

## COMMON SENSE AND REPARATIONS

The Seattle Evacuation Redress Committee's views on reparations, as presented in a series of articles published in the Japanese American press during the past three years, represented the results of many months of study and research by members of our committee over a period of some five years. Our plan was repeatedly gone over by several attorneys and was thoroughly discussed with our area's congressmen and members of their staffs. At these discussions, none of our proposals was ever criticized as being liable to Congressional rejection on the ground that it would set an undesirable precedent opening the way for all kinds of claims by other minority groups.

From the start, we have always recognized that the method of funding, the method of payment, and the amounts of reparations could be changed at any time. For example, we feel that the tax credit method of payment proposed by the Sacramento Chapter of the Japanese American Citizens League is a good one and would have no objections to its adoption after certain relatively minor changes. In any final draft of a bill based on the Seattle Plan, the amounts of payments originally suggested by us should, of course, be increased to offset the effects of inflation since the plan was first written. Most of the rest of our proposals can not be so easily changed without altering the basic direction of our efforts which we have tried to base on the principles of equity and justice.

Although the recently formed J.A.C.L. National Committee for Redress at its April meeting chose to reject practically all the proposals previously made by us, the National Committee's chairman has stated that his committee's decisions are open to modification. Members of the Seattle Evacuation Redress Committee feel that we would be failing in our responsibility to the Japanese American community if we now remained silent about the flaws in the National Committee's April decisions.

Any J.A.C.L. sponsored proposal asking Congress for monetary redress of wrongs perpetrated by the United States Government against Japanese Americans during World War II which will require the Government's expenditure of billions of dollars should appear to be fair, just, and reasonable upon first reading if it is to have much chance of serious consideration for passage by Congress. Furthermore, the amounts of payments to individuals should have at least some rough correlation with the injuries and injustices suffered.

The proposed payment of a flat \$25,000 for every Japanese American residing within the Western Defense Command area at the start of World War II includes providing that amount even for Japanese Americans residing in places such as Spokane, Washington, who were neither forced to move nor subjected to imprisonment. Such a thoughtless request would at once open the J.A.C.L. to the charge that, in effect, it is trying to conduct a mass raid on the United States Treasury using the Government's mistreatment of Pacific Coast Japanese Americans during World War II as an excuse. Attempting to give each such resident of non-evacuated areas the right to receive \$25,000 upon his presenting a "prima facie showing of injustices suffered" (whatever that means) is so preposterous a proposal that it will materially weaken any chance of the redress bill ever getting through Congress.

Common sense would indicate that every dollar of any reparations made available by the American Government justly belongs to the individuals who were directly affected by the World War II exile and mass imprisonment orders. That the individual victims of those injustices who are still living should be given the money to use or keep as they wish can hardly be a matter for dispute. For the J.A.C.L. National Committee, however, to decide to deny to even the immediate kin of deceased evacuees the right to receive reparations money which the deceased would have re-

ceived if living is an unwarranted denial of a basic and customary right of inheritance. To state, furthermore, that such sums will be placed in a trust controlled by a Japanese American group to "be used for the welfare and benefit of Japanese Americans" is to sanction the unauthorized expropriating of money which rightfully should be going to the next of kin. We can not consent to such an unconscionable proposal which we are unable to perceive as being morally much different from giving approval to an act of theft.

Moreover, we are both puzzled and alarmed by the National Committee's intention to first put all redress funds appropriated by Congress into a trust to be controlled by a Japanese American Commission. In view of the demonstrated inability of the J.A.C.L. to manage or handle its own funds, it is questionable whether a trust fund controlled by any casually selected Japanese American group could show any better results. Directing the management and disbursement of up to three billion dollars requires persons of a very high level of experience, ability, and integrity. Such a sum in the hands of a randomly chosen group of inexperienced Japanese Americans would become an almost irresistably tempting money depot for looting by clever knaves and crooks.

The Seattle Evacuation Redress Committee firmly believes that any funds appropriated by Congress should remain in the hands of the United States Government at least until all claims by individuals have been paid.

If the National J.A.C.L. is truly serious about getting redress for the former West Coast exiles and inmates of American concentration camps, it should not only refuse to accept most of the decisions made by its National Committee on Redress in April, it should also recognize that a reparations drive with any hope of success will require nothing less than the undivided attention and committment of the entire resources of the organization for as long as necessary to get a bill passed and all

its provisions carried out. This means that the J.A.C.L. national staff will have to drop practically all its other activities and work almost solely on reparations because the J.A.C.L. is too small and weak to be able to afford any other course.

We ask that all who are interested in getting a just end fair redress bill enacted into law make known their views to both the local and national officials of the J.A.C.L. by telephone calls, letters, or telegrams.

SEATTLE EVACUATION REDRESS COMMITTEE

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