

The Forestry Corps on Review

THE initial enrollment period of the Emergency Conservation Corps ended September 30. Three hundred thousand young men whose summer work camps have dotted the forest areas of the country from ocean to ocean were "mustered out," and at the same time given the opportunity to "reenlist" for another six-month period. Early in the month, estimates of the probable drop-out ranged from twenty-five to fifty per cent, but the Administration anticipated no difficulty in filling the vacancies, and plans have gone ahead full-speed for a program of winter camps winter work for 300,000 men. Camps already built which work in the woods or in the open country can advantageously done during winter months are being put in condition to keep the men warm and comfortable while new camps are being located to replace those in regions where winter work is impracticable. Some twenty-five new camps are to be established in the Tennessee Basin to integrate with that project, while as many more new camps will be established on areas recently acquired in connection with the \$20,000,000 acquisition program.

It is too early for a conclusive appraisal of the Emergency Conservation project but certainly the experiment thus far has well demonstrated its worth and the soundness of its conception. Criticism there has been, some of it justified, more of it unjustified and indulged in by uninformed or prejudiced persons who sometimes magnified small or exceptional troubles. It would have been a miracle indeed for any undertaking of similar magnitude and involving almost a half million men from all walks of life to have been put underway without some criticism. It was to be expected that a certain number of undesirable characters would be enrolled in the haste to organize the project and provide work as quickly as possible. It was to be expected, too, that the heavy machinery of Government, strained under other large projects, with responsibility divided between departments and with participation by forty-eight states involved, would not move with exact precision. That the project has been organized and carried through its initial period with so few delays and so little cause for merited criticism is in itself high tribute to the organizing and cooperating ability of the responsible Federal and state agencies.

Putting the undertaking on review as it has now "struck its stride" and assuming that it will continue along the same purpose lines, the project, we believe, will go down in history as one of the great accomplishments of President Roosevelt's administration. Those intimately familiar with the many camps, the men in them, and the diversified work radiating from them must admit the far-reaching value of the project in point of relief to the 300,000 men enrolled, to

their dependents and to the hundreds of communities adjacent to the camps. They must also credit the great amount of work which these young men have done and are still doing. Their activities have been many and diverse and although values may not be immediately apparent it is work that will bear fruit in years to come. The money spent represents capital investments in the building of a better America. In its larger significance, the C. C. C. may well mark the definite close of an age of destructive exploitation of natural resources and the dawn of an era of restoring and conserving wealth producing processes of nature.

But there are weak links in the Civilian Conservation Corps as now operating. One is its educational side. Commenting editorially some months ago this magazine expressed the opinion that the educational opportunity offered by the project forms the key to its highest ultimate success. Amid the stress, confusion and difficulties of organizing the projects, the educational side, unfortunately, has been forced into a secondary and incidental place. For the project as a whole it lacks organization, definite purpose and specialized personnel. In many camps where there happens to be someone interested, educational opportunities are being well met, but in great numbers of camps, one finds educational activities disorganized, uncoordinated and inadequately formulated. And as between camps, there appears to be no unity of educational purpose or program. In just as far as these lacks continue the project will settle on a plane of material work, and the human significance of it all will remain dull, hazy and questionable in the minds of the 300,000 youths performing it. What seems specifically called for is centralized organization of educational activities, including formulation of a corps program by competent educators and adequate provision for carrying it out systematically.

Another respect in which the project is open to criticism is the taint of political patronage given it by an order issued last July requiring that men needed to refill certain supervisory positions be selected from names recommended by local Congressmen. Limited though the order is in its application, it nevertheless colors the project with the name and influence of patronage and raises the constant threat of further politicalization. Once the project in the eyes of the public receives the label of political patronage fair recognition of the value of the work will be impossible, public support will turn cold and the whole undertaking will come to an untimely end. In the interests of preserving the high-purpose integrity of the project and of assuring its rightful consideration as a permanent instrument in promoting social and economic welfare, the Administration should rescind at once the order in question.

