

the charge that they write propaganda; Steinbeck, for example, stands up as stoutly as an Englishman for his unintelligence. Dumbness is an American ideal which not only our statesmen possess; I had it once myself and can understand and sympathize with anybody's fear of losing it. It's a jewel

that the New York correspondent of the *New York Times* reports with malice the loss of. I charge that he is trying to steal the most precious thing we Americans have, our English innocence, our ignorance of purpose. If we once know what we are up to, we become guilty.



FARM FASCISM

BY CAREY McWILLIAMS AND CLIVE BELMONT

IT WOULD require a work of encyclopaedic scope to trace in detail the development of the various extra-legal techniques used in California to keep migratory farm labor submissive. The pattern of suppression, however, is clearly indicated.

Briefly, the development has been from unorganized farmer violence—vigilantism proper—to highly organized and skillfully manipulated terror. The various investigations of the Wheatland Hop Pickers Riot (1913) reveal the details of the terrific onslaught directed against those who, guided by the I. W. W., attempted that initial organization of farm labor in California. (See: Hearings of Industrial Relations Commission, Vol. V: *The Casual Laborer and Other Essays*, by Carleton H. Parker, 1920; and report of Simon J. Lubin, submitted to the Governor of California, June 1, 1914). Private detective agencies were employed; the National Guard was mobilized; hundreds of workers were arrested; Suhr was kidnaped in Arizona and brought back to Marysville in a box car; workers were beaten indiscriminately, many were injured, and one man driven insane. Farm fascism in California has, indeed, a history. Incidentally, Ford and Suhr were indicted for inciting to murder, and the technical difficulties that the prosecution experienced in conducting a prosecution under this obsolete procedure was unquestionably a factor in bringing about the enactment of the Criminal Syndicalism Act which has, of course, been used repeatedly against farm labor, notably in Imperial Valley in 1930 and in Sacramento in 1934.

Although the Criminal Syndicalism Act has been the chief weapon of the farm-industrialists, it has been supplemented by other and subtler devices. Espionage is essential to the effective working of the act, and the systematization of espionage has long been accomplished. Captain Hynes, of the Los Angeles Red Squad, working in close collaboration with the Department of Justice, has collected an elaborate file of documents and exhibits for use in prosecutions under the Criminal Syndicalism Act. His services have been widely utilized throughout the state; for example, he directed the prosecutions in Imperial Valley and Sacramento—at a special fee paid by the local authorities. The Bureau of Criminal Identification has functioned as a branch of the California Farm Bureau. Its operatives were active in shadowing organizers in the San Joaquin Valley in 1933 and it has consistently furnished information and reports for the files of the Associated Farmers. The Associated Farmers maintain, of course, their own espionage department with a file containing photographs and biographical information about approximately 2,000 "radicals" in the state, the cards carrying references, in some cases, to similar records in the Bureau of Criminal Identification. Insurance companies cooperate with the authorities in supplying information about farm workers

suspected of asserting "false" claims for damages. A well-known farm owner boasted to the writers that he could, within a day, get "a complete line" on practically any migratory worker who applied for a position. The State Peace Officers Association has an espionage service, including an interesting manual on "Communism" which is distributed to local law enforcement agencies. The Sheriff's office in Los Angeles has a well-organized Bureau of Communistic Intelligence which has sent operatives into neighboring farm regions whenever "labor trouble" impended. The Bureau of Immigration and Housing, theoretically concerned with housing and living conditions, has sent its sleuths into the camps to spy upon the workers. With scarcely a single exception, the local Mexican consuls have worked in the closest collaboration with the farm interests, heading fake nationalistic protective organizations and supplying information needed when the threat of deportation has been utilized. All of these agencies are coordinated through the State Bureau of Criminal Identification, Mr. Clarence Morrill, of the bureau, being a close friend of Mr. Guernsey Frazer, at one time chief executive officer of the Associated Farmers. County and state health department officials have obligingly submitted to the dictates of the farmers. In Imperial Valley the county health officer ordered a camp of 2,000 workers evacuated and his order was backed up by the armed forces of the community. The *Shipper-Grower Magazine* has praised the state motor vehicle department for undefined "aid and assistance" which it has given in the past to suppress strikes. Both the California Grange and the California Farm Bureau are, in effect, controlled by the Bank of America and its subsidiary, the California Lands Company. Through the medium of the Giannini Foundation for Agriculture, at the University of California, the Bank of America has a powerful influence on farming interests of the state. So-called "instructors" from this institute have done all manner of errands for the farm-industrialists and many have been "loaned" to the Roosevelt Administration to assist the Department of Agriculture in giving \$600,000.00 to California prune growers, \$1,133,748.00 to California raisin growers, \$1,102,277.00 to California rice growers (rental and benefit payments for the first quarter of 1935-1936), \$396,592.00 to California cotton growers (same period), \$245,523.00 to California wheat growers and \$214,293.00 to California sugar beet producers (same period), and \$4,000,000.00 to California walnut growers (two years). Many state officials are special agents for the farm interests. Assemblyman John Phillips, of Banning, has been writing an interesting series of articles in the *California Cultivator* (Feb. 1 and 15, 1936), on his recent European travels, notably his visit to Nuremberg to attend the convention of the National German Socialist Labor Party. Mr. Phillips goes to great length in explaining to the California farm-industrialists the

operation of the new German citizenship—the Reichsbürger—under which “you simply say that anybody who agrees with you is a citizen of the first class, and anybody who does not agree with you is a non-voting citizen” and of his great admiration for Hitler: “I would like to tell you how the personality of Hitler impressed me and how I feel that he has a greater personal appeal and a greater personal influence on his people than many of the nations realize.” It was Mr. Phillips who lent his name to the growers special committee (Phillips, Dean Hutchison of the University of California, and W. C. Jacobsen of the State Agricultural Department) to whitewash the vigilantes of Imperial Valley. In other words, many state and federal agencies, many individual officials and several organizations of officials, all work with the farm-industrialists in their efforts to keep down farm wages in California. By these agencies, espionage has been systematized and criminal syndicalism prosecutions standardized, at the same time that public opinion is mobilized against the workers, so that nowadays even the clumsiest district attorney has no difficulty in securing quick convictions.

In addition to this widespread system of espionage, the farm-industrialists have been able to make effective use of the highway patrol. In Salinas, on August 28, 30 and 31, and September 1, 1934, the state highway patrol was used to break a strike and eject Filipinos from the community when they refused to return to work. The same patrolmen did nothing to prevent the violence then general nor were they available when Rufo Canete's camp was burned to the ground by vigilantes. Not satisfied with the state highway patrol, the farmers conduct a tireless campaign for a state police force and have experimented with privately recruited military organizations. On July 23, 1934, Sheriff O. W. Toland at Gridley announced that a “trial mobilization” of American Legion men and special deputies had come off perfectly: “All Legionnaires were at the hall in ten minutes and in forty-five minutes the entire assembly was present.” From Merced, on July 14, came word that “farm interests”, notably the California Lands, Inc., and the California Packing Corporation, had demanded forty extra deputy sheriffs “equipped sufficiently to cope with violence”—i. e. to provoke violence. From Hanford, July 26, 1934, came the report that the county officials had organized an Anti-Communist association “to cooperate with county officials in case of emergencies”. In a raid on agricultural workers in Oxnard on July 25, 1934, Chief of Police Kerrick was assisted by “special operatives”. (Incidentally, on January 29, 1936, Kerrick was indicted for maltreatment of prisoners—the sixth indictment filed against Kerrick in eight months; he has since resigned.) From Fresno, the United Press on July 9, 1934, sent out a story about a huge moat constructed on the Tagus Ranch near Tulare to “protect

its properties”. On July 21, 1934, an Anti-Red organization was formed at San Jose: “The new organization will cooperate with a smaller group of fifty which was formed a few months ago.” The headquarters of the C.A.W.I.U. in Watsonville were raided by a party of legionnaires and business men on May 8, 1933. In Salinas, April 10, 1933, a Merchants Patrol was formed by the Vegetable Growers and Shippers Association to sell protection to strikebreakers at \$1 a head. This selection of specimen items from the news sufficiently indicates that, when organizational activities are launched in the fields, the farm communities mobilize for war.

The utilization of the American Legion in local communities for purposes of intimidation is, of course, notorious. The *Calexico Chronicle*, January 12, 1934, reported the “mobilization of the American Legion reserve—to keep down the rising tide of strike sentiment”. The *Brawley News* of January 11, 1934, commended the American Legion for its readiness “to go to the bat”. Chapin Hall, in the *Los Angeles Times*, of January 15, 1934: “It's a secret, but the vigilantes are really Legionnaires, and do they have fun!” And the *American Legion Weekly Bulletin*, in its issue of February 3, 1934, carried a story indiscreetly titled: “The Inside Story of the Imperial Valley Lettuce Strike”. It quoted a speech by a former post commandant in El Centro to the effect that “the veterans of the valley, finding that police agencies were unable to cope with the situation, took matters into their own hands and solved the situation in their own way. Now the valley is free from all un-American influences.”

It probably will be said that episodes and utterances of the character here mentioned belong to the past. But what happens to-day with the first intimation of organizational activities? The authorities have grown cunning and now make “protective” and “precautionary” arrests, before any strikes are called. On December 30, 1935, the Associated Press carried a story from El Centro that Sheriff Bob Ware of Imperial County had “launched a valley-wide roundup of professional agitators, Communists and suspects to avert a possible strike among lettuce workers”. With a strike of celery workers at Chula Vista in February came word of a public meeting held February 16, 1936, in San Diego, attended by Supervisor Hugh Osborne, Superior Judge Vaughn Thompson, Rodney Clark, deputy sheriff, and Municipal Judge William Lorenz, all from Imperial Valley, “to warn” residents of San Diego of “subversive forces” in the fields. Commenting editorially on Sheriff Ware's “preventive roundup” of “agitators”, the *Los Angeles Times* said: “Professional agitators who are busily engaged in fomenting new labor trouble in the Imperial Valley winter lettuce deal will find the authorities ready for them. Sheriff Ware and his deputies *have the jump on them this time.*” The growers do not intend to tolerate any kind of pre-strike activity to-day.


There can be no question but that the immigration officials are subservient to the farm-industrialists. In 1926 these officials collaborated with the farm interests in Imperial Valley, assisting C. B. (“Chet”) Moore, of the Western Growers Protective Association, in the formation of the Associated Labor Bureau. At one time this fake “labor” bureau had registered some 6,000 Mexican workers with the implied connivance of immigration officials and had obtained in this manner the photographs and identification records of thousands of workers. They had also extracted from the workers a “registration” fee designed to take care of the head-tax and other items of expense. The incident aroused a storm

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—RUVIN BARTH



FARM FASCISM

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of protest from the workers and was officially investigated (report by Mr. Louis Bloch, 22nd Biennial Report, 1925-1926, Bureau of Labor Statistics, pp. 113-127). The Agricultural Bureau of the San Joaquin Valley, organized in 1925, with F. J. Palomares as manager, performs a somewhat similar service in "shepherding" the workers. The organization is, in fact, a labor recruiting office which, however, cleverly escapes state regulation as an employment agency because it does not "charge a fee". Palomares, headlined in the publicity of the shipper-growers as "the padre of the workers", is a talented labor manipulator, with a long record of labor-contact work, for the State of California during the war and previously with the Spreckels Sugar Company. The State and Federal employment services are, of course, very friendly with the farmers. "A plan to end California's annual shortage of agricultural labor" was recently outlined (February 26, 1936) by Roy S. Stockton, chief of the state employment agency. "Stockton said he will suggest to Frank McLaughlin, WPA administrator, that some 60,000 farm laborers on relief be transferred to projects which will be completed by the opening of the harvest season. In this way, the labor will be free to go into the fields when the crop harvests necessitate." At a meeting in Los Angeles on November 7, 1935, Colonel W. E. Garrison, of Lodi—organizer of vigilante groups in 1933 and 1934—outlined the present system whereby farm labor is "registered". The growers plan to employ all labor indirectly in the future through the state employment bureau. The workers report with two cards, one of which is filled out and returned when he reports for work and the other is kept by the grower until the end of the season when it is returned. These cards, which are kept on file, give full information about the workers, description, license number of car, if he has a car, fingerprints and employment record. Thus, the "bad ones" can be "weeded out". All of this service is, of course, performed by the state and federal employment services for the farmers without charge.

But even more grandiose schemes of dominance excite the farm-industrialists. Their latest plan, sponsored by the Rural Resettlement Administration, is to build labor camps upon which the migratory farm workers can be "stabilized". Curiously enough, this plan is mentioned in the news as the conception of the government. But, actually, whose plan is it? Thirty years ago the citrus growers toyed with the idea; in 1926, 1927 and 1931, the Los Angeles Chamber of Commerce agitated for such a plan; and, obviously, it was back of the maneuver by which Mr. Ross H. Gast was appointed to the Subsistence Homestead Division for California (Mr. Gast was formerly editor of the *Shipper-Grower* magazine). As Dr. Clements puts it: "When Mr. Gast was taken out of the Agricultural Department to write our small farm home program, we adapted the Subsistence Homestead idea into our clearing house program for stabilizing agricultural labor." This plan, as outlined by Dr. Clements, a passionate advocate of the wisdom of using child labor in agriculture, involves the construction of 90 labor camps, scattered throughout the

agricultural counties, capable of housing 4,500 families, and with a total federal expenditure of \$6,805,000.00. Hearings on this plan were held in Los Angeles, November 7, 1935, and an adjourned meeting in Santa Cruz on November 18, 1935. A conspicuous feature of both conferences was the strident insistence of the farm-industrialists that workers were not entitled to private privies. The final conclusions of the industrialists were: 1. That the size of each camp be restricted to perhaps between 200 and 300 persons and located upon private property wherever possible. 2. That the accommodations furnished be platforms for tents with side walls and doors, one or two-room cabins, with community facilities for laundry, bathing, toilets, garbage control, children's playground, and that these facilities strictly follow the rules laid down by the state division of immigration and housing. 3. That each camp supervisor shall be under the control of the individual grower or committee of growers. 4. That strict regulations be made against establishment of permanent residence by any group or groups in relation to relief conditions. The policy behind the recommendations is obvious: farm labor should be stabilized, but not comfortably stabilized, by the creation of an integrated system of penal labor camps dominated and controlled by the growers. Moreover, the matter of stabilizing farm labor has international implications: on December 1, 1935, Gen. Saturnino Cedillo, Secretary of Agriculture of Mexico, and F. Vasquez del Mercado, of the Mexican Immigration Commission, were in Los Angeles, in connection with a plan to build colonization camps in Lower California, so that the Mexican migratory workers might be shunted back and forth from one labor camp to the other.

The present attempt to stop transients at the border of California is closely related to the efforts of the farm-industrialists this season to force workers off the relief rolls in a wholesale manner. By turning transients back at the borders, relief costs can be lessened and an artificial "labor shortage" created. Then, when the season is in full swing, a great hue and cry will go up about crops rotting in the fields for lack of laborers, etc. And then the great crack-down on the relief rolls will follow. At a meeting in Los Angeles on March 5, 1936, between relief administrators and growers, Mr. C. E. Weeks of the Balfour-Guthrie Company, made it quite plain that "WPA must make its jobs less desirable than those of private industry". Mr. McLaughlin thought it would be nice if the growers could pay at least \$48 a month for field labor, but, however, he realized "that we cannot dictate wages to the farmers and growers". McLaughlin was asked: "What will happen if these men are discharged?" His reply was unequivocal: "We will not take them back. We shall be vigilant to make certain they do not get back on relief. We are just as anxious to get them off the relief rolls as the farmers are to take them." One relief worker stated privately: "These workers are getting a raw deal. The growers will cut wages to a starvation level. If the men cannot hold up under the grueling 10-hour day, they will get fired. Where can they go? They can't get back on relief. Industry cannot absorb them. Will California highways be strewn with emaciated dead in the next year?"

Under these circumstances, and having received from the AAA during 1935 a total of \$9,566,448.00 "land rental and benefit payments", and with a 1935 farm income over \$500,000,000.00, is it remarkable that as Melvin Lord, Sacramento correspondent for the United Press, stated in a dispatch dated December 26, 1935, "California growers look forward to 1936 with a measure of optimism and increased confidence for the stability of California's greatest industry"?