

California, The Jap Problem And Idle Land

GERRIT J. JOHNSON in *Grand Rapids Herald*.

THE writer having just returned from California, finds what seems to him a general misunderstanding here in Michigan regarding the so-called Japanese menace on the Pacific coast, and believes that the readers of your valued publication might be interested in getting the facts from first hand observation.

Before the World War California papers were full of this Japanese menace. They told us seriously that Japan was shipping troops into Mexico and massing them close to our border line; that Japanese submarines were seen near our coast. The atmosphere became so charged with fear that some of the well-to-do, those who occupy the beauty spots on the ocean front, actually moved into the interior. Many Japanese were arrested as spies and we were told they had maps, photographs and drawings of our forts and ports. Then Congress declared war on Germany and the Japanese troops along our border line must have faded away; the Japanese submarine disappeared and the Japanese were let out of jail. Then we appealed to these same despised Japanese to help us raise food to win the war and place democracy on the world map. They responded with a will. They thought here was their chance to show us Americans that they too could be Americans to the core.

After we placed democracy in Europe what happened? In the last election California passed an amendment which not only disfranchises them but prevents them owning or leasing land, or owning stock in any company that owns land. All that is left for them is to be our servants. I sometimes wonder who among us foreign born or of foreign descent are so important we have the right to say that the Japanese shall not have the same privileges under the Stars and Stripes that we enjoy. Surely if there is such a thing as priority right it would belong to the Indian. If Thomas Jefferson could come back to life and get our present idea of Americanism and democracy, would he drop dead again?

What's really troubling California? We could ask the same question of all other states. In California moving picture houses spring up like mushrooms. Movies, movies everywhere and yet crowds are lined up for blocks waiting to get in. It is the same with football, baseball and prize fights and there must be the jazz music while we eat our soup. The lectures where there is food for thought usually go unattended. We point with pride at the numerous \$1,000,000-a-year movie stars but the teachers who are supposed to be the foundation of this republic have an awful time making both ends meet. I sometimes wonder if Nero is again playing his old fiddle.

Is it really a Japanese menace that is ailing us or are we who call ourselves Americans becoming a menace to ourselves? Had these Japanese been frugal French peasants instead California would have hated them just the same.

It is not a racial but an economic problem that confronts California and the rest of our country.

Here is the trouble as I see it. California land boosters have boomed a fictitious value on the land. The land that the Japanese use for truck gardening is held from one to three thousand dollars an acre. The Japanese are very frugal. Their whole families will work 16 hours per day, every day in the year. They have to do this to eke out an existence. Americans can not compete in long hours and low wages with the Japanese in tilling this high-priced soil, so they get peeved and they think it is a racial and do not see it is an economic problem. They do not see the land profiteer. In California there are still millions of acres of idle fertile land in its natural state, but held out of use by land profiteers. While Californians were attending the movies, football, baseball and prize fights, and while the fizzle-headed sports were doing the shimmy, sharpers stole their lands. Now the sharpers realize they cannot get Americans to work this high priced land, so there has been a quiet movement on foot to import four or five million coolies. Land profiteers would rather flood our whole country with cheap coolie labor than sell their land at a price that enables Americans to buy and till the soil.

How can we remedy this situation? By using our brain power. Our present system of taxation is all in favor of the slacker and suppressing industry and thrift. We are working hind end too. We must face about and take all taxes off things desirable and place them on the undesirable. Idle city lots, idle lands and idle mines are undesirable. Suppose we take all taxes off our stores, stocks, factories, homes and contents and instead tax the vacant lots just the same as the used lots, according to their location value. That would drive vacant lots on the market. Then the young men who are making goo-goo eyes at their best girls could buy a lot. That would mean new homes, new furniture and new life. Then take all taxes off the farmers' crops, stocks, buildings and contents and instead tax the idle lands and idle mines the same as the mines or lands that are in use. That would kick the props from under the land profiteer and throw idle land and mines on the market. It would give man the same privilege as the birds of the air who build their nests in any place not in use. Then the Japanese will not want to work 16 hours a day and the American can then also afford to till his own soil. As soon as we are ready to attend to the duties of our American citizenship with the same alertness that we attend the movies, football, baseball games and prize fights, just so soon will our troubles disappear. It is not the Japanese who are bothering us but our trouble lies with ourselves.

GERRIT J. JOHNSON.

IF, as one of Mr. Hanna's writers insists, some taxes are "wholesale thievery," and if, as the *Saturday Evening Post* asserts, a tax dodger is a criminal, are not citizens between the devil and the deep sea?

H. M. H. in *Cleveland Citizen*.