

SETTLEMENT OF NEGOTIATIONS REACHED AFTER 11 YEARS
FOR ONAGAWA NUCLEAR POWER PLANT

In connection with the planned construction of Onagawa Nuclear Power Plant-1 (BWR, 524 MW) in Onagawa-cho, Oshika Country, Miyagi Prefecture, the local fisheries' association decided on August 28 to waive part of its fishing rights. The decision was made by a two-thirds majority vote at an extraordinary meeting of the association. Japanese fishermen are invested with an exclusive right to fish in such sea, river and other common water areas as are designated for fishing operations. An area scheduled for the spread of thermal waste water from the plant extends over some 500,000 square meters into the fishing zones over which the Onagawa and other fisheries' associations have a right to operate. The go-ahead for the construction project could not therefore be given until the fisheries' associations had waived their fishing rights over this area. Now, eleven years after the nuclear power plant project was announced, the construction work is to begin in December this year.

Tohoku Electric Power Company announced its Onagawa Plant project in April, 1967, when the social trend was generally in favor of the development of nuclear power. The local assemblies of Oshika and Onagawa quickly approved the construction project, and purchases of land for the nuclear power plant went ahead. The plan appeared to be going smoothly.

But Onagawa is close to the fishing ground off the coast of Kinkazan, claimed to be one of the world's big three fishing zones, and the bay of Onagawa is a good breeding ground for oysters and sea squirts. Some fishermen began to fear that, although thermal waste water from the nuclear power plant would not have an adverse effect on the fishing ground, low prices might be offered for fish taken from the sea close to a nuclear plant. In 1969 some fishermen in Onagawa, Oshika and Okachi got together to oppose the construction of the nuclear power plant, and they set up an organization which led a movement in the three towns against the Onagawa Nuclear Power Plant. As the Onagawa Fisheries' Association, which has fishing rights over 80 percent of the 500,000-square-meter area scheduled for the spread of thermal waste water, resolved to oppose the construction project, the plan came to a deadlock. The following year student activists and the Japan Scientists Association began to intervene in the movement against the construction project, and public opinion was split over the plant, particularly in Onagawa.

In its efforts to break the deadlock, Tohoku E.P.Co. joined with the prefectural and town authorities, as well as other organizations concerned, to talk fishermen out their opposition. As a result, all the fisheries associations except Onagawa had signed a memorandum by 1974, agreeing to the nuclear plant construction and receiving temporary payment of fishery indemnities. But this did not bring all fishermen to terms, because the Onagawa Fisheries' Association continued to oppose the construction project.

The Government designated the Onagawa Plant an important site in June, 1976, and relentless persuasion by Tohoku E.P.Co. and the prefectural and town authorities was effective in bringing the Onagawa Fisheries' Association to a softened attitude, little by little. At an extraordinary meeting held in November last year, the Association at last voted 306 to 207 in favor of the construction project. But a partial waiver of common fishing rights is a substantive matter which requires a two-thirds majority vote. When it was put to the vote, there were 362 in favor and 209 against, resulting in it being turned down, and again the project was suspended.

Tohoku E.P. Co. stepped up its efforts to improve its public relations, and commercial and industrial interests in Onagawa were increasingly motivated to help promote the construction project in the hope that the nuclear plant construction would provide fresh encouragement to the local economy. Some people in the Onagawa Fisheries' Association were beginning to feel that their approval of the nuclear plant construction would contradict the resolution they had adopted against the waiving of fishing rights, essential for the start of construction work.

This trend led the Fisheries' Association to call another extraordinary session on August 28, after obtaining assurances from the Tohoku E.P. Co. (1) that ¥950 million will be levied on the indemnities. The meeting was held under strict police guard, as it was faced with a crowd of radical opponents, such as the "league of the three towns against the Onagawa Nuclear Power Plant Construction," from which many fishermen had seceded, and a radical group of the New Left. Nevertheless, the imposing atmosphere did not prevent the meeting from voting to waive fishing rights, carried by a two-thirds majority. The voting was 454 in favor and 124 against. The previous resolution was reversed in nine months, and eleven years after it was first announced, the Onagawa nuclear power plant project was cleared from the lengthy dispute.

In 1970, in addition to Onagawa-1, construction permits were given for Fukushima I-3, Takahama-2, Hamaoka-1 and Genkai-1, and now all are in operation except Onagawa. Eleven years have passed since the Onagawa project was announced, and eight years since the approvals of the Electric Power Resources Development Coordination Council and of the Prime Minister were granted. The main factor behind these many years of struggle is the movement carried on by the fishermen to preserve their fishing grounds from which they earn their daily bread. Another characteristic of this dispute is the absence of dispute over the engineering safety of nuclear reactors, such as was involved in the Ikata and other cases.

This dispute was settled after the demand was met for payment of a sum in addition to the fishery indemnities, bringing the total to ¥6,000 million. If this precedent sets other demands for compensation going, it will have a considerable influence on other areas proposed for the construction of nuclear plants.

On August 30, the opponents made an application to the Sendai District Court for a provisional injunction nullifying the decision of the extraordinary meeting of the Fisheries' Association. The dispute has virtually been settled, but the litigating struggle of the opponents is likely to continue for some time.