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## CHAPTER II

## EMERGENCE OF THE BLOCK LEADER SYSTEM

## I EARLY REFERENCES TO BLOCK LEADERS

Throughout the pages of the Information Center's daily reports occur many references to the things which the Block Leaders could or should be called upon to do. Yet seldom does an instance get recorded in which the Block Leader is reported to have done it, or to have taken the initiative in getting a thing done. It is hard to tell just when the Block Leaders became an integral part of the operation of the Center. Although officially appointed on April 22 to represent their blocks, the first 10 Block Leaders seem to have held their offices in name only during the first three months of the Center's existence. In that period, the actual work of receiving complaints was handled by the Information Office staff, which then made referrals to appropriate departments or officials.

As early as March 30, 1942, the Director of Community Service Division had indicated to the Information Office that a man wanting to have an electric switch in his room fixed should seek help, not from the Administrative staff, but from his Block Leader.

The second reference to a Block Leader system occurs in an Information Office memo, dated April 2, 1942, which states that

"Block Leader, ----- and Mr. ----- are to work on the instruction to the people regarding the nightly check-up of room occupants. A bulletin is to be issued."

Apparently the services of the Block Leaders were initiated in March but there are no notations as to how, or on what date, or by whom they were set up. However, it is obvious that the general conception of

a Block Leader system was formulated within the first week of the Center's existence. Yet there is not, in the files, any organized presentation of the early conception of the duties expected of the Block Leaders, or the scope of their work.

A need for leadership was recognized, it is true, and representation by block groups was as logical as by any other grouping. In the general evacuation, original lines of group cleavage had been broken and new ones had not yet formed. Families and friends and even regional associates had been scattered to different assembly centers. Old political or religious groupings had been interrupted. These were replaced in the Center by immediate needs to re-adapt to new faces, new conditions, new ties, new groupings. In the Centers, people were congregated in blocks, these often being separated by 300-foot wide firebreaks. It was inevitable that a feeling of unity and identity of interest within the blocks should emerge. Block solidarity was the nucleus for organization on which a community government was later to be attempted.

## II NEED FOR AN AVENUE OF COMMUNICATION BETWEEN ADMINISTRATION AND BLOCK LEADERS

Even before the evacuees recognized the need for any group representation plan, the Administration recognized the need for a quick and sure means of getting its messages to the residents. An early query addressed to the Director of the Service Division from the Information Center asked *it* if was possible, publicly to answer the most common questions and complaints and to listen to evacuee suggestions. Periodical gatherings within each block, or group of blocks, was offered as a way to do this: with an authoritative representative from the *Administration* office to be present to make announcements and answer questions and listen to complaints

and discuss suggestions. It was felt that this would help improve morale and stop the wild rumors which so easily sprang into circulation. The FREE PRESS was also mentioned as a medium of communication and dissemination of truth.

The next day brought an announcement that the Information Centers, the FREE PRESS, and occasionally a group meeting might be used to disseminate information concerning camp and enrollees' interests.

Mention was made also of the intention that "one function of the Block and Ward Leaders now being selected will be to pass information both ways between residents and management."

The Administration indicated that it had no reluctance to attend meetings, if and when meetings could be arranged to serve a useful purpose.

The same day brought evidence that other groupings were tending to get formed. The Information Office worker who was taking care of personal problems and complaints reported that the Bainbridge Island, the Terminal Island, and the Los Angeles people were holding meetings of representatives from among their Christian, Buddhist, and young peoples' groups, the purpose being to form a Family Relations Council. This Council was to recommend one or two persons to work with the Head as social workers for their groups. Thus service would be assured for people in camp who might have a group problem.

### III OTHER STEPS TOWARD SELF-GOVERNMENT

#### A Rise of Junior Councils

On April 20, 1942, the social workers for the Terminal Island group called a meeting of young people over 18 years of age, of whom some 120 to 130 responded. Nominations for a Junior Council were

entertained, with 6 leaders, 3 girls and 3 boys, chosen. The head of the Family Relations Office gave a talk on peace and order in the community and asked for the assistance of the young people present.

✓ It was contemplated that the youth from Los Angeles and Bainbridge Island would follow the example set by the Terminal Islanders and would organize Junior Councils for their respective groups.

This in itself was a step in the direction of Americanization and the ✓ establishment of representative government at Manzanar. Experience obtained by the younger Nisei, through participation in their Youth Councils, would enable them not only to make the voice of their group heard but would give Youth Council members an opportunity to practice parliamentary procedure and exercise a franchise within the Center.

3<sup>a</sup> The FREE PRESS announced that the purpose of the Junior Council was not only to help solve problems among the young people, but also to cooperate with the Senior Council for the general welfare of the community. (4/22/42)

#### B Women Organize

The zest for representation and organization reached out to the women also. Though Japanese women are traditionally of a retiring nature, the women of Manzanar were not restrained from meeting in groups to try to find solutions for some of the problems which confronted them in community living. High on the list was a better maintenance of the women's rest rooms, in the care of which every unemployed women in the block was expected to participate.

Early in May, the women of Block 5 gathered to discuss their problems. It was their hope that they could form a women's council to

work with the Block Leader. To activate their program further, they called for a second meeting on the Sunday following.

A month later, the women of Block 12 met also on a Sunday afternoon, their purpose being "to discuss problems concerning women and children." A council of 4 Issei and 4 Nisei women was elected to preside over the Block.

### B Boys Organize

The boys, too, caught something of the desire to organize. Early, Block 3 formed its Boys Club which upon inception had 30 prospective members who were above 15 and eligible to join. On a Sunday afternoon in the first week of June, the boys met and appointed a committee to draw up a constitution. They had as their advisor the leader of Block 3.

### D Protest against Indiscriminate Organization

Yet as early as May 12, the FREE PRESS reports a disinclination on the part of the Block Leaders to see other--or as they expressed it--"unnecessary" organizations forming in Manzanar. At the Block Leaders' Council, (held <sup>May 8</sup> "last Friday" --FP 5/12/45) a special resolution was passed addressed both to the Administration and to the evacuees, urging those who were contemplating the creation of an organization first to receive the specific sanction of the Administration. It was feared that "Organization for the sake of organization" would tend to create factionalism and thus disrupt harmony within the Center. At the same time, the Leaders expressed their whole-hearted support of clubs and groups that were set up to promote mutual interest in art, literature, music, and sports. Said one member:

"Our past experience has taught us that a maze of organizations whose reason for existence is 'just to get together' has more often than

not resulted in personal and group friction while contributing nothing to the welfare of the community. However, we want to see more of gch clubs, hobby clubs, and others, which bring together people of mutual interest."

The Nisei evacuees who were over the age of 21, American citizens all, had of course been entitled to vote in national and local elections in their home communities. Their sudden evacuation to an Assembly Center naturally precipitated the question as to whether this right was in any way being revoked or infringed upon for them.

That the younger evacuees were not unmindful of the privileges of the franchise, and that they were willing to take steps to preserve it, is to be deduced from a memo found in the report of the Information Office, dated April 29, 1942, asking the Director of the Service Division to write a letter to the Registrar of Voters at Los Angeles, regarding registry of absentee voters. As matters stood, all those wishing to vote had to write individually to the registrar to inquire into their absentee voters' rights. They would like to have the matter settled for them as a group.

#### IV DUTIES AND ACTIVITIES OF BLOCK LEADERS

Some idea of the role of the Block Leader, insofar as his role was already articulate in the minds of the evacuees, or indeed of the Administration, can be derived from an examination of the items mentioned for his attention in the Information Center reports in Manzanar's first few weeks. These references covered mostly such petty items of squabble and friction as could not be allowed to tax the time and attention of Administrative officials.

Petty complaints were discouraged, but serious ones were expected at the Information Center whose purpose was service. The only stipulation

was that all reports should be substantiated by specific names, places, circumstances, and other detailed charges. Wherever possible, or where a departmental set-up was provided, the items of difficulty would be referred elsewhere for adjustment and correction. Taking its place in the departmental line-up was the Block Leaders' category of responsibilities and services. Through a study of the referrals to the Block Leader, one can detect the interpretation which the Center--both resident and Administration--placed upon their work almost as readily as if a job description of their duties were available.

#### A Individual Problems

1 Mess Hall Service and Food An area of major complaint centered around the matter of food. Complaints were general about people chiseling in the line-up at the mess halls. Fathers of families would hold their place in line, and when near the door would signal to wives and children who had not stood their turn, to come and join them. This naturally disturbed those who had to fall back several places, or people would go into the mess halls through side doors and thus cause much grumbling from those in line who did not have the benefit of mess hall friends.

Others objected to signs of partiality, claiming that food served to doctors and hospital staff members was superior in quality and quantity to that given to the general group of diners.

2 Quarrels about Working Conditions Those seeking employment complained that personnel officers were discourteous and lacking in tact. Those working on April 14 registered protests that foremen had <sup>were still</sup> become unduly discourteous to their workers, and when an accompanying request was made that the camp should set up a mediation board to settle the

disputes, the Director's answer had been, "The Block Leaders should correct it."

3 Handicapped Parents (April 17) When the Director's attention was called to the fact that widowers with small children were unable to get their childrens' washing done during the week, the Block Leaders were called into conference, with the head of the newly formed Family Relations Office to work out a solution for securing laundry services for such handicapped families.

4 Behavior of Youth (April 18) Two boys broke a section of the floor in their barrack while practising weight-lifting. Some elderly men in the apartment were annoyed and urged the boys to do their practicing in the recreation hall. When the report reached the Director of the Service Division, he voiced the hope once more than Block Leaders would get into action and handle cases such as that.

✓ Late Hours! The tendency to "waywardness" displayed by youth in the Center was a matter of early concern in the minds of their elders. The Issai frowned on late nights and suggested to parents that their youth be home by 10 p.m.

The daily report of the Family Relations Office on April 18 records that "This matter will be taken up at a joint meeting with the Block Leaders after they are appointed." The Director's comment was simply, "Good."

Another resident was irate at some young girls who were making so much noise every afternoon in the apartment adjoining his that his invalid wife was being disturbed.

Noise until midnight was keeping a kitchen worker, who had to rise

at 5 a.m. from getting adequate rest. He was advised to take his protest to the Block Leader.

(April 21) To the complaint that some young boys were keeping their radio turned on late and dancing in a room adjoining the sleeping room of some kitchen workers, and that one of the elder residents had moved out to avoid the trouble of reprimanding the boys, the answer was made by the Director of the Service Division that the names of the Block Leaders would be announced that day. This presumably would be the mechanism through which neighborly friction would be handled thereafter.

5 Showers, Latrines, Laundry The problems of the laundry, the shower-rooms, and the latrines were constantly demanding attention and service from some one. These three facilities had been set up army fashion, namely, one of each facility to each block, these to be shared mutually and equally by all residents within the block.

With use and privilege generally goes responsibility and obligation. *But since*  
 ✓ However, the new evacuees at Manzanar were not organized in groups, not even on a block basis, *(they were not set up)* to handle collective responsibilities and obligations. Instead, they met them as difficulties arose, separately and on an individual basis. This kind of adjustment was expressed oftenest in the form of individual complaints, protests, and requests for service and repair from some department, some official, some person or persons, other than themselves.

✓ A woman complained that ~~other~~ women in her block laundry were monopolizing the wash tubs, some using two tubs instead of one, while other women had to stand around waiting. Women with children particularly were being greatly inconvenienced. She suggested that a notice be posted to tell the public not to monopolize the tubs, but was told instead to

let it go until her block was organized.

In another block, an outdoor ~~field~~ worker found himself unable to take a shower until 11:00 or 11:50 p.m. because the younger boys had wasted too much of the hot water ahead of him. He was advised to see the Block Leader.

Another complainant suggested that those not employed should take their showers in the afternoon to free the warm water for workers after work. <sup>hours</sup> The <sup>implementing</sup> ~~working out~~ of this suggestion would require group arrangement.

Missing faucet handles were the object of attention and checking and referral to Block Leaders. It was reported in one of the blocks that the Block Leader <sup>✓</sup> had requested the occupants of a front apartment to keep the faucet handle when not in use, and thus prevent it from being used for any purpose <sup>other</sup> than to water the ground or clean the apartment.

Constant disappearance of light globes in the men's latrine interfered <sup>✓</sup> with the proper lighting needed for the general welfare of the block. Checking on such minor thefts, it was pointed out, should be the responsibility of every one in the Center, not just of the police or of the Administration. It was decided ~~to~~ draw up a notice and post it.

<sup>✓</sup> Even the rocks which construction workers had set into place under the outdoor faucets to prevent water from stagnating in pools began to disappear as residents found in them a source of supply for small garden hedges. As with other matters, this, too, was referred to the Block Leaders.

6 Health and Sanitation From one block came a complaint that a man urinated outdoors at night and that this was unsanitary because children played regularly in the yard. The objector was advised to call the

policeman's attention to the matter until a Block Leader could be appointed, after which he would take care of such things.

From another block, came a parental request that ~~some~~ <sup>a certain</sup> single man housed in an apartment with a family of children be removed from the room and placed in quarters where the bad moral influence which the situation was creating would be averted. Referral was made to the Block Leader.

7  Gestures of Cooperation In 2 block latrines where janitorial services had apparently not been supplied, a woman resident undertook the job of clean-up, doing the entire work of both latrines herself. A fellow resident suggested that other women in the block be asked to take turns to relieve her. No one ought to do such work alone, she declared. The protester suggested that some one with initiative should be called upon to form a voluntary group for this purpose (presumably the Block Leader). At the Information Office, ~~she~~ <sup>woman reporting</sup> was referred to the Block Leader, who pointed out that the woman worker should secure a work slip from the Employment office and thus get paid for her pains. In this the Administrative officer concurred.

It is relieving, too, to find on April 22, 1942, still another cooperative note in the Information Office report, which records the fact that a few responsible-minded women were unanimously offering their services to take turns in keeping the latrines and laundry rooms clean in their blocks. These women indicated that if the Block Leaders would approach them, they were prepared to cooperate in an arrangement which would enable them to assist the man who was already doing the janitor work. Their standards of service ~~was high~~ to the community were high, but the mechanism for meeting these standards had still to be put into

operation.

8 Selection of Volunteer Helpers On April 15, when the Director of the Service Division was advised of a need to recruit volunteer helpers to aid the new inductees, his reply had been that Block Leaders would be announced after the Camp Manager arrived the following day.

The business of recruiting volunteer helpers was also to be left to the Block Leaders if and when the latter were set up in office.

Apparently the Block Leaders had not yet got into action on their own initiative. This is just another instance of their being referred to, called upon, or anticipated, for their future use, if and when their organization got under way.

9 Referral to Chairman of Block Leaders The occupants of two adjoining apartments complained of a man's continuous coughing during the night. This time, the complaint was brought to the Information Center through the Block Leader himself who wished to know what could be done about moving the man to an apartment where nobody would be disturbed. The Block Leader was advised to bring his case to the attention to the Chairman of the Block Leaders!

This last kind of referral suggests a little of the mechanism known as "passing the buck" when included parties are either not willing, not able, or not supplied with the right machinery for themselves meeting problems. Such referrals were inevitable in a set-up which grew into existence as rapidly as did the assembly centers, with not too clearly preconceived ideas as to what their concrete problems would be or what the solutions to these unknown problems should be.

## B Group Problems

1 Selection of Members of Police Force The problems which were referred in the first 2 months for the attention of the Block Leaders

were, on the whole, matters of grievance and complaint over camp services or over some individual who the evacuees felt should be rendering service. Rarely were matters brought up which called for action as to policy or principle on the part of the Block Leaders as a group.

But as the camp began to settle to a routine, evidence of a more active participation in camp-wide affairs began to come up. Block Leaders were asked to give their opinion on affairs which concerned the camp as a whole.

For instance, when a few "dubious characters" were reported to be on the Police Force, a suggestion was made that Block Leaders should be the ones to recommend all those who got appointments on the force before they received their appointments.

The Administrative reply was that the Block Leaders could recommend capable men to the Police Chief if they wished to do so, but that the Chief was doing the best he could to pick good men and build a capable police force.

2 Baseball Playing When boys playing ball near a washroom broke "some glasses," the person reporting it was referred to his Block Leader (5/1/Rep31), presumably for a ruling. Three weeks later (May 18, Rep 45), when a youngster was hit on the head by a ball, a man suggested that a sign be put up to the effect that kids should not play ball near washrooms, nor in the spaces between the buildings. Also, the reporter thought that the police should be asked to keep an eye on such practices.

The Administrative reply was that a list of recommendations in-

cluding this point had been presented to the ~~Police~~ by the Block Leaders. Apparently the Block Leaders were getting into group action on matters of general concern.

3 Funerals When death came to a Japanese family, it brought with it certain obligations and necessary rituals. The first funeral in Manzanar was conducted with due formality and consideration for the Japanese bereavement requirements. An unexpectedly fine casket, good undertaking service, and other funeral essentials <sup>were</sup> made available by the Administration to the deceased's family. This courtesy was much appreciated by the whole camp.

Then the matter of a small gift in money, <sup>7</sup> (koden) which the Japanese make in times of death to the bereaved family of little or no income, came up for consideration. At first residents thought that this Japanese custom should be dispensed with in camp, since everyone ~~now~~ <sup>there</sup> suffered from low income. But no action was taken until the matter was referred to the ~~Block~~ Leaders who made a final decision and recommendation.

Here definitely is a question of policy that had to be determined. It was a group matter and the solution should be arrived at through group decision by way of duly elected representatives. This action is one of the first mentioned which would indicate that the Block Leaders had responsibilities beyond those of individual "trouble shooters" for their blocks. Their services as leaders of social, economic, and political thought and action were beginning to be envisaged.

4 Clothing Needs Other matters of social welfare also were brought to the attention of the Block Leaders, sometimes indeed by the Head of the newly formed Family Relations Section of the Information Office.

Early a committee was appointed to look into the needs of the men who were short of clothing. It was suggested that the "pioneers" in Block 1 and 2, who had been working steadily for 2 months, should be supplied with army clothes to replace those they had worn out in their rough work in the Center. A committee to distribute a collection of old clothing was appointed.

Loan Fund: The Block Leaders cooperated with the Family Relations Office further by collecting money from people within their blocks who were willing and able to make donations. A loan fund committee was appointed to consist jointly of Information Office workers, Block Leaders, ~~together with~~ <sup>and</sup> members at large. Four places on the Advisory Board were left to be available to people who would come to the community at a later date. By May 19, a loan fund of \$45<sup>dollars</sup> was collected, in cash, and almost without solicitation.

5 Desire for a Japanese Translation of FREE PRESS May 12. A common cry from the elderly people in the Center--few of whom could read English--was for a Japanese translation of the Manzanar FREE PRESS. The Camp Manager, under WCCA, had felt that it was impossible, at least highly doubtful, that a Japanese version of the camp newspaper could be published.

After the WCCA shifted to WRA, the Block Leaders again made a strong recommendation for a Japanese edition but again reluctance and doubt were expressed by the Administration in the words of the newly appointed Public Relations Officer, who was also in charge of the FREE PRESS. The Block Leaders heard that:

"To have a Japanese version published to supplement the English may have an adverse affect upon the attitude of the Caucasian public outside the Center; whereas it may certainly have merit in that it will contribute to bettering the morale of alien Japanese in this Center."

### C Grievances which Developed into Major Issues

1 Wages for Pioneers As early as May 1, a point was brought to the attention of the Administration, which even then was stressed as needing their close attention. It concerned those men who had come to Manzanar in March to serve as volunteers in getting the relocation center ready for the major influx of evacuees who ~~would~~<sup>were to</sup> follow shortly afterwards.

✓ These "pioneers" had come of their own accord when others had dropped out/ in the recruiting process. They had worked willingly and hard and had worn out shoes and work clothes in service to the camp. They had been promised favors and advantages in return for their sacrifices, but ~~to date~~<sup>after 3 months had gone by</sup> they had not received even wages or clothing. Their pocket money was running down, their patience was running out, and their friends were running short, at least such friends as might be called upon to furnish loans. The "pioneers" were beginning to voice their disgruntlement and annoyance in no uncertain way and griping was becoming infectious in camp. ✓ Something ~~should~~<sup>had to</sup> be done about it.

2 Kitchen Crew Disputes (May 13) In the kitchens all was not going well. Workers were being confronted with problems peculiar to the mess halls. Many of their grievances were on a petty level and could be settled if some means for settling disputes were <sup>made</sup> available. ✓ It was felt ✓ that the Caucasian officials in charge of the mess halls were too busy ✓ to spare time for adjusting ~~such~~ matters of personnel which in numbers alone could and did loom large. A labor coordinator had been assigned to the Personnel Office but the mess hall crews either did not know of his availability or did not care to use it.

A request was brought in to the Director of the Service Division

for permission (May 18, Rep 41) for the kitchen group to organize. The Director promised to take <sup>this request</sup> under consideration.

3 Sugar Begins to Scarc After the camp began to settle to a routine existence, evacuees began sending for supplies out of camp which they could not obtain within the Center. Orders for food stuffs and sizable packages came in through the warehouse.

✓ On May 26, a ~~Mr. Uyeno (22-3-4)~~ and a ~~Mr. Wada (22-3-1)~~ <sup>Two evacuees</sup> applied at warehouse 20 for a delivery of goods that had been sent to them by friends in Los Angeles. The warehouseman gave them all the goods expected, except 2 sacks of sugar, one weighing 20 pounds, the other 10 pounds, which he refused to hand out. Without giving reasons for his refusal, he directed them to inquire at the Information Office for details.

At the Information Office they promptly put their query as to why the sugar was confiscated while the rest of the foodstuff was allowed to go through. Both men appeared willing to comply with all sugar-rationing orders which may have gone into effect since their evacuation from outside communities, but they wished to get their sugar or as much of it as would be permitted them.

The Director seemed himself to be at a loss to deal with this problem. He asked for more details as to who had refused and why.

#### D Inter-factional Rivalries

1 Issei-Nisei On April 10, 1942, an inquiry was addressed to the Director as to whether it would be necessary for all applicants for police patrol duty to be citizens. Relief was expressed when it was revealed that absolute distinctions between citizens and aliens were not going to be drawn. This inquiry touched on a spark of feeling which was to flame

into a conflagration before many more pages of Manzanar's history unfolded. Even at this early stage, the significance of an impartial attitude on citizenship was appreciated:

"We are especially glad such distinctions are not being made," the note ran; "for it would tend to lower the morale of all the aliens capable and willing to work in any capacity."

2. Nisei-Kibei In a memo from the Information Center, supplementing the regular daily report to the Director of the Service Division, the following protest was made. (April 11)

"In as much as the basic idea in this camp is the overall spirit of equality and similarity of treatment for all persons, whether they are American citizens or of Japanese ancestry, or their parents, the alien Japanese, we feel that this matter needs attention:

"While the baseball games yesterday were successful from the standpoint of recreation for the players and diversion for the fans, the game entitled 'Nisei vs Kibei' drew our attention. In every way possible, we have been trying to erase, or minimize, the distinctions between them; the public announcement of a game in this manner only tends to emphasize the difference.

"There are other ways of naming opposing teams."

Apparently the director sympathized with this objection for he soothingly wrote that "N. will correct it."

On April 17, the comment was made that there was a pressing need for harmony between Nisei and Kibei but that not many young men from either group were equipped with capacity or understanding to handle their problem. A meeting of leaders from all groups of different backgrounds was suggested. The Director, however, pointed out that it was a matter for Block Leaders to take up, adding that the fewer committees there were, the better, if confusion was to be avoided.

#### C Summary

That the Block Leaders were not adequately equipped, either with

experience, attitude, or wisdom, to wrestle with the problem of Issei-Nisei relationships is obvious from the record. As time went on and people became jealous of power and prerogative, the Issei-Nisei struggle became a central issue in Manzanar politics and economy. Age versus youth, alien versus citizenship status, insecurity versus self-confidence, little schooling versus college education, experience of control and headship versus an expected acceptance of it, habits of parental autocracy versus administrative orders, were all forces that pulled their two-way tugs in this major issue in Manzanar. The Block Leader System, particularly the Town Hall and the Executive <sup>Committee</sup> Council, were the receptacle in which the issue was brought to a boiling point.

#### V THE BLOCK SYSTEM BECOMES A COMPETITIVE THREAT TO THE INFORMATION OFFICE

On April 27, 1945, the head of the Family Relations' Office (attached to the Information Center) asked to learn as soon as possible what the duties of the newly appointed Block Leaders were to be, so that the Family Relations workers could be instructed in how to avoid overlapping. It was the Head's understanding that the Block Leaders were to be on duty for part time only. If so, she questioned the advisability of asking them to undertake such tasks as arranging shower schedules for blocks which contained many families, or trying to settle matters of loud noise, overactive radios, late hours, and the like. Such matters were usually brought to the Family Relations Office even though most of them were such as could be handled by Block Leaders. On the other hand, she felt that inter-family frictions, caused by close quarters and conflicting personalities, could more easily and more understandingly be settled by Block Leaders who knew their block people intimately and who could therefore rearrange rooms so

that neighbors of more congenial interests could be housed together.

This time, the Director of the Service Division gave the answer to "wait until the Constitution is drawn up."

While the Block Leader System was struggling with the mechanical details of its own establishment, the Information Center and its branches continued to "carry on."

The budding uneasiness, however, which the Information Center felt as to a possible overlapping of function between its services and those to be rendered by the newly appointed Block Leaders was accompanied by a readiness to cooperate with them. On that same day, the Information Center wrote into its report:

"We are keeping in mind that Block Leaders hold authority directly under the head of the Administration. It would, however, help the work of the Information Center and the affiliated Social Service Office if we could learn at the earliest possible date as to the extent of the jurisdiction of Block Leaders. Keeping in mind that our office must not overstep its bound of tasks, we would still deem it profitable for us to correlate the work of our office with that of the Block Leaders." ✓

(Information Report 26, 4/27/42, p 3)

To this the Administrative comment was repeated: "Wait until the Constitution of Block Leaders is drawn up."

Thus slowly and somewhat uncertainly, steps were taken toward the establishment of the Block Leader System at Manzanar. On the one hand, the Administration was showing its readiness to foster this development; on the other hand, the resident population was recording its impatience at the slow evolution of the new organization which in the minds of both was to become the new mouthpiece for complaints and the mechanism for obtaining solutions.

On April 29, one of the residents requested that a nightly curfew

be installed. He was told that such matters would be handled by the Block Leaders as soon as they had drawn up their Constitution. Impatiently the petitioner protested that the Block Leaders had already spent enough time on such things. What he wanted was immediate action on the matter of a curfew.

This illustration is probably typical of the attitude most of the evacuees bore at the time. What evacuated Japanese wanted was quick adjustments of their separate difficulties. These loomed as of much greater moment than the acquisition of a system of self-government. Hedged in by an enclosed physical barrier which prevented them from setting their day-to-day irritations as they had been accustomed to do on the outside, they felt more keenly ~~the~~ <sup>be derived from</sup> importance of concrete comfort than any advantage <sup>to</sup> of abstract principles such as inhere in a system <sup>of</sup> of community government.

On the outside, government in <sup>so far</sup> as most of the Issei were concerned, had operated without their direct participation. Being alien, they had never voted. Many of them ~~may have~~ felt little interest or desire to ~~do so~~ <sup>vote</sup>. They had accustomed themselves to a relatively smooth functioning of community services: traffic rules, licensing procedures, police protection, schooling for their children, and so on, and had taken all such things as a matter of course. Arrived in an ~~Assembly Center~~, <sup>public services</sup> it was still too soon to feel that such ~~things~~ would be a matter of major concern to themselves. What was most important at the time was what was most imminent, particularly if it was irritating. The need for a curfew is a good example. The need for a self-governing system to set up the curfew was much more shadowy. The need for a representative body to consider other needs and procedures was even more indistinct and remote. The

respect which Americans feel for democratic governmental procedures had not been fostered in the Issei since childhood as it has <sup>been</sup> with American-born citizens. It would be only when they <sup>evacuees</sup> were faced with concrete realities that they would even begin to want to participate in community control. That would take time.

## VI MECHANICS OF SETTING UP A BLOCK LEADER SYSTEM AT MANZANAR

### A First Election

The procedure for getting the Block Leaders was one of block and administrative selection.

When the population of Manzanar numbered 3302 (FREE PRESS, 5/11/2, first issue) the community held its first election for Block Leaders. The date was Monday, April 13. Temporary chairmen had already been appointed to preside over and explain the purposes of the election. Residents of the 10 blocks, which then made <sup>up</sup> of the Center, met in their respective recreation halls and elected nominees for their blocks. In each block, 3 capable persons were chosen, one of whom would later be selected by the Administration when all 3 had been interviewed in regard to their background and qualifications.

On the morning of April 22, the Camp Manager announced the names of the 10 men whom he and his two administrative assistants had chosen from among the 30 names previously submitted. Alternate names were also given for each of the 10 blocks.

Thus a compromise was effected between the strictly democratic process of election by the people and selection by the Administration. At the election, voting was heavy and a vigorous interest was shown by Issei and Nisei alike, the Issei being especially impressed with their opportunity to have a say in who should be their leaders. Residents

deliberated long over their choices and even engaged in heated controversy. To give the Camp Manager ample scope for making his choice, some blocks even elected ~~members~~ as their candidates members of the three different groups in camp, namely Issei, Nisei, and Kibei.

The position of Block Leader was a full-time assignment. It required skill and tact in handling people and dealing with interpersonal difficulties. Also, it required intelligence and insight in dealing with principles and issues and an ability to determine policies. Not all men could qualify for these demands, not even those selected by popular vote.

#### B Constitution is Drawn Up

On the following Friday, the 10 men and their 10 alternates met with the Camp Manager and his 2 administrative assistants and together they named a Committee on Constitution to draft the rules and by-laws of the organization which they were about to set up.

When the first draft of the proposed Constitution was ready, a copy was sent to the Assembly Center at Santa Anita for comment and suggestion.

1. The Proposed Constitution The unit for self-government, as laid out in the proposed Constitution, was the block. Each block would be represented by a Block Leader who would be selected as the original 10 men had been selected, namely, from a list of 3 nominees submitted by popular election from the block, and then narrowed down to a selection of the Block Leader and one alternate by the Administration.

The tentative Constitution also provided for a Council of 6 Ward Leaders who would be chosen from among the Block Leaders, one Ward Leader eventually to represent each 6 blocks.

## C Second Election

While the Constitution Committee was wrestling with its task, camp life went on, carrying with it its load of problems and complaints for which there was as yet no ready solution other than that of administrative pronouncement. That there was a definite need for a people's government, or at least a representative body to secure action, is reflected in a plaintive memo addressed by the Information Office to the Director of the Service Division. It ran, ~~was~~ "Is there any objection to passing out petitions?"

The Administration replied that the evacuees should come to the Information Office instead of resorting to petitions. There they would be granted as much of a hearing as any petition would bring.

But an equally plaintive sentence, appended as a postscript to the report of the day, reflects an equally insistent need, namely one for lessened demands on the time and attention of the Director of the Service Division; it ran... "Tell the people that Mr. -----(the Director) is in the hospital."

The population of Manzanar was increasing by leaps and bounds. The sudden and large accretions which each week brought meant the opening up of block after block of barracks to house the newcomers. These newer residents went through experiences similar on the whole to those undergone by the earlier arrivals. Although techniques had been worked out, and procedures arranged for adjusting difficulties, personnel were not always appointed in time to handle them. In report No. 30 the query is brought to the Information Office:

"When will Block Leaders for the newly occupied blocks be selected?"

No direct answer was given, for the process of selecting Block Leaders was not one that could be settled by spot decision. According to the precedent set in the first election and in accordance with the terms of the tentative Constitution, a procedure would have to be followed.

On May 20, those residents who had arrived in the Center too late to participate in the first election of April 13, were given their opportunity to select leaders for their blocks at a second election. The 10 Block Leaders, already in office, with 2 of their alternates, acted as temporary chairmen in conducting the meetings in the 12 new blocks. Balloting, as before, was by secret vote, and voters were men and women over 21. No restrictions were made as to sex, religion, or political belief. Residents of all 12 blocks flocked enthusiastically to the polls.

The procedure for selecting Block Leaders conformed to that already practiced and set up in the proposed Constitution, namely, 3 candidates were selected from each block and their names submitted to the Administration. When nominees were interviewed, the Administration selected one leader and one alternate, from each block.

#### D Rumor of "Dirty Politics"

That the new electorate was not without its apprehensions and scruples can be detected in the query, (dated May 23, 1942, Rep 50) which suggests that a possible manipulation was already forming in the political machine: "Can a Block Leader of one block bring in a friend from another block to take his place?"

The Administration's answer of course was in the negative and the correct procedure was pointed out, namely to have the appointed alternate take the place of an absentee leader. The matter was referred to the

Chairman of the Block Leaders.

On that same page a small notation appears to the effect that "dirty politics" was rumored for Block 17.

#### E Interpretation of Needs to Make Self-Government a Success

(May 14) A letter written anonymously, but obviously by an Issei, <sup>sums up</sup> what most Issei considered to be the principles which should govern the operation of a self-government system in camp: The first to be enunciated was respect for elderly people; the second was love for young people.

The writer went on to point out that the Administration had done its part in respecting personality by granting and establishing a system of self-government. It was the evacuees, however, who fell short in supplementing this step by their own lack of cooperation. This lack was particularly noticeable within the evacuee group itself. A self-government system could not function ~~without the presence of~~ <sup>except under</sup> certain conditions, chief of which was a spirit of cooperation. Without this readiness to <sup>evacuees</sup> cooperate, both among themselves and with the Administration, severe consequences might follow.

As in any other sound society, the principles of a self-governing democracy must be supported by an adequate and strong police power, <sup>but</sup> the policing power should not be left to the official ~~Police Force~~ alone. The writer <sup>of the letter</sup> enumerated 3 points which the population should observe for its own comfort and protection and which should correspondingly not require the intervention of the police force. These were: a set time for extinguishing lights at night; the withholding of acts or conversations which disturb the peace of other people; courtesy and decency in the shower rooms.

Shortly after this, the Chief of Police stated that minor crimes would fall under the jurisdiction of the Block Leaders. Manzanar would ✓ try to keep all its activities as self-governing as possible. ✓ (Major crimes, of course, would have to be carried to the court at Lone Pine, a neighboring town).

The conception of the Block Leaders' functions was by mid-May ✓ broad brought enough to include some kind of over-all administrative concern.