

REDEVELOPMENT MYTHS ABOUT NIHONMACHI

To justify its destruction of Nihonmachi, the Redevelopment Agency has carefully nurtured three myths:

1) First the Redevelopment Agency claims that sufficient low-rent housing is being built in Nihonmachi, citing the 245-unit Nihonmachi Terrace project as an example. The agency further has stated that 1,549 low-to-moderate income units have been built in the Western Addition A-2 project (which includes Nihonmachi) with another 1,330 units scheduled or under construction.

Significantly, the agency fails to mention the following points:

\* Only one-third of the 245 housing units of Nihonmachi Terrace will be low-rent units. Tenants in some of the remaining two-third units will be paying as much as \$300 for two bedroom apartments. Moreover, in less than three months, since the project has begun to accept applications, 299 individuals and families have applied for Nihonmachi Terrace's 245 units. Obviously, the limited low-rent housing provided by Nihonmachi Terrace will not be sufficient to meet the pressing low-cost housing needs of Nihonmachi. There is a need for more low-rent housing in the Nihonmachi area.

\* While the Redevelopment Agency mentions the number of new housing units being built in Western Addition redevelopment project A-2, it fails to mention the amount of low-rent housing it has destroyed. It is easy to see why. According to statistics compiled by Neighborhood Legal Assistance and the League of Women Voters, the Redevelopment Agency destroyed 6,000 low-rent housing units in Western Addition redevelopment project A-1 and has destroyed or will destroy another 6,000 low-rent housing units in Western Addition A-2. In other words, new low-rent housing construction is replacing a fraction of the total number of low-rent housing destroyed.



\* The agency also fails to mention the wholesale dispersal of residents from Western Addition resulting from its so-called "urban renewal." Census tract statistics indicate that in 1950 the area bounded roughly by California to Eddy, Gough to Steiner (which encompasses the Nihonmachi area) was the home for 20,009 persons. By 1970, only 9,164 persons remained following two waves of redevelopment. Thus, for Western Addition and the Japanese American community, redevelopment has not meant "urban renewal" --- it has meant people removal.

2) The Redevelopment Agency scoffs at the statement made by CANE that Nihonmachi has been redeveloped according to a masterplan that benefits big business interests at the expense of common people.

Significantly, the agency fails to take into account the following facts:

\* The largest land-holder in Nihonmachi today is Kintetsu Enterprises, owners of one-half the Japan Trade Center, the Miyako Hotel, Suehiro Restaurant, the building housing the Japanese Consulate, Kintetsu Travel Agency, Kintetsu Coffee Shop, the Kyoto inn now under construction, and a scheduled for construction 40-lane bowling alley. Kintetsu is the American subsidiary of Kinki Nippon Railway Company, Japan's largest private railway corporation. Starting with the Japan Trade Center project, Kintetsu and the Redevelopment Agency have been working hand-in-hand to transform Nihonmachi from a residential and small business neighborhood into a tourist showcase. For Kintetsu, the culture and heritage of Nihonmachi are saleable items --- commodities to be sold for its own economic profits.

\* The redevelopment of Nihonmachi is but part of an overall redevelopment masterplan for San Francisco that is systematically changing our city into a "Wall Street of the West." The contours



of this masterplan are easy to recognize: residential and small business neighborhoods are being demolished and replaced by high-rise office buildings, tourist hotels, and expensive market-rate housing. Ethnic cultures are being destroyed or else prostituted to a growing tourist industry to accommodate big businessmen and conventioners.

According to statistics compiled by Neighborhood Legal Assistance and the League of Women Voters, the Redevelopment Agency has been responsible for the destruction of some 27,000 units of low-rent housing city-wide.

On the other side of the ledger, the San Francisco Convention and Tourist Bureau reports that the number of first class hotel rooms in San Francisco increased by more than 5,000 since 1971. Similarly, 23 new high rise office buildings were erected in the city's Financial District from 1960 to 1972.

3) The Redevelopment Agency cites the Nihonmachi Community Development Corporation (NCDC) as representing the interests of the majority of Japanese Americans and providing the mechanism for the community to decide its own destiny.

Significantly, the agency fails to mention the following points:

NCDC was born in the early 1960s as a direct result of the massive destruction and dispersal of homes and small businesses that occurred on the plot of land where the Japan TradeCenter now stands. The trade center was not built by local Japanese Americans. It was developed by outside conglomerates from Hawaii and Japan as part of the scheme to turn Nihonmachi into a tourist showcase. NCDC was formed when several small property owners banded together to prevent being driven out of Nihonmachi by another wave of redevelopment.

Today, however, several NCDC members have come to embrace the very destructive redevelopment that they had originally opposed. They see their economic survival as linked to tourism and the con-



tinuing destruction of Nihonmachi as a residential and small business neighborhood. They choose to disregard the basic fact that historically small businesses in Nihonmachi have survived and prospered by maintaining an interdependent relationship with neighborhood residents not tourists. They choose to disregard the fact that tourism is an unstable source of revenue, vulnerable to fluctuations in the economy, such as recessions and the "energy crisis."

NCDC's masterplan for a four block area it controls includes no low-rent housing whatsoever. Rather, the housing being constructed is market-rate housing with rents starting at \$245 per month for a studio unit. To build these expensive apartments, NCDC is working with RDA to destroy the remaining stock of low-rent housing in Nihonmachi.

What has led NCDC to come to embrace the very destructive redevelopment that led to its formation?

The reasons lie in the domination of NCDC by a select group of property owners and their overriding concern for their self-interests, not broader community concerns. Earlier this year, a member of NCDC told the San Francisco Examiner (March 18, 1974):

"A great many Japanese merchants who took part in the formation of NCDC were motivated by self-preservation and that's it. We really didn't consider the removal of the people who lived here, where they could go --- these considerations never did get the attention they deserved. Their (the merchants) self-interests and need to survive in this area were too dominant. The people who could have brought these considerations to the NCDC board of directors didn't join NCDC."

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CANE (Committee Against Nihonmachi Eviction) was organized in early 1973 around two principles: (1) To stop the destruction and dispersal of Nihonmachi and to keep it a residential and small business

community; and 2) To uphold the rights of residents and small businesses.

CANE stands in direct opposition to the redevelopment masterplan which we see as transforming our community into a commercial, tourist attraction. CANE stands in direct opposition to the domination of our community by corporate giants which we see as using our culture and heritage as commodities for their own economic profits.

CANE stands for the right of all people to decent, low-rent housing. CANE stands for the right of all people to live in a community of their own choice and making.

We ask those organizations and individuals interested in finding out more about the redevelopment situation in Nihonmachi to come to our community. We can provide tours of Nihonmachi to point out why we oppose the redevelopment masterplan and what we feel can be done to stop and change it.

We ask each person to come to Nihonmachi and decide for her/himself; Is redevelopment really "revitalizing and renewing" Nihonmachi --- as the Redevelopment Agency maintains --- or is redevelopment destroying and dispersing our community? We ask each person to come to Nihonmachi and decide.