

Newsstand: 25¢

\$8.7 million
campaign opens
for WDC memorial

AACL)

\$1.50 postpaid (U.S., Can.) / \$2.30 (Japan Air)

paccit@aol.com

Oct. 3-16, 1997

FBI's role firing Issei, Nisei, railroaders, miners found

BY MICHI WEGLYN

The inordinate power wielded by J. Edgar Hoover, who ruled over the FBI for nearly fifty years, is legendary. If there was one man in political life that even Franklin Delano Roosevelt feared, it was Hoover. The President frequently bypassed Hoover's superior, Attorney General Francis Biddle, and dealt directly with the FBI chief. Hoover could be counted on to act decisively, to resort to police-state tactics, unfettered by constitutional conscience. Certainly, Hoover's agents-in-the-field knew better than to make potentially controversial decisions or to take action without first consulting "the chief." Whatever the situation, Hoover was in total control.

When evaluating the significance of World War II documents that expose the FBI or Hoover as players, I believe there is a need to focus a moment on the forceful, uncompromising character of Mr. Hoover. As we race against the Redress dead-

line, let's keep in mind that FDR gave Hoover's civilian agency prime responsibility for protecting our nation's vital industries and transportation networks, such as mines and railroads.

Thanks to Andrew B. Russell, a graduate student at Arizona State University who wrote his Master's thesis on Japanese Americans in
See RAILROADERS/page 6

Fingerprinting seen as delay for citizenship

WASHINGTON—Over the past year, the backlog for naturalization applications has grown significantly in the Asian Pacific American community, the waiting time currently averaging 21 months and expected to double. The number of applications has been fueled by anti-immigration measures, according to some experts who say immigrants fear losing benefits because they are not citizens.

How Congress resolves the delay
See FINGERPRINTING/page 6

FBI's role firing Issei railroaders, miners found

(Continued from page 1)

wartime Nevada, I have been made privy to some remarkable materials that clearly expose FBI involvement in mass layoffs of Japanese workers.

Fumie Shimada of Sacramento discovered Russell's thesis while searching for information related to the Southern Pacific Railroad's dismissal of her father and data that might help prove the rigidly controlled nature of her family's subsequent "relaxed internment" in Reno, Nevada. We owe much to Ms. Shimada and Mr. Russell for bringing to light what I consider some "smoking gun" documents, long sought by those Russell refers to as "the forgotten victims." He does not support the Office of Redress Administration's (ORA's) sweeping assumption that the government played no role in the layoff. Based on considerable research, his conclusion is that "the federal government was, in part, responsible for the dismissal of most of them." Excerpts from documents uncovered by Russell's pioneering research

better than to rebuke the FBI chief's arbitrary style. Already, Hoover's public and media image ballooned larger than life; he made Americans feel safe and protected.

The worst assault against Japanese railroad workers occurred in February 1942, as devastating military defeats continued to mount upon Allied forces in the Pacific Theater. During one of the darkest weeks of the war, President Jeffers of the Union Pacific Railroad capitulated to the "Yellow Peril" fear and hysteria of his workers who belonged to the Brotherhood of Locomotive Engineers. The railroad president seemingly requested and got the "green light" to lay off Japanese workers from Hoover on February 11, and subsequently from Attorney General Biddle. A letter from Jeffers to Commanding General, Seventh Corps Area, dated February 11, 1942, stated: "I talked with Mr. Hoover of the FBI and subsequently talked with Attorney General Biddle and ... I was given to understand that they saw no objection." On February 13, the Union Pacific Railroad fired every

cripts from documents uncovered by Russell's pioneering research speak volumes:

December 8, 1941—Minutes from a meeting of the White Pine County Council of Defense held that evening show that mine workers in Ruth, Nevada, a company town owned by Nevada Consolidated Copper, had introduced a resolution demanding immediate confinement of Japanese fellow workers under guard. A call to Nevada Governor Edward Carville and the FBI brought news that the Japanese were to stop work immediately.

The minutes further reported:

Guards "will be posted and an attempt will be made to hold the Japanese together until further notice ... the FBI did not want wholesale discharges or dismissal since the federal agency didn't want the Japs to spread." (emphasis added).

December 11, 1941—(The day Germany and Italy declared war on the United States): A letter written by H.M. Peterson (an official of the Nevada Northern Railroad) stated: "Mr. W. Howard Gray, [the attorney for Nevada Consolidated] and representative [of the] F.B.I. gave me [the] following instructions: All Japanese, German and Italian aliens in our service must receive no pay after today in any form until we are so advised by Mr. Gray." Further instructions from Peterson asked that a check be made of naturalized citizens and that "aliens are to be removed from work today and asked to remain at home until the situation is clarified."

December 12, 1941—A letter written by L.J. Bean (another Nevada Northern official) to Mr. Daniel Jackling (CEO of Nevada Consolidated Copper Corporation—or Kennecott, Western Mines Division, which also owned the Nevada Northern Railroad) reveals that the "removal of 14 Japanese section workers between McGill Junction and Cobre is causing a virtual stoppage of track maintenance between those points until such time as the Japanese can be removed from our section living quarters and, we are able to get relief forces on the job. A number of the Japanese who worked for the Copper Company at Ruth and McGill are being kept in their living quarters for the time being, or "until the Federal government decides what they are going to do with them. Understand from representatives who are here that [a] decision should be reached within the next ten days (emphasis added). In the meantime we will bring the Japanese off the line between McGill Junction and Cobre and house them with the Japanese at Ruth and McGill ..." Dismissed **railroad workers**, in other words, were to be confined and placed under guard along with the Ruth and McGill **mine workers**. Documents reveal that some of these workers were, in fact, American born, but authorities made little distinction among White Pine County "Japs."

December 19, 1941—A letter to Mr. Beem from H. M. Peterson discloses that Mr. Gray (Kennecott attorney) had "talked to FBI representative (Olsen) this morning about our Italian aliens who have been here many years in our service and who had taken out first papers for naturalization." Olsen counseled that if such Italian aliens "had made no statements in support of the Axis nations or against the United States, it would be wise to put them back to work, "but this would not apply to Japanese" (emphasis added).

The unfair government tactics and practices exposed in these documents were typical of the callous, clearly racist wartime treatment meted out to the Japanese and they may not have pleased the U.S. Attorney General. But Biddle knew

no objection." On February 13, the Union Pacific Railroad fired every last one of its Japanese workers, affecting men working as far east as Wyoming and Nebraska.

Within that harrowing week, all western railroads followed the lead of the Union Pacific (at about the same time—February 19, 1942, FDR struck back at all "Japs" closer to home with Executive Order 9066). Private companies were finally secure in the knowledge that the government sanctioned "preventive measures" to prevent derailment and sabotage.

By February 18, most Japanese had been fired from such lines as the Santa Fe, the Western Pacific, Northern Pacific, Southern Pacific, the Great Northern and others. Families served with overnight eviction notices became America's first horde of the homeless. Not only was their material loss incalculable, but valued pre-existing relationships suffered from sudden termination. Children were yanked in and out of schools as their families searched for work. Essential psychiatric, medical, and dental care were cut off, and I have been told that many of this group were turned away when they attempted to enter the WRA camps.

Only through the Freedom of Information Act will we be able to find out the full extent of this long-veiled wartime "Trail of Tears."

The documents provided by Russell have caused not only ORA functionaries, but also librarians, researchers, and community members to start searching for additional World War II Council of Defense records.

Perhaps Russell will delve even deeper into this sadly-neglected chapter in American history for his Ph.D. dissertation. Moreover, let us hope that documents like these will at last lead to redress payment for all of the victims of the government-sanctioned railroad layoffs—before time runs out. ■

Fingerprinting seen as delay for citizenship

(Continued from page 1)

is before the House and Senate appropriations committees considering bills by the State, Justice and Commerce departments, staff attorney Jayne Park at the National Asian Pacific American Legal Consortium pointed out this past week (Sept. 15).

A provision in the bills requires INS, rather than local providers, to conduct all fingerprinting services effective Oct. 1, 1997. NAPALC hopes the provision is removed. Continued funding of INS staff, which expired Sept. 30, is also a part of the bill. An extension to Oct. 23 is anticipated.

Fingerprint and FBI background checks are conducted to assure the applicant has five years of continuous residence, can speak sufficient English, shows good moral character and no serious crime on record. ■