

JULY 31, 1943

Fair Treatment of War Prisoners

THE UNITED STATES, as of this writing, has a little more than 36,000 prisoners of war within its borders—about 22,000 Germans, 14,000 Italians, and 62 Japs. Questions as to how best to treat these persons and the numerous others who we all hope will be arriving, are bound to come up.

Nobody has yet suggested an improvement on the basic principles laid down in the Geneva Convention of 1929 on proper treatment of war prisoners—decent food and quarters; officers not to be compelled to work; enlisted men to be required to do camp housekeeping and such work if necessary; modest pay rates, with provisions for sending money to prisoners' dependents; prisoners to be shielded from popular violence or ridicule.

We think it will pay us dividends in the long run to stick conscientiously to these rules, no matter what provocation to violate them may be offered us by, for the likeliest example, the Japs.

The way *not* to treat prisoners of war and enemy alien internees, however, has been vividly illustrated by the goings-on at the big Poston, Arizona, relocation center for Japs moved back from the Pacific Coast after Pearl Harbor. The Dies Committee has been digging up testimony on this matter, and it is anything but reassuring.

The core of the trouble at Poston apparently was that sob sisters and social workers (entirely okay in their proper spheres) got into this relocation center and wished on it a weepy, sentimental method of guarding and policing the internees. Self-government among the interned Japs, for instance, was widespread. The results were only what might have been expected—riots, strikes, food thefts and food waste, sabotage of important telephone lines, and so on.

That's typical American softheartedness. To repeat, this softheartedness is fine in its place, and far be it from us to urge Americans to try to become spiritually like the Nazis or the Jap war lords. But its place is not in war-prisoner camps or alien-internment centers. These institutions should be under firm though good-natured and fair military control, with sob sisters ruled all the way off the reservation and a few F.B.I. or G-2 men scattered around unobtrusively to keep tabs on probable spy activities.

It's to be hoped that the Poston episodes were the last of their kind, and that henceforth we'll manage our war prisoners and internees primarily with our heads instead of primarily with our hearts.