CENTER FOR ORAL AND PUBLIC HISTORY
CALIFORNIA STATE UNIVERSITY, FULLERTON

Japanese American Oral History Project

An Oral History with KARL YONEDA

Interviewed

By

Ronald C. Larson and Arthur A. Hansen

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NARRATOR: KARL YONEDA

INTERVIEWER: Ronald C. Larson and Arthur A. Hansen

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PROJECT: Japanese American

RL: This is an interview with Karl Yoneda at his home in San Francisco, California, for the Japanese American Oral History Project [Center for Oral and Public History], California State University, Fullerton. Interviewed by Ronald C. Larson and Arthur A. Hansen on March 3, 1974, at 10 A.M. Mr. Yoneda, I'm interested in finding out about your activities with the newspaper *Doho*. Perhaps it would be easier if you went back to *Rodo Shimbun* [Labor News], an earlier Japanese American newspaper, and tell me how you became involved with that paper.

KY: Well, when I took over *Rodo Shimbun* in 1933, it was the organ of the Japanese language section of the Communist Party USA. The paper was published on a monthly basis, and sometimes we used a special edition on a strike that took place in the Sacramento or Fresno areas. The paper continued until 1936, and we couldn't make any headway. We discussed among ourselves and we decided that our paper, in the progressive nature, would have to change its format as well as its aim.

We decided to have a new paper based in a place where most of the Japanese were situated; in this case, Los Angeles. So we decided to move our office to Los Angeles, and we published under the coalition of communists, progressives, and whoever was to support our paper. I relinquished my editorship of the paper. When the paper started publishing in Los Angeles, the first issue was published on January 1, 1937, under the name *Zenshin*. *Zenshin* means the march forward. It was under the editorship of Henry Sugimura. Incidentally, we didn't decide whether we should use his true name, which was Shuji Fujii. Fujii also had the responsibility to publish the paper.

In the first issue, the paper asked the readers to submit names for this paper. Besides *Zenshin*, other names suggested were *Toso*, which means the struggle; *Zensen*, which means the front line; and *Doho*, which means the brotherhood, et cetera. We eventually picked the name *Doho* because it had more support than the other names submitted by our readers.

First they published on a monthly basis. The editorial policy was to cover Japanese political news on the front page as well as page two. That's the kind of editorial policy that language newspapers published in this country followed. Then pages three and four would be filled with the local news—some of it from farms and canneries—and also, the paper had a space for readers.

RL: For letters?

KY: Yes. The paper was well-received among Japanese, particularly among working people, the farmworkers, and the others who worked in the shops and stores.

RL: What approximately do you think the circulation was? What would be an estimate?

KY: I think they published 2,000 copies, same as the *Rodo Shimbun*. *Rodo Shimbun* had a circulation of 2,000. Actual subscribers were anywhere from two to three hundred. And the rest of the copies were handled by the paper's agents in various places in Stockton, Sacramento, Lodi, Fresno, Los Angeles, Seattle, and New York. They either sell them or give them away.

But in the case of the *Rodo Shimbun*, because of the fact that people knew that it was an organ of the Communist Party, it was very hard to push the paper. Some people shied away, you know, "I don't want the Communist paper." Well, they were antagonistic toward the Communist Party. Then, also the position of the Communist Party means that they were subject to deportation, so there was a fear among some of them. Generally speaking, our group was very small and we didn't have a strong mass base among the Japanese communities.

But in the case of *Doho*, it's a non-communist paper. They tried to push the paper on the coalition basis, and wherever the paper found a place where it could be sold publicly, such as a drugstore or grocery store, these places were willing to generally keep them on the news rack. Whereas the *Rodo Shimbun* never got this kind of a chance. Then Fujii—the name of Fujii is a sort of, what do you say, regency among the Japanese community, because of the fact that his father is a well-known newspaperman, especially in the San Francisco area. His father used to publish a paper back at the beginning of the 1900s. And his father was quite a newspaperman, a pretty good writer.

RL: What was his father's paper like?

KY: Well, the same as the other Japanese language papers: mostly news of Japan. That's what the Japanese people wanted to read. But the writing style is what many people like.

RL: Oh, it can be easily read.

KY: Many people said, His son is editing; he's just as good as his father. So that sort of feeling existed among certain circles, especially among our newspapermen and among some intellectuals.

RL: Several of the *Doho* copies advertised that *Doho* was the only Japanese language progressive newspaper in the United States. Was that true at that time?

KY: Oh, yes, that's the only one. We carried news of political and social interest and also news for the working people.

RL: The *Rodo Shimbun* had a predecessor, too, didn't it, the *Kaikyu Sen*?

KY: Yes, the *Kaikyu Sen*. The first issue of the *Kaikyu Sen* [Class War] was published by the Japanese Language Association of Los Angeles in 1925. This group's members were mostly gardeners, farmworkers, restaurant workers, as well as domestic workers. Some of them belonged to the Communist Party, but the others didn't.

Half of the members were Okinawans. Okinawan people were subject to oppression and exploitation by Japanese interests while they were in Okinawa. They had this experience of being exploited so they are more socially conscience of what's taking place than other Japanese. You find more progressive people among Okinawans; their group membership numbered, I think, about forty to fifty.

Kaikyu Sen lasted, I think, three months, then later moved to Berkeley. Then the group of Japanese communists in Berkeley and Oakland, as well as San Francisco, got together and continued to publish *Kaikyu Sen* under the editorship of Teiichi Kenmotsu, a university graduate.

After several issues, the publishing offices were moved to San Francisco, and they changed its name to *Zeibei Rodo Shimbun*. *Zeibei* means in the United States. It became an organ of the Japanese Laborers Association of America, and the editor was [Sadaichi] Kenmotsu. This occurred in 1928. Then, in 1930, the name changed to *Rodo Shimbun* and began publishing in Japanese and English, with Kenmotsu remaining as editor. The number of copies published were 2,000 and it became the organ of the Communist Party Japanese language section on November 10, 1930.

About this time Kenmotsu was arrested and ordered to be deported as an undesirable alien communist. And when he was deported in 1931, I think, someone else took over the editing until I came to San Francisco, in 1933, and took over the editorship.

RL: I see. So apparently you took his place because he was deported.

KY: Yes. I stayed with the paper until 1936. As a matter of fact, the last issue of *Rodo Shimbun* was issued on December 1, 1936, issue number 172. So it had a long history. Of course,

it was edited by different persons, but the policies and the programs were generally the same as in 1925. The only change was that it was made into a mass paper instead of a sectarian, small group paper.

RL: Going back, could you tell me a little bit more about Shuji Fujii? His background as far

as the movement went, his dealings with *Doho*, his responsibilities, and what exactly he accomplished with the paper, and his activities after *Doho* ceased publication.

KY: Well, I don't know his background too well. He is a Kibei. He returned to the United States after 1930. Among the Kibei you will find many of them under the influence of Japanese militarism, because when Japan invaded Manchuria in 1931, this was the beginning of an upsurge of a strong, pro-war, nationalist movement in Japan. And the government began to suppress free speech and assemblage—and began suppressing many trade unions, as well as arresting union leaders and Communist Party leaders. One of the most famous suppressions was, I think, in 1932 or 1933, when the government arrested seven to eight thousand activists throughout Japan.

So Japan has a long history of peoples' struggles. Shuji Fujii was the product of that period, but for some reason—I don't know how he became a Communist Party member. I have no way to know. When I met him, he was already a member of the Communist Party.

RL: He was pretty much the backbone of *Doho*, wasn't he? He wrote both sections—the Japanese section and the English section—isn't that correct?

KY: Yes. You talk about the collective leadership, but you have to have a figure or figures when you publish a paper. You know, this is so-and-so's paper. And Fujii was well-liked by many people. And many people were willing to supply all sorts of news that the other Japanese press refused to carry.

RL: In the very first English edition of *Doho*, dated June 10, 1938, in the John Kitahara column, there is mention of Sei Fujii, the editor and publisher of the *Kashu Mainichi*, a Los Angeles-based Japanese language newspaper. And from this point on, all the way through the paper's history, Sei Fujii is attacked as being pro-militarist Japan and pro-Axis. Could you expand on this? Who exactly was Sei Fujii and what type of things did he do?

KY: Well, Sei Fujii was well-liked by Japanese leaders in the community because he acted as an interpreter as well as legal advisor. I think he was a lawyer in Japan, so he had a background. And because of the language difficulty, the Japanese had to depend on an interpreter with a knowledge of American law. That's why he had so many supporters among Japanese, not only leaders, but businessmen as well.

RL: But was he really pro-militarist Japan?

KY: Oh, yes, definitely. He was for the emperor system. He was for the Japanese military clique. He was for Asia for Asians.

RL: Since I mentioned John Kitahara, could you tell me a little about him? His byline appears quite often in the earlier years and so does that of Funio Tanaka. Could you tell me more about Tanaka, also?

KY: John Kitahara, he must be Joe Koide [actually, according to Karl Yoneda's

autobiography, *Ganbatte: Sixty-Year Struggle of a Kibei Worker* (1983), Koide's true name was Nobumichi Ukai]. He is the son of a Christian minister. He was born in Tokyo and graduated from one of the universities in Japan. Then he came to the United States and enrolled at the University of Colorado [Denver] in 1925. His background is an intellectual one. And he must have had some experience with the student movement.

RL: In Colorado?

KY: No, in Japan.

RL: Oh, is he a Kibei?

KY: No, he is an Issei.

RL: Oh, he's an Issei?

KY: Yes. I don't know how he joined the Communist Party, but during the process of studying, he joined the Communist Party in New York. And for some reason the party saw that he was cadre material, so the party sent him to Moscow, where he attended the Lenin School in 1928. When he came back here, he took over the leadership of the Japanese section of the Communist Party USA. But most of the members among us didn't trust him because of his background, and because he doesn't look like he's a worker, you see. You can see right away that he came from a nice family, and he talks different than us. He is a very refined one. Although he knows quite a bit about the Communist Party policies, as well as the war of politics. So maybe it was thought that this guy must be a somebody, but they don't know whether he is a genuine communist or not, because we are always afraid of a government agent. He joined the party and posed as a very active member, and in the meantime, he supplied names and other information to the government agencies.

RL: There was a lot of that sort of activity, right?

KY: Oh, yes. But Joe Koide later turned out to be a government agent.

RL: He did?

KY: Yes.

RL: After going to Moscow and everything?

KY: Yes, so I don't know when he became a spy. To this day, we just couldn't pin this down. He could have been an agent from the beginning. Or he could have been coerced into supplying information on communist activities because of the fact that he overstayed his student visa.

RL: Oh, I see. As an Issei he could have been deported.

KY: Maybe the government brought the pressure on him, saying, If you don't supply

information we will deport you.

RL: What about the other writer I mentioned, Fumio Tanaka? Was there a Fumio Tanaka, or was this too a pseudonym?

KY: Fumio Tanaka, he had written many articles for the Communist international publication. So it must be—oh. [reviews an edition of *Doho*] Fumio Tanaka's "Views and Reviews." It could be that Joe Koide used the two names.

RL: I noticed he had the same column.

KY: He was a very fast typist on the typewriter.

RL: Both of their columns are called "Views and Reviews." And they never had both of them on the same page, so I was kind of wondering whether they were the same person. I noticed, too, this might be because of the idea of a coalition—that *Doho* always supported the Democratic Party. This was in 1938, during the New Deal.

KY: Yes.

RL: I have a copy here of *Doho* for November 1, 1938, and the headline says, "Vote Straight Liberal."

KY: Yes.

RL: Did *Doho* ever support any Communist Party candidates or was all its support given to the Democratic Party then?

KY: Oh, wherever there was a communist candidate the *Doho* supported him. I don't know any instance.

RL: It seems as though *Doho*'s candidates were usually what they called liberal candidates: Democrats, New Dealers, or the like. During this time was that pretty much party policy, too? Wasn't the popular front a move towards supporting Roosevelt's New Deal?

KY: Yes, that's more or less the Communist Party policy, to work within not only the Democratic Party, but any mass organization where workers belong.

RL: Unions?

KY: Yes, unions and the other mass organizations, the women's organizations, and even churches.

RL: In the November 1, 1938, edition of *Doho*, there is an article with the caption, "Nisei Elected to Offices in Alaska Cannery Union." And throughout the paper they refer to you as vice president of the Alaska Cannery Union. Could you tell me something about this union, your role in it, and a little background about it during the *Doho* period of,

say, 1938 to the end of 1941?

KY: Well, *Doho* supported the CIO [Congress of Industrial Organizations] organizing drive, and one of the organizing drives was among cannery workers used in Alaska. So, in 1937, I was asked to come up to Seattle to organize the cannery workers, which resulted in the forming of the Cannery and Field Laborers Union, Local 7, CIO. The union was mostly composed of Filipinos, about 3,000 of them, and also included some 700 to 800 Japanese. The rest of the union members were blacks, whites, and others. It was quite a big union. Usually, the president was a Filipino, and the vice president was George Takigawa, a student at the University of Washington at that time. And the publicity chairman, Dyke Miyagawa, was another university graduate, and a very capable writer.

RL: Yes.

KY: So that union functioned until 1941. After Pearl Harbor, Japanese were excluded from the Pacific Coast so they were not able to go to Alaska. But the union operated without the Japanese members until after the war. When the Japanese came back from the camps and the other areas, they were allowed to go to Alaska, but not too many went there; I'll say maybe 100 or 200.

RL: Not nearly the number that were in it before. What was your role within *Doho*? What was your assignment? What did you do?

KY: Well, my function in the *Doho* was to act as the San Francisco agent, so I used to take care of the correspondence, collecting money, and also getting ads, as well as getting subscriptions. And, also, we had the *Doho* readers circle here, monthly meetings. This group of Japanese readers got together once a month and discussed ways and means of how to get new subscriptions, or how to raise money, and also made suggestions as to what sort of articles should appear in the paper. I also had my own column in each issue of the Japanese section.

RL: I noticed that periodically you had Friday columns in the English edition as well.

KY: Yes, now and then I thought that maybe it would be interesting for Nisei or descendants in English, but otherwise they were all in Japanese.

RL: Are you more comfortable writing in Japanese than in English?

KY: Well, definitely. You know, I think in Japanese first.

RL: Oh, I see. In the March 1, 1939, edition of *Doho*, Shuji Fujii had a column entitled, "Fred Tayama, Hypocrite." And from this point on, the paper seems militantly opposed to Fred Tayama and his dealings with his restaurant employees. Could you tell me a little bit about Fred Tayama and why *Doho* opposed him?

KY: Well, Fred Tayama was a successful Nisei businessman. He and his brothers used to run a chain of restaurants in Los Angeles. I don't know how many; they must have had four or five. The name of the restaurant chain was the U.S. Café. There were other

restaurants run by Japanese, but Fred Tayama's restaurants had the worst working conditions. And when the employees complained, they got fired. It was very hard to organize his shop because he fired anyone who made a move toward the union. He would spot him right away and kick him out. The working conditions in the restaurants was, I think, the worse than in other fields.

For instance, in those days men used to work twelve hours a day at the split shift, seven days a week—with just two days off per month, and pay was $1 per day. So, in many instances they didn't even have cigarette money after paying for their rooms. Of course, the employers said, Well, we feed these men three times, even four times a day, and give them as much as they can eat. That's their excuse. At the same time, the number of unemployed people was so great, not only among the Japanese, but among others throughout the United States. So, through the eyes of the employer, men were plenty available. These men were looking for any kind of a job. So, for even $1 a day they were willing to work, as long as they had something to eat.

So, Fred Tayama and others took advantage of this situation. In the case of Fred Tayama, he took a very strong anti-union stand, which he told to union organizers and other people. So that's why he was hated by many restaurant workers, "By gosh, I don't care how much he pays me, I don't want to work for him!"

RL: It's also mentioned in the same issue of *Doho* that Fred Tayama at this time was the first vice president of the Japanese American Citizens League [JACL].

KY: Yes. In the meantime he promoted himself within the Japanese business community, and a certain segment of the people in the community looked up to him as one of the leaders.

RL: Because of his success in business?

KY: Yes.

RL: In the March 15, 1939, edition of *Doho*, there is a letter written in response to a Fumio Tanaka article, which refers to Buddy Uno. It's very derogatory. Tanaka describes him as being a "fence sitter," one willing to go whichever way fortune takes him. In later editions of the paper, Uno is reported as having spoken at JACL meetings, and *Doho* attacks the JACL for allowing such a fascist speaker.

KY: Yes. Buddy Uno was the news reporter for, I think, the *Hokubei Asahi* [San Francisco]. During the Manchurian occupation he went to Japan, and he also went to Manchuria. And he was convinced that what Japan was doing was just cause. So when he returned to the United States, he made a lecture tour of the Japanese community wearing a Japanese officer's uniform with a sword. Really! (laughs) In the Japanese military fashion. And the Japanese community loved it. Because here he made such a strong pitch for the cause of Japan. "Some day Japan will be the king over Asia, and Japan will be the emancipator of all Asian people." Naturally, Japanese people swallowed his propaganda talk.

RL: So he had a big effect on Japanese Americans then?

KY: Well, in some sections they looked at it as sort of a comic thing; they didn't pay much attention. But most of the people thought it was great. I don't know what happened to him. He is a Nisei. Incidentally, he is the brother of Edison Uno, who you hear so much about.

RL: Tell me something about Edison Uno.

KY: Well, he is a liberal, a quite outspoken liberal among the Nisei. He served on the grand jury here in San Francisco. He exposed the grand jury system to the press, and to a television audience. He made a big name [for himself] and some people think he will make a good member for the board of supervisors. He's a very eloquent speaker, and he teaches at San Francisco [State University].

RL: Is Kasimuro Uno the same person as Buddy Uno?

KY: Yes.

RL: Okay. I just wanted to clear that up since both names are used by *Doho* at different times. Buddy Uno's father was a very noteworthy figure, wasn't he?

KY: Oh, I don't know too much about his father. His father was interned, suspected as an enemy alien Asian. I think he stayed in camp for the duration of the war. I take that back. I think the second year the government allowed internees to send for their families. That's how Edison Uno and others lived with their fathers in detention camp [Crystal City, Texas]. Then later he was released, so he took his family and they went to the relocation center. I don't know which one.

RL: Do you think *Doho*'s main interest, editorially, was labor? Or was it primarily political, in the sense that it was anti-Japanese militarism and pro-progressive toward American issues? What would you call it, a labor paper, a political paper, or what?

KY: Well, I would say it was a political paper as well as a labor paper. But I would also say that community paper would much more fit in this case. Because *Doho* carried a slogan at the top of the front page in its Japanese section, "For Peace and Prosperity for the Japanese in the United States." We kept that slogan all the way through *Doho*'s history.

RL: In every issue of the Japanese section?

KY: Yes. Not in the English section. Was there any heading in the English section? I forget.

RL: Yes, "Equality, Peace and Progress."

KY: Yes, but in the Japanese section it clearly says, "For the Japanese in the United States." And this was a pretty good slogan, so that most of the Japanese would support us. They'd say, I go for it. There was no argument about it, but only a question as to how to

go about it. Then there would be arguments. Our paper not only appealed to the working class, but to professional people and business people.

RL: The May 20, 1939, issue announced that *Doho* would sponsor a huge rally on June third to protest Japanese fascism. They said that they expected a turnout of thousands of people. Two issues later, I think, they declared the rally a great success. Do you remember anything about that rally? What was it like?

KY: You know, Japan began invading North China in 1937. That was the beginning of the Sino-Japan War. This unjust war was going on at full scale, so naturally *Doho* was the only paper among the Japanese press which attacked the action of the Japanese government. And the *Doho* had quite strong support among Japanese, as well as Caucasians. Because of the English section, quite a few Caucasians subscribed to *Doho*. And it's name was well-known among progressive circles, particularly in California. So this meeting, I gather—I wasn't there—was attended by not only Japanese but Caucasians, too. That's why the rally was such a success. That was the kind of unity that the Japanese needed.

RL: In *Doho*'s "Letter Box" for June 15, 1939, a letter appears over your signature as vice president of the Alaska Cannery Workers Union.

KY: Yes.

RL: Was this your official title? Did you usually sign your name in this fashion?

KY: That's right. Well, usually, whatever I wrote, or any other office wrote, reflected the policy of the union.

RL: I see.

KY: Of course, in other unions they do it differently. You know, the head of the union writes whatever he wants and he doesn't give a damn about what the members have to say. Our union was one of the few militant unions in the Bay Area at that time. We took a strong anti-Japanese militarist stand. We were also against the Nazis as well as the fascist tendencies that existed in the United States.

RL: In *Doho*, there were many critical references to the *Kashi Mainichi*. I was just wondering what reaction the *Kashu Mainichi* and the other vernacular papers had toward *Doho*? Do you remember that?

KY: There were four dailies in Los Angeles at that time: the *Kashu Mainichi*, the *Rafu Shimpo, Rafu Nichibei*, and I forgot the other one. The Japanese sections of these papers were more or less pro-Japan. Most of the items they carried were from the Domei dispatch, which sugarcoated the imperial headquarters' announcements. Well, that's what most of the Japanese people want to read. But in the English section, it depended on the editors. Some of them took a mild approach towards the Sino-Japan War. In some issues they might take a strong stand, but not too strong, just strong enough not to antagonize the editors of the Japanese sections-because they are the bosses. All the

publishers were Issei. But in the case of *Kashu Mainichi*, Sei Fujii was one of the outspoken publishers for the cause of the Japanese military government. So that's why *Doho* picked on *Kashu Mainichi* more than the other papers. Incidentally, the publisher of *Rafu Shimpo*, H.T. Komai, approached some issues with more or less of a liberal mind.

RL: This is Togo Tanaka?[1]

KY: No, he was the editor of the *Rafu Shimpo*'s English section. But the publisher was H.T. Komai. So maybe *Doho* didn't pick on the *Rafu Shimpo* so much, even though the front page articles were the same as the *Kashu Mainichi* or the other Japanese papers, because they all carried the Domei dispatch.

RL: Did *Doho* also carry the Domei dispatch?

KY: No, because everyone read the Japanese dailies. So [it was] no use to carry duplicate information.

RL: So *Doho* provided an alternative then, right?

KY: Yes. Besides there is not enough space there. But some of the items that *Doho* carried explained what the news meant to us, and to the future of Japan.

RL: Since I mentioned Togo Tanaka, was there a pretty good relationship at that time between *Doho*'s staff and Tanaka?

KY: Well, I don't know too much about their personal relationships. But most likely, Shuji Fujii, being a fulltime editor, must have known all of the English section editors of the Japanese press. And among the English editors, there weren't any anti-labor or anti-communist editors at that time. So Shuji Fujii must have gotten along with all of them.

RL: Another prominent feature of *Doho* that I noted was its coverage of what they call fifth column activists, within Little Tokyo, and their criticism of other papers for not mentioning them, as if trying to hide the fact of their existence.

KY: Yes.

RL: Exactly what sort of fifth column activities were going on then? And were they as considerable as *Doho* appears to point out?

KY: Well, one example was that the overseas ex-servicemen, of those who served in the Japanese army, organized the Overseas Ex-Servicemen League in San Francisco in 1937, right after the outbreak of the Sino-Japan War. And they began collecting a war relief fund, which is understandable, for wounded soldiers and families.

But later, they began handling Japanese government war bonds. Naturally, in

[1] Togo Tanaka, OH# 1271, Center for Oral and Public History.

these drives there must have been some fifth column activists among the organizers. And I'm sure that the Japanese government was pushing this campaign through some channel that those in the organization were not able to see. And once you start to push the Japanese government war bonds, suddenly it's a violation of the American democratic principle. Or when you buy bonds, you are supporting the Japanese invasion of China, which is unjust. And practically everyone in the American public knew it.

There was great support for Chiang Kai-shek at the that time. He is a hero and you welcome him. And then you can't help these fifth column activities. Even the government stepped in, and I think it stopped the handling of war bonds because they didn't register with the government under the—what do you call it? The security—the handling of foreign countries through stocks. [U.S. Security and Exchange Commission?] You must have registered with the government. So, later they withdrew the war bond drive. Oh, yes, the organizational step calls for _____ (inaudible). They had as high as 8,000 members throughout the United States. And many Nisei don't want to talk about it.

RL: They like to pretend that it wasn't there.

KY: Then they'll say, Why wash dirty linen in public? Let's keep quiet. But the facts are facts, you know. It was there and the record shows that 8,000 supported it. And most of the Nisei who kept quiet knew what was going on in their families. The Nisei kept quiet because of the Japanese family system: the father is the master of the family and whatever he does—why the rest of the family members don't say. So most of the Nisei keep quiet. And I'm sure that no writing by Nisei mentioned this fact. They must've raised a couple of million dollars.

But in 1941, Roosevelt froze the foreign assets as well as the sending of money. And this organization decided to disband. Not only raising for war chest fund, but also, they had a big drive among Nisei students who attended the Japanese language schools. You know, in California alone we had 25,000 Japanese language schools, and nearly 20,000 Nisei attended language schools. And in each classroom there were two boxes. One to put in a penny. They said, Don't eat candy; save that money for the war relief fund. It was clearly stated. And the other one for scrap metal, or chewing gum wrapping paper, or anything. That was for the war chest fund to be sent to Japan.

RL: Little pieces of metal?

KY: Yes, or anything. It comes in handy. Particularly they stressed very strongly that when your father or someone used the cigarette—you know, they used to have this tinfoil—be sure to bring them to the classroom and put it in the box. To see which school raised more, that kind of a campaign went on. Then the school instructors instructed the students to write the so-called comfort letter to the Japanese soldiers in North China. And several Buddhist churches organized the comfort mission to be sent to North China to visit wounded soldiers. Of course, that's in name only, "wounded soldiers." They wanted to say brave, courageous, Japanese soldiers fighting in China—they didn't say killing off Chinese indiscriminately.

The most common phrase the Japanese army used was the "communist bandit." They would arrest anyone and say he was a communist bandit—so just chop off his head. They must have killed off thousands under the guise of people being communist bandits. But this wasn't reported in any English section of the Japanese press.

RL: Talking about language schools and the fifth columnist activities, in the August 15, 1939, edition, *Doho* exposed a recruitment plan from Japan: to recruit twenty promising students to come back for training and then come back as information agents. Can you tell me more about that? Later, *Doho* printed names of the people who went. Do you remember that?

KY: They sent some from here, too. It was, I think, in 1940. Was it in 1940?

RL: This was 1939.

KY: Oh, this was arranged by Japanese generals in the consulate here.

RL: In the October 15 edition of 1939, it gives names: Kay Tateishi from the *Rafu Shimpo.* Another person they cite is Isamu Masuda, who won a *Rafu Shimpo* award for patriotic oratory. I was just wondering since they gave names, if you knew anything about that recruitment?

KY: I don't know any details, but usually they picked them from Japanese language schools, to see which one is good material for the Japanese government. Not only Japanese language schools but also Buddhist youth associations, Christian youth associations, and women associations of various churches. All these groups cooperated with the Overseas Ex-servicemen Association to raise the war relief and the war chest fund during the Sino-Japan War. This continued until 1940. Everybody pitched in practically, including Nisei language school students.

RL: And newspapers were pretty big on it?

KY: Of course, some of the Nisei you ask about it today are apparently unaware of these facts. For instance, _____(inaudible) the martial arts association that mostly teaches you Japanese fencing, their head was Mitsuru Tōyama, head of the Japanese Black Dragons in Japan. And one of the Nisei who took this fencing, said, "Well, I joined this just for the sports purpose. I never thought of this organization being controlled by Japanese militarists." But just the same, there they were asked to contribute for the cause of war in Japan.

RL: I'd like to introduce Arthur Hansen, who will continue with the interview.

AH: Mr. Yoneda, during the period in the late 1930s when *Doho* was spending most of its time directing its attacks against the Japanese nationalism coming out of the *Kashu Mainichi*, they had a rather ambivalent attitude towards *Rafu Shimpo*. What was the basic philosophical difference between the *Kashi Mainichi* and the *Rafu Shimpo* at that time?

KY: Well, as I gather, the policy of the *Doho* was to work with whoever agreed on a certain issues—not all issues. And in this case, some of the Japanese press, particularly in the English section, cooperated with the *Doho*. That's because of Shuji Fujii. He was well-known among the Japanese community as a well-liked, progressive guy.

AH: Who in the English section cooperated with Shuji Fujii?

KY: Oh, I don't know their names.

AH: Did Togo Tanaka, the editor?

KY: I don't know when he took over the editorship of *Rafu Shimpo*.

AH: About 1936, I think it was.

KY: So most likely he had a friendly relationship with Togo, I gather, but I don't know these personal relationships with these Nisei newspaper people.

AH: One of the things that happened was during the crisis, just prior to the announcement of Executive Order 9066, Togo Tanaka went back to Washington several times. And one of his trips was partially financed by the Japanese Association, and *Doho* took him to task for that.

KY: Oh.

AH: And he claimed later on that he had no knowledge, that the tab was being paid for by the Japanese Association. He felt that the publishers paid it and he didn't realize the source of the money.

KY: Well, Togo went to Washington with [Katsuma] Mukaeda. He was, I'm not sure, the secretary or president of the Central California Japanese Association, and I think the Japanese Association coughed up the expense. I don't think *Rafu Shimpo* had that much money for sending Togo to Washington, D.C. This was mainly to try to ease the relationship between the United States and Japan. At the same time, I don't know that Togo told you about it. I think his assignment was to see that this crisis would not affect the Japanese in the United States, particularly Nisei.

AH: What was the attitude of *Doho* towards the JACL?

KY: Well, the JACL was controlled by a very conservative element, so *Doho* criticized certain policies. On the other hand, *Doho* had many friends within the organization. So they didn't have a frontal attack on the JACL. They thought it was one organization that they had to work with very closely.

AH: So there was an overlapping relationship between *Doho* and JACL.

KY: That's right, yes.

AH: What about the repeated attacks by *Doho* on the Kibei group within the JACL? There was a Kibei chapter, wasn't there?

KY: Oh, yes.

AH: And was that only in Los Angeles, or was there one in San Francisco, also?

KY: Yes, in San Francisco, too.

AH: And what was the nature of that organization that set it apart from the mainstream of the JACL?

KY: Well, the Kibei group—you see, the Japanese American Citizens League didn't take any stand on the Sino-Japan War when the war broke out in 1937. They finally took a stand on the war issue—no, they didn't say anything whatsoever when the crisis became so acute in 1941. Finally, Saburo Kido issued a statement stating that we are loyal Americans, our place is in the United States, we have to uphold the Constitution of the United States, et cetera. But they didn't touch on what's going on in the Far East or the Japanese community.

I said before that the Overseas Ex-servicemen Association, composed of mainly Japanese servicemen who lived here, organized to raise the war relief and the war chest funds, and they had as high as 8,000 members throughout the United States, with more than eighty branches. And certainly *Doho* was the only one to expose this pro-Japan activity, and no one else. So the Kibei group within the JACL usually sided with these pro-Japan groups.

And James Oda was one of the Kibei section members. Oda criticized, and in some cases, attacked the Kibei leadership headed by Dave Itami, a vice president of the Kibei. "Why don't you take a stand on the upsurge of fascism in the United States?"

AH: Was the JACL also a little bit uneasy about the Kibei wing of the organization?

KY: Well, yes. On the one hand they more or less treated them as their stepson.

AH: As an unwanted stepson?

KY: Yes. Actually, they didn't like to have a Kibei section. They'd much rather have them under the general overall organization instead of a Kibei section as such.

AH: So JACL was pretty conservative itself, but the Kibei section was even more conservative?

KY: Yes.

AH: If you measure it against Japanese nationalism as a standard?

KY: The Kibei section, without consent of the JACL headquarters, carried on many cultural

activities, which turned out to be nothing but the praising of Japan's war effort in China. They put on this play praising the courageous Japanese soldiers—three soldiers who carried the dynamite with them and broke through the barricade in Shanghai, a famous story.

AH: The Kibei put on a play?

KY: Yes. That's true in San Francisco, too. They put out their own publication in the Japanese language, so that the JACL headquarters didn't know what the contents of that were. But every item praised Hitler and Mussolini, as well as the Japanese military government.

AH: Did you ever go to any Kibei meetings?

KY: No, but I had access to their publications.

AH: Do you recall the name of it?

KY: Well, I don't know exactly. I don't have a copy with me. I should have kept those copies.

AH: Did it parallel the *Pacific Citizen*, only separately run by the Kibei group within the JACL?

KY: Well, mostly. Usually no news item appeared in the magazine, only what some member thought and his attitude toward a certain subject, or his reminiscences of his life in Japan.

AH: Did that come out of San Francisco or Los Angeles?

KY: Both places.

AH: Do you recall who was the editor or the moving force within that publication?

KY: Well, in Los Angeles, most likely Dave Itami. He was very capable of writing in both Japanese and English. And the San Francisco editor was [a man named] Akai, who later joined the Communist Party. He broke away from the Kibei group.

AH: Now, *Doho* was taking a very strong stand against Japanese nationalism, and all of a sudden Pearl Harbor comes along and you were arrested, weren't you?

KY: Yes.

AH: And what was the rationale for that?

KY: Well, I guess that sort of shows that the U.S. Government doesn't even trust a person like me, making sure that he's really for the United States and against Japan.

AH: A person like you meaning because of your left-wing ideology, or because of the fact

that you're Japanese, or both?

KY: Well, I guess this has much to do with the anti-Japanese racism that exists in this country. Whether he is fascist or nationalist or communist, they just don't want to trust him. The best way to find out is to put him in the can and see whether what the guy says is true or not.

AH: Was it exceptional to have Nisei rounded up and put in jail after Pearl Harbor?

KY: Well, besides myself, there were three others that were picked up here.

AH: In San Francisco?

KY: In San Francisco.

AH: Who were they?

KY: One is Yasuo Abiko, the son of Kyutaro Abiko, a well-known pioneer. Abiko was the English editor of *Nichibei*. Another is George—I forgot his last name, but a proprietor of a Japanese tea garden in Golden Gate Park.

AH: He was a Nisei, too?

KY: Yes. Then the other one I didn't know what his connection was.

AH: Koji Ariyoshi wasn't picked up?

KY: No. The reason they picked up the others was because of their ties with the tea garden and newspapers—especially newspapers, because all newspapers were pro-Japan.

AH: Well, your situation was probably most unusual, then?

KY: Yes.

AH: They didn't have a real ground for it in the same sense that—well, they probably didn't have a real ground in the other cases either, but they at least had a sense that the person was the head of an organ of opinion or something of that nature.

KY: As a matter of fact, the FBI told me many times, We know where you stand, but we want to make sure if what you say is the truth.

AH: So how long did they keep you?

KY: Two nights.

AH: Two nights? How did you get released.

KY: The third day one of the inspectors came around, "I'm sorry we kept you so long. We have to check and double check to make sure. We don't know, a person like you may

play as the double agent and do damage during time of war."

AH: I guess there were double agents even within *Doho*, as you've indicated. So there was a possibility.

KY: Well, I didn't get mad too much, you know. Anyway, I said, "I don't have my car, so you better take me home." So one of the agents said, "Well, we'll get you a car and they'll take you home." That's the only time that the government agency chauffeured me.

AH: You must have been pretty uncomfortable—after you were picked up, being put into jail—more than likely with Issei, who perhaps had some strong affiliations with Japanese nationalism. And you had been playing a role over the past number of years, bringing attention to their nationalism and calling, you know, them to task for it. You must have been spending a couple of uneasy days and nights in that cell.

KY: No, I had a grand time with these pro-Japanese groups. Let me tell you the incident. As soon as I was brought in in the morning to Immigration Detention House on Silver Avenue, I noticed about fifty or sixty Japanese community leaders there, most of whom I knew. And, as soon as I came in, the principal of a Japanese language school, Suzuki—he is for Japan but he is a very kind, sort of a nice guy that likes to talk to me. He said, "Mr. Yoneda, you must have come to the wrong place!" (laughs) So I said, "Yes, I think so." "Well, sit down and don't worry about the others."

Well, of course, others there were the strong anti-communist bunch. As a matter of fact, one of them said, "If this wasn't under the control of the U.S. Government, you would be a machine gun target." And they are loudly talking about—through the window you can see the Golden Gate Bridge. Especially Kondo, that's the one who raised the three daughters that were university graduates and ran a pro-Japan weekly.

AH: His daughters were in that Young Democrats group?

KY: Yes. And Kondo said loudly, "Wait and see, in another couple of days there will be a Japanese navy that will come into the bay and free us." (laughs)

AH: They were fully anticipating that?

KY: Oh, yes. They truly believed it. And there was no use to argue with these people. But there were a few that were very friendly toward me. One was Kenji Asai. His brother was a graduate of Columbia and elected to the Diet [of Japan]. He made lecture tours of the United States many times on behalf of the Japanese government. His brother had an office on Fourth Street to handle stocks. He was also a University of California graduate. But he was constantly with me, "At a time like this, we need a person like you." He said this to me many times, because these people didn't pay attention to him; they were really fanatics. "But now I realize," he said, "that Japan is wrong. At a time like this we have to be quiet and raise any issue like other people do."

AH: So your experience there wasn't really that tense?

KY: No. As a matter of fact, as soon as I was released, I sent him cigarettes and fruit, and I have a nice letter from him. I still have that letter with me. He repeatedly said, "I'll depend on a person like you to meet a crisis like this that the Japanese—particularly the Japanese—are facing."

AH: Could you be so kind as to read the letter he sent you into the tape?

KY: Yes. This is a letter from Kenji Asai for detainment at the immigration house.

Dear Mr. Yoneda, December 11, 1941, 8 A.M. I express my deepest appreciation for your kind present, from the bottom of my heart. Please imagine how I have been deeply impressed how it came to me so unexpectedly. I was called to the letter office just atop the step at 7:30 last night, and found a large bag containing the most delicious fruits and the cigarettes. I was quite astonished to find your name and choked with appreciation. I shall endeavor to conserve them to enjoy your kindness as long as I can stretch. I confess to you that I gave up my smoking habits fourteen years ago, so I gave the cigarettes to my friend, who enjoyed your kindness the same as I do. At first I wished to take the package as a treasure of this incident, but I realize it is selfishness, so I decided to share it with my friend, who appreciates it most. Please appreciate this with me. After you left here, our number is increasing day and night, as you will see in the paper. Now it is almost 100 from San Francisco, Sonoma, Stockton, Hollister, San Jose, Watsonville, Salinas, Monterey and others. Mr. Yoneda, please do your best at this most crucial moment in our Japanese American history, by realizing your duty as a Japanese American citizen, and do your utmost efforts to lead and counsel our helpless Issei and their children on the outside by utilizing your privileges as an American citizen. Please give my best regards to Mrs. Yoneda, to whom I have no privilege of meeting yet. Most sincerely yours, Kenji Asai. P.S. Many thanks for your weekly. I shall sure enjoy it. That was the *Doho* that I sent him.

AH: Oh, you sent him a *Doho*?

KY: *I wrote a letter this morning to express my feelings as best I can by my limited English, but I was puzzled where it should be sent. Fortunately, the paper reached me in time. With appreciation, Kenji Asai.*

AH: So he could read the situation and he thought that it would be better to take an attitude like yours than some hysterical, pro-Japanese position, then?

KY: Well, the school teachers, they didn't get excited like the other community leaders.

AH: You mean the language school teachers?

KY: Yes. I became friends with these teachers while I was gathering the news for *Doho*. I would usually stop by language schools, and sometimes would use their libraries as a reference place.

AH: So you had known them in the past, then, and just the human contact dissolved some of the ideological differences, right?

KY: Yes. So I had enemies, and at the same time, I had friends among them. The restaurant called the Eagle Café, its proprietor was a real pro-Japan type. You know, "For the emperor I will die anytime." That kind of a type. And every time I came up, "Here comes Mr. Communist Party boss. Come on in. I admire your principles. I admire your guts. Have a coffee on me." Free coffee every morning I go there. "I want to pay." "No, no, no, I respect you as a person, not as a Japanese, who has the guts to stick to the idea and the principle."

AH: So you were a respected adversary for him.

KY: Yes. He returned to Japan. He died. His son took over the Eagle Café and is now working at some bakery, I understand.

AH: There is no doubt in your mind during this period that, as you've documented other places, there was a very concerted pro-Japan movement within the Japanese American communities on the West Coast.

KY: Oh, definitely. We just couldn't pin down who were the fifth columnists. But, at the same time, you know, the U.S. Government really played a dirty trick on the Japanese. The number arrested among Italian and German aliens—nowhere near approached the number of Japanese aliens. I remember the Thursday when the list of all the arrested enemy aliens was announced, more than 1,100 Japanese aliens were arrested. Whereas in the case of German or Italian aliens, only 1,000. And I knew very well at that time that we had more vicious, open, fascistic activities among the Japanese. So certainly, to my way of thinking, this anti-Japanese racism played a great part in this rounding up of an unnecessary number of Japanese. For instance, Terminal Island. I'm sure there were a few outspoken, pro-Japanese leaders, but not all 500 fishermen.

AH: Terminal Island has sometimes been talked about as a particularly Japanized area. What explains the fact that their assimilation was less than, say, among the Japanese in West Los Angeles or in part of San Francisco?

KY: Well, first of all, the place was isolated from other parts. And their lifestyle and their daily life was similar among 500 families. They were a family of fisherman, and during the cannery season, their wives worked in a cannery. So, in everyone's daily conversation, the subject was whether my husband brought in more fish or less fish than last catch, or made more money or less money. Naturally, there was a close tie, a close kinship among them.

AH: So they were very much more contained and homogenous as people, then?

KY: Yes. So there was a close tie among them. So when the councils were raising the questions of money for certain events, they always met the quota that the Japanese Association used to assign them. They had their own Japanese Association besides the Japanese Fishermen Association.

AH: Well, pro-Japan sentiment then was more pronounced in, say, that area, too?

KY: Yes. In a place like that it is understandable, you see. Just like in a country area there is more pro-Japan feeling as well as pro-Japan customs. For instance, January first, they have a new year's celebration. Usually residents get together at the language school auditorium and sing the national anthem, and then they'll have the opening of the pictures of our emperor and empress, which you're supposed to not look at. The principal takes the pictures out of a box and bows three times. And then they put them back again and put the box away. This is one of the ceremonial customs. Then the representatives of various groups, associations, and youth groups—in some cases Boy Scout leaders and student leaders—will make short speeches praising Japan's greatness.

AH: Is it fair to say that the strength of the pro-Japan sentiment was not in the cities like Los Angeles and San Francisco, but in the rural areas?

KY: Well, in comparison to the population, let's say, in the Sacramento area; there, practically all of them attended ceremonies. But in San Francisco, with, say, a population of 20,000, how many will attend new year's ceremony or founding day or the birthday of the emperor, or other holidays or ceremonies? Maybe four or five hundred or more.

AH: So it's sort of like today when we speak about Mid-America being the heart of super-patriotism, you might say the same thing prevailed then for the Japanese population on the coast.

KY: Yes.

AH: Although the organs of opinion were in the cities. And there were movements that gathered strength from these rural areas because it was just a more conservative way of life, and they were all together in this large, sort of family, and they didn't interact with other influences like those in the larger American culture. So they almost had preserved for them a Japanese way, right?

KY: Especially among the fishermen. They made very good money. Among the Japanese, I think, occupation-wise, fishermen did far better than the other occupations. For instance, every time you see a new Buick—it used to be a fancy car in Japantown—it was usually owned by a fisherman. So we used to say, Well, here comes a fisherman; he must have a good catch; he's driving a new Buick.

AH: So their standard of living was a little bit higher?

KY: No, they invested in additional boats and other supplies. I don't think so. They lived the same as they had before because of the living quarters, you know, you can't make them any bigger. The small, individual houses were just like barracks. It's the same style of building.

AH: So their housing and their outward style of life was pretty much the same, but they were able to make a little bit more money than the average person who worked in a restaurant or had a small business in Little Tokyo.

KY: It is very common that among them their annual earnings were from $7,000 to $15,000. This is according to a Japanese history book edited by the Japanese Association, published in 1940. So, naturally, among them they had kind of a feeling of pride, in doing better than others. So that added to their feeling of kinship and closeness. Of course, if they were poor, I'm sure that their ties of kinship were much stronger, too.

AH: There was at least a third Los Angeles vernacular newspaper. I think it's called the *Sangyo Nippo*. They largely had a readership within the rural areas. It would be interesting to me to know whether they pursued a strong pro-Japan stand, or did they mostly concern themselves—

KY: In Los Angeles?

AH: Yes.

KY: Hold it, I'm going to find it. Los Angeles had the three Japanese dailies in 1940: *Rafu Shimpo*, *Kashu Mainichi*, and *Beikoku Sangyo Nippo*. The last one was mainly supported by the growers and the businessmen. So their editorial policies were geared towards the thinking and wishes of businessmen and growers. And naturally, it was very conservative, and in many cases, very pro-Japan oriented.

Incidentally, the editor of this paper was Shin'ichi Katō. I think he is another one that you ought to interview. He wrote the book called *A History of One Hundred Years of the Japanese and the Japanese Americans in the United States*. He is retired now. He is an Issei born in Hiroshima. And he is an intellectual. In 1928, when a group of intellectuals organized the Friday Association to study Marxism, he attended this group. We were on talking terms, but their stand was anti-Communist Party. They were for Marxism, but against the Communist Party.

AH: When he edited the paper he wasn't a Marxist, was he?

KY: No. At the time that he was in the Friday Association, he was a news reporter for *Rafu Nichibei.* And when the *Rafu Nichibei* bankrupted, I think these people started organizing this *Sangyo Nippo*. And during the strikes, which took place in various Southern California farms, Katō also became the secretary of the Southern California Japanese Growers Association. And he led the immigration officers to various campuses, pointing out, "He is a red, he is a red, he is a communist." They were all Japanese. He led anti-labor scab activities. But otherwise the guy was well-liked by many people, particularly businessmen, because he was the spokesman for them.

AH: I want to ask you about the term *aka*. It was used in the Japanese American community prior to the war. And *Doho*, of course, was sometimes smeared by the accusation that it was run by *aka*. What connotation did this term carry to people within the community?

KY: Well, I think it's the same as in English. You know, he is a red. It would mean that he or she was a traitor. In many cases, they would be isolated by a community. And it made life difficult in getting a job and a place to live.

AH: Did it mean specifically communist or just progressive?

KY: Well, anyone contrary to the established customs or traditions within the community, they call him *aka*.

AH: Was it used with pride by people who were self-consciously communist or left wing?

KY: No, but it's funny, you know. If someone starts to argue and you don't agree with him, he figures that you must be an *aka*, although he is apolitical and has nothing to do with politics.

AH: So it means troublemaker in that context, right?

KY: So it's widely used. I think in English we don't use that so widely as among the Japanese.

AH: It's a term, then, that has a lot of different applications, but it usually means that somehow or other you're being hard to get along with. What was the general opinion in the Japanese community of *Doho*? Did the community resent *Doho* because of its activities? Because of its exposures? Because of its attacks on restaurant owners, et cetera? Did you ever have your office, say, visited by people who wanted to shut it down? Was there any form of intimidation? Was it something you had to do surreptitiously, behind the scenes? Or was it something you could do quite openly?

KY: Well, generally we were well-received within the community. They read the Japanese press every day, nothing but the Domei dispatch because they liked to read the one showing the imperial headquarters announced that the Japanese army captured this town, that town, killed so many enemies. That kind of news they like to read, but sometimes you get fed up with the same news. You would like to read something contrary to what the Domei dispatch carries. So some of them were curious. Some of them just wanted to read some other items. But, among working people, they welcomed the *Doho*.

AH: Was the readership largely among young Nisei?

KY: No, mostly among young Issei and the Kibei.

AH: So you had very few Nisei readers then. Who financed *Doho*?

KY: Oh, the average working people like myself and others. Each city like New York, Seattle, Los Angeles, San Francisco, Stockton, Sacramento, had *Doho* readers' circle. They met once a month, sometimes once in two months, and raised the money. They found the ways and means to get more subscriptions.

AH: You mean it had extended that far?

KY: Oh, yes. It was a national paper, not only a Los Angeles paper.

AH: But most of your news had to do with Los Angeles, right?

KY: Yes, because it's easier to get it, and most of the news that the outlying districts would send in would become old news by the time it got to Los Angeles. Besides, there was not enough space anyway. Then sometime or another we would have a Japan night. There would be served chop suey, coffee and donuts to raise money.

AH: What was *Doho*'s attitude towards Pearl Harbor? What did that event signal to them as a policy? Did they, at that point, decide that they would have to try to further expose, to flush out people who would have made it tough upon Japanese Americans by their identification with the Japanese government? Or how did they react to that?

KY: Right after Pearl Harbor, *Doho* issued a statement—not only a statement, they issued many statements urging the Japanese to support the United States war effort. And also, *Doho* followed the same line that the anti-Axis committee issued: buy war bonds and inform on any fifth column activities among the Japanese community to the authorities. That's really why most of the Japanese turned against, not so much the anti-Axis committee, but Fred Tayama. Of course, some of them worked in his restaurants, so there already existed some antagonism toward him. Then here's Fred Tayama telling us to inform on our own brothers, and even sisters, to the FBI. In other words, he is becoming an FBI *inu*, an FBI spy.

AH: Tayama was the head of the anti-Axis committee.

KY: He felt very uncomfortable. That's why he resigned and Tokie Slocum took over.

AH: What did you think of Tokie Slocum? Did you know him at that time, before the war?

KY: Yes.

AH: Had you had contact with Slocum then in some connection or another? Or did you just know him casually?

KY: Well, I encountered him during his activity on behalf of getting citizenship for those Japanese who served in the First World War.

AH: In what connection exactly did you run across him?

KY: Well, I attended some of the meetings that were run by the JACL. He was quite an outspoken guy. He was a real flag waver, especially at the time of World War II. The guy came in handy; nobody ever thought to attack his record. And I'm sure that Joe Kurihara would have played the same role if he had wanted to, or if he had happened to be there.

AH: So Slocum was a super-patriot then.

KY: Yes.

AH: Well, I'd like to now move into the period in which *Doho* gets phased out, and you go off to Manzanar. Prior to the time that you went to Manzanar, I guess about the time

you went to Manzanar, *Doho* sent a group of representatives to Manzanar to survey what was happening there. And they wrote a little piece about their findings in one of their final editions. Do you recall when the *Doho* people went to Manzanar?

KY: Yes, I remember.

AH: At this time, what was the general strategy of *Doho* and people of that persuasion toward the internment [incarceration] camps?

KY: Well, we discussed the many things among ourselves. One of the things was that we must have our own paper and maybe raise enough money to move it to Salt Lake City, like *Pacific Citizen* did later. We continued to stress our point of view, and also that by all means we must cooperate with the evacuation order, and there shouldn't be any hitch whatsoever in completing the evacuation.

AH: In what ways, then, did you cooperate?

KY: Well, first of all, we asked people to volunteer to go to camp. And we helped build a camp that would be livable for evacuees. Of course, when the first evacuees went to Manzanar on March 23, 1942, the government stopped the volunteering altogether.

AH: Did you succeed in being able to establish a newspaper outside of the strategic area, like in Salt Lake City or someplace else?

KY: No. It was a question of finance. We looked around and we couldn't find anyone with the money. Most of our so-called sympathizers—we had a few—their assets were frozen so they couldn't take any money out of the bank.

AH: Did you make any attempt, therefore, to take over the existing newspapers that were in the camps, like the *Manzanar Free Press*? Was there an attempt to move public opinion through somehow having a shaping voice in the media at Manzanar and the other camps?

KY: We had no intention of taking over. In the first place, our force was scattered all over the camps. But in the case of the *Manzanar Free Press*, we had James Oda on the Japanese section so he was able to carry our wishes or thinking. At the same time in the English section we had Tom Yamazaki, a capable Issei writer. He worked for *Shin Sekai Asahi,* and also later he edited the organ of the Japanese trade union, which was composed of 2,000 members.

AH: What about Chiyo Mori, who was the editor of the *Manzanar Free Press*?

KY: Yes, she was part of the *Free Press*. I didn't have too much connection with Chiyo and the others on the staff.

AH: You didn't know Joe Blamey?

KY: No. The first time I met him was in camp.

AH: I have here a report that was written by Togo Tanaka, January 25, 1943. And this was written in his role as the documentary historian at Manzanar, and it was after the Manzanar Riot of December 6, 1942. And he, along with many others, a party of about sixty, were sent to Death Valley for protective custody purposes. And he wrote back to the Manzanar administration an analysis of the riot, his final report as a documentary historian. In the course of this analysis, he claims that there were, roughly speaking, three groups at Manzanar. One of which was a JACL group; another which was what he calls, for want of a better name, an anti-JACL group; and then the third group that was anti-JACL and anti-administration and perhaps pro-Japan.

But in describing the second group, which I suppose would encompass *Doho* and your own position, he writes, "Group II, an anti-JACL group, a term used only for want of a better name, this faction in pre-war days held a reputation among the Japanese population generally as being *aka*, red, meaning communist. In a community where economic control or dominance was held largely by a Japanese-speaking, non-citizen element, to be labeled *aka* was synonymous with ostracism. It was a complete and utter brush-off. You just didn't belong. It should be mentioned here that individual, political thinking was neither characteristic nor conspicuous. Among the so-called anti-JACL group, however, it was. Some individuals who shied away from this group for personal, economic, or social reasons considered it more as a left wing, liberal, or progressive group, rather than the *aka* label more generally recognized."

Anyway, he later on claims in his analysis that, during the riot, Group I individuals, who were JACL, found themselves on the death list. Group II individuals usually found themselves only on the black list. He says that, "It should be recalled that members of Group II, this *aka* group, arrived at Manzanar as evacuees before Group I. This was true almost without exception. Group II members established themselves at the relocation centers first. When Group I, JACL members, arrived a month or so later, they generally discovered that Group II had laid the mines and torpedoes in advance of our coming. They prepared the administration and the volunteer evacuees for a hostile reception for us. They kept up the vicious rumors to perpetuate themselves in their petty, little jobs, continuing jealousies and frictions of pre-war and evacuation days. On the other hand, Group II members felt justified in their attitude toward the late-comers. Troublemakers and would-be big shots, the whole lot, the JACL should have sense enough to know that the people are fed up and sick of its name. They were so used to grabbing self control on everything. When they discovered that they couldn't do it at Manzanar, they began agitation. They should have kept their trap shut and minded their own business."

Okay, so he sets down two groups. The main point being that he claims people like James Oda, yourself, Tom Yamazaki, and Koji Ariyoshi came to Manzanar first, took control basically of positions, and then, more or less jockeyed the JACL crowd out of those positions. And I imagine he's talking about the newspaper and perhaps other jobs that were available to evacuees [inmates]. Do you have any comment on that analysis?

KY: Well, I think he stresses this number two group a little too much. Because it was true

that—I'll say this much about JACL. You have to give the JACL people credit for staying as the last persons in the communities so that all Japanese were properly attended [to], such as filling out records and making arrangements for the evacuees as much as they could, under the circumstances. Without them, the people, particularly Issei, would be left without leaders. So they did serve the people.

However, when they arrived—particularly in the case of Manzanar—they began establishing the post office and the other administrative sections. And they grabbed all this clerical work and administrative work, naturally because of their knowledge and skill, such as typing. Among the Kibei and Issei, we didn't have those kinds of skills. So it's natural that they got that kind of a job.

On the other hand, as far as I'm concerned, I never had any anti-JACL feeling or antagonism toward the JACL people. Myself and our group, we didn't have organized meetings, but in the camp you meet every day, so we talked and so forth. One of our main aims was to try and work together, get along with everybody, because the evacuation [incarceration] would last long years. That's what we estimated. And we were going to be there for a long time.

In the meantime, we were, more or less, you know, the dreamers on the council there. We thought that we were going to establish sort of a model camp for the rest of the relocation [incarceration] camps. We were going to start a democratic constitution, with bylaws, a copy of the U.S. Constitution, as well as Bill of Rights. So we talked about these things with the camp administrator. "Okay, we'll appoint you on the constitution committee to draw up the bylaws of the camp." So they appointed Ted Akahoshi, an Issei and a Stanford graduate, a very capable guy. Then Tommy Yamazaki and me. Three of us. You can imagine three of us. All three of us, more or less, when it comes to operation camp, had about the same ideas. We tried to establish the kind of camp that the rest of America would look up to, a really nice camp, so that maybe we wouldn't need to stay there too long. We thought that maybe we could win the confidence of the American public.

So we sat down, and naturally, when the JACL group began coming in, they started to raise hell. They don't like a bunch of *aka* sitting on that committee trying to run the camp. And naturally, this talk spread all over camp, and it made it very difficult for us to operate. But, on the other had, we did many things that influenced the administration to improve camp conditions.

My wife Elaine [Black Yoneda] took a very active part, too.[2] She's an outspoken woman. Anything that was wrong with camp, particularly matters concerning women, she barged into the administration office and pounded the table, saying, "You have to do this or that, otherwise the camp will be in turmoil." She complained about such things as the conditions of the women's toilets. A noble person—especially Japanese women, they don't dare do that. It's not for them. It's not the way they are trained. A Japanese woman's part is to be in the kitchen.

[2] Elaine Black Yoneda, OH# 1377, Center for Oral and Public History

AH: Did it create some hostility towards you because your wife was acting in a non-Japanese way? Did that make it tougher on you to operate within the camp with respect to the rest of the community? Because if you already had one strike against you, in the same sense that you were labeled an *aka*, and then all of a sudden you had this additional one of having an untypically Japanese type of wife—

KY: Well, camp people resented, too, that I brought a Caucasian wife into camp. Some of them said, Well, you know, she has the right to stay outside of camp; why does she have to come into camp and become sort of a sore thumb? It was easy for some to point out the ways that she didn't fit into the Japanese community. Naturally, in the camp you didn't have anything to do, so camp became really a rumor factory. You can't imagine every day some of the rumors I noted in my diary. It will really blow your mind. I mean, these people figured out that tomorrow morning they're going to cut people in on this story or that story. They were cooking up stories because they had nothing else to do.

For instance, we arrived in camp and a couple of days later somebody spread a rumor saying that the army killed about five or six Japanese. Nobody asked how or what. One tells one, another tells another, and the rumor spreads throughout the camp. And another time they said, Japan is winning the war so they won't keep us here too long. They're going to ship us to an isolated island someplace, so be prepared.

AH: So you became a block leader, and you were in Block 4. When they formed the Block Leaders Council, the procedure, initially, was to have the block nominate three candidates and then the administration would have final determination over which of the candidates was appointed block leader. So you apparently were one of three, then later were appointed by the administration. Do you think your appointment was a popular one with the people in Block 4?

KY: Well, at the beginning, three or four names were submitted. But under my name it stated that I had the support of the majority in my block, that's Block 4. They considered, This guy's an outspoken man; maybe he'll do whatever we want, and he's able to meet face-to-face with the administration.

AH: Did it help because you were a Kibei in being able to speak both languages, too, so that you could meet with the needs of the Nisei on the one hand and the Issei on the other?

KY: Not so much Kibei as my past record being known as an *aka*. At that time there wasn't such a strong antagonism towards the so-called *aka* group.

AH: They just wanted someone who would be forthright and able to present their grievances to the administration.

KY: Right.

AH: What about the Block Leaders Council once it coalesced? What did you think of that organization, or what was its composition? Was it basically Issei, basically Nisei, what? What was it to begin with?

KY: Let me see, at the beginning there were very few Nisei, [it was] mostly Issei and Kibei.

AH: So they appointed people who were previously leaders in the community?

KY: Yes.

AH: Who were some of the leading figures within the Block Leaders Council? Ted Akahoshi was the block leader—

KY: No, he was not the block leader. He was the chairman of the Block Leaders Council. Most of the other people I didn't know, because they came from the Los Angeles area. Most of the people who lived in a certain block knew this particular person—that they chose as their block leader—from pre-war days.

AH: Did you find yourself somewhat isolated on the council by the fact that you were, for one thing, from San Francisco, and secondly, because of your political background?

KY: Not at the beginning. They took the attitude of wait and see what he has to say. They had the idea, Well, here is a guy who did a lot of organizing in unions and was also active in politics, we'll see what he says. Whatever I said, therefore, they listened to it.

AH: Did you speak quite a bit at the council meetings?

KY: Oh, yes. Oh, yes.

AH: Who else on the council—on the early council—were outspoken individuals?

KY: Well, Ted Akahoshi, and also Tom Yamazaki took an active part in it.

AH: They shared most of your positions, didn't they?

KY: Yes.

AH: What about some of the Issei that were on the council?

KY: Issei didn't say much.

AH: Were the meetings originally, then, conducted in English, Japanese, or both?

KY: English. And the Issei spoke in Japanese. Usually Tom Yamazaki or someone acted as their interpreter. The Issei spoke very seldom. I guess they were just feeling around. And at the same time they never faced this kind of situation.

AH: What about the Kibei?

KY: The Kibei, too.

AH: They were pretty silent as well?

KY: Except one or two, like this guy, Shigetoshi Tateishi. Let me see, is he a Kibei or an Issei? [Shigetoshi Tateishi was a Kibei.] I forgot, but he took the floor quite often.

AH: Did he have any position that was in opposition to your own?

KY: No.

AH: It was just that he happened to speak out within the council.

KY: Well, at a council meeting, usually—you know, the policies are laid down by the administration already, so we can't say much. Actually, the council is not the camp policy deciding body. Whatever instructions came down from the administration offices, we simply discussed how to carry it out. You can't say no.

AH: So what you could do was to decide on ways to either carry out a measure more effectively or not. In other words, by cooperating, you could implement programs and help facilitate WRA [War Relocation Authority] policies.

KY: Yes. Well, in many cases we were the first ones to speak in favor of a policy decision. If it is against our wishes, we will speak against it. I didn't come across any instances where camp policies were not in our favor except, you know, when the instruction came from Washington, D.C. that all Block Council Leaders meeting will be conducted in English. That's where we made a mistake. We should have allowed Issei to speak in Japanese. So that really added another item to the fire. They spread the story right away, Well these guys won't even let us speak Japanese in the camp.

AH: Why did you not want them to speak Japanese?

KY: Well, at that time we felt that these Issei began to take the floor, and sometimes they spoke in such a way as to hint the pro-Japan sentiment, their oratory sometimes became strong, "You don't belong here." Or some Issei would end a speech with *bonsai*, you know, which usually we say at a Japanese national holiday. When we get together, we end up with *tenno heika*, *bonsai*, *emperor bonsai*, you know. In other instances, we don't use that.

AH: You mean that you were getting some pro-Japan sentiment at the Block Leaders Council meetings?

KY: Yes, it began to show, so we sort of limited discussions to English only, so that we wouldn't hear these pro-Japan phrases being thrown up. These people were more or less—that was their way to protest, I guess.

AH: What about the Manzanar Citizens Federation? What was the rationale behind starting that, and when did it first emerge?

KY: Manzanar Citizens Federation, the first meeting I did not attend. I was not invited. Koji Ariyoshi, Togo Tanaka, and others got together and thought that since the JACL leaders couldn't express their real feelings, or their ideas, then maybe they ought to have an

organization that is mutual to, more or less, the larger organization.

AH: You mean, they didn't have much of an input into the Block Leaders Council so they set up an alternative organization that would be able to have some policy statements voiced at camp?

KY: That's why, I guess, they started. But when James Oda and myself came in, we turned it around and made it into an entirely different organization, altogether, which they didn't like, because as soon as we got in we took over the leadership. Koji Ariyoshi, myself, and James Oda became the new leaders, and Togo Tanaka, Joe Grant Masaoka, and Fred Tayama didn't say boo when we decided to have a mass meeting. They said, Well, Karl, you speak. I said, "Okay, I'll speak on the war efforts of the evacuees." And even Mrs. Miyo Kikuchi, a social worker, was supposed to speak on camp conditions. She declined at the last minute. So this fellow from Hawaii, Hiro Neeno spoke. Togo Tanaka and Joe Grant Masaoka also spoke at the first mass meeting, so there were four speakers.

AH: This was on July 28, 1942, then. What were the differences in philosophy with respect to the Citizens Federation? How did the JACL look at its purpose, and how did the people in your group look at its purpose differently?

KY: One of the purposes was to push this petition drive. This was not done in the name of the federation. But through the Citizens Federation, we saw that we had more support among evacuees.

AH: Which petition drive was this, to establish a second front?

KY: Yes, open a second front and utilize manpower of Japanese Americans within the camps. I think we obtained only about 214 signatures. Among them, I think, were about forty women. Even we were surprised. These woman said, I'll join if they allowed Japanese Americans to serve in the American Army service.

AH: And what was the JACL's philosophy? How did that differ? What do you think they wanted out of the organization?

KY: Well, the JACL people—actually, they don't know what to do, you see. Many times they asked us, you know, What do you think? Because we were really the driving force within the Manzanar Citizens Federation. Although, opening the second front, that's the Communist Party line. There is no such physical condition existing in the United States. The United States is just building up its armed strength. It is impossible to open a second front in 1942. So they have to open it later, in 1944, two years later, you see. You need preparation. But they took it slow on this. Why don't they open a second front—in our way of thinking, this was a way to help the Russian front, because the Russian front is being beaten by Nazis, and the Russians keep on retreating. And if we open a second front, why, Hitler will divert most of the force towards the European front. This way this will help the Soviet Union. That's our thinking. And that's also the party line, too.

AH: So you, in a sense, maneuvered the JACL into certain policies through the Citizens Federation. In a sense, they didn't know what they were doing at this period.

KY: No, not even Togo Tanaka or Joe Grant Masaoka. They signed our petition. Oh, it's a good idea. Of course, one of the driving forces was Koji Ariyoshi.

AH: He was made president as a strategic device, I imagine because he really was not connected with JACL, and he was from Hawai'i. He wasn't even so much connected with any left wing activities in the states, is that right? So he was a strategic choice, acceptable to all parties.

KY: Right.

AH: But, by in large, the Citizens Federation somewhat backfired as a device in camp, didn't it?

KY: Well, naturally the formation of this organization created opposition, mainly from Joe Kurihara and Ben Kishi. They didn't come from any organization. But in one meeting—my Manzanar diary shows—they came to a group meeting, and Joe Kurihara questioned the name of the Manzanar Citizens Federation. He suggested that it be changed to the Manzanar Welfare Federation. And when a vote was taken, we narrowly won. Let's see, the vote was about 214 to 210, or something.

AH: Do you think this Manzanar Citizens Federation excited a lot of resentment on the part of Issei?

KY: Among the Issei, we had many supporters. At least the Manzanar Citizens Federation was also asking that the manpower in camp be used to save the crops in the Idaho and Wyoming areas. And the first group came back from Idaho—Koji Ariyoshi and his men. I think about six or seven hundred went to Idaho. They made a good impression in Idaho. In the meantime, they earned quite a sum of money. They came back, and many in the camp said, We'll ask for a follow-through and then we'll go out to where they need us to.

AH: So this won some favor with the Issei, then?

KY: Yes. Well, not only Issei, Nisei, too.

AH: What was the big resentment against the Manzanar Citizens Federation?

KY: Well, it mainly came from Ben Kishi and his group.

AH: Who is this Ben Kishi exactly? I know he was a young fellow about twenty-two years old.

KY: I describe him as a Meiji-Samurai type. He says something very exciting that people go for. I forgot some of the things he said. But for instance, when he opened the Kibei meeting, he didn't say, "Men are dying in Asia," but, "Men are dying, let's stand up and

have a one-minute silence." He put it in such a way that everybody, even myself, wondered, My god, what the hell's this guy trying to prove? Later I figured out, my gosh, this guy is really pulling this pro-Japan stunt.

AH: Did you think of him as intelligent?

KY: No, he isn't. He's one of those ghetto-boss type of guys.

AH: He knew how to pull the right strings.

KY: Oh, yes. He knows how to maneuver, "You follow me; You listen to me; I'll take care of you."

AH: Did you see him as the major leader of any pro-Japan sentiment within the camp? Did you think that Kishi was the leader?

KY: Oh, yes, definitely, the leading "open" spokesman from the start.

AH: Much more so than, say, somebody like Harry Ueno.[3]

KY: Ueno is such an unknown figure. He talks about organizing the kitchen workers union. To me, through my experience of organizing, he just had a handful of followers, mostly in his kitchen and among the strong pro-Japan kitchen crew members in my block, Block 4. So he and his group used to come to kitchen 4, and after supper they used to have a meeting in the kitchen. They used to tell the waitresses, You people go home; this is a men's affair. And it would turn out to be a meeting that they had. Actually, they don't have an organization such as the kitchen workers union; they merely named themselves.

AH: So they didn't really have much of a following either. The kitchen workers constituted about a third of the workforce at Manzanar.

KY: Yes.

AH: But of this group, very few of them identified in any real strong sense with the kitchen workers union.

KY: No, I don't think so, because I was there. If they had such a strong force, I'm sure I would detect it right away.

AH: Well, what kind of an organization did exist at Manzanar around pro-Japan sentiment that coalesced? Was there an organization, or was it a series of groupings here, there, and elsewhere that had common indignation over specific causes?

KY: Well, I'll say that loose bodies such as the Blood Brothers would get together and they'd call themselves by various names. In the case of the Manzanar Citizens Federation, we

[3] Harry Ueno, OH# 1518, Center for Oral and Public History.

met and had a secretary there who took minutes of each committee meeting, as well as mass meetings. I don't know what happened to our minutes. At the first Manzanar Citizens Federation meeting we elected three secretaries to take the minutes—only Nisei university students. In fact, they volunteered. "Does anybody want to take minutes?" And three of them said okay. But we should have kept the minutes. I have kept most of the documents that were issued or made in Manzanar camp.

AH: They have a folder on the Manzanar Citizens Federation in the Manzanar collection at UCLA, and I'm pretty sure that they have those minutes from the first couple of meetings there. I don't recall seeing them right offhand, but they might be there. They do have a folder which deals only with the Manzanar Citizens Federation material.

KY: We had many committee meetings at Togo Tanaka's apartment, so-called apartment. It's only one room. And I think Joe Masaoka acted as secretary. And he took down all the things that we said, but that too, I guess, was lost someplace. In my diary I just put down who attended and what they discussed.

AH: Getting back for a second to Ben Kishi, you said that he was definitely the number one leader of pro-Japan sentiment. What did his organization or following consist of exactly? Who was he appealing to?

KY: Well, this group that he had—I figured this was a way to express their dissatisfaction, create turmoil, or to protest. Whatever comes along they just go after somebody, whether it's me or Tokie Slocum, or anybody else.

For instance, Ben Kishi and his scavenger crewmembers had access to a truck, so they used to drive around in the truck every day and pick up garbage cans. So they'd meet more camp people than us. The weather is sometimes unbearable, going as high as 114, 115 degrees. And if you walked from one block to the next block, you get tired. You can't go from one end of the camp to Togo Tanaka's place in Block 36. It's about a mile, mile and a half walk. Even in the evening the sun is way up, and by the time you get there, you'd be pretty tired. So it's very hard to find out actually what is taking place in the camp. The only way to find out is through the grapevine. Naturally, through the grapevine many untrue stories and rumors get mixed with fast.

AH: Were you aware of Ben Kishi fairly early?

KY: No, I encountered him in camp.

AH: I mean, within the time you were in camp, did you know of his hostility?

KY: Oh, yes, practically every day. Because his scavenger crewmembers passed by Block 4 and we had the Block 4 office located in one of the apartments. So we sat there and Kishi's scavenger trucks would pass by shouting out some name, such as "you damn Korean *inu*," or "FBI spy."

AH: Were they shouting this at you in Japanese?

KY: Yes.

AH: Were they mostly Kibei in the scavenger crew?

KY: Oh, yes. Some of them came from Terminal Island. Some of them belonged to a judoist club.

AH: On August 8, 1942, at the Kibei meeting that you talked about earlier, there was a lot of hostility directed against Nisei and against the JACL, and against the Manzanar Citizens Federation. There was a lot of pro-Japan sentiment aired there. And one of the things that the meeting called to protest was the fact that the Kibei were disallowed to be available for relocation, to take off [from camp and settle in the free area of the country]. But I read in the documents, subsequently, that both you and Ben Kishi, both of whom were Kibei, went off to Idaho. How did that come about?

KY: Let me tell you the incident. Ben Kishi came to me and said, "We'll have a meeting. I want you to be a speaker." I said, "Who is organizing the meeting?" "One of my group." "What do you mean your group?" "Well, you know, us. The several of us get together and we want to organize for this meeting, and I want you to be a speaker." So I said, "No, I won't speak at your meeting. You go ahead and have your own meeting."

Then he went to the administration office and told the administrators, "Karl Yoneda is one of the speakers. Give us permission to have a meeting." On that basis, he got the permission, you see. For any gathering you have to get permission. So I must be a very important person. Later the administration asked me, you see, "You sure you gave the consent for this kind of meeting?" "No, no, I refused to be a speaker."

But at the Kibei meeting they asked anyone to speak, to take the mic. And of course, in my case, they shouted me down. (laughs) They called me all kinds of names. But I was stubborn enough and I decided not to budge a step, but to stay put. I wasn't going to speak my piece until the crown quieted down. I said a few things, but I'm sure the crowd didn't listen. They didn't know what I said.

Then Jimmy Oda, he spoke. He spoke in such a fashion that the crowd listened to him. He appealed towards them all being Japanese, "Why do you have to fight each other?" That's how he got the crowd to listen to him. Then he started to go into what we're supposed to do, and then the crowd started shouting at him that he was a spy and an *inu*. And he couldn't continue either.

AH: Now, I read the minutes of that particular meeting, and they were recorded from memory the next morning by Fred Tayama. What was he, a Nisei, doing at a Kibei meeting?

KY: He was, I guess, a bystander. Inside there were about 200 people. It was very hot, you see, so all the windows were open. And outside there were easily about three or four hundred people. So most likely he and others maybe went over there among the crowd. When you have about five to six hundred people, you know, it's pretty hard to notice who is there.

AH: That means that to a large extent the Kibei were rapidly reaching the point of becoming out-rightly pro-Japan, right?

KY: Not only Kibei. Many high school age boys participated. And this is understandable. They have nothing to do and here comes someone telling them, Your citizens paper is nothing but a scrap of paper, and what you've learned about U.S. democracy is phony. And they buy it. Here you are in concentration camps the same as us, the same as your parents. And so they'll buy it. But that's all there is. They don't know what to do.

AH: Were there any intellectuals among the pro-Japan group?

KY: There weren't any.

AH: So by in large it was people like Ben Kishi.

KY: The muscle-type and all, I guess. You know, I don't see any intellectualism in Hitler. How come people follow him? Ben Kishi is that kind of type. He doesn't have any big figure. I don't know why some of them admire him. Whatever he says, everybody agreed with him, followed him. It is very hard to describe what kind of a guy he is. I think he's dead now, I just don't know. I've asked so many people what became of him. Nobody seems to know what happened.

AH: What about Joe Kurihara? How does he fit into this? Would you describe him as a leader, or a person who was just used? Or as somebody who was bitter for personal reasons and all of a sudden then turned out to make statements that were helpful to the pro-Japan cause? I mean, here was a guy who was a citizen, had fought in World War I, and had also earned a good livelihood. He made quite a bit of money before the war.

KY: Oh, yes.

AH: He tried to volunteer to get into the service, the Merchant Marines. He was turned down there. He gets into camp and then finds the situation there not very much to his liking either. Then he becomes out-rightly, like he says in this one speech, "I'm 100 percent Jap, and that's how I'm going to act from now on." What was his role in relationship to people like Kishi?

KY: Well, at least with Joe Kurihara, I could talk to that guy. You see, Ben Kishi, you couldn't talk to that guy. Right away an argument starts and you call each other names, so I didn't like to talk to him. But this Joe Kurihara, you can sit down and talk to this guy. You see, he listens to reason. I'll say he spoke for himself, not that he wants to take over the leadership. He out-rightly expressed his feelings. Rightly so, on many occasions, most of the people want, Well, Joe, you take over the leadership; you lead us and we'll follow. He's not that kind of a guy. Whereas with Ben Kishi, they said, You are right, you spoke your piece; you take over and lead us; we'll follow you wherever you go.

AH: Did he have any following among the Issei?

KY: Not so many, maybe a handful.

AH: How would you characterize the Issei sentiment in camp during the time that you were there? Would you say that it was increasingly becoming, although still silent, more pro-Japan than when they first came to the camp?

KY: Well, I would say so. If they don't become more pro-Japan, there's something wrong with them, you know.

AH: You mean, because of the experience they had in camp?

KY: Yes.

AH: So it's justifiable in a sense. You felt the growing pro-Japan feeling then, while you were there?

KY: Yes.

AH: And it was registered by hostility directed against you for your pro-American stand?

KY: Yes. For instance, when I volunteered for the Military Intelligence Service, James Oda asked me, "What about the camp people? If we leave here, they will be in the hands of these terrorists. Who will protect them?" So I told Jimmy that we had better things to do than dealing with 10,000 people, which was true. And after we talked it over, Jimmy agreed with me, "Yes, I'll volunteer, and I'll go with you."

AH: So you had some kind of strategic choice to make?

KY: Yes. And when I left camp, I felt sorry for the people that were left behind.

AH: I bet you also felt frightened about what might happen to your wife and child, too, didn't you? Hadn't you been attacked earlier?

KY: Yes, that's what I expected. You know, I was in the movement for many years, and this was expected. I thought, If anything happens I'll not be surprised. But I really felt sorry for those who were left behind, especially for those who supported our cause and our opinion.

AH: Would you say that your main reason for your pro-American position in camp was because you wanted to defeat the fascists or because you wanted to uphold the democratic way of life? Or were you phrasing the one in terms of the other?

KY: No, upholding the democratic way of life was secondary. Well, you had to say so. We were trying to get the confidence of the U.S. Government. (laughs) But I never paid much attention to so-called American democracy.

AH: So that would almost be a difference between your group and the JACL group.

KY: Yes.

AH: Whereas you were really concerned with defeating somebody, they were concerned with preserving a particular way of life that was really objectionable to you to begin with, wasn't it?

KY: Yes.

AH: I mean, American capitalism wasn't something that you were really fighting to uphold.

KY: I had the future of the Japanese in my heart always. I figured out what is the best for us is to survive this war. And when the war is over—I told many of them, "Suppose we resist *en masse*, what will happen to us after the war? We will be called all kinds of names. You know, you bunch of slackers, you bunch of S.O.B.'s. Here we shed our blood to defeat Hitler, Mussolini, and Tojo. You guys sat on your asses and didn't do a damn thing." But, on the other hand, those who resisted being drafted in 1943, 1944, for this I certainly condemn the actions of the government. They have no business drafting those that were kept in camps. That's really one of the greatest mistakes that the government made.

AH: Did you feel uncomfortable, psychologically, in camp? All of a sudden becoming a flag waver when your past was basically concerned with exposing certain kinds of injustices under the name of patriotism? I mean, here suddenly the people you're linked with are Tokie Slocum, who is a super patriot wearing his flag on his sleeve, and Fred Tayama, who is an exploitive capitalist, who you had been attacking right along the line with *Doho*, as almost the number one enemy of the Japanese American community, because of his policies and wage scale. And now these are the people that you're in shop with, that you're doing business with.

KY: Well, I wasn't too closely associated with them. But we talked these things over, and sometimes we have to do these kinds of thing, you know, to achieve your aim. Just like the Soviet Union had to make a pact with Hitler, which astonished thousands of Soviet supporters as well as liberals, too. "How could you shake hands with the bloody hand of Hitler?" Here Hitler is killing left and right, not only communists, but trade union activists and also many Jews, in the camps. And here the Soviet Union was supposed to be a defender of freedom. But sometimes you have to do that.

AH: So it was a question, then, of maintaining a higher morality. Keeping that in mind while in the meantime you might resort to more expedient devices or coalitions?

KY: Well, this we told to Togo Tanaka, Fred Tayama, and others, If you want to survive this war, you should not only give your lip service, but support the U.S. Government through actually participating in fighting, maybe shedding your blood. And they all agreed that they were not aggressive enough. That's why Fred and Togo and Joe Grant Masaoka didn't volunteer. You hear a story about the Masaoka brothers all volunteering, but Joe Grant stayed behind.

AH: And Togo Tanaka worked for the Quakers in Chicago, didn't he?

KY: Yes. So they were really forced to adopt this resolution asking the U.S. Government to

draft the Nisei at the JACL convention in November 1942.

AH: The Salt Lake convention.

KY: Yes.

AH: I have a few more questions about camp which I would like to ask you before concluding the interview. I had thought that the Manzanar Charter Commission—which was formed to draw up a revised camp governmental structure—was headed by Togo Tanaka. But in the reports that I have read, it merely states that a Mr. T. was head of it. Was it Togo Tanaka that was adamantly holding out for the constitution, whereby only citizens could serve on the council that they were going to implement? Or were you gone from camp at the time that this issue surfaced?

KY: Yes, I think Togo participated in that. He is not an aggressive type, you know. You have to coax him into something. He'll say, "Yes, that's right, that's right," but that's it. In the case of Fred Tayama, he won't agree with something that he doesn't like to hear. But in the end, in most of the cases, he agreed with us, "Yes, you are right." What else can they say, you know? Because they are not the ones who first proposed that the government utilize the manpower of the Japanese Americans in the camp. We were the ones who proposed it first, as soon as we landed in Manzanar. And they realized that was the only way. That's why Mike Masaoka, executive secretary of the JACL, and others got our message.

AH: The policy came out that way.

KY: Yes, that's right. In fact, I have a letter from Mike Masaoka, written, I think, in July or August of 1942, asking my cooperation.

AH: I understood that at one point, about fourteen individuals came to your block and spent about an hour or so in your apartment, with the intention of either maiming you, or in some other way doing harm to you. But they refrained because your wife and your child were both there in the apartment. Do you recall that situation?

KY: Yes.

AH: What exactly was the nature of the episode, and who was involved in that?

KY: Well, Ben Kishi was the spokesman, and I recognized the rest of them. I had a hunch right away that they really came to get me, either beat up or cripple me. And I decided, well, even one against fourteen, I'll fight them. So I stood near the wall by the window, so in case I had to get out, I could get out through the window. But I noticed that outside the window were about ten or fifteen guys marching back and forth, and all of them belonged to the judoist club headed by Seigo Murakami. Incidentally, Murakami was given a nice black belt, which is more or less an honorary procedure on the part of the *Kodokan*. There was a big ceremony in Los Angeles a couple years ago. It was about seven or eight years ago. Very smooth operator, never says anything, just directs, do this and do that. He lived in our block, that's how I knew him pretty well.

AH: Did Kishi have that group at his disposal to use for intimidation purposes?

KY: Yes. What led to that incident was that at the Block Leaders Council meeting, I had made a report of what transpired at the Kibei mass meeting. Kishi and his group asked me to retract what I had said at the previous block meeting at the forthcoming Block Council meeting. And I refused. "Whatever I said is the truth, and I'm not going to change it."

So this kept them going back and forth, back and forth. And of course, I'm ready to jump on or take on anyone of them, so they didn't dare move. I sensed it right away. If anyone moved, I was ready to get up and start to fight.

So this continued for about two hours until somebody said, "Well, don't you have a mother that lives in Hiroshima? All I have to do is inform the Japanese government that her son is anti-Japan and speaks against the Japanese emperor and the Japanese government. We'll fix up your mother." When I heard this, I realized that, wow, he meant what he said. This really made me madder than anything. And when they get down to this kind of situation, it becomes personalized, and it's either you or me. And especially you felt that very strongly in the camp. So I have no place to go and they have no place to go. I guess they were willing to give a life to get rid of me. But because of my stubbornness—and you know, I shouted back and forth. I shouted louder than them, you see. Finally, they retreated. I thought they'd really get me, and that I'd be a goner. (laughs)

AH: They left peacefully, then?

KY: Oh, yes.

AH: And what about the fact that sometimes these salvage trucks used to try to run you over. Was that a repeated thing, or was that just once?

KY: Well, I got wise to them. When a salvage truck came down to Block 4, then I stayed away or just stayed inside, so I wouldn't be bothered by them.

AH: So the last couple of months that you were in Manzanar, you were pretty much on alert all the time for any sort of foul play.

KY: Well, fortunately, I had Jimmy Oda and several others who supported me physically. Just two nights before we left for Minnesota, Jimmy and the others stayed with me in the apartment.

AH: Oh, they stayed within your apartment? To give you some kind of protection?

KY: Yes.

AH: Well, I don't have any further questions, so I'd just like to thank you very much, Mr. Yoneda, for all your cooperation. Your interview has been most information and interesting.

END OF INTERVIEW