

Trouble Among Japanese Americans¹

TROUBLE has been experienced in the past few weeks in a number of the Japanese Relocation Centers. The disturbances at Poston, Arizona, and Manzanar, California, were sufficiently serious to get into the papers; and there have been others which indicate pretty clearly that something is the matter.

I had been at Poston until a short time before the disturbance and I am afraid I must report that the newspaper interpretation of it—that the rioters were merely pro-Axis elements—was oversimplified. Pro-Japanese sentiment, and a plain hoodlum element in the center, played a part in the trouble. But the situation of which the troublemakers took advantage was produced by other causes, chiefly two: the great sense of frustration which all members of the camps feel and the great cleavage between the first and second generation which has made the American-born, who cooperate with the authorities, the subject of attack. "As you have not been treated as Americans, your cooperation must be opportunism," is the charge. In the case of the trouble at the Jerome center in Arkansas, where threats of violence and reluctance to participate in communal work have been reported, the factor of contact with the native attitudes toward the Negro is also involved.

It must be remembered that these 110,000 people are in the camps presumably only because they were unable to find places to go, voluntarily, before the mass-evacuation order was issued. They should not be confused with the 1,974 suspected enemy aliens in internment camps. There are ten relocation areas, managed by the civilian War Relocation Authority, in undeveloped regions of Arizona, California, Utah, Wyoming, Colorado and Arkansas. Evacuees live in barracks, often overcrowded, with communal services as in the army. The extreme boundaries are guarded by the military.

If cooperation with the authorities has unfortunately become a hazard, it has been made so in part by the decision of the WRA limiting participation in government to the American-born. Only they may belong to the community councils which have been set up in the camps as a measure of democracy. While two-thirds of the population are citizens, less than half of them are of adult age, and it is this inexperienced group that has had to bear the burden of the responsibility. Their parents are for the most part old: their average age is

¹Isamu Noguchi, the writer of this article, is a well known American sculptor. His father is the Japanese poet, Yone Noguchi, his mother, an American. He has recently returned from the relocation center of Poston, Arizona, to which he went voluntarily last April; his object in going was to help relocation by contributing his services as an artist in developing the areas. Evacuees may now leave the camps to take private employment anywhere in the area between the Alleghenies and the Rocky Mountains. The changed policy of discouraging any activity that might give the Japanese an incentive to stay in the camps has forced his return to New York. — THE EDITORS

fifty-six. They have helped build America and have sacrificed their lives so that their children might enjoy the fruits of American citizenship. Evacuation has meant for them a bitter realization of failure. The small concessions made in camp to the citizenship of their children seem to them unrealistic and unrepresentative.

The riots, though deplorable, were in a sense helpful, since they attracted attention to problems which can only be solved with the help of public opinion. The solution decided on by the WRA is to remove as many as possible of the loyal evacuees for work in communities outside the military areas. They see that resettlement and assimilation must be pushed forward now, while the shortage of labor throughout the country makes it economically easier. So far about a thousand have obtained their release, three hundred of them in colleges and universities. The FBI has agreed to certify for exit, in advance, individuals who are looking for jobs, which should speed up the process somewhat.

To date there is no provision for redistribution of the evacuees from the centers except as individuals. Placement of them, sight-unseen and with general suspicion rampant, is difficult enough, but added to this is the reluctance on the part of the Japanese to go out alone into a part of the country they have never seen, where they fear discrimination, and where they will be cut off from the social contacts upon which they depend. This is especially true of the parents, whose individual adjustment to a strange community would be extremely difficult. As they constitute the skilled farmers who formerly grew an annual crop worth more than \$100,000,000 in California, group resettlement of them, limited perhaps to twenty-five families each, would not only facilitate their exit but return them to a productivity which is badly needed. To a planned program for selected areas they could bring their own resources on a cooperative basis.

Group relocation, of course, need not and should not be limited to racial groups. The American-born, at least, should be available as part of the War Manpower Pool, for placement in small groups in factories. Their association with the larger American group should result in their speedy assimilation.

It is also hoped that the army will resume selective service of Americans of Japanese origin. There were nearly five thousand in the services when further enlistments were halted, shortly before the evacuation, and calls for volunteers who can read and write Japanese have recently been issued. A renewed opportunity for joining the United States armed forces would have a deeply beneficial psychological effect.

Perhaps 30,000 of the 110,000 now in the relocation centers can be resettled and, given public support for

the effort, will be. Of the remaining 80,000, a certain number of hoodlums and "pro-Axis" people, plus perhaps those who have signed up for repatriation to Japan, should be moved to a separate camp, as has been suggested. All the others, except as they may be relocated in groups, are going to stay in the relocation centers a long time.

Will there be a real attempt to make these areas self-supporting before the people in them become too demoralized? It would be tragic—and very expensive as well—if they came to be simply stagnant reservations for the old, the misfit and the very young. Here again there seems to be a possibility for small-group tenancies, whereby at least a few of the relocation areas may be developed by the evacuéés themselves, with their own capital, tools and manual skill.

Finally, I hope that the WRA will attempt to deal with these people as a whole, in problems of self-government, rather than dealing merely with the second-generation group. As individuals leave to take work outside, the age divisions among those left will become even more unbalanced. The stabilizing influence of the parents will be still more needed in the government of

the centers. It is estimated that about 50 percent of the non-citizens are now at least passively loyal to America. I think that this proportion could be increased and I think this effort, too, is worth making, if only for their influence on the children. Steps along this road would be opening the Community Councils to the parents, establishing an Inter-Center Relocation Council and putting into effect an adult-education program, with a newspaper or bulletin printed in Japanese and English. Through it the evacuéés themselves could assist in the problem of relocation.

Poston has finally received a priority rating for the purchase of materials for school buildings to be constructed by the evacuéés. Surely it is understandable that the degree of coöperation for community projects that can be obtained in any of the centers depends upon the degree to which the people feel that they are being occupied in work that will lead to a self-respecting future for them. The solution of the problem is, in short, to return the evacuéés to their normal civilian status both by getting them out of the centers and by making the centers themselves as much like other places in America as possible.

ISAMU NOGUCHI