

L.A. Redress Hearings Concluded 9/18/81

Community Stands Behind Monetary Compensation

The federal Commission on Wartime Relocation and Internment of Civilians ended three days of hearings in Los Angeles Thursday evening. In all, more than 200 witnesses gave testimony before the presidentially- and congressionally-nominated panel, which is charged with reviewing the facts and circumstances surrounding Executive Order 9066 and the impact of the order on American citizens and permanent resident aliens and to recommend appropriate remedies.

One of the highlights of the Thursday testimony was a statement by long-time civil liberties attorney Fred Okrand, of the American Civil Liberties Union.

Okrand, speaking as part of a panel on constitutional issues involved in the World War II evacuation and incarceration of Japanese America, called the Supreme Court's decision in the landmark **Korematsu v. United States**, which deemed the evacuation constitutional, "wrong" and characterized the high court's decision as "a judicial precedent which fed upon expediency."

The legendary ACLU counsel went on to say that U.S. actions against Nikkei during WWII had a "melancholy resemblance to what was done in Nazi Germany."

"The idea of monetary compensation is correct," Okrand told the commission. "Little will have been accomplished here without compensation—we could have all stayed home."

He added that monetary compensation is historically provided for as reparations for a wrongful incarceration. The imprisonment of Japanese Americans, he offered, was a "colossally large wrongful incarceration."

On the same panel, Rose Matsui Ochi, a legislative planner for Mayor Tom Bradley, said the incarceration was a "castration of the Japanese American psyche." She added it was "ludicrous to ask if a wrong was committed,"



Rev. Herbert V. Nicholson

saying a failure of the U.S. government to provide compensation would represent a second betrayal of Japanese in America.

A friendly voice out of the past, the Rev. Herbert V. Nicholson of Pasadena, came from a hospital bed to testify on behalf of the Nikkei redress movement.

Nicholson, 88, who assisted the Nikkei community before, during and after their wartime ordeal, advocated the foundation of a memorial fund for those who perished during their imprisonment in concentration camps for Japanese Americans. He suggested that the U.S. government should start by appropriating "several million dollars" for such a fund. He also suggested that the government help pay for the Japanese American Cultural/Community Center in Los Angeles and publicize the loyalties of the Japanese Americans during WWII.

Nicholson left the hearing room to loud applause from the 300 in attendance.

Other key testimonies during the L.A. hearings will be published in full in upcoming editions of **The Rafu Shimpō**.

A fitting close to the three his-

toric days of testimony in Los Angeles was contained in a presentation by California State University, Long Beach researcher, Larry Boss. His study of Japanese American losses because of the WWII evacuation and imprisonment indicated that Nikkei lost more than \$40 billion in land, residences, farms, retail business, personal property and wages.

Boss' study estimate of the Japanese American losses did not include possible damages for psychological damages and increases in land values.

Boss, the final witness to appear before the commission, testified that if the government were to recompense Japanese America for only the losses identified in his study, it would have to pay victims of the camps "a third of a million dollars each."

The L.A. hearings, which attracted turn-away crowds all three days, elicited gut-wrenching, emotional testimony from former Japanese American camp inmates from throughout Southern California and, according to community organizers lent added impetus to the current drives to gain reparations from the government for the injustices meted to Japanese America.

Testimony delivered at the hearings seemed to render questions of whether a wrong was committed against Japanese in America during World War II academic. However, commissioners present for the L.A. hearings, save for former Supreme Court Justice Arthur J. Goldberg, were reluctant to openly support a recommendation for redress and reparations.

The CWRIC will be holding hearings in San Francisco next week, in Seattle, Alaska and Chicago next month.

The commission is expected to deliver its report and recommendations to Congress next spring.

—DWIGHT CHUMAN