

NEWS LETTER FROM DR. BEN YELLEN

Brawley, Calif.

Oct. 1, 1960

The Cruel Plight of the Elderly Citizens of Imperial Valley

The Imperial Valley is being run as a feudal empire by 300 persons and corporations who own 90% of the farmland. Of this group, absentee landowners have 70% and local rich people have 20%. Little farmers own the remaining 10%.

The absentee landowners and the local wealthy landowners are united in getting very low assessed valuations on their farmland so that they pay very little in property taxes. The elderly citizen who lives in the towns, has to pay 4 times more taxes for his real estate property than the rich landowner does for farmland of equivalent value. Many of the elderly citizens live on a pension or small income, and to make them pay excessive taxes while the rich landowners enjoy low taxes is unfair and cruel.

Many elderly citizens live in a front house and rent out the rear house. From the rent of the rear house, the elderly citizen gets along. But the wealthy landowners have imported Mexican farmworkers to work the farmland. This has resulted in the American farmworkers losing their jobs or not being able to get farm jobs. The American farmworkers and their families have left. So the elderly people have been finding it difficult to rent their rear houses. The imported Mexican farmworkers live in labor camps and not in residences like the American farmworkers and their families did. The loss of this rental income is very serious to many elderly folks.

When the American farmworkers and their families had to leave because they could not get work, the merchants and small businessmen began to suffer also because they lost their customers. So the merchants and businessmen cut down the help in the stores and places of business. Lots of these people used to rent homes from the elderly citizens. But these store and business workers also had to leave, and again, the elderly folk lost rental income.

The powerful, rich landowners control the Imperial Irrigation District. They had a \$25,000,000 All American Canal built by the U.S. government and arranged to have it paid for out of electricity receipts. But this Canal benefits the landowners only. The landowners in 1959, received \$2,000,000 of water. The towns of Imperial Valley received only \$30,000 of water. The towns of Imperial Valley were always able to get water before the All American Canal even if there was a drought. The towns use very little water, but it was the big landowners who could not irrigate their farmlands unless they could get large amounts of water. But the wealthy landowners have evaded paying for the Canal which benefits their farmlands. The 70,000 people who live in Imperial Valley, practically all live in the towns. They do not own farmland. They however, are the big users of the electricity. The big landowners who live outside Imperial Valley and own 70% of the farmland, of course do not use electricity here and escape the big electricity bills. The local rich landowners do not use electricity in proportion to the amount of farmlands they own, and end up only paying small amounts for the All American Canal.

Dont forget--300 persons own 90 % of the farmland which is benefitted by the Canal. They do not pay the bill for the Canal. The bill is paid by 70,000 people and the elderly people suffer the most.