

Letters

TO THE EDITOR

Dear Editor,

My name is Juan Cantu. I went out of Texas to Idaho. I am 17 years old. I am now in trouble in Oregon because of a contractor. In Edinburg I went to the contractor's office. This office was of Tom Alvarez of Albany, Oregon.

I was signed to a contract there by Gregorio Garcia. The contract said I was to go to Idaho. That I would work on a tractor at \$1.50 an hour or move pipe at \$1.35 an hour minimum wage, ¼ mile long \$1.50 per set, a pay roll every two weeks.

They gave us \$5.00 and said they would lend us \$15.00. They put us on a bus with a bad motor and we drove until the bus broke down. It took six hours to fix the bus and we started again. They did not let us rest. We did not complain because we wanted to work in Idaho. We got a Glensferry and the labor camp was on a mountain and it was snowing. We were all in one cabin. And we waited. No work, we waited for two weeks, no work all this time we had to food on credit. We went to the grower, and asked for work, we asked for the money the contractor said would be lent to us. No money. We asked for Tom Alvarez, the contractor. They said he had gone back to Texas. There we were, no work, no money. So all of us 38 workers left. We got on a train, it was snowing. Half of us stayed in Boise, Idaho, looking for work. The rest of us started towards Portland. The train men let us ride on the train free. We had not eaten for two days, we were scared, but they told us not to run away—they brought us some food. They were good to us. We got to Portland. Some of us decided to stay in Portland and look for work. The rest of us to Salinas, California. We still had some food left. We thought we would go to the Red Cross and sell some of our blood to buy more food to last us to get to Salinas. But we didn't have enough time as the train that goes straight to San Francisco was leaving. We looked for an empty box car but there were none. So we found some big iron pipes that were on a car and we crawled inside. It was very cold. There were eight of us in the pipes. I got off to get some cardboard to stuff up the ends so the cold air wouldn't get to us. And when I came back, the train was gone . . . I saw it down the tracks and I ran very hard and climbed on the caboose.

My friends were in the pipes 40 cars away. I ran on the tops of the cars trying to get to my friends. The train guards saw me and then the police came with their sirens. They stopped the train and we were taken to jail. As I was the youngest they took me to juvenile court. The man at juvenile court called Mr. Stan Hushbeck and Mr. Hushbeck called Sonny Montes. And they let me go being responsible to Sonny. My friends are still in jail. I want to go back to Texas. I am homesick. The welfare office said they would help me. I've had a lot of bad luck already. My ears got infected and I do not hear very well now. I want to go home. I am writing this to you so that all the others can know the truth of what has happened. I want the people to know so they won't let it happen to them . . . what happened to me.

Sincerely,

Juan Cantu

Querida redactora,

Me llamo Juan Cantu. Salí de Texas para Idaho. Tengo 17 años. En un apuro en Oregon debido a un contratista. En Edinburg fui a la oficina de un contratista. Era la de Tom Alvarez de Albany, Oregon.

Gregorio Garcia me hizo firmar un contrato allí. El contrato era que me fuera a Idaho y que trabajara en un tractor a \$1.50 por hora o moviera pipas a \$1.35 por hora como, mínimo, ¼ de milla a \$1.50 por salario cada dos semanas.

Nos dieron \$5.00 y nos dijeron que nos prestarían \$15.00. Nos pusieron en un camión con un motor malo y fuimos hasta que se descompuso el camión. No nos dejaron descansar. No nos quejamos porque queríamos trabajar en Idaho. Llegamos a Glensferry y el campamento estaba en una montaña y estaba nevando. Todos nos metimos en una cabina. Esperamos. No había ningún trabajo — esperamos dos semanas sin trabajar. Tuvíamos que conseguir comestibles con crédito. Fuimos al agricultor y le pedimos trabajo y le pedimos el dinero que el contratista dijo que nos prestarían. Nada de dinero. Pedimos ver al contratista, Tom Alvarez. Él dijo que había vuelto a Texas. Allí estábamos sin trabajo y sin dinero. Así los 38 de nosotros subimos a un tren y salemos. La mitad se fue a Boise, Idaho buscando empleo. Los demás seguimos hasta Portland. Los ferrocarrileros nos permitieron viajar gratis. No habíamos comido por dos días, teníamos miedo pero nos dijeron que no nos escaparían. Nos trajeron comida. Nos trataron bien. Llegamos a Portland. Unos decidieron quedarse en Portland para buscar empleo. Los demás fueron a Salinas, California. Nos quedó algo de comida. Pensamos ir a la tienda a comprar. Roja y vender sangre para compra suficiente comida para llegar a las minas. Pero no tuvimos tiempo porque el tren que se iba para San Francisco salía. Buscamos un vagón vacío pero no había. Encontramos pipas de hierro en un vagón y nos metimos en ellas. Hacía mucho frío. Había ocho de nosotros metidos en las pipas. Me bajé para conseguir un cartón para taparnos para protegernos del aire frío. Al volver el tren había salido — lo vi desapareciendo a lo lejos, corrí y subí al último vagón.

Mis amigos estaban en las pipas a una distancia de 40 vagones. Yo estaba sobre los vagones para llegar a donde estaban. Los del tren me vieron y luego llegó la policía. Pararon el tren y nos llevaron a la cárcel. Yo era más joven me llevaron al tribunal juvenil. El señor de la corte me mandó al Sr. Stan Hushbeck y él llamó a Sonny Montes. Me dejaron salir libre del cargo de Sonny. Mis amigos están siempre en la cárcel. Quiero volver a Texas. Extraño mi casa. La asistencia pública me dijo que me ayudara. Ya he sufrido mucha mala suerte. Mis oídos se infectaron pero ahora puedo oír muy bien. Quiero volver a mi casa. Le escribo para que todos sepan la verdad de lo que pasó. Quiero que sepan para que no les suceda a ellos lo mismo de lo que me sucedió a mí.

Sinceramente,

Juan Cantu

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