

Verbundkatalog Kalliope

Blackouts.

Mann, Erika

ca. Datierung v. Stuart D. Ferguson

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One of the most serious affects of blackouts in wartime is the loss in working hours occasioned by the lack of illumination. Without light by which to perform their tasks, workers are obliged to lay down their tools, the wheels of industry slacken, and production of vital war-time necessities suffers in consequence. It is interesting and heartening to know that when and if blackouts become a common occurrence in the cities of the United States there will be many small factories and workshops across the country where national defense production will go on as usual, with no slackening of pace and no loss of time. For the men and women who toil in those workshops are blind, and to them a war-time blackout is nothing more than an incident in the dark stream of time. Most of them have lived their lives in blackouts, and by courageous application and effort have learned now to make those lives useful and productive without benefit of sight.

And so when the lights go down, and other workers are obliged to interrupt their production effort, there will be more than 2000 blind men and women in 54 workshops across the continent who will go calmly about their patriotic work turning out the mops and brooms, the deck-swabs and pillow-cases, the mattresses and the khaki twill trousers that are as necessary to the equipping of Uncle Sam's Army and Navy as are the more spectacular items on the national defense list.

The nerve center of this unusual working unit is the American Foundation for the Blind, 15 West 16th St., New York City, which has set up an affiliated non-profit marketing agency called National Industries for the Blind to function in a liaison capacity between the

federal departments purchasing blind-made products and the various workshops for sightless workers equipped to handle the work. Three of these workshops are situated on the west coast, at Los Angeles, San Diego and Oakland, California, respectively.

From this section of the country , which has already experienced frequent blackouts since December 7, comes the first report of the behavior and morale of blind workers under war-time conditions. R. V. Chandler, Superintendent of the Industrial Home for the Adult Blind in Oakland, where more than 100 blind men and women are engaged on national defense orders, writing to the American Foundation for the Blind states that the only apparent change or departure from the regular routine there since the declaration of war has been a voluntary increase in production effort.

Last year, when the word "blackout" was beginning to creep into the American vocabulary, Mr. Chandler and his associates decided to see just what effect such an occurrence might have on the work routine of the blind workers. Accordingly, for one week, at frequently intervals all lights in the workshop were turned out. The sightless men and women continued with their work as though nothing had happened. The few sighted workers who are part of the personnel of the home were slightly handicapped and were obliged to use small pencil-point flash lights to thread needles, adjust tensions, etc.. The partially sighted operators (none of the workers has more than 10 per cent vision) were elated to find that they did not really need to use their small percentage of vision to keep on working, and since that time they have practiced working entirely by touch, with bandages over their eyes, in order that a blackout may make no difference whatever to their working efficiency.

The totally blind, who make up the great majority of the workers, were able to carry on without the slightest inconvenience or slowing up of the production line.

As for the morale of the workers, Mr. Chandler says it has been of the highest, not only with ~~their~~ regard to their attitude toward their work under normal conditions, but during the current blackouts as well.

Provisions for the protection of the men and women during blackouts in workshops for the blind on the west coast have already been made. Immediately the blackout warning is given, the main switch is pulled, plunging the entire institution, factories, offices, and dormitories in darkness. In the matron's office, where the central switchboard is located, and in the entire hospital unit, heavy black curtains have been provided for all lower windows. Higher windows have been blacked out with a mixture of white kalsomine and lamp black which is easily applied, inexpensive, dries quickly, and is lasting but easily removed. All areas in the buildings which are provided with the proper drapes and other blackout precautions have a supply of candles immediately accessible.

All residents of the home are warned to remain away from windows, and all night employees, such as watchmen, janitors, matrons and nurses - who are, of course, sighted, carry master keys at all times, and have been instructed in the necessary routine for evacuation of the buildings if necessary. Since the workshops have for many years had regular fire drill and evacuation practice, all employees and residents are thoroughly trained in this procedure.

In summing up the feeling of blind workers in wartime Mr. Chandler says: "I am certain that we are reflecting the attitude of every loyal citizen and industry - to ignore all trivialities, and concentrate with unity of purpose on maintaining and surpassing our production quota. It is thus we can best serve our country's needs."