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Refugee Scholars

APR 14 1942

Emergency Com. in Aid of  
Displaced Foreign Scholars  
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Displaced Foreign Scholars

INTERVIEWS: JM

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Luncheon meeting of Executive  
Committee.

April 9, 1942

Japanese Refugees

Most of the discussion concerned Aydelotte's statement about the position of alien enemy scholars on the West Coast. Aydelotte urged that postwar relations with the Japanese made it desirable for the Committee to take some steps to ease the plight of scholars of Japanese nationality who were subject to evacuation from the coast area. This produced considerable opposition from various members of the Committee. Bernard Flexner, for example, argued that this was no function for the Committee: it had been organized to deal with the cases of refugees put in that position by the action of other governments. He did not feel it a function of the Committee to deal with cases of scholars who were, in effect, refugees because of action of the United States government. After considerable discussion pro and con during which Alvin Johnson moved that the whole matter be tabled, an amendment to this action was voted asking the chairman to appoint a special committee to explore the matter. In the course of this discussion the question was asked whether or not any other agency was concerned. The only response was JM's inquiry as to what, if anything, the Institute of Pacific Relations was doing.

Comm. on Coast:  
Spends a member

Interesting also was the competent and well-balanced contribution to the discussion from Abramson, of the National Refugee Service, who showed that his organization was in close touch with government sources on the West Coast situation and had its own representatives there. If evacuation were to go further, the Service would have a heavy responsibility. At the moment, however, Abramson said that, on the basis of the best information obtainable, the Service was acting on the assumption that evacuation would not go further, i.e., would not include enemy aliens of German and Italian origin. The Department of Justice, he said, is asking the advice of such agencies as his in working out categories for exemptions. Of course, aliens of German and Italian nationality are now subject to curfew, which is naturally irksome but only to be tolerated. The probability is that the Department of Justice's categories will provide exemption for enemy aliens with relatives in the armed forces of the United States and will include procedures for establishing the loyalty of others. In short, the National Refugee Service, with a heavy potential responsibility, is standing pat.

In general, it was evident from this discussion that most members of the Committee were not emotionally involved in the situation of the Japanese. Aydelotte's remarks on tactical fairness of the attack on Pearl Harbor - "Only generals' houses were machine-gunned." - elicited no sympathetic response. Shapley read into the record a note from Seelye saying that he had always supposed it to be tacitly assumed that the Committee was primarily concerned with the victims of Nazi oppression. Statements by Duggan and Johnson put the Committee on record as interested in combating intolerance in general, but a certain confusion in the discussion suggested that strong feelings were involved and raised clear doubts in JM's mind as to the Committee's competence for dealing disinterestedly with the problems of any Japanese refugees.

JM:AWC

JM