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AMERICAN FRIENDS SERVICE COMMITTEE

1501 Cherry Street  
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania 19102

MEXICO-U.S. BORDER PROGRAM

BACKGROUND

In 1972 the Community Relations Division of the AFSC identified a concern for the worsening conditions along the Mexico-U.S. border and the potential and necessity for joint efforts with the Mexican Friends Service Committee (MFSC) to play a useful role in relation to those developments.

Roots of the Comité de Servicio de los Amigos go back to 1939. In the United States, AFSC work in the southwest with Chicano communities and AFSC involvement with farmworker movements also have a long history. By 1975 the National Community Relations Committee had developed a proposal for an AFSC Interdivisional Task Force to give increased attention to border issues, with special focus on the economic and political causes of the growing migration from rural areas of Mexico to urban areas and to the United States. In June 1975 the Board of Directors approved this new focus and allocated \$1,000 to facilitate a meeting of the proposed Task Force, as well as \$1,500 for use in gathering information from a Mexico City base, and encouraged staff to develop further plans for work.

At that meeting we posed the following questions for which a Border Project would seek to find answers.

1. Historically, large scale U.S. agriculture (as well as other segments of American industry like railroads) has depended on cheap foreign labor. In recent years this labor has come from Mexico. With the abolition of "contract" labor and the so-called "Bracero Program" in 1964, there has been a drastic increase in the importation of Mexican campesinos, legally and illegally, for farm work. Poverty, land shortages and a rapid population growth in Mexico have played a part in this growing immigration. Those who come or are brought to this country illegally live in constant fear of apprehension and for the most part in poverty. The temporary importation of people without power from countries with a lower cost of living depresses wages in the United States and makes even more difficult the successful organization of worker groups and unions. What contribution can AFSC make to solving this problem and to educating people to see that the immigrant is not the problem, but rather the symptom or outgrowth of a larger problem?
  
2. What is the real nature of the problems of rural people in Mexico which makes them emigrate to the United States, even without legal papers and at great personal risk? To what extent and in what way does the United States bear responsibility for the continuation of conditions which force such emigration? What steps might Mexico take unilaterally to counter such forces?

3. What can be done to improve the immigration policy of the United States which imposes more difficult conditions on would-be immigrants from the Western Hemisphere while at the same time providing for a large low-wage labor pool for farming operations, hotels, restaurants, factories and domestic work?
4. What is the positive and/or negative impact of the U.S.-Mexico agreement of 1965 that established a 10 mile duty free zone south of the border by which U.S. companies (287 in 1973) are enabled to take advantage of cheap Mexican labor for labor-intensive work such as the assembly of electronic parts?
5. What is the effect and impact on farm operations, on union organizing efforts in the United States and on the Mexican worker of the so-called "runaway" farm operations in areas south of the border. Farmers in Oregon testified that without the labor of children under 12 to harvest their strawberries they cannot compete with Mexican berries these American companies produce.
6. What can be done about alleged corruption of immigration officials on both sides of the border?
7. It is said that the economic dependence of Mexico on U.S. capital (over \$2 billion in 1973) has a powerful influence over the economic and political decisions of Mexico. To what extent does this dependence on foreign capital discourage social change in Mexico? How far does it contribute

to economic imbalance between the two countries and create a cheap labor supply for agribusiness and other industries in the United States?

As a first step towards activating a program and drawing on resources of both AFSC and MFSC, in August 1975, a meeting was convened at which Community Relations Division, International Division, regional office and Third World Coalition representatives stressed: 1) the role the United States plays in perpetuating the economic imbalance between the U.S. and Mexico; 2) the need for close working cooperation with the MFSC and concerned Mexican organizations; 3) the importance of involving community groups on both sides of the border in any activity; 4) the importance of educating the American people, including the media, as to the basic causes of immigration, and 5) the need for greater communication between grassroots groups and individuals in the U.S. and Mexico.

Toward this latter goal, in 1975, two conferences were held at Ciudad Juarez (twin city with El Paso, Texas) involving Mexican and U.S. community organization leaders, including the United Farm Workers. Out of these two meetings came agreement that an informal, Mexico City-based, information clearing house was the first priority. One Mexican organization agreed to provide office space and secretarial support. MFSC agreed to supervise staff and AFSC agreed to seek the needed funds for staff and travel. We were unable to find funds. However, the Mexican Center for Coordination of

Ecumenical Projects (CECOPE) was able to start a small staffed operation in Ciudad Juarez--El Centro Piloto--whose function was to keep in touch with rural out-migrants, document their experiences, share information with concerned Mexican organizations, and develop local resources to give valid information concerning the experience of "illegals" once in the U.S. and all possible aid to the undocumented workers.

In October 1976 we submitted to the National Community Relations Committee the following analysis of the problems stemming from the border. It is valid today.

1. The victims are: human beings who feel driven to leave rural homes in Mexico to seek money in the U.S.A., and human beings in the U.S.A. whose wage-earning and economic advancement are repressed by the availability of the desperate immigrants.
  - (a) There are well organized and powerful economic enterprises that build and exploit the traffic in Mexican workers on both sides of the border.
  - (b) U.S. Immigration and Naturalization Service statues, policies, regulations and behavior support and add to the victimization.
  - (c) Violations of the legal and human rights of undocumented workers in the U.S.A. are common and widespread.

2. The economic, social and political conditions in many parts of Mexico produce overwhelming and intolerable pressures to emigrate for the survival of at least a remnant of individual families.
3. U.S. public and corporate agencies and institutions with the aid of powerful economic and political entities in Mexico try to control the use of land, capital and technology for their own benefit.

DEVELOPMENTS IN 1977

Developments in the summer of '77 were ominous. In July enforcement agencies raided the offices on the National Center for Social Communications (CENCOS) in Mexico City and took away all the files and other materials. They sealed the doors, although no government agency publicly admitted responsibility. There were many public protests. Mysteriously the materials were brought back, and the agencies have resumed working.

CENCOS and CECOPE are private religious organizations concerned with migration and rural reform and are important colleagues in our work.

Enforcement agencies also raided the offices of the Auxiliary Committee for Latin American Refugees (CARLA). They took all the research files on Latin American refugees in Mexico.

In the United States, public concern over increased immigration was rising. There was fearful talk of the "silent invasion"

across the southern border. Deepening economic crisis in Mexico was driving thousands to the U.S. border in search of employment--some estimate 20 people came for every job in the industrialized zone on the Mexican side. The population of towns on both the U.S. and Mexico sides of the border swelled.

In August, the Carter Administration announced its immigration proposals. One immediate effect was to "pull" thousands more toward the U.S. They were acting on a misplaced and generalized hope that the "amnesty" spoken of would somehow apply to them.

In September the Community Relations Division, in consultation with staff of the International Division, the Mexican Friends Service Committee, the Pacific Southwest Regional Office, and the AFSC staff in the Lower Rio Grande Valley of Texas called for a conference in El Paso to review our plans for work in light of the present situation.

The discussions were able to draw on a truly remarkable range of experience, including that of AFSC Texas staff who had helped to develop a strong community organization, La Campaña, in El Paso in the neighborhood of the now famous "Black Bridge" area, as well as the courageous director of El Centro Piloto across the river in Juarez, who grapples daily with the misery and harassment of the Mexicans crowded at the border and who himself has had his documentation, which enabled him to move back and forth across the border, taken from him. The AFSC/MFSC consultation moved across the border to Juarez to speak with him.

A Chicano journalist from Albuquerque, who has special knowledge of Mexico's rural villages and those areas from which desperate Mexicans come to the United States, attended. An AFSC committee member from El Paso with deep concern for developing sensitive north-south contacts was consulted. A Chicano, now studying at the University of Mexico but who had helped the Pasadena office develop seminars on the border problem, attended.

Luis Torres of AFSC's Northern New Mexico program was there, as was Rogelio Cova of the MFSC. David Burciaga, whom the AFSC supports in his work with the United Farm Workers, attended. UFW membership has deep roots in Mexico and a concern that Mexicans and Chicanos not be pitted against each other in the search for jobs and survival.

The group's analysis confirmed our earlier identification of the importance of finding ways to gather information from Mexico City and along the border and to use it to educate and affect policy.

The group also identified the new and increasing moves for economic development along the border on the U.S. side. Our experience with regional economic development groups elsewhere demonstrates that those presently in an area and therefore directly affected by such planning are often displaced or left in their poverty and are by-passed in the planning stages of such economic development schemes. Given the AFSC Texas Valley project experience in developing consumer participation in health planning, it seemed possible and important to draw on that experience in relation to the proposed regional development bodies.

The group of course was deeply under the weight of the increased migration to and across the border--the human misery involved, the harassment encountered, the tension between Mexican and North American, the struggle for survival, the growing exploitable class emerging, and the Carter Administration response in the limited terms of immigration policy.

The group was aware that many aspects of the Administration's proposals are directed at the Mexico-U.S. border. Enforcement activity by the Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS), both present and proposed, is concentrated on the Mexico-U.S. border. According to INS figures more than 65% of undocumented aliens apprehended are apprehended on the Mexican-U.S. border. More than 60% of the enforcement personnel are presently deployed along the Mexico-U.S. border and two-thirds of the proposed additions would be deployed there as well.

Out of the meeting emerged a restatement of AFSC long range goals and enabling objectives in relation to our border work. These appear on page \_\_\_\_\_.

#### MORE RECENT DEVELOPMENTS

The last few months have added considerably to our experience and understanding.

The Peace Education Division's "Right Sharing of the World's Resources" Program in the Pacific Southwest Regional Office, has held four widely attended seminars in cooperation with the Chicano Studies Department, California State University,

Los Angeles. The title of these seminars was "United States-Mexico Economic Relations and the Role of California". The governor of California has written a letter of support and the original series of three was increased to four at the request of the Mexican Ambassador to the U.S. and the U.S. Ambassador to Mexico, both of whom were speakers along with Jorge Bustamante of El Colegio de Mexico, Richard Maulin of the California State Energy Commission, and Robert Silcott, vice president of Audio Magnetics Corporation.

The Austin, Texas Peace Education Office is holding a somewhat similar seminar entitled "La Frontera: Economic Relationships Between Mexico and United States."

Marcos Cazares, student in Mexico and formerly closely associated with the Pacific Southwest Regional Office is on the staff (on a maintenance basis) of the Mexican Friends Service Committee and serves as coordinator of El Centro de Información.

During the past six months, two mailings of relevant news clippings from Mexican and U.S. papers have been sent by Community Relations Division to a select mailing list of AFSC staff, to allies in the organizational and academic world, and to our Mexican colleagues. Rogelio Cova, Juárez staff of the Mexican Friends Service Committee, has made this possible and a number of enthusiastic responses have come from recognized authorities in the field U.S.-Mexico relations. The nature and frequency of such mailings will be improved now that Marcos Cazares is working with Rogelio Cova and the MFSC Centro de Información.

El Centro Piloto in Ciudad Juarez is continuing its work with potential and actual indocumentados (illegal immigrants to the U.S.) and is beginning to communicate directly with the AFSC; the El Paso Committee of the Pacific Northwest Regional Office is giving border problems major attention and serves as another channel of information with El Centro Piloto.

Nationally, the Community Relations Division was able to hire for four-six weeks work two consultants to do special research on 1) economic developments and plans for the border area, and 2) immigration and the treatment of indocumentados and those who harbor them. Manuel Lopez, long time friend of AFSC and a man with special interest in and capacity for economic research, has produced a detailed report dealing in depth with the newly created Southwest Border Commission (one of a number of Regional Commissions created by Act of Congress and somewhat resembling the Appalachian Regional Commission). This Border Commission has to date operated with maximum secrecy and is entirely the creation of government and private industry. Poor people or others who will be affected by the plans and projects developed are not involved, consulted or even aware of its existence. The report also deals with the "Organization of Border Cities", a political grouping with the Economic Development Administration (EDA) of the Department of Commerce and with the "Maquiladores" (U.S. assembly plants in Mexico). A shortened edition of his report is appended.

Ed Krueger, long time Valley resident and community worker and recently, with his wife, AFSC staff in Chile, undertook to

examine the question of immigration and indocumentados. His report, thoroughly documented, stresses the powerlessness of the indocumentados, the violence and harassment of citizens and aliens alike. On the basis of his report and subsequent detailed research, AFSC has prepared testimony for the Senate on Sub-committee on Immigration. The Immigration Carter Administration proposal for immigration legislation. It is appended.

These in depth investigations and the increase in communication were made possible by an allocation of funds by the Board of Directors of the AFSC, which identified the Border Program as having major potential.

#### THE FUTURE

In September 1977, a small gathering of AFSC and MFSC staff met for two days in San Antonio to hear reports from our two special consultants (Lopez and Krueger), learn from Marcos Cázares and Rogelio Cova of recent developments in Mexico and plans for the future, discuss the concerns and plans of the Pacific Southwest Regional Office, including those of its El Paso Committee, and hear the plans for a Texas seminar patterned on the California meetings described earlier.

We also developed specific plans for the future (subject to finding funds), decided what would be the most effective use of remaining Board funds in the Border Project.

Assumptions

The proposed program is based on the following assumptions.

1. The fundamental cause of the increased pressure on Mexicans to cross the border to find employment in the United States is the economic imbalance between the U.S. and Mexico. Public and private interests and policies in both countries contribute to the perpetuation of this imbalance.
2. The indocumentados are not the villains of the piece, but rather the victims and symptoms of problems stemming from this imbalance.
3. The people most affected by the economic and human problems stemming from the border should be informed of and should participate in economic development plans and other programs that affect their lives and the lives of their families on both sides of the border.
4. There is gross misinformation (if not a real lack of hard facts) about the number of persons illegally in the United States, their use of services, their payment of taxes, and the nature of their treatment by employers and by some members of the Immigration and Naturalization Service.

Goals

At the beginning of this report we stated the overall aim of AFSC's activities related to the U.S. Mexican Border. More specific goals have evolved as we have become more informed.

The goals and enabling objectives are as follows:

GOAL I. Develop community participation in the economic development programs being planned along the Mexico border.

Objectives:

- 1) Assist low income community groups along the Mexico border to gain representation in the board and in administration of the Southwest Regional Border Commission; and other economic planning institutions in both countries; and to strengthen the capacity of local organization to carry forward their own economic development planning.
- 2) Gather and disseminate for community use data on economic development programs planned for the area.
- 3) Conduct training and education sessions to advise community groups on their economic rights.

GOAL II. Support efforts by community groups on both sides of the border to identify and work on issues of common concern.

Objectives:

- 1) Foster coordination of current mass media efforts to expose border problems.
- 2) Facilitate the efforts of individuals and groups to deal with human problems created and exacerbated by the existence of the border.
- 3) Support efforts to reduce violence along the border.
- 4) Work with El Centro Piloto of Juarez, Mexico and other groups in their attempts to protect the safety and rights of the undocumented on both sides.
- 5) Gather data on violent incidents occurring along the Mexico boundary and use such data to press for justice for the undocumented worker.
- 6) Encourage people at community level to develop across border communication and where possible work together on issues of common concern.

GOAL III. Promote genuine understanding of the nature and causes of the problems revealed along the Mexico-U.S. Border.

Objectives:

- 1) Collect hard information on the nature of these problems and how U.S. policies and practices affect them.
- 2) Develop information exchange among U.S. and Mexican groups.
- 3) Undertake educational and advocacy efforts to reach a variety of particular audiences, including government, the media business, labor, and academic leaders.

GOAL IV. To play a strong advocacy role on the national level in relation to beneficial and harmful policies proposed or implemented by the Federal Government, utilizing our continuing experience and involving community people in that advocacy.

Objectives:

- 1) To discover the nature and details of regulations promulgated in relation to the functions, processes and performance of Regional Commissions.
- 2) To monitor the ways in which the Southwest Border Commission complies with the enabling Acts (PL 94-487 and PL 89-136) and regulations promulgated in relation to that Act.

- 3) To identify needed policy changes in U.S.-Mexico relations and to advocate specific changes - e.g. the Southwest Border Commission; the Border Industrialization Program and the International Monetary Fund.
- 4) To identify individuals in various departments of government whose functions relate to the issues involved and seek ways to involve them in helping improve U.S. policies and practices with relation to Mexico.

#### Proposed Project Activities

The proposed project is five-pronged. If funds can be found, we hope:

1. To provide staff assistance and support for community organizing in three communities along the Mexico border (El Paso, Laredo and the Lower Rio Grande Valley) where there exist three or more viable community organizations whose lives and survival depend upon their ability to know about economic development plans, to influence those plans and to provide decision makers in their state and nationally with information about the effect of programs and policies generated at the state and federal levels without consultation or involvement of the people most likely to be affected. These staff would be closely linked to and supervised by full time AFSC staff of our Texas Valley Project whose ability to serve as a volunteer for much longer is limited.

This will, we hope, move us forward toward achieving Goals No. I and II and their objectives. We have already made significant progress in Goal I, Objective 2; and Goal II, Objective 5. (See community organizing on chart.)

2. To maintain and strengthen our ability to communicate frequently and effectively with the Information and Communications Center in Mexico City and to provide that staff with maintenance and communication and travel funds.

Work has begun on this with the appointment of Marcos Cazares--(see Impact and Communication on chart).

3. To maintain a continuing research and resource capability on which local communities, AFSC national and regional offices draw, including occasional meetings of the Border Resource Panel.

This and the remaining proposed actions implement Goal III--progress has been made on Objective 1. The panel has been invited to serve. It includes four community people and three "academicians". Their functions are described in appendix.

4. To increase AFSC's capability to communicate via mailings and off the record consultations with key decision and opinion makers, including bringing to Washington experts and people with first hand experience in the field from various parts of Mexico and the United States.
  
5. To produce audio-visual and written materials for wide distribution, including regular broadcasting on AFSC's radio network.

These last two actions are in progress but need expansion if Goal III, particular section 2 and 3 is to be achieved.