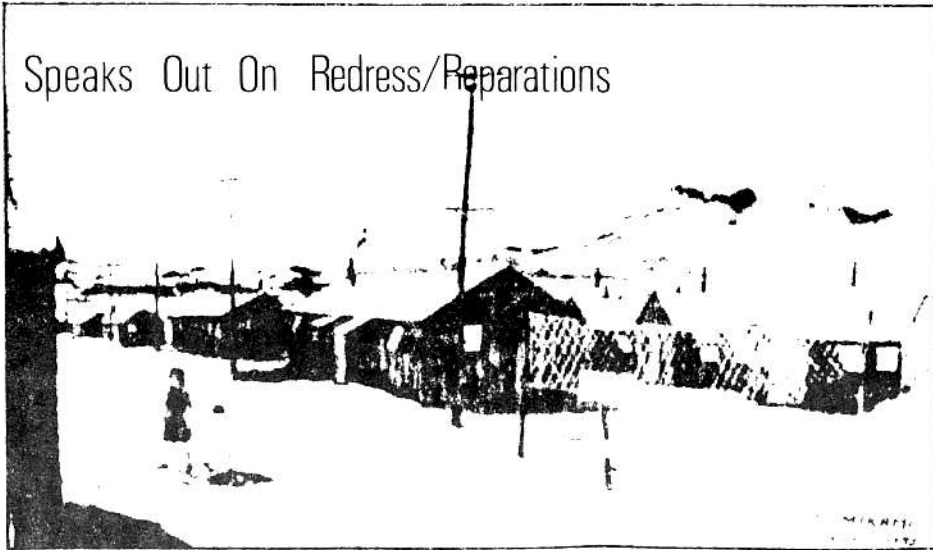


LTPRO Speaks Out On Redress/Reparations



The following is the presentation given by the Little Tokyo Peoples Rights Organization (LTPRO) at a community meeting we sponsored this past January 29, 1983 at the Little Tokyo Towers. Also on the program was the National Coalition for Redress/Reparations (NCRR), the Japanese American Citizens League (JACL) and the National Council for Japanese American Redress (NCJAR).

We are entering an exciting and crucial phase in the movement for reparations and justice. Three examples of this are:

- (1) Reparations bills have been enacted for California State, Los Angeles County and San Francisco City workers who lost their jobs as a result of the evacuation.
- (2) Father Drinan, a member of the Commission on Wartime Relocation and Internment announced recently that the Commission will probably recommend monetary reparations to the Japanese American evacuees.

- (3) Major newspapers across the country, including the Los Angeles Times, Los Angeles Herald Examiner and Washington Post, as well as several television stations have editorialized in favor of monetary reparations.

These gains within the Redress/Reparations movement were not the result of the actions by "enlightened" commissioners, legislators or editors. They were the result of the efforts made by hundreds of us who spoke out, attended meetings and rallies, wrote letters, signed petitions, gave money and testified at government hearings in support

of justice for the Nikkei community.

This is a very important lesson because in this coming phase, that same mass involvement and participation will be decisive in winning meaningful redress/reparations.

LITPRO: SEVEN YEAR HISTORY

We in the Little Tokyo Peoples Rights Organization (LITPRO) have been involved in many issues in our seven year history: we stood with other groups and individuals against the destruction of our community center of Little Tokyo by redevelopment and were able to win some low-cost housing, space and subsidies in the Japanese American Community Cultural Center (JACCC) and subsidies for some small businesses who were displaced. We stood with the workers at Japan Food Corporation (JFC), Nishimoto Trading Company, Ltd. and Hori-kawa Restaurant in their struggle for higher wages, better working conditions and the right to have a union. We have worked with others in Asian Americans for Nuclear Disarmament (AAND) to oppose the threat of nuclear war and to support the Nikkei hibakusha (Atomic Bomb Survivors) in getting medical aid from the U.S. government. We've worked with others to keep alive the yearly Little Tokyo Mochitsuki tradition. But for the past couple of years, our priority has been our work in the reparations movement.

R/R: LESSONS FOR THE FUTURE

LITPRO has learned a great deal by working in this movement: this movement has been able to unite



the different generations in our community behind a common cause. Despite what S.I. Hayakawa and Yo Takagaki claim (we can see that they are both out of touch with what the majority of us think and feel and also they are both full of 'you know what' to try and speak for us), 89% of the people who responded to a Rafu Shimpō survey in 1981 were for reparations, a majority of whom were nisei and issei.

Another thing we in LITPRO have seen through work in the reparations movement is that it is now alright for many nisei and issei to finally talk openly about this painful and long-hidden wound. We sansai are learning from our parents and grandparents about a part of our history ignored, belittled or distorted by the school books. While we are outraged at the injustice of the evacuation, we are also proud to learn of the courage and bravery of our people to have withstood this trauma. This pride extends to those who stood up to challenge the evacuation. Such fighters include Fred Korematsu, Min Yasui and Gordon Hirabayashi, the three who chal-

lenged the 1942 curfew, and who, today are challenging the legal justification for the camps. Others include the Manzanar kitchen workers union, the Heart Mountain draft resisters, as well as the nisei soldiers who fought facism in Europe and the Pacific, while their families were imprisoned behind barbed wire...and the countless other ways all our people resisted and maintained their dignity in the face of such loss and suffering.



COMMUNITY FUND

We feel that in addition to this tremendous loss and suffering our people were subjected to, our communities were also devastated. In addition to individual reparations, we see the need for a community fund to help fund vitally needed social services to our people, to build more senior citizen housing and to develop cultural and educational programs. This community fund is needed to rebuild our communities into the vibrant economic, social, cultural and political centers they once were.

Another thing the reparations movement has provided is a common cause for a broad spectrum of or-

ganizations and individuals to unite around. We can see this reflected in the recent programs at the Little Tokyo Towers and in Gardena. This is also evident by the broad nature of support the National Coalition for Redress/Reparations (NCRR) and other groups have been able to win both within the Nikkei community and from non-Japanese alike.

VISION FOR THE FUTURE

And we in LTRPO have learned how effective a nationwide network can be. In three short years, NCRR has become a major force in the national Redress/Reparations movement. We have learned that the best way to win is to be organized and united. We have a vision of a united Nikkei movement — not just behind redress and reparations, but united behind many concerns of Nikkei people; united not just locally, but statewide and even nationwide. Since early last year, LTRPO has been discussing the idea of merging with another similar organization, the Japanese Community Progressive Alliance (JCPA) in San Francisco. The idea of merging the two organizations is a way to combine our strength and our numbers.

We see this merger as a first step towards building a statewide, and eventually nationwide progressive Nikkei organization, representing the broad majority of Japanese Americans. Already, the impact of this possible merger is being felt: The Nihonmachi Outreach Committee (NOC) in San Jose has expressed an interest in becoming a

THE STRUGGLE MUST CONTINUE

And although redress/reparations is a key battle today, we can predict many battles to come, judging from the deteriorating economy, and the increasingly racist atmosphere in this country today for all minority people. As Japanese, we can see it in the government trying to blame Japanese imports for the economic crisis. Just as with the issue of redress, we must seek support from other minorities and the American working people in general; and in turn, we must actively support their concerns and their struggles against injustice.

It isn't going to be easy given the rightward direction this country is being led, to take progressive and militant stands for what we believe in. But, if we don't, the alternatives are not very promising: we can turn our backs and not get involved; we can try to melt into the mainstream white America by denying our identity, culture, language and history; we can let ourselves be pitted against other minorities; we can place our faith solely in the hands of the politicians, government officials and lawyers to decide the outcome of the Redress/Reparations campaign, and of our future as a people; OR WE CAN TAKE THE FUTURE INTO OUR OWN HANDS TO DEFINE WHO WE ARE AND WHAT WE ARE, IN OUR OWN WAY, AND ON OUR

OUR TERMS.

We have a long way to go. The Reparations movement is a big step forward. We must close ranks, fight for Redress/Reparations, for justice and continue to build, organize and unite. We must fight for the pio-



Manzanar concentration camp, 1942.

neers who came before us, who suffered, fought back and taught us to persevere; We must fight for those who are now demanding justice; and We must fight for our future generations who can say proudly "I'm Nikkei." knowing our people stood for justice, full equality and political power.

*Little Tokyo Peoples Rights Organization (LTPRO)
244 South San Pedro Street, Room 406
Los Angeles, California 90012
(213) 620-0761*