

November 30, 1943

Rohwer Community Council
Rohwer Relocation Center
Relocation, Arkansas

Gentlemen:

The statement of the Committee of the Rohwer Relocation Council for the Study of Relocation Problems has been forwarded to me by Mr. Johnston. I find it a thoughtful, mature presentation of certain aspects of relocation, and as such it has been given careful consideration.

For the sake of clarity it seems desirable to discuss separately each point raised in your letter.

1. "The WRA has not completely grasped the evacuees' true sentiments as regards relocation."

The WRA believes that the understanding of "the evacuees' true sentiments as regards relocation" is a continuing process. It is of great importance that there be full understanding by the evacuees as to the congressional and budgetary limitations under which the WRA operates. Such communications as yours are to be commended as an effective means of helping to bring about this mutual understanding. It should be emphasized that the proposed family counseling program and the provisions for increased evacuee participation in the relocation program, which were outlined in the Acting Director's letter of October 28, are steps toward gaining a better understanding of evacuees' attitudes in regard to relocation. Community Analysis is also working toward promoting our understanding of evacuee relocation attitudes, and we have recently begun to obtain the views of resettlers concerning their experiences.

2. "The WRA has not formulated any concrete plan regarding our further welfare after relocation from these centers."

By "further welfare after relocation" it is presumed that the Council is referring to the adjustment period when the resettler is working out the transition from center life to normal life in American communities. The WRA has developed extensive plans for the welfare of resettlers during the adjustment period, which are indicated in the following paragraphs. Planning for the future of the Japanese Americans beyond the transition period is surely something in which the evacuees themselves will wish to take the lead.

Meanwhile an increasing amount of time and energy has been devoted by WRA to planning and developing on a nationwide scale aids to the security of the evacuee resettlers. Churches, private citizens, social agencies, labor unions, and many government agencies have been drawn into the plans of the Authority and are now taking an active part in developing concrete plans for the welfare of the evacuees after relocation. The basis of this program for the welfare and security of resettlers was laid over a year ago. At that time WRA enlisted the aid of the Committee on Japanese Americans Resettlement of the Federal Council of Churches and with the committee made contacts with the leading citizens of many American communities deemed most suitable for resettlement. Since that time the number of influential and prominent persons assisting the WRA in the resettlement program has grown enormously until now many hundreds of community leaders throughout the Middle West and East are supporting the WRA resettlement program and working constantly toward achieving greater social and economic security for resettlers.

The WRA itself has established 45 offices in 25 states, with a total personnel of 144 specialists in the fields of employment and social adjustment. WRA staff members in these offices are in close touch with organizations in their home communities, informing them of the excellent record of the evacuees on the West Coast, making clear the loyal and law abiding character of the evacuees, and pointing out the importance of full recognition for their civil rights. They are pointing out the successful adjustment resettlers have thus far made, and the further contribution they are potentially capable of making to the community's welfare and the war effort. They are working with cooperating groups of leading citizens in every place where evacuees are resettling, working out plans for employment, health and social security.

Various national organizations are working with the Authority in planning for the welfare of the evacuees after resettlement. The Brethren, the Friends, the Baptists, the Congregationalists, Methodists, Presbyterians, and many other denomina-

tions in cooperation with the WRA are developing programs to acquaint their vast membership in many thousands of individual churches with the need for assistance to evacuees during the adjustment period. Many pamphlets and leaflets have been distributed to the church members making clear the problems of the evacuees and their rights. Hostels have been established in several cities by the Baptists, Friends, and Brethren. Y.M.C.A.'s and Y.W.C.A.'s throughout the areas of resettlement have extended hospitality and are aiding resettlers in their social adjustment. The Travelers Aid Society has been actively cooperating for many months in aiding evacuees enroute. Instructions have gone out to every Travelers Aid Office in the United States to the effect that they are to keep alert for opportunities to aid evacuees arriving at various cities. Colleges and universities have participated in the planning for the welfare of resettlers. The National Japanese American Student Relocation Council representing the cooperation of church groups, colleges and universities of the country, and now in its second year, has been responsible for educational opportunities extended to hundreds of evacuees. The Student Relocation Council estimates that the same number of Japanese Americans are now attending institutions of higher learning as was the case prior to evacuation.

The WRA has been active in securing the assistance of government agencies for resettlers. Through an agreement with the Social Security Board a system of financial aid to evacuee resettlers confronted by economic or health problems too difficult for them to solve is in operation in every state except Colorado. The details of this plan are in the hands of your relocation program officer.

The United States Employment Service has been thoroughly acquainted with the problems of relocation and now includes in its own manual of instructions a provision making available to resettlers its full resources for job placement.

The National Housing Agency has been thoroughly acquainted with the housing problems of the evacuees and has given assurance that evacuees finding employment in essential occupations of all types may call upon the war housing resources available in most localities. Some resettlers are now living in such war housing.

The United States Office of Education has been similarly acquainted with the problems of resettlement and has prepared packets of information in regard to resettlement of Japanese Americans which are being widely distributed. State officials, educational officials, school boards, superintendents of schools, and educational authorities on a local level have been contacted by WRA, and the result has been that in all communities where evacuees have gone, their children have been accepted without question in the public school system.

The Department of Agriculture, the Department of Interior, the Department of Labor, and the Maritime Commission are among the agencies currently planning with WRA for the future of resettlers. The WRA has carried out an active campaign for the education of other government agencies in regard to the loyalty, abilities and rights of the evacuees, and as a result many evacuees are now in government jobs.

In addition to the cooperation which has already been secured from the various government agencies referred to, the WRA through the Washington Office and also through its relocation supervisors and officers in the field is constantly developing and extending through its educational program the list of private and public agencies assisting resettlers.

3. "Failure of the WRA to provide for the safeguard of our lives after relocation."

The mention of this point was a little surprising in view of the vast evidence piling up that relocated evacuees have been accepted in the areas of resettlement practically without incident. It is probable, however, that insufficient information on community attitudes has been presented to evacuees still in the centers. A year ago when the relocation program was first getting under way, it was thought necessary before relocation took place in any area to obtain the assurances of local and state officials that the evacuees would receive the same protection as other residents. It soon became apparent that even stronger guarantees existed in the overwhelming community belief in fair play for resettlers. Experience of the past year has shown that the population in the Middle West and East is prepared to vigorously support the civil rights and peaceful existence of the resettlers. Consider the fact that approximately 40,000 Japanese Americans, one-third of the total Japanese American population, are living outside the relocation centers. Approximately half of this group has never been in relocation centers. Resettled evacuees have been involved in disturbances less frequently than an average cross section of the American public, and the three or four incidents that have occurred were not serious. In each of these cases peace officers acted promptly for the punishment of the wrong doers and the protection of the resettlers. The attitude of soldiers and sailors and other members of the armed forces has generally been friendly beyond the average, and specific instances have been written up in project papers as to the unusually courteous and friendly treatment accorded evacuees by members of the armed forces.

A question is raised as to the attitude of American communities if and when casualties in the South Pacific become more severe. It is of interest in this connection to point out that there are now several towns in which evacuees have resettled where a large part of the male youth of the town was killed or taken prisoner by the Japanese in the earlier days of the war. There have been no instances of violence in any of these communities. Nisei soldiers who received their basic training at Fort Douglas in Utah reported that they were accepted on a completely friendly basis by convalescent soldiers who had fought and been wounded in the South Pacific. The excellent record of the 100th Battalion in Italy has been widely publicized by the War Department, and it may be expected that the further fighting of this unit and the participation of the combat team now in training at Camp Shelby will be extremely effective in continuing these favorable public attitudes.

It is obvious that certain special groups particularly active on the West Coast have for months carried on a campaign in the newspapers with the aim of arousing hatred for all persons of Japanese ancestry. It must be emphasized that this West Coast newspaper campaign does not have its counterpart in the Middle West and East, and that on the contrary many of the largest and most influential newspapers of these areas have actively supported the rights of evacuees. Among these are the St. Louis Post Dispatch, Des Moines Register, Kansas City Times, Milwaukee Journal, Chicago Sun, Cincinnati Times-Star, Washington Post, and New York Times. Many other newspapers in both small and large communities have been favorable to Japanese Americans. Copies of this favorable publicity are in the files of the Reports Division and can be furnished to the Council if desired.

In connection with the future safety of the persons of Japanese ancestry in this country, it should be pointed out that to date most public criticism has been centered on the persons remaining in the relocation centers and not upon the resettlers. The case of the young evacuee couple who relocated on an Iowa farm this spring and who were discharged after word was received that the farmer's son had been killed in action in the South Pacific is regrettable, but certainly substantiates the entire experience of the WRA in its belief that evacuees resettling in the Middle West and East at the very worst need not fear attacks on their persons. Evacuees fearing such violence under-estimate the essential fairmindedness of the residents of the Middle West and East and their ability to differentiate between the Japanese with whom we are at war and the loyal, law-abiding persons of Japanese ancestry who have chosen America for their home. The very fact that evacuees have resettled and are working actively to contribute to the war effort counts heavily in their favor. There is a likelihood that recent criticism directed at evacuees remaining in centers and thus withholding their contributions from the war effort will be intensified.

4. "Lack for provision for group relocation especially farmers."

It is not clear just what the Rohwer Community Council means by group relocation, and admittedly it is a term which seems to mean a great many different things to different people. If by group relocation the Council means the purchase of a fairly large tract of land and the colonization of a considerable number of evacuees on this land, the WRA will have to answer that it actively discourages such plans. While the people of the Middle West and East are prepared to accept resettlers as fellow Americans, such a colonization plan would be met, we believe, with strong opposition. Such colonization implies that the Japanese Americans are less interested in being accepted as fellow members of these communities than a separate group having a special community life and set apart from the other people of this nation. Such special groups whether they are Japanese, Italian, Greek, Polish, or Turkish, will meet with antagonism and opposition.

It should be entirely possible, however, for half a dozen or more families to establish themselves in agriculture in a locality. The WRA is ready to consider any such propositions made by evacuees, devote its resources to this end and endeavor to obtain the resources of cooperating agencies, toward the successful relocation of these small groups. There are also many opportunities for relocation of a number of farm families as tenants or on a crop-share basis in neighborhoods where the families will be fairly close to each other.

In addition to the points enumerated, the WRA is currently exploring the possibilities of developing credit unions of evacuees to aid in the financing of group and family relocation plans. The Authority has detailed a supervisor to develop at two centers specific plans for the experimental relocation of small groups of families in agriculture. It is not necessary, however, for the evacuees at Rohwer to wait for the full development of these plans. WRA will be very glad to review specific propositions for group relocation and assist those interested in every way possible. While WRA is not in a position to finance such plans, other government agencies, such as Farm Credit, Farm Security and National Housing Agency, have been created to handle the types of financing which evacuees require in the course of resettlement. WRA will aid in securing the assistance of these agencies. However the

fact that these agencies exist for the purpose of financing precludes any possibility of WRA's receiving funds to spend for this purpose.

To sum up:

1. The WRA is anxious to improve its knowledge of evacuee sentiments in regard to relocation and will shortly undertake a family counseling program at every center in order to discuss future plans with every family group and secure accurate information on evacuee attitudes concerning relocation.

2. While the WRA believes that the evacuees will desire to take a major part in planning for their future welfare, the WRA has formulated concrete plans for aiding resettlers during the transition period. The present large scale program directed to this end is continuing and additional assistance is being secured from private and public agencies.

3. The attitude of the people of the Middle West and East towards resettled evacuees has been good, and the WRA believes that in addition to the educational work being done to increase this friendly feeling, the excellent records of resettlers and the participation of Japanese American soldiers in the war will create even greater community acceptance. Consequently there is no basis for believing that the evacuees are running any physical risk in the many approved areas of resettlement.

4. Group relocation within certain limitations is feasible, and if specific proposals are made by evacuee groups, WRA is prepared to assist these groups and will aid in securing the assistance of private and government agencies.

We, here in Washington, even as you at the centers, are primarily concerned with the future of your children, and it is this concern that they have the opportunity to live normal lives that primarily motivates our vigorous development of relocation opportunities.

May I express my appreciation for your communication as evidence of your desire to share fully in planning for the future of Japanese Americans. It is hoped that this letter will to some extent answer the questions you have raised. Please be assured that your communication will receive the continued study and thought of Washington Staff members concerned with relocation.

Sincerely yours,

/s/ D. S. Myer

Director

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