

WAR RELOCATION AUTHORITY  
Community Analysis Section

TRENDS IN THE RELOCATION CENTERS: III

September 26, 1945

Two major trends in evacuee thinking have been apparent since last March. The dominant one through July was the persistence of the conviction that centers could not be closed out completely. The other, which developed slowly through the spring and summer, was that resettlement on the West Coast was possible even before the end of the war. The two points of view have gone through dynamic changes, each gaining and losing adherents as WRA policy developments have unfolded and the war, housing shortage, and West Coast prejudice and discrimination have played on conceptions of the future.

1. The Idea of the Residue

The evacuee view that centers should exist for the duration of the war goes back to evacuation, when they were led to believe that the centers would be "war duration" homes. It lost some ground in the face of satisfactory relocation outside the centers by Nisei and some Issei, but it had remained throughout the three years of center life the generally accepted view among Issei.

When WRA presented its policy of center closure in December, 1944, it required more than three months before there was any general acceptance even of the belief that the agency was in earnest. It was only after repeated statements by project officials, visits to all centers by the National Director during which he discussed the policy with evacuee groups, and the failure of the All-Center Conference to influence WRA in important ways that large numbers of evacuees became convinced that WRA had stated its actual intentions. Perhaps by April most evacuees were living with the idea of center closure in some form. This acceptance did not however result in widespread decisions to relocate. Influenced by a variety of motives, ranging from simple satisfaction with relocation center life, through fear of reception outside, to conviction of the injustice of closing centers during the war, the great majority of people waited.

By June most of the persons in the centers had a settled conviction that, even though WRA was determined to relocate everyone, a large number could not and would not relocate either until more assistance was given or they were simply ordered out of the centers. There would, in other words, be a "residue." The residue concept had been formulated earlier, in 1944, when there were rumors of center closure, but now it became a constant subject of discussion and a center political issue. By the end of June it was as basic an element in evacuee thinking as the war, West Coast prejudice, or government

obtusity. Almost all responsible evacuee leaders believed in it and many members of project staffs shared the belief. Estimates of the extent of the residue were freely made. Most were a third to a half lower than such estimates made in January by councils and other evacuee bodies. A widely accepted estimate by Poston evacuees was about 5000 for that center. At Minidoka in June evacuee leaders spoke in terms of a residue of 2000. At Topaz estimates in late July ranged from 1000 to 2000. The residue was regarded as inevitable unless WRA changed its policy in some way.

Once accepted, the idea of the residue led necessarily to certain further questions. For example, "What about schools in the fall for the children of persons 'who cannot relocate?'" During the spring schools were raised as an issue with WRA. Closing them by the end of the summer was regarded as a broken promise and as unjust to those who couldn't relocate. The Minidoka Council sought legal grounds for requiring WRA to continue the schools. The PTA and other groups in various centers protested and cast about for means of continuing the schools. In most centers groups of parents continued through August to make plans for giving their children schooling in the centers.

A second important question was "What will be done with the residue ultimately after WRA closes out?" This was a constant point of discussion in all centers. Speculation developed along innumerable lines: Gila and Poston would remain open; Manzanar would remain open as an old peoples' home; the Justice Department would take over; a new agency would be created; etc. The feeling was strong that WRA must have some undisclosed plan for taking care of the residue. This feeling grew, and the issue was taken up in some councils. WRA's refusal to admit a residue was branded as unrealistic. As discussion continued, feeling against WRA hardened. It was held that it was inhumane not to reveal the plan for disposal. WRA should let people know their fate. If on the other hand there was no plan that was even more inhumane, for it would mean that unrelatable people would be forced out at the end with nowhere to go. Feeling of this sort was strong in Topaz and other centers by the end of July.

Evacuee thinking concerning a residue was based, at least in part, on lack of information concerning the possibilities for the various kinds of people then left in the centers. Thus persons classified as internees (such as renunciants of citizenship) by the Justice Department, those excluded from the coast by Army orders, dependency cases, large families with depleted resources and other hardship cases, persons able but disinclined for personal reasons to leave the centers, repatriates, persons too timid to take the step to leave, and those who felt that they should have internee status were all lumped together in the concept of the residue. The residue idea had become an unanalyzed stereotype which for many was something to lean on in their search for security and a block to individual initiative.

But the residue theory was based on a good deal more than lack of information about the plans for various types of cases. It was rooted in the experience of the past three years. It was nourished by the feeling that a government commitment for "war duration homes" was not being lived up to and by the hostility which, characteristically, had developed toward an agency charged with the problems of people made dependent through no fault of their own. It was fanned by each new shooting incident or evidence of anti-evacuee feeling on the West Coast. It rested in the feeling of helplessness of family heads isolated in centers and unable to see the way to a new start outside. It was rooted in the feeling that the government was not being as generous as it might in helping evacuees toward a readjustment. If there had been complete isolation in the centers during this period, it is likely that the residue viewpoint would have been the only one of any consequence and the overwhelming majority would have settled back to regard themselves as all members of the residue. There were, however, other forces working against the acceptance of the idea, and these gathered momentum during June and July.

## 2. Relocation West

By March 1 only about 700 persons had left the centers for the three West Coast states. These were mostly property owners, usually individuals with exceptional confidence in themselves and their ability to buck antagonism. Despite the opening of the West Coast only between 500 and 600 persons were leaving the centers weekly by the end of March. This was, however, almost double the weekly average for March the previous year. Much of the increase was obviously due to West Coast movement, but still three times as many were going eastward as west. Relocation through the winter and early spring was still largely determined by the eastward base, but it was clear that a new factor was already working strongly.

The terminal departures do not indicate the major factor which was ultimately to influence relocation most profoundly. This was the volume of exploratory movement to the West Coast. Persons on short term leave, "scouts" as they came to be called, looking over the old territory at their own expense, began to go out in the winter. By April their numbers had reached considerable proportions. At Poston in April, there were more than twice as many "scouts" out to California points as persons who had permanently left the center for the coast: 410 on short term as against 183 on terminal leave. The number of scouts continued to multiply during the spring. Inevitably they influenced attitudes in the centers. They came back with a wide variety of stories, some good and some bad, but all of actual experiences in which friends and relatives had confidence. The basis for real participation in relocation planning was steadily being laid. New attitudes about the possibility of return despite the war slowly grew up, attitudes not at all characteristic of relocation center thinking up to this point.



The month of April marked the turning point in feeling about the West Coast. In general during the early months of the year evacuees in the centers accepted the constantly reiterated statements written by West Coast friends that "the time is not yet ripe for return." Numerous shooting and arson incidents in the Central Valley of California re-inforced this view, as did the sudden appearance of anti-Japanese organizations in Oregon and Washington. Well on into May the dominant objection raised to West Coast relocation was fear of violence at the hands of West Coast people. Nevertheless already in April began to appear unmistakable signs of a new positive approach to re-establishment on the West Coast.

Two indications of this new approach may be singled out as examples. In the same week, the last week in April, two events occurred which reveal the trend most clearly. On April 27, the Buddhist Churches of America under the leadership of Bishop Matsukage announced a plan for the reestablishment of headquarters outside the Topaz center and for a systematic participation in resettlement with the establishment of hostels in West Coast regions. At the same time a Christian minister Rev. D. Kitagawa was at Heart Mountain telling his experience during a return to an actively hostile community, White River, Washington. He spread widely through the centers a letter announcing his conviction that the only way to combat West Coast hostility was to return in numbers to the old communities and meet it face to face. These particular events by no means affected large numbers of evacuees instantaneously. They are merely indicative of the influences which were beginning to operate on a small scale among the evacuees themselves, focusing the problem and influencing group after group to participate in the settlement of its own future and to resume the old frontal attack on prejudice.

By June another type of influence was beginning to be felt. This was the change in attitude of prominent persons in the centers who had been publicly opposed to relocation. Some went out on scouting trips, came back and with no declaration of change of view quietly slipped out of the centers with their families. Others came back, described their experiences publicly, plumped for relocation, and one day went out. The term "bandwagon" leader began to be heard, as defections from the so-called "sit-tighter" groups increased. Any sense of unity which the sit-tighters may have felt was steadily undermined. As one prominent Minidoka leader said in July: "You can't really tell who's who any more. What a man says in public doesn't count. He may go out tomorrow." What was happening was the disintegration of the community into individuals who were putting the solution of their personal problems before any group considerations.

The greater number of community leaders were not however behaving in this way. Many had never been in the ranks of "the opposition." Others under the sway of the residue theory continued to hammer at WRA for more relocation aid. Still others, perhaps the most effective and most respected, worked hard, despite conviction that there would be a residue, to help others solve their relocation problems and to coordinate individual planning with what assistance was available from the government.

Relocation figures mounted slowly but steadily through May. In mid-May they were little above those for the same period in 1944. In June, however, there was a slight upsurge, bringing weekly departures from all centers to about 1100. By the end of July, after a brief midsummer slump, it appeared that the new influences had reached a maximum and that the centers had settled down to a higher summer relocation rate than in previous years, but not one which would result in emptying the centers by the end of the year. This was pretty much in accordance with the predictions of those who held to the residue theory, maintaining that relocation would rise sharply after May as a result of the new relocation base on the West Coast, but that it would fall or level off to a "plateau," not accelerating in late summer and fall.

By August almost as many persons were going west as east. The figures, however, hardly reflected the mounting interest in the West Coast. Attitudes in the centers indicated that the major block to a steadily accelerating relocation rate lay mainly in housing. People were piling up in the hostels on the West Coast, despite the constant opening of more hostels. There was extreme difficulty in locating either permanent or temporary places to live and the accounts of these difficulties were influencing people in the centers. Three months earlier the major anxiety had been fear of violence. Now that fear had become relatively unimportant and the chief obstacle everywhere was lack of housing. Although rooted in reality the concern over housing was steadily becoming an obsession.

The shift from West Coast violence to housing as the chief relocation anxiety indicated a profound change in center attitudes. People were in touch again in an intimate way with the West Coast and their former communities. Anti-evacuee feeling was admitted to be sporadic and localized. The orientation was definitely outward now. Worries were tied in with practical difficulties in the old localities. Still the idea of the residue was dominant in the centers and the real shortage of housing was sufficient to cause a majority of people to regard themselves as members of the residue.

### 3. The Disintegration of the Centers

During August the whole situation in the centers changed with unpredicted rapidity. By the middle of August, Poston which had been sauntering along with one of the lower relocation rates suddenly began to lead all centers in weekly departures. This was indicative of a general turn toward accelerated relocation activity. The relocation figures for the third week in August were twice the number which had become routine in July. Three weeks later even this figure had nearly doubled to a total of 3,748 departures for the week from all centers. The increases varied considerably from center to center, reflecting local influences, but all centers except Manzanar showed sudden rises at some time during the period. There were obviously new factors at work.

It is difficult to assess the relative importance of the new factors. One which had some influence was certainly the recent developments in WRA policy, all centering on making center closure more definite. From December through early June WRA indicated no new features of closing policy. People knew only that WRA intended to close centers not later than January 2, 1946. By the time the residue theory had crystallized in evacuee thinking, however, a new feature was announced, namely, that the smaller units of Poston and Gila would close by October 1. There was no pronounced evacuee reaction and no apparent effect on relocation figures. It is probable that the announced dates for these units eliminated some of the speculation to the effect that Gila and Poston would be retained for the residue. It also sharpened the question which everyone was asking: "What will be done with those still in centers when they close?" Within a month the closing schedule for all centers, somewhat in advance of January 2, was announced. Again there was no pronounced evacuee reaction or any important effect on relocation figures. If the announcement had any great effect on persons who had not already been planning relocation, it was chiefly to convince them that some agency other than WRA would ultimately take over the residue. However, there was some indication that it gave impetus to leaders who were actively working to help other evacuees solve their relocation problems. Aside from this the major effect was probably to stimulate the relocation staff in the centers to more intensive effort. Early in August the final implementation of WRA policy was announced in Administrative Instruction No. 289, which provided for the scheduling of departure quotas for all centers so that they would be empty on the dates set. Whatever general reaction there may have been to this was almost immediately submerged in the announcement of peace with Japan.

The closing of hostilities between Japan and the United States has probably been the crucial factor in the now general acceptance of relocation. WRA policy, after the summer of 1942, hinged not on the duration of the war, but rather on exclusion from the former residence area, as crucial in the determination of liquidation dates for the centers. The most common Issei view, on the other hand, was that the war had given rise to the camps and that such havens of neutrality, once established, should remain until the war was over.

The reaction to peace was immediate. It is true that poorly informed persons and some who disbelieved American war news on principle did not accept the announcement promptly. Even a month later there were individuals who still felt that it did not ring true. They had not expected such an end, and the suddenness with which it came caught them unprepared. The better informed among the Issei, however, accepted the new situation within a week or two, and most of these were in influential positions among the evacuees. As one chairman of a Japanese Nationals committee said, "We feel that there is no longer a fence around the center," and another, "We have nothing to argue about now." Even before the Army lifted its restrictions on segregees and individually excluded persons the tide had turned. By the first of September the movement outward was steady and on such a scale that it taxed the processing



facilities in most centers. Even the continued housing shortage seemed to retard very little the general exodus. Only Manzanar lagged.

By the middle of September life in the centers was charged with a sense of temporariness. Populations had been reduced from 40 to 70 per cent in a space of eight months. Center newspapers had been discontinued. The process of merging messhalls had long since been accepted and had now become a routine matter, usually smoothed during the first consolidation meal with a pleasant ceremony. Councils were generally disintegrating, although most continued to hold meetings. Except at Manzanar, block closures had been resisted, and consequently the emptiness of blocks occupied by only a few families contributed to the ghost town atmosphere. Social activities had largely ceased, especially in the centers nearest to closing date.

The sense of temporariness was heightened by a gradual development of confusion. In the centers about to close the work of maintenance, keeping the blocks clean, janitor service, even messhall work was done by volunteers and consequently irregularly and none too efficiently. Most activity was in dismantling apartments, crating household goods, hauling baggage. Evacuees were helping each other voluntarily, much as they had in the early days when the centers were starting. Project directors' worries shifted sharply to those of getting baggage packed and hauled, to appointed staff morale, and to how to maintain services for the appointed staff. The most urgent problems were all suddenly tied up with the ways and means of departure.

It was clear that center disintegration had reached a point at which it could not be reversed. Whether or not every center closed to the day on schedule, there was no doubt that the view of centers as places holding any security whatever had vanished. The real problems of relocation had been shifted back to the communities of the West Coast where they originated.