

Desertions Threatened as Work Lags in Colony

Some Families Ask Return to States, Others Talk of Tackling It Alone; Officials Worried

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Palmer, Alaska—(By Radio)—It is now confessed by officials that the magnitude of the task of settling 200 families in the Matanuska valley was not realized when undertaken and, recognizing the tremendous amount of work remaining to be done, authorities here are making desperate efforts to get more help.

Already the administrative personnel of the colonization division—as differentiated from the construction division, manned mainly by California transients—has been bolstered. Howard Lyng of Nome has been added as assistant to General Manager Don Irwin and Ed Croning of Anchorage as purchasing and disbursing agent.

Huge Job Barely Started

To date the transient laborers and some of the colonists have been in the valley more than a month and have not made a dent in work promised the settlers. Trouble ahead is revealed by a brief summary of the work to be done:

The colony must construct a community center, a monumental task in itself considering available facilities.

Erect homes for all colonists (except for a few who happened to draw tracts with houses on

them). Just one cottage is now started.

Erect shelters for livestock.

Provide a water supply for settlers' homes and livestock.

Clear 12 acres of land for each colonist.

Build thirty-odd miles of new roads in the valley, plus 12 miles connecting Palmer with the Anchorage road now ending at Eklutna; and this includes a \$150,000 bridge.

Prepare and harvest community garden and field crops for settlers and livestock during the winter.

Most of these tasks have not even been started and others just barely touched. For instance, the road program, under the Alaskan highway commission, is about a month behind. Director Irwin concedes that conditions are serious and other officials privately admit the situation is most alarming.

The colonists themselves are becoming apprehensive. Some of them talk about cutting loose and going into the woods and building their own shelters, even if they must give up their colony tracts to do it. They say that this is a big country with a lot of land open; that they already like Alaska and will find new places to settle if they have to.

Tiny Railroad Swamped

Others of the new settlers are sick and tired of delays, bickering and mismanagement. Irwin says that four families have asked to be sent home, but rumors around the camps are that more than 30 are ready to quit. Those with serious

complaints are asked to sign affidavits that conditions were misrepresented to them by case workers back home. Then the Alaska Rural Rehabilitation corporation will investigate the charges and may provide transportation, according to Irwin. Nothing is definitely promised, however.

Transportation, more than any other colonization problem, was overlooked. In the first place, just two bands of steel, representing the Alaska railroad, connect this wilderness with the rest of Alaska, there being no highway. It is a small system whose trains chase themselves around innumerable curves like a dog after its own tail. The entire railroad has only some 70 cars and there are some 12,000 and more tons of freight coming into the colony!

Approximately 4,000 tons have come into Palmer to date and it has kept the railroad practically swamped. Costly freight that never should be left uncovered has had to be dumped off and piled around Palmer to make cars available for more shipments. Bad weather could ruin thousands of dollars' worth of equipment.

Tools Never Came

Complicating the problem, materials have been shipped out of the United States that will not be needed for months.

"I've wired the shipping agent at Seattle time after time what we needed and had to have," Director Irwin declares. "I've told him ahead of time so we'd have things here when needed."

What has happened? Two hundred kits of tools, such as hammers, axes, saws, levels and planes for cutting house timber and erecting cottages, should have been here when the colonists arrived. They are still missing. Authorities here bought up all possible tools at Anchorage and Seward and these, with what the colonists brought along, are all that there has been to work with. Sixty-nine horses arrived a