

NOW IT'S THE MEXICAN

In order to be assured of a supply of cheap labor and thus keep production costs low and profits as high as possible, employers have always favored immigration. First, it was the serfs and convicts of Europe who were brought to this country and sold into indentured slavery. This supply of cheap labor was augmented by black slaves captured or bought in Africa and brought over in the foul-smelling holds of ships owned by the pious mariners of New England. Following them came the Irish, the Germans, the Italians, the Poles and finally the Russian Jews. Now it is the Mexicans.

Each group as it has arrived, has for some time enabled the employers to keep production costs down and profits up, but each group has, in turn caused a social problem, that, so far as the nation is concerned, has been very costly and proved somewhat of an obstacle to the attainment of that homogeneity which some thoughtful people feel desirable. The competition of slave and free labor caused hundreds of thousands of "poor whites" to retreat to the mountainous districts of the Appalachians and vegetate there for generations in sloth, ignorance and idleness, and result in the Civil War. Each following wave of immigration caused social schisms, enhanced prejudices of race, nationality and religion, and slowed up the process of assimilation. Time and opportunity are necessary before an alien group, especially an exploited laboring group, can be absorbed into the social body. In the meantime there are all sorts of delicate problems, which are reflected in the opposition to a Catholic or Jew for President, the opposition to the granting of social equality to Negroes, and the prejudice against citizens of a foreign extraction not sufficiently far removed. Some contend that immigration of these masses of laborers from foreign lands has been beneficial to the United States because it has made for tolerance, independence and love of liberty. In view of all of the prejudices on tap in the United States at present, however, it can hardly be contended that there is more prejudice, bigotry and freedom among homogeneous peoples like the Finns, the Swedes and the Danes, than there is in our heterogeneous population.

So far as the Negro is concerned, it is exceedingly doubtful whether he has been benefited by these successive waves of foreign labor. Indeed, there is good reason to believe that the economic progress of our group has been hindered by immigration. As proof, one has only to point to the great strides made by Negroes, in all classes, since European immigration has been so markedly curtailed. This is especially noticeable in the North and East, where, despite the present temporary period of unemployment, the Negro has more industrial opportunities than at any time since the Civil War. And he might have a great deal more if it were not for the opposition of most of this foreign laboring element who but a few years before came humbly to this country seeking work and opportunity.

Heretofore the Negro's losing competition with low-standard foreign labor has been in the North and East, but now comes competition of a similar sort in his old stronghold: the South. In the past ten years well over a million and a half Mexicans have entered the Southwestern states seeking work. They were encouraged originally by the employers seeking cheap labor and high profits. Their coming has not been an unmixed blessing. While the Mexican has worked for lower wages, he has, like all preceding groups, brought a social problem. Social agencies and civil authorities have suddenly come to realize that cheap labor is costly in taxes. Low wages means low living, and low living means squalor, disease, crime and high death rate. So the cry has gone up to restrict Mexican immigration just as the entrance of all other foreign laboring groups is now rigidly restricted.

Consequently a great deal of propaganda is being circulated against the lowly Mexican. While we agree that the entrance of Mexican labor should be restricted just as all other alien labor is, we register a strong objection to the tone of the propaganda being broadcasted. Instead of placing the blame squarely on the selfish employers who paid, and still pay, these Mexicans the lowest wages possible, the contention is now advanced that the Mexican is diseased, criminally inclined, cannot be assimilated and is about to cause another race problem. Of course this is all nonsense. What is being said of the Mexican peons today was said of every successive wave of immigrants and is still being said about the Negro. Other groups like the Irish, Jews, Germans, Greeks and so forth, have been or are being assimilated and have reached the American standard of living, so why not the Mexican, in time?

There is only one valid ground on which agitation against further immigration of Mexican labor should be opposed by us: economic competition. The Negro is in no position to stand it, being himself the lowest economic group. For that reason, and for that reason alone, he should align himself with the forces favoring restriction of labor immigration from the southern republic.