

YAKIMA CIVIC LEADER REPORTS

ON

CALIFORNIA FARM FAMILY LABOR CAMPS

(During a recent visit to California, Dan A. West, member of the Yakima County Welfare Advisory board, and prominent business man, was invited to inspect several Farm Family labor camps of the Farm Security Administration, similar to the project proposed for Yakima Valley. To present an impartial picture of how these camps are helping to meet the problems of migratory workers' families and drouth refugees forced into seasonal agricultural employment, West's report to the welfare board is reproduced herewith.)

112 West Walnut
Yakima, Washington
August 8, 1938

Gentlemen:

Upon my arrival in San Francisco I received a call from Mr. Jonathan Garst, Regional Director, who invited me to visit the offices of the Farm Security Administration and meet the various members of that organization. I accepted this invitation, visited their offices and conferred with Mr. Garst, Dr. Omer Mills, Mr. Irving Smith, and Mr. Rowell, who explained to me in detail the operation of the camps and the results thus far attained.

It is only natural to suppose that these gentlemen were most enthusiastic over the results. Mr. Garst offered the services of a representative of his department to accompany me to any or all of the camps located in California. I advised him that I would prefer to visit the camps alone, but would appreciate a letter of authority that would permit me free access to anything pertaining to the camps that I care to know. This letter was furnished me. I was advised by these gentlemen that the two poorest camps, from the viewpoint of physical equipment, in California were the camps at Marysville and Gridley, located in the Sacramento Valley. Accordingly, I visited the above-mentioned camps.

The camp at Marysville is located on the river-bank and contains approximately 200 tent bases and is housing at the present time 220 families, numbering between 1000 and 1100 people. The physical properties, in addition to the tent bases mentioned, consist of a small clinic with a registered nurse in charge, five utility houses containing 60 shower baths and an equal number of flush toilets, a large assembly hall, a nursery building for children under the direction of an experienced kindergarten teacher who is assisted by teachers assigned by the National Youth Administration.

A large recreational field is on the ground where baseball games are played, soft ball games, volley ball, horseshoe court and, adjoining this field, is a playground for children containing swings, teeter boards, and other appliances for their entertainment. A camp office is located at the entrance, and directly back of this office is the manager's residence cottage.

The camp government consists of five councilmen elected from the residents of the camp by districts, and one councilman elected at large. Likewise a secretary of the council is selected and this group meets at regular frequent intervals with the camp manager, the camp manager having full veto power of any and all acts of the council, but there is no record of his ever having exercised this privilege. This camp is a year-round camp and from the records of the camp, the following information was obtained:

On January 1 there were 19 families residing in the camp; on February 1, 25 families.

There is no record available, and this is confirmed by the camp manager and camp employees, of any arrests ever having been made in the camp, or of any resident of the camp ever having been arrested and convicted of a crime of any nature, although the law enforcement officers of that district invariably search the camp and conduct an investigation whenever a law violation occurs in that district. The campers are required to pay 70¢ per week in advance, per family. In addition, they are required to devote not less than one hour each week in caring for the general surroundings of the camp. This is in addition to caring for their own property immediately adjacent to their tent-house. The labor conditions in the camp are as follows:

The Sacramento Valley, like all agricultural districts, is presented with a large crop. At the present time the peach crop is being harvested. Due to a low price of approximately \$7.50 a ton for the peaches of that district, the farmers have been obliged to reduce wages this year for the harvesting of this crop to an average of 25¢ an hour. I am advised that the wage last year was 40¢ an hour. The workers in this camp have accepted the 25¢ an hour wage and are working and eagerly seeking jobs at that price.

At the beginning of the 1938 season a question arose in the camp whether or not labor meetings would be permitted in the camp. Accordingly, a secret ballot was prepared and the members of the camp eligible to vote, voted by secret ballot on the question of labor meetings. The result was 254 favoring labor meetings and 149 opposed to them. Labor meetings are now held in the camp one night each month and these meetings are open to either labor organization, although at this time the Committee for Industrial Organization are the only ones availing themselves of the privilege. I am advised that no disorder has ever resulted from these meetings and that it is estimated approximately thirty to forty per cent of the people in this camp eligible for labor organization membership are members.

There is no record of any labor disorder in the camp and the only disagreement occurred during the so-called lettuce strike at Salinas, California, when the camp advisory council, composed of Marysville citizens, responded to the request of the City of Salinas and requested that workers be sent to Salinas from this camp in view of the fact that the residents of the Marysville camp were working on the average of three days a week. This request by the Salinas group, and the recommendation of the Marysville advisory council, was referred to the manager of the Marysville camp, and he consented to the sending of these men to Salinas.

The council of the camp, at the request of the members of the camp, protested this action to the manager and he in turn referred the matter to the central office of the Farm Security Administration, and the camp manager withdrew the

request and in turn advised the residents of the camp that the work was available at Salinas and of the full conditions surrounding the work and that if they cared to go, it would be their privilege to go or not. The Farm Security Administration evidently takes the position that they did not believe it within their jurisdiction to supply workers in what appeared to be a labor controversy at Salinas.

Within the past two weeks photographers from the magazine "Life" have visited the California camps and we may anticipate pictures of camp conditions in that publication in the near future.

At the time I visited the Marysville camp there was a mild epidemic of Conjunctivitis (Pink Eye), those afflicted being quartered in an isolation district of the camp, but due to the fact that the entire country was overrun with gnats the control of this was most difficult as the gnats were carrying the disease, and I am advised that this difficulty was by no means confined to the camp; that people throughout the district were affected.

The first requirement of entrance to the camp is that the applicant must be an agricultural worker. During the winter and spring of 1937 and 1938 the residents of the camp, previously referred to, were obliged to accept work other than farm labor and practically all had employment on the W.P.A. projects in that vicinity. These people were called together and advised by the camp manager that due to the regulations governing the camp they would be obliged to vacate and, in accordance with that order, did vacate the camp and at the present time have, through some means, acquired a piece of land in the Marysville district and are attempting through their own efforts to establish a camp similar to the Farm Workers' Camp where they had previously resided. Because of limited finances they are not making much progress, but I am advised that they do have shower baths and are attempting orderly arrangements and cooperative sanitary facilities.

Upon arrival at the camp the applicant is obliged to register and furnish the camp with all information regarding himself and his family. These people are then assigned by an employee of the camp and accompanied by this employee to their new home. Upon getting settled they are then ordered to appear at the camp clinic and submit to a physical examination. Part of this examination and treatment must be voluntary on the part of the tenant and consists of typhoid and diphtheria inoculations. Likewise, a blood test is taken at this time. All of the tenants are compelled to submit to the physical examination and less than five per cent have refused to submit to the typhoid and diphtheria inoculations which, because of their belief, cannot be enforced upon them.

One of the most interesting projects in the camp is the operation of the children's nursery. This nursery, located in the back of the assembly hall, consists of a kitchen under the supervision of a woman who prepares their hot lunches. This lunch is a balanced diet and the children have responded to the benefits of this diet by the complete elimination of rickets and other diseases caused by malnutrition. The children are taught, first, the care of themselves, the toilet and washroom being well equipped and, because of the age of the children ranging from two to four years and nine months, it is necessary that small steps be constructed to permit the children to use the wash bowls, etc. They are taught to brush their teeth, brush their hair, and to keep themselves clean and neat.

I was greatly impressed with the absolute cleanliness and healthy appearance of these small children. Each child is assigned a small stall or booth where they are obliged to care for their own belongings in an orderly manner. They are taught to hang up their towels and put everything in its place. This, I am told, has a most stimulating effect on the parents at home who are, in many instances, criticized by their children for the disorder in their homes. These children have a small garden where flowers and vegetables are planted and cared for. They have outdoor studies, finger painting, and all the usual advantages of a modern kindergarten. A cement floor covered by a roof has the small canvas cots where the children are required to take their afternoon nap.

A careful inspection of the tents themselves indicate cleanliness and orderliness. It is, of course, most difficult to keep these tents neat at all times. You can imagine the problem of a family of, say, 5, 7, or even 9, being obliged to occupy one room. If you doubt this, just try moving your family, including the bedrooms, into your kitchen at home. In practically every instance the beds had clean linen and clean spreads.

Dogs are permitted in the camp, but only on leash, and must be kept tied.

The liquor problem has never been serious. At the dances, which are held regularly, the only difficulty that has occurred has been from people outside the camp attending the dances. Liquor is prohibited in the camp by camp rules. This has been remedied to the extent that the dances are invitational to non-residents, and to secure an invitation to a dance the person extending the invitation must submit his request to the camp manager and in turn his request is either granted or denied. Music for the dances is provided by the talent of the camp.

In connection with the utility houses, complete modern laundry facilities are maintained. Washing machines and wash trays are available to the tenants with plenty of hot water. The tenants take their washing to their respective houses where clothes lines are installed and then may take that part of it back to the utility house where ironing facilities are provided.

Supervised sewing rooms are operated in connection with the camp where the tenants may make new clothes or repair the old ones.

A complete library is on the premises and is supplied with books largely furnished them by the State Library and from the nearby communities. I examined carefully the type of books in the library and found nothing objectionable.

Literature of any description, except by permission, is prohibited on the camp grounds and, so far, permission has not been granted for the distribution of any literature pertaining to labor matters and is confined largely to the grocers and merchants of Marysville circulating hand bills which is in turn objected to by the camp members as causing litter on the camp and, therefore, a camp rule has been adopted requiring that these hand bills cannot be left in the camp unless they are handed directly to the person.

Sunday School services are conducted in the camp each Sunday morning and an interesting comment was made to the effect that the percentage of Sunday School attendance in this camp is higher than in the City of Marysville. Likewise,

church services are held on Sunday evening and the ministers of the churches in the surrounding communities have freely and willingly volunteered to conduct them.

A mimeographed camp newspaper is put out each week wherein camp events are related, special notices are carried, and general news of the camp recorded. I am attaching herewith the last four issues of the publication known as the "Migrant Weekly".

Moving pictures are shown in the assembly hall on regular nights, ordinarily on Saturday. Excellent pictures are shown at low prices to residents of the camp the charge being 5¢ for all children over 15 years of age and it is limited to tenants only.

While in the camp, I had a rather lengthy talk with the council-man-at-large and we discussed the labor situation. He was most conversant with the problems and stated to me that he had led the campaign against permitting the labor speakers to hold meetings in the camp. This would indicate most conservative leadership.

In making inquiries around the City of Marysville regarding the camp, I made it a definite point to ask all questions pertaining to the camp in a negative manner which should have in every instance indicated to the person questioned that I was opposed to the camp. I did not find an objector to the camp. I failed to bring out any statement from anyone, except as noted hereafter, that the camp had created any new condition or any condition that did not already exist prior to the establishment of the camp, and I was advised in many instances, that from a health point of view the people in the camp were vastly improved.

In Marysville I visited several beer parlor operators to discover that they in most cases were opposed to the camp for the reason that the tenants remained in the camp in the evening to participate or witness recreational activities instead of coming to town. In other words, after having a shower bath and enjoying a meal under fairly comfortable conditions, they were satisfied to remain at home and did not frequent the beer parlors. I visited with one farmer, whom I discovered working on his place adjacent to the road, and was advised by this man that the camp was in no manner objectionable, but that it had afforded a pretty good market for some of the farmers in that district to peddle their fresh vegetables.

The manager of the camp, Mr. Dempster, was ill at the time I visited the camp and I called on him at the insistence of his assistants in the camp and discussed with him the camp problems. Mr. Dempster impressed me as being a very intelligent person and having a sympathetic understanding of the conditions. He was very highly regarded by the tenants of the camp.

I made inquiry in Marysville regarding the school situation but did not find where any unusual condition had been caused by the camp, although while I did not make inquiry, I am inclined to believe that the problem was met there by distributing the children to several schools inasmuch as the camp is located only two or three miles from the City of Marysville.

In checking up the use of the rental money paid into the camp fund, I found this money being used in many instances as a loan fund for new tenants who required temporary assistance for the purchase of food used in the nursery, and for

the general improvement of camp conditions. I could find no evidence of its being wasted or unwisely spent.

I was advised by Mr. Dempster, the camp manager, that the tenants of this camp were generally employed by the farmers throughout that district and that no effort, to his knowledge, had ever been made by the farmers of that district to favor the laborers from outside the camp over those within the camp.

I was advised, while in Marysville, that the law enforcement officers of that county had been instructed to remove all campers from the roadside and ditch banks of private property in that county. That, to me, indicated that the citizens of that community recognized the health and social problems involved by that type of living. In spite of this order I observed a great many families camped on the road under the trees, etc., and the conditions surrounding those campers were certainly deplorable.

I am attaching herewith copy of a camp permit used at Marysville; likewise, a statement of policy applying to the operation of these camps issued by M. L. Wilson, Acting Secretary of Agriculture; also a bulletin pertaining to medical regulation in the camp.

CAMP AT GRIDLEY, CALIFORNIA

This camp is very much smaller than the camp at Marysville, having 140 families as tenants at present, with a total of 624 individuals. This camp at Gridley was closed during the winter of 1937 and 1938. The camp contains 28 shower baths and adequate toilet facilities. The management of the camp is conducted in exactly the same manner as the Marysville camp and is composed of a camp committee headed by the manager of the camp, a Mr. Anthe. Mr. Anthe was absent from the camp in Oroville the day I visited.

In variance with the camp at Marysville, this camp voted almost unanimously to prohibit labor meetings of any kind. The only meetings held in the camp are church meetings which are held every other night, and frequent dances are held during the week, the orchestra being supplied by the talent in the camp.

The liquor problem in this camp is at a minimum and no liquor has ever been seen in the camp. A complaint was made to me in Gridley that there was gambling in the camp and this was emphatically denied, not only by the people whom I met, but by the assistant manager who escorted me through the camp. He admitted that there was some card playing by both men and the women but that, in his opinion, they were too poor to use their money for gambling.

In checking into the labor conditions of this camp, I was advised that undoubtedly there must be some members of the camp who were members of a labor organization, but that that number would not exceed ten or twelve people. The only labor difficulty known occurred during the plum season when a local farmer asked for 12 men to harvest his crop. He called at the camp during the forenoon and these men reported for work at one o'clock. They worked slightly over four hours each and received an average of 32¢ each for the more than four hours labor. Upon their return to camp that night they peacefully took this matter up with the camp committee and manager and, accordingly, when the farmer notified them the following morning of the number of men required that day the notice was sent out to the camp that the work was available and also notified the workers of the experience of the previous day by the men that had worked on that particular farmer's ranch.

This camp, because of poor physical property, does not maintain the high degree of efficiency of the Marysville camp. There does not seem to be the spirit in the camp, and I cannot attribute any reason for this other than the lack of leadership. That statement may be unfair to the manager whom I did not meet, but after visiting the Marysville camp I could not help but observe certain contrasts.

I interviewed several people in Gridley with the same result as in Marysville. In both cases you can appreciate that it was difficult to discuss the school problem because there wasn't any school problem at this particular moment.

One's first and lasting impression of these camps is the absolute cleanliness and orderliness; first, of the people in the camp and, second, of the camp itself.

Respectively submitted,

(Signed) Dan A. West