

FRIENDS
CIVILIAN PUBLIC SERVICE

STATEMENT OF POLICY

AMERICAN FRIENDS SERVICE COMMITTEE
TWENTY SOUTH TWELFTH STREET . PHILADELPHIA, PENNSYLVANIA

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Statement of Friends Civilian Public Service Policy

Every citizen of the United States has certain rights and certain responsibilities. These are ultimately determined by the moral and religious principles upon which our form of government is founded. While the exercise of these rights may be variously limited in a period of emergency by legislative enactment or executive order, it is one of the premises of our form of government that the rights of citizens should be preserved. The Selective Service and Training Act of 1940 recognizes the right of exemption from military service of those who are conscientiously opposed to war by reason of religious training and belief.

Historical Background

In order to understand the policy of the American Friends Service Committee in regard to Civilian Public Service it is necessary to be familiar with the history and development of the program since the Selective Service and Training bill was introduced in Congress in 1940.

The history of the Bill until its enactment has been outlined by E. Raymond Wilson in Memo No. 14 of the Friends War Problems Committee dated January 27, 1943, entitled "Some Notes on the Evolution of the Provisions for Conscientious Objectors in the Selective Training and Service Act of 1940."

After the passage of the Selective Service Act, Dr. Clarence A. Dykstra was appointed Director of Selective Service and Colonel Lewis B. Hershey Assistant Director. Representatives of the American Friends Service Committee were in frequent conference with them and others in Selective Service, and plans were worked out for the establishment of Civilian Public Service Camps under the direction and control of the Brethren, Friends and Mennonites as a first step in providing work of national importance under civilian control.

The National Service Board for Religious Objectors was established to meet the requirement of Selective Service that it have one agency to deal with instead of many. As no appropriation had been made to cover the expenses of the camps, the Brethren, Friends and Mennonites were asked by Dr. Dykstra to finance them until July 1, 1941, by which time it was hoped an appropriation sufficient to cover camp operation might be obtained. This course was followed, but subsequent developments made it clear that the whole program would be endangered by a request to Congress for an appropriation. In this way it came about that the American Friends Service Committee agreed to carry on its share of the program within the limits of its financial ability, first during the last half of 1941, then through 1942, and now through 1943.

These facts stand out:

(1) That Friends opposed conscription in principle, but when it became inevitable, bent their energies to obtain exemption of conscientious objectors from military service, not on the basis of membership in the historic peace churches, as in the 1917 Act, but on the basis of the individual's conscience as to participation in war;

(2) that the provision for conscientious objectors in the Selective Service Act was the best that could be obtained from Congress, though not what Friends and other pacifist groups desired;

(3) that the American Friends Service Committee undertook to share in the setting up and administration of Civilian Public Service, first, to secure the maximum opportunity possible under the Selective Service Act, for conscientious objectors to act in accordance with their beliefs; second, to give a continued demonstration even in the face of war and destruction, of the power of spiritual forces to overcome evil and create a free and peaceful society through cooperation and service;

(4) that in setting up the Civilian Public Service Camps it was contemplated that they would be only one of several avenues of doing work of national importance, both at home and abroad, under civilian direction, and it was hoped that they might be financed by public funds. Public financing of privately operated camps having proved impossible, Friends thus far have deemed it better to carry on the camps with the private funds rather than to lose the advantages of private operation. In this way it has been possible to provide for the great majority of the conscientious objectors.

Attitude Toward Conscription

The Service Committee's participation in the Civilian Public Service program does not imply its approval of conscription. It has continued its basic disapproval of the entire war system, involving as it does conscription of the lives and service of men, as contrary to the moral and religious principles on which the Committee is founded.

The Committee, however, has felt its chief responsibility is for something more than protest. It has sought to establish within the framework of the Selective Service Act the greatest possible freedom for conscientious objectors to express their convictions. Though the Act does not establish a thoroughly satisfactory status for the conscientious objector, it represents a great advance over the Selective Service Act of 1917 and leaves opportunity through administration and interpretation to work out a far more liberal policy in practice than the minimum actually required.

Civilian Public Service Camps Not Exclusive

The American Friends Service Committee is anxious to extend the opportunity for service under its direction to any conscientious objector who wants to express his convictions in this way, regardless of his race, creed, or color. Its policy is to accept any man assigned to Friends Civilian Public Service after classification 4-E; also, any man paroled while serving a sentence for violating the Selective Service Act on grounds of conscience, provided the man wishes to cooperate in a Friends' camp. The committee does not accept a man who objects to being paroled to Friends' Civilian Public Service.

The Service Committee does not wish to make Civilian Public Service the sole program of service for conscientious objectors. It hopes that the character of the Civilian Public Service program and its administration will be such that most men can find in it opportunities for worthwhile service consistent with their beliefs, despite the limitations imposed by conscription and the war. But it has no desire to be responsible for men who do not wish to be in Civilian Public Service. The Committee is, therefore, engaged in exploration and negotiation with the government, with a view to securing its approval of further programs of work for conscientious objectors, completely outside the jurisdiction of the private religious agencies.

Financial Support

The financial support of the Friends' Civilian Public Service program depends entirely upon the free contributions of the men in camps, their families, the churches to which they belong, the members of the Religious Society of Friends, and others who believe in the rights of conscience. Through their voluntary assumption of this financial burden, these contributors demonstrate their confidence in the power of constructive goodwill in time of war.

In appealing for contributions to Civilian Public Service, the American Friends Service Committee stresses the significance and needs of the total program, rather than attempting to secure funds to meet the expenses of individual men. It levies no charge against any individual or group. Financial support is not a prerequisite for the enrollment of a man in Civilian Public Service.

The American Friends Service Committee is committed to the carrying on of the program only to the extent of its financial ability, and it emphasizes that Civilian Public Service contributions should not be made at the expense of other worthy enterprises.

Administration of Civilian Public Service Camps

It may be interesting to examine the administrative relationship which has grown up between governmental and private agencies particularly as it relates to the democratic maintenance of discipline in the camps. The American Friends Service Committee regards discipline as an essential of effective camp operation. This discipline can be achieved only by constant effort and practice. The difficulties of self-discipline are increased by the fact that men coming into Civilian Public Service camps have to face a number of extremely difficult adjustments. The first efforts to help a man with such adjustments may be ineffective, and as the process continues, not only must he be helped to adjust to his situation, but attempts must be made to place him where he can perform his best service.

A man classified 4-E retains his civilian status even after being called to duty in Civilian Public Service. On entering a Civilian Public Service Camp, however, a man becomes a member of a conspicuous minority group. He can no longer act in a manner which will draw the attention of the public without the group being the object of that attention. In exercising his civil liberties each member of Civilian Public Service should therefore endeavor to behave in a way that recognizes his full responsibility to the group.

The Service Committee operates within a framework which, in some respects, is extremely rigid. Many of the requirements are not of the Committee's making. Furloughs, leaves, hours of work, and certain other conditions of camp life have been prescribed for all of the camps in regulations drawn up by Selective Service. The Committee believes that these regulations do not preclude the development of a satisfactory community life and has accepted them.

The Committee, however, has felt it essential to its operation of the camps that the maintenance of discipline be in its hands. In undertaking this responsibility the Service Committee must accept and respect the Selective Service framework. There have been ques-

tions as to whether this framework leaves room for democracy in the operation of the camps. The American Friends Service Committee believes that it does. It is convinced that camp participation in discipline and operation is not only possible, but essential.

The nature of a responsibility is such that it can be delegated only to those who are willing and able to accept it. Generally speaking, it has been the Committee's hope that the responsibilities which Selective Service was originally willing to delegate to it might be passed from it to the Camp Director, and from him to the men in the camps. This passing of responsibilities has had to be a two-way matter. The camps have had to demonstrate their willingness to accept in full the responsibilities which they have desired, and the Camp Director has been obligated, either to see that the men in the camp accepted the responsibility, or to assume it himself, if there was reluctance or incapacity on the part of the men to do so.

The Service Committee has an obligation to see that both the Camp Directors and the men understand and accept the share which they have wished to take. The democratic process is not superimposed upon a camp community; it develops with the realization that freedom from outside authority entails acceptance of responsibility within the camp.

As was to be expected, the implications of this process were not fully recognized by all at the outset of the Civilian Public Service program. In some cases our responsibilities have not been satisfactorily met. These failures have been passed on to Selective Service in such a way as to lead them to further restrict the Committee's freedom to operate. The Service Committee has become increasingly aware of this situation and is resolved that the responsibilities which it has accepted shall in the future be met so as to give Selective Service no cause for further restrictions on the liberties that both the Committee and the men in camp desire.

This does not mean that the American Friends Service Committee would accept without question all future restrictions which Selective Service might think it wise to impose upon its operation of the camps. However, in the light of the sympathetic understanding which General Lewis B. Hershey and others of his staff have demonstrated in matters of this sort, it is not anticipated that any serious difficulties will arise on this account.

Work Projects

The American Friends Service Committee considers that those who enter Civilian Public Service incur an obligation to do an honest piece of work on any projects of national importance assigned by Selective Service that have no material military significance. It maintains, moreover, that all men grow in inward strength as they learn to use hands and back as well as head in the interests of other men.

This does not mean, however, a passive acceptance of any work program. As in the administration of an individual camp, the American Friends Service Committee believes that it and the government must work out policies together. Although Selective Service reserves the legal right to define work of national importance, the Service Committee entered the program with the understanding that no work would be assigned which was of material military significance, and that every endeavor would be made to evolve programs of fundamental national importance both in the United States and in foreign countries. This is a slow process and requires much patience, but the Committee feels it can go forward so long as real effort at progress is being made.

The Service Committee has always found its special task in work with the unfortunate and the embittered, work where the pacifist can use his skill in dispelling fear and suspicion from areas where prejudice and poverty have created rifts in human society. It has been especially concerned with the relief of war victims and the reconstruction of war devastated countries. Progress toward this type of work has been slow, but there has been continued discussion with Selective Service and other government agencies and officials looking toward the conservation of human as well as material resources both in this country and abroad. In both fields, the American Friends Service Committee wishes to emphasize long range programs rather than emergency projects, since the seeds of war and hatred take root in the human injustice and poverty of years of peace as well as of war.

Whereas the work project is the chief purpose during most of the hours of the camp day, the Committee would also stress the importance of other aspects of camp life. It offers no creed, no formal religious practices, but it believes that all life and therefore all camp life should be religious in spirit. It feels that in the simple organization of group living, basic problems of social responsibility are met

and social theories are tested by the stubborn facts of imperfect human material and the need for constructive personal and group discipline.

The American Friends Service Committee is also concerned to develop increased opportunities for education. It urges men to pick up useful skills in kitchen and on project, to work out language study and discussion groups in the limited hours of freedom from the work program. It looks to work in hospitals and other human service projects as invaluable training and it is working for more courses of full-time study. Above all, the American Friends Service Committee hopes that the men in Civilian Public Service will learn from each other and from their own successes and failures in meeting the trials of Civilian Public Service the humble and searching attitude which is the beginning of true religion.

