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TV: 'Harvest of Shame'

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Exploitation of U.S. Migratory Workers Is Documented on 'C. B. S. Reports'

By JACK GOULD

THE shocking degradation and exploitation of millions of human beings who pick the fruits and vegetables that are served on America's richly laden dinner table were shown Friday night on "C. B. S. Reports" over Channel 2.

"Harvest of Shame," narrated by Edward R. Murrow and produced by David Lowe, was uncompromising in its exposure of the filth, despair and grinding poverty that are the lot of the migratory workers who follow the sun from Florida to upstate New York and from Mexico to Oregon.

Mr. Murrow described the plight of the roaming laborers as "The grapes of wrath of 1960"; the program proved it.

Mr. Lowe, working under the over-all supervision of Fred W. Friendly, executive producer, spent months in following the fruit and vegetable pickers as they made their northward circuits. With his cameras he showed real-life scenes that could add up only to a terrifying blot on Democracy's escutcheon.

Humans were shown stacked vertically in trucks for trips of hours and hours while the products they picked were shipped in streamlined trains and refrigerated trucks. The hovels called homes, one-room shanties for large families working near Princeton, N. J., and Riverhead, L. I., were contrasted with the lush stables for race horses.

The faces of the migratory workers were their own eloquent editorial on a national disgrace. There were young women who looked like aged wretches; bright little children with no hope of a decent education; men and women, both white and Negro, with no apparent hope of experiencing minimum toilet facili-

ties and youngsters waiting for the unspeakable meals that pass for nourishment.

"Harvest of Shame" stressed the role of "crew leaders" who recruit the migrant workers in the South and then truck them from state to state. But the chief blame was put on the so-called "farm lobby." The Secretary of Labor, James P. Mitchell, indicated that he had been powerless to push forward the steps necessary to protect the mobile labor force.

Charles B. Shuman, president of the American Farm Bureau Federation, did not help his position by complaining over the possibility of Federal interference. The indignities visited upon the pickers made his words sound as if they came out of the Dark Ages, especially after a viewer had heard a mother of fourteen children explain how she worked in the fields from 6 A. M. to 4 P. M. Her total pay for ten hours under the broiling sun was \$1.

One aspect of the migratory labor situation was not too thoroughly developed, namely the influence of the large chain grocery stores. One farmer said the food chains ultimately call the tune in the economics of fruits and vegetables, but Secretary Mitchell indicated this was just an alibi by the farmers. The matter should have been pursued further.

The photography in "Harvest of Shame" was of exceptionally good quality; Mr. Lowe can be extremely proud of his accomplishment.

Mr. Murrow and "C. B. S. Reports" left no doubt of where they stood. The commentator concluded by asking viewers who benefited from the labors of the "excluded Americans" to raise their voice in Congress, something very likely to happen.

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James Mitchell

Box 132

1960 - President's Committee on

Migratory Labor [Nov-Dec 15]