

Racism on the West Coast

WITH THE REMOVAL from the West Coast of 100,000 persons of Japanese ancestry, and their subsequent internment, the artificially stimulated agitation which had stampeded the federal government into the adoption of this harsh wartime measure momentarily subsided. During the spring, summer and fall of 1942, all was quiet on the West Coast front. But in January, 1943, a new campaign, of unparalleled virulence, was launched against this luckless minority. Throughout 1943 it raged without let or hindrance. Before another pogrom is launched in this region, it is important that the nation realize just what prompted the extraordinary outburst of racial violence. For example, why was it that anti-Japanese, or rather anti-evacuee, agitation assumed such menacing proportions after every person of Japanese ancestry had been removed from the area and placed in protective custody? One would have assumed that such a harsh measure as mass evacuation would have satisfied even the most insistent pressure groups on the West Coast.

If these groups had really been concerned with the "security" of the area, mass evacuation would have satisfied their demands. But so-called "security" considerations had little to do with the organized pressure for mass evacuation. While insisting that all persons of Japanese ancestry should be removed from the West Coast, many of these same pressure groups were conducting a quiet but effective campaign *against the removal* of persons of Japanese ancestry from the strategically far more important Hawaiian Islands. For example, the powerful California Joint Immigration Committee indicated that it was "unalterably opposed" to the evacuation of the Japanese from the islands. For if Japanese were removed from Hawaii, they would necessarily have been transferred to the mainland. If they had been removed to the mainland, the number of resident Japanese would have been increased and some of them might not have returned to the islands after the war. What groups such as the California Joint Immigration Committee sought, in advocating mass evacuation, was not the removal of persons of Japanese ancestry from the West Coast, but their eventual removal from the United States.

By the fall of 1942, the War Relocation Authority had begun to experiment with the issuance of seasonal work permits. Several thousand evacuees, under this plan, had been permitted to leave the relocation centers to meet the manpower shortage in agriculture. This program was only initiated by the WRA after "very great pressure"—in Mr. Dillon Myer's phrase—had been brought to bear by the sugar-beet industry. Since the experiment proved entirely workable and satisfactory, the WRA was encouraged to expand the

program. The emphasis in policy shifted from resettlement in the centers to relocation outside the centers. New procedures were evolved by which local evacuees might be given permanent releases permitting them to relocate in areas outside the Western Defense Command. By the end of 1942, several hundred evacuees had been given such permanent or indefinite leaves.

The moment that it became apparent that most, if not all, of the evacuees might be released in this manner, the West Coast pressure groups got busy. For they had always assumed that evacuation necessarily implied internment for the duration. The main motive back of the resumption of anti-evacuee agitation in January, 1943, was, therefore, to prevent the release of any further evacuees from the centers. If these pressure groups were genuinely desirous of preventing the return of the evacuees to the West Coast, then the most obvious considerations would dictate the necessity of their supporting the WRA in its efforts to relocate as many evacuees as possible in the Middle West and East before the war is over. But what these groups really want is mass deportation of all persons of Japanese ancestry; hence their insistence that the evacuees be confined in the centers during the war.

It is not necessary to infer the existence of such a motive in the resumption of agitation on the West Coast. One of the leaders of this agitation stated, at a meeting called in the fall of 1942 to plot the strategy for the campaign, that "we should strike now, while the sentiment over the country is right. The feeling of the East will grow more bitter before the war is over and if we begin *now* to try to shut out the Japanese, after the war we have a chance of accomplishing something. Now that all the treaties between the two nations have been abrogated by Japan's war on the United States, Congress is under no treaty obligation and it could easily pass an act ordering all nationals of Japan to return after the peace. . . . Maybe the return of the aliens would mean that some of the American-born would follow them."

Who are the leaders of this campaign? What organizations sponsor this movement? One of the most active leaders in the anti-evacuee campaign is Dr. John R. Lechner, who functions through his alter ego, the Americanism Educational League. It is interesting to note that Dr. Lechner was not originally in favor of mass evacuation. "Mass evacuation," he said, "would only cause hardship both to the Japanese and other residents of the state" (The Los Angeles Daily News, January 21, 1942). The day following the delivery of this speech, he sent a marked clipping to the editor of a Los Angeles Japanese-American newspaper stating that he would greatly appreciate having some

cards printed—gratis. He is the author of a pamphlet entitled "Playing with Dynamite," full of the usual bedtime stories about the West Coast Japanese. On a recent visit to Washington, numerous officials received the impression that he was "representing the American Legion." In its issue of January 15, 1944, The California Legionnaire, speaking in the name of the Legion, not only repudiated any such connection, but went on to characterize his action as being "in flagrant violation of written notice from our Department Commander."

Another "anti" organization is the Home Front Commandos, Inc., of Sacramento. This organization has inundated Northern California with racist manifestos. One of its recent pamphlets carries the caption: "Slap the Jap Rat," and still another is captioned: "No Jap Is Fit to Associate with Human Beings." These statements are made, of course, in reference to American citizens of Japanese ancestry. One of the main financial supporters of the organization is a Sacramento millionaire, Mr. C. M. Goethe, long prominent in the affairs of the Northern California Council of Churches and treasurer of the California Joint Immigration Committee. He is the founder and, I suspect, the chief member, of the Eugenics Society of Northern California. The weird bulletins of the society contain endless derogatory remarks about Mexicans, Italians and, in fact, almost every ethnic group in America with the exception of what are termed "Old New Englanders" and "the Virginians." In Eugenics Pamphlet No. 12, issued before the war, one finds this interesting statement:

Since Hitler has become Führer, he has made eugenics an applied science. Germany has set up hundreds of eugenic courts. These try German social inadequates as to their fitness for parenthood. Please do not think these trials are based on race hatreds. Whatever else may happen in the Reich, the eugenics trials proceed with fully as much caution as if they were held in the United States. Germany's plan is to eliminate all low-powers to make room for high-powers and thereby ALSO SAVE TAXES!

Still another "anti" group is the Pacific Coast Japanese Problem League, headed by Dr. John Carruthers—Presbyterian minister, graduate of Princeton, former professor of Religious History at Occidental College, for five years assistant to the president of the University of Southern California. Like Dr. Lechner (another ex-clergyman), Dr. Carruthers has not always been anti-Japanese. During the years 1924-26, he was a director of the Council of International Relations, which was created primarily to combat anti-Oriental agitation on the West Coast. Testifying before a California Legislative Committee, Dr. Carruthers recently stated that, after an hour of prayer in "the privacy of that precious American heritage, the Christian home in a Christian city in a Christian land of freedom," he had come to the conclusion that it was his

duty to urge "the deportation, if possible, by every means possible, of all Japanese from the American continent." The Japanese Americans, he said, should not object to this proposal, since, if they were really Christians, then "they ought to be glad to be shoved out anywhere that they can bear witness to the Kingdom of Christ."

Then there is the California Citizens' Association of Santa Barbara. And the California Citizens' Council of Los Angeles. This organization has been circulating petitions for the "ouster of the Japanese from California forever." Its slogan is: "Remember a Jap is a Jap." Its members are urged to place stickers on the windshields of their automobiles. The sticker contains a picture of a rat with a Japanese face. Still another organization is the American Foundation for the Exclusion of the Japanese; and yet another is No Japs, Inc., of San Diego. At the present time another organization, the Japanese Exclusion Association, is circulating a petition to place a special initiative measure on the November, 1944, ballot in California. Drafted as an amendment to the Alien Land Act, this proposed amendment, if adopted, would make it virtually impossible for Japanese aliens or persons "of the Japanese ancestry or other ancestry ineligible to citizenship under the naturalization laws of the United States" who owe allegiance to "any foreign Government, Emperor, Prince, or Potentate," to function economically in California. The statute would place the burden upon the Japanese American to prove that he did not possess dual citizenship.

The real force behind the "anti" movement in California, however, is the California Joint Immigration Committee, which speaks in the name of the American Legion, the State Federation of Labor, the Grange, and the Native Sons and Daughters of the Golden West. The Native Sons, with a membership of around 25,000, is particularly active in the campaign. This organization has traditionally been, not merely anti-Japanese, but anti-Oriental, anti-Mexican, anti-Negro. In a brief filed in a recent suit by which it sought to test the citizenship of the Nisei, or Japanese Americans, the organization contended that the words "we, the People of the United States," in the Constitution, refer to "the white people"; and that the "ourselves" of the Constitution "included white people only" (Appellant's Brief, p. 47, *Reagan v. King*). The California Joint Immigration Committee filed a written statement with the Tolson Committee in 1942 in which it contended that we had made a great mistake in conferring citizenship upon the Negro after the Civil War. These groups are, therefore, adherents of the doctrine of white supremacy and their propaganda is directly predicated on so-called "racial" considerations.

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CAREY MCWILLIAMS

This is the first of two articles. The second will appear in an early issue.—THE EDITORS