a little education to go with the whole thing" was no doubt trying to rise to his pedagogical responsibilities. With much wider vision the Council of California Growers found in *bracero* hiring the possibilities for "providing one of our best counter measures against communism in Mexico. This new middle class . . . imbued with democratic ideas and recipients of our capitalistic wealth serve as an effective counter-force."

The education of the *bracero* by his custodians was an afterthought to make managed migration respectable. It never passed beyond the token stage. There was without question a considerable amount of practical learning among the workers, encouraged by the instruction of employers who were aware of the capabilities of the Mexicans. There was no resemblance between this and what the California Council of Growers had in mind. Nor was there any doubt on the part of the Mexican Government that if the words about polishing the *bracero* culturally and indoctrinating him politically ever became more than happy talk, it would only mean an undesirable americanization.

It is one of the characteristics of image making, as an art in public relations, that it can blend in such broad strokes so little that is not necessarily untrue with so much that is excitingly false. Varnished at last with culture, Public Law 78, it could even be claimed, had created a dynamic middle class of small farmers in rural Mexico and had preserved its sturdy democratic counterpart in California. If the *bracero* was generating democracy in his native land and preserving it abroad, history had indeed charged him, the poorest of the poor, with a heavy task.

PART VI.
Perspective

CHAPTER 21
ALTERNATIVES TO THE BRACERO

Although unchallenged in its control over the Mexican farm labor program, commercial agriculture was never fully at ease. In the early years the industry had to make sure of the intentions of the bureaucracy in both countries, to hedge the hazards of government intervention, to see to it that the rules were cautiously drawn and the administrative machinery favorably mounted. Until farm employers felt secure in all these respects they continued to use Wetbacks on a large scale. After 1950 public criticism became more embarrassing and domestic laborers more annoying. Discussions of the law in Congress wore the arguments thin, leaving the program clothed more and more in sheer political power and less in reason and candor.

On these accounts it was wise to keep within reach alternative sources from which the labor pool could be replenished, and facilities to tap them ready in blueprints and pilot projects. The industry turned its mind again to Japan, Hawaii, and the Philippine Islands. It also encouraged limited immigration of Mexican farm laborers under the provisions of United States immigration statute Public Law 414. And it kept a small reserve of Wetbacks.

Plans to reopen the Japanese labor market on a stand-by basis were first discussed by employers in November 1953. At a meeting of industry leaders held in Los Angeles it was agreed that possible sources of farm manpower in Asia should be investigated. It was feared that "as long as Mexico believed that she held all the cards and that California agriculture had no other source of labor supply, the program would continue to be subject to delay and exhorbitant demands."[1] The lead in this direction was taken by the citrus producers of southern California but interest in the plan soon spread

to other commodity groups. A committee composed of Mr. J. J. Miller, Mr. Jack Bias and Mr. Bruce Sanborn, Jr. was appointed to investigate and report.

By the spring of 1956 the preliminaries were out of the way, including the approval of state and federal agencies. Although there was at that time no scarcity of Mexican *braceros* a shortage of farm labor was declared to exist in California. There was no intention to abandon Public Law 78, but only to replace Mexicans with Japanese to the extent that labor on reasonable terms was denied by Mexico.

An agreement was reached between California commercial farmers and the Japanese government with the approval of the Department of Labor and the Immigration Service. It was signed in time for the fall harvests of 1956. Its declared purpose was "to alleviate the continuing shortage of agricultural labor" as well as "to give the worker an opportunity to participate in the American way of life and to learn the latest technical methods in American agriculture."

One thousand Japanese contract workers were authorized. The first plane load of 63 workers arrived in San Francisco on September 22. By December 30 there were 386 men at work, the admissions increasing to 594 by the middle of February.[2] The experimental quota was renewed from year to year. Labor shortages continued to be declared by the Farm Placement Service, although the Department of Labor was turning away thousands of *braceros* at the screening centers in Mexico. Japanese contracting reached its high point in 1959 — 1,356 workers distributed in ten counties, with the largest numbers in Ventura, Monterey, San Diego and Orange. The Japanese were assigned to segregated subpools from which they were drawn, principally by Japanese employers, for work in lettuce, strawberries, lemons, tomatoes, asparagus, melons and other crops in which Mexicans were heavily employed.

The Asians were hired at prevailing wage rates as determined by the Farm Placement Service. They were found to be even more dependable that the Mexicans in that "they do not go to town very often." Mr. Roy Scott, of Salinas, comparing them with the *braceros,* declared them to be "fundamentally clean and not as apt to get drunk."[3] In the south, the citrus growers also discovered

in the Japanese farm hands a bright opportunity for democratic international relations to stem the tide of communism in Asia. Mr. Charles Gibbs, secretary of the Associated Farmers, pronounced the agreement as "more or less an educational deal" for the benefit of Japan's future agricultural leadership.[4]

Efforts to organize a manpower bank in Hawaii preceded the Japanese agreement. In the spring of 1950 representatives of the Salinas association completed arrangements with private contractors in Honolulu for the recruitment of unemployed farm laborers, all of them of Filipino ancestry. The plan called for the hiring eventually of between 3,000 and 5,000 men. The first contingent of 300 arrived in Salinas in May 1950 and was distributed among corporation farms in the area. A farm labor shortage had been previously declared.

The experiment with the Hawaiians was ill fated. Within a month after their arrival they declared a work stoppage which was effective enough to bring a state deputy labor commissioner to the scene. The men objected to the low earnings, to arbitrary changes in the terms of the contracts, to the impounding of their documents and to housing facilities. Many of the strikers were sent home on their request. Of those that finished their terms of employment, most showed too much experience in industrial relations to make them as attractive as either the Mexicans or the Japanese. Agribusinesss bade them Aloha.

It next turned its attention to the Philippine Islands, where farm laborers had not received the hard union schooling of the Hawaiian plantations. Industry proposals were approved by the state and federal agencies, which extended their finding of a labor shortage to accommodate the Filipinos as supplements to the supplementary *braceros.* A quota of 1,000 was established in August 1956 of which 100 were hired immediately.[5] Up to 1960 the Filipino quotas were never fully drawn upon, but enough workers were held in employment to keep the agreement in effect and the standard operating procedures, which could be suitably expanded on short notice, in working order. As in the case of the Japanese the necessary legal authority was found in Public Law 414. The familiar methods of prevailing wage determination, declaration of need, forecasting

of shortages, assignment to pools and other devices which had by now been perfected under Public Law 78, were adopted.

The use of regular immigration procedures under Public Law 414 was not limited to the Asian pilot projects. It had been considered by the industry as a secondary line upon which it could fall back to obtain Mexicans of a status different from Wetbacks or *braceros*. Section 508 of Public Law 78 provided that nothing in the Act was to be construed as limiting the authority of the Attorney General, pursuant to the general immigration laws, to permit the importation of aliens of any nationality for agricultural employment under contracts or visas. This alternative was not resorted to, except on an experimental basis, up to 1960, but it was clearly valuable as a fifth ace in the deck. In the words of the Agricultural Producers Labor Committee: "If the Department of Labor is not willing or feels it is not proper to bring contract workers under Public Law 78, arrangements should be made with Mexico to bring them in under contract under the proper sections and procedures of the immigration law."[6] The meaning of this was plain: should the Department of Labor ever get out of hand, the growers, the Department of Justice and the Mexican Government together could correct the situation.

Visa immigrants or "green carders," as they were called, were additional insurance against a sudden drying of the labor pool. The common Spanish equivalent of "green carders" was "*viseros*." Between 1956 and 1960 there were admitted into the United States 196,658 Mexican citizens under visas. Of this number 82,369 declared that their destination was California and the majority gave their occupation as farm labor or none. The number of *viseros* in California agriculture rose after 1954. They were to be found in preferred employment in camps, mess halls, farms, packing sheds and drying yards. Their increase was no doubt reflected in the growing number of Mexican citizens residing in California who registered each year with the Department of Justice under the alien registration provisions of the law. In 1955 there were 380,091 such registrants; in 1959 there were 528,275.[7] Recruiting under Public Law 414 was stimulated by letters to former *braceros* and Wetbacks by their former employers and by advertising. An agency with headquarters in Guadalajara, which for a fee paid the immigration costs, placed an ad in the *California Farmer* of September 12, 1959, to this effect: "Need help? Hard working farmers and ranchers from Mexico's cool highlands want permanent U. S. jobs. They accept minimum pay requirements to get U. S. visa. Free details."

So far as the commercial farms of the border counties were concerned there was still another alternative to Public Law 78. This was the border crossing system, under which day permits were issued to residents of adjoining Mexican communities by the Immigration Service. American farms lying in Imperial or San Diego counties within a radius of 20 to 25 miles of the border could easily take advantage of this type of labor. It was a handy choice for the few in a position to make it.

A still smaller number of agribusinessmen could elect the tantalizing possibilities of removing their operations to Mexico. The fertile coastlands of Sonora and Sinaloa, lying south of the border in a narrow strip of rich land 300 miles long could produce winter vegetables for profitable sale in the American market. In this area, as elsewhere in Mexico, the agrarian revolution patterned on the collective *ejido* had spent itself. In its place modern private farms of the commercial class were emerging as American capital began to explore the possibilities of agribusiness. Partnerships with affluent or influential Mexican revolutionists were being tried out; they could be uneasy but profitable enterprises.

In considering alternatives to Public Law 78, the return of the Wetback could not be ruled out. This did not seem probable, especially in the light of public reaction in the middle 1950's. The indignation of high federal officials, influential citizens, religious organizations and even farm employers over the evils of labor bootlegging might be aroused again. But the door was not entirely closed. When the immigration code was revised in 1952 it was carefully provided that employers could not be prosecuted for harboring illegals. Section 504 of Public Law 78 itself offered ways and means by which persons who had entered the United States illegally might within five years be recruited as *braceros*.

In any event the Wetback method of labor recruiting was also maintained on a pilot basis and on a scale larger than either the Japanese or Filipino programs. In 1957 the Immigration Service re-

ported that illegals continued to be employed by members of some associations between *bracero* assignments.[8] Wetback middlemen kept their underground machinery well oiled, maintaining fly-by-night pools from Bakersfield to Yuba City along the familiar routes. These were practical precautions and not too discordant with the views held in high quarters. Senator Hayden once warned his colleagues that the demand for laborers north of the border and their abundance south of it would be brought together legally if possible, and outside the law if it could not be done otherwise. Congressman Poage of Texas urged the House of Representatives in June 1960 to extend Public Law 78 on the ground that otherwise "there is going to be a stream of wetbacks to fill all of the area close to the border."[9] *Braceros* on their own terms or Wetbacks remained a feasible choice, in the opinion of many employers.

The final alternative to alien contracting was the most obvious of all, the domestic farm laborers. In 1960 California had no fewer than 55,000 to 60,000 experienced adult workers who made their living from seasonal employment in agriculture. In a hundred or more rural settlements there was probably an equal number who had withdrawn from the fields to marginal employment under the pressure of *bracero* domination. These were men and women who had settled down to employment routines within a radius of 20 to 30 miles of their permanent homes. They were the former migrants who had lived continuously *en route* but who were now, so to speak, on root – families who were digging in precariously in the shoestring communities of the Central Valley, the border counties and on the fringes of the larger cities. In 1960 three out of five temporary hired domestic farm workers lived within commuting distance of their employment.[10]

That a reliable and steady supply of manpower for the seasonal needs of California's harvests could be organized with these workers was denied by the industry. To this goal it was unwilling to apply any of the lessons of the *bracero* program. Among these were that harvest workers could be contracted under written agreements, that they could be guaranteed minimum employment, that adequate employment records could be maintained, that sanitary and even comfortable housing could be provided, and that work scheduling to keep crews busy was feasible.

These were technicalities. What disqualified the domestic laborers was the fact that they tended to become stable. While they could undoubtedly carry the burden of production, they were also discovering the possibilities of community life, experimenting with economic organization and talking of collective bargaining. Emerging slowly out of the flux of the labor pool these were the first footings of a countervailing force that might some day face the associations on even terms. In the campaign of a century waged by commercial agriculture to postpone such a day the *bracero* system had played an important part. It held the line for twenty years.