800 Youths Join
In Manual Tasks
At Work Camps

National Movement Attracts
Students to Program of
Practical Democracy

BY BENJAMIN FINE

Growing at a remarkable rate, work camps have been established this Summer in forty communities throughout the country, attracting nearly 800 young men and women—just about double the attendance a year ago. While the majority are college students, youth from all walks of life have been enrolled.

Under private, religious or charitable auspices, the camps provide an opportunity for persons between the ages of 16 and 24 to combine study with recreation. A definite program has been established, whereby the democratic ideal is stressed; it is hoped that four weeks in a work camp will make the individual into a better citizen and a more cooperative member of his community.

Back in 1933 the first camp, under the direction of the American Friends Service Committee, was formed in this country. It was highly experimental, based on European experiences in this direction.

Actually, the first European work camp was started in 1920 by a Swiss pacifist, Pierre Ceresole, with the assistance of the Fellowship of Reconciliation and the Society of Friends. He brought together a group of German and French youth—some of whom had fought each other two years before—at Verdun, and on the very battlefield where bloodshed had taken place, peace and harmony were developed.

Idea Fostered in Germany

Rapidly the movement spread throughout Europe, gaining its greatest following in Germany. In fact, the Brüning government subsidized the camps in 1931; that year 250,000 German youth were enrolled, and from all accounts, enjoyed their labor service immensely. Unfortunately, when Adolf Hitler came into power in 1933, he took over the work camps, as he did the schools, press, radio and other aspects of German life, coordinating them into his Nazi pattern.

However, the work camp idea was not discredited, even though Hitler misused the program. In this country substantial support for the establishment of such camps has been received from prominent educators. President Harry D. Gideon of Brooklyn College in his last annual report advocated a term of labor service for every student.

Much of the impetus for the work camp movement is coming from
Rebuilding New England Dam

A rural New England Work Camp is being conducted at the Northampton Center, N.H. With the assistance of the town, which has provided $1,200 for materials, the students attending the camp will construct a trail, build a bridge, and construct buildings and facilities. By restoring the dam, they will recreate Kilton Pond, which covered sixty-four acres of what is now a grassy area and can currently be used for recreational purposes. It will restore to cultivation fifty acres of arable land.

At the Mountain Region Work Camp at Montagle, Tenn., also under the direction of the Internatonal Student Service, high in the Cumberland Mountains, the students are working with residents to help develop native talent. Not far distant at Mauldin, S.C., the Cotton Region Work Camp is to be a center for a vocational training school for black youth. The camp is sponsored by the Southern Negro American Women's Institute, and the students present are helping to rehabilitate the grounds and buildings of the Goodrich Social Settlement.

An impressive program is underway at the Middle Western Work Camp, Hudson, Ohio. The campers are a cosmopolitan group, both white and Negro, with students from thirty-two states, many of them from Kentucky, Indiana, and Louisiana. They are working towards the rehabilitation of the grounds and buildings of the Goodrich Social Settlement.

At the end of a month, proponents of the program believe, the young men and women will return to the communities with a much deeper insight into the problems of this country as a whole. Citizenship is stressed; democracy is emphasized as a living, day-to-day reality. A primary reason why the work camps have taken root in America today.