

"Jap Crow" Experiment

BY JOHN LARISON

ENOUGH time has rolled by since we evacuated the Japanese from the West Coast and relocated them in the interior to enable us to appraise the undertaking and perhaps to project a better way out of one of the strangest dilemmas in our history. The majority of the evacuated are American citizens, and now that we have regained our poise after the shock of Pearl Harbor we ought to be able to work out some wise and just means of reintegrating them into the American community.

It is no secret that ten months' experience with the relocation centers has not been a happy one either for the administrators or for the citizens and aliens taken into "protective custody." It can be said at the outset that the enterprise as a whole has been humanely administered by men of good-will, though it has never been the Sunday School picnic or the Boy Scout jamboree that some of our more imaginative reporters have tried to make it out.

The évacués are distributed among ten centers in California, Arizona, Utah, Idaho, Wyoming, Colorado, and Arkansas. They live in standard army barracks built of lumber covered with tarpaper. Originally it was intended to allot one room about twenty feet square to each family, but owing to shortages in building materials this space allotment could not be followed, and a good many families had to double up, sometimes with strangers, at best with friends. These living quarters obviously permit little in the way of home life, since they lack both privacy and cooking facilities. Dining-halls, toilet and bath houses, and laundries are communal, one of each to a block. Meals are fair, with some provision of Japanese dishes for the older people. The food cost is about forty cents a person a day, and food is rationed as in other communities.

The centers have few facilities for recreation. The

recreation halls, of which there is one in each block, have in many cases had to be preempted for temporary schools and other purposes. Moving pictures are few and far between. Mostly the people have had to make their own amusements, and have leaned heavily on baseball, theatricals, and gardening and landscaping. Books, newspapers, and magazines are scarce and in great demand. As an offset to the meager recreational facilities, the authorities plan to operate the schools eleven months a year, on the theory that the devil finds work for idle hands to do. The elementary and high schools are making every endeavor to meet the standards of the states in which they are situated, although there is a shortage of Caucasian teachers, and inexperienced évacués have had to be hastily trained to meet the need. It is significant of the strong trend toward Americanization that the parents urge the employment of Caucasian teachers.

The government does not provide education beyond high school, although there are large numbers of college students whose work has been interrupted by relocation, as well as recent high-school graduates ready to enter college. With the cooperation of a number of Western universities, the War Relocation Authority has been able to provide some facilities for adult education but nothing adequate for the need. Through the admirable work of the National Student Relocation Committee, a private agency, several hundred évacués have been released to attend colleges outside the evacuated areas.

The economic condition of the évacués is very bad. The original intent of the WRA was to develop agriculture and to some extent industries on a scale sufficient not only to make the centers self-supporting but to create a surplus for the war effort. Three things have caused this program to fall short of accomplishing its purpose. One is the surprisingly large outside demand for Japanese-American labor that developed during the 1942

harvest season. About ten thousand workers left the centers, after official investigation and permission, largely for beet and cotton picking. This demand will undoubtedly increase in the coming season.

A second obstacle to industrial and agricultural development in the centers has been the wage scale. In addition to furnishing board, lodging, and hospitalization or other medical care to all évacués, the government has set up a system of cash wages for all workers for whom jobs could be found in the centers. These wages amount to \$12, \$16, and \$19 a month, depending on the nature of the work, whether unskilled, skilled, or professional. Almost half the inhabitants are thus employed—many in essential services such as clerical work, transportation, warehousing, and mess-hall operation, others in agriculture and industry. Even if to the cash wages we add the cost of food and quarters, it is clear that for most of them the resultant wage scale is very meager and far out of line with what is being paid elsewhere in this country. Resident aliens of course would expect to receive the customary perquisites of interned enemy aliens, and, figured on this basis, the allowances would be considered generous. With our American citizens of Japanese ancestry, however, the case is different. They regard the wage scale as unfairly discriminatory and do not work with any enthusiasm. Nevertheless, they have collectively done a surprising amount of work in agriculture, in running the essential public services, in organizing community stores, and in operating certain industries such as camouflage net factories—in which, however, a more attractive wage scale had to be established after a preliminary failure to attract workers at the standard relocation-center rates. During the calendar year 1942, with most of the centers getting into production only by midsummer, about \$800,000 worth of vegetables and other crops were produced. In 1943 crop production will run to almost \$3,000,000, and by midsummer of 1944 the value of livestock and livestock products will amount to another \$2,000,000.

Thirdly, the évacués have been too much bossed and managed by unnecessarily large administrative staffs. Among the évacués are highly skilled farmers, artisans, engineers, technicians, scientists, doctors, business men, mechanics, foremen, nurses, and artists. As a group they are unusually well educated, have a tradition of good workmanship, and are in general competent to organize and manage their own affairs. If they had been given free rein, they could have done a far better job than they have been able to do in bureaucratic leading-strings and with a superfluity of Caucasian bosses. Even in their own civic affairs they have been restricted, the community councils being only advisory and hampered moreover by the arbitrary ruling that no Issei—first-generation, elderly people—could hold public office in a center, with the result that the civic responsibilities have fallen

largely on the shoulders of the Nissei—second generation—most of whom are so young that a community council meeting is almost like a meeting in Boys' Town.

The unexpectedly large demand for évacué workers outside the centers has led to an important shift in the basic policy of the WRA, which is now to encourage and assist as many of the évacués as possible to obtain outside employment, and to keep the centers unattractive enough to persuade most of them to leave instead of to stay. If this plan could be handled wisely, skilfully, and gradually, with emphasis on those best fitted to work outside, it might be one step toward a final solution.

Thus far, this report might convey the impression that aside from some material inconveniences and low wage scales, relocation has been pretty satisfactory. But it cannot be too strongly emphasized that the evil of relocation is its psychic and emotional effect; much damage has already been done and will be permanent unless great skill and insight go into the future handling of this minority problem. It must be remembered that about 70 per cent of the évacués are American citizens by birth. Moreover, with a few exceptions they are eagerly, indeed pathetically, American in speech, manners, and ambitions. So Americanized are they, in fact, that a very troublesome aspect of administration in the centers is the deep schism between the young generation and the old.

These young citizens are for the most part courteous, industrious, earnest, and intelligent. They strike an unbiased observer as unusually good human material. Moreover, they approach their own minority problem in a spirit of humility, candor, and cooperation. Yet they are deeply troubled by the paradox of their detention despite their citizenship in a country whose constitution is conspicuously devoted to safeguards of liberty and equality. Like all young people, they lean heavily on the security, continuity, and predictability of a meaningful environment. Yet these supports have been snatched away from them. They, along with their elders, were removed from their homes, vocations, and schools, from their friends and social ties, often at great financial loss. And they have been confronted with an unpredictable and consequently terrifying future. Worst of all, relocation has fastened on them the galling stigma of suspicion. In this atmosphere it was inevitable that they should be subject to psychic and emotional deterioration, which in some cases has become overt in strikes and riots.

The first step toward the moral rehabilitation of this unhappy group is to clear the innocent of unjust suspicion by segregating the disloyal. And the evidence is that the great majority are innocent of any subversive design or intent. In *Harper's* for last October an anonymous intelligence officer of the armed forces who had carried on a long investigation of our West Coast Japanese published his conclusion that at least 75 per cent

April 10, 1943

were loyal. It is likely that this figure is purposely conservative: the responsible administrators of the centers would probably place the percentage well above 90. More convincing is the fact that the army has recently begun to recruit Japanese-American regiments on a voluntary-enlistment basis. Army recruitment has done a great deal to restore the self-respect of the évacués. Even more effective would be inducting them under the draft, after segregation of the disloyal. The young men are eager to serve their country, but they want to serve it on a basis of equality; they regard voluntary enlistment as in itself a form of discrimination, and they have dubbed the special Japanese-American contingents "Jap Crow" regiments. As a result, voluntary enlistments have been relatively few.

A second necessary step is to begin to work out now the permanent solution of the problem. Merely to encourage or to use pressure on the Japanese to leave the centers for outside employment is not a complete solution. Many of them can and should go out, but many of them have been disqualified by "war-shock" from going out and starting life anew without considerable support and advance preparation. A careful family survey, by qualified social workers, would determine which are qualified to go out and which had better stay in the centers until a permanent resettlement plan is devised.

For those who remain in the centers a more normal life should be worked out, better recreational and adult-education facilities provided, and a system of normal economic enterprise developed. Cooperative agricultural and industrial projects on the orthodox profit-making pattern would restore the initiative of the évacués and greatly reduce costs in operating the centers. Genuine civic self-government should be part of the program.

As to permanent resettlement, the government should by all means begin to lay down the broad lines now, lest at the end of the war the whole question be approached on the basis of emotional politics and racial prejudice. Many of the évacués can doubtless shift for themselves and regain a worth-while place in the American community. But many others, probably the majority, if left to themselves would sink to the status of migratory workers. There is especial need for a permanent agricultural-settlement program for the highly skilled farmers among them, preferably in small groups to safeguard them from race discrimination on the one hand and from segregation in ghettos on the other. To effect permanent resettlement, the government must ally itself with liberal community and religious leaders and groups to assure fair play and non-violence.

Only a few hotheads among us need whipping-boys as an emotional outlet during the war. The rest of us might reflect on how best to emerge from the relocation enterprise with a minimum of damage to the évacués and to our own national dignity.

519

75 Years Ago in "The Nation"

SINCE the New Hampshire election Democrats no longer stalk of carrying Connecticut by a majority of four or five thousand. The Republicans . . . grow more and more confident. . . . Furthermore, the Republicans are not this year, as they were last, weighted with Mr. P. T. Barnum, who in his Congressional district ran some hundreds—267—"behind his ticket," and whose name undoubtedly hurt the Republican Party throughout the state.—April 2, 1868.

THE ACCOUNTS of the operations of the "Klux Klan," the secret organization which has been formed by Southern "Conservatives" for the purpose of making the South unpleasant for Yankees and Negroes—or, to put the matter more plainly, for the purpose of breaking up the Radical organization at the South—are anything but pleasant reading. . . . The "Klan" . . . has established a reign of terror in Tennessee and Georgia, and is spreading into other states.—April 9, 1868.

ONE OF THE DOCUMENTS with which the "Ku Klux Klan" are intimidating their opponents . . . is adorned with . . . cannon, . . . a coffin with a white cross, a skull and cross-bones, a dagger, a chain, a coiled snake, a sword, a heart, two crescent moons, a black flag with "K. K. K." upon it, a hound, a bugle-horn, and such inscriptions as these: "Klansmen—the deed without a name is done"; "Many thanks, O Ghenghis Khan, thou whose crown is" [device of skull and cross-bones]; "Attend the Cabala, and the curse of Nemesis upon him who speeds not the foot at its mystic summons." To be put to death by persons of the mental caliber of the inventors of these placards—to furnish in one's own person the tragic conclusion to so trivial a farce as the "Klan" performances would be if cowardly murder were not the end of them—this must be peculiarly trying to a victim whose taste is not wholly unformed.—April 16, 1868.

NOVEL-READERS who got a sensation as of something fresh and new when they made the acquaintance of Ivan Turgenev's "Fathers and Sons," will be pleased to hear that another of his very clever books has been translated into French. Its Russian title is "Duim," which means "smoke" or "vapor."—April 16, 1868.

THE PRESS DINNER to Dickens, in spite of some conspicuous drawbacks, was a success. . . . The speeches . . . were more than usually good. Mr. Greeley's at the opening was both happy and graceful; was, in short, done in his best vein—which, whatever one may think of his worst vein, is in most particulars admirable.—April 23, 1868.

THE GALAXY comes to us enlarged and improved, and contains good light reading. . . . "Personalism" is by Mr. Walt Whitman, whose power of brain does not seem sufficient to make his prose remarks valuable.—April 30, 1868.