

EFFORTS TO CIRCUMVENT INDIVIDUAL REPARATIONS PAYMENTS

Former Japanese American evacuees and their relatives and friends should be aware that there exist a number of Japanese Americans who, while voicing approval of efforts to seek reparations for the World War II evacuation and imprisonment of the Issei and Nisei, are opposed to any plan which would result in the direct payment of reparations to each individual evacuee. Those favoring the denial of direct payments to individuals believe that reparations should be paid to some Japanese American organization or groups which would then use the money in a manner which they feel is desirable. Their reasons include the following:

1. Japanese Americans do not want individual payments.
2. Payments to individuals will be "wasted" by the recipients and should be used for "better" purposes.
3. A reparations bill involving direct payments to individuals would be either impossible or hopelessly difficult to get through Congress.

Surveys of the past two years have shown that reason No. 1 is simply not true. Questionnaire results indicate that over 90% of former evacuees who were questioned want individual payments.

Reason No. 2 reflects such contempt for the intelligence and rights of others that it should be unacceptable to anyone who truly believes in the American traditions of human dignity and individual rights.

Reason No. 3 is based on incorrect assumptions. Inquiries made by us and by Wayne Horiuchi of the J.A.C.L. Washington Office reveal nothing to indicate that individual payments would be any more difficult to get passed by Congress than block payments to groups.

In effect, reparations are the same as damages, from the party who caused the injury, being paid to the persons who suffered the injury. In other words it is an attempt to "make the injured party whole" by the payment of a sum of money to him. The suggested payment of such money to a third party instead would be equivalent in essence to the unauthor-

ized misappropriation of funds which properly should be going directly to each victim of the evacuation.

Even if the money from block payments were spent for such things as community recreation centers or community old age homes, many former evacuees and especially those living remote from large Japanese American population centers would receive no benefit whatever.

Moreover, the record of block grants by the United States Government to Indian tribes for past wrongs indicates a high probability that such a method of payment would lead to endless and costly lawsuits over how the money would be spent. Instead of the former evacuees, the lawyers involved in the court cases would become the main beneficiaries.

Rejecting or ignoring the principle of direct compensation to the individual victims of the evacuation and the sacrificing of justice and principle for the sake of tokenism and assumed expediency could again alienate a large portion of the supporters of the J.A.C.L. Although the decision by the J.A.C.L. leaders in 1942 to cooperate with the Evacuation Order was made under conditions of wartime duress, many of those who had expected the J.A.C.L. to put up some kind of opposition reacted with bitterness. To this day, some of the residual feelings of disappointment continue to hinder the organization from gaining wider support.

If this matter of reparations is handled properly, community support and backing for the J.A.C.L. undoubtedly would rise substantially. Let us hope that the present J.A.C.L. leaders possess the wisdom and foresight to refuse consent to any arrangement which would amount to a denial of direct reparations payments to the individual victims of that outrage of 35 years ago.

Seattle Evacuation Redress Committee

March 1977