

WAR RELOCATION AUTHORITY
Community Analysis Section

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Registration at Central Utah: 14-17, February, 1943
by John F. Embree

Staff and Residents

The staff at Topaz lives in Block 2 and so are physically close to the residents. The children of staff and evacuees go to school together and play together. In general, social relations seem to be considerably better than some of the projects in the Western Defense Command area. In the dining room, Japanese helpers eat after the staff finishes, and Japanese visitors, such as soldiers, often eat together with the appointed personnel.

Sunday, February 14, Meeting on Registration and Civil Rights

The day of my arrival was definitely one of excitement in Topaz. The registration and enlistment program here met with unexpectedly strong opposition, especially in regard to questions 27 and 28. Meetings were held, and the opening of registration was put off from the 10th to the 13th. On the 13th, (Saturday) a comparatively small number of people registered from two blocks.

The opposition came from a number of sources. First, the old people objected to forswearing all ties with Japan, since that would make them a people without a country and meetings were held early in the week to discuss this problem. Eventually, the question for the Issei was revised and so they were somewhat mollified. Then the Nisei and Kibei raised objections to registering since they have been deprived of so many of their civil rights. Tied up with all the opposition was anxiety as to the meaning of this new set of forms to be filled in and questions to be answered. Though it was never explicitly stated, the fact that questions in regard to repatriation had been raised by the government during recent weeks probably added to these anxieties.

This afternoon a meeting was convened at 2:30 and lasted in formal session about three hours. A temporary chairman was elected, but only after two who were nominated had refused to accept, and the one who finally did accept reserved the right to voice the viewpoint of his block on the question at issue.

The meeting was orderly and most of the speeches were in English, except for two Kibei - one an emotional young 20-year old, and the other a fairly intelligent graduate of one of the Imperial Universities.

At the meeting many representatives said their blocks had decided to leave registration up to the individual. As to whether to register or fight for civil rights first, the blocks appeared to be about evenly divided. However, a number of Kibei became quite vocal in opposing registration. If a vote had been taken it might well have gone negative, but the project director had forestalled any vote on the issue by reading the Espionage Act and pointing out that group action to prevent registration would fall within the scope of this Act.

Since there could be no final vote, the meeting did not end very satisfactorily from the viewpoint of many delegates, and some of the Kibei were quite evidently disappointed at the general quietness of the meeting.

On the suggestion of representatives from Block 8, a committee was formed to draw up a set of resolutions in regard to civil rights to be sent to the Secretary of War. A rump meeting went on until about 10:00 p.m. which was characterized by definitely higher tension and emotional speech-making. Finally things quieted down and the resolutions were drawn up by a subcommittee of nine. The subcommittee called on the project director with them a little after midnight.

This set of resolutions was a well organized document. Certain of its clauses, such as the one on property, showed an ignorance of the new WRA Property Division. The article asking some assurances on the restoration of civil rights was regarded by some of the committee as the most important of all. (Incidentally, no one on the project, either staff or resident, seemed to know of the Solicitor's statement of WRA's stand to defend the citizenship rights of Japanese Americans.)

One of the subcommittee members was the same young 20-year old who had been so fiery in his demands for a fight for civil rights to the last ditch. He was very mild in the midnight meeting with the project director. The rest of the subcommittee seemed to be a rather good cross-section of opinion and was probably reasonably representative of the various groups at the afternoon meeting.

The various points in the resolution were discussed by the director, his two assistants (Hughes and Bell), and myself, together with the committee of nine, until 2:20 a.m., and it was finally decided to send them off in the morning by teletype. One rather important final clause was omitted - the one requesting postponement of registration until an answer came. The director pointed out that the resolution was a legitimate one but that its strength would be impaired by tying it up directly with the matter of registration. Instead, a proposal was made and accepted that a subcommittee and the director ask Lieut. Tracy to allow those young men who wished to do so to delay in their

answers to questions 27 and 28. The desirability of sending the resolution to Biddle rather than Stimson was brought up by the director but later dropped when it was evident that the committee felt duty-bound to see that it was sent to Stimson. Their acquiescence in leaving out the final clause on registration was all that could reasonably be asked of them under the circumstances. Meanwhile it was agreed that registration should go on.

The fact that it later did go on indicates that a crisis of major proportions was probably averted by this meeting. (A copy of the resolution is appended.)

Some Young People of Topaz

Miss K. is a young American pianist who has spent ten years in Japan and so is a Kibei, but she definitely has faith in this country. She reports that this is the first serious trouble Topaz has had. (Many other informants have told me the same thing.) She says that many Kibei wish to go back to Japan after the war, and that this attitude on their part is a direct result of evacuation. She also remarked that while many Nisei are willing to be drafted, they feel that it is too much to ask them to volunteer after all that has been done to them since December 7. This is especially true of those who were inducted and then discharged from the Army shortly after December 7. Many also feel that the special combat unit is a sign of discrimination.

I also visited with the A's, young Americans of good education who appeared to be rather upset by all the rumpus Topaz has kicked up about registration. In talking with them and others and trying to find some chronic sore points that might lie behind recent events, the only one of any seriousness that anyone mentioned was partitions to separate families and to separate couples from their in-laws. The lack of such partitions - long awaited - seems to be one of the most serious dissatisfactions. But even this is not too general a complaint.

One person also commented that Topaz teachers could be divided into friendly and unfriendly. Some of the evacuee teachers were said also to have no training, and one or two haven't even been to college. (This is second-hand information.)

Issei Worries

For the older people, registration represents a new insecurity, just when they were settling down and they are afraid that it may mean another proced move. Many Kibei, and even ordinary Nisei, are somewhat loath to enlist now after all the bitter experiences of evacuation. There is also parental pressure against it. Some project staff think it possible that there are a few repatriates who feel that they have nothing to lose by obstructing the American war effort.

The Issei held a meeting Monday afternoon with Mr. Ernst present, in which they poured out their past woes and present worries - financial losses as a result of evacuation, the disappointment of seeing their children treated as aliens after they had sacrificed so much to give them a good education and training to be law-abiding citizens, worrying about having to ask for leave clearance and the implication that such application might result in a forced move again, unfortunate experiences in sugar beet labor last summer. In regard to the sugar beet work, one man, in describing the way he was gypped, threatened to commit suicide as a protest and as a means of causing an investigation of the abuses attending last summer's sugar beet recruitment.

The meeting, judging by reports, was a sort of catharsis for them. Up until now these old people had never expressed openly and to the director all the frustrations and disappointments they have experienced since December 7.

Monday Night Meeting (15 February)

On Monday night the committee of nine came again to get the results of the sending of the petition, and also of Lieut. Tracy's conversation by phone with the War Department. Lieut. Tracy, incidentally, has been a most understanding man. As might have been expected, a rumor had got around that the petition had not been sent. After this rumor was squelched, Lieut. Tracy informed the group that the present registration came as a result of efforts of a friendly group in the Army, and he pointed out that some people in Congress and many people in the country at large have been generally unfriendly to the Japanese Americans. If registration fails, then the group in the Army that has worked for a combat unit will be disappointed, and the whole idea of Japanese Americans in the Army might even be dropped. He warned the group against letting this be a lost opportunity. He also pointed out that the present scheme was not tied up with any desperate need of the country for manpower, contrary to a rumor which was going about the center. After all, 5,000 men one way or another in an Army of 10,000,000 is not much numerically speaking.

After he left the committee asked a few questions, and in particular asked for an acknowledgment of the petition from Washington in order that they could show this to the blocks, and thus prove that the petition had been sent.

One spokesman of the committee assured Lieut. Tracy before he left that the committee hoped to get the whole camp fully behind registration by Wednesday -- a very different viewpoint, incidentally, from that taken by the group the previous night. Also, judging from remarks picked up in the camp during the

afternoon, an anti-Kibei group was busy at work to counteract its obstructionist activities. During the afternoon, a couple of big husky fellows, followed by some smaller ones, marched into the registration room and boomed out for all to hear, "Where are those enlistment blanks?" This was evidently done to influence some of the weak-kneed in favor of registration.

And Monday night at midnight, a group of young men and women called on the director and protested against the sending of the petition, saying that they had not been consulted and protesting against the tactics of the obstructionists. This group was made up largely of young Americans of a literary and intellectual bent.

Meeting with Young Democrats

I met on Tuesday afternoon from 2 to 6 with the committee which called on Ernst the previous night in protest against the petition of the other group. This group includes a noted young woman artist, a young man who is the editor of the Topaz Times, and 15 or 20 others. They are a liberal, intellectual group, and have strong convictions. The editor complains that the Topaz Times has no editorial policy and that it should be stronger. Several complained the the Japanese section of the Topaz Times is often misrepresentative, and that one of the men who makes the translations into Japanese is himself an older man who is pro-Japanese and not to be trusted with such work.

The group felt that the teachers and the education department in general should take a more active hand in explaining the WRA program, the social background of evacuation, etc. This remark and some others came about as a result of a rather lengthy account which I gave them in regard to the background and history of relocation, in an attempt to explain present WRA policy. In the course of this discussion it became apparent that many things which we felt to be obvious in Washington are either not known at all on the projects or are known only in a rather garbled manner.

From this group I also received the complaint previously noted that some of the teachers are anti-Japanese. One or two appear to be extremely so (This fact was later corroborated by some appointive staff people, and I understand that something is being done in regard to this particular problem). The Young Democrats, as some of these people are termed, say that many Kibei are misrepresenting the whole registration in their respective blocks.

There are many rumors going about the camp, according to this group. One is that the combat group is to be sent to a front where casualties will be high. Another is that the combat

group will shortly be put on a ship and sunk in the middle of the Atlantic. Another rumor is, and this one appears to stem from the anxiety of the older people, that the combat group will all be trained as pilots and sent to bomb Tokyo.

This group also seems to feel that there are a number of Kibei repatriates who have nothing to lose by causing a disturbance. They also noted the fact, which had also been mentioned to me by the Chief of Community Services, that most of the local objectors to registration, who have now come to the fore, were never noticeable before in the center. They seem to be people who suddenly feel that their views get applause, and so they have taken to speech-making, and rather enjoy the spotlight.

I brought up the subject of segregation. There seems to have been no discussion of it here before, probably because there has been no felt need for it. As a consequence, it was rather a new idea to the group, and they had no particular opinions about it.

These young people in general felt that the administration had been too neutral and that it has not backed up the pro-democratic element enough.

Family Meeting

Tuesday evening I had a very pleasant visit with the F. family - father, mother, son and three daughters. A young writer was also a guest, as well as a young economist who lives nearby. They all seem to be of the opinion that the crisis in Topaz had passed its peak. They pointed out that one man, who formerly advocated not registering, had now publicly reversed himself.

The question of property came up, and they were surprised to hear that WRA had taken over and was making an effort to look after evacuee property. They said that things such as this need greater publicity. Also, that the background and meaning of registration needed a great deal more explanation than had been given. In fact, the general impression I received was that much of the difficulty over registration was due to ignorance, misunderstanding and anxiety as to meaning and consequences.

Final Wednesday Meeting

On Wednesday morning I talked with a group of older people, some of them the committee of nine American-born, and some from another committee of nine Issei. The subject of registration was not brought up -- only the subject of why people feel as they do as a result of experiences in Tanforan Assembly Center, etc. One old man commented that they did not resent so much their own experience as the fact that their children had been treated as if

they were enemy aliens. The minutes of this meeting are attached.

Redemption of a Kibei

A very significant development, to my mind, was what might be called the redemption of a Kibei. I refer to the young man who was so emotionally demanding a fight for civil rights Sunday afternoon. As a member of the committee of nine, he was much milder about it. At the Wednesday meeting with me he went out of his way to explain to me why he and others had made the statements and demands they had. When he returned from Japan in 1940 he had felt an upsurge of love for the U.S.A. Later he found a job, then came the war. The bitter experiences of Tanforan and later frustrations of life in Topaz had embittered him and made him lose faith in the sincerity of the American government.

The important thing about all this is the way in which this young man, once he had made his speeches and expressed his views, and later received some recognition from the Administration, became much more reasonable, and finally had come around to a state where he not only could review calmly the whole crisis, but through a better understanding of the motives of WRA he could even bring himself to cooperate with the very government he had attacked three days before.

Application vs Questionnaire

A thing that bothered a lot of the older people was the compulsory filling in of an "application" for leave. They felt that by so doing they could later be forced to move because they had "applied". So finally the project director said the word "application" could be changed to "questionnaire".

When finally the crisis appeared to be passed, one old man said to the project director, now that the people of Topaz had been torn apart, something should be done to bring them close together again. The project director proposed that they have a ceremony to mark the beginning of building the new school -- a proposal that met with great approval. So the ceremony is now scheduled for Washington's Birthday.

The Great White Father

One significant event occurred on the day I arrived at Topaz. A young couple waited on Mr. Hughes and wanted him to do something about getting them back their apartment in Topaz because they wanted to return to live in it. The reasons they gave were that they found life on the outside was more difficult than they expected, what with the high cost of living and all.

RECOMMENDATIONS

I. Communication

The most important lesson learned at Topaz -- and the situation here is probably to be found in other centers -- is the need for a more effective means of communication. Too much dependence is placed on the newspaper and the occasional formal announcement. The Topaz Times reaches every apartment at Topaz, but there is no indication that everyone reads it, let alone becomes mentally aware of what it contains. I discovered very few people who had actually read the Stimson statement, and those who had had usually missed some of its most important clauses and implications.

I would recommend that every time an important announcement is made, such as a new policy, an official statement, etc., that:

- A. The text be first printed in full in the paper.
- B. The next day a commentary on this be written with quotes from significant phrases of the original text.
- C. On subsequent days references to and quotes from the text should be made under the pretext of quoting other newspapers on the subject and quoting comments of some residents or appointed staff on the subject.
- D. While all this repetitive newspaper publicity is going on, the project director and others should see to it that Council members fully understand the new announcements of policy and in particular that they understand what led up to it. In other words, put the new development into the general context of past and future WRA practice and policy, on the one hand, and of the national U. S. picture, on the other.
- E. The school teachers should be informed as fully as possible along the same lines in order to explain things to their children and to answer the questions of both children and their parents. To the Japanese, both child and adult, the school teacher is supposed to know everything. On the WRA centers they have often been woefully lacking in the knowledge of things, contemporary and governmental.
- F. Forums of adults, Nisei, older Issei, and other such groups should be meeting on all centers, and when new policies and events are announced in a center the project administration should try to bring them to the attention of such forums. Furthermore, they should, if possible, sit in and help in the discussions by supplying adequate background information.

II. Education of Staff

The ignorance and confusion as to the WRA policy is not confined to the residents. More attention is needed in the field of personnel training.

III. Avoidance of Discriminatory Documents

The psychological wounds of the evacuation period, especially the bitter experiences of Tanforan under wretched social and physical conditions, cannot be underestimated. (E.g., racially biased administrators and housing in stables not properly cleaned of old manure.) This experience taken together with the fear of being discriminated against on racial grounds lay behind much of the difficulty in regard to the registration at Topaz. The fence--a symbol of imprisonment--is a constant source of mental irritation to the citizens.

In this social context, registration forms marked as being for "citizens of Japanese ancestry" are regarded by citizen evacuees as most objectionable. It is, therefore, recommended that every effort be made in the future to have any papers or formal procedures which apply to citizen evacuees bear no such phrases which can be interpreted as "Jim Crow".

APPENDIX I

Resolution Drafted by the Committee of Nine, February 15, 1943

Resolution to Secretary of War Henry L. Stimson

We, the citizens of the United States of America, residents of the Central Utah Relocation Project, Topaz, Utah, in order to perform our duties as loyal citizens of the United States and in order to uphold the principles of democracy as established in the Constitution of the United States, do hereby state that:

Whereas, we the citizens of the United States have been asked by our government to pledge our unqualified allegiance to this country

Whereas, we have accepted in good faith and in full cooperation the extraordinary orders of the United States Army

Whereas, we feel that we have given our fullest our fullest cooperation to the program of evacuation

Whereas, we have temporarily surrendered many of the rights and privileges of citizenship which we have heretofore enjoyed

Whereas, the government, through the Federal Reserve Bank, has promised us full protection from unscrupulous people at the

time of evacuation

Whereas, we believe the Federal Reserve Bank has failed to protect the people

Whereas, we suffered losses of homes, properties, work, freedom of movement, separation from friends and all things we felt dear to us, without protest

Whereas, we wish to prevent in the future the mass evacuation or confining of citizens without trial

Whereas, we feel that there is only one class of citizenship in this country and a loyal citizen of one race should not be treated any different from another

Whereas, we believe that some of these things mentioned above constitute a violation of our civil rights and

Whereas, we believe sincerely and honestly in the principle of freedom of speech, freedom of worship, freedom of the press, and freedom of assemblage as embodied in the Constitution and its amendments,

Therefore, be it resolved:

1. That we ask Secretary of War Henry L. Stimson that after a thorough investigation by the Military Intelligence and the Federal Bureau of Investigation and other Federal authorities, that persons that are cleared should have absolute freedom of movement and a choice of returning to their homes.
2. That we request President Roosevelt to give us assurance that he will use his good Office in an endeavor to secure all constitutional and civil rights as American citizens.
3. That the security for the Issei be assured.
4. That we ask President Roosevelt to use his good Office to bring favorable impression to the public regarding the loyal citizens.
5. That we ask that those Issei considered by the government as being not disloyal to this government be classified as friendly aliens.
6. That we have the government note the advantages of the good publicity to be gained by disbursing Nisei soldiers into the Army at large, rather than by forming a separate Combat Team; and that the government further note that the education of Caucasian soldier can be made through deep comradeship that

grows between soldiers facing a common task, and thereby educate the American public.

7. That the government, recognizing that we are fighting for the Four Freedoms as embodied in the Atlantic Charter, should apply these democratic principles to us here at home.

8. That we believe that if satisfactory answers can be given by a government spokesman, preferably the President of the United States, to these questions, we can go and fight for this our country without fear or qualms concerning the security of our future rights.

And be it further resolved that we respectfully ask for immediate answers to the questions in this resolution.

APPENDIX II

Statement of Other Residents of Topaz, February 16, 1943

We as certain residents of Topaz taking exception to the resolution presented to the Honorable Secretary of War Stimson as the expression of the majority wish to state the following:

We feel that loyalty to our country is something to be expressed without reference to past grievances or wrong.

We feel that in according us the right to the second Article of the Bill of Rights, that it is the right of every man to bear arms in the defense of his country, the War Department has in good faith started the first step to restore us all rights as citizens of the United States.

We feel that the issue of expressing our loyalty has been confused. We believe in fighting for our rights but we believe that fighting for our country and our ideals is the most important thing when our country is at war trying to uphold those ideals for which we stand.

We shall register, we are loyal, we shall fight for the United States.

/s/ Other Residents of Topaz

APPENDIX III

Summary of the Wednesday Meeting

1. Opening Remarks

I began the meeting by giving the background of evacuation

and the broad trends and policies of WRA.

2. Effects of Evacuation

An old man, anxious to be understood, said that he, as an Issei, could not honestly answer some of the questions on the registration forms because of what had been done to him since December 7. More especially he had been hurt by what the American government did to his children, born and reared as American citizens and now treated as if they were enemy aliens.

3. Insurance

The question was raised as to what, if any, provision is made by WRA to insure personal property on the project. The fire hazard was pointed out in this connection. And what about accident and life insurance? On \$12, \$16, and \$19 a month most evacuees cannot afford to maintain insurance.

4. Mess Halls.

The now familiar, but none the less serious, effects of mess hall eating on family life were pointed out.

A complaint was made that so far as the men engaged in physical labor was concerned the amount of food provided was inadequate. How about diets for diabetics?

5. Privacy in the Family

The general effects of mess hall eating, family life in single rooms, etc., on the morals and manners of the young were stressed. Various means of strengthening the family tie were mentioned - partitions in apartments, family tables in dining rooms, etc. The worry here was more about their children than about themselves.

6. Education

Are high schools of the proper standard? Is there to be a school building? In regard to adult education the complaint was made of the lack of equipment. A desire for vocational education in connection with the leave program was voiced.

7. Recreation Halls

The statement was made that there are only four recreation halls available for children. The need for more was pointed out. As in adult education, there appears to be a severe lack of equipment and facilities for recreation.

8. Sewers

Complaints in regard to the sewerage system and the smells thereof.

9. Arid Land

Will the land be able to produce anything? If not, will the WRA buy or rent some other acres on which to grow subsistent crops?

10. Health

It was said that there is only one ambulance and that it is a junk. Furthermore, it does not seem to be always available for carrying the sick to the hospital.

11. Railroad Fare to Job

There was a strong desire expressed that WRA provide at least a one-way ticket to the job. It was said that many people were fearful of accepting a job for lack of funds to get to it.

APPENDIX IV

The following was handed to me by one of the Wednesday morning group who had to leave before the meeting was over.

Statement of Facts in Explanation of the Attitudes and Actions of the Residents, Especially in Regards to Registration

1. Residents were asked to place their confidence in the government; but the government did not inform the residents of their plans and did not seek their opinion or advice at any time before announcement of its program. Cooperation to the fullest extent would have been possible, if the people directly concerned were also taken into confidence and were given opportunity for discussion so that emotional and hasty conclusions would be avoided.

2. There were statements issued which seemed to imply that the registration was to separate the loyal from the disloyal, not only segregation in regards to loyalty, but physical segregation. That such action on the basis of "yes" or "no" answers to two questions is unsound and unfair is without question. If such was not the intention, adequate explanation was not presented to the residents.

3. That this registration was also for the purpose of determining clearance for leave was also stated. The residents could not put much faith in this statement, for up to the present the WRA program of issuing clearances has been a total failure.

Only a hundred or so indefinite leaves have been granted to the residents here, who number well over seven thousand. Residents had many opportunities to attend school and to be gainfully employed but permanent jobs and scholarships were lost because of the unpardonable delay in issuing clearances. The actions of the WRA relative to clearances have been totally inconsistent with their announcement of intent and purpose of relocation.

4. Since the time of their evacuation, the residents have had to fill in a seemingly countless number of questionnaires and forms. Another questionnaire seems like another blow in an endless third-degree interrogation. Duplication is unreasonable.

5. The Kibei, the citizens educated in Japan, will have a difficult time for relocation, for they usually worked in Japanese firms or employed in laundries, restaurants, etc., owned and operated by Japanese, or as domestics. The future for them in this country is less hopeful than for the Nisei, at the present time. Their intensity of emotion in demanding their civil rights could be understood in view of their plight.