

upon Sumio Miyamoto, the business manager of the canteen, who spoke good Japanese, and who was respected by Issais, to review the principles of the co-op. This he did to the satisfaction of all present.

In most of these ward meetings a decision was made to ask the people in the various blocks whether they were for a co-op or not. Many of the co-op representatives left the meeting with only a vague idea of what a co-op really was. Of the seven members of the Advisory Council, Tad Tomita, a Nisei who could speak Japanese and English well and who had an understanding of the co-op, was probably the only one who was able to carry on a discussion in his ward properly. The feeling of many of the Issais seemed to be that Japanese could go ahead with the organization of a co-op without a majority of the people in the blocks understanding what it was about. There was also a feeling that Mr. Elberson was needlessly trying to slow up the organization of a co-op.

When Mr. Elberson heard that a vote was going to be taken to decide whether the people wanted a co-op or not he was alarmed. He felt that such final steps should not be taken without the people learning a little more about the co-op. He sent out notices to the co-op representatives to inform the block people of the organization of the Advisory Committee before taking up anything so formal as a vote. Many of the blocks, however, took a vote. Feeling that it was not wise to hold back the organization of the (co-op) any longer even though the educational program was not even started, Mr. Elberson asked each block to find out whether they were in favor of a co-op or not. In some of the blocks the principle of the co-op was well explained before the vote was taken. Most of the meetings were block meetings, while a few were only able to meet with the Advisory Committee. Also, not all of the blocks sent in formal reports of block opinions to the central office. Of those that did report definitely 35 answered yes and only one (Block 25) replied that some questions would have to be answered before they could make

their decision. The majority of the blocks had reported in favor of the Japanese forming a cooperative and taking over the Community Enterprises. The Advisory Council had received the go signal that it had desired.

At the same time the blocks were asked whether they felt that they had sufficient education on the co-op. Of the handful that answered, most of them said that more knowledge about the co-op was desired in the block. Mr. Elberson had also won his point on the desirability of more education.

#### F. Argument for and against the co-op

After the ward meeting was held, meetings were held in each block to explain the principle of the co-op to the people and to get their approval. More than half of these blocks answered in favor of the Co-op Movement in spite of the incomplete explanation by co-op representatives in most blocks. What convinced the people of the necessity for a co-op? Also, what were some of the questions asked and doubts raised by the people in the blocks?

The amount of profit possible was an important factor, but not the most important in determining whether the people wanted a co-op or not. Co-op representatives had to maintain that prices would probably remain about the same (10 per cent markup), but that past profits would go to the members. One of the other strong arguments for the co-op was that if the people wanted a store at all, they would have to form a co-op. The WPA could not run a store, private enterprise was not allowed, and the only alternative remained a cooperative organization. In many of the blocks this argument was probably used, even though it did not rest on the merits of a co-op. The most important argument, however, was the fact that a co-op would give members entire control over the organization. This control was not thought in terms of consumer vs. business men, but in terms of Japanese vs. Caucasian, especially Mr. Smith. The suspicion of the people had been centered on him,

and the general feeling was that the only way in which to take the Community Enterprises out of his hands was to form a co-op. This feeling was to become more widespread and stronger when the Theater Project was announced.

In spite of the lack of an educational program, many of the objections raised by co-op representatives at the first meeting to form a cooperative organization had been eliminated. The suspicion toward the WRA cropped up in most meetings, and it had to be explained time and again that the WRA, under its regulations, could not operate a consumer business organization. In one "reactionary" block, (Block 25) the co-op principles were explained and the people agreed with them in principle, but would not vote for a co-op until certain questions were answered. One point was that the co-op couldn't be expected to make a profit if it had to pay the rent, wages, and other expenses. Also, in the winter time there would be less profit than in the summer time. The feeling was that the WRA should pay the expenses of the canteen. One person asked why the farm was not turned over to the Japanese. Someone thought that it was going to be eventually. Another person mentioned that the farmers couldn't make a profit because ten workers didn't do the work of one. Other pet protests such as "We're being treated like Indians;" "They should take us back to Stockton;" "I can't consider this my home;" "The WRA should pay the expenses of the canteen because they put us in here;" were voiced by several of the more vociferous Issei. Their argument dominated the meeting and even though the co-op was accepted in principle, the group did not vote in favor of it at that meeting. The fear that it would not be possible to make a profit persisted. There was still a desire to get as much out of the WRA as possible, and there was a feeling that if they held out long enough the WRA would not expect the co-op to pay any of the expenses. Since the first meeting, however, the Co-op Movement had made progress in eliminating most of this

sort of objections among a majority of the people.

It should be noted here that in Block 25 it was always four or five people in the Advisory Committee or in the block who did most of the talking, usually opposing most of the constructive measures that were presented. At this particular meeting they gave vent to their indignation at the way they had been treated. They also expressed the opinion that since they were put in here the WRA should take care of them. With this sort of talk dominating the meeting, even Mr. Sakamoto, the Co-op leader, was forced to go along with the rest and express the opinion that he could not consider this his home. During the discussion the merits and demerits of a co-op had been forgotten, and the dissatisfaction felt by the Japanese people was brought into the limelight. This swayed the group to such an extent that it made the approval of the Co-op Movement difficult. This is mentioned at this point because so many of the other meetings have been dominated by this sort of rule of the emotion, whipped up by a small minority, over a saner discussion of the issues at stake.

#### G. Dissolving of the Preliminary Co-op Organization

The majority of the block, and hence the people, had approved of the organization of a co-op, and the representatives were prepared to go ahead with the organization. As the present representatives were, for the most part, appointed by the block managers or the block Advisory Committee, it was necessary to replace them with representatives elected by the people. At the same time it was decided that the Advisory Council would also be dissolved and soon be replaced by the Board of Directors elected by co-op representatives. The advisory function of the Advisory Council had been entirely forgotten, and when the theater issue came up, the co-op group was to have no representative body to look into the matter.

At the final ward meeting of co-op representatives, tentative by-laws were presented by the member of the Advisory Council and discussed. There was a feeling among the representatives that this discussion should be done by the

real co-op representatives to be elected soon, although it was Mr. Elberson's surmise that most of the present co-op representatives would be reelected from each block. Discussion of the by-laws was, therefore, rather superficial. Several interesting opinions, however, were revealed.

At the Ward II meeting, it was the desire of most of those present that the membership fee should be as low as possible. One dollar seemed to gain the approval of most, while it was thought sufficient to have the members pay up only about 50 cents. This was contrary to the wish of Mr. Elberson, who felt that a larger membership fee would create more interest in the co-op. There was also a feeling that the profits should not be distributed only to the members, but should be distributed to the community as a whole. This again was contrary to Rochdale principles which believed that it was important to keep the interest of members of a cooperative by returning the profits in proportion to the amount of purchase. If the profits were to be used for the benefit of the community, there would be no advantage in becoming a member. There was also a feeling that profits would be small as the price would have to be kept down as low as possible for the sake of the people. This solicitude for the welfare of the people of the community was a definite trend in the discussion in one ward meeting.

The Advisory Council had proved to be of little value in learning about the co-op and extending knowledge of it to the people. For this reason, Mr. Elberson and his assistant, Fumi Sakamoto, felt that it was advisable to have an advisory committee "whose purpose is to make critical analysis of the progress of the co-operative to coordinate information submitted by the various committees, work out procedure in advance and in consulting with the store manager if it affects the business policy of the store, and to advise the Board of Directors."<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Cooperative Plan.

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The feeling was that if the Board of Directors knew as little about co-ops as did the Advisory Council, it would not be able to function properly. At the ward meeting, however, most of the co-op representatives felt that such a committee was not necessary. Suspicion was aroused as to how much power the WRA and Mr. Smith did have over the co-op and whether the co-op was really going to be run by the Japanese people. It was felt that the fifteenth person on the Board of Directors, who was to be a Caucasian staff member, would be sufficient voice for the Administration to have in the co-op. In other words, the Advisory Committee was thought to be unnecessary.

Co-op representatives were instructed to have an election in each block to elect representatives; and the meeting was adjourned. At the same time the Advisory Council was automatically dissolved.<sup>1</sup>

#### H. Co-op Leaders

Several co-op leaders, all Niseis, had attended Elberson's lecture series or had previous knowledge of the Co-op Movement. Most of them were college men who had a vision of some of the broader implications of the Co-op Movement in Tule Lake. The co-operative association as a method of meeting post-war relocation problems and as a means for a racial minority group to break into the Caucasian world were more important to these people than just the matter of whether the Japanese or the Caucasians controlled the co-op here or how the profit was distributed.

Heading this informal staff of discussion leaders was Fumi Sakamoto, Mr. Elberson's assistant. She was vitally interested in the Co-op Movement, and helped Mr. Elberson work out many of the technical details of the organization. Many of the ideas which were presented to the Advisory Council were often

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<sup>1</sup>J. S. Minutes of Ward II Co-op Meeting.

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either Sakamoto's or Elbersen's.

Sakamoto came from San Francisco, was once married, and at present is probably in her late twenties. According to her own story she has always lived among Caucasians as a dressmaker. Her speaking ability of Japanese is not highly polished but not too poor. When she first entered the Project, her attitude tended to be blunt and to antagonize the Japanese people. Through her contacts, however, she has learned to be more tactful and even to flatter people. She seems to get along quite well with the people about her at present. She can get a job with a business firm out East through a Caucasian friend of hers. However, she is thinking of attending Rochdale Institute in New York to receive training and make contacts which may help the Japanese later on. Her attitude probably has been greatly influenced by that of Elbersen, with whom she worked intimately. His true adherence to democratic principles in his contact with Japanese probably set an ideal pattern for Sakamoto to follow.

Elbersen and Sakamoto consulted the discussion leaders from time to time. These included Haruo Najima, Bob Ota, Sumie Miyamoto, Mas Kawato, Tad Tomita, Ted Tokuno, and James Sakoda. On plans for organizing the education program and steering the direction of discussion at ward meetings these people were consulted. Several informal meetings were held with Elbersen and Sakamoto to discuss some of these plans, while the other times the latter two went to see the others. Originally one person was assigned to each ward and was asked to lead the discussion on co-ops, as members of the Advisory Council were poorly informed on this subject. Although it was Elbersen's plan to have these discussion leaders carry on the educational program, the Advisory Council was allowed to go ahead with its own program and also to chair the ward meetings. At the last meeting of the temporary co-op representatives, the discussion leaders were asked to stress the importance of an advisory body to the Board of Directors, but they were helpless to do very much about it, because most of the others

seemed to be opposed to such a plan. This group, however, was able to do something of which the Advisory Council could not readily be made to see the importance -- mainly, laying a stress on understanding the principle of the co-op and also in bringing back to Elberson some of the reaction of the people which he could not observe or understand for himself. The value of this group was during the period of preliminary organization, and after that it did not convene again as a group. Some of the individuals, however, functioned to keep the co-op central office informed of the feeling of the people.

#### IV. ACTUAL ORGANIZATION

##### A. Election Meeting

For the next few weeks election of co-op representatives were held in various blocks. There were delays in some blocks, as there were still doubts among the people which could not be dispelled in a short explanation before the election. Between September 3 and September 26, all of the blocks except two had chosen their co-op representatives -- preferably one Issei and one Nisei. Not until then did Elberson feel that he should go ahead with the electing of the incorporators who would file incorporation papers.

In Block 25 which had not formally approved the setting up of a co-op, both of the co-op representatives were reelected as co-op representatives, but not without some feeling of doubt as to the advisability of having a co-op in the Project. People who attended the meeting wanted to know whether they shouldn't first ask the people whether they wanted a co-op or not before they elected a representative. It was explained that it would be the work of the new representatives to find out from the people whether a co-op was really desirable. When the question about the possibility of profits was brought up, it had to be explained that people didn't have to become members if they didn't want to.



The block manager helped along the matter by explaining that electing of representatives did not mean that a co-op was going to be put up yet. After the election the people were asked whether they desired a canteen or not. After some discussion, the following points were brought out.

1. The canteen is necessary
2. It should be taken over by the Japanese people
3. Definite plan of the co-op should be submitted to the people for approval

4. The expenses of the canteen should be partially met by the WRA

By delaying the final decision on the desirability of a co-op, the representatives of Block 25 were able to go ahead with the others in helping to organize the co-op.

#### B. Lecture Series

In the meantime Elbersen started a new series of lectures on the principles of the co-op one night a week. Fifteen to thirty representatives attended these lectures. As both Issei and Nisei were present, language difficulty became a problem from the very first meeting. At the end of the first lecture, Shirai, a young Issei student at Stanford, was asked to translate what Elbersen had given in his lecture. Another Issei (Donao), however, got up and called everyone's attention to the fact that this was not a meeting just for Nisei and that Japanese was as important as English. He thought that there wasn't a Nisei who couldn't understand Japanese, and therefore felt that everyone should remain behind to hear the lecture in Japanese. He was calmed down, however, and the Nisei were allowed to go home first. Henceforth, all of the lectures by Mr. Elbersen were translated to Japanese at the end. These meetings were also characterized by a lack of interest in abstract principles. While the lecture

was mainly about principles, the questions asked concerned such practical aspects as marketing, insurance, reserve funds, profits. Some were eager to go ahead with the organization and were unwilling to attend to lectures.<sup>1</sup>

### C. Forum on Co-op

As a part of the educational program a forum on the co-op was sponsored by co-op leaders (Elberson and Sakamoto). For this, two persons who were known to be against the Co-op Movement, Norman Koyama and Tom Yego were secured as speakers. As men favoring the co-op, Sumio Miyamoto and Frank Miyamoto were asked to speak. Don Elberson also sat on the panel and gave the history of the Co-op Movement and its meaning for the people. The audience which only half filled a mess hall was largely Nisei.

The meaning of the co-op for the Japanese people, which Elberson presented, was: (1) that it was the WRA policy to give the people increasing management of the project, and that the co-op was the first real opportunity for the Japanese people to run their own enterprise, and (2) that the co-op stands for racial equality. Elberson had learned during his contact with the people here that the latter argument would appeal to the Japanese more than other abstract principles which were more often quoted in favor of the co-op. In his review of the Co-op Movement in the Project, he said that the by-laws were the result of the thinking of the people.

Tom Yego's speech brought out some interesting points. He started out by saying that he didn't receive his degree at Cal or Stanford, but by digging on his farm back home. His statements were characterized by lack of knowledge. For instance, he stated that if the co-op took over the Community Enterprises, it would have to raise its price, which was not true. He also expressed

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<sup>1</sup> J. S. Journal, September 16, 1942.

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