

November 1949

MEMORANDUM
FROM A COMMITTEE REPRESENTING THE WORKERS OF THE
LOWER RIO GRANDE VALLEY
OF TEXAS

WE, the undersigned members of the Citrus Workers and Food Processors Union, A. F. L., respectfully submit to our national officials the following analysis of the conditions existing at present in the Lower Rio Grande Valley region of the State of Texas:

THE basic industry in this region consists of enterprises dedicated to the canning and processing of fruits and vegetables. Several thousand persons are engaged as workers in this industry, and unquestionably the most difficult problem that we have had to contend with has been the competition offered us by the illegal immigrants from Mexico, who, for obvious reasons, are compelled to work at sub-standard wages and under conditions bordering on peonage.

THIS competition has been made possible by the connivance of local -- and sometimes even Federal -- authorities with selfish private interests whose sole desire is to obtain labor at the cheapest rates possible in order (1) to be in an advantageous position as compared with similar industries in other sections of the country where reasonable wages are paid; and (2) to make the largest profits possible in the shortest period of time.

THE difficulty confronting well-intentioned leaders who wish to change conditions -- whether from the Union movement, minority group organizations, or otherwise -- can be readily seen when we consider the fact that any attempt to secure better wages, more favorable working conditions, and/or the suppression of the illegal traffic in alien laborers is immediately branded by the powerful interests involved as a radical, Leftwing or Communist-inspired scheme. The industries in question have well paid publicity directors and public relations men; they have access to the channels of information and communication inaccessible to the workers; they have the wholehearted support of local and even national public officials; they are in a position to bring economic and political pressure to bear on any independent or individualistic employer who veers in the slightest degree from this well-established policy of getting helpless illegals at the lowest possible wage.

OUR committee consists of workers who have been far more fortunate than others similarly employed because the undersigned are at least able to

read, write and speak the English language. As a result of the unfair competition on the part of alien laborers ("wetbacks") an annual exodus of thousands of families takes place -- people who in effect become displaced persons and who take with them even the youngest members of their families to seek a better means of livelihood elsewhere. The overwhelming majority of these migrant laborers are Americans of Latin-American origin. This may explain, in part at least, why, according to a study conducted by the University of Texas under the direction of Dr. George I. Sanchez, some 125,000 children of Latin-American descent, comprising about one-half of the school-age Latin-American population of the State of Texas, are not in school in any grade on any one day of the school year. As a result of the foregoing conditions the average native born Latin-American school child is in attendance only three to four months out of the year, and finds himself in the second grade when he is ten years old. Even if he aspires to continue his education, it becomes almost impossible for him to do so. This constant migration may also explain why the juvenile delinquency rate and the percentage of felony convictions in Texas are abnormally high among Latin-Americans. A high infant mortality rate, caused specially by infant diarrhea, plus an incidence of tuberculosis more than three times as great as that of the negro population in Texas, complete this sordid picture of a forgotten minority group.

IT should be remembered that in spite of the fact that these migrant workers must seek a living wage away from where they reside, they are subjected proportionately to the same taxes for schools and public improvements and to all other obligations imposed upon other citizens who are fortunate enough to be able to remain in the community of their choice.

IN addition to the above unfair burden, the people who participate in this annual Grapes-of-Wrath-with-a-Spanish-accent movement find themselves deprived of their prerogatives as voting citizens. Texas is a one-party state; the Primary election at the end of July, and the runoff election at the end of August determine who the local and state officials shall be for the following two years. Most of the migrant workers have already left their communities by the time the runoff election is held, if they have not already begun their movement by the end of July. Absentee balloting is generally discouraged by local officers, and thus these citizens of the United States find themselves disfranchised and unable to exercise the right to determine who their public officials shall be.

THE Union that this committee has been selected to represent has

endeavored to improve the economic standards not only of its members, but of all working people in the Lower Rio Grande Valley region. Invariably, however, we have come face to face with the proposition that, whether it be in the industrial or agricultural field, there is a limitless reservoir of cheap labor across the Rio Grande, which most employers prefer not only because of the sub-standard wages paid, but because the illegals are afraid to complain about working conditions, let alone join labor unions. It is difficult to develop leadership among the workers because of the fear on their part that they will be singled out for punitive action by way of immediate discharge or demotion.

THERE has been little or no attempt to disguise the fact that local Immigration authorities have deliberately ignored existing conditions and have even encouraged the use of "wetbacks" by favoring those employers who were looked upon with approval by locally elected public officials. The very fact that a change of policy has been announced by the Immigration Service with accompanying national fanfare within the last few days is a candid admission that it could have stopped the flow of cheap labor simply by warning the employers to desist from the practice of hiring these illegal immigrants. That this has not been done heretofore is due to the fact that selfish vested interests were able to exert sufficient influence on our national officials, specially Congressmen and Senators, to insure the maintenance of a "look-the-other-way" policy by the Immigration Service.

REPRESENTATIVES of the private interests involved have talked out of both corners of their mouths while attempting to justify their position. For example, when a report entitled, "A Study of the Spanish-Speaking People of Texas" was released at the University of Texas, spokesmen for the Rio Grande Valley Chamber of Commerce denied the existence of discriminatory practices, either against "wetbacks" or native laborers. They also denied that 25¢ per hour or less was the prevailing wage in that region for agricultural workers. Recently, however, they not only voiced strong opposition to President Truman's request for a 75¢ an hour minimum wage for industrial workers, but held conferences with the President and other high ranking officials in Washington for the purpose of attempting to change the International Agreement with Mexico so as to provide for a 25¢ wage for agricultural laborers, basing their demand on the contention that this was the prevailing wage. The Executive Secretary of the Texas Growers and Shippers Association expressed indignation when the United States Employment Service refused to accede to his demands that this sub-

standard wage be fixed arbitrarily by our nation in violation of its solemn International Pact with a neighboring republic and ally in World War II.

WHILE the Union that we represent has been pleased to read of the change of policy on the part of the United States Immigration Service in regard to illegal immigrants, we would most respectfully point out that this "about face" is occurring at a time when the need for the bulk of the agricultural workers has virtually ceased to exist, or, at least, we submit, by the time the new program is carried out in full this need will have ceased to exist. We trust that after the issue of agricultural workers has been settled for the present year the Immigration Service will not revert to its former policy as far as "wetbacks" in industry are concerned. As is often the case, once the sensational part of a burning issue has been settled -- in this instance the agricultural workers, because of the international implications of the Bracero Agreement -- the equally sinister and harmful but less spectacular phase remains unnoticed and unpublicized. There is one proposition that we desire to emphasize, namely, that although there may be temporary seasonal shortages of agricultural laborers in the Lower Rio Grande Valley of Texas, there has never been in the past -- and there is no basis for expecting in the future -- any real labor shortage in the basic industry of this region. All that this industry has to do is to pay a living wage and the supply of labor will be plentiful.

IT is the contention of our Union that on divers occasions such organizations as the Valley Chamber of Commerce, in their zeal to maintain the status quo and in their ever prevalent fear brought on by such words as "statism", "socialism", "welfare state", etc., have misrepresented even to their own members the possible effects of pending legislation and at the same time have failed to explain the potential benefits to all concerned. For example, the Valley Chamber of Commerce represented in open meetings to many small business men that the proposed 75¢ per hour wage bill would apply to them and would force them into bankruptcy, although being fully apprised of the fact that such Federal legislation applied only to products in interstate commerce and provided for numerous other exemptions. The same Chamber of Commerce never saw fit, however, to point out to all business men, large and small alike, that high wages mean greater purchasing power and that sub-standard wages are reflected in a community by higher rates in disease and by the mental and physical

retardation of the children in the community. Our Union would point out that this situation of unfair labor competition has not always existed in the Lower Rio Grande Valley. It is a phenomenon brought about by the War when a legitimate manpower shortage in certain sections necessitated the importation of alien laborers. This situation is no longer in existence, however, and its attempted perpetuation is due to the reasons previously noted in this memorandum.

A careful study of the overall picture was made by the University of Texas and the General Education Board of New York. A copy of this report is attached to this memorandum, and as representatives of our Union we heartily endorse the conclusions found therein in so far as they are applicable to the laboring classes of this region.

AS to the remedy for the conditions of which we as representatives of our Union are complaining, we would respectfully request the following action:

(1) That all Immigration Laws be rigidly enforced without fear or favoritism and that this policy be established as a permanent one by our national officials.

(2) That specific instruction be issued to Federal officials stationed in the Lower Rio Grande Valley ordering them to desist from practices which protect the employer as against the worker, and which, through collaboration with local politicians, result in the oppression of the laboring people by social, economic or political means.

(3) That a congressional committee or sub-committee conduct an impartial and thorough investigation as to all conditions existing in the Valley among the working people, including conditions of employment, housing, sanitation, public health, etc., and hold public hearings on the spot.

(4) That under no circumstances, either illegal immigrants or legalized braceros be permitted by our Government to compete with resident workers in the industrial field in the Lower Rio Grande Valley.

THIS memorandum is not intended as a protest of conditions among any particular racial or ethnic group. It is simply coincidental that about ninety-five per cent of the affected group are of the same national origin. The Citrus Workers and Food Processors Union, directly affiliated with the American Federation of Labor, has received the wholehearted approval of all organized labor in the Valley region to carry out this plan of visiting our national officials and of calling to their attention,

in a frank but respectful manner, these grave problems confronting us in
the Valley.

Respectfully submitted,

E. C. De Baca Org. A. F. of L.

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Nov. 1949

Members, Citrus Workers and Food
Processors Union
A. F. of L.

A Preliminary Report to The Advisory Committee
Study of Spanish-speaking People, The University of Texas

George I. Sanchez and Lyle Saunders

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I.

INTRODUCTION

One of the most serious problems facing the people of Texas is the presence in the state of a very large, but as yet undetermined, number of wetbacks--illegal aliens who cross the border from Mexico mainly in search of agricultural employment, but who are to be found in many cities of the state, and in many non-agricultural jobs. The Spanish-speaking Texans are not the only ones affected. Every citizen of the state, Spanish and English-speaking alike, shares, to a greater or lesser extent, in the evil effects and devastating repercussions that derive from the presence in the state of from a hundred thousand to a half a million homeless wanderers - men, women, and children, without legal status, without skills, without knowledge of our ways and customs, without protection, and without opportunity for improving their condition. No citizen of the state, or of the other states into which many of the wetbacks eventually drift, can escape the consequences which appear in the form of poverty, disease, slums, ignorance, dependency, low wages, and social and personal disorganization, not only for the wetbacks themselves, but for the Spanish-speaking citizens whom they displace, and the English-speaking Texans in whose communities they, and the thousands of displaced persons, come to live.

No one knows how many wetbacks there are in Texas, but everyone, who has given thought to the problem, is aware that the number is almost unbelievably large. Low as are the wages which they can command for their services, these low wages are still several times greater than could be earned in Mexico. This economic differential becomes a powerful attractive force, drawing the laborers across the border in numbers which the Immigration Service and Border Patrol, with their present staffs, (approximately one patrol officer for each forty miles of border), could not control, even if they always wanted to.

Grover C. Wilmoth, District Director of the Immigration and Naturalization Service, was quoted by the International News Service in December, 1948, as saying that there are a hundred thousand illegal Mexican workers in Texas. The National Farm Labor Union of the American Federation of Labor, at an international conference in Laredo late in 1948, discussed the problems in terms of at least 200,000 whom they believed to be illegally in Texas, and working along the border at wages of from twenty to thirty seven cents an hour. The El Paso Times of September 22, 1948, quoted an Immigration Service report of 207,000 Mexican nationals having been deported during the previous year. In the San Antonio district alone there were, in the 1947-1948 fiscal year, more than 117,000 arrests of illegal aliens, 95% of whom were Mexicans. Mr. Watson B. Miller, U. S. Commissioner of Immigration, in a letter re-

duced later in this report, speaks of 193,852 and 194,954 apprehensions by the Border Patrol alone, during the past two fiscal years.

With about 200,000 Mexican aliens being caught and returned to Mexico each year, it is evident that several times this number must cross the border during the course of any given year. Some are caught, most of these are allowed to leave voluntarily. Some few are deported. Many immediately return. There are many stories - possibly apocryphal, but certainly revealing - of Immigration Service officers who escorted Mexicans to the bridge, turned them loose on the Mexican side, and then, later, on their way back to headquarters, found the recent deportees thumbing a ride on the highway. Some probably return the way they came and never get into official records at all. Others, no one knows how many, remain for years or even permanently, living on farms along the border or drifting up to San Antonio, Dallas, Houston, Austin, or even on out of the state to Chicago, Detroit, New York, and other Midwestern and Eastern cities. Forty, who had ridden for five days, packed under a false bottom in a truck, were arrested in Chicago last June; fifty six, who had walked more than seventy five miles through the brush, were picked up near Falfurrias in September. Ten unlucky ones were injured in December, one fatally, while riding to work in the Rio Grande Valley in a truck belonging to a county judge. These are some of those who are caught. But what of the ones who get away? Quien sabe?

The life of a wetback who escapes the attention of the Immigration Service is not pleasant. He has no rights and no privileges. He must stay off the highways and out of the towns. He must work for whatever is offered under whatever conditions the employer chooses to provide. His home is a shack or a brush shelter, or a blanket thrown beside a ditch. He owns nothing except that which he carries. His wife and his children, when he has them, share his life.

Johanna Mertens, social worker of the American Friends Service Committee, described a wetback camp which housed some thirty families who had lived for about five years in the brush a few miles this side of the border in Hidalgo County. The thatched shelters, she said, were similar. She states:

Each had one narrow bed built of two sawhorses and planks, covered with no more than a flannel sheet or blanket. The small babies slept in a suspended wooden box. The large families had nothing else but the hard earthen floor on which to sleep and eat. . . . Most shelters had a makeshift bench, stool or chair. Each had an indoor fireplace with no chimney outlet. Thus the interior of the hut soon blackened, darkening the already cave-like atmosphere. The two unprotected openings, serving as window and door, are the only source of light other than burning candles There are no cupboards . . . I saw no ice box nor even any food, with the exception of frijoles and tortillas A main irrigation canal borders the camp on the East. This is the only source for washing, drinking, and cooking water The only available store is owned by the company which operates the camp. It is on the farm. For two reasons the people must buy there. One is that it is over two miles into the nearest town. Another factor is that these people are not under the protection of their Company when they are outside the plantation boundaries and are therefore in danger of being picked up by the border patrol. Consequently, they are completely at the mercy of the boss, benefactor, father, company, etc., who is in reality one and the same All men, women, and children in the camp, who work in the fields, put in equal hours and receive equal pay - - \$2.50 per day. A day consists of twelve hours of labor. The weather, crop, and season determine the number of days required each week.

The more transient workers have even worse conditions. A Starr County teacher writes:

One day when I was driving through McAllen on my way to Pharr, I happened to notice a line of clothes hanging behind the June Day Packers shed. This shed is located on the Valley highway, and the clothes, together with a group of what looked like stacks of

packing crates, were clearly visible from the highway. We drove in back of the shed and saw what was one of the foulest sights I have ever seen. These packing crates were stacked together with pieces of canvas over them for a roof. Men were living in these shelters - some with only three sides - in the midst of pools of mud and garbage from the shed. The stench was so bad I had to leave after a brief look. There must have been twenty five alien men living there, clearly in view of any passer-by. I mention this because it indicates that there are few attempts made to conceal wetbacks.

The condition of the wetback is incredibly bad, but his condition is only one aspect of the problem resulting from the uncontrolled importation of contraband labor. Much more important are the effects on the resident population and on their institutions in areas where the wetbacks are concentrated. No citizen, who wants to live in even a minimum of comfort and decency, can compete with the wetback wage scale. With an oversupply of cheap, unprotected labor always present, organization of workers is impossible, individual bargaining is futile. There are only two choices: work for what the wetback works for and live as he lives, or leave the area. Many accept the former alternative; those who can, choose the second and become displaced persons. Either choice results in undesirable conditions for the individual and social problems for the community. For those who stay and attempt to compete, there is poverty and all the evils that are associated with it: disease, ignorance, child labor, crime and delinquency, lack of concern with civic affairs, slum conditions, and always there is the weight of a deadened, passive, apathetic population to be carried on the shoulders of the other elements of the community. For those who leave, there are similar problems of health, education, welfare, and housing - problems that affect both these migrating displaced families and those in the communities to which they go!

In every piece of fruit, every vegetable, every product of any kind that is produced in areas of wetback concentrations there is a hidden cost that never appears in the retail dealers' price tags. It is a cost that is shared by everybody, worker, consumer, and producer - a cost that appears in the form of higher taxes for welfare and other community services; in illnesses and deaths from dysentery, tuberculosis and, more recently, polio; in adult populations of citizens who cannot speak the language of the country in which they were born; in the labor of children and the consequent denial to them of opportunities for education and mental and physical development; in the slums of San Antonio and Corpus Christi and El Paso; and in the maintenance in much of Texas of a permanent minority group, the majority of whom are citizens, who are denied many of the opportunities, rights, and privileges that their fellow citizens enjoy. One begins to wonder if grapefruit and cotton are worth it.

This preliminary report is issued to provide information to members of our State-Wide Advisory Committee and to call attention to the seriousness of the wetback problem at a time when the new invasion is rising toward peak numbers. Presently available evidence indicates that there will be more border crossings this year than ever before. The number who took voluntary deportations in the lower Valley in January of this year was almost twice that of January, 1948. In the San Antonio division, more than 11,000 wetbacks were caught in February 1949, as compared with 6,200 in February 1948. In April, according to the Dallas Times, 160 illegal entrants were seized at Laredo carrying letters from United States farmers urging that they undertake to recruit other braceros. From Mexico come charges that border radio stations are being used to spread the word about job opportunities for agricultural workers in this country. And in El Paso, in April it was estimated that more than fifty potential wetbacks were arriving in Juarez each day, that 8,000 of them were gathered in Juarez waiting for an opportunity to cross, and that five hundred illegal passports were being used in that area to enable a stream of aliens to enter the United States.

Two documents are presented herein: a report on the wetback situation in the El Paso area by Art Leibson, reporter on the staff of the El Paso Times; and a general statement on wetbacks prepared by George I. Sanchez, Gus Garcia, and R. A. Cortez, and presented to David Miles, Executive Assistant to President Truman, in Washington in January, 1949.

Mr. Leibson originally planned a series of newspaper articles on the Wetbacks to run in the Times. The first article appeared in October, 1948, on the day that the El Paso breakthrough occurred. As a result of that and subsequent developments, the series was canceled. At our suggestion, Mr. Leibson made additional investigations and incorporated his findings, together with the material he had gathered for the Times series, in the report which we reproduce here. Mr. Leibson's point of view is that of a disinterested observer. He reports the situation as it looks to a man who is neither a farmer, a labor organizer, a public official, or an intensive student of social problems, but who can see and understand something of the viewpoint and special position of each.

The second of the documents here included was prepared by Mr. Garcia, Mr. Cortez, and Dr. Sanchez in January, 1949, for use in connection with a trip to New York and Washington to point out to the President of the United States, the Department of State, other governmental officials and agencies, and the officers of the major labor organizations, the seriousness of the wetback situation, and to urge that a governmental investigation be undertaken. Their written report is purposely brief, but it summarizes and outlines the essential points of the wetback problem and its implications for the welfare of Texas and the nation.

These two documents, together with our introduction, are presented for the purpose of giving a quick overview of the wetback situation and its relation to other social problems in Texas. It is hoped that the Study of Spanish-speaking people may, at a later day, do a more intensive study and make a more thorough analysis of the problem and its ramifications and publish its findings in more substantial form.

* * * * *

It is our opinion that the wetbacks constitute the outstanding issue facing the State of Texas today. It is true that there are other problems of a more spectacular nature, and which receive, or have received recently, more public attention - the tidelands question, the recent election of a U. S. Senator, the incidence of polio throughout the state. But there is no problem which occupies such a fundamental position in relation to other problems in the fields of health, housing, education, labor organization, politics, and social and economic relationships as does that of the wetback. For the wetback is a major source of social and economic infection. He is a focal point from which flow social poisons that manifest themselves in symptoms of various kinds: disorganized, migratory populations; segregated schools; hostilities and tensions; political apathy; economic waste; peonage; and a divided citizenry.

A large part of the economy of central, western, and south Texas is being founded upon most dangerous ground: the shifting quicksand that is the wetback - contraband labor. The cotton and citrus industries, vegetable farming, and similar enterprises there, by the shortsighted dependence on wetback labor, are sowing the wind - and, as a result, the state and nation will long reap a whirlwind of social misery and unrest, of expensive remedial action, of international embarrassment. Those enterprises, by their very dependence on wetbacks and on modified peonage, are exposing themselves to economic disaster. The flow of contraband labor, like that of contraband goods, is subject to legal sanctions and to control; and a sudden turn of events could bring a sudden removal of this mainstay of a warped economy.

All in all, the ill-gotten profits from the exploitation of this illegal labor seems poor compensation for the myriad real evils and potential dangers attendant on the use and encouragement of wetbacks. It is the conviction of the authors that measures for the solution of the wetback problem should be given highest priority by state and national officials, as well as by the leaders of private enterprise in Texas. This is a major problem, of far-reaching consequences, and its solution calls for the best that the coordinated intelligence of our top-flight leadership can offer in the way of social and economic inventiveness and of truly enlightened social consciousness.

II.

THE WETBACK INVASION

by

Art Leibson

Born of a wartime shortage of farm workers, and fed on postwar boom wages in the United States, and the shrinking 1948-49 peso, the migration of Mexican workers has become an economic monster along the Texas border near El Paso.

In 1948 the "wetbacks," so called because most of them waded the shallow Rio Grande under cover of darkness in search of the good Yariqui dollars, swarmed into El Paso and its adjacent irrigated valleys as never before. Estimates have placed the total crossing, within a single thirty day period, at between 20,000 and 40,000.

Some were to find employment in the fields on the Juarez side of the river, but the bulk dispersed to cross over into the promised land of two dollars a hundred pounds for picking the cotton.

Other cotton-growing sections of the South and Southwest paid more - up to five dollars in Arizona - but between the wetback and the lush fields was an effective Immigration Service roadblock and a wide stretch of desert.

The workers glutted the market, quickly knocking the picking rate down to \$1.50 and less as the invading horde harvested the crop in record time, bringing the Rio Grande farmers a near-record price, far above the floor guaranteed by the government.

The Mexican bracero could only compare his wage with the domestic standard, and his earnings looked like a fortune - before the commissary deductions were made. Below the border the picking rate was about sixty cents for one hundred kilos, roughly 230 pounds, and competition was fierce for those jobs.

Despite the lowest wage in the industry, and the gouging at the commissary, thousands of wetbacks managed to return home in the Fall of 1948 with savings enough to carry them through the Winter and early Spring. And early in 1949 they began again their mass movement to chop the cotton, weeding and hoeing at thirty cents an hour - or less.

They are the forerunners of the cotton pickers expected to bring the biggest official headache ever dumped into the governmental lap of the El Paso office of the Immigration Service.

Organized labor, never strong along the border where it must compete with the Mexicans both for skilled and unskilled job opportunities, has protested long and bitterly over what it calls a tacit agreement between Immigration Service officials and large cotton plantors to ignore the wetback during the picking season. They lay the blame in Washington, crediting the local border police for a fine job with a skeletonized personnel.

Equally bitter has been the argument of the plantors that they are totally dependent upon the Mexicans to get their crops picked and would face certain ruin if the supply were to be cut off suddenly.

The wetback problem is an old one at El Paso - older than the irrigation project at Elephant Butte, New Mexico, that made cotton possible in the Valley. For more than forty years organized labor in Texas has openly fought the coming of the wetback, climaxing with testimony before a Congressional investigating committee that came to the border in 1948 for a first-hand study of the problem.

On April 22, 1910, El Paso's Labor Advocate carried the following item: "This resolution was adopted by a unanimous vote of the 13th convention of the Texas State Federation of Labor at Galveston the past week, this being the biggest convention ever held of this body.

"Whereas, at the El Paso Port of Entry there is practically no attention paid to the admission of Mexico's laborers who are entering the United States at the rate of more than one thousand per month, many of whom are partially skilled as musicians, carpenters, painters, tanners et., who are displacing home and citizen labor at less than living wages according to the American standard of living; and,

"Whereas at the El Paso Port of Entry building contractors, railroad agents and labor agents have sub-agents in Old Mexico bringing this pauper class to this country, and it appears that no efforts are being put forth by the agents of the United States Bureau of Immigration to prevent such undesirable wholesale admission. Therefore, be it

"Resolved, that the Texas State Federation of Labor, in convention assembled at Galveston, Texas, does hereby enter its solemn and sincere protest against such action, and the secretary-treasurer is hereby instructed to lay this matter and a copy of this resolution before the American Federation of Labor at Washington, D. C., at his earliest opportunity."

Through the years, labor has gone on protesting and passing resolutions - and the wetback has kept on marching over the border. Until October, 1948, the problem was confined to the border. Then the Immigration Service made its dramatic move that focused national attention upon the wetback.

During the war the Federal Government had arranged to import tens of thousands of farm workers under "bracero" contracts, the Mexicans going into the agricultural states to replace men in the armed forces. The workers soon learned that a season among the Yanquis was good for a year-round grubstake.

Then the war ended and men poured back onto the farms from training camps and battlefields. At the same time, the Mexican Government raised the objection that braceros were being treated badly, poorly paid, fed, and housed. Several states were blacklisted from obtaining contract workers. Texas was found to be one of the most objectionable, according to Mexican officials, and since the beginning of 1948, no contracts have been entered into with Texas farmers.

Other states were hard hit by the Mexican move. And to aggravate the problem, the Latin-American axis of the Good Neighbor Policy delayed recruiting for the acceptable areas.

As harvest time approached in 1948, braceros, who had not been recruited in their native states, and those who had made up the bulk of the recruits for the areas now barred, began their migration to the border, confident that work would be found somehow. Most of them had no money and only enough food to reach the border. As they swarmed into Juarez, Mexican and United States officials conferred hastily on the establishment of a recruiting center across the river.

Cotton was opening. Frost was threatening the sugar beet crop in Colorado. But Mexico was in no hurry to come to an agreement. Each day brought reports of a possible settlement and rumors that a center would be opened in a day or two. Agents recruiting labor for fields a thousand miles away were waiting for the green light in Juarez and El Paso. Thousands of braceros had gathered at the Juarez race track, often used by Villistas and other revolutionaries in besieging the strategic border city. They were hungry and bitter - and ripe for a desperate move.

Nudged by farmers and politicians, the Immigration Service acted suddenly in the crisis. Recruiting agents were supplied with certificates of need by the United States Employment Service. Their trucks were waiting a few hundred yards from the river. The Great Western Sugar Company representative had backed a special train into the El Paso depot yard, ready to haul the hundreds of men needed. He had set up an office, a packing box placed behind a billboard near the Immigration headquarters. Recruiting already had been completed in Juarez and the men needed by Great Western had been provided with identifying slips.

Many farmers, told of the hunger of the workers, had loaded their trucks with dozens of loaves of bread, bologna and other cheap edibles.

The workers filtered across for twenty four hours while the Immigration Service blandly denied it was winking at the illegal entries, even while the truckloads of men were moving out of the city. Then orders came from higher up and the Service dropped all pretense. Word was spread in Juarez and the massed men waiting at the river bank stampeded across the railroad bridge leading to the Immigration headquarters. In Juarez troops were called out to hold back the wetbacks - negotiations for recruiting supposedly were continuing - but the troops were futile. Within forty eight hours more than 7,500 Mexican workers had crossed the river, been processed as to name, age, and home address, and turned over to the farmers and recruiting agents.

Border Patrol officers worked around the clock to get the workers away from the border and into the fields. Then, the needs supplied, the bars went up again and the officers returned to rounding up the illegal entries found in the El Paso valley. The wetback, dramatized in widely-circulated news pictures as he waded the river - posed by an enterprising El Paso newspaperman and photographer - again was a local problem.

Nobody in a position to know would tell where the order came from authorizing the Immigration Service move, but politicians had been active for weeks earlier. When President Truman came to El Paso for a campaign address, the problem was laid before him by cotton men and by Texas and New Mexico Congressmen. Soon after his train moved East through Texas, there was a meeting of top Immigration officials at El Paso. Then the gates went down for the unprecedented mass movement.

The incident was protested in Washington by Mexican officials as a treaty violation. The protest only pointed up the situation that has arisen in the Southwest as one more war baby. It continues a serious problem for the El Paso stretch of the irrigation district - blessing or menace, depending upon whether the problem is viewed by the highly caustic and well-informed labor leaders, or by equally trenchant farmers in the area.

Valley men have estimated that a minimum of ninety per cent of the valuable cotton crop was picked by wetbacks in 1948, and ginned long before competing areas because of the plentiful supply of pickers.

The local supply of farm labor, that once worked the fields with outside seasonal help from across the river, has moved out of the valley, unable or unwilling to work at the prevailing rate as whittled down by the oversupply. They have gone into the smelters and refineries flanking El Paso, and into the factories. Thousands have moved on to Colorado, Arizona and California.

When the cotton farmer says he would be ruined if the supply of Mexican labor ended, he is telling the blunt truth. He could add, with equal verity, that the situation is one of his own making, from which he has reaped a golden harvest in competition with other cotton sections of the country.

John P. Swanson, assistant chief patrol inspector for the Immigration Service, has watched the problem developing for many years. He has talked with hundreds of employers who have told him without hesitation that they will not employ local workers to chop or pick their cotton.

Why? Because, the farmer says, the native is lazy, discontented and troublesome. Also, he wants a living wage, by American standards - low enough at the border.

Before the coming of the wetback in mass numbers, farmers each year were forced to round up workers against stiff competition - competition from others within the area and from distant growing regions. They had to send trucks to the workers' homes to pick them up in the morning and return them at night. The farmer is unquestionably better off with his imported labor supply and, therefore, the farmers turned their eyes across the river.

They built rude huts to house their migratory workers. They provided food - at a premium profit - for the labor army. Larger farms installed commissaries that could supply every need, including the pick-up bags the workers were required to provide as a condition of employment. And the farmers found they could depend upon a reasonable coop-

eration from the Immigration Service. The threat of deportation was enough to keep the wetbacks on the farms and away from the bars - and keep the malcontents in line. There was no union, no organization to present grievances, and - the farmers said - the Mexicans would work harder, longer, and more efficiently than their blood-brother American citizens.

There has been little interference with the farmers' labor supply at El Paso during the chopping and picking seasons. United States officials rarely enter upon a farm unless there has been a complaint. But the wetback found on the public highway, or in the taverns, or in small communities around El Paso, is vulnerable. He faces deportation if a first offender, prison at La Tuna Correctional Institution if a repeater. Two big roundups are made each year, immediately after the Spring planting and chopping, and after the valuable fluff has been picked.

Housing and feeding the wetback, who has been arrested and faces trial, has become a major industry of the Sheriff's Department in El Paso. Arrests made by the Border Patrol, formerly independent but merged into the Customs Service in 1948, totaled 22,554 for the fiscal year ending July 1, 1948. In the following six months there were 20,079 arrests. The flood of foreign labor expected in 1949 will jam the tanks and cells of the county jail with a record population as those reluctant to return to their homes are gathered in by the patrols.

The El Paso County Sheriff received \$1 for each day a Federal prisoner is housed in the jail, to be accounted for to the county. In 1947 the amount received was close to \$100,000. In 1948, with a speed-up in hearings, the figure dropped slightly. But in 1949, even before the start of the cotton chopping, the revenue had risen to a record \$27,948 for the first three months.

Feeding the wetback on the farm also is an important industry, now monopolized by the farmers according to the bitter but furtive complaint of the merchants who fear total ruin if they openly protest. The wetback, confined to the farm where he is working, must depend upon his employer to supply his food. The larger farms have well-stocked commissaries. Smaller farmers take orders for foodstuffs, pick it up and make deliveries. In all cases, investigation discloses, a good profit clings to the employers' fingers. In most of the commissaries, in 1948, a sixteen cent loaf of bread sold for twenty five cents. Beans, the Mexican staple, sold for from fifty to one hundred per cent above the price quoted in El Paso stores. Other mark-ups in work clothes, picking bags and other needs were equally high. The bill presented to the worker on pay day made a deep gouge into his earnings, but there was no questioning the figures. For the Mexican peon could only take what was left and move on to the next field.

The agreed pay in 1948, for the first picking of the opened cotton, was \$1.50 a hundred pounds. The average picker is able to gather about 250 pounds from dawn to sunset. Hundreds of Mexicans brought their wives and children to work beside them in the fields, untouched by any child labor regulations.

How well is the wetback treated by his American employer? To answer this question, I went into the fields with an interpreter. I observed the workers' homes, their living conditions. Answers were freely and cheerfully given. From what I saw and heard, not from the workers alone, but from patrol inspectors, it was easy to conclude that the black slave of the pre-emancipation years was far better off. Uncle Tom at least had his cabin and a reasonably assured social security.

Mr. Swanson and some of his subordinates agree that slaves were treated better than the men on many farms they visited. "Peonage conditions under which the wetbacks frequently live, eat and sleep, can only be described as horrible," Swanson said. He told of one case, fortunately an extreme, that arose at a time when early field workers, usually paid thirty cents an hour in 1948, had flooded the market and were willing to labor for far less than the Federal Government prescribed as the minimum for workers engaged in production for interstate commerce. "We investigated one complaint," Mr. Swanson said, "and found that the employer was paying his help only what they could eat. And he had instructed his foreman to make certain they didn't eat too much." Some cotton pickers received as little as fifty cents a hundred.

Because of the outraged protests from inspectors who talked with wetbacks and arrests of workers that were made at the farms of employers who exploited them most, valley farmers in 1948 raised the cry that the Immigration Service was trying to fix wages and conditions of employment at El Paso. Grover C. Wilmoth, a long-time director of the Service, smilingly denied the charge but admitted it was only natural for the inspectors to be more sympathetic with the employer who paid a living wage and tried to give the worker a reasonably decent living condition.

Many farms in the valley have posted signs warning all visitors to keep out, lest they see too much of how the Good Neighbor Policy works as a practical matter. I could only guess at conditions behind the cotton curtain, using as a gauge what I saw on other farms.

Together with my interpreter I started my tour at a shack in the shadow of the patrol watch tower at San Elizario, below El Paso on the river. An enterprising woman had converted the shack into a boarding house to feed unmarried wetback for \$8 a week. She was having a slack period when we first called at her home because most of the men had returned to Juarez to celebrate the Mexican Independence Day on the 16th of September. They would be back in a few days, the woman told us.

Our next stop brought us to a colony of workers quartered in crude buildings made by tacking scrap tin over a rough framework. Children played on the dirt floor and cooking was going on in the yard, over an open fire. September is a hot month in El Paso and the flies swarmed over the food and the children, attracted by the refuse in the nearby fields that offered the only sanitation - not even open pit plumbing available. Children old enough to drag a small-sized picking bag through the irrigation furrows were out in the field at their hard work, the labor that brings on the telltale scars and callouses. In El Paso's police court a vagrant who claims to be a migratory cotton picker is given away by a quick glance at his hands. The veteran picker carries his identification badge from year to year in his hardened hands.

On many of the farms there was no provision for shelter, strictly catch-as-catch-can. The men, and often the women, slept under the long cotton wagons, under trees, in trucks, or in the open fields. The flies, valley mosquitoes, and other insects of the Southwestern Summer, crawled over the workers by night. They welcomed sunrise each morning as an escape to the fields. On the larger farms the makeshift housing often was a big improvement. There were the rude adobe huts, some with screens, and rows of tents moved in for the season.

Inspectors early discovered a racket being perpetrated by some of the more greedy farmers - and proceeded to smash it. The employer would work his wetbacks until the cotton was picked and sent off to the gin, then call the Immigration Service to come and remove "troublesome" workers and haul them off to the county jail - before they could collect their pay. Inspectors began returning to the farms to pick up the payroll for the deportees, and the practice stopped.

Wives bearing children in America offer another problem to Immigration officials because of the generous laxity of naturalization laws. When a Mexican national gives birth to a child on the American side of the Rio Grande - a United States citizen by having been born here - the parents will not be deported because it would work an undue hardship on the infant citizen. As a result, the parents are admissible to citizenship even though they cannot qualify on literacy and know nothing of the government of the United States or any responsibilities of citizenship. And once they are naturalized, their other children are quickly admitted.

An El Paso Naturalization official told me there were 1600 such "hardship cases" pending in 1949. The law requires that a copy of the proceedings be given to each such applicant, and the copy is carefully studied by English-speaking friends. It is taken to the padre for further study, and the loophole quickly gets around among the Mexican population near the border.

Many women, expecting children, wait until a few days before the expected delivery and then cross the river to give birth on the American side, the birth being duly recorded on the county records and constituting an insurance policy against deportation. Many foreigners who could not expect to be admitted legally, because of physical disabilities or illiteracy, find safe harbor in Texas while desirable aliens wait and hope for admission. They are here to stay.

Another loophole of the law allows aliens who entered illegally to become citizens after seven years of residence, if they have no police record. Thousands of the wetbacks, and other braceros, are scattered through the country today in agricultural communities, waiting until they, too, may claim citizenship and immunity from return to the peon conditions of Mexican agriculture.

It was inevitable that the wetback would bring on a deep resentment from those already in the El Paso valley. One war veteran told of having worked sixty hours on a farm in his work week, at a \$5 daily wage as a tractor operator. He was satisfied, he said, but soon lost his job to a wetback who would work the tractor for \$3. The story is told over and over again.

Valley merchants, begging us not to use their names, told of the loss of income by the displacement of local workers. Simple arithmetic showed why their income had shrunk heavily since the mass coming of the wetback. The newcomers would buy only what they needed for a bare existence among the Yanquis, hoarding their precious dollars that would buy so much more when turned into pesos and spent below the border.

One of the protests against the wetback has come from an El Paso post of the Veterans of Foreign Wars, who asked an investigation of what they called the "destruction of little businessmen."

A startling fact uncovered in canvassing the valley farms was how many are owned by El Paso's most substantial citizens who flaunt their "Americanism" while exploiting foreign citizens. One heavy property owner is a judge, another is a banker, a third a legislator, and on through a roll call of business and commercial leaders. They are only playing the game as they find it, no better and no worse than their neighbor cotton-growers. They are taking advantage of a profit belt in cotton that has pushed the cost of irrigated land up to \$1000 an acre--where any can be bought.

Many wetbacks, skilled or semi-skilled, use the cotton fields only as a wedge to work into other occupations around El Paso. George Weber, executive secretary of El Paso Central Labor Union, and a member of the seven-man executive board of the National Farm Labor Union, estimates there are between 6,000 and 9,000 illegal workers from Mexico out of a total labor force in El Paso of about 21,000. Many of the non-agricultural workers enter under false working permits, issued to other persons who have sold or given them away to friends.

Much of El Paso's 1948-49 new housing construction has been done by wetbacks, working beside union electricians or plumbers. "We are fighting the cheap, unorganized labor constantly," Weber said, "but we must face, and recognize the inevitable. So long as the United States Government allows the cheap labor to cross the river, we are all but helpless in trying to obtain a fair labor scale in the area. And Congress hasn't the guts to pass a law that would really hit at the wetback. "When I appeared before the committee investigating in El Paso in 1948, I gave them the answer. All they would have to do is pass a law making the employer equally liable with the employee for hiring a wetback. The first time a cotton-planter went to prison for a year and a day, you would see the practice disappear overnight. But they weren't interested. They were only shadowboxing with the problem and talking piously of makeshift measures."

Weber, who is the A. F. of L. organizer in the Southwest, insists that his union would win every election held under the sponsorship of the National Labor Relations Board in the El Paso area if only American citizens were allowed to vote. He called the wetback the number one enemy of organized labor at the border.

The inevitable result of the wetbacks' presence is a lowering of living conditions as the influx of peons brings with it a demand for less

modern improvements than the natives have come to take for granted. And El Paso is losing its fight to Americanize its Latin-American youngsters when a constant influx of children, who speak no English, pours into the city's schools and those operated by the county in the outlying districts. At one high school, with an almost 100 per cent Latin-American enrollment, the principal has suspended dozens of children for violating the rule against speaking other than English in the school or school yard. But it is a hopeless battle. The children return to their homes and never speak a word of English until they again enter the classroom.

There is trouble ahead, and both labor officials and Immigration inspectors know it. The army of wetbacks has become an annual invasion and their cheap labor a fixture. When employment slackens, and competition for jobs in El Paso's industrial fields becomes more acute, you may start looking for danger signals on the border. There will be a concerted move to close the floodgates and oust the illegal workers, countered by the opposition of farmers and employers who have the power in their hands at present to resist labor's battle that has shuttled between El Paso and Washington. Organized labor, with its back to the wall, will make a stronger fight to Americanize the working force--and organize it. The Good Neighbor Policy, stripped to its fundamentals, will be shown for the window-dressing it is known to be all along the border.

An example of the tenacity with which the farmers cling to their labor bargain in the Rio Grande Valley was their invoking of an old Texas law against recruiting workers, to bar outsiders from taking away their cheap labor and causing a return to the old seller's market in cotton picking.

By invoking that law, they enlisted local as well as Federal authorities on their side to keep the wetbacks bottled up in the valley where they are at the employers' mercy. There were arrests and prosecutions in 1948 when farmers from the Pecos Valley, or other areas where there was a serious labor shortage, came into the city looking for workers. Road blocks set up by officials intercepted and searched trucks suspected of carrying wetbacks to outlying fields. When officials examined a watering tank they found its iron walls were filled with human cargo, several near death from thirst and from the terrific heat cooking the walls of the tank.

There is an interesting sidelight discovered by Immigration Service men when they began registering the wetbacks in October. They found that a number gave El Paso as their address. They had crossed into Juarez, they said, waded back across the river, and joined the columns moving through the patrol headquarters. It was the only way--as wetbacks--that they could get a job barred to them as a United States citizen.

"Farmers have told me they would give up their lands before they would use local workers," Mr. Swanson told me. "Recently our men rounded up the wetbacks on a farm and the owner bitterly complained and demanded an answer to the problem of how he was to get his cotton picked. I was ready for him and told him there were five carloads of American citizens from East Texas then waiting a few miles away, unable to get work. He mumbled something and turned away. The next day there were more wetbacks on his farm. It was the same throughout the valley. Open hostility against any American agricultural worker. We finally sent the Texans into the Pecos Valley where there would be plenty of work for them--at a higher rate of pay."

The wetback problem isn't peculiar to El Paso. A much larger army of Mexicans is rounded up annually in the San Antonio area. California has its mounting problem of the undesirable visitors from below the border who come for a season and stay to become a tax burden. But in El Paso, because of its native population, the problem is more acute.

Lines are drawn for the 1949 battle. Declining cotton prices--still supported by a subsidy floor--and greater unemployment, can lead to nothing but trouble. The Immigration Service will be caught squarely between two warring forces, labor battling to maintain living standards, and farmers struggling to hold onto their profit levels.

The Border Patrol is ready -- and waiting.

III.

THE WETBACK PROBLEM OF THE SOUTHWEST

1. Spanish-speaking People of the United States

The Spanish-speaking people of the Southwest number about 3,000,000. Over 80 per cent of them are citizens of the United States, many of them here since Spanish Colonial days (1598-1821). These people have repeatedly demonstrated their loyalty to this country, in war and in peace; and, in this respect, they have a record second to none among the minority groups of this nation.

Because of a long succession of unfavorable circumstances, over which they've had virtually no control, these people are in essentially the same position of underprivilege that confronts the Negro. While they exhibit every conceivable variety of status and accomplishment, the rule is one of socio-economic underprivilege, of "racial" discrimination, etc. Since the Southwest was Annexed and occupied by the United States, most of these people have been "pushed around," "jim crowed," and otherwise mistreated -- by individuals, by organizations, and even by both state and Federal governmental agencies -- to such an extent that today, after 100 years of U. S. rule, they are still largely unassimilated. Our record with these subject peoples, right here at home, is worse even than with Puerto Ricans, the Filipinos, and the Indians. (See North From Mexico, Carey McWilliams; Forgotten People, George Sanchez; Not With the First, Ruth Tuck; and similar books). Right now, however, their past experiences are of small moment in the face of a development which bids well to sink them even deeper in the mire of socio-economic underprivilege. We refer to the illegal mass movement of Mexican aliens to the United States.

2. The Wetback

The figures of the Immigration Service show that more than 190,000 illegals are apprehended and repatriated each year. The number not apprehended, and therefore not recorded, may be several times this figure. One can easily imagine what this great mass of "wetbacks" does to the economy, the education, and the general well-being of the resident "Mexicans" (and other workers, Negro and white, with whom the wetbacks compete). The illegals work for 15 cents - 25 cents an hour. They are subjected to virtual peonage. Because of their competition, thousands of resident families are displaced and forced to move on -- men, women, children -- to compete on a cut-throat basis farther on, to live in slums, in extreme ill-health, in ignorance, and in a squalor that is spiritual as well as physical.

Exhibit A gives sample data which describe the current situation of the 1,500,000 Spanish-speaking people of Texas. These data suggest that, certainly in Texas and probably all the way to California, a fantastic process is underway which is breeding ignorance, misery, disease, disillusionment, and despair among our 3,000,000 Spanish-speaking Americans. What does this promise to the coming generations, to the citizens of tomorrow, to the assimilation of a rapidly increasing number of "Mexicans," to the Four Freedoms, to the American Way? Today, the exploitation of wetback labor is the most potent factor in this degrading and depressing spectacle. And the most dismaying aspect of this unsavory picture is the fact that governmental agencies, notably the Immigration Service and the Employment Service, are participating in the introduction and employment of these thousands upon thousands of wetbacks. The correspondence reproduced in Exhibit D substantiates this charge.

Strangely enough, a December 5, 1943, INS report from El Paso quotes Mr. Grover C. Wilmoth, District Director of the U. S. Immigration Service, as follows:

"More than 100,000 Mexicans are working on farms and ranches in Texas alone and they are all in this country illegally. These people are living in a state of virtual peonage and they have no recourse to the law regarding the amount of pay they receive.

"The problem is one we could control if we had the laws, but several factors prevent our doing the job we want to do."

Note should also be made of the fact that the Immigration Service, by its own statistics for 1948, admits to returning 6,912 wetbacks in January, 6,886 in February, 9,253 in March, 10,409 in April, 11,021 in May, 9,216 in June, 7,554 in July, and 34,397 in August. Activity in the "deportation" of these illegal aliens fluctuates with the requirements of employers for cheap, peon labor. Actually, the vast majority of them are not deported, but repatriated by the application of voluntary return provisions of our immigration laws. August is the month which marks the end of the seasonal need for "stoop labor" in southern Texas.

3. Additional Dangers

These developments put in jeopardy the National security, for here is a wide open door that anyone with ulterior motives can use -- to undermine organized labor, to maintain a caste system, to manipulate government, and even for subversive action against the government of the United States.

Many of our returned veterans, after distinguishing themselves notably in the war (of 14 Texans receiving the Congressional Medal of Honor, 6 were "Mexicans"), came back to find themselves converted into second-class citizens, to find their families converted into miserable migrants, themselves ostracized and treated on the same terms as the wetbacks, even by veterans' organizations.

4. Proposed Remedy

For all these reasons and their implications, we believe that this matter constitutes an emergency of national significance. The situation is rapidly worsening and, unless relief is applied, irreparable damage will be done. We propose three steps:

- a. Immediate application of all existing remedies - through the various arms of the Department of Justice, of the Department of State, and so on.
- b. Emergency legislation which would penalize the use of illegal alien labor - through bonding of employers of non-citizen workers, or some other plan.
- c. The immediate appointment of a President's commission to go into all aspects of the situation confronting the Spanish-speaking people of the Southwest.

We are three individuals, acting in our private capacity, who act only through a sense of moral obligation. We have no obligation to any private or political vested interest, and want only to see that justice is done our people. Because of this, we place ourselves completely at the service of our President in this matter, and we are eager to do whatever he may suggest would get this job done.

Submitted January 27, 1949, by:

R. A. Cortez,
(National President of the League
of United Latin American Citizens,
214 Broadway, San Antonio, Texas).

Gus C. Garcia,
(Attorney, and member of city school
board, Majestic Building, San An-
tonio, Texas).

George I. Sanchez,
(University professor, 2307 San An-
tonio Street, Austin, Texas).

EXHIBIT A

1.

Fifty per cent of the Spanish-name children of school age in Texas are not in any school on any given school day. In many communities, "Mexican" children are still segregated in the public schools. While they constitute over 20 per cent of the white population in Texas, these people have only 2 per cent of the college enrollment.

2.

Selected Mortality Rates, Texas, 1946

	<u>Deaths</u> <u>Anglos</u>	<u>per 100,000</u> <u>Population</u> <u>Spanish-Speaking</u>
Diphtheria	1.31	6.47
Whooping Cough	0.64	5.73
Tuberculosis	25.40	159.00

Source: State Department of Public Health.

3.

In San Antonio, a survey by the Health Department revealed that the death rate, per 100,000, from tuberculosis was: for Anglos 40, for Negroes 50, for "Mexicans," 140.

4.

Per Capita Income During Past Year, 3,103 Spanish-speaking Families, Hidalgo County, Texas, 1947-1948

<u>Annual Per Capita</u> <u>Income</u>	<u>Number</u> <u>Families</u>	<u>%</u> <u>of Families</u>	<u>Cumulative</u> <u>%</u>
\$ 0 - \$ 49	42	1.4	1.4
50 - 99	175	5.6	7.0
100 - 149	403	13.0	20.0
150 - 199	439	14.1	34.1
200 - 249	440	14.2	48.3
250 - 299	352	11.3	59.6
300 - 349	347	11.2	70.8
350 - 399	154	5.0	75.8
400 - 499	262	8.4	84.2
500 -	403	13.0	97.2
Not stated	86	2.8	100.0

Source: United States Public Health Service, unpublished survey data.

5.

Total Family Income During Past Year, 3,103 Spanish-speaking Families, Hidalgo County, Texas, 1947-1948.

<u>Annual</u> <u>Income</u>	<u>Number</u> <u>Families</u>	<u>%</u> <u>of Families</u>	<u>Cumulative</u> <u>%</u>
\$ 0 - 499	303	9.8	9.8
500 - 999	987	31.8	41.6
1000 -1499	828	26.7	68.3
1500 -1999	452	14.6	82.9
2000 -2499	250	8.0	90.9
2500 -2999	86	2.8	93.7
3000 - 3999	92	2.9	96.6
4000 - 4999	25	0.8	97.3
5000 - 7499	9	0.3	97.6
7500 -	1	0.0	97.6
Not stated	70	2.3	99.9

Source: United States Public Health Service, unpublished survey data.

6.

Sanitary Facilities and Public Utilities Used by 1249 Spanish-speaking Families, West San Antonio, 1948

Utility	HAVE		DO NOT HAVE		NOT STATED	
	No. Families	%	No. Families	%	No. Families	%
Water Supply *	809	64.8	394	31.5	46	3.7
Electricity	756	60.5	447	35.8	46	3.7
Gas	75	6.0	1128	90.3	46	3.7
Sewer Connections	25	2.0	1178	94.3	46	3.7

*This refers to any source of water in or near the home. Those indicating no water supply, purchase water by the barrel from traveling vendors. Many of those families reporting a water supply, depended on cisterns, wells, or, in some instances, open ditches. A private company, which piped water to the homes of a number of those indicating a water supply, suspended operations in November, a few months after this survey was made.

Source of data: House to house survey made by the Pan-American Progressive Association, July, 1948.

EXHIBIT B

1.

The following telegram was sent to President Harry S. Truman, Hon. Tom Clark, and Hon. Dennis Chavez, by Mr. R. A. Cortez, on October 18th, 1948.

"Our Organization has been endeavoring to uplift the economic and social standards of Americans of Latin American descent for twenty years (stop). The Action of the United States immigration authorities as reported by the press in allowing an avalanche of illegal Mexican labor signifies the lowering of wage standards almost to a peonage level and will force thousands of native born and naturalized Americans to uproot their families, suspend the education of their children and migrate to other states in search of a living wage (stop). To nearly three million Hispanic Americans in Southwestern and Western United States, this action represents a violation of our fundamental American principles and a retardation of our progress (stop). We protest most emphatically, we ask for an investigation of the violation of our Federal laws, and we demand the immediate deportation of all persons who are in the United States illegally."

2.

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE
Immigration and Naturalization Service
Washington 25, D. C.

October 26, 1948

Office of the Commissioner

56265 333

Dear Mr. Cortez:

To expedite a reply, the Attorney General has requested that we respond to your telegram of October 18, 1948, in which you express concern regarding reports which recently appeared in the press to the effect that this Service "allowed admission" of, or "let down the bars" to illegal Mexican farm laborers. At the outset, I should like to state that it was inaccurate and misleading to refer to the situation which arose the week before last at El Paso as a "letting down of the bars to illegal immigration." The facts of the matter are that pursuant to the International Agreement of February 21, 1948, relating to the importation of Mexican agricultural laborers to be used exclusively in such employment

after certificates of need for their services have been issued by the United States Employment Service, the Mexican government agreed to establish a recruiting center at Juarez to supply workers urgently needed in New Mexico and in the intermountain states.

Various employers had been granted certificates of need and their applications, to import specified numbers of agricultural laborers under the immigration laws, had been approved. These employers had proceeded to El Paso for the purpose of recruiting the workers, but dangerous delay elapsed without any recruiting center having been established in Juarez. In the meantime, an almost total loss of the sugar beet crop was being threatened by the delay, as well as the loss of millions of dollars' worth of cotton, which was open and ready for picking. At the same time, thousands of Mexican agricultural laborers, many of them on the verge of starvation, had assembled for the purpose of being recruited under the program by United States' growers. Finally, the news having spread among the workers that employers were waiting in El Paso to commence employing them, they proceeded to flock across the river in large numbers. The Border Patrol, with all of its facilities greatly overtaxed, continued, as it had done for some weeks, to apprehend them in large numbers and return them to Mexico. Eventually the situation became so critical from the standpoint of both the need of the employers and the need of the workers, that it was decided, strictly as a temporary emergency measure, to parole the arrested aliens and defer their removal to Mexico until the crops in question have been harvested.

The conditions of the parole were that the aliens be paid prevailing wages, that the employers comply with all other terms of the international agreement relating to conditions of employment, and return the workers to Mexico at the termination of their contracts. Incidentally, the paroling of the aliens was discontinued on October 18th, the needs of the employers, as certified to by the United States Employment Service, having been filled. I may add that teams of Border Patrol officers of this Service are being detailed into the areas where these aliens are employed for the purpose of inspecting conditions of employment and to ascertain that the agreed upon wages are being paid; also to prevent the aliens from drifting into other areas and into other types of employment. At the termination of their present employment, the aliens are to be returned to Mexico. In fact, on October 22nd 200 of these aliens were returned to Mexico, and they will be continued to be returned at the rate of from one to several hundred per day until all have departed.

As to complaints which have been received since the appearance of the press reports concerning the situation at El Paso on the general subject of illegal Mexican immigration and its effect upon domestic workers, it may interest you to know that during the first three months of the current fiscal year, the Border Patrol, on the Mexican border alone, apprehended and returned to Mexico 80,322 Mexican nationals who had entered, or were attempting to enter, illegally. In addition, substantial numbers were apprehended in other parts of the country and returned to Mexico. During the last two fiscal years, Border Patrol apprehensions numbered 193,852 and 194,954 respectively and, again, these figures do not include substantial numbers of Mexican nationals apprehended in the interior of the country and returned to Mexico.

Sincerely yours,

(signed) Watson B. Miller, Commissioner

3.

November 4th, 1948

Honorable Tom C. Clark
Attorney General of the United States
Washington, D. C.

Dear Mr. Clark:

In answer to my telegram to you of October 18th, I received a letter from Mr. Watson B. Miller, Commissioner of Immigration, a copy of which

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I enclose. In behalf of the League of United Latin American Citizens and in my own right, I wish to express our sincerest appreciation for the interest that you have shown in this matter, notwithstanding your multitudinous and complex duties and responsibilities.

While I am deeply grateful to Mr. Miller for his prompt reply, his courteous tone and his detailed response to our communication, I am unable to express anything less than amazement at the explanations he offers in connection with the El Paso incident. In the first place, you will observe that Mr. Miller states, with reference to the repatriation of the illegal Mexican workers, ".....At the termination of their present employment, the aliens are to be returned to Mexico..." This explanation does not conform with the statement issued by the Assistant to President Harry S. Truman, Mr. John R. Steelman, who declared recently: "The matter has been investigated and the Commissioner of Immigration, on October 22nd, directed the Immigration Service to promptly return all such persons....." Furthermore, Mr. Miller's statement is not in accord with press reports of the answer handed to the Mexican Government by our own Department of State, in which the Government of Mexico was assured that all persons, who had entered illegally at El Paso, would be returned to Mexico immediately.

In other parts of his letter, Mr. Miller states that the reasons for the action taken by the Immigration officials at El Paso were (1) That the Mexican Government had not lived up to its agreement to establish a labor recruiting center at Juarez; (2) That a critical situation existed among the Mexican laborers, many of whom, asserts Mr. Miller, were "on the verge of starvation"; and (3) That a critical situation arose from the standpoint of the American farmers in that they stood to lose millions of dollars worth of crops.

It appears to me that the Immigration Service thus admits having set itself up as the arbiter of (1) Mexico's compliance or non-compliance with the International Agreement; (2) The conditions and welfare of laborers who are citizens of, and who were on the soil of a foreign country; (3) The economy of our agricultural enterprises - matters that, to my understanding, do not fall within the province or competence of the Service.

I consider it nothing less than ironic that Mr. Miller should give as the reason for the discontinuance of the "paroling" of the aliens the fact that the needs of the employers had been filled. In effect, then, the Immigration Service appears to have been acting, not as a department of the Federal Government charged with the enforcement of Federal Laws, but simply as an employment agency for the benefit of certain agricultural interests.

In addition to the foregoing, I would respectfully point out to you that, according to Mr. Miller's statement, the Immigration officials are now apparently performing the duties formerly assigned to the FEPC, in that ".....teams of Border Patrol officers of this Service are being detailed in the areas where these aliens are employed, for the purpose of inspecting conditions of employment and to ascertain that the agreed upon wages are being paid....."

In addition to their duties as F.E.P.C. Agents, these Immigration officials, Mr. Miller informs us, have also been charged with the responsibility of preventing ".....the aliens from drifting into other areas and into other kinds of employment...." I cannot interpret this last self-imposed "duty" on the part of these officials as anything else except the forcing of conditions of involuntary servitude upon these aliens by the threat of deportation if they refuse to continue to work for the employers to whom the Immigration Service itself has arbitrarily assigned them.

Assuming that the Immigration officials are acting in complete good faith in desiring to insure the welfare of these aliens, and that they are acting within the scope of their authority, I still fail to see how they can possibly carry out this plan of supervising thousands of laborers scattered over hundreds of miles, when, under their own admission these same officials were unable to cope with the situation when the presence of these laborers was limited to an area a few hundred yards wide. Furthermore, no possible explanation can justify the Immigration Service's aiding and abetting a scheme of assigning these workers to sections of the United States where the importation of alien labor had

been specifically prohibited by the International Agreement between Mexico and the United States because of conditions of discrimination existing in these areas.

As to the last paragraph in Mr. Miller's letter in which he points with pride to the accomplishments of the Immigration Service in returning "wetbacks" to Mexico, I would respectfully call to your attention the fact that the statistics released by the Service itself clearly indicate that the peak of these "deportations" takes place in accordance with the termination of the demand for seasonal labor. It appears to me that, in carrying out this policy, the United States Immigration Service is acting more like a repatriation agency than a department charged with the responsibility of deporting aliens who are illegally in this country.

It is my understanding, furthermore, that the policy on the part of the Immigration Service, of paroling "wetbacks" to employers, as carried out in El Paso in the case at hand, is merely in keeping with the long existent custom in the Lower Rio Grande Valley of Texas, where it is estimated that there are now between eighty thousand and one hundred thousand such aliens, many of whom literally commute every day between Mexico and the United States.

Lest the position of the organization, of which I have the honor to be President, be misunderstood, I want to make it perfectly clear that, as American citizens, what we are primarily concerned with is the disastrous effect that the use of this limitless reservoir of cheap labor -- workers without rights or standing, and without protection of either the Mexican or United States Governments, and bordering on conditions of peonage -- has on the nearly two and one half million American citizens of Mexican and other Latin-American extractions, who are permanent residents of the Southwestern part of the United States, many of whom are forced to migrate as displaced persons because of their inability to compete with this illegal labor and those conditions of employment. The repercussions of these existing conditions can be keenly felt in the situation prevalent among these two and a half million American citizens as to health, education, standard of living, and other socio-economic phases.

Finally, again thanking you most sincerely for your timely intervention in this matter, I wish to reiterate the plea that we made in our telegram of October 18th; viz: that you conduct a thorough investigation; that appropriate legal action be taken against all officials who have been derelict in the performance of their duties and responsibilities to us, the citizens of the United States; and that immediate measures be taken to insure that all persons who are illegally in the United States, regardless of whether they are in the El Paso area or in other sections, are deported at once.

Respectfully yours,

E. A. Cortez, National President

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| cc: Mr. Watson B. Miller
Comm. of Immigration
Washington, D. C. | cc: Senator Tom Conally
Washington, D. C. |
| cc: Mr. John R. Steesman
Assistant to the President
Washington, D. C. | cc: Hon. Paul J. Kilday, M. C.
San Antonio, Texas |
| cc: Mr. Robert A. Lovett
Under-Sec'y. of State
Washington, D. C. | cc: Mr. William Green, President
Am. Federation of Labor
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| cc: Mr. Philip Murray, Pres. J.I.C.
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