

May 7

Dear Kazu and Tak:

A matter of great importance has arisen for grassroots Asian community groups here in the Bay Area and its ramifications will affect other Asian communities, all over the nation, including New York. The matter concerns the National JACL gerontology program. I am enclosing a copy of the position paper drafted by Kimochi (SF Issei project) and East Bay Japanese for Action (Berkeley-Oakland Issei project) to provide you with some background on the matter.

Basically, though, the matter does not center on gerontology per se. It involves the whole direction of the National JACL leadership (since Ushio and other opportunists have risen to positions of leadership) and the whole concept of how community needs and problems are to be defined and how they are to be met.

Here's a brief background on the JACL gerontology program: The project was funded by the federal govt. (HEW, Administration on Aging) without the knowledge of grassroots community organizations working with the elderly. In fact, the names of these groups were used in the JACL proposal without consent. After the proposal was funded, groups such as Kimochi learned of it from newspaper press releases and attempted to contact the National JACL office for more information. They learned that a program director, Eugene Moriguchi, had been hired. The choice of Moriguchi is interesting because he is a lawyer who has no experience at all in working with the elderly.

As the proposal was originally conceived, the JACL would provide university students with stipends and "field placements" at different Asian elderly projects throughout the nation. This was conceived without prior consultation with the groups which presumably were to take the field placements.

Later, because of federal budgetary cuts, the proposal was re-conceptualized to its present form: the development of a series of video-tape materials on Asian elderly which would be used to "sensitize" public agencies. Again, Asian elderly groups had no input on the change of direction in the gerontology program.

What all this comes down to is that the National JACL staff, a staff of professionals with little or no community involvement prior to their hiring, has obtained a grant from the government to develop an Asian elderly program. The grant is based on the JACL's own definition of what the needs of the Asian elderly are, again based on no prior experience in grassroots projects and without any consultation with the grassroots groups themselves. In fact, had JACL taken the time to consult these groups in the beginning, they would have learned that there was really no need for a gerontology program per se; what the groups do need are people from the community willing to volunteer their time and services --- in other words, a united community effort, rather than the actions of a few so-called professionals and gerontologists.



Thus, a key concept of this controversy is how community needs are defined, who is to do the defining, and how the needs are to be met. And it is clear that when we talk about this matter, we are talking about a JACL National staff approach that stands in stark contrast to the approach of grassroots community groups.

The JACL approach is basically this: community needs are defined by the National JACL staff, a staff of professionals with little experience in day-to-day community struggles and without input from grassroots organizations actually involved in the day-to-day struggles. Community needs, in turn, are solved by professionals (gerontologists for the elderly, lawyers for those in need of legal help, social workers for those with social problems, etc.) Change is defined in terms of "sensitizing" these individuals.

The grassroots community approach is this: problems are defined by those who are at the point of the problem: in the case of the elderly, those who are involved in the basic day-to-day work with the elderly, and most importantly, the elderly themselves. These are the people who should define what are the needs because they are in the process of struggling against the problems.

The grassroots community approach sees solutions to the problems not in terms of mobilizing a handful of professionals (i.e. hiring gerontologists) but in terms of mobilizing large numbers of common, everyday people in the community to collectively work together and to change the situation.

The JACL approach smells of elitism, paternalism, and opportunism. The grassroots community approach hinges on the "masses" of people, because only through concerted action by large numbers of people can solutions come about.

Therefore, as you can see, the present controversy thus does not just focus on gerontology but rather on the whole direction of the National JACL since the resignations of Warren, Victor, Ron, Jeff etc. At that time, Warren warned people in his "Liberated Warren Report" that the JACL direction was becoming one of opportunism and professionalism --- away from the community --- under the leadership of Ushio. Please re-read Warren's statement on these points.

What we are seeing now is the concrete expression of this opportunistic trend.

The gerontology grant, from the information that we have uncovered, is only the first of many such grants being developed by the JACL staff. All the grants lean heavily on a professional's approach to problems, without input from local community projects directly involved in the problem areas.

What these grants mean is that the JACL is going to "front" off the good work done by others across the nation to obtain funds for their own projects which basically serve their own ends. They will continue to do this until they are exposed, stopped and dealt with.



Here is the strategy that we who are active in Bay Area grass-roots community projects have come up with to combat the JACL direction, specifically on the gerontology project:

The Kimochi-EBJA position paper will be the first of several position papers to be publicly issued. Other position statements will hopefully come from other Asian community elderly groups around the nation. At the same time, we are attempting to contact as many other groups in the community to notify them about what's going on and to urge them not to collaborate with the JACL gerontology project until the matter has been resolved. Resolution will probably come about through a meeting of all Asian elderly groups on the matter. Until the time of this meeting, we are asking that no groups go into individual negotiations with the JACL. Finally, we have talked with people in Washington and have laid the groundwork for cutting off the JACL funds based on the reasons given in the Kimochi-EBJA position paper (the cutting off of funds is what most of us would want, since it would effectively deal JACL a blow which they could not ignore).

The long-range goal is to isolate the National JACL staff from the community, to put the heat on them from community sources, to expose their opportunistic directions, and to educate the community on the matter of opportunism.

I am writing to you to alert you to these developments and to ask that you inform others in the New York area about the situation.

The JACL has announced through its press releases that it will be using New York as one of its site for the video-tape project. The JACL National staff --- Ushio, Moriguchi, Barry Matsumoto, Patricia Nakano, Margie Yamamoto --- may have already initiated contacts with groups or individuals in the New York area. We are asking that these groups and individuals not collaborate with the National JACL until the matter has been resolved at an Asian meeting. We are also asking that groups and individuals re-read the "Liberated Warren Report" and study it in light of the gerontology project controversy.

Please pass this information on to AAA members and other who you think should be informed. We have had some problem with "security" --- informational "leaks" to JACL sources --- therefore, we are asking that the short-range and long-range strategies be revealed only to those who you absolutely trust.

I hope this letter has not been too mumbled. Hello to all in New York from me and Sho, especially to beady-eyed Chris. Will keep you posted on latest developments in this issue.

*Allen*