

Tanaka 2

Governmental and Administrative Action

Governmental and administrative policy, and appointed personnel handling of issues in the center did much to heighten general tension at Manzanar. The following were important in the early history of Manzanar:

Restriction on movement: (Must have been important, but so far no data).

Lack of evacuee participation in administrative decisions: Most residents had little or no contact with the appointed personnel. Popular sentiment about the first WRA Project Director was that he was too impersonal, even unconcerned about the evacuees. "He's always too busy to see you." "You can't get past his secretary." (early Project Report, documentarians').

Nevertheless staff-evacuee relations were at first sometimes compared favorably with reports of relations at other centers. Later staff-evacuee relations became a sore point, especially as manifested in labor relations, and the carrying out of administrative instructions or decisions without conferring with the evacuees affected. "Block Leaders complained that policies were formulated in Washington about which they knew nothing and over which they had no control." (early Project Report) The same feeling applied to local administrative decisions. One example is the famous "Block 1 Case."

Block 1 was inhabited largely by the volunteers, the single men who came to the center first to help in construction. Conditions of work and pay which they had understood they would enjoy never came to pass and they endured many hardships and privations. They had several times hinted that their early sacrifices were neither acknowledged nor appreciated. Then, without consulting them or asking their permission, their laundry room was commandeered for the shoyu factory, and equipment was moved into place in it. All the mounting feeling of injustice that these residents had been penning up since March 21 burst into flame. They asserted that their minimal rights, guaranteed at evacuation, were being disregarded. They threatened to smash the equipment unless it were removed. As usual the matter went to Town Hall. One of the Block Leaders offered to settle the dispute and thought he had succeeded. He announced his success too soon, however, and having failed and thus lost face, he resigned in consequence.

A blunt, none too tactful Asst. Project Director did little except to stir up more resentment when he tried to intercede. Upon being told that he did not understand the hurt pride and the psychology of the Japanese, he retorted that the Japanese did not understand Caucasian psychology either and that he would make no concessions. After a series of special meetings of Town Hall the matter was finally mediated by an elderly man of high standing in the Japanese community. Some inexpensive remodeling and alteration of the facilities of Block 1 were agreed on which satisfied the needs of both parties. (Opler, 241)

Employment policies and the Work Corps: Labor relations stuff, but no data. In early September an attempt was made to enroll those gainfully employed into a Manzanar Work Corps with a Representative

Assembly and a Fair Practice Committee. Those who were most cordial toward such an organization were the labor-conscious, Americanized Nisei who had been affiliated with labor unions on the outside (then why JAEL restaurateur Fred Tayama as chairman?) and who had been identified with such creations as the Manzanar Citizens Federation while they were in the center. Consequently the Work Corps was considered with some suspicion by many of the evacuees.

September 28 the various departments nominated candidates for a representative body. The plan was to have a representative for every fifty workers of a given department. Interest was lukewarm however. Few offered themselves for nomination and only a small percentage voted. In a situation where there was a low, inflexible wage scale and small chance for advancement, it was inevitable that attempts to organize on this basis would be greeted with a certain amount of cynicism.

On the first of October the Free Press printed the opening section of the By-Laws of the proposed Manzanar Work Corps. The series ran for several issues. In its aims and qualifications were defined, provision was made for an executive staff, a representative assembly and a fair practice committee and a program for training and vocational counseling was outlined.

Immediately after the general election for members of the Fair Practice Committee, the Free Press noted, "Due to a misunderstanding about the organization, the mess employees did not respond as well as expected." The fact was that most of the employees of the mess hall had resolved to ignore the Work Corps and its FPC and had formed a Kitchen Workers Union of their own. The leaders of this union, some of whom were to play an important role later, looked with suspicion upon the Work Corps' announced goal of "establishing understanding between evacuee workers and the Administration." They saw in this Administration-sponsored organization a mechanism by which the Administration would seek to regulate work activities, stifle criticism and increase production in spite of the nominal wage scale. What they wanted was an organization which would wring concessions from the Administration and which would exercise some restraint on appointed personnel. **

At a Block Managers Assembly December 4 a report was given by the Chairman of the Mess Hall Committee, a body which had been appointed to attempt to bring into harmony the Work Corps and the representatives of the Kitchen Workers Union. Few were surprised when the Chairman announced that "no progress has been made." (Opler, 241)

English Speaking at meetings: On July 19, at a Town Hall meeting, it had been mentioned to the Block Leaders that the Administration hoped all meetings and discussions would be carried on as far as possible in English. At a meeting of Block 24 the next day, there was heated discussion of this request. When a non-English speaking man sought to take the floor, an ex-World War Veteran, who was heartily disliked, sought to make him stop speaking. This led to considerable recrimination on both sides and to the assertion that the Issei and Nisei could not understand each other and could not cooperate towards self-government. (Opler, 241)

Language did not really become an issue however until after the "Kibei meeting" of August 8. Permission was obtained from the Administration to hold this meeting in Japanese, but such anti-administration sentiments were voiced that the Administration had the meeting adjourned. Afterwards the Project Director issued a notice condemning the meeting ("disgraceful") and reiterating the ban on Japanese language. The ban hit home in the Block Leaders meetings, where one man resigned because he said he could not speak well enough in English to contribute to the discussions. Many Kibei and Issei deeply resented the ban.

~~Citizen Government~~xxxxxxxx

Relocation: Bulletin No. 22 opened relocation only for Nisei with no Japanese residence. Resented by Kibei, who felt they were being discriminated against. The ostensible reason for holding the Kibei meeting of August 8.

Citizen government: See under community government below.

Community activities: While the Issei were still bristling over the plans for community government, another bit of news that was irritating to them was announced through Town Hall. The Government they were told, could no longer provide teachers or facilities for Japanese music. Coming so hard upon the order which they felt eliminated them from politics, the Issei could not but interpret this as a further attack upon their legitimate interests. (Opler, 241)

Net Factory: The net factory was the center of controversy from the first, both within concerning the wage scale, and without by those who felt such a project had no place in a center. (Full discussion in Opler, 241)

Cooperative Enterprises: There was some agitation against the cooperative enterprises by those who felt that it was simply a device to impoverish the evacuees. (Full discussion in Opler, 241)

4. Social Organization.

While the various factors discussed above were bringing the temper of the residents to a boiling point, simultaneously adjustments were being made to life in a center.

Physical Improvement of the Center

Tensions involved in center living conditions, important at first, were rapidly lessened as the center was improved physically and as people became accustomed to the new way of living.

With a head start of several months as an Assembly Center, two months after WRA Administration the center was pretty well settled. The Children's Village was operating, the hospital opened, mess halls running, and by August lawns had appeared between barracks, half a dozen fish ponds had been built, some rock gardens and many victory

gardens. The landscaping helped the appearance of the center immeasurably. The Canteen and a Department Store were running under Business Enterprises. Christian and Buddhist services were being held regularly. People were talking about the hot weather, the water supply, the war, the food, and governmental red tape. (Project Report 70, October 1942)

In spite of adjustments, food anxieties later were joined with dissatisfaction regarding community organization, by the famous "sugar investigation" and so continued to be important.

Organization of Social and Political Relations

The first evacuees coming to Manzanar were greatly disappointed in the barrack-dwellings, the heat and dust, and in general the dreary look of the camp. With time, the physical comforts of the camp improved. But new arrivals kept coming to the center all through the Assembly Center period, and this constant arrival of new people caused constant confusion and uncertainty. The paramount interest of the newcomers was to get all the information possible about their new life and the uncertain future. Two days after the official opening of the center two evacuees conceived of the idea of an Information Center, which was immediately organized by the evacuees to serve as a clearing house for all the questions that were constantly being asked.

The Administration early recognized the block as the important socio-political unit in the center. Evacuees in the blocks in the very early days unofficially selected Block Leaders who served in practically every capacity imaginable. They were the link between the center population and the Administration, and the latter made extensive use of Block Leaders and their assistants. Gradually the Block Leader position and a Block Leader organization became formalized. As blocks became inhabited and organized and the Block Leaders Council became an instrument of internal government, and as the first series of questions were answered and camp routine established, the Information Center diminished in importance. Block Leaders, first nominated by the blocks and selected by the Administration, and later elected by the blocks, were bulwarked by block organizations which began to take form and cooperate with them.

In spite of the increased prestige of the Block Leaders, there was a marked tendency to gain objectives and express interests by the formation of new groups and organizations, and the Information Center struggled to retain its old position. In May the Block Leaders Council passed a resolution deploring the habit of "organizing for the sake of organization" and declared that factionalism was detrimental to center harmony. In June the Leaders had completely supplanted the Information Center and its satellite organizations (Family Relations Council, Lost and Found, Volunteer Help Organizations) and this situation continued for some time after WRA assumed the administration of the center. A Town Hall was built, Judicial Committee appointed,.

(Information Center fought dissolution on grounds of offering non-political services as compared to the Block Leaders "political" standing.)

Community organization was a central issue during almost the entire settling down period, largely because of the Administrative Instruction 34 limiting office-holding to citizens.

In the early summer of 1942, then, the Block Leaders were "community government" at Manzanar, and about two-thirds of them were Issei, and many of the others Kibei. Although encouraged and used extensively by the Administration, the Leaders and their block organizations had developed largely out of the evacuees' own conception of their needs. However, Issei were largely in the saddle and developments soon sharpened Issei-Nisei feeling.

First there was the rumor that Washington had decreed that only citizens would be eligible to block representation, which increased tension between the Issei and some Nisei. Some of the Nisei argued for the use of English at public and Town Hall meetings, which was also resented.

Then JACL Nisei and some of the left-wingers organized the Manzanar Citizen's Federation, which many residents felt was only a thinly veiled revival of the hated JACL. The Citizens's Federation went on record as in favor of the Nisei draft, and some thought, segregation. A large number of Manzanites felt that their own personal woes were so great and evacuation so recent, that they were much more concerned with local and personal matters than with national and international affairs. The average resident wanted to debate WRA wage scales, money owed them by WCCA, the conditions under which they might leave the center, etc, and not the second front. They bitterly resented the disruption of consideration of these local issues in favor of political ideas - "educating citizens for leadership," "participating in the war effort," etc. The Federation continued throughout its short existence to rub the rest of the center the wrong way. They hoped Manzanar would become a center for defense industry and supported the camouflage net factory as a step in that direction. (The Camouflage Net Factory as early as June employed 400 people with a goal of 1000. This was the only project turning out production for the outside, but others were planned. 10,000 nets were turned out for the Army in July. Also in June a Quayle Experiment Station was operating; research to develop a high rubber content plant with fast maturity and high propagation and frost resistant qualities.) Their fanatical zeal in the matter brought a reaction from those who did not share their political convictions or their selflessness. Evacuation was too recent and too vivid.

Many residents felt that the Federation was inu, desirous of embarrassing Issei and Kibei by banning the use of the Japanese language, and the limitation of voting and office-holding privileges to citizens only. Kibei felt discriminated against, especially when the first leave regulations were issued which made relocation possible only for the Nisei. The ban on their relocation brought Kibei resentment to the boiling point. Issei supported the Kibei position, since both were vulnerable on the same grounds - Japanese speaking and residence in Japan.

A "Kibei meeting" was called, at which their problems were discussed and the Federation and the Administration criticized. The

discussion got heated and criticism of the government was later interpreted to be pro-Axis by the JACLers, left-wingers and Administration. The result was a regulation that all future meetings must be conducted in English, and heightened tension between Federation members and anti-Administration, anti-JACL group.

The language ban was more of a blow to the Issei Block Leaders at Town Hall than to the Kibei. Many Issei and Kibei now took a definitely anti-Administration stand. All their resentments were becoming crystallized. For awhile there was out-and-out battle between the Federation Nisei and the anti-group. The Federation leaders asked the Project Director to back their organization and take drastic action against "subversive elements." The Block Leaders were split, some on both sides. Some resigned because of the conflict. Block Leaders were beginning to see their position with the residents and the Administration as one between the devil and the deep blue sea.

Federation leaders could see in the opposition to them nothing other than a demonstration of pro-Axis sympathizers, and petitioned for examination of subversive activities. Tension mounted. Issue after issue came to the front, since Manzanar was in its formative stage, with patterns being set. Issei felt that attempts were being made to reduce them to obscurity and impotence, and the breach between the Issei and the JACL Nisei widened, if possible. Popular sentiment was definitely running against the Federation. Later it was abandoned and one of its principal exponents stated, "The results show that obviously a mistake was made and friction the only thing we got." (last Project Report, from Death Valley)

On top of this feeling, the Administrative Instruction on evacuee government was issued, decreeing that only citizens could hold office. Issei resentment was keen, and at the time there were twice as many Issei as Nisei Block Leaders. The morale of the Block Leaders was already low; they had been meeting a constant chorus of complaints as intra-block and community problems came thick and fast. The self-government ruling was the final touch, and morale sank out of sight.

The Administration, in trying to organize community government, used as their contact with the people the Block Leaders Council. Yet this was the body which was most adversely affected by the decision. And they didn't fall for the business of retaining administrative functions in the block under the title of Block Managers, or the concession that they could sit on advisory committees to the Council which was to have legislative functions. The Issei were in no mood for such nice technicalities, and feared they would be entirely at the mercy of the less sympathetic among the Nisei and of the Government.

Stimulation of relocation for Nisei individuals or young couples reaffirmed the Issei in their belief that the center and its government was their business and not the young fries!

A committee worked on drafting the community government charter, but it had a hard row. Block Leaders continued to resign sporadically. Some also resigned when in September the Block

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Leaders were transformed into Block Managers. Opposition to self-government from the community was largely on the Issei issue.

Although a Block Managers Organization had supplanted the Block Leaders Council, it soon became clear that the Managers were still chiefly concerned over the same grievances and affairs which had monopolized their attention as Leaders. This, although nominally the Managers were stripped of more general powers.

The tide of sentiment rose steadily against accepting a self-government charter. This was expressed most dramatically by the Blood Brothers, who sent anti-Charter letters to members of the commission working on a charter. Their point of view was that the government was trying to absolve itself of blame and give the impression of satisfaction among evacuees by devising the scheme of self-government -- which would actually be run by Caucasians anyway.

In spite of the rising tide of opinion against self-government, stemmed momentarily by an acting Project Director (the third WRA P.D. in a relatively short time - soon to leave and another to arrive) delegates were chosen to draw up a system. The delegates, except for one, turned out to be against it, the Issei largely because of the citizenship stricture, and the Block Managers because they felt they could speak for the people under the existing set-up.

Many Nisei felt that the fanfare over the right to legislate for a group detained in a relocation center was just a farce. Even those who were not actively against the self-government plan could not become as enthused over what it proposed to grant them as the Issei became rebellious over what the scheme was designed to take from them.

Associations: The majority of the mess hall employees decided to scorn the Administration's Work Corps and Fair Practise Committee and form an association of their own. They disliked the "Administration-slant" of the Work Corps. The Kitchen Workers Union, which resulted, became a political power in the center, and its Chairman the key figure in the December disturbances.

Various gangs were operating in Manzanar during this period. November 11, an evacuee member of Internal Security (and also a pro-self-government man) was beaten by one of them. At this time the Reports Division listed the following gangs:

1. The Terminal Islanders, or "Yogores," or the "San Pedro Gang." These boys were the most active in committing physical violence, and were the largest gang. They claimed 200-300 members, but the police believed 20-25 was closer to the truth. Were fishermen or cannery workers, harbored a deep resentment against the government, were outspokenly bitter about the internment of their fathers, and had crude manners. Intensely partisan group. Were outstanding in sports, and rather pugnacious. Also stuck together in labor crews (the linoleum layers for example) and scorned white collar workers as stooges. A well organized group. The gangs activities were used

by San Pedrans as threats against other Manzanites.

2. The Dunbar gang, included some zoot suiters. In general a loose association of hell-raisers. Worked on a smaller scale than Terminal Islanders. (Most notorious member, Bob Matsuda, who later went to Leuppe.)

3. The Blood Brothers, an underground political movement, composed of older men than in the gangs. Seemed to control the mess hall division.

The sugar investigation: Food anxieties and antipathy for appointed personnel resulted at Manzanar, plus the political activities of the Kitchen Workers Union, in the sugar investigation. The investigation was initiated by a Block Managers Committee, with considerable push from Mr. U., the Chairman of the KWU. Mr. U. suspected appointed personnel of appropriating some of the sugar meant for the evacuees or at least of allowing some dishonesty in its distribution. Consequently, the investigation was a gesture of defiance toward the Administration which the Block Managers undoubtedly appreciated since their prerogatives were being curtailed at the time. It was an attempt to strike at Caucasians who were believed to be profiting at the expense of the evacuees.

Although the sugar investigation and self-government originated as separate issues, anti-Administration groups soon combined the two, and the Block Managers continued to press the investigation.

Relations with the Administration

No specific data for this period; sprinkled through the rest; other information in following sections on riot and post-riot period.

(opler, 241; "All Documentarians' Proper Reports; Confidential file on Manzanar Incident.")

5. The Incident.

Following pages.

6. Post-Incident Period.

After the tensions had finally exploded in the Manzanar Incident of December 6, the problems of diverging orientations and community government, Administrative action and relations between the appointed personnel and evacuees, were lessened by:

1. Desire of the community as expressed through the Committee of 108 and its Committee of 4 for peace and order. (Documentation on Peace Committee activities attached)

2. Efforts of Project Director toward smooth relations with the community.

3. Removal of key personalities.