

# As CPS Ends for Friends

An Appraisal by an Anonymous Assignee *(L.S. K...)*

WITH demobilization for me a matter of days, I have been reviewing my three and a half years in CPS. Enough has been said and written of the disillusionment which has been all too evident, of the frustrations of semi-separation from family, old friends and society in general, of the hardships of no pay, of the lack of self-discipline, and the all too frequent disregard of the available knowledge on how to keep mentally and spiritually alive under such conditions.

I want now to summarize some of the more positive values which I feel that I have gained from these three and a half strenuous years—physically, mentally, spiritually. Here are some of them:

1. Although we could have had longer visits from persons with a deep concern for the pacifist way of living, and even though we would have profited from long periods of living in camp, such as the Warings and Eatons have carried out, we have been given many opportunities to meet outstanding leaders in various fields of human endeavor—educational, economic, political, and religious.

People like Roland Bainton, E. Stanley Jones, Haradas Mazumdar, Frank Olmstead, A. J. Muste, Douglas Steere, Roger Wilson and Ray Wilson are not available in normal, civilian life in the same way that they have been in CPS. That has been one of its strengths. The women visitors have been far too few in view of the special service they could have rendered, but people like Irene Pickard, Ruth Seabury, and Katherine Whiteside Taylor have done a great deal during these past months to lift the tone of our living and thinking.

2. Living over a period of many months, in the intimate way in which one is forced to live in CPS, means that nearly everyone has made some friends who will be lifelong friends. And these friendships are in many instances very deep, for the experiences through which we have passed have been such as to demand such depth in our personal relationships. Those who have shared with a small group of men in common work, common worship, common study, and common recreation have experienced something which gives significance to the word fellowship.

Had Friends remembered their often discovered truth that such fellowship is best fostered in small units, and had they come forth with the necessary

funds to support such small units, there would have been even more such friendships developed in this period. Had the men come to know that only by a variety of shared experiences can one develop the fullest fellowship, there would have been greater resemblance between CPS and "the beloved communities" of religious literature.

3. For many of us these years have caused us to re-examine our vocations and ourselves to see whether or not we have been contributing the most possible to society. Bull sessions in camp, long hours of discussion while felling trees or painting buildings, and whole days of work alone, even if on comparatively insignificant work, have given many of us a new sense of vocational direction. Among others, I feel fairly "clear" now as to what I want to do and can best do. Whether I find that perfect situation still remains problematical. The personnel program, especially in these latter months, has been particularly helpful in this respect. Like a great many other things in CPS—and in life—it was started too late and could have been much better administered, but it has been helpful.

4. For some men, CPS has meant a monotonous experience on one job in one camp. For some that has been partially by choice, because they did not want to go on detached service or did not feel they could fit easily into it, or because they wanted to remain nearer home, or because they dreaded moving. For those of us who have had a variety of work experiences, I believe the time has gone faster, and the years have been more fruitful. Having been in several camps and units, I feel this variety has been good. There was much more significant work which we could and should have done, but within the framework imposed by Selective Service and Congress (and ourselves), there have been some openings for varied experiences such as acting as guinea pigs, working with the mentally handicapped, helping prevent soil erosion, and manuring the forests.

In all these projects, I have learned something. I have been privileged as well to be in camps of both Mennonites and Friends, which I consider one of my most valuable gains from these years. I sincerely believe that the restrictive policies of the Mennonites tend towards an ingrowth and narrowness which is definitely bad. I also believe that the mixture of tolerance and an unwarranted belief that they can deal with all kinds

of people, have led Friends too far in the other direction. Had Friends striven for more uniformity among the men assigned to their camps, and at the same time worked harder to help those pacifists with a different conception of conscientious objection, there might have been less frustration among *both* types of C. O.'s.

5. The diversity of men in CPS, however, has had some positive points in its favor. In the conglomeration of men called a CPS community, one has had to work and eat alongside men from widely different backgrounds. Often the shared experiences have been limited to those two, plus the close association in the barracks or dormitories. But even that partial sharing of life has broadened most of us. Talking, listening, asking questions, observing men who were Jehovah's Witnesses, Christadelphians or so-called agnostics; socialists, Henry George disciples, or reactionary Republicans stimulates one's thinking and affects one's actions. Some of this diversity, but not all of it by any means, would have been lost had there been an earlier and more marked differentiation among those believing in religiously-controlled camps and those believing in government-controlled camps.

6. These many months of CPS have developed in most of us an increased social consciousness. Although never harshly treated, we have nevertheless experienced something of what it means to be a minority group. We have lived with Negroes and seen them discriminated against, and that is quite different from hearing about such discrimination or talking race relations. We have shared the thinking and experiences of labor leaders, cooperators, small community advocates, internationalists, and others. Consciously or unconsciously we are in varying degrees socially more sensitive.

7. Likewise, our idealism has been tempered by experience. Personally, I do not feel that is bad. Many of us could help any group interested in Utopian communities to see where their experiments would probably fail. We have learned the need for privacy; we have seen how few idealists are capable of manual labor; we have learned how hard it is to agree upon the mechanics of community living, so that the energy of all concerned may be freed for more important tasks. To those who leave CPS with that knowledge and without having become embittered or cynical,