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Notes on Reaction to the Reinstitution of the Selective Service at Topaz

Community Analysis Section

April 10, 1944

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I. Background of the Nisei and Selective Service

1. Status of nisei immediately after Pearl Harbor
2. 4C Classification for all Japanese Americans
3. Volunteer Japanese Combat Team proposed
4. 100th and 442nd Japanese American Infantry Battalion organized

II. Reinstitution of Selective Service

1. Immediate Reactions

Except for a small group who wished to prove their loyalty, the news of the draft was resented because of its undemocratic nature. (p. 6)

2. Citizens Committee

"Representatives from each block met at the Block Managers office, a central location, for the purpose of discussing the advisability of forming a citizens committee of Topaz. The representatives unanimously agreed that such a committee was necessary at this particular time, and consented to hold block meetings for the purpose of discussing the need for an officially recognized citizens committee. All blocks interested in forming such an organization elected an official delegate to the citizens committee. Two days following these block meetings the official delegates met at the Block Managers office again, and created the following offices and committees:"

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"At the beginning the members of the Citizens Committee believed that most work could be accomplished by being independent in its affiliations. The Community Council was interested in officially recognizing the body. However, since it was felt that the citizens group could best function separate from the Community Council, the Committee did not become associated with the Council."

"At the beginning some members of the citizens committee were interested in collaborating with committees of other centers with similar interests. But as the Topaz Citizens Committee learned of the methods and the intentions of other centers, they thought it wise not to do so." (Note: Probably refers to Heart Mountain Fair Play Committee.)

"The above indicates there are two schools of thought within the committee as to the method to be used to gain their purposes. The majority, 87 % of the citizens committee representatives, have conservative views. Their stand has definite limitations. They propose to make recommendations to Washington whenever they feel protests are in order to protect their Civil Rights. When drafted they want to be on record as protesting the undemocratic treatment received at the hands of the U. S. government. They are strongly against any resistance to the draft as a means of protesting discrimination. They favor preventing any incident that could cause unfavorable publicity. They are also interested in avoided incidents that might hinder the good works Caucasian groups are accomplishing on the behalf of Americans of Japanese descent.

"On the otherhand, the minority group of 13% are in

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favor of drastic action. They have been in favor of resisting selective service pre-induction physicals en masse. They are in favor of cooperating with groups in other centers who believe united resistance is essential. They favor retaining a lawyer to assist the committee in their fight for the restoration of their rights. They feel the young people of draft age should be prepared to test the legality of draft ~~ages should be prepared to test~~ in a relocation center. The majority feel hasty actions should be avoided and as a compromise insisted advice from lawyers, and interested minority groups be gotten before thinking too seriously test cases. In answer to any inquiry, the citizens committee was told by the Civil Liberties Union lawyer, Attorney Wirin, that the Civil Liberties Union will not handle a test case testing the legality of draft in a WRA center. With this the minority group fell in with the majority method in dealing with the draft problems."

2. Mother's organize

(Similar to Minidoka)

Attitudes of Fair Play Leaders

From Further Reactions to Selective Service
at Heart Mountain March 16 - April 7, 1944

Heart Mountain Relocation Center
Community Analysis Section

April 15, 1944

A. T. Hansen

"Here is a summary of the views expressed by the leader the analyst visited. Insofar as the Sentinel writer discussed the same things, the opinions of the person with whom he talked did not differ from these in any important way. It will be observed that the ideas are not always consistent with each other. For instance, during the course of the conversation comments were made which constitute three answers to the first question.

Why was selective service for Nisei re-instituted?

(1) It was a plot fostered by JACL which has always favored the weak and supine policy of smiling whenever the Government kicked the Japanese. This improves the status of JACL members and entitles them to special consideration. It brings them personal benefits at the expense of other evacuees. (2) It was the idea of WRA which has never had the interest of evacuees at heart. WRA heads figured they would make a big hit with the rest of the Government by tapping this source of unused military manpower. (3) It was initiated by the Army itself. The war is not going as well as most Americans imagine. The newspapers fool them. The Army is desperately in need of fighting men. There is so much disunity in the country that the need cannot be met by drafting enough fathers. There might be a rebellion. Hence, the Nisei, since

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the Army is in such desperate straits, are in an excellent bargaining position. The analyst got the distinct impression that the FPC leader with whom he was conversing thought that the Nisei practically held the balance of power in the war; they have Uncle Sam over the barrel.

"What is the program? Nisei should refuse military service until all inequalities have been ~~abolished~~ abolished. They want a test case to find out if they can be drafted illegally while they are only "second-grade citizens."

"Why then should not just one or two refuse to be inducted to make the test? Nisei, none of them, should serve until the issue is decided.

"Does FPC really think it can win such a test case? It does. Its position is so completely in accord with the Constitution, the principles of Democracy, and the inalienable rights of man that sooner or later it must prevail. Besides, the Army is on the spot for men.

"If FPC does not win, if even the Supreme Court decides its position is untenable, then what? The leader had insisted over and over again that it was the duty of Nisei to find out what the law was and that this could be learned only when the courts had made ~~xx xxxxx~~ a pronouncement. This question was never answered clearly or explicitly. (It was never asked in this form, either, nor were any of the other questions. The discussion was an informal "bull-session") But the analyst arrived at the conclusion from many things that were said that if the court decision was adverse, the court would be wrong and FPC would be right. That is, that the final judge of the Government's right to draft Nisei is

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the individual's own conscience. There was an assertion to the effect that life imprisonment would be preferable to continued existence under unjust conditions outside of prison. (The leader interviewed by the Sentinel writer made the additional point that if the objectors were imprisoned for a few years, when they were released the war would be over--a circumstance he appeared to contemplate with some satisfaction.)

"What effect will the action of FPC have on the attitudes of Americans in general toward persons of Japanese ancestry in this country? The ideas on this point were astounding. Nisei will win the respect and admiration of people by standing up for their rights. One of the sources of anti-Japanese prejudice was their failure to resist evacuation and other injustices. Other Americans think the evacuees have no guts; when they demonstrate that they do have, their relations with other Americans will be better than they have ever been. One of the advantages that may accrue from evacuation is that it may force the Japanese to fight for their rights and thus make it possible for them to win the respect of their fellow citizens, which they have really never had. The leader criticized the inept efforts of JACL and others to obtain the goodwill of the United States public by cooperating in spite of the wrongs that the Japanese had suffered...." (pp. 16-19)