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Strike



The Minersville Shuffle

Conscientious objector Lee Boucher at "work" on a fire trail, typifies the slow-down strike tactics being carried out at Minersville. Although the blond, hand-

some youth was aware of the camera, he was not posing—this slow-motion effort goes on eight hours a day, 40 hours a week, as the objectors respond to direct

work orders only "in body but not in mind." Cameraman Ken McLaughlin took the picture at one-fifteenth of a second, and yet the slow shutter stopped the "action."

A War of Nerves

Conchies Act Only on Direct Orders And Then Work at a Snail's Pace

By JACK FOISIE
(Chronicle Staff Writer)

MINERSVILLE, Calif., May 21—The slow-down strikers at the conscientious objectors' camp who have defied the Government for six months insist that during work hours their every move be ordered by camp officials.

Then even direct orders are carried out at a snail's pace.

For example, Jim Cassels, a University of Chicago graduate in engineering, must be told each morning to work on a firebreak trail; must be told that he will use a hoe for the work; must be told how to hold the hoe, and where to hoe.

Even then he swings his hoe in slow motion, scratching a foot of ground about once every two minutes as long as a foreman stands over him.

"It is the most nerve-wracking job I've ever had," said Camp Manager C. C. Turner. "How much patience must we put out before we fly off the handle?"

The Conflict Of Conscience

Conscientious objector: "One who, for conscience' sake, objects to warfare or to military service."

—Webster's Dictionary

"Any . . . person . . . because of such conscientious objections . . . shall, if he is inducted . . . be assigned to work of national importance under civilian direction."

—Selective Service Act

"Conchies:" Short for the above.

—GI

Objectors End Eleventh Day of Hunger Strike

SANDSTONE, Minn., May 21 (UP)—Five conscientious objectors at the Federal penitentiary here went without food for the eleventh consecutive day today, apparently without ill effects.

Warden George Humphrey said the men, who steadfastly have refused food in a self-imposed "strike" to win Presidential pardons, had been examined daily by prison physicians. Their conscientious objections to Selective Service regulations were not based on religious belief, hence they had drawn prison terms.

Release on Bail Ends Fasting by L. A. Conchies

LOS ANGELES, May 21 (UP)—Six conscientious objectors who went on a three-day hunger strike in jail because a Negro member was segregated ate heartily today after their release on bail.

The objectors were being held for Federal officers on charges of insubordination at a conscientious objectors' camp. A citizens' committee put up their bail last night after it was reduced to \$500 apiece from \$5000.

SERIOUS BUSINESS

However ridiculous the tactics may appear, they become serious business when practiced for over six months by a handful of men isolated in the heavy forest country 60 miles northwest of Redding.

According to Dr. Marden Habag-ger, himself an objector, but not in favor of the slowdown, 12 men at the camp have become mental cases since October. They have been sent to hospitals or discharged.

"It is the hardest kind of work to work at doing nothing," he explained. Long periods at Camp Germfask, Mich., where trouble-makers were previously sent, may have contributed to the breakdowns, he said.

The slowdown is equally trying on camp officials who have the task of trying to make the men do "work of national importance."

Their only weapon, under selective service regulations, is removal of privileges. Ringleaders have been consistently refused week-end passes and furloughs.

TENSE ATMOSPHERE

Some of the "conchies" have not participated in the strike. They are assigned to camp maintenance duties. But the slowdown is slowly spreading, and a new recruit may suddenly announce his stand by spilling a sack of beans in the kitchen, then taking a day or two to pick them up, one at a time in slow motion.

The slowdowners spent the winter chopping wood—and managed to cut just enough to keep themselves warm. The spring project was a small garbage pit. It took them six weeks to dig it.

Tactics call for the stalling to be done with a humorous touch and aboveboard. With few exceptions, officials have found it useful to match the atmosphere, "or else we would all go nuts."

But a triggerlike tenseness is always evident. The officials have guns in their possession and wore them during the sabotage period last winter.

WORKING FOR NOTHING

The slowdowners declare that they will continue to stall, even if called upon to fight a forest fire threatening the camp.

"We work for what we get paid—nothing," chortled Leo Kekoni, self-appointed court jester for the strikers. Conscientious objectors receive \$5 a month "allowance" to purchase necessities.

The goings-on at Minersville are not approved by any of the peace churches. They do believe, however, that some of the complaints are justified.

The majority of the slow-downers claim allegiance to no church. They do not conform to the general profile of deeply religious youths, although their sincerity in "our cause" is registered in years of imprisonment prior to parole to CPS camps.

Some of them, in barracks conversation, occasionally cussed, talked about drinking and about women.

NO CHURCH SERVICES

No mass religious services are held in camp, perhaps because there is no common religion and no ordained ministers. The majority of men attached to churches are Jehovah's Witnesses, in which church each man is considered a minister.

The strikers, with a frank eye toward publicity, term Minersville "a concentration camp." Their mail, uncensored, bears the letterhead "Camp Germfask," which sounds like a horror prison, but is merely the name of the Michigan CPS camp from where they were transferred.

To carry out the theme, the slowdowners put "PW" on their shirts, clutter the grounds with wise-cracking signs, and name their barracks after Dachau and Buchenwald. Camp Director Bliss Haynes lets the signs stay up.

To Camp Foreman Russ M. Finley all this has a slightly ridiculous appearance. He is a purple heart veteran of Sicily and knows what German prison camps are like.

LIVING QUARTERS

The strikers are fed regular Army food, and have the right to rig up their own version of living quarters in the barracks. Incoming communications are uncensored, even though they be wires of sympathy and support from "outside." The use of the single telephone has been somewhat restricted.

The strikers themselves admit that "Haynes is the best camp director we've run into, and it is too bad we have to put him on the spot."

But the "conchies" declare they will go on striking until the Government closes down the camp and acknowledges that you can conscript a man's body perhaps, but not his mind.

(Note: This is the second of three articles on Minersville. Tomorrow, the overall case, for and against, conscientious objectors.)