

Pat Detention Centers for Subversives *1/20/71*

Concentration camps are about as un-American as borscht. Yet there is a provision authorizing the creation of such camps, euphemistically called detention centers, in an act of Congress—the Internal Security Act of 1950—still very much on the statute books to this day. That provision is certainly the most un-American inheritance from the now slightly face-lifted House Un-American Activities Committee, currently operating under the alias, House Internal Security Committee. It authorizes, during a period of war, insurrection or invasion, the rounding up and detention of persons concerning whom there is “reasonable ground” to believe that they would “probably” engage in sabotage or espionage.

Un-American as such camps or centers may seem to most Americans, they are not unimaginable. At the outset of this country’s involvement in the Second World War, American citizens of Japanese ancestry were rounded up all over the west coast and impounded, behind barbed wire, in what were then called “relocation” centers—merely because it was supposed they would “probably” engage in espionage or sabotage. So there is very little reason to be surprised that minority groups of various sorts—militant blacks, long-haired youths, New Left radicals, old left Communists, ardent adversaries of the government or of the war in Viet-

nam—are full of apprehension that they may become victims of this totalitarian mechanism. Indeed, William Greider of this newspaper reported recently that the FBI has compiled, and keeps enlarging, a list of the names, addresses, jobs and phone numbers of thousands of Americans considered potentially dangerous as spies or saboteurs in case of war or some other “national emergency.” The FBI documents stolen at Media, Pa., afforded confirmation of this index.

Rep. Spark Matsunaga of Hawaii, a wounded war veteran who has reason to feel rather strongly about internment camps because some of his relatives were interned in one 30 years ago, has introduced a bill—along with more than 100 co-sponsors—to repeal Title II, the internment camp provision, of the Internal Security Act. There would have been little doubt about its adoption, had not the Internal Security Committee, with its usual propensity for mischief, come forward with a substitute bill slightly amending the existing law but retaining many of its worst features.

The Matsunaga bill would eradicate an ugly splotch from the American escutcheon. It has the full backing of the Justice Department. It would lift a pall of fear from the country. We hope that Congress will adopt it speedily, restoring the American way of dealing with dissent and rejecting the Un-American Activities way.