

GET THE EVACUEES OUT!

BY M. MARGARET ANDERSON

Citizens of a large complicated democracy do not always have a chance for direct participation in righting democracy's wrongs, and the remoteness of our effort tends to make us as individuals feel sterile and unimportant and restless. We itch to have a hand in things directly.

There is a job for us----important, specific, calculable.

It is the resettling of our Japanese Americans---their dispersal resettlement out of the government camps where they are now detained into productive jobs around the country for their own---and America's---good. This is no program for the government alone---though the War Relocation Authority, the War Manpower Commission, the War department, and the Department of Justice are behind it; it is no program for the social agencies alone---though the churches, the International Institutes, the American Friends Service committee, the Y's, and other agencies are behind it. It is ultimately the responsibility of the individuals at the base of American communities, for it is there that the evacuee must eventually find his job, his housing, his community acceptance--his assimilation into the American scene.

There are readers who go with us in Common Ground on every thing except those of Japanese descent; there are others who go with us on everything except the Negro or the Jew. But democracy is no such half way process. It is tough belief, and it brooks no emotional with-drawals. We really mean democracy--at home and abroad--or we don't.

It seems crystal clear that against our Japanese Americans democracy has done deep wrong. Evacuated from their West Coast homes in the hysteria that followed Pearl Harbor, over 100,000 people, two-thirds of them native-born American citizens, have been detained now over a year in government camps, euphemistically known as relocation centers but uncomfortably close to concentration camps; detained not on investigated and determined dangerousness to the country, but because they happen to have been born with Japanese faces and names, and because the rest of us--citizens by no better right than the almost 70,000 Nisei, the accidental right of birth--forgot for a moment the story of transplantation that lies behind all American citizenship, were blind to the implications of something that threatened the security of all Americans. For if the United States government can not only evacuate from designated areas but indefinitely detain American citizens, without a hearing, only because of race or nationality background, then no one of us is safe.

To undo the wrong we allowed to happen will not be easy. Wrongs breed evils; and no one can read the account later in these pages of the spiritual crackup of families and individuals in the centers and not realize the size of the social problems we have created for ourselves. We will have need of great imagination and understanding and vision. We will have to ask ourselves how we would have taken a year and a half's arbitrary confinement in our own country because--say--we happened to be of Swedish or Swiss or Italian or German descent and the United States happened to be at war with that ancestral homeland. Would we have been docile evacuees? Could we have remained unembittered? Could we have lost our personal freedom and still have kept our faith in the ultimate justice of the democracy we thought we were part of? We have asked this of Japanese Americans.

For other reasons, too, the job will not be easy. Anti-democratic forces are always better organized and more vocal than the force of goodwill. It is these who see danger of community security in the arrival of a half dozen badly frightened evacuees, cleared by the FBI and the WRA, to take up jobs in their city; who stir up scare editorials and hurl their shameful epithets, "A Jap's a Jap," forgetting that an American--regardless of his descent--is also an American, and if the title is deserved it is because the wearer practices American beliefs. It is these forces who call mass meetings of protest at giving fellow-Americans jobs, even while we import labor from Mexico and the Bahamas and Puerto Rico; who have written a succession of discriminatory laws into state legislation,

a process insidiously creeping eastward until now even as liberal a state as Iowa would ship relocated students of Japanese descent back to the centers. And this, while we engage in a colossal war for the freedom of the common people of the world. America is people, too. It is time we stopped being intoxicated with ourselves and our mission and ideas, and really had a look at what we are doing here at home. It is understandable why we like to look away.

The following pages outline the general resettlement program-what has been accomplished, what remains to be done. The close reader will find many areas in which he can take hold individually and help. If he lives in Cleveland, Chicago, Peoria, Milwaukee, Madison, Detroit, Minneapolis, St. Paul, St. Louis, Denver, Des Moines, or Cincinnati, he can get in touch with local city-wide committees on resettlement already functioning. Elsewhere, he can be on the alert for jobs at prevailing wages and report them to the nearest relocation supervisor of the WRA (addresses in Robert W. Frase's article which follows). He can go quietly about organizing a resettlement committee of public citizens and social agencies in his own town (too early and immature publicity on such a committee lends itself to the creation of scare rumors) to work in connection with the National Committee on Resettlement of Japanese Americans at 297 Fourth Avenue, New York City, (sponsored jointly by the Federal Council of Churches, the Home Missions Council of North America, and the Foreign Missions Conference of North America). He can bestir himself on housing for resettled evacuees, a serious problem in war-boom towns; he can open his own home to them and reward himself with an intensely interesting new contact. He can take some of them under his wing and see they meet people their own age, go to the movies with them, help them pick up the old normal strands of taken-for-granted living, help them find their way back to what they thought at the base of American society-can create the true climate of democracy.

For this is a test of democracy. If we cannot solve so small and tidy a problem as the dispersal resettlement and assimilation of 110,000 people of Japanese descent within our borders, what hope is there for our own 13,000,000 Negroes and for the greatest masses of the people of the world who look hungrily to us for moral leadership?