

Fishery co-operatives-5

A time of surrender

The fifth instalment in the series on
the pioneer of Japan's co-operative movement

Just when our co-operative movement was starting to operate smoothly and we saw some hope for the future, we were faced with this crucial development. I became very worried about the future of the fishing villages and the FCAs in Hokkaido.

At about that time, we had a large stock of dried squid and, as there was an extraordinarily good harvest, the price plummeted. The price of one bag of squid fell to ¥80, which was not even enough to cover our costs. The fishermen had to get at least ¥90 in order to make a profit. The merchants in Hakodate, who claimed that their city was the nation's major trading centre for dried squid, also faced a severe lack of funds, and had to sell some of their stocks at a loss.

In an attempt to deal with these problems, they established the Japan Squid Distribution Association, and I hoped that, by dealing with them, we could keep the price at an acceptable level.

We sold all the dried squid that Dogyoren collected from the FCAs in the southern regions, as well as the stock of the individual merchants. The price soon rebounded to ¥95, but the government again set the official price at ¥80, thereby spoiling any advantages which the association had gained.

I had, in fact, negotiated with the Fishery Agency prior to the announcement, and they had agreed to a price of ¥97.

I felt betrayed, but, at the same time, I realized that this decision had been made not by the Fishery Agency, but by officials at the Ministry of Commerce and Industry who had not researched the situation and did not have enough information to understand the situation fully.

Furthermore, the aforementioned Japan Marine Products Trading Company had considerable deficits. While we were taking measures to bolster the prices, Matsuo and I became the subjects of a police investigation. Certain anonymous letters had been posted to the police stating that we were trying to inflate the prices and keep some of the profit for ourselves. We insisted that we were working solely for a system under which the fishermen could receive their just benefits.

The merchants also testified in our favour, by stating that they agreed with the aims of the association, and that they played an active part in it and had a share of its capital. They stated that if they did not co-operate with us to maintain the market conditions, all production activities would stop. The police soon called off their investigation.

When Dogyoren was first established, nobody expected it to develop as much as it did, and, therefore, none of the directors had wanted to become president of Dogyoren. Finally, Demachi, a member of the Hokkaido Prefectural Assembly and of the Kamoenai FCA, said that he might undertake the post.

Managing director

The other directors gave neither their approval nor disapproval. They simply said that it was best to leave all the management matters to me in my post as managing director. As Demachi also agreed to leave these affairs to me, he assumed the post of president. I went about my daily business, and when questions about hiring new personnel arose, I would ask Demachi for his advice or approval. He always told me to decide whom to hire, as I was the one who would work with the employees.

Nevertheless, he sometimes told others that I would never ask for his advice, and, for a while, I found his attitude troubling. Then, after several years during which our business and number of personnel increased greatly, Demachi announced a number of personnel transfers and structural reforms that I had not been consulted about.

Even though he had the power to make most decisions regarding Dogyoren, I protested these moves, because he knew nothing about the abilities or compatibility of the employees. Rumours that the relationship between the president and the managing director were bad spread rapidly through the fishing villages of Hokkaido.

From 1937 to 1941, I was devoted to the development of Dogyoren, but I decided to resign my post as managing director in 1941. There was talk in the FCAs of convening a special general meeting where Demachi would be asked to resign, so that I could be promoted to the post of president. I, however, intended to resign from Dogyoren, and persuaded them not to call a meeting. I then informed the board of directors of my resignation, but many of the directors still tried to convince me to stay on.

However, I had worked hard for Dogyoren and felt that I needed to rest for a while, so I decided not to continue.

Demachi resigned at the same time, and new directors were elected in June 1941.

After I had been off for a year, I was nominated to assume the post of president of the Hokkaido Marine Products Wholesalers Co-operative Association in May 1942. I accepted the position and worked for that co-operative for a year and a half, during which time I learned much more about fishing goods and about the distribution of fishery products.

In 1944, I moved again, to the newly established Hokkaido Fisheries Industry Organization, previously known as Dogyoren, which had been restructured and renamed by the military government. The FCAs were also forced to change back to Fisheries Associations, which were established separately in each municipality.

The co-operative movement, which was based on the principles of independence and solidarity, was thus forced to surrender its ideals to those of the military government.

No excuses

After the war, many people tried to make excuses for their co-operation with the government, but I firmly believed that I did not have to make any excuses regarding my devotion to the fisheries organizations. My motivation had always been simply to allow the fishermen to

work for their mutual benefit, even during wartime.

I remained in the position of managing director of the HFIO until 1949, when the New Fishery Co-operative Law was enacted. This law incorporated the international principles of co-operatives, which are standard the world over. ♫

This instalment is excerpted from
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