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REACTIONS TO LABORERS FROM RELOCATION CENTERS*

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● Harvesting the fruit and root crops in one of the intermountain counties for 1943 proved to be a very serious problem. The construction work on a new two-hundred-million-dollar steel plant, a government emergency program, was at its peak. Wages were so attractive that small acreage farmers, in many cases marginal farmers, left their crops and the bigger acreage farmers could not pay competing wages for Caucasian labor. A means of relief was discovered in the manpower of the WRA Centers.

Approximately 680 Japanese Americans and Japanese were employed in this area from July, 1943, until January, 1944—171 working more than 5 months. They worked an approximated total of 21,300 man-days during this period. The crop was 170 per cent normal.

Eighty-five per cent of the workers from the WRA Centers were hired for harvesting and farm work; however, the above total does include some light industry employment. Of the 680 workers who were employed in this county, 75 were Issei, or first generation. These, however, had been released from the camps only after careful investigation and personal declarations of allegiance to the United States. In the questionnaire the only reference to American Japanese was made in question 17, where the employers were asked if, in their way of thinking, there was any difference between Japanese born in Japan and Japanese Americans. The reason for the absence of the term "Japanese American" was to avoid confusion in the

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minds of those filling out the questionnaire. It should be noted that 605, or 88.9 per cent of the workers, were Nisei, or second generation. These were American citizens in good standing.

The average number of persons employed by each of the 43 farmers was 14.8. The wages which were paid varied from 25c an hour to \$2.00 an hour, the average per-hour wage being 76c. Not all the employers listed the crops that the Nisei and Issei harvested for them, but the crops that were listed and the average price per hour for harvesting said crops, as reported by them, are as follows: tomatoes, 72c per hour; potatoes, 75c; peaches, 77c; cabbage, \$1.00; pears, 84c; apples, 73c; hoeing, 60c; common labor, 63c; hay, 60c; prunes, 96c; berries, 65c; cherries, 70c; lima beans, 70c; carrots, 70c; onions, 70c; beets, 65c. Twenty out of the 43 thought that the wages for the Issei and Nisei were too high; 19 thought the wages were fair; 3 were uncertain; 1 made no answer. As to whether these workers gave full value in labor for the money paid, 21 answered yes; 15 answered no; 7 were uncertain. To the question whether there was a direct effort on the part of these people to get unfair wages, 13 answered yes; 8 answered no; 10 were uncertain; 2 made no answer. When asked if they would hire this type of labor again, 22 answered yes; 8 answered no; 10 answered uncertain; 3 gave no answer. In considering whether they employed these laborers only for the reason that there was no other labor available, 38 answered yes and 5 answered no. As to the efficiency of these men, 9 reported them highly efficient; 24, efficient; 9, inefficient; and 1 was undecided.

Frequent reports have been made that the workers deliberately damaged plants and trees; so the question was asked whether the farmers felt any damage was done to plants, trees, or crops by the laborers. Fourteen checked purely accidental; 15, usual damage by any worker; 3, in-

tentional and willful destruction; 7, no damage at all; 4 gave no answer. A factor that has frequently presented a problem has been the use of the Japanese language by laborers employed by Caucasians. In response to the question whether these workmen speak in Japanese generally, sometimes, rarely, never, 8 underlined generally; 22, sometimes; 7, rarely; 6, never. When the farmers were asked if they objected to the laborers talking in their own language, 16 said yes; 24 said no; 3 were uncertain.

An attempt was made to get an estimate of the personal character of the Nisei and Issei from the employers. Hence, the latter were asked whether their employees were law abiding, unmindful of the law, or lawbreakers. Thirty-seven answered law abiding; 2, unmindful of the law; 2, lawbreakers; 2 gave no answer. Regarding the question whether these laborers worked most efficiently under close supervision, occasional inspection, complete freedom, 8 checked close supervision; 24, occasional inspection; 11, complete freedom.

The farmers were then asked to check the traits of character that most completely described their employees. The privilege was granted to add any additional words that would describe the character of these persons. Twenty-eight checked industrious; 33, courteous; 27, honest; 7, deceitful; 1 wrote "careful"; 1 wrote "fast"; 1 stated, "They are never satisfied"; and 1 wrote, "They are industrious for their own interests."

On the basis of social distance, the farmers were asked whether the farmers thought of Nisei and Issei as friends, acquaintances, strangers, or enemies. Thirteen checked the first term; 12, the second; 11, the third; 3, the last. Four employers gave no answer. Following this line of thought, information was sought regarding whether the farmers as a result of their experience as employers of Japanese Americans and Japanese had become more friendly or

more antagonistic to these people. Twenty-five underlined more friendly; 9 checked more antagonistic; 3 were uncertain; 4 gave no answer. A further effort to obtain data of a social distance nature was made by asking the employer whether, in his way of thinking, there was any difference between persons born in Japan and Japanese Americans. Thirty answered yes; 7, no; 3 were uncertain; 3 made no answer.

When the farmers were asked whether they felt that their treatment of these laborers this past season was poor, fair, good, fine, 1 said poor; 4 said fair; 27, good; 9, fine; 2 gave no answer; 29 said they had made no commitment to the Nisei and Issei whom they employed this last year for next year's work; and 13 said that they had done so.

The most desirable age for employment of evacuees, as far as the employer is concerned, is the older group, 25 and above. Nineteen of the employers listed 25 and above. The next largest number of farmers, 13, considered the ages between 20 and 24 as most desirable.

The employers were then given an opportunity in the Survey Schedule to make any comments they desired in regard to the program as it functioned this past year, and to make any suggestions for the coming year's employment. One employer seemed to feel that all the workers from the WRA should be treated somewhat as prisoners of war.

I think the War Relocation set-up and labor employment office should run the set in respect to allotments, prices, etc. They should be handled as a war problem in agriculture and not a social problem.

Another said, "I would suggest that they all be paid a definite rate per bushel throughout the season and that there should be no bargaining direct with the laborers." The employers, in some cases, were competing for the services of these workmen.

Recommendations that suggest better understanding among the employers were: "Make wages standard by age groups. The younger aren't worth as much as the older workers." "They should set a wage, and leave it that way, and not let everyone change it, as it makes your help dissatisfied to hear of others paying more. There is a difference in orchards if paid by the bushel. Old orchards are more difficult to pick than young orchards." And "In agriculture, adults with experience are far more desirable." Still another stated, "Make all the farmers pay only one price." He also added that the government should set that price.

Many of the employers seemed to be satisfied with the arrangements, as was indicated by the following statements: "Program OK. They should get same wage for same work as any other nationality, if American born." "Very effective as long as there is such shortage of labor." Another, "I think it was very fine." Still another favorable response, "I appreciate the fact that this help was made available and think it was well handled." There was also the unfavorable side, as expressed in such statements as: "I wouldn't have one on my place if I never got help."

The following statements are included to give the employment agency the full benefits of the employers' reactions: "Room for improvement in method of handling situation. Surely expect improvement." "Continue."

... that a definite program should be worked out early enough so everyone concerned would have a definite understanding at the beginning of the season, and a more conscious effort to live up to the agreement by both employer and employees.

Although there are many limitations in the findings of this study, there is social significance in the reactions of the 43 employers to the 680 Japanese Americans and Japanese whom they employed.

First, the bulk of negative reactions centered around the wage problem. The main point involved was economic profits. The crops were good, demand was great, and prices were tops. Caucasian labor was unavailable. These Americans of Japanese ancestry and the Japanese insisted upon wages in line with present economic conditions. The right to bargain is a democratic principle that all Americans cherish.

Second, more than half the employers expressed appreciation for the fact that their crops were harvested, that the work was efficiently done, and that the employees had given full value for wages received.

Finally, social nearness in terms of better understanding has resulted from this experience. Few of the employers had previously had direct contact with these people. Only 3 of the 43 checked "enemies" and 25 underlined "more friendly," as a result of their contact with their employees.

These Americans of Japanese ancestry, or Nisei, and the Issei who are favorable to the United States need to be understood in terms of what they can contribute to our society. This goal may be sought through intergroup contacts which may result in better understanding.