

Stooping to Raise Up

by CLAYTON C. BAUER

IMPERIAL VALLEY, CALIFORNIA, peculiarly reflects much that is wrong with American agriculture. A major problem was and is, land monopoly. Stepchild of that monopoly has been the power of the land barons to flood the region with cheap foreign labor during harvest seasons.

Mexico to many of us has meant romance. The very name evokes perfumed nights, silvery moonlight, soft voices murmuring endearments, gently strummed guitars—that sort of thing.

Even Georgists have seen in the braceros' seasonal incursions to our farm areas, northern and southern, a cementing of neighborly ties, a kind of foreign aid that would actually put pennies in our pockets. Our farm workers always saw through such sentiments. Thousands of them had to labor for reduced wages each year or see their jobs go to imported help.

The AFL-CIO consistently fought against these unnecessary invasions. And "Doc Yellen, the Giant Killer" (see Dec. HGN) could see that this unfair competition was killing family farming and raising the incidence of poverty-produced disease, physical and mental, among his patients. His was perhaps the most effective voice combatting every form of cheap labor competition from south of the border.

The arguments sounded sensible to Secretary of Labor Willard Wirtz, who cut off the main part of the bracero flow. Howls of anguish arose from the great landowners as they predicted that crops would rot in the fields and fruit

and vegetable prices would soar. Now that the results are in and the prophets of doom are discredited, Mr. Wirtz has declared his intention of halting *all* migrant encroachments for 1966.

He makes the following points in "Year of Transition": The use of foreign labor on farms was cut 83 percent in 1965. While the price of food generally rose by 3.5 percent, those fruits and vegetables affected by bracero operations fell 3 percent. The 100,000 Americans who would have been squeezed out of employment by past practices of the land barons regained jobs and self-respect, also their hourly wages rose from \$1.08 to \$1.14.

Landowners in search of cheap labor fostered the idea that American workers were not fitted for stoop labor. They'd have us forget that the South's cotton economy for more than two hundred years rested on the stout backs of American workers.

Secretary Wirtz put it well: "The false notion that Americans won't do stoop labor was carefully nurtured from the truer fact that they won't work for stoop wages.

"Only in Michigan did any crops rot for lack of workers. Not enough Peter Pipers showed up to pick the pack. It is noteworthy that these pickles were more than two thousand miles from Imperial Valley and its border."

We applaud all those who helped achieve this victory for American labor. Greater victories await all labor, American and Mexican alike, when they fight land monopoly for the deadly foe it is.

At a Toronto Extension graduation banquet on April 1st, students heard from their president, Ernest Farmer; Archibald McColl of New Brunswick; and Peter Patsakos, assistant director of the HGS in New York.

On April 23rd, at a Chicago HG Woman's Club birthday dinner, the guest speaker was William A. Camargo, head of the Spanish Division, N. Y. HGS. The club presented him with a \$125 school donation.