

The occupation of Japan was, from start to finish, an American operation. General Douglas MacArthur, sole supreme commander of the Allied Power was in charge. The Americans had insufficient men to make a military government of Japan possible; so they decided to act through the existing Japanese government. General MacArthur became, except in name, dictator of Japan. He imposed his will on Japan. Demilitarization was speedily carried out, demobilization of the former imperial forces was completed by early 1946.

Japan was extensively fire bombed during the second world war. The stench of sewer gas, rotting garbage, and the acrid smell of ashes and scorched debris pervaded the air. The Japanese people had to live in the damp, and cold of the concrete buildings, because they were the only ones left. Little remained of the vulnerable wooden frame, tile roof dwelling lived in by most Japanese. When the first signs of winter set in, the occupation forces immediately took over all the steam-heated buildings. The Japanese were out in the cold in the first post war winter fuel was very hard to find, a family was considered lucky if they had a small barely glowing charcoal brazier to huddle around. That next summer in random spots new houses were built, each house was standardized at 216 square feet, and required 2400 board feet of material in order to be built. A master plan for a modernistic city had been drafted, but it was cast aside because of the lack of time before the next winter. The thousands of people who lived in railroad stations and public parks needed housing.

All the Japanese heard was democracy from the Americans. All they cared about was food. General MacArthur asked the government to send food, when they refused he sent another telegram that said, "Send me food, or send me bullets."

American troops were forbidden to eat local food, as to keep from cutting into the sparse local supply. No food was brought in expressly for the Japanese during the first six months after the American presence there. Herbert Hoover, serving as chairman of a special presidential advisory committee, recommended minimum imports to Japan of 870,000 tons of food to be distributed in different urban areas. Fish, the source of so much of the protein in the Japanese diet, were no longer available in adequate quantities because the fishing fleet, particularly the large vessels, had been badly decimated by the war and because the U.S.S.R. closed off the fishing grounds in the north.

The most important aspect of the democratization policy was the adoption of a new constitution and its supporting legislation. When the Japanese government proved too confused or too reluctant to come up with a constitutional reform that satisfied MacArthur, he had his own staff draft a new constitution in February 1946. This, with only minor changes, was then adopted by the Japanese government in the form of an imperial amendment to the 1889 constitution and went into effect on May 3, 1947. The new Constitution was a perfection of the British parliamentary form of government that the Japanese had been moving toward in the 1920s. Supreme

political power was assigned to the Diet. Cabinets were made responsible to the Diet by having the prime minister elected by the lower house. The House of Peers was replaced by an elected House of Councillors. The judicial system was made as independent of executive interference as possible, and a newly created supreme court was given the power to review the constitutionality of laws. Local governments were given greatly increased powers.

The Emperor was reduced to being a symbol of the unity of the nation. Japanese began to see him in person. He went to hospitals, schools, mines, industrial plants; he broke ground for public buildings and snipped tape at the opening of gates and highways. He was steered here and there, shown things, and kept muttering, "Ah so, ah so." People started to call him "Ah-so-san." Suddenly the public began to take this shy, ill-at-ease man to their hearts. They saw in him something of their own conquered selves, force to do what was alien to them. In 1948, in a newspaper poll, Emperor Hirohito was voted the most popular man in Japan.

Civil liberties were emphasized, women were given full equality with men. Article 13 and 19 in the new Constitution, prohibits discrimination in political, economic, and social relations because of race, creed, sex, social status, or family origin. This is one of the most explicitly progressive statements on human rights anywhere in law. General Douglas MacArthur emerged as a radical feminist because he was "convinced that the place of women in Japan must be brought to a level consistent with that of women in the western democracies." So the Japanese women got their equal rights amendment long before a concerted effort was made to obtain one in America.

Compulsory education was extended to nine years, efforts were made to make education more a training in thinking than in rote memory, and the school system above the six elementary grades was revised to conform to the American pattern. This last mechanical change produced great confusion and dissatisfaction but became so entrenched that it could not be revised even after the Americans departed.

Japan's agriculture was the quickest of national activities to recover because of land reform. The Australians came up with the best plan. It was basis was this: There were to be no absentee landlords. A person who actually worked the land could own up to 7.5 acres. Anyone living in a village near by could keep 2.5 acres. Larger plots of land, exceeding these limits, were bought up by the government and sold on easy terms to former tenants. Within two years 2 million tenants became landowners. The American occupation immediately gained not only a large constituency, for the new owners had a vested interest in preserving the change, but also a psychological momentum for other changes they wanted to initiate.

The American labor policy in Japan had a double goal: to encourage the growth of democratic unions while keeping them free of communists. Union organization was used as a balance to the power of management. To the surprise of the

American authorities, this movement took a decidedly more radical turn. In the desperate economic conditions of early postwar Japan, there was little room for successful bargaining over wages, and many labor unions instead made a bid to take over industry and operate it in their own behalf. Moreover large numbers of workers in Japan were government employees, such as railroad workers and teachers, whose wages were set not by management but by the government.

Direct political action therefore seemed more meaningful to these people than wage bargaining. The Japanese unions called for a general strike on February 1, 1947. MacArthur warned the union leadership that he would not countenance a nationwide strike. The strike leaders yielded to MacArthur's will. The re after the political appeal of radical labor action appeared to wane.

The Americans wanted to disband the great Zaibatsu trust as a means of reducing Japan's war-making potential. There were about 15 Zaibatsu families such as - Mitsui, Mitsubishi, Yasuda, and Sumitomo. The Zaibatsu controlled the industry of Japan. MacArthur's liaison men pressured the Diet into passing the Deconcentration Law in December 1947. In the eyes of most Japanese this law was designed to cripple Japanese business and industry forever. The first step in breaking up the Zaibatsu was to spread their ownership out among the people and to prevent the old owners from ever again exercising control. The stocks of all the key holding companies were to be sold to the public. Friends of the old Zaibatsu bought the stock. In the long run the Zaibatsu were not exactly destroyed, but a few were weakened and others underwent a considerable shuffle.

The initial period of the occupation from 1945 to 1948 was marked by reform, the second phase was one of stabilization.

Greater attention was given to improvement of the economy. Japan was a heavy expense to the United States. The ordered breakup of the Zaibatsu was slowed down. The union movement continued to grow, to the ultimate benefit of the worker. Unremitting pressure on employers brought swelling wages, which meant the steady expansion of Japan's domestic consumer market. This market was a major reason for Japan's subsequent economic boom. Another boom to the economy was the Korean War which proved to be a blessing in disguise. Japan became the main staging area for military action in Korea and went on a war boom economy without having to fight in or pay for a war.

The treaty of peace with Japan was signed at San Francisco in September 1951 by Japan, the United States, and forty-seven other nations. The Soviet Union refused to sign it. The treaty went into effect in April 1952, officially terminating the United States military occupation and restoring full independence.

What is extraordinary in the Occupation and its aftermath was the insignificance of the unpleasant. For the Japanese, the nobility of American ideals and the essential benignity of the American presence assuaged much of the bitterness and anguish of defeat. For the Americans, the joys of promoting

peace and democracy triumphed over the attendant
frustrations and grievances. Consequently, the Occupation served
to lay down a substantial capital of good will on which
both America and Japan would draw in the years ahead.

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