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Excerpts from Testimony of Mrs. Lenora B. Willette  
Presented September 5 and 6, 1950 at the Hearings held in Trenton, N. J.  
by President Truman's Commission on Migratory Labor

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I am presenting this statement as Chairman of the Committee on Migrant Affairs of the Consumers League of N. J. and as a citizen deeply concerned with improving the status of migrant workers not only in New Jersey, but in all parts of the United States where patterns of production make the services of migratory workers necessary.

The line of inquiry set by President Truman for the Commission to follow parallels the course set for action for Migrant Labor Board, namely, investigation and procedures for improving the social, economic, health, and educational opportunities for migrants.

SOCIAL: There are few social opportunities offered for migrants in the sordid camp life, and the vicious influences to which they are restricted in the towns surrounding the camps merely duplicate the camp conditions in a garish manner.

a. Example: Four of the large camps in Monmouth County are classified as "very good camps" yet they offer nothing for this classification but weatherproof shelters, electric lights and the minimum number of outdoor privies allowed by law. The living space allowed a family does not permit the exercise of sex privacy, and the surrounding grounds are bare and unattractive. Recreational facilities are not available, and the lack of responsible supervision encourages dangerous fights at all hours of the day or night. Professional gamblers and liquor venders have the free run of the camps, and independent prostitutes vie with the girls and women for business who are "managed" by men from the cities. These managers have been known to challenge the efforts of social welfare workers to talk to the girls.....

b. Example: The rural communities have their slums, in spite of the pastoral peace of their broad avenues. These slums duplicate the squalor of the camps and the vices, to which are added the taverns with their juke-boxes, and the "houses" with their fancier prostitutes, both white and Negro, who migrate to the farm areas from as far as Vermont. . . Until the farmers reorganize their camps, and the communities clean up their slums, it is unfair to expect the migrants to be models of social behavior.

ECONOMIC: The economic condition of the migrants will continue in a state of flux until they are brought under the protection of labor laws and union affiliation. Whether a migrant picks fruit or vegetables, or cans fruit or vegetables, either operation is equally necessary in the process of supply and demand.

EDUCATION: Freehold has been the only rural community to offer the facilities of a public school to the State Board of Education for the purpose of operating a Summer School for Migrant Children. The well-appointed Court St. School was used by the state for three years (1947-48-49) for what had every promise of becoming a nation-wide pattern for education for migrant children. Migrant parents were eager to have their children enrolled in regular classes due to the fact that many of the children were woefully behind in their grades. All America was watching the progress of this school experiment, but All America watching did not prevent the closing of this project. With thousands of taxpayers in favor of schooling for migrant children, it is hoped that the present set-back is only for reorganization. The school was operated in a truly democratic manner, understood in spirit by the youngest pupil, and if it is not reactivated in 1951, a fitting epitaph would be, "Here lies Democracy, killed in Action". . . . .



## ECONOMIC (contd)

a. Recommendations: I offer four possible methods by which better education may be given migrant children:

An accelerated program of education in their home school worked out by experts.

An interstate program of summer schools, similar to the one operated in Freehold, N. J. and planned by federal, state and municipal educators.

Area camps, operated by the Federal government, where crews of adults could be recruited and their children left in the camp child care centers.

Recruit crews of men only, leaving the women at home to care for the family and keep the children in local schools.

RECREATION: Freehold is the exception in community attitudes regarding migrants.

The same well-appointed Court St. School was made available by the Freehold Board of Education for a week-end cultural center for the entire family, and all migrants working within a radius of five miles of the school. . . .

A Town Committee composed of leading citizens from the business men's clubs, the Women's Club, churches, and public officials was organized and has done a wonderful job. Father Bernard McGarlick, the General Chairman, and Mrs. Theodore Moreau, Chairman of the Program Committee, cooperated fully with the state's representative, to the end that the influence of the Center was felt in the most neglected camps.

The salaries of the staff for this Center were paid by the Migrant Labor Board, while the building, supplies and food were made available by the community. This splendid example of cooperation between the state and the community might well be followed in all sections where migrants assemble for harvest purposes, if the Federal government would propose a standard pattern for centers along the entire route of inter-state migration. In this manner the migrants would be able to obtain better social contacts and instructions, leading to full integration into orderly community living, as the need for migratory labor decreases with the increase of farm machinery service.

The advantages of this Center were the results of careful planning. Each migrant is required to register his name, age, marital status, number in the family, his crew-leader, the number in the crew, his farm employer, how many trips he has made to New Jersey, what mode of travel he used, and if he (or she) reported to the clinic, as required by law, upon arrival. The migrant is also asked whether he (or she) intends to remain in New Jersey after the harvest, or return home. Most of the southern migrants return south, others continue on up into New York State and to Maine. Some are undecided. However, the questions as worked out for the Center. . . . were designed to show a general picture of the migrant flow in the Tri-County area, at least, for future study.

After the migrants and their children are registered, the adults are given "Membership Cards" for the season, and upon each visit the cards are punched, along with their companion index cards to record the number of times each card holder used the services of the Center. Their Membership Cards are treasured by the migrants. They give them the feeling of belonging to something fine and worth while. They also serve as identification cards in case of any disturbances. Through them the staff can determine the migrants who attend in good faith, as against the floaters who claim to be migrants to hide their true identity. The feeling of being a member works wonders in morale among the migrants, used only to rebuffs.



Once a member, the adult migrant is free to engage in any recreational activity offered by the staff. This includes soft ball, basket ball, horseshoe pitching, foot ball, for outdoors; while in the adult game room are playing cards, checkers, a victrola for desired recordings, a radio for general music, current magazines of all kinds, dancing and group games. A television set was also made available for the 1950 season. This game room and all outdoor sports are under the supervision of a trained director.

For the women and girls there are classes in cooking, sewing, home management, personal hygiene, good manners. This program is carried out under the direction of the supervisor. There is a nursery for children up to twelve years of age, in which all sorts of toys and games are available. Group activities are planned by a nursery school teacher, and there is a fully equipped playground for outdoor activities. Children from the community are permitted to use the nursery along with the migrants to develop intra-racial good will, but only migrant children receive the free lunches, supplied by the town. Well-appointed wash rooms and flush toilets for both sexes are highly appreciated by the migrants.

HEALTH: The program of health instituted by the Migrant Labor Board of N. J. has promise if allowed to expand under the planning of the Commissioner of Health, and might well serve as a model for the Federal government to propose to other states, until such time as all migrants are accepted for treatment on the same basis as resident citizens.

PROBLEMS: The problems that beset migrants are common to all citizens, namely; housing, education, health, recreation, and employment. As regards employment a better system of recruitment is needed. Men who do recruiting should be obliged to register at their base station for their entire course of state or inter-state migration, reporting at each employment Bureau upon arrival in a state, and upon returning home.

Furthermore, a better system, in fact, a real system of job opportunity and alignment for foreign and domestic migrants, is seriously needed. Before certification of need for foreign workers or Puerto Ricans is given, every avenue of domestic supply should be checked. . The human resources of the nation should not be handled lightly in the field of agricultural labor. The farmer today is no striving, poor individual who hoes and sows then trusts in God to do the rest. He is highly organized, and is represented by the keenest legal minds in all the capitols of the country. . . In other words, the farmer is an industrialist, and as such, should be required to maintain the same standards of employer-employee relationship as do other industrialists.

Better police protection should be given migratory workers. Their personal property should not be searched without warrant, nor should they be subject to mass arrest. The Federal government should aid in the protection of these inter-state workers.

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