

IN ANSWERING REFER TO

No. 5009/46

October 15, 1918.



Commissioner-General of Immigration,
WASHINGTON, D. C.

This is to acknowledge receipt of Bureau letter of August 31, No. 54410/331 (Confidential), having reference to a conference had in the office of Mr. Leland Harrison of the State Department, at which was discussed the matter of devising ways and means by which good feeling might be cultivated between the citizens of this country and Mexico. With a view to further consideration of the subject I, among others, was asked to submit a statement on the subject "What the Mexicans need and what could be done to enable them to get these needed things without disturbing what has been done to prevent certain articles from going into Mexico." In reply, it is desired to say that the question opened up such a field for consideration as to render it practically impossible of immediate adequate answer with the vast amount of details incident to the enforcement of the new passport regulations pressing for attention.

It seems to me that the Mexicans need almost everything this country can give them in the way of money, foods, clothing and commercial support, but so long as they continue to view our official acts with suspicion and distrust it will continue to be difficult to work out any policy devoid of possibilities for friction.

It is reasonably well established that thousands of Mexicans resident of the interior of Mexico are, at the present time, practically facing starvation; on the other hand, it is no less well known that American capital which might reasonably be depended upon to assist in relieving destitution cannot be safely invested in that country. Immediately adjacent to the border there are thousands of Mexicans practically dependent upon American border towns for a living. They are compelled to secure practically all of their supplies from the United States and this is likewise true of many residents farther inland. It is recognized that this country needs some of the things Mexico can furnish, or assist in producing. The War Trade Board is encouraging the importation of different kinds of ore, the raising of stock for export and the production of other commodities which would materially assist in supplying our Army. The Food Administration, together with the U. S. Employment Service and Railroad Administration, is endeavoring to devise plans by means of which it will be possible to import several hundred thousand common laborers from Mexico. Opposed to the realization of these purposes, are the restrictions placed by the War Trade Board upon the exportation of food stuffs. When the new passport regulations have reached their maximum effectiveness, the traffic over the border through ports of entry will be materially reduced. In spite of every precaution, some resentment may be expected. However, as our country has decided that the various restrictive measures are necessary for its protection, it would seem that the feelings of the Mexicans are, and of necessity must remain, a secondary consideration.

As paradoxical as it may seem, it is my conviction that a strict

and rigid enforcement of the passport regulations along the entire border, with our officers privileged to exercise a broad discretion in specially meritorious cases, at the immediate legalized points of entry, would go farther towards reducing friction and complaint than any other course of action.

Representative and fair-minded Mexicans appear fully to recognize the moral as well as legal right of this country, in time of war, to adopt any measures it may deem necessary to protect the interests of the nation. Travel over the border may be divided into two classes; firstly (and this comprises the large majority), representative persons of different nationalities, Mexicans of course predominating, having legitimate business interests in the States or Mexico requiring attention; those coming to work, to remain for a short period; those coming to make small purchases or on simple but legitimate errands and those bent upon that social intercourse which has been more or less freely enjoyed for generations; secondly, the lawless element, smugglers of all kinds, thieves, enemy aliens and agents. Persons belonging to the first division may, generally speaking, be considered harmless so far as the mischief the passport law and regulations are designed to prevent is concerned, and these persons are willing, and without serious resentment, to comply with all the regulations even at the expense of individual inconvenience, provided they are satisfied no unfair discrimination is practiced and that the evilly disposed are thus being kept out of the country. It is the last class mentioned to which serious consideration should be given, not solely because it is composed of persons actually or potentially enemies, but because of the evil effects created upon the minds

of the law abiding, arising from the knowledge that the law reaches out and discommodates the innocent and friendly without fully effecting its true purpose.

The evilly disposed will respect law and order just to the extent they are compelled to. As repeatedly pointed out, this Service, and in fact all branches of the Government represented on the border (excepting the Army), are powerless, as at present constituted to deal effectively with this dangerous element. In a report submitted on February 5th last, I pointed out what was being done then by the various agencies of the Government, and in subsequent correspondence the remedy for the situation was set forth in detail. The situation has not changed since that date except that the new passport requirements have added to the burdens of the already overtaxed and numerically inadequate Immigration force.

I wish to repeat that in my opinion a fair, firm, reasonable and as nearly uniform and effective enforcement as possible of the passport law will do more than anything else to reduce friction and resentment, and that so long as we continue enforcing the law inspoats along the border, leaving the balance of it unguarded, we will continue to incur the displeasure and resentment of those persons willing to abide by the law and this without commanding the obedience and respect of the lawless. Unless the machinery is provided to make the law uniformly effective, it seems to me we can consistently do nothing more than is now being done to prevent friction.

J. W. Beckwith

Supervising Inspector.