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Chapter 2

Mexico and U.S. Guest Worker Proposals in 2000

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Introduction

For too long in the United States we have debated guest worker proposals in black-and-white terms with the expectation that all such proposals would have virtually the same effects on the domestic workforce. Similarly, for much of the past 35 years—since the Mexican Bracero Program came to an end in December 1964—it has been commonly assumed that the Mexican government could adopt only one position: to establish a neo-bracero program. (The Bracero Program was a labor recruitment mechanism that allowed for 4.6 million Mexican workers to be employed temporarily, usually about six weeks at a time, in agriculture or railroad work in the United States between 1942 and 1964.) These two expectations illustrate that the Bracero Program has cast a long shadow over our thinking about guest worker proposals and that the interests of the Mexican government in emigration are not well understood.

It is of course true that there is some basis for these expectations, even if they oversimplify. Before and after 1965, guest worker proposals were advanced by agricultural employers to thwart agricultural labor organizing efforts and restrain wage increases. Many guest worker proposals of the 1980s and 1990s *would* in fact have resulted in a substantial deterioration in wages and/or working conditions. Similarly, the Mexican government *did* oppose the termination of the program in 1964. Mexican presidents from Echeverría in the 1970s to Salinas de Gortari in the 1990s expressed support for a new bracero-type program. As a consequence both of employer advocacy and Mexican government preferences, guest worker proposals have come to be viewed as attempts to re-create the dismal working conditions generally associated with

the Bracero Program during its heyday in the late 1950s and the Mexican government as a silent partner of US agribusiness interests.

Even though these interpretations are not entirely without foundation, our analysis and critiques of current proposals will fall significantly short of their mark if they do not take this into account. The purpose of this paper is to take a step in that direction by analyzing some of the implications of the policy legacy of the Bracero Program and focusing on the Mexican government's role during that program and its potential role when we debate guest worker proposals in 2000.

The Policy Legacy of the Bracero Program

When the Bracero Program began in 1942, many observers concerned about the welfare of Mexican immigrants and of US farm workers expected it to be an improvement over the status quo. From the perspective of the national wartime emergency, the program was intended to avert agricultural production failures due to insufficient labor at harvest time. And although the program would increase the labor supply, and thus labor competition, it would do so under conditions where the foreign workers would have labor protections that domestic workers did not have. Labor-oriented bracero advocates saw the program as providing an incentive for growers to hire domestic workers at higher wages and better working conditions, and take away any excuses for crop failures due to labor shortages. In this manner some of these advocates hoped to avoid a guest worker program without any safeguards at all, which they were certain would undermine the condition of domestic farm workers.

The extent and type of protections and labor conditions afforded by the Bracero Program were unusual for that time (Craig, 1971; Galarza, 1964; Rasmussen, 1951). First, it established the US government as the formal employer of these workers and the US growers as subcontractors, so that the Mexican government could hold the US responsible for the conditions under which Mexican workers were recruited and employed. (This condition was dropped in 1947, and then a version of it reinstated with P.L. 78 in 1951.) Second, it required the employer to pay the transportation costs of the Mexican braceros. In practice this meant that transportation costs were split between the US government and the employers during the war and for a period in the early 1950s, but paid for by growers between 1947 and 1951 and after 1955. In principle this made braceros more costly to growers relative to domestic migrant labor, since domestic workers arranged their own

transportation. It also made braceros more costly to growers than unauthorized migrants, for similar reasons, with the added condition that many of the unauthorized migrants came from the same villages as the braceros or themselves might have worked legally as braceros in the past, and therefore arranged their own transportation home as well.

Third, the recruitment of guest workers was supposed to not adversely affect the conditions of domestic workers. Workers could not be recruited unless the Department of Labor determined that such workers were needed. (This was the forerunner of our current labor certification process both for H-2 workers and legal immigrants.) Braceros were to be paid the «prevailing wage,» i.e., not less than what domestic workers were paid for comparable work. (This was less than the “adverse-effect wage rate” currently required for H-2A labor certifications, which grower organizations are trying to eliminate under current law.) Braceros were not to be recruited to a worksite where there was a labor dispute.

Fourth, the employment and housing conditions of braceros were regulated in considerable detail. Although the details varied, practically all of them required growers to meet conditions not required under domestic labor law, which virtually excluded farm workers from labor protections. The contracts specified a minimum contract period—initially 6 weeks, later 4 weeks. The Bracero Program also is the origin of our current three-quarter employment rule for H-2A workers—that agricultural workers not be idle and unpaid for more than 25% of the period of the contract. The contracts also provided for various forms of work-related insurance. The Mexican government pressured, without success, to get growers to pay for nonoccupational insurance as well.

In addition to standard labor protections, the bracero agreements included some provisions that were very much a reflection of their time. Before 1964, the United States was a society segregated by race and color, and from the very outset in 1942 the Mexican government demanded and obtained certain anti-discriminatory provisions in the bracero agreements. Because overt anti-Mexican segregation was especially prevalent in Texas, Mexico was able prevent any braceros from being employed by Texas growers until 1947. This prohibition backfired, though. Texas growers recruited Mexican workers illegally and during World War II the INS cooperated by stopping enforcement at harvest times.

Until 1954 the Mexican government interpreted the agreements as giving it the right to withdraw workers unilaterally from communities which engaged in discriminatory practices. In effect, the Mexican

government embargoed legal labor to counties where public businesses, such as restaurants and movie houses, barred Mexican patrons. In communities where Mexican braceros were a critically important labor source this action by the Mexican government gave farm employers an incentive to ask their neighbors to drop segregationist practices (García y Griego, 1988).

The previous list of requirements associated with the bracero agreements suggest that the architects of the bracero program were quite conscious of some of the potential problems that might result from this guest worker program. They were keenly aware of the history of farm labor struggles and the types of protections that might be needed. The three-quarters employment rule and housing requirements—conditions adopted by the H-2A program and largely intact to this day—are reflections of this awareness. They also were aware that, given the politics of agriculture of that day, a minimum wage for domestic agricultural workers was not an attainable goal.¹ The Bracero Program, arising as it did in the context of a wartime emergency, was thus designed first to solve a national production problem without doing harm to domestic workers. A secondary goal was to help establish a new and improved labor market standard for domestic workers by requiring a high standard for foreign guest workers.

Analyzing the failure of the Bracero Program

We now know that the Bracero Program failed to live up to this promise. Two obvious policy shortcomings are closely related to this failure: inadequate enforcement of the contracts and the inability of the two governments to cooperate to reduce unauthorized migration.

The failure to enforce bracero labor contracts adequately is worth a closer examination than it has received in previous analyses of guest worker proposals. The enforcement of labor law in many industries, not just agricultural employers of foreign labor, is generally inadequate but only in extreme cases do we find such large individual Mexican consular officials went above and beyond the call of duty to assist workers in their jurisdiction; others did as little as possible. U.S. officials represented growers in a collective bargaining situation and also were subject to pressures from Congress and the public. They sought to obtain favorable terms for growers and to cope with the growing negative

¹ Ellis Hawley's analysis (reprinted in 1979) of the congressional politics of bracero recruitment shows how improbable such reforms would have been.

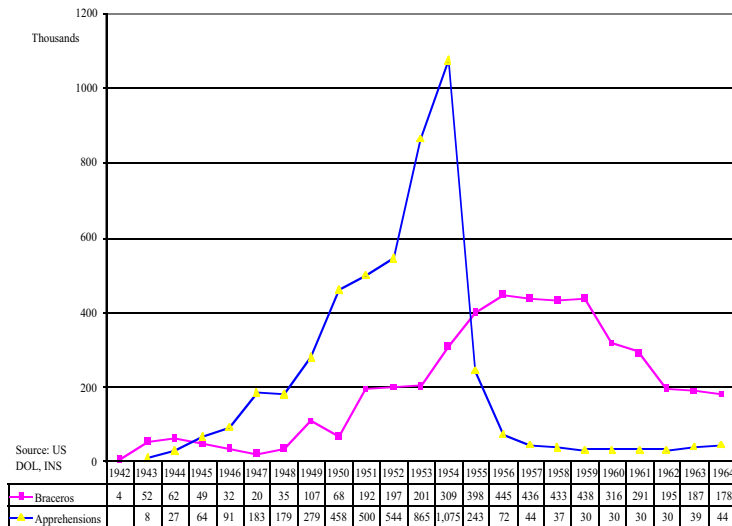
publicity associated with unauthorized migration. During the late 1940s U.S. officials stopped border enforcement selectively or threatened to stop enforcement in order to pressure the Mexican government to reduce its labor demands (U.S. President's Commission on Migratory Labor, 1951; García y Griego, 1983). For its part, the Mexican government began to advocate that the United States penalize employers who hired unauthorized immigrant workers.

The Bracero Program is often blamed for the vast increase in illegal migration from Mexico after 1945. The most comprehensive evidence we have of this is the sharp growth in the number of unauthorized migrants apprehended by the INS, from 64,000 in FY 1945 to 1,075,000 in FY 1954. The actual growth was probably smaller, but no less dramatic. Anecdotal information suggests that in fact the news of the bracero jobs in the U.S. circulating in Mexican villages brought many more would-be migrants to migration stations in Mexico than could be accommodated. Many left to work for the United States even though they did not get a labor contract. In other instances, growers who got to know their workers well encouraged them to return even if they did not get a contract a second time. Through a variety of circumstances guest worker programs stimulate new unauthorized migratory flows.

The Bracero Program rarely gets the credit, such as it is, for reducing unauthorized migration after 1954. "Operation Wetback," launched in the summer of 1954 as a joint operation between the INS and the Mexican government, entailed a two-step process to reduce unauthorized migration. The first step was the mass expulsion of about 200,000 long-term residents from mostly California and Texas, and their transportation by Mexican railroad to communities of origin in central Mexico. The second step was to make legal recruitment easier for growers, mostly by shortening the contract period to 4 weeks, reducing transportation costs, and easing up on the contract compliance efforts of both governments. By 1955 a major shift had occurred: bracero apprehensions were down to 243,000 and bracero contracts were up to 398,000. Figure 1 shows the "x" pattern of rising bracero contracts and declining apprehensions after 1954—a pattern which reflects the mass substitution of unauthorized workers by legal braceros (though with practically worthless contracts).

There is a complex story behind this graph of exponential rising, then falling apprehensions and a zig-zag growth of bracero migration before 1954 and the plateau and gradual tapering off afterwards. That story can be summarized briefly. In the early period, farm employers

FIG. 1. BRACEROS CONTRACTED AND UNAUTHORIZED MEXICAN MIGRANTS APPREHENDED, 1942-64



complained bitterly about what they saw as excessive requirements and red tape in the bracero agreements and tried unsuccessfully to get them changed. Some hired workers briefly and then arranged for them to return illegally without contracts afterwards. Texas growers, who were barred from legal Mexican labor before 1947, had considerable experience by the late 1940s in using contractor and labor networks to obtain unauthorized workers. The relatively small number of braceros contracted during the war and in the late 1940s was the result of considerable reluctance by growers to meet the formal requirements in the bracero agreements, notwithstanding their inadequate enforcement. The explosive growth in the number of apprehensions is suggestive of a sharp growth in the flow of unauthorized migrants who were apprehended at entry as they sought employment in agriculture, especially in Texas and California. Then as now, apprehension often delayed but did not dissuade migrants from reaching their destinations.

The position on U.S. and Mexican authorities zig-zagged between extremes on this issue during the 1940s and early 1950s with adverse unintended consequences. Initially, the two governments penalized growers who hired unauthorized workers by blacklisting them from future bracero contracts. However this also had the consequence of assuring that these growers would continue the practice of hiring unauthorized

workers. Later in the 1940s, some growers were given an amnesty and their workers legalized by giving them bracero contracts with their employer. But this also gave growers an incentive to hire unauthorized workers and then try to legalize them later in order to avoid both bracero transportation costs and an INS raid.

After the Korean War began in 1950 with its attendant perceptions of a looming agricultural labor shortage, the Mexican government made two demands as its price for continuing the Bracero Program: the adoption of an institutionalized role for the U.S. government (which had been scaled back in 1947) and the enactment of employer sanctions. Although the Truman Administration made a good faith effort to obtain both conditions, it was successful only in obtaining the first one, which became known as Public Law 78, enacted in July 1951. The effort to enact employer sanctions was spectacularly unsuccessful. The Truman Administration did succeed in getting Congress to pass a law making it a felony to “harbor an alien,” which basically meant assisting in the illegal entry of a foreigner. But this proved to be hollow victory for those seeking to reduce illegal entry via legislative means. The Texas congressional delegation tacked on an amendment explicitly exempting employment from the penalty provisions of the new act—an amendment which thereafter came to be known as the “Texas Proviso” (Craig, 1971).

The growing negative publicity associated with the “wetback invasion”—the term then used to refer to the growing migration of unauthorized Mexican migrants—worried the U.S. and Mexican governments and U.S. farm organizations. It also gave labor organizations a new weapon to use in their advocacy against the Bracero Program, which had been thoroughly discredited in their eyes by the late 1940s. The U.S. government adopted a number of tactics to respond both to the migration and to the negative publicity. In 1952 it began to expel unauthorized migrants by air to the interior of Mexico with the hope of discouraging them from crossing the border again after deportation. In early 1953 it sought cooperation to get Mexican authorities to use police power to dissuade migrants from traveling within Mexico to migrate illegally to the United States. Mexico’s Foreign Relations Secretariat rejected the U.S. argument that this would be permissible under Mexico’s Constitution. In late 1953 the U.S. began to plan for unilateral recruitment of Mexican workers as a way to pressure Mexican authorities to make certain concessions at the bargaining table. When the Mexican government did not yield, the U.S. initiated a unilateral contracting program in early 1954 and Mexican

authorities at the border used force in a vain attempt to stop their countrymen from crossing into the United States. Later in 1954 Mexico made important concessions at the bargaining table which made legal braceros more attractive to growers (García y Griego, 1983).

Implications for the Domestic Debate

Given this historical summary, what can we say about the relevance of the Bracero Program to the current and future debate about guest worker proposals? The most obvious point is that labor organizations and advocates whose primary interest is the working condition of domestic and migrant labor have a well-founded skepticism of guest worker programs. The Bracero Program demonstrated to this political constituency that a program with even these remarkable labor protections can be thoroughly corrupted. Not surprisingly, this constituency is equally skeptical of the ongoing H-2A agricultural worker program, many of whose provisions grew directly out of the Bracero Program except that it is run unilaterally by the United States. Growers have been discouraged from recruiting H-2A workers in part for the same reason they did not like the Bracero Program—it puts considerable bureaucratic requirements and labor obligations on them that they do not have with domestic workers or with unauthorized workers. They also have been discouraged from using this program because of labor advocacy litigation. In a partial replay of the Bracero Program growers have rejected the H-2A program as too stringent and have gone to Congress to obtain legislative authorization for an alternative streamlined program that imposes fewer burdens on them (and incidentally fewer protections on workers). To complete this historical analogy, pro-labor organizations also reject H-2A, because it does not offer enough labor protections, and sometimes they minimize the difference between H-2A and the grower-inspired alternatives.

The experience with the Bracero Program is relevant to today's debate in other important ways. The inferences I draw from that experience can be summarized in a few basic points. The first is that conditions likely to produce a balanced guest worker program, beneficial both to grower and labor interests, were only met when unauthorized migration was low and labor had strong allies in Washington. Second, protections available to domestic workers via domestic legislation, labor law enforcement, and the advocacy of labor and other organizations, made a critical difference. Guest workers cannot be employed to set a higher labor standard than that already available for domestic and

unauthorized workers. The minimum standards already in place are critically important, which suggests that if labor advocates are unable to stop a guest worker proposal they should extract the price of higher standards for domestic labor. Third, guest workers are unlikely to be employed to replace unauthorized workers unless there is a parallel concerted immigration enforcement effort. Without such a concerted effort, whether solely by the INS or with Mexican border enforcement cooperation, a guest worker program is likely to stimulate rather than substitute for unauthorized migration.

In sum, it is not correct to assume that all guest worker programs are alike or any program adopted will function exactly as did the Bracero Program in its final years. Safeguards in the terms of recruitment and employment obviously can make a difference, and an adequate enforcement effort is critically important. Guest worker programs should not be conceived in isolation from the standards already applied to protect domestic workers or without considering how such programs relate to ongoing and possibly new flows of unauthorized migrants. Under the conditions that have prevailed during much of the past three decades—slack labor markets, large-scale unauthorized migration, and intermittent influence by labor and pro-immigrant advocates in Washington—it would have been unlikely to obtain a balanced guest worker program that would not have harmed labor interests.

The Role of the Mexican Government during the Bracero Program

During the Bracero Program, Mexico's role evolved, in part due to changing government personnel and political priorities, and also because of the lessons that Mexican officials drew from their experience with the negotiations and administration of the program. Mexico's political leaders were sensitive to domestic political criticism of the program, especially to allegations that Mexican worker interests were not properly represented or that they had made too many concessions to the United States at the bargaining table. This motivated Mexican negotiators to seek favorable labor terms for braceros and even to push for concessions that U.S. negotiators were unlikely to be able to deliver. Because the terms of the agreement were widely publicized but the actual conditions of workers were far more difficult to document, Mexican officials were less motivated to seek a strong enforcement of the agreement. Even so, the Mexican Foreign Secretariat was perfectly

capable of holding up contracting unilaterally or to order the withdrawal of workers from a community when certain conditions were violated. Mexican officials were more aggressive in defending these interests prior to 1954 than is usually recognized, though it is noteworthy that such efforts virtually ceased after the successful U.S. unilateral contracting of 1954.

The unilateral contracting of Mexican workers over the very public objections of the Mexican government in January 1954 represented a major watershed in Mexican official thinking regarding emigration. Prior to that time Mexican officials promoted certain modifications to the work contract and occasionally held up contracting to obtain better wage offers from growers with the expectation of political rewards at home. When Mexico refused to renew the agreement under terms proposed by the U.S. in 1953 and the U.S. called Mexico's bluff by contracting workers unilaterally, conditions changed dramatically. Mexican border guards were ordered to use force to keep Mexican workers from crossing the border. The spectacle of Mexican workers rushing to leave for the United States and the use of illegal force to prevent the departure of nationals from Mexican territory brought a storm of criticism upon the government. When Mexican officials returned to the bargaining table and met U.S. conditions, the initiative in the administration of the program shifted to the United States. Mexico's president decided to continue with the program even under less favorable circumstances, probably on the basis of the argument that Mexico needed an emigration "safety valve" for rural unemployment and discontent.

There is a certain irony in the reversal of roles of the 1960s between the United States and Mexican governments when the U.S. decided to terminate the program. By the early 1960s the Department of Labor had reached the conclusion that the terms of the bracero contracts were not adequately observed by growers and that braceros were being used to lower wages or restrain the wage growth of domestic farm workers. This was, in essence, the position of the Mexican government before 1954, when it pressured the U.S. to adopt employer sanctions and to negotiate more aggressively with growers regarding the conditions of employment. The U.S. solution in the early 1960s, however, was not to fix the Bracero Program but to abandon it. The official Mexican response to congressional efforts to end the program was opposition, on the grounds that terminating the program would not stop Mexican migration. Then as now, Mexican officials preferred legal Mexican migration to illegal migration, and they saw the U.S. decision to end the Bracero Program as a de facto decision to allow the hiring of unauthorized

workers. A review of the evidence of the growth of the unauthorized migrant population after 1965 shows that although the replacement of braceros with unauthorized migrants was not immediate, unauthorized migration grew explosively after 1965.

Mexico's Post Bracero Program Goals

The goals of the Mexican government with respect to emigration are rarely articulated explicitly. Migration to the United States is a subject discussed frequently in Mexico's mass media and within the government, but the discussion is usually framed around implicit though widely accepted premises which guide Mexican policy. When we seek to identify broad themes that have been consistent across several administrations we find that Mexican policy goals are essentially four: access, protection, predictability, and participation (García y Griego, 1998).

Assuring access means that the United States remains relatively open to Mexican migration. This goal has been held in part because no government wants its nationals to be barred from another country. In Mexico's case, this goal also reflects the assessment that the country needed a "safety valve" for its national economy. Any act of the U.S. Congress which might restrict immigration from Mexico or any large scale enforcement effort by the INS which might return hundreds of thousands of workers to Mexico was seen as a potential closing of that safety valve. (It may be worth noting that the evidence is weak that the Mexican economy or political system was actually vulnerable to changes in U.S. immigration policy [García y Griego and Giner de los Ríos, 1984]. The safety valve has not been as large as usually assumed and closing it has proved far more difficult than most analysts imagined. Nevertheless, Mexican and U.S. officials assumed that emigration functioned as a safety valve for Mexico.)

Assuring access should not be equated with unlimited Mexican migration. The Mexican government has supported a relatively open U.S. policy, but not one that would draw away all of the Mexican migrants that might conceivably leave. This position was explicit during the Bracero Program, when the Mexican government sought to lower and the U.S. to raise the limits on the number of workers to be recruited in any given year. During the 1984 U.S.-Mexican Inter-Parliamentary Meeting the leader of the Mexican Senate observed that "in the long run out-migration from Mexico to the United States is contrary to the national interest" (Bustamante, 1988). This position reflects several

Mexican assumptions held before and after 1984: that the Mexican government is not in a position to prevent emigration; that must find ways to manage it and ameliorate its potential problems; that emigrants would make important contributions to Mexico if they remained at home; and that an improvement of Mexican economic conditions that led to a gradual reduction of emigration would probably be the best possible outcome from a Mexican point of view.

A second important Mexican goal is protection. “Protection,” as a Mexican emigration goal, is broader than labor protections as have been discussed in the above section regarding the bracero program. The protection of emigrants is generally thought of in Mexico as the sovereign obligation of consular protection. It consists of assuring that the rights of Mexican nationals are respected in the United States. In political terms it includes being perceived in Mexico as responding appropriately to anti-Mexican actions that take place in the United States. Thus, news events which generate little or moderate attention in the U.S., such as the high-speed chase of Mexican migrants by Riverside Sheriff’s Deputies in 1996, and the subsequent televised beating, get a great deal of coverage in Mexico. Even minor changes in status of immigration bills in Congress in INS administrative procedures are scrutinized as potential threats to the welfare of ordinary migrants. The demands of the public on the Mexican government are: what are you doing about this?

A third Mexican goal is predictability. The importance of this goal is difficult to overstate. There are about seven million Mexican immigrants, authorized and unauthorized, residing in the United States. This number is equivalent to a medium-sized Mexican state. Even a minor change in the status of Mexican migrants can affect a large number of people. Much of what can affect the legal status of this population is in the hands of the U.S. Congress, state legislatures, or the courts—entities whose behavior is difficult to predict. Having a large emigrant population in the United States is similar to having a large part of the country ruled by an opposing political party—another unsettling condition which the Mexican government has been getting used to in the 1990s.

A final Mexican goal is participation. The terms under which Mexican migrants are admitted, employed, and accepted as long-term residents are largely determined by U.S. governmental entities and private employers. The Mexican government exercises little direct influence. Given a choice, the Mexican government would prefer to participate in this decision-making process, especially if the possibilities

of influence are real and the costs are relatively low. During most of the post-bracero period the Mexican government has refrained from such participation. For example, during the attempts by U.S. officials to consult with the Mexican government regarding the Simpson-Mazzoli bills during the 1980s the Mexican government largely refrained from expressing a point of view. The costs of participating were perceived as high and the likelihood that the Mexican government could influence the outcome positively was seen as low.

This calculation has changed during the past decade. The Ascensio Commission of the late 1980s did much to change Mexican thinking on the possible benefits of engaging the U.S. in a migration policy dialogue. The efforts of the Salinas and Clinton administrations to secure passage of the NAFTA legislation in 1993, though not directly related to migration, also broadened channels for migration dialogue and cooperation. This effort has spilled over into the migration issue area, and has encouraged Mexican officials to look for concrete ways in which the two governments can cooperate on migration issues. One such effort led to a 1995 agreement to create a study group formed by academic researchers and experts from both countries who met over a two-year period to arrive at a common set of facts on migration issues as a potential prelude for bilateral negotiations.

Reviewing these four Mexican goals on emigration one can see how they might be consistent with the bilateral negotiation of a guest worker program. Almost by definition such a program would meet three Mexican goals: participation, access, and predictability. A bilateral program also would insure that the Mexican government would influence the terms of labor recruitment and therefore facilitate the protection of Mexican workers. Since both Mexican officials and the Mexican public accept the premise that unauthorized migration will not be stopped in the short run, legal migration seems to be a better alternative to the status quo.

Clearly, the Mexican government is likely to support U.S. policies which facilitate legal entry to some extent, and this might include a guest worker program. It is not clear, however, that the Mexican government would support any guest worker program on grower terms, or a neo-bracero program that did not seem to be an improvement on the experience of 1942-1964. Mexican officials are less likely to point to the Bracero Program as a model than to its bilateral guest worker program with Canada, which sends less than 10,000 agricultural workers from Mexico each year. Precisely because the Canada-Mexico program is so small it has worked well, but also for that reason it is probably not a good model for any proposals to be advanced between Mexico

and the United States.

In this binational debate regarding guest workers, Mexican officials and the public have access to essentially the same information that we are familiar with in the United States. In the event of a serious guest worker proposal, the dismal record of the enforcement of labor rights under the Bracero Program would receive widespread analysis and discussion in Mexico, perhaps even more so than in the United States. In Mexico, however, the attitude that a guest worker program can be fixed to work properly is more likely to command acceptance. Much depends, however, on the highest officials of the Mexican government. President Luis Echeverría, for example, promoted a new bracero agreement with the United States with much fanfare between 1971 and 1973. In 1974, after meeting with Ernesto Galarza, who persuaded him that any neo-bracero program would not protect the workers as promised, he reversed course. Though not all his cabinet appeared to have been convinced, as president Echeverría was in a position to depart sharply from the standard assumptions about how a bracero program is better for Mexico than the status quo.

The position of the Mexican government in any guest worker proposal debated in 2000 could shape the outcome of the U.S. debate for any of three reasons. First, Mexico's society and government are interested parties, and they have an even more direct interest in U.S. policies that bear on guest workers than they do on policies regarding the admission of permanent immigrant residents. Guest workers are likely to be recruited in Mexican territory itself (not just in the U.S.) and there is constitutional and statutory law that applies to the recruitment of emigrant workers which is the responsibility of the Mexican Secretariat of Government (Gobernación). Moreover, as previously noted, the treatment of Mexican nationals in the United States is a traditional concern of the Mexican Secretariat of Foreign Relations. The Mexican government will be held accountable in the Mexican mass media and in an increasingly independent Congress for its efforts or lack of protection of Mexican nationals in the United States. Given these considerations, Mexico has a large stake in the outcome of any U.S. debate regarding guest workers and can be expected to play a role in shaping that debate and perhaps the content of the U.S. policy itself.

A second reason why Mexico's position on guest workers will be important to the U.S. policy process is that Mexican positions on many other matters, such as trade, investment, the environment, and drug-control policies have become more important to the United States in

the 1990s. The North American Free Trade Agreement is a symbol of this new importance and closer consultation between the two governments, and other indicators include U.S.-Mexican cooperation on monetary issues (the so-called Mexican bailout of 1995), and the efforts by both governments to defuse potential conflicts over drug policy (1997) and immigration policy (the 1996 amendments) in recent years. U.S. and Mexican cabinet officers and their staffs regularly meet and hammer out executive agreements and memoranda of understanding on subjects ranging from radio frequencies to hazardous waste disposal. What position the Mexican government takes on a matter as important as guest workers will be taken quite seriously within the U.S. executive branch if for no other reason than the huge range of bilateral problems on which cooperation is essential. Even if the U.S. adopts a guest worker policy that in the end does not include explicit Mexican government participation, U.S. officials will consult their counterparts in Mexico and take those consultations into account in deciding what range of guest worker proposals is acceptable.

A final reason why Mexico's position will matter is that the U.S. will be sharply divided on guest workers, thus increasing the marginal impact of external influences. Mexico's position would have far less influence if the U.S. were nearly unanimous on this question. Both sides (or more if there are more than two sides) in the U.S. debate will court Mexican support for its particular position on a given guest worker proposal. Whichever side prevails will most likely have obtained Mexican government and perhaps widespread Mexican public support for its proposal.

Conclusion

This summary review of the history of the Bracero Program and Mexican government emigration goals suggests a more complex situation that is usually described when we debate guest worker programs. Though it is generally recognized that the Mexican government desires access for its workers to the U.S. labor market, the importance of other goals is not generally appreciated. If a bilateral guest worker program is proposed there is much room for dialogue between U.S. labor organizations and the Mexican government, if for no other reason than its sensitivity to domestic criticisms regarding the lack of protections available to Mexican workers. The Mexican goal of protection is the principal area where U.S. labor and immigrant advocate groups and Mexican government interests converge. That dialogue

may take the form of efforts by U.S. organizations to persuade Mexican officials that a particular guest worker proposal is harmful to the interests of Mexican workers. To be successful, however, such efforts will need to acknowledge that not all guest worker programs are the same—some provide less protections than others. In the current climate, moreover, it is not likely that the Mexican government position on this matter is likely to be decided single-handedly by a president after a meeting or series of meetings with one group or individual such as occurred with Galarza and Echeverría in 1974. U.S. organizations interested in engaging the Mexican government in a dialogue over guest worker programs will need to meet with a broad range of government officials and to not limit their contacts to officials—to engage Mexican private organizations and the mass media as well.

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