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House Vote Today

The Fear of U.S. Detention Camps

Washington

Members urged the House yesterday to repeal a 1950 law authorizing the jailing of suspected subversives in detention centers, arguing that it created a real — but unfounded — atmosphere of fear among some groups of Americans.

"I have said many times that there are no detention camps in America," Representative John Conyers (Dem-Mich.) one of the 12 black members, told the House, "but there are still citizens who believe that there are."

He said the law creates "an atmosphere of fear on the parts of millions of blacks that they could be victims as were the Japanese-Americans in World War II," he said.

The House will vote today whether to repeal the law or modify it as recommended by the House Internal Security Committee. The Nixon Administration favors repeal.

Representative Spark Matsunaga (Dem-Hawaii), a Japanese-American who had some relatives caught up in the internment of Japanese on the West Coast at the start of World War II, is the principal sponsor of the bill to repeal Title 2 of the Internal Security Law.

It provides that the President, in time of war, invasion, or insurrection in support of an enemy, can detain persons deemed likely to engage in spying or sabotage.

While many members argued for repeal on the ground that the bill created fear among some groups, Matsunaga said, "The bill involves a simple but vital question: Is there a place for concentration camps in the American scheme of life?"

"The answer is obviously no," Matsunaga said.

Representative Richard H. Ichord (Dem-Mo.), chairman of the Internal Security Committee which voted 5 to 3 to recommend an alternative bill to the outright repeal recommended by the Judiciary Committee, conceded that the measure created unfounded fear among some groups.

But he said repeal of the law completely would open the way for another President, relying on general powers, to conduct mass round-ups such as the one that routed 110,000 Nisei from their homes in 1942.

Ichord's committee proposed a bill to limit preventive arrests to persons trained as spies or saboteurs and to qualify a period of insurrection as one declared by Congress.

But John B. Anderson (Rep-Ill.) cited widespread expressions of fear that the detention camp law might be used to silence unpopular views. Young militants — both black and white — have cited the law and the underground press has taken up their claim the government might put masses of them in camps.

"This fear is genuine," said Anderson, while agreeing that it is groundless. "It should be allayed and laid to rest once and for all."

United Press