

CHEATING CONTRACTOR MUST PAY BACK WAGES

Labor Contractor Jimmy Hronis of Delano has at last been ordered by the government to pay back to his workers the money he stole from them, through illegal deductions from their paychecks. The Labor Commissioner, John Manning of Fresno, made this decision last week, and warned Hronis that if he did not pay the money to the workers, he will be taken to court by the Labor Commissioner.

This case has been in the courts for almost a year now. Almost a year ago, a dozen members of the Association who had been cheated by Hronis came to the office and told the Association that they wanted justice. The workers were working for Hronis in the sugar beets. And since the government gives sugar beet growers huge handouts and subsidies, the government says that growers must pay their workers a minimum wage in this crop.

The Association went to work on the case. It got the information and filled out all the papers. It took Hronis to trial time and again. Hronis was caught openly lying during the hearings. The Labor Commissioner soon realized that Hronis had lied, that he had illegally falsified his records in an attempt to conceal how much he had cheated his workers. But in spite of this, the Department of Agriculture tried to hush up the case, and get the workers to accept "token payments" (sometimes under \$1). The official admitted that the workers were right, that Hronis had cheated them, but he wanted to let Hronis off easy.

The Association and the workers refused any kind of deal. They wanted full justice. Hronis threatened to sue the



Hronis and Sugar beet worker

Association and El Malcriado, but nobody was afraid of him. And Mr. Moe, the lawyer of Mr. Hronis, secretly told El Malcriado, "We don't like to defend people like this. It gives us a bad name."

And so finally the workers won...

But it took almost a year. And it was only possible because the workers were brave enough to go against their contractor in the first place; and because they had an Association to help them with all the bureaucrats and officials, and red tape; and because Labor Commissioner John Manning believed in justice and worked month after month to bring it about.

This also points up to the problem of a minimum wage for agriculture. Though the Association supports such a law, in the hopes that some growers would honor it, there is really no way at present of enforcing it.