

LAND AND EQUALITY: A HUNDRED YEARS OF STRUGGLE IN THE SOUTHWEST

Any correct understanding of conditions in the Southwest has to proceed from the first fact characterizing the history of the region: the southwest is occupied territory, seized from Mexico by the United States in a series of wars and extortions in the middle of the nineteenth century. As the southern slave owners pushed westward in search of fertile land and political allies, they ran up against northern Mexico. Texas had been wrested from Mexican control by 1845, and in 1846 the USNA provoked the infamous Mexican war.

Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo

By 1848, with Winfield Scott occupying Mexico City, the Treaty of Guadalupe-Hidalgo was signed between the two countries. It provided that Mexico cede California, New Mexico, Arizona, Nevada, Utah and part of Colorado, over half its territory, to the conquerors and recognize the Rio Grande as the southern border of Texas. Mexico received \$15 million in return, and the United States guaranteed the Mexicans who remained "the enjoyment of all rights of citizens of the United States according to the principles of the Constitution." The US government specifically undertook to recognize the grants of land which had been made by Spain and Mexico before the conquest to the inhabitants of the ceded territory.

The provisions of the Treaty of Guadalupe-Hidalgo have never been honored by Washington, and a glance at the history of the Southwest testifies to the continual robbery of the land, attacks on civil rights, and discrimination that people in the region have endured for over 100 years. Southwest Texas, for example, has been marked by a pattern of vicious inequality, brutality and violence that is commonplace by now. The wealth, privilege and property of such robber barons as Charles Stillman, Richard King and Sam Beiden were protected and enforced by the murderous Texas Rangers and other legal and illegal groups in the service of the imperialists. It is estimated that between 1915 and 1920 over 5000 Mexican national minority workers and peasants were killed by local bosses, police, Texas Rangers, and vigilantes in an orgy of terror that was sparked by well-founded fears of a mass rebellion.

As imperialism expanded, exploiting the tremendous wealth of the Southwest, the workers turned to unionization. The unions were initially most successful in the mining industry. The Western Federation of Miners, a union led by communists and progressives, began by organizing the workers regardless of nationality. In 1903 it forced the Arizona Territorial legislature to make the 8-hour day mandatory. When mine-owners cut wages by 10% in retaliation, 3500 miners shut down the copper smelters and mills in Clifton Arizona. The area's first major strike ended in defeat as the Arizona Rangers, Federal troops and the Mexican consul succeeded in intimidating and dividing the strikers. The violence of the Arizona Rangers continued unabated, and in 1906 they even crossed the border to suppress Mexican workers during the famous Cananea strike. Corruption, low wages (Mexican miners were earning \$2.39 for a 7½ hour shift), intolerable working and living conditions and continual harassment led to a five-month strike by Arizona copper workers in 1915. The miners won a raise of \$2.50 a day for surface workers and \$3 for those working underground, but the price was high. They were forced to abandon the radical UFM for the milder Arizona State Federation of Labor, an affiliate of the already-compromised AFL. The first thing the AFL did was to abandon the national minority and Mexican national workers.

Land Question

The conditions for the merging of the land question with the general struggle of the working class throughout the country were set by the industrialization of the Southwest during World War I. This resulted in one of the largest movements of people in human history as over one-eighth of the population of Mexico migrated to the USNA after 1910 looking for work. The railroad and the refrigerated boxcar made it possible for fuel, minerals and food to be shipped to the markets of the East and Midwest while capital and manufactured goods flowed into the Southwest.

Like European workers, Mexicans came to the USNA because of their hunger; but unlike the Europeans, they did not intend to stay, nor did the capitalists intend for them to remain. They came as temporary workers, who shuttled throughout the Southwest and Midwest, and, when they did settle down, generally lived within 100 miles of the border. But by 1905 the pattern began to change. In that year Mexican workers could be found as far west as San Francisco, as far east as Chicago and Detroit, and as far north as Wyoming. From 1910-1919 a total of 173,663 Mexican workers came north. This migration reached the proportions of a flood during the 1920's, as more than half a million legal Mexican immigrants crossed the border. Since the

bourgeoisie needed large amounts of cheap labor, there were no restrictions to immigration.

The situation changed during the 1930's, during which only 28,000 Mexican workers crossed the border.

Immigration from Mexico increased again during World War II and into the 1950's, spurred on by the shortage of labor and the continuing industrialization of the Southwest. But by the 1950's pressure was again building for exclusion as the US entered another capitalist crisis.

The official leaders of the trade union movement, for the most part, went along with the imperialists. They generally paid little attention to the organization of national minority workers and it is only recently that they have been forced to deal with the farmworkers. From the 1920's on, the trade union movement has consistently stood against undocumented workers instead of standing against national privilege and demanding the same benefits for all workers. In furthering the division of the working class along national lines, the trade union leadership have contributed to the vulnerability of the most exploited and oppressed workers, accepted imperialist bribery for the upper stratum, and weakened the workers' ability to present a united front to the capitalists. The actions of the Texas Farmworkers Union in organizing workers on both sides of the border and the recent change in the position of the United Farmworkers Union on deportations are notable exceptions.

Half a million Mexican workers were deported during the depression which the bourgeoisie, then as now, blamed on them. While President Herbert Hoover publicly whipped up anti Mexican sentiment, wholesale intimidation, deceit and brutality marked the deportations of the 1930's in every city from Detroit to Los Angeles. The deportations of the 1950's (officially called "operation wetback") meant internment camps, house-to-house searches, physical brutality, and massive violations of civil rights as over 2.2 million undocumented workers were deported. Under the fascist leadership of Lt. General Joseph Swing, the Immigration and Naturalization Service became a terroristic group which conducted periodic raids and roundups in the *barrios*, plants and mines throughout the Southwest. This wholesale terror was aided by the reactionary offensive of the period. The McCarran-Walter Act of 1954 (which established a Subversive Activities Control board, authorized construction of concentration camps—six were built—and called for the deportation of "subversives") had the effect of intimidating many of the existing working class organizations, removing their progressive elements, and converting them into organs of the imperialists.

Since the 1950's, the shooting of the Sanchez cousins and Ruben Salazar during the Chicano Moratorium of August 29, 1970, the continuous murders of Indians around Gallup and Shiprock, N.M., unending police harassment and brutality show that life for the people of the Southwest can never improve as long as the region remains under the thumb of USNA imperialism. This is true despite the continuing heroic struggles of workers from the Farah plants in El Paso to the mountains of northern New Mexico and the *barrios* of Denver, from the Melon fields of Texas to the slums of Los Angeles.

The Indian People

The Indian people of the Southwest have been deeply affected by the same forces that have molded the history of the entire region. The main thrust of Spanish and Mexican policy had been "civilizing" the Indians and converting them from "heathen barbarians" to devout tribute-paying Christians, because they needed them to work the mines. The Anglo-Americans who flooded into the Southwest during the 1840's pushed the Indians out of their way and kept them out of "official" society. Extermination and segregation, resulting from the land hunger of the US bourgeoisie, replaced the Spanish and Mexican programs.

Following the Mexican War, the policy of the USNA government was made plain. Indian land claims were not to be recognized; settlers had the right to travel and settle anywhere; companies were free to begin exploiting the natural and human resources of the area. This policy was elaborated further between 1850 and 1875.

The 1880's were marked by two very important developments. The building of the railroads linked the Southwest with Eastern and Midwestern markets and sources of capital, provided jobs, and brought thousands of speculators, farmers, settlers and others.

The so-called Dawes Act, or General Allotment Act, based on various homesteading laws, provided for the parceling-out of tribal land to individuals once again, thus encouraging the appearance of a "stable" group of industrious farmers who, it was hoped, would keep the Indian masses in line.

By the 1930's the massive land losses and utter dependence of the tribes on Washington had created a serious problem of over-grazing and land erosion, particularly on the Navajo reservation. The national economy was in the worst crisis of overproduction in the country's history, and the Federal government instituted a massive stock-reduction program and started controlling grazing rights. This impoverished many small ranchers and herders and often drove them off the range altogether. Many of them became wage workers, handicraftsmen, or subsistence farmers. As it became more difficult to make a living on allotted land, more and more Indians were driven into the ranks of the proletariat or into the reserve army of the perpetually unemployed.

The vast mineral and oil resources which lie under Indian land were first uncovered in the 1920's. Since then the federal government and the comprador tribal governments have been actively recruiting large corporations, discouraging unionization, and providing the imperialists with subsidized wages, publically funded training programs, tax breaks, low-interest loans, and free "infrastructure" such as roads, fuel, electricity, water, and buildings. The federal government assists tribal governments in training a highly-organized repressive apparatus on the reservations. Such an apparatus will be needed in the coming years, for the stakes are enormous. Proven reserves of over two trillion tons of coal, over 100 million barrels of oil and over 27 billion cubic feet of natural gas lie under Indian land — not to mention one of the world's richest deposits of uranium oxide ore.

Since World War II most Indian communities have become increasingly dependent on wage labor. Migration to the cities is increasing. Subsistence farming is becoming increasingly precarious. Small scale handicraftsmen find it very hard to compete against the fraudulent "Indian jewelry" manufactured in great plants in Albuquerque, Pine Ridge, Taiwan and Singapore. Seasonal and permanent wage-labor in agriculture, mining, and light assembly (textiles and electronics)

is irresistably drawing the Indian people into the proletariat.

Abolition of national privilege, economic and cultural assistance from the government, industrialization, recognition of indigenous languages and customs, an extensive system of regional autonomy to ensure local self-government: without these ingredients the problems posed by imperialist plunder of the Southwest will never be resolved.

The unity of the multi-national working class is absolutely crucial. The Mexican national minority and Indian workers have historically led the struggles of the workers in the Southwest. But the industrialization has merged their struggles with those of the Anglo-American working class in such a way that they can no longer be separated. Anglo-American workers must understand and take up the demand for equality. This demand is not made out of charity. The history of the Southwest offers abundant proof that so long as the imperialists can exploit cheap, unorganized labor in this region, the wages of workers everywhere are in danger. So long as the imperialists' anti-labor conspiracy keeps trade unions out of the area, unions everywhere are vulnerable. So long as tax breaks, and governmental assistance offer a reserve to which the imperialists move their operations, all workers' jobs are threatened. So long as health care, education, unemployment insurance and retirement benefits are so criminally inadequate for workers in the Southwest, the rights of all workers are in jeopardy. The bribe that imperialist plunder make possible cannot mask the fact that Anglo-American workers cannot move forward unless they take up the defense of the most exploited and oppressed sections of the working class.

Only if workers fight together, beginning with the defense of those on the bottom of the ladder, will the workers be able to unite the centuries old struggles throughout the country and rid the world of the scourge of US imperialism. And this is the only way the people will be able to build the kind of life in which the rights and security of all workers are protected.

Health and Safety

STRICT ENFORCEMENT OF OSHA

The movement for healthy and safe working conditions has always been more backward in the US than in other industrialized countries. Because capitalism developed earlier in Europe, many reforms were enacted 50 years ahead of the US.

In England, the rising capitalism of the 1800's brought incredible horrors of child labor, sweatshops, and 18-hour work days. Enlightened liberals helped expose these conditions and bourgeois politicians supported passage of the Factory Acts beginning in 1833. These Acts called for mandatory inspections of plants, and the correction of hazardous conditions. But the capitalists always found a way around these laws.

In the USNA, the economic and social laws of capitalism produced similar exploitation, and similar reforms. Although the conscientious liberals cried out against the daily human sacrifice of young children in the mines of Pennsylvania and New England, little was accomplished until the working class began to organize itself. Tragedies like the Triangle Shirtwaist Co. fire, where locked doors caused 143 women to perish, contributed to the growth of the trade unions and led to protective labor laws.

This industrial slaughter began to let up as US imperialism assaulted the world market. With plenty of elbow room, imperialism was able to concede reforms like union recognition and the 8-hour day to the Anglo-American working class. Worker's Compensation, which was inaugurated in Germany in 1884 as a tactic to blunt the strong socialist movement, was introduced in various states after 1910. This made disability and death on the job a little less horrible than in the days when hearses used to park at the factory gates to wait for "customers."

But as the legislatures granted worker's compensation with one hand, with the other hand they took away the right of workers to sue their employers for negligence. Today, contrary to bourgeois propaganda, "comp" does not function as a financial incentive for employers to make working conditions safer. But one thing is certain—it is the most profitable branch of the insurance business.

There was no significant advance in occupational health and safety during the 1930's Depression and World War 2. Although the Federal Government entered the field with the Walsh-Healy Act, 1936, regulating conditions of labor for employees working on government contracts only, there was little enforcement of the law because the misleaders of the labor movement were collaborating with the bourgeoisie to head off proletarian revolution. In fact, Walter Reuther

became a partner of the fascist National Safety Council's program to put the burden of accident prevention on the workers instead of on the employer.

By dishonestly emphasizing the individual rather than the work environment as the leading cause of accidents, and by misdirecting attention to injuries which generally are obvious instead of to diseases which are not as apparent, the bourgeoisie, through the National Safety Council and the Department of Labor, ensured that little was done to improve health and safety until the 1960's. By then, scientific progress had led to the discovery that many substances commonly used in industry were causing cancers, stillbirths, miscarriages, mutations, heart and lung diseases, premature aging, brain damage, etc. On the social front, the reforms of the "Great Society" were evolving as a program of domestic pacification in response to the militant struggles against the Vietnam War and for the national liberation of the Negro people and other oppressed minorities. The two currents of social militancy and scientific progress, joined in struggles like the Black Lung Movement, created massive pressure for new reforms.

The Coal Mine Health and Safety Act, 1969 and the occupational Safety and Health Act OSHA, 1970, represent significant victories for the working class. Although they have not been adequately enforced by the government, they signify the emergence of the health and safety movement as a permanent feature of the working class struggle.

The working class must protect itself by fighting for OSHA's strict enforcement. We need safer standards for permissible levels of hazardous substances. Public employees, now excluded from coverage, should be brought under the law. New chemicals must be proven safe before they are introduced into production. All workplaces should be inspected frequently and fines should be high enough to force employers to correct violations. Above all, workers on the shop floor must learn how to use OSHA so that they can demand their right to a safe and healthy workplace.

The establishment of a new branch of science devoted to occupational health ensures that as new technology is introduced, new problems will be recognized. With every new machine, process and material, new ways to die will arise. In the process of organizing to defend, enforce, and extend OSHA, an ongoing battle in the interests of the workers will be raised and developed, a struggle that must inevitably become a struggle against the capitalist system itself.