

Wartime 'CL Role Questioned at Seattle Hearing

Panel Charges JACL, WRA Were "Partners" in Running WWII Camps

SEATTLE.—The War Relocation Authority and the wartime Japanese American Citizens League were partners in running American concentration camps for Japanese Americans as a "controlled indoctrination program," according to testimony heard on the first day of federal commission hearings in Seattle. The indoctrination program had as its alleged goal the forced assimilation of the Nikkei into white American culture by the creation of "new Americans" through the destruction of Nikkei culture inside the camp, according to testimony by Chinese American playwright and literary historian Frank Chin. Document uncovered by Chin also suggested a link between a 1942 JACL loyalty oath and the 1943 WRA loyalty oath—including the notorious questions 27 and 28.

The news was greeted with surprise by JACL leaders attending the Wednesday afternoon session of the Commission on Wartime Relocation and Internment of Civilians at Seattle Central Community College. At least one indicated a willingness to re-examine the JACL's role in 1942, and possibly acknowledge it.

Chin spoke with poet and educator Lawson Fusao Inada and scholar Rita Takahashi Cates on a panel exploring the cultural damages inflicted upon Japanese America by the incarceration. Inada testified that because of the nature of the camps, many ex-internees will not speak about them.

"There are those who have had to sublimate the effect of the experience to survive, who have swallowed the barbed wire so it eats the interior, stops the throat and strangles the heart," said Inada.

Inada testified his survey of existing Japanese American literature from the camps showed that "apart from the actual evacuation itself... the single source of the most widespread damage was incurred by the instituting in 1943 of the "application for leave clearance," otherwise known as the loyalty oath.

He blamed the loyalty oath, which among other things required Nikkei to forswear any and all previous allegiance to the emperor of Japan, and which was widely regarded as a trick questionnaire for forcing the dispersal of Nikkei families across the nation. Inada said "the compulsion was to disperse and, as much as possible, to disappear... If there had been a magical pill to eradicate one's 'Japness' I shudder to think how many would have taken it."

Registered Nurse Testifies That Euthanasia Was Practiced in WWII Camps for Japanese Americans

SEATTLE.—The story happened 40 years ago, but many of us are hearing it for the first time now. Tales of horror surrounding the imprisonment of thousands of Japanese Americans during World War II. Thursday in Seattle, a federal commission looking into the internment heard one of those stories... a story of euthanasia practiced in camp hospitals.

Emi Somekawa is now 63 and lives in Puyallup. In 1942, she was a registered nurse... rounded up by the U.S. government and incarcerated in a California internment camp at Tule Lake. She told the Commission on Wartime Relocation and Internment of Civilians she witnessed and participated in euthanasia—mercy killings—at the camp.

She said the camp hospital had only five doctors and four nurses to serve the thousands of inmates

at the camp.

Somekawa told of a pregnant patient with a heart condition. Because of inadequate medical supplies, she said the patient's family requested she be "put to sleep" after giving birth. Somekawa said a doctor ordered her to give the patient a quarter-grain of morphine. The patient was then put out of her misery, she said.

There were other incidents, according to Somekawa. She said patients were at times "put to sleep" because they were terminally ill. The camp hospitals were crowded and had medical facilities she calls "profoundly inadequate."

Asked what would be just compensation for her imprisonment, Somekawa told the Commission, "Money," adding that she would give her reparation payments to charity.

—FRANK ABE

petuating the very things which we hope to eliminate: Those mannerisms and thoughts which mark us apart, aside from our physical characteristics. We hope for a one hundred per cent American community.

"One thing is certain: There should be no Japanese language schools.

"Special stress should be laid on the enunciation and pronunciation of words so that awkward and 'Oriental' sounds will be eliminated."

Chin then compared the JACL program presented to the WRA with interview questions eventually posed by the WRA in 1943 to screen out those who would be sent to the Tule Lake segregation center as so-called "disloyals."

"Will you assist in the general resettlement program by staying away from large groups of Japanese?"

"Will you avoid the use of Japanese language except when necessary?"

"Will you try to develop such American habits which will cause you to be accepted readily into American social groups?"

The apparent answer required by the WRA to these questions was "Yes." Chin asserted that the process, which was taken without benefit of legal counsel, required all those who hoped to leave camp to reject Japanese American culture and "endorse and swear themselves accomplices to the

pose for being in the camps.

"I don't feel that they went to camp to have their culture, their ethnicity, their pride and their sense of honor eliminated," said Chin.

Commissioner Edward W. Brooke, the former Massachusetts senator, asked Chin why he thought it was necessary to have a loyalty oath for Japanese Americans anymore than any other group. Chin replied he saw no justification for one. He said the key question 28, asking "Will you forswear all allegiance to the emperor of Japan" raised an issue which the JACL created—the question of dual citizenship. "I am sure you are well aware of the fact that the United States government hasn't recognized any dual citizenship since the War of 1812," he added.

Brooke asked if he thought things would have been worse or better without the loyalty oath. To which Chin replied: "Without the loyalty oath 18,000 people would not have been stigmatized as 'disloyal' and the current rift that exists in Japanese America between JACL and non-JACL Japanese Americans wouldn't exist. This rift still exists today and is very bitter. The commission I'm sure finds this rift pos-

sibly internecine, petty and irrelevant. But I suggest this rift itself was created by the loyalty oath and that rift which tears at Japanese America today is camp damage."

After establishing Chin's endorsement for Japanese American reparations, Brooke tried to establish why Chin was raising the questions now, when the Japanese Americans were focusing on the redress issue.

Said Brooke: "We've got to write this report sometime, and I understand what you're saying. In addition to monetary reparations and some compensation for property (you feel) that history ought to be righted and I quite agree with you, history ought to be righted. That's very important for the Japanese American people. But you suggest that we find, we addition to the U.S. government being wrong as the executive order was wrong, that we find the JACL to be wrong..." Chin corrected Brooke by saying "... That you find the government's support and favoritism of the JACL to have been mistaken."

Contacted immediately after Chin's testimony, JACL national president Dr. James Tsujimura of Portland said, "My reaction at first was I was angry, however if (Mr. Chin) does have that proof I think we should look into it and clear this up."

Asked what further steps he might take if the allegations prove true, Tsujimura said, "We should just acknowledge it and go on from there." He added, "I would like to go to the source which is of course (Mike) Masaoka and get his side of this. Was he under pressure? Was he forced to write that? If he was not under pressure or anything like that, in the light of today, it really looks bad. But I don't know what the story is."

He suggested that Masaoka may appear at a future JACL function to answer any questions in a workshop format. An exchange of information between Chin and the JACL was arranged following his testimony.

—FRANK ABE

● Editor's Note—Frank Abe, 30, is news director for KIRO Newsradio, the CBS affiliate in Seattle. His journalism on redress has appeared in the Seattle Post-Intelligencer, The Seattle Sun, The International Examiner, The San Francisco Journal and The Rafu Shimpō.

his research in Washington, D.C. showed that the loyalty oath was originally a JACL invention created before the evacuation to convince the government to recognize JACL as the leadership of Japanese America. He said "key phrases and the foreswearing of all forms of known and unknown allegiances to the emperor of Japan are virtually identical to the JACL loyalty oath of 1942 and questions 27 and 28 of the WRA Leave Clearance Application."

He quoted the JACL's pre-evacuation oath to the commissioners and the 600 spectators who crowded into a 400-seat capacity theater and others watching the proceedings on TV monitors in adjacent rooms.

"I,, do solemnly swear that I will support and defend the Constitution of the United States against all enemies, foreign and domestic; that I will bear true faith and allegiance to the same; that I hereby renounce any other allegiances which I may have knowingly or unknowingly held in the past; and that I take this obligation freely without any mental reservation or purpose of evasion. So help me God."

Chin said a copy of the JACL's loyalty oath was found in the records of Secretary of War Henry L. Stimson, dated February 1942. The playwright then produced excerpts from a list of recommendations handed by the wartime JACL field secretary Mike Masaoka to then director of the WRA Milton Eisenhower on April 6, 1942. The JACL recommendations urged the WRA to use the camps to "create 'Better Americans in a Greater America,'" by some of the following policies:

"We do not relish the thought of 'Little Tokyos' springing up in these resettlement projects, for by so doing we are only per-

to indoctrination." Chin said the April 6, 1942 letter from Masaoka to Eisenhower "leaves no doubt as to (the JACL's) intention to use the camps to modify Japanese American society, history and individual behavior."

"The JACL created the loyalty oath, they campaigned for the loyalty oath and the segregation camps for those who flunked it," he continued. The Army and the WRA administration and the FBI enforced it . . . the JACL became the Nikkei leadership at the government's pleasure, not by any form of Japanese American approval.

"The rift between the JACL and Japanese Americans was created by the government when they imposed JACL leadership on the Nikkei," said Chin. "By that gesture alone, the government forcibly altered the course of Japanese American history and gave the JACL license to 'create Better Americans in a Greater America' and use the loyalty oath and the entire leave clearance program as a graduation competency test, and as a consequence they ruined thousands of lives."

Commissioner William M. Marutani, judge of the Philadelphia County Court of Common Pleas and a JACL columnist who describes himself as an oft-times "antagonist" to the group, questioned Chin's interpretation of the documents.

"You refer to Mike Masaoka as if he did something bad, and maybe I'm old-fashioned . . . this perspective of almost 40 years later can be quite different than what was facing the Nisei at the time. I know I have changed. I always wanted to be 120 per cent American too in my life, but I've changed," pointed out Marutani, the only Japanese American on the nine-member panel.

Marutani took one of the JACL's wartime recommendations to the WRA and asked Chin, "Wouldn't you want to be a Better American in a greater America? I don't see anything ominous in that. Did I miss something?"

Replied Chin: "The assumption was that the Japanese Americans were being relocated. That there was nothing wrong with them as Americans in the first place (but) against their will and without their knowledge (to be) made to be 'Better Americans in a Greater America' . . . by whose program?"

Marutani interrupted, "Well you're reading an awful lot into those words, sir. I suppose you could take any set of words and read whatever you wish into them, good, bad or neutral."

Chin repeated quotes from the Masaoka-Eisenhower letter regarding suppression of Japanese culture, speech and association, and asserted that these JACL policies did not represent Japanese American feelings on their pur-

Re: Circus of Freaks

I knew in advance that publishing Frank Chin's piece on the Los Angeles hearings of the Commission on Wartime Relocation and Internment of Civilians would cause quite an uproar among our readers and in the rest of the community.

Over the past few months, we here at the Rafu have been gratified at the interest in and good words about our coverage of the redress issue. As editor, I have tried to give as many organizations and individuals with something to say on the issue space on our pages.

I have been rather disappointed at the response to Chin's confrontation essay, however. I think discussion of the issues that affect us is vital, and Chin's effort deserves more than the put-downs it has been getting. Sure, the guy's not subtle. His rough words—freaks, grotesque, uglies—grate on our sensibilities. But I feel that in the aftermath of the hearings—as we wipe our tears and try to understand our emotions—Chin's thinking is important.

I heard an account of another congressional hearing in Washington, D.C. just the other day. A member of the congressional committee drew applause for an eloquent statement and the commission chair immediately gaveled the hearing back to order saying he would not tolerate another outburst.

The hearings of the Commission on Wartime Relocation and Internment of Civilians are another matter. Booring, catcalls and general intolerance for adversary testimony have been the rule not the exception.

Maybe Chin is right in suspecting that the hearings are being encouraged to digress into a mob-like setting by design. It seems that every city the commission goes to there's a white-haired racist woman there, to try to disrupt the proceedings and to grab the headlines. It's happened in L.A., S.F. and Seattle. Why?

I wholeheartedly agree with those who say that firsthand victim accounts of what happened in the camps are valuable not only to the commission but also to the community and to American society at large. But I cannot help but feel that we're being treated to a little emotional overload during the CWRIC hearings. The testimony, while heartfelt and sincere, states the obvious—that Japanese America was royally screwed by the U.S. government during the war.

Even the commission is now acknowledging this fact. But they are still looking for a way out of recommending direct monetary compensation.

Let's not ever kid ourselves. These hearings are a concession. Congressional hearings are often used to vent the emotion and anger of a group, to temporize. And let us not ever forget, that the hearings are being held and controlled by the same government which put Japanese America behind barbed wire in the first place.

Hope some of you were shocked into thinking by Chin's commentary. I was.



Four leaders of the Pacific Southwest District Council of the JACL have requested a meeting with Rafu Shimpo publisher Akira Komai and myself on Monday, Sept. 14 to deal with this newspaper's coverage of the redress issue. Ostensibly, they're coming over to discuss the Chin article, but I have a suspicion that our editorial policy in relation to the League is more on their minds than the Chin piece. Sources say the 'CL leaders will deliver a petition protesting the publication of the "Circus of Freaks" to us. Fine.

I have discussed our policy with publisher Komai and am glad to say that he'll stand behind keeping the Rafu an independent source of information for the Nikkei community.

Since JACL is neither the only group to object to the Chin article nor the only group assuming a leadership role in the redress issue, I have invited representatives of the National Coalition on Redress/Reparations and the notorious Chin himself to be at the meeting Monday. Should prove quite stimulating. More on this later.

—DWIGHT CHUMAN

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