

REPORT OF THE INFORMAL INTERVIEW
OF THE
DIVISIONAL RESPONSIBLE MEN
AND THE
DETAINED STOCKADE INTERNEES

January 14, 1944

DATE: January 14, 1944
TIME: Administration Building Room 23
PLACE: 1:45 p.m.
ATTENDANCE:

Divisional Responsible Men: Shimada, Akitsuki, Nakao, Okamoto, Naito,
Namekawa, Yamatani, Mayeda, and Furukawa

Detained Internees: Hoshiko, Morri, Shimizu, Inouye, Katayama, and
Nakamoto

- Shimizu: The stockade internees first questioned me, what the standing of the people whom we met was and the object of the meeting. So will you kindly explain that fully again, if you don't mind, so that our positions will be cleared.
- Shimada: This body was selected from the various divisional heads. The object is just the way we explained yesterday.
- Shimizu: From what view point did you people call us?
- Akitsuiki: As to the people we wanted to meet, we didn't have the slightest idea whom to call. We first included some of the members of the Negotiating Committee but permission was refused and their names were crossed out.
- Shimizu: Did you say that you couldn't get permission to call the Negotiating Committee members?
- Akitsuiki: We asked for Mr. Kimura, for instance, of the Negotiating Committee, but he was denied. There were few others who were also crossed out from the list we submitted.
- Shimizu: We reported all the things discussed at yesterday's meeting to somewhat 247 stockade internees and also told them that your sincere object in meeting with all the divisional heads was your earnest intention in trying to restore the Center to its normal condition. Unless you try to encounter this problem with solid determination and sincerity this situation cannot be solved. Merely return to work of a portion of the colonists is not enough. You have a very heavy responsibility.
- Shimada: I can't and don't know whether we'll succeed or fail. But I can tell you this, we are doing this with our sincerest faith and I can say that we are certainly doing our utmost.
- Akitsuiki: Let me add this, we have no political ambitions, whatsoever.
We have strongly resolved to dissolve this group as soon as the Center returns to its normal condition, as soon as people go back to work, as soon as we succeed in getting the release of those justifiable colonists detained, and finally when the responsible political group is established. However, we're not saying that we'll not be responsible thereafter, even after dissolution.
- Naito: We're just saying that until that time, that is until the official political group is selected by the people, we will act as the Co-ordinating Committee.
- Shimizu: The Dai-hyo Sha and the Negotiating Committee members looked at the results of the referendum vote. They

noted that over 4,000 still favored status quo. Looking at the problem from that point of view, they felt and were somewhat worried whether returning to work of a portion would not be complicated and perhaps dangerous.

Inouye: Yes, after looking at the results, it's barely half and half. I wonder if the workers returning to work on Monday could go without complications. I surely hate to see the Japanese divided and hate to see them fighting with each other. It's obvious that majority of colonists have opposed status quo. If a portion return to work what do you think these people will think or what kind of reactions will they take? They might take an exactly reverse attitude instead of calmly, peacefully yielding to the winning side. In that case will you people take the responsibility? I hate to see anything like that happen, after all the things you people have gone through. Have you anything prepared in the event of such a circumstance? As Japanese to Japanese, let's speak frankly and tell all we know, after all we're working for the same object.

Shimada: That was the very thing we were worried about. This morning one representative came over. He was a strong backer of this status quo, his attitude was very firm; however, he gave many just and sound reasons for supporting it. Of course, I made my footing clear too. Nonetheless, I found, after talking to him, one thing in common and that was the ultimate object which we were both aiming for, although in a different way.

Let me give you an illustration. During the hot presidential campaign, when Roosevelt and Wilkie were running for President, American people were divided. But after it became known that Roosevelt was the victor, all the Americans, including the ones who strongly stood up for Wilkie, conceded (whether they liked it or not) to Roosevelt and his Administration and supported him wholeheartedly. Why can't we do that?

Inouye: The referendum was won by a bare majority, but I personally think that in reality, status quo actually won. After all that hardship and all that misery the people had gone through for a long time, little less than a half still supported status quo. Without giving that point a thorough consideration and should people return to work on Monday, it may be pretty hard to continue or re-establish friendly relations among the Japanese. You may be worried about that point, but so are we.

Shimada: Yes, we were worried about that and that's why we really wanted to consult and confer with you people and possibly find a harmonious solution to this problem.

Shimizu: To what extent, in the first place, are you attempting to get our release, that is among the 247 interned. You realize, of course, that the reason why status quo came into existence was chiefly for the purpose of getting our release. In other words you cannot remedy and settle this situation fundamentally, by merely liquidating status quo. Normalcy will automatically come back if you solve the root of it.

Morri: In getting our release, did you have any arrangements or provisions made with the Administration?

Shimada: We tried all means we could think of, but all in vain and so we concluded that this was the only way out.

Shimizu: This is my personal opinion. If, for instance, one or two men are left behind the rest of us cannot come out of the stockade, from the standpoint of humanity. I think the others have the same opinion. If we are all released status quo will automatically disappear.

Are you thinking in this way - abolish status quo first and then proceed with our release? Even if status quo is gone some people will be left behind without work, then this situation cannot be remedied fundamentally.

- Shimada: Let me repeat this, the Army would not give us a chance to talk about release of you people, unless normal condition was first returned.
- Inouye: The opinion of the internees in the stockade is that "if one go out, we all go out, if one stay in we all stay in." Do you realize why the people are so firm in their conviction?
- I have heard such a thing as this - FBI said that there are people like this, one who is a source of strife to the WPA, the Army, and even to the Japanese people. Remember, the FBI is an American. Who told such an erroneous thing? That's the cause of all the troubles.
- I think it is only proper to get the former Negotiating Committee released first. If you don't do that the others will not come out. If release is impossible and Army continues to repress us, we will still continue to favor status quo, since that's the only thing we can do.
- Shimizu: Are you willing to negotiate with the Administration whether release en masse of the detained would be possible? Then the whole thing will be solved.
- Shimada: We tried, as I said before, we tried all methods and ways, but was kicked each time. This was the only alternative.
- Shimizu: To what extent is release en masse possible? You see there are some men who have had no hearings even after two months and they still don't know why they were picked up.
- Katayama: So the people are actually returning to work on Monday? What is your outlook? What are you trying to tell us? Are you trying to get our understanding or concession? As Japanese to Japanese, let's not have anything behind our backs.
- Shimada: Yes, the people are returning to work on Monday. We called you people with a thought that we might be able to get your understanding and your cooperation and perhaps your frank opinion, as we mentioned yesterday. We thought by doing this, we might be able to avoid possible frictions among the Japanese, who are so divided in their ideas.
- Morri: You have our cooperation in all respects. However, speaking from our standpoint, don't you think you people have more-or-less over-ridden us in not consulting or conferring with us before the referendum. If you people had any sincerity I don't see why you overlooked that.
- Shimada: We admit that we over-rode you people, but you see we tried to put this issue over in a matter of two or three days that . . .
- Inouye: What is your future plan and what kind of negotiation are you expecting to carry on in regard to our release?
- This problem does not concern the 247 detained nor does it concern the mere 16,000 colonists - this is a very delicate problem which affects Japan and America. Do you realize that?
- Akitauki: After many attempts, we found that the release of you people was just impossible; therefore, we took this step of first returning the workers back to their jobs, thereby restoring normalcy to a certain extent, and then continue on to transact negotiation to get your release. Even though we realized that the prime object of this present incident was improvement-of-living-conditions movement. We expect to go into that after we complete our plans of getting your release. With that purpose in mind, we wanted to meet you people to hear your opinion on this matter.
- Inouye: But what is your future plan?

- Shimada: Well, if this place returns to its normal condition, we will try to get you people released, that is justifiable colonists. The Administration also said that they are willing to take that into consideration; only, if the center is in its normal condition.
- Inouye: Are you trying to just give us a report or asking something from us?
- Shimada: If you will only understand why we took this step, that is all we ask. Some people who are returning to work are a bit afraid of those who are not. If you people will agree and understand this situation, the colonists will think more deeply. As you know some colonists have so much confidence in your statements.
- Naito: As Mr. Norri stated, we may have over-riden you, but you see, there were several warehouse workers who wanted to work and who started work at a great risk. In order to protect and support them, we had to take quick action in carrying out the will of many others. So we did not consult you first. I can say that there were 300 young people who were ready to stand up, however, they were suppressed. I think if suppression wasn't done, there would have been riots.
- Norri: The foundation of this, as you know, is the Negotiating Committee. Even if we, six, were called out like this, we cannot decide at our own will. We want you to ask Mr. Best or Colonel Austin to release en masse all those detained without condition. Then the problem is automatically solved, I think.
- Naito: Let's see. Unconditional release? That may be impossible, I think.
- Shimizu: In the past we got into politics and feuds, but after and if the release is granted, we can assure you that the Negotiating Committee will not mix into politics. Even at that time, our object was the improvement of living conditions. With this condition and promise, will you inform the Administration about it? It is certainly not our desire to see riots and disorder. Then consideration, as well as our fullest cooperation will be given wholeheartedly.
- Akitsuki: Negotiation will be facilitated if you will give us such an assurance in writing.
- Katayama: Mail is censored.
- Akitsuki: However, we have our weaknesses too, lest we are accused or suspected by the Administration.
- Norri: If you have any Japanese spirit, I think this matter could be easily solved. If you have any intention in trying to accomplish anything, I know you will succeed, but if you have any personal element involved, it will always be a complete failure.
- Shimizu: There's another plan, if Mr. Norri's is impossible. Since you are so worried about restoring the center to complete normalcy, how about getting the Negotiating Committee (14 members) out for maybe even two or three hours and have them meet and talk to the colonists. I think if you should do that they can convince the people, who are so strongly supporting them, of the fact that true normalcy can only be achieved by yielding to the plans offered by you people.
- Inouye: I had the same feeling. You said that the camp might be divided into two (that is the people). If you believe in peace, I suggest that you consider Mr. Shimizu's plan.

- Yamatani: Well, according to the referendum, we won by a majority, which is little over half, but the ballots were none too good and some people didn't understand the meaning of status quo.
- Akitsuki: Maintenance and Mess are working. Let me give you a sample of some of the opinions expressed. There are families where four or five of their members are working in the mess. Lost status quo is abolished they fear that they may lose their jobs; such people voted for status quo, purely from a selfish standpoint.
- Inouye: On the other hand, there are people who just became tired of status quo and voted against it, so you can't say very much.
- Akitsuki: Two boys came over last night to beat me up. I asked for their names and told them, "If you came to beat me up, why didn't you come during the daytime. Baby has just gone to sleep; you might wake her up." After talking to the boys for a lengthy time, we came to an understanding and they assured me that since we were all working for a common cause, they will be willing to support us.
- Inouye: We realize all the things you people are going through and have told the men in the stockade that you people were working so hard for the common goal. We are just as worried as you people are.
- Morri: However things don't always happen by accident. Only with firm determination, you can go ahead; otherwise, no.
- Shirazu: Men in the stockade commended and appreciated your efforts. We request that you solve the problem from the root. At least try again.
- Akitsuki: Let me say this. We don't want to annoy the Japanese Government any more. We know that they have plenty on their hands. Let's try to solve our own problems with our own hands. We must fully realize that if we fail this time, the whole thing will go on a stand-still.

(At this time, Mr. Yamatani asked if the men could tell us more about the hunger strike.)

- Morri: The reason why we went on a hunger strike was because the Army boys stole our shirts, gloves, fountain pen, and even garlic, while we stood out in the snow for about three hours. I think they took about \$1,000 worth, of course, this is a guess. So we took an aggressive stand and said that isn't it a shame for men of the Army, the most responsible men who are now backing America in this war, to steal people's things and doesn't it spoil the history of U. S. They took an immediate retaliatory step--by food. They threw loaves of bread into the gate--giving an attitude that bread and water was good enough for us. This is the first time we had real unity within the stockade. All were very indignant, so I think there isn't a single thing that cannot be fulfilled if one has a strong will and determination.
- Inouye: The whole thing started just because we refused to appear for roll call.
- Morri: Chief reason, of course, was because two men laughed during the roll call. They weren't laughing at the officer calling the roll, but were laughing at some men who were loading cartons of tobacco, I think. These men happened to be extra small in stature and they were really a comical sight juggling with a piled stack of cartons in an attempt to load it. Well, just because these two laughed they were segregated into another tent. This happened on the 30th. We refused roll call unless these two were released. Thereupon, the Army took this bread-and-water-is-good-enough-for-you attitude. On the 31st, I think, Army men gave in and said that if we appear for roll call

these two will be released and they were released but as we said before we were left out in the snow while the Army boys searched our entire barracks, and took many of our belongings. On the 31st these two returned but we still refused to go out for roll call. The Army said, "All right, we have plenty of soldiers." And they brought out some 300 soldiers so we had to go out for roll call. Our punishment continued to be bread and water.

Inouye: As Japanese we couldn't just concede to the Army's mean attitude like this so we took the same stand Let's not Eat.

Morri: Our strike ended on the 6th. Not a single person ate. We just managed to survive on water and salt.

Yamatani: What caused you to give in finally?

Morri: Mr. Hartman requested Tsuda for an interview. Tsuda came back and requested us to stop the strike and so we did.

Inouye: So you can readily see that the circumstances made it so that we had to be united. We are so united, I don't think individual release would be possible.

Shimizu: If Mr. Inouye's plan is not feasible, see if you can get the Negotiating Committee out for certain number of hours for the purpose, as I mentioned.

Akitsuiki: Whatever the Negotiating Committee members have to say to the people, I suggest that such should be written up.

Interview ended at 3:45 p.m.