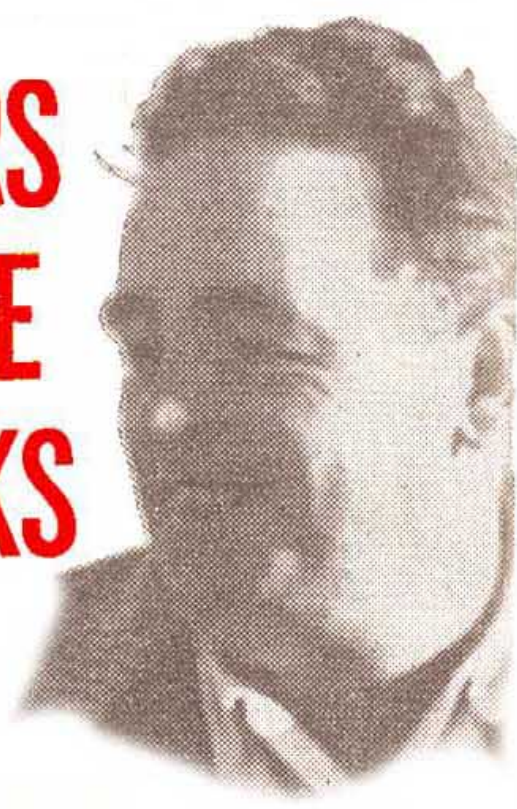


O'DWYERS AND THE WETBACKS



Probably no U.S. Ambassador has been so bedeviled, beleaguered and berated as William O'Dwyer, occupant of the Embassy in Mexico. Not yet out of the shadow of the Kefauver crime investigation, New York's ex-Mayor is now target of a bitter labor dispute that's narrow enough to involve family relationships but broad enough to have international repercussions.

Cause of the Ambassador's headache is the use of Mexican labor on farms in California's Imperial Valley. O'Dwyer's brother, Frank (*above, r.*), and Keith Metz, president of the Imperial Valley Farmers Assn., own a lushly profitable 1,750-acre farm there.

A 1949 U.S.-Mexican agreement permits farmers to import Mexican "contract" workers at an average of 60¢ an hour wage. But they must be removed in event of a labor dispute in order not be used as strikebreakers. And a farmer's contract for these legitimate Mexican workers must be cancelled if he is caught hiring "wetbacks"—Mexicans who swim the Rio Grande, enter the U.S. illegally, and hire out to the farmers for as little as \$3 a week.

U.S. farm workers in the Valley (members of the AFL National Farm Labor Union) charge Frank O'Dwyer has violated the agreement on both counts. Up in arms for months over the wetback problem, the NFLU reported that 300 wetbacks were working on the O'Dwyer-Metz farm last January. Dragging a foot, the Labor Dept. did not get around to investigating until May, found no wetbacks working there then.

Farm Strikers Ask Ouster of Bill O'Dwyer

On May 25, the 6,000 NFLU workers in the Valley struck, asked the Labor Dept. to remove Mexican "contract" workers in accordance with the agreement. The Mexican government made the same request through Ambassador O'Dwyer. Charges that he delayed transmitting this request to Washington, to aid his brother, led to a union demand for Bill O'Dwyer's ouster. Getting into the act, columnist Drew Pearson investigated, reported Ambassador O'Dwyer had relayed the Mexican note to Washington by telephone within 24 hours.

Most Valley farmers, including O'Dwyer and Metz, insist they are not involved in a strike, continue to employ Mexicans. Late in June the Labor Dept. ruled 3 farms were struck, ordered Mexicans removed. A number of other cases are still under consideration. But the Labor Dept. has cleared 2 farms of any involvement in the strike. One of the 2: the Frank O'Dwyer ranch.

In the midst of the Imperial Valley labor strife, on June 27, the U. S. House of Representatives passed a bill by a vote of 240 to 139 making it possible for farmers to hire illegally entered wetbacks. This is in direct opposition to a Senate bill. A conference committee of both houses must iron out the conflict.