

Public Relations

Hon. Henry C. Dworshak
House of Representatives
Washington, D. C.

Dear Mr. Dworshak:

This is in reply to your letter of July 16 asking for comment on the statements forwarded to you by the Chamber of Commerce of Jerome, Idaho regarding operation of the Minidoka Relocation Center.

The criticism and suggestions of the Chamber, it seems to me, can be boiled down to four essential points:

1. Residents of the Minidoka Center are being granted too much freedom to leave the Center for the purpose of shopping or visiting in nearby communities.
2. Too many able-bodied residents of the Center are unwilling to leave the Center for the purpose of entering private employment.
3. All evacuee residents of Minidoka should be moved to one part of the center and the remainder should be used as a camp for prisoners of war.
4. The War Relocation Authority has not reclaimed land from sagebrush and repaired the Milner-Gooding Canal in accordance with commitments made prior to opening of the center.

I should like to comment on each of these points in the above order.

Since the residents of relocation centers are not internees and are guilty of no crime, the War Relocation Authority has always taken the position that they should not be kept in strict confinement within the centers. We have, however, advised all Project Directors that permits for visits to near-by communities should be granted with discretion and with a view toward the prevailing public attitude in those communities. Definite precautions have been taken to avoid a heavy influx of visitors from the centers and an undue strain on local marketing facilities. Unfortunately, I do not have information readily available on the number of temporary passes that have been issued recently at Minidoka, but I am sending a copy of your letter to Project Director Harry L. Stafford for his information and guidance.

In view of the widespread agitation against persons of Japanese ancestry throughout many parts of the country, it is not surprising that many of the residents of relocation centers are somewhat hesitant to leave the centers for private employment. The policy of this agency, however, is to encourage all those with good records to take seasonal farm jobs or to re-establish themselves in private life at the earliest opportunity. Actually more evacuees have left Minidoka for these purposes than have left any other relocation center. During the peak of the harvest season last fall, approximately 2,400 residents of this center were out on seasonal leave working in the sugar beet fields and on the potato farms of Idaho and the labor supply within the center was so short that many essential services -- such as fire fighting -- had to be temporarily carried on by women. Since that time there has been a steady exodus of people going out from the center on indefinite leave to take year-round employment in agriculture or industry in various parts of the country. By July 31 of this year, more than 1,600 had left the center on indefinite leave and another 1,200 were out on seasonal farm work. The total number of leaves (of both types) granted to date is greater than at any other relocation center even though Minidoka is and always has been one of the smaller centers from the standpoint of population.

The suggestion that part of the Minidoka Center should be made available as a camp for prisoners of war is quite impractical under the present circumstances. As you may know, the War Relocation Authority is now engaged in segregating those residents of relocation centers whose loyalties lie with Japan from the great majority whose loyalties are with this country. Starting about the first week of September, the disloyal residents of Minidoka will be moved to the Tule Lake Center in northern California and loyal people now residing at Tule Lake will be moved into the other centers including Minidoka. In other words, once the segregation has been completed, the population at Minidoka will consist exclusively of people whose loyalties to this country have been well established and who are eligible for indefinite leave. To put prisoners of war in the same area with such people would, I am sure you will agree, be highly ill-advised even if housing facilities were available. And after the segregation has been carried out, surplus housing facilities are not likely to be available at Minidoka in any significant degree for some time to come. As the indefinite leave program moves forward, however, we are hoping gradually to close out some of the relocation centers. Whenever any center is closed, it will be turned over to the War Department for any use which the military deems appropriate.

It is true that when the relocation centers were first established, the War Relocation Authority did have plans for rather extensive land development work not only at Minidoka but at virtually all the other relocation centers. Difficulty in obtaining equipment combined with the urgent need for manpower outside the centers, however, led to a gradual downward revision of these plans. At the present time, we are planning to develop or subjugate at each center only enough land to provide the residents of the community with subsistence crops and are not contemplating any significant agricultural production for outside markets. In fact, the current priorities situation makes any more extensive plan almost completely infeasible. Nevertheless, it is not strictly accurate to say that no land reclamation work has been done at Minidoka. Despite the large exodus of able-bodied workers on indefinite and seasonal leave, considerable progress has been made in clearing land of sage brush, in construction of laterals and irrigation structures, and some of the most serious leaks in the Milner-Gooding Canal have been repaired. During the current year we expect to bring a total of approximately 2,000 acres in the area into food production.

I am sorry that we were not able to answer your letter earlier, but it seems to have been inadvertently mislaid. If we can be of further assistance to you, please let us know.

Sincerely,

Director

C.C: Mr. H. L. Stafford