

Japan: Against the regime

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"Thousands die for the glory of a single general." This classical Chinese saying was found on a telephone pole in 1945, according to Tokyo secret police reports.¹ That such a thing occurred may seem surprising given the way the Japanese population has been portrayed as of one mind with the ruling elite. For example, in response to military aggression towards China at the time of the Manchurian Incident (1931), it was reported that "the populace was swept away by a nationalistic euphoria".² And following the Marco Polo Bridge attack (outside Beijing) in 1937 "public opinion was marked by great patriotic fervor".³ The army developed a series of pamphlets which Borton notes indicated that: "As the crisis in Asia increased, persons from all classes in society—the political parties, businessmen, labourers and farmers—found...philosophical and religious justification for the national expansionist program".⁴

These and countless other examples portray the Japanese population as totally carried away with the war effort and possessed of a mindless unanimity—what the Japanese state called "100 million hearts beating as one".⁵ This perspective is symbolised by the *kamikaze* suicide flights which are used to show how fanatical the Japanese population was—with young men eager to die for the emperor. The individual soldier has also been caricatured in the same way: "He was cruel, and dirty, and bestial...he plundered and raped the natives".⁶ In reality, political uniformity was imposed on the Japanese population and it did encounter resistance.

Much of the English language literature on this period in Japan's history focuses on Japan as a monolithic entity with the population united behind the militaristic goals of the state. This chapter documents another aspect of Japan's history, that of resistance to the Japanese state's military expansion. It focuses on both collective and individual acts of resistance. The banning of left wing groups, the forced amalgamation of unions into an industrial association, *Sanpō*, and the gaoling and torturing of political and union activists, did not stop the resistance.

- 99 Fenby, 2003, p461.
- 100 O E Clubb, "Manchuria in the Balance, 1945-1946", *Pacific Historical Review*, vol 26, no 4 (November, 1957), p377.
- 101 Quoted in Clubb, 1957, p381.
- 102 Clubb, 1957, p379.
- 103 Schramm, 1967, p218.
- 104 Note accompanying the Sino-Soviet Treaty of Friendship and Alliance of 14 August 1945, in *American Journal of International Law*, vol 40, no 2, April 1946, p59.
- 105 Schramm, 1967, p 218; Xiaoyuan Liu, *A Partnership for Disorder: China, the United States, and Their Policies for the Postwar Disposition of the Japanese Empire 1941-1945* (Cambridge University Press, 1996), p279.
- 106 D G Gillin and C Etter, "Staying On: Japanese Soldiers and Civilians in China 1945-1949", *The Journal of Asian Studies*, vol 42, no 3 (May, 1983), p499.
- 107 Supreme Commander for the Allied Powers General Order no. One. This was formally accepted by the Japanese on 2 September. www.taiwandocuments.org/surrender05.htm
- 108 Act of Surrender—China Theatre, 9 September 1945, www.taiwandocuments.org/surrender02.htm
- 109 Quoted in Gillin and Etter, 1983, p501.
- 110 Gillin and Etter, 1983, pp499-500.
- 111 I Buruma, *Year Zero: A History of 1945* (Atlantic Books, London 2013), p193.
- 112 Gillin and Etter, 1983, p511.
- 113 *American Journal of International Law*, vol 40, no 2, April 1946, p53.
- 114 American investigation report quoted in E D Hawkins, "Manchuria's Postwar Economy", in *Far Eastern Survey*, vol 16, no 3 (12 February 1947), p35.
- 115 C P Fitzgerald, *The Birth of Communist China* (Penguin, Harmondsworth, 1964), p97.
- 116 Fenby, 1961, p306.
- 117 Fitzgerald, 1964, p97.
- 118 Schramm, 1967, p225.
- 119 K Marx, "The Bourgeoisie and the Counter-Revolution", *Neue Rheinische Zeitung*, no 169, December 1848, www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1848/12/15.htm. For a discussion of this see R Day and D Gaido, *Witnesses to Permanent Revolution* (Haymarket Books, Chicago, 2011).
- 120 L Trotsky, "Foreword to K Marx Parizhskaya Kommuna", in R Day and D Gaido, *Witnesses to Permanent Revolution* (Haymarket Books, Chicago, 2011), p503.
- 121 T Cliff, 1963.
- 122 K Marx, "Feuerbach. Opposition of the Materialist and Idealist Outlook D. Proletarians and Communism", *The German Ideology*, part 1, www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1845/german-ideology/choird.htm

There are numerous examples of individual resistance from the military, including within the ranks of the renowned *kamikaze* pilots, by peasants, Koreans forced into slave labour in the mines, workers and the intelligentsia. The resistance took the form of violent struggle, workplace sabotage and absenteeism and activists continuing their activism in the form of poetry, graffiti, jokes and publications. One union activist Yamashiro Yoshimune was gaoled for leading a miners' strike in 1927; he continued his activities on his release in 1936 and was imprisoned again in 1940. He refused to renounce his Marxist views and convert to "Japanism" despite pressure from the authorities. Representing only the tip of the iceberg, this chapter indicates there is clear evidence that resistance to Japanese militarism occurred within Japan, and from many levels.⁷

The origins of the Pacific war

The blame for the Pacific War is usually laid at Japan's feet. As Peter Edwards says, Japan "had revealed an expansionist and profoundly anti-democratic underside. This had to be eradicated, and it was".⁸ But the causes lie deeper; they lie in the rise of global imperialism and industrialism. By the 19th century predominance within the system of empires was going to those who embraced industrial capitalism. But there were some who sought to defy this. Among them was a set of islands in the north west Pacific.

For two centuries Japan had isolated itself and it had threatened no one outside its borders. But the Western powers would not allow it to remain a backwater forever. In 1853 Commodore Perry's US ships arrived to begin forcing Japan open to foreign trade and influence and the British followed. Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels had described how western expansion was breaking down the "Chinese walls" of recalcitrant peoples.⁹ They might have been writing about Japan.

The war was sold to the population as a "righteous war".¹⁰ Early in the 20th century nationalist thinker Hibino Yutaka wrote in an influential book that his country faced a world of annihilating competition. Indeed a "discarded scrap of flesh upon the Asiatic continent has the power to assemble the hungry vultures from the whole earth".¹¹ Japan would need to match the vultures for strength and so it began building an empire. In doing so it adapted and modified Dutch and French colonial practices the brutality of which were to make it notorious.¹² The Japanese ruling groups had entered a period of crisis that was only resolved after a series

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of struggles consolidated power and led to the return of the emperor as the symbolic head of state in what is referred to as the Meiji Restoration.

By 1905 Japan had defeated Russia in a major war but Russia was weak and it remained difficult to impose militarism on the people of Japan. It was not some historical inevitability; rather there were sharp struggles over what direction society would take. Millions of workers opposed capitalism, expansionism and the military. During the sensational 1930 Toyo Muslin strike young working women singing the Internationale waged street battles with police and company guards.¹³

Japan's brutal aggression against China was partly a response to Western pressure. Joseph Grew, US Ambassador to Tokyo, said that the Japanese, believing that Britain and the US threatened them, "sought to carve out an economic sphere in which to operate should the Western world deny them access to raw materials and markets."¹⁴ Chris Harman has outlined how both Germany and Japan, as late-comers to the global carve-up, were impelled by a sinister logic:

Once the path of military expansion had been decided upon, it fed upon itself. To challenge the existing empires required the maximum military-industrial potential. Every successful imperialist adventure increased this—for example, the Japanese takeover of Manchuria, the German annexation of Austria and then Czechoslovakia. But at the same time it increased the hostility of the existing empires—leading to the need for a greater arms potential and further military adventures. The breaking points were the German seizure of western Poland and the Japanese onslaught on Pearl Harbor.¹⁵

The US forced Japan to take the road of conquest, then blocked the road. Washington imposed a savage oil blockade on Japan, apparently to provoke war. It demanded a large-scale Japanese retreat, something Tokyo saw as impossible. However, Japan lacked the material resources to confront the US. Or did it? Was there any way to break out of the circle? The key problem, said a senior Japanese Navy Ministry official, was oil and if its reserves were depleted, Japan would grow weaker: "A grim and humiliating end. However if we could strike boldly and get the oil in the south..."¹⁶ The south meant Indonesia. But a strike to the south would only succeed if Japan could cripple the US Pacific fleet centred on Pearl Harbor.

A British Admiralty intelligence report acknowledged that "had she not gone to war now, Japan would have seen such a deterioration of her economic position as to render her ultimately unable to wage war, and to

reduce her to the status of a second-rate power".¹⁷ Joseph Rochefort, Commander of Station HYPO (combat intelligence centre for the Pacific Fleet) was blunter: "We cut off their money, fuel and trade. We were just tightening the screws on the Japanese. They could see no way of getting out except going to war".¹⁸ The Japanese government's "Main Principles of Basic National Policy", formulated in 1940 and adopted after the move to the south began, underpinned the southern strategy and emphasised bringing "the eight corners of the world under one roof".¹⁹

Historical overview

The 1870s and 1880s had seen the emergence of a democratic broadly popular People's Rights Movement which focused attention on political freedoms and individual rights through demands for a national assembly and a broadening of the political power base.²⁰ The movement secured the establishment of a parliament and was only halted in the end by tough internal security laws.

The new climate created greater space for the left. A proletarian literature movement arose which "with an explicit class perspective presented anti-war ideas and unflattering descriptions of the military".²¹ These had some appeal because in a time of détente and relative prosperity the military lost prestige. Young men sought careers in other fields and "the public began to look down upon the army as a superfluous if not parasitical element of society in a peaceful world".²² However, the relatively peaceful climate ended in 1891 after which Japan was almost continuously at war.

Japan went through a tense time during the First World War, experiencing food riots and a wave of labour disputes. But the 1920s were a time of relative prosperity as well as international détente, exemplified by the 1921 Washington Conference at which the powers arrived at a set ratio for naval assets. As long as the world capitalist economy grew, allowing Japan a certain affluence and social peace at home and reducing external pressures on the imperial state, elements of liberal government could emerge.

The rule of the Taisho Emperor (1912-1925) is popularly referred to as Taisho Democracy. Universal male suffrage, granted in 1925 following mass protests, expanded the electorate from 3 million to 13 million. There was growing interest in left wing ideas and the General Election Law of 1925 benefitted some left wing candidates. Attempts to pass legislation protecting workers' rights to join unions, however, continued to be blocked by business interests.

Nevertheless, although the period was characterised by a two-party parliamentary system, the repression identified with the 1930s is evident. Laws such as the Police Security Law (1900) were introduced to contain mass protests and the growth of left wing ideas and combined with the Peace Preservation Law (1925) to curb “radical” elements in the labour movement.

The Communist Party was formed in 1922 but due to the increasingly repressive conditions decided to dissolve in 1924. It reformed in 1925 as a broader based party. Continued repression decimated the party and by 1935 it had ceased to operate. The government conducted a series of “red” mass arrests, murders and torture of left wing activists—in 1922, 1928 and again in April 1929. On 15 March 1928, 1,600 people were arrested in a single day.²³ The Great Kanto Earthquake (1923) provided the opportunity to massacre Koreans and Chinese living in Japan and to murder the imprisoned anarchist Osugi Sakae and women’s liberationist Ito Naoe. *Burakumin* (ethnically Japanese but considered outcast) activists associated with Marxists were also arrested and tortured in this period.²⁴

The state used imperialist adventures to undermine class struggle at home. During 1933 and 1934 cabinet meetings repeatedly complained that domestic unrest was a “great problem, impeding national defence”.²⁵ As early as 1929 Lieutenant-Colonel Ishiwara Kanji had written: “Japan must expand overseas to achieve political stability at home”.²⁶

The 1931 Manchurian Incident, which opened the way for Japanese invasion to China’s north, was the first opportunity to apply this logic. When in September 1931 the Kwangtung Army marched in to set up the puppet state of Manchukuo, it created a surge of patriotism and repression. The labour movement retreated. “In the winter of 1933, an estimated 80,000 union workers and 20,000 non-union employees agreed to work on a Sunday or holiday and donate that day’s wages to the army’s National Defence Fund Drive”.²⁷ In 1920 *Sōdōmei* (Greater Japan Federation of Labour), the largest trade union federation, had condemned Japan’s Siberian intervention in 1918 and called for self-government in Korea. It dropped the word “Greater” from its full name to show its opposition to Japanese imperialism.²⁸ However, after 1931 *Sōdōmei* union contracts began incorporating a promise of “industrial service to the nation”.²⁹ From this time Japan was effectively at war.

General Ugaki Kazunari wrote that the main objectives of his time as army minister were achieved through the Manchurian offensive: the unity of the military and the people and the “popularisation of national defence”.³⁰ An Army Ministry newspaper remarked: “Since the

Manchurian incident, confrontational attitudes between social classes with differing economic interests appear to have gradually subsided”³¹

Millions of workers opposed capitalism, imperialism and the military. As early as 1903 socialists were working to build an anti-war movement, arguing in their newspaper that “war benefits the bourgeoisie but sacrifices the common people.”³² In Japan as in any other society, there were anti-war and militarist tendencies, liberal and authoritarian impulses, left wing and right wing movements. Tragically, the militarists won.

Resistance to militarism

General society

In the atmosphere of the 1920s left wing culture coalesced, becoming the basis for criticism of the growing militarism. The *Nihon Purōrateria Bunka Renmei* (Japan Proletarian Cultural Association) was formed in 1931 uniting the arts and sciences. It produced numerous journals and magazines. This was the first ever educational and cultural movement in Japan based on workers and peasants and its impact was significant. Films and social criticism also flourished despite heavy censorship. In 1932 over 400 activists associated with the *Nihon Purōrateria Bunka Renmei* were arrested but those who had escaped this fate remained active underground.

Continued repression destroyed the *Nihon Purōrateria Bunka Renmei* in 1934.³³ However, intellectuals and artists still found ways to protest. The *Gakugei Jiyū Yōgo Dōmei* (Federation to Protect Freedom of the Arts), which was formed in July 1933, opposed fascism and the war but was unable to develop because of the repression. Two dissident journals, *Chikaki yori* and *Kashin*, continued to publish monthly even after the beginning of heavy air raids and appeared in mimeographed form until the day the war ended. Even a village theatre performance reflected resistance: “I don’t understand the guys that send you off with a cheer (*banzai*). No one comes back alive. Instead of shouting *banzai*, they would be better off saying *Namu Amida Butsu*—the Buddhist death rites”³⁴

Cultural circles formed in factories and villages allowing workers and peasants to have their own independent culture. These movements allowed the illegal Japan Communist Party and left wing of the union movement to operate semi-legally and played a major role in the mass dissemination of anti-war ideas and the ideas of scientific socialism and revolution. Education was also affected by the formation of the *Shinkyō Kyōiku Kenkyūjō* (Progressive Education Institute) which opposed imperial and

militarist education, instead supporting a democratic education system. The influence of scientific socialism was widespread among primary school teachers. In February 1932 the "Red Teachers' Incident" involved the arrest of numerous teachers in many prefectures and the following February in Nagano prefecture 230 teachers were arrested.³⁵

The mood among the public in general, and workers in particular, was hostile to the government and often to the emperor. Police records from as early as 1942 reported growing contempt for existing authority extending even to the emperor. "Ten labourers in the steel industry were apprehended after a conversation in which they reportedly had discussed the emperor at some length and concluded that when the farmers and workers made their own world they should throw the emperor into the Siberian snow, like the Russian revolutionaries did with the tsar and his family."³⁶

There was much hostility towards military officers. One report records that when a staff officer inspected an area, he saw burnt-out residents sitting exhausted by the road. "Suddenly they all jumped up and shouted, 'This all happened because of you military men! What's the point of you coming here to look at it?' Without a word, the officer got back into his car and hurriedly drove off."³⁷

Anti-war protests

In Nagoya, *Sōbyō* (Nihon Rōdō Kumiai Sōhyō Gikai—union federation) mobilised 300 people at a demonstration commemorating the first anniversary of the Manchurian Incident and distributed leaflets with slogans including "Oppose the Imperialist war!" Students from several of the elite imperial universities formed a movement to protest at the suppression of free speech and government demands for "red" professors to resign. Nationally 1,500 students were arrested.

On 1 August 1931 the Japan Communist Party organised an illegal gathering and demonstration for Anti-War Day in a number of areas demanding the withdrawal of Japanese troops from Manchuria, Korea and Taiwan. Communist Party affiliated unions and the legal left protested against the war in 1932, holding partly illegal demonstrations on International Anti-War Day and International Youth Day as well as a 30-minute strike.

The Japan Communist Party soon attracted the attention of the authorities. While 1932 was the peak of its membership and publication of magazines, in October 1932 nearly 1,500 activists were arrested nationally, including party members, youth activists and *Zenkyō* (Communist

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Party dominated union federation) members. By 1935 the last remaining Central Committee member had been arrested and the final issue of the party's newspaper *Akabata* (Red Flag) had been published. Despite the best efforts of activists around the country to rebuild the party, repression stopped it reforming until 1946.³⁸

Workers' resistance

In 1933 there were 1.9 million factory workers and of this number women represented 49 percent. This was the first time that men outnumbered women factory workers. As Table 1 indicates, strikes occurred during this period and continued throughout the war. Although unionisation rates were low—about 5 percent—the number of organised workers rose by 25 percent between 1934 and 1936. Strikes reached a high of 2,456 in 1931 and, after a slight decline in 1935, labour began to mobilise and move leftwards once again. There were 1,915 strikes in 1934 and 1,975 strikes in 1936. In 1936 and 1937 the number of workers joining strikes or slow-downs peaked again. In 1937, 231,622 workers participated in strikes, the largest number since 1919.³⁹

Table 1: Number of strikes and workers participating

Year	Number of strikes	Number of workers involved
1931	2,456	154,528
1932	2,217	123,213
1933	1,897	116,733
1934	1,915	120,307
1935	1,872	103,692
1936	1,975	92,724
1937	2,126	231,622
1938	1,050	55,565
1939	1,120	128,294
1940	732	55,003
1941	334	17,285
1942	268	14,373
1943	417	14,791
1944	296	10,026
1945	256	164,585

Sources: Ohara Shakai Mondai Kenkyūjō (Ohara Institute for Social Research), *Annual Report on Japanese Labour 1935*, p217; 1938, p132; 1965, p14; 2011, p1057. A Fujihara, *Nihon Minshu no Rekishi 9: Senso to Minshu* (The History of the Japanese People, vol 9: War and the People), 1975, p180; S Shioda, *Nihon Shakai Undō Shi* (History of Japan's Social Movements), 1982, p62; Y Nishinacita, *Kindai Nihon Rōshi Kankeishi no Kenkyū* (Research on the History of Japan's Modern Labour-Management Relations), 1988, p232.

The main factor causing strikes in the late 1930s was working conditions, which continued to deteriorate with working hours increasing and overtime normalised so that 15-hour days became widespread. Slogans such as "Luxury is the enemy" were fed to the workers to keep them working. Workers, however, were not permitted to celebrate May Day; the 26 February incident (an attempted military coup) was used as the pretext for banning it in 1936 and it was not celebrated again until 1946.⁴⁰

Strikes, including a planned national general strike in March 1932, were suppressed but in the early 1930s the number of actions in the military and military factories increased. In March 1932, under the leadership of *Zenkyō*, the Tokyo subway workers' strike successfully linked the workplace to the war zone and demanded improvements in workers' conditions. The impact of this success was widespread. Strikes were larger and the government classified two thirds of them as "assertive", up from a quarter in 1930 and 1931. It took yet another military adventure to undermine worker resurgence. In July 1937 Japan again went to war, this time invading the Chinese heartland. According to Andrew Gordon, "Had it not been for the war in China, which began in July and led workers to restrain demands in cooperation with the 'holy war', the year 1937 would have been by far the time of greatest labour protest in Japan's history."⁴¹

For the first time since 1939 the number of strikes increased in 1943 (417), well into the Pacific War, before declining to 296 in 1944. The numbers of workers participating in strike action also decreased between 1940 and 1944. By 1945 although the number of strikes had fallen to 256, the number of workers participating in strikes was 16 times higher than in 1944.⁴²

As the war ground on Japanese society and industry descended into a disastrous state. Sabotage was frequent: a general reported that in July 1944 an estimated 10 percent of the aircraft manufactured in Japan were defective. As the old type of strike declined a new kind of "strike" became more frequent: absenteeism. In 1943 a 10 percent absentee rate was reported in war plants, rising to an average of 15 percent by mid-1944. The Kanagawa Prefecture Industry Association newspaper reported on 30 May 1940 that "absenteeism at its peak was 22 percent, and at its lowest 10 percent with the average about 15 percent. This is not just our prefecture but a national trend."⁴³

Figures for April 1943 indicate the absentee rate for women workers at the Kawasaki Aeroplane Factory was 44 percent compared with 20 percent for male workers. In general absenteeism was higher among women than men.⁴⁴ A doctor reported one third of people claiming illness were

not sick, while Dower says that by July 1945 absenteeism had deprived Japan of half of its potential working hours.⁴⁵ In the final days of the war Chinese workers forced to labour in a copper mine in the north rose up against the inhumane conditions. Estimates suggest 400 died in the year 1944-1945 and many also died on the day of the uprising.⁴⁶

Dissolution of the union movement

Elements of the union movement had been active in opposing the war and growing militarism but by 1937 many of Japan's representative trade unions had limited their industrial action and virtually stopped functioning as trade unions. Illegal unions, which included groups such as the Japan National Railway Workers Preparatory Committee, were also suppressed at this time. By July 1940 the *Nihon Rōdō Sōdōmei* union federation had dissolved as had most of the remaining non-federation affiliated unions. It became part of *Sanpō* (Sangyō Hōkoku Kai—Patriotic Industrial Association) in which the enterprise was seen as one family (*jigyō ikka*). The police, with the collaboration of right wing labour leaders, organised and supervised *Sanpō* for permanent employees and created *Rōhō* (Rōmu Hōkoku Kai—Patriotic Labour Association) for casual workers in 1938. *Sanpō* organised every workshop with the objective of compelling workers to submit unconditionally to forced labour, overwork and low wages.

With both organisations the police were able to control approximately 80 percent of the workforce. As the war dragged on and managing workers increased in difficulty, big business used *Sanpō* to indoctrinate workers with the ideology that the enterprise was an extension of Japan's unique family system—the head of the enterprise was the head of *Sanpō*.⁴⁷ A number of important industrial disputes occurred, however, even after the dissolution of the union movement. Many struggles broke out nationally due to workers' heightened class consciousness and their resistance to the war.⁴⁸ In places where unions were weak or where the traditional May Day march could not be held, other forms of celebration were held—union meetings, speeches, forums, mountain-climbing picnics and sumo wrestling.⁴⁹

Strikes did not disappear entirely and not all unions disappeared during the war. Many of the struggles in this period focused on the wages system and from 1939 the labour system.⁵⁰ Current research has so far revealed that one of the most active of unions throughout the war was the Printers' Union based in Tokyo which transformed itself into the Printers' Club (*Shuppanko Kurabu*), but there may have been others. The

club stated that by continuing to exist they wanted to "show the determination of Japan's entire union movement".⁵¹

The Director of the Printers' Club, Shibata Keiichiro, stated that "our members thought that no matter how much strain we were put under, we had to ensure the club survived".⁵² He observed that: "The right wing trade union officials dissolved the organisations and co-operated with the military. They sold workers out to the enemy and because of that many other organisations were forcibly dissolved. We thought that the club would also be ordered to dissolve. If we continued in the same way and with the same [union] activities we would be looked at as 'red' [communist], which would lead to immediate repression, and we thought we needed to continue the club... If workers stood firm together and fought we would raise our class consciousness... We decided it was important to research becoming an organisation like a consumers co-operative or a study group to improve print workers' skills, organisations that anyone would think was necessary".⁵³

In February 1940 the Printers' Club had 1,500 members. When the police demand that it disband in March, members formed a book club and published a *haiku* (Japanese poetry) journal. The Printers' Club held a fake dissolution party in August, but in October they established three travel clubs, initiated a cooking class and organised a hike attended by 50 people. The Printers' Club continued to meet, print materials and conduct political education activities until most of the leading male members were arrested in 1942. The club then continued under the auspices of the women members.⁵⁴

Nothing escaped the eyes of the state. Foreign Ministry files record an official pondering reports of industrial sabotage and rumours of drunken workers cheering Stalin. Even students too young to have learnt Marxism in the 1920s and 1930s who were recruited for factory work "appeared to have imbibed class consciousness almost intuitively".⁵⁵

As the war dragged on the cost of subsidising the conflict increased. Inflation ensured the cost of living rose while wages declined. If wages in 1934 are taken as 100, by 1940 workers' wages had decreased to 81.9 while the cost of living reached 180. Predictably, working conditions deteriorated. Actions occurred because people were angry over the hunger caused by the war, low wages and poor conditions. Workers protested by refusing overtime, were absent or adopted "go slow" measures at work.⁵⁶

In 1942 communists organised and led action in a steel works controlled by the navy, and sabotage by workers at a Hitachi manufacturing works resulted in a 30 percent decline in production. These workers

demanded improved working conditions including to the company's pay system. At this factory 13 people demanded improvements to their working conditions. Because of management's negative attitude and under direction from communist members, workers protested by sabotaging the products including by producing "rejects".

At the Nikko Electrics factory 1,500 people signed to register their demand for a wage increase and a reduction in daily working hours. The police concluded that in these last two actions communists had formed a group in the factory and were attempting to convince workers of left politics. The Ministry of Internal Affairs Police Bureau's edited volume, *The State of Social Movements (Shakai Undō no Jōkyō)*, notes for 1942 that there was an increase in late arrival or early departure from work and an increase in absenteeism, which rose to over 40 percent in some factories. When the bombing of Tokyo started (in 1942 and then again in 1944) absenteeism rose to 49 percent. In 1944 absenteeism levels were running at between 24 and 51 percent in shipbuilding and between 21 and 51 percent in aircraft manufacturing.⁵⁷

In 1943 many of the struggles were around wage increases, improvements to conditions and opposition to management; one was around the unfair distribution of food and other goods and a half-day strike was over the demand for a day off. Women workers from a manufacturer of aircraft parts decided to take a day off; at first they gathered in a nearby shrine and then went swimming. There were also demands for improved working conditions by workers in the Japan Pharmaceutical company.

High school and university students were also forced to work and often did so unwillingly. However, they did resist. The following is an example from Shibaura Manufacturing in Tokyo where several hundred students were confined to their dormitory for stealing some food. They retaliated with two days of sabotage and rotation of work groups so that one group was always absent, ensuring that no finished products could be completed.⁵⁸

The Ministry of Home Affairs Police Bureau reported on the dissatisfactions of workers—including insufficient food, poor wages and conditions—which resulted in increased absconding from factories, absenteeism, sabotage and the production of faulty products right up until the end of the war. In an electrical factory in Nikko in September 1942, 1,500 workers struck to demand higher wages and shorter working hours. However, the workers demands were not realised as they came under increasing repression from the police. In November 1942 in the Hitachi company's Kameido (Tokyo) factory, workers demanded higher

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wages and the strike action took the form of a campaign to deliberately produce faulty goods.⁵⁹

Peasant struggles

Even after the outbreak of war and despite increasing government oppression, tenants won 57 percent of their disputes with landlords—more than ever before. In many agricultural villages tenant farmers gathered together and tilled co-operatively on May Day to show their solidarity against the landlords.⁶⁰ Table 2 shows resistance by peasants continued until the end of the war.

Table 2: Peasant struggles

Year	Number of disputes	Number of tenants involved
1931	3,419	81,135
1932	3,414	61,499
1933	4,000	48,073
1934	5,828	121,031
1935	6,824	113,164
1936	6,804	77,187
1937	6,170	63,246
1938	4,615	52,817
1939	3,578	25,904
1940	3,165	38,614
1941	3,308	32,289
1942	2,756	38,614
1943	2,424	17,738
1944	2,160	8,213

Sources: A Fujihara, *Nihon Minshu no Rekishi 9: Senso to Minshu* (The History of the Japanese People vol 9: War and the People), 1975, p216; S Shioda, *Nihon Shakai Undō Shi* (History of Japan's Social Movements), 1982, p66.

Resistance inside the military

Unrest among soldiers was more significant than people realised. In Osaka in 1930 a Soldiers' Committee was established under the auspices of the Japan Communist Party and was very active once the Manchurian Incident began. Committees were also established in a number of other facilities. The Communist Party established a section in the party for organising in the military in July 1932 and in September published a magazine for soldiers called *Soldier's Friend* (*Heisbi no Tomo*), while the *Advanced Military's Bugle* (*Shingun Rappa*) was established in the Kansai (Osaka/Kyoto) area. These magazines emphasised the freedom and human rights of soldiers and sailors or "workers and farm labourers in uniform."⁶¹ In 1931 the

Soldiers' Committees tried to set up reading groups and while some were stopped using military laws others succeeded. Table 3 shows the number of anti-war actions which took place in the military and in military factories.

Table 3: Anti-war actions by the military and in military factories

Year	Number of anti-war actions
1929	66
1930	158
1931	126
1932	204

Source: A Fujihara (ed), *Nihon Minshu no Rekishi 8: Danatsu no Arashi no naka de* (The History of the Japanese People, vol 8: Amidst the Storm of Repression), 1975, p304.

Soldiers developed tricks to escape fighting—how to get into hospital, how to get a tour at a training camp and how to get the best jobs.⁶² Diaries and letters show many *kamikaze* loathed what they were doing and were critical of the war. Diary entries show one pilot, Hayashi Tadao, read Lenin's *State and Revolution* up to the day before he died. He read it secretly in the toilet, swallowing pages as he read and concluding it was an imperialist war. A sailor wrote: "This journey of ours is meaningless from the point of view of military strategy, and will cause no damage to the enemy. Our purpose is to prove the meaninglessness of such an action, and for this we are going to die".⁶³

In 1939 soldiers taken prisoner by the Chinese Communist Eighth Route Army formed the *Nihon Heishi Kakusei Dōmei* (League to Raise the Consciousness of Japanese Troops). Other groups also formed including one in May 1940 under the direction of Nozaka Sanzō, who became a Japan Communist Party politician in the 1950s and 1960s, which focused on the Japanese army, and using leaflets, pamphlets and newspapers demanded improvements to the living standards of soldiers and concentrated on notifying Chinese soldiers and peasants of the anti-war activities of Japanese people.

Japanese prisoners of war in China rallied to the Chinese cause. The *Hansen Dōmei* (Anti-war League) formed by captured soldiers engaged in "megaphone propaganda" at the front, appealing to Japanese troops to surrender or refuse to fight. The League was forced to dissolve in August 1941 by the Nationalist government and its members were returned to prison, but even under repression and with limited freedom they continued their activities. With the cooperation of the Chinese Communist Party, Nozaka also established the Japan Workers and Peasants School

(*Nihon Rōnō Gakkō*) in 1940 to educate prisoners about Japan's military and in 1942 established the *Nihonjin Hansen Dōmei* (Japanese People's Anti-war League) and called on Japan's soldiers to participate in the anti-war movement.⁶⁴

After the Armistice, Japanese soldiers also deserted in Indonesia to join the national liberation struggle. According to the *New York Times*, perhaps 1,000 did this. Sergeant Fujiyama heard independence leader Sukarno give a speech and decided to join the liberation struggle. He was twice wounded in combat alongside Indonesians.⁶⁵ Others such as Sergeant Ono Shigeru had been sent to Indonesia to train the local nationalist youth. When the war ended, he stayed in Bandung and joined up with the independence fighters. Later he lost his left arm in an attack on a Dutch post office and lived in Batu, Eastern Java.⁶⁶

Resistance took the form of both collective and individual actions including strike action by workers but also collective absenteeism. Graffiti, humour and story telling also expressed resistance. It was resistance such as this that the Japanese elite feared. As navy minister Yonai Mitsumasa commented, "The reason why I have advocated the end of war is not that I was afraid of the enemy's attack, nor was it because of the atomic bombs or the Soviet entry into the war. It was more than anything else because I was afraid of domestic conditions."⁶⁷

In combination the research presented indicates a more nuanced picture which challenges the hegemonic vision of Japan's wartime population as fully supporting the war effort and this may represent just the tip of the iceberg.

Under occupation

Resistance continued during the Western occupation and for good reason.

The occupation was supposed to be humanitarian, foster democracy and work for peace. In practice it was racist, vindictive, favoured the rich and began rearmament. According to Australian cameraman William Carty, the first orders from General MacArthur, commander of US Army Forces in the Far East, to his foreign correspondents' club included no fraternisation or feeding the Japanese although many were starving. The Office of Strategic Services, ancestor of the CIA, said censorship under the occupation continued the "authoritarian tradition" in Japan. Men of influence, said a parliamentary report, wore a mask of democracy but in reality they "swaggered on black markets".⁶⁸

Western attempts to reform Japan were half-hearted. In less than a decade, moreover, the US was pressing Japan to create new fighting

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forces to be directed against the Communists in Korea and China. The needs of economic reform likewise took a back seat and the purging of elements considered dubious became less of a priority after late 1947. Under the watchword "Reverse course" Japan began to fit into the Western alliance.

The International Military Tribunal for the Far East, also known as the Tokyo War Crimes Trials, judged the chief (so-called Class A) war criminals. Many thought Tribunal president Sir William Webb was biased. The British judge Lord Patrick saw Webb's absences along with those of one other judge as "the gravest blot that had yet stained the honour of the court".⁶⁹ After 18 months of prosecution Webb suggested each accused should get only two days rebuttal, prompting outraged protests from the defence.⁷⁰

Webb himself agreed that the crimes of which the German leaders at Nuremberg were accused were far more serious than those of the Japanese defendants. He acknowledged that the Tribunal was flawed because Emperor Hirohito, the leading criminal, had received immunity.⁷¹ The prosecution indicted Japanese leaders for promoting racial superiority in a trial where few of the judges were non-whites. Thus the credibility of the trials was dubious.

The occupation never really finished. Rather a new global political alignment arose with Japan as a crucial strategic base against Russia and China in the Cold War, complemented by a hot war in Korea. As this new global conflict emerged, the US's Japan policy changed dramatically. The new phrase on everybody's lips was "Reverse course". Wartime villains who might once have expected to be purged were now allies against Communism. They were "de-purged" and the occupiers hounded leftists instead.⁷² Ambitious plans to break the monopoly power of the *zaibatsu* mega-corporations were quietly abandoned because opening up the Japanese economy to US capital became less important than immediate economic stability and the imperatives of winning the Korean War:

the changes turned out to be considerably more modest than some had hoped...shifts in American foreign policy towards east Asia...and calls from the Congress to guard against unnecessary overseas spending left the core of Japanese finance unimpaired... The old combines regrouped and returned to something akin to their former status.⁷³

In a speech marking the first anniversary of the surrender MacArthur had remarked that Japan's strategic position could make it either a mighty bulwark for peace or a perilous springboard for war. Millions of

Japanese yearned for the former but once Korea blew up US leaders opted for the latter.⁷⁴

The fate of the labour movement expressed wider social patterns. With the end of the war, interest in trade unions had revived quickly. Total union membership was 600,000 in late 1945, rising to 6.7 million or 53 percent of the workforce by June 1948.⁷⁵ Conventional accounts attribute this to encouragement by the occupation forces but MacArthur was more interested in a new version of corporatism. Unionisation did not proceed in the normal way, by persuading individuals to join; instead almost the entire company workforce would join *en masse*. According to Japanese expert Kazuo Nimura, most doubt that all these workers joined as a result of freely made individual decisions.⁷⁶ Closed shop arrangements can, of course, be a mainstay of genuinely independent trade unionism but that was not the case here. Another writer, Taira Koji, argues that when large enterprises were “unionised” overnight it was really an extension of the corporatist *Sanpō* methods used by the wartime regime to integrate workers.⁷⁷

While these devices sought to restrict unions, large numbers of workers had ideas of their own. In addition to work stoppages they used workers’ control strategies (taking control of production) to get around MacArthur’s anti-strike restrictions. When employees took control of the *Yomiuri* newspaper and shifted its editorial line to the left, circulation rose sharply. The first peak of struggle was the Food May Day demonstrations of 1946. This attracted some 2 million workers, half a million of them in the capital. Communist leader Tokuda Kyuichi drew prolonged cheers when he shouted “Down with the emperor!” The day was filled, one observer wrote, “with a curious kind of joy—perhaps the kind of luminous joy a war prisoner feels on regaining freedom.”⁷⁸

MacArthur’s team began looking for ways to get trade unionism back under control. When workers announced a general strike for 1 February 1947, the situation became urgent. US labour adviser Ted Cohen, supposedly a leftist, thought the general strike such a “fearful prospect” that he suggested MacArthur ban it—which he eventually did. Labour leaders who had taken the occupation’s pro-union rhetoric at face value were so shattered they wept publicly. From this point labour’s position deteriorated steadily. Fourteen months later, in March 1948, the occupation authorities banned regional strikes by postal workers. Then in July MacArthur directed the Japanese government to deprive civil servants and other public sector employees of their right to strike. In December an injunction was issued against a miners’ strike. In 1949 the qualifications for legal strikes in the private sector were tightened.⁷⁹

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Meanwhile MacArthur's Labor Division encouraged campaigns against the left in the unions, culminating in a "red purge" on the outbreak of the Korean War.⁶⁰ They were ably assisted by the Intelligence branch headed by General Charles Willoughby, who had praised Italy's fascist dictator Mussolini in 1939 for re-establishing the traditional military supremacy of the white race and who would later work for Spain's fascist dictator General Franco.⁶¹ In this way the best chance to really democratise Japan was lost. Thomas Bisson, who worked for the occupation authorities, wrote in his diary: "The one really significant challenge to the old guard Japanese establishment has been turned back."⁶²

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