

SUMMARY OF THE PROCEEDINGS

Forum on Japanese Americans in the Victory Program
Hotel Commodore, New York February 13, 1943
co-sponsored by Japanese American Committee for Democracy
American Committee for Protection of Foreign Born

Abner Green, Secretary of the American Committee for Protection of Foreign Born, acted as Chairman of the Forum, since Arthur Upham Pope was unavoidably detained until late in the meeting.

Mr. Green outlined the purpose of the Forum, pointing out the need for coordinated activity between Government agencies, trade unions and other interested organizations and the loyal Japanese Americans themselves, in order to make use of this important minority group as a part of the whole country's war effort. Citing the recent move of the Senate reactionaries under Senator Reynold's leadership to "investigate conditions in the War Relocation Centers as an example of the dangerous interest that such forces have in the Japanese American problem, he pointed out that such an "investigation" was in reality an attack not only on the Japanese American evacuees, but also an attempt to discredit the War Relocation Authority, a Government agency carrying out its job as an authorized part of the President's war program, and thus an attack on the whole American victory war effort.

Blake Clark, Office of Civilian Defense, Washington, D. C.
Mr. Clark, from his experience in Hawaii, before, during and after December 7, 1941 presented evidence refuting false rumors of sabotage by Hawaiians of Japanese birth or descent. He showed how in every phase of the defense of Pearl Harbor at the time of the treacherous attack, civilians and soldiers and volunteer defense workers not only cooperated with our Government, but showed stamina and initiative that could only come from the most conscious and unswerving loyalty to their country. Quoting from the records of nisei (2nd generation) in the Army and from their superiors, from the FBI, from all sources who had constant contact with Japanese Americans, particularly in Hawaii, he stated the conviction that as a group there was no doubting the integrity of these people nor any question as to which side has their support in this war.

Donald Henderson, Int'l President of United Cannery, Agricultural, Packing and Allied Workers of America, CIO
Mr. Henderson, in whose union there were many members of Japanese origin and descent particularly those workers in the salmon fish canning industry on the West Coast, said that the only way to find a positive solution to the Japanese American problem was to approach it, not sentimentally, but realistically from the point of view of strengthening the war effort. He reviewed the whole "mossy" background of this particular minority group in this country, and showed that, whatever the cause, it had an especially isolated and non-assimilated character different from the rest of the American people. He felt that the trade unions, insofar as they had organized these people, had done a better job of integrating and assimilating and carrying out non-discriminatory practices than any other type of leadership that the Japanese had in this country. He stressed the need of considering the special aspects of the Japanese American situation, not only for the duration of the war, so as to achieve a correct economic base whereby they could contribute to help win the war, but also, as a part of strengthening the war effort internationally, and in reference to the post-war situation in the Far East and our relation to the people there.

He felt that the real problem of treating the Japanese American minority in this country in the proper democratic manner meant seeing that the

the democratic forces of the people of Japan could see to it that after the war a real reconstruction in terms of true democracy, and not in any "phony" puppet terms would be established there.

He stressed the same point in the handling of the problem here, and showed the necessity of developing real anti-fascist leadership among the Japanese American workers by integrating them into the trade union movement, and by seeing to it that, without fear of any racial prejudice or discrimination, they were recognized as a part of the whole people's fight against fascism.

Michael Obermeier, President of Local #6, Hotel and Club Employees Union, AFL. Mr. Obermeier spoke both as a trade unionist and as Chairman of the Victory Committee of German-American Trade Unionists. He told of his many years' experience with the Japanese as active members of his local, and remembered the anti-militarist demonstrations organized in Japan by the militant trade unions there in 1932. He showed the similarity between the big problems confronting the anti-fascist German Americans and the anti-fascist Japanese Americans; exposing and ending pro-Axis propaganda and its carriers within the national group itself, and tying up the development of new pro-democratic leadership with the struggle going on inside the fascist countries themselves to destroy fascist militarist enslavement, and set up true democracies free from any vestige of fascist or "puppet" control.

John C. Baker, Chief, Office of Reports, War Relocation Authority, Washington, D. C. Since Dillon Meyer, Director of WRA, was unable to arrange his work schedule to attend the Forum, Mr. Baker spoke in his stead, reporting the whole story of evacuation and relocation of the West Coast Japanese Americans in War Relocation Centers.

Mr. Baker explained the basis for the evacuation order as a measure to insure the safety of the strategic military areas on the West Coast, especially as a potential zone of combat, and said that only because of the concentration of these people in this one area had evacuation been found necessary. He emphasized that the Government does not recognize the evacuees as "enemies", nor individually as "criminals, potentially subversive, dangerous to society, or to national security." He gave as the basic rule of the WRA in both policy and administrative decision, the slogan, "Be Fair," and said that WRA in setting up the relocation centers had no way of knowing how long they would be used, but was determined that the period of time should be as short as possible. He told of the difficulties arising from hasty preparation, and the quick construction work necessary to lay at least the bare framework for relocation life. He described living conditions as at "a minimum standard of decency," providing food and shelter, adequate care in case of sickness, education for the children, and work in maintenance of center life. Workers receive nominal wages of \$12, \$16 and \$19 monthly, plus clothing allowances for all members of the worker's family (\$3.75 monthly for an adult).

He mentioned the War Department announcement of January 28, 1943, and quoted in full President Roosevelt's letter commending Secretary Stimson for opening the U.S. Army to nisei volunteers in order to form a special combat battalion of American citizens of Japanese ancestry. The President's letter said... "Americanism is not, and never was, a matter of race or ancestry," and acknowledged the new collaboration between the Army, Navy, War Manpower Commission, Justice Department, and the WRA in assuring the opportunity for the loyal Japanese Americans to serve their country "at a time when the fullest and wisest use of our manpower is all-important to the war effort."

Today, Mr. Baker said, registration is taking place in the centers, of all persons,

FORUM - page 3

over 17 years of age, male and female, citizen and non-citizen. This is being done to clear the background of all evacuees, not only to volunteer in the Army, but so that when employment is found for those ineligible for the Army, all cleared evacuees can leave to resettle in the country outside the centers anywhere except in the West Coast military area. WRA expects, by the end of May, to have cleared 40,000 employable men and women as a labor source for prospective employers.

Already released, on an individual basis, are about 2,000 evacuees, 350 as college students, most of the rest for jobs. WRA is setting up offices in Cleveland, Chicago, Kansas City, Denver and Salt Lake City to aid in getting employers in touch with qualified evacuees, working with War Manpower Commission, U.S. Employment Service and Department of Agriculture. Position of WRA in getting employment is to see that prospective employer makes connection with prospective worker, "from that point on arrangements are between them." Only restriction after evacuee is on the job; he may not return to evacuated area, he will keep WRA informed of his whereabouts, if he is an alien, he is of course also subject to Justice Department restrictions in regard to aliens.

Mr. Baker concluded by saying that he considered evacuee manpower of vital potential use to the war effort, and that with a successful resettlement achieved, he hoped there would no longer be a Japanese problem in the United States by the end of the war.

Janet Fukushima, Chairman of Japanese American Committee for Democracy
Miss Fukushima traced the effect of Pearl Harbor on the Japanese American community, showing the disintegration of the old social, economic and political relationships controlled by the former community leadership, now in the main repatriated to Japan or interned as pro-Japanese in this country. She told of the instinctive identification, although confused and without organized leadership, of the freed people with the war effort of this country, and of their cooperation as they were evacuated from the West Coast. She commended WRA, but mentioned problems which had not yet been resolved by WRA. She raised the matter of the evacuees' almost complete isolation from the rest of the country's war effort, except for the small camouflage net projects and the emergency harvesting of vital crops, for which thousands of evacuee volunteered. The general idleness resulted in a feeling of frustration, increased by the bitterness aroused by the arbitrary distinctions made between citizen evacuee and alien evacuee, a separation first aroused by the raising of abstract "civil rights of citizens" test cases which greatly confused the minds of Japanese Americans. She showed the struggle between the pro-Axis minority, who were not segregated and who were able to seize every opportunity to create disruptive incidents, and the genuinely anti-fascist elements who were trying, without recognition and on their own initiative, to educate and stabilize the people against divisionism and disruption from within and without the centers.

She stressed the importance of Secretary Stimson's statement opening the Army to nisei volunteers, and showed the need of positive action to follow this step forward by working out a concrete program to successfully integrate all Americans of Japanese birth or descent into either the Army or essential industry, and to recognize the importance of destroying the fifth column and developing clear new leadership among Japanese Americans so that these people could become a self-respecting part of the United Nations.

Arthur Upham Pope, Chairman of the Committee on National Morale, arrived and greeted the Forum, characterizing the meeting as "a patriotic, humane and honest undertaking

in the interest of this country." He noted the fact that certain journalists had attempted to "cast suspicion and ill will on this undertaking and those concerned with it" as indication that they were thus taking the Nazi line, "to create suspicion of one community against another," and were by doing so rendering their own patriotism doubtful. He paid tribute to the loyalty of the evacuees under the most critical conditions, and expressed admiration for the Japanese people through his long contact with them. He stressed the difference between the Japanese people and the brutal military clique which seized power and rules Japan, and who is our enemy today.

Louis Goldblatt, Int'l Representative of the International Longshoremen's and Warehousemen's Union, CIO

Mr. Goldblatt, who represented the CIO, as Secretary of the California State CIO Industrial Union Council, at the Tolson Committee hearings in California at the time of evacuation, made recommendations as to the most effective ways of bringing about the contribution of Japanese Americans toward winning the war. He commented that WRA, in spite of the fine progress it had made, had one serious shortcoming: it had consistently treated the evacuee situation from a social service rather than from a war consideration of evacuation and handling of Japanese people in America. He reminded the Forum that at the Tolson hearings the CIO had asked immediate setting-up of a tribunal whereby loyal Japanese could establish a clear record and then be permitted to take their proper place within the industrial war effort or within the armed forces of America. He felt that the new WRA policy of clearance first, and then finding employment, would become a point of departure for convincing the American people, and for mobilizing the democratic forces in America into acceptance and cooperation with an aggressive, progressive program of resettlement by WRA.

Mr. Goldblatt criticized the WRA for failing to make a distinction within the centers between the true anti-fascist Japanese and the "phonies" and the anti-American minority, thus depriving the people of their genuine pro-democratic leadership, who were put in an unfavorable light just because WRA did not recognize the need for developing and respecting such leadership. He drew an analogy to the result in industry, where even after the establishment of labor-management committees to increase production, if management does not support the union's effort with like contributions, attempts to discredit the union by defeatist and disruptor elements often result.

He made the following recommendations:

1. Set up machinery to clear loyalty of Japanese Americans, with unions and other anti-fascist organizations of which they are members participating and helping to establish the records of the evacuees
2. Vindication by wide publicity resulting from these hearings would mean general recognition that the assimilation of Japanese Americans into the American war effort would be one of the greatest contributions toward defeating the Axis
3. Correct union policy could see that Japanese be brought into industry and kept there side by side with other workers to establish a fundamental unity which will end any possibility of discrimination because of race or national origin
4. America to stop discrimination against Asiatics; amend the naturalization law so that all Orientals can become naturalized citizens, recognizing this as the "single greatest political weapon" for defeating the Axis, and proving to the people of Asia that America is fighting a people's war, and will get a people's peace and a people's world

DISCUSSION

Carol King, American Committee for Protection of Foreign Born, announced that they

FORUM - page 5

are about to have introduced into Congress a bill to amend the Naturalization Act so that there shall no longer be a denial of naturalization to the Asian in America because of race

Charles Collins, Executive Secretary of Negro Labor Victory Committee, upon opening of the Selective Service draft for Japanese Americans on an equal basis with all other Americans

Teru Masumoto, Japanese American Committee for Democracy, announced that in correspondence with Dillon Moyer, Director of WRA, this Committee had established the fact that WRA would accept as guarantee of employment the statement of a union that it could place evacuees through its employment bureau in a field where there is a shortage of labor, without specifying name of employer. Local General Clerical UOPWA, CIO, is thus guaranteeing jobs in N.Y.C. to two

Louis Goldblatt stressed importance of Government taking an aggressive stand against discrimination against Japanese in industry in order to assure success of unions' fight to end discrimination as a bar to full mobilization for maximum production to win the war. He cited the fight to end discrimination against Negro people in industry.

Donald Henderson said that in spite of the known labor shortage of agricultural workers, over which UCAPAWA has jurisdiction, neither WRA nor any Government agency has ever approached UCAPAWA to place Japanese American labor on the farms. From a UCAPAWA organizer's report (Arizona, cauliflower packing) he reported that Japanese labor had been imported to replace union labor at a lower wage, and that unless WRA and the Department of Agriculture stopped such practices, correct labor policies, the unions could do nothing to end discrimination against racial minorities so used.