previously abandoned, 48 per cent were endeavouring to make a home on a tract of unimproved land, and 28 per cent had obtained a farm or a subdivision of a farm. It is estimated that at least 50 per cent have settled in so-called 'rural problem areas'. At the time of their arrival, there were already 34,000 farm families in the North-west who were living on farms that were incapable of adequately supporting a family. The typical settlement has taken place in the so-called 'stump' lands or cut-over timber regions. It cost as much to

clear this land as the land itself is worth. Clearing the land, moreover, is a slow process. Then, too, migrants have moved into the 'shoestring' valleys where there is a clearing in the midst of a forest miles removed from the next settlement. It has been extremely difficult for migrants to lease land, even the poorest land. By their numbers they have brought about a competition for land which has resulted in increased rentals. Land and development companies have not hesitated to capitalize on the distress of migrants and have created numerous cheap subdivisions, and rabbit farms, and goat ranches, and so-called 'farmettes', which are sold on easy terms.

The danger that arises from this improvised resettlement—this temporary and makeshift rehabilitation—is that it may lead to further migration in the future. Many migrants, abandoning their farmettes, are already drifting into the towns and cities where they make for a further increase in the supply of unskilled labour. Others, uprooted after only a year or two of attempted resettlement, join the army of migratory workers on the Pacific Coast and, by over-crowding the labour market, only further demoralize working conditions. All of the 'marginal vocations', so-called, in the North-west have felt the competition of the migrant group.

One of the reasons migrants have moved into the North-west has been the great interest aroused in its reclamation projects. Secretary Ickes, for example, has hailed these projects as a 'solution' of the migrant problem. Unfortunately, however, there is little basis for the statement. The entire Grand Coulee project will not be completed until 1960. Between 1935 and 1940 there arrived in the North-west more families than could be accommodated on farms in the entire Columbia River Basin, even after it is fully developed. The Bureau of Reclamation has itself stated that it has received over ten times as many applications for farmsteads as can be accommodated. In the Grand Coulee project it is estimated that settlers will require $3,000 in cash in order to take over an eighty-acre irrigated tract. In addition to the cost of the land, prospective settlers will be charged $85 to $100 an acre for the construction of irrigation works. At the present time, there is no lending agency, public or private, willing to assume the financial burden of resettling destitute migrant farm families on these reclamation-project sites.

One of the major social disadvantages of migration is that it seriously uproots processes of cultural adaptation. Migrant farmers from the Great Plains are, at the outset, at a distinct disadvantage in such a new environment as the North-west. They find it difficult to adapt themselves to small units of operation producing speciality crops. Nor are they always the best judges of land in a new environment. 'Trees, green vegetation, and abundant rainfall are deceptive factors to the plainsman who failed chiefly for lack of sufficient rainfall.' Even in attempting to supplement their subsistence farming with part-time employment, they are at a disadvantage. Fishing and lumbering are novel trades to them. In their farming efforts not only are they frequently deceived by the character of the soil, which is notoriously 'spotty' in the North-west, but they do not know how to calculate irrigation and reclamation costs. As a consequence there has been a rapid turnover of lands in the problem areas as migrant gives way to migrant, the earlier

arrival making way for the latest victim. Summing up the situation, the Pacific North-west Regional Council has this to say: 'Many of those who at first succeed are doomed to eventual failure, and about half of those in rural areas already have had to turn to the state for assistance.'

3. APPLE KNOCKERS AND HOP PICKERS

Migrants have provided the 'labour pool' so long desired by the commercial farming interests. The possibility of getting seasonal employment as migratory workers has been, in fact, a major element which has drawn migrants to the region. Throughout the Northwest the workers who follow the crops over various routes are predominantly 'White-American' families, the bulk of them being recent recruits from the Northern Great Plains. During the height of the season, about 150,000 migrants are at work in the fields or *en route* from one crop to another.

One of the major districts involved is Yakima Valley, where the demand for seasonal labour resembles a fever chart. In December and January only about 500 or 1,000 farm workers are needed; but at the height of the season about 35,000 are required. The supply of local labour has never been sufficient to meet the seasonal demand, which jumps from 4,000 in June to 25,000 in September, with 49 per cent of the labour in apples, 31 per cent in peaches, 10 per cent in grapes, and 53 per cent in apricots and cherries being non-resident or migratory labour. Labour turnover in the valley is remarkably high: 60 per cent to 70 per cent every five or six days, with most of the jobs—70 per cent in fact—only lasting for a week or less. Since the number of workers entering the valley each season is far in excess of the actual labour requirements, the labour market is utterly disorganized and has become increasingly so with the migrant influx. Even resident agricultural workers find themselves unemployed about 30 per cent of the time during the peak of the season.

In Yakima for a few weeks in September, 33,000 workers are needed in the hop fields; and in October about 12,000 are required in the apple orchards. Since both major crops are highly comercialized and keenly sensitive to market conditions, growers want to crowd the maximum amount of work out of employees in the briefest period of time. There is, therefore, really no norm for the number of workers who, during a period of a few weeks, can find some employment. Both crops, moreover, attract a different type of labour: large migrant families for hops; smaller resident families for apples. Agricultural labour has its own hierarchy and hop picking is universally regarded as about the lowest form of field labour. Nearly three-fourths of the hop pickers are non-agricultural workers by vocation; the apple knockers, on the contrary, are usually professional migratory workers. Fruit pickers, also, generally come from a greater distance than hop pickers.

Workers are recruited in Yakima by various means: by advertisements; by placards put up in gas stations, tourist camps, and posted on the highways; and, in former years, by 'labour bosses' paid 50 cents a head to bring workers into the valley. Nowadays, since the influx of migrants, most of the labour is of the 'drive-in' variety; it appears at the gate and seeks employment. The apple

knockers and hop pickers travel to Yakima by all sorts of conveyances: 75.1 per cent by automobile (five or more to a car); 15.4 per cent by riding the freights; 7.9 per cent by hitch-hiking; and 5.2 per cent—the elite —by rail or bus as paid passengers. Single men ride the freights; families travel by car. 'The car', writes Dr. Landis, 'is petted and the family denies itself necessities of life that it may be kept in running condition.' Most of the cars are old-model sedans—ten and twelve years old in need of constant repairs; but of late trucks and trailers have come into more general use. According to Dr. Carl F. Reuss, the average distance travelled in a year by these migrants is 1,226 miles. Allowing 2¼ cents per mile as a minimum cash cost for car operation, he concluded that families were spending 11 per cent of their annual cash income for travelling expenses.

Migrants are not encouraged to remain in Yakima once the season is over. Law-enforcement officials raid the camps, round up the migrants, and 'encourage' the stragglers to be on their way. During the summer, one clerk in the welfare office is kept busy preparing notices to be served on the families who during the season have applied for assistance. Once the apples and hops are picked, the notices are served. Reciting the provisions of the Pauper Act, the notice 'warns' the migrant 'to get out' and advises him that no relief will be granted if he stays. Despite these precautions, many workers, failing to make their expenses in the summer, are compelled to wait around until spring before they can leave. Of the transient families studied by Dr. Reuss, 54 per cent reported that they had received relief during the year. 'It is extremely significant,' comments Dr. Reuss, 'that such a high proportion of persons deriving private employment solely from farm labour were aided by relief funds. The relief programme in Yakima County in effect becomes a subsidy to agriculture, raising the less than living wages paid farm labourers to a minimum subsistence level.' The subsidy to agriculture, in this case, is a subsidy to a certain type of agriculture: namely, a highly commercialized agriculture. Half of the families included in a study made in 1936 earned less than $220 a year;[1] Dr. Reuss has estimated the annual earnings of migratory families at $254 a year.

The living conditions of migratory workers in the Yakima Valley have long been regarded as about the worst to be found in the entire West. One of the four richest agricultural counties in the United States, Yakima has had one of the highest typhoid-fever rates of any county in America. It is not uncommon to see mountain streams in the valley, crystal clear above a hop pickers' camp, muddy with filth and debris for miles downstream. Other areas in the North-west have long provided private labour camps; but Yakima has had the reputation of not providing camps. Camps near the orchards, according to the growers, would provide workers with too good an opportunity to steal fruit. It would require too much space to describe the existing camps; full descriptions, with photographs, can be found in a study made by Dr. Marion Hathway in 1934 and in a later study by Dr. Landis.[2]

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[1] *Monthly Labour Review,* August 1937.

[2] Bulletin No. 363, Washington State College.

4. ROUGH STUFF

Yakima growers have long resorted to extra-legal methods to control the 35,000 migratory workers who enter the valley every year. Most of the hop camps are guarded, during the season, by special deputy sheriffs and every year the celebrated Hop Patrol, composed of State Highway Patrolmen, appears in the valley. The purpose of the Hop Patrol, writes Dr. Landis, is 'to guard against labour disorders'. His further comments are illuminating: 'Employers keep a strict watch for organizational activities. One even went so far as to draw up a contract which he required all pickers to sign, the second clause of which was: "Employee agrees not to directly or indirectly engage in any strike or participate in any disorder or labour disturbance during said season." Pickers in this camp and in many others were afraid of employer espionage. Opinions on the labour situation are rarely voiced and talk of strikes was barred, for pickers knew that the surest way to be ejected from camp was to talk of striking. Cases were reported in the press where pickers were escorted from the county for demanding higher wages.'

Located near Yakima is one of the great show places of eastern Washington**:** Congdon's Castle. Built by a wealthy Eastern family, it is a castle on the plain: a replica of a medieval castle, with turrets, manorial hall, and beautifully designed approaches. The castle is located on a model farm, where imported thoroughbred cattle are housed with great elegance. Automatically controlled flushing systems wash the manure from stalls at regular intervals. But a mile down the road, migrants in 1933 were living in shacks with blankets thrown on the floor for beds. Dust was deep throughout the camp. There was one water spigot for forty families housed in the shacks. The contrast between the barns and the shacks was as great as that between the well-being of the cattle and the poverty of the migrants.

From California to New Jersey, agricultural workers in 1933 were attempting to organize in the belief that the right of collective bargaining was assured to them by Section 7 (a) of the National Industrial Recovery Act. During the pear harvest, in August of that year, a strike occurred at Congdon's Castle. Strikers, evicted from the ranch, converged on a triangular piece of land at the intersection of two highways, which, according to local tradition, was public property. Here they established a squatters' camp. No sooner had they arrived at what they thought was a temporary sanctuary than an army of growers, assembled from all parts of the valley, descended upon them. Mounted on horses, the growers wore white armbands, and were equipped with clubs and pick handles, rifles and shotguns. As the cavalcade surrounded the camp, migrants armed with rocks battled with growers armed with shotguns. The engagement is still known in the annals of Yakima County as the 'Battle of Congdon's Castle'.

The battle, needless to say, was of short duration. When it was over, the strikers were driven on foot, like a herd of cattle, down the highway for a distance of about ten miles to Yakima, where a stockade had been built near the county jail. It has been described as 'a sturdy affair, built of heavy planks, topped with barbed wire and supporting a catwalk where guards walked at night when

recalcitrant "reds" were in the stockade'.[1] Into this stockade, about two hundred workers were driven. Most of them were kept in the stockade from August 1933 until the spring of 1934. In many instances no charges were preferred against the prisoners, although some seventy-five workers were convicted of various 'crimes', such as assault, unlawful assembly, and disturbing the peace. From a letter in my possession written by a resident of Yakima, the following statements have been excerpted: When workers were released from the stockade in the spring, they were not released as a group. On the contrary, they were released usually at night, and in small groups of two and three. As they left the stockade, these groups were picked up by waiting vigilantes, escorted out of the county, and told never to return. Several were tarred and feathered. In one case, a jar of honey was poured over a man's head, his hands were tied behind his back, and he was dumped out of a car, in the early morning sun, about ten miles south of Yakima. Many of these happenings were unblushingly reported in the local press; and there are persons in Yakima to-day who can name the principal leaders of the vigilantes, who were, incidentally, among the most 'prominent' and 'eminently respectable' residents of the valley. On the 24th of November 1939, according to Mr. Bill Greenberg of the *Washington New Dealer,* the stockade still stood: a visible threat to the world at large that the incident at Congdon's Castle might be repeated.

5. 'SHIFTING PEOPLES'

Migration to the North-west needs necessarily to be considered against the economic and social background of the areas from which most of the migrants came. The settlement of the Great Plains Area is almost without parallel in human history. 'Rarely, if ever,' it has been said, 'has so large an area been occupied and brought under cultivation in so short a time.' Seventy years ago about 166,887 people resided in the Northern Great Plains states: Montana, Nebraska, North Dakota, South Dakota, and Wyoming. In 1930, 3,514,828 people resided in these states.

It is highly debatable, however, whether the region was ever actually *settled.* Population has shown such marked instability in the area as to indicate that the region was occupied and reoccupied rather than settled. Parts of it should never have been opened up for general agricultural settlement. The Homestead Acts were ill adapted to conditions prevailing throughout the area, and resulted in an atomization of landownership and the creation of thousands of uneconomical units of operation. Cultural practices, developed in other areas, were applied and stubbornly adhered to for years. Everyone homesteaded land: teachers, lawyers, invalids. Only a small proportion of the original settlers, were actual farmers with farming experience. And the majority of the actual farmers lacked familiarity with dry-land farming. Even governmental agencies were patterned after models that had grown up in connection with closely settled, populous areas. The inevitable result was too many units of government, too many roads, too many town sites, too

[1] *Washington New Dealer,* 24 November 1939; for a detailed description of a similar stockade built in California the following summer, see La Follette I Transcript, vol. 72, p. 26627.

many county seats. A ruinous mountain of public and private debt was created. Land promotion companies and railroads, concerned only with getting rid of the land, settled people throughout the area in utter disregard of its capacity to sustain population.

In this area, by 1930, was a large resident population, overwhelmingly rural in character, with only one city of 100,000 population in the entire region. Most of the existing cities and towns have been properly described as merely 'service stations' for the rural population, which had one of the highest birth-rates to be found in the nation. Under these circumstances, it is not surprising to note that the region had begun to 'export' population by 1920. Since then, of course, the out-migration has reached enormous proportions. From 1930 to 1940 about 400,000 people have moved out of Nebraska, South Dakota, North Dakota, and Wyoming.

But the outgoing migration does not begin to approximate the actual mobility of the population. From the time of its original settlement, there has always been much moving about within the region with a very high and rapid turnover of farm population. In twelve townships in western North Dakota 40 per cent of the farm operators present in 1919 had moved out by 1926; for every ten farmers leaving, six new farmers had come into the district. Left in the region to-day, despite the heavy outgoing movement, are thousands of migrant families, the so-called 'stranded farm population' of the area. In Wyoming, Colorado, and Montana alone there are approximately 12,604 such families. There are, therefore, really about three levels of migration involved: those migrants who have moved out of the state, passing directly, or by stages, to the Pacific Coast; those who have continued to move about within the region seeking an adjustment to their environment; and, lastly, the stranded groups who lack even the meagre resources to escape.

The trend has been consistently westward. Half of those who have left the region altogether have gone to the Pacific Coast, and there has been practically no counter-movement back. On the other hand, there has been a constant movement into the Northern Great Plains area from regions still farther east. From the Dakotas migrant families have moved into eastern Montana, failed there, and moved on into the cut-over timber regions of western Montana, and then on to the Coast. As they have moved out, others have moved in, with the process, in general, being a gradual but constant shifting of population westward. The new farmers who have moved in to take the place of those who have migrated are, for the most part, young men with slight previous farming experience. The outgoing families are, incidentally, somewhat smaller than the incoming families.

Actually the outgoing migration from the Northern Great Plains, instead of easing the pressure of population upon resources, as one might imagine, has intensified that pressure. As drought and repeated crop failures have forced people off the land, the banks and insurance companies have taken over a vast acreage. One insurance company, operating in the region, has 800 farms involving a total of 200,000 acres of land. About 35 per cent of the total of North Dakota farm acreage will shortly be publicly owned through tax delinquency. The land commissioners, dealing with tax-delinquent land, and the insurance companies with foreclosed land, have sought to dispose of such acreage as rapidly as possible. This has created a situation where large-scale operators, with machinery, can

lease large acreages on desirable terms. Dispossessed farm families, lacking capital and machinery, cannot compete with these 'suitcase' or 'Main Street' farmers. Migration out of the area has actually stimulated further dispossession of the original farm families and resulted in additional migration. It has also increased migration from farm to farm within the area.[1] Landlords prefer to lease to large operators; in many instances they refuse to lease to anyone who does not have a tractor and other needed machinery. Large operators lease extensive holdings to get A.A.A. benefit payments which they use to lease still more land. Regarded from a long-range point of view, it is possible that this tragic process of liquidation and enforced exodus does work a measure of adjustment between land and people. Nevertheless experts who have studied the problem closely have expressed grave doubt that the 'disruptive' effect of the outward migration is 'fundamentally correcting difficulties created by the rapid occupation of the area. Nor is there assurance that future migration may not occur and lead to a repetition of the errors of original settlement.' To achieve even a limited degree of adjustment, the process must go still further. A vast public debt must be wiped out or repudiated, for, with the people gone, the tax base has largely been destroyed and the rural communities are, if anything, more impoverished than they were before the migrants left. Those who glibly rationalize migration as a means of population adjustment have yet to demonstrate the soundness of the theory as applied to the exodus from the Northern Great Plains.

[1] See Bulletin 315, South Dakota State College of Agriculture and Mechanic Arts, p. 9.

CHAPTER IV

ARIZONA: MIGRANT WAY STATION

When migrants start out on Highway 66 for the Coast, many of them are headed, in the first instance, for the cotton fields of New Mexico and Arizona. Once the cotton is picked, there is nothing in the way of general employment to hold them, so they naturally drift into California. Arizona has become, therefore, a winter resort for the migrants—a way station *en route* to the Coast—where they get their first taste of a fully developed system of industrialized agriculture. Its major agricultural areas are concentrated in a few irrigated valleys in which the land has long since passed into private ownership. Development costs and power and irrigation charges are extremely high. Water is more important than the land itself. Even the original settlers found settlement in Arizona precarious and difficult. If settlement was difficult then, it is far more difficult to-day.

Diverse racial patterns have created in Arizona a labour market which offers few work opportunities for migrant families. There are three major elements in the population: 'White-American', Mexican, and Indian, with the Mexicans and Indians comprising about a third of the total. With slight cultural exchange between these groups, occupational stratification along racial lines has become a marked characteristic of the region. Long 'the chore boy of Arizona', the Mexican, well-adapted to the climate and familiar with irrigated farming, has made an ideal farm labourer. Since the availability of Mexican labour decreases westward across the state, migrants, on first entering Arizona from the east, naturally gravitate to those areas in which there is the least amount of Mexican labour. As they move westward across the state, they get nearer to California.

1. KING COTTON

Arizona provides an excellent illustration of what happens to the agricultural economy of a state once it has become thoroughly industrialized. Not only does agricultural employment become permanently stratified, but small farmers are gradually eliminated; land-ownership becomes concentrated in a few hands; small rural communities wither up and die; local self-government becomes non-existent. The irrigated valleys of the state, once prosperous small-farming communities, have become desert sweatshops. By 1912 the early settlers had created, at great expense and hardship, a well-balanced, self-sufficient agricultural economy which fitted the natural limitations of the region. The dairy industry, supplemented by melons and cantaloupes and produce crops, made for rural prosperity. The family-sized farm was intact; there was no farm-labour problem; nor was there a public assistance or rural health problem. Overnight this economy was violently uprooted and supplanted with a large-scale industrialized type of agriculture.

The farm-labour problem in Arizona dates from the development of a long-staple Egyptian variety of cotton, especially good for thread, aeroplane cloth, and tyre fabric, which, it was found, grew amazingly well there. But as late as the outbreak of the World War, there were only about four hundred acres planted.

When the price of long-staple cotton began to soar, Arizona went cotton-crazy. Speculative operators leased thousands of acres, at fabulous prices, for cotton production. Fortunes of $350,000 were made by individuals in a single year. Profits of $100, $150, and $250 an acre were not uncommon. Thousands of acres were shifted from alfalfa to cotton and some 65,000 dairy cows were sold. With the speculative operators in a frenzy for cheap labour, the immigration laws were relaxed, and Mexicans began 'creeping under the fence all along the international line'.

When the price of cotton collapsed in 1919, the resulting devastation was appalling. 'In one season,' according to Mr. Walter V. Woehlke, 'the Salt River Valley's cotton deficit equalled the entire cost of the Roosevelt Dam, including the cost of its elaborate canal and ditch system.'[1] Visiting Arizona at the time, Mr. Woehlke quoted a local banker as follows: 'During the last three years, cotton has been a curse to the irrigated valleys of the South-west. What we need and want is forty-acre farms tilled by the owners. Cotton brought farms of 300, and 1,000 and 2,000 acres operated by hired labour and tenants. Cotton brought Hindus, Negroes, and Mexicans by the thousands; it brought illiterate Southern "poor white trash" with their large families of children kept out of school and worked from dawn to dark picking cotton.'

At the time of the débâcle, warning voices urged Arizona farmers to return to diversified farming. A writer in the *Arizona Labour Journal* for the 14th of May 1920, pointed out that the extra cost of recruiting cheap labour 'comes off the entire community and not from those who enjoy the special privilege. If cheaper than the American standard is necessary for successful cotton farming, it would be better to return to alfalfa, the dairy cow and thoroughbred cattle, to fruit and vegetables.' At this time, when Arizona was undecided whether it should return to diversified farming, labour commentators pointed out that large-scale cotton farming involved the doom of the small farmer. The price of long-staple cotton is fixed by a few manufacturers and several of these manufacturers also produce cotton. Placed in competition with the large-scale operators, the small cotton farmer is at a hopeless disadvantage.

Unfortunately these considerations went unheeded. The temptation to make bonanza profits through the use of cheap labour proved irresistible. The factory farm, based on the use of migratory labour, began to supplant the small farms. 'Markets and machines,' writes Dr. E. D. Tetreau of the University of Arizona, 'definitely threaten the family-sized farm in Arizona's irrigated areas. Commercialized and mechanized farming experts and operators exploit land and water resources, using cheap money and cheap labour to the exhaustion of soil fertility and often to the detriment of local institutions.'[2]For 'any excessive reduction in the number of resident owner-families' tends to weaken local initiative 'without which popular government is but an empty shell'.

In Arizona the die is cast in favour of the large-scale Industrialized farm.'In the newer irrigation districts,' to quote from a recent study,[3] 'where the bulk of Arizona cotton is grown, large-

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[1] *Sunset,* July 1921.
[2] *Rural Sociology,* vol. 5, No. 2.
[3] *Migratory Cotton Pickers in Arizona,* 1939, p. 52

scale, highly mechanized operations prevail. One grower is operating what was once a whole development district of small farms which went bankrupt during the depression. A single corporation controls 19,000 irrigated acres in Maricopa County. According to local estimates, close to half of the 1937 Arizona cotton acreage was operated by a few growers, each controlling upwards of 1,000 acres.'Gone beyond recall is the early self-sufficiency of Arizona agriculture. An ideal dairy-farming community, Arizona to-day produces only half the poultry and eggs consumed in the state and much less of its requirements for butter and cheese. The one-crop commercial farmers do not 'want to fool with cows and chickens.'[1] Naturally, in this type of agricultural economy, there is not much place for thousands of migrant farm families.

2. IT'S AN OLD, OLD STORY

Long before the Joads ever thought of becoming migratory workers, thousands of Mexican families were recruited every year by the Arizona Cotton Growers Association to pick cotton. Every season subsequent to 1914, labour scouts were sent to Mexico and throughout the South-west to recruit cotton pickers. Thousands of Mexicans were imported under contract to work in the fields, with the growers being obligated to pay their return transportation expenses. By and large, however, the growers defaulted in their obligation, some because they went broke in the débâcle of 1919, others because they wanted to see the labour stranded in Arizona so that they would not have to spend money the next season to import additional workers.

Under the typical contract of employment, the Mexican had to repay to the grower the expense of transportation. If the family were large, this might involve a season's earnings. Once these costs were repaid, however, the Mexicans began to demand a living wage. Since it was impossible to import contract labour after the war, those already in Arizona thought that they were in a position, with the backing of their own government, to insist upon fulfilment of the original contracts. In 1920 about 4,000 Mexican workers notified the growers that they wanted a living wage and a full compliance with the contracts.

'Immediately upon this declaration,' to quote from the *Arizona Labour Journal,* 'the agents of the cotton companies declared them on strike, arrested the leaders, and took them to Tempe and put them in jail.' Most of the leaders were either arrested or deported. Mexicans, complaining of the exorbitant prices charged at company-owned commissaries, were arrested right and left. One worker was deported when he asked for his pay cheque; his wife, two children, and a sister were left stranded in Arizona.[2] Over two hundred penniless Mexicans from Sonora were destitute at Nogales and had to be transported back to their homes by the Republic of Mexico. In an effort to break the strike, the companies hired renegade Mexicans, dressed them in flashy clothes, and sent them to

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[1] *Arizona: A State Guide*

[2] *Arizona Labour Journal,* 23 July 1920.

Mexico to spread extravagant stories of the high wages to be made in Arizona picking cotton.[1]

The situation became so acute for the Mexicans left in Arizona that the Mexican consul made a full investigation and submitted a report to the governor of the state. The consul pointed out that he had received hundreds of complaints from Mexicans that wage claims had not been paid; that they had been overcharged at the commissaries; and that transportation charges ($72 to transport a worker from Culiacan, Mexico, to Tempe, Arizona) were excessive, particularly when the same charge was made for children regardless of their age. Even with the relatively high wages then prevailing, Mexican families were making only about $18 a week, one-half of which was applied against the transportation charges and the other half allowed as a credit at the commissaries. Three-fourths of the workers, according to the consul, were living in flimsy tents, drinking ditch water and plagued by swarms of flies and mosquitoes.

The cotton growers, moreover, used the strike as a pretext for failing to transport the contract workers back to Mexico at the end of the season. During the winter of 1921, the Arizona State Federation of Labour, out of its funds, had to establish soup kitchens for hundreds of Mexicans ‘starving along the roadsides because the cotton people who imported them have not paid their wages in full nor returned them to Mexico in accordance with their agreement'. On the 28th of March 1921, the Mexican consul had to get an appropriation of $17,000 from his government for the relief of stranded Mexicans in Arizona. The city manager of Phoenix rounded up hundreds of destitute Mexican families, loaded them in trucks, and delivered them at the door of the Arizona Cotton Growers Association in Tempe with emphatic instructions 'to take these people of yours until they can be deported'. Towns and communities throughout Arizona vainly petitioned the State Legislature and Congress for relief. From 1920 to 1930 almost every winter witnessed a repetition of precisely the same situation. Through the decade the Arizona State Federation of Labour kept up an unceasing agitation against the use of cheap migratory labour in the cotton fields. As the Federation pointed out, on many occasions, it was not only the Mexicans who were being victimized**,** for the effect of creating an annual reserve of cheap labour was to demoralize all labour standards in the community. It was stated, for example, in the *Arizona Labour Journal* for the 18th of February 1928 'that thousands of white citizens of Arizona, California, Texas, and New Mexico have disposed of their homes for what they could and have left Arizona to escape the competition of Mexican labour'.

In the latter part of the 'twenties the growers began to advertise for white families and to advance money for gasoline in an effort to lure migrants to the cotton fields. Sydney P. Osborne (the present ' Governor of Arizona) commented on the continual recruitment of cotton pickers as follows: 'There is no scarcity of labour in Arizona; on the contrary, there is an abundance of labour. If the prices being paid for cotton picking constitute less than a living wage, the city, county, and state might find it advantageous to pay a bonus for cotton picking, rather than to support soup lines, or any other lines

[1] *Arizona Labour Journal,* 20 July 1920

for mendicants.'[1] At a later date, with the institution of relief, this is exactly what the agencies of government did. Professor Clark Kerr of the University of Washington has pointed out that the expenditures of relief agencies on all agricultural and unskilled workers in the cotton-producing areas of California and Arizona, for 1939, was estimated at $5,000,000. In the same year more than $9,000,000 was paid to cotton growers in the two states by the A.A.A., or the equivalent of nearly one-third of the entrepreneurial cost of the entire crop.[2] Nor would relief expenditures alone indicate the total social costs involved in the production of cotton.

Under the pretext of a continuing 'labour shortage', the Arizona Cotton Growers Association, in 1926, arranged with the Bureau of Insular Affairs of the Department of Interior to import 1,500 Puerto Ricans. The adventure was ill-fated from the start. On the day the first boatload sailed from San Juan, 6,000 Puerto Ricans, starving for work, clamoured about the port demanding a chance to board the ship. 'Rioting followed.' Most of the those who sailed were negroes, 'ill adapted to the new environment'. In Arizona the Puerto Ricans 'could not be speeded up to the point where they could pick enough cotton to make a living. They soon became public charges.'[3] The labour scouts who had recruited these workers had grossly misrepresented conditions in Arizona. Workers were told that houses with 'electric lights' were furnished, and that wages were high. When they discovered that they had been deceived, they staged a minor rebellion. Less than 50 per cent remained in the fields; the others deserted the camps and marched into Phoenix. When the Governor called upon the cotton growers for an explanation, they suggested that the city and county adopt strict ordinances against 'loitering'. If this action was taken, they said, 'we will have no difficulty in holding the supply of unskilled labour on the ranches'.[4] By the following season, 90 per cent of the Puerto Ricans had disappeared; they had 'scattered like clouds'.[5] No-one knows just where they went or what happened to them; but they were not returned to Puerto Rico.

But there is still another racial group involved in the Arizona cotton industry. Located in Arizona are three Indian tribes—the Papagoes, Pimas, and Maricopas. The three tribes number about 11,700 people and are referred to as the 'poorest Indians in the United States'. As cotton pickers they have the advantage, in the eyes of the growers, of being permanent residents and, more important, permanent wards of the government. 'Unlike the landless migratory farm labourers that come to Arizona from Arkansas, Texas, and Oklahoma or from the Pacific Coast, Indian farm labourers are almost without exception self-supporting the year round.'[6] As soon as the season is over, they can be returned to the reservations. Dr. Tetreau estimates the number of Indian cotton pickers as about 2,000, but Mr. Ted Shipley, of the Indian Employment Service in Phoenix, told me in 1940 that about 4,000

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[1] *Dunbar's Weekly,* 9 November 1930.

[2] *Industrial Relations in Large-Scale Cotton Farming,* 1941.

[3] *The New Republic,* 14 August 1929

[4] *Arizona Labour Journal*

[5] *Proceedings of the California Fruit Growers Association,* February-November 1927, p. 74.

[6] Dr. E. D. Tetreau, *Arizona's Farm Labourers,* May 1939.

or 6,000 pick cotton in Arizona. Because the Indians are slow and careful pickers, their daily earnings are small. Mr. Shipley believes that, on an average, they make from 50 to 60 cents a day, with daily earnings for families being about $2.50. According to Mr. Shipley, however, their wants are negligible and 'they live on beans'.

To-day the Arizona cotton growers have an excellent setup. Picking long-staple cotton is a much more difficult operation than picking short-staple cotton. The customary arrangement is to use Mexicans and Indians in the fields of long-staple cotton and negroes and Okies in the short-staple fields. Naturally the pressure of white migrant labour is being increasingly felt by the local Mexican workers. The Mexican consul in Phoenix told me that the growers constantly warn them, not only in cotton but in other crops, that unless they toe the line 'we'll bring in more Okies'. The consul estimates that Mexican seasonal workers make about $6.00 a week and that annual earnings, per family, do not exceed on an average $250.

3. THE ARRIVAL OF THE JOADS

Migrant farm families from Oklahoma and Texas have worked in the Arizona cotton fields since 1921; but with the dust-bowl exodus they have swarmed westward in increasing numbers. Over 400,000 have passed through the Arizona way station *en route* to the Coast, and the westward movement still continues. While not all of these migrants stop in Arizona to pick cotton, large numbers of them have done so. In November 1937 it was estimated that Arizona needed some 45,600 cotton pickers. Of this number 20,400 were local residents (Mexicans, negroes, Indians, and some whites), but 25,200 : were recruited outside the state.

The systematic annual recruitment of American farm families for employment in Arizona was begun in 1929 by the Arizona Cotton Growers Association. From 1929 to 1933, the association had charge of recruitment; but from 1933 to date activities have been carried on by the Farm Labour Service, which is financed, not by the cotton growers**,** but by the cotton-ginning companies.[1] One of these companies, Western Cotton Products Company (a subsidiary of Anderson, Clayton & Company), in 1939 financed 485 'cotton accounts' involving 57,236 acres in cotton, and, in that year, ginned 41 per cent of the total cotton produced in Arizona.[2] Like the sugar-beet refineries, the cotton-ginning companies insist that, in advancing money to recruit cheap labour, they are merely 'performing a service' for the growers. When the Arizona Cotton Growers Association conducted the annual recruitment of labour, it frequently advanced transportation expenses. These expenses were, of course, later deducted from the earnings of the workers. But every year the association lost money (in one year $25,000), since many workers, on becoming familiar with working conditions, would desert before the season was over.[3] The Farm Labour Service does not advance travelling expenses; its labour scouts and runners merely start the migrants towards Arizona. This it has been able to do, until the last year, by reason of the almost incestuous

[1] La Follette Transcript, vol. 53, p. 19555.
[2] Ibid., vol. 72, p. 26586
[3] Ibid., vol. 53, p. 19560.

relationship that existed in Arizona between the Farm Labour Service (the cotton ginners) and the United States Farm Placement Service. The two organizations occupied the same offices; shared the same stenographer; and until Senator La Follette turned the spotlight on Arizona, the Farm Labour Service actually used the free franking privilege of the federal agency. Every year since 1933, the Farm Labour Service has sent its labour scouts throughout Oklahoma, Texas, and Arkansas, to recruit cotton pickers; it has distributed handbills and placards in these areas advertising for workers; it has used the radio and also the newspapers for the same purpose. In 1927 alone the Farm Labour Service was responsible for 20,000 out-of-state cotton pickers entering Arizona. Nowadays as the processes of the industrial revolution in agriculture uproot farm families in one area of the country, the same processes buttress more fully matured types of industrialized agriculture in other areas. Migrants, uprooted from the land in Oklahoma and Texas, are sucked into the orbit of migratory employment in states such as Arizona and California. In 1920, Arizona cotton growers, to recruit 20,000 out-of-state pickers, spent $300,000; but in 1937, with the aid of the public employment service and the expenditure of $900, they were able to recruit a similar number of workers.[1] Migrant American farm families, recruited by the Farm Labour Service, and paying their own transportation expenses, have received in Arizona precisely the same treatment (and have created the same problems) that Mexican families, recruited by the Arizona Cotton Growers Association, received from 1914 to 1933. Migrant families have been stranded in Arizona just as Mexican families. Just as the Mexicans rebelled in 1920, so the Joads in 1937 sent delegations to camp on the steps and lawns of the State Capitol in Phoenix, clamouring for food, shelter, clothing, and medical care. But by 1937 Arizona had increased its residence requirements for relief from one year to three years, so that the migrants were not eligible for relief. Nor were they eligible for W.P.A. employment, since the W.P.A. employs only those who are certified and referred from the state welfare department. The situation finally became so desperate that the Farm Security Administration appropriated $50,000 for relief. Throughout the winter of 1938, the F.S.A. cared for some 4,500 relief cases involving about 16,000 people.[2] Despite this spectacle of poverty and disaster, the Farm Labour Service in 1938 and in 1939 and in 1940 continued to recruit out-of-state workers.

Since 1937 the Farm Security Administration has had to support, every winter, about 3,000 migrant families in Arizona, or about 12,000 people. There is little likelihood that other than a few of these families can be rehabilitated as farmers in Arizona. As cotton pickers and field workers in the state, they are constantly making it more and more difficult for the resident Mexican workers to earn a living. Despite these considerations, migrant farm families continue to migrate to Arizona every year. 'The fact remains,'as the F.S.A. points out,'that resident labour is sufficient to harvest the crops, and the employment of migratory labour is in effect a replacement of available local workers. Were it not for the cotton harvest, Arizona would not have a migratory labour population of

[1] Tolan Transcript, part 5, p. 1885.
[2] La Follette Transcript, vol. 53, p. 19571

any significant size.'[1] These considerations, it might be observed, were just as true in 1920 as in 1940.

Migrant farm families in Arizona live in four types of settlements: grower camps; cheap auto and trailer camps; squatter camps; and in the shack-towns of Phoenix and Tucson. The worst camps are, of I course, the squatter camps, in which about 10 per cent of the migrants live. They are located on ditch banks, along the roadside, and on the open desert. Sometimes as many as fifty families collect in these improvised camps, usually located near a highway intersection or where some type of water supply is available. In the squatter camps, the F.S.A. found ‘numerous cases where no shelter other than automobiles' existed. It is scarcely necessary to point out that it can be extremely hot and also extremely cold in Arizona during the cotton- picking season, which lasts through December and into January.

Many migrants are also housed in the shack-towns around the cities. In the Phoenix shack-town some 3,704 families reside (1,166 white families, 1,566 Mexican families, and 912 negro families). Near 16th and Jefferson Streets, in Phoenix, the trucks line up at 5 a.m. and the drivers blow their horns and yell 'Cotton hands!' In a few moments the trucks are loaded and on their way to the fields. They return to the corner about 9.30 or 10 o'clock at night.

To say that the use of migratory labour in Arizona creates a health problem is to indulge in understatement. Through the Agricultural Workers Health and Medical Association (a co-operative financed by the federal government) an old hotel at Chandler, Arizona, has been taken over and converted into a hospital to care for cotton pickers. To provide medical treatment for migrants in Arizona, the Association spends about $16,624.92 per month throughout the year. This fact alone should indicate what the health problems are among the migratory workers of Arizona. The total sum expended by the government for health services is merely an additional subsidy to the cotton industry—one more social cost involved in the use of migratory labour in an industrialized agricultural economy.

It is ironic to note that migrants have been victimized, both at the place of origin and at the place of destination, by the cotton industry. It was their preoccupation with cotton that made tenants, and then sharecroppers, and then migrants of them in Oklahoma and Texas; it was cotton that lured them west to Arizona. Through mechanization cotton production expanded so rapidly that it became necessary, in the judgement of Congress, to inaugurate the A.A.A. programme. Mechanization and the Triple A benefit payments are largely responsible for the breakdown of the tenancy system in cotton, which in turn is responsible for the migrants being in Arizona. Once in Arizona, they cannot become farmers because agriculture has become so thoroughly industrialized and mechanized that the costs are far beyond their meagre resources. The Triple A benefit payments have made it possible for large operators in Arizona to lease state-owned land and to make $30,000 a year on an initial payment of $640 (a section of land at $1.00-an-acre rent from the state). The details on this typical operation are

[1] *A Survey of Migratory Labour Population in Maricopa and Final Counties,* November 1939.

carefully worked out in Mr. Darnton's article in the *New York Times* (5th of March 1940).

Arizona affords many illustrations of what happens to farming as a way of life once industrialized agriculture develops. Such an illustration was given by Dr. Paul Taylor in his testimony before the Tolan Committee. In 1940 Dr. Taylor visited a large cotton development in the vicinity of Eloy, Arizona, where about 35,000 acres of cotton, largely on public lands, have been brought under irrigation since 1934. 'Only the pumps, gins, and some of the farm machinery,' he testified, 'are subject to county taxation, although the county has been presented with new emergency burdens by the development. Farms of several sections in size are common. The operators are virtually all absentees, frequently residents of another state. I did not personally see a first-rate rural home in the area, but only an occasional cheap house for an irrigator or foreman. Hundreds of tents and shacks dot the area for the thousands of transient cotton pickers who also originated largely in other states, and who carry smallpox and typhoid with them into other states when they leave. Thus the operators, the capital, the labourers, the problems of health and relief—all are largely interstate. On Saturday during the harvest the town of Eloy is crowded with thousands of pickers who throng the food stores and patronize rummage sales on the streets. But the fact that there are only perhaps 350 people in the entire area stable enough to register to vote reveals the role of these 35,000 acres as nourishment for an American farm population.' It was, therefore, rather amusing to hear Mr. R. V. Jensen, of Anderson, Clayton & Company, tell Senator La Follette that the reason migrants had come to Arizona was because 'they found things nice out here'. This phrase 'Things Are Nice Out Here' should be inscribed over the entrance to every cotton camp in Arizona.[1]

[1] What I have said in this chapter about Arizona could also be said of New Mexico, another migrant way station on the route to the Coast. Full details **can** be found in *Migratory-Casual Workers in New Mexico* by Sigurd Johansen, a publication of the W.P.A., 1939.

BOOK II THE UPROOTING

CHAPTER V BLACKBIRDS AND SCISSORBILLS

Having finished its investigations in California, the La Follette Committee was back in Washington by May 1940, where the hearings were resumed. There it was reminded, by a number of experts, of facets of the problem of migrant farm labour which, momentarily forgotten in the excitement over California vigilantism, were shown to have an important relation to the basic causes under investigation. The committee discovered, for example, that thousands of Oklahoma and Texas farmers had been migrants for years before they set out for California. It also discovered that the industrialization of agriculture in the Middle West was directly related to the problems of the dust-bowl. Gradually it began to find out about thousands of Joads who, once a major national concern, had somehow been forgotten. The trail of the investigation led finally to a brief consideration of the migratory labour pattern in the Wheat Belt, in the evolution of which many latter-day problems of a mechanized agriculture were clearly foreshadowed two decades ago. It may seem a far cry to cut back from a consideration of migrants and migratory labour on the Pacific Coast to an examination of the Wheat Belt migration, but the relationship between the two, unmistakably clear and direct, illuminates many aspects of the general problem.

1. THE HARVEST HAND

In the years from 1900 to 1927, the wheat fields of the Great Plains area were the scene of a great seasonal migration. Since large population centres within the area were almost non-existent and most of the farming was restricted to family-size units, a vast amount of labour had to be recruited each season for the short 'flash' harvest of the wheat. In the process of recruiting out-of-state labour, a definite pattern of migration was developed which, in general, followed the maturity of the crop northward. The cycle began with winter wheat in Oklahoma, Texas, Kansas, Missouri, and Nebraska, and moved gradually northward into the spring wheat areas of northern Nebraska, the Dakotas, Minnesota, Montana, and Canada. When the tide of migration was at its height, some 200,000 harvest hands were on the move.

From an early date, migratory labour in wheat had certain marked characteristics. It was made up of single men who were almost entirely 'White Americans'. Unaccompanied by families and unburdened with responsibilities, they had to be treated with some deference- With heterogeneous backgrounds, they were not divided into racial groups and were predisposed, from an early date, to a radical type of trade-unionism. Since they were employed by thousands of unorganized farmers, the labour market remained 'free', and wages, in general, had a direct relation to supply and demand. Labour in the wheat fields was never cheap. It was in part because of this circumstance that a considerable inducement always existed to mechanize the crop.

At the outset one of the major elements in the army of wheat harvest hands was the hobo. In the Northern Great Plains perhaps one-third of the workers regularly combined a season in wheat with employment in the lumber, railroad, and mining camps of the Northwest. These workers were, for the most part, homeless and womanless. If they had a home, it was the jungle camp beneath the railroad bridge, or across the tracks from town. At least a third of these harvest hands, however, were one-crop migrants from the small-farm sections of Oklahoma, Arkansas, and Texas—the Joads of yesterday. In 1923 Mr. Don D. Lescohier noted that 'many of the agricultural workers come from the small farms in the hills of Missouri and Arkansas, or scattered through northern Texas and Oklahoma, which cannot provide support for a family.'[1] He discovered, also, that many of these small farmers had been making the wheat harvest for ten, fifteen, and twenty years. By following the crop harvest northward, they could make a little nest egg which would tide them through the winter when they returned to their semi-subsistence farms. In following the wheat crop, however, they never brought their families along. It is significant that from 1900 to 1927 thousands of farm workers, from precisely the areas of heaviest recent migration to the Pacific Coast, managed to find seasonal employment in wheat. The fact that they could do so was a major reason which, even during these years, held them to the land.

Until 1919 the wheat harvest migration was made by train. The harvest itself extended over an area a thousand miles long (not including Canada) and three hundred miles wide, and great distances had to be travelled in a short period of time. Heavily interested in the wheat traffic, the railroads during the season permitted thousands of workers to ride the freights. 'Years before the war,' writes Dr. Paul Taylor, 'one could see the freights in July moving slowly through Sioux City into the Dakotas, the roofs and doorways of boxcars literally black with men *en route.to* the wheat fields.'[2] Each season a great black shadow of men passed like a cloud over the plains and, with uncanny swiftness, disappeared. 'The outstanding transient labour problem in the world,'[3] the wheat migration naturally attracted public attention, but no-one noticed the dark clusters of men that, in the winter months, hung around the improvised soup kitchens and flophouses in Kansas City, St. Paul, and Chicago. In the summer the blackbirds would begin to 'hop the freights' for the nearest distributing centres, or depots, for the Wheat Belt. In the towns, where they first jumped off the trains, their arrival usually created considerable consternation. 'Drowsy little villages in the midst of the yellowing wheat fields woke to the need of providing temporary shelter for the harvest hands who landed from boxcars or who came walking.'[4] If the town was already crowded with hands, the authorities rounded up the latest arrivals and started them on the road. 'Move On Is Order of Police as Trains Bring Hobo Throngs to City' was a typical headline of the time.[5] The bargaining for labour that went on in the towns during the season was usually of the kerbstone variety: the farmer in his

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[1] *Survey,* 1 July 1923. 76
[2] *Monthly Labour Review,* March 1937.
[3] *Kansas State Board of Agriculture,* 1919-20, vol. 27, p. 204.
[4] *Review of Reviews,* September 1927.
[5] See *Daily American,* Aberdeen, South Dakota, 18 July 1921

wagon, the bindlestiffs sitting on the kerbs or with their backs against the buildings along Main Street. There was not much disparity in bargaining power, for farmers were still farmers.

It will be noted that this migration pattern was almost the reverse, in many respects, of the typical present-day agricultural migration. The wheat migrant was not despised; his services were eagerly sought after, and his working conditions were tolerable. A lord of the rods, he had no travelling expenses and never worried about a broken-down jalopy. Nor did he have a hungry family following him about through the region. He was actually received into the farm family: he slept in the hayloft and was provided with board. 'Few complaints concerning food are heard,' noted Mr. Lescohier, for Mid-west farm wives prided themselves in preparing good meals for harvest hands. Workers could net, for the season, around $200, which, for many of them, was a tidy sum. And, more important, the small farmers who participated in the movement had a home to which they returned at the end of the season. Even the hobos could usually get a winter job in the lumber camps, the mines, or on the construction projects in the West. But beginning about the time of the World War, the blackbirds began to feel the harsh whip of circumstance.

2. TO WIN THE WAR

With war in Europe, the wheat fields stirred with activity. The price of wheat soared; new lands were broken to the plough, and labour began to command a scarcity value. Even before America's entrance into the War, surplus labour from the towns and rural areas began to be drawn into industrial centres. From 1914 until 1920, there was an incessant clamour in the Wheat Belt for harvest hands. With the outcome of the War itself dependent upon the annual wheat harvest (such, at any rate, was the opinion of Thorstein Veblen), the government began to concern itself directly with recruiting labour.

The threatened shortage of hands presented the opportunity which the I.W.W. had long awaited to organize agricultural labour. Formed on the 21st of April 1915, the Agricultural Workers Industrial Union had by 1918 enrolled approximately 50,000 members.[1] The great strength of the wobblies had always been in the unskilled migratory groups—in agriculture, lumber, and mining—among the single men, the bindlestiffs, the floaters. Its headquarters were the jungle camp and the boxcar, admittance to both of which was generally restricted to those who carried a red card. The jungle camps were usually in charge of a delegate and a genuine effort was made to enforce, within the camp, the rules of the road.

Even before the I.W.W. had started regular organizational work among the harvest hands, the Wheat Belt rocked with serious labour unrest.'Since June,' wrote Mr. George Creel, 'the whole wide sweep of the western grain belt has been the scene of ugly disorder and even actual riot. Thousands of men, marching in great bands, have broken down the rules of railroads, ravaged fields and gardens, robbed provision stores, and acted as aggressive units in making

[1] Thorstein Veblen, *Essays in Our Changing Order,* p. 319.

wage demands. Towns in Oklahoma, Kansas, Nebraska, and the Dakotas, have been compelled to treble their police forces, the railroads have largely increased their constabulary, pitched battles are not unknown, and jails have been filled to overflowing.'[1] In an effort to keep wage rates down, recruiting activities were intensified. Wheat Belt towns, wrote Mr. Creel, 'grew black and blacker with work hunters.' 'The pressure of these thousands of idle, hungry, shelterless men bore heavily on every community. Townspeople were deputized and armed with clubs, trains were met by these posses.' Most of the vigilantism arose in the small towns in the Wheat Belt which were endeavouring to protect themselves against the unprecedented influx of workers which had been stimulated in order to check mounting wage rates. For in 1914 wild stories had been circulated throughout the country that the Wheat Belt needed 150,000 additional workers. Labour agents had worked incessantly, during the season, in such communities as Kansas City, St. Louis, St. Paul, and Chicago. Handbills had been distributed and advertisements had been placed in newspapers throughout the Mississippi Valley.

Despite these recruitment activities, however, the I.W.W. continued to force wages up throughout the period from 1914 to 1917. To understand the significance of the development which took place during these years, it is important to remember that a militant farm movement then existed in the Northern Great Plains area.[2] Thorstein Veblen pointed out, at the time, that farmers in the Dakotas and Minnesota shared with the wobblies an intense dislike of the 'vested interests', the 'money barons', and the 'lords of industry'. For a few years it actually seemed as though the long-awaited farmer-labour alliance were about to be realized in the North-west. Not only were many farmers openly sympathetic with the I.W.W. but, in the Dakotas, during one season, they came to a tentative agreement with the wobblies over wage rates, which was only upset by the recruitment of dry-land farmers from Montana. Veblen was so impressed with the possibilities of the *rapprochement* between farmers and farm workers that he recommended to the federal government that the I.W.W. be recognized and used as the medium through which harvest labour should be recruited.

Unfortunately, however, both the Non-Partisan League and the I.W.W. were crushed after the United States entered the War. In 1917, A. C. Townley and other leaders of the Non-Partisan League were indicted in Minnesota for alleged 'disloyal' utterances, despite overwhelming evidence, attested to by Mr. Creel and others, of their active support of the war effort (North Dakota farmers in one year. increased the wheat acreage by 630,000 acres at the request of the government and, by doing so, prepared their own subsequent financial ruin). And, on the 7th of September 1917, the federal government launched its nation-wide campaign against the I.W.W. It was at this point, as Dr. Taylor has written, that 'class warfare broke out in the most "American" sections of rural America. . . . With the entry of the United States into the World War, the authorities stepped into the situation, suppressing the I.W.W. by

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[1] *Harper's Weekly,* 25 September 1914.

[2] See Charles Edward Russell, *The Story of the Nonpartisan League.* 1920.

criminal prosecutions of its leaders, on the one hand, and, on the other, by drafting a new and less radical type of young migrant from more remote rural districts. These rural youths were recruited in order to replace the "hobos" and "gandydancers" from the cities who were habitually exposed, and more susceptible, to the "wobbly" agitation.'

Despite the repressive measures invoked against them, the wobblies were active throughout the War, and in 1919 they redoubled their efforts. 'From Oklahoma to Canada,' writes Mr. Lescohier, 'the hand of the I.W.W. has been felt in the harvest.' Although the federal government was doing everything in its power to flood the Wheat Belt with surplus workers as part of its efforts to crush the wobblies, the expanding wheat acreage, and other factors, continued to create a relative labour shortage. It was estimated, for example, that during the War some 40,000 agricultural workers were attracted to Canada by the prospect of good wages in the wheat fields.[1] As a consequence, wages remained fairly high. In Kansas, in 1919, harvest hands were making from $5.00 to $7.00 a day. In 1920, Mr. Lescohier states that wobblies in North Dakota were scorning employment at $7.50 a day. At Aberdeen, the same year, 400 harvest hands paraded through the streets, when work was available at 60 cents an hour, shouting 'We don't want an honest day's wage for a day's toil. We want the abolition of the wage system.'

Typical of the methods used in the post-war years to eliminate the I.W.W. influence in the Wheat Belt is an incident described by Mr. Lescohier. 'At Colby in 1921,' he writes, 'the I.W.W.s were in control of the situation for about a week. Approximately 1,100 harvesters were in town, a majority of whom were farmer boys from Missouri, Arkansas, Oklahoma, and eastern Kansas. The farmers were offering $4.00 a day, with no takers. . . . Into this situation came three special railroad police. Guns in hand, they went into the jungles, lined up the men there and brought them up to the government employment offices, where they were told to get to work or get out—on a passenger train. Then began the sorting. The southern farmer boys, factory. workers, and others who were "making the harvest" to work, stepped up immediately and took work. The others were marched to the Rock Island depot and over $250 worth of tickets were sold them—probably the first tickets that many of them had bought during extended travels. Within forty-eight hours not more than fifty men were left in Colby.' Throughout the Wheat Belt the process was systematically applied: wobblies were separated from the stream of workers and rousted out of the communities, and the farm boys were treated as favourite sons. With industrial employment low in 1921, it became possible, moreover, to recruit city labour for the wheat harvest so that, in 1923, Mr. Lescohier estimated that of 100,000 migratory workers in wheat one-third were farm workers (from Missouri, Oklahoma, Texas, and Arkansas); one-third were skilled and unskilled workers recruited in the cities; and one-third were more or less habitual migratory workers. The shift in the type of labour used, effected during these years, would have been difficult to achieve had it not

[1] Article by E. V. Willcox in *American Economic Review,* Supplement March 1918.

been for the assistance provided by the newly established government employment offices. These offices were largely responsible for the 'sifting out' technique which eliminated the old-type single transient from the wheat harvest.

3. EXIT BLACKBIRD

While the scissorbills had used strong-arm tactics to drive the blackbirds from the Wheat Belt, a change in type of transportation in the post-war years was probably the decisive factor in eliminating the single transient worker. In an effort to assist the farmers in developing a more 'reliable' labour supply, the railroads began, in 1924, to refuse to carry harvest hands into the Wheat Belt. By 1926 it was estimated that 65 per cent of the harvest hands were travelling by automobile. The professional single migrant, the typical blackbird of the earlier period, could not fit into the new pattern of migration. The transition shortened the harvest period by facilitating the movement of workers from area to area; and eliminated the dangerous tendency of harvest hands to move about on freight trains in large bands or groups. It broke the labour supply up into separate and isolated units. It also tended to bring about a better distribution of labour throughout the area. In addition to attracting more farm workers from the South-west, it stimulated the use of city labour: college students, workers in quest of health, unemployed industrial workers. The old-time blackbirds were at first contemptuous of the new order of things and boasted that 'a chisel through the radiator, a sledge-hammer on the cylinder head', would be all that was needed to drive the auto migrants from the harvest. But they were badly mistaken.

As late as 1927, it was estimated that 100,000 workers were still involved in the wheat migration, from June in Texas to October in Alberta and Saskatchewan. A surprisingly large number were still experienced wheat harvest hands. A study made in 1926 indicated that 57 per cent had served in the wheat harvest for five years or less; 43 per cent for more than five years; and 19 per cent for more than ten seasons. But the proportion of occasional migrants increased in relation to the number of habitual migrants; and by 1927 it was generally agreed that the professional harvest hands were a minority.[1]

4. EXIT FARMER

In rallying to the government's slogan, 'Win the War with Wheat', farmers in the Great Plains area set in motion a chain of circumstances that rapidly resulted in their own displacement. The genesis of the dust-bowl may be traced to the fact that, in response to wartime demands, lands were sown to wheat that should have remained in pasture. With acreage expanding and wages rising, mechanization and power farming were greatly stimulated. By the use of trucks and tractors, the harvest was speeded up and marketing costs reduced. It was, however, the development of the combine-harvester, usually tractor-driven, that revolutionized wheat farming. The general threshing methods in use prior to 1927 required three

[1] L. F. Shields, 'Nomad Workers in America', *Missionary Review of the World, June* 1927.

times as much labour as the combine. In the first year of its widespread introduction (1926) the combine displaced an estimated 33,227 harvest hands;[1] by 1928 it had displaced 50,000 workers;[2] by 1930 the number of displaced workers was estimated at 100,900.[3] In the brief period between 1926 and 1933, about 150,000 harvest hands had been completely eliminated. With an almost audible sigh of relief, the displacement of the harvest hand was romantically noted: 'the care-free knights of the boxcar rods have gone to join the buffalo hunters'. The same wistful observers did not, however, foresee that the farmer himself, in an equally brief period of time, would also join the buffalo hunters.

With the reduction of costs through mechanization, many capitalists were quick to see the possibilities of profit in large-scale wheat farming. The swiftness and efficiency of the new harvesting methods reduced weather hazards and decreased crop losses. But, to offset depreciation on heavy equipment costs, the size of farm operations had to increase. In one county in Kansas it was noted that the average wheat farms increased, between 1910 and 1930, from 562 acres to 911 acres in size. It was not long before agricultural engineers had concluded that 165,000 farm units in wheat in Kansas might more efficiently be operated were the number reduced to 40,000.[4] Soon farmers were moving to town to look for work, and business and professional men, in the towns, were operating wheat farms by remote control. Mobile operating units appeared in which the 'farmers do not live on farms but move from area to area', and observers noted that the 'small wheat farm is vanishing'.[5] As the 'side-line' or 'suitcase' farmers multiplied in number, the remaining dirt farmers moved from country to town. In the decade from 1930 to 1940, the population of Kansas decreased 82,184 and most of the decrease was, of course, in the rural areas.[6]

Having abundant capital for the acquisition of land and equipment, the new large-scale operators greatly increased the already existing surplus of wheat and, by so doing, still further cut the ground from under the family-sized farm. The government was then successfully induced to pay heavy subsidies and bonuses which went, in the main, to the same large-scale operators, who used the money to increase still further the scale of their operations. The process is graphically described in two county reports from Kansas:

'This county in the past seven years has rapidly ceased to be in the small farmer class. Farm after farm has had the improvements torn down and the acreage cultivated by a hired man. This procedure has reduced the landlord's taxes and at the same time he received the entire A.A.A. or soil conservation allotment. Former tenant farmers have been thrown out of a job and a place to live. People have been forced to move into the towns. In 1933, 1934, 1935, and 1936, we had many people living in the county receiving assistance. Now a very small percentage live outside a town. Low-income families formerly lived in an old house on a farm and raised a few chickens or pigs and had a cow. These buildings have been torn down

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[1] Editorial Research Reports, 28 July 1927.

[2] *Report of the Department of Labour,* Oklahoma, December 1928, p. 11.

[3] *Arizona Labour Journal,* 7 July 1930; 18 October 1930.

[4] *Agricultural Engineering,* December 1927.

[5] See Avis D. Carlson, 'The Wheat Farmer's Dilemma', *Harper's,* July 1931; and *American Bankers' Association Journal,* August 1930

[6] Tolan Transcript, part 4, p. 1483

to a great extent and even the pasture ploughed for wheat land. A result has been exorbitant rent in town for a very poor shack or house and very inadequate housing. . . . The 1940 Census report shows a decrease of over 900 persons in this county.'[1]

Or, from another county:

'The cause behind this [distress] is the ploughing of the native buffalo sod and planting the land to wheat. In many cases this was done by "suitcase" farmers, who operated from a base in eastern or central Kansas. They did not put improvements on the farms, not even drilling a well. After raising one or two good wheat crops the land failed to produce. For several years they kept on cultivating the land (with a one-way plough), hoping that this would be the year for a good crop, until the top ground was a fine powdery silt. When the land began to blow these men went back to their homes and left the native farmers to live in the dust clouds they had caused.'[2]

Slight wonder, then, as Dr .J. M. Gillette of the University of North Dakota has observed,[3] that the rapid mechanization of farm production has transformed 'much farming into a highly sedentary, mechanized, and technically industrialized business', or that 'a permanent submerged socio-economic class of employable unemployed farmers' has developed in the Wheat Belt. It is from this class that an endless stream of migrants has flowed from the Great Plains area to the Pacific Coast.

The revolution in wheat has left no place for the old-time farmers or farm labourers. The efficiency experts complain that the former harvest hands have 'horse-habits' and cannot be adjusted to machine work.[4] The typical harvest hand, they say, even shows a deplorable tendency, once he has learned to operate a tractor, to stop every now and then and take a smoke. It is as though from force of habit he wants to give the machine a rest. The remaining farm hands are, nowadays, really machinists. Many of them do not reside on the farm but are members of special custom-work combine crews that contract to harvest wheat from Oklahoma to Kansas. With floodlights turned on the fields, they work day and night and the harvest is completed in a matter of hours. With the smaller combines mounted on rubber tyres and the larger combines being transported by truck, combine crews move from state to state, from area to area, in a brief period of time. Labour has even been eliminated in hauling wheat to the elevators. Huge six-wheel trailer trucks, with long bodies, now haul loads of approximately six hundred bushels of wheat and are unloaded, at the elevators, by hydraulic lifts. Under the new dispensation, even 'racketeering' has appeared in rural America. 'Trucks', reports the Texas Farm Placement Service, 'have been known to sneak into the fields at night, load up, cross the state line, sell the wheat, and return to work for other growers.'

Noting the sharp displacement of workers that resulted in 1927 from the use of the combine, the *New Republic* of the 31st of August 1927 printed an editorial under the caption: 'Shall We Have Factory Farms?' Almost as if in answer to the query, Wheat Farming Company was incorporated in Kansas on the 3rd of September

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[1] Tolan Transcript, part 4, p. 1495.
[2] Ibid., p. 1496.
[3] *Rural Sociology,* March 1940, p. 64.
[4] *Agricultural Engineering,* December 1930.

1927. By 1933 the company was operating 64,000 acres of wheat land scattered throughout ten counties in Kansas. Originally incorporated for $150,000, the capital stock structure of the company was soon increased to $2,000,000. Here was a farm that was owned by 1,200 stockholders. Here was a farm with machinery and equipment valued at $234,000 and that through a subsidiary, Hays Tractor & Equipment Company, manufactured farm equipment. Here was a 'farmer' that maintained a complete equipment and repair division and constructed trailers, trucks, and tractors; and that operated its own elevators and warehouses. By 1931, Wheat Farming Company was operating forty caterpillar tractors, thirty combines, and several hundred tillage machines and trucks, with its employees punching time clocks and working in shifts 'with large lights illuminating the prairies at night'. From 1926 to 1931, the number of wheat factories in the Middle West constantly increased, with many companies operating units of 40,000 and 75,000 acres.

'Kansas wheat farming,' a witness told the Tolan Committee in 1940, 'is a big business.'[1]

5. THE STRAGGLERS

To-day in Kansas, Texas, Oklahoma, and Nebraska some 110,000 combines are in use and the employment of harvest hands has been 'almost completely eliminated'.[2] In Kansas, with 90 per cent of the wheat combined, the employment of migratory labour has been reduced 'to a trickle'.[3] But in the areas such as North Dakota, which is only 25 per cent mechanized, much migratory labour is still used. In the 1938 harvest it was estimated that 25,000 migratory workers obtained work in North Dakota and that there were three men for every job available, not including resident farm labour and local labour.[4] Labour originating on the farm (the farm operator, unpaid family labour, and labour exchanged between farms) accounts for about 40 per cent of the labour demand in North Dakota. Farm hands, also, move from the western parts of the state to the eastern sections, for the harvest. But in a study made in 1938, workers were found in the wheat harvest from 41 states of the Union; most of them, however, were from Wisconsin, Iowa, Illinois, and Missouri.

Most of these 25,000 transient harvest hands were found to be rural workers without property of any description who were 'trying to get started farming for themselves'. Since the work period is now so short (only about seventeen days in North Dakota), seasonal earnings are much lower than they were fifteen years ago. The average amount earned in the harvest in 1938 was $45. With average travelling and living expenses of $14 per worker for the season, it was found that none made net earnings of $100 and that average net earnings were about $30 per worker. These remaining migratory workers in the Wheat Belt will soon be eliminated. Once the North Dakota harvest is thoroughly mechanized, they will no longer be needed. They are young men, for the most part, from rural

[1] Tolan Transcript, part 4, p. 1485.
[2] *Report of the Bureau of Labour Statistics,* Texas, 1929—30, p. 52.
[3] Tolan Transcript, part 4, p. 1494.
[4] Supplemental Hearings, La Follette Committee, part 2, p. 419.

areas who are still trying, with great tenacity, to find a place for themselves on the agricultural ladder. The stragglers of a routed army, they will soon be on the road. For with the disappearance of the blackbirds, a new shadow has fallen across the plains—a shadow that is likely to remain.

CHAPTER VI

THE JOADS AT HOME

As the seemingly endless procession of Joads began to move west- ward, a common assumption took form. The plight of the migrants was characterized as a 'natural catastrophe'—'a tragedy of the dust-bowl'—and the migrants themselves became 'refugees from drought'. A variation was occasionally played upon the theme with 'tractor' being used as the symbol of displacement and distress. The migrants, it was said, were either 'dusted out or tractored out'.

In the fall of 1940 I visited Oklahoma to discover, if possible, why thousands of American farm families had been uprooted from their homes and set adrift on the land. I had not been in Oklahoma long before I realized that 'dust' and 'tractors' accounted for only a small part of the migration. The tragedy of the Joads is, most emphatically, not a natural disaster; they are the victims of grab and greed as much as dust and tractors. Their distress is the end-product of a process of social disintegration set in motion as early as 1900. Their problem is distinctly a man-made problem. Their tragedy is part of a greater tragedy—the wasteful and senseless exploitation of a rich domain— the insane scramble of conflicting group interests which frustrated the promise of the frontier and (within a decade) converted a pioneer territory into a sink of poverty.

The impressions I formed of the Joads at home are necessarily somewhat sketchy and tentative. It would take a volume to do full justice to the story in all its ramifications. In this chapter I merely attempt to touch upon one or two neglected phases of their problem at home, before they became migrants on the road.

1. RED ISLAND OF THE WEST

When the great tides of settlers moved westward across the Mississippi in quest of new lands to farm, Oklahoma was passed over, not because, it was inaccessible or undesirable, but largely because the national government had decided to round up the scattered Indian tribes, from Florida, Georgia, Illinois, and other states, and settle them there. The eastern part of the state remained 'Indian Territory' —a no-man's-land so far as settlement was concerned, a 'region set aside as the perpetual home of the red man'.[1] Land allotments, 'non-taxable and inalienable during the lifetime of the allottee', were made to the members of the tribes. The balance of the Indian lands, over and above the allotments, were then purchased or acquired by the government and thrown open for settlement at intervals from 1889 to 1906. When the initial opening occurred on the 22nd of April 1889, thousands of land-hungry American farm families 'made the rush' for 'the last frontier in America'.

This celebrated 'last frontier', however, was somewhat of an illusion from the beginning. A considerable part of the excess or reserve land was sold in 'strips and by runs and lotteries', making it difficult, if not impossible, for settlers to acquire tracts of sufficient size to constitute economical farm units. The lands in the eastern part of the state were broken up into odd-sized fragments and the

[1] See Milton Ernest Asfahl, *Oklahoma and Organized Labour,* 1930.

region was soon dotted with tiny holdings of ten, fifteen, and twenty acres, intermixed with large Indian holdings, non-taxable and inalienable. From the outset, many settlers discovered that they could only farm as tenants of Indian owners. 'Dead Indian lands' might, through a cumbersome process, be placed on the market; the bulk of the land, however, was not subject to alienation during the lifetime of the allottee. The Indians had, moreover, large families, and before many years had passed their original allotments (through inheritance) began to break up into smaller and smaller parcels. Over a period of years (generally subsequent to 1908) Indians were permitted to sell land. But by the time title could be acquired, the units had become fragments and the soil was already badly overworked. The basis upon which Indian lands were operated led to various rackets and speculative devices. Land hawks, working with Indian agents, leased large sections of the Indian lands and, in turn, sub-leased them to settlers. At the time of the Walsh (Industrial Relations Commission) hearings in 1915, one witness told of a firm of speculators who controlled 30,000 acres of land in the Indian Territory and leased it to over 1,500 tenants. This was by no means an exceptional case; in fact, it was quite typical of the time. Thus the novel spectacle was presented of 'White**,** native, Protestant Americans working as the land slaves, tenants, and sharecroppers of the aboriginal Indians'. They were not so much the 'slaves' of the Indians, however, as they were of the land sharks, the crafty lawyers, the 'lease hounds' of the period.

This crazy pattern of land settlement resulted, from the outset, in deplorable social conditions. Since the Indian lands were non-taxable, it became extremely difficult to support public schools. Illiteracy became the norm; literacy the exception. Yet, to this day, critics of the Okies like to regard the low educational level of migrants as still another indication of their inherent shiftlessness. This celebrated shiftlessness was in itself merely a reflection of a generally hopeless situation. Settlers soon became discouraged when, as pioneers in quest of homes and farms, they found themselves tenants and sharecroppers. By the time they could purchase a twenty-acre tract, the land itself was worn out and exhausted. It was not long before they lost interest in improving the land or in building substantial homes. Nor were they actively interested in the community—its churches, schools, or social life—for the next year they might be somewhere else. It might be observed that Indian lands are still exempt from taxation in Oklahoma and that Indian agents still make only one-year leases.

Not only were these settlers uninterested in the community, but they were made to feel that they were excluded from it. On the one hand were the residents of the 'electric light' towns—lawyers, merchants, usurers, and lease sharks—and on the other a dispossessed rural horde of quondam settlers. The one-crop system was at once riveted upon settlers and its baneful limitations kept them in perpetual poverty. They needed operating capital badly—for equipment, supplies, homes, improvements. The giving or withholding of this capital was the exclusive prerogative of the landlords and merchants, or bankers. To what extent the people were literally enslaved by such a system may be variously illustrated. Interest rates on chattel mortgages ranged from 20 per cent to 200 per cent. Mr. E. J. Giddings, testifying at the Walsh

hearings, said: 'In the cities I have had usurious contracts for labourers that went as high as 230 per cent.' Even in the western part of the state, where landownership by homesteading was possible, the equities soon shrank to the vanishing point. By 1915 it was estimated that 80 per cent of the farms of the slate were mortgaged for 40 per cent of their value and that 62 per cent of the mortgaged farms had been lost through foreclosure.

To understand how this shocking transformation of a frontier into a sump-hole of poverty was effected, it should be pointed out that during the critical, formative years of settlement, the people were in effect powerless to govern themselves. The western part of the state had been organized as a territory in 1890, but the state as such was not admitted to the Union until 1907. The absence of local self-government created the perfect milieu for social exploitation. It made, also, for a definite lag in institutional development. The consequences of this retardation take on added significance in view of the fact that, while the other states were populated by the gradual extension of settlement, Oklahoma was settled overnight. Although admitted as a state as late as 1907, Oklahoma to-day has a population greater than that of Kansas, or Arkansas, or Iowa, or Nebraska, or Louisiana, or Mississippi. In a predominantly agricultural state, the constant pressure of population on resources soon became acute. As oil, mining, and lumbering activities began to decline, workers from these industries crowded into the already overpopulated areas in search of subsistence farms. The number of farms increased in precisely the poorest, therefore the cheapest, farming areas in the state. As farming units got smaller and smaller, soil erosion, already far advanced, began to claim the land. Dr. W. L. Thurman, testifying at the Walsh hearings, pointed out the desperate plight of farm families in 1915: 'They are forced to live,' he said, 'in Indian huts. These Indian shacks are leaky and rotting down. In the tenant quarters of the state, hundreds of thousands of acres have been ruined—through soil erosion—the soil has just washed away.' 'Instead of escaping industrialism and finance capitalism,' writes Oscar Ameringer, 'as they had hoped, the last frontiersmen had brought it with them, as they had cockleburs to their blue-jean breeches and flowing Mother Hubbards.'

Ameringer came to Oklahoma in 1907. It would be difficult to imagine a more impressive summation of the degraded social conditions that even then prevailed in eastern Oklahoma than he has written. 'I found,' he writes, 'toothless old women with sucking infants on their withered-breasts. I found a hospitable old hostess, around thirty or less, her hands covered with rags and eczema, offering me a biscuit with those hands, apologizing that her biscuits were not as good as she used to make because with her sore hands she no longer could knead the dough as it ought to be. I saw youngsters emaciated by hookworms, malnutrition, and pellagra, who had lost their second teeth before they were twenty years old. I saw tottering old male wrecks with the infants of their fourteen-year-old wives on their laps. I saw a white man begging a Choctaw squaw to persuade the man who owned the only remaining spring in that neighbourhood to let him have credit for a few buckets of water for his thirsty family. I saw humanity at its lowest possible level of degradation and decay. I saw smug, well-dressed, overly well-fed hypocrites march to church on Sabbath day, Bibles under their arms,

praying for God's kingdom on earth while fattening like latter-day cannibals on the sharecroppers. I saw windjamming, hot-air-spouting politicians geysering Jeffersonian platitudes about equal rights to all and special privileges to none; about all men born equal with the rights to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness without even knowing, much less caring, that they were addressing as wretched a set of abject slaves as ever walked the face of the earth, anywhere or at any time. The things I saw on that trip are the things you never forget.'[1]

But, unfortunately, these things are forgotten. By 1940 the Tolan Committee had to remind us of what the Walsh Committee had discovered—a quarter of a century ago. In 1915 there would have been mass migration from Oklahoma, if transportation facilities had been sufficiently developed. No-one heeded Dr. Thurman when, in 1915, he said that there was 'very deep-seated unrest' in eastern Oklahoma. By the time the Green Corn Rebellion occurred in 1917, people had already forgotten the warning of 1915.

This rebellion had as its immediate cause the resentment of the tenants against the draft, registration for which was ordered for June the 5th by President Wilson ('Big Slick' to the croppers). The war was undoubtedly very unpopular in the rural sections of Oklahoma, but a more fundamental cause of unrest was the appalling condition of the croppers. Their distress was fertile ground for the activities of organizations like the I.W.W., the Renters' Union, and the Working Class Union, and by 1917 these groups had made considerable headway—much of it at the expense of the more conservative Socialist Party. The Working Class Union seems to have had more to do than the others with the organization of the violence which flared up in several counties some weeks after the relatively uneventful Registration Day. From August the 2nd to August the 6th insurrection raged throughout the area, but by the latter date the whole affair had fizzled out. Some locals failed to mobilize; the plans inevitably misfired.

The rebellion, of course, dealt a crushing blow to the progressive cause in Oklahoma. The Socialist Party dissolved; the Renters' Union was crushed; soon even the rebellion was an episode in local history. Then came the post-war débâcle and the rise of the Ku Klux Klan. Once again the old Socialist leadership, headed by men like Oscar Ameringer and Patrick Nagle, made a bid for power. In 1922 they formed the Farmer-Labour Reconstruction League and elected their candidate, J. C. ('Jack') Walton, as governor. No sooner had he been elected, however, than Walton began to go 'sour'. He turned up with a $40,000 mansion and, within a few weeks, it was quite apparent that Oklahoma had been tricked. The Governor was soon impeached and the farmer-labour crusade collapsed.

It is slight wonder, under these circumstances, that despair seized thousands upon thousands of poverty-ridden Oklahoma tenants and sharecroppers and day labourers. When the depression struck them in 1929, and severe droughts in 1935 and 1936, they knew instinctively that they must move on. But once again there was a minor flare-up. In July 1931 a serious riot occurred in Henryetta, Oklahoma, when 'two hundred starving men, women, and children, led by a clergyman, raided sixteen grocery and

[1] Oscar Ameringer, *If You Don't Weaken,* 1940/

provision stores'.[1] The Okies of Henryetta discovered, however, that raids on grocery stores were no answer to their problems. So they started out on the long trek, by way of Enid, through Oklahoma City, on their way to Highway 66 and the West Coast.

2. ROLLING STONES

Before considering the emigration from Oklahoma, it might be well to examine the heavy internal or intra-state migration. For over a quarter of a century the high mobility of Oklahoma farm families, according to Dr. Otis D. Duncan, has been a clear indication of 'serious economic stress and social unrest'. By 1935, 61.2 per cent of the farms in Oklahoma were operated by tenants. Each year 40 per cent of these tenants 'break loose like tumbleweed and go rolling across the prairie until they lodge for a year against a barbed-wire fence, only to break loose next year and go tumbling on again.'[2] In 1938 it was estimated that 275,000 people, or 28 per cent of the farm population of the state, moved to a new farm during the year.[3] This constant turnover of farm families—unmistakable evidence of unrest and maladjustment—began to assume alarming proportions at least two decades before the great exodus began in 1935.

In addition to a general turnover of farm population there has been a considerable urban-to-rural movement of population within the state since the depression of 1929. The production of oil, commenced in 1907, reached its peak about 1928. Thousands of oil workers, sucked into the state by the boom, had to move. Some migrated into newer oil fields in Illinois, Louisiana, California, and Texas. Others decided to try their hand at subsistence farming. With the reduction of employment opportunities in mining after 1930, the surplus mining population either moved to other mining areas or, like the oil workers, became subsistence farmers. Between 1930 and 1935 the number of farms in Oklahoma remained virtually un-changed, owing, in large measure, to the fact that as fast as farms were abandoned, new families moved in. This internal flow of population has, by and large, been from urban areas to already overpopulated farm regions, and from the better farming areas to the poorest farming areas.

Not only do tenant farmers wander aimlessly from farm to farm in Oklahoma, but thousands of them now make a winter excursion to the Rio Grande Valley and to the Gulf area in Texas. It has been estimated, for example, that 50,000 people from Oklahoma now winter in Texas. 'From their winter homes most of these migrants turn north in the spring and pick up a precarious living from chopping cotton, working in the harvest and picking cotton. Once the cotton crop is out they return to their winter homes where vegetables grow the year around, where fruit is cheap and where the weather demands little fuel and few clothes.'[4] These migrants, mostly farm families, move south and north each year. They are in the process of becoming professional or habitual migrants—families

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[1] Mauritz A. Hallgren, *Seeds of Revolt* (1933), p. 147.
[2] Tolan Transcript, part 5, p. 1933.
[3] *Current Farm Economics,* Oklahoma, February-April 1940, p. 24.
[4] *Daily Oklahoman,* 19 November 1940.

on the road following a more or less regular pattern of migration each year.

The net emigration from Oklahoma since 1935 has been very large. At least a hundred thousand people have taken part in the great exodus from that state. Between 1935 and 1940, Oklahoma lost 33,274 farms, a drop within a five-year period of 15.6 per cent of the total number of farms and an estimated loss of 133,000 people from farms.[1] During this five-year period, farms were vanishing in Oklahoma at the rate of eighteen per day. How were these farms 'lost' ? For the most part, they were probably merged or consolidated, either by lease or by purchase, with other farm units. Several counties in the state have, since 1935, lost 20 per cent of their operating farm units and 40 per cent of their population.

The farm families, however, are by no means the only refugees who have taken to the road. The United Provident Association in Oklahoma City is the agency through which verification of residence of former Oklahomans is effected by welfare organizations outside the state. In 1940, the association analysed 1,000 such requests, 844 of which came, incidentally, from California. Farmers were the largest single group involved, with day labourers and W.P.A. workers constituting the next largest groups. But the list included butchers, barbers, bookkeepers, cab drivers, carpenters, cobblers, domestics, janitors, machinists, mechanics, miners, musicians, painters, policemen, printers, roustabouts, rug cleaners, salesmen, schoolteachers, truck drivers, waitresses—almost every imaginable occupation. The bulk of the exodus from Oklahoma has been, in fact, from the populous counties of the central part of the state.[2] Since a surprisingly large percentage of the exodus from Oklahoma is represented by non- agricultural groups, it is quite likely that many dispossessed farm families have moved into the poorer farming sections of the state. Not all of them, in any case, have migrated elsewhere.

Nor have all of the Okies, by any means, gone to the Pacific Coast. There are many swirls and eddies in this outgoing movement of thousands of migrant families. Small islands of Okie settlers may be found in the inter-mountain West, in New Mexico, Colorado, and Idaho. An interesting example of this type of settlement is to be found in Dolores County, Colorado. In 1930 the county had the lowest plane of living, for its farm population, of any county in the state. [3] Between 1930 and 1939 well over half of the population of the county moved elsewhere. As these families left, the Okies began to move in. To-day, near Dove Creek, a settlement in the county, there are nearly three hundred former Oklahoma farm families. They have settled for the most part, on dry-land farms that have recently been brought into cultivation.[4] At Cahone, in the same county, there are about two hundred such families, most of whom moved north to Colorado after 1935. The present farm population is younger, and with more younger children, than the families that resided there prior to 1939. The reason land was available for settlement in Dolores County presents no great mystery. According

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[1] *Farmer-Stockman,* 1 and 15 August 1940.
[2] Bulletin No. 88, Oklahoma A. and M. College, May 1940, p. 18.
[3] *The People of Dolores County,* Amarillo, 1940
[4] *Daily Oklahoman,* 11 August 1940

to Mr. C. E. Hazard, of the Farm Security Administration, the county has had only eleven crops in forty-four years. 'If too many go down there,'he says, 'and start breaking up that land, they'll all go broke. There will be a new dust-bowl, because that land's just blown in, and what can blow in can blow right out again.' In a few years the Dove Creek and Cahone pioneers will probably be on the road again—refugees from still another 'dust-bowl'.

The factors responsible for this mass exodus of people from Oklahoma, and also for the mobility of farm families within the state, are so closely interwoven that it is virtually impossible to disentangle any one skein of causation from the others to which it is related. This becomes immediately apparent as soon as such major factors as soil erosion, mechanization, and the consolidation of farm units are considered.

The magnitude of the problem of soil erosion in Oklahoma (and for that matter in Arkansas and Texas) is almost incomprehensible wind erosion in the western part of the state, water erosion in the eastern part. Depending upon the degree, soil erosion calls for either curative or preventive treatment. If 25 per cent or more of the topsoil has been lost, then the experts agree that drastic and expensive curative treatment must be used if the soil is to be preserved. If less than 25 per cent of the topsoil has been lost, then preventive practices, which are relatively inexpensive, may be sufficient. With these categories in mind, the figures on soil-eroded lands in the three states are as follows:

Acreage Requiring Curative Treatment

Oklahoma:	25,268,034 acres or 62 per cent of all lands in the state
Arkansas:	12,215,609 acres or 36.1 per cent of all lands in the state
Texas:	97,297,316 acres or 38.1 per cent of all lands in the state

Acreage Requiring Preventive Treatment

Oklahoma:	5,664,207 acres or 13.9 per cent of all lands in the state
Arkansas:	3,285,827 acres or 9.7 per cent of all lands in the state
Texas:	51,163,507 acres or 36.4 per cent of all lands in the state

Upon the farms in Oklahoma, Arkansas, and Texas which require either curative or preventive soil treatment reside 6,545,302 people. These farm families are living on acres from which the topsoil is being carried away every day of the year. As the soil blows away or is washed away, the relation of the people to the land becomes increasingly tenuous. The people, in time, become badly 'eroded' themselves. They lack capital; they lack education and training; they lack medical care and attention.

The problem of soil erosion, however, has many ramifications. The worst eroded lands are, of course, the cheapest lands. Like magnets, therefore, they attract ex-oil workers, ex-miners, and dispossessed farm owners and tenants who cannot get a foothold, through lack of capital, in the better farming areas. The constant

pressure of population upon depleted acres results in ever-smaller units of farm operation, which lead to bad soil practices, which, in turn, accelerate the process of erosion. Before sound soil-restoration practices can be instituted, thousands of families (in eastern Oklahoma, an estimated 30,000 farm families alone) must be moved from the land. One branch of the government service cannot proceed with a soil-conservation programme because other branches of the government are making it possible for destitute families to eke out a miserable living on ten- and fifteen-acre tracts of badly eroded soil. In certain areas, according to Mr. Clarence Roberts, 90 per cent of the entire farm population is receiving aid: 'This outside aid amounts to far more than the earned income of large numbers of families. In some in-stances this aid or relief received by farmers of a county amounts to more than the value of the farm production of that county.'[1]

Soil erosion sets in motion a whole chain of disastrous minor consequences. Mr. Roberts, editor of the *Farmer-Stockman* in Oklahoma-City, tells of a farm that once sold for $4,800 or $30 an acre. When the soil began to blow, the original purchaser had to abandon the farm and it was purchased, at a tax sale, for $532.45. For a number of years the farm had been off the tax rolls altogether; it was now. restored to the rolls, but at a valuation of $700, which was all it was worth, or would be worth, for years to come. In the meantime, of course, the tax rate on other farms in the same area had been in-creased. Increased tax rates spread the blight of tax delinquency. To escape them, absentee owners have razed improvements from the land and rented to large operators. Through this process, small tenant farmers find themselves evicted, without a place to live in or a place to farm. With the exodus of rural population, the structure of county government totters. Deprived of an adequate tax base, communities find themselves unable to build roads or schools or hospitals or to sponsor work projects. In many counties the out-movement of population has left the community with too many roads, schools, and hospitals. When the farm population moves, the small town disappears. A few years ago, Goforth, Texas, was a prosperous small town. Besides several general stores, it boasted a meat market, a barber's shop, a blacksmith shop, a drug store, a post office, and a large cotton gin. Soil erosion killed farming in the area. At present to quote an official of the Soil Conservation Service, Goforth is 'completely abandoned—a ghost town, with deserted buildings; sombre weather-beaten, decaying walls; lopsided dilapidated houses and store buildings; rust-pitted gin machinery strewn beneath a creaking swaying tangle of sheet iron—a grisly monument of soil erosion and the disruption of human lives which it wrought.'[2]

Soil erosion is closely related to the problem of the consolidation of farm units. South-eastern Oklahoma is an area of great soil erosion it is also an area in which 'surplus' farm population has become congested. A vicious circle has been created: small farms make for soil erosion; soil erosion makes for small farms. It costs money to institute a sound soil-rebuilding programme. Even on a small farm, it may cost as much as $600 to

[1] *Daily Oklahoman,* 2 April 1940.
[2] Tolan Transcript, part. 5, p. 1974.

complete such a programme. The small farmer cannot possibly make such an investment; nor can anyone else make it 'until some means can be devised which will properly take care of the surplus people'. Unit reorganization has, therefore, become essential. As a consequence, a sharp conflict has developed between a crop economy and a livestock economy. While the soil being restored, the only use to which the land can be put is to let it revert to grazing. But it takes about 1,800 to 3,000 acres of land to constitute an efficient livestock farm. Consequently units are being consolidated. When a sharecropper or tenant moves out of a shack, the owners, in many cases, burn the shack to prevent some other tenant from moving in. Many owners are selling their holdings, or consolidating them with other holdings, as fast as they can get the tenants off the land. As a corollary to this development, a noticeable decline has occurred in the birth-rate of the farm population on the large-scale wheat and livestock farms. The farms increase in size the while farm families decrease in number and in size.

Mechanization, in turn, is closely related to the other trends I have mentioned. The number of tractors in Oklahoma has increased from around 10,000 in 1930 to nearly 60,000 in 1940. The introduction of tractors has, however, been pretty largely confined to the level lands of the western part of the state. There the use of the tractor has been a powerful factor making for the consolidation of operating units. Where four families formerly occupied a section of land, two families or even one family will now be found. This tendency depopulates the better farming areas and overcrowds the poorest farming areas.

Accompanying the change in type of farms, in the last decade, has been a change in type of ownership. 'Farms,' notes Mr. Roberts, 'have been passing out of the hands of the man on the farm and into the hands of others.' It has already been pointed out that, in 1935, 61.5 per cent of the farms in Oklahoma were tenant-operated. 'How many of these rented farms were owned by operating farmers or retired farmers,' to quote Mr. Roberts, 'we have no way of knowing. Nevertheless it's a fair guess that from one-third to one-half of all farm units in the state were owned by corporations, trust companies and individuals living in cities and towns widely scattered in Oklahoma and other states.'[1] This development, also, has collateral ramifications. It has been noted, in Oklahoma and elsewhere, that a shift in the ownership of farm land to city dwellers has a tendency to shift the point at which purchases of farm supplies are made. The smalltown merchant does not profit by the change in ownership.

The efforts which are being made in Oklahoma to-day to offset the trends that I have discussed are interesting but woefully inadequate. One of the best F.S.A. projects in the state is that known as the Eastern Oklahoma Farms Project at Muskogee, which I visited. In 1937 the government purchased a large acreage of badly eroded hillside land, most of which was being farmed in small twenty- and forty-acre tracts by tenants, and immediately retired it from production for soil-conservation purposes. Some seventy-one families were then moved from the district and relocated, on the infiltration plan (scattered, individual units), on other farms near Muskogee. Good farm land was purchased for $40 an acre. The new

[1] *Daily Oklahoman,* 5 November 1940

farms average about 87 acres in size and cost approximately $4,000 each. With loans furnished by the F.S.A., the new tracts were improved, fences built, wells dug, and livestock purchased. Each farm operation is closely supervised. Only about one-fourth of the unit can be planted to a cash crop and a diversified farm programme is carefully planned. Farmers are encouraged to 'live at home'; to pack their own meat; preserve their own vegetables and fruit; make their own quilts, mattresses, and furniture. The average gross cash income from these units is now around $1,576 per family; the value of home-consumed produce is estimated at about $400 per family. At the time they were relocated, these seventy-one families were virtually destitute. They had no machinery, no livestock, no furniture. All were old-time residents of the community. To date they have managed to meet 92 per cent of the maturities on their loans with the government. Farmers on the project are encouraged to subscribe to newspapers; to participate in educational programmes; to acquaint themselves with modern farm methods. They are required to keep books of account and to follow a carefully supervised programme of farm operations.

Here is a beginning in farm rehabilitation; it illustrates what can be accomplished. While this type of project represents only one phase of the Department of Agriculture's programme in Oklahoma, suffice it to say that the F.S.A. has not been able to reach, through loans, grants-in-aid, or other types of assistance, more than 20 per cent of the farm families who have applied for aid. Nor have the other government services been much more effective. In 1940 there were 136,661 tenants in Oklahoma in need of assistance from the Farm Security Administration with funds available for only about 16,000 of this number. At the same time, 93,810 heads of families (422,145 people) were certified as eligible for W.P.A. employment, but only 31,000 were so employed. (Farm labourers and tenants constituted 64 per cent of those certified as eligible for assistance.) In addition to this total, some 20,000 Oklahomans were in the process of being certified to the W.P.A.[1] It is no criticism of the Farm Security Administration to state what is so obviously the fact—namely, that so far as rural rehabilitation is concerned, the surface has not been scratched in Oklahoma.

Because of the nature of the trends mentioned in this section, it should be clear that there is no place in the agricultural economy of Oklahoma for thousands of farm families now stranded on the land. Their presence on the land is actually retarding the stabilization of farm population on a new level; it is also a serious hindrance to the soil-conservation programme. Migration from Oklahoma is, therefore, likely to continue for years. Travel facilities between Oklahoma and California are incredibly cheap. On one of the main streets in Oklahoma City appears a large sign which reads: 'Travel Bureau for California'. In the *Oklahoma City Times* of the 14th of October 1940 I found six advertisements for passengers 'to Los Angeles' on a share-the-expense basis. I discovered in Muskogee that by travelling with another party you can get to California for $10. That the Joads are still leaving Oklahoma in large numbers is obvious.

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[1] Tolan Transcript, part 5, p. 2180.

CHAPTER VII
REVOLUTION IN TEXAS

They said they were an-hungry; sigh'd forth proverbs,
That hunger broke stone walls, that dogs must eat,
That meat was made for mouths, that the gods sent not
Corn for the rich men only: with these shreds
They vented their complainings.

'Coriolanus', Act I, Scene I

1. A FRONTIER OF POVERTY

Until about 1880, Texas was a virgin agricultural empire, which was held mostly as part of the public domain, or owned 'in large part by non-resident speculators'.[1] Throughout the state were huge landholdings, acquired in the form of Spanish land grants, or purchased by speculators for trivial considerations. These vast holdings embraced some of the richest agricultural lands in the state and such of them as were developed at all utilized the old plantation system which had followed the westward movement of the cotton grower.

Relatively undeveloped as compared to most of the Confederate states, Texas suffered more from retarded development than from collapse following the Civil War, when it found itself with 182,566 Negro freedmen, who constituted 30.2 per cent of the entire population. In Texas, it was observed that the 'freedmen eschew anything that smacks of the old bondage', and that they showed a preference: for the status of sharecroppers or tenants.[2] In effect, this system was merely another name for the old plantation system, but the name, as it were, gave the negroes the illusion of independence. Naturally enough, as the cotton acreage expanded through Texas, the sharecropper or tenant system became the one means of guaranteeing a constantly available labour supply. Hence the patterns of slavery, if not the name,'continued to influence the economic and social status of agriculture for many years' .[3] The long distances from markets and the necessity of planting a cash crop tended to fix cotton as the dominant agricultural enterprise in Texas. After 1880, the state rapidly became the leading cotton-producing region of America; and as the cotton acreage grew, so did the sharecropper-and-tenancy system spread. In 1880, while Texas was still in its pioneer phase, 37.6 per cent of its farms were tenant-operated, in 1920, 53.3 per cent.[4] Throughout this forty-year period, Texas had a consistently higher percentage of tenant-operated farms than was noted for the nation.

Despite its continued growth, evidence of the instability of the tenant-and-cropper system, largely occasioned by the sharp rise in land values, began to be apparent after 1900. When the homestead lands of Kansas and Nebraska were practically all taken by eager settlers, the westward movement of farm population swerved towards the south-west. Oklahoma, just prior to the turn of the

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[1] William Bennett Bizzell, *Rural Texas,* 1924.
[2] *Report of the Industrial Commission on Agriculture,* 1901, vol. II.
[3] William Bennett Bizzell, *Rural Texas,* 1924.
[4] Ibid.

century, was settled in a fortnight and, after 1900, the drive began to penetrate Texas. Large land companies, which had acquired vast domains at prices of from 50 cents to 75 cents an acre, began to sell their holdings, to speculators for $7.00 and $8.00 an acre. These speculators, in turn subdivided the land and sold farms to the inrushing settlers for $25 and $30 an acre. Once the farmers began to flow into the state, the movement was shrewdly promoted. Land-selling campaigns were organized; special railroad rates were obtained; and presently special trains were bringing land buyers into Texas by the thousands. With the speculative increase in land values, farms had to become more profitable. So the owners began to exert pressure on their tenants and croppers: rents were raised; bonuses were demanded; a larger percentage of the crop was exacted. This pressure not only made the lot of the average tenant unendurable, but it converted the sharecropper into a farm labourer paid in kind. Even among the tenants it was noted that three types characterized the group: a third were fairly successful; a third were on the verge of poverty; and at the bottom was 'a migratory thriftless body of men not unlike the casual unskilled workers of our cities'.[1] This last group was, of course, the emerging farm proletariat or the migratory workers of the present time.

2. THE NIGHT RIDERS

Unrest among Texas sharecroppers and tenants began to take an organized form when, in September 1909, the first Renters' Union was organized. Unlike many previous farm organizations, the Renters' Union was inspired by the work of the Socialist Party in the south-west. Oscar Ameringer, publisher of the *American Guardian,* in Oklahoma City, had a hand in forming it. But the real driving force behind it was Tom Hickey, an Irishman and a former member of Sinn Fein, an inveterate foe of landlordism. Under his leadership, the Renters' Union made remarkable headway in the south-west, later changing its name to the Land League. The vehicle for the union was an extremely interesting publication, the *Rebel Farmer,* edited by him.

In view of later developments, the demands of the Renters' Union have considerable interest in retrospect. First on the list was a demand for a house to consist of not less than two rooms and a lean-to—'said two rooms shall not be less than 14 feet square with a ceiling not less than 8½ feet high'; the house to be plastered and to have a lumber floor. Provision was also made for an arbitration court to determine differences between landlords and tenants in which courts 'no lawyer shall be allowed to appear and plead'. Another demand was for a stable, large enough for three horses, and a chicken coop. The state was urged to establish a system of crop insurance; delinquent farm lands, at either judicial or tax sales, were to be purchased by the state and leased to actual farmers. The lessees were to pay, as rental, one-fourth of the crop, and when, on this basis, the appraised value of the land had been repaid, along with 2½ per cent interest, the tenant would be given right of permanent occupancy. If he abandoned the lease, he was to be reimbursed for the value of improvements. 'The right of occupancy',

[1] Benedict and Lomax, *The Book of Texas,* 1916.

read the demand, 'to such land shall continue until such time as co-operative farming evolves from the existing system.'

When these demands were not granted, the membership of the Renters' Union began to indulge in direct action. When a tenant was evicted, his abandoned shack would go up in smoke the next night. One method of dealing with an unruly landlord was to go out at night and sow his place to Johnson grass. In a single night, said one observer, a farm worth $10,000 might be made valueless for several years. These Johnson-grass sowers were the celebrated 'Night Riders' of the period. So rapidly did the movement gain momentum in the south-west that the Commission on Industrial Relations held hearings in Texas in 1915 to ferret out, if possible, the causes behind militant farm unrest in frontier Texas and Oklahoma.

It was quite apparent at these hearings that the tenant-and-cropper system was in process of disintegration. With the rush of settlers and 'outside' money to Texas after 1900, the position of the tenants had become intolerable. Previously the almost universally prevailing system allotted one-fourth of the cotton and one-third of the other crops (usually corn) to the landlord. But, with land values rising, the landlords demanded half the cotton, a bonus for the lease, and rent for the tenant shack. Since most of the leases were oral and seldom ran for more than a year, the tenant's position became increasingly insecure. 'The credit merchants and the banks assist the landlords,'a witness testified,'in forcing a large cotton crop upon the renters. There is no earthly chance for diverse crops as long as a few own all the land.' Bad soil practices were an inevitable result of the tenant-and-cropper system. Farmers, it was said, 'skinned' the earth; they farmed with 'one eye on the land market—they are more like gold seekers than sober producers'. The lack of social organization, too, so apparent throughout Texas and Oklahoma to-day, may be directly traced to the ravages of the tenant-and-cropper system. Tenants might not be there next year, so they took no interest in the local church, the local school, the local community. In 1915 there were 90,000 children in Texas who never attended school because they were a part 'of this moving population'. The tenancy system made it almost impossible, in fact, to maintain a system of rural schools.

Here in rural Texas, a pioneer state, intense class feeling had developed. 'Is there unrest among the tenants at the present time?' asked Mr. Frank Walsh, Chairman of the Commission. 'Yes,' replied a witness, 'right smart.' To understand this crystallization of sentiment, it is necessary to note that, between 1890 and 1910, a marked class differentiation had occurred in the south-west. The landowner, profiting by the rise in land values, rented his place and moved into town. There he became a merchant and a banker as well as a landlord. He also became interested in cotton gins; in the cotton market; in land speculations. The cities and towns, in the eyes of the tenants and croppers, were in league against them. A witness for the Farmers' Union tersely summarized the situation: 'The farmers and the bankers of the South and the merchants of the South have been playing a game for twenty years; it is known here as the thimble-rig game.'

The 'thimble-rig' system kept the tenants and croppers perennially in debt. If they bought supplies at the commissary on the plantation, they were overcharged; if they sought credit of the

merchant in town (who was often their landlord), they were unable to take advantage of 10 per cent discounts for cash. Nine out of every ten tenants in Texas, according to Dr. Leonard of the University of Texas, 'have most of their working animals encumbered; over half of them have none of their instruments of production free.' Interest rates on chattel mortgages in Texas in 1915 averaged about 12 per cent per annum. All of the tenants were borrowers: 30 per cent from the stores; 60 per cent from the banks; 10 per cent from miscellaneous sources. Under this system, the tenant actually paid his own wages! Dr. Lewis Haney, for example, explained that in Texas tenants borrowed money 'not for the purpose of investing and making a profit, or of saving. He borrows chiefly to get a sort of circulating capital—*it is virtually wages. He borrows his wages and pays interest on them.*'

While most of the large Texas landowning companies were satisfied with the wholly inefficient sharecropper system (since taxes were low and land values were constantly increasing), nevertheless the beginnings of large-scale farming, with the use of industrialized methods, were apparent at the Walsh hearings in 1915. The Coleman-Fulton Pasture Company at that time owned the Taft Ranch, consisting of nearly a million acres which had originally been acquired for 50 cents and 75 cents an acre. In 1913 the ranch was described as a '100,000-acre business—a large agricultural undertaking thoroughly commercialized and highly organized'.[1] Over 5,000 employees lived in four company towns on the ranch; agricultural products of a gross value of over one million dollars a year were annually sold from the property; it had 8,000 acres in cotton and a subsidiary company operated six cotton gins and one cotton mill. Like many other large-scale farms then operating in Texas, the company used Mexican day labour. Even at that time, the white sharecroppers, according to Dr. Leonard, were 'made to encounter a new competitive group, the Mexican'.

In 1915 Texas was ripe for a mass exodus of tenants and sharecroppers. In that year, 25 per cent of the tenants had no property whatever, and 54 per cent were worth less than $400 per family. The affidavits with which Tom Hickey flooded the Commission on Industrial Relations told a story of incredible poverty even then. From all over Texas pitiful letters and statements poured into the Walsh hearings; but after 1917 no-one remembered the testimony.

Mr. Charles W. Holman, one of the experts who testified at the hearings in 1915, saw clearly enough what was happening.'Tenants', he said, 'who constitute the majority of the farming population in Texas, are arriving at the status of wage-labourers rather than the popular conception of them being tenants on the land. ... A very large per cent of the tenant farmers have slipped away from the old feudal conception of being tenants of the soil, and have dropped into the modern conception of labourers in fact. The main difference between the casual labourer and the tenant farmer is that the casual worker drifts by himself from place to place and may shift over the whole of the continent, while the tenant farmer drifts from farm to farm and carries his family with him by means of the covered wagon.'

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[1] *World's Work,* January 1913.

In 1915 the tenant-and-cropper system was obviously on the verge of complete collapse. But transportation facilities were not well developed; it was not easy to escape from serfdom. Instead of fleeing to California, the tenants organized. What they might have been able to accomplish in their own behalf cannot, of course, be said. But that they were reaching towards an effective solution of their problem seems plausible, particularly when one studies the demands which they had formulated in 1910. With our entry into the War, however, the leaders of the Land League were arrested; the *Rebel Farmer* was suppressed; and the whole movement passed into history. No-one paid the slightest heed to the testimony which had been presented at the Walsh hearings in 1915. It is interesting, therefore, to read to-day the testimony of Mr. Patrick Nagle, attorney for the Renters' Union. 'Heretofore,' he said, 'it has been impossible to enslave the American producing farmer for the same reason that it was impossible to enslave the Indian. *He escaped to the woods.* But the public domain is exhausted. He is face to face with a crisis. He must accept one of two alternatives. He must in the future be contented and docile as a peon and a serf or he must crush the power of the parasite class.' Unknown to Mr. Nagle, however, the future held still another alternative: the farmer might become a migrant. 'To-day,' writes an official of the Farm Security Administration, 'the fate of the Indian and the buffalo is in store for the small farmers of Texas and Oklahoma, if the tendency for large farms to gobble up the small ones is not stopped.'[1]

3. THE BLOW IS STRUCK

A number of causes, culminating about 1935, served to kick the last props from under the system in Texas. Mechanization ranks high among the causes for the profound social dislocations which, in Texas, have set numberless thousands of farm families adrift on the land. The process, as it relates to cotton, began about 1926. It was first noticeable in the shift from one-row equipment to multi-row equipment. The use of multi-row equipment greatly increased after 1934 with the widespread introduction of the all-purpose tractor. The number of tractors increased from 37,000 in Texas in 1930 to 99,000 in 1938. In many areas of Texas, the planting and cultivating operations in the production of cotton are already 80 per cent mechanized.

Government policies have also had a marked influence on the pace of mechanization. The Triple A programme in cotton has given a strong incentive to farm operators to eliminate sharecroppers and tenants and, thereby, to appropriate for themselves the entire amount of the government benefit payments. In many instances, government payments have been used to finance the purchase of equipment which, in turn, has been used to displace sharecroppers and tenants. At the same time, the government established the principle of support for the unemployed. There was no longer any reason, therefore, why landlords should support croppers and tenants during the non- seasonal period. That this burden could be shifted to the government merely accelerated the change from croppers to migratory workers.

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[1] *Dallas News,* 26 August 1939.

But it is not only sharecroppers and tenants who have been adversely affected by the A.A.A. programme in Texas. The curtailment of basic crops naturally hits the small farmer, who produces only a small surplus above his family's needs, harder than it does the large farm. Many small farmers had begun to diversify their farm operations, as a result of low cotton prices, as early as 1930, and to reduce the acreage in cotton. When the control programme was established, they were hit harder than the large plantations, since, on the five-year-prior-cotton-history basis, they were entitled to relatively smaller , cotton allotments. In many instances, the crop-reduction programme has not affected the larger growers at all, since, by increasing yields per acre (in some instances from 200 pounds per acre in 1934 to 475 pounds in 1938), they have been able to pocket the government payments and still produce the same amount of cotton. Operating on less valuable lands and using less efficient methods, the small farmer has not been able to increase his yields proportionately. Using cheap Mexican migratory labour and improved mechanized methods, large growers have profited enormously from the A.A.A. payments. It has been observed that it is always the 'cotton barons' who are represented in the Washington cotton conferences. They control, administer, and reap the benefits from the A.A.A. programme.[1]

Since yields per acre are increasing on the large farms as a result of technological improvements and more efficient production, and labour requirements are decreasing (through mechanization), the investment in labour costs has declined. Consequently it is to the interest of the operator to assume the risk involved in paying a wage instead of a share of the crop.[2] In areas where yields are low and the fields are small (and therefore difficult to mechanize), it is more advantageous to retain, for the time being, the sharecropper system. Also as cotton prices tend to rise more rapidly than wage rates, there is a tendency to shift towards wage labour; and, conversely, when the prices obtained for cotton tend to fall more rapidly than wage rates, there is a tendency to shift back to the sharecropper system. While there has been some tendency to shift back and forth between the two systems, it is stated to-day that the shift towards wage labour in Texas is 'permanent'.[3]

Since 1930 at least 60,000 Texas farm families have been displaced as a result of the transition; in 1937 there were 130,000 agricultural workers unemployed in the state.[4] Professor Horace Hamilton estimates that from three to five croppers or tenant families are commonly displaced by each new tractor purchased. Since 1935, about 10,000 farm families have been displaced each year. The process is graphically illustrated by the striking fact that in 1935 there was a decrease in Texas of 28,654 sharecroppers and, at the same time, an increase of 25,601 in the number of farm labourers. What this means, in terms of the welfare of the families involved, can best be appreciated in the light of the fact that, as sharecroppers and tenants, they might make, at present cotton prices, $800 per family a year; but as migratory workers they would

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[1] See an article by James S. Surman in the *Dallas News,* 26 August 1939.
[2] Supplemental Hearings, La Follette Committee, part 2, p. 470.
[3] Ibid., p. 493.
[4] Tolan Transcript, part 5, p. 1883.

be lucky to earn $250 a year.[1] During the 1930-5 period, 11,000,000 acres of land in Texas were shifted from farms of less than 500 acres to farms of more than 500 acres.[2] Mechanization has increased the amount of cotton land which can be handled by an individual operator (exclusive of harvest) from 100 to 450 acres.

The figures on the number of farm families actually displaced would not, however, indicate the full magnitude of the change that is being effected. As mechanization advances, it means, as Professor Hamilton has said, 'that farm machinery manufacturers and the large oil companies are engaged in the process of agricultural production, without having to take nearly so many of the risks as does the farmer'. Temporarily this change may benefit those farmers who can make the transition, but in the long run it tends to lower cash costs and forces the farmer to sell cheaper—unless, of course, agriculture itself becomes a monopoly. The process also threatens the structure of rural society as we have known it. With the collapse of the family-sized farm, the rural system of schools, county government and taxation, and the small towns themselves, are likewise affected. As a consequence, it is not only farm families who are displaced, but many other groups—business men and professional men—who have been dependent upon farmers for their support.

4. BUTTER AND GRAPEFRUIT

Since 1936 there has been no state assistance in Texas for the care of the indigent. Each county (and there are some 230 counties) has been forced to care for its indigents, regardless of the number, or the county's ability to provide for them. In April 1939, here is how the public assistance problem in Texas looked:

93,939 family heads and single workers were working on W.P.A.
53,159 were certified to W.P.A. but had not been assigned to jobs.
12,197 families were receiving direct aid from the counties.
105,128 individuals were receiving old-age pensions.
69,000 or more needy families were existing on surplus food commodities.[3]

These families, of all categories, were predominantly rural families. Here is what they got in the form of surplus food commodities during 1939 and 1940: a month's supply of surplus commodities for the average needy family of four members had a retail value of $3.88—*less than one cent per person per meal.* The family received in food for a month the following items:

dried beans	3 pounds
butter	3 pounds
white flours	24½ pounds
grapefruit	25 pounds

[1] Tolan Transcript, part 5, p. 1887.
[2] Ibid., p. 1937.
[3] *Need,* a publication of the Texas Social Welfare Association, issued in November 1940.

The families on W.P.A. got $41.75 a month; those surviving on surplus foods received commodities valued at $3.88 a month; those living on old-age pensions got $8.88 a month; and those on local relief got $7.47 a month per family. Rehabilitation efforts have been as feeble as welfare programmes. Between 1937 and 1940, about 25,095 former tenants applied to the Farm Security Administration for tenant-purchase loans: 988 loans were made[1]. Under these circumstances, it is not surprising that in September 1940 more than 75,000 children were reported out of attendance in the public schools of Texas.[2] So far as public health is concerned, Texas spends slightly less than 3½ cents per person per year: approximately the same amount that it spends for the protection of the health of cattle, sheep, goats, mules, pigs, and horses—as much for a pig as a person.

Slight wonder, then, that 32,850 Texans should have crossed the Arizona border into California between the 1st of July 1935 and the 30th of June 1939, or that they should be travelling, as migrants, in all directions. Still stranded in Texas, however, are about 350,000 displaced tenants, sharecroppers, and farm labourers.[3] Uprooted by the processes of social change, they have become the evacuees, the refugees, of America. Far from being *attracted* to other areas, such as California, they are *fleeing* from hunger and exposure. Like civilians from bomb-shattered European cities, they have been forced to take to the roads, to the highways, to the fields, scattering in all directions in search of a sanctuary that they are not likely to find.

[1] Tolan Transcript, part 5, p. 1937.
[2] Ibid., p. 16
[3] *Dallas News,* 4 March 1940.

CHAPTER VIII

A KICK FROM THE BOOT HEEL

The dogma that the frontier has vanished from American life has been incessantly dinned into us since the depression. But are there, in fact, no new land frontiers in America? In the undeveloped lowlands of the Mississippi Delta—in Louisiana, Arkansas, Mississippi, and Missouri—there are millions of acres of land that, as a result of fairly recent flood control and drainage programmes, are now available for settlement. Mr. Raymond C. Smith, of the Department of Agriculture, estimates that these Delta lands would provide eighty-acre farms for 62,500 families.[1] A portion of the area—the lowlands comprising the seven south-eastern counties of Missouri, the Boot Heel of Missouri 'where the Mississippi Delta meets the Ozark Highland'—as late as 1923 remained an agricultural frontier, rich in resources and capable of supporting a large rural population. One would assume that the region might have absorbed much of the 'surplus' farm population from the distressed rural areas in the adjacent states. The facts, unfortunately, point to a different conclusion.

For it has been here, in an agricultural frontier, and not in the Deep South, that workers have struck against the dying sharecropper system and that grave unrest has developed. Here the dual process of the expulsion of farm families from the land and their dispersal can be studied in detail. For with the exception of Oklahoma and Texas, •the displacement of sharecroppers and tenants by day labourers has been greater in the Boot Heel than in any other area in the United States. Missouri is one of the five states contributing most heavily to the Pacific Coast migration and most of the migrants from Missouri have come from the southern counties.[2] From the same counties in Missouri, migrants have taken to the road and joined the various migratory cycles in the Middle West in quest of work. A recent study of migrant cherry pickers in Michigan indicated that 60 per cent of the families were from south-eastern Missouri. Here, too, in the Boot Heel, an ambitious programme has been launched to stabilize farm workers and to create a 'brave new world'. Just what has been happening in the Boot Heel? What is back of rural unrest in the region? Why has the Boot Heel begun to kick?

1. RICH LAND, POOR PEOPLE

Although its lands are level, rich, and easily cultivated, and receive abundant rainfall, a number of factors account for the belated development of the Boot Heel. A series of earthquakes and intense guerrilla warfare during the Civil War made the region, for years, a no-man's-land so far as settlers were concerned. Also, since the land was originally timbered and full of swamps, settlers skirted around the area for lands further north, west, and south. For years it remained a reserve province—a national asset of great potential wealth. Even after most of the timber had been stripped from the

[1] *Land Policy Review,* March 1941.
[2] *Migrant Households in California,* 1938, p. 19.

land, in the years from 1890 to 1910, its agricultural possibilities remained unexploited.

Then came the World War; prices encouraged investment in new and undeveloped farm lands. Land speculators from Ohio, Indiana, and Illinois began to move into the Boot Heel, giving it a slightly 'Northern spice' which it - still retains. Landownership tended to become consolidated in large holdings. 'The land-speculators are gambling with the land the way they gamble with stocks on the market.'[1] High development costs and speculative land values forced owners to concentrate on cash crops and intensive production. Within a decade after large-scale cotton farming had been introduced in 1923, the sharecropper system became the prevailing pattern. Since however, it never had deep roots in the Boot Heel, tensions soon began to develop, and with the depression, it started to disintegrate. It is for this reason that recent disturbances in the Boot Heel may be said to herald the storm to come in the Deep South.

With the development of large cotton plantations, growers in the Boot Heel began to bring trainloads of workers into the area from Arkansas, Tennessee, and Mississippi. These workers were, for the most part, trained agricultural labourers: sharecroppers and tenants, with a heavy percentage of negroes (two-thirds of all the rural negroes in Missouri now reside in the area). A selective process was at work in this migration which left the older people behind and brought in the younger families; but these families were located throughout the area, not as owners or settlers, but as sharecroppers and tenants. The development of the Boot Heel, as the Farm Security Administration points out, provided 'a unique opportunity for the establishment of a community which would be progressive and idealistic. Instead, tradition, suspicion, prejudice, and resentment prevail'. Most of the families were, in fact, worse off than before they migrated.

Within a decade the Boot Heel ceased to be a new frontier. Diversified farming had been almost completely supplanted by cash crops. By 1935, 74 per cent of the farms were operated by tenants; in two counties the tenancy rate was 90 per cent, in one 80 per cent. 'Large tracts of land,' according to the F.S.A. report,'are held by insurance companies, land development companies, and large individual landholders.' Out of 1,800,000 acres in farms, by 1936 some 950,000 acres were owned by landlords, corporate and private, each of whom owned 200 acres or more. Landlords leasing to a hundred or more tenants and sharecroppers were quite common in the region. Obviously these 'islands' of 'new land frontiers' cannot survive long in our present monetary economy.

Not only had a lopsided tenure pattern developed in a decade, but the relation between people and resources had been grossly perverted. 'Concentration on a single cash crop,' to quote from the F.S.A. report**)** 'demands a large labour supply for only part of the year. Landlords prefer large families to meet the labour demands of the peak seasons and give preference in selecting tenants to families with several able-bodied children, thus encouraging a high birth-rate. The high birth-rate in turn perpetuates the economic system.'

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[1] *Rich Land—Poor People,* a report of the Farm Security Administration, 1938.

For five months of the year, labour requirements in the Boot Heel ranged from 4,940 workers in January to 18,653 workers in May. But to ensure themselves an adequate labour supply for the harvest, growers had built up a reserve of 35,737 family and hired labourers in the area, leaving a surplus for each of the five months of 30,797 to 17,084 workers.[1] Nor do these estimates take into consideration the migratory workers who drifted into the Boot Heel every season. Average annual family income in 1936 was estimated as follows: for white sharecroppers $415; white farm labourers $264; for negroes, of all tenure types, $251. These estimates, moreover, included relief payments and all other sources of income. They did not include the value of products consumed on the farm; but, although the area is admirably suited for vegetable growing, few sharecroppers have gardens. Landlords systematically discourage the planting of gardens which require attention when labour is needed in the fields.

A few comments will serve to illustrate conditions prevailing in this rural slum in 1936—only a few years after the area had been settled, 'Sharecroppers and farm labourers,' quoting from the F.S.A. report, 'make up a majority of the population, but have little influence in determining the conditions under which they work and live. ... A journey through the area presents a picture of poverty, deprivation, and hopelessness, with but few avenues of escape even for those who keep alive a flickering desire for something better.' Throughout the area 87 per cent of the people live in one of two types of shacks: the 'strip house' with vertical siding and stripping over cracks to keep out moisture; and the 'weatherboard house' of frame construction with drop sidings. Practically none of the 'houses' have cellars; 61 per cent have never been painted; many have no toilet facilities of any kind; screening-is almost unknown; water is drawn from surface wells easily contaminated. The interiors are 'a picture of squalor, filth, and poverty', with children sleeping on thin pallets spread on the floors, and with the furniture being wholly negligible. 'Salt pork, corn pone, dried beans, and occasionally a few vegetables' are the principal items of food. Typical of the attitude of the growers on the matter of diet is a remark made by the local chairman of the Citizens' Committee, who, denouncing the work of the Farm Security Administration, said:'Can you imagine wanting to give a negro lettuce and mayonnaise—what he needs is sow belly and beans.'[2]

The Boot Heel, as might be expected, has a serious public-health problem. The malaria rate in the region is twenty times as high as the state rate ('chill days', the croppers say); the typhoid-fever rate is nine times the state rate; tuberculosis is double the state rate; the death-rate for pneumonia is extremely high; and the mortality rate for diarrhoea and enteritis among children under two years of age is eighteen times the state rate. The only type of insurance commonly maintained by the submerged population is—and quite properly so under the circumstances—'burial' insurance. It is estimated that about 40 per cent of those who apply to the F.S.A. for assistance have gonorrhea. Mobility among the sharecroppers is so great that, in the judgement of the F.S.A., 'the system of tenure

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[1] *Land Policy Review,* January—February 1940, p. 8.

[2] *Sec Report of the Federal Bureau of Investigation,* 21 March 1939.

cannot be stabilized without a change of ownership. Ownership by the operators themselves and ownership by some government agency are the possible alternatives.' Community organization, in the area, is non-existent. The principal churches are such esoteric cults as the Nazarenes, Holy Rollers, Pentecostal, One-God Church, Church of Jesus Christ and Sanctified, and similar sects presided over by lay clergymen who are, for the most part, combination witch doctors, faith healers, and exorcizers of evil spirits. Out of almost 400 schools in the region, 24 meet the requirements of the State Board of Education; only about 54 per cent of the children attend school (and these have a regular 'cotton vacation' spring and fall); and adult education is unknown. 'Ironically enough,' observe the F.S.A. investigators, 'these conditions exist in a part of the state where the extremes of wealth and poverty are represented; wealth in the sense of productive value of the soil, and poverty of the people who work this soil, a paradox of rich land—poor people.'

2. THE ROADSIDE DEMONSTRATION

For some years prior to 1937, a change in status was noticeable among the 35,747 rural workers in the Boot Heel. By 1936, 36 per cent cent of those who had been sharecroppers in 1929 had become farm labourers (the agricultural ladder in reverse). Mechanization and the use of migratory labour developed quickly.'A practice was adopted,' reports the F.S.A., 'of substituting day labour for sharecroppers, in maintaining low wage rates for day labour, and of assuming that the relief agencies would take care of the labourers when they had no work.' For some years prior to 1939, the tendency to eliminate share- croppers in favour of migratory workers had caused considerable-consternation; this greatly increased when, during the 1938 season, Mexican migrant pickers from Texas appeared in the fields of a 10,000 acre plantation.[1]

At about the same time a change occurred in the method of dividing A.A.A. benefit payments which provoked widespread anxiety and fear in the area. Under the 1937 A.A.A. programme the share-cropper received one-fourth of the benefit payments; but under the 1938 programme he would receive one-half of the payments. 'The 1938 programme,' as the F.B.I, pointed out in its report (p. 6) 'obviously offered an inducement to the landlord and tenant-operator to eliminate the sharecropper.' Although the change between the 1937 and 1938 programmes was intended to improve the position of the sharecroppers, it had exactly the opposite effect. By December 1938, several thousand sharecroppers had been served with notices of eviction. It was to meet this emergency that Owen H. Whitfield organized the celebrated 'roadside demonstration'. Since 1935, Whitfield a negro minister (Southern Baptist), had tried to organize the share-croppers for the Southern Tenant Farmers' Union; but in 1938 he was an officer of both the S.T.F.U. and the U.C.A.P.A.W.A. (United Cannery, Agricultural, Packing and Allied Workers of America affiliated with the C.I.O.). The father of eleven children, Whitfield had been for years a sharecropper himself. A remarkable man is the Reverend Mr. Whitfield: shrewd and droll, eloquent and cunning. To the white

[1] See *Report of the Federal Bureau of Investigation,* 21 March 1939, p. 46.

sharecroppers in the Boot Heel, he said: 'Trade unionism is not a social equality movement. No social mixture—we don't desire that. You are satisfied, I am sure, with your white women and I am tickled to death with my tea-kettle brown. You and I must unite for a higher standard of living through collective efforts and we can better our condition.'

On the morning of the 10th of January 1939, some 251 sharecropper families, comprising about 1,161 people, moved out of their shacks and cabins, and set up improvised camps, thirteen in number, along two major highways running through the Boot Heel (Highway 60 and Highway 61). Motorists zooming along the highways, on the morning of January the 10th, were surprised to see these strange makeshift encampments on either side of the highways in which an army in rags and tatters—an army without banners—was bivouacked, at intervals, along 150 miles of open road.[1] Exhibited along the highway were most of the worldly possessions of the sharecroppers: dogs, children, goats, tin cans, ragged tents, and sheet-metal stoves. The camps themselves were eloquent and irrefutable evidence of poverty and desperation. Nor could the evidence be ignored: it was there for all the world to see. No longer lost in the obscurity of the fields, no longer hidden in remote shacks, no longer covered with tarpaulin in trucks, these shadows had suddenly taken tangible form and were on display, like the figures in a department-store window, along two major highways.

The demonstration lasted only three days and three nights. On the morning of the 13th of January 1939 the law wheeled into action. The roadside camps were pronounced a public health menace (the thousands of filthy shacks in the Boot Heel, which had existed for years, were never a menace to public health). The State Highway Patrol entered the area and began to disperse the ex-sharecroppers.

But the effects produced were truly amazing. By their silent presence on the highways, the sharecroppers were dramatizing the death of the cropper system. The Deep South, quick to recognize the implications, 'quivered under the impact of the demonstration'. For the same type of protest, tantalizing in its passivity, might easily have spread. This was revolution; this was treason. Editorial writers spewed abuse upon the demonstrators; the Halls of Congress echoed with rabid denunciation. The debate in Congress was devoted, not to the facts of the sharecropper system, not to the question of whether these people had a grievance, but to a single issue: Who had instigated this treasonable conspiracy? Mr. J. Edgar Hoover was requested by the Attorney General to investigate and the sharecroppers soon found that they were defendants, not plaintiffs, in the proceedings. The hollowness of the conspiracy charges is illustrated by the story of Thad Snow's 'confession' as reported by the F.B.I. One of the large growers in the area, Mr. Snow, unlike some of his colleagues, has a sense of humour. Because of his addiction to new ideas, he is a figure of legendary eccentricity in the Boot Heel. In the eyes of the landowners he was, of course, implicated in the roadside demonstration. Mr. Snow let the rumours multiply for several days and then announced that, if the local newspaper reporters would call at his place, he would make a formal

[1] [1]See *An American Exodus,* p. 38, for an excellent photograph of the camps.

'confession'. The confession was taken down verbatim and appeared in every newspaper in the locality. According to Mr. Snow, the idea for the demonstration originated in the mind of Leon Trotsky, to whom he had been introduced, on a recent visit to Mexico City, by Diego Rivera. Other conspirators with whom Mr. Snow discussed the plot, upon his return from Mexico, were Secretary of State Hull, President Roosevelt, Tom Mooney, Upton Sinclair, Al Smith, Norman Thomas, Dorothy Thompson, Tom Girdler, and Frank Hague. Messrs. Hague and Girdler tentatively approved of the idea, but requested permission to consult Hitler and Mussolini. Before leaving Mexico, Mr. Snow had also discussed the matter, it seems, with President Cardenas and Ambassador Josephus Daniels. There are still people who insist that the 'confession' was genuine and that no-one, not even Thad Snow, can convince them it was a hoax.

There is a charming candour about Mr. Snow. Some months ago he appeared before a Congressional committee and proposed a modification in the cotton acreage reduction programme. Instead of giving cotton allotments to land, he suggested that the allotments should be given to workers. Listening to this unbelievable heresy, a Congressman from the Deep South wanted to know just who had paid Mr. Snow's expenses to come to Washington. 'Well, gentlemen,' said Mr. Snow, 'I'll tell you who paid my expenses—my share-croppers did. I've been living off them for twenty years, and I thought it was about time that I tried to do something for them.'

3. BRAVE NEW WORLD

Throughout 1939 'hair-trigger times' prevailed in the Boot Heel.[1] By June most of the strikers had gradually been reabsorbed on the farms; others, in the words of Mr. P. G. Beck, regional director of the F.S.A.,'moved into camps where they lived precariously close to the starvation level'. Although no further incidents occurred, by January 1940 more than 1,500 sharecropper families had received notices, to move on. Fortunately, during 1939, the F.S.A. had been hard at work devising a programme to meet the situation.

At the time of the roadside demonstration, the F.S.A. had one rehabilitation project in the Boot Heel: the LaForge Project, in New Madrid County. Here in 1937 the F.S.A. had purchased 6,700 acres of land which had been divided into one hundred farmsteads, of varying size, and rented to a hundred families: sixty white families, and forty negro families. For each settler on the tract, the F.S.A. built a modern home and provided an operating loan. The average cost of each farmstead, including land, building, and improvements, was about $5,980; the operating loans averaged $1,314.54 per family. In addition, the government formed the LaForge Co-operative Association which operates a cotton gin, warehouse, cotton seed house, store, blacksmith shop, and provides many services for the residents on the project. Homesteaders are taught to diversify crops; to follow sound soil-conservation practices; and are encouraged to 'live at home'. Each family has a pressure cooker and must preserve a certain amount of fruit and vegetables for home consumption. The F.S.A. maintains a vocational training

[1] See *Land Policy Review,* February 1941, p. 15.

programme for both children and adults. When the project was opened, the average worth of family possessions was $28 per family. After two years of operation, the families had, in surplus cash and average gross worth, property valued at $1,473.71 per family; and the project had on hand 1,048 bushels of stored vegetables, 47,412 pounds of meat which had been butchered on the project, and 34,947 quarts of canned food. During the same period of time, the government had been repaid $94,455.09 on its loans. Most of the settlers have had no difficulty in paying their rent or in meeting interest instalments on the operating loans. Naturally the project has a demonstrational value in the community, in addition to what it has meant to the families rehabilitated.

After the roadside demonstration, the F.S.A. determined to expand its programme in the area. The problem which it had to solve was this: during four months of the year, 35,000 workers were needed in the area to chop cotton and to pick cotton; during the balance of the year, 5,000 workers could meet the labour requirements. Were these additional workers to be imported every year; and, if so, what would they do during the eight months when they were unemployed? Or was this surplus of labour to be left stranded in the area and sink from one depth of degradation to another? The F.S.A. was also worried over the appearance of Mexican migratory workers from Texas. If resident workers were supplanted by Mexicans, then the problem would be almost beyond hope of practical solution.

In an effort to stabilize farm labour in the area, the F.S.A. devised four types of farm-labour projects. The first of these is the so-called Labour Rehabilitation Project. In 1940 the local relief officials certified 1,549 families to the F.S.A. Through negotiations with landowners, the F.S.A. managed to secure for these families shacks, small garden plots, and a slight amount of pasture, without the payment of rent. To each of the families was then made a small grant to enable them to purchase garden seed, garden and canning equipment, and a cow. In consideration of the grant, the families in turn agreed to build food storage cellars, to construct privies, to dig wells, and to improve the shacks in which they lived. Even this slight assistance has been of great value to the families affected. They have canned about eighty quarts of food per person each year since the grant was made. Some of their garden and canned products have won prizes at the annual county fairs in the district.

Then the F.S.A. established a Scattered Workers' Home Project. Here the government managed to obtain, for the families involved, small acreages from landlords on a ten-year rent-free basis. Loans were made to the families settled on these tracts so that they might build, with their own labour, cheap frame houses at a material cost of about $500, the amount of the loan to be repaid over a ten-year period. In lieu of rent, the improvements are to revert to the landlord at the end of ten years. Under this plan, homes have been built for 337 sharecropper families. To each of these families, also, the F.S.A. made a loan for garden seed, tools, canning equipment, and the purchase of livestock. Trained home economists have provided each family with plans for a garden and a live-at-home budget. Also a co-operative health service has been inaugurated by the F.S.A. for the benefit of the same families.

A third type of stabilization project undertaken in the area is the Group Workers' Homes Project. Under this plan, the F.S.A. purchases land, builds groups of fifty to a hundred worker homes, and rents these homes to day labourers. Each of the homes has a garden lot provided as part of an effort to supplement annual seasonal earnings in agriculture. All of the families are required to register with the: Missouri State Employment Service. Some 1,512 acres have been purchased for projects of this type and about 502 families, including 175 negro families, have been resettled. Built for a cost of about $900 per unit, the homes rent for $4.00 a month. If a family is unable to, pay the minimum rent, an opportunity is provided to work out the rent in miscellaneous labour about the project itself.

Finally, the F.S.A. has experimented with lease-and-purchase associations designed to equalize bargaining power between landlords and tenants. To voluntary non-profit associations, the government makes a forty-year loan repayable with interest at 3 per cent. Utilizing its superior bargaining power, the association leases a large tract of land which, in turn, is sub-leased to members of the association. With the aid of government attorneys, model forms of lease agreements, as between the landlord and the association, and the association and its members, have been worked out. The plan presupposes that the tenants will be full-time farmers and not farm labourers employed by non-members. To date about 16,924 acres have been acquired, either through purchase or through lease, and some 260 families have become members of the various associations. All of these various types of projects have been launched since the roadside demonstration. Prior to the demonstration, Whitfield had made several trips to Washington in behalf of his fellow sharecroppers; but he had never been able to get action. The demonstration, it seems, had the desired effect.

Under these four types of stabilization projects some 2,648 families have been at least partially rehabilitated in the Boot Heel. If judged as a substitute for relief, then the plan has been successful. The rehabilitation of these 2,648 families has cost less than $75 per family, including all administration expenses and losses.[1] The importance of the projects consists in the fact that they point the way for a much larger programme which will have to be devised to meet the problem of displacement in other areas in the South. It should be pointed out that the F.S.A. has repeatedly said that it does not consider the readjustment of people to land a complete solution to the problem of halting unnecessary and undesirable rural migration. Its projects have at best merely cushioned the effect of displacement and temporarily stabilized the labour supply. It remains to be seen whether these measures will be used to depress wages and to reinforce the very conditions which they were intended to correct. In any case, the F.S.A. is entitled to great credit for the 'brave new world' it is attempting to create in one of the worst rural slums in the Middle West.

[1] Tolan Transcript, part 3, p. 1142

4. WHITE GOLD

Processes similar to those at work in the Boot Heel are already noticeable throughout the old plantation districts in the Mississippi Delta. With the rapid expansion of power farming and mechanization, sharecroppers are being replaced by a mobile labour supply. 'The landless cotton worker's year is being divided into occasional employment by the day on the plantations between May and December,' writes Dr. Paul Taylor,[1] 'and virtual idleness on relief in the towns from December to May.' Displaced sharecroppers and tenants in Arkansas are drifting into other areas (thousands have migrated to the Pacific Coast); and have settled in the towns where they 'live in the cheapest quarters available seeking whatever day work they can find on the nearby farms'.[2] Planters in the area frankly admit that, in their own interests, they are forced.'to demote a class already one of the least privileged in the land'.[3] White workers from the Delta, as Dr. Taylor points out, are already picking cotton in Arizona and peas in California (and, for that matter, strawberries in Louisiana, cherries in Michigan, and potatoes in Florida). The negroes have not yet started on the road, but they have become migratory workers within the area. Naturally the repercussions of the twin processes of displacement and migration are certain to be more far-reaching in the Delta than in the newly developed sections of Missouri.

It is possible, in fact, to see these processes at work at the present time. During the season, some 15,000 cotton pickers leave Memphis every day to pick cotton in Mississippi, Missouri, Tennessee, and Arkansas. They are negro pickers who, for the most part, have been driven into the city by the process of displacement. Instead of being provided with a shack and 'furnish', they are now being trucked to and from the fields. Mr. Clark Porteous, in an article in the *Memphis Press-Scimitar* for the 1st of October 1938, has described how this army assembles every morning to go to the fields to pick the South's 'white gold'.

Workers assemble at the Harahan Bridge around 4.30 in the morning and are at work in the fields, writes Mr. Porteous,'before most of you are awake'. No-one observes this daily mobilization and demobilization, for it occurs in the half-light of dawn and in the shadows of evening**.** Many of the pickers eat breakfast while waiting to go to the fields**.** A 'favourite breakfast', according to Mr. Porteous, consists of crackers and sausage, 'costing five cents'. (The standard lunch, incidentally, consists of a nickel package of gingerbread, known as 'stage planks' to the storekeepers and 'daddy wide legs' to the negroes.) At the Bridge, 'trucks and automobiles of all sizes line up for about three blocks. Some of the trucks haul ninety or more pickers. Battered old cars are jammed with humanity.' Patrolmen cruise up and down the long line of vehicles 'watching to see that none of the negroes get into fights'. 'White truck drivers stand beside their vehicles, bidding like auctioneers until they get a load, then they pull into the steady caravan of traffic rumbling across the Bridge, bound for Arkansas fields.'

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[1] *An American Exodus,* 1939, p. 41.
[2] *Agricultural Labour Problems in Arkansas,* 31 October 1936.
[3] *Land Policy Review,* February 1941, p. 17

The description sounds familiar; it calls up dozens of similar scenes that I have witnessed—in Muskogee, Oklahoma; in Phoenix, Arizona; in the skid-rows of Fresno, Stockton, and Sacramento. Here, in the Memphis 'slave market', the practice is the same. Workers are recruited by truckers (labour contractors) who are paid 80 cents a hundred to pick the cotton; they pay the pickers 50 or 60 cents a hundred and pocket the difference as their compensation. They are also frequently paid for the use of their trucks in the fields to haul cotton. Even Mexican trucker contractors, and their crews, are seen nowadays in the plantation areas of Arkansas, Louisiana, and Mississippi;[1] and negroes are trucked to the Delta occasionally from Muskogee, Oklahoma. Truckers operate within a radius of a hundred miles around Memphis.

Mr. Porteous in 1938 followed a crew of 250 negro pickers from Memphis to a plantation in Arkansas. As they arrive, they file through the commissary, getting their numbers and their cotton sacks; these are nine feet long, consist of six yards of cloth, and hold a hundred pounds of cotton. On the plantation visited by Mr. Porteous, a loudspeaker system had been installed through which four plantation managers directed the movement of workers through the commissary and even bawled instructions to them in the fields. 'Negroes don't sing in the fields,' notes Mr. Porteous; 'that seems to be reserved for picture shows.' When the fields grow dark, workers trail back to the commissary and line up in front of the cashier's window, where a large sign reads: 'Use four fingers. Pick up all your money at one whack. Be quick.' As workers present their numbers to the cashier, he makes the calculation on a pay-off machine and 'the coins roll down a chute'. If they have picked 200 pounds in a day, the planter explained to Mr. Porteous, ' it is like hitting 300 in baseball '. While waiting in the line for the pay-off, 'negroes eat bologna, "daddy wide legs", sardines or crackers and cheese' (their evening meal). 'They drink "belly-washers", large bottles of bright-coloured soda pop. The plantation owner,' writes Mr. Porteous, 'gets much of the money back through the store.' There is not much money to get back, however, since most pickers are fortunate if they make 50 or 60 cents a day. When they make a dollar, they are paid in silver, and to have earned a 'cartwheel' indicates real competence. 'Some of the pickers carry bottles of whisky in their pockets, to perk them up as they work in the hot sun. Some of the women had whisky. Negroes call cheap whisky "Joe Louis" because it "don't take much to knock you out".'It is well after dark 'and the lights glisten on the murky river when they go back across Harahan Bridge'; but they will be ready, concludes Mr. Porteous, to come back at 4.30 in the morning for another day's work in white gold—'probably to earn less than a dollar'.

[1] Tolan Transcript, part 5, p. 2011.

BOOK III

MOBILE RURAL PROLETARIAT

CHAPTER IX

COLORADO MERRY-GO-ROUND

'There is a human drama in Colorado,' writes Dr. R. W. Roskelley of Colorado State Agricultural College, 'which is almost as spectacular as *The Grapes of Wrath.'* The appearance of rural slums in a pioneer Western state calls in question one of our most deeply felt convictions: that democracy was reborn on the frontier. For the roots of the problem go back to the turn of the century, when Colorado was still, for many purposes, a Western frontier community. It is a story, moreover, of general national significance, for it involves the growth of an important American industry and the welfare of thousands of American farm owners and tenants. Every American consumer, too, should be interested in the drama, since, unknowingly, he is a party to the plot. For the sugar-beet industry has been created out of public funds and to-day is being subsidized to the extent of $350,000,000 a year by the American public. It is this subsidy which, in part, makes possible the perpetuation of rural sweatshops and what has been aptly characterized as industrialized slavery. Just how did this dizzy Colorado merry-go-round get started? What keeps it going? Who is it that calls the turns?

1. THE HEAD-HUNTERS GET BUSY

The sugar-beet industry in Colorado dates from 1900 when the first sugar-beet factory was constructed at Loveland. Other factories were rapidly added as the feasibility of growing sugar beets in the irrigated valleys became an established fact. Since there were no reservoirs of cheap labour in the sugar-beet district, it became necessary to import beet workers. The first to be imported were the German-Russians, or Volga-Germans, who, throughout the country, have played such an important role in the development of the sugar-beet industry; they soon became the dominant element,[1] but the cessation of immigration during the World War cut off the supply. Those who had already been recruited, moreover, rapidly became sugar-beet growers, either as owners or as tenants, and their children drifted off to the cities. By 1916 the sugar-beet companies had begun to import Mexican labour, at first from the southern part of Colorado and later, in 1918, from Mexico.[2]

The chief agency involved in the importation of Mexican labour to Colorado has at all times been the Great Western Sugar Company, which, at an early date, acquired a virtual monopoly of the processing of sugar beets in the state. In one year, 1921, 10,000 Mexicans were shipped north; between 1910 and 1930, at least 30,000 were imported. These workers, supplemented by occasional

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[1] The story of the Volga-Germans in Colorado is admirably told in a novel, *Second Hoeing,* 1935, by Hope Williams Sykes.

[2] See Dr. Paul S. Taylor, *Mexican Labour in the United States, Valley of the South Platte, Colorado,* 1929.

recruits from the Indian reservations in New Mexico, have met the labour requirements of the industry in Colorado from 1916 to date. The company has always shown a marked preference, however, for the peon from Old Mexico—the 'unspoiled' Mexican field worker 'fresh from Mexico clad in the sombrero, light cotton clothing, and even sandals, of the Mexican peon'. It is important to note that the workers were imported, not by the growers, but by the Great Western Sugar Company. The existence of the custom is, in fact, beyond dispute: in 1920 the company spent $360,000, in 1926 $250,000, in the recruitment of Mexican field labour. While conceding that it has always imported and distributed Mexican labour, the company has consistently disclaimed all responsibility for the welfare of the workers.

Since the process of annual recruitment involved considerable waste and inefficiency, the company has always sought to eliminate its necessity through the expedient of anchoring workers in the area.. It was noticed, at an early date, that each year a number of workers remained at the end of the season in Colorado. Gradually this pool of resident labour has been augmented, so that some 25,000 Mexicans have, by force of necessity, become permanent residents of the state. In fact, the supply of resident labour to-day is not only sufficient to meet the requirements of the industry in Colorado, but to export workers to Montana and Wyoming, Nebraska and Kansas.

It has not been an easy task to build dykes around the Mexican labour imported to Colorado. The winters are cold and disagreeable; the environment is unfriendly. For a time an effort was made to shift Mexican labour, during the winter months, into the mining areas. But in the face of strong trade-union opposition, the expedient had to be abandoned. Faced with these difficulties, the company resorted to the simple device of pauperizing the Mexican so that he could not move at the end of the season.'Peonage', of course, is an ugly word; it is also a crime. But there are many ways of creating a condition which borders on peonage without violating the law.

One obvious means is to stall, at the end of the season, on the prompt settlement of wage claims. A former Mexican consul in Denver told me that, from 1933 to 1938, he never had less than 500 pending unsettled wage claims for Mexican sugar-beet workers. It was frequently two and three years before he could effect settlement on many of these claims. The company, of course, disclaimed responsibility but, when hard-pressed, would sometimes advance money to settle a claim. While the claims were pending, the Mexican field worker was stranded. The existence of this condition has, moreover, been verified by an official government report.[1] Still another technique is to use the offer of free rent and limited credit at a grocery store as bait to hold Mexicans in the area during the winter months. To be sure, the Mexican can always run away in the spring and leave the company to pay the bill. But it is not easy for him, if he wants to work in sugar beets, to escape the tentacles of the Great Western Sugar Company. It is a simple task to follow him into any sugar-beet district in the United States. Another device used by the company to anchor workers in the area consisted in

[1] W. Lewis Abbott, *Report for the Committee on Labour Conditions in the Growing of Sugar Beets* (March 1934), p. 4.

establishing colonization projects. Mexicans were encouraged to build adobe homes on sites acquired by the company in the sugar-beet districts. From the workers' point of view, the projects have been a dismal failure. Most of them are located on poor land, or water is not available, so that colonizers have been unable to plant gardens and raise their own produce. Also, the Mexicans soon discovered that it was virtually impossible for them to acquire title to a particular lot. For the contract provided that title to each and every lot should remain in the company until the entire indebtedness had been repaid. So long as one contract remained unpaid, no purchaser could acquire title. The simplest way to create a stranded labour population, however, is to make economic security unattainable. Annual earnings have been so consistently inadequate in the sugar-beet areas that workers, at the end of the season, have been unable to discharge debts incurred, much less to accumulate a surplus. Consequently, over a period of years, workers have been forced to remain in the area. By these means the gay merry-go-round, from season to season, from contract to contract, from farm to farm, was set in motion. Once you get on the merry-go-round, you can't get off. Just to be sure that workers remained in the area, the company has at all times seen to it that a surplus of labour existed. For if the supply of labour closely approximated the demand, then wage rates might rise or a strike might be effective. While constantly building up a supply of resident non-migratory labour, the company has continued to import additional seasonal workers. The surplus of workers has kept a low ceiling on wages; it has also created a local pool of reserve labour to be utilized for out-of-state employment in the northern sugar-beet areas in which the company also has factories. The company has also consistently adhered to the policy of switching workers about within the area. The average Mexican sugar-beet worker never knows for whom he will work ('contract') next year. While his contract is with the grower, the company 'distributes' the labour. As a result of this policy, Mexicans have been prevented from getting a foothold in any particular community; they have been kept in a state of perpetual insecurity; they have remained 'aliens'. An indirect consequence of the policy has, also, been to thwart organization activities.

The merry-go-round has wheels within wheels and it continues to spin. For at the Tolan Committee hearing in Lincoln, Nebraska, a sugar-beet worker testified that needy American farm families from Kansas had begun to make it difficult for Mexicans to secure contracts in Colorado.[1] Resentment against 'Okies' and 'Arkies' has already begun to develop among Mexican sugar-beet workers. Today the company no longer needs to import workers, at its expense; for there are thousands of American farm families on the road who can be used, if necessary, to displace the Mexicans.

2. HUNGER STREET

The problem of anchoring Mexican sugar-beet labour in Colorado came to an end with the depression. With employment sharply restricted in industry and in agriculture and with wages at

[1] Tolan Transcript, part 4, p. 1700.

the lowest point in the history of the sugar-beet industry, Mexicans had to remain in the state. Not only was the expense of annual recruitment eliminated, but the company managed to escape other costs. In former years it had occasionally made loans to beet workers during (he winter months or underwritten limited credit at a grocery store (usually specifying that credit should only be allowed for a few items, such as beans and coffee). With the inauguration of a government relief programme, however, even this measure of responsibility could he avoided. Subsidized in one form or another throughout its entire history, the company now managed to have the community assume the social costs involved in the use of seasonal labour.

By the very nature of employer-employee relationships within the industry, the Mexican has at all times been forced to remain a seasonal worker unable to become self-supporting. The field men of the sugar-beet refinery distribute Mexican labour to the growers. Under the terms of the contract, printed by the company but signed by the grower, the worker agrees to cultivate and to harvest a particular acreage. Through either bonus or a 'hold-back' payable at the end of the season, the Mexican is compelled to fulfil the contract; he must remain through the harvest. By the terms of the contract, the Mexican is tied to a particular acreage for six or seven months and usually is required to reside on the premises. Depending upon the size of his allotment, the worker may only put in sixty or eighty days' actual work in the field. But during the life of the contract he has virtually no chance to secure outside supplemental employment. The average sugar-beet worker can handle about ten acres of beets, and he is paid, of course, on an acreage basis. Since there has at all times been a surplus of workers and since both processors and growers insist upon the quickest possible harvest, the average acreage allotments have steadily decreased. To-day a worker is lucky if he is given as much as six acres to cultivate and harvest. In the latest study made (by Dr. Roskelley in 1938), the average yearly income for an entire family of sugar-beet labourers was found to be $568.49. Of this amount, $412.46 was earned by working beets, $132 was obtained through other types of employment, and $24.12 came as a form of public assistance. Since the families are large, it is extremely doubtful if average earnings per worker exceed $70 a year.

The reports of the Colorado State Council of the Knights of Columbus from 1927 to 1931 clearly indicate what happened to the Mexican worker before general public relief programmes were established. According to these reports, the number of Mexican families ; remaining in Colorado after the season steadily increased from 1922 to 1930. Every winter families had to seek some form of private charitable assistance (there were 2,038 dependent families in the winter of 1927). Each of these reports, prepared by Mr. Thomas Mahoney of Longmont, Colorado, calls attention to increasing poverty among Mexican sugar-beet workers; to wretched housing; to serious health problems; to rank social discrimination. The main change worked by the institution of public relief has been to fix workers in a permanently underprivileged status. A report by Mr. Olaf F. Larson[1] indicates that the average sugar-beet family

[1] *Beet Workers on Relief in Weld County, Colorado,* May 1937.

consisted of 5.6 persons and that in 1936 the average annual income per family was $436, half of which came from beet labour, 10 per cent from miscellaneous employment, and 40 per cent from public assistance. In 1935 and 1936 practically every Mexican family in the county was on relief for six months; even in 1937, 70 per cent of the families had to seek public assistance for three months of the year. Most of the families embraced within the survey had been beet workers for ten or more years, an indication that their status had become permanent. As to housing conditions, a comparison of the findings made by Dr. Roskelley in 1938 with those made by Mr. Mahoney in 1927 indicates that no improvement has been made in the past decade.

'Logic suggests,' writes Dr. Roskelley, 'the impossibility of scoffing at the Mexican cultural patterns, of indoctrinating them with those of the Nordics and still expecting them to perform a type of labour and live under conditions which Nordic standards taboo. Neither can it be expected that they will willingly relegate themselves to the status of second-class citizens in a country where equal opportunity, regardless of race, is the symbol of freedom.' Unfortunately, however, it would appear that Mexican sugar-beet labour does tend to become a caste and class permanently fixed in status.

With the commencement of the sugar-beet season each spring, public welfare agencies eliminate all Mexicans from relief. The process by which this is accomplished is known among Colorado social workers as a 'linguistic device': all persons with Spanish names are presumed to. be sugar-beet workers and are eliminated from the rolls. If the Great Western cannot employ them, they are supposed to get miscellaneous field jobs. Each morning they must report at the produce market in Denver at five o'clock. If work is available, they are loaded in trucks and taken to the fields. Charged 25 cents a day for transportation, they also furnish their own lunches. If there are no jobs, they wait at the market most of the day and then report to the welfare agency. Working in beans, celery, berries, and tomatoes, they are lucky to make 50 or 60 cents a day.[1]

According to the *Denver Catholic Register* of the 24th of October 1940: 'In 1939 a county welfare official told the beet field recruits that they would not be permitted to object to low wages or to where they would be sent. When some refused to co-operate because they had children in school, they were told that it was unfortunate that such a situation existed, but work must be taken where it could be found. Anyone refusing work in the fields will " be dealt with summarily". They were to work in the beet fields for starvation wages under conditions of which they knew nothing and in which they had absolutely no voice.' Slight wonder, then, that the Very Reverend John Ordinas, Pastor of Saint Cajetan's Church, should denounce the entire system as a form of 'industrialized slavery' or that Mr. Mahoney should feel forced to observe that 'the W.P.A. with its notorious "hunger pressure" methods takes advantage of the destitution of our Catholic Spanish-speaking poor and forces them into the beet fields on the threat of starving their families. Their plight is worse than that of chattel slaves of the old plantation days. At least slaves were sure of food and shelter.'

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[1] *See Report of the Denver Bureau of Public Welfare,* December 1940.

To thousands of Mexican workers in Denver, Larimer Street, their main thoroughfare, is known as 'Hunger Street'. I mention this detail for the benefit of Mr. Thomas Hornsby Ferril, 'poet laureate of Colorado', in the hope that he may fashion a lyric out of it. To the Mexicans on Larimer Street, Mr. Ferril, public-relations counsel for the company, is known as the 'Poet Laureate of the Great Western'.

In response to pressure from the sugar-beet counties, the State Legislature in Colorado, in 1927, passed a law (Senate Bill No. 208) which provides that public funds belonging to the counties cannot be used for the burial of the poor. If relatives cannot be reached, or if they are unable to pay the burial expenses, then the body must be delivered within twenty-four hours to the State Board of Health for removal to one of the medical colleges for dissection. Aimed at sugar-beet workers, the statute struck mortal terror to the hearts of thousands of Mexicans. Most of them try, at considerable personal sacrifice, to carry burial insurance. But the medical students have had their share of Mexican corpses. Of recent years the Catholic Church, to appease the Mexicans, has established a special fund out of which the burial expenses can be paid. The St. Vincent de Paul Society of Denver, in 1940, provided burials for 175 Mexicans. Even in death, poverty stigmatizes the Mexican beet worker; and even in death, the Great Western Sugar Company disclaims responsibility.

3. 'SUGAR DOLLAR'

From its inception in 1890, the domestic sugar industry has always enjoyed either a federal bounty on domestic production or a high protective tariff. Two reasons have traditionally been urged in defence of this preferential treatment: 'American' workers must be protected against the competition of coolie labour in the islands; and a crop 'highly profitable' to the American farmer must be safe-guarded. Despite the fact that it was estimated in 1924 that two-thirds of the industry had worked out costs which would permit continued operation without the protection of the tariff,[1] the tariff has remained.

To see how this government-subsidized industry operates, it is necessary to look at the relationships between the various groups involved in production, the refineries, the growers, and the workers. There are few refiners, as the sugar-beet territory is parcelled out into various 'factory districts'. But in 1934 there were 70,709 growers and 159,394 workers. Most of the workers are not, and never have been, self-supporting. As to the growers, 57 per cent were tenants in Colorado in 1917; to-day about 70 per cent are tenants. The average annual share of the growers in the total gross income has been somewhat less than $ 1,000 per farm. According to a recent study made in Colorado, it was found that on the basis of the 14.6 ton average yield, the average landlord *income* was slightly more than five dollars an acre, the average tenant *loss* was five dollars an acre.[2] While on the surface there *appear* to be three elements involved in production, actually there is only one: the refiner. The pivot of the sugar-beet merry-go-round is the factory. A

[1] Dr. Paul S. Taylor, *Mexican Labour in the United States, Valley of the South Platte, Colorado,* (1929) p. 98.

[2] Dr. J. Edwin Sharp, *Sugar Dollar,* 1940.

sugar-beet factory must be located near the source of its raw materials; and, conversely, beets are not valuable unless grown near it. Thus, as Professor R. T. Burdick has pointed out,[1] both the production and the processing of the beet are local monopolies. It is this consideration which caused the United States Tariff Commission to point out in 1926 that 'the culture of sugar beets and the manufacture of sugar are so closely allied as to constitute virtually a single industry even though the two operations may not be carried on by the same persons or organization'. Complete integration has been achieved in practice; it is only the formal aspects, preserved in fictitious contractual relationships, that remain separate. Why is it, therefore, that the illusion of three separate contractual groups is maintained?

The reason is quite simple: politics. The sugar-beet industry is based upon public subsidy; to maintain the subsidy a huge lobby must be kept in Washington; the lobby, to be effective, must have the support of the farm organizations. Were it not for this fact, sugar-beet companies would raise their own raw materials. But to keep the farm bloc in line, they permit farmers to make a small margin of profit, but never more than is necessary to induce them to raise beets. To secure this, the refiners have always maintained control of the labour supply. The significant fact about the industry is that the great majority of farmers raising sugar beets contract the labour necessary for production. They do no hand labour themselves for the simple reason that they cannot afford to. They would then be carrying the burden of the unpaid labour costs themselves. Thus out of 1,047,029 acres planted in sugar beets in 1933, 766,343 acres were worked under the so-called 'contract' system.

Beneath a formal guise of independent contractual relationships, the entire industry is controlled by the refiners. They finance the growers, purchase the production in advance of the season, and, by contract, retain complete control over every phase of production. Their field men tell the grower what type of seed he shall use, when he shall cultivate, the kind and amount of labour he shall employ— there is not a detail of the entire operation which is not dictated by the refiners. In many cases, tenants are forced to raise sugar beets by pressure brought to bear on them by landlords, or banks, or by the sugar companies who finance their operations. It is the company which prepares the printed contract used between grower and worker. It is the company which procures and distributes the labour supply. Every sugar-beet district has its 'Sugar Beet Growers' Association'. These associations are merely glorified company unions under the dominance of the processors. To cap the climax, the federal programme is administered by local committees which, in turn, are controlled by the companies. Labour is never represented on these committees. The Sugar Division of the Department of Agriculture has never even bothered to issue a booklet in Spanish which might explain to the workers how the programme operates.

To-day it is estimated that two-thirds of the income of the industry is derived from a tax on the consuming public which amounts, at the present time, to about $350,000,000 a year. To this subsidy must be added, however, the heavy social costs involved in

[1] Bulletin No. 453, Colorado Experiment Station, p. 46

the use of cheap labour: the cost of relief, public health, and all the manifold and concealed burdens cast on governmental and private agencies. No-one has ever had the hardihood to estimate what these social costs total. Just how badly does the industry need this heavy subsidy?

Shortly after its organization in 1905, the capital stock structure of the Great Western Sugar Company consisted of $15,000,000 common stock and an equal amount of preferred. In the course of time all of the preferred stock and $10,571,520 of the common stock was sold for cash or used in exchange for properties; the balance of the common stock was then issued in the form of stock dividends. The actual investment in the company was, therefore, $25,571,520. From this investment the company had accumulated, by the 28th of February 1939, net assets of $75,791,221 and it had accounted for total net earnings for thirty-four years of operation in the amount of $188,188,866. These earnings constituted 736 per cent on the total original investment; an average annual return of 21.6 per cent. But the return on the preferred stock was limited to 7 per cent per annum or a total, for the period, of $32,979,625. When deducted from total net earnings, this leaves $155,209,241 for the common stockholders, a return of 1,468.2 per cent on the original investment, or 43.2 per cent annually. It has been estimated that the company, which produces one-third of the beet sugar in the United States, indirectly receives an annual subsidy from the government equivalent to the original investment. I am advised that about one-sixth of the common stock is held by two interests: the Havemeyer Estate and the Boettcher family.[1]

[1] These figures are taken from *The Financial History of the Great Western Sugar Company* by J. F. Rasmussen; they may also be verified by reference to W. Lewis Abbott, *Report for the Committee on Labour Conditions in the Growing of Sugar Beets,* March 1934, p. 24.

CHAPTER X

THE BIG SWING

1. SNOW TIME IN TEXAS

‘Snow time in Texas,' wrote John A. Lomax, 'is not in the winter but in the fall, when cotton is everywhere and the fields are white with the open bolls.' Nowadays the bulk of the cotton crop in Texas is harvested by migratory workers; an army of 400,000 pickers follow the crop. The racial composition of the group is somewhat as follows: Mexicans 75 per cent; White Americans 15 per cent; and negroes 10 per cent. In addition, some 300,000 workers pick for a part of the season but travel only short distances from their residences. Representing the remnants of the share-croppers and tenants in Texas, the workers in this group are merely part-time agricultural employees. At the peak of the season more than 800,000 men, women, and children pick some cotton in Texas.

The production of cotton extends from the southern tip of the state through to the edge of the Panhandle in the north-west. The physiographic and climatic heterogeneity of the state is such that it results in a staggered system of planting, cultivating, and harvesting. The cotton harvest lasts for six months, despite the fact that in no one region does the season last for more than six to eight weeks. Migration is a natural consequence of the progressive maturity of the crop. 'The big swing' of workers in the cotton harvest starts in the southern part of the state in June or July. From there it sweeps eastward through the coastal counties and then turns west for the central portions of the state. After the cotton has been picked in central Texas, the army splits into three units: one moves into east Texas; another proceeds to the Red River country; and a third treks westward to the San Angelo-Lubbock area. Most of the migrants who make the entire circle are Mexicans from the southern counties of the state. They tend to move west, rather than north, and skirt the old plantation area in which most of the negro labour is concentrated. From the West Plains area, in late November or December, the movement doubles back towards the southern counties for winter vegetable and produce crops. The migration pattern may be likened to an imperfect circle, a circle that is somewhat flattened out and that bulges towards the west. It is this pattern which is referred to in Texas as 'the big swing'.

Although the army of cotton pickers is organized in the south, it gains recruits as it proceeds along the line of march. Recruits join the army, follow it through a county or two, and then drop out, to be replaced with new families from the next county. It is estimated that at least 200,000 make the circuit covering a distance of from 1,800 to 2,000 miles, all within one state. Over this long and wearisome route, in the blazing Texas sun, Mexican families migrate 'like the starlings and the blackbirds'.

The generals of the army are, for the most part, Mexican labour contractors or truckers, through whom approximately 60 per cent of the cotton picking is handled. The contractor system has its roots deep in the background of Mexican labour. On the great haciendas of pre-revolutionary Mexico, the peon became accustomed to a somewhat similar system. Since many Mexican migrants do not

speak English, they turn naturally to the *jefe* who does speak English. Also, the Texas cotton grower, unable to speak Spanish, generally has to deal with someone who does. 'With the growth of absentee ownership and mass production in Texas, the contractor has gained his place as an indispensable cog in the wheel of production.'[1]

With the decline of the plantation system, the demand for Mexican workers has steadily increased. 'The present day Texas cotton grower, who has discarded his plantation habits of thought, wants his cotton picked in the quickest possible time, and it makes no difference to him whether he stretches employment or not, for expenditures for labour remain the same. He, therefore, prefers a larger crew and wants it in a hurry. It is here that the Mexican workers' advantage lies, since Mexicans do not follow the harvest individually but as a group, a gang, either of individuals or of families, led and transported by the labour contractor who undertakes to supply the farmer with the entire crew he needs for his crop.'[2] Nowadays harvests which formerly took two months' picking are concluded in a few days and the 'farmer knows nothing of the welfare of the pickers, as they come to-day and leave to-morrow'; as many as a thousand Mexican cotton-picking families have been observed entering a single plantation in a day.[3]

The contractor is really a *capitán* or *jefe* who happens to own a truck. In addition to transporting workers, he is hired to weigh the cotton, take charge of the commissary, and oversee the work. Sometimes he is paid $1.50 per adult picker for transportation, $1.00 a bale for overseeing the work, and extra pay for weighing the cotton. He may also be paid for the use of his truck in hauling cotton to the gin. Relieving the grower of considerable red tape, he does most of the bookkeeping and handles the pay roll. This system is one method of organizing an otherwise chaotic labour market and, to this extent, there is something to be said in its favour. But it is subject to grave abuses. It has a natural tendency to discourage union organization, for it confers upon the contractor a virtual monopoly of employment opportunities. 'The Mexican labourers,' comments the Texas State Employment Service, 'are easily made submissive to one of their own countrymen. They are kept in a mild state of peonage, and whether the grower is prosperous or not, a Mexican labourer's wage for farm work remains around 75 cents or $1.00 a day.' The contractor does, however, provide transportation by truck (with about fifty or sixty workers per truck) and truck transportation is generally preferable to individual transport. The contractor, also, does know where jobs are to be had, for he works in close touch with the Texas State Employment Service. Family ties remain exceptionally strong among Mexicans. The contractor may be the general, but the Mexican patriarch is the major. He has his own family organization, consisting not merely of the members of his immediate family, but of collateral relatives. Embraced within the family unit may be twelve, fifteen, or twenty workers. They stick together; they work and camp and move as a unit. This, in

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[1] *Annual Report, Texas State Employment Service,* 1936—7, pp. 38, 85.
[2] Tolan Transcript, part 5, p. 2196
[3] Ibid., p. 1893

turn, helps to organize the labour market and it also gives the contractor a closely knit working organization.

The plantation system did at least provide every family with a shack or a cabin. But with migratory labour this touch of paternalism has been eliminated. Generally speaking, there are no private camps in Texas. Pickers are supposed to provide their own camps; and to camp wherever they can find a site. No effort is made to provide camp facilities such as water, toilets, and shelter. There is no system of labour camp inspection in Texas and the camps, such as they are, are the worst in the United States. It should be kept in mind, also, that it occasionally rains in Texas and that, in October and November, it gets extremely cold at night on the North-west Plains. Where camps are provided, they consist of sheds, barns, machine houses, or rows of one-room cabins, twenty or sixty in a row.[1] The typical camp is the roadside squatters' camp, along the railroad right of way or near the edge of the cotton field.[2]

To indicate what the camp problem is in Texas, consider the following passage from the *Annual Report of the Texas State Employment Service,* 1936-7 (p. 40):

'In the fall of 1935, a situation arose in Lubbock which gave a vivid picture of the results of aimless, misdirected, untimely migration of workers into big crop areas. The peak of the cotton picking season is reached in the latter part of October and in November in this part of the state, and workers begin to move into the counties in droves as they finish picking in other areas. It was about the 10th of October; the picking had not yet begun; the growers were not all ready for their labour, and reports had been exaggerated as to the cotton yield. Truck after truck of Mexican labourers poured into Lubbock from every direction.

'There were no concentration points, no housing facilities, no camping grounds. About the time that the great mass reached Lubbock, a cold rain set in. There were hundreds of Mexican families with no means of shelter, camping in open spaces. The situation grew more and more serious as sickness developed, especially among small children. There was no available aid for them from public services, as they were ineligible for relief, and most growers would do nothing for them as they could not go to work until the rain was over.'

It was about a week before the rain ceased and picking could be resumed. 'it was never known,' adds the report, '*how many children died from exposure'.'*

In certain districts the Texas State Employment Service has encouraged local communities to build so-called 'concentration camps' or 'labour supply depots'. These camps are usually located in the local County Fairgrounds or on the outskirts of some important town in the cotton area. Into these camps the field supervisors of the Employment Service endeavour to route pickers from the highways. Some of the camps will have 2,000 or 3,000 pickers. From these camps, workers are then taken, by truck, to the various fields where work is available. There are only a few community camps and the policy of building them was not established until 1936.

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[1] See *Survey,* May 1931

[2] See Supplemental Hearings, La Follette Transcript, part 1, p. 264; see also p. 204 for photographs.

Recently the Farm Security Administration has constructed four migratory labour camps in Texas, at a cost of upwards of one million dollars. It is also proposed that four additional camps be constructed in the near future. These F.S.A. camps primarily attract the dispossessed sharecroppers and tenants. The Mexican, being attached to a labour contractor and being more mobile, is likely to avoid them. While the F.S.A. camps are a vast improvement over such private camps as exist, they only accommodate at capacity about 1,000 out of 70,000 families involved. As sharecroppers and tenants are forced from the land, the labour supply becomes increasingly urbanized and the first visible evidence of urbanization is invariably the shack-town on the outskirts of an established community. Texas, needless to say, has its share of shack-towns.[1]

The average earnings of migratory workers in cotton are shockingly low. In 1938 the Texas State Employment Service estimated that, at 50 cents a hundred pounds, workers could not average more than $37.50, per individual, for the season of six months. From a study made in 1940 by the Farm Security Administration, of 108 families, it was found that the average income per person during the season was $2.53 per week, or 36 cents per day. In studies made in other areas the same year, the F.S.A. reported weekly incomes of $1.60 per person, or 23 cents a day; of $1.08 per week, or 15 cents per day. 'We have found,' an official told the Tolan Committee, 'able- bodied men working ten hours a day and receiving as low as 20 cents for the entire day, or 2 cents an hour. In 1938 the Texas State Employment Service found a large group of pickers, six hundred miles from their homes, who were 'financially unable to move out to find other employment. They were completely stranded'.[2]

Naturally, an army of this size has its proportion of camp followers. One Texas farmer explained this phase of the migration to Dr. Paul Taylor, in 1934, as follows:

'Some farmers put in gamblers to keep them broke. Some people say that the way to keep negro labour is to let them have women and shoot craps. The Mexican women, however, go along with their men- folk. The smart Mexican gamblers go around among the Mexicans and play monte and shoot craps. Gamblers and prostitutes come and get places and pretend to pick. It is better for the farmer in one sense, because they work better when they have no money.'

2. WINTER GARDEN

When the cotton-picking season is over in the North-west Plains area in November or early December, the army of cotton pickers disbands. Stragglers move in all directions: some go on to the Pacific Coast; some drift back to other areas in Texas; others proceed to Arizona and New Mexico for more cotton picking. But the bulk of the Mexican migrants turn back to the Winter Garden area in the south of Texas.

One of the most remarkable off-season produce areas in America, the Winter Garden specializes in such major crops as

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[1] See the *Texas Child Welfare Study,* 1938, p. 427, for descriptions and photographs of some existing shack-towns.

[2] *Report of 1938,* p. 13.

spinach, onions, cabbage, beans, and tomatoes. Over 55,000 acres are planted in spinach in Zavalla and Dimmit counties; Willacy County is the largest onion-producing county in the world. A typical shipper-grower community, farming operations, as such, are merely incidental to the main business of processing, shipping, and distributing; much emphasis is placed on proper timing. To handle this type of operation requires a large surplus labour force which can be rushed to the fields one day and withdrawn or transferred elsewhere the next. In the course of a single day, for example, field crews may work for three or more employers. Most of the labour consists of Mexican families who reside in shack-towns. Considerable Mexican labour is also trucked into the area, and migrant farm families are drawn to the Winter Garden, in small numbers, from Oklahoma, Arkansas, Louisiana, and Florida.

Typical of the shipper-grower concerns in the Winter Garden is the case of Mr. Fred Vahlsing. Some years ago Mr. Vahlsing, operating a market in New York, found that his Italian customers wanted broccoli in the winter months. So, in 1926, he invaded the Winter Garden and to-day has a 10,000-acre vegetable garden. During the winter season in Texas, Mr. Vahlsing employs 3,000 workers and ships thousands of carloads of produce to the eastern markets. The farm is almost completely mechanized: the ground is ploughed and harrowed by tractors; the planting is done by machine; and aeroplanes dust insecticides over the growing crops. But 'tractors can't work between tightly packed rows and the machine that can harvest broccoli and eggplant and tomatoes has yet to be built'. On this typical Winter Garden farm are packing sheds, vegetable washing machines, and an ice plant with a capacity of 40,000 tons of ice a year. Mr. Vahlsing ships produce to over 127 cities in America.

Many of the truck and produce crops create special labour problems. The more insecure the employment, the lower daily earnings, the more migrants will travel great distances to participate in a harvest. This is not because migrants are ignorant. The explanation is to be found in the fact that the more stable crops, with the longer average periods of employment, are monopolized by special groups of semi-skilled workers. Asparagus field work in California, which lasts for five months, is monopolized by Filipinos. In the Winter Garden, work in the spinach fields is monopolized by Mexican crews. The effect is, of course, to force the white migrants, who have travelled greater distances, into the less remunerative types of employment. The onion harvest invariably attracts thousands of out-of-state migrants. In 1938 the Texas State Employment found 2,000 migrants camped in a colony 'scattered out through a mesquite thicket. Mothers with little babies were lying around on the unshaded ground, as the foliage on the mesquite is thin, and there was no other shelter for those without tents or trailer houses.'[1] Since there was not enough work for the thousands who had moved into the area, they were living on rotting vegetables left in the fields from the spring harvest. One of the richest produce areas in the world, this is the best, apparently, that the Winter

[1] See Annual Report, 1938, pp. 38-9, for details and photographs.

Garden can do for the thousands of workers upon whose labour the structure of the industry depends.

3. THE ROAD-RUNNERS

'There is a bird in Texas,' a Mexican told Mr. J. H. Plenn, the author, 'called the road-runner, which cannot be like other birds, although it has wings. It stays on the ground and dodges in and out of the brush. The bird reminds us of our humble selves so much that we call it the *paisano,* which means countryman.' The road-runner must stay close to the earth, hopping and running along, picking up whatever odds and ends of food can be found scattered about the countryside. To the road-runner, as to the Mexican, 'the next field, the next season, always looks as if it might be better'. Profoundly influencing the agricultural development of the South-west, the importance of the role which the 400,000 Mexican 'road-runners' have played cannot properly be understood apart from a knowledge of the circumstances which account for their presence in Texas.

As a conquered race Mexicans were rapidly forced out of the status of landowners and ranchers in Texas and became, at an early date, a permanently disadvantaged social group. They were originally employed as cowhands and sheep-herders, and the demand for their labour increased with the beginnings of agricultural development. 'Grubbing,' according to a local saying in Texas, 'is a Mexican job.' Although there was a steady stream of Mexican immigration to Texas during the 'nineties, it was not until about 1900 that the flood began. The number in Texas increased from 71,062 in 1900 to 683,681 in 1930 (38.4 per cent of whom were foreign-born). Large numbers came north during the World War, and in the post-war period there was another heavy influx despite a sharp exodus in 1922. During the last decade, Mexican immigration has virtually ceased; in fact, more Mexicans have left the United States than have entered during these years.

The rapid expansion of Texas agriculture was primarily responsible for the great influx of Mexicans from 1900 to 1930.'Cotton picking suits the Mexican,' was the unanimous opinion of Texas growers (conversely, of course, it might have been said that 'the Mexican suits cotton picking'). Large-scale commercial truck farming, made possible by the opening of new irrigation projects and the availability of cheap Mexican labour, also developed rapidly throughout the period. There is no question but that the development of large fruit, truck, and vegetable crop areas in the South-west between 1910 and 1930 came about largely through the use of unskilled Mexican labour. A Texan testifying before the House Committee on Immigration and Naturalization in 1926 stated: 'Mr. Chairman, here is the whole situation in a nutshell. Farming is not a profitable industry in this country, and in order to make money out of this, you have to have cheap labour. In order to allow landowners now to make a profit off their farms, they want to get the cheapest labour they can find, and if they get the Mexican labour, it enables them to make a profit. That is the way it is along the border, and I imagine that is the way it is anywhere else.'

During these same years thousands of Mexicans were being recruited by the railroads to extend and improve their lines. Mexican labour was also recruited for unskilled work in mining

areas throughout the South-west, particularly as muckers and scavengers in the most hazardous types of employment and in the most dangerous properties. In many instances, Mexicans recruited for the railroads and the mines later drifted into agricultural employment. The passage of the Immigration Act of 1924, which checked European immigration, greatly stimulated Mexican immigration to the United States. The lax enforcement of the immigration laws prior to 1924 and disturbed conditions in Mexico gave added impetus to the northward movement of Mexicans. With a revolution in Mexico, thousands of peons were literally driven north by marauding armies. The completion of the Mexican Railway in 1910, and the construction of better roads and the use of trucks and automobiles after 1920, also stimulated migration.

Texas became a great reservoir of cheap labour from which workers were siphoned off in all directions. The tip of the wave of Mexican immigration reached as far north as Detroit and as far east as Pittsburgh. A newspaper in Pocatello, Idaho, on the 27th of October 1919, complained 'of several thousand Mexican sugar-beet workers' who had been stranded there, without resources, at the end of the season. An entire trainload of Mexicans was shipped from Texas to Seattle for employment in the fish canneries of Alaska. While they were *en route* to Alaska, the company went bankrupt and the workers had to be taken back to Seattle, where charitable donations were received to return them to Texas.[1] Unlike European immigrants, these Mexicans,'nomadic and outside American civilization', never did settle down; they never became home owners; they were always on the move.

The importation of alien contract labour had been prohibited by federal law since 1885. But during the war the enforcement of the statute was suspended. From 1918 to 1921, Mexican contract labour was imported on a large scale; sugar-beet companies were expressly authorized to recruit labour in Mexico under contract; and, in addition, payment of the head tax and the literacy test were waived. During these years, Mexicans poured across the border by the thousands. When the border laws were again enforced, the labour pool in Texas had been filled to overflowing. From 1885 to 1924 the contract-labour law was, moreover, consistently violated. Texas growers . sent agents to Mexico each season to recruit contract labour and to advance transportation expenses. In large measure the traffic was made possible by the activities of the labour smuggler or 'coyote', as he was called. For a fee of $10 or $15 the coyote would arrange to get Mexicans across the line, by having them 'jump the fence' at La Colorado; or come across in automobiles or carts or trucks; or by crossing the Rio Grande by boat; or, in many cases, by providing forged passports and head-tax receipts. With each effort to tighten the immigration requirements, the activities of the coyotes were only stimulated.[2]

Once across the line, the Mexican was turned over by the coyote to a labour contractor or *enganchista,* who sold him for a fee of from 50 cents to $1.00 a head to some agricultural, railroad, or

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[1] *Migration of Workers,* Department of Labour, vol. 1, p. 93.

[2] See an article by Mr. Kenneth Roberts, *Saturday Evening Post,* 4 February 1928.

mining employer. Labour contractors, operating out of Laredo and El Paso, had forwarding agents elsewhere in Texas, notably in San Antonio. The contractor had a number of special side-line rackets. He charged the employer for a fee for recruiting labour, but also charged the worker for transportation and board.[1] The profits in the business were really enormous and the smugglers and coyotes constituted an intimate and powerful alliance from Calexico to Brownsville.[2]

Another type of agent who figured in the illegal traffic was the man-snatcher. Not a bona fide labour contractor, the man-snatcher, after selling labour to one employer, would steal the same workers and sell them to still another employer. Crews would be sold, in this manner, to four or five employers during a single season. Frequently man-snatchers would raid crews imported by labour contractors and shanghai them for employment elsewhere. A common practice was to keep crews locked up in warehouses with armed guards posted at the doors. Many of these man-snatchers were, in effect, gangsters, smuggling dope and merchandise across the border as well as labour. They worked in the most devious and secret manner and indulged in a mysterious system of codes, signals, and messages.[3] Naturally this traffic had many of the aspects of chattel slavery. Crews of imported Mexicans were marched through the streets of San Antonio under armed guard and, in Gonzales County, workers who attempted to breach their contracts were chained to posts and guarded by men with shotguns[4] In excessive charges for board, transportation, and groceries, contractors preyed upon Mexican labour in the most outrageous fashion.

To inject 400,000 workers, in the space of two decades, into the labour market of Texas, could only have had the effect of intensifying competition for jobs, wrecking whatever labour standards existed, and of bringing wages down to the lowest possible level. 'To have 200,000 Mexicans shuffling back and forth from one end of the state to the other can conceivably be a matter of great distress both for the Mexican and the community,' wrote Dr. Max Handman.[5] It was the large-scale operator in Texas who, in the first instance, sought the introduction of Mexican labour. 'The dirt farmers,' noted Dr. Glenn E. Hoover, 'whose incomes must be chiefly attributed to the value of their own labour', consistently opposed unrestricted Mexican immigration.[6] The use of Mexican migratory labour in Texas has had much the same effect on sharecroppers and tenants that the use of the same labour, at an earlier date, had upon small farmers in California. 'In the country,' wrote Dr. Handman, 'the old-fashioned American farmhouse is being supplanted by shacks unbelievably primitive, while agricultural relations bordering on peonage are showing their heads here and there. The farm problem may be solved sooner than we think by the disappearance of the farmer and the taking of his place

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[1] See *Survey,* 7 September 1912.

[2] Dr. Manuel Gamio, *The Mexican Immigrant,* 1931.

[3] See The Origins and The Problems of Texas Migratory Labour, 1940, p. 16.

[4] See the testimony of Mr. Emelio Flores before the Industrial Relations Commission in 1915; also *Mexican immigration to the United States* by Dr. Manuel Gamio.

[5] *American Journal of Sociology,* January 1940.

[6] *Foreign Affairs,* No. 9, p. 99.

by a group of Roman *coloni,* covering the essential unsoundness of their status by a thin veneer of the ubiquitous automobile.'[1]

The shift from the tenant-and-sharecropper system to migratory Mexican labour has also been a powerful factor making for the disruption of the small rural town. In 1930 a merchant in Dimmit County, Texas, told Dr. Paul Taylor that 'our merchants have no trading territory. Labour with $1.25 wages can't buy. Our lands of about 12,000 acres under cultivation are in the hands of about a dozen men. They live in hotels; they are not farmers; they are speculators in onions. The farms are practically uninhabited except by groups of Mexican labourers.' While the use of Mexican labour made possible the development of large-scale truck and produce farming, it prevented diversified farming on general farms. Unable to meet the competition of the large-scale truck farms, small farmers continued to grow a single cash crop, aggravating the problem of so-called 'surpluses' and ruining the soil.

The introduction of Mexican labour also resulted in violent competition among employers for cheap labour. Texas farmers keenly resented the activities of railroad companies in enticing Mexican labour from the fields. Cotton, sugar-beet, and vegetable growers warred unceasingly among themselves over the exclusive right to exploit Mexican labour. Texas growers not infrequently shot the tyres off the trucks of labour agents sent by the sugar-beet companies to recruit labour. 'Seasonal needs for cotton-pickers,' according to Dr. Handman, 'are so great that Texas farmers have stood guard with shotguns over their Mexican cotton-pickers to prevent other farmers from luring them away by the promise of better pay.'

The Mexican, unfortunately, has never been able to capitalize on the unseemly lust for his services. By long-established custom, he is supposed to discharge his debts before he can move from one employer to another. The custom, of course, constitutes peonage; but there have been peonage prosecutions in Texas.[2] Through the use of guards, no-trespass signs, the isolation of workers, warnings to strangers, and the active co-operation of sheriffs, *de facto* peonage still exists on a large scale in Texas. The threat of turning recalcitrant workers over to the immigration officials is, also, an effective method by which Mexicans are held to a strict fulfilment of their contracts of employment. Through the use of such methods, 'deserters' soon discover that they are not free agents. Since Mexicans are always in debt—to the contractor or to the company commissary—they have not been able to move freely from one employment opportunity to another. There is an abundance of evidence verifying the widespread use of such methods to enforce a state of actual peonage.[3]

Despite the use of such illegal devices for holding Mexican labour in Texas, thousands of workers continue to migrate out of the state in search of employment. The principal offenders in luring Mexicans out of Texas have been the sugar-beet companies. In an effort to put an end to the practice, the Texas legislature in 1929

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[1] See also an article by Mr. Roy L. Castle in the *Saturday Evening Post,* 19 April 1930

[2] See Walter Wilson, *Forced Labour in the United States* (1933), p. 103.

[3] See Dr. Paul S. Taylor, *An American-Mexican Frontier,* 1934; and Mr. J. H. Plenn, *Saddle in the Sky,* 1940.

adopted the Emigrant Agency Law. The statute provides that labour agents recruiting labour in Texas for employment elsewhere must post a bond, pay an annual license fee, and also a graduated occupational tax.[1] Having built up a reserve of cheap labour in Texas, the growers did not propose to let the labour sneak away from them. While the Emigrant Agency Law has checked, it has by no means entirely eliminated, the migration of Mexican workers outside the state. Some Mexican labour has, also, 'escaped' from Texas and returned to Mexico. In 1922 and again in 1929, thousands of Mexicans returned to their native land. The newspapers and magazines throughout 1922 carried stories of thousands of Mexicans being herded together in Juarez and Nuevo Laredo awaiting shipment home.[2]During the post-war débâcle, it cost the Mexican Government $2,500,000 to transport stranded Mexican nationals from the Texas border towns back to their native villages.[3] In the years immediately subsequent to the 1929 depression, exactly the same countermovement took place.[4] Despite the return movement of depression years, however, the Texas growers still retain a bountiful supply of cheap Mexican labour.

The Mexican continues to migrate—to be a road-runner—after his arrival in Texas, largely because he has never been able to achieve a working adjustment with his environment. Excluded from business, never acquiring a foothold as tenants or landowners, Mexicans have been forced to become nomads. Even in agricultural employment, they have been crowded into the casual types of work. Farmers do not employ them as year-round farm hands, since they are not accepted into the farm household. Many of them have been kept on the run, also, because they fear arrest and possible deportation as illegal entrants. Rumours, usually false, set them in motion from one place to another. The desire to educate their children has been one factor holding white sharecroppers to the land; but this motive has no application to the Mexican. The truth of the matter is that few Mexican children attend school in Texas. The nearness of the border has always had a tendency to prevent the assimilation of Mexicans in Texas. Many of them toy with the idea of eventually returning to their original homes. Social attitudes in Texas have also precluded the idea of assimilation.'The worse you treat them, the more they do —you can't praise them like you can a nigger—the less you pay them the more they do'—these are but samples of a hundred or more similar remarks jotted down by Dr. Taylor during field trips in Texas. It is not surprising, therefore, that Mexicans have kept on the move or that they should be willing to migrate, not only throughout Texas, but to Michigan and Montana for seasonal work. They may not be migrants by nature, but they have certainly been made migrants by circumstance.

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[1] Similar statutes were adopted at an early date in other Southern states to check negro migration: see Bulletin No. 630, Department of Labour, pp. 9-11.

[2] *Nation,* 12 July 1922.

[3] *San Francisco Examiner,* 5 May 1923.

[4] *Survey,* 1 May 1931.

CHAPTER XI

THE CROWS FLY NORTH

For many years Mexicans have been recruited in Texas for out-of-state employment, primarily in the northern sugar-beet fields in Michigan, Ohio, Wisconsin, Minnesota, the Dakotas, Montana, Colorado, Wyoming, and Nebraska. Michigan imports, by a considerable margin, the most Mexican labour. The average current acreage in sugar beets, about 140,000 acres, necessitates the employment of nearly 12,000 field workers. Since 85 per cent of the sugar-beet acreage is handled by contract labour (that is, labour performed, not by the growers, but by field labour under contract), and since 57 per cent of the contract labour comes from Texas, it is apparent that at least 7,500 Mexican field workers make the trip to Michigan every season.[1] Originally the sugar-beet companies imported foreign immigrant families to handle the field labour requirements. These families, principally Polish, Belgian, and Hungarian, were settled on small acreage allotments in the immediate vicinity of the thirteen sugar-beet districts in the state. In 1897, when the Michigan sugar-beet industry was receiving a state bounty of a cent a pound on all sugar produced and enjoying the protection of a high tariff, 'Polacks' were contracting to raise beets at $4.00 an acre and women were working in the fields for 50 cents a day.[2] Since the first generation of these families is now rapidly disappearing and the succeeding generations have drifted to the cities for industrial employment, Mexican labour has almost completely supplanted the original immigrant groups. The transition began to be effected, on a large scale, immediately subsequent to the passage of the Immigration Act of 1924, which cut off the supply of European families. An incident occurred in 1935, however, which served to accelerate the pace of the transition. Stirred by powerful currents in the labour movement that year, the remnants of the original immigrant families formed an agricultural workers' union affiliated with the American Federation of Labour and, in May 1935, struck for higher wages at Blissfield, Michigan.[3]

Prior to the Blissfield strike, out-of-state Mexican labour had been recruited in a haphazard, informal manner, with each grower endeavouring to obtain his own labour. To place the recruitment of workers on a more systematic basis, the Beet Growers' Employment Committee, Inc., was formed on the 7th of April 1938. Although its board of directors is composed of representatives of the various sugar- beet growers' associations, the committee recruits workers only for those growers who raise beets under contract for the Michigan Sugar Company. The use of Mexican labour has increased and the methods of recruitment have been streamlined. In the drama of the Texas- Michigan migration, the curtain rises on the first act, in Texas—the place, San Antonio.

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[1] Tolan Transcript, part 3, p. 1302.

[2] *Report of the Industrial Commission,* vol. 10, p. 535.

[3] *American Journal of Sociology,* January 1938.

1. THE AFFABLE MR. CORTEZ

The Mexican *barrio* in San Antonio is an indolent and rather attractive quarter. Shacks line the dirt streets for miles; dogs bark; children yell; and radios blare in every hovel. Every corner has its grocery store and beer hall (and above the beer hall is the bagnio). Thousands of Mexicans, constituting perhaps 40 per cent of the population of San Antonio, live in the quarter. It is the hunting ground of labour contractors; the capitol of the Mexico that lies within the United States.

Here on a Sunday morning in October 1940 I interviewed Mr. Frank Cortez in his headquarters on El Paso Street—the skid-row of San Antonio. A versatile citizen, Mr. Cortez is the principal emigrant agent (labour contractor) in Texas and also the operator of several stores, cafes, and a funeral parlour in the *barrio*. Young, snappily dressed, exceedingly affable, Mr. Cortez was once a migrant worker himself. One year in the service of a Pennsylvania steel mill as a contract employee was enough, however, to convince him that he should seek another vocation. So he returned to San Antonio and opened a funeral parlour. It proved to have been a happy decision. For the death rates among the Mexican population are high, the Mexicans like ornate funerals, and most of them carry burial insurance. From March until May each year he is busy recruiting Mexican sugar-beet workers, at the funeral parlour, for his friend Mr. Max Henderson, of the Michigan Beet Growers' Employment Committee. 'It is a nice business,' says Mr. Cortez. Each year he recruits 6,000 workers for the committee, for which he is paid $1.00 a head. 'There is practically no overhead expense to the business,' he observes, 'and I make $6,000 for three weeks' work.' Even when workers go directly to Michigan, the committee never attempts to chisel on Mr. Cortez but always remits $1.00 per Mexican, which it charges, however, against the worker's earnings.

The sugar-beet companies are fastidious: they want rural Mexican families, not the proletariat of San Antonio. Of the six thousand workers annually recruited by Mr. Cortez, at least two-thirds come from rural areas. Many of them have travelled great distances, paying their own living and travelling expenses, before they ever reach San Antonio. It is 'no trick at all', to quote Mr. Cortez, to get workers. Usually all that is necessary is to start a rumour circulating along the 'grapevine'; and, if this does not work, an announcement in Spanish over one of the Mexican radio broadcasts will produce results. Thousands of Mexican field workers all over Texas know about the funeral parlour on El Paso street. Besides, when it is necessary, a crew can always be filled out with workers from San Antonio. So great is the demand for work, in fact, that Mr. Cortez usually turns away between three and four thousand job-hungry workers every year.

Once recruiting starts Mr. Cortez is a busy man. The flow of traffic around the funeral parlour is so heavy that special police traffic squads have to be called in to maintain some degree of order in the neighbourhood. At four o'clock in the morning, the line begins to form outside the office. The army that assembles in El Paso Street has its own camp followers: fancy girls, marijuana peddlers, and sleight-of-hand artists. But Mr. Cortez, a member of Rotary and the Order of Neptune, will have no truck with these

gypsies; he endeavours, so he says, to eliminate all 'racketeering' elements.

As the line of workers passes through the office, each applicant is interviewed. Has he ever worked in beets before? Where? How many in the family? The answers are carefully jotted down on a registration card and, as the records grow, it becomes possible to weed out the 'undesirable' or 'troublesome' individuals. After they have been registered, each worker is given a physical examination. After the men have been examined, the women and children of working age pass through the same process. Since there are no women physicians on the staff and the examination is conducted *en masse,* the women are merely given a chest test. As one of the physicians has observed, with delicacy and tact, 'most of the women are married so we assume that there is no venereal infection among them'. Each worker who passes the medical examination is given a certificate which has his photograph affixed. Out of 4,200 workers examined in 1940, only 125 were rejected: 86 cases of tuberculosis, 39 cases of venereal infection. The cases rejected are never referred to local health officers for follow-up treatment or medical care. The 'culls', so-called, usually go to the beet fields in Minnesota; or they will seek out an unlicensed agent, or 'bootlegger', and arrange to go north with him. Only those workers recruited by licensed agents for employment in Michigan are given a medical examination.

Michigan has not always been so discriminating, and thereby hangs a tale. By statute in Michigan, all cases of pulmonary tuberculosis, resident and non-resident, must be hospitalized, at public expense. In 1937 the Department of Public Health discovered that, in the Saginaw Tuberculosis Hospital, with a capacity of 100 beds, there were 25 Mexican patients, most of whom were sugar-beet workers.[1] Consequently an arrangement was worked out whereby physicians from the Michigan Department of Public Health would go to San Antonio each spring to examine all Mexicans recruited through the licensed agents. The expense of the examination is divided between the United States Public Health Service and the Beet Growers' Employment Committee, according to Dr. A. W. Newitt of the Michigan Department of Public Health.[2] Actually, however, workers are charged 25 cents apiece for the examination, which is deducted from their pay, so that the committee is really not contributing anything to the cost of the service. Once the examination is over, there is nothing for the Mexicans to do but wait until the order for their departure arrives. The Michigan growers do not want workers to arrive too soon; they attract public attention and advances have to be made to keep them alive. Nor, in San Antonio, does Mr. Cortez want to be caught short of workers when the signal is given. So, sometimes for a week or ten days, thousands of workers, usually without a dime to their names, mill around the funeral parlour. While they are waiting, needless to say, they are not employed.

While Mr. Cortez is the kingpin among the Texas emigrant agents, there are many other important agents. Under the Emigrant

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[1] Over 72 per cent of all tuberculosis deaths in San Antonio in 1938 were among Mexicans, although Mexicans made up only 38 per cent of the population. On general health problems among Mexicans in San Antonio, sec Menefee and Cassmore, *The Pecan Shelters of San Antonio* (1940), pp. 45-7.

[2] Tolan Transcript, part 3, p. 1317.

Agent Act of Texas, a person is licensed to recruit for a single employer in a single state. If he wants to expand his operations, he must take out a separate licence for each employer and for each state. That there are many bootleggers or unlicensed agents is indicated by the facts: 66,100 Mexicans seek employment outside the state every year, principally in sugar beets, but there are only four licensed agents in the state. It is true that thousands of Mexicans set out on their own initiative, hoping somehow, somewhere, to get a contract to raise beets. Those who are recruited by licensed agents do, at least, have a contract; they know that they will get work. But the number of workers recruited by unlicensed agents is unquestionably larger than the number of legally recruited. It is difficult for many agents to comply with the rigid requirements of the act; it costs about $1,750 a year to operate such an agency (occupational tax $1,000 a year, county taxes $200, employment agency licence $150, bond $50). As a consequence, 'there has developed in Texas the insidious practice of bootlegging transportation—irresponsible persons operate outside the law, charging exorbitant fees for transportation, extra fees for contracting, with no insurance against accidents and no assurance that work will be secured when the destination is reached.'[1] The first act ends, in this drama, when the green signal is flashed from Michigan and the army starts northward; the second act occurs *en route* from Texas to Michigan.

2. FLIGHT IN THE NIGHT

To understand how the northern migration to Michigan is organized, it is necessary to keep certain facts in mind. Sugar-beet workers cross five states and travel a distance of about 1,600 miles; there are numerous legal pitfalls to be avoided, if possible, in making the trek. If they travel by truck, as many of them do, they run the risk of being stopped in each state through which they pass. They must constantly be on guard against agents of the Bureau of Motor Carriers who will want to know if they are transporting passengers across state lines for hire on a regular schedule from one point to another. When they cross a toll bridge, as they frequently do in making the trip, it is important to conceal, if possible, the number of passengers in order to minimize charges. Many of the workers who make the trip are, moreover, 'wet backs'—that is, they have entered the United States illegally. If they are arrested for any cause along the way, or if they are even stopped for questioning, there is always the possibility that they may be turned over to the immigration officials. In bringing Mexican labour into the state, the sugar companies are anxious to do so with the minimum amount of publicity, for there is a strong public opinion against the use of such labour in Michigan. In fact, highway patrolmen in Michigan will use almost any pretext to turn back a truckload of Mexicans at the border. What happens along the line of march cannot, therefore, be understood without realizing that the whole business is shrouded in conspiracy and intrigue. The traffic in sugar-beet workers from Texas to Michigan is, in effect, an underground railroad.

[1] Tolan Transcript, part 5, p. 1864.

For thousands of workers, travelling from Texas to Michigan by truck is an eventful experience, more properly described, perhaps, as a horrible nightmare. Most of the trucks are open, used during the season to haul sugar beets from the field to the factory. Most of them are old-model trucks that have had much hard use. Before starting out, the trucker is careful to substitute Michigan licence plates (which have been forwarded to him) for his Texas plates, so that his truck will not catch the eye of a wary highway patrolman in Michigan. Planks or benches are then placed on the truck and it is loaded with passengers and equipment. Although some of the companies have issued instructions that not more than twenty-five passengers shall be loaded on a truck (quite a load in itself), the average truck carries about fifty people, their bedding and equipment, and food for the trip. Once the Mexicans have crowded into the back of the truck, a heavy tarpaulin is thrown over them and fastened down around the edges so that the passengers are concealed.[1] Before climbing into the driver's seat, the trucker tosses a couple of coffee cans into the back of the truck which are used as urinals during the journey. Then, usually around midnight, the truck rolls out of El Paso Street for the long trip north.

Afraid of being arrested for violating the Emigrant Agent Law, fearful of being charged with violating the motor vehicle laws of the states along the line of march, usually apprehensive that the truck itself will be picked up by a finance company, the truckers drive like devils. With a relief driver in the cab, they drive straight through to Michigan, stopping only for gas and oil. By driving night and day, they can make the trip in from forty-five to forty-eight hours.[2] Paid $10 a head to deliver Mexicans in Michigan (ultimately charged to the workers), some truckers make $3,000 a year. Naturally they are in a hurry. They want to make, if possible, two or three trips. And since they never leave San Antonio until the last minute, they have no time to waste. Instead of travelling the main highways, however, they pursue a zigzag course, making many detours, in an effort to avoid highway patrolmen. Notoriously bad drivers, and travelling under these circumstances, they have many accidents every season. The truckers, as a rule, are a domineering and dictatorial lot; as arrogant as ship captains on a slave galley. They pay little heed to the passengers in the truck; drink to stay awake; and drive against time.

To indicate what the truck traffic is like, here is a sample from a collection of affidavits presented to the Tolan Committee[3] by the Texas State Employment Service:

Salome Ravago, 1902 Colima Street, San Antonio:

Left San Antonio on the 6th of May 1938, for Saginaw, Michigan. The trip required five days and four nights. The weather was cold and rainy. There were no seats in the truck; it had no top; the roads were bad; and the brakes on the truck were functioning badly. The workers finally forced the driver, at the point of a gun, to stop and buy brake fluid with money which they lent him. The truck was a double-decker and had as passengers thirty-five adults and ten

[1] See Tolan Transcript, part 3, p. 1306, for a photograph of such a truck loaded and ready to start out.

[2] Tolan Transcript, part 3, p. 1311

[3] Ibid., part 5, pp. 1848-9.

children. Some of those on the upper improvised deck sat with their legs hanging down around the necks of those below. Several brawls developed *en route.* One boy had to stand on his feet for the entire trip. The wife of one Adolfo Salamone was very ill *en route;* she thought she was dying, but the trucker would not stop for medical attention.

Catarino Ramirez, 2317 El Paso Street, San Antonio:

Went north in 1938. Spent two days and three nights on the road. No stops were made unless the driver was forced to do so; when such stops were made, the passengers ate if they had time.

Those who travel in their own cars have a somewhat easier trip. Most of them leave San Antonio, however, without a cent; advances frequently have to be made to enable them to buy gasoline and oil for the trip. Their cars are old and broken-down and, along the way, they often have to stop for repairs and to wire ahead for further advances to get their cars out of hock. Fines for traffic violations are, of course, major calamities. Since the Michigan migration is made up almost exclusively of families, the cars are usually overcrowded. A typical unit will consist of Señor and Señora, their married children and in-laws, the grandchildren, and a few uncles, aunts, nephews, nieces, and remote cousins. Heavily loaded with passengers and equipment, the old cars wheeze and snarl all the long distance north. Without funds and in a hurry, these workers have little time for camping; they make few stopovers along the way; and they, too, usually drive night and day.

The whole trip is a nightmare: ten thousand workers and their women and children scurrying northward in early spring, fleeing like fugitives from the long arm of the law, driving day and night, hurrying along to keep a rendezvous with the sugar-beet trust. A dark and devious traffic, disgraceful in its every detail.

On the 3rd of June 1938, the American Federation of Labour reported that there were 'hundreds of Michigan workers, many of them unemployed members of the Agricultural Workers Union, who are anxious for employment, while these Mexican families are being brought in from a distance of 2,000 miles.' On the 24th of June 1938 the Bay City newspapers reported that 'if those 1,000 jobs in the fields had been given to unemployed men here, the relief question would be answered and there would be no unemployment in the county'. The following comment was made in the Michigan press on the 20th of May 1938: 'These Mexican workers were brought to Michigan *to break the union of beet workers at Blissfield.* There is a colony of "old beet workers" living near Blissfield on relief. They are Hungarians, Bulgarians, and Polish people that came years ago and have been working in the beets ever since. Last year they organized an American Federation of Labour Agricultural Workers Union and got their wages up to $21 an acre, which is only $2.00 less than the wage that prevailed in the low-wage era before the World War. This year the company is permitting them to remain idle on relief, while it imports hundreds of Mexican families to tend the beets at $18 an acre.' The third act in the sugar-beet play might well end on a comment appearing in the Michigan press on the 17th of June 1938: 'Want, poverty, misery, and terror stalk the beet fields like four gibbering ghosts, haunting the days and nights in the

inarticulate Mexican labourers who have been brought so far from their homes to the strange northern land to work in strange fields.'

3. THE JOURNEY HOME

By the time the harvest is over in December, it is getting cold and rainy in Michigan and the Mexicans are anxious to get back to Texas. But many of them have difficulty in getting out of the state. Since there are two major labour operations in sugar beets, the companies (who keep all the books) make payments on contracts twice during the season. The first payment under the contract is made in August after the blocking, thinning, and cultivating. Since Mexicans try to leave Michigan as soon as the harvest is over, they cannot collect the final payment because the companies have not, by that time, closed their books. So the final cheques are given to the field men of the sugar-beet companies who mail them to the workers in Texas. Workers never get a chance to inspect these books; nor do statements accompany the cheques.[1] Consequently, they usually have to get an. advance to leave Michigan, just as they had to get an advance to leave Texas.

Mexicans arrive in Texas, as they left, with scarcely any money. In the monthly report of the W.P.A. in San Antonio, for November 1939, I find this statement: 'Mexicans are returning in a much worse state than when they left. Of all these people reinterviewed, not one has started his children to school this term. They state that they barely manage to buy food enough to exist and no clothes at all.' Cases have been reported to the W.P.A. in Texas of Mexicans who have had their cars appropriated for failure to pay reputed tax or licence fees of $30 or $50 for using the roads of certain of the counties through which they pass on the journey home.[2] While some families, of course, fare much better than others, it is highly debatable if the average family is able to accumulate as much as $200 for eight months' employment in Michigan.[3] When they arrive in San Antonio, they spend a few weeks visiting friends and relatives in the *barrio,* and then disperse to their homes—in El Paso, Laredo, Crystal City, Robstown, and other communities. The great march is over—the army is disbanded. But when spring rolls round again they will be back in front of the funeral parlour in El Paso Street.[4]

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[1] Tolan Transcript, part 3, p. 1314.

[2] Ibid., part 5, p. 1907.

[3] Menefee and Cassmore, *The Pecan Shelters of San Antonio,* p. 29.

[4] Since the foregoing chapter was written I received a letter dated 18 October 1941, from Dr. J. F. Thaden of Michigan State College, who is engaged in preparing a comprehensive study of migratory agricultural labour in Michigan. Dr. Thaden points out that the holdback payment of $2.00 an acre has recently been discontinued; that the 'wagon house' type of housing is gradually being replaced; that in 1941 some 1,800 Mexicans made the trip from Texas to Michigan by special train; that an excellent beginning has been made in educational and recreational projects in Mt. Pleasant, Alma, and Blissfield, by the Home Missions Council of North America in co-operation with the Michigan Council of Church Women and the Michigan Council of Churches, indicating what might be done in 150 beet-growing towns and communities in Michigan.

CHAPTER XII

IN OHIO AND INDIANA

Ohio and Indiana have, nowadays, already begun to tap. labour pools outside the region for the recruitment of cheap migratory labour. Mexicans from Texas have begun to appear in the fields in both states and, across the Ohio River, the distressed rural areas of Kentucky, overpopulated with farm families, have long exported labour to the Northern states. So miserable are living conditions in these distressed counties that the mere rumour of work is sufficient to start farm families on the road. While the areas in Ohio and Indiana that employ seasonal labour are, at the moment, still limited, nevertheless they constitute a pre-view of what is likely to happen as agriculture becomes increasingly

1. FROM MUSKRATS TO MIGRANTS

It took almost a hundred years of intermittent effort, in the face of great difficulty, to drain the Scioto Marshes in Ohio—17,000 acres of the richest farm land in America. While the reclamation projects were not finally completed until about 1922, considerable headway had been made by 1907. As the marshes were drained, onions became the dominant crop, yielding as much as a thousand bushels an acre. New markets were opened, great storage sheds were constructed, and the towns of Alger, McGuffey, and Foraker, on the edge of the rich marshlands, became the first of our company towns in agriculture. Heavy development costs created high land values and most of the small farmers were forced to sell their holdings. Since the entire crop was grown for the market, a high degree of industrialization soon developed. It was necessary to squeeze every possible penny from the soil. This meant concentration on a single cash crop; it also meant cheap labour. Once a preserve for muskrats, the marshes soon became the home of Kentucky migrants. A highly speculative 'onion deal' developed in which growers one season would make as much as $150,000 and be bankrupt the next. But over a period of years, most of the land came to be owned by the Scioto Land Company, which to-day is the company that dominates the towns around the marsh.

As early as 1907 the onion growers of the marsh began to send agents into the hill country of West Virginia and Kentucky to import labour. Advertisements were placed each year in the county seat newspapers. From March to June, a large number of workers are needed to sow and to weed the plants; but the peak labour period comes with the harvest which lasts from June until August. After the harvest is over there is nothing much to be done until the following spring. The Kentucky mountain families, with eight and ten children, constituted an ideal labour supply for this type of work. There was available local labour in Ohio; but it was never 'cheap' enough. Wages have always been so low in the marsh that only large families can possibly be attracted to the area. Besides, working in the marsh is almost like working in a mine and not everyone is anxious to 'mine' onions.

The workers at first came in small groups, but each year the number increased. Hundreds of the Kentucky families came north in

the spring, worked through the season, and returned to their mountain shacks in the winter. But, as so often happens with migratory labour, small groups of workers gradually began to stay in Ohio after the season was over. To have the workers as near the onion fields as possible, growers had constructed small one- and two-room shacks on the marshes. Many families soon got permission to live in these shacks during the winter months and thus saved the expense of a trip to Kentucky and return. Some of the Kentuckians, after a winter on the marsh, found it bitterly cold and disagreeable and left the onion fields never to return. But from 1907 to the present time it has been noted that, when a shack is vacated by one Kentucky family, it is almost immediately occupied by another Kentucky family that has just arrived.

Peopled with illiterate and semi-illiterate mountain families, Alger, McGuffey, and Foraker became rather notorious spots: 'bad little towns' in the words of one observer. During the onion harvest, nearly every week-end produced a first-class knifing; murders were not uncommon; and feuds, originating in the hill country, were transferred to the marsh. As the number of 'stay-over' families increased, many social problems began to develop. Every winter there was a relief problem; petty crime, juvenile and otherwise, increased; bad housing and living conditions were reflected in a mounting tubercular rate. But no-one paid much attention to the onion workers and their needs until, as so frequently happens, the bombs began to explode. For here, almost in the centre of rural America, class conflict and violence appeared.

2. 'WE AIN'T A-GOIN' BACK'

In the years from 1929 to 1934 a crisis had developed in Hardin County. The land had been cropped continuously with onions for years and, as the soil became drier each year, the depth of the muck decreased. It shrank from a depth of eight and ten feet to two and three feet; fungus and insect growths developed, and the blowing and burning of the soil diminished its fertility. Decreasing yields, the development of competing areas in Michigan and Texas, and a contracting market, forced the growers to strike a harder bargain with the onion workers. The wage system was abandoned by many growers and sharecropping substituted in its stead. During these same depression years, large numbers of the workers were stranded in the county at the end of the season. Even those who wanted to return to Kentucky were unable to do so. In 1931 Marion Township spent $2,300 for relief among its 4,000 residents; the next year the number of relief clients increased by 50 per cent; by 1933 the number had trebled and murmurs of discontent began to grow in volume as spring, and a new onion deal, approached.

It all started on a Sunday night, the 18th of June 1934, when several hundred onion workers met at McGuffey and formed the National Farm Labourers' Union, affiliated with the American Federation of Labour. The leaders of the union were O'Kay O'Dell, an onion weeder, and J. M. Rizor, who had formerly been an organizer for the International Quarrymen's Union. A general strike was voted in the marsh to enforce demands for a flat rate of 35 cents an hour and an eight-hour day. O'Dell was elected chairman of the strike and the next morning picket patrols were established

throughout the area. By the middle of the week the union claimed a membership of 600 workers, all of whom were on strike and all of whom were destitute.

The conditions which existed in the marsh when the strike was called were thoroughly investigated at the time. The *Nation* of the 12th of September 1934 reported that 'work in the marshes is uncertain at best. Because the growers prefer to use the cheap labour of children from nine to fourteen years of age, there is seldom as much as ninety days' work a year for adult members of the family—at twelve cents an hour and less. The bulk of the work consists of weeding the onions after the planting season. Hand-propelled wheel hoes are run between the rows, followed by hand weeders who crawl on their knees all day in the black muck.' Where the sharecropper system was used conditions were, if anything, still worse. 'Theoretically the shares are fifty-fifty, but the charges deducted from the tenant's share often leave him at the end of the season with nothing paid but his rent.' A writer in *Survey* (October 1934) found that wages had been cut from 25 cents an hour to 12½ cents an hour; that 'families are housed in unheated shacks, most of which leak and many of which have no windows. By way of rent, each worker must, in addition to work in the fields, cultivate a share-crop patch of onions around his shack.' By that date more than a hundred families had been evicted from their shacks. The Federal Emergency Relief Administration[1] found that 'the typical home' was a rough wooden shack, unplastered, with cracks between the boards and tin roofs, which offered little protection against the snow in winter and were exceedingly hot in the summer. It also found that many of the women were without shoes; that three-fourths of the families were on relief every winter; that no maternal care was available (six women, selected at random from a group of twenty, had suffered still-births or miscarriages the previous year); and that less than 50 per cent of the children living in the marsh had completed the eighth grade.

From the inception of the strike, an effort was made to ship the striking Kentuckians back to the hill counties. Officers of the Ohio National Guard appeared on the scene; fifty-four deputies were sworn in, and strikebreakers were imported. But these onion weeders were a fighting lot. To every threat they had but one reply: 'We ain't a-goin' back.' Women marched in the picket lines with their husbands and attempted to drive strikebreakers from the fields. Soon thirty-three strikers were in jail with O'Dell. Rifles were posted on top of silos to discourage 'further sniping'; vigilante groups were formed; and still the picket lines appeared each morning on the marsh. On the 6th of July 1934, a $40,000 onion storage plant in McGuffey burned to the ground. When strikebreakers attempted to pass through picket lines, cars were stoned and knives ripped holes in automobile tyres. The following day a major riot occurred and more arrests were made. Home-made bombs exploded; telephone wires were cut; a time bomb damaged a bridge; cars were pushed over embankments; a house was set on fire. Throughout July and August the strike continued, with charges and counter-charges, arrests and more arrests. An official of the Department of Labour, who attempted to mediate the dispute, made

[1] *Social Service Review,* June 1935.

some interesting findings. He verified the fact that 12½ cents an hour was the prevailing wage at the time the strike was called; that 53 per cent of the families averaged less than $250 a year; that three companies owned 30 per cent of all land in the marsh; and that prior to 1929 the onion lands of the marsh, valued for taxation purposes at $750,000, earned about $1 ,000.000 a year.

Some of the strikers began to go back to work as they saw their jobs being taken by newly arrived migrants recruited, as they had been recruited, in Kentucky. By September the strike—one of the bitterest struggles in the history of farm labour in the country—was over. Many of the families held out to the end and would not return to work. Those who lacked local residence were forced to leave since they could not obtain relief. Even some of this group refused to leave until they were taken into custody by the authorities and transported, at public expense, across the Ohio River into Kentucky. Most of them never returned to the marsh. Those who had residence in Ohio stayed on relief that winter and, when spring came, sullenly returned to the fields.

'The strike,'in the words of a government report, 'was the finish of the onion. King Onion died in June 1934.' Afraid of labour trouble and concerned over steadily declining yields, the growers have constantly reduced the onion acreage since 1934. As the soil has changed from pure muck to mucky loam, an increasing acreage has been devoted to potatoes and sugar beets.

3. DEAD END

In December 1940 I visited Scioto Marsh. The acres and acres of rich black muck and loam, devoid of farmhouses and the usual paraphernalia of rural life, remind one strikingly of the vast lettuce and sugar-beet fields around Salinas, California. Scattered through the property of the Scioto Land Company one can see the shacks of the tenant farmers and farm labourers. There are no garden lots or subsistence livestock. I visited any number—as miserable as any migrant shacks in California—that rent from $2.50 to $3.50 a month. I saw one three-room shack that housed, at the time, twenty-three people. Here and there, you can see the typical 'wagon-house' with its inevitable number over the door. These have been installed for the incoming Mexican migrants who are displacing the Kentuckians. In the cold wintry fields you can see a few lonely figures of farm labourers, with sacks in their hands, searching for unharvested ears of corn like city scavengers going through garbage cans.

To-day Alger is a 'ghost town'. As you wander around the place you can see the 'ghosts' staring out at you from the windows of the farm-labourer shacks that line the streets and the railroad right of way, as desolate and poverty-haunted as the shacks of the abandoned coal camps in Scott's Run, West Virginia. On the outskirts of McGuffey is the spacious, well-constructed, and carefully designed headquarters of the Scioto Land Company. Here in the richest farm area in Ohio, after years of effort and struggle to reclaim the land, all that has been evolved in the way of a decent rural community is a scattered collection of hovels and shacks. The lands in the marsh are listed on all soil-utilization maps as Grade A land—the best in the state. But when you leave the marsh and enter

areas of Grade B and Grade C land—much less valuable; much less productive—the character of the farm dwellings improves. It is on these poorer lands that you will see the spacious red barn, the whitewashed sheds, the well-built farmhouses, the gardens and the livestock.

Stranded on the marsh to-day are about three hundred 'poor white' families. For them the marsh has become a rural dead end, from which at the moment there is no escape. As onion production has decreased, employment opportunities have dwindled. Most of the families are on relief. From 1932 to 1934 Hardin County spent over $53,000 for the hospitalization and treatment of tubercular cases, most of which came from the marsh. 'It is an interesting fact,' observes Dr. Moore, 'that the real-estate taxes paid on the marsh farm land for county, township, and school district purposes were approximately equal to the public expense of tubercular treatment of marsh residents in these three years.'

The marsh is to-day a rural slum. It is sufficient on this score to quote Dr. Moore. 'Social conditions,' he writes, 'existing in the marsh have naturally caused more children to become wards of the probate court than is usually the case in a rural community. On the other hand, tests given to schoolchildren coming from the area indicate that the native intelligence of these children is high.' The marsh families are, of course, landless and propertyless. They do not even own jalopies. They are so poor, in fact, that they cannot meet the meagre standards of the Farm Security Administration and are, for this reason, ineligible for rehabilitation or farm-tenant loans. With 300 families stranded in Hardin County, and with Mexican migrants being imported to work in the sugar-beet fields, still additional families are being transported from Kentucky to the marsh.

4. THE MEXICANS ARRIVE

To-day the sugar-beet acreage of north-western Ohio is increasing; it has now reached as far south as the marshlands of Hardin County. As sugar beets replace onions, Mexicans replace Kentuckians. Dr. Moore makes still another interesting observation: 'The amount of Mexican labour used in the beet fields of Hardin County and the southern part of Hancock County would be approximately equal to the number of W.P.A. workers coming from the marsh area the past summer (1938).' The use of Mexican labour has, therefore, probably kept an equivalent number of local resident workers on relief.

But Mexicans constitute only about one-third of the total number of sugar-beet workers employed in Ohio. The remaining number of workers needed, about 4,575, are for the most part also imported from outside the state. A report of the F.S.A. indicates how workers are recruited for employment in sugar-beet fields in Seneca County. They are 'obtained through an office in Detroit. A man employed by the sugar-beet company, known as a roustabout, goes to Detroit in late winter or early spring, and takes up residence in the locality in which these labourers live. He contacts bosses who round up this labour and the bosses are paid by the roustabout for their services, much as a local horse dealer might pay a commission merchant in the West to buy horses for him.' These workers from

Detroit are, for the most part, Belgians, Poles, and Hungarians who, in the winter months, get some part-time employment as unskilled labourers in the factories. A considerable number of them, originally imported as seasonal workers, have remained after the season and established themselves in the small towns from which they commute to and from the fields. They, too, like the Kentuckians, are in the process of be coming 'stranded farm families'. For each year more Mexicans are imported from Texas.

The use of Mexican labour has unquestionably operated to the disadvantage of the Belgians, Poles, and Hungarians originally imported to work in the sugar-beet fields, as well as to decrease the employment opportunities for Kentucky migrants. Has it, however, greatly benefited the Mexican? Mexicans are imported from Texas—with an average of thirty-five occupants per truck—under circumstances quite similar to those involved in the Texas-to-Michigan migration (Chapter XI). According to the F.S.A., the Mexicans, while in Ohio, 'live in small buildings furnished by the sugar-beet company, which are decidedly overcrowded during summer months. Their living conditions are as a whole much lower than other families in the same community.'

But surely, if none of the labour groups are making a living from sugar beets, the growers must be profiting. They should be, for the sugar-beet counties have much excellent farm land. But not only do these counties show a high percentage of tenant-operated farms, a considerable number of the farms showed, in 1935, annual incomes of less than $600 a year and a number with annual incomes of less than $250 a year.

CHAPTER XIII

THE BERRY MIGRANTS

Since 1922 berry growing has become an enormous industry. In large part, the increased demand for a year-round supply of fresh fruit, berries, and vegetables was a result of post-war changes in the American diet—occasioned by the vitamin craze. The expansion of commercial canning, the development of the 'cold-pack' process, improved methods of refrigeration, and the rapid extension of trucking facilities are largely responsible for the transformation of a minor speciality crop into a thoroughly commercialized industry. Markets are now so well integrated that berries can be delivered to most areas throughout the nation during a considerable portion of the year. To meet this increased demand production has become constantly more commercialized, more specialized, and more intensive; it has also involved mass employment of thousands of migratory workers during the harvest season. These have, for the most part, been drawn from the 'anonymous mass of the dispossessed'. For the expansion of the berry industry has closely coincided with the disintegration of the tenancy system in the Southern states. Estimates of the number of workers who now follow the berry crops seem almost astronomic. In 1929 the Department of Labour estimated that over 600,000 transient pickers follow the berry crops through the Gulf states and the Middle West. The berry season starts in Florida in January. From there the migrants follow along the Gulf Coast to Louisiana and work up the Mississippi Valley. Louisiana, Arkansas, Tennessee, and Missouri have the largest strawberry acreage of any four states in the Union. The movement of workers does not, however, follow a uniform pattern. From Arkansas workers move into Missouri and north to Michigan; from Illinois, Ohio, Indiana, and Kentucky they move south to Missouri and then turn north again. Generally, the 'white migrants' from Florida and Arkansas skirt the berry fields in Louisiana which are largely monopolized by negro labour. The main trek, over the route I have described, is about 1,500 or 2,000 miles. Berry migrants are usually described as a skylarking, carefree, debonair group of rural picnickers. But an examination of a few important crop areas should be sufficient to dispel the illusion.

1. CLEOPATRA AND PUCK IN ARKANSAS

Judsonia, in White County, Arkansas, is the reputed centre for strawberry shipments for the entire country. It is the centre of a six-county area which, in 1934, produced 85 per cent of a total of 26,632,460 quarts of strawberries raised in the state. Frequently as many as forty carloads of strawberries a day are shipped from Judsonia. Shipments go far afield: into Canada, throughout the Middle West (but seldom east of the Mississippi or south of the Ohio River) | and into the Far West. Operations have become thoroughly commercialized and large farms are supplanting small individually operated farms. Berries are, indeed, big business.

Three labour operations are involved. The first—planting, cultivating, and fertilizing—and the second—spraying and

additional cultivating—can, owing to mechanization and the use of power, usually be handled by the owner or operator and the members of his family, with some local labour. The third operation, harvesting, presents an entirely different problem. The period for commercial shipments lasts for only fifteen or twenty days and there is the utmost necessity for extreme speed in harvesting. Local labour is not available in nearly sufficient volume to handle the harvest.

Transient labour is drawn from a variety of sources. There is a stream of migrants from Oklahoma, Texas, and other parts of Arkansas who arrive around the latter part of April or the first of May. After the commercial harvest is over, these families are permitted to pick strawberries for their own use, chiefly for canning. When they have finished picking what they need, they return to their homes. Another group is made up of professional migrant berry pickers who follow the crop from Arkansas into Missouri, Illinois, Indiana, and Ohio, and end the season in the Berrien district in Michigan. Few, if any, negroes will be found in the Arkansas berry . fields. In addition to these groups, about three hundred Cherokee Indians are transported to Arkansas from eastern Oklahoma. They work through the commercial season and then pick free berries for their own use. In 1934 these various groups made up a total of approximately 20,000 non-resident workers.[1]

Writing in the *Nation* for the 11th of September 1929, Mr. Charles Morrow Wilson gave a rather colourful account of berry-picking time in Arkansas. 'There are school youngsters immersed in the first openings of vacation; housewives out to gain surcease of pot scrubbing and to earn an extra penny in the doing; there are young ones out for sunburns and barefootedness and devilment; there are back-brush courtesans, country girls grown restlessly romantic, disconsolates and jobless labourers. The berry bed has its Cleopatras and its Puck, its shysters and sots and hard cases. The strawberry field is a dramatic spot—with its murders and marriages and dynamic traditions, its berry fights and picking clans and row-boss rows.'

The Emergency Relief Administration, in a study made in 1934, points out, however, that 'these berry pickers can in no manner be regarded as picnickers. The vast majority of them are people without work and without apparent means of subsistence. No provisions were made for housing and they were found in camps at the side of the road or in groves. No sanitary rules were invoked, no provision for water and no provisions for determination of health conditions even regarding communicable diseases had been made.' The season only lasts for six weeks and pickers move about from one strawberry area to another, in a vain and fruitless attempt to find more desirable camping conditions or better picking. Each season nearly 50 per cent of the workers are in the fields for the first time in their lives and are utterly unfamiliar with the work.

In preparing the 1934 survey, field representatives of the Emergency Relief Administration made personal contacts with 4,898 picker groups, including 10,945 people. Of those interviewed, 3,142 were children under the age of sixteen. Estimates of annual

[1] This estimate checks fairly well with later studies: see Tolan Transcript, part 5, p. 2011

earnings from 1929 to 1934 ranged from a high of $424.02 to a low of $108.24. Only 6 per cent of the entire group claimed to have ever owned real property; and their ownership of personal property was negligible. The average per family value of transportation equipment was $54.46 and for all other personal property $49.20. As to transportation, 1,236 were hitch-hikers; 1,101 had their own cars; 1,309 travelled by truck or car on a share-the-expense basis with other families; 46 had animal-drawn vehicles; 319 rode freight trains; and 886 had come into the area by bus.

2. 'FROM NOWHERE TO NOWHERE'

After the season is over in the Ozarks, the next stop for the berry migrants is Berrien County, Michigan, which has become one of the important fruit-and-berry centres of America. Since the establishment of the Benton Harbour Market in 1930—'the largest cash-to-grower market in the world'—produce is shipped and trucked to a vast market extending from the Great Lakes to the Gulf, throughout the Middle West, and as far west as the Rockies. In 1939 some 8,893 truck operators, from twenty-four states, were registered at the market; sometimes as many as 450 operators bid on the market during a single day. Nor are the products offered for sale all grown in the adjacent territory. The. Grand Traverse area sends down cherries and plums; potatoes are trucked from Minnesota and Wisconsin; orchard products are brought from points as far away as Florida and Georgia. From May to October, the Berrien district is a beehive of activity.

With the expansion of the market has come a great increase in the demand for migratory labour. Harvest labour demands are three and four times as great as the labour demands for the rest of the year. Just as the market for produce has expanded, so the area from which migrants are drawn has been enlarged. The produce, fruit, and berry industries have, in fact, become migratory. Truck drivers work ; through many states and in different areas; produce firms shift their operations from California to Colorado, from Florida to Michigan; and armies of migrants follow along in the wake of the trucks.

The new migration to Michigan started under exceptional circumstances. In the spring of 1931, Michigan newspapers carried stories of dire suffering in Arkansas occasioned by floods, crop failures, and the gradual breakdown of the sharecropper system. Thousands of families, facing starvation, were reported as 'wearing gunny sacks as their only articles of clothing'.[1] Michigan growers, in an expansive mood, organized a Benton Harbour Relief Expedition. Truckloads of food, clothing, and supplies, with banners reading 'Arkansas Relief from Berrien County, Michigan', were sent. Although some migration from Arkansas to Michigan had taken place as early as 1929,[2] it was the relief expedition that really stimulated the northward movement. Growers who had participated in the relief expedition suddenly realized that Arkansas was a reservoir of potential migrants. In 1932 the first Michigan grower visited the state and brought back 200 workers by truck. Since then

[1] *Berrien Journal-Era,* 26 February 1931.
[2] Tolan Transcript, part. 3, p. 1233.

migration from Arkansas to Michigan has been an annual occurrence. Little was needed to stimulate the movement. Wages were incredibly low in Arkansas and, besides, the expedition of 1931 had advertised Berrien County as a place where jobs might be found. To-day it is estimated that between 15,000 and 25,000 workers are involved in the annual influx. Most of them are experienced fruit and berry pickers, having worked for years in these crops in Arkansas, Missouri, and Louisiana. Michigan growers have nothing but praise for them as workers.

The appearance of migratory labour in the Berrien district has had a depressing influence on the local labour market. While the expansion of the industry since 1930 has created a sharp demand for harvest labour, there has at all times been a large supply of available local labour. But resident labour cannot compete successfully with migratory labour, since it has a higher standard of living than do these families from distressed rural areas in the South with fewer fixed living expenses; the resident worker must pay taxes, maintain a home, and keep his children in school; he cannot travel as readily or as far as migrant labour. The growers, moreover, prefer migratory labour: it is cheaper, is willing to reside on the farm, is more reliable, and obligingly disappears at the end of the season. In the berry crops the amount picked in any one day depends upon weather conditions and the state of the market. Workers may pick early in the morning, lay off during the day, and pick again in the evening. With highly variable conditions, growers prefer a type of labour that will camp near by so that it can be used as needed. Workers find jobs, not through the employment service, but by going from farm to farm. There is a marked tendency for the same workers to return each season to the same employer. Growers, in fact, show a preference for those who have previously worked in the district.

'To the casual traveller driving around the countryside,' reads a government report, 'all that is visible are acres of beautiful fruit trees and fields of small fruits dotted with workers busily occupied in harvesting.' It is, indeed, a beautiful sight. I have been through the area during the season and have seen it from a plane. But neither from plane, from auto, nor from train can you see 12,000 migrants. Where are they? Where do they come from? Where do they go? Here is how they appear in the area:

'In June, with the advent of the strawberry harvest, the migrants stream into the area. Whites, Mexicans, and negroes; men, women, and children; old people, sick people, old men, and pregnant women leave their homes in Texas, Arkansas, Missouri, California, Florida, and other states where it has become impossible to earn a living. Lured by a Pied Piper's call to work they followed the trail on foot, in secondhand cars, in trucks, and on freight cars. The difficulties that they endure are staggering. Here is a jalopy puffing uphill, radiator steaming; just short of the top the motor pounds to a stop and awaits shuddering the ministration of the owner. Children pour out of a shanty, roofed with a mattress, built on the rear. An old man blocks up the wheel, a young man goes for water; eventually after some tinkering the motor roars, the children scurry for the truck, the men climb in the cab, and creeping over the crest of the hill they rumble on their way north.

'Along the road an old 1928 Chevrolet truck is stalled. It carries the unmistakable signs of migrant ownership—a shelter on the back and household goods piled high. There are ten persons—father, mother, six children, a married daughter, and her husband. They are in serious trouble—rear axle has given way. Out of a reserve of $1.50 the son-in-law is given $1 to buy a secondhand axle at the nearest junk shop; 50 cents must somehow be stretched until work can be found. The mother is lying half-dazed on a mattress in the truck-she has been ill during the entire trip from Arkansas. The family hope that "she will get better when we stop travelling and start working". To find work they have travelled hundreds of miles, ten persons in one truck (one seriously ill), sleeping on the ground in all kinds of weather.'[1]

This has a familiar sound—it might be an echo from *The Grapes of Wrath* or a scene from the picture. These Joads are from Arkansas, not Oklahoma; they have been travelling north-east, not west; and this is not a scene from a movie script but two paragraphs from a government report.

The number of migrants who stay over in Berrien County is negligible. At the end of the season, the sheriff rounds up the stragglers and 'encourages' them to 'get going'. There is a tacit agreement, among all groups in the community, that migrants must be out of the area by October. They come with the blossoms; they disappear when the fruit is harvested and the berries picked. As one grower told the Tolan Committee, migrants go from 'nowhere to nowhere'.

3. VACATION IN BLOSSOM LAND

The shores of Lake Michigan are beautiful in spring and summer and fall. Benton Harbour and St. Joseph are famous resort towns. There is a Cherry Festival in the south. Seen from a plane in late May, the district is an enchanting fairyland of winding waterways and blossoming orchards. Can it be that there are people working in these orchards who live on sowbelly and white bacon? Can it be that these woods conceal malaria-ridden migrants and broken-down . jalopies? Throughout the area there is almost no visible sign, except in the towns on Saturday nights, that the region has been invaded by a shadowy army of migrants. Where and how do they live? What do they make?

'Many producers in the area,' to quote from the W.P.A. report, 'hire from 50 to 400 workers. All the camps in which these migrants live follow the same dreary description. The only concession the producers make for the convenience of their workers is the location of a well for water, and an average of one outhouse for fifty persons. When old barns and buildings are available they are used as bunk-houses to provide for an unbelievable number of people. . . Driving off a small country road and up a dirt lane we came upon a camp located in a grove of trees. In the centre were two large frame buildings each about 75 feet long and 12 feet wide. Around these buildings were tents, old cars, trailers, and trucks. The houses had dirt floors and each was divided by flimsy partitions into eight rooms. There were few furnishings. Some have packing boxes, old

[1] Tolan Transcript, part 3, p. 1240

chairs, tables made from rough lumber, and these are scattered between old mattresses and blankets which are spread on the ground and serve as beds. On nails driven into the wall hang a few articles of clothing. Food is prepared outside over open camp fires or on fireplaces built with a few bricks. Water is supplied by one hand pump. About ten feet away from the pump are two outhouses, toilet facilities for all families living in the camp. The buildings are the homes of 100 men, women, and children—an average of over eight to one small room. Here and there were small groups of children too young to work, with an older girl keeping watch while they played in dirt and garbage churned up by the passing cars.'[1]

In one year Berrien County spent $6,000 for the medical care of migrants—14 per cent of the total expenditure of the hospital; and 'this service did not even make a beginning in dealing with the public health problem'. Medical care is generally available only for the treatment of emergency cases, such as injuries received in automobile accidents. With 15,000 migrants travelling around in ancient jalopies the number of accidents is quite large. Each year with the migrant influx many cases of typhoid fever, dysentery, malaria (seventeen cases in one county in 1938), and venereal infection are reported. 'Many babies are born in tents and outside under trees.'[2]

It is difficult to estimate either the seasonal or the daily earnings of migrants in the area. Hourly rates range from fifteen to twenty cents. The 'ticket' or 'counter' method of payment is quite common, with a ticket being usually good for fifteen cents. Piece rates, the general standard used in berries, average from two to two and a half cents a quart. Since workers are not able to control the labour market, wages have slight relation to prices received by growers. The rate usually depends upon how generous a grower happens to feel on a particular day. At existing rates, workers can average about $2.00 or $2.50 for a ten-hour day. But on many days pickers are idle and 'if the season is late or the crop small, these days may run into weeks'. When picking conditions are good, growers employ all available labour, and the work period is shortened. It is extremely doubtful if the average family makes more than $150 or $200 during the season.

Despite these meagre earnings, migrants for the most part manage to stay off relief. Technically they are not eligible for relief, but some assistance is occasionally given to them out of the district. In 1939 Berrien County spent $6,830.68 for relief of transients and $5,400 for the hospitalization of non-residents. The county also spent $1,000 for the burial often migrants at $100 a corpse (Michigan, unlike Colorado, buries the dead). Assuming that the migrant families earn an average of $150 during the season, Mr. Daniel O'Connor, of the F.S.A., has estimated their aggregate earnings at $1,125,000. Most of this money is spent in Berrien County for food, clothing, picture shows, cigarettes, beer, ice cream cones, and used automobiles. When this sum is balanced against the slight expense occasioned by their presence, it would seem that the community could well afford to provide a few good camps.

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[1] Tolan Transcript, part 3, p. 1240.
[2] Ibid., p. 1241.

There are three separate patterns of migration in Michigan: sugar beets; berries; and orchard and produce crops. Outside of Berrien County, there are a number of other counties in which large numbers of migrants may be found. For its fruit, berry, and onion harvest, Allegan County imports about 2,000 migrants each season. A group of 1,185 migrants in the county in 1940 was analysed as follows: 375 Mexicans (chiefly in sugar beets), 100 Kentuckians (chiefly onions), 450 Arkansans, and 260 Missourians. In the huckleberry and onion marshes of Berry County, about 1,500 migrants are employed each year. In Van Buren County about 2,500 are employed—in berries, celery, onions, peppermint, spearmint, and cucumbers. About 1,000 migrants work in the pickle fields. Most of this miscellaneous field labour comes from Kentucky, Arkansas, and Missouri, while a number of Mexicans work during the slack season in beets.

In only one area in the Great Lakes district has a sensible approach been worked out to the migrant problem. Cherries have been grown on a large-scale basis in Door County, Wisconsin, since 1916.[1] Here the growers got busy years ago and built community camps and dormitories. They established the practice of signing contracts, at the end of one season, for the return of the same pickers the following season. By furnishing adequate housing and insuring definite employment, they were able to stabilize the labour market and secure local labour. Surrounding towns were thoroughly canvassed and arrangements made to bring in young men and women to work through the season. These same practices are still followed to-day. Approximately 3,000 out-of-county workers are employed each season, but, with the exception of a few Indians, no out-of-state labour is recruited. Little family labour is used and workers are paid (1940) six cents for a four-quart pail, averaging about $3.00 to $3.50 a day. The workers, according to the Farm Security Administration, are 'not the usual near-destitute type ordinarily to be found in the fruit-picking business where transients are employed in the Middle West.' The experience of this county shows that it is possible, given some local initiative and intelligence, to handle a migratory labour movement with a minimum of friction and inconvenience.

[1] See the *Rural New Yorker,* 2 February 1918.

CHAPTER XIV

MIGRATORY LABOUR ON THE EAST COAST

No-one knows how long migratory labour has been moving up and down the Atlantic seaboard. The Industrial Commission pointed out in 1901 (Vol. X) that coloured labour from the South was being used in the New England states. But a fully developed cycle of migratory labour could not be organized on the Atlantic seaboard until the Florida muck lands were brought into production. Before 1920 the undeveloped swamp and palmetto scrub lands of south-east Florida had no agricultural importance. To-day one of the most valuable and productive 'winter gardens' in America is located in the area. Over 80,000 acres of muck land, reclaimed by federal drainage projects, are now in production. Three and four vegetable crops a year are produced from these acres. A crop of beans can be grown in forty-two days. Mainly within the last ten years, a large-scale industrialized type of agriculture has developed in the region which, to-day, involves the employment of some 50,000 migratory workers.

In general the industry has been organized by the shipper-grower, who operates in a dozen or more states from California to Florida, from Florida to Maine. The typical shipper-grower is interested in market quotations, in the carload movement of produce to large terminal markets. He is not a farmer; in many cases, in fact, he knows nothing about farming. It is his function to organize the market. He may contract for produce in advance of the season, buy it at auction in the field, or raise it himself on owned or leased land. When he raises produce, however, he generally deals with a labour contractor or employs a 'field man' to supervise production. With his eyes glued to the ticker tape, the shipper-grower has no time to spend in the field. A labour contractor or custom-work crew will undertake to furnish labour and the machinery. Contractors, owning potato-digging machinery, follow the progressive maturity of the crop from southern Florida through North Carolina, Virginia, New Jersey, to Maine. It is this development which accounts for the one-crop migrant—the potato migrant, the celery migrant, the berry migrant. The contractor follows the shipper-grower, the migrants follow the contractor. The key to the industry, in a way, is the truck. Fifty per cent of the Florida produce is trucked to market; workers and equipment are transported by truck. Prices received for off-season produce are sufficient to counterbalance transportation costs; and off-season production implies specialization in particular crops, intensive farming, and dependence upon migratory labour.

1. MOBILIZATION IN THE EVERGLADES

As winter tourists flock to Miami, an army of migratory workers assembles in the Everglades. As thousands of workers assemble, the area takes on the appearance of an early-day mining community in the West. It is a camp where people mine carrots, beans, peas, and tomatoes. 'Enormous yields,' according to the *Florida Guide,* 'are produced with hothouse rapidity on the reclaimed muck lands. The producers who operate in the district are

often called "one-season" gamblers, because they stake their money on one planting, sell the harvest at auction in the fields, and move on. Corporation producers, many of them controlling thousands of acres, depend on the same speculative market for their returns.' From Christmas until April, the Everglades operates on a twenty-four hour basis, with long trains of refrigerator cars rolling out for northern markets by day and night. The streets of Pahokee are noisy and crowded; bars, restaurants, and gambling joints are seldom closed; the 'jukes' clang and clamour.

The season starts in Dade County, about thirty-five miles south of Miami. Some 8,000 workers are required to handle the harvest of beans, potatoes, and tomatoes which starts in December. Of this number, 25 per cent are trucked in on a day-to-day basis from Miami. The trucks line up along the kerbs in the negro section at five o'clock in the morning, and when fifty or sixty workers have piled in they head for the fields. The balance of the harvest labour is recruited from out-of-state sources, chiefly Georgia. 'Labour runners' are paid fees ranging from thirty cents to $6.00 a head, to deliver labour on the ground. If the market is 'hot', growers compete with each other for labour, bribing the labour runners and raiding the camps of their rivals. The shed or packing-house labour is 'White-American'—professional migratory 'packers'; 90 per cent of the field labour is negro. North of Dade County is another 'winter garden': 40,000 acres in Broward County, which requires about 10,000 migratory workers. Still farther north is the Belle Glade district, with 52,000 acres in truck and produce crops, where, between October the 15th and June the 15th of each year, some 20,000 migratory workers are needed. As the season draws to a close throughout Florida, migrants disperse in all directions. The potato migrants and the celery migrants follow up the East Coast as the crops mature in other areas; the berry migrants leave for Louisiana and Kentucky on their way to Michigan; the cotton pickers start back for Texas, Arkansas, and Mississippi. By June the army has vanished and the 'jukes' in the Everglades are stilled.

2. THE POTATO BATTALION

By late May one battalion—the potato migrants—branches off from the main army and commences its long march north. Between 6,000 and 8,000 negroes, packed thirty and fifty in a truck, and crowded in passenger cars, follow the potato harvest up the East Coast. The average picker travels about 1,520 miles north and south; some even go as far north as Aroostook, Maine. While it is estimated that about 8,000 workers make the cycle, the actual number of people involved is, of course, much larger—perhaps as many as 15,000 people.

As the potato battalion marches north, workers desert from time to time and return to the South. At least 4,000 negro migrants work in the potato harvest in New Jersey each season. Most of them have been making the Florida-New Jersey junket for years. Customarily the New Jersey growers deal with labour contractors who return, year after year, with their crews for the harvest. The contractor is paid a fee of so much a bushel to handle the crop and he, in turn, makes his own deal with the workers. Often the grower will pay the labour directly, on the order of the contractor, and deduct the total in

his final settlement. During the month and a half or two months that these 4,000 negro migrants work in New Jersey, their living and working conditions closely parallel those which prevail in Florida, and, for that matter, all along the line of march. There is the same miserable housing; the same lack of recreational facilities; the same low earnings and high living expenses; and the same chiselling on the part of contractors. There is also the same discrimination. In the Cranbury area, in New Jersey, serious riots against the use of negro labour occurred in September 1939, with state troopers being used to assist in quelling the disturbances. The potato areas of New Jersey are as syphilis-ridden as those of Florida. Out of 2,948 negro migrants examined in New Jersey in 1939, 34.9 per cent were found to be afflicted with syphilis (in Elizabeth City, North Carolina, 70 per cent of the resident and migrant negro population is syphilitic). It is naturally difficult for health services to maintain continuity of treatment unless they actually follow the migrants from area to area.

Migratory labour is preferred in New Jersey for the same reasons that it is preferred in other areas. Since the planting and cultivating operations are mechanized, there is no need to maintain year-round employees. The negro migrant comes in for a short season, works for low wages, submits to the dictates of a row-boss, resides on the premises so that his services are always available on a piece-rate basis, and obligingly disappears at the end of the season. From Florida to Long Island, the labour-contractor or row-boss system prevails wherever migratory labour is used. 'The row-boss,' according to the Labour Commissioner of Virginia, 'herds these people together, makes them pay a fee; then he charges the farmer for obtaining the labour, and I can cite innumerable instances where they steal the labour out at night and sell it up the road a little further.' Many growers are themselves afraid of the row-bosses. 'If I don't play ball with them,' one grower told the Commissioner, 'they are going to blacklist me and refuse to deal with me any more.' Migratory workers must, by necessity, deal with row-bosses who, from California to Florida, are a tough lot. In the spring of 1930, two murders were reported in the Stockton area in California which arose out of disputes between migrants and labour contractors.[1] 'The coloured people,'it has been said, 'are afraid of the row-bosses, and they literally carry them along in almost slavery. The whole system is a racket.' It is a racket, however, which is part and parcel of the present system of commercialized produce production.

3. FACTORIES IN THE FIELD

Along the Atlantic seaboard from Florida to Connecticut, 'farm factories' have begun to make their appearance. Industrialized agriculture has not, of course, developed as rapidly on the East Coast as it has on the Pacific Coast, but the trend is apparent. In Florida, the United States Sugar Corporation has operated since 1925 a 25,000-acre plantation in the Everglades; it employs 2,500 workers the year round and about 5,000 during the peak period. The company has a system of retail stores throughout the plantation which do a business with its employees of $750,000 a year. The company furnishes good housing for its employees; maintains a

[1] See the *Stockton Record,* 29 April and 1 May 1930.

health service; refuses to employ child labour; and has established a system of schools throughout the area. It indulges in paternalism on a large scale: choral societies, company bands, barbecues, and prize contests. About 90 per cent of its employees are negroes. All of its operations are thoroughly industrialized. It processes its own cane sugar (115,000 tons a year) and operates its own railroad system on the plantation. The president of the company has nothing but scorn for the notion of 'farming as a mode of life', which, to him, is 'just so much smug-voiced hypocrisy'.

The shade-grown tobacco industry in Connecticut is a similar example of industrialized agriculture. The wage bill for hired labour on seventy-three large-scale tobacco farms in the Connecticut River Valley in 1929 amounted to $2,311,000. In 1939 the average value of the tobacco crop, per grower, was in excess of $67,000. Two typical 'farmers' in the district are the American Sumatra Tobacco Corporation and the Consolidated Cigar Corporation, both of which, according to Dr. Arthur Stuart, 'display a high degree of vertical integration, including not only growing but processing, marketing, and, in some cases, the actual manufacture of the finished product, cigars'. The first-mentioned company produces one-fifth of the tobacco crop in Connecticut and operates acreages in Massachusetts, Florida, and Georgia. The Consolidated Cigar Corporation operates eleven farms in New England. Most of the tobacco in Connecticut is grown under contract for these two concerns. For years the tobacco-raising industry imported negro labour from the South; nowadays most of the labour is recruited from Hartford and Springfield and trucked back and forth each day from town to field and field to town. Child labour has been used extensively and some negro labour is still employed. The negroes pay their own transportation expenses from the South and are housed in shacks throughout the area.[1]

The Seabrook Farm, near Bridgeton, New Jersey, represents a different type of industrialized agriculture. The farm consists of 6,000 cultivated acres, with thirty miles of improved roads on the company's property; the company also maintains its own railroad facilities for the simultaneous loading of thirty cars of produce, a packing plant, a cannery that serves some 32,000 acres of surrounding truck and fruit crops, a large overhead irrigation system, a fleet of specially built trucks, two company-owned airplanes to spray the field crops, and a system of hothouses. Some 2,000 employees live on the premises, punch time clocks, and work in the fields. As early as 1918, the company was producing foodstuffs of an annual value of $200,000 and making as much as $2,450 from an acre of produce in a season.[2] At that time the company used Hungarian and Polish women, recruited from the Passaic Mills, to meet its seasonal labour requirements. Later it began to use negro migratory labour until, in 1934, it decided to eliminate migratory labour as rapidly as possible.

This change of policy came about as a result of an interesting incident. In the spring of 1934, the company was paying 12½ and 15½ cents an hour for field labour. The Agricultural and Cannery

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[1] General living conditions are described in detail in the Tolan Transcript, part 1, p. 390.

[2] *Country Gentleman,* 9 February 1918.

Workers Industrial Union appeared at Bridgeton and, by organizing the workers, forced the company to double the rate. A few weeks later, on June the 25th, the company announced that it intended to eliminate the increase and to fix the rate at 17 cents an hour. Immediately 500 employees voted to strike and picket lines were established along the highways leading to the packing sheds and canneries and to the entrances of the property. 'A large proportion of the workers,' according to the *New York Times* of the 11th of July 1934, 'were negroes and most of the others apparently were first or second generation foreign groups.' They lived in company-owned houses for which they paid $3.00 to $8.00 a month rent out of irregular earnings based on the rate of 17 cents an hour. On July the 7th and 10th serious disturbances occurred. The strike ended on the 12th of July 1934, when most of the workers went back to their cabins after the appointment of an arbitration committee. Since the strike, however, 'the company has abandoned its policy of employing migratory workers' and has tried to stabilize employment by using year-round employees. Here, in 1934, a typical California incident—tear gas, vigilantism, evictions, riots, violence, and arrests—occurred on the doorsteps, so to speak, of New York City. And here, on the Atlantic seaboard, a pattern of migratory labour has come into existence which closely parallels, in many respects, that on the Pacific Coast.

BOOK IV

REVIEW OF A REVOLUTION

CHAPTER XV

'OUR AGRICULTURAL REVOLUTION'

The preceding chapters have been devoted to a study of two types of agricultural migrants: constant or habitual migrants (migratory workers); and depression or removal migrants. At bottom both groups are victims of a basic process at work American agriculture. 'Our agricultural revolution', as it has en called, did not commence yesterday. Nor is rural migration—a symptom of maladjustment and social change—merely a current phenomenon. In 1915, for example, there was marked evidence of unrest and instability in many of the areas from which the heaviest emigration has occurred of recent years. But within the last few years the industrial revolution in agriculture has been accelerated and has assumed new implications. Just as the changes that are taking place in American agriculture are largely responsible for the heavy rural migration of yesterday and to-day, so these same changes, in the form that they are now assuming, seriously restrict the possibilities of resettlement and readjustment. 'Farming somewhere else' no longer provides an outlet for migrant farm families; nor can urban areas absorb further 'surplus' agricultural population (except, perhaps, on a temporary basis in connection with the national defence programme). With each acceleration of the process of change, the tempo of rural migration increases. Without attempting to measure the total degree of change or to document statistically the pace of transition, just *what* changes have occurred in American agriculture in the last fifty years? Are these changes so fundamental as to be revolutionary in character?

Basically what has happened to American agriculture during this period, as Dr. Carl T. Schmidt has said, is that 'farmers have been drawn into the vortex of industrialism'. This change has been brought about by a process, not by any single factor. Our agriculture is changing in many ways; it is the totality of these changes which constitutes the process mentioned. The following sections do not purport to be an exhaustive catalogue of all the changes that have occurred. In these sections, I have merely sought to demonstrate that the industrial revolution has finally hit the farmer: that the preview provided by the La Follette Committee hearings in California does foreshadow the future of American agriculture.

1. CHANGING CONCEPTS

Perhaps the first change in American agriculture that might be noted is a change in our concept of farming itself. The patterns of land settlement and farming operation laid down at the outset in American agriculture were based upon the family as an economic unit. Because of the isolation of the farm, family ties tended to remain stronger in rural than in urban areas. Farmers went West, not to make fortunes, but to establish homes. Dr. Taylor quotes a Congressman Holman of Indiana who, in 1862, stated this ideal in the following terms:

'Instead of baronial possessions, let us facilitate the increase of independent homesteads. Let us keep the plough in the hands of the owner. Every new home that is established, the independent possessor of which cultivates his own freehold, is establishing a new republic within the old, and adding a new and a strong pillar to the edifice of the state.'

This was the ideal upon which our Homestead Acts were predicated, and which constituted the underlying premise of our agricultural economy. It is this ideal which still continues to influence the thinking of our legislators when they deal with the farm problem.

To-day the concept of the 'family-sized farm'—of the farm as homestead—has been thoroughly undermined not only in California but in the Western Cotton Belt, the Plantation Cotton Belt, the Wheat Belts in Oklahoma, Washington, and the Dakotas; in the Corn Belt; in the fruit, vegetable, and berry industries; in Maine and in Florida, in Tennessee and Montana. 'We no longer raise wheat here,' said a Washington wheat grower to Edwin Bates of the Department of Commerce in 1932; 'we manufacture it.' 'A farm,' wrote Mr. Samuel Crowther in 1927,[1] 'is only an industrial plant in which chemistry and the handling of materials are the predominant factors.' To such an extent has our thinking about the farm changed that Professor William S. Hopkins, of Stanford University, has referred to the earlier concept as 'mythological'. To-day the farm has come to be regarded as any other business enterprise. This radical change of concept implies a gradual breakdown of cultural differences between rural and urban groups. It implies, as Dr. Holmes pointed out in 1919,[2] the destruction by modern means of communication of the farm neighbourhood group. It implies, also, that the farming class, as such, is in the process of being broken up under the impact of the 'selective forces of normal competition' from which farmers were, for a period, more or less protected.

Until of recent years the occupational efficiency of the typical American farmer has been exceedingly low when compared to standards of efficiency maintained in other occupations. The family-farm economy did not permit much development in the division of labour. The farmer had to be an 'all-round' expert; the hired hand had to be a jack-of-all-trades. Nowadays, to be sure, we attempt to remedy the farmer's lack of specialized skills with bulletins and brochures, demonstrations and exhibits. Through co-operative associations, many specialized problems, such as marketing, are shifted from the farmer to the farm group. By and large, however, these developments have increased the operating efficiency of the large farm at the expense of the small farm. The co-operative associations tend to fall under the influence of the large growers. The agricultural advisor too frequently becomes the advisor for the top tier of farmers, for only they have the necessary plant and capital to put his suggestions into practice. Emphasis on speciality crops has resulted in the development of special skills. We no longer have 'hired hands' but peach pickers, asparagus cutters, lettuce trimmers. Most of these vocations are highly skilled. In the production of bulk or extensive crops, on the other hand, a different

[1] New Agriculture', *Country Gentleman,* October 1927

[2] *American Journal of Sociology,* May 1919.

development has occurred. Here the substitution of machines for skill has made it possible, as Peter Drucker notes,[1] to raise bulk crops on an industrial basis on large mechanized estates with the use of paid migrant labour.

Changing concepts of the farm and the farmer have been reflected in a marked change in the relationship between farm employer and farm employee. Formerly the hired hand was regarded as a member of the farm family who proverbially married the farmer's daughter and inherited the farm. But in 1926, a spokesman for California agriculture told his colleagues: 'The old-fashioned hired man is a thing of the past. . . . There is no place for him, and the farmer who does not wake up to the realization that there is a caste in labour on the farm is sharing too much of his dollar with labour. ... We are not husbandmen. We are not farmers. We are producing a product to sell.'[2] Merely to indicate the significance of this changed relationship it is sufficient to point out that, between 1930 and 1940, over 250 strikes of agricultural workers were reported in the United States.

Just as a wedge is being driven between farm owner and farm employee, so ownership itself is being rapidly separated from management. To-day the 'managerial concept' is becoming as firmly established in agriculture as in industry. The new concept did not make much headway until 1919 when the 'professional' farm managers began to make their appearance.[3] With the 1929 depression, banks, insurance companies, and other lending agencies began to come into possession, through foreclosure, of thousands of farms. Unequipped themselves to undertake the function of management, they turned to the farm management company to handle their newly acquired properties.

The first company of this type to make its appearance was the Farmers' National Company of Omaha, Nebraska, formed in 1926. In a few years the company was operating 700 farms—over 252,297 acres of farm land—in seven Middle Western states. Much of the success of this pioneer management company can be traced to factors other than its use of sound techniques. The banks had found that local managers were 'provincial' in their attitudes. Sometimes they had relatives whose farms had been foreclosed; or, again, they might be disposed by reason of long friendship to give a tenant 'a break'. The corporation, happily, is incapable of emotion, feeling, or susceptibility to moral considerations. Other large farm management corporations soon made their appearance. The Doane Agricultural Service of St. Louis, formed in 1932, now manages 200,000 acres of farm land; the Decatur Farm Management Company of Decatur, Illinois, manages some 17,000 acres; the Farm Management Company, Inc., of Irwin, Ohio, manages eighty farms comprising some 22,000 acres. On the 27th of May 1929 the farm managers organized their own professional group: the American Society of Farm Managers and Rural Appraisers. A glance at any issue of the journal published by this society will serve to show how zealous the new management group is in the

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[1] The Industrial Revolution Hits the Farmer,' *Harper's,* January 1940.

2 See testimony of Dr. Paul S. Taylor before the La Follette Committee.

[3] See D. Howard Doane, History and Growth of the American Society of Farm Managers and Rural Appraisers, April 1937

service of the moneyed interests it represents. 'The economic basis of managerial service,' Dr. Taylor told the Tolan Committee,'is superior skill of professional managers over other farm operators, and the possibilities of collective buying and marketing, and of unified operations. These services offer genuine benefits to the landlord and to the land itself, and doubtless to some tenants. But it is equally plain that they promote (1) absenteeism by making it profitable; (2) united control of large acreages; (3) large-scale operation, by developing and utilizing its economies. The results,' he cryptically concludes, 'are no part of the pattern contemplated by the Homestead Act.'

In some cases the problem of management has been solved by lending institutions creating their own land-operations division. This is the solution to the problem adopted by the Bank of America in California. Through California Lands, Inc., a subsidiary, the bank operates hundreds of thousands of acres which it has acquired through foreclosure. The company maintains a central office in charge of accounting, sales, leases, and operation. Under 'operations' the state is divided into districts, each in charge of a district manager who, in turn, has a number of supervisors under him. Each supervisor, with the aid of a foreman responsible to him, is supposed to manage forty or fifty farms. I dare say that this pattern of farm operation was, also, hardly within the contemplation of the original Homestead Act.[1]

2. TECHNOLOGICAL CHANGE

An important barometer of change in agriculture is the shift that has occurred in the amount and type of mechanical power and equipment used on farms. With the development of the internal-combustion gas engine, power farming became feasible. The number of horses, mules, and colts on farms decreased from 26,500,000 in 1915 to 15,182,000 in 1939. In one year alone (1935), the tractor, motor truck, and automobile saved in agriculture or shifted to industry labour equal to that of 345,000 persons for one year.[2] But the efficient utilization of power requires large units of operation and a constant demand for power. This is shown by the sharp variation, between different farming regions, in the amount of power used on farms. Primary power varies, according to a calculation made in 1935, from as low as 1 h.p. per worker and 2 h.p. per farm in Alabama, to as high as 14 h.p. per worker and 22 h.p. per farm in South Dakota; while the horse-power hours actually utilized vary from 380 per worker and 730 per farm in Alabama to as high as 4,580 per worker in North Dakota and 10,000 per farm in California. But the increasing use of mechanical power on farms is rapidly expanding the size of farm operations and is, therefore, becoming more efficient. Directly increasing productivity per worker, power farming has also indirectly increased production by releasing some 35,000,000 acres of land formerly needed to produce feed crops. Requiring increased capital investment and heavier cash operating costs, power farming makes for a further dependence

[1] See Howard Whipple, ' Problem of the Bank-Owned Farm' in the *American Bankers' Association Journal,* November 1929.

[2] Y*ear Book of Agriculture* (1940), p. 512

upon a money income and thereby stimulates the commercialization of agricultural production.

Generally speaking the enormous technical advances that have been made in farm techniques in the last hundred years can be divided into two classifications. The period between 1831 and 1900 witnessed the introduction of the reaper, the steel plough, the threshing machine, grain drills, corn planters, harrows, cultivators, grain binders, and many other machines. These, however, were all more or less specialized agricultural tools, relying upon the use of animal power, and increasing the productivity of the farmer without diminishing the need for his labour or skill. This period might, therefore be called the 'mechanical' rather than the 'industrial' revolution in agriculture. The period from 1900 to 1940 has been characterized by an entirely different development. Automobiles and trucks have broken the isolation of rural life and set in motion forces which tend to undermine the enforced solidarity of the farm family. Swifter high way transportation has revolutionized the means and methods of marketing crops. It is the tractor, however, which has been the real spearhead of the industrial revolution in agriculture.

Prior to the invention of the Farmall tractor in 1924, the use of tractors had been pretty largely restricted to the clumsier types of farm operations. The development of the all-purpose tractor not only made possible the mechanical cultivation of row-crops, but it also brought about a 'radical revision in the design of the principal farm machines'. These newer farm machines are essentially appliances to be attached to the all-purpose tractor. They are not mere tools to be used by the farmer; they extend the functions of the tractor, not of the farmer. It is for this reason that they strike at the very basis of independent farming. For they nullify, as Peter Drucker has said, the one competitive advantage which the owner or tenant farmer, in extensive farming, held over the big estates: the cheap labour supply of his family. Not only is the effect different, resulting in large-scale technological displacement, but the pace of transition is much swifter. On the 1st of January 1920 there were 246,083 tractors on American farms; five years later there were 505,933—a gain of 100 per cent. By 1930 there were 920,021 tractors in use, a gain of 82 per cent over 1925. Sales of the all-purpose tractor increased from 33.3 per cent of all tractor sales in 1931 to 71.3 per cent in 1935.

Since its invention in 1924, the all-purpose tractor has been steadily improved. In 1933 rubber tyres were first introduced as standard equipment on this type of tractor. Rubber tyres not only increase the efficiency, but make possible their use to haul other types of rubber-tyred equipment along highways at a speed of from eight to sixteen miles per hour. Speed not only makes possible the fullest utilization of machinery in a limited use-period, but it also enables the farmer to work nearby land and thus to expand the area of farm operations.[1] Nor has the tractor by any means yet reached its maximum use or development. In 1938 an electrically powered tractor was exhibited. To-day, according to Mr. Wheeler McMillen, an 'automatically guided tractor is in successful use'. A further

[1] See Dr. Paul S. Taylor, 'Good-bye to the Homestead Farm,' *Harper's,* May 1941.

qualitative change, of considerable importance, has occurred of recent years in the development of farm machinery. Formerly the size of the farm itself was the 'dominating force in the development of machinery'[1]. These machines made large-scale farming feasible, but they did not noticeably increase the relative efficiency of the large-scale farm nor did they greatly enhance its competitive advantages over the family-sized farm. To-day a different type of machinery is being developed—more flexible, capable of greater variation in use, and more mobile. For a time it was frequently said that this newer farm machinery would be the salvation of the small farmer, since it made possible the utilization of machinery on small acreages. But actually a different effect has now been observed. The machine has become the dominating force in dictating the scale of farm operations; no longer does the scale of farm operations dictate the type of machinery. As the all-purpose tractor (and the machines designed for its use) proved its high utility value, people had to revise their ideas about mechanization in agriculture. It had been said, at one time, that the tractor could never be used in the cultivation of row-crops. In the same way it is now said that machinery can never displace labour in the 'stoop labour' operations required in the fruit, vegetable, and berry industries. But from the University of California, on the 10th of April 1940, comes word that sugar-beet planters, toppers, and lifters have been perfected and that the hop picker is now in successful use in many localities. A gigantic vacuum-cleaner apparatus, attached to a tractor, harvests clover seeds in twelve-foot swaths. On the 23rd of November 1935 the *California Cultivator* carried a story about a tractor-driven walnut picker which drives an endless chain of mechanical fingers along the ground picking up walnuts, previously shaken from trees, at a rate of ten acres a day with 97 per cent accuracy. In May 1937 a mechanical asparagus cutter was perfected. 'Mechanization,' writes Dr. Taylor, 'moves progressively into every phase of farm production.'[2] While cultivating and planting operations have generally been more completely mechanized than harvesting operations, the logic of the development inevitably leads to complete mechanization.

By increasing the capital investment required for successful farming, mechanization makes for the consolidation of farm units and gives a decided advantage to the large-scale farm. The more continuously machines can be used, the more production costs can be cut. Since interest on money invested in machinery and depreciation make up the biggest part of the cost of operation, 'the hour cost is markedly influenced by the number of hours the tractor is used; noticeable economy is effected in per acre cost, investment, and repair cost of machinery as size of farm increases'.[3] To reduce the overhead cost of operation and to make use of labour released by mechanical power and large-sized equipment, many farmers have taken on additional land, either by rental or by purchase, and have increased the size of the farming unit.[4] At the same time that mechanization results in farm consolidation and thereby drives

[1] Tolan Transcript, part 10, p. 4063.
[2] Ibid., part 8, p. 3248.
[3] Ibid., p. 3247.
[4] Ibid.

farmers from the land, it makes it more difficult for these same farmers to find new farms. Since the amount of good farm land is necessarily limited, consolidation of farm units in good-land areas forces displaced farmers into less advantageous farming communities. 'There are now few sections in the United States,' a witness told the T.N.E.C. in 1940, 'where a man with no more capital than that required for a team of horses and horse equipment can begin farming. A tenant finds it difficult particularly in the corn and wheat regions to lease land unless he has a full complement of mechanical and horse equipment to operate the farm. The investment required to begin farm operations offers one explanation for the concentration of workers at the bottom of the agricultural ladders.'

A great controversy has, of course, raged for years over the extent to which mechanization in agriculture does result in the absolute displacement of workers. That it results in the displacement of farmers is obvious. But the major farm-equipment houses, through their subsidized research organization, Farm Equipment Institute, have consistently maintained that only a slight, or incidental, displacement of workers is effected by mechanization. It is unquestionably true that the use of machinery stimulates industrial employment, but for skilled industrial workers, not for agricultural labourers. The new employment opportunities are, moreover, created at places far removed from the areas in which displacement occurs. It is likewise true that mechanization does create some new employment on farms, but usually for trained machinists. The development of cheaper and smaller machines and the formation of farm machinery co-operatives also tend to offset certain effects of mechanization. But the net result, the immediate result, of mechanization in agriculture is the displacement of farmers, farm tenants, and farm labourers. Mr. Fowler McCormick, Vice-President of International Harvester Company, in his testimony before the T.N.E.C. on the 24th of April 1940 admitted that 'advancing technology sometimes results in displacement of labour'. To state that displacement of workers does result on a large scale from mechanization is not to inveigh against the machine or to suggest that inventive faculties should be shackled. It is merely to state a plain and obvious fact. Not only is it more difficult for displaced agricultural workers to find employment than for skilled industrial workers, but technological advance in agriculture results in absolute displacement. Furthermore, in past periods of depression, the land has always been a stabilizing influence, a place of refuge for those in 'flight from the city'. When the next depression occurs, that refuge will have vanished.

Just as the position of those farmers not actually displaced is made increasingly insecure by the advance of technology on the farm, so does the position of the farm labourer rapidly deteriorate as a result of the same causes. Employment opportunities on farms decrease; the labour market becomes overcrowded; such employment as remains becomes casual and irregular. 'Temporary or emergency workers,' by contrast with the regular year-round hired hand, 'have neither security nor reasonable promise of advancement. They cannot extricate themselves so as to attain a level of living which will make it possible for them to take a full part either in rural or urban society. Most of them are caught

between the farm and the city.'[1] Reliance upon migratory labour develops and the use of migratory labour seriously affects labour standards. Social costs mount and commercialized farming becomes increasingly subsidized. 'The efficiencies of the machine,' writes Dr. Taylor, 'are partly real, partly dependent on the set of books you keep.' Mechanization will likely represent progress on the books of account maintained by the large-scale commercial farmer; but the social side of the ledger is more likely to show a deficit. If man power is a national asset, then the failure to utilize effective, but idle, man power on American farms must be recognized as a major loss. The amount of time lost by migrants in senseless and meaningless migration probably represents a sum vastly in excess of the total amount spent by public and private agencies for their support, care, and treatment.

The effect of the changes outlined in this section is, moreover, two-fold: it makes for an increase in the number of large-scale commercial farms and also for an increase in the number of small-scale subsistence farms. The same process which enhances the technical efficiency of one group of farmers destroys the technical efficiency of still another group. The phenomenon here observed is that of 'polarity': an increase in two extremes. 'It would seem, on the whole, that under current conditions of industrial unemployment, insufficient demand for a number of farm products, and a surplus agricultural population, mechanization will tend to increase subsistence farming wherever there is a possibility of establishing such farm units. An increase in subsistence farming as well as in the mechanization of commercial farming would indicate that one part of the farm population is becoming more dependent upon industry and the national economy as a whole, while the other part, to the extent that it actually becomes self-sufficient, is gradually becoming less dependent on other economic groups. Commercial agriculture is so organized that it must sell to other groups in order to carry on production. Mechanization and other developments that have increased the dependence of farmers on cash income have also increased their vulnerability to changes in the economic system.'[2]

3. LARGE *V.* SMALL PRODUCTION

The paradoxical process described in the last paragraph—enrichment of one group and pauperization of another—is graphically illustrated in the changes which have taken place in the size and scale of farm operations. Years ago there was much excitement over the rise of 'bonanza' farms in many areas of the United States. These bonanza farms, however, were never industrialized in the modern sense. They were merely large aggregations of land upon which small farm methods were extensively used. With the breakup of most of them, agitation over large landholdings abated, nor did it revive until the early 'twenties' when corporate farming became quite common. The phrase 'corporate farming', however, fails to indicate the real issue, which has always been whether large-scale farming, corporate or otherwise, is increasing. The facts are: the medium-size farms are

[1] Tolan Transcript, part 10, p. 4073
[2] Y*ear Book of Agriculture* (1940). p. 532

decreasing in number; the extremely small farms are increasing in number; and the large-scale farms are increasing in number, size, and value of products produced. The 1940 census showed that, compared with 1930, medium-sized farms (from 20 to 175 acres) decreased by 8.8 per cent, while the percentage increase of farms of 1,000 acres and over was 24.7 per cent. The tiny subsistence farms, twenty acres or less, increased 41.3 per cent. The increase in the number of subsistence farms does not really represent an increase in 'farms', but an increase in rural residences. This is shown by the fact that the areas having the greatest increase in the number of farms of twenty acres or less were generally noted in industrial and mining sections where living on farms, due to improved transportation, could be combined with non-farm employment. The same report notes 'a general tendency towards consolidation of land into larger operating units throughout most of the nation, except New England and the Middle Atlantic States. . . .' In 1940 there were 100,531 farms of 1,000 acres and over compared with 80,620 such farms ten years ago; there were 5,471 farms of 10,000 acres and over compared with 4,033 such farms in 1930.

Mere increase in the size of farm holdings does not tell half the story. Concentration of control in farm operations may be effected by any number of devices: through leases, crop purchase agreements, multiple farm operations, and similar methods. Perhaps the most significant tendency in the direction of concentration of control in agriculture production is 'to be found in the case of the manufacturing or trading corporation which comes to engage in farming operations as a means of providing its own raw materials or the particular quality of farm products which its trade demands. Thus we find a canning company in New York raising 1,000 acres of its vegetables, a prominent rubber company securing its tyre cloth and belt fabric by growing 1,110 acres of Egyptian cotton in the Salt River Valley, a big marketing concern in Chicago cultivating 1,300 acres of Wisconsin potatoes, a Pittsburgh rival operating large cantaloupe fields in the Imperial Valley, and another owning a dozen orchards.' This tendency is most marked in highly industrialized produce areas. There are many methods by which integration of this type can be effected. Nor do these figures purport to measure the increasing discrepancy between the productive capacity of 'large-scale' farms (whatever their actual acreage) and 'small-scale' farms stated in terms of value of products produced. If we contrast the situation in 1929 with that obtaining in 1899, we find a marked increase in the proportion of total farm product coming from the largest farms; a decrease in the proportion coming from the poorest and smallest farms; and a corresponding decline in relative importance of smaller farms of all sizes. According to Dr. Carl T. Schmidt, half of our farmers in 1929 produced 89 per cent of the total commercial output of American agriculture. 'No doubt,' he says, 'these farmers could easily produce the remaining 11 per cent if prices offered them only a little encouragement. That is, the less productive half of our farms are not needed to feed and clothe the non-farm people—at least, on present levels of consumption.'

While large-scale production, however achieved or effected, is the real issue, nevertheless the 'large-scale factory farm' is making its appearance in many areas other than in Arizona and California where, in the past, most of the large-scale farms have been found.

Hazel Hendricks describes many such farms: Stokeley Brothers and Company, Inc., with 7,545 acres in Tennessee and 27 plants in Indiana, Delaware, Wisconsin, Tennessee, Washington, Florida, Texas, and California; the Applecrest Orchard of Hampton Falls, New Hampshire, largest apple producer of New England with its own packing plant, which last year produced more than 70,000 bushels of apples; Starkey Farms Company, owning asparagus acreage in Pennsylvania, New Jersey, Delaware, Maryland, and South Carolina; and the big Walker-Gordon dairy farm in New Jersey.[1]

4. 'THE VORTEX OF INDUSTRIALISM'

As a result of the widening gap between large production and small production, occasioned by the profound changes taking place in American agriculture, farmers are to-day divided into two sharply antagonistic groups: 'the upper strata of agriculture'—the phrase is that of Mr. Wheeler McMillen—and the lower strata; big producers and Master Farmers versus 'shiftless croppers, mean-spirited farmers, and dumb clods'. As a consequence, it is utterly unrealistic nowadays to refer to the 'farm group' or the 'farming class'. The 'upper half of the farm group not only dominates production, but controls the various marketing agreements, pro-rate programmes, and crop-control committees. Set up to administer various phases of the A.A.A. programme, these committees have been hailed as 'the rise of economic democracy on the farm'.[2] Having watched many of these committees function in California, I remain wholly unimpressed by their 'democracy'. In practically every county, they are stacked with representatives or 'stooges' of the big farming interests. That the same condition prevails in other areas is amply confirmed by Dr. Schmidt's testimony before the Tolan Committee.

Important changes have also occurred in the status, as well as in the relationships, of the different groups involved in agricultural production. The Industrial Commission on Agriculture in 1901 could find no evidence to warrant the 'conclusion that the class of farmers will ever give place to one of tenants, or that the soil is to be monopolized by the rich'. But in 1937 the President's Committee on Farm Tenancy reported that 'for the last fifty-five years, the entire period for which we have statistics on land tenure, there has been a continuous and marked increase in the proportion of tenants. Tenancy has increased from 25 per cent of all farms in 1880 to 42 per cent in 1935.' Owners, as a class, have not fared much better than tenants, for farm equities have declined catastrophically: from 62 per cent of the value of all farm real estate in 1880 to 39 per cent in 1935. At the bottom of the famous agricultural ladder are the farm labourers. What their present status is may be illustrated by sample annual earnings, per worker, for various crops as estimated by Mr. Carl C. Taylor in his testimony before the T.N.E.C.: tobacco, $188; grain crops, $206; truck crops (New Jersey), $265; corn (Illinois and Iowa), $308; sugar beets, $340.

For years a studied attempt has been made to rationalize this unmistakable evidence of distress as the 'farm problem', and to

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[1] *Atlantic Monthly,* October 1940.

[2] See *Achieving a Balanced Agriculture,* a bulletin issued by the Department of Agriculture, April 1940.

isolate, and narrowly define, its causes. To suggest that the farm problem might be merely one phase of the imperfect functioning of our economic system, has been to invite the wrath of the bureaucrats. The Populists in 1890, with all their noisy talk about Trusts and Wall Street and the Money Power, were closer to the reality of the farm problem than we seem to be to-day. To bribe farm unrest out of its militancy we paid more to farmers in 1939 than it took to run the federal government in 1916.[1] But despite all our efforts to protect the farmer against the competitive influences at work in modern society, he has been inextricably drawn into the 'vortex of industrialism'.

The profound changes which have occurred, in the last fifty years, in the economics of farm production have forced farmers to become business men. Formerly the farm was, to a considerable degree, a self-sufficient economic unit. Most of the farm family's food was produced on the premises; the family manufactured many articles required for domestic use or consumption. Barter, also, was an important prop to the maintenance of the family-sized farm. But a number of developments soon forced the farmer into the maws of a money economy and made havoc of the concept of 'farming as a way of life'. The staggering accumulation of farm debt made it imperative for farmers to concentrate on cash crops, to increase production, and to cut costs. Rents paid by farmers to non-farmers increased from $561,000,000 in 1910 to $829,000,000 in 1937; in 1909 farmers paid about $200,000,000 in interest on mortgage debt—in 1937 the amount had increased to $400,000,000.[2] The practice of barter declined with the rise in farm debt. Insurance companies are not interested in accepting wheat and pigs in payment of interest or principal. Concentration on a cash crop involved neglect of home-grown produce: the diversified farm tended to be replaced by the specialized one-crop farm, which geared the farmer to a capitalist economy. Production for use or for sale in the local market gave way to production for exchange on the world market. By 1929 products 'sold or traded' constituted 87 per cent of all farm products. As one farm industry after another was removed from the farm to the city, the dependence of the farmer upon a money income increased. To-day more than half the gross farm income in the United States is consumed in cash payments necessary to carry on farm production.[3] The spectacle of farmers buying butter, eggs, and bread in the nearest market illustrates the change that has taken place in farm production.

Even more striking are the changes that have taken place between farm and non-farm groups. In 1915 there were 503 companies engaged in the manufacture of tractors; by 1937, the number had been reduced to twenty-five.[4] Formerly there were scores of farm-machinery manufacturers; to-day there are eight 'full line' companies and about two hundred 'full line' and 'short line' companies. The business of manufacturing farm machinery, according to the T.N.E.C. reports, is a 'nearly perfect oligopoly'. Two firms dominate the industry, four firms have effective control

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[1] Speech of Dr. Ira Cross, University of California, 20 March 1940.

[2] *Agriculture in Modern Life* (1939), pp. 46, 50

[3] Anna Rochester, *Why Farmers arc Poor,* (1940), p. 79.

[4] Harry G. Davis, *The Cavalcade of Farm Mechanization* (Chicago, 13 January 1937).

of the output. The results of such a striking concentration of control are obvious. ' From 1929 to the spring of 1933, production of agricultural implements was reduced by 80 per cent, but the prices dropped by only 6 per cent. In contrast, agriculture reduced its production by 6 per cent, but its prices went down by 63 per cent.'[1] 'The singleness of purpose and of organization,' it has been said, 'that the farmers find in finance capital and its component parts stands in marked contrast to the millionfold atomization of the farmers.' Six million farms all in competition; two farm-machinery manufacturers working in perfect harmony. Farmers unable to control prices effectively; the oligopoly controlling its prices perfectly. It is not surprising to find, therefore, that the five largest farm-equipment companies 'cleared net profits of $46,000,000 in 1936'.[2] In 1939 the cost of farm machinery (depreciation and operating costs) amounted to about 21 per cent of farm cash income, compared with less than 7 per cent in 1913.[3]

Farmers have long been at a disadvantage in bargaining with non-farm groups. But in former years it was primarily the banks and the railroads which held the whip hand. Due to the industrialization of agriculture, other groups are now taking a large slice of the total farm income. These groups include farm machinery houses; manufacturers of automobiles and tractors and trucks; refiners of gasoline and oil; canners; packers; processors; power companies; shippers; terminal markets; chain stores; meat packers; manufacturers of fertilizer. , The relationship between the average grower of orchard or vegetable crops and the cannery with which he deals; between the average grower of sugar beets and the sugar-beet factory with which he deals —these and many similar relationships are different to-day than they were two decades ago. For the farmer, once drawn into the 'vortex of industrialism', must become as ruthless, as efficient, as powerful, as the concerns from whom he - buys or to which he sells, or his interests will be subordinated to their interests. The monopolistic structure of industry stimulates, therefore, big business in agriculture. It is likely to be paralleled by the rise of 'food' trusts in which the production and processing of food products are thoroughly integrated.

All of these changes, technological and otherwise, of the last fifty years have enormously increased actual and potential agricultural production. Between 1910 and 1930 output per worker in agriculture increased 41 per cent; from 1922 to 1926 production increased 27 per cent with crop acreages remaining almost unchanged. With crop acreages not expanding (or being reduced) and with the number of workers employed in agriculture constantly decreasing, production in the aggregate and productivity per worker have steadily increased. Fewer farms, fewer farmers, greater production.

5. THE GRAPES OF PROMISE

The industrial revolution in agriculture has already begun to be succeeded by the chemical revolution. Agriculture, chemistry, and industry, 'the new triumvirate', propose to convert the farms of

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[1] *Achieving a Balanced Agriculture,* p. 41.
[2] *Facts for Farmers,* August 1937.
[3] Testimony of Louis H. Bean before the T.N.E.C., April 1940.

America into 'great chemical manufacturing plants'. Formal recognition of the new trend occurred in May 1935, with the organization of the National Farm Chemurgic Council at a conference held at Dearborn, Michigan. The moving spirit in this enterprise was the late Francis P. Garvan. He it was who induced President Woodrow Wilson to confiscate the German patents during the last World War and turn the proceeds over to the Chemical Foundation. It was from funds donated by the Chemical Foundation, while Mr. Garvan was chairman, that the National Farm Chemurgic Council was formed. Since the formation of this Council, $150,000,000 has been invested in chemurgic enterprises in this country. At its prompting, the Agricultural Adjustment Act of 1938 contained provision for the establishment of four regional research laboratories to experiment in the development of new uses for agricultural products. At its prompting, also, Michigan State College recently received $500,000 from the Rackham Foundation for chemurgic research.

Dazzling, indeed, are the vistas which chemurgy opens before the hard-pressed American farmer. Agricultural products may be used to make anhydrous alcohol; they may be used in plastics. About 80,000,000 bushels of corn are now 'refined' to make such by-products as dextrine, syrup, and sugar; starch is made from sweet potatoes; soya-bean meal can be used to make upholstery for automobiles. Cotton stalks, cottonseed hulls, and even cotton burrs can be converted into important by-products. Over 90,000 pounds of a new oil were manufactured in 1939 from grapefruit seeds. Cotton, mixed with cement, makes an excellent shingle for roofing. Many new crops, such as soya-beans, sunflowers, and castor beans, have important industrial uses. The rapid development of new uses for agricultural products—particularly for by-products—has increased the proportion of numerous crops now sold to processing firms; it protects the price on the major product itself and lowers production costs. The canning and processing houses to-day waste nothing, not even peach pits and walnut shells. Fifteen important commercial uses have been developed for the powder manufactured from walnut shells, including hard and soft rubber compounds, roofing paper, abrasives, and linoleums.[1]

Many of our leading industrialists have been quick to recognize the importance of the farm chemurgic movement. The National Farm Chemurgic Council was formed at a meeting sponsored by the Ford Motor Company. The great chemical plants, the soap-manufacturing companies, the farm-machinery concerns, the paint and varnish industry, the powder-manufacturing companies, have all been deeply interested in chemurgy. The Ford Motor Company operates farms of its own and not only uses soya-bean oil in the manufacture of enamel, and as an oil in its foundries, but it uses soya-bean meal to make plastics. In the production of a million American automobiles, it is now estimated that the agricultural products from 500,000 acres are used. Even such a concern as Westinghouse Electric and Manufacturing Company is vitally interested in a large number of farm products, such as furfural made from oat hulls, molasses, alcohol, dextrin, and wheat flour for

[1] *San Francisco Examiner,* 27 March 1936.

making cores. It even purchases a considerable amount of hay and straw.

So excited has Mr. Louis J. Taber, Master of the National Grange, become over the farm chemurgic movement that he writes in one of the council's publications that it is time for American farmers to 'turn from *The Grapes of Wrath* with its hate and despair, to the Grapes of Promise (chemurgy) and the open door of opportunity'. The door which chemurgy opens, however, is a door for industry, not for agriculture. The new methods and processes of chemurgy, as Peter Drucker says, represent economic progress precisely because they project the industrial principles of specialization and the division of labour into farming.'They thereby raise the amount of capital needed for the attainment of a livelihood on the land beyond the reach of the independent family farm.' Whatever 'open door' the great industrial and chemical interests have in mind for American agriculture, it is most certainly not an open door for the millions of people now dependent upon agriculture for a livelihood. While chemical research does promise to revolutionize our concept of agriculture, we may be sure that the migrant farm families of to-day and to-morrow will not be the beneficiaries of the new dispensation. The chemurgic farm of the future will most likely be integrated with the particular chemical or industrial plant to which it feeds raw materials. 'The Grapes of Promise', on inspection, seem to bear a fatal resemblance to 'The Grapes of Wrath'.

CHAPTER XVI

NO PLACE IS HOME

1. CAST-OFF HUMANITY

As agricultural production steadily increased during the last fifty years, the proportion of our population engaged in agriculture steadily decreased: from 53 per cent in 1870 to 21 per cent in 1930. To-day the so-called normal requirements of farm production can be met with at least 1,600,000 fewer workers on farms than in 1929. It has, in fact, been recently estimated that 15 per cent of our population could produce all the farm products required by our economy.[1] While the fact of this displacement of farm families has been frequently pointed out, it has not been generally observed that technological displacement in agriculture has a somewhat different effect than in industry. The effect of the process is to create an absolute reduction of employment opportunities in agriculture. At the time of the enclosures in Great Britain, farm families were brutally driven from the land into the factories; but to-day they are driven from the land and cannot be absorbed in the factories. As a consequence they become migrants: either 'depression' migrants or 'habitual' migrants—that is, migratory workers.

To-day it is estimated that from one to two million men, women, and children move about the country seeking farm jobs.[2] Mr. Philip E. Ryan states that, from four distressed areas in the United States, we may anticipate in the next few years a mass exodus of from 4,000,000 to 6,000,000 farm people.[3] Vice-President Henry Wallace told the La Follette Committee, in May 1940, that more than 1,700,000 farm families have an average income of $500 a year, 'including as part of this income all they grew for themselves'. In other words, there are about 8,500,000 people (not families) in American agriculture trying to struggle along on an average income of about $2.00 a week each or $10 per family. According to Mr. Wallace, 'every one of these people is a potential recruit to the army of migrant agricultural labourers'.

The fact that some 1,600,000 workers have been, in effect, displaced in American agriculture during the last decade by no means adequately measures the disruptive effect of the processes described in the last chapter. Not only is an absolute reduction of the number of workers taking place, but the separation of landownership from land cultivation has been creating migrants for many years.

To-day it is generally recognized that the frontier in American history was never quite the 'safety valve' that, at one time, was imagined. It merely delayed, as Louis M. Hacker has pointed out, 'the proletarianization of the American agriculturist for a number of generations'.[4] It certainly did not prevent a development that was inherent the moment that capitalist production became actively operative in agriculture. In this sense, as I have pointed out in previous chapters, the frontier was somewhat of an illusion from the

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[1] *New Republic,* 6 December 1940.
[2] Paul S. Taylor, *Adrift on the Land,* 1940.
[3] *Migration and Social Welfare*
[4] *The Triumph of American Capitalism* (1940), p. 203.

beginning. The almost immediate appearance of tenantry in frontier communities was, in itself, striking evidence that the 'safety valve' | somehow was not functioning. The truth of the matter is, as Mr. Hacker has said, that 'self-sufficing agriculture in the West was a brief and transitory phase in the American economy: the western settlers were caught in the tangled relations of the cash nexus quite from the very beginning.'

It is not surprising, therefore, to note that, since 1870, there has been a steady migration of farm families to urban areas. While migration from farms was continuous throughout the period, it was greatly accelerated during the decade from 1920 to 1930 when some 1,940,000 men, women, and children were *annually* driven from the farms to the cities. It is true that there was a contrary movement of smaller proportions during these same years, with some 1,300,000 persons *annually* seeking to find, on the land, the security that they could not find in the cities even during the heyday of prosperity. Because of the insecurity in both city and farm in the crisis years, 1929 to 1933, the number leaving and returning to the country was about equal. Nevertheless from 1920 to 1930 there was a net farm migration to urban centres of about 6,000,000 people. This fact, in itself, was striking evidence of marked instability of population in agriculture.

The passage of the exclusionary immigration law of 1924 had a tendency to speed up rural migration as farm workers took the place of foreign immigrants in our factories, mines, and mills. From 1914 to date, our cities have maintained or increased their population levels, not through foreign immigration, but by internal migration: the migrant has replaced the immigrant; the farmer has become a worker. The same trend towards the proletarianization of the rural population is now, of course, also noted in agriculture itself. Either in the town or in the country the displaced farmer, or his son, is usually re-employed, not as an independent owner, but as a paid employee. The net result in either case is loss of economic independence and status.

The processes by which farmers have been drawn into the 'vortex of industrialism', moreover, intensify already existing population pressures; they aggravate basic maladjustments in our economy. With declining employment opportunities in agriculture and with agricultural income down to only 9 per cent of the total national income, the rate of population growth among farm families has been strikingly higher than among urban families. The ratio of children to women in the white farm population is 62 per cent in excess of that necessary to maintain present rural population levels. When urban-ward migration slackened during the depression, population 'backed up' in the most poverty-stricken rural areas in America. About 1,167,000 youths, between the ages of fifteen and twenty-five, are now on American farms who would not be there to-day if industrial and economic opportunities in cities had been as inviting as they were between 1920 and 1930. To-day the poorest land areas have the highest birth-rates and the lowest levels of living. At the same time, farm population in the more productive areas increased only slightly or declined. The best farming areas have the lowest farm birth rates. The lack of urban employment opportunities, however, is only partially responsible for the accumulation of surplus rural population in distressed areas. The

economic forces which are raising the technical level of agricultural production, by driving towards increased mechanization and capital investment, also drive untold thousands of farm families from the good-land into the poor-land areas, where they intensify, by their presence there, the already distressed character of such communities.

From 1929 to date an increasing proportion of this so-called surplus farm population—this 'cast-off humanity'—instead of moving to cities, has joined the procession of agricultural migrants. There has been, in fact, no other alternative than to seek farms 'somewhere else' or to join in the mad scramble for the relatively few jobs available as migratory agricultural workers. 'The stationary life of our agricultural economy,' as one observer has said, 'has definitely given way to the mobile industrial system.' There is reason to believe, moreover, that agricultural migration will increase throughout the next decade. Witnesses told the Tolan Committee that approximately '400,000 farm labourers will soon be moving across the country to become our citizens at large'.[1] In fact, the portion of the farm population between the ages of fifteen and sixty-five will probably increase 23 per cent by 1960; hence 'the problem of unemployment in the farm population will grow steadily worse, because of the ever-increasing percentage of farm population in the working age groups.'[2] This impression is strongly confirmed by an examination of the 'levels of living' now prevailing in farm communities. In the 'prosperous year', 1939, 1,681,667 farmers, who numbered, with their families, 7,700,000 people, were dependent on an income of $25 per month per family. More than a million of these families were on relief in 1935. To-day our farm programme has not reached these families, nor is it likely ever to reach them. They are 'cast-off humanity'—the 'waste' of the social organism. Agricultural Adjustment payments have gone quite generally to farmers in commercial farming areas in which relatively few of these people are living. Surveying the calamitous effects of agricultural unemployment (and under-employment), Mr. Thomas C. McCormick has written that rural families on relief : are primarily the victims of 'a vast, unplanned economic structure and its latest "fault"'.[3]

2. THE SAFETY VALVE IS STUCK

The reduction in the rate of urbanward migration after 1929 has resulted in some curious theories of migration. To-day we are told, with increasing emphasis, that migration is a result of the 'imbalance between population and resources' and that a steady flow of population must be kept moving towards cities if overcrowding of the land is to be avoided. Remove the barriers to migration, it is said, and an automatic adjustment will be effected. Migrants have been likened to frontiersmen, to pioneers, to the builders of America. The only difficulty that results from migration, we are told, is that it is usually misguided or undirected. But the best employment service in the world cannot place people in jobs if no jobs are available.

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[1] Tolan Transcript, part 2, p. 678.
[2] Testimony of Mr. Carl C. Taylor before the La Follette Committee.
[3] *Rural Sociology,* December 1936.

Does outgoing farm migration, from particular rural areas, under the present organization of society, actually relieve the pressure of population upon resources? Does it solve *any* problem either in the'distressed' area or in the 'area of greater opportunity'? In the Great Plains area, from which there has been heavy emigration, the Farm Security Administration notes that 'some of the migrants were immediately replaced by families coming from towns and cities or by young people who were entering farming'. In most distressed rural areas, one farm family will occupy a farm as soon as it is abandoned by a family that has migrated. The net adjustment effected by migration is, therefore, almost wholly negligible. In other distressed rural areas, migration, instead of solving the problems of the community, only intensifies them. A sharp loss of population will, for example, bring down the entire social and political structure of such communities. They find themselves with too many schools, too many roads, too many counties; and, in an effort to bring about a new equilibrium, consolidation of farms is effected so rapidly that still further families are uprooted. In many problem areas, emigration has not even reduced the high fertility rates prevailing; the rural population has continued to increase—the pressures have remained almost constant. Theoretically it has been estimated that 9,000,000 rural people should migrate from the Southern states; 450,000 of the existing farm population of Arkansas, for example, 'should move elsewhere'.[1] The emigration from these areas has been so slight, however, in relation to the amount needed that the relation of population to resources remains virtually unchanged.

A still more cogent objection to the theory of migration as an automatic safety valve is that the 'net displacement of migrant families bears only a partial similarity to the ideal pattern of migration that the Study of Population Redistribution has constructed'. Noting that population tends to migrate from areas of high birth-rates to areas of low birth-rates, from areas of restricted to areas of expanding economic opportunity, theorists have been tempted to conclude that migration is desirable *per se.* But unfortunately for the theory, migrants, particularly rural migrants, are likely to move in the wrong direction. The same forces that expel them from the land make it impossible for them to relocate themselves on desirable land.

Not only are rural migrants likely to move in the wrong direction, but they are apt to move at the wrong time. Migration from farms to cities, which is accelerated during periods of prosperity, 'transfers wealth to the cities, and during periods of depression it transfers poverty and dependency to the farming areas'. If the migration of farm families to the cities continues, it will only result in the transfer of still more rural wealth to urban areas and in a further retrogression of rural life. 'More land will pass from the ownership of farmers and eventually more than half of the entire agricultural income will be diverted to the cities. Reluctance to incur expenditures for rural schools and churches may be expected of many urban landowners; reluctance also to engage in efforts to retard erosion of the soil and depletion of natural resources.'

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[1] Tolan Transcript, part 5, p. 2002.

Along the line of march and at the point of destination, rural migrants create new problems. Migration to the Pacific Coast, as I have demonstrated, burdened relief rolls, depressed wage rates, created problems of housing and sanitation, complicated the tasks of school authorities, necessitated increased taxation for police and fire protection, and caused intense friction between migrants and residents. Instead of bringing about a better balance in the lopsided agricultural economy of California, migration only cemented the undemocratic relationships involved in large-scale industrialized agriculture. Far from becoming small farmers in the rich valleys of California, migrants became farm labourers and displaced thousands of Mexican field workers. Every phase of the farm-labour problem in California has been aggravated by the dust-bowl migration. It certainly cannot be said that migration has 'solved' any problem in California.

Furthermore, are some of these problem areas really lacking in opportunities? In resources? Oklahoma, a state of heavy rural emigration, is rich in resources: undeveloped or misused, or monopolized. The same can be said of Arkansas, of Georgia, of many other states having distressed rural areas, while a state such as Texas, far from being poor, is amazingly rich in resources. What is needed in these areas is, therefore, not an abstract adjustment between people and resources, but an adjustment between various social groups in their relation towards already existing resources. When we had new land frontiers and an expanding economy, migration did result in a temporary adjustment of population to resources. Even then, however, the adjustment was frequently lacking in stability and seldom entirely satisfactory—as witness the unwholesome spectacle of new -and frontiers being converted into rural slums in a decade.

To-day the operation of the same economic forces which have narrowed the range of both urban and rural opportunities for the dispossessed also tends to interfere with the process of migration. Migration, in other words, is no longer a 'free process'. It takes place to-day under strikingly different circumstances from those which prevailed a quarter of a century ago. Even a hundred years ago, the available Western lands were not wholly free; the dispossessed did not pull themselves up by their own bootstraps simply by emigration. Mr Hacker has estimated, for example, that in the 1840's the typical pioneer family intent upon engagement in commercial agriculture required from $1,000 to $1,500 before it could be considered 'secure' in its new surroundings. Although transportation costs are much less to-day, the expense involved in resettlement is much greater and the dependence upon money infinitely more important. Even on lands located in reclamation districts in the West, families nowadays need, perhaps, $5,000 to get a start as farmers.

Agricultural economists tell us that we have 'too many farmers'; but, by the same token, we have 'too many industrial workers'. Farmers, we are told, must move from the land; yet, during periods of depression, we are told by these same economists that workers must 'go back to the land'. Because we have always migrated in the past, we have become victims of our own folklore. It is, of course, the old 'safety-valve' theory of the frontier; but it is no longer of much practical value. It is for this reason that theories of migration

have become popular escape mechanisms for economists who do not relish the necessity of having to face facts, and that almost every discussion of the migrant problem becomes highly confused. We have too many farmers; therefore, farm families must move to cities. But there is no prospect of industrial employment providing jobs for the desired number of migrants. So, the argument usually ends, we must expand industrial production. No-one, however, suggests how the necessary industrial expansion is to be effected. For the 'cast-off' farm family has its counterpart in the 'cast-off' families of our industrial centres. Both are victims of technological unemployment; of the processes inherent in capitalist production. The adjustment that is needed, therefore, is not an abstract adjustment—an arithmetical calculation on paper, a moving of darts on maps—between population and resources, but an adjustment in the relationships that exist between people and the means of production. The real 'imbalance' is in the system of production itself, not outside that system in the general domain of population and resources.

3. ALIEN AMERICANS

Not only is the effectiveness of migration limited by the increased difficulties of resettlement under present-day conditions, but, through a system of obsolete settlement laws, migrants are kept constantly on the move and find it almost impossible, if they are destitute, to stay long in any one place. Settlement laws have a twofold legal purpose: to establish conditions of eligibility for assistance; and to fix responsibility for public assistance upon the locality in which there has been compliance with eligibility requirements. Our settlement laws date from the Ordinances of Labourers enacted in England in 1349. Their original purpose was to immobilize labour and to prevent the migration of skilled workers after the Black Plague. At a later date, in 1662, the English Settlement Law was enacted which turned the theory of the Ordinance of Labourers to an entirely different purpose, namely, not to maintain the poor, but to get rid of them.[1] What has been said of the effect of these settlement laws in Great Britain is equally pertinent to-day:'Scores of thousands of poor folk were taken into custody annually and transported from one part of the kingdom to another, unless they could put up sufficient security to ensure their not becoming public charges. The custom of "passing on" or of removing persons without authorization from one parish to another was commonly practised, the sick, the insane, and penniless often being dropped in the next town in the middle of the night. There were thousands of law-suits between the parishes and millions of pounds were spent for litigation and removals.' There is not a single statement in the foregoing quotation which cannot be abundantly illustrated by case histories presented to the Tolan Committee.[2]

Settlement laws, patterned largely on these early British statutes, were on the statute books of forty-three states and the District of Columbia on the 1st of January 1936. At the present

[1] See Harry M. Hirsch, *Our Settlement Laws,* p. 6; also *Social Forces,* May 1938, for a history of these statutes.

[2] See, for example, Tolan Transcript, part 5, pp. 1377 to 1384; part 3, p. 850; part 1, p. 327.

time, there is an almost complete lack of uniformity in these statutes. Under most of them, residence must be continuous, with intent to reside permanently, and without acceptance of public funds, for a period which may vary from six months to five years. Residence can be lost by absence from the state for six months or three years. Similar provisions determine a person's eligibility for medical care and institutional treatment. To appreciate the horrifying senselessness, the sheer barbarousness, of these laws, it is important to remember that they apply not only between states, but between counties in the same state, and between townships in the same county. Responsibility for the care of the destitute rests in Illinois, for example, upon 1,454 townships. In July 1939 the poor law of the state was amended to provide that applicants for relief must have resided continuously for three years in the particular *township* in which they applied for aid. Several states have two sets of settlement laws; some specify one type of residence in order to make a person eligible for relief from a particular fund, another type of residence for relief from still another fund. Settlement, moreover, is a matter of status; not a vested right. Hence, even once acquired, it can be taken from a person arbitrarily and retroactively.

Our settlement laws have always been unworkable; but with the great increase in migration since the depression they have become intolerable. States compete nowadays to see which can enact the toughest settlement laws; as one state raises its residence requirements, other states do likewise. The result of these laws has been the creation of a special category of distress, the 'federal homeless': residents of the United States, citizens of the United States, but without settlement in any particular state. Settlement, under these laws, is not synonymous with legal residence. Hence a person may be a citizen and a voter in Illinois and still be ineligible for any type of public assistance. Thousands of migrant American citizens are, each year, shipped from one state to another, like so many convicts, in the process of being removed to the state of their legal settlement. States exchange migrants as belligerents exchange prisoners of war. Migrants are 'warned out' of particular communities, like lepers, and are 'moved on' from one township to the next, from one county to another, from state to state. In the files of the Tolan Transcript, for example, will be found the records of a case in which an American farm family was shipped back and forth from South Dakota to North Dakota, with each state denying responsibility for their welfare, four times in slightly less than a month. The family was finally stranded on a railroad track which constituted the border line between the two states.

During the period from the 12th of May 1933 to the 20th of September 1935, a semblance of decent treatment of migrants was achieved under the Federal Transient Service. But with the abrupt termination of the service, chaos once more prevailed. Both before and after the Federal Transient Service, states and localities endeavoured through harsh settlement laws, border patrols, promiscuous arrests under vagrancy statutes, and by many other devices, to build up barriers against the migrant. This tendency is even more marked to-day than it was in 1935. No-one has ever dared to estimate how much administrative agencies spend annually in interviewing migrants and attempting, by correspondence, to verify their place of residence. I have seen files on particular

migrant families which resembled a dossier on the Dreyfus case. Not only is the administrative expense fantastic (and the actual transportation costs, even at the cut rates allowed by the railroads, considerable) but the delay is often protracted and the inconvenience almost unbelievable.

To-day it is frequently charged that migrants move from state to state in order to get larger relief payments. The truth of the matter is, as a witness told the Tolan Committee, 'when you leave home, you do not get relief'. One or two states (New York is an example) provide care for transients. Most states will give some temporary assistance, but usually only while they are attempting to verify residence elsewhere. If residence can be verified, the migrant must agree to return to the state of residence or further aid will be denied. There are court decisions upholding the right of a state to 'deport' a transient, whether he agrees to the procedure or not.[1] Generally speaking, transients (or those who lack settlement) are not eligible for relief; and, as Mr. Nels Anderson has said, they are commonly excluded from the W.P.A., and other federal work programmes, because the amount of money available is never sufficient to meet the requirements of unemployed residents, let alone transients.[2] The Farm Security Administration, in some states, does give a measure of assistance to non-resident agricultural migrants. But, with this exception, migrants are generally 'outlaws' or 'aliens' so far as our welfare programmes are concerned. Living outside the pale of our economic order, they are also outside the pale of our welfare programmes. Yet they stand in greater need of public assistance than any other group. Settlement laws represent an attempt to Balkanize the nation; to divide it up into a number of migrant-proof communities. But, in actual effect, the settlement laws stimulate migration. Since the migrant stranded in a 'foreign' state cannot get relief, he must move on; he has no other alternative. And if he does not move voluntarily, he is likely to be moved forcibly. 'Every parish,' noted the *Annals of Agriculture* in 1808, 'regards the poor of all other places as aliens.' There are literally hundreds of thousands of 'alien' American citizens to-day who are kept constantly on the move by idiotic settlement laws which, three hundred years ago, produced precisely the same social effects. When people talk of migration as a beneficent and necessary 'social process', working towards a natural adjustment of population and resources, they might well pause a moment in their theorizing to reflect that, under our settlement laws, migrancy tends to become chronic.

4. DEFENCE AND MIGRATION

No sooner had the hard-working staff of the Tolan Committee, headed by Dr. Robert K. Lamb, submitted the preliminary report of the committee to Congress, than the migrant problem suddenly took on an entirely new aspect. Beginning in the late summer of 1940, workers were found flocking to national defence projects from every quarter of the nation. Congress was quick to recognize the perils involved and, on the 26th of February 1941, extended the Tolan Committee until the 1st of January 1943. At the same time

[1] *See New York Times,* 25 July, 1940; *Harvard Law Review,* April 1940.
[2] Men on the Move, p. 333.

the name of the committee was changed from Select Committee To Investigate the Interstate Migration of Destitute Citizens to Select Committee Investigating National Defence Migration.

The national defence programme has greatly stimulated the migration of agricultural families. Approximately 73 per cent of the defence funds will be spent in industrial centres where only 19 per cent of the W. P. A. employment is located. Agricultural workers, as a consequence, are migrating to industrial centres on a scale that dwarfs all prior experience. Over 5,000,000 migrants, more than twice the number needed, are being attracted to defence areas and military communities. In the trailer camps that have sprung up around Vallejo, California, near the Mare Island Navy Yard, I have seen migrants newly arrived from Florida, Georgia, Texas, Oklahoma, Missouri, and Arkansas. A news story from El Paso, under date of the 9th of April 1941, tells of the 'Okies of 41' flocking to Fort Bliss in search of jobs. The Salvation Army in El Paso receives, on an average, requests for assistance from 400 men and 50 families a month.'They travel in broken-down automobiles and sleep in their cars. Sometimes a family of six or more travels in a single jalopy.' Stranded in El Paso without jobs, they besiege the Salvation Army headquarters for gasoline to get back to their homes. 'Defence Grapes of Wrath' is the lead line on a Pearson and Allen column of the 20th of February 1941. 'Over 3,000,000 destitutes, mainly from rural sections,' they announce, 'have hit the road in the last six months looking for defence jobs.' The unemployment crisis is so acute in the Texas towns where cantonment construction is under way that migrants assemble each day in 'bull pens' in search of work orders. A bull pen in Brownwood, Texas, averages from 500 to 1,000 jobless a day. From all over the country similar reports have appeared. With millions of people held to the land by only the most tenuous ties, it is not surprising that the defence programme has set them in motion in all directions.

The national defence programme, moreover, is not merely serving as a magnet to draw workers from agricultural areas, it is directly uprooting thousands of farm families. Overnight the government has purchased thousands of acres of farm land—in Iowa, Missouri, Indiana, Ohio, Illinois, and Georgia—and has notified farm families that they must move. In some cases, farm families, residing on the land, have been given two weeks' notice to vacate. Invariably the 'new dispossessed' are never the persons who receive compensation for the land purchased. They are not the owners; they are merely the occupants. The Farm Security Administration has already announced that it must now assist 8,000 dispossessed farm families to find 'new locations' on American land.

The problem is seriously complicated by reason of the fact that many defence projects are located in the south-east portion of the United States in areas from which the heaviest emigration of rural population has been expected.[1] Mr. Lowell Clucas, in the *Saturday Evening Post* of the 15th of March 1941, has told of the manner by which, in a few weeks' time, Bradford County, Florida, was changed from a 'strawberry' centre into a roaring national defence boom town. 'Rude camps,' he writes, 'sprang up along the narrow, jammed

[1] See 'Defence Invades the South-east,' *Social Work To-day,* March 1941.

highway between the camp and town, camps where there were no sanitary facilities and life was dusty by day and cold by night. ... Migratory workers came from Georgia and the Carolinas. They parked their ancient cars in the woods off the highway and lived in trucks with crude home-made bodies, in hand-made trailers, lean-tos, tarpaulin shelters, cardboard-box huts and brush piles hollowed out for sleeping.' Similar reports have come from California, Maine, Virginia, Indiana, Louisiana, Texas, and other states. All of the social problems occasioned by the use of migratory labour—health, education, housing, demoralization of the labour market, and the other problems which I have emphasized throughout this book—have been intensified by the national defence programme. There is not a single phase of the problem, however, which has not been strikingly apparent for the last twenty-five years wherever migratory labour has been used.

Under the stimulus of the national defence programme, the labour market in the United States is rapidly becoming integrated on a national basis. Local government is premised upon the assumption of a stable resident population; it cannot possibly cope with the problems created by large groups of migratory workers who bounce across the nation like billiard balls on a table. To meet these problems, the national government must concern itself with many matters, such as health and education, formerly reserved to the states and the counties.

The social implications are no less significant. Workers isolated in various regions have, in the past, been noticeably influenced and conditioned by local *mores.* To-day thousands of rural families are moving out of their local rabbit warrens, where they have lived for generations, and are mingling with workers in California, in Texas, in Florida, in Illinois. This is certain to bring about important changes in sentiment, in attitude, in thought. Workers who have been given their first taste of real employment in nearly a decade are not going to return to destitution and unemployment when the emergency is over. In the meantime, the national defence programme cannot be expected to provide full employment for those agricultural migrants already on the road. Contrary to some impressions, expressed and implied, the defence programmes do not promise to relieve all of the pressure upon opportunity in rural areas by drawing people into non-agricultural pursuits. And what happens after the defence programme begins to abate is a problem that no-one even dares to think about at present. Regardless of what the outcome may be, it is seriously to be doubted that these millions now on the march will settle back, stoically and placidly, into the dead-end communities of rural America once the emergency is over.

Already a chain of circumstances has been set in motion the ultimate consequences of which cannot possibly be foreseen. As the national pool of surplus labour is enlarged by recruits from agricultural areas, the free labour market, as we have known it in the past, tends to break down. Theoretically it becomes possible to organize this market on a more efficient basis. If workers can be shifted from Oklahoma to California, and from California to Oklahoma—from agriculture to industry and from industry to agriculture—as necessity for their employment arises, then the responsibility now shared to some extent between the local community and industry for their maintenance in the off seasons of

production can be eliminated or minimized. It is towards some such goal, in fact, that migration is now tending. But this goal cannot be achieved if migration is to remain 'free'—that is, uncontrolled. Already California agricultural interests are bemoaning the fact that agricultural workers are deserting the fields for national defence areas. Already Arizona cotton growers have opened negotiations with the Immigration and Naturalization Service to permit, once again, the importation of Mexican contract labour for the 'duration of the emergency'.[1]

To-day we are witnessing the beginnings of a process which, if permitted to proceed unchecked, is likely to break down the free labour market in this country. Every worker in Germany must carry a Work Book; to-day it is being suggested that we adopt the same procedure. Employment is monopolized in Germany by the employment service; the same suggestion has been repeatedly made in this country. It is also suggested that all migrant labour be fingerprinted[2] and registered as one means of controlling its movement. It is suggested that we adopt a system of universal registration and a system of domestic passports as still additional means of controlling migration. By threatening workers with termination of relief, we, in effect, force them into certain types of employment. In a highly complex industrial society, the mass movement of thousands of workers inevitably becomes a matter of grave national concern. When migration ceases to effect, as it does in modern society, the adjustments that it once accomplished, it reaches such proportions and creates such aggravated social problems that it leads directly to regimentation and control. With the problem seemingly insoluble within the existing framework of society, demands for control multiply as the problem becomes increasingly acute. As production tends to become monopolized, a free labour market becomes anachronistic. It must be controlled and integrated as production is controlled and integrated.

The major objection, therefore, to migration in a society such as ours is that it leads, sooner or later, to the elimination of the free labour market. It not only threatens to undermine many of our existing social and political institutions, but the controls likely to be imposed would strike at fundamental rights and privileges of American citizens. Freedom to move is perhaps the most basic of human liberties. It is the very antithesis of bondage or slavery. The problem, therefore, arises: can this essential freedom be preserved merely through legislation primarily aimed at facilitating migration, or does its preservation raise issues of a more fundamental character which involve the functioning of our present economic and industrial order?

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[1] *Arizona Daily Star,* Tucson, 5 August 1941.

[2] *Social Forces,* October 1940; see also *New York Times,* 26 July 1940.

CHAPTER XVII

FROM TALK TO ACTION

Most of the proposals outlined in this chapter have been culled from the hundreds of recommendations made to the La Follette and Tolan Committees. I have not taken the trouble to indicate the authorship of the various proposals; suffice it to say that I have merely tried to outline a few of the measures proposed by the experts who testified before the two committees which seem to offer the most promise and concerning which there was the largest measure of agreement among the various witnesses.

1. SIX MILLION PEASANTS

It has only been within the last few years that we have even begun to learn a little about where and how the farm worker lives. But today we do know that the problem of farm labour is not confined to a few commercial truck and fruit-growing areas; that it is nation-wide in scope and that it has ramifications reaching into every aspect of our national economy. The census of 1930 indicated the existence of 2,727,035 wage workers in the total working population on American farms, 1,545,233 unpaid family workers, and 776,278 sharecroppers. Most of the sharecroppers should be regarded as farm labourers; many tenants, for that matter, might well be regarded as farm labourers. Counting sharecroppers, there are about 1,500,000 farm-labour *households* in the United States. It has been estimated that there are 6,000,000 members of farm labourers' families. Wage workers, as such, constitute 26 per cent of the total working farm population. In particular states they constitute a much higher percentage: 57.2 per cent in California; 53.9 per cent in Arizona; and 46.9 per cent in Florida. Not only is the farm-labour group important numerically, but it has a peculiar social importance in our scheme of things. The birth-rate among farm-labourer groups is the highest of any occupational class in the nation; it is, for example, 30 per cent higher than among farm-operator households. Farm labourers are younger, as a group, than farm operators. As a group, therefore, they have, as Professor Horace Hamilton has said, 'an economic and social responsibility heavier than that of any other class of parents in America'.[1]

There are four main types of farm labourers: the typical hired man; groups of wage workers; women and children; and migratory farm workers. The typical hired man, or year-round farm employee, is mainly to be found in the production of corn and livestock, wheat and the small grain crops, and in the dairy industry. He does not constitute a major problem. The second group represents large numbers of wage workers employed on farms hiring two, three, or more labourers. In July of 1935, 184,000 farms (those employing three or more labourers) were employing 1,156,000 hired workers, or about 43 per cent of the total number of hired workers. Only two-fifths of the farms of the nation reported an expenditure for labour in 1929. Women and children make up a large percentage of the unpaid labour group. In 1930 there were 171,000 women reported as working for wages on farms; and 469,497 children between the

[1] Supplemental Hearings, La Follette Committee, part 1, p. 201

ages of ten and sixteen years. The employment of these children was primarily on large-scale rather than upon individually owned and operated farms.[1] No-one knows the number of migratory agricultural workers. The F.S.A., in a release of the 11th of May 1940 estimates that there are at least 500,000 migratory workers in agriculture and that, when their families are counted, they number in excess of 1,500,000 people. There is every reason to believe that this estimate is conservative.

If regular hired hands are excepted, this group to-day is the most thoroughly under-privileged group in American life. We know that about 50 per cent of all agricultural labour is seasonally employed; that agricultural labour has few, if any, opportunities to accept other types of employment; that it has little non-agricultural income; and that, even in 1929, farm workers 'earned far too little to meet the costs of any accepted American standard of living'.[2] According to a survey in ten counties in eight states in different sections of the country, the average annual earnings of farm labourers ranged between $125 and $347 for the crop year 1935-6. We know that in the Southern states the net cash earnings of hired workers, whether sharecroppers or wage hands, only occasionally exceed $100 per worker per year, and that even when goods for home use and perquisites are added the total annual net income per workers seldom exceeds $I50.[3] We know that the agricultural worker has an average employment period for only about 40 per cent or 60 per cent of the year. We know that if farm wage rates were considered on an annual, rather than a. seasonal, basis, they would still be, in the North-east, 70 per cent; in the Western states, 60 per cent; in the North Central states, 60 per cent; and in the South 50 per cent of the average factory wage rate.[4] We know, as Carl C. Taylor has said, that many farm labourers 'cannot, or do not, even send their children to school. They do not know the stability and security of being a real, integral part of a community, and therefore enjoy almost no social participation of any kind. They are a socially isolated, sometimes shifting, sometimes stagnant group, without anchor, without keel, and without direction.' Many of them are homeless, jobless, and voteless. They live in the worst housing in America. We know that few farm labourers own subsistence livestock, such as cows, pigs, or chickens; and that few of them have a chance to grow garden produce. Yet many of them work in the most productive farming areas in America. We know, also, 'that the prospect of eventual land ownership is scarcely within the realm of possibility' for the vast majority of these workers.[5] And this is the worst phase of the entire problem, for, as Carlyle once said, 'It is not to die or even to die of hunger that makes a man wretched. Many men have died. But it is to live miserably and know not why, to work more and yet gain nothing, to be heartworn, weary, yet isolated and unrelated.'

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[1] Supplemental Hearings, La Follette Committee, part 3, p. 790.

[2] J. C. Folsom and O. E. Baker, *A Graphic Summary of Farm Labour and Population,* 1937

[3] Supplemental Hearings, La Follette Committee, part 2, p. 469

[4] *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science,* November 1936.

[5] *Social Research Report* No. 8, Department of Agriculture, April 1938, p. 19.

The agricultural worker is a pariah, a social outcast. He not only lacks the protection of social legislation, but in the matter of public assistance, of social services, of institutional aid, of vocational guidance, he is either ignored or discriminated against. He goes round and round, like a dog chasing its tail, unable to break through the set of vicious circumstances to which he has been born.

2. LABOUR STANDARDS IN AGRICULTURE

The first thing to do, therefore, to aid this group is to remove the disabilities under which they now suffer. While some qualifycations might be noted for absolute accuracy, nevertheless it can be said generally that agricultural labour has no legislative protection at present in this country. Historically several reasons were urged to establish the precedent for exempting agriculture from social legislation. It was said that agricultural labour did not need this protection; that the industrial revolution had not arrived in agriculture; that farmers were subject to special hazards, such as weather conditions, which made them a legitimate object of legislative favouritism. But the 'real reasons for the exemption of farm labourers', as Professor Willard C. Fisher pointed out in 1917, 'are political, nothing else. Farm labourers are not organized into unions, nor have they other means of bringing their wishes to the attention of legislators.' Most of our social legislation, in fact, has been enacted as the result of a political 'deal' between organized labour and the farm groups. The basis of this deal has always been: we, the farm representatives, will not object to this legislation, if you, the representatives of organized labour, will agree to exempt agricultural employees.

To-day it has become imperative for us to establish some fair labour standards in agricultural employment. Consider, for example, the matter of workmen's compensation insurance. Only four states treat agricultural employment the same as non-agricultural employment so far as compensation for industrial injuries is concerned. Yet what are the industrial facts? As early as 1911 Mr. Don Lescohier pointed out that the substitution of power machinery for hand labour had made agriculture a hazardous industry. 'Much of the machinery used,' he wrote, 'is far more dangerous than that used in most factories, for sufficient attention has not been paid to guarding it.'[1] Occupational deaths in agriculture were estimated at 4,300 in 1939—over one-fourth of the total fatalities for all industries. In 1936, 6,100 agricultural workers received permanent disabilities and 253,000 were temporarily disabled.

Due to the absence of labour standards, many of our farms are nothing but sweatshops. Children formed 10.7 per cent and women 14.7 per cent of all farm labourers, paid and unpaid, in 1930. Twenty-three states excluded agricultural labour from existing child-labour statutes; only three states have legislation specifically relating to the employment of children in agriculture. Few states even make a pretence of regulating the hours of employment for women and children in agriculture. Farm labour should no longer be idealized; to-day it is monotonous drudgery. Two or three

[1] *Survey,* 7 October, 1911.

generations ago it could be said that a child received an education by working on a farm; the same cannot be said to-day.

With a mounting surplus of workers, wage rates in agriculture have reached the point where, even in the economic sense, outright exploitation occurs (that is, where wages lower than marginal productivity are paid). While wage rates in agriculture do fall and rise in relation to agricultural income, they nevertheless always lag behind. When agricultural income goes up, farm wages increase, 'but not quite as much'. Farm wage income has consistently failed to keep pace with the recovery in farm income and in total national income. Nor can the pressure of surplus farm labour on wages be lifted as long as industrial unemployment continues in large volume. Even if we could greatly increase the rate of industrial recovery it would not measurably yield any real increase in the living standards of farm workers. Here is one of the most compelling arguments for govern mental intervention for the purpose of establishing modern labour standards in agricultural employment.

Agricultural workers will organize if they are given a chance to organize. Modern agricultural workers,'employed in a simple monotonous task, receiving low wages, living together not merely for a season but often for the whole year, sharply differentiated from other workers, tend to feel that they have a commonality of interest not only among themselves but against the absentee farmer or his ever-present superintendent.'[1] Many barriers stand in the way of effective organization: lack of experienced leadership; mobility in employment; the surplus of agricultural labour; and other factors. But none of these difficulties would be important if it were our policy to aid and encourage the organization of agricultural workers. Remove the disability, give agricultural labour the same right of self-organization that workers now enjoy under the National Labour Relations Act, and effective organization will soon result. Trade-union organization would be one of the most effective means of coping with the problem of a surplus of workers in agriculture. Waterfront employment, like farm employment, is casual. Yet waterfront unions have rationalized employment practices to a great extent in the last decade. Agricultural workers must be organized so that they can demand and receive the same protection, no less and no greater, than is given other workers.

Not only should agricultural labour be brought within the protection of existing social legislation, but several special types of legislative protection should be afforded farm workers. Thirteen states have some type of regulation governing private labour camps. Every state should have legislation of this type which might well be modelled upon the Labour Camp Act of California. Since perquisities often constitute a portion of the agricultural wage, these perquisites should meet certain minimum requirements. Because the application of the principles of collective bargaining is new in agriculture, special legislative machinery should be devised to facilitate the application of these principles. Since the extension of the wage-and-hours legislation would reach only a portion of agricultural workers (those engaged in interstate commerce), state wage-rate boards should be created. The function of wage-rate

[1] Sydney C. Sufrin, 'Labour Organization in Agricultural America', *American Journal of Sociology,* January 1938.

determination and mediation might well be combined in the same agency. England has had a most satisfactory experience with legislation of this type. Space will not permit any elaboration of the suggestion, but concrete proposals can be found in my testimony before the La Follette Committee.[1] Labour contractors in agriculture present many problems different from those presented by the private employment agency in industry. One of the first recommendations of the Tolan Committee to Congress called for federal regulation of labour contractors.[2] The problem of agricultural labour contractors is dealt with at length in my testimony before the Tolan Committee.[3]

A great improvement in farm-labour conditions can be made through a more effective functioning of our employment services. Here, again, the type of improvement that can be effected is well known and only requires application. The Texas State Employment Service has devised an admirable system of bringing about the easiest, swiftest, and most accurate placement of farm workers. We should have a national employment service. The labour market in the United States is a national labour market; it therefore requires action on a national basis.

To illustrate what can be accomplished through a more efficient functioning of the Farm Placement Service, I want to give one concrete instance. In May 1941, Mr. John Cooter, Farm Placement Supervisor for Oregon, received an order for 200 families from the berry growers in Gresham. Since local labour was not available to fill the order Mr. Cooter left for California on a recruiting expedition. There he visited the F.S.A. camps and explained to the workers precisely what they could expect in the way of camps, wage rates, and seasonal earnings in the Gresham berry fields. Before he left Oregon, however, he had made arrangements for the berry growers' association to provide $4,000 to pay transportation expenses. Those families in California who expressed a willingness to go to Oregon were given a sticker and a list of filling stations that would supply gasoline to cars carrying these stickers. The stations were located at regular intervals between Winters, California, and Dayton, Oregon. Workers were given maps indicating the highways they were to travel and were told to report to the F.S.A. camp at Dayton, where arrangements had been made to receive them. Since many of the families were without funds, arrangements were made in advance so that needy families might receive F.S.A. food orders as soon as they arrived in Oregon. The procession was accompanied by representatives of the employment service who went along to see that the workers got to their destination without mishap. Two hundred families (as well as some additional workers—the 'side flow' that always accompanies such a movement) made the trip north in comparative comfort and arrived safely in Dayton.

Many other minor improvements can be effected. State and federal laws regulating the transportation of persons for hire should be amended to apply specifically to the transportation of agricultural workers, if for no reason other than to insure agricultural workers

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1 Vol. 59, p. 21768.

2 See the speech of Congressman John H. Tolan, delivered in the House of Representatives on 17 February 1941.

3 Part 6, p. 2529.

against the hazards involved. In many cases, I feel that the employment services should provide transportation without cost to the worker. It can certainly be demonstrated that transportation costs are a major item in the annual living expenses of migratory workers to-day. An important precedent for legislative action was established in the Sugar Act of 1937, which provided that all growers accepting benefits under the Act should agree to pay wages which the Secretary of Agriculture should find to be reasonable. This principle should be embodied in every statute under which benefit payments are made to farmers. I should also like to see every state labour department establish a special division or department to function in the field of agricultural labour. The task of establishing and enforcing a system of adequate labour standards in agricultural employment requires a specialized staff fully conversant with all the ins and outs of the problem.

3. RURAL PUBLIC WORKS

To check the volume of rural migration, it has been suggested that we should launch a large-scale public-works programme. The proposal is entirely feasible since the areas of greatest potential rural migration are also the areas which offer the greatest opportunity to launch public-works projects. It has been estimated that 3,000,000 people, in the important areas of distress, could be provided with worthwhile employment, on a full-time or part-time basis, in projects designed to protect land, water, and forest resources. Some 1,500,000 workers could be provided with part-time employment on reforestation projects alone for the next ten years. The areas referred to are in need of almost every imaginable type of service, from hospitals to schools, from roads to churches. Since most of these communities are bankrupt or have a tax base that has been nearly destroyed, they are not in a position to help themselves. While the cost involved would be enormous, it can be easily justified, as a direct investment in the protection of human and natural resources and the social dividends would be considerable. Even if the entire cost were to be regarded as a direct subsidy or grant, it would still be justified. Through the protective tariff we have for years subsidized industry to an amount probably in excess of the cost involved in such a programme as that suggested.

It has also been suggested that we should launch a vast rural housing project. The Farm Housing Survey indicated the existence of 3,000,000 farm dwellings that failed to meet the minimum requirements for health and comfort. Such a programme might well be regarded as part of a larger programme of rural reconstruction. Many farms in the areas involved are in need of ditches, fences, storm cellars, and general rehabilitation. A considerable portion of the expense involved could be self-liquidating. The American Society of Agricultural Engineers, on the 12th of February 1941, released a comprehensive and detailed report on a nation-wide farm building programme, including vocational training. There is no question but that most of the human and natural resources needed to carry out such a vast rural slum-clearance project are available in the areas of greatest need. As also pointed, out in this report, one billion dollars a year is not an unreasonable expenditure for the construction and repair needed on farms to provide good housing.

This amount is estimated to be about 2 per cent of the 1930 census value of farm real estate. The general feasibility of such a project was confirmed in testimony which Mr. Raymond C. Smith, of the Department of Agriculture, presented before the La Follette Committee. In the prosperous year 1929, about 1,500,000 tenants lived in houses worth less than $475. A large percentage of farm owners themselves had little better housing. Engineers have estimated that $3,500,000,000 could profit- ably be spent putting our inadequate farm structures in repair. 'City folk, both capital and labour, should be aware of this tremendous potential market. The 3,000,000 neediest farm families in the nation are now using very few industrial products. In 1934 more than 25 per cent of all American farm homes lacked window screens; more than a third were unpainted, and an additional 30 per cent needed repainting. More than 70 per cent of our farm homes lacked a kitchen sink with a drain, and only one out often had an indoor toilet.'[1]

The merit of such proposals is that they offer a practical prospect for furnishing rural families with a substantial annual income. They would check needless and haphazard rural migration; they would also greatly stimulate purchasing power. If surplus farm population must be subsidized, it is much more economical to do so in rural than in urban areas. By forcing them to move, we compel migrants to assume unnecessary risks and needless expense. There is not much point in opening, at enormous expense, new reclamation districts in the West, while failing to reconstruct the economies of the most distressed rural areas in other sections of the country.

Service projects are as badly needed and as feasible to undertake in distressed rural areas as are construction projects. On the 1st of January 1939 there were 780 counties without a public health nurse; and 241 counties with more than 2,000 population per physician. There are 864 rural counties in the United States in which, in 1937, no live births occurred in hospitals, yet nearly 200,000 live births took place in these counties.[2] The infant mortality rate is, as one might expect, highest in the sixteen states which have the lowest *per capita* income. Lack of adequate local health and medical service is, in fact, one important cause of rural migration. The F.S.A., through a variety of plans, is to-day helping more than 75,000 low-income farm families to receive medical attention. These programmes are of the utmost importance and should be greatly expanded. A far-reaching public health and medical programme should be inaugurated by the federal government for those rural counties which to-day are most badly in need of such service. This would necessarily involve the construction of health centres and hospitals, and provide employment, and valuable vocational training, for thousands of unemployed persons in rural areas.

What has been said on the importance of public health programmes applies also to public education. Most of the witnesses before both the La Follette and the Tolan Committee were agreed on three propositions: that educational handicaps have retarded rehabilitation programmes in many rural areas; that the federal

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[1] Evidence of Dr. Will Alexander, p. 336.

[2] Testimony of Dr. Martha M. Eliot before the La Follette Committee.

government must subsidize education in many of these areas; and that lack of educational opportunities is a factor which makes for migration (particularly in the case of the Southern negro). Nearly every witness stressed the importance of adequate vocational training and deplored the lack of educational facilities in the areas of greatest rural distress. With about 400,000 rural youths reaching maturity each year, and with the rural areas destined to repopulate America, too much emphasis can scarcely be placed on the importance of education. On its 162 homestead projects and through its migratory labour camps, the F.S.A. has made it possible for 160,000 children to increase their school attendance. We need mobile schools just as we need mobile health units to reach a migratory population. California discovered years ago that 'you can't educate a procession'. The children of migratory workers are generally retarded: in some cases to an alarming extent. In all of the areas of heavy potential rural migration certain facts are strikingly apparent. These are, without exception, the areas of greatest soil erosion; of heaviest population pressures; of the highest birth rates and the lowest *per capita* incomes; of greatest rural unemployment (and under-employment); of the poorest health and educational facilities and the worst housing. Even heavy migration will not bring about an automatic correction of these conditions, but is, in many cases, likely to accentuate them. What these areas need is basic reconstruction, which can be made the means for rehabilitating many rural families in the same areas. If migration must then continue, at least the outgoing migrants will be in better health, with more adequate training, and in possession of a few resources. It is much better that a large number of agricultural migrants, actual or potential, should be put to work at fair wages on valuable public projects than that they should be forced to take to the road and still further demoralize an already demoralized agricultural labour market.

4. RURAL REHABILITATION

Most of the witnesses before the La Follette and Tolan Committees stressed the importance of rural rehabilitation programmes. These programmes may be divided into three general categories: partial rehabilitation projects designed to supplement inadequate incomes or to provide temporary shelter; individual full-time rehabilitation projects; and large-scale co-operative projects.

An example of the first type of project is that of the migratory labour camps maintained by the F.S.A. in Idaho, Oregon, Washington, California, Texas, Arizona, and Florida. There are forty such camps now in operation in addition to sixteen mobile camps. They accommodate, at capacity, about 13,205 families. Here migrants can find shelter, a good camp site, good drinking water, and adequate toilet, bathing, and washing facilities. The average charge is something like ten cents a day and migrants can work even this meagre charge out by doing services around the camp. For the purpose for which they were designed, the camps are wholly admirable and we should have more of them. Another example of the same general type of project is the permanent farm-labourer home. The F.S.A. has built, at various points, some 1,729 farm-labourer homes, either in groups or scattered throughout an area,

with garden lots. They usually rent for six or eight dollars a month. As a means of giving workers a chance to supplement meagre incomes from agricultural labour, the projects are excellent. Another variation of the same type of project is the subsistence homestead. These projects, whether of a half-acre, or two or three acres, or ten acres, per family unit, are satisfactory where the family has some regular source of income. Where there have been good leadership, outside employment, and an emphasis upon co-operative enterprises, several of these original resettlement or subsistence projects have succeeded remarkably well.[1] But the F.S.A. has itself said that it regards the migratory labour camp, the farm-labourer home, and the subsistence-garden type of project as in no way intended to be a complete solution to the problems of migrant labour.[2]

The 'full-time' individual rehabilitation type of project is of an entirely different order. It is designed to make the 'agricultural ladder'—from farm labourer to tenant to farm owner—a present-day reality. The better type of dispossessed tenants or farm owners are carefully selected; if they are burdened with debt, an attempt is made to scale down or otherwise adjust the debts. A fair-sized farm is then selected in the community; through a government loan the client is placed in possession and given, in addition, an operating loan for the purchase of necessary equipment, livestock, and seed. A carefully diversified crop programme is worked out for each client; even the housewife is instructed on the merits of a budget and how to preserve fruits and vegetables. In 1939 the F.S.A. helped more than 200,000 farmers in the organization of small service co-operatives for the purchase of machinery, trucks, and livestock. That the individual rehabilitation programme has been fairly successful to date is indicated by the fact that the government estimates it will eventually be repaid 85 per cent of the full amount of the loans which have been made. Farm families have been given a respite—a chance to live. It works better in some areas than in others, and is most likely to succeed in areas where land and operating costs are low.

Valuable as this work has been, particularly in the last few years, the entire programme has several marked limitations. Consider, first, its effectiveness. Under the Bankhead-Jones Farm Tenant Act the F.S.A. was authorized to assist farmers to change their status from tenant operators to owners. But farm tenants are increasing at the rate of 40,000 a year, while less than 10,000 loans a year can be made under the act with its present appropriation.[3] Because of the rapid expansion in the size of the farm enterprise and other factors discussed in the preceding chapters, it is no longer easy to find farms.The programme, moreover, is not likely to succeed in areas of high land and operating costs, such as California. The 'live-at-home' philosophy of the programme, while it makes for an immediate improvement in the living standards of the farm families affected, does not square with the fundamental bias of our economy. The logic of technology, it has been said, is a higher living standard for all. While I do not altogether agree with the remark, nevertheless

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[1] Raymond P. Duggan, *Granger Homesteads,* 1937

[2] Final Report, Tolan Committee, p. 127.

[3] Testimony of the Secretary of Agriculture before the Tolan Committee.

there is some truth in what was once said about such programmes: that at best they make for an independent peasantry as against a dependent peasantry.

There is, moreover, a still more fundamental objection to this type of project. The shifting of mortgage holding from private agencies to the federal government in the post-war period meant for the capitalist class an exchange of individually insecure and 'frozen' equities in agriculture for equities (in the form of Land Bank notes) secured by quasi-government guarantees and as liquid as the bond market, than which more could not be asked. The government even assumed the burden of collecting the interest. Interest rates were moderated from the inflated toll that could not be collected, due to the crisis, to levels that could be extracted without facing the danger of militant farm unrest such as developed in 1931-2. In entering the field of agricultural finance, the government, like any private agency, makes loans to the best risks, that is, the commercial farmers. By doing so, of course, the government strengthens the position of the 'upper half' of American agriculture at the expense of the 'lower half'. When aid is provided for the lower half of the farm population—located in the poorest areas—it takes the form (as in these individual rehabilitation projects) of 'live-at-home' programmes designed, not to strengthen the potential migrants in the struggle for existence as competitors in the agricultural market, but to remove them from the competitive market to 'subsistence, non-commercial vegetation'.

There is, however, still another type of rehabilitation project which offers more promise of eventual success than any of the types previously mentioned—the large-scale co-operative farm. In 1936 the F.S.A. purchased a tract of 3,607 acres in the San Carlos Irrigation District in Arizona. Only seven families then lived on the tract; all but one of the farms were operated by tenants. The F.S.A. then formed a co-operative farm corporation, Casa Grande Valley Farms, Inc. Three new patterns of resettlement were involved in the project: (1) the government retains permanent ownership of the land; (2) the farm homes are grouped in a village rather than in scattered units; and (3) the land is operated as one large holding by a corporation the stock of which is owned by those who actually work the land. The government merely leases the land to the association. Fifty-six migrant families, selected by the F.S.A., are members of the association, which employs an expert manager, and operates a number of collateral co-operative enterprises; its production costs are lowered both by division of labour and by the use of machinery. The living standards of the families have been immeasurably improved over what they were at the time they were selected. Casa Grande is, of course, a full-time co-operative farm. The only other similar type of farm operated by the F.S.A. is at Mineral King, California. While both farms have only been operated for a few years, they have shown a profit.

In Arizona the F.S.A. operates two part-time co-operative farms, designed to provide agricultural workers with the opportunity to engage in what might be called 'co-operative subsistence' farming. Both farms are much smaller, of course, than the Casa Grande project. The Camelback farm has 197 acres; the Chandler farm 310 acres. Some ninety-one families reside on the two projects, which are operated in such a manner as to make it possible

for these families to accept outside part-time employment as agricultural workers and at the same time to supplement their income through part-time farming. The resident families have decent quarters and are given many facilities, such as easy access to schools and community resources, as well as a chance to have their own gardens and to purchase milk and dairy products from a co-operative on the farm, which they would not enjoy as migratory workers. As a means of decasualizing migratory farm workers and improving their real wages, the part-time co-operative farm is one of the best remedies yet devised by the ingenious officials of the F.S.A.

All rural rehabilitation programmes of whatever type should be accompanied by measures which favour the operators of small farms. Frankly I do not believe that the individual small farmer, rehabilitated or otherwise, can survive even with the aid of these additional measures taken for his protection. But since so much has already been invested upon the premise that we must preserve the 'family-sized farm' at all costs, then we should be consistent and try to ensure the small farmer the largest possible measure of economic democracy.

I should like to see the T.V.A. 'yardstick' principle applied in agriculture. I should like to see what a government-operated factory, using the best available techniques and services, could return, by way of a money income, to sugar-beet growers and sugar-beet workers. I should like to see one or two canneries operated by the government on the same principle. Mr. Wallace's proposal, as reported in the *New fork Times* of the 4th of May 1940, to build a $14,000,000 market in New York City is a proposal in the same vein.

It has been estimated that such a government-operated market would save $8,500,000 a year in distribution costs. Through such experiments entirely new patterns might be evolved in the relationships between the various groups now engaged in agricultural production. While these new patterns might not result in the re-establishment of the agricultural ladder, in all its pristine innocence, still they might result in a more equitable, a more democratic distribution of agricultural income. Experiments of this type should, most emphatically, be undertaken by the federal government. State and local units of government are not capable of initiating such projects. As part of this same general approach, the Department of Justice should launch a vigorous campaign to enforce the anti-trust laws against food processors, canners, packers, and farm-machinery manufacturers. Some legislative means might be devised which would make it impossible for a cannery which purchased fruit on the open market to be itself a producer of fruit. These dual relationships, such as canner and grower, work to the detriment of those who are merely growers.

If the family-sized farm is to be the centre of our agricultural policy, then certainly the A.A.A. programme should be modified in many particulars. To pay to the Metropolitan Life Insurance Company, as the A.A.A. did in 1937, the sum of $257,095 can hardly be in the interest of the small farmer. If benefit payments under the A.A.A. accrue, as they do at present, as an added return to the land, then they are immediately capitalized in higher land values and the small farmer is once again at a distinct disadvantage. A far

better method, if we are going to continue to subsidize agriculture, is to make the benefit payments dependent upon the people-carrying capacity of the land. As at present operated, the A.A.A. primarily benefits the already successful commercial, farmer. Under the 1939 A.A.A. programme, 32 per cent of the payments went to 5 per cent of the payees.[1] It is highly inconsistent to set up the preservation of the family-sized farm as the prime objective of our agricultural policy and then to enact legislation which undermines the position of precisely this same type of farm. A better means of helping the small farmer would be to concentrate on reducing the amount that he pays for power and water and for all the other services and supplies furnished by non-agricultural sources. While the use of such measures to supplement or to protect rehabilitation programmes is highly desirable, they are not likely to prove effective in the long run. But they might, at least, enlarge the area of democratic competition in farm production.

5. LAND-USE PLANNING

If agricultural migration is to be controlled and if present rural rehabilitation programmes are to be continued, then we need to alter our traditional concept of land. We have been too prone, as a writer in the *Land Policy Review* for November 1940 has pointed out, to regard land 'as a fixed commodity to be held for speculation, to be exploited, subdivided, composed, let, assigned, mortgaged, sold, bargained, bequeathed, and otherwise alienated at the will of the legal holder without restriction.' Land is a public resource; the people of the United States are its ultimate and absolute owners. And to-day land use must be subjected to social control. It is not necessary to go as far, for example, as Mr. Charles Abrams has suggested in *Revolution in Land,* and urge the nationalization of land. But if one considers the extent to which the federal government has subsidized landowners, it does become apparent that we have already moved a long way in that direction. If rural families continue to move into abandoned farm areas as fast as other families move out, we cannot cope with the problem of rural migration. If farm families are permitted to bring new lands into cultivation which should be withheld from production, or, if in doing so they are permitted to follow wasteful soil practices and inefficient land-use methods, then we shall be creating future areas of migration. We have long assumed that the most stable element in our population consisted of those who live on the land. We know, to-day, that this assumption is no longer tenable. Half of our farm population is utterly lacking in security and is likely to migrate. Our traditional *laissez-faire* attitude towards land tenure and utilization must be modified.

Through the soil-conservation programme, we have already begun to exercise a limited degree of social control over land use. But we need to proceed much further in the direction of effective planning and control. Several excellent suggestions were submitted to the Tolan Committee. One is to encourage the enactment of rural planning and zoning ordinances under state-enabling legislation. If certain lands should not be farmed as a matter of soil-conservation

[1] Tolan Transcript, part 8, p. 3244

policy then their use should be restricted to other purposes. The pattern for this type of control has already been worked out in Wisconsin and several other states.[1] Another point at which government can effectively intervene is in the handling of tax-delinquent land. Our handling of tax-delinquent lands to-day is generally conceded to be scandalously inefficient. Two dust-bowl counties in Colorado, in the last few years, have acquired over 1,000,000 acres of land through tax sales. Most states to-day have no means of dealing with tax-delinquent land other than to hold it for possible redemption or sell it. Arkansas has recently adopted an Act[2] which authorizes the state to use tax-delinquent land for resettlement purposes. A somewhat similar proposal was made to the Tolan Committee by Mr. Benjamin Marsh of the People's Lobby. Mr. Marsh proposed that the Department of Agriculture be specifically authorized to acquire farm property either through purchase or through exercise of the power of eminent domain and to lease the land so acquired to bona fide farmers or to co-operative farm corporations or associations.[3] Measures of this type are particularly pertinent in view of the fact that the general tendency in farm tenure and utilization at the present time seems to be for the good farm lands to fall into the hands of commercialized farm operators, while subsistence farming tends to be concentrated in the poorer land areas. Rather than wait until farmers are displaced and then attempt to settle them on poorer lands it is better to act at once and to resettle them on good lands, under the most favourable circumstances (even if at a much greater initial expense). But this implies large powers, vested in some agency, to acquire title to farm land, if necessary by use of the power of eminent domain; it also implies power to control the use of sub-marginal land and to withhold it from production.

In the opinion of Oscar Ameringer the essential fault of the original Homestead Acts was that they did not provide for retention of title in the government. There is much evidence to support this contention. The United States Government spent over $10,500,000 in developing the San Carlos reclamation project in Arizona. Most of the land in the project passed from public ownership to private ownership under the operation of the Homestead and Desert Land Act. But 'shortly after the title to these lands passed out of public hands, the concentration of ownership, which the government desired to prevent, began.'[4] So rapidly did this process take place that when in 1936 the F.S.A. acquired 3,607 acres in the project for resettlement purposes, all of the lands in the tract had become concentrated in the hands of nine owners. 'Only one owner, a widow, lived on the property.' This is merely one instance of what happens when a policy of complete *laissez faire* prevails. It is our criminal neglect of the land, particularly our indifference to tenure patterns and utilization, that has resulted in that 'depression and decay' already apparent in a large segment of American agriculture. Not only should the government intervene for the purpose of effectively controlling land use, but it should also intervene for the

[1] Tolan Transcript, part 3, p. 1028.
[2] Cited in Tolan Transcript, part 5, p. 2051.
[3] Tolan Transcript, part 9, p. 3656
[4] La Follette Transcript, vol. 59, p. 21812.

purpose of altering tenure relationships which have a direct bearing upon land use. We need, for example, to regulate tenancy. This need not be done by direct legislative action; it can be done through the establishment of land-leasing associations financed by the federal government such as the F.S.A. has already formed in Missouri. The report of the President's Committee on Farm Tenancy in 1937 points a way to effective action. All of these suggestions can be summarized in one simple proposition: that land use is no longer a matter of individual concern but has become vested with a public interest.

Even these suggestions stop short of what is not only desirable but eminently feasible. We should create 'rural resettlement authorities', patterned after T.V.A., which could purchase entire communities and then undertake their complete reconstruction. Such an authority would not be hampered, in its planning, by legislative restrictions. It not only could plan for the -creation of new patterns of tenure and land utilization but could lay out the entire community: its roads, villages, power development, schools, health services, and supplemental industrial activities designed to raise farm incomes. Some of the original resettlement projects almost achieved this type of planning, but unfortunately most of them emphasized the idea of subsistence farming. Under the 'authority' idea, which I have suggested, full-time farms could be established. By planning resettlement projects in this manner, great savings in initial costs can be effected. 'There is a marked trend,' write O. E. Baker and Conrad Taeuber, 'towards uniformity within the rural population, as well as between the rural and the urban groups.'[1] By locating rehabilitated farm families on individual isolated units, we fail to take cognizance of these trends. Communities of the type that I have indicated might well be important bridges to the future. Through 'authorities' especially created for this purpose, it is possible to escape the necessity of running back to Congress every year for additional authorizations. Congress could appropriate the money and control the general policies; but administration might, through use of the authority principle, be decentralized. Title to the land itself should remain permanently in the authority, regardless of what assurances of security might be given the occupants. To fail to reserve ultimate ownership and control in the authority would be to jeopardize the objectives sought to be achieved.'Green Belt', in other words, might, in a few years, become still another rural slum.

Nowadays a great deal is said about the 'decentralization of industry' as a means of checking rural migration. But here, again, the real 'imbalance' is not between rural and urban communities as such, but in the system of production itself. We cannot 'balance' our economy by shifting industry from urban to rural areas. A good case, perhaps, can be made for decentralization; but on different grounds. For instance: recently a paper company constructed a new factory in east Texas—a region of great rural poverty and unemployment. But instead of training available rural workers in the area, the company imported skilled workers from urban centres. While the future may doubtless see the rise of a new type of rural community and while many of our cities may already have reached

[1] La Follette Transcript, vol. 59, p. 828

their maximum size, no basic adjustment will have been effected until adequate social controls are imposed upon the 'chariot of industrial dominion' itself.

6. MIGRANT WELFARE

One of the most obvious steps that should be taken to prevent unnecessary migration and to relieve the distress of migrants is the immediate elimination of all settlement laws. The right to relief should be determined upon the basis of need, not of residence. Two general proposals have been made upon the basis of which federal action could be predicted. The soundest proposal is for the federal government to add an additional category—for general aid—to the provisions of the Social Security Act. Making grants-in-aid, to be matched by the states, the federal government could insist upon the elimination of settlement laws and the establishment of sound personnel practices and an equitable administration of relief. It could also insist that non-residents be accorded the same rights as residents. Under this proposal, we would have a federally integrated but state-administered welfare programme. If it is impossible to achieve this end, then another alternative is possible. The federal government, by making grants-in-aid for the care of non-residents, can insist upon uniform settlement laws. It is preferable that settlement laws be abolished altogether; but if they cannot be abolished, then at least they should be made uniform.

An adequate welfare programme, administered on the basis of actual need, would do much to check needless, wasteful, and unplanned migration. If the federal government does not formulate a policy, then inevitably the tendency will be for the states to increase residence requirements for relief and to establish barriers to inter-state migration. 'Absence of a national policy,' it has been said, 'means almost total neglect of the migratory population. It does not eliminate migration—but merely leaves the migrant in helpless suspension between his legal but uninhabitable residence and other communities from which he is likely to be excluded as a public charge.'[1] Such a policy should include special provisions for meeting the special needs of migrants on the score of education, health, and shelter. Migration is not an evil *per se;* it is not only inevitable but, in many cases, highly desirable. To the fullest possible extent, however, it should be planned, guided, and directed and the full brunt of the burden of migration should not be forced upon the migrant.

7. THE POLITICAL PROBLEM

It is all very well to point out what is desirable in order to deal with the problem of rural migration. But one of the major causes of the present problem consists in the fact that farm-labour and farm-migrant groups are not adequately represented, either functionally or politically, in our scheme of things. 'Economic half-castes', these millions of American citizens are faced with many political handicaps: the poll tax; isolation; mobility. California presents a typical illustration of this point. Farm labourers constitute perhaps 53 per cent of the total farm population of the state. Yet a small

[1] *Social Forces,* May 1938

group of farmers, so called, constituting not more than 3 per cent of the entire farm population, dominate agricultural legislation. They are able to force through almost any type of legislation they desire; they can obtain, from the Department of Agriculture in the state government and also from the Department of Agriculture in Washington, and from the University of California, almost any free service that they desire. In manifold ways, their operations are heavily subsidized, by both state and federal government. But farm labourers, because they are not organized, can obtain no legislative consideration. Nor can migrant farm families.

In large measure this situation can be explained by the fact that farmers themselves are not effectively organized. The Grange and the Farmers' Union do, for the most part, really represent farmers. But the powerful American Farm Bureau might fairly be characterized as a 'company union' of farmers. The initial funds for the formation of the Farm Bureau came from the Lackawanna Railroad, the Chicago Board of Trade, and similar organizations. It was created, in fact, for the express purpose of keeping down farm unrest. The officials of the organization have, on many occasions, sold the elaborate propaganda apparatus of the Farm Bureau to various special-interest groups.[1] It is a common experience nowadays to see 'farm' organizations rush to Washington to defend the chain stores to defend the sugar-beet refiners; to lobby for the most outrageous special-interest legislation. In actual fact, the real dirt farmer has a 'more serious quarrel with his banker, his furnish-merchant, and his seed, feed, and fertilizer dealers than he has with his workers.'[2] Because of the character of the major farm organizations, a large part of our agricultural legislation is thoroughly undemocratic in the sense that it is intended to benefit merely the top tier of farmers.

To-day, as the gulf widens between the 'upper half' (it should be called the upper 10 per cent of farmers) and the 'lower half', a farmer-labour alliance becomes politically feasible. Farm workers cannot effectively be organized unless 'dirt farmers' are also organized. Together they would represent a powerful social group and, fundamentally, their basic economic interests are identical. If farm labour were brought within the scope of our existing social legislation, it could be organized; and this same extension, insofar as it affects the right of self-organization, should be granted the small farmer. The court records in California are full of cases clearly indicating how small farmers have been victimized and discriminated against when they attempted to organize for the protection of their own interests.

The close correlation between the index of industrial production and the price of farm commodities[3] now makes possible a still broader alliance: between the 'under half' of American agriculture and organized labour. Such an alliance would represent the most powerful democratic force conceivable in our society. For a variety of reasons, it has been impossible in the past to effect this alliance. It was, at one time, offered by farmers to labour and, as a

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[1] Mr. Dale Kramer, in his pamphlet, *The Truth about the Farm Bureau,* has thoroughly documented this charge.

[2] *Harper's,* May 1937.

[3] See *Yearbook of Agriculture,* p. 342.

matter of historic fact, it was labour that declined the offer. Influenced by short-range perspectives, labour foolishly imagined that its interests were with the industrial group. It refused, therefore, to have any direct relations with the farm group which was interested in lower tariffs. Since then labour has occasionally, but usually in a halfhearted manner, offered an alliance to the farm group. But it has never shown much understanding of the problem, as witness its longstanding failure to organize farm labour. Until agriculture became industrialized, however, there was not much possibility of organizing farm labour; to-day that possibility is very real indeed. But labour must recognize that there is not a farm group in this country, but two farm groups.

With the reversal in movement up the agricultural ladder, however, important ideological changes have occurred in agricultural groups. Farm workers on large industrialized farms think, feel, and act much like workers in an automobile factory. The small farmer, too, is rapidly abandoning his faith in 'rugged individualism'. In California, at least, they are awakening to a realization of the true nature of the struggle which they must wage, if they are to survive. On several occasions, in recent years, they have organized themselves into trade unions and have conducted 'strikes': refusing to deliver produce to the canneries, for example, until their price demands were met. This is economic realism. And it is on this level that organized labour can do much to assist the farmer and the farm labourer.

No amount of 'expert testimony' before Congressional committees can possibly result in remedial legislative action on the problem of agricultural migration, unless effective political power can be mobilized in support of the various proposals made. For what has happened, essentially, to American agriculture is that it has become tied to the 'chariot of industrial dominion.' Every proposal made before the La Follette and the Tolan Committees could be enacted tomorrow and the problem of agricultural migration would not be 'solved'. Some of the more urgent pressures making for migration would be relieved; the immediate welfare of thousands of farm families would be improved. But until this colossus of industrial dominion, and the processes which created it and the relationships upon which it is predicated, are brought under adequate social controls, then the basic causes of dislocation in American agriculture will not have been corrected. In many respects, therefore, the problem is essentially political in character.

In its final hearings in Washington, the La Follette Committee took thousands of words of testimony, from the best experts in every field, on the question of what should be done about the related problems of migratory labour and agricultural migration. Three thick volumes, consisting of 1040 pages of closely printed material, were assembled. The Tolan Committee, interested in the same problems, heard from the same and still additional experts and issued three fat volumes also devoted entirely to ways and means, proposals and suggestions. In the foregoing pages, I have endeavoured to summarize the best of these proposals, those concerning which there seemed to be the most agreement. But in the future it must be confessed that these six volumes of testimony are likely to stand as an enduring monument to the bankruptcy of ideas which, at the moment, seems to characterize 'official' thought in this

country. Nearly every witness who testified before both committees seemed forced, by some obscure compulsion, to confine his suggestions to what is possible within the existing framework of society.

Most of the witnesses, after elaborating their particular pet proposal, invariably came back to the fundamental proposition that industrial production must be expanded. Historically our surplus agricultural population has been drawn into industry, as Dr. Paul Taylor pointed out, 'with clear advantage to the Nation'. While there are still resettlement possibilities on the land, it is primarily in the direction, as he emphasized, of 'opening up productive industrial employment by public and private measures that we can tap the greatest absorptive capacity.' 'If we hold,' said another witness,'that our goal is total production in agriculture and industry it is necessary that thought be given to the problem of increasing consuming capacity of those with whom we would exchange. It is evident that we cannot accomplish this end by increasing the number engaged in agriculture or industry unless the combined index of production and price is increased.'[1] 'The black plague of the twentieth century,' writes Mr. Milo Perkins, 'is under-consumption.'[2] The distribution of surplus food commodities has already shown how quickly our so-called agricultural surpluses can be absorbed if consumer power is expanded. But it was at precisely this point—how and by what means total production was to be achieved—that most of the .witnesses faltered. By failing to attack this problem, they were necessarily confining their testimony, not to basic causes, but to ways and means of dealing with the effects of these causes. For the problem of agricultural migration is merely part of the total industrial problem in the United States. The migrants are 'messengers': they are visible evidence of breakdown, of maladjustment.

There was a time in American history when people did have an organic relation to the land upon which they lived, and worked, and built their homes. They were as much a part of that land, of that landscape, as the trees and rocks, the streams and the grass. It was the most beautiful land, the most varied land, the richest land in the world. It stretched westward in seeming inexhaustibility. There were always more free land, additional frontiers, greener pastures. Even after the passing of the frontier was mournfully noted in our chronicles, there remained still more land: new frontiers reclaimed from the desert, new agricultural empires created by drainage and reclamation projects. The frontier experience so profoundly affected American thought that people still imagine there is a home for them somewhere else; that, in some distant land, they can once again recapture that heritage of peace, of security, of useful, honest, and productive work which once was theirs. Thousands of American farm families have set out to find that treasured land where, under new skies, they might once more become 'giants of the earth', rooted deeply to the soil. But something has happened, not to the people, but to the relationship that once obtained between them and the land. It is as though the soil itself had become poisoned. And the

[1] Tolan Transcript, part 2, p. 603.
[2] *Farmers in a Changing World* (1940) p. 650.

thousands who are on the road to-day are but the precursors of those who will set out on the highways to-morrow.

For the time being, events have provided an answer to that question which none of the witnesses at the La Follette and Tolan Committees could answer: how to increase production. Production of war materials has once again set the factories ablaze with light. Thousands of people will be drawn from rural areas into industrial centres. Much of our 'surplus' agricultural population will find at least some temporary employment in defence industries. But already the witnesses before both committees have begun to express deep concern over what will happen once the present emergency is at an end. In former years during depressions, agriculture was always the 'shock absorber'. It provided temporary shelter and sustenance for thousands who sought refuge on the land. But, by the time the next depression arrives, agriculture will itself have become largely industrialized; 'agrological unemployment' will be as great a problem as industrial unemployment, if not a greater one.

In facing this possibility, there is no point whatever in attempting to reverse a clearly defined historical trend. We cannot cope with the problem by relocating displaced farm families on subsistence noncommercial farms. Nor can we legislate the large-scale industrialized farm out of existence by conducting indignant campaigns against 'corporate farming'. The processes described in earlier chapters have, in fact, clearly resulted in technological advancement. But the burdens of this transition should not be borne exclusively by the group in agriculture least capable of sustaining any additional burden—the lower half, the emerging agricultural proletariat. Industrialized agriculture, like industry generally, should be made to assume a measure of social responsibility for the well-being of those whom it employs. If the subsidies are to continue, they should be conditioned, in each instance, upon the maintenance of decent labour standards and working conditions. This is the immediate objective—the obvious next step.

As to the future, it is rather idle to speculate at the moment about ideal patterns of rural social relationships or idyllic rural Utopias. If such patterns were worked out and put into effect on an experimental basis, they would probably be destroyed, or perverted in their purpose, within a brief period of time. Likewise, to debate the merits of the various 'types of farms'—industrial, commercial, subsistence—is also a rather idle form of speculation. There is, in fact, no 'solution' of this problem (although its effects can and should be mitigated by means such as I have suggested) so long as we permit this 'chariot of industrial dominion'—the whole complex of our industrial order—to be exploited by a small section of the population to the distinct disadvantage of the great masses of people in this country.

For better or for worse, the fact is that our economic order has its own logic; its own system of relationships; its own dynamics. It is inside, not outside, the domain of these relationships that the difficulty lies. The question is not whether we want the family-sized farm or the farm factory; it is not even a question of which is the more efficient. The question is: what kind of society do we want? For our economic order is a unity, with its own rules, its own logic, its own psychology. The rifts between the various groups in agriculture—the conflicts between country and town, industry and

agriculture—are merely reflections of the unequal position which obtains between social classes engaged in production. Naturally any means calculated to improve the economic position of working farmers in relation to the groups who now exploit them are valuable instrumentalities and should be fully utilized. They may even result in a limited measure of success; they may grow into or become the nuclei of important units of co-operative effort. Too frequently we insist upon categorical affirmations limited in scope and application: one must be either for or against the family-sized farm; one must either advocate or oppose collectivization in agriculture. Actually this is not the issue. Family-sized farms, for that matter, might flourish like the green bay tree in a society that permitted them to flourish. I do not think this type of farm can survive, as I have pointed out, not because there is some inherent fault in the type of organized effort it represents, but because the logic of our economic order is against it. Also, a strong farmer-labour alliance might, through organized effort, restore some measure of relative equality in power between the owners and the operators of the means of production. To the extent that it did so, it would be enlarging the sphere of democracy and would be desirable and effective.

To deal with the basic causes of migration, we can no longer think in terms of rehabilitating a few thousand individual farm families, of makeshift work programmes, of improvised welfare projects, of social legislation to protect farm workers (valuable as these proposals are to attain immediate objectives). These measures will not, and cannot, suffice. We must think in bolder terms; we must plan on a much larger scale. The general direction which our thinking and planning should take is clearly indicated. Democracy is not only a means but it is the goal towards the attainment of which our efforts should be directed. The findings of the La Follette Committee, of the Tolan Committee, of the Temporary National Economic Committee, all point to the conclusion that our industrial and economic order in all its phases—industrial, agricultural, and financial—is not democratic. It is neither owned nor administered nor directed democratically. It functions in an autocratic manner. It is at variance with our social and political ideals. Its prime objective seems to be the concentration of wealth and power in the hands of a constantly decreasing number of individuals. It breeds poverty and want, scarcity and insecurity, not by accident, but by necessity. It can no more eliminate unemployment, short of the emergency created by war (and then only temporarily), than an engine can run without fuel. We need to refashion this economic order to a more democratic pattern by democratic means and for democratic objectives. If we fail to do so, the shadows are likely to lengthen across the land.

GLOSSARY

A.A.A. (or Triple A). Agricultural Adjustment Administration; an organization set up under the New Deal, making payments to farmers for reductions in crop and livestock production and for the retirement of land for conservation purposes.

ALFALFA. Lucerne; a deep-rooted leguminous fodder plant.

ASSESSMENT. In this context, a levy or tax.

BINDLESTIFF. Drug addict; narcotic smuggler. A tramp who walks on the railroad tracks.

BOXCAR. Covered railway wagon.

CANTALOUPE. A variety of melon.

CARLOAD. The American 'freight car' has a very much larger capacity than the English 'goods wagon'.

COMPANY TOWN. Town built by an industrial undertaking for housing its own employees, and usually controlled by it.

COMPANY UNION. Trades union organized by an industrial undertaking, usually in its own interests (e.g. in opposition to employees' own union).

CORN BELT. Corn in the U.S., always means maize. The U.S. crop of about 100 million acres is well distributed but the greatest concentration occurs in the 'Corn Belt' (Iowa, Missouri, Illinois, Indiana, and Ohio).

COTTON GIN. A mill where cotton is de-seeded and otherwise processed after picking.

CUT-OVER LAND. Forest country from which the millable timber has been cut; usually a wilderness of scrub and second growth.

DIRT FARMER. Working farmer.

FARM EQUITY. Difference between the capital value of a farm and the amount of mortgages and other charges outstanding; i.e., the owner's financial interest in it.

F.B.I. Federal Bureau of Investigation; equivalent to Scotland Yard.

The Grapes of Wrath. Celebrated best-seller by John Steinbeck (1939). This novel describes in great detail the hardships endured by a family (the Joads) before, during, and after their flight from Oklahoma to California.

HOMESTEAD ACTS. The legislative foundation of land settlement in the U.S., also Canada, Australia, and N.Z. Conceived on democratic principles, they were designed to give poor men access to public lands at nominal cost for purposes of settlement. The usual homestead grant was a quarter-section (160 acres) at a dollar an acre, but extensions were possible on fulfilment of conditions. Many millions of acres were settled in this way.

JALOPY. Old, worn-out car.

JOADS. See *The Grapes of Wrath.*

JOHNSON-GRASS. A creeping grass; a bad weed on cultivated land.

JUKE BOX. A musical slot-machine.

LOBBY. Group who bring political pressure to bear on legislative assemblies on behalf of specific interests.

MARIJUANA. A drug commonly smoked in cigarette form.

NATIONAL GRANGE. An early form of farmers' union.

PECAN. An edible American nut.

SCISSORBILL. Contemptible, or disreputable person. Strike-breaker; one willing to work for less than the established wage, or take the place of a striker. Working men willing to let labour difficulties take their course. Traitor, informer, 'stool pigeon'. Also, victim or dupe. A Western term of contempt.

SKID-ROW. Vice district, also the section of a city where employment agencies are located, frequented by prostitutes. Also lowest stratum of society, and lowest stratum of the underworld.

SMEAR CAMPAIGN. Organized attempt to discredit opponents.

STOOGE. Ventriloquist's puppet.

TENDERLOIN. A certain tender cut of beef. Also, in New York, designates the amusement district centring on Broadway.

THIMBLE-RIG. Equivalent of our 'three-card trick' or 'find the lady'; usually played with a pea and thimbles or walnut shells.

T.N.E.C. Temporary National Economic Committee.

T.V.A. Tennessee Valley Authority. Large federal undertaking instituted under New Deal to check soil-erosion and initiate social and economic reconstruction in the Tennessee Valley.

VIGILANTISM. The original vigilantes were a frontier institution—armed local volunteers called out to deal with an emergency.

W.P.A. Works Project Administration. Another New Deal organization charged with the promotion of public works and the relief of unemployment and destitution.

PRINCIPAL AUTHORITIES TO WHOM REFERENCE IS MADE IN THE TEXT

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BURDICK, PROFESSOR R. T., Colorado Experiment Station.

DRUCKER, PETER. Well-known writer on sociology and economics.

DUNCAN, DR. OTIS B., Oklahoma Agricultural Experiment Station.

HAMILTON, PROFESSOR HORACE, Texas Agricultural Experiment Station.

HOPKINS, PROFESSOR WILLIAM S., Stanford University. Author of *Changing Technology and Employment in Agriculture* (Department of Agriculture), May 1941.

LANDIS, DR. PAUL H., Washington State College of Agriculture. Author of numerous bulletins and articles on agricultural migration.

MOORE, DR. H. R., Ohio State University, College of Agriculture.

MCMILLEN, WHEELER. Author of *Too Many Farmers,* 1929, and well-known advocate of agricultural industrialization.

SCHMIDT, DR. CARL T. Author of *American Farmers in the World Crisis,* 1941.

TAYLOR, CARL S., Department of Agriculture (Social Research).

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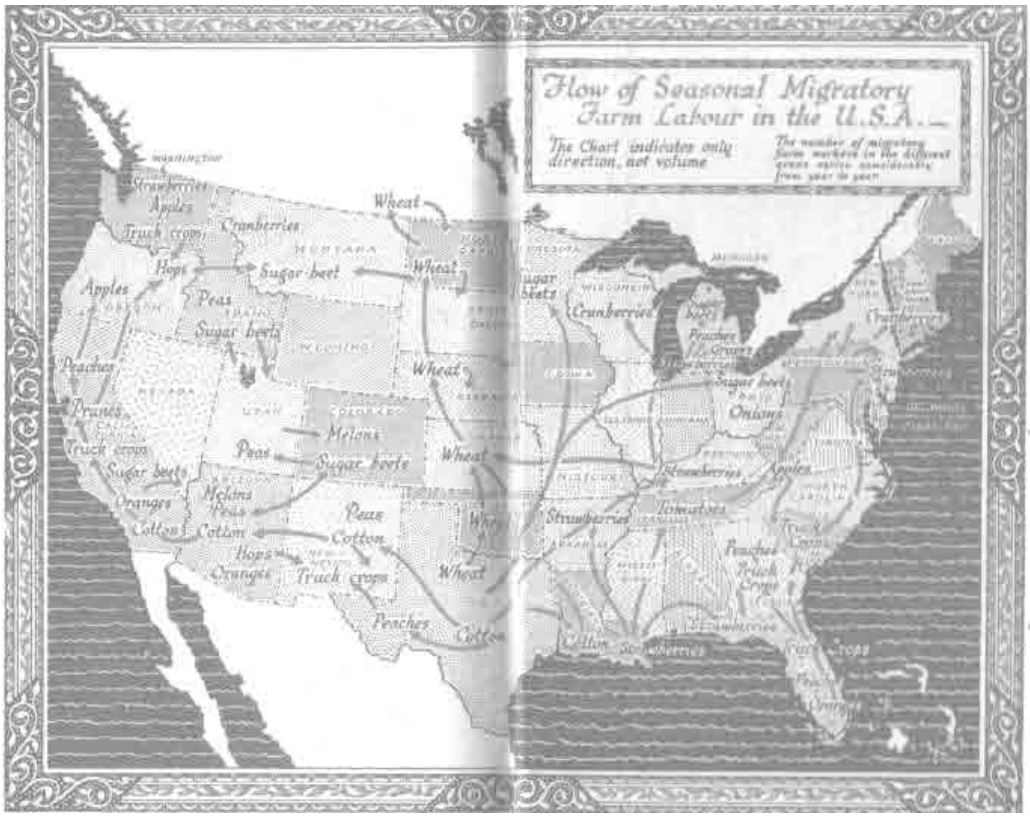
TETREAU, DR. E. D., University of Arizona, College of Agriculture.


Flow of Seasonal Migratory Farm Labour in the U.S.A.
The Chart indicates only direction, not volume
The number of migratory farm workers in the different areas varies considerably from year to year
Strawberries
Apples
Truck crops
Cranberries
Wheat
Hops
Sugar beet
Peas
Sugar beets
Peaches
Prunes
Melons
Oranges
Cotton
Truck crops
Onions
Tomatoes