Bigelow

THE RELOCATION PROGRAM

An address by Dillon S. Myer, Director of the War Relocation Authority, delivered before a meeting of State Commanders and State Adjutants of the American Legion in Indianapolis, Indiana, November 16, 1943.

I welcome this opportunity to meet with you here today and tell you about some of our problems and policies in the War Relocation Authority. Like practically all Americans, I have always had a great deal of respect for the American Legion and for the principles on which it was founded. Of course, I have been disturbed by many of the resolutions regarding our program that have emanated from your national organization and from some state departments and local posts over the past fifteen months. But I have felt all along that what we needed more than anything else was to get together for a frank exchange of views. So I am encouraged by the fact that you have invited me to this meeting. It gives me an opportunity to talk with you about a problem of interest to every section of the country. And it proves what I have felt for some time now -- that a great many of you are sincerely interested in getting at the facts about the relocation program and in forming your judgments on the basis of full and accurate information.

To get this whole problem in proper perspective, let me go back and review briefly some of the background and early history of our program. The War Relocation Authority was established by Executive Order of the President about a year and a half ago -- in March of 1942. At that time, the Army on the West Coast was preparing one of the biggest population moves this government has ever undertaken. In the interest of military security, it was calling upon about 115,000 people of Japanese ancestry -- both American citizens and aliens -- to move from their homes. The Army's primary concern was to remove all such people as quickly as possible from a highly sensitive military area along the West Coast. At the same time, however, the government recognized that it owed the evacuees an obligation to help them in getting re-established. And that is where WRA came into the picture. We were set up, as the name of the agency indicates, to relieve the Army of the burdensome and essentially non-military task of helping the evacuated people in relocation.

Even before the War Relocation Authority was established, the Army had made a start on this problem by asking the people of Japanese ancestry to move voluntarily away from the coastal area and resettle in inland communities. By the time we came into the picture, however, this voluntary movement had begun to create serious difficulties particularly in the intermountain states. It was becoming increasingly apparent that we could not have thousands of

people moving indiscriminately across the country under wartime conditions without throwing the economy of local areas badly out of gear and without arousing a lot of public apprehension. Toward the end of March the Army and WRA jointly decided to stop all further voluntary migration so that the evacuation might be carried out thereafter on a controlled and orderly basis. This decision was put into effect by the so-called "freeze" order which was issued by the Commanding General of the Western Defense Command on March 27, 1942.

Almost immediately thereafter the War Relocation Authority began a search for sites where barrack-type communities could be established. By the early part of June we had finally selected eight sites of this kind in more or less isolated localities -- six in the western states and two in the delta section of Arkansas. Meanwhile, we had taken over one of the assembly centers which the Army had established for temporary housing of the evacuees at Manzanar, California, and we had worked out an agreement with the Indian Service for management of another center which was constructed very early in the game near Parker, Arizona. This meant a total of 10 barrack cities or relocation center for about 110,000 people of Japanese descent. The movement of these people from their homes into the Army's temporary assembly centers and later into relocation centers was started toward the end of March, 1942 and was completed in the early part of November.

While this movement was going forward, we began working out some of our basic policies. We had to start practically from scratch. The job that lay ahead of us was wholly without precedent in the history of the United States government. There were no guide posts we could follow and no previous governmental experience from which we could benefit. But by August of last year we had accumulated enough experience of our own so that we were able to lay down a broad framework of guiding principles and operating procedures.

One of our major objectives was to take every possible precaution for protection of the wartime security of the nation. Almost immediately after the outbreak of war, the Federal Bureau of Investigation rounded up several hundred Japanese aliens on the West Coast who were suspected of subversive intentions. During the period while the evacuated people were in assembly centers, it was not possible to carry out this screening process any further. But as soon as we began receiving the evacuees in relocation centers, we immediately started building up comprehensive records on the people 17 years old and older. We checked into their background before evacuation and we accumulated extensive information on their behavior at the relocation centers. In a large number of cases we wrote back to former employers, to local officials and to neighbors in the evacuated area. Our internal security or police division in

each center kept careful records on all people who attempted to stir up trouble or endanger the peace of the community. Our Employment Division maintained a file of current information on work performances. In fact, almost every branch of the center administration contributed toward the building up of a well documented case history on the individual residents.

Then in February and March of this year we collaborated with the Army in conducting a large registration program to round out the screening process. Questionnaires were developed both for citizens and aliens. These questionnaires were worked out in close cooperation with the Army and Navy and were designed to bring out basic information on background and attitudes which these agencies had found useful in dealing with the people of Japanese descent over a period of years. They asked for information on topics such as education, previous employment, knowledge of the Japanese language, number of relatives in Japan, investments and other business ties with Japan, travel to Japan, religious and organizational affiliations, and even sports and hobbies. But the most crucial question was Number 28. As presented to the citizen evacuees, this question asked whether they would state unqualified allegiance to the United States. Since the alien evacuees are aliens in large measure because our laws do not permit their naturalization, they could not answer such a question in the affirmative without becoming virtually "men without a country". The question was rephrased for these people and they were asked whether they would abide by the Nation's laws and refrain from interfering with the War effort. The registration included all evacuees at the centers 17 years or over. We are still registering the younger residents as they reach the age of 17.

As the registration forms were completed, they were sent in from the relocation centers to the Washington office. Under an agreement with the Department of Justice, the Federal Bureau of Investigation assumes responsibility for providing us with any information available in the files of the intelligence agencies on each evacuee who is registered. In carrying out this responsibility, the FBI has checked its files for us with great care. Thus we are building up a comprehensive docket on each adult evacuee which is readily available at the relocation center and which provides us with a good indication of basic loyalties.

A considerable number of people in this country seem to feel that there is no way of determining the loyalty of a person of Japanese ancestry. This is a point of view which we in the War Relocation Authority have never shared. We recognize, of course, that there is no absolute way of guaranteeing the loyalty of a Japanese American or -- for that matter -- of anyone else. But we do feel that it is possible, by employing techniques which the

intelligence agencies have used effectively, to make a determination that is wholly adequate for the purpose of protecting the national security. And I might add that we are not the only branch of the government which has this feeling. Both the Army and Navy quite obviously are confident of their ability to determine the loyalty of Japanese Americans within practical limits because these agencies are using large numbers in combat service and in other important lines of work. There is a battalion of American boys of Japanese descent from Hawaii which has recently distinguished itself in action on the Italian front. There is a combat team made up wholly of Japanese-American volunteers both from the mainland of the United States and from the Hawaiian Islands which is now in training at Camp Shelby, Mississippi.

Nevertheless, we have recognized from the very beginning that there was in the evacuated population a minority which had stronger ties with Japan than with the United States and which might conceivably interfere with the war effort. There are some among the aliens who have maintained persistent contact with their native land and who have made frequent visits there for business or cultural purposes. There are several thousand young American citizens who have received practically all their education in Japan and who have been affiliated with pro-Japanese organizations in this country. Many of this latter group have doubtless been imbued with the Japanese militaristic spirit while others probably returned to this country for the purpose of avoiding service in the Japanese Army. Because we have realized that there were such people in relocation centers, we have taken particular pains to build up a record on the background and attitudes of adult residents. From the very start, we have been denying the privilege of leave in all cases where records have indicated that the evacuee might endanger the national security. And within the past few months, we have carried out a segregation program to separate such people from the bulk of the evacuee population.

Under the procedures we established, all persons who requested repatriation or expatriation to Japan were designated for segregation. In addition, the segregants have included (1) those who failed to answer Question 28 during registration with an unqualified affirmative; (2) those with intelligence records or other records which indicated that they might interfere with the war effort; and (3) immediate family relatives of persons in the groups already mentioned. As most of you doubtless know at this time, Tule Lake in northern California was designated as the segregation center. The main movement of segregants into Tule Lake and of non-segregants from Tule Lake to other centers took place during September and October. But there are still about 1,900 people at the Manzanar Center in California awaiting transfer to Tule Lake as soon as housing to accommodate them is completed. And there are around a thousand other people at the various centers who will probably be designated for

segregation as the leave clearance hearings are concluded. We expect that the entire process will be finished about the first of the year and that we will ultimately have a population in the neighborhood of 18,000 people at Tule Lake.

I am sure that many of you would like to learn more about the events that have taken place at Tule Lake during the past several weeks. The story is so complicated that I do not want to take up time to discuss it in this talk. But I have brought along several copies of a prepared statement on the incident and will be glad to make them available after I finish my remarks. At the same time I will also try to provide answers for any specific questions which you do want to ask.

Once the segregation process is completed, the people remaining in our nine other relocation centers will be those who have stood up under the most careful type of scrutiny and proved themselves to be eligible for leave whether they be American citizens or law abiding aliens. Our policies governing the administration of these centers will be pretty much what they have been all along. We have been providing the essentials of living -- food, housing, medical care, and education for the children -- and we have utilized voluntary evacuee labor to the fullest possible extent in order to hold down the costs of operation. Evacuees who work at the centers receive small cash allowances for the purchase of incidental items and special allowances for the purchase of family clothing. The feeding program is carried out strictly in accordance with all rationing regulations and is limited to a maximum cost of 45¢ per person per day or about 15 cents per meal.

At all centers except Tule Lake, we also provide the evacuee residents with an opportunity to set up their own community government and to formulate rules and regulations for the community welfare within certain limits. At each center there is a police force headed by several non-Japanese officers and staffed mainly by evacuees. The exterior boundaries of each center are guarded by a detachment of military police who can be called within the center whenever a show of force is necessary for the preservation of order. Aside from Tule Lake, which is a rather special case, we have had to call in the troops on only one occasion. The only other aspect of relocation center management that I need to mention here is the business enterprises which the evacuees themselves have set up on a cooperative basis to sell goods and services to the residents.

But our primary aim is not to manage relocation centers. These centers have often been confused with internment camps which are managed by the Department of Justice for the detention of enemy aliens suspected of subversive activities or intentions. Actually the relocation centers were established for a wholly different purpose -- primarily to provide places where the evacuees could be

quartered while we were developing an orderly program of relocation in normal communities. Even before the centers were fully constructed and populated we started making efforts to reduce their population by encouraging properly qualified evacuees to return as quickly as possible to private life. That is our principal policy and the one that has been most widely debated pro and con. Consequently I want to discuss this policy with you, telling you how we go about putting it into effect and why we feel it is a sound course from the standpoint of the national welfare.

First of all, I should explain that the relocation policy does not apply to the segregation center of Tule Lake. The residents of that center have been separated from the other evacuees because of evidence that they might endanger the national security. They will not be eligible for leave while the war is going on. But now that segregation is virtually completed, we are redoubling our efforts to relocate the people from the other centers in normal communities.

We started out on our relocation efforts rather slowly and cautiously in the late summer of 1942. Throughout the fall and winter, as we gained additional experience on the job, we gradually geared up our machinery to handle a larger program. One thing we had to do was set up a field organization to check community sentiment in areas where the evacuees are relocating and to serve as a point of contact between employers in need of workers and evacuees at the centers. Such an organization was established in the early months of this year and is now functioning in 40-odd communities throughout the middle west, the intermountain states and the East. Then we also had the job of classifying the evacuated people according to their previous employment experience and their basic skills.

It would be possible, of course, for us to adopt a passive attitude toward relocation merely permitting the people to leave the centers without actively encouraging and aiding them in the process. But after we had been on the job only a few months we began to realize with increasing clarity that relocation centers are not desirable institutions and that it is far better, in terms of both immediate and long-range national interest to restore the evacuated people as quickly as possible to life in ordinary communities.

To begin with, we realize that the cost of maintaining the entire evacuee population in relocation centers would mean an unnecessarily heavy drain on the taxpayers of the country. We set up our work programs at the relocation centers in such a way that the evacuees could contribute through voluntary work to their own support. And we have maintained that policy consistently from the very start. But even so, the expense of keeping 100,000 people in government centers and providing them with the essentials of life is a heavy one. I am sure all of you will agree with us that it

should not be encouraged if there is any feasible alternative.

An even more important reason why we have placed so much emphasis on immediate relocation is the nation-wide manpower shortage. We realized from the beginning that the evacuated people represent a significant reservoir of energies and skills which is badly needed in our war production effort. At the start, we made rather elaborate plans for a work program at each relocation center. We had plans for manufacturing enterprises through which citizen evacuees could produce goods needed in the war effort; plans for extensive development of raw land through clearing, irrigation, drainage; and plans for large-scale agricultural production. But before we had received more than half the evacuee population at the centers, we were forced to recognize that this was a cumbersome method of utilizing evacuee energies and skills and that it was fraught with many difficulties. It meant starting from scratch and gradually building up work opportunities over a period of months. It necessitated acquiring equipment and facilities that were badly needed in other sectors of the national economy and in the war effort. It involved production and sale of manufactured goods and foodstuffs in competition with established private producers. Everything considered, it seemed quite clear that the evacuees could make a quicker and more effective contribution to our wartime production needs by returning as quickly as possible to private employment.

But aside from these wholly practical considerations, there is another even more significant reason for trying to depopulate the relocation centers. I realize that one of the primary aims of the American Legion is to foster Americanization. That has also been one of the major objectives of our program. There are many ways to define Americanism but I have always felt that it is a quality which we absorb quite naturally by living in a thoroughly American environment. It is as President Roosevelt has stated, "a matter of the mind and heart; Americanism is not, and never was, a matter of race or ancestry." We have made every effort to create an Americanizing atmosphere in the relocation centers. We have established the curriculum for our schools with particularly heavy emphasis on the history of American traditions and American institutions. We have taught these subjects in adult education classes and have stressed them in connection with public discussion forums. But despite all our efforts, we have not succeeded -- and I am afraid we never can succeed -- in duplicating the atmosphere that prevails in a normal American community. The influences that operate every day and every week to make us a distinctive people on the face of the globe cannot be reproduced within an atmosphere of restriction -- an atmosphere which makes a mockery of our American traditions. Relocation centers are and probably always will be essentially outside the mainstream of our national life.

I subscribe whole-heartedly to the principles on which the

American Legion was founded and to the creed which is printed on the back of all your membership cards, and which sums up forcefully and succinctly the major tenets of your organization. This creed is a sound guide for every good American:

> "For God and country, we associate ourselves together for the following purposes; to uphold and defend the Constitution of the United States of America; to maintain law and order; to foster and perpetuate a one hundred per cent Americanism; to preserve the memories and incidents of our association in the great war; to inculcate a sense of individual obligation to the community, state and Nation; to combat the autocracy of both the classes and the masses; to make right the master of might; to promote peace and good will on earth; to safeguard and transmit to posterity the principles of justice, freedom and democracy; to consecrate and sanctify our comradeship by our devotion to mutual helpfulness."

With these principles in mind, I feel sure that all of you will make every effort to see this problem from all angles before coming to any final judgments.

There are a great many people in this country who feel that all persons of Japanese ancestry should be confined under heavy guard for the duration of the war. I want to say right here and now that I consider such a proposal fundamentally un-American. It is contrary to the constitution of the United States and to the basic precepts of the American Legion. It violates our most precious guarantees of freedom and justice. If we single out one minority element of our population such as this one and categorically confine all members of the group simply on the grounds of race, I believe we are embarking on a dangerous course. Once we start moving in that direction, the whole structure of constitutional safeguards that now protects every last one of us against arbitrary governmental action will be weakened and impaired. In the last analysis, it would mean that we had found the democratic method of handling a minority problem too difficult, too complex, and that we had adopted the easy course followed by the dictator nations.

Since the earliest days of WRA, our problem has been complicated by the fact that we are dealing with a mixed population. Approximately two-thirds of the evacuees were born in this country and are thus American citizens under our constitution. The overwhelming majority of this citizen group have spent their entire lives here and have received all their education in our schools. Seventy-two percent of these citizens have never seen Japan. The remaining one-third of the population consists mainly of the older people who were born in Japan and were not eligible to become

naturalized under our laws. Most of them have lived here for 20 years and even longer, have established families here and have no desire to return to Japan.

But the real point that I want to make is that we have had to deal with both citizens and aliens at every step in our program. Because we do have citizens in relocation centers, we have had to be unusually careful in denying indefinite leave and in transferring people to the segregation center. So far the Supreme Court has not handed down an opinion on the consitutional validity of detaining American citizens. But lawyers are pretty well agreed that it can be done even in wartime only on the basis of rather strong evidence that the detainee is a potential threat to the national security. Consequently, in developing our leave procedures we have had to walk a very narrow line between unconstitutional detention on the one hand and inadequate regard for national security on the other. I am confident that we have followed a sound middle course.

The fact that we have aliens in the relocation centers has important implications in our international wartime relations. Unfortunately, there are a great many American civilians and American soldiers in the hands of the Japanese. And if we adopt any repressive measures against Japanese nationals, the militarists of Japan undoubtedly will take retaliatory action. Because of this fact, among other reasons, we have tried all along to conduct our operation sanely and calmly so as to arouse a minimum of public emotion. But in a program such as ours, this is extremely difficult to do. Actually we have been operating in a very highly charged atmosphere ever since we started -- and I suppose we always will.

However, I think that most of you will agree that nothing is gained by an emotional approach to this problem and that a great deal can be lost. Quite aside from the dangers of retaliatory action, it is also true that the Japanese have been watching this program for propaganda purposes. They have been picking up inflammatory remarks made by some of our citizens and using them to convince other oriental peoples that the United States is conducting a racial war.

In conclusion, I want to remind you once again that there is a battalion of soldiers of Japanese ancestry in action under General Clark at the present time. There is a combat team, also composed of Japanese Americans, some of whom have recently asked to be sent into action against the Army of Japan. Knowing the background of the American Legion and the way you fought to gain citizenship for the veterans of our first world war regardless of ancestry, I am wholly confident that you will open your membership to those boys who are now wearing the uniform of our country in the current war for survival.

We have tried in the War Relocation Authority to conduct our

program at all times in accordance with certain basic principles which we feel are essential in a democratic approach to the problem. We believe that loyalty cannot flourish in an atmosphere of suspicion and discrimination; grows and sustains itself only when given a chance. We recognize that the foremost task before the people of this country is to win the war. We feel that this means concentrating on fighting the enemy rather than fighting among ourselves, and using all our available manpower where it will do the most good. We have confidence in the ability of the armed forces to wage the war and in the ability of the authorized intelligence agencies to give proper surveillance to all suspected or potential enemies within our country. Finally we have faith in the American way of life and in the melting pot tradition on which this nation has developed. We believe that there is opportunity here for all people of democratic faith and that the United States has benefitted and will benefit by providing such opportunities for all its citizens without regard for race or ancestry.