



---

## [Community Government by Masuda]

[ca. April 1944]

---

### COMMUNITY GOVERNMENT

Thomas S. Masuda  
City Attorney  
APR 1944  
EXHIBIT III

It has been pointed out that it is very difficult to write good history, if one has been closely associated with the events described, since one's own feelings and thoughts enter into the situation to such an extent as to preclude any objectivity. This generalization applies to me now, for I have been here in Poston while the community government which I am about to describe was developing; therefore I can only tell you as a witness of what I saw.

There have been three distinct phases in the history of community government: the first Temporary Community Council, the second Temporary Community Council, and the permanent Community Council. There were two periods during the process in which there was no community council at all.

At the very beginning Poston had no civic organization. Very soon a commission was set up to attempt to solve the problem. Using charters from various cities as models, the commission worked out an elaborate system of community government for Poston. However, in June, 1942, administrative instructions were received which curtailed the powers of the proposed government so much that people were discouraged and the plans were abandoned.

These administrative instructions laid down the requirement that the members of any civic governing body must be American citizens, a restriction which was very disturbing to many residents. It meant that the bulk of the people would not be represented unless they were willing to leave such representation in the hands of American citizens, who were young and relatively inexperienced. Despite all this, an election for a temporary community council was held in July under the guidance of the legal department and Mr. Haas, who was Project Lawyer at that time.

After the council had met and elected its officers, it began to realize fully the limitation of its powers. There was no need in Poston for many of the functions which a city council would ordinarily perform, because such things as hospital service, public health, and public utilities were already provided. There seemed to be only one function remaining to it, that of a suggestive body. At the first meeting the council had created committees on food, labor, and so forth, and these committees tried to begin operations. They did not get very much cooperation. The council had been given the burden of maintaining a government, but had no actual authority. Discouragement became general.

Later, to take care of the injustice which was felt because no Issei representation was possible in the community council, Issei were elected by the people and then appointed as an advisory board by the council. The council and the advisory board met jointly.

In November, 1942, discouragement and grievances felt by the people culminated in Camp I in a protest which took the form of a general strike. This focussed on the demand for the release of two prisoners who were being held in the project jail. The people believed them innocent of the charges brought against them, and also believed that there was insufficient evidence to justify their being held. The Community Council tried to negotiate for their release, but was not able to accomplish its purpose and so resigned in a body. On November 18, a mass meeting was held and a group was elected to represent the whole camp and govern it through the strike.

One result of the strike was the creation of an executive board. One Issei and one Nisei representative were chosen from each block, this group selected a Committee of Twelve, which in turn elected eight of its members who formed the executive board. Also the creation of an honor court, a device to sift rumors and clear evacuees of false charges, was suggested, but it never materialized because no one was willing to act in such a capacity. The community had felt the need of such a procedure strongly.

The last part of December or early in January, 1943, another election was held to set up the second temporary community council. Mr. Head, Project Director, said that he could recognize only the community council, and not the executive board. The Issei advisory board and the community council were elected, but there were some difficulties. The community council and the Issei advisory board met separately, each sending observers to the other's meetings.

Mr. Head in the fall of 1942, appointed a commission to draft a charter for the community. This charter was presented to the community on May 18, 1943. It provided for three local councils, made up of one representative from each block. The qualification of citizenship was removed. The local councils were to regulate affairs in the unit, and to elect representatives to the Poston Community Council, nine from Unit I, five from Unit II and five from Unit III. The Community Council was to legislate on matters concerning all three camps. The charter was approved by Unit I and II; Unit III voted against it because it felt it would represent a surrender of its local rights to a federated group. The Project Director, however, approved it, and the machinery was set up to elect a permanent community council.

Until the election was held, there was a good deal of curiosity as to whether an all-Issei council would result. The outcome showed that Issei and Nisei were almost equally represented, the balance being slightly in favor of the Nisei.

For a time there was some conflict between the local councils and the community council, but eventually the duties of each were worked out. For instance, the question of an ordinance for cats and dogs came up before the Community Council. It seemed, however, to affect primarily Unit I, so was referred to the local Council of Unit I. Later it was discovered that its application was camp wide, so it went back to the Community Council and a regulation was enacted. Recently, the Sanitation Section asked for a regulation on the keeping of chickens. The local Council of Unit I could not agree, so the matter went to the Community Council which set up regulations applying to all three units.

The United States government has only those powers granted to it by the states. Its powers are specifically stated in the Constitution and anything not so specified is within the province of the state governments. The situation is reversed in Poston, for here the local Council may legislate on any subject over which the Community Government has not taken jurisdiction. The Community Council has the right of vetoing, repealing, or making any other changes on regulations of the local councils. The Community Government is responsible directly to the Project Director.

The Council has created a judicial commission which is made up of three members from each unit. Three or more members are required to hold a hearing. Members are interchangeable; cases can be tried in any camp with any of the members sitting on the commission. As far as possible, however, cases are tried in the camp in which they occur.

When the police chief of Unit I resigned and it was necessary to appoint his successor, the council created a police commission which took over his duties and which has continued to operate. Other committees of the local councils, such as the library board and the committee which worked on the rest home in Camp II, have also been active. The Community Council now has standing committees to deal with food, labor, and public relations, and plans to create more committees as the need arises. Local councils have comparable committees.

The chairman of the community council is known as the Mayor of Poston. Other officers are the vice-chairman and the city clerk, who keeps the records. The Unit administrations and the local councils are entirely separate theoretically, one being legislative and the other administrative. The administrative branch, or the block managers, is not controlled by the council but the relationship between the two and the delineation of their respective spheres of control have not yet been finally adjusted.

Only a small proportion of the community understand the working of the system of government and its purposes. However, if the government is properly guided and fairly representative of the community, it will become more and more important in the management of the project. Its members can keep the administration informed on problems of the evacuees and other issues confronting the residents. Today, to a greater extent than ever before in the history of Poston, the real leaders of the people are coming forward and assuming positions of responsibility.