



Community Council Historical Report

by
Harry Miyake
Chairman, Butte Community Council
September, 1943 - March, 1944

The Bancroft Library
University of California, Berkeley

Community Council Historical Report Organization History, Butte Community

Soon after the last contingents from the Tulare Assembly Center was transferred to the Gila River Project, Mr. Smith, the first Project Director passed a circular, the content of which in short described the self-government. It mentioned the fact that the instruction from Washington stipulated that the members for the self government shall be of citizen of Japanese Ancestry of voting age. This instruction was met with considerable opposition by the community and especially by the Issei. Perhaps because of language handicap or lack of initiative, or of an Army controlled center, the Issei failed to participate in the community government in the Assembly Center. However, as soon as they arrived to this center many able Issei began to take initiative, first in small groups and later a representative, one or two from each block. The reason for this action, I believe, is very obvious, the camp being a temporary home for the duration, and the incompleteness of the camp. The leading Nisei on the other hand, had enough grief for undertaking such a thankless

— 2 —

jobs in the Assembly Center, more than welcomed the spirit of the Issei. Why the attitude of intimidation was shown to some leading Nisei is something that no one knows; perhaps a spontaneous action, and again it may have been of a jealous nature. On one or two occasion, certain nisei was threatened and criticism against them became more and more acute. This atmosphere made it difficult to serve the community both by the Issei and the Nisei. In spite of the strong protest by the community in reference to citizenship qualification for community government, the Washington Office, after a long delay, failed to see such importance and denied the request. The objectives of the community government as stated in the reply from Washington pointed out that since the Nisei was being encamped the responsibility of giving all the practical aspect of civil and government system rested in WRA. Meanwhile, a temporary council was elected with members of citizen alone and their first meeting was held on December, 1942. A chairman was elected and various committees was appointed. Because of the temporary nature, the administration, I believe, failed to give proper co-operation on top of poor support by the community notwithstanding a good effort on the part of the council. Another failure, I might say is the fact that because of temporary nature, in many cases, the

— 3 —

councilman failed to make decisions without first discussing with their respective block. This is true to some

extent with our permanent council. Out of the various committee so appointed, the constitution and the co-operative enterprise were the two that completed its work long after the temporary council was disorganized. The most outstanding financial undertaking the community have contemplated was in the camouflage net factory. The net amount the community shared was some \$75,000—and most of this amount has been distributed to all workers. The first dividend was \$8.76 per worker. By this time the Washington office modified its regulation and the citizenship no longer became the requisit for community government. The constitution committee soon revised its constitution and upon presentation it was approved in June, 1943. The machinery for general election for permanent council was set up in latter part of August and in September the council was elected. The most able and active leaders failed to participate for some reason or another and the election proved citizen and non-citizen divided equally. Before the temporary council was organized, the administrative instruction provided a block council group. This block council had no legislative power but created merely for the welfare of the block itself, such as to disseminate informations and to work out a harmonious relationship

— 4 —

within the block. It composed of one member from each barrack plus the supervisor of the mess hall and the block manager as ex-office member. They elected its own chairman and when problem arose which would concern the community as a whole the block manager was instructed to report to its body and solution reported to the residents. The permanent Council promptly organized the council into four main divisions, namely, Administrative, Work, Welfare and Protective, with its committee responsible to her division. The committee failed to function properly for in many cases they performed their regular work that it was very difficult to find time which was convenient for other members to discuss and work out a solution for problems needing immediate solution. Since the Chairman spent full time in the council, the chair in most cases performed the committee work in order to facilitate problems. It was suggested by the cabinet members that an advisory board be created from the community at large but the body rejected this suggestion. Thusly, the permanent council completed the remaining term of office in the manner described above.

Functions Performed by the Council

In the legislative field, the committee on codification and legislation of both communities met jointly and measures affecting the common and the most urgent was adopted for council

— 5 —

ratification. These were fire and health regulation and minor misdemeanor regulations. Appointment of judiciary board was a most difficult matter, however, five or six candidates were selected for approval, but when they were contacted, most of them declined to serve. The community acceptance of the findings of the Judicial Board was unknown and possibility of revenge by unfair victims was feared. After considerable delay, the council finally selected three members to 1 in the judiciary board with the community clerk to keep calendar and order of court. The first hearing of this board was held on January 19, 1944 with the courtroom filled to capacity with spectators.

During the early stages of the council, since the advisory board was suggested but rejected by the council body, an executive board was established. This board composed of the four division heads plus the chairman and the executive secretary. It was this board that met with the administrative staff and received various criticism and Washington instruction sometimes before action was taken and many times after action had already been taken. This Board in turn discussed the problem and submitted them for further detail study by the standing committee under the respective division head. After through study by the committee, they then report the findings

— 6 —

to their division head who in turn discuss with the executive board for final solution. This action was brought

to the general council meeting for ratification.

Communications during the early stage of the council was very nominal. A suggestion from other centers in reference to All Center Conference; inquiry from other centers in reference to the above; relocation planning and activities in this field, report and suggestions with other centers, etc.

Since the operation of the center was not entirely left for the council to work out, it was almost impossible to make any budget planning. However, the committee on finance and budget was introduced to the method of how a Federal Government financial system was operated by hitting the high spots of how the budget was estimated. Should a certain expenditure for the future was not included in the budget, that expense either must be dropped or some fanagling must be made.

Ceremonial affairs where a council body participated was very nil. The graduation of the Elementary and High School was directed mostly by the education department with the Parent Teachers Organization, which organization was recognized by the council. Boys and Girls Scout activities were conducted by their respective sponsors, and again the occasional parade and other festivals were operated by its sponsor and

— 7 —

generally the council members were included in their invitation. Often they were called upon to speak in behalf of the community.

Participation by the council in the Administration of Center Program:

A relocation committee was organized in the council, however through necessity, a relocation planning board was already in action. The council committee adopted this body and continued the work together with the appointed Relocation personnel. This board in finding the relocation pulse of the evacuee issued a questionnaire to each block managers for a house to house canvass. A simple question of "Are you willing to relocate?". "Yes or no". If answer is no, give reason briefly. It was explained to the block manager very clearly before they approached for this survey that we are not interested with the names of the individuals but most interested with the reason of negative answer. These survey was studied further by the relocation planning board with the purpose of finding the possible answers to this survey, and still further a recommendation was suggested to Washington office.

The council had nothing to do with the segregation as any part taken one way or another reflected upon them and the choice of segregation determined by each individual wishes or desire.

The council was very seldom approached by the educational

— 8 —

division both elementary and high school. The request to complete the high school auditorium perhaps was the major problem with occasional juvenile cases. In relation to the Adult Education, the council was approached on several occasions to inform the evacuee of such branch and the advantages in such undertakings.

The committee on health met with the health board of which was composed of four or five appointed personnel, one evacuee from each community and one evacuee doctor. The voting right was as follows: two votes from the appointed personnel and three votes from the evacuee representatives, making the total five votes. The evacuee on one hand as asking for unlimited services from the evacuee doctors who are working for \$19 a month. Since the W. R. A. and the government have made repeated statement that all medical care will be provided in the center, the evacuee took advantages and demanded all the services possible. Since relocation was the prime objectives of the W. R. A., the professional people had the opportunity to earn their share of ability on the outside; naturally making a shortage of doctors down to nurses aides. Repeated efforts on the part of the council to have at least the doctors work on civil service rating failed. A survey of health condition of school children was made which showed numerous tooth decay and bad tonsils. A school clinic

was established but somehow or other, it was discontinued. A special diet kitchen was created to feed those people who was recommended by doctors that special feeding was necessary and many convalescent patient who no longer needed hospitalization. Considerable numbers of school children below certain age who live in distance blocks from the school area was fed in this special diet kitchen. A crew of block nurses was created to at least help reduce the daily clinic callers. These block nurses was trained to give first aid in case of emergency before the doctors arrived to the scene. Nurses aides became more and more acute, especially in the TB wards that the council appealed to the patient's immediate family to take care in part time. It is obvious of the shortage of nurses aide; first due to relocation and second, nurses aide having insufficient experience to protect herself from the transferable disease that an actual cases where the nurses aide contacted TB and now a patient in the hospital. The remuneration for such a risk is not there. Is the WRA other than caring here in the hospital has made provision to aid her or her family? Not that I know of. These are the problem the council committee on health had to contact when shortage of nurses aide was reported.

Gila River Center was considered a city within the State of Arizona and all offense that could be heard in the city was

tried within the center, while the state offense and the Federal Offense was heard outside of the center. Few cases of destruction of government property, some battery and assault cases; quite numerous gambling cases was noticed as major law disturbances. All these violations were charged with the law and orders prescribed by the council which in turn was regulated by the Arizona State law and Washington regulations. Juvenile delinquency is one of the most troublesome cases and the council has provided with a board members to handle and guide these cases.

A committee in labor relation was created and it was called upon to solve some of the most difficult problems. Since relocation is the objective of all centers and when making various budget, it was estimated that so much will relocate and the population will decrease accordingly. Efficiency of operation was more and more stressed in the second year and naturally a program of reduction of workers was necessary. The labor relation committee was again on the spot, influence one way stronger than another resulted in friction with the workers or the administration. On one occasion it was necessary for the committee to recommend a petition to Washington requesting a change of certain reduction. Labor relation committee, I believe, have averted

possible strike in this community by careful and sincere attitude taken by them. The attitude of the semi-truck was such that one false move meant a work stoppage, but when the labor relation committee stepped in with the sincerity and tact, it was discovered that there was a friction with the internal security in matter of traffic regulation.

Public relation work especially in this center was most necessary as the neighboring communities is rather hostile to the evacuee. A public relation committee was established in the council who have participated with good work when Arizona State Teachers Convention was held in this center. The credit is due to the education department for bringing them here. Various drives such as Red Cross, Community Chest and March of Dimes has been fully participated by the council. There is a law prohibiting collection from house to house for anything other than Red Cross and Community Chest. When the community council adopted the resolution condemning the atrocity act against the American soldiers in Bataan, this resolution was mentioned in most leading newspaper of the country and spoken over the National radio hook-up. Public relation was carried on through the athletic events which is controlled by the commission under the council.

Relationship:

The council relationship with the administration was well proven when an incident arose where an evacuee was shot by the Military Police stationed at the gate post. For certain reason, he was temporarily affected with mental unbalanceness, and after thorough investigation, it was disclosed that he had contemplated relocation to some Eastern point but the clearance had been delayed unnecessarily. A resolution requesting for speedy action for leave procedure thereby eliminating unnecessary waiting. A joint relocation planning board, a joint health board are some of the activities where the council and the administration worked with such a close relationship to transmit problems jointly. The Wational Red Cross Drive and the Community Chest drives are again a joint undertaking.

The council in relation with the community is well illustrated in the shortage of oil, soap and food materials when rationing became necessary and the regulation well observed. In spite of the camp life being an unnatural community law and order established by the council was observed and the offenders was punished with the satisfaction of the community.

The religious organization which was recognized by the

— 13 —

the Washington office were the Christian, Buddhist and Catholic. Each of these organization is well established that the council had very little opportunity to serve them. Some of the out-standing undertakings were the distribution of the Community Chest fund based on findings of that committee. A clarification of Buddhism from Shintoism. The council has established an agency which control all activities which involve admission price or collecting of any finance such as athletic events, movies and other entertainments. Creation of such agency eliminated the possible profiteering by any organization.

Evaluation:

A critical moment arose when instruction from Washington ordered reduction of mess workers. This order came just prior to segregation and the worker requested withholding such reduction until completion of segregation. This request was denied and as a result, strike vote was taken awaiting for final order from the community. At this time, the council was not established, but some of the leaders contacted the mess workers and proved to them that strike at this time was not appropriate with segregation before us; thus avoided the strike. The shooting of the evacuee by the military police at the gate post was another incident where the quick action taken by the

— 14 —

council avoided the possible difficult complication. Numerous incidents especially with the mess workers was experienced by the labor relation committee and in all cases, the difficulty was worked out with the community cooperation. Net factory and ship model plan was the two most important, direct aide in war effort this community has taken. From my observation as council chairman, I believe, in many instances, especially with those concerning reduction of workers, consolidating and closing of certain divisions made it difficult for the council to make decision one way or another without effecting the harmony of the community. However, these undertakings are the very essence of the existence of the council and with the knowledge of the creation of these centers and its policies from year to year, I am sure the council could have released its obligations. The first year the policy of WRA was to give work to all able residents; the second year it concentrated its objectives to efficiency; and by the third year, resettlement.

The community government as a mechanism for training in civic responsibility and Americanization program, I believe, cannot be illustrated as one would like. In the first place, the evacuee was not concentrated on their own free will. To many of them an anguish mental attitude of evacuation uprooting their livelihood, not

because of military necessity but

— 15 —

discrimination. Not only alien but the citizen without proper hearing were placed behind barbed wire fence. Freedom of speech to certain extent was limited. With the above condition of the residents, the aggressive council members were subject to persecution. Nevertheless, the community government was beneficial in many ways for training in civic responsibility, especially the right to vote and exercise their voice in government.