

Atmosphere of Solidarity Pervades Fifth Annual Event in Little Tokyo

400 L.A. Nikkei Mark "Day of Remembrance"

2/21/84

President Franklin D. Roosevelt's signing of Executive Order 9066 on Feb. 19, 1942 resulted in the detention of more than 120,000 Japanese Americans in internment camps during World War II. To mark the 42nd anniversary of that act, 400 persons attended the fifth annual "Day of Remembrance" program in Little Tokyo's JACCC-Isamu Noguchi Plaza Sunday.

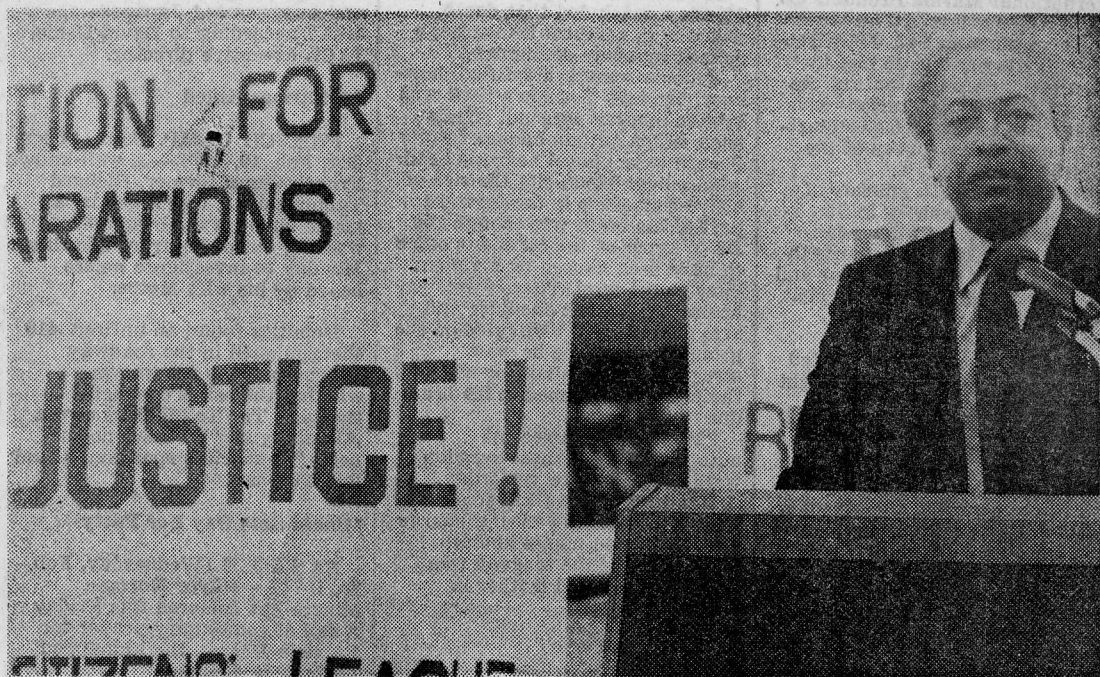
Following Buddhist and Christian invocations, the audience listened to Nisei community activist Bert Nakano of Gardena (whose keynote address is printed in this issue) and Congressmen Mervyn Dymally (D-31st) and Edward R. Roybal (D-25th) call on those campaigning to have the federal government compensate those affected by the wartime evacuation and internment to take their movement beyond the Japanese American communities in order to muster enough support to give the four pieces of legislation pending in Congress a chance for passage this year or next.

Rep. Dymally, who was the first congressman to introduce a bill to compensate WWII Japanese American internees in 1982, told the mostly Nikkei DOR crowd that there are three schools of American thought on the Japanese American redress issue—a third who are opposed to compensating the internees; a third who favor compensating those imprisoned during the war; and a third who don't even know about the issue at all.

Pointing out that black community leaders stood alone in California in opposing the mass exclusion of Japanese Americans from the West Coast, Dymally pledged Congress' Black Caucus' support of the redress bills and urged Japanese America to solicit the support of other groups of Americans for the issue.

Rep. Roybal, the dean of the Latino contingent in Congress having been elected from the Boyle Heights area into the House 22 years ago, recalled that the day his Japanese American neighbors and friends were ordered from their homes was "the saddest day of my life."

The veteran Mexican American lawmaker joined his House colleague Dymally in calling on the Japanese American community to flood their congressmen with letters supporting the redress bills. He said the tactic has worked before for other groups and other issues, such as stopping Social Security cuts and funding for programs for the elderly.



CONGRESSMAN MERVYN DYMALLY pledged Congressional Black Caucus support for pending Japanese American redress legislation and urged Nikkei to educate and solicit the support of people outside the Japanese American community for the issue. Dymally was the author of the first bill to compensate Japanese American internees following the report of the federal Commission on War-time Relocation and Internment of Civilians. There are now four redress measures before Congress.

Both Dymally and Roybal are co-sponsors of House minority leader Rep. Jim Wright's H.R. 4110, which calls for the funding of a foundation which would administer reparations payments to surviving Japanese American internees. Also awaiting committee action in the House is Rep. Mike Lowry's H.R.3387, which would provide for direct, individual compensation of internees.

There are also two bills pending in the Senate—California Sen. Alan Cranston's S.1520 and Hawaii Sen. Spark Matsunaga's S.2116.

Solidarity among community groups leading the drive for reparations was a sub-theme of this year's L.A. Day of Remembrance. According to organizers of the event, the sometimes rocky relationship between the National Coalition for Redress/Reparations and the Japanese American Citizens League has evolved into one of coexistence. The two groups co-sponsored this year's DOR and distributed literature and collected donations side by side—NCRR selling redress T-shirts, the 'CL peddling neckties emblazoned with the group's logo.

A sign that the redress issue is now acceptable to the Japanese American mainstream is the

participation of a Kiwanis-sponsored Key Club chapter from Gardena High School.

Messages of support for the redress drive came from Rev. Carl Segerhammar of the Pacific Southwest Synod of the Lutheran Church of America, and from Eric Mann of the United Auto Workers, Local 645.

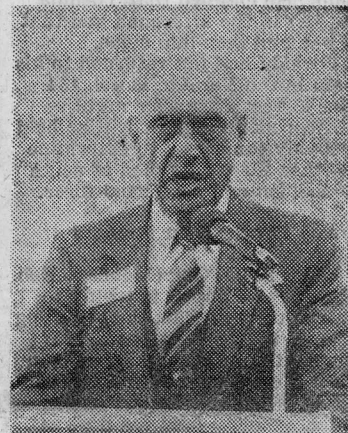
Also a part of the program was a satirical skit on the internment experience put on by the Little Tokyo People's Rights Organization.

This year's Day of Remembrance was marked by an air of optimism. Not only are there four pieces of redress legislation in Congress, but city and county governments up and down the West Coast have passed laws compensating workers terminated because of their Japanese ancestry during World War II and the redress issues seems to have, for the moment, captured the imagination of the media.

After the Day of Remembrance crowd had dispersed, local news stations made the Little Tokyo event one of their top stories and later that same evening the

CBS news magazine "60 Minutes" broadcast a 10-minute-long segment examining curfew and evacuation order test case defendant Fred. T. Korematsu's 40-year-long fight to clear his record.

—CECIL SUZUKI



Rep. Edward R. Roybal
"Write Your Congressman"