

22 Transient Workers Quit Jobs in Colony

Dissatisfied With Tasks and Pay, They Leave Alaska to 'Mosquitoes and Suckers'

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BY ARVILLE SCHALEBEN
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Palmer, Alaska—(By Radio)—At least 22 transient laborers quit the Matanuska valley colonization project in a group Monday because of dissatisfaction with conditions. Four others were fired for drunkenness.

This reduced the construction division personnel, whose laborers came from California transient camps, to 400 men just at the time when every man is needed and Frank U. Bliss, director of construction, is calling for more help because he is behind schedule. He has been promised 80 lumberjacks from Washington state.

Mismanagement Charged

"All I can say," Bliss said, "is that these men were dissatisfied with life in Alaska and this kind of camp life. Their quitting is not unexpected and we expect more quitting. The reason this came to a head now is that we are just starting to crack down on the work schedule and they didn't like it."

The men said they quit because of mismanagement. They claim they signed up in California to do one kind of work and have been doing other kinds here.

"I'm a carpenter," one said, "and I've been cutting more bacon than I ever saw in my life. They had me working in the kitchen."

Another explained that he had signed as a steel worker and that there was nothing but logs to work with in Alaska. Others claimed they were machinists or truck operators and had been handling freight or brushing.

Had to Pay Own Fare

These men asserted that they were absolutely promised the kind of work they were fitted for but Bliss said they were simply classified and told they would have to do whatever work was required. Bliss was borne out by the work agreements, in which the men agreed "to perform such technical, manual or other duties as directed by superintendents" for 48 hours weekly.

Some men also complained about the hours of work, the food and the fact that they hadn't known what their wages would be. The agreements said no less than \$20 a month wage.

All 26 men were required to pay their own railroad transportation to Seward, costing \$9.65. They will be hauled to Seattle on the government chartered North Star. The railroad fare comes out of what money they had coming from the government for their labor.

"Gosh," one protested at the fare, "I could walk and make wages."

Finished Their "Chapter"

It was an odd scene when they boarded the train. Many didn't have a dollar in their pockets. They carried blanket rolls and old suitcases and joshed about being through making history.

"We've written a chapter and that's enough," they said. "Let the suckers stay here with the mosquitoes and finish the book."

Their reference was to the fact that some foremen have been telling the men how they are going down in the history books for their work done in Alaska.

Construction crew friends who happened not to be working came down to the tiny station to see them off and made bets about who would have the best stake in November, those who stayed or those who left.

When the train pulled out past the construction camp, two miles from the station groups of workers gathered and waved and shouted goodbye. The men on the train stuck their heads out of the windows and cried "So long, Alaska, so long, you old mosquito swamp."

It Really Is Important

While the officials, with much discretion, say this was expected and take it with a smile, it is much more important than just 26 men quitting a construction camp.

This project was to indicate somewhat how such fully trained men could be rehabilitated, just as it is to show how successfully 200 farmers can be rehabilitated in their work.

Now there are 400 odd construction men left but if desertions develop on a large scale it might well mean that no more transient camp labor would be used on other contemplated projects like the Matanuska colonization project.

Hopkins Sure Colonists to Have Winter Shelter

Admits Delay in Construction

FERA Head Tells Senate Extra Workers Will Be Sent to Alaska

BY JAMES L. WRIGHT
STAFF CORRESPONDENT OF THE JOURNAL
Washington, D. C.—"It is possible to give full assurance that facilities providing safe and reasonably comfortable living conditions will be completed before the winter."

That report on the Matanuska valley colonization project was submitted to Vice President Garner Tuesday by Harry L. Hopkins, administrator of FERA, after he had admitted that the work in the valley is approximately three weeks behind.

All plans for the project have been executed according to pre-determined schedule with the exception of the actual construction work, Hopkins said.

"Three Weeks Behind"

"Construction activities as a whole," Hopkins reported, "are approximately three weeks behind schedule. This delay has been caused by abnormally rainy weather, some delay in the arrival of materials, and by administrative difficulties which were encountered on the job. Materials are now arriving satisfactorily. Action has been taken to correct administrative difficulties and a sufficient number of additional workers has been engaged to make up for the time lost to date."

"The very nature of the project, its distance from sources of supply, the short working season and the hazards of weather, make it impossible to give positive assurance that all construction will be completed according to schedule."

"It should be noted that all materials and supplies required for subsistence and maintenance, as well as for construction, had to be procured in the United States and transported to Alaska," Hopkins pointed out.

Hopkins reported that a total of 1,336 persons have been transported there, of which 425 are transient workers, 897 colonists and 14 supervisory workers. He said the transient workers were selected from

But Think of All the Fun We Have

BY LEASED WIRE TO THE JOURNAL

Beverly Hills, Calif. — In schools they have what they call intelligence tests. Well, if nations held 'em I don't believe we would be what you would call a favorite to win it. The chain letter thing lasted just two days in England. Over here it took us a whole month to figure it out. And Mexico laughed the thing out of their country before lunch. Then there was "tenocracy," which we took serious for over three months. There is still a lot of monkey in us. Throw anything you want into our cage and we will give it serious consideration.

WILL ROGERS.

Most Pioneers Want to Stick

June 26-1935
Strike of Transient Work-

10,000 transients on relief in California, having been chosen for their skill in construction.

"Gave Good Service"

"While a few of these persons," said Hopkins, "have become dissatisfied and have left, they have as a body rendered excellent service, working without regard for hours and maintaining a high morale. Their relief pay is \$1 per day and board."

Hopkins told of how the colonists were selected from the lumbering and mining regions which "have been definitely abandoned."

"It should be borne in mind," said he, "that these families were definitely stranded where they were, and totally dependent on the government for their living. They had no hope for employment and were degenerating into a complacent acceptance of definitely subnormal social and economic standards."

Hopkins said that for the time being the colonists are living in floored tents, boarded on the sides and equipped with mosquito netting.

An emergency hospital is maintained in four tents with one doctor, four hospital orderlies, one public health and three visiting nurses, Hopkins declared.

Food Ample, View

After itemizing the food available there, he stated that "in some cases the cost of food may be high, but if so, it is because of the high cost of transportation. Because of this fact, in connection with the work which the colonists do on community projects, wages commensurate with such high costs are paid."

Hopkins said that there are few good roads available, but new roads are under construction as a part of the project.

There is, he said, a direct rail connection with Anchorage, 40 miles away, and with Seward, the port 125 miles distant.

Food supplies, according to Hopkins, were prescribed by experienced dietitians and while there may not be the variety afforded in shops in the average city of the United States proper, there is full confidence that dietary needs are adequately met.

Radio reports are received by the federal emergency relief administration every two or three days from the administrator of the project in Alaska.

