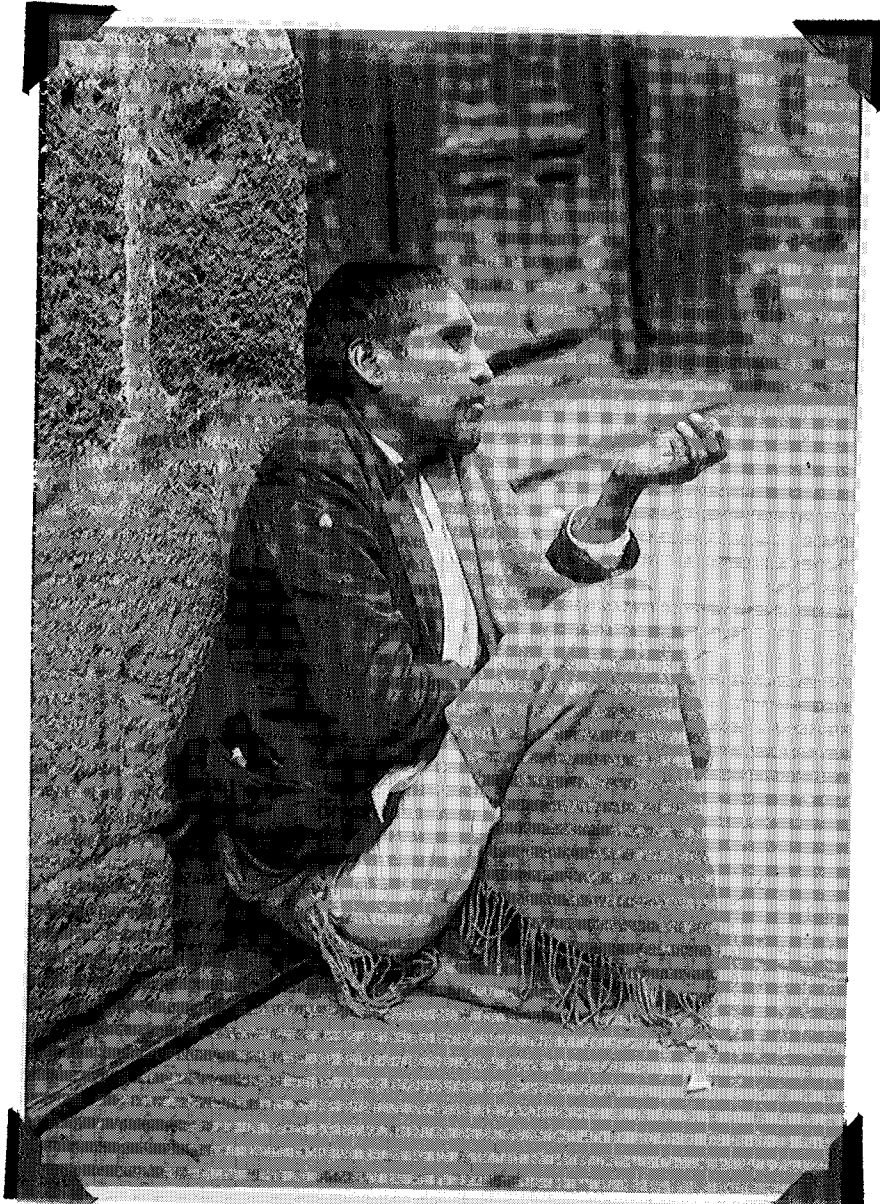


MISCELLANEOUS STUDIES  
SERIES I NO.2

THE PROBLEM OF BEGGING IN MEXICO CITY

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INSTITUTE OF CURRENT WORLD AFFAIRS  
MEXICO CITY -- JUNE 1930



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## INTRODUCTION

### Statement of the Problem

The problem which will be investigated in this study of Begging in Mexico City may be stated as follows:

- (1) How many beggars are there and in general what is their distribution in the city?
- (2) Who are the beggars, and why do they beg?
- (3) What are the fundamental factors and forces, social and economic, which contribute to support of the institution of begging?
- (4) What has been the history of private and public efforts to deal with the problem of begging in the Federal District?
- (5) What efforts are being made at present by governmental and other agencies to control begging?
- (6) What suggestions and recommendations can be made with reference to the future administrative program and method of procedure which should be adopted by public and private agencies in order to deal effectively with the problem of begging?

### Methodological Procedure

It should be clearly stated and understood that this investigation makes no pretension of being either exhaustive or conclusive. In no sense whatsoever is the claim put forward that in the following pages the problem of begging in Mexico City has been solved once and for all. Indeed, even were it possible in the short time of less than two months which has been available for making this investigation to achieve a formula for the final solution of a problem as deep-rooted and as complicated as that presented by the phenomena of begging in Mexico, such has not been

either the purpose or the intention. Rather, the study was undertaken at the request of the President of the Associated Public Charities of the Federal District, primarily with a view to illustrating and demonstrating modern methods and techniques for social research. As such, therefore, the investigation has been more in the nature of an educational enterprise than it has been an attempt to produce an administrative program for the guidance of private or public agencies dealing with the problem of begging.

The methodological procedure used in this study is that now familiar to students of social science as the "case-study" method. This method, as is well known, is essentially exploratory and is particularly useful in opening up a new field of study and in revealing points of departure for further investigation and research. In short, the case study method is designed to give an appreciation of and insight into a problem as the first step in the direction of an eventual complete understanding. In passing, it might be remarked that the case-study method differs from the statistical method in that the intention is not to draw conclusions from a study of a large number of elements, but rather to throw light upon the problem by a careful and detailed analysis of a few instances of the phenomena under consideration. It is obvious that this procedure involves an assumption to the effect that the cases studied are more or less typical. It is also obvious that a completely scientific study would require this assumption to be backed up and proved by statistical data.

## THE NUMBER AND DISTRIBUTION OF BEGGARS IN MEXICO CITY

It would appear that there is some difference in opinion with respect to the number of beggars in Mexico. The 1910 census gives the total number of beggars in the Republic as 96. According to the 1921 census, in a little more than ten years the total number of beggars in the Republic had increased to 994. On the other hand, a recently published estimate by the Police Department of the number of beggars in Mexico City alone gives a total of 5,000 (1). Other figures may be found anywhere between the numbers just mentioned.

In order to clear up the slight ambiguity in the available statistics on the number of beggars, an attempt was made in connection with the present study to take a census of the beggars in Mexico City. This census was made in the following manner.

In view of the fact that neither sufficient personnel, time, nor money was available for a complete census of the whole area covered by Mexico City, it was decided to count the beggars only in those districts and places where and at those times when they most likely would be found, i.e., where and when from the point of view of the beggar "business" was good. Accordingly, the first count was made in the central retail business district of the city (see map 1) between the hours of 12 noon and 1:30 p.m., that is, during the time when most people in the City are on their way home for lunch. The second count was made on a Sunday between the hours of 11 and 12:30. On this occasion, only beggars stationed in front of or near churches were enumerated. It is clear that this procedure for arriving at the total number of beggars in the City leaves something to be desired. However, it is believed that it offers the best basis for achieving an approximate estimate of the total number

that could be devised under the circumstances.

The results of the two counts made are presented in tables I and II.

It will be noted in these tables that on each occasion the census-takers were instructed to classify the beggars under the following heads: sex, apparent place of origin (rural or urban, to be judged largely by clothing), apparent age, and apparent physical condition. These classes were established, as the word "apparent" indicates, purely on the basis of the sight judgment of the enumerator. For obvious reasons, it would have been useless to have questioned the beggars.

It will be noted in table I that the total number of beggars found in the business district was 494, of which 338 were male and 156 female. Apparently, the beggars appearing on that day were predominantly of urban origin for 413 out of the 494 were thus classified. With regard to the distribution of age, two facts of importance were revealed: Over 50% of the total number of beggars were found to be in the age group (20-50) ordinarily considered the most active years of life, whereas at the extreme ends of the scale only 12.5% were minors still in their teens, and 3.5% were classified as being more than 50 years of age. These figures for age distribution, however, must be taken in connection with the figures for the distribution of beggars with reference to their apparent physical condition. Here we note that more than 62% of all the beggars enumerated were either sick, or suffering from some physical deficiency.

The figures of the Sunday census with respect to the age and sex distribution indicate in general a much larger percentage of women and of individuals beyond the age of 50 than were found in the work-day count. The distribution on the basis of apparent physical



TABLE I

CENSUS OF BEGGARS IN CENTRAL BUSINESS DISTRICT OF MEXICO CITY  
 Thursday, May 22, 1930

---

A Distribution by Sex

|             |     |
|-------------|-----|
| Male.....   | 338 |
| Female..... | 156 |
| Total.....  | 494 |

B Distribution with reference to Probable Urban or Rural Origin

|            |     |
|------------|-----|
| Rural..... | 81  |
| Urban..... | 413 |
| Total..... | 494 |

C Distribution by Apparent Age

|                 |     |
|-----------------|-----|
| 0-1 years.....  | 7   |
| 1-10.....       | 32  |
| 10-20.....      | 23  |
| 20-30.....      | 40  |
| 30-40.....      | 108 |
| 40-50.....      | 102 |
| 50-60.....      | 89  |
| 60 or more..... | 93  |
| Total.....      | 494 |

D Distribution with reference to Apparent Physical Condition

|                    |     |
|--------------------|-----|
| Healthy.....       | 186 |
| Blind.....         | 98  |
| Sick.....          | 82  |
| Crippled.....      | 41  |
| Paralysed.....     | 34  |
| Senile.....        | 21  |
| Alcoholic.....     | 9   |
| Footless.....      | 8   |
| Feeble-minded..... | 8   |
| Armless.....       | 7   |
| Total.....         | 494 |

TABLE II

CENSUS OF BEGGARS STATIONED AT CHURCHES IN MEXICO CITY  
Sunday, May 25, 1930

A Distribution by Sex

|              |            |
|--------------|------------|
| Males.....   | 193        |
| Females..... | 150        |
| Total.....   | <u>343</u> |

B Distribution with reference to Probable Urban or Rural Origin

|            |            |
|------------|------------|
| Rural..... | 64         |
| Urban..... | 279        |
| Total..... | <u>343</u> |

C Distribution by Apparent Age

|                 |            |
|-----------------|------------|
| 01 years.....   | 10         |
| 1-10.....       | 37         |
| 10-20.....      | 4          |
| 20-30.....      | 22         |
| 30-40.....      | 60         |
| 40-50.....      | 67         |
| 50-60.....      | 65         |
| 60 or more..... | 78         |
| Total.....      | <u>343</u> |

D Distribution with reference to Apparent Physical Condition

|                    |            |
|--------------------|------------|
| Healthy.....       | 105        |
| Blind.....         | 84         |
| Sick.....          | 48         |
| Paralysed.....     | 35         |
| Senile.....        | 31         |
| Crippled.....      | 21         |
| Footless.....      | 12         |
| Feeble-minded..... | 3          |
| Alcoholic.....     | 2          |
| Armless.....       | 2          |
| Total.....         | <u>343</u> |

|  |    |
|--|----|
| Total number of churches investigated..... | 97 |
| Number of churches found closed.....       | 8  |

condition was approximately the same on the two days.

The smaller number of beggars encountered in the Sunday census as compared with the Thursday census might be explained in several ways. In the first place, the Sunday census was of a more restricted and specialized type; second, the churches selected for investigation were only those within the city limits -- i.e., some of the most famous and important churches (such as those in the suburb of Guadalupe) were not included; and, third, as luck would have it on the Sunday on which the census was taken it rained most of the morning, including the hours of the census.

The significance of the statistics in tables I and II will be made more apparent in the later sections of this study (see especially the sections entitled "Begging as an Institution" and "Public Health, Sickness, Disease, and Physical Deficiency"). For the moment, the question to be answered is: is it possible on the basis of the statistics which have been gathered to estimate the total number of beggars in Mexico City. Without giving a lengthy discussion of the matter, the present writer believes that a fair and conservative estimate of the total number of beggars would be not more than twice the total number indicated in table I -- that is, 1,000 in round numbers.

## WAGES AND THE STANDARD OF LIVING IN MEXICO

Beggars and the institution of begging are, from the point of view of the social scientist, pathological phenomena. Like crime, juvenile delinquency, desertion, prostitution, and so forth, begging represents a breakdown in the normal functioning of the individual and of society. On the one hand, the beggar is essentially a demoralized and dislocated person; on the other hand, the institution of begging is a manifestation of social disorganization.

Begging presents at once personal and social aspects and both must be taken into account in any effort to understand the problem. The beggar lives and has his being not only as an individual, but also as a product of society. Part of the "why" of the Mexican beggar, therefore, lies deep in the social environment which has brought him forth and made it possible for him to exist.

Since begging is primarily a manifestation of the underlying and more fundamental social phenomenon, poverty, it is to the economic aspects of Mexican society that one must first turn in seeking an explanation of the Mexican beggar. Accordingly, in the following pages are presented such data as are available on the subject of wages and the standard of living in Mexico.

## Agricultural Wages

Although in this study we have been concerned for the most part with the Federal District and the City of Mexico, it is pertinent and appropriate in presenting the data on wages to extend the area of interest somewhat and to give the relevant data concerning wages in the Republic in general. In the following paragraphs will be found a summary view of the history of agricultural wages in Mexico.

In the last years of the Spanish rule, according to the best information available, the daily wages of peons were about twenty-five centavos in the "cold regions" (i.e. the Central Plateau) and thirty centavos in the "hot lands" (i.e. the tropical coast). In 1828, or seven years after Mexico had gained her independence from Spain, it is recorded that the daily wages of "those workers who received their wages in money varied from one to three reales" (i.e. from 12-1/2 to 37-1/2 centavos).

A rather detailed study for the year 1891 (see table III) shows that the average daily wage paid to agricultural workers at that time varied between 23-1/2 and 50 centavos and averaged 36 centavos for all states in the Republic. In the last decade of the Díaz regime (1900-1910), statistics indicate a slight rise in money wages for agricultural workers. The highest published estimate for this type of work for the period in question gives an average daily wage for the whole Republic of 46 centavos. (Some writers claim that this figure is too high. In any case, it should be held in mind that before the revolution of 1910 the wages of peons were seldom paid in money; time checks to be negotiated at the company store were the regular method of payment. In addition, the farm

TABLE III

DAILY AGRICULTURAL WAGE PAID PEONS IN VARIOUS STATES 1891<sup>1/</sup>

| State            | Wages in Centavos |         |         |
|------------------|-------------------|---------|---------|
|                  | Minimum           | Maximum | Average |
| Aguascalientes   | 18-3/4            | 18-3/4  | 18-3/4  |
| Lower California | 50                | 50      | 50      |
| Chiapas          | 25                | 75      | 50      |
| Chihuahua        | 18-3/4            | 25      | 21-7/8  |
| Coahuila         | 31-1/4            | 75      | 53-1/8  |
| Colima           | 25                | 37-1/2  | 31-1/4  |
| Durango          | 25                | 75      | 50      |
| Federal District | 31-1/4            | 37-1/2  | 31-3/8  |
| Guanajuato       | 18-3/4            | 31-1/2  | 25      |
| Guerrero         | 18-3/4            | 50      | 34-3/4  |
| Hidalgo          | 12-1/2            | 37-1/2  | 25      |
| Jalisco          | 18-3/4            | 50      | 34-3/8  |
| Mexico           | 12-1/2            | 37-1/2  | 25      |
| Michoacán        | 15-1/2            | 75      | 45-1/2  |
| Morelos          | 25                | 75      | 50      |
| Nuevo León       | 18-3/4            | 18-3/4  | 18-3/4  |
| Oaxaca           | 18-3/4            | 50      | 34-3/8  |
| Puebla           | 18-3/4            | 50      | 34-3/8  |
| Querétaro        | 18-3/4            | 37-1/2  | 28-1/8  |
| San Luis Potosí  | 18-3/4            | 25      | 22-1/4  |
| Sonora           | 30                | 1.00    | 65      |
| Tabasco          | 37-1/2            | 50      | 43-3/4  |
| Tamaulipas       | 25                | 50      | 37-1/2  |
| Tepic (Nayarit)  | 25                | 50      | 37-1/2  |
| Tlaxcala         | 25                | 50      | 37-1/2  |
| Veracruz         | 25                | 62-1/2  | 43-3/4  |
| Yucatán          | 25                | 37-1/2  | 31-1/4  |
| Zacatecas        | 18-3/4            | 50      | 34-2/8  |
| Total average    | 23-1/2            | 50      | 36      |

<sup>1/</sup>

Department of National Statistics, quoted in "Estadística Nacional" May 31, 1925.

worker usually received rent free a small plot of ground, a hut, and frequently small allowances in kind of food and drink (pulque) each week.)

In the period following the revolution of 1910-21, money wages again show an increase. Agricultural laborers are reported in 1926 as being paid from 60 centavos a day (in the state of Zacatecas) to 3.60 pesos per day (in the northern part of Lower California). The average agricultural wages for the whole Republic in this year is given as 1.14 pesos per day. (See table IV.)

It would appear from the foregoing that in the last century and more for which we have reasonably accurate figures there has been a gradual advance in Mexican agricultural money wages. In order to give these figures significance, however, it is necessary to compare them with the changes in the cost of living during the same period. The main items of diet in rural Mexico are corn, beans, wheat, and rice. The following table shows the changes in the prices (in pesos) of these items from 1792 to 1926 in the years for which statistics are available.

|                     | <u>1792</u> | <u>1891</u> | <u>1908</u> | <u>1926</u> |
|---------------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|
| Rice per 100 kilos  | 7.60        | 12.87       | 13.32       | 27.75       |
| Corn per hectoliter | 1.75        | 2.50        | 4.89        | 9.25        |
| Wheat per 100 kilos | 1.80        | 5.09        | 10.17       | 16.12       |
| Beans per 100 kilos | 1.63        | 6.61        | 10.84       | 27.75       |

In other words, the cost of living insofar as this can be demonstrated by the prices of the main articles of diet increased in the hundred years from 1792 to 1891 as follows: rice 69.34%; corn 42.86%; wheat 182.78%; and beans 305.52%. Prices in 1908 had in-

TABLE IV

DAILY AGRICULTURAL WAGES BY STATES - 1926<sup>1/</sup>

| <u>State</u>                     | <u>Average daily wage<br/>(pesos)</u> |
|----------------------------------|---------------------------------------|
| Aguascalientes                   | .84                                   |
| Lower California (Northern Part) | 3.60                                  |
| Lower California (Southern Part) | 1.80                                  |
| Campeche                         | 1.52                                  |
| Coahuila                         | 1.44                                  |
| Colima                           | 1.20                                  |
| Chiapas                          | .96                                   |
| Chihuahua                        | .96                                   |
| Federal District                 | 1.44                                  |
| Durango                          | 1.20                                  |
| Guanajuato                       | .60                                   |
| Guerrero                         | .48                                   |
| Hidalgo                          | 1.20                                  |
| Jalisco                          | .90                                   |
| Mexico                           | .96                                   |
| Michoacán                        | .90                                   |
| Morelos                          | .76                                   |
| Nayarit                          | .92                                   |
| Nuevo León                       | .96                                   |
| Oaxaca                           | .84                                   |
| Puebla                           | .72                                   |
| Querétaro                        | .80                                   |
| San Luis Potosí                  | .60                                   |
| Sinaloa                          | 1.12                                  |
| Sonora                           | 2.04                                  |
| Tabasco                          | 1.36                                  |
| Tamaulipas                       | 1.48                                  |
| Tlaxcala                         | .72                                   |
| Veracruz                         | .96                                   |
| Yucatán                          | 1.60                                  |
| Zacatecas                        | .60                                   |
| Average                          | 1.14                                  |

<sup>1/</sup>

Herzog, Jesús Silva, La Revolución Económica, Suplemento a El Sol, February 1928, p.8



creased over those for 1792 by 75.62% for rice; 179.43% for corn; 465.00% for wheat; and 565.03% for beans. But -- and this is the important point -- during this same period of 116 years, agricultural wages remained practically stationary. By 1926, however, as we have seen (Table IV), agricultural money wages, as compared with those paid during the last years of the Spanish rule had advanced considerably. In other words, estimating the average paid during the Colonial period as about 25 centavos per day and comparing this with the average daily wage of 1.14 pesos paid in 1926, it will be noted that there is an apparent increase in money wages of 356 percent. But that real wages increased during this period is to say the least extremely doubtful, for the price of rice in 1926 was 265.13% higher than in 1792; that of corn, 428.57%; of beans, 1602.45%; and of wheat 795.56%.

The figures given here refer of course only to agricultural workers. However, it must be remembered that as late as 1910 agricultural workers (peons) and their families represented an estimated population of 9,591,752 out of a total of 15,160,369 -- or more than three-fifths of the people of Mexico. It would appear, therefore, that the statistics quoted give a fairly accurate picture of wages as compared with the cost of living for the great majority of the people of Mexico for the period indicated.

#### Current wages for manual labor

The figures given in table IV indicating the daily agricultural wages by states for the year 1926 may be supplemented at this point by additional statistics concerning the wages now being paid in Mexico for manual labor of various types -- agricul-

tural and otherwise. In table V will be found the average wages paid for manual labor of whatever type in the various states of the Republic for the year 1927. More recent statistics (for the year 1929) are given in table VI . It will be noted from these two tables that wages for manual labor in general are somewhat higher than the wages paid for agricultural field work and that there has been an apparent increase in money wages in the year 1929 over the year 1927.

#### Wages in the Federal District

In the two tables just quoted (V and VI ), wages for manual labor in 1927 in the Federal District were reported as varying between 1.19 and 1.95 pesos per day and between 1.50 and 1.75 pesos per day in the year 1929. Wages for skilled workers (operarios) were given in 1929 as averaging between 2.50 and 3.25 pesos per day for the Federal District. Other statistics which have been gathered by the Department of Labor support these average figures for 1929 and indicate that they represent a very fair approximation of the average wages currently paid to skilled and unskilled manual labor in the Federal District. The wages paid in cotton mills in 1928, for example, averaged 2.95 pesos for men, 2.56 for women, and 1.32 for children. Workers in mattress factories received from 1.05 pesos for unskilled labor to 4.00 pesos per day for master mechanics. Unskilled labor in shoe factories located in the Federal District were paid on the average 2.42 pesos per day. Wages paid in canning factories were as low as one peso per day for unskilled labor and as high as 4.50 pesos per day for skilled mechanics.

TABLE V

GENERAL WAGE TABLEAVERAGE DAILY (8-HR.) WAGES FOR MANUAL LABOR BY STATES - 19271/

| State            | Wages in Pesos    |                   |
|------------------|-------------------|-------------------|
|                  | Minimum <u>2/</u> | Maximum <u>2/</u> |
| Aguascalientes   | 1.13              | 1.20              |
| Campeche         | 2.08              | 2.61              |
| Coahuila         | 1.29              | 1.74              |
| Colima           | 1.14              | 1.51              |
| Chiapas          | .82               | 1.05              |
| Chihuahua        | 1.53              | 1.97              |
| Durango          | 1.11              | 1.60              |
| Guanajuato       | .70               | 1.03              |
| Guerrero         | .75               | 1.53              |
| Hidalgo          | 1.03              | 1.43              |
| Jalisco          | .88               | 1.18              |
| Mexico           | .78               | 1.20              |
| Morelos          | 1.18              | 1.47              |
| Nayarit          | 1.26              | 1.78              |
| Nuevo León       | 1.12              | 1.41              |
| Oaxaca           | 1.02              | 1.13              |
| Puebla           | .86               | 1.57              |
| Querétaro        | .77               | .66               |
| San Luis Potosí  | .94               | 1.64              |
| Sinaloa          | 1.36              | 1.95              |
| Sonora           | 2.49              | 4.19              |
| Tabasco          | 1.55              | 2.86              |
| Tamaulipas       | 1.17              | 1.72              |
| Tlaxcala         | .94               | 1.19              |
| Veracruz         | 1.27              | 1.87              |
| Yucatán          | 1.55              | 1.86              |
| Zacatecas        | 1.01              | 1.48              |
| Federal District | 1.19              | 1.95              |
| Lower California | 3.19              | 3.21              |
| Quintana Roo     | 3.11              | 3.43              |
| Average          | 1.29              | 1.76              |

1/

These statistics collected by the Department of Labor, Ministry of Industry Commerce and Labor. They are entitled "Cuadro General que Muestra el Promedio del Salario de Miseria que Prevalece en el País." A note explains that the "Salario de Miseria" (Wages of Poverty) are actually lower than they appear in this chart due to the fact that many villages did not return statistics. The figures are for all classes of work, but for the most part they represent wages paid to farm laborers and other manual workers.

2/

These columns are headed "Fijo" (Fixed) and "Destajo" (piece-work) and represent the difference between wages paid to regular employees and those hired for only short periods.

TABLE VI

AVERAGE DAILY (8-HR.) WAGE FOR MANUAL AND SEMI-SKILLED LABOR  
PAID IN VARIOUS STATES - 1929 <sup>1/</sup>

| State            | Manual Laborers       |                       | Skilled Laborers      |                       |
|------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|
|                  | Minimum <sup>2/</sup> | Maximum <sup>2/</sup> | Minimum <sup>2/</sup> | Maximum <sup>2/</sup> |
| Aguascalientes   | 1.25                  | 1.50                  | 1.75                  | 2.25                  |
| Lower California | 3.00                  | 4.00                  | 4.50                  | 4.75                  |
| Campeche         | 1.75                  | 2.25                  | 2.50                  | 3.50                  |
| Coahuila         | 1.50                  | 2.00                  | 1.75                  | 2.50                  |
| Colima           | 1.00                  | 1.25                  | 1.50                  | 2.00                  |
| Chiapas          | 1.00                  | 1.25                  | 1.50                  | 1.75                  |
| Chihuahua        | 1.75                  | 2.50                  | 2.25                  | 3.00                  |
| Federal District | 1.50                  | 1.75                  | 2.50                  | 3.25                  |
| Durango          | 1.50                  | 2.50                  | 1.75                  | 2.00                  |
| Guanajuato       | .75                   | 1.50                  | 1.75                  | 2.00                  |
| Guerrero         | .75                   | 1.75                  | 1.25                  | 2.25                  |
| Hidalgo          | 1.25                  | 1.50                  | 1.75                  | 2.50                  |
| Jalisco          | 1.25                  | 1.50                  | 1.50                  | 1.75                  |
| Mexico           | 1.00                  | 1.25                  | 1.50                  | 2.00                  |
| Michoacán        | 1.00                  | 1.50                  | 1.50                  | 2.00                  |
| Morelos          | 1.25                  | 1.75                  | 1.75                  | 2.75                  |
| Nayarit          | 1.25                  | 1.75                  | 1.50                  | 2.00                  |
| Nuevo León       | 1.50                  | 1.75                  | 1.50                  | 2.00                  |
| Oaxaca           | .75                   | 1.25                  | 1.25                  | 1.50                  |
| Puebla           | 1.00                  | 1.25                  | 1.50                  | 2.00                  |
| Querétaro        | 1.00                  | 1.25                  | 1.25                  | 1.75                  |
| Quintana Roo     | 3.00                  | 3.75                  | 3.75                  | 4.75                  |
| San Luis Potosí  | 1.00                  | 1.50                  | 2.00                  | 3.50                  |
| Sinaloa          | 1.50                  | 2.00                  | 1.75                  | 2.50                  |
| Sonora           | 2.00                  | 6.00                  | 3.00                  | 4.50                  |
| Tabasco          | 1.50                  | 1.50                  | 2.50                  | 3.25                  |
| Tamaulipas       | 1.50                  | 2.00                  | 2.50                  | 3.25                  |
| Tlaxcala         | 1.75                  | --                    | 3.00                  | --                    |
| Veracruz         | 1.75                  | 2.25                  | 2.75                  | 6.00                  |
| Yucatán          | 1.25                  | 1.50                  | 1.75                  | 2.00                  |
| Zacatecas        | 1.25                  | 1.50                  | 1.50                  | 1.75                  |
| Average          | 1.43                  | 1.90                  | 2.01                  | 2.61                  |

<sup>1/</sup> Department of Labor, Ministry of Commerce Industry and Labor, 1929. Statistics represent average wages paid in various states for one or more of the following industries: agriculture, mining, live-stock, and general industry.

<sup>2/</sup> These columns are head "por día" (daily wage) and "por destajo" (piece-work) and represent the difference paid to regular workers and those hired for only a short period.

The foregoing statistics indicate, of course, only the wages paid to the lower classes of labor. Although these classes numerically constitute the vast majority of individuals employed in the Federal District, it is not intended to leave the impression that higher wages are not paid in other lines of activity. Certain highly skilled types of labor such as locomotive engineers, for example, were being paid in 1927 an average of 15.41 pesos per day; master shoemakers in 1928 averaged 9.94 pesos per day; in the so-called white-collar class the wages of stenographers and clerks -- although varying considerably with the experience and ability of the individual -- have been estimated at around 5.00 pesos per day, etc., etc. In general it may be said that money wages in the Federal District tend to be somewhat higher than in most of the other sections of the country. However, as will be seen in the following pages, this is only an apparent gain and is more than offset by the corresponding higher costs of living.

#### Standard of Living in Mexico

Some attention has already been given in the discussion of agricultural wages to the question of relation of wages to the cost of living measured in terms of the prices of the principal articles of diet. The clear indication of the figures presented was that the standard of living for agricultural laborers has at all times been of the lowest type. Now that the statistics of the wages in other lines of activity have been set forth, we may return to the question: what sort of a life is it possible to live on the wages now being paid in Mexico?

In order to answer this question, it would be desirable to have a large number of accurately made case studies of families

in the various laboring groups. Unfortunately up to the present time no studies of this type have been made in Mexico. It is possible, however, to throw some light on the subject under consideration by reviewing briefly certain investigations of a more general nature made in recent years by departments of the government and by private individuals.

In 1928 the Department of Labor attempted to estimate on the basis of statistics gathered in various states the daily wage necessary for what was called a "Minimum of Comfort Standard of Living", i.e. the wage which theoretically a typical family should receive in order to satisfy the minimum requirements of health and decency. As may be noted in tables VII and VIII (which contain the summary results of the studies in question) a distinction was made between a so-called "typical laborer's family of five members" and an "employee's family of four members."

For the first mentioned the theoretical daily wage necessary for a minimum of comfort standard of living varied from 2.90 pesos in the state of Chiapas to 3.45 pesos in the state of Yucatán. An examination of the individual items in the summary schedules indicates that "minimum of subsistence" would probably be a better term to designate the standard of living possible to maintain on the basis of the daily wage given than the phrase used. In the schedule for laboring families, for example, only 16.50 pesos per month is allowed for rent and no provision whatsoever is made for such things as health, amusement, savings, education, furniture, etc.

In the case of the employee's family of four members the estimates are somewhat higher and vary from 4.94 pesos in Nuevo

TABLE VII

STANDARD OF LIVING TABLE -1928 <sup>1/</sup>

ESTIMATE OF AVERAGE DAILY EXPENDITURES FOR "MINIMUM OF COMFORT" STANDARD  
FOR LABORER'S FAMILY (5 MEMBERS)

| Commodity        | Tamau-<br>lipas | Oaxa-<br>ca | Yuca-<br>tan | Sono-<br>ra | Coa-<br>huila | Federal<br>District |
|------------------|-----------------|-------------|--------------|-------------|---------------|---------------------|
| Corn             | .11             | .14         | .16          | .14         | .14           | .12                 |
| White Bread      | .22             | .28         | .27          | .21         | .21           | .16                 |
| Beans            | .05             | .07         | .08          | .07         | .06           | .05                 |
| Rice             | .07             | .07         | .08          | .07         | .08           | .05                 |
| Meat             | .49             | .58         | .64          | .52         | .50           | .52                 |
| Lard             | .11             | .09         | .13          | .10         | .11           | .11                 |
| Salt             | .01             | .01         | .01          | .01         | .01           | .01                 |
| Chili            | .06             | .04         | .03          | .05         | .05           | .06                 |
| Coffee           | .03             | .03         | .05          | .04         | .04           | .04                 |
| Milk             | .29             | .39         | .52          | .34         | .23           | .34                 |
| Sugar            | .08             | .09         | .07          | .10         | .08           | .06                 |
| Vegetables       | .23             | .06         | .06          | .06         | .06           | .06                 |
| Fuel             | .16             | .13         | .10          | .11         | .13           | .16                 |
| Muslin           | .25             | .22         | .35          | .23         | .25           | .26                 |
| Wool Cloth       | .16             | .14         | .12          | .19         | .15           | .12                 |
| Calico           | .02             | .02         | .05          | .02         | .03           | .02                 |
| Shoes <u>2/</u>  | .25             | .12         | .12          | .22         | .22           | .18                 |
| Hat              | .04             | .04         | .04          | .03         | .04           | .05                 |
| Sarape <u>3/</u> | .06             | .06         | .04          | .06         | .06           | .02                 |
| Shawl            | .02             | .02         | .02          | .02         | .02           | .02                 |
| Man's Suit       | .08             | .11         | .16          | .20         | .20           | .16                 |
| Rent             | .21             | .08         | .23          | .28         | .14           | .55                 |
| Oil (Light)      | .02             | .03         | .04          | .02         | .02           | .02                 |
| Bath             | .12             | .06         | .12          | .10         | .06           | .15                 |
| Soap             | .06             | .06         | .07          | .06         | .08           | .05                 |
| Total            | 3.20            | 2.94        | 3.45         | 3.24        | 2.97          | 3.36                |

1/ Department of Labor, Ministry of Industry Commerce and Labor.

2/ This item means generally "guaraches" or the native Mexican sandal.

3/ This item means the blanket generally used by Mexican natives as a coat in the daytime and a blanket at night.

TABLE VIII

STANDARD OF LIVING TABLE - 1928 1/ESTIMATE OF AVERAGE DAILY EXPENDITURES FOR "MINIMUM OF COMFORT" STANDARD  
FOR EMPLOYEE'S FAMILY (4 MEMBERS)

| Commodity                 | Aguasca-<br>lientes | Yuc-<br>atan | Sin-<br>aloea | Federal<br>District | Chi-<br>huahua | Nuevo<br>León | S.Luis<br>Potosí |
|---------------------------|---------------------|--------------|---------------|---------------------|----------------|---------------|------------------|
| Corn (tortillas)          | .19                 | .22          | .19           | .14                 | .20            | .20           | .18              |
| White Bread               | .80                 | .80          | .80           | .80                 | .80            | .80           | .80              |
| Beans                     | .05                 | .16          | .17           | .12                 | .09            | .11           | .12              |
| Rice                      | .09                 | .10          | .10           | .06                 | .09            | .09           | .10              |
| Meat                      | .20                 | .65          | .37           | .30                 | .34            | .28           | .35              |
| Lard                      | .22                 | .27          | .20           | .22                 | .21            | .22           | .22              |
| Salt                      | .01                 | .01          | .01           | .01                 | .01            | .01           | .01              |
| Chili                     | .09                 | .06          | .12           | .08                 | .11            | .13           | .12              |
| Coffee                    | .15                 | .13          | .13           | .13                 | .13            | .12           | .12              |
| Milk                      | .34                 | .74          | .45           | .48                 | .25            | .29           | .40              |
| Sugar                     | .06                 | .07          | .09           | .06                 | .08            | .07           | .08              |
| Potatoes                  | .10                 | .19          | .12           | .09                 | .07            | .11           | .11              |
| Pastry                    | .04                 | .07          | .09           | .05                 | .06            | .06           | .06              |
| Vegetables                | .06                 | .06          | .06           | .06                 | .06            | .06           | .06              |
| Fuel -- cooking           | .20                 | .10          | .10           | .20                 | .16            | .12           | .13              |
| Light                     | .05                 | .05          | .05           | .05                 | .05            | .05           | .05              |
| Cloth -- underclothes     | .24                 | .33          | .31           | .23                 | .29            | .25           | .26              |
| Cloth -- shirts           | .18                 | .15          | .18           | .14                 | .15            | .11           | .17              |
| Stockings -- women        | .06                 | .05          | .05           | .04                 | .05            | .04           | .04              |
| Stockings -- children     | .01                 | .01          | .01           | .01                 | .01            | .01           | .01              |
| Socks -- man              | .04                 | .04          | .05           | .03                 | .03            | .03           | .02              |
| Ties -- man               | .02                 | .04          | .02           | .02                 | .02            | .02           | .02              |
| Handkerchiefs - man       | .03                 | .03          | .03           | .02                 | .02            | .03           | .02              |
| Handkerchiefs - woman     | .03                 | .02          | .02           | .01                 | .02            | .02           | .02              |
| Cloth - woman's dress     | .24                 | .17          | .23           | .14                 | .22            | .15           | .14              |
| Cloth - child's clothes   | .07                 | .05          | .06           | .04                 | .05            | .05           | .06              |
| Cloth - man's suit        | .23                 | .23          | .23           | .23                 | .23            | .23           | .23              |
| Man's hat                 | .03                 | .03          | .04           | .03                 | .02            | .04           | .03              |
| Child's hat               | .03                 | .03          | .03           | .03                 | .02            | .03           | .02              |
| Woman's shawl             | .05                 | .07          | .07           | .05                 | .06            | .04           | .06              |
| Child's shawl             | .05                 | .04          | .04           | .02                 | .03            | .03           | .03              |
| Man's shoes               | .04                 | .05          | .05           | .05                 | .05            | .05           | .05              |
| Woman's shoes             | .07                 | .07          | .08           | .08                 | .08            | .06           | .07              |
| Child's shoes - male      | .04                 | .06          | .05           | .05                 | .04            | .04           | .04              |
| Child's shoes - female    | .04                 | .06          | .05           | .05                 | .04            | .04           | .04              |
| Woman's overcoat          | .03                 | .03          | .03           | .03                 | .03            | .03           | .03              |
| Man's overcoat            | .04                 | .04          | .04           | .04                 | .04            | .04           | .04              |
| Child's overcoat - male   | .02                 | .02          | .02           | .02                 | .02            | .02           | .02              |
| Child's overcoat - female | .02                 | .02          | .02           | .02                 | .02            | .02           | .02              |
| Bedclothes                | .08                 | .08          | .08           | .08                 | .08            | .08           | .08              |
| Baths                     | .07                 | .07          | .07           | .07                 | .07            | .07           | .07              |
| Laundry soap              | .13                 | .13          | .13           | .13                 | .13            | .13           | .13              |
| Toilet - man              | .05                 | .05          | .05           | .05                 | .05            | .05           | .05              |
| Toilet articles - woman   | .06                 | .06          | .06           | .06                 | .06            | .06           | .06              |
| "Honest" diversion        | .13                 | .13          | .13           | .13                 | .13            | .13           | .13              |
| House Rent                | .24                 | .17          | .36           | .58                 | .33            | .18           | .31              |
| Miscellaneous             | .14                 | .14          | .14           | .14                 | .14            | .14           | .14              |
| Total                     | 5.16                | 6.13         | 5.78          | 5.47                | 5.24           | 4.94          | 5.32             |



León to 6.13 pesos in Yucatán. Here again, although a somewhat larger amount is allowed in the budget for food and clothing, and, although 3.90 pesos is ear marked for "honest diversion", apparently no expendutires are contemplated for doctor's bills, education, religion, furniture, or savings.

The reader by comparing these estimates of the daily income theoretically necessary for a "minimum of comfort (subsistence) standard of living" with the actual wages received in Mexico at the present can draw his own conclusions and point his own morals.

In any country the most revealing index of the standard of living is that derived from a study of the purchasing power of wages in terms of food. Studies of this type are usually made by stating in terms of calories the actual amount of food consumed by typical average families in the various classes of the population and then comparing this with the theoretical number of calories necessary for the sustaining of life in a reasonable state of health and well being. Thus, for example, according to Hervé-Mangon, the number of calories required each day in order to "maintain the organic equilibrium" are:

|                        |                |
|------------------------|----------------|
| for moderate work..... | 4,200 calories |
| for ordinary work..... | 4,800 calories |
| for heavy work.....    | 6,000 calories |

(These figures, of course, represent only the average standard requirements. Allowances must be made for differences in climate, season, individual constitution, etc.) By comparing the actual number of calories consumed by any given individual with these standard requirements it is possible to determine whether or not the individual in question is receiving enough food.

In the last two years two studies of the type here indicated have been made for Mexico. The first of these studies was published in 1925 by the Department of National Statistics. Figures were gathered in six of the most densely populated states of the Republic (Jalisco, México, Michoacán, Puebla, Veracruz, and the Federal District) on the following points: the actual wages received by the typical families in various working groups; the amount and distribution by items of diet of money spent each month by typical families; the retail prices of the major items of diet. On the basis of these statistics a comparison was made for each of the working classes studied between the actual number of calories consumed by the average family and the theoretical number of calories required by that family. The results of this investigation show conclusively that the vast majority of the families studied were definitely undernourished and unable with the wages and salaries which they received to buy enough food to meet the ordinary requirements of health. (1)

A second study of food consumption in Mexico, also made by the Department of National Statistics, bears out in striking fashion the conclusions noted in the above paragraph. In this study as in the previous one an effort was made to set up a theoretical standard of the number of calories "indispensable for the maintenance of life" in average families for various classes of the working population. Using these standards as a base (i.e. equal to 100) index numbers were calculated for the actual number of calories consumed by families in each of the several different classes of workers in question. Table IX shows the results of this study in selected states. It is interesting to note that this investigation

TABLE IX

INDEX NUMBERS OF CALORIC CONSUMPTION BY CLASSES OF WORKERS  
IN VARIOUS STATES  
(Families of 3 to 5 individuals)

1/

| Classification<br>of<br>Families | Index Number of Actual Caloric Consumption |        |           |        |
|----------------------------------|--|--------|-----------|--------|
|                                  | Federal District                           | Oaxaca | Chihuahua | Mexico |
| Teachers 2/                      | 150.33                                     | 134.80 | 137.86    | 104.08 |
| Public Employees 3/              |  |        |           |        |
| Class A                          | 167.64                                     | 152.74 | 162.87    | 124.53 |
| Class B                          | 137.32                                     | 126.65 | 159.22    | 94.82  |
| Class C                          | 152.20                                     | 119.77 | 105.12    | 85.80  |
| Private Employees 4/             |  |        |           |        |
| Class A                          | 149.56                                     | 150.59 | 163.17    | 102.52 |
| Class B                          | 150.20                                     | 128.94 | 130.02    | 76.01  |
| Class C                          | 158.58                                     | 120.02 | 83.64     | 88.11  |
| Skilled Laborers 5/              |  |        |           |        |
| Mechanics                        | 151.31                                     | 109.40 | 119.26    | 86.45  |
| Carpenters                       | 108.71                                     | 96.48  | 109.40    | 57.06  |
| Bricklayers                      | 117.74                                     | 97.84  | 89.56     | 92.63  |
| Shoemakers                       | 112.65                                     | 96.03  | 104.89    | 70.74  |
| Others                           | 112.65                                     | 93.25  | 89.56     | 93.65  |
| Unskilled laborers 6/            |  |        |           |        |
| Muckers                          |  | 79.11  | 63.91     | 54.77  |
| Mine Workers                     | 107.95                                     | 72.25  | 36.68     | 54.20  |
| Agricultural Workers             | 105.33                                     | 88.85  | 68.83     | 77.88  |

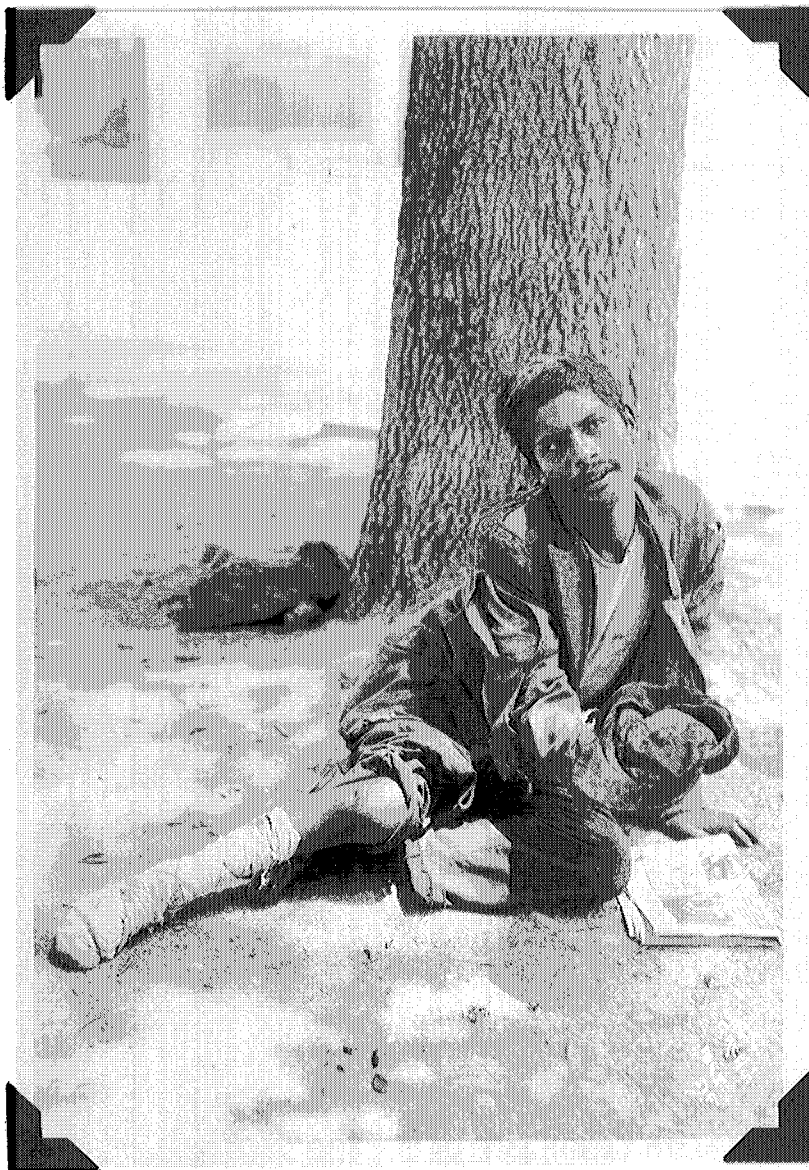
- 1/ Herzog, Silva -- Unpublished manuscript of study made for Departamento de la Estadística Nacional, 1924, and 1925
- 2/ Estimated number of calories indispensable for the maintenance of life -- 360,000 equals 100
- 3/ Estimated number of calories indispensable for the maintenance of life -- 360,000 equals 100
- 4/ Estimated number of calories indispensable for the maintenance of life -- 360,000 equals 100
- 5/ Estimated number of calories indispensable for the maintenance of life -- 456,000 equals 100
- 6/ Estimated number of calories indispensable for the maintenance of life -- 600,000 equals 100

indicates not only an increasing deficiency in the number of calories consumed as one passes from the "higher" to the "lower" classes of workers, but, also, a marked difference in the variety of items in the diet. Thus in practically all of the states studied such items as meat, eggs, and milk fail to appear at all in the diet of the lowest classes. (2)

Whereas the above summarized investigations cannot be taken as final proof of the fact that a large part of the population of Mexico is condemned by the present wage scales to an existence which falls far short of offering even the minimum desiderata of health and well being, at least they create a strong suspicion that this may be the case. And when one adds in other types of direct and indirect evidence of the poverty of the average working class family in Mexico this suspicion tends to become conviction.

Mexicans are no less subject to sickness, accidents, unemployment, and adversity than other people. But in contrast to some countries, at least, the vast majority of the people of the Mexican nation live so close to the poverty line that it takes very little to push them over. On the wages now paid to the majority of Mexican workers, savings, insurance, and other types of economic protection are out of the question. When hard times come, therefore, they have few alternatives -- they can starve or they can live on public charity. Begging is one form of the latter procedure. While all of those who meet with misfortune do not become beggars, many do, and many more are forced to depend to a greater or less degree on some form of public charity. At the present time, there are more than 10,000 people in charitable

institutions in the city of Mexico alone. The amount spent last year (1929) by the two organized charity associations in Mexico City (the Beneficencia Pública and the Beneficencia Privada) was more than 8, 200,000 pesos.



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JUAN JIMENEZ AGUILAR

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