

Migrant labor

SOME CURRENT PROBLEMS OF THE MIGRANT  
AGRICULTURAL LABORER IN THE GREAT VALLEY

Term Paper of  
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## Table of Contents

Chapter I	Why Migrants	1
Chapter II	Housing of Migrants	9
Chapter III	Employment - Unemployment	26
Chapter IV	Competition	33
Chapter V	Education Problems	39
Chapter VI	Health and Accidents	47
Chapter VII	Attitudes toward Migrants	53
Chapter VIII	Relief	63
Chapter IX	Conclusion	67
Bibliography		76

## Chapter I

### Why Migrants

The question we might well ask is why ~~sh~~ould anyone leave the shelter of his house and home to go out on the wild goose chase of the migrant farm laborer? If the problems that we discuss here are vital, important, dangerous, imminent, then why should a person become a migrant? Maybe we only imagine the problem. Maybe the life of the migrant is all milk and honey. Edith Lowry\* has as her central

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Lowry, Edith E.: Migrants of the Crops

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theme "They starve that we might eat". That is certainly nice of them if they starve so that we might have full stomachs. But we know that these migrants do not want to starve. They do not want to starve. They do not do it for altruistic purposes. Migrants do starve, yes. They why do they become migrants?

On the surface we might say that the people become migrants because workers are needed to harvest the crops throughout the land. And those places that grow surplus crops need more laborers than are ordinarily available in the stabilized area. Shall we assume, then, that these people are coaxed away from hearth and bedstead with offers of high wages to gather the crops? Decidedly not. Yes, money tempts some people to migrate, but the amount offered is almost always insufficient to tempt anyone who has a decent home to leave it and take to the highway or open road.

Naturally "the only fair approach to any study of this problem must in all fairness recognize that the migrant agricultural laborer

is an asset as well as a liability".\* Therefore it depends on the

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\*Lowry, Edith : Migrants of the Crops p. 34

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colored glasses one wears whether the migrant is considered desirable or undesirable.

First let us realize that there are two general types of migrants. First is the type that has a house somewhere to call home and during vacations, or slack seasons, or for other reasons leave the house and migrate to some other area to work. Second is the type of migrant who has no permanent place of abode, but wanders from maturing crop to maturing crop, northward behind the robins. "The increasing number of crops that because of climatic conditions can be harvested in winter as well as summer...have produced the all year migrant".\*\*

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\*\*Lowry, Edith: Migrants of the Crops p. 1

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The causes of migration are three: Economic forces of "shifts in industry, technological changes, business failures, industrial disputes, depressions, seasonal fluctuations; psychological forces such as desire for security, desire for new experiences; and third, social changes" \*\*\* such as breakdown in family solidarity, new

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\*\*\*Hathway, Marion: Migratory Worker and Family Life p. 1

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customs brought by the automobile, paved road, tourist cabins, national parks, resort advertisements, and so on.

I don't believe any comment is necessary to explain the economic forces that cause migration. This is not a paper devoted to the causes. However "rapid population increase on lands of diminishing



fertility (of land) has been a fundamental factor" \* in causing

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\*California State Chamber of Commerce: Migrants, a National Problem p. 16

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migration from the Great Plains and South Central States areas. "In the newer sections of the cotton belt, such as the High Plains area of Texas and Oklahoma, there has been an especially rapid trend towards mechanization". \*\* These two examples of economics operating

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\*\*ibid p. 17

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show forces that tend to cause migration.

The psychological reasons for migration may need some thought. A sedentary worker wonders perhaps why anyone would like a migrant life, but some people seem to do so. I have a quotation from a letter written to a migrant camp paper by a member of the camp. He says , "fruit tramping is a wonderful life". \*\*\* As a former "fruit tramp"

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\*\*\*Marysville Camp News April 2, 1938

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of type one, I can say that I looked forward yearly for the fruit season so that I might camp and work some 150 miles from home.

Perhaps the prime reason for the great range of the migrant is the third reason for migration. The Migrant Committee of the California Chamber of Commerce notes than "an obvious factor which has facilitated such interstate migration has been the increased availability of automobiles and good roads". \*

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\*Migrants, A National Problem p. 18

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The charts on the following page gives an idea of the relative proportions of people in their reasons for migration.

Chart 1

	No. and %
Raised as migrants	14
Forced from other jobs	52
Health	5
See the west	5
Crop failures	19
Wanted freedom from monotony	2
Not given	<u>3</u>
	100
Why I am a migrant *	

Chart 2

	no.	%
Forced from other jobs	52	62.7
Forced from farming	19	22.9
Health	5	6.0
See the west	5	6.0
Freedom from monotony	<u>2</u>	<u>2.4</u>
	83	100.0
Why I changed to a migrant*		

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\*Adopted from Hathway, Marion: Migratory Workers and Family Life  
pp. 44-48

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Where do these migrants go? We from California usually will answer, "They are all coming to California". However many "recruits to the itinerating life too often enter upon it in great bewilderment as to distance, direction, or destination". \* Of course there are

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\*Lowry, Edith: Migrants of the Crops p.19

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"guides" of various sorts along the line and as the often bitter experience of the migrant extends, he can read these "guides" more accurately. He finds the "states having crops to harvest the year around must depend on migrant labor more continuously than other parts of the country".\*\* Which states are climaticly able to produce year round

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\*\*ibid. p.15

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harvests? Not the North. The long cold winter precludes that. How about the South? The local labor supply, always in superabundance well takes care of Southern needs How about the East? The East has its type I migrants, but there is not much work for out-of-the-area workers. How about the west? The possibility of finding work is better in the west because there is a much small proportion of family-size farms. "In the west, particularly on irrigated lands...paid laborers *comprise virtually nine out of ten of all farm laborers.*" \*\*\*

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\*\*\*Taylor, Paul: The Place of Agricultural Labor in Society p. 4

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And so the migration towards the west increases. And to most migrants, as well as the rest of the country the west means California. "The story of California is the story of migrations both into and within the state." \*\*\*

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\*Gunther, John: Inside the U.S.A. p. 1

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So the jalopies and migrant inhabited freight cars roll westward. But why pick on California in particular? They do not. But the majority do come to California for at least three good reasons. The first~~is~~ climate. California has a more mild climate than any of the other western states, altho almost all the western states have climate superior to the northern and northeastern states. The second reason for choosing California is because this is perhaps the climax of the long historically perceived migration from Central Asia to Eastern Europe, from there to Western Europe, from the ports of Western Europe the emigrees left for the Americas. And our nation has experienced a constant movement westward. Oregon and Washington share in this movement, but California gets the lions portion.

The third reason why California is so attractive is because of higher wages usually paid to farm workers in California than any other state. Carey Mc Williams complains about the farmers trying to reduce the wages of the farm laborers, but he fails to point out that California pays considerably more than do other states. The migrants "heard of opportunities for work at good wages. Principally such information came to them by direct communication, either by word of mouth or by letters from friends or relatives. Less often it reaches them through newspaper accounts". \*

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\* California State Chamber of Commerce: Migrants, A National Problem p. 20

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For instance when some farm workers in California were earning 30 and more cents an hour (most earning around 25 cents an hour during the depths of the depression), some workers in Oklahoma were receiving 10 cents an hour and worked 10 hours a day. "In January 1940. California farmers were paying an average of \$2.85 per day to farm laborers

compared to \$1.00 in Arkansas, \$1.25 per day in Texas and \$1.35 per day in Oklahoma and Missouri". \* These were examples of day labor or

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\*California State Chamber of Commerce: Migrants, A National Problem p. 18

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hourly labor. Piece rate for cotton picking was about 35 to 40% higher in California than in Arkansas, Texas, and Oklahoma. \*\*

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\*\*ibid

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These are examples of wage differentials paid by private individuals. Now let us look at the relative governmental agencies of the states in relation to the migrant problems. "The average monthly payments of old age aid in California was \$38.00 per case compared with \$6.00 in Arkansas, \$8.91 in Texas and \$18.58 in Oklahoma." \*\*\* Even

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\*\*\*ibid p. 21

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the Federal Government thru the process of relief differential has encourage migration from the dust bowl to California--perhaps this was for political reasons to increase the Democratic Party's strength to a majority in California. If that was the aim it succeeded, because the registration in California which prior to 1932 had a heavy Republican majority now has a three to two majority of registered Democrats. For instance "W.P.A. wage payments averaged \$62.48 per person in California, compared to \$41.02 in Texas, \$40.91 in Oklahoma, and \$42.46 in Arkansas". \*

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\*ibid

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It might be argued that the \$42 in Arkansas bought more, perhaps, than the \$62 in California, but the ignorant prospective migrant did

not know that. However, take the case of the Farm Security Administration. "Subsistence grant payments in Oklahoma, Texas, Arkansas, and Missouri totaled only 2% of the national total in spite of the fact that this area has 18% of the nation's farm population," \* and

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\*California State Chamber of Commerce: Migrants, A National Problem p. 25

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manifestly needed the help worse than probably any other area.

And so migrants by the hundreds of thousands have been and are entering California. We must not jump to the conclusion that all the thousands of migrants to California come as applicants for farm labor. The California State Chamber of Commerce's Committee on Migrants estimates that "little more than a third of the employed new comers are engaged in agriculture labor". \*\* However those who do come as agri-

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\*\*ibid p. 15

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cultural migrants "enter, for the most part, through the Imperial Valley, working their way north following the crops". \*\*\* Sometimes work is

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\*\*\*Me Willians, Carey: Factories in the Field p. 309

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available, sometimes it is not. It is here that the migrant receive their major shocks. Prices are higher, jobs are scarce, people (even of their own kind) are often unfriendly or even hostile. With no jobs they cannot settle down. "Once within the State, these emigrants have not come to rest, they have been necessarily swept along by the established currents of migrating farm labor". \*

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\*ibid

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## Chapter II

### Housing of Migrants

Next to food and clothing comes the necessity of shelter. The problem of finding shelter for millions of new arrivals in California is more than merely academic as anyone in search of a home, house or hotel can truly testify. For the wealthy prospective citizen of California, house hunting is difficult. But this difficulty is as nothing compared to the problems of the agricultural migrant who has to seek shelter many times each year.

"Harvesting of certain agricultural products requires the provision of housing facilities for not more than two or three week periods while the harvesting of others necessitates housing provision for as long as three months. At best temporary houses are utilized for a short period of months only and stand empty and vacant during the remaining months of the year. Housing provision...suggests many peculiar problems among which are the following: the necessity of housing a large number of persons within a limited area accessible to the place of employment; the temporary nature of the housing need; the supervision of health and sanitation";\*and what to do about the unoccupied

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\*Hathway, Marion: The Migratory Worker and Family Life p. 104

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buildings during the balance of the year. For instance there is always the danger of any plumbing present being stolen, windows broken, electrical and other fixtures removed. There is the problem of insurance. Repairs are necessary, if the property is to maintain any semblance of utility or beauty.

"The housing problem is anguishing. Most responsible Californians

hope that the new arrivals will stay and find jobs." \* "The Auto

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\*Gunther, John: Inside the U.S.A . p. 5

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Club of Southern California reports that 2,700,719 persons entered California from other states during 1947 by ~~motor~~ car. This is a good explanation why the housing shortage persists." \*\* Naturally

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\*\*The Modesto Bee, Feb. 2, 1948 p. 16

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all these visitors are not going to stay, but the figure quoted did not include passenger trains, planes, freights. Even from some who leave California will come stories that will attract others here.

To further aggravate the housing shortage is the constant threat of fires, both accidental and incendiary (set by vigilantes, or even officials, to the shacks of migrants). The houses of the migrants are more apt to burn for a large number of reasons than are the houses of others. First, the building is frequently of flimsy material; second it may be close to fire hazards such as dry lots, brush, city dumps, factories, other tinder shacks; third, the electrical wiring, where it exists, is most often put in by amateurs; fourth~~X~~, fire protection is remote or non-existent; fifth, no water is usually available to fight a small beginning fire; sixth, buildings are often close together; seventh, flimsy construction requires more heat in the winter time with resultant dangers of fire; eighth, ignorance or carelessness in the use of gasoline about the premises; ninth, general ignorance or carelessness about fire prevention itself; tenth, large number of children in the family. Needless to say little or no insurance is carried on many of the permanent buildings and of course no insurance is carried on the shacks.



The housing of migrants comes under five different classifications, namely the shacktowns, farm camps, trailer camps and motels, *government permanent camps, and* government mobile camps. A sixth type of housing is permanent housing, but this makes the migrant a type I migrant or an exmigrant with a permanent home. I believe this to be best and eventually one of the solutions of the migrant problem.

"California is one of the few states where there are laws requiring employers to provide sanitary camps, but this unfortunately does not apply to squatters camps which are not located on the land of the employer". \* True, the county boards of health have authority

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\*Lowry, Edith: Migrants of the Crops p. 23

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and responsibility over the so-called squatter camps but more often than not they do not exercise this prerogative until conditions become intolerable. It is impossible to keep track of these camps because many are not permanent. Some camps are used but a day or two, others are perennial and even constantly occupied by varying numbers of families from one to many hundred. If the board of health of a county should clear out a camp on Monday, new arrivals might populate it on Tuesday. Hence it would take almost a representative from the board at each prospective camping or squatting place to keep the rules of the board. Manifestly this is impossible for "California has the largest number of out-of-door labor camps of any state in the Union". \*\* "For the most part they have lived in tents. Year

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Hathway, Marion: The Migrant Worker and Family Life P. 144

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after year Boards of Health have been investigation and threatening

camp inhabitants." \*

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\*Lowry, Edith: Migrants of the Crops p. 17

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It would be impossible to generalize regarding these squatter camps or shacktowns. Some are decent others are sorespots. However we can say that "the typical shacktown is devoid of every recognized American right and standard of living".\*\* "They live in all kinds of

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\*\*Croutch, Albert: Housing Migration Agricultural Workers in California  
p. 144

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places--shelters that look like chicken coops, tents on the river bottoms, squatter camps and shacks on the banks of the irrigation ditches",\*\*\* alongside the highway, in the river "jungles", on vacant

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\*\*\*Lowry, Edith: Migrants of the Crops p. 21

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lots under bridges, anywhere.

Of the types of housing mentioned above "squatters camps are naturally of the worst type, there being no semblance of control in them. As one squatter said, 'Livin' a bum's life soon makes a bum out of you. YouX get started and you can't stop'" \* Croutch avers

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\*ibid p.. 23

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that "the squatters' camp represents the very lowest form of housing the migrant can come to live in and marks complete inability of the migrant to provide decent housing, because he has no money and no job, or because there is no available housing to be obtained even with money." \*\* He goes on to say in comfort to the migrant that these

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\*\*\*Croutch, Albert: ob. cit. p. 30

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"shacktowns represent about the highest form of housing the migrant is able to obtain by himself" \* (Croutch makes a grievous error,

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Croutch, Albert: Housing Migratory Agricultural Workers in California  
p. 35

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however, in conclusion \*\* regarding shacktowns by including the Modesto

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\*\*ibid pp. 37-39

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Airport District among this group.)

The extent of these shacktowns can be summed up by the statement that "shacktowns...had absorbed at least 150,000 families by 1939" \*\*\*

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\*\*\*ibid p. 35

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This would represent a minimum of about 600,000 individuals. And there are <sup>no</sup> fewer people living in these shacktowns in 1948. In fact the number may approach close to 1,000,000 souls.

The problems of this type of housing <sup>are</sup> obvious. To offset the fact that they are cheap, are the grievous problems of unhealthiness, distance from good drinking water, lack of internal government. Immorality is often rife. The camps are disgraceful in the eyes of the occupants as well as the other people of the area. Untold numbers of migrants doubtless are killed and injured along the highways and many, especially children, are drowned in irrigation ditches and rivers along which the camps boarder.

Mrs. Sue Sanders in telling of her study of the causes of migration states, "Squatters seemed to me to be better off (from a mental health viewpoint) than the folks at any of the federal camps. They had got off to themselves and were working out their own problems.

They wanted to be let alone and not make public their poverty. They were not flaunting their needs in the hope of getting something for nothing. They hadn't grown soft with too much attention and false sympathy." \*

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\*Sanders, Sue: The Real Causes of Our Migrant Problem p. 42

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The shacktowns, we have noted, are certainly far from ideal. The next type of snelters is housing furnished by the growers upon the land owned or rented by the grower. I have deliberately refrained from using the word farmer here. Many growers have seldom been on their farms. "In 1940 there were over 5,000 grower-owned camps" \*\*

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\*\*Hewes, Laurence; Some Migratory Labor Problems in California's Specialized Agriculture p. 91

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In fact "a majority of migratory agricultural workers are housed by their employers".\*\*\*

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\*\*\*Croutch, Albert: Housing Migratory Agricultural Workers in California p. 40

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There are a multiple of reasons why the growers have been solicitous of the housing welfare of their temporary employees. There may be some altruism to help the poor migrant out. More decidedly it is to the direct economic advantage of both employer and employee for the migrant to live on the property where he is to do his work. First there is the economy of time. The worker could start work earlier and quit work later if fruit is plentiful and hours of work are necessarily long. Or in a stable work day of a certain number of reasonable hours, the migrant could leave his bed later and retire earlier, thus saving energy. Or a combination of both could be worked out. Second there is the economy of wear and tear on the means of transportation.

The less the vehicle of transportation is used, the less gas, oil, tires, and repairs expenses. Or shoe leather is saved, as well as energy, if the migrant would otherwise have to walk to his work. Living on the farm, the migrant may grow a bit of a garden or his children may eat some of the produce from the farm. (This may not be a valued advantage, because the worker might grow a garden~~X~~ or the children pilfer a ranch wherever the family might be located.) Often the migrant may be given free use of electricity and other utilities of the farm.

From the viewpoint of the grower the migrant might be of advantage on the farm for other reasons. If fire should break out, help would usually be immediately available, the grower might have a few grocery items, even run a store, to profit from the migrant. He could keep an eye on the migrant if anything seems suspicious. Housing would attract more workers (at a lower rate) than would be the case if there was no housing furnished. And probably the biggest reason for housing the migrant on the growers property is in case of labor trouble, the grower could more easily ascertain the cause of the trouble and if strikes are threatened or occur, eviction is easy. The worker would think twice before striking if he knew his family would be summarily evicted.

So we see both sides are benefitted by grower housing. Now let us look at the housing facilities. "With the exception of one or two large ranches, investigators agreed that the housing situation was indescribably wretched." \* The growers had claimed that they were

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\* Mc Williams, Carey: Factories in the Field p. 316

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providing housing for the migrant up to the standards of the migrants.

However "most of the boasted model camps maintained by the growers were found to be without baths, showers, or plumbing; in most districts the workers bathed in and drank from the irrigation ditches".\* Not

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\*Mc Williams, Carey: Factories in the Field P/ 316

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only that, but "most of the ranches charge from \$3 to \$15 a month for the wretched accomodations they provide the workers, and sell (drinking) water at 5 cents a bucket." \*\*

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\*\*ibid p. 317

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During World War II better housing was sometimes provided by the grower, but much excuse for not building adequate housing was the obvious shortages. However the migrants, fewer in number due to war demands, received much better wages and <sup>were</sup> more nearly constantly employed, were better able to, and did find better housing for themselves (new tents, trailer houses, better shacks). However even due to the prosperity engendered by the war "less than one-third of the camps inspected in 1945-46 complied fully with the standards of the State Labor Code". \*\*\* There are now two attitudes in regards the farm

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\*\*\* Croutch, Albert: Housing Migratory Agricultural Workers in California p. 40

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housing of migrants. On the one side are the few progressive farmers. "A few farmers with more adequate resources, concerned with the welfare of their employees, found that good housing was a sound investment. One grower found that he saved two dollars per ton in the cost of harvesting his peaches when he provided new and comfortable quarters for the workers. He discovered that when they were comfortably housed, they ~~worked~~ more effeciently. More employers would provide adequate

housing and pay fair wages if they could do so, but in many cases they, as well as the migrants, are caught in the web of circumstance and sometimes catastrophe". \* After the war many of these progressive

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\*Lowry, Edith: Migrants of the Crops p. 22

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farmers were able to purchase, at exceedingly low prices, barracks or other smaller buildings to house workers.

On the other hand the forced layoff of many hundred of thousands of men from the bloated war, and related, industries, has thrown thousands of workers back into the migrant competition. Why, ask some farmers, should we spend good money on housing these migrants when we can get more than we need without so expending.

Proposals for migrant housing have come from many quarters and cover many angles. Here are a few good proposals:

"(1) Adequate inspection of farm labor camp housing and facilities be made and that enforcement of the requirements set forth in the state law."\*\* be more rigid by state inspectors with real authority.

"(2) Efforts should be made to facilitate new construction on farms.

(3) Develop public work projects to construct housing or camp facilities...using relief labor." \*\*

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\*\* California State Chamber of Commerce: Migrants, a National Problem p. 32

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Not much need be said about the private trailer camps, tourist rests, motels, auto camps. The commercial nature eliminates most of the poorer migrants from these camps. In 1940 there were "Over 850 auto camps which catered to the migratory workers." \*\*\* These greatly

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\*\*\*Hewes, Laurence: Some Migratory Labor Problems in California's Specialized Agriculture p. 91

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increased in number and use by migrants during the war, but with the coming of rougher times during the post-war readjustment, fewer, in proportion at least, of the migrants afford these private commercial camps. The sanitation is state supervised and usually quite good, tho far from perfect in many instances. One camp near Modesto expanded greatly in number of inhabitants, but water and sanitary facilities lagged far behind, and public health officials complained.

Now we come to the aristocracy of the migrant camps--the federal camps. The Federal Government ~~of~~ recognized that relief, particularly of interstate migrants was a national problem. "The Resettlement Administration was organized to meet the problems of (dispossessed) rural folk". \* Under the United States Resettlement Administration, The

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\*Survey Graphic, Sept., 1936 p. 526 Taylor, Paul: "From the Ground Up"

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government "established camps in strategic locations to ameliorate bad conditions and to serve as a demonstration of what might be done" \*\*

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\*\*Lowry, Edith: Migrants of the Crops p. 53

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by private groups or state, county, or local units. The camps were turned over to the Farm Security Administration of the United States Department of Agriculture for administration. This agency was "most actively engaged in experimentation with the place of the workers on the land. Its work properly is characterized by variety. Individual laborer's housing with subsistence gardens, cooperative housing and cooperative subsistence farming, communities of individual farms, cooperation between individual farms for the purchase and use of work animals and machinery, cooperative large scale farming, under manage-



ment, with division of proceeds." \* We here are interested more in

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\*Taylor, Paul: The Place of Agricultural Labor in Society p. 8

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management of the farm labor camps.

There are two types of stable camps, permanent with good buildings, houses, barracks, apartments, and temporary, with tent platforms, wash houses, showers. Some 28 camps existed at one time and 21 still remain at this writing. The permanent government camps consist of "an utility building, an isolation unit, a "delousing" unit, an assembly room and nursery, a first aid room and child clinic, a garbage pergola, a grease rack, a kitchen unit, office and living quarters for the manager, a warehouse, a pumphouse, a hose cartshed, and incinerator, shower bath units, and other sanitary units, and a recreation field". \*\*

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\*\*Croutch, Albert: Housing Migratory Agricultural Workers in California  
p. 85

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"Migrants in the federal camps have comforts the average farm worker never dreamed of, such as hot and cold shower baths, electric washing machines, electric irons, and well equipt sewing rooms." \*\*\*

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\*\*\*Sanders, Sue: The Real Causes of Our Migrant Problem p. 14

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Early requirement for living in camps were about like this:

- (1) 10 cents a day, (to be paid towards a campers fund) or one hour per week extra if they cannot afford the 10 cents.
- (2) Work Maintenance of one hour per week.
- (3) Share of bathhouse cleanup.
- (4) Keep own lot clean.
- (5) Water trees on lot. \*

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\* Marysville Camp News, August 20, 1937

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These camps seemed like heaven to the weary migrant. But even with these small requirements to live in the camp some families were so unutterably lazy they had to be removed. Some families were evicted from camp for failure to do cleanup work, and make payment of 10 cents into the Campers Fund. \* This seems unbelievable, but some few

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\*Marysville Camp News, Sept. 10, 1937

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people won't work at all to keep themselves and their surroundings clean. The camps were intended as subsidies to both migrant and grower, but were not supposed to be gifts to either. During the war the rents were increased at the federal camps, but even with the increases, the rental incomes equaled only 50% of the cost of operation. \*\*

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**\*\* Croutch, Albert:** Housing Migratory Agricultural Workers in California p. 85

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Usually the camp population rises and falls with the need for labor in the area, ranging from less than 100 to nearly 1000 individuals in the Marysville Camp, with hundreds turned away during peak needs.\*\*\*

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**\*\*\*Marysville Camp News, Jan 15, 1938**

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Today many camps are the permanent habitats of (former) migrants. The Ceres Camp for instance, is always filled with permanent force and a long waiting line is trying to get in.

Even within the relative heaven of the camps there are many problems, *some serious, most merely annoying. Examples of problems* hereinafter cited are gleaned from the official paper of the Marysville Camp, published entirely by members of the camp. These problems come under five headings of laziness, carelessness, ignorance, unlawfulness, and miscellaneous. Further breakdown could be made into violations against individuals and violations against the camp. One of the heights of laziness is the case of the camper who borrowed

her neighbor's oil stove when she was away "and boiled jelly on it and brought it back without cleaning it, but set the oven over it to hide the filth".\* Another camper complains that some campers are

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\* Marysville Camp News July 9, 1938

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"too lazy to go to the office to get their (free) rolls of toilet paper, using newspaper~~s~~ instead, leaving them on the floor". \*\* Another

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\*\* ibid. Oct. 2, 1937

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"woman in camp insists on dumping dish water in the laundry tubs". \*\*\*

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\*\*\* ibid. March 12, 1938

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Another complaint involved "people using wash tubs for garbage instead of putting their garbage in the can." \* In some cases these violations

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\* ibid. May 14, 1938

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may be in ignorance, but in most cases it is probably plain unwillingness to exert enough to do the necessary carrying to the proper container.

One of the primary defects of our mobile age is the desire and willingness to speed. There are race tracks built to cater to that desire. But crowded camps with the many children is no place to satisfy the craving for speed. But a camper had to be dismissed for persistent careless speeding on camp grounds. \*\* Any one who has

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\*\* Marysville Camp News Sept. 10, 1937

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enough extra money that he can afford to speed has no business in a government camp anyway.

Two examples of ignorance follow: "Accomplaint was raised that some camper put half of an overalls leg down a toilet bowl," \* ~~and~~

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\*Marysville Camp News Oct. 2, 1937

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most effectively damming the plumbing. This may have been maliciousness, but the next example is not. The campers complained that some campers were not properly disposing of their dishwater, instead throwing it on the ground thus attracting flies. \*\*

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\*\* ibid. Dec. 4, 1937

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Unlawful acts are always a problem in any camp. "Much complaint (has been received) about shooting dice, (thus) breaking rules of both the Farm Security Administration and the Camp".\*\*\* It seems

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\*\*\*ibid. March 19, 1938

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wherever migrants congregate dice or other means of gambling are utilized apparently as long as there is any money divided among two or more people. The migrants might not have money enough to buy food, clothing, or medicines, but they always seem to have enough with which to gamble. And the man who loses his poke before his necessities are obtained ~~are obtained~~ is tempted to steal. For instance the campers were warned at the Marysville Camp that "petty thievery" \* was increas-

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\*ibid June 25, July 16, 1938

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ing. Hose connections (brass brings a few cents a pound) were cut off the camp hoses. \*\* Horse stealing on the frontier was considered a

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\*\*ibid May 14, 1938

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capital offense because it deprived the victim of his means of transportation and that might cause his death. But apparently the bad migrant ~~never~~<sup>never</sup> worried about depriving his colleagues of their transportation for complaints were made about gasoline being stolen. \*

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\*Marysville Camp News July 16, 1938

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Perhaps most reprehensible of all: (maybe because the gentler sex was responsible) Complaints were made that "plug nickles were inserted in camp washing machine meters". \*\*

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\*\*ibid May 14, 1938

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A few miscellaneous problems will conclude the problem discussion. In December, 1937, the Marysville camp was flooded with 6 feet of water, but everyone in the camp valiently worked and saw that all inhabitants (human) safely left the camp. \*\*\* Guards from the campers had to be

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\*\*\*ibid Dec. 24, 1937

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organized to prevent uninvited or unauthorized outsiders from crashing camp dances. \* And finally the most joyful "problem" of all: A

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\*ibid Sept. 10, 1937

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scheduled baseball practice was ruined because of "all men having jobs"\*\*\*

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\*\*ibid Jan 15, 1938

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Perhaps the above list of problems would indicate that the government camp was not all beauty and sweetness. It was not, but such problems also existed among the shacktowns and grower camps as well as the trailer camps. Most of the campers in the government camps appreciated the camp and acted accordingly. Below is an open letter to the Marysville camp paper:

"How nice it is to be back in a sweet and decent place to live. No one really knows how to enjoy a good place to live until they have (sic) experienced the cotton ranches in the South; altho there is lots of work and plenty of cotton to pick. But the drunks are too thick and what room there is is always full of drunks playing cards. You~~X~~ may go to work and think it is a good place but you will miss your (government camp) home, for every camp is full of dice games. You dec~~X~~ide on a cabin to live in. Then you have to scrub and rake. But it smells like a hog pen. They (the cabins) get knee deep in mud. There people sleep in gunny sacks, cotton sacks, and in hay, some of the filthiest. If ever I go south (again) <sup>2 will leave</sup> ~~where~~ *my family here where* my kid can go to a decent school." \*

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\*Marysville Camp News Jan. 8, 1938

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Growers had long complained against the government camps because the managers would not evict the union organizers (Red Agitators, according to the growers. Anyone who wants good wages, good working conditions, organization for the migrant worker is a Red Agitator in the eyes of the growers.) from the government camps. From the beginning the State Chamber of Commerce had opposed permanent F.S.A. camps. Finally in 1946 (under a Democratic-Majority Congress and President) the Federal Camps were voted to be liquidated by sale to the highest bidder, preferably the states. The final date for liquidation has been postponed several times and now is set for June 30, 1949. In the meantime the camps have been leased to non-profit farmers associations, but these leases may be revoked by the government on 30 days notice. \*\* Under the private lease rents have been increased.\*\*\*

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\*\*Croutch, Albert: Housing of Migratory Agricultural Labor in California

\*\*\*Ibid. p. 121

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The camps will never pay for themselves thru the rents collected and still maintain any semblance of decent housing.

The California State Federation of Labor wanted the Federal Government to continue the operation of the government camps. They did not want liquidation. \* I believe that the Federal Government should

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\*Croutch, Albert: Housing of Migratory Agricultural Labor in California p. 118

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continue the ownership and operation of the camps, but it seems irrevocably set on turning the camps over to state or private control.

In the meantime "the forces representing the California State Grange, A.F.L., C.I.O., and small farmers" \*\* want the state to

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\*\*ibid. p. 106

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purchase the camps. If the camps should fall into the hands of the growers associations, I can see little except more trouble for the already overburdened migrant. He has one small chance to counter-attack. During the War many learned the values of unionization. The A.F. of L. and the C.I.O. have some active organizers and more sympathisers in the ranks of the migrants. They may be able to defend themselves.

Another type of camp is the mobile camp. The State Chamber of Commerce suggested mobile camps and they may be an answer to the migrant problem. Knocked down shower stalls, portable kitchens, trailer houses, chemical privies could follow the harvest to supplement the available housing facilities. From central points these mobile units could get to any threatened sore-spot in a few hours' or a day's time. The possibilities of this type of solution for the migrant has barely been scratched. And its cost need not be too excessive considering the importance of human values.

### Chapter III

#### Employment - Unemployment

In perhaps no other industry is there greater uncertainty as to employment length as in agricultural migrant labor. It would seem that with everyone in the world needing to eat and all eating approximately the same amount year in and year out that agriculture would be a stable industry. (Horse raising is a stable business.) However due to seasonality of practically every crop, vagaries of the weather, and pests, changes in eating habits, agriculture is notoriously fluid in relation to needs of labor. For instance this year peaches are about three weeks later than last year due to the mid winter drought condition in California and ~~the~~ late rainy spring. And there was unusually strong winds that thinned the peaches so that the farmers did not have to depend so much on manual labor to do the job.

The experienced migrants know about when crops are due to ripen and show up in the area about that time. If the crop has been early or light, no job may be available. Or if the crop is late, the migrant may have to wait a week or two. With large numbers of migrants in an area the picking may be completed in a few short days and the next harvest farther north may be weeks away. In some cases picking cannot be completed in a hurry no matter how many are there to do the work. The alternatives then will be up to the farmers whether to hire all available help for a half a day or half the help for a full day. In the one instance everyone will be working at half wages, and on the other ~~horn~~ of the dilemma half would be without work.

The average duration of jobs for migrant farm laborers was about two months which was a lower average than all other migrant jobs. "Jobs in agriculture were consistently shorter." \* This length of job really

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\*Webb, John: The Migrant Casual Worker p. 54

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is meaningless, it is the length of time sans job that is important. During the war very little time was usually lost between jobs, especially as the main harvest seasons came on. Now however the trend is towards not only shorter jobs, but also fewer jobs and more time spent between jobs, and the migrant nor his family has learned yet to hibernate. Something must stop this trend, but the curve is becoming steeper as more potential migrants are tracted off their farms or lose their war jobs. The war had drawn "off the glut of farm laborers, produced higher wage rates and incomes". \* The total wages

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\*Rural Sociology June, 1943 p. 139 *Article by Dr. Paul Taylor*

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increased more rapidly than the proportionate increase in either hours worked or wage rate increases alone. The twin benefits caused by the war were, first "advance in wage rates, second increased employment." \*\*

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\*\*ibid

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"The trend of earnings since the end of World War II has been downward. A great influx of migrants into California resulted in more competition for jobs which have not increased in (proportionate) number and in less employment for the individual migrant."\*\*\* The

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\*\*\*Croutch, Albert: Housing Migration Agricultural Workers in California p. 27

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reverse of conditions that tended to raise the migrants wages is now in operation. Jobs are scarcer even at smaller rates, employment is shorter, unemployment is longer. (and the prices of goods continues to rise.)

There are a few factors that tend to help the migrant labor even now. The prices of farm goods are high and the indications are that they will continue to remain high, therefore the risk to the grower of falling prices is less and he can therefore figure on paying his workers more accordingly. Another factor favorable to the migrant is the recent draft act passed by congress, which will naturally remove some migrants into the army and continue high the demand for farm products. Another favorable factor is the Taft-Hartley Act. It has not covered agricultural workers directly, but indirectly it has been a big help to the migrant laborer. The Taft-Hartley Act has reduced the number of strikes in the industries of the country.\*

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\*Modesto Bee Feb. 26, 1948 p. 28

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The way this Act has helped is in keeping people employed. That means the non strikers have more money to buy the goods, services, and food and keeps the wheels of progress moving. Secondly when industrial workers strike, they often move into the ranks of migratory farm laborers, thus increasing the over supply of migrants.

Besides the influence of the Taft-Hartley Act is the favorable factor of more intelligent labor policy on the part of many industries in voluntarily raising wages or improving working conditions to forestall labor trouble and strikes. These offers are usually by heavy or light industry but even in farm industries this happens. "Groundwork has been laid for a season of peaceful labor relations in the California canneries through acceptance by the workers of wage increases voluntarily proffered by the canners." \*\* We need more of

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\*\*Modesto Bee Jan. 2, 1948 p. 18

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*upon*

these mutual agreements built <sup>1</sup> sensible studies of economic conditions. Government reasonable support prices could and should make it possible for farmer and processor alike to stabilize wages and working conditions for years in advance. Reasonable minimum wages should go with any support price by the government.

This year was a most unusual year for California. January and February were near drought conditions. A labor contractor estimated to me in February that "all the peaches would be picked by the first part of August." However fortunately for the overall history of California the spring rains and mountain snow came in superabundance.

During the time of the insipient drought, farmers were cautious to scared. They were afraid to risk their capital on work that should be done. Plowing was postponed--too dry. The working farmer did his own pruning and spraying. The lack of rains caused a small set and for that reason, and the fact that there was a hard wind in the spring, little thinning work was necessary in the orchards. The migrant continued to look for largely non existent work. He hitched in his belt another notch. The children became more gaunt. Relief, sporadic, was furnished.

There was one or two silver linings in the otherwise gloomy prospects for employment. One was the hope that if and when the rains came, more spraying would be required (it was) and bigger fruit would be a result of the smaller set. <sup>(it was too)</sup> The second silver streak was the fact that the drought conditions made hazardous the forests in the Sierras. A thousand extra forest fire fighters were needed because of the drought. The question was raised whether the seasonally unemployed were willing to work at \$170 or more a month rather than accept relief.\*

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\*Modesto Bee Feb. 7. 1948 p. 18

the migrant farm laborer in the Great Valley in his opportunities for employment. There are, of course, many more including too much rain, insect pests, late frosts, etc. Several things should be done to make the obtaining of employment much easier for the laborer and the obtaining of workers easier for the farmer. "Agricultural employees must cooperate more closely with the Employment Service to avoid the discouragement of (workers) which results when they are asked to follow false leads arriving at the fields only to find work not ready to begin, or work finished, or their places filled." \* In addition to farm-

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\*Statement of Dr. Paul S. Taylor before the U.S. Senate Special Committee to Investigate Farm Labor in the West. p. 4

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er cooperation with employment services, the various governmental agencies have adequate powers and adequate money to handle the employment situation with the minimum of delay, red tape, and incompetence. In 1947 "a futile \$1,400,000 was allocated (by the federal government) to state employment services for farm labor placement." \*\* Probably

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\*\*Colliers Sept. 13, 1947 Whitman, Howard: "Heartless Harvest" p.23

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that figure could be doubled and redoubled and save money in relief payments.

The farmers should as far as possible diversify crops "in order to even out the seasonal demands for labor." \*\*\* Some attempts have

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\*\*\*Crouthch, Albert: Housing Migratory Agricultural Workers in California p. 68

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been made by the introduction of plants that lengthen the harvest season, to help solve the migrant problem. For instance in the peach industry, growers have recently added earlier peaches. There used to

be three major classifications of peaches, early, midsummer, and late. Now there are four classes. There is a new "early" group, the old early is called early-midsummer, the midsummers are now called late midsummers and the lates remain. This spreading has been encouraged by the canneries, is a big help to the farmer who does practically all his own work, and is a help to the large grower with less of a peak demand for workers. The cannery saves several ways. First it would not have to operate as much at night, second less fruit would pile up and get lost, third less fatigue would affect the workers, fourth, less overtime would have to be paid.

How does this ~~lengthening~~ of the season affect the migrant? For the migrant who gets an early start and works night thru until the end of the season, this works out beautifully. But for the migrant who is pinched out of the peak run it is bad.

Let us see how this works. A cannery wants to put out, say, a million cases of peaches for the year. This takes, say, thirty thousand days of work.

Week one	two	three	four	five	six	total	
500	1000	1000	1000	1000	500	1000	men employed
workers @ 6 days							
3000	6000	6000	6000	6000	3000	30000	man hours

Under the old system the employment figures looked something like this:

Week one	two	three	four	five	six	total	
0	0	1000	1500	1500	1000	1500	men employed
workers @ 6 days							
0	0	6000	9000	9000	6000	30000	man hours

Under these imaginary circumstances under the first example 500 men could work six steady weeks and another 500 men could work four steady weeks. Under the second, older, method 1000 would work four weeks and 500 would work two weeks. The newer method would deprive 500 men of *two weeks work, but for another* 500 men there could be six weeks of continuous employment.

The recruit to the migrant life must realize that he will have much time for leisure. "The worker must be prepared to accept discontinuous employment involving lay-offs varying from a few hours to several days or weeks or months." \* These layoffs are as unforeseen

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\*Hewes, Laurence: Some Migratory Labor Problems in California's Specialized Agriculture p. 111

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as cold spells, fires, riots, power failures, technical difficulties, entrepreneur decisions. The entrepreneur should cooperate (and most do) to prevent unwarranted delays with resultant costs of idle machinery and lowered morale of workers.

## Chapter IV

### Competition

Everybody fears competition. We may fear economic competition, amory, physical, mental, social. Competition may tend to keep most people on their toes but competition may keep some people knocked down. To the migrant farm laborer, almost everything competes with him. His wife and children compete for the beans in the pot. His sons competes for the family car. He competes with the farmers, with his fellow migrants, with tractors and other labor saving devises. The white migrant has to compete with the Mexican (also partly <sup>which part?</sup> white), the Negro, Japanese, Filipino, Hindu, and what have you. He is met at every angle and facet with competition. A strike is called in Seattle: the migrant horde is increased in California; a Negro is ynched in Alabama: the migrants are reinforced in California; the sugar beet crop fails in Wyoming: more migrants in California; a farm family is sold out by the sheriff in Oklahoma; "California, here I come"; an extra cold winter hits ~~Minnesota~~ Minnesota: "get ready prunes, I'm on the way."

Today the migrant competes with the ghost of migrants past. He has to live up to what good points the farmers remember about prior groups of migrants. (This is the "old oaken bucket" tradition in psychology.) "For many years before 1930 the migratory labor farce of California contained large elements of colored foreign workers who accepted the prevailing conditions of employment with docility."\*

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\*Hewes, Laurence: Some Migratory Labor Problems in California's Specialized Agriculture p. iii

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After the 1929 economic crash, millions of people hit the migrant road looking for work. The foreigners were outnumbered and largely either removed themselves from active competition in the agriculture field or else specialized in certain types of crops that were mostly too arduous for the native whites. These crops were

asparagus, lettuce, strawberries where Filipinos, Hindus, Mexicans, and Japanese were largely predominant.

When war broke out there was great agitation on the Pacific Coast to get rid of the Japanese Americans. "The Japanese exclusionists were motivated more by economics than by racial Bias." \*

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\*Gunther, John: Inside the U.S.A. p. 47

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Japanese have largely returned to their homes, but they do not compete very much directly with the migrants. Few Japanese are now migrants.

The Filipinos and Hindus are not great competitors with the migrants. Since the Philippine Islands have been given their independence, less competition will be had with the Filipinos remaining in the United States. The Hindus can largely be ignored. ✓

The Mexicans, due to the large number in California, and the easy availability, both legally and illegally, make them a constant potential and actual rival of the native white migrant. Most Mexicans can be deported if the going really gets extremely rough for the American citizen migrant. In the mean time the Mexicans are used as strike breakers. ( Di Giorgio) and field hands in the "stoop crops". Occasionally they compete in the other fields, but their proportionate number is not very great.

Perhaps of greater imminent, tho perhaps not ultimate, threat is the suggestion that 100,000 Displaced Persons be brought to this country. The number that might find the way into the California migrant labor force is problematic, but the threat is there.

To the white migrant of the South, Southwest, and South Central states the Negro is always a threat of competition. Until recent years the Negro migration has been fairly well stabilized in movements north.



The east coast Negro migrated north with the harvest but largely kept to the Atlantic Seaboard, returning to his home in the autumn. A few remained in Harlem or "crossed the color line" and settled down in the North East. The Negro from the Central South migrated due North also, ending up in Chicago or Detroit, if he did not return with the end of the harvest season. Until recent years the negro had not migrated to the west in large numbers, but in the last fifteen years the Negro has come in increasing numbers to the Pacific Coast. The War stimulated this growth even more so. Largely during the war the Negro was an industrial worker. But to the Negro the end of the war meant the end to his lucrative war jobs. He has remained mostly in the cities, but increasing numbers are finding their way into the migrant labor classification. ~~many are not visddivsion~~ "Racial prejudice commonly operates as a check on the mobility of negroes by increasing the difficulties of travel, and by limiting the number of job opportunities". \* Even

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\*Webb, John : The Migrant Casual Worker p. 89

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many rabid Southerners are beginning to show more tolerance towards the Negro, especially in the West. As one Southerner told me, "As long as they are here, they have to eat" and he did not seem to resent the competition. The competition was not intense. There were jobs for all and each was getting the same amount of money. However as jobs become less plentiful, emotions and prejudices will get the upper hand and trouble will break out. To prevent this trouble, migrant labor problems need to be solved.

Another form of strong competition, but much less obvious than the Negro competition, is the competition of unemployed industrial workers. Veteran migrants have contempt for the city worker who tries to do work on the farm. However the farmer is not too particular who

he hires, and often the "city slicker" may be more careful, because of his slowness, and less bruising of fruit results. The farmer need not worry how slow the individual is, he can pay him by piece work. Since the war has been over, factory and other industrial employment has remained high. It has decreased in relation to the total population in California, which means that more workers are forced toward agricultural and other occupations. This winter "factory employment fell in the (San Francisco) ~~bay~~ area."\* This resulted in more pressure

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\* Modesto Bee Feb. 24, 1948 p. 2

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on the already hungry migrant. It is true that the industrial worker receives unemployment insurance money when he is without employment, but that does not stop him from hunting for casual work even in the agriculture fields. He may even find it, but he often "forgets" to notify the social security office that he is working. And as the farmers are not required to report on who is working, he is usually able to get by with it. Annual crackdowns on these chiselers do little good. A more stringent law depriving violators of any further social security benefits might be a solution to prevent the competition between industrial and migrant farm laborer.

These displaced (temporary or permanent) industrial workers are a real threat to the migrant even tho they might never obtain a single job. This is because of the peculiar mechanics of job applications. Let us take an idealized situation. Say there are needs for 5000 migrant work~~ers~~ in the area. Each of 100 ranches needs 50 workers. There are exactly 5000 migrants available, and they show up, say, one week before the harvest. In the week each migrant approaches, say five different ranches asking for work. On the average, then, each grower, needing 50 workers, has been approached by 250

workers requesting work. He has the obvious impression there is a huge labor surplus and in the back of his head creeps the idea of cutting the prevailing rate. The growers unite and the rate is dropped. Efficient job placement bureaus could prevent this.

That growers deliberately try to bring more workers into an area than is necessary, in order to force the rates down, is an undeniable Historical fact. One example will suffice. In response to newspaper advertisements promising work for the thousands during the season, "2000 workers had assembled at Nipomo, near Santa Barbara, in the spring of 1937 only to discover, of course, that there was work for but a third of their number". \* We can see from the above that

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\*Mc Williams, Carey: Factories in the Field p. 312

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growers deliberately try to overpopulate a harvest area in order to drive rates down. They do not have to try very hard! The migrant is his own worst competition!! The faintest smell or rumor of a job somewhere will attract many more than the required number of workers. The years since the war has seen more and more migrants in California earlier and earlier. In 1947 "Texas began disgorging migrants in February, much too soon, for the crops weren't nearly ready. Thousands <sup>(poured)</sup> ~~back~~ upon the land; ~~that~~ the fields were overcrowded. All summer California was swamped, its migrant camps bulging with families waiting for work." \*\* This year has been no better and threatens to

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\*\*Colliers Sept 13, 1947 Whitman, Howard: "Heartless Harvest" p. 23

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be worse as the years go by unless governments act intelligently. Those thrown out of work anywhere naturally look to the harvest-- "at least we can eat". And they starve or steal, or both.

Another form of competition is the "winoes". Some growers make a practice of going into the "skid row" part of the cities and drafting

the stewbums pimps, building-construction-inspectors, and bait for Alcoholics Anonymous to work in the orchards. Often these workers quit after an hour or two or after half a day. Seldom do they return until their wages have been consumed in the form of firewater or other doubtful pleasures of the corporal being. These third-strike individuals are usually only hired during the peak when workers are scarcest and, because they are paid by the piece rates, minus transportation usually, the grower cannot lose.

Another, all too obvious, form of competition for the migrant is mechanization. The tractor has been a common sight since World War I. World War II saw the increased introduction of the mechanical cotton picker. Mechanical walnut knockers are being increasingly used. Hand picking (up) of prunes is on the way out. The list of inventions to make farm labor easier and migrant labor less necessary is indeed large. In the past only a few large ranches could afford some of these devices. However due to wartime needs, wartime labor shortages, wartime profits more farmers are beginning to demand and buy these mechanical devices. With larger volume of sales and back orders (and with the release of shortage materials, factories are manufacturing these articles rapidly. And with assembly line techniques the prices will fall farther and that will put the machines in the range of even smaller scale farmers. The near complete mechanization eventually will practically eliminate the migrant worker, but in the meantime the threats of mechanization are real and urgent competition for the migrant.

## Chapter V

### Education Problems

Closely related to Employment and Competition is Education. The more education a person has, other things being about equal, the better opportunity he has of being regularly employed. School learning of migrants range from no schooling to college graduates. Manifestly the majority are not college graduates, nor for that matter, are the majority without schooling. In book learning the average "migrant workers are ignorant facks. Among the poor whites and negro migrants, many can't write their own names". \* About 40% of the migrants have not

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\*Colliers Sept. 20, 1947 Whitman, Howard: "Heartless Harvest". p. 28

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finished the eighth grade altho more than 5% had some college.\*\*

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\*\*Webb, John: Migrant Families pp. 103,4

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60% of the migrants had finished the eighth grade. But there is still much need for practical education in behalf of the migrant. He needs culture, vocational training, economic training. An example of the need for better economic management follows: Under "the most favorable picking conditions and the highest wages ever know (for this type of migrant work), within a few weeks of the end of the harvest we suddenly found that thousands of workers were broke. We had supposed these workers had plenty of money to tide them over for two months. It is not my business to say how a worker shall spend his money. But I do suggest that some program of education and guidance is needed". \*\*\*Mr Giffen had probably noted the mismanagement

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\*\*\*The Farm April 16, 1948 interview with Russell Giffen p. 5

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of the workers' money by the workers. He probably noted the number

of drunks on payday nights. He probably noted the almost universal habit of gambling and smoking. It seems unfair for anyone to smoke and drink up or gamble away earnings and then bum off the bounty of the county, city, state, nation, or private individuals.

Obviously practically all migrants have plenty of time for schooling. And those who have the most time are in need of education the most. With the large numbers of free adult classes available in California, more people should take advantage of these opportunities. The migrant needs to<sup>be</sup><sub>1</sub> educated to the need of education. Perhaps requiring signing up and attending school should be made a condition of relief payments.

How about the children of these migrants? As little education as the parents have "the National Child Labor Committee...warned that they would get even less schooling than their parents. Their parents were among the sorriest illiterates". \* In California education thru

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\*Colliers Sept. 20, 1947 Whitman, Howard: "Heartless Harvest" p. 28

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High School and even thru the Junior College is virtually free. And attendance is required to the age of 16 and in many districts the age of 18. However "school is a luxury for migrant children because their hoe calloused and berry stained hands have a monetary value in the fields". \*\* Some parents do their best to see that the children

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\*\*ibid

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get to schools when they are not required in the fields. Others take advantage of the children and put them to work for selfish and mercenary reasons. Often the old man spends enough on liquor and tobacco to more than amount to the child's earnings. In other words the child is too often employed to keep the old man in the luxury of liquor and tobacco.

Severe punishment should be meted out to any grower who allows children to work during school hours. Parents too should be made to realize the obligation they owe to see that the children are properly educated and not made a tool of the parents' narcotic habits. Unfortunately most "child labor/laws do not protect children in agriculture."\*

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\*Lowry, Edith: Migrants of the Crops p. 23

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Even the young people themselves do not try to protect one another. Some of my students have told me that they know "lots of" families who do not send their children to school. They maintained that "if they can get away with it, that is up to them." I try to explain that no one should be deprived of an education, but the pleas leave them unmoved.

Some parents withhold children from school on religious grounds. (Most migrants seem to be fundamentalists from a religious point of view.) This year we had trouble in Ceres with a man, who had recently arrived from Marysville, who refused to send his five children to school because of his religious beliefs. He said, when confronted in his tent by the school attendance officer, he would rather not send the children to school and "quoted scriptures to justify his position." \*\* He later went to jail after repeated warnings.

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\*\*Modesto Bee Feb. 7, 1948 p. 5

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Actually there are two groups of migrant children in relation to school needs, corresponding with the two major types of migrants.\*\*\*

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\*\*\*supra p. 2

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There are those who have an established residence much of the year and attend school there, entering late, perhaps, and leaving early.

The second group are those who have no established residence and spend from hours to months at many different places throughout the year.

There are stories current, unbelievable, of children who spend several years in one grade without finishing it, beginning the same one the following fall. However it is an acknowledged fact that "nearly all transient children are retarded because of failure to attend any school or because of attendance at several schools during a year." \*

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\*Hathway, Marion: Migratory Worker and Family Life p. 163

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So we see by the very nature of migratory life the children are at a disadvantage in school, due to the retardation, irregular attendance often poor health, poorly clothed, coarseness and vulgarity in their ways, prejudices of townspeople, other children, and even sometimes the teachers. Obviously, often the child feels out of place and unwelcome and therefore does not want to attend school.

The feeling of being unwelcome is not always reduced by the attitude of some school officials. In California the state pays large sums of money to local school districts on the basis of attendance at the schools. Therefore it is usually to the best financial interest of the school to have as many attend as possible. A point is reached however when additional classrooms and teachers are necessary if any more increase in attendance results. At that point the law of diminishing returns begins to operate. An additional few students would require a new school room and an additional teacher, some \$7000 or more the first year. And at that point migrant children may be discouraged from attendance.

"Even when the local authorities were inclined to insist that migratory children attend school, the nomadic nature of the employ-



ment followed by their parents make it almost impossible to enforce the school laws." \* The will to do so existed, usually, but many

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\*Mc Williams, Carey: Factories in the Field p. 30

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other factors make it hard or even undesirable to enforce the school laws. "Since the 1930's with thousands of migrants almost constantly in <sup>the</sup> area "local school authorities were powerless to cope with the problem. During the height of the harvest season, the schools in the rural areas are extremely crowded. In one area the investigators found a cow barn which had been converted into a schoolhouse...Fully half of the students move twice during the school year; five, six, and seven moves are not uncommon." \*\* I have many students who attend

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\*\*ibid. p. 319

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for only a few days and then move on. I welcomed one girl to class this last year. She said "I don't know how long I can stay. My folks are always moving." She was a fair student for the week she was in the class.

Let us not go overboard and think that California is not living up to its possibilities in caring for the migrant children. Much more can be done, but "California has perhaps the best provisions for the education of the migrant children. Here a migratory school system has been established. There must be a school building on a ranch if a certain number of children of school age inhabit the camp. If there are fewer children, a school bus must be provided to take them to the nearest school. The growers provide the buildings; the County Department of Education provides the equipment; and the State Department of Education pays the teachers salaries." \*\*\* What more fair

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\*\*\*Lowry, Edith; Migrants of the Crops p. 51

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arrangement could be made than this? Other states do not equal this.

Most migrant children go to the regular schools, however, and we shall consider them further now. The schools in the valley cooperate with growers and migrants alike by setting the date to open schools to coincide with the probable close of the principal harvests. This benefits growers by allowing them more workers during the height~~X~~ of the season. The migrants also benefit by a larger income. The townspeople benefit by lower tax rates due to increased state aid. They likewise benefit in that their own sons and daughters have a longer time to work in the harvest. The school is benefitted by the higher state allocations and the fact that less makeup work is required of students who would otherwise enter late. And the students themselves benefit by almost all entering together.

A trouble often found among migrant children (the others too to a lesser extent) is lack of interest in the schoolwork or of the school itself. This is doubtless due in part to the frequent late entry, retardation, poor health. However it is more than those. Many parents are not interested in the school. The P.T.A. strength is not found in the migratory parents. Children of migrants often are weak in the fundamental processes of school--reading, writing, and arithmetic. Few books are carried by migrants, besides the Bible, and not always that. Library cards are almost unattainable. Therefore the migrant student usually receives lower grades and these discourage the student.

The teachers attitudes towards these students affect their interest in school. Teachers vary, of course, but many prim ladies and self complacent men are frequently disgusted with the migrants because of their frequent uncleanliness, lack of respect for the teacher,

frequent absences, foul language. The migrants usually add to the teachers already crowded classes, more time is needed to be spent on him to brush up on the subject. The teacher often splits the difference by largely ignoring him and then (in High School, at least) flunk him if he does not do the minimum required work.

All migrant children must not be grouped together. Some of my migrants have been the most respectful, ~~mannerly~~, clean, polite, students I have had. Some always say "yes, sir" or "no, sir", showing excellent training at the hands of decent parents. Some of the most course, brutal, ~~quarrelsome~~ have been likeable anyway.

One of the principal problems of the migrant school child is the attitude of the fellow classmates. Here the teacher can be a big help to the migrant by encouraging friendliness, tolerance, consideration, politeness, cooperation. The attitudes adopted by the fellow students often reflect the attitude of the home and community as well as the teachers attitude. Often the attitude depends on the migrant himself. If he is friendly, ~~decent~~, clean, wholehearted, he may be a welcome addition to the school social life. If he is evil minded, crude, unfriendly he may be shunned.

Attitudes vary from utter contempt of the migrant to sympathy and helpfulness. Students are often jealous of the freedom of the migrants to travel, to cut up, to earn money, to defy teacher and authority. Migrants frequently stick together and this causes distrust in other students. The biggest complaint from a school sociological viewpoint is that the migrants are some times brutal, dishonest, filthy, ill mannered, and addicted to the use of foul language, tobacco and often alcohol. And a bad part about it is that the natives, gaining courage by the freedom of the migrant and his ability to get

by with it, tend to immitate the mannerisms of the migrant. The influence of migrants can be indicated by the following: A survey recently conducted by our school showed that 40% of the students were from Oklahoma, 40% were from California, and 20% were from other states. A State official said that our area was one of the "black spots" in the state for juvenile delinquency.

Due to the influx of so many migrants the schools have become greatly overcrowded. This has put a premium on teachers and now "teachers salaries in California are the highest among the 48 states" \*

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\*Modesto Bee Feb. 9, 1948 p. 20

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With the current construction programs, high state aid, there will be schools available for all migrants. That much is being solved. Now to get the maximum possible into the schools. All capable migrants should be expected to attend school. Free lunches are now sometimes furnished. Maybe even clothes should be furnished, too, so that no one in California would be deprived of an education because of poverty.

## Chapter VI

### Health and Accidents

Most migrants live in deplorable conditions. "The disease problem is terrible, Smallpox, typhoid fever, and other filthy diseases abound." \* Wherever poverty, poor housing, hard work, constant mov-

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\*Croutch, Albert; Housing Migratory Agricultural Workers in California  
p. 96

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ing, insufficient clothing focus together, ill health is a normal result. If we should not find this to be true we would indeed be surprised.

Coupled with the natural environmental problems is the factor of irrigation itself. Irrigation of crops make soggy ground for workers. Most growers try to irrigate only when the crop is not being picked. But some growers and in some crops water is placed in the fields even as the pickers are preparing to enter. On one ranch of which I am familiar, workers wear rubber boots. This causes extra effort and results in break down of body and health quicker. The grower usually pays a picker a premium for working under these adverse conditions.

Another irrigation water problem is the resulting mosquitoes breeding in the places where excess water becomes stagnant. Mosquitoes are problems to all campers. And more so to the migrant who cannot afford detergents. The babies who cannot protect themselves are particularly annoyed. It is surprising there is not more malaria.

A U.S. Public Health Service Physician says, " migrant children miss out on their immunizations. There is considerable diphtheria among them, though it could be prevented by simple inoculation. We've found the most weird kinds of malnutrition in these (migrant)

camps. And talk about your impetigo, scabies and plain lousiness--there's perhaps as much among our own migrants as among the D P s of Europe". \* This bold statement is borne out by the following

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\*Colliers Sept. 20, 1947 Whitman, Howard: "Heartless Harvest " p. 31

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excerpts from a government camp weekly newspapers; Pink Eye was reported in the camp.\*\* A "new isolation unit for impetigo cases"\*\*\*

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\*\*Marysville Camp News August 20, 1937

\*\*\*ibid. Oct. 2, 1937

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was set up. "At present there are two cases of chicken pox and a number of colds". \* There are no good reasons to believe that the

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\*ibid Dec. 24, 1937

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illness incident rate<sup>1</sup> is substantially different in 1948.

"The average incident of illness among the groups of migratory workers in California varied from seven to over twelve percent,"\*\*

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\*\*Hewes, Laurence: Some Migratory Labor Problems in California's Specialized Agriculture p. 94

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which is very high.

"The primitive background and ignorance of these people were among the factors contributing to their high rate of illness. Often they failed to take elementary precautions. Some children were inadequately clothed in the winter time, or were overexposed to the heat in the summer. Women were reckless in their disregard of precautions before, during, and after childbirth. Infants were born and spent the first months of their lives beside irrigation ditches with no shelter at all. In other instances adults and children who

were seriously ill continued to work and remain active almost up to point of death. Among many of these people there was a persistent distrust of doctors, hospitals, and things medical although frequently faith was placed in fake "cures" and superstitions practices."\*

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\*Hewes, Laurence: Some Migratory Labor Problems in California's Specialized Agriculture p. 95

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"With the frequent moving from squatter camp to another squatter camp, the disease of one camp can be spread through the communities the migrant travels and to the new camps he comes to stay at. Epidemics have resulted."\*\* \*Privies are a polio threat. There was a

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\*\*Crouthch, Albert: Housing Migratory Agricultural Workers in California p. 32

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polio outbreak in a migrant camp in California and, though disregarded at first, it spread to a nearby town and that changed things! Local health officers swarmed through the camp cleaning up messes and giving everybody examinations and shots". \*\*\*

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\*\*\*Colliers Sept 20, 1947 Whitman, Howard: "Heartless Harvest" p.31

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It is often all too true that local health authorities ignore the conditions in the camps until they become of startling size. Reasons for this have been previously discussed. \* Some local Health

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\*supra p. 11

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Authorities seem to take a Malthusian attitude towards disease, poverty, and population.

Closely related to poverty, very closely related to health, and almost synonymous with population is birth control. A very big reason

for the poverty of migrant families is the number of children in the family. Frequent child birth ruins the health of the migrant mother. The mother cannot or does not adequately supervise the children. The health of the younger children is undermined. Venereal diseases are the almost inevitable result of allowing the teen agers to run wild. Some children in the elementary school go without shoes summer and winter in California. If my children did that they would be down with a cold or pneumonia. And so we hear that the migrant children are so tough that nothing could hurt them. This is only partly true. However the illness rate is high, death early takes the weak children, only the more fit survive the arduous childhood.

In one of the government camps "several of the women came to the nurse to ask about birth control. They were informed that they could get the materials for a year for only forty cents...but...not one of them ever did anything about it." \* Health and birth control go hand

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\*Fortune April, 1939 \_\_\_\_\_: "Migratory Labor: A Social Problem" p. 100

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in had for the poor migrants. They need to be educated for both.

The migratory life is a source of innumerable accidents. The highways of the nation are crowded with speeders and jalopies. Wrecks can be caused by either. And when the jalopies try to speed--hold on! We have mentioned previously the possibilities of drowning in the irrigation ditches and rivers. \*\*

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\*\*supra p. 13

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The "accident hazard in agricultural occupations is increasing. The introduction of machinery and the gradual mechanization of many processes in agriculture have exposed the average (farm) worker to the dangers of accident which would not have been believed possible a few



years ago". \* And the accident rate will increase as mechanization

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\*Hathway, Marion: The Migratory Worker and Family Life p. 98

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increases. The migrant will be exposed to the hazards as long as he continues to work around machinery that often do not have sufficient safety devices.

It is bad enough to contemplate the normal risks of life and limb, but this article would not be complete without reference to another "accident" hazard: "A mob of 40 men armed with sticks and clubs today assaulted and beat five union pickets." \*\* at the

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\*\*Modesto Bee Feb. 7, 1948 p. 1

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Di Giorgio's ranch. It is easy enough to say that if they were working it would not have happened. The fact remains they were agricultural migrants. They were apparently peacefully picketing, which is perfectly legal. It was not mass picketing. Besides they have a constitutional right "peaceably to assemble".\*\*\* These American Citizens

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\*\*\*United States Constitution, Amendment I

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were beaten by a vigilante group about eight times their number, depriving the men of their Constitutional rights.

Who are the vigilantes? They are extra legal fascisti-type thugs who try to be 200 percent Americans by depriving others, less numerous than themselves, of American and legal rights to organize, of free speech, and assembly. They are usually fool tools of those who feel their toes may be stepped on by organized labor. On the phoney plea of "Reds", "Agitators", "Protection of America" these depraved, moronic sheep do illegal battle. Here is what a more

colorful author has to say about the Vigilantes: "Why, they are the dirtiest guys in any town. They're the same ones that burned the house of old German people during (World War I ). They are the same ones that lynch Negroes. They like to be cruel. They like to hurt people, and they always give it a nice name, patriotism or protecting the Constitution. But they're just the old nigger torturers working. The (growers) use 'em, tell 'em we have to protect the people against reds. Y'see that lets 'em burn houses and torture and beat people with no danger (to themselves). And that's all they want to do, anyway. They've got no guts; they'll only shoot from cover, or gang a man when they are ten to one. (Eight in this instance.) I guess they are about the worst scum in the world." \*

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\*Steinbeck, John: In Dubious Battle p. 175

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## Chapter VII

### Attitudes Toward Migrants

Community attitudes towards migrants vary but little from area to area. But attitudes towards the migrants do vary greatly from individual to individual in the community. Some communities may have more of one kind of people with a given attitude than other communities, but all have the same general range based upon the same general characteristics of both human nature and the migrants themselves.

Why should what someone thinks about migrants be a problem to the migrant? Everyone wants to be well thought of, even tho some of us do not always act that way. No one wants to be snubbed, ignored, hooted at, imposed upon, kicked around. So the attitude of the community is an important problem to the migrant. He may need a loan, relief, a casual job, a bite to eat. The community attitude will determine his welfare. He wants his children to be treated decently in school and in the community. He is vitally interested in the community attitude.

The attitudes of the community run from fear, distrust, hatred, contempt, dislike to sympathy, understanding, friendliness, cautious welcome. The attitude of children to their migrant colleagues has been discussed previously. \*

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\*supra pp 45,46

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One of the main general drawbacks to better relationship between native and migrant is that migrant "farm labor in general does not get enough income to provide an adequate standard (She means scale) of

living". \* And "the appearance, attitudes, and capacities of the

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\*Lowry, Edith: Migrants of the Crops p. 5

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newcomers do not help their case. Manners, speech, and appearance set them apart. Their behavior is odd and many of them appear as dirty and dissolute to the Californian accustomed to a higher standard of living...On occasion some of them are sullen, mean, or violently angry...Many county officials feel that the migrants are an inferior group of people." \*\* This is a description ~~of~~ the Okie type

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\*\*Hewes, Laurence: Some Migratory Labor Problems in California's Specialized Agriculture p. 80

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migrant.

Unfortunately the work Okies has been used to designate "the tenant farmers and sharecroppers of the state of Oklahoma (who were supposed to be) aX slovenly, hopeless, dirty-thinking, vile-talking class of people." \*\*\* The use of this term Okie to designate a certain type

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\*\*\*Sanders, Sue: The Real Causes of Our Migrant Problem p. 7

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of migrant was most unfortunate. There are many good people from Oklahoma who are migrants and do not fall into this type. And there are "Okies" who were born in California and have never gotten out of the State, which is most unfortunate for California. Now decent people from Oklahoma should be called Oklahomians to differentiate them from the malicious word Okies. It would undoubtedly be better to coin a new word to cover this type of character, but I'm afraid "Okie" has too much of a head start. Too often the community sees a migrant and automatically types him as an Okie with all the connotation that goes with it. This is often very unfair. The Migrant

may be clean, decent, religious, law abiding, friendly, patient, and otherwise an asset to any good community.

Part of the reason why the Okie got his ~~had~~ name goes back to the competition between the natives and the recent arrivals. One good Californian by birth was driving truck at 75 cents an hour. Two migrants offered to do the work at 25 cents an hour each. The boss offered to let the Californian keep the job if he was willing to do it at 50 cents an hour. What the Californian told the boss would probably <sup>have</sup> blistered the paint on the side of the truck. The migrants got the job. Within two months the truck was ruined by the migrants. You can guess what the Californian thought of the "Okies." Another instance is the case of the fellow who was from the dust bowl. He asked a farmer for a job pitching hay. The farmer said he had enough workers. He was asked how much he paid. When the farmer said 25 cents an hour the migrant offered to do it for 10 cents an hour. He got the job. You know what the other workers thought about ~~the~~ migrant. The out of state migrant constantly forced down the wages toward the level of the area from whence he came, to the utter disgust of the Californian. What the natives thought is still carried over into the general concept of the "Okie" type.

This cut-rate, cut-throat competition of the migrants from the dust bowl created a secondary problem. The migrant who offered to drive truck at 25 cents an hour or pitch hay at 10 cents an hour soon discovered that he could not live on those wages and soon rationalized that as long as the tight employers paid so cheaply it would be quite all right and ethical to steal the difference. The farmers grapes were pilfered, his hen house raided, his tractor drained of gasoline. To the victimized farmer or townspeople, the word Okie leaves a bitter taste in the month.

Nor did the stealing stop with the "cheap" farmer or industrialist. The migrants stole from one another. Frequent complaints and warnings of petty thievery within ~~migrant~~ camps \* has been recorded

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\*Migrants Mike Jan. 31, Feb. 7, 1941

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in the official weekly paper of the Yuma, Arizona federal camp. How much worse the petty thieving must have been outside the camp is left up to the reader to decide. Today the attitude that the Okie type migrant is untrustworthy is borne out by the frequency that fixtures are being stolen from houses under construction. More migrants are building houses. ~~M~~migrants don't have much money, fixtures cost money, ergo the migrant is stealing the fixtures to build his home. Whether this is true or not makes little difference. Many townspeople when they read of such removal think, "confounded Okies" and the type idea continues. "The crime record of the these migrants includes a lot of ~~these migrants includes a lot of~~ sordid, depraved acts." \*\* The poor

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\*\*Croutch, Albert: Housing Migratory Agricultural Workers in California p. 96

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attitude towards the migrant is based on more than mere prejudice.

Another reason ~~why~~ the migrants are not welcomed with open arms is because of the cost to the community for relief which will be discussed at greater length in the next chapter. The communities that need the migrant labor during the harvest season would be very happy if all migrants would leave when the season is over. But increasingly "migrants do not leave the rural areas during the off employment." \*\*\*

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\*\*\*Hewes, Laurence: Some Migratory Labor Problems in California's Specialized Agriculture p. 77

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Local tax burdens have been increased out of all normal proportion.

*Stanislaus County for*  
This year record tax rates for 1948-49 has been tentatively set at

\$2.43, a raise from last year's \$1.95. \* Of course the migrants can-

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\*Modesto Bee July 23, 1948 p. 1

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not be blamed for all of the raise, but indigent relief and other social services, largely to migrants and other indigents, are very high. And the populace looks at the migrant and shakes its collective head.

For they remember the war days when a good peach picker could make \$20 or \$30 a day. Some families made \$50 or more a day during the peak season. And as soon as the crop started thinning out they moved on to lucrative fields farther north. What happened to the huge bank accounts the migrants must have been accumulating? Why are we forced to feed them now? Something is rotten in Denmark. Let us more calmly view the situation. True, some pickers made \$30 a day picking peaches. But the average was little over \$10 a day, the same as most industrial workers. The industrial workers did not save much either. They are still employed but that is their good luck. Some of the more ambitious migrant workers, those who did make good money and saved have become small business men, farm owners here in the Great Valley. Some have bought businesses or farms back home. Many of the migrants who were in need of relief this spring were new to California.

A very real complaint, and in my opinion quite justified has been discussed previously. \*\* This is the fact that the recipients of

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\*\*supra pp.39,40

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relief waste their wages and even relief on liquor, tobacco, and gambling. A local citizen who cannot afford to smoke, drink, or gamble, feels that he should not be called upon to subsidise those vices of

others. And those who are morally opposed to gambling and narcotics, blame, with some justification, the migrant.

The story is still current, that the white migrant is not careful about his work, is dirty about his camp. That "poor white trash are not dependable" \* is a conception still held by growers. Some

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\*California Historical Quarterly Sept., 1945 Taylor, Paul: "Foundations of California Rural Society" p. 218

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growers feel that when they are needed the most they may not show up, may turn up drunk, or may strike, or will stay only during the best of the season and leave the farmer in the lurch at the tag end of the season. There is some justification for this last complaint. Growers sometimes withhold a certain percent of the wages until the end of the season. This practice is frowned upon by the State Labor Commission. A better plan has been to pay a bonus to those workers who do stay to the end of the season. This independability extends to the picking of the crops. It was felt that white boys and men were hard on the threes. Some growers felt "they would make an infernal region of any orchard." \*\* This was generalizing from a few unfortunate

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\*\*ibid p. 223

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cases. A rancher told me that he much preferred the Japanese to Okies. He had had very unfortunate experiences with these workers and swore he would not hire more. He sold his ranch shortly after the Japanese stopped being migrants in the area. Another grower friend of mine tells the story of letting an unfortunate family of Okies stay at his ranch house for the winter because they did not have enough money to make the trip back to the Dust Bowl. He charged them no rent with the understanding they would keep the place up. There must have been a slight misunderstanding. When the owner checked up on it in the spring, the migrants had left. The place had been literally chopped



up. Some of the floors had been torn up and used for fuel during the winter. I would not dare ask what he feels about migrants, my tender ears could not stand the blast. Another case is that of the house that was leased to a migrant family. When the owner came to collect the next month's rent, the front room had been turned into a chicken pen. The migrants were raising baby chicks on the front floor. These examples are admittedly only a few. One swallow does not make a summer. However it is examples like this that make the native wonder what kind of people these migrants are. The burden of proof is now on the migrant to show that he is not one of the "Okie" type.

Lack of manners and culture are further indictments against the migrant. Some migrants realize the community judges them by their actions and one complains that "the way the older boys misbehave at church is most disgraceful...I think men in camp interested in church should...make boys not interested stayaway". \* We wonder why the

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\*Marysville Camp News Aug. 20, 1937

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parents of the children allow them to act that way. At least the item indicates that some migrants have sincere interest in the proper things of life. I have at hand a clipping from a nearby paper. It says in part: "Coming home to their ~~rooming~~ house at 2 A.M. and making so much noise no one could sleep, cost two youths \$25 or 12½ days in the county road camp yesterday. (The 23 year old boys), who said they were college students from Arkansas and came to Modesto recently as farm warkers, did not immediately pay the fine and were returned to the county jail". \*\* This may be a slam at college boys, but

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\*\*Modesto Bee July 16, 1948 p. 5

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many townspeople will think only, "migrants from Arkansas disturbing the peace of Californians". And thus is built up community attitudes. We have previously quoted the story of the woman who borrowed her neighbors stove and returned it uncleaned. \* I suppose similar calomns

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\*supra pp. 20,21

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tricks have been played on natives. But even if they have not, the natives hear about them and judge accordingly.

Another example of violation of ethics follows: "Pickers who have worked in a field long enough to know where the "good picking" and the "poor picking" are to be found, will frequently stop work temporarily if they anticipate a "poor" field. Often, the pickers will inspect the rows and will leave the field for the time being, if they do not think it worth while to work. The new and ~~in~~experience pickers are then left to cover these rows. Occasionally these (attempts to avoid poor fields) force the (farmer) to abandon large areas of the ranch or to offer special inducements to workers to cover them. Sometimes pickers who have worked in a poor field are permitted to inspect the next section and to select rows for special assignment. Ordinarily rows are assigned in turn, but there is so much variation in the crop, that workers will resort to many devices to protect themselves from low earnings." \*\* We are not blaming the worker for trying to

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\*\*Hathway, Marion: Migratory Worker and Family Life. p. 90

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protect himself against low wages. But when he forces others to work for low wages by his actions, that is unethical. Besides laying off for the day or part of the day does not increase his wages. We are not here discussing the economics or the ethics of the situation.

We are discussing community attitudes. The grower does not like to be forced to pay a premium to pick a poor field. (Some farmers pick the poor areas themselves, or have the year around help do it; others pay by the hour to have these fields picked ). The grower does not like to see his best (or any) pickers sneak out when the going gets tough. Whenever any picker does so, down goes the grower's opinion of the worker. During the War many townspeople went into the fields to "save the crops". They felt rather mean when some of the workers took advantage of them and took the best rows. Not all migrants did this, and doubtless some townspeople caught on very quickly and did the same themselves. But the unethical practice was usually begun by the experienced picker and to the townspeople all experienced pickers were classed as the "Okie" migrants.

Another criticism, often with very little reasonable justification is that the migrant does not participate in community life. These criticisms are partly unjust because "the life of the migrant family makes the exercise of voting and other privileges of citizenship and the participation in community life difficult if not impossible." \*

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\*Hathway, Marion: Migratory Worker and Family Life p. 223

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Migrants, with much justification, have felt that they were not always welcome. However in the places where they are welcome such as at Parent Teachers Association meetings, Boy Scouts, Cub Scouts, and other community projects the migrants are most often too "busy" to show up. In four years of P.T.A. meetings, I do not know of the parents of one of my migrant students ever showing up. They take little interest in school affairs and sometimes are combative towards the schools.

Another community attitude, somewhat artificially stirred up, is <sup>that</sup> "growers fear the congregation of workers in large numbers and beyond their own control". \* So they do not want to be too friendly, for

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\*Croutch, Albert: Housing Migratory Agricultural Workers in California p. 91

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that might attract too many for them to handle during the off season. Before the present extent of union organization the growers often wanted many migrants to force wages down. Now they are not so sure of this method.

"Sometimes the feeling about migrants shows up in the prices at the village stores. A few pennies higher is often regarded as a kind of tariff because migrants don't belong in the community". \*\* This

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\*\*Colliers Sept 20, 1947 Whitman, Howard: "Heartless Harvest" p. 32

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miserly attitude is indefensible ethically. The migrant usually is forced to pay cash. Credit risks for migrants are admittedly bad. But to gouge on the poor migrant, is certainly morally wrong. A further problem of the migrant is the fact that he usually is paid by check. And it is silly to suppose that he has a bank checking account. Often banks and stores make a practice of charging from 10 to 50 cents a check for cashing. The service charge presumable is mostly to cover bad checks, showing an attitude of distrust.

## Chapter VIII

### Relief

Relief is rather closely related to community attitudes, because historically relief has been the duty of the local unit. The attitude that the local officials have had has determined the amount, quality, and promptness of relief. When the Great Depression of 1929 began, the local officials extended the customary relief. They overexerted their limited financial means and the states were forced to step in to help solve the problem. But soon practically every (if not all) state was caught by the tremendous size of the financial burden. Only the Federal Government could command the necessary resources and credits to relieve the unemployed.

In the interim, some states, such as California, Oregon, and Washington had much larger relief rolls than other states due to the migration from other states. Some states apparently encouraged migration from their states to California. One Texas representative said, "Let the Texans go to California. We've more than we can handle in Texas without them." \* Of course this caused retaliation on the part of

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\*Free America June, 1939 Livingston, Helen: "Americans on the Move" p. 11

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the recipient states. They tried to stop these unneeded migrants. Or they tried to put residence requirements before a person would be eligible for relief. But humanism cannot see fellow beings starve. Relief was given regardless of residence, and the migrants came in increasing swarms and droves.

"California approves of Federal funds, but revolts when she must loosen to some extent her strict residence requirements." \*\* Her motives

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\*\*ibid

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for wanting to control residence and other relief requirements in her own hands, even with Government money, are two fold. First, "there was an almost hysterical fear on the part of officials and citizens that if relief was extended the migrants would remain and other migrants would be attracted to the community". \* This is understandable.

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\*Hewes, Laurence : Some Migratory Labor Problems in California's Specialized Agriculture. p. 81

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Second, the growers wanted to continue the local relief pattern which "has been to force workers off relief whenever work has been available in the fields, regardless of what (wage) rates were offered." \*\* This

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\*\*New Republic Sept. 20, 1939 Mc Williams, Carey: "What's Being Done About the Joads" p. 179

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was a less understandable and more reprehensible practice, for the wage rates tended to approximate the relief rates.

With the war over, conditions of relief are going back to the 1930-33 period. Local relief has been sporadic and often ineffectual, despite heavy taxes to pay for normal transient aid. This year there were at least 50,000 unemployed migrants in the Great Valley. "Counties have either ignored the situation or have run into financial troubles" \*\*\*

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\*\*\*Modesto Bee March 3, 1948 p. 8

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trying to help them out. However "the majority of rural districts have not offered as generous relief to the individual migrant as has been afforded in metropolitan and industrial cities". \* A few of the

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\*Hewes, Laurence: Some Migratory Labor Problems in California's Specialized Agriculture p. 79

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rural counties, mostly in the Great Valley, do exert themselves to give a semblance of adequate relief.

I believe it is the duty of the Federal Government to furnish relief to all transients from one state to another. And it should keep the rules and regulations in its own hands, not in those of local politicians or growers associations. "Of course, when people are actually hungry no one asks whose job it is to feed them; but everybody pitches in and helps to get them fed." \*

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\*The Farm April 16, 1948 Interview with Russell Giffen p. 5

County and state relief requirements are still, at least in theory, high, but in practice the migrant has been, (since the War) getting good attention. "Persons who have been in the state three years, and one year in the county, are eligible for free care in county hospitals. For treatments of emergencies, such as serious injury, childbirth, or communicable disease, any person is admitted to the county hospital regardless of residence or other rules.. Under present conditions, recent migrants who have not yet established residence in California are receiving free hospital and medical care, which is not available to residents of this state or to residents of the states from which they came," \*\* That has been a long standing plaint of local citizens

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\*\*California State Chamber of Commerce: Migrants, A National Problem P. 35

that their county hospitals, for which they pay high taxes, are closed to them, but open free to non residents who do not pay to support the institution.

Due partly to the high rate of transient indigent pulmonary and other diseases, "a shortage of hospital beds makes it bad for T. B.

cases." \* The county hospitals are swamped.

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\*Modesto Bee, Feb. 26, 1948 p. 5

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California has probably the best relief setup. In most of the midwest, and "notable in Oklahoma and Arkansas...unemployment relief and other social welfare aids from state and local governments have been very meager". \*\*

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\*\* California State Chamber of Commerce: Migrants, A National Problem p. 17

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We could discuss the pros and cons of transient relief, but "above everything else the transient asks to be regarded as a fellow citizen rather than as a mass menace". \*\*\* In order that the local citizens

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\*\*\*Free America June, 1939 Livingston, Helen: "Americans on the Move" p. 12

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can consider them other than as a "mass menace", the intense economic liability pressure must be removed by the Federal Government. Then the townspeople can feel more free to open their hearts to the migrant.



Chapter IX

Conclusion

"It must be recognized that the migrant is here to stay." \*

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\*Lowry, Edith; Migrants of the Crops p. 62

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We should make plans for him to help him solve his problems and plan to solve the problems that his presence creates. California has a broader outlook towards its migrants than any other state despite a few narrow groups that may have a lot of influence or lobbies at Sacramento. "The most conspicuous pressure group in agriculture is the Associated Farmers...attempting to prevent the organization of farm labor...by actively promoting vigilantism,\*\* antipicketing drives,

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\*\*supra p. 51,52

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and so on...Most observers think that its influence is diminishing".\*\*\*

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\*\*\*Gunther, John: Inside the U.S.A. p. 38

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"Only the combined efforts of all agencies related to the (migrant) problem can bring about a solution." \*

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\*Lowry, Edith: Migrants of the Crops p. 62

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Some significant factors need to be considered before solutions can be suggested. First, "a larger proportion of the total man-power of the nation is now on farms than is needed...to produce domestic and export requirements for agricultural products." \*\* That means that

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\*\*University of Pennsylvania: Migration and Economic Opportunity p.396

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one solution, the reclamation of desert, swamp, and other unutilized lands, is not sufficient to make much difference. Besides "the United States has shown a net increase of 3,250,000 new families since 1940". \*

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\*Modesto Bee July 16, 1948

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That means at least that many wage earners, with very little more demand for additional agricultural laborers. Any possible gift to the present migrants of very good wages would again tempt many more into this type of migrant life. "Since 1945 squatters camps are again on the increase". \*\*

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\*\*Croutch, Albert: Housing Migratory Agricultural Workers in California p. 33

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Other problems face the economist. Farm land speculators have driven the price of farm land up. And, altho many farmers made excellent money during the War (a farmer, learning that \$1,500 was required as a down payment on some construction work to be done on his place "went to his car and picked up a length of pipe capped at both ends. Removing the caps, the farmer pushed out a \$3,000 roll of bills, made the payment and then returned the remaining roll of bills to the pipe and tossed it back on the floor of the car".), \*\*\* ,

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\*\*\*Modesto Bee Jan. 30, 1948 p. 2

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Many bought land during the inflation period. These farmers feel that they have to lower the wages of the workers in order to make out as the farm prices have lowered. (Peaches for instance fell from about \$80 a ton in 1945 to about \$50 a ton in 1947, a decrease of about 37½%. Besides the decrease in prices, the "sale of canned fruits declined in 1947. There was a record pack in some fruits and large unsold

stocks" \* remain.

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\*Modesto Bee Jan. 29, 1948 p. 18

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Something does have to be done to remove the migrant from his position as a second class or junior citizen. Henry A. Wallace said, "the migratory agricultural worker presents a picture of one of the most disadvantaged groups in the nation." \*\* Carlton H. Parker noted

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\*\*Lowry, Edith: Migrants of the Crops p. 5

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that ~~they are~~ "a social class with fewer legal and social rights than is conventionally ascribed to Americans".\*\*\* We cannot blockade

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\*\*\*Hathway, Marion: Migratory Worker and Family Life p. 102

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the highway and say, "you cannot move," for that would deprive him of rights; besides, "a highly mobile labor force is required". \* The

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\*Hewes, Laurence: Some Migratory Labor Problems in California's Specialized Agriculture p. 111

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excessive numbers of migrants must be discouraged. Perhaps better conditions and more available jobs in other fields would cut down on the number of migrants. Most workers are not "adaptable to abrupt changes in his rate of earnings, to the speed with which he works, and the length of the working day". \*\* "Less than a third of the migrant

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\*\*ibid

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families surveyed were able to maintain themselves without public assistance during some period of the year." \*\*\*

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\*\*\*California Chamber of Commerce: Migrants, A National Problem p. 15

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Three solutions were recently proposed to modify the recurrent off season unemployment.

- "1. To extend state unemployment service to farm workers.
2. To augment county funds with state monies.
3. To establish a work relief policy throughout the Valley for the Winter months of each year." \*

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\*Modesto Bee March 3, 1948 p. 8

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These proposals are laudable, but do not meet the crux of the problem--that of preventing unemployed migrants. And to prevent unemployed migrants, fewer migrants must be in the market for employment." "The remedy for the employer faced with (apparent) labor shortage (should not be) to press demands upon government to supply workers at wages and conditions which the farmer could meet, but rather to stabilize employment, promote rural health, and make farm life more attractive to the laborer". \*\*

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\*\*Taylor, Paul: The Place of Agricultural Labor in Society (p. 3)

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Ultimately technological developments may be made in agriculture, particularly in California, to allow for a nearly equal stable demand for labor thruout the year. In the meantime "there is no immediate prospect of major change in the State's farming methods or in crops produced. So the troublesome migratory labor problem will continue to be an annual affliction until effective means are taken to solve it".\*\*\*

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\*\*\*The Farm April 16, 1948 Interview with Russell Giffen p. 1

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There are some changes that are being made that ultimately will tend to stabilize the number of people employed thruout the year.

"Most of the perishable fruits and vegetables (have been) canned in the immediate vicinity of the farm. Therefore farm work and cannery work for migrants (have been) closely allied". \* However two

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\*Lowry, Edith: Migrants of the Crops p. 26

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developments have come to separate these two. It would be ideal for a small number of migrants to harvest <sup>the crop</sup> and after the harvest is over to start canning it. Formerly the products had to be canned in a day or two, now months may go by before the actual canning takes place. The development of deep freezing and the ice storage-houses have made this possible. At the present time there is more waste in this method, but further technical advances may make this ideal realized. The second development has been in high speed transportation. 300 and 400 mile hauls of perishable fruits to the canneries are now almost routine for some canneries by trucks. Some use of planes may be possible. The advantage in the transportation of the products instead of the workers is obvious. Many erstwhile migrants could stay all year in one canning area and have the fruit sent to them for processing. This eliminates much of the migration. The employment opportunities are still present.

Diversification of crops in each area is as important, or even more important, than on a statewide basis. If crops could be grown that would mature periodically thruout the year, this also would be ideal. However manifestly this is not quite possible, but it does not need a great deal of boost to put it over as far as possible. Then if the fruit stored in icehouses were released during the winter off season, then employment would be largely stabilized. Now, cherries and berries mature first in the area. in May, apricots and plums next, peaches follow, grapes and tomatoes end the year/about the first of

December. During the winter, pruning, spraying, plowing is necessary, but does not require anywhere near the help required by the harvests. Winter truck such as lettuce might be added in the area. At the present time there is a hiatus between apricots and peaches. Planting of ~~earlier~~ varieties of peaches is being done to help bridge this gap. \*

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\*supra pp. 30,31

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I believe that one key to the solution of the migrant problems is the near elimination of the type II (all year) migrant. The migrants who have a home somewhere are far ahead of those who have no established home. Type I migrant can be better off in health, housing, economics.\*\*

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\*\*Fair, Laura: Migrants as a Social and Educational Problem in New Jersey pp 9-23

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"One of the most important discoveries which the Farm Security Administration has made is that the moment a migrant family can be (stopped from migrating) its annual income is increased approximately 20%. \*\*\*

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\*\*\*New Republic Sept. 20, 1939 Mc Williams, Carey: "What's Being Done About the Joads" p. 179

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The Census of Agriculture noted that in California in 1940, "38,000 workers were hired on a monthly basis all year." \* This number could

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\*Hewes, Laurence: Some Migratory Labor Problems in California's Specialized Agriculture p. 64

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be greatly expanded with the diversification plan previously mentioned.

What can be done to get the excess migrants off the road? It had been hoped to send them back to their home state, provide them with credit to buy 40 or so acres and enough more to get a good start on the land. Mrs. Sanders, who had traveled the State advocating just

that, says it is futile to hope for the migrants to return to the land of their native states, even tho many want to, because of the land policy of artificial, scarcity and paying farmers not to raise crops. \*

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\*Sanders, Sue: The Real Causes of Our Migrant Problem p. 48

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She claims with some justification the "the crop control plan was at the bottom of the mess". \*\* However crop control or other programs

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\*\*ibid.

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of artificial scarcity has to share the blame with multiples of other causes.

To counteract its action on artificial scarcity, the Federal Government set up the Farm Security Administration of the United States Department of Agriculture. This agency did the most experimenting to determine what to do about the migrant.

Resettlement somewhere of the migrants is necessary. This does not necessarily mean on a 40 or 80 acre farm. It might be on a 2 acre tourist camp. Perhaps the government could well afford to subsidise many rest homes, motels, service stations across the arid and sparsely populated areas of the United States. I am sure applicants would not be hard to find.

"Garden homes" were established in an "effort to anchor as many migrants as possible to the land and prevent further migration". \*\*\*

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\*\*\*Croutch, Albert: Housing Migratory Agricultural Workers in California p. 87

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"It (is) believed that some potential migrants might be held to a locality and become producers, making at least a living even if no surplus". \* This is what an exmigrant has to say about resettlement:

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\*Lowry, Edith: Migrants of the Crops p. 54

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"When I was a fruit tramp I thought I was like a Jew without a country... You may stop the habit of being a fruit tramp and brand yourself a citizen of California. Then in twelve months no one can question your residence...I have a small house, and all kinds of flowers and shrubs which means I am trying to establish a home." \* "They ask for the

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\*Marysville Camp News, April 2, 1938 open letter

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chance to prove themselves: for the "grubstake" of the pioneer" \*\*

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\*\*Free America June, 1939 Livingston, Helen: "Americans on the Move" p.9

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My suggestions for solving the migrant problems include:

I. Eliminate most of the migrations

1. Resettle on land those who can be provided with land with reasonable possibilities of success.
2. Stabilize in industry those who can be taught and want to be employed in industry.
3. Make liberal advances for those who are capable of running their own businesses.
4. Garden homes should be encouraged for most of the year.
5. A small highly mobile force of skilled harvest lands should be available at the big harvest demands.

II. Educate the migrants

1. General education
2. Health education
3. Vocational education
4. Leisure times handicraft
5. Birth control
6. General culture

III. Educate the farmers

1. To diversify crops



2. To correctly estimate harvest help needed
3. To allow migrants to organize
4. To hire more monthly workers

#### IV. Improve agriculture

1. Diversification
2. More spread in crops
3. Bigger and better products

#### V. Government control (federal, state, or local)

1. Farm labor camps (housing)
2. Guarantee floor for farm prices
3. Guarantee minimum wages
4. Effective elimination of child labor during school year
5. Sanitary conditions enforced
6. Protection for workers
7. Unemployment benefits
8. Retirement
9. Health insurance
10. Effective employment agencies
11. Compulsory arbitration of labor disputes

#### VI. Industrial Development

1. Processing plants operate in off-harvest season as much as possible
2. Make peak loads in nonagricultural products to correspond with off-season in agriculture

#### VII. During harvest peaks

1. Do not call in more migrants than absolutely necessary
2. Encourage local townspeople to participate
3. Boys and girls of teen age should be hired, with all safety precautions observed

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