

CITIZENS BEHIND BARBED  
WIRE

By Charles Inglehart

A recent visit to the West Coast gave me an opportunity to see at first hand how the present removal of the Japanese from the defense areas is working out.

The evacuation policy was a strange compound of war necessity and mass hysteria. Behind it lay thirty-five years of determined effort by certain West Coast groups to eliminate Japanese from any share in American life. Persisting economic competition, racial antipathy, and veral politics played their part in it. In addition, the Japanese immigrants have been slow in adopting American ways. And since Japan launched its expansionist program and older settlers have reacted to the heightened nationalism of their homeland by emphasizing their unAmerican habits, bowing toward Tokyo and celebrated oriental festivals as they never used to do. Moreover, the Japanese language school are using textbooks recently brought from Japan which exalt the new ambitions rampant there. These developments have been in general quite innocent, but they have not tended to allay the suspicions of Caucasian neighbors.

In the first two days after Pearl Harbor the Department of Justice drew its net around two thousand Japanese aliens; later it rounded up two of them in their camps and found them living in very decent condition and uncomplaining. I understand that only one or two in a hundred were suspected of actual complicity in any subversive activities; most of them merely subscribed to some fund or belonged to some organization that was open to question. This group is not our present concern.

Before the publication of the Roberts Reports on Pearl Harbor on January 25, no apprehension was expressed concerning those Japanese residents and their American children who had been left undisturbed, but the report ushered in a period of feverish excitement, stimulated by press and radio, which reached a climax when the West Coast Congressional delegation petitioned the President to empower the Army authorities to handle the entire situation and to deal summarily with "aliens" and subversive persons." This action has since been defended on the ground that the Japanese themselves were in danger. I talked with a good many people of all sorts and found no evidence of any serious danger. Nor could I discover single case of subversive activity although the air was filled with substantiated rumors. A minority group always has a grapevine which carries news with uncanny speed and accuracy, but no Japanese whom I met had heard of more than three instances of violence resulting in death, and all of these were said to have been the work of Filipinos.

I cannot escape the conclusion that even as war measure evacuation was unnecessary. The slumbering embers of public antagonism to this alien group were, it appears, deliberately fanned by inter-

ested persons and organizations until a conflagration was threatened, but at any time it could have been quenched if the authorities had shown the proper firmness.

On March 2, under the President's executive orders of February 19, General De Witt took over, and the West Coast was zoned for the control of aliens. In Mesa, Arizona, I saw how this measure affected the lives of Japanese residents. Most of them lived on farms in Zone B, which was a restricted area. The boundary of Zone A, the prohibited area, ran through the city and the market and schools were on the other side. Thus the Japanese were unable to sell their produce or to send their children to school. One man told me that he had sent 800 pounds of peas to the market by a Mexican truckman, but that somewhere along the way the whole load had been mysteriously lost. Some persons representing themselves as government agents were moving about among the Japanese farmers advising them to dispose of their holdings. Often these men were large farm owners themselves who would benefit by the dumping of Japanese property.

Actual evacuation began on April 1. It was then found that the order was not to apply to German or Italian aliens, at least for the present, but only to Japanese. What is certain to cause the greatest difficulty in the future, however, is the fact that it made no distinction between the alien Japanese and their sons and daughters who are native Americans. In everything except physical appearance, these young people are so far removed from their despair of their parents, know little or nothing about Japan. They have no desire to be anything but Americans. The alien are almost all over sixty, while many of the American-born are under twenty-one. In the degree of their Americanization, this second generation compares favorably with other foreign groups. The process has already gone far enough to disprove our fears that the Orient and the Occident could never mix. In these ~~that~~ young people the mixing has actually taken place without any detriment to the American way of life. Nevertheless, they are being treated exactly as if they were aliens, owing allegiance to Japan. In one California city I found a legal effort being made to remove from civil service positions ever American-Japanese who had ever attended classes in the Japanese language.

Community after community showed the effects of the shock of evacuation. Selling out signs on retail shops told of the forced liquidation of small businesses on a few hours' notice. I heard ugly stories of intimidation and exploitation. One farmer was said to have sold a thousand dollars worth of equipment for a hundred dollars thinking he had to. A hardware merchant was so threatened that he sold his business for a song and then saw a sign on his store announcing "The Japs are going." His business was in a zone not yet evacuated.

In many places the people were living with the sword of Damocles hanging over them. I talked with the old people and found them silent and impressive. This was just another event beyond their

control in strange, contradictory America, where life alternates so unpredictably between calm sailing and shipwreck. They do not complain. But it is plain to see that their physical resistance, spiritual resiliency, and economic resources have been shattered. When this crisis is over they will have to be carried by their children.

The young people react differently. They are not afraid, but they are desperately perplexed and puzzled. One said to me: "This thing has taken all the starch out of us. We thought we were Americans; now we don't know what we are or what on earth to do about it." Other thoughtful young leaders feared that the disillusionment and frustration would destroy all ambition and even self-respect. How could they hope to go on with college, or to go qualify for decent living again? However, most of these keep their chins up. An old friend of mine and his bride have gone to camp, and this week she writes: "In spite of all the sacrifices we had to make in selling our home, giving a good business and coming here, we still believe that democratic America is the best, and we too are praying for an early end."

Evacuation is now almost completed: 110,000 people--40,000 aliens and 70,000 of their American sons and daughters--are moving into "Assembly Centers." Evacuation, of course, was to be followed by resettlement in other less exposed areas; apparently the authorities hoped that this might be accomplished with reasonable ease. But the opposition in the receiving areas is so stubborn that it has become necessary to multiply and expand the temporary filter stations into something like semi-permanent camps. Near most of the larger towns and cities there is a race course or fair grounds and many of these have been taken over, inclosed in barbed wire, and provided with hastily built barracks for the evacuees--rows and rows of sheds made of thin pine boards, the sides and roof covered with tar paper.

The congestion in the assembly centers is and was caused by the unwillingness of other communities to accept the evacuees. The Tolson Congressional Committee for the study of migrant population made a canvas of the sentiment in all states west of the Mississippi. It met with a unanimous refusal, expressed by the respective governors in their replies to the committee's questionnaire to permit civilian relocation of these unfortunate people. One state made a distinction between the older aliens and the second generation Japanese-Americans. The other classed them all together as aliens, undesirables, and subversive agents. The most that any of the states would agree to was to set aside one unoccupied area to which the federal government might bring five or ten thousand evacuees, putting them behind guards and supporting them for the duration on the distinct understanding that they should be removed again at the end of the war. In a talk with the governor of one of the middle western states I got an epitome of the general sentiment. He said: "The people of California needn't think they can push their problem off on to us. We aren't going to mop up for them. If the federal government wants to bring any of these people into a camp in our state it can, but it will have to take them out the day this thing is over."

Because of the prevailing attitude the better areas are being denied the federal authorities, and it is likely that only small sites will be set aside for new concentration camps differing very little from the present subhuman assembly centers. Indeed, reports from persons who live in the vicinity of one or two of these contemplated resettlement centers indicate that they are being built on exactly the same lines as the temporary camps with the same flimsy shacks, the same barbed-wire barriers, and in general the same prison-like setup.

The need for labor to get in the food crops may operate to modify to some degree to bleakness of this picture. We hear of furloughs to be granted the men of some camps to permit them to go out to work, but friends of the evacuees express the fear that this will mean the continuation of the temporary assembly centers and that the women and children will be left there indefinitely. It may also mean that the men will be taken under guard to distant places, where their work will be little more than an extension of what is now virtually prison life. Wages will, of course, be paid and undoubtedly the men will have the option of going out to work or remaining idle in camp. But this will be a far cry from relocation and it will offer no solution of the problem of future integration in American community life.

One prospect that is now being explored by the War Relocation Authority is the possibility of releasing all college students for transfer to other regions where they can finish their education. There may be two or three thousand of these young men and women. Their fate depends on the guaranteed willingness of other college communities to receive them.

Confronting this baffling situation, all persons of good will must be asking what can be done. It is too late to do anything about the basic policy of evacuation. That is an accomplished fact. Now we have the assembly center phase to deal with. As life in the camp shakes down into routine, the worst physical hardships may be expected to moderate. But the crowding, the lack of privacy, the idleness, the forced intermingling of persons of widely divergent social levels and ideas and character will increasingly undermine morale. The authorities intend, they say, to utilize every possible resource of personnel within the camps, in developing programs of recreation, health, education and other types of activity. We cannot hope that this will work out according to plan.

Pressure should be brought to bear upon the federal authorities to induce them to discontinue the assembly centers as the way of dealing with the problem. And every effort must be made to obtain separate treatment for aliens and for second generation Americans. Discrimination against citizens because of their racial lineage cuts straight across the American tradition. It is our duty, difficult as it may be, to find some way of extricating Japanese-Americans from the operation of this war measure. In Honolulu they are at liberty and the authorities have said, "We trusted them and they have proved worthy."

But the great task is the reaction of an informed public opinion. If we had had it, evacuation need not have occurred. If it prevailed now, relocation would be possible. Unless we have it, after the war, we shall be helpless in the presence of an awakened Asia with whom we must share the world. The logical ~~XXXX~~ implication of our present concentration camps is the deportation after the war of all Japanese--aliens and American citizens alike. If we choose that course, dark and heavy times will lie ahead.

An intelligent policy of adjustment to our thousand million neighbors across the Pacific demands the fearless application of our American tradition of controlled assimilation. This calls for repudiation of racial pride and privilege and for improved social practices within the community.

-----  
-----  
-----  
-----  
-----  
-----  
-----