

# California Builds Highways to Rebuild Men

*Prison labor camps set example to world in convict rehabilitation; men paid daily wages, and work without armed guards or within walls of confinement.*

*By a Staff Correspondent of  
The Christian Science Monitor*

**SAN FRANCISCO**—Success of prison labor camps in rebuilding prisoners' character through construction of state highways in California has reached a new high point with completion of the scenic \$8,000,000 Carmel-San Simeon highway.

Attention has been focused anew on the California prison road camp system that has as its ultimate goal the rehabilitation of men serving prison terms. More spectacular to the public, however, is the periodic publicity afforded through the construction of a new piece of state highway. But the making over of prisoners into co-operating citizens is the larger task—although slower and less apparent.

Other states employ prison labor in the building of state highways, but California claims to have the most progressive system in the world. Development began in 1923 when the Legislature passed a prison labor camp law framed by Julian H. Alco, prison expert of San Francisco.

## Nations Study System

European nations recently have been studying this system, which emphasizes the well-being and future citizenship of prisoners selected to work on the roads. It is reported other states are framing similar legislation.

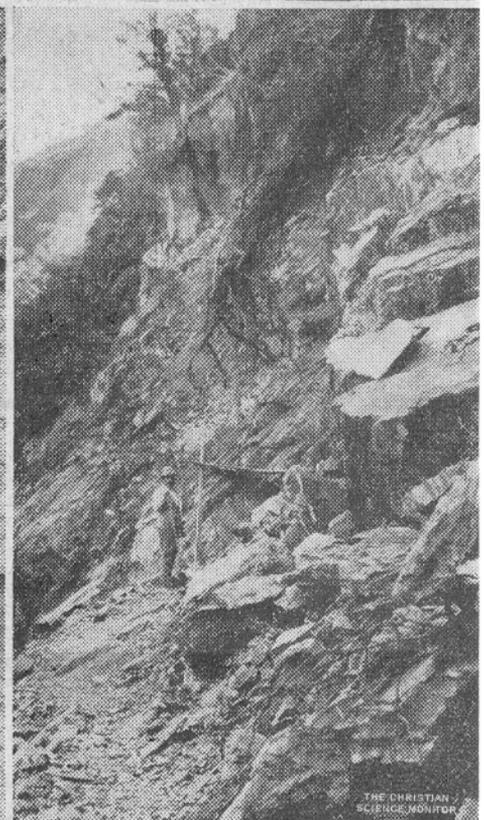
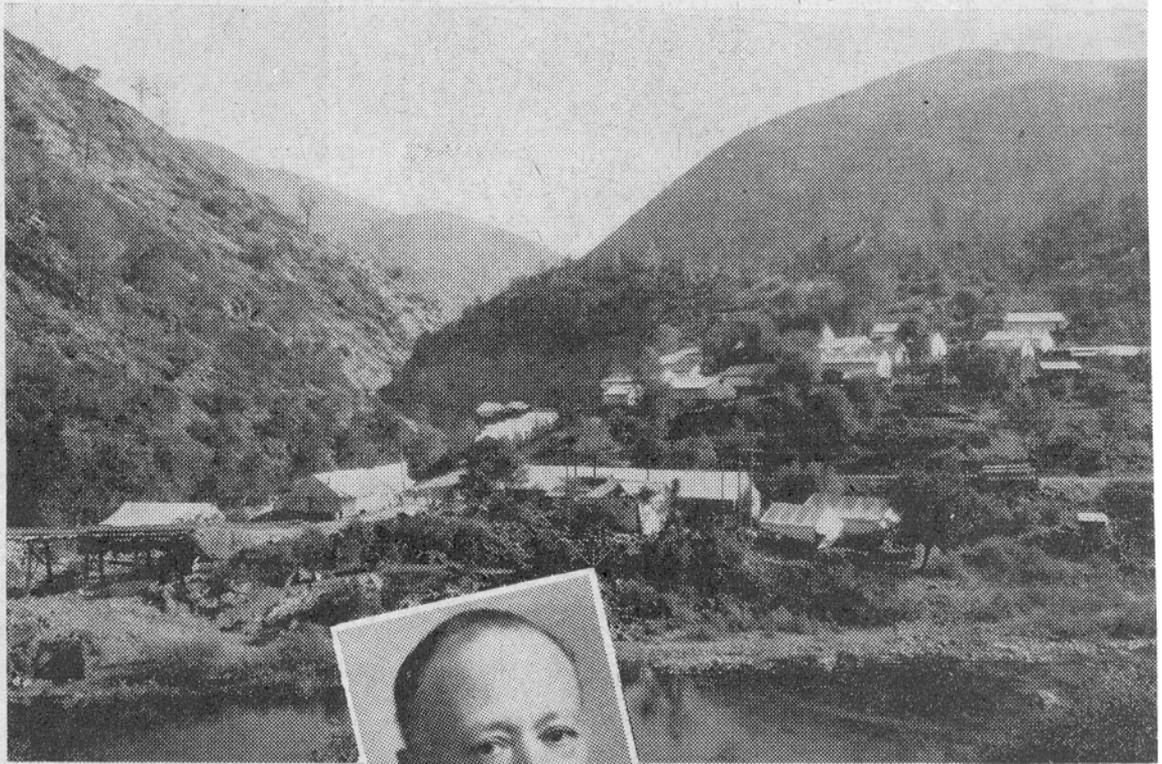
California prison road camps differ from those in other states in four main essentials:

1. A daily wage of \$2.50 is paid each prisoner.
2. Prisoners are not chained, nor are armed guards present with work gangs.
3. There are no walls around road camps—only camp boundaries pointed out by the unarmed camp head.
4. The men are free, when they return from the day's work, to fish, play games or otherwise amuse themselves.

The fact that startles most prison authorities, according to Mr. Alco who has just returned from a survey of prisons abroad, is that approximately only 1 per cent of the prisoners escape.

## Easy to Escape

It would be easy for the men to escape from the camps or from their jobs on the road, but several things deter them. There is in the



California State Department of Public Works; Moore and Clarke

## Rehabilitating Prisoners in the California Hills

Inset—Julian H. Alco, Prison Authority  
Upper—Camp for Prisoners Working on California Highways  
Lower Left—Trucks Play Important Part in Highway Construction  
Lower Right—Cutting Road Through Difficult Section of Mountain Terrain

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first instance, considerable competition among prisoners for road gang jobs and they are selected only after passing rigid physical examination and close scrutiny of their records in prison. Once on the job, they are paid \$2.50 a day, out of which are deducted living expenses. It is estimated they can save about 75 cents a day. If there is an escape from the camp prisoners at that camp are assessed \$200—the reward for the prisoner's return. And the prisoner, when caught, receives an additional five-year sentence. It is to the financial advantage of all prisoners in the road camp therefore to keep fellow prisoners in line.

If the prisoner has no dependents on state relief rolls he may save the 75 cents a day to be given him when his term is up. When compared with the regulation new suit and \$10 bill this is considerable with which to face the world. If he has relatives outside two-thirds of this, or 50 cents, goes to them, thus helping to cut state relief costs.

But the most important factor in keeping men in camp is the stipulation of the Alco law that for each two days on road camp work the prisoner gets three days off his sentence. For eight months' work on the highways one year is deducted from his sentence.

The state, it is reported by Mr.

Also have saved hundreds of thousands of dollars through this system, as well as rehabilitating the men. With prisons crowded, taking from 800 to 1000 men out on the road has aided in alleviating that condition. With men earning their keep the cost to the state for their upkeep is reduced. With men aiding families on relief the state's relief burden is reduced. And finally, the construction of roads in districts where the cost of free labor would be prohibitive, has been relatively inexpensive, and beneficial to the state as a vacation center. It is pointed out by prison officials that one reason the road camp idea works so well here is that work can be carried on nearly all the year.

Prominent state highways that have been constructed by prison labor are the Yosemite National Park, "all year road"; Klamath River road to General Grant National Park, Kern River Canyon road; roads in Lake county; and the Ukiak-Tahoe road. These with the new Carmel-San Simeon highway are considered among the finest in the state.

Mr. Alco, declares that it is his opinion after visiting the major prisons of the world that California leads all in the direction of fitting the prisoner to become a stable citizen. He says that in his estimation

there is nothing in prison that could be constructive towards preparing a man for his return to society; he gets into mental ruts that are impossible to iron out until he comes out of prison—and what employer, he asks, wants to employ a man who has to be ironed out "after" he is released. He also points out what is usually recognized, that a man rarely can return to the position he held, or one similar to it, when he is released.

#### Points to Solution

The solution, he says is found in the field of physical labor. Here there is little unionization, little required except that a man work hard, and be physically able to take care of himself. Therefore Mr. Alco argues, that a man prepared for this type of labor in serving his prison term is ready to go out and get a similar job as soon as he is released.

Proof of his contention that the road camp system is effective lies in the report, he says, that seldom does a man who has worked on a road camp either break his parole, or is returned to prison on a second offense. The road camp is a school of training, Mr. Alco maintains, that fits the men mentally, morally, to a better degree than inside the prisons, and physically to go back into organized society.