

OBSTRUCTING JUSTICE

Any proposal to provide individual monetary redress payments by the United States Government to Japanese Americans for the violation of their Constitutional rights during World War II usually arouses some opposition among the older white voters who were brain-washed by the intense anti-Japanese propaganda during the first half of this century.

Faced with this situation, the five Japanese American legislators now serving in Congress noticeably withheld even their slightest gesture of support for the "World War II Japanese American Human Rights Violations Redress Act" (H.R. 5977) which was introduced by Congressman Mike Lowry in November 1979. Instead, the five politicians, in a maneuver to avoid confronting the basic Constitutional issues involved and risking the ire of some of the older Caucasian voters, have at last succeeded in getting their "Commission on Wartime Relocation and Internment of Civilians Act" enacted into law.

It is apparent from the large number of names of Caucasian co-sponsors that much effort had gone into lobbying for the latter bill. Equally significant is the fact that at the June 2, 1980, hearing by the House Subcommittee, lobbyist Mike Masaoka was allowed the role of principal speaker and used 25 minutes to make his presentation while all others were limited to 10 minutes each. Not content with limiting his remarks to urging the approval of the bill to establish a study Commission, he vigorously attacked the Lowry redress bill.

The stark contrast between Masaoka's speech strongly endorsing redress at the 1976 National J.A.C.L. convention in Sacramento and his present position on the Lowry bill probably reflects Masaoka's response to the fears of the five Japanese American legislators over the possible threat to their own political fortunes if the proposal for individual monetary redress ever becomes a reality. To Masaoka, their remaining in office appears to be of overriding importance.

While claiming to represent something called the Nisei Lobby, a considerable portion of Masaoka's speech was devoted to establishing his own credibility by heavily emphasizing his past connection with the Japanese American Citizens League and his and his brothers' service in the United States Army in Europe during World War II. No claim was made, however, that he had ever lived in the concentration camps. It is my understanding that Masaoka never spent any time as a regular inmate in the prison camps which were built as a result of Executive Order 9066. If this is the case, it would help to explain his seeming inability to understand what imprisonment in those camps really meant to the victims.

"The Japanese American Creed", which was included by Masaoka as a part of his written presentation at the House Subcommittee hearing on June 2nd, is said to have been written by him and to contain an important part of his personal political philosophy. Its first sentence states that "I am proud that I am an American citizen of Japanese ancestry for my very background makes me appreciate more fully the wonderful advantages of this Nation". It then continues with such humble and fulsome praise of almost everything about America that many white Americans find reading it embarrassing.

It might be suitable as a declaration made to some king by a newly freed race of former slaves proclaiming their total subservience and loyalty to their ruler for his kindness to so unworthy a group. The United States, however, is supposed to be a democracy where sovereignty rests in all its citizens and all persons are equal before its laws. Masaoka's "Creed", therefore, amounts to an apologetic self-declaration of the imagined racial or ethnic inferiority of Japanese Americans and a promise of complete submission to and utter trust in the white majority.

Masaoka's Nisei Lobby is something which practically no one had heard of before he appeared at the June 2nd House Subcommittee hearing.

His claim that the J.A.C.L. also opposes the Lowry bill has subsequently twice been denied by Ron Wakabayashi of the J.A.C.L. National Committee for Redress. Masaoka's claim to be speaking for all Japanese Americans is of even more questionable validity.

The right to speak for any group of people can only be given by the freely expressed will of a majority of such group or by their freely elected representatives. No such vote or election of any kind was ever held at any time which gave the right to speak for all Japanese Americans to either Masaoka or the J.A.C.L.!

With the arrest and internment by the F.B.I. of almost all the real leaders of the Japanese American communities in the days following December 7, 1941, practically all Japanese American organizations, except the J.A.C.L., ceased to function. The J.A.C.L. was the only Japanese American organization whose existence the United States Government seemed to approve and was the only one which Government officials chose to deal with as "representing" Japanese Americans.

The J.A.C.L., it should be noted, is primarily a social organization. Many of its chapters meet only once or twice a year. Its paid-up membership of around 24,000 constitutes approximately three percent of the total Japanese American population of the United States. On the basis of these figures alone, any posturing by J.A.C.L. leaders as being representative of all Japanese Americans is obvious nonsense.

Contrary to Masaoka's statements, the Japanese Americans went to the camps quietly because in the face of the threat of the use of military force by the Government, effective resistance was plainly not possible. To describe the behavior of the victims, as Masaoka has done, as "a disciplined display of loyalty and faith in the American way unmatched in history" is a grotesque falsification of the heart-rending truth.

Masaoka seems unaware that the essence of Americanism is resistance

to tyranny. It is not weak-kneed submission to tyranny and crawling for the approval of Government officials.

In attacking the Lowry bill's attempt to provide some correlation between the amounts to be paid and the time spent in the camps, the Nisei Lobby has revealed a smug indifference to the sufferings of the Issei (first generation Japanese Americans). Masaoka sounds outraged that the Lowry bill would result in larger payments to "those who deliberately stayed in camp and took advantage of the government's food and clothing allowances" and that the young who left camp early would be "penalized" by receiving less. Let the Nisei Lobby and its lobbyist be reminded that practically no one went to those camps by choice or stayed in them because he loved the places. Those who were able to leave early because they had the youth, ability, or financial resources to do so are not likely to object to the \$15 a day paid to those unfortunates whose circumstances forced them to remain in those prison camps until the end.

His other objections to the Lowry bill display a similar quality of logic.

Instead of speaking for all Japanese Americans as Masaoka has claimed, he seems really to be speaking for only a very limited group. Quite often such persons are relatively successful in their fields and have reached middle class status. During their careers, they have found that they were aided in some way by a white person who knew of the World War II exile and imprisonment of Japanese Americans and who out of a sense of vicarious guilt over the injustice went out of his way to do his bit to redress the wrong by favoring the Japanese American when an opportunity arose.

If a meaningful redress bill such as Lowry's H.R. 5977 were enacted into law, such vicarious guilt feelings among Caucasians would tend to disappear. To some Japanese Americans the elimination of such guilt

feelings could be a far greater loss to their present and future earnings possibilities than could be offset by a mere \$30,000 redress check from the Government. Maybe this is what the Nisei Lobby really has in mind when its lobbyist claims that the Lowry bill "cheapens what happened to us" and that "no amount of money can compensate us for what we endured in those tragic times".

It is significant that the Commission bill which was passed does not even mention the possible consideration of individual compensation and that the word "redress" is totally excluded from its text. Although the bill provides for the creation of a seven man Commission "to review the facts and circumstances surrounding Executive Order 9066, issued February 19, 1942, and the impact of such Executive Order on American citizens and permanent resident aliens and to recommend appropriate remedies", totally excluded are any suggestions or hints of what "remedies" might be desirable or appropriate.

The only certain outcome of this bill will be to delay any possible passage of a genuine redress bill for at least two more years. It thus serves to deny even token justice to the many rapidly aging victims of the Evacuation Orders who will die during that time.

Massacka's Nisei Lobby appears to be dogmatically opposed to individual monetary redress and the five Japanese American legislators in Congress have coldly ignored the forthright redress bill introduced by Congressman Lowry. Let us hope that the persons appointed to the Commission will have the wisdom and concern for justice to see through the arguments and motives of those opposed to individual monetary redress and address themselves to making the recommendations which will prove to the world that this nation's Constitution is a living document and that each individual who has been wronged by our Government's violating the provisions of our Constitution is rightfully entitled to just and reasonable redress.

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