

INTERVIEW MINUTES  
with  
D. S. MYER, WRA NATIONAL DIRECTOR

March 18, 1944

An informal interview with the National WRA Director, D. S. Myer was held on March 18, 1944, at the Project Director's office, from 4:00 p.m. D. S. Myer was introduced to the body assembled by the Project Director, R. R. Best.

Those present were: R. R. Best, Project Director, Harry L. Black, Assistant Project Director, Paul Robertson, Assistant Project Director and Director of Operations, and Williard Schmidt, Chief of Police. Co-ordinating Committee members present were: G. Yamatani, K. Okamoto, M. Shimada, and B. Akitsuki.

Questions presented by the Committee and statements included in the answers given therein by Mr. D. S. Myer were as follows.

1. We wish to ascertain what our standing is; that is, the standing of the Co-ordinating Committee. To what extent has the WRA headquarters in Washington been informed of our purpose and activities up to date?

Answer: WRA officials are informed of every development, day by day and week by week. Mr. Best was in Washington twice and we went over the whole problem and policy, not only in relation to the general program, but in relation to Tule Lake Center. (Mr. Best, at this time, commented that the standing of the Committee is well-known to the Committee itself, as well as to the Administration, and he jokingly stated that the Committee was just trying to 'test' him. He reiterated that this representative Committee is purely of a temporary nature, until a permanent committee is organized. This body has been doing a very good job and full confidence and faith of the Administration rest in this Committee.) Mr. Myer remarked, "If that is his answer, that is also my answer."

2. With an understanding with the Administration, we have been making arrangements toward the formation of a self-governing body. We wish to inquire of the attitude of the WRA headquarters toward self-government in a center like this.

Answer: WRA is now an agency under the Department of Interior, which has not changed our program in any manner up to date. WRA does discuss any major problems with the Secretary and the Under-Secretary before it moves ahead. WRA has gone over number of problems regarding general policy of the Tule Lake Center. Upon clearance with the Secretary, which will probably be within a few weeks, WRA is ready to make its decision, therefore, no definite answers could be given now. If the Secretary agrees, (it is hoped that he will), some plan could be worked out where Tule Lake may have a representative type of election, actually selected in the same capacity as this Committee. It will not be a community government in the same sense as those functioning in the other relocation centers, but as a group representing the Colony to serve as a channel of information and understanding between the Colony and the Administration and a body representing the point of view of the Colony to present to the Administration, and visa versa.

3. Will the future policy of this Center be any different in comparison to the other relocation centers?

Answer: Yes, in certain respects it will. Some of the major differences will be: (1) Some differences in self-government, (2) Because of necessity, change in the setup of the Internal Security, until the establishment of confidence that there is no further necessity of a wired fence and extra guards, (3) Difference in the relocation program. However, there will be opportunities for all those who want to leave the center, provided they haven't been denied leave clearances, and (4) No restrictions relative to the operation of Japanese Language Schools in Tule, notwithstanding, services of public schools are offered.

4. We presume that this Center's employment policy is somewhat different from the other center's. Will you please tell us what employment policy is applied to this center, relative to the population of the center, the status of the center, and the standing of the people?

Answer: Relative to employment policy, there are some differences because of nature of things. In general, employment policy will be the same. The plan is to continue the same policy, same wage scale, same hour scale, continuance of every-day routine jobs, etc. There will be some curtailment in the farm operations because of the past incident. It will be operated on the basis of self-sufficiency. Subsistence particularly within the center to further employment -- every industry to be developed will receive every consideration, just so it remains within the general policy of the WRA ruling. WRA is willing to do everything within reasons if it is sound and if people are willing to work. (Mr. Best stressed the fact that sound employment practice to be based on job analysis of every major job and job classification will be practiced. Sound employment practice does not only mean employment, it means terminations as well.)

5. Persons who are not able to obtain employment -- are they eligible to receive clothing allowances, at least?

Answer: No, unless they need it. If they are not in need they can't get such. Same policy is in effect as in any other centers. People who are actually in need are eligible for public assistance grants and clothing allowances, but again WRA is not going to hand out money unless they can show their urgent needs, because of governmental procedure and commitments to Congress. However, WRA doesn't intend to let anyone go cold or hungry.

6. Will the colonists who have applied for repatriation or expatriation, prior to January 20, 1944, be exempted from Selective Service?

Answer: No answer to this question was given by Mr. Myer, who stated that the Army is the only one who is going to decide.

7. There has been prevailing rumors within the Center that there will be a change in appointed personnel, including the Project Director. At this time, we, the Committee, wish to be informed definitely regarding it, since we cannot afford to lose Mr. Best, which would also be a great loss to the colonists, as a whole.

Answer: There is no plan for a change in Project Director. Full confidence is vested in Mr. Best, Mr. Black, Mr. Robertson, and Mr. Wells.

8. Assuming that an incident which occurred in the past re-occurs and the Army controls the Center again, in that event, how will the case be disposed? Will the WRA be allowed to assume authority as an Administrative Agency?

Answer. "God only knows. I don't. I only hope there won't be any, which doesn't mean that there isn't going to be trouble. I don't see that there is a real chance of incident of the type that would require the Army to come in. However, if necessary Army will be brought in." At the present time, WRA has an agreement with the Army to be given right to ask for more detailed soldiers and they in turn have agreed to retire as soon as the WRA dismisses them.

Thereupon, the National Director inquired whether there is any possibility of the recurrence of the incident. B. Akitsuki immediately responded, "We are just hoping and praying that it will not happen again." When asked whether the situation in the Colony in comparison to the past two or three months had improved, B. Akitsuki answered, "Greatly".

At this time, Mr. Myer was interested to know what the major problems of the Center were, at present, and what the people have that they have to kick about. B. Akitsuki mentioned the food situation (not enough and the worst quality), and he continued to state that people have been saying that the situation had grown worse, subsequent to the Army's stepping out. Mr. R. R. Best immediately answered the problem as follows: that the same food, same source, and same identical requisition through the Quarter Master was being distributed, even during Army's control. The Army didn't provide a bit of food, it merely distributed it. They wanted quick solution therefore, they distributed food on the basis of 300 to a block, regardless of the density of population. When WRA stepped in, they once again calculated distribution on per head--per block basis. Mr. Myer informed the body that he had discussed WRA general policy with Mr. Wells and mentioned the fact that he wanted it understood that WRA is not trying to save money on food, provided it is kept within the limits of the policy, or not more than 45¢ per day on food. However, one must expect the fact that the amount will inevitably fluctuate, regardless. Mr. Best cited an illustration of food situation of the Army. Colonel had told him that even the Army had failed in their requisition, since the Quarter Master wasn't able to supply certain food.

In an event one has complaints, Mr. Myer advised that specific cases should be submitted to Mr. Best. Since there are important international aspects involving aliens in this matter, WRA wants to live up to its requirements. If there are legitimate 'kicks' at any point, submit all facts, and not just rumors. Consideration will be duly given.

Recommendation of the Committee in regard to employment of priests as Social Workers and Educational Lecturers was remarked by Mr. Myer that WRA has no provisions to compensate ministers, that policy has been thrashed over way back in 1943, he mentioned, and such cannot be changed. He added that such matter must be worked out within the Center.

Mr. Myer went on to say that doubtless there are many who earnestly desire to get friends out of the stockade, but one should be reluctant in making demands, until WRA has a chance to get the inventory taken and get all papers in order, to check the stockade list. He advised that one should withhold making too many recommendations which are inclined to embarrass the Administration.

Lastly, Mr. Myer expressed his delight in meeting with this group, and his appreciation for the work done by the Committee, as well as the tremendous progress made since last November. However he cautioned that everyone should be alert. "I still have my fingers crossed", he concluded.

The interview ended at 4:45 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

/s/ Byron Akitsuki  
Executive Secretary

## QUESTIONS

March 18, 1944

1. We wish to ascertain what our standing is, that is, the standing of the Co-ordinating committee. To what extent has the WRA headquarters in Washington been informed of our purpose and activities up to date?
2. With an understanding with the Administration, we have been making arrangements toward the formation of a self-governing body. We wish to inquire of the attitude of the WRA Headquarters toward self-government in a center like this.
3. Will the future policy of this Center be any different in comparison with the other relocation centers?
4. We presume that this Center's employment policy is somewhat different from the other Center's. Will you please tell us what employment policy is applied to this Center, relative to the population, the status of the Center, and the standing of the people?
5. Persons who are not able to obtain employment -- are they eligible to receive clothing allowances, at least?
6. Will the colonists who have applied for repatriation or expatriation, prior to January 20, 1944, be exempted from Selective Service?
7. There has been prevailing rumors within the Center that there will be a change in appointed personnel, including the Project Director. At this time we, the Committee, wish to be informed definitely regarding this, since we cannot afford to lose Mr. Best, which would also be a great loss to the colonists, as a whole.
8. Assuming that an incident which occurred in the past re-occurs and the Army takes control of the center again, how will the case be disposed, in that event? Will the WRA be allowed to assume authority as an Administrative Agency?