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BEET LABOR PROBLEMS IN COLORADO

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The study of some housing conditions, working patterns, and related problems of sugar beet laborers in Colorado was initiated as a means of providing some basic data regarding one of Colorado's major social problems—the sugar beet workers. The study included information on 470 beet labor families comprising 1167 beet workers. The proportionate maple was chosen at random in 7 of the 11 most intensive beet-producing counties in Colorado. The families represent about 8 percent of all the sugar beet workers in the counties studied.

Methods and Procedure. The study was outlined on the basis of two factors: (1) an inquiry into the available literature and (2) an a priori knowledge of the universe. A questionnaire and a suggestive case history outline were developed and submitted to a number of sugar beet workers, officials of labor unions, social case workers, employees of the Great Western Sugar Company, and representatives of Farm Security and the lational Youth Administration. Each person contacted was asked to criticize the schedules and make any recommendations which he felt would be constructive.

A number of revisions were made in the schedules in the light of the suggestions and criticisms given. The use of some schedules in the field revealed certain inadequacies which were corrected. The major portion of the data was secured by personal interviews with the heads of the households of the sugar beet labor families. Supplemental information was obtained through personal interviews with employers of the sugar beet laborers, officials of the sugar companies, and welfare workers, and limited information was obtained from the files of welfare offices.

Every person who assisted in interviewing was selected because of his qualifications to do the work. Each was given an intensive three-day training period which included a study and an examination of the schedule and observation and experience in the field under the direction of a supervisor.

Special Problems and Methods of Overcoming Them. Three special Problems were encountered in the study: (1) questions of validity and reliability; (2) problems related to the language and culture of the beet Workers; (3) the difficulties of suspicions and inhibitions of the beet laborers.

The first measure used to increase the validity of the study was the attempt to reduce as many of the variables as possible to a quantitative rather than a qualitative basis. Considerable time was spent with the field workers in an effort to establish rather uniform concepts and definitions of the qualitative variables.

Interviews with the people who helped define the scope of the study were also used as a means of checking the validity of the information sought.

The lack of validity which might have been introduced into the study because of the cultural differences between the interviewers and those interviewed was reduced to a minimum by either selecting Spanish-American people to interview the Mexicans and Spanish-Americans or having the interviewing done by a a person who could speak and read Spanish. Most of the German-Russian beet laborers were interviewed by a worker who had a fluent knowledge of the German language and who was well oriented regarding their culture patterns.

The means used to achieve a high percentage of reliability were: first, interviewers who belonged to the same ethnic group as the inter-Viewees were used; second, the schedules were tested and the field workers Were given some training in the techniques of social investigation, which included a consideration of the ways and means of soliciting accurate answers; third, various checks of internal consistency found in the schedule Were explained to the workers of the study; fourth, each schedule was edited at the close of each day by the field worker who obtained the information and by a supervisor on the following day; fifth, a procedure was used which put the field workers on the spot." The supervisor assumed that if the interviewers obtained correct answers from the beet workers the answers should check very closely with those which might be obtained by interviewing the employer of the same beet laborer. Every day the supervisor and assistant supervisor selected, at random, about 25 percent of the schedules that were filled out by each investigator on the previous day and interviewed the employers of each interviewee for whom a schedule was drawn. The employer was asked to reply to most of the questions that were answered by his employee. In cases where the answer of the employer differed by more than 10 percent on the quantitative variables from that of the employee, the supervisor would explain the discrepancy which apparently existed. In such cases the employer would usually revise his estimate or indicate further proof for the accuracy of his original answer.

By doing this, it was possible to estimate the proportion of the total items on the schedule for which the answers given by the employee agreed with those given by the employer. Any answers that differed by more than 10 percent were considered errors and the field worker was asked to re-interview the employee in an effort to obtain a more accurate estimate. The field workers were not told the direction of the error.

The schedules which contained an appreciable degree of error were discussed by the supervisor in the presence of all the field workers. Thus each one knew the standing of all the others, and competition between them, plus the stigma involved in having to re-visit a beet worker, seemed quite effective in reducing the error to a minimum.

In one county the records of a social case worker on family income checked very closely with those obtained by the investigators.

A number of techniques were used to reduce the suspicions and inhibitions of the people interviewed. The selection of field workers whose language and cultural background were comparable to that of the employees probably helped some. The religious, civic, and social leaders of the people who were interviewed were contacted and the project was explained to them before the field work was started. They were asked to encourage their people to cooperate by providing accurate information as requested. In most communities the interviewers were given a letter of introduction from a leader which could be presented to the prospective interviewee if it were necessary.

Significant comments and observations made by the persons inter-Viewed were written on the back of each schedule. These, plus a number of Case histories and the writer's acquaintance with the problem studied, Constitute the frame of reference for the interpretation of the study.

Following are some of the results of the study. For comparative purposes the data in the Arkansas River Valley and the northern irrigated sections were tabulated separately. Because of limited time, the speaker will limit his observation to northern Colorado unless otherwise specified.

The average house of the sugar beet laborer had 2.8 rooms; of this number 1.5 were bedrooms. There were 5.9 persons living in a house, giving an average of 2.1 occupants per room. The evidence of overcrowding and lack of privacy under such conditions is rather obvious. One factor which aggravates the situation is the small size of the average room in these houses. Many are about 7 by 9 feet, and few are as large as 12 by 15 feet.

Approximately one out of five (19.8 percent) houses in northern Colorado were made of adobe or earth, compared with three out of five (58.6 percent) in the Arkansas River Valley. Seventy-seven and seventenths percent of the houses were of frame construction in northern Colorado in contrast to 28.3 percent in the Arkansas Valley.

houses which they occupied, 3.6 percent lived in the employers house and paid rent, while 42.3 percent lived in the employers house and did not pay rent. Twenty-eight and four-tenths percent lived in a non-employers house but did not pay rent. Most of these latter houses are owned by the sugar companies who allowed people to live in them as long as they worked sugar beets. A number of people worked just enough beets to enjoy free housing. Others were very frank in suggesting that the only reason they contracted beets was to obtain free rent.

In general, the houses offered limited protection from the weather and other elements; only 28.4 percent had roofs that were waterproof. The speaker was in one house interviewing a family when a rather severe wind and rain storm developed. The people closed the doors and windows as tightly as possible. Even then the women mopped up about 15 gallons of water that leaked onto the kitchen floor during the 2-hour storm.

Only about one-third of the houses (34.5 percent) were located in a position that rain water would drain away from them. The concrete floors found in many houses were conducive to dampness and cold living quarters during the winter months. Defective walls and poorly fitted windows and doors offered little protection against dust, dirt, rats, and insects.

A number of questions were asked regarding various types of equipment and facilities in the house. Following are a few considerations. About one out of ten houses (10.3 percent) had piped cold water, while one out of two hundred (0.56 percent) had piped hot water; 1.8 percent of the families obtained culinary water from a pump inside the dwelling; 30.1 percent got it from a cistern. Most of the latter people lived in colonies where members of from 4 to 10 families all dropped their buckets into the same eistern. The construction of these cisterns, plus the practices of obtaining the water, lend to easy and frequent contamination resulting in dysentery and other diseases.

Thirteen and four-tenths percent of the household have electricity. Minety-three percent have no refrigeration of any kind, 6.2 percent use ice for refrigeration, and 0.8 percent have electric refrigeration. Ninety-four families out of every hundred (94.1 percent) dispose of their garbage by throwing it in the back yard.

Less than one out of five (17.9 percent) houses of the sugar beet laborers have built-in closets, and nearly two out of five (39.5 percent) have storage space for fruits and vegetables.

An indoor toilet is found in only 1.7 percent of the houses, 34.3 percent have improved outdoor toilets, and 63.8 percent have unimproved outdoor toilets. The condition of the toilet is frequently not as much a matter for concern from the standpoint of health as is the number of people who use it. In some of the colonies many people use a single toilet. One colony had only a double-hole outdoor toilet for all the males belonging to fourteen families. The possibilities for the spread of social and other types of diseases under such conditions are many.

Various studies have shown rather clearly how poor housing and limited facilities contribute to crime, juvenile delinquency, family troubles, and numerous types of personal and social raladjustments. The figures just given indicate rather clearly the decrepit and inadequate state of housing found generally among the beet laborers in Colorado. The dockets of the juvenile courts and reform institutions in Colorado confirm the results of studies elsewhere to the effect that poor housing is associated with social problems. The institutional cases are not the only costs. The educational, the social, the psychological, and the emotional development of thousands of persons are impaired by the poor housing and the related conditions under which these persons are forced to live.

The question arises, "What could be done to improve the situation?" Any possible contributions by the Mexicans are hindered by three

things: (1) limited economic resources, (2) inertia and lack of skills, and (3) the insecurity of a job in any area.

The average yearly income for an entire family of sugar beet laborers in northern Colorado for 1938 was \$568.49. Of this amount, 412.46 was earned by working beets, \$132.00 was obtained through other types of employment, and \$24.12 came as a form of public assistance. The average for the families in the Arkansas River Valley was less than in northern Colorado. In the Valley, each family had an average income of 400.00 of which 170.11 was carned in the beets, 49.57 was obtained by other types of employment, and \$180.31 came from relief. Reducing the average total family income to a per person monthly income gives a figure of \$8.02 for northern Colorado and \$6.25 for the Arkansas Valley, which means that the average man, woman, and child each have the amounts specified to pay for food, clothing, rent, light, water, medical facilities, automobiles, and various sundries. It seems quite obvious that when the average family income per month in each area studied approximates \$47.37 and \$34.37, respectively, there is practically nothing available for in-Vestment toward building or buying a house.

General experience in the field, case histories, and personal interviews with the leaders of the German-Russians, Spanish, and non-Spanish people all confirm the idea that the spirit of complacency is a common characteristic of these laborers. Hundreds of cases could be cited where the expenditure of a little energy would have improved the house materially and the monetary costs would have been nil.

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the beet workers to the effect that the beet laborers seldom, if ever, were capable of doing any type of work other than beet labor.

Insecurity of the Job. Various factors associated with the insecurity of the job contribute to the difficulty of these workers. For example, 69.5 percent had oral contracts, which meant limited protection. Of these oral contracts, 60.8 percent were with farmers and 8.7 percent were with some other sugar beet laborer who had contracted beets with the farmer. Approximately 50.0 percent of the contracts were shared with other workers, which meant lessened employment per family. An average of approximately four persons (4.0 and 3.9) shared thinning and topping contracts, while slightly less than three and one-half persons (3.4) shared the hoeing contract.

The lack of continuous employment with one employer adds to the for his present employer. The average laborer had worked 2.35 years people were working the first year for their present employer when interviewed.

and \$5.12 for topping may be considered good wages, but the average yearly

loyment for all three tasks was only 38.9 days.

Incidentally, a number of farmers interviewed reported that one the major reasons the beet workers did not receive more menial farm or were that they wanted a wage for all types of work equal to that they received in the beets, and the farmers were not able to pay to much.

Other factors which complicate the problems of the beet laborers the attitudes of the farmers and the employees of the sugar companies. It farmers want the beet workers to live on the farm; others would prethat they live elsewhere and walk or travel to and from work. Some the farmers who want the laborers to live on the farms frequently use house as a bargaining device to make the beet workers adhere to the sonal whims of their employers.

Roughly speaking, the farmers can be divided into three groups cording to their attitude toward the beet workers. A small proportion them recognize the housing conditions among the laborers; in such cases by either provide good houses for their employees or are willing to make provements. Approximately 40.0 percent of the farmers realize that if houses of the beet workers were improved they would be more satisfied probably be better employees, but such farmers are not financially let to do anything. The remainder look upon the beet laborers as a dumb, shorant, unskilled, and uncouth group. To such farmers, all the beet ployees possess every vicious and undesirable attribute that any one lossessed. To this group, the employee is merely an instrument of processors and has the right to go back where he came from if he does not like that which is offered him.

The housing problems of the beet laborers are influenced by the attitude of the sugar companies. In the Arkansas Valley a large majority of the workers live in colonies where the houses are provided by the sugar companies. In northern Colorado most of the laborers live in houses provided by the farmer for whom they work. According to a labor agent for sugar company, this policy, is recommended by the sugar company. Without attempting to discuss the merits of such a system, I may say that the fact remains that this policy leaves the employee at the mercy of the employer as far as housing conditions are concerned.

The problem of poor houses, lack of conveniences, ill health, low income, the attitudes of farmers and other persons, as well as a lack of job security, are only a part of the total picture. There is a human drama in Colorado which is almost as spectacular as "The Grapes of Wrath."

An American citizen in my community has a large scar below his right eye. Not long ago he entered a beer hall. Just as he stepped inside, another American citizen of my community struck him on the jaw and knocked him into a glass show case. The scar is the result of a cut which he received then. As the person who was struck was getting up his assailant

**Rade Only."

This incident is not the first of its kind. Rather, it is an example of the race conflict in Colorado and has numerous implications. The occurrence of such conflicts raises two questions: first, what conditions have given rise to them; and second, what are some of the probable results if such incidents continue?

In 1938 President Roosevelt said that the South was the nation's problem area number one. Colorado was not included in the problem area, yet an examination of some conditions and practices which have existed and still exist within the state reveals parallels to those that gave rise to the problem area of the South. As in the South many of Colorado's present and future social problems are rooted in the basic population changes and the existing culture patterns.

1st Parallel: Imported Labor

The negro was imported into the South to perform a type of menial labor associated with the production of cotton which the Nordics refused to do. It is estimated that more than thirty thousand Mexicans came into Colorado between 1910 and 1930. Most of them came from Mexico, New Mexico, and Arizona. They were encouraged to come into the state because they were considered cheap workers who would perform the "stoop labor" in the sugar beet fields that the Nordics refused to do.

Although the exact proportion which may be thought of as having been imported into the state is not known, it is recognized that most of them came because of direct or indirect inducements by promoting groups.

2nd Parallel: The Rapid Rate of Increase

The rapid rate of increase among the negroes is rather common knowledge. In 1910 the Mexican population in Colorado was 3,269; it rose to 57,676 in 1930, a growth of 1664.3 percent. Expressed otherwise, the Mexicans accounted for 0.4 percent of the total population of Colorado in 1910 and 5.6 percent in 1930. The increase was caused by two major factors: (1) a net migration into the state, and (2) an excess of births over deaths.

Which a net migration into the state has accounted for a growth in the Mexican population since 1930. Recent studies make it possible, however, to estimate the extent to which a high birth rate among the Mexicans has contributed toward an increase in their numbers. Such an estimate may be obtained by calculating the ratio of children under 5 to women 20 to 44 years of age. Using such a measure, one obtains a figure of 1045 children per 1000 Mexican women--more than twice the number necessary to maintain a stable population. According to the 1930 census there was an average of

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m lO3}$ children per 1000 women for the state as a whole.

3rd Parallel: Emancipation

The 13th amendment to the constitution technically gave the hegroes their freedom. Freedom in the eyes of the law made possible an even greater emancipation which came as a result of new attitudes and philosophies of life. With this new outlook many negroes refused to work and live under the conditions which characterized slavery.

Most of the Mexicans adjusted to the work and the very unfavorable Working and living conditions fairly successfully because of their backfround. A majority of the people from old Mexico were peons in their homeland. Those from Arizona and New Mexico had not enjoyed, nor were they well acquainted with, certain economic and social advantages and standards of living which even the lower economic class of Nordics in the United States have possessed. However, even the older people who came to Colorado have assimilated a number of American ideals and standards; much effort has been expended to make them think and behave like Americans. The younger senerations have been encouraged to go to school. County case workers to volunteer social workers have attempted to teach them American ideals, principles, and practices in every field.

To a degree the Mexicans have responded to the Nordic program of indoctrination. Many have become citizens. Some American ideals and culture patterns have been almost completely adopted, others have been accepted in part, while some have been modified to fit the cultural norms indigenous to the Mexican culture. In consequence, one sees evidence of dissatisfaction with the status quo. Many young Mexicans who have gone to conscious and have learned American ideals refuse to do the sugar beet field work which Nordic attitudes taboo. Youths who seek enrollment in CCC camps and elsewhere frequently falsify their fathers' occupations as truck drivers or something else because they are conscious of the stigma associated with sugar beet labor. In brief, emancipation among the Mexicans is definitely manifesting itself in two directions: first, some flatly refuse to be subjugated to the status of the sugar beet worker; and, second through such organizations as C.T.O. and other power devices, some attempt to improve living conditions and wages.

4th Parallel: Social Status

The situation in the South needs no explanation. In Colorado, with the exception of one or two counties in the southern part of the state, the Mexicans constitute a class and caste distinctly different from that of the Nordic. Some business houses place in their windows placards which read "White Trade Only." Mexicans who fail to abide by the request are either ignored, politely or impolitely asked to leave the store, or are physically thrown out. The following incident is told by a Spanish American girl who is now a senior in college. "Last summer a friend and I went to the Tavern. We had just seated ourselves

hen the manager came to our table and very politely said that he would have to ask us to leave because some of the other patrons had said they hald go if we did not."

Motion-picture theaters reserve certain sections for the Mexican atrons. Some rural villages do not allow Mexicans to build or live in the others, more liberal, allow them to purchase property within the lity limits, but it is usually "across the tracks" where real estate is of the value and houses are poor. The position of the home of the sugar taborer, compared to that of the employer or regular farm laborer, llustrates this caste system further. The average house of the owner or the house of the farm laborer, if there be one, is regularly situated near the owner's; it is not as large as that of the owner but is usually fairly took. The beet laborer's or Mexican's house is traditionally miserably compared to either of the former, has limited conveniences, and is located either near the cattle corrals and barns or out in the field.

A recent study made among 915 students in the junior and senior high schools in one rather representative county in Colorado reflects the pupils!--perhaps parents!--attitudes toward the Mexicans. The scale used for this measurement was similar to those constructed by Bogardus to be assure the attitude of the Nordics toward the Japanese and other minority from in California. There were a few Mexicans attending the schools when the charts were filled out. The results of the inquiry showed that percent of the students would not grant the Mexicans U. S. citizenship, so percent would not allow them in the same school room, 42 percent would not let them become members of the church to which the students belonged, so percent would not accept a Mexican as a friend, 69 percent would not accept a Mexican and percent would not accept a Mexican and percent would not accept

5th Parallel: Occupational Limitation and Replacement by Machinery

A fifth parallel to the negroes of the South deals with the Problems of occupational limitations and replacements by machinery. The Social status determined by caste and class into which the Mexicans are placed in a dominating Nordic culture pattern limits them occupationally. To date the Mexicans have found few opportunities for work outside the mines, certain types of menial agricultural labor, and WPA. Mine work—highly seasonal—has been restricted largely to coal fields. Agricultural employment, likewise seasonal, has been limited mostly to hand work in Sugar beets and potatoes. Some employment in certain areas has been available in onions, beans, pickles and tomatoes for a short period during the Summer.

Employment of Mexicans in other occupations has been almost nilerhaps the two major reasons for this have been (1) a lack of training and skills, and (2) the lack of opportunities, due to their social status and the accompanying taboos.

by machinery in the South. Machinery in the mines is gradually replacing hand labor. The four-row beet cultivator now does a large portion of the weeding work formerly done by hand. The cross-blocker in the sugar beet field is gradually being improved and now is replacing hand labor. Much progress has been made toward the perfection of the beet topper. When completed it will eliminate thousands of laborers in the beet harvest. Mechanical potato planters and diggers have done away with much work formerly done by the Mexicans.

We find then that a group of Mexicans with strange culture patterns and low standards of living were imported into Colorado to perform a type of work which the Nordics refused to do. A large majority of these people lived on the verge of poverty which was frequently associated with unsanitary health practices and other behavior patterns of fensive to the Nordics. These factors, plus a high birth rate coupled with partial adoption and modifications of Nordic culture patterns to fit the Mexicans: own culture, became the basis of racial discrimination which found expression in the establishment of a system of caste and class and consequential economic, social, and occupational discrimination. Limited employment has been still further reduced by the introduction of machinery . The emancipation of the Mexicans, which education and the privileges of democracy enable, has caused dissatisfaction with the status quo. Their success in supplementing meager earnings by relief has placed heavier tax burdens upon the Nordics. The Mexican expression of dissatisfaction with his position coupled with his efforts to improve his lot has accentuated the antagonism between him and the Nordics. What is the meaning of the Whole problem?

It is generally conceded that caste and class are inimical to the processes of democracy and free education. Ancient Egypt knew that a good slave was an ignorant slave. Logic suggests the impossibility of scoffing at the Mexican culture patterns, of indoctrinating them with those of the Nordics and still expecting them to perform a type of labor and live under conditions which Nordic standards taboo. Neither can it be expected that they will willingly relegate themselves to the status of second-class citizens in a country where equal opportunity, regardless of race, is the symbol of freedom. One hundred years ago, race prejudice was justified because of the supposed mental and social superiority of some groups over others. Today, but few scientists champion such a theory. It is rather well known that social antagonisms are not biologically innate but are required from tradition and current propaganda. History reveals that race friction develops only where the security of one group is seriously threatened by another.

Welfare of the people of the state. An examination of the relief rolls reveals a disproportionately large percentage of the Mexicans on relief in Colorado. Their numbers constitute a high proportion of county patients at the hospitals and medical clinics. In the light of the rapid rate of

Natural increase and limited occupational opportunities it is probable that they will constitute an even larger relief burden in the future. The inculcation of Nordic ideals and their numerical increase will probably augment each other and find expression in more numerous and more effective resistance patterns to their present status. This, plus the Mexican's expression of his rights as a citizen, will probably tend to increase the antagonism and discrimination of the Nordics toward them.

If these results do come, it is not improbable that Colorado will of violence a new venture in racial antagonism with the consequential results might express itself in any combination of the following ways: (1) it would be possible to deny the people citizenship and deport them if there were a place to send them; (2) it would be possible to shoot the Mexicans down as Hitler did the Jews, or as the settlers did the Indians; or (3) an attempt could be made to reduce them to second-class citizens like negroes in the south. The last procedure would involve the problems of maintaining two systems of schools, hospitals, jails, and the like, with the appalling economic and social costs.

anthropology would generally agree that the Nordics do not have as many cultural patterns in common with the South Americans as do even the that the South and Central American countries will keenly resent any discrimination which may be directed against the Mexicans in Colorado.

problems which exist. Some factors, however, which might be considered involve a willingness of all parties concerned to become thoroughly familiar with the trends which exist and the probable consequences which resolve to make the necessary adjustments to insure the welfare of everyone by refusing to discriminate against anyone.

there are no longer many more jobs than people, and one of the basic conditions necessary to maintain a high standard of living is to insure a favorable ratio between the population and the natural resources and opportunities. They must realize that democracy can not function among an unenlightened and uneducated people. They must understand that the privileges of citizenship also involve obligations. They must learn that the satisfactory solutions to the major social problems (health, crime, relief, and others) are possible only when (1) every person is unemotionally acquainted with all the factors which bear upon the issues, (2) when everyone has a clear perspective of some of the results which will follow if this or that given course is pursued, and (3) when each individual is willing to live and sacrifice in order to achieve the desired objectives.

thing is different from another it does not follow that one is superior

other. He should know that racial discrimination either socially, conomically, or occupationally is incompatible with the free ideals of ducation and democracy. History has shown that economic self-sufficiency a by-product of occupational opportunities rather than taboos. The oloradoan should learn from experiences of others that to indoctrinate experience with the precepts of freedom and opportunity and, at the same time, maintain a system which inhibits their expression is to breed discontent sow the seeds of social disorder. He should learn from the experiences of the South whether or not the maintenance and perpetuation of a system of caste and class is economically sound, socially desirable, and in accordance with the recognized procedures of achieving high standards of health and general living.

Valuation. In the opinion of the speaker the most serious deficiencies of the study are as follows: First, the absence of a control group. It would be of interest to compare the houses of the employees with those of the employers or with some other group. Second, the lack of techniques which could be used to show the inter-relationship of a number of factors. For example, we do not have an exact statement of the effect of poor housing upon the self respect or the community participation of a family. The relationship between poor housing and such factors as the physical, intellectual, and emotional development have not been expressed in quantitative terms. To date we can only draw on what we call common sense experience and observation to show the correlation between household conveniences and such factors as home training of children and home management.

In other words, this study fails to consider many relationships and only partially handles a number of others. Until we develop means and techniques to measure larger segments of human relationship in the Various fields our research is incomplete.