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LABOR PROBLEM BIG ON CANAL

PANAMA WORKERS GET HIGH WAGES

Men on the Isthmus Beginning to Look Around for Other Jobs—Some Government is Despotic. Colonel Goethals has Troubles

By GEORGE PALMER PUTNAM.

In thinking of the men who are building the Panama Canal remember that over 5000 Americans are down there on the Isthmus, and with them about 30,000 foreigners. Of the latter, some 25,000 are West Indians, chiefly from Jamaica, and the balance from Spain, Italy and neighboring Central America.

The task of getting labor for the Canal work proved one of grave difficulties at the outset. Many experiments were tried, for the climatic conditions were of the worst, when construction commenced, and it was not only difficult to get labor to go to Panama but even harder to keep it alive after it was imported. For instance, in the days when the French were trying to build the Canal, back in the nineties, the experiment of importing Chinese labor was tried. But so many of the celestials perished from disease, or took the suicide route to get away from their worldly troubles, that this source of supply was permanently abandoned.

Negroes Prove Best. The negro laborer has proved himself the best adapted to work under the peculiar conditions found on the Canal Zone. His standard wage is ten cents an hour, a few getting 15 and even 20 cents for exceptional work.

At the outset in order to get the requisite amount of labor it was necessary to recruit extensively. In this way 11,797 workers were brought from Europe, chiefly from Spain, and a balance making a total of 43,432 from the West Indian islands.

All Isthmian labor is divided into two classes, the "gold employees" and the "silver employees." The

former is made up of the officials, clerical force, construction men and skilled artisans, and the "silver" constitute the ordinary laborers. As indicated by their title, one class is paid in gold, or U. S. currency, and the other in Panamanian silver.

Pay Scale High.

Since the Americans took hold at Panama in 1904 the wage scale has been extremely high, probably higher than ever before on any construction work. Wages average from 25 to 100 per cent more than in the eastern United States, and in addition to this the employees receive many perquisites, such as free quarters and cheap food, an interesting subject that will be touched upon in next week's article. The high pay scale was necessary in the early days to get suitable labor to come to the Isthmus, for when the health conditions were such that every third man was always in the hospital and the death rate was appalling, it required big financial inducements to get and keep men.

Now, however, sanitary conditions are almost model, and the pay scale is out of all proportion to the situation. The result is that there is more demand for positions than there are positions to be filled. From this spring on to the completion time the enrollment will gradually be diminished. It is very probable that the force that will operate the canal after completion, which probably will number more than 2500 Americans, will work for wages about the normal received for similar labor in the north.

Men Looking for Berths

Already the "home stretch" spirit is in the air on the Zone and "the boys" are beginning to look around for new berths.

It is surprising to know how many have invested in Northwest farm and orchard lands. Apparently salesmen have been working pretty industriously down there, and as everyone gets good wages and is apt to be pretty sick of the Tropics it has been easy to find investors in homes in the cool Northwest.

Perhaps a third of the men are planning to remain on the job, with the operating force, if they can get positions. The rest will scatter over the earth. Quite a few will move on to South America, and many will locate throughout Central America, doubtless doing much to hasten the development of that rich but very backward territory.

Government is Despotic.

Nowhere in the world, at least in the English speaking portion of the world, is there such a despotic and

"one-man" government as that which exists over our 445 square miles of Canal Zone.

Colonel G. W. Goethals, the army-engineer chairman for the Canal Commission, is the dictator. What he says "goes", and goes with a vengeance. If you don't like what the Colonel does to you, or doesn't do to you, you have the privilege of getting off the Canal Zone.

The Chairman is supreme. He knows everything that goes on in his little empire, and he not only bosses all the big details of the actual construction work but he watches over the domestic affairs of his variegated family of some 70,000 persons, of all conditions of race, creed and color, not to mention morality and immorality.

All of which means that the men on the job have very little to do but their work, and lack other responsibilities. For instance, they have no franchise, for there is nothing to vote for, if they had one.

So the time which in the United States might be devoted to larger matters at Panama often goes to petty troubles, and gossip and friction, social and official, is a big item in the routine life of the workers and their families.

Sunday Sessions Unique.

One of the really unique features of Colonel Goethals' regime is his regular Sunday morning session at his office at Culebra, when anyone who has a grievance, or thinks he has one, can come and explain his troubles.

"The Colonel" has an ear for everyone, from the poorest laborer to the highest official. Of course some very funny matters are brought out at those meetings. Indeed, it is said that at one time or another all the dirty linen of the Zone is washed by the Chairman, who seems willing to give his time to intimate consideration of his subordinate's difficulties and family quarrels, with just as much thought and gravity as he does to the million dollar matters of the Canal work.

Here is an extract from a verse that very patly describes the sort of thing "The Colonel" is "up against" when the rest of us are going to church—or ought to be.

TELL IT TO THE COLONEL.

If you have any cause to kick, or feel disposed to howl, if things aint running just to suit, and there's a chance to growl, if you have any axe to grind or graft to shuffle through, just put it up to Colonel G., like all the others do.

"Dear sir, the commissary here," writes Mrs. Percy Jones, "is charging me for porterhouse which aint no more than bones.

And I assure you, Colonel, that the pork chops which they sell are rotten. I enclose herewith a sample, just to amell."

Mrs. Hobbs and Mrs. Dobbs are neighbors in a flat. And Mrs. Hobbs calls Mrs. Dobbs a dirty this and that; Then Mrs. Dobbs reciprocates, and maybe both are right. But in the end the Colonel has to arbitrate the fight.

Don't hesitate to state your case, the boss will hear you through; It's true he's sometimes busy and has other things to do; But come on Sunday morning, and line up with the rest— You'll maybe feel some better with the grievance off your chest.

See Colonel Goethals, tell Colonel Goethals.

It's the only right and proper thing to do.

Just write a letter, or, even better, Arrange a little Sunday interview.

MENELY QUARTET MARCH 25

The Menely Quartet of Chicago, with their organ chimes and marimbaphones, and Raymond McCord, impersonator and reader, will appear in Bend on March 25 at Lister's hall. Word recently received from the manager of the company says "they are appearing before packed houses everywhere and are enthusiastically received as the strongest number on the course." Without doubt Bend people have never listened to such a musical treat as that which awaits them next Monday night. Tickets at the window 50c.

CHURCH SERVICES.

Baptist Church—Corner Hawthorne and Oregon Streets. This church is occupied jointly by the Baptist and Presbyterian congregations. All the appointments are federated under the leadership of Revs. I. I. Gorby and H. B. Foskett, who speak regularly on alternate Sundays. Calendar of services: Sunday—Bible school at 10 a. m., public worship and sermon at 11; Juniors at 3 p. m.; Christian Endeavor at 6:30; people's service at 7:30. Wednesday—Prayer and social meeting at 7:30 p. m. Thursday—Choir rehearsal at 7:30. A full chorus under the leadership of Miss Marion Wiest, with soloists and orchestra, makes the musical service especially attractive and inspiring. Strangers are especially invited to all meetings. All are cordially welcome. Come and get our grip of welcome and worship with us.

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is always demanded by the stylish dresser, and we cater to this discrimination by keeping all styles in stock for the season. We would like to show you some stunning creations from the best hat factories, with wide and narrow brim, high and low crowns, in all sizes, and in all shades too.

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STARTS LIFE AS CITY

Silver Lake Incorporates and Plans First Municipal Election.

SILVER LAKE, March 18—Last week a municipal ticket was named by local voters for Silver Lake's first city election, for now that the County Court has approved the articles of incorporation for the town it will proceed to the municipal election. The following is the ticket named: Mayor, Charles S. Reed; Marshal, E. Nichols; Treasurer, E. A. Reed; Recorder, G. W. Marvin; Councilmen, S. W. Martin, E. G. Graves, A. N. McCall, J. B. Gilliam, J. S. Wakefield, and J. H. Gowdy.

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