

## TAKING CHARGE

Before the hearings, it was assumed that the JACL spoke for the Japanese American community. NCRR was looked upon as a group of young Sansei upstarts that hadn't even been in the camps. Even though we passionately believed in the cause, somehow, who spoke for the community was always an issue. We had always gone to the community for direction. We were guided, for example, by the Rafu Shimpo survey of its readers on monetary compensation. We felt that the JACL never took the time to ask the community how they felt about an issue!

Since the commission hearings were the first concrete step that the government took, the JACL took credit for it. We, as LACCRR and NCRR had discussed and debated how we should view the hearings and what we would do about it. Some who were suspicious thought that it was an attempt to "white wash" everything and spoke about boycotting the hearings. The majority, however, thought that we should participate and so we decided to go right into it and get people to testify!

It was a slow process to get people to speak publicly but once the hearings happened, it brought about a cataclysmic change. Once people understood what was going on, we couldn't fill the slots fast enough. People were coming out of the woodwork and it was really cathartic! Many internees had held their stories within themselves for years and emotions that had been buried and repressed finally began to come out. The hearings began to take on a life of its own and it developed its own momentum. People began to speak for themselves!

In the middle of the process, we as NCRR, were no longer willing to settle for a nice orderly 9 to 4 P.M. meeting. We asked the commissioners to go to the community, to hold a meeting at the Little Tokyo Towers (a senior citizen residence in the heart of Little Tokyo) to hear from the people. We got them to set up a special community meeting for testimony in the evening. This was a request from NCRR and they complied. Due to our involvement and presence, I think it was recognized that NCRR represented a legitimate voice in the community. From that moment on, the people of the Japanese American community also made it clear that they would now be in charge of the redress issue!

June Kizu

