

Brito questions integration of workers into society

To the Editor:

A very real social and economic problem does exist in Starr County. Such problems, however, cannot be solved until defined and the full implications of all proposed solutions considered.

The problem in Starr County as stated by the Thresher and Miss Lewis of the AFL-CIO is as follows: There are in the Rio Grande Valley 200,000 workers not protected by federal minimum wage laws earning between \$.50 and \$1.00 an hour and working under conditions that can best be described as primitive.

These workers are uneducated (less than half have finished the fifth grade) and, one would assume, unemployable except

why doesn't the Thresher wait until a worthwhile cause appears before issuing the call to arms, and stop castigating those of us who don't care for mob scenes.

CHARLES HOMER III
Hanszen '67

as unskilled labor. The goal as stated by the Thresher is to integrate the workers into society and, thus, to enable them to achieve a better way of life, i.e. education, adequate nutrition, enfranchisement, adequate medical care . . . etc.

The solution supported by the Thresher is to organize the workers into a union, force the owners to negotiate with the union by means of a strike and thus win a decent wage rate for the worker. By implication they thus achieve the goal of integrating the worker into society.

The proposed solution however may not be consistent with the stated goal. To understand the full implications of the proposed solution one should bear in mind the following:

1) At the present time produce from Mexico is imported to the United States. Also at the present time there is considerable investment being made in Mexico by American companies such as Campbell Soups in canning plants and other agricultural enterprises.

This implies that the production in Mexico of produce and related goods for the American market can and probably will increase. It also appears not to be in the interest of United States foreign policy vis-a-vis the Alliance for Progress to restrict the importation into the United States of agricultural commodities.

2) The production of produce and other truck crops is very labor intensive, that is to say that a very large portion of their cost can be imputed to labor. As a rule they do not require the use of such fixed factors as vineyards and orchards.

This means that unlike California where the substantial investment in vineyards prevented the grape growers from shifting to alternate crops, the growers in the Rio Grande Valley can, if the price of Labor goes up, shift to less labor intensive crops.

3) Cereals are a capital rather than labor intensive crop. The Rockefeller Foundation has developed hybrid cereals that can be grown in the Valley. The world demand for cereals is strong and is expected to increase. The large cereal surplus of a few years ago no longer exists.

Thus, if it is possible to organize the workers and force an increase in the wage rate, the growing of produce will become less profitable unless the price of produce increases. If the free importation of produce from Mexico prevents the domestic price from rising, it will be very likely that the growers will shift from product to less labor intensive crops, i.e. cereals, and the end result will be mass unemployment in the Valley.

This is clearly inconsistent with the stated goal of integrating the workers into society as this integration has been defined by the Thresher as predicated on a decent standard of living.

Unfortunately, I can suggest no other short run solution to the problem. The key to solving the problem is transforming a large mass of unskilled labor into productive members of society and I know of no short run way to do so.

However, I feel that unless the Thresher editorial staff accepts the Hegelian idea that all change must be for the better, then perhaps they should consider all implications of their recommended solution, before they attempt to lead the Rice student body in a crusade.

D. L. BRITO
Wiess '67