Struggle and Purpose in Postwar Japanese Unionism

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I have been privileged to join the long list of scholars trained in historiography and things Japanese by Thomas C. Smith. His support, high standards, and gentle prodding constitute the indispensable background for this study. Through him I also met other scholars whose support and encouragement were vital to my work. These include Nimura Kazuo, formerly head of the Ohara Institute for Social Research, who provided me an office for two years and unlimited access to Japan's finest archive for the study of labor history. Working with Tom Smith also brought me into the orbit of his friend and colleague Irwin Scheiner. Indeed, it is no exaggeration to say, to paraphrase one of my *senpai*, that every graduate student in Japanese history at Berkeley in the 1970s and 1980s was the joint product of the fruitful collaboration of Tom Smith and Irv Scheiner. Words like *supportive* and *encouragement* only begin to describe what we owe to both of these men.

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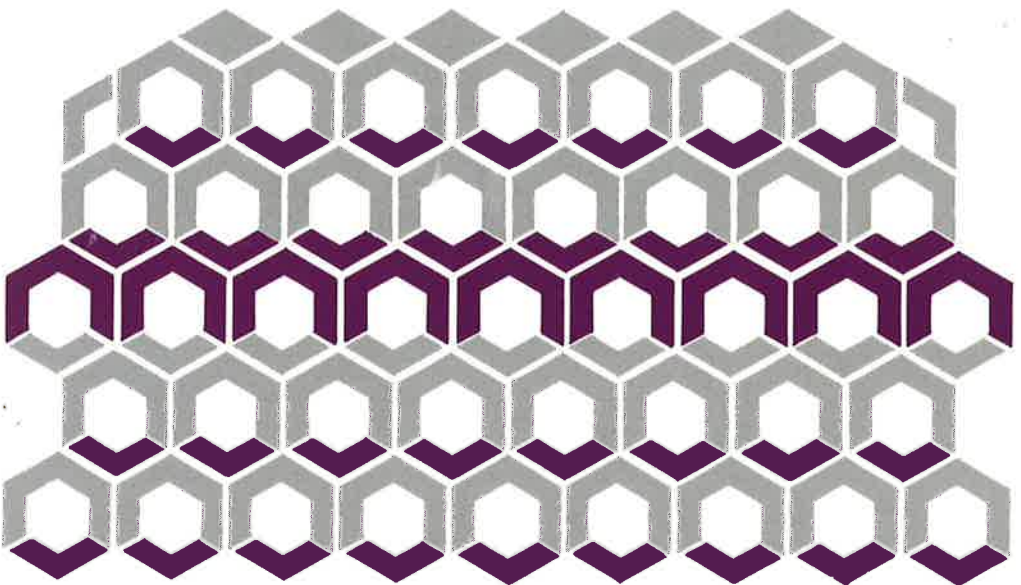
The Department of History at the University of Denver has provided a home for me and a place to develop, both as historian

and as teacher of history. John Livingston was been my guide in both of these endeavors. He was at once the toughest of critics and the most supportive of colleagues. My senior colleague at DU, Peter Golas, has also been supportive in every possible way, encouraging my scholarship, reading my manuscript, and allowing me the freedom to develop our curriculum in East Asian and world history. I am also grateful to the prodding of my colleague Joyce Goodfriend, who never let me forget the importance of getting the manuscript done. To all of my colleagues in the department and to the staff of the department, a heartfelt thank you.

I also owe a profound debt of gratitude to the veterans of the postwar labor movement whom I interviewed in 1988. I have kept in touch with several of these men in the years since and have found in their encouragement a source of inspiration. I wish therefore to thank Ōshima Ki'ichi, the late Shimizu Shinzō, the late Harada Kanae, Miyata Yoshiji, and Tanaka Yukio.

I have been engaged in this project for a decade and a half. In that period I have been privileged to share my life with four people, each of whom has used the same years to grow and develop in her or his own way—Sumako, the ceramic artist; Mark, the cellist; Eric, the student of things Japanese; and John, the builder. More than this I am unable to express in words.

Introduction

Status, purpose, and lineage are the themes of this study of the postwar Japanese labor movement. Japan's most important postwar industry, steel, provides a setting appropriate for the consideration of workers and unionists, but also managers and politicians. The time of the study stretches from 1943 to 1984, with particular attention paid to the first two decades. Between 1943 and 1963, Japan went from being a vast empire, spanning oceans and continents, to a defeated, occupied, and outcast nation that had just begun to reemerge onto the international stage. During these years of tumult, what were the larger processes that provide the context for this study?

The most basic was the political sea change, long in the making, that made government officials and others in positions of public authority—specifically, in this study, politicians and corporate managers—responsible to the nation (*kokumin*) instead of the imperial state. As happened elsewhere, the distinction between nation and state was obscured in the process of Japan's modernization. The leaders of imperial Japan (as it became after 1868) subsumed the nation within the state, despite early and continuing popular resistance and pressure for more of a nation-centered polity. The destruction and nearly complete dismantling of the coercive apparatus of the imperial state under American military occupation brought to rapid completion the process of making officials responsible to the nation, now clearly defined as the people (*kokumin*). This was the essence of the postwar democratization of the Japanese *state.*

The second process at work was the social transformation, long prepared and awaited, that lowered the barriers of status and class, permitting hitherto low-status individuals—in this case, workers and trade unionists—to become men of high moral purpose (*shishi*). Unionists were now able to join government officials, politicians, and business leaders in legitimately justifying

their actions in the name of the nation (even as the elite groups were now forced to justify their actions in the name of the nation, instead of the imperial state). This process of breaking down and readjusting barriers of status was the essence of the postwar democratization of the Japanese nation.

The third process at work in the postwar transformation of Japan was the economic restructuring that reoriented industry from wartime to peaceful production. *Fukoku,* the goal of modern Japanese political economy, now came to mean a rich nation (*koku-min*) instead of a rich state (*kokka*) ruling over a poor people with a strong army. Accomplishment of this new goal required, first, national economic recovery and second, the rationalization of industry to make Japan's economy as productive and strong as Europe's or America's. Whose task was it to conceive, lead, and carry out a transformation of this order? Unions stepped forward, for the first time in Japanese history, as qualified candidates for this purpose.

The fourth process was the task of finding a secure niche for Japan in the international arena. Here too the voice of labor would be heard, not for the first time, but more clearly and decisively than in the past. Union leaders' contributions to the central national debates of the late 1940s—on the shape of economic recovery and the nature of democratization—prepared the way for their intervention in the controversies of the 1950s over the nation's role in the Cold War. Unionists ensured their eligibility for participation in the national political discourse of the 1950s and 1960s by demonstrating their sense of high purpose in the debates of the late 1940s.

High purpose had long meant loyal service to higher authority or loyal action in the name of such authority. In the modern period, that higher authority had most often been the imperial state. The nation had been subsumed within that imperial state, despite the best efforts of progressives to liberate it. Only with the collapse of the imperial state in 1945 could the nation emerge as the undisputed object of loyal service and action. The struggle then became one to define the nation and to reconstruct the state (and its political economy) to truly reflect the interests of the nation. Each group involved in the struggle had its own vision of those interests; indeed, the vision of each defined the group. Each group thus had its own ideology, which was anchored in its own historical lineage, from the right-wing radicalism of the followers of Asahara Kenzō (see glossary) to the young Communists,

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Old Purpose Frustrated and Old Loyalties Challenged, 1943–1947

As 1943 opened, a fifty-year-old official in the Japanese imperial service was transferred from Korea back to Japan. The event was not particularly significant in itself, as officials were routinely transferred throughout the war years. It is the man, together with the nature, timing, and geography of his transfer, that interests us. Miki Takashi had been plant manager at the Chongjin works of Japan Iron and Steel (Nittetsu) since its establishment in 1939. In 1943 he became assistant plant manager at the Yahata steelworks on the island of Kyūshū, in southwestern Japan. Before moving to Yahata, Miki oversaw completion of work on Chongjin's second blast furnace, leaving the newest of the Nittetsu steelworks fully operational.

Rewards of Imperial Service

Miki Takashi proved himself a loyal servant of the imperial state in his three and a half years at the remote north Korean site—closer to Vladivostok than to Pyongyang or Seoul, though linked by rail to Jilin (Kirin) in Japanese-controlled Manchuria. The addition to the empire's productive capacity that he oversaw helped make 1943 the peak year for steel production in imperial history. Indeed, the modern empire whose goal was *fukoku kyōhei* (the creation of "a rich country with a strong army") can itself be said to have "peaked" about the time Miki was transferred from his imperial posting. Chongjin itself became operational just in time to suffer the shortages that overwhelmed the imperial Japanese political economy after 1943.

Miki Takashi represented the imperial state in Chongjin, despite a background that had not groomed him for the role. He oversaw the exploitation of Korea's abundant mineral resources

Purpose Redirected, 1945–1947

That the steelworkers could strike in Muroran, late in 1943, when the wartime regime had been fully deployed and the population (supposedly) fully mobilized, showed the limited effectiveness of Sanpō—and by extension, the entire wartime mobilization. Workers clearly needed more motivation than provided by the Sanpō slogans that proclaimed their importance to the imperial war effort. The authorities were, naturally, highly embarrassed by the strike's outbreak. Somebody had to be held responsible. That somebody turned out to be Tamaki Masatoshi. Tamaki was chief of labor affairs at the Nittetsu Muroran works, and he managed to coax the striking workers back onto the job before the police learned of the incident. Strikes were illegal in wartime Japan, and strikers were liable to be jailed for Communist subversion if the police intervened. Tamaki's timely mediation avoided the arrest of steelworkers, which would have created great difficulties for plant management, who were of course ultimately responsible for industrial unrest. Because under the wartime labor-front regime, Sanpō managers and workers belonged to the same organization dedicated to maintaining industrial peace and promoting production, those holding the highest rank within Sanpō were the most responsible for any problems.

The Nittetsu head office (not Muroran's plant management) reprimanded Tamaki Masatoshi in 1944, after the police learned of the strike and protested to corporate management about not being informed of it at the time. Someone had to take responsibility for something as serious as a strike. There was plenty of low-level sabotage at factories and mines during the war (mostly work slowdowns) but few strikes. Plant management, however, was grateful to Tamaki and showed their confidence in him by promoting him, later in 1944, to a higher position, which supervised all aspects of worker life, including job performance, education, security, and housing. While in this position Tamaki got into

In Search of New Purpose, 1946–1949

In many ways the labor movement at the Yahata steelworks, on which I concentrated in chapter 2, was unlike that which developed elsewhere. This was bound to be the case, given Yahata's sheer size and its distinctive tradition. That tradition produced a style of unionism at once highly ideological and very proletarian. Most union leaders at Yahata were workers or former workers. One might say that this was to be expected—after all, we are studying the labor movement—were it not for the greater prominence elsewhere of white-collar union leaders. Indeed, their presence in unions was one reason why unionists—as distinct from workers per se—were able to engage in "activities of high purpose" and to succeed in having the nation recognize them as legitimate "agents of righteous action." As men educated at Japan's finest universities, their qualifications for high purpose were unquestioned.

Loosed Cannon

Ōshima Ki'ichi, encountered in chapter 2, was one of these. Tamaki Masatoshi was another, although he was an advisor to the labor movement and not a leader of it. Ōshima and his peers throughout Japanese industry were white-collar unionists. They were not just radical clerks, but men groomed for managerial positions who set their careers aside to join and, in many cases, lead the labor movement. Some of these staff—they were on the white-collar staff—unionists foreswore careers in management when they joined the unions. Such was the case with Hayashi Takeo, the leader of the production-control takeover at NKK Tsurumi in 1946. Some of these men acted as they did for ideological reasons; again Hayashi was a case in point, since he was

At Cross Purposes, 1950–1954

The events of 1949 transformed the labor movement. From being a struggle to reach a consensus on a single higher purpose for unions, the movement split into a multifaceted struggle between a number of groups working at cross purposes. This "plurality of purpose" would be symbolized not by unionists themselves, but by labor's political and ideological leaders—men such as Asahara Kenzō, Itō Ushirō, Takano Minoru, Nakajima Hideo, Shimizu Shinzō, and Ogata Takao—all candidates for high office or leading national political figures. None of these leaders was, throughout the period concerned, a unionist, though Ogata and Nakajima had once been unionists. University-educated white-collar unionists had led the quest for a single high purpose, but their presence within the labor movement waned after 1949. Those replacing them came from a remarkably diverse range of backgrounds. Ogata was a primary school graduate and a former laborer. Nakajima Hideo had gone only as far as middle school. Asahara and Itō had had some secondary education in the 1910s, though how much is unclear, and each had had to work his way through what schooling he had. Takano was a university student who became radicalized and left college for a career in labor politics. Shimizu had the most elite education of all, graduating from Tokyo Imperial University and joining Nittetsu in 1936 (though he quit the corporation ten years later). None of these individuals held high political office in 1950. Each sought it (or its equivalent in terms of influence) in the course of the next decade.

Fragmentation on Purpose

The events of 1949 had left unionists dazed. January's election brought conservative prime minister Yoshida Shigeru a whopping majority in the Diet. It also seemed to give the Communist Party the initiative over the Socialists on the left, but this came at a time

The Purpose of Unionism, 1955–1963

A decade after the end of the Pacific War and the start of the American occupation, a famous government white paper declared that the postwar transition was over (*mohaya sengo de wa nai*). The realization or hope that this might be the case inspired an out-pouring of historical reflection, as people in various walks of life tried to make sense of what had transpired. Different groups took the opportunity to cement their sense of purpose by developing or extending their own views of the past. In doing so, they not only sought to legitimate their own past actions through historical reflection on them, but they endeavored to record for posterity the high purposes to which they had aspired and continued to aspire.

For most historians as well, the middle 1950s have come to symbolize a major turning point in Japanese history. A listing of important events occurring between 1954 and 1956 might include the following: the irradiation of the Japanese fishing vessel the *Lucky Dragon* by an American H-bomb test in the Pacific; the ratification of the U.S.-Japan Mutual Defense Assistance Agreement; the resignation of Prime Minister Yoshida and the formation of the Hatoyama cabinet; the formation of the mass-based anti-nuclear organization Gensuikyō; the reunification of the Socialist Party and the formation of a single conservative party, the Liberal Democratic Party; the normalization of Soviet-Japanese relations and Japan's admission to the United Nations. No single national consensus emerged from these events—indeed the nation remained bitterly divided—but the process of political and ideo-logical fragmentation that we detected in the early 1950s was reversed. In contrast to 1952 and 1953, when there seemed to be an almost infinite variety of causes to serve, by mid-decade a pro-cess of consolidation had begun.

The consolidation of alternatives reflected the economic and political shakedown of 1953–54, the immediate postoccupation years. Political candidacies such as that of Asahara Kenzō failed;

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Struggle over History, 1964–1984

By 1964 major changes had come to Japan and to its most important industry. The political turmoil surrounding the U.S.-Japan Security Treaty had passed. The major political parties had relaxed their confrontational stances of the late 1950s. Japan had joined the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development and the International Monetary Fund and held the Tokyo Olympics, all in 1964. The nation had passed France and Britain to become the world's fourth-largest steel producer (and was close on the heels of number three, West Germany). Nagano Shigeo, president of Fuji Steel, had become head of the steel industry association. Inayama Yoshihiro, Nagano's future partner in the revival of Nittetsu, was president of Yahata Steel. Hirai Tomisaburō, another former MITI official, was Yahata plant manager.

In the labor movement, Dōmei, descendant of the old Sōdōmei, was formed in 1964 as a rival to Sōhyō. Soon more unions from heavy industry would belong to it than to Sōhyō. The International Metalworkers Federation formed a Japan Council the same year. The IMF-JC, as it was called, included the Electrical Workers, the Shipbuilders, the Autoworkers, and other union federations, plus the Yahata Steel union (though not yet Tekkō Rōren). One of its principal organizers was Miyata Yoshiji, then solidly in place as general secretary of Tekkō Rōren. Kadoma Yoshinobu of Tsurutetsu, one of the last of the militant leaders of Tekkō Rōren, stepped down as its chair in 1964.[1]

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[1] Kadoma had been chair of Tekkō Rōren for three years. Tanaka Yukio of Sumitomo did return to the Tekkō Rōren leadership in 1964, and Kadoma's replacement was Mito Kunihiko of Yahata, a member of the leftist Dōshikai. However, Tanaka would depart after two years (in 1966, when Tekkō Rōren joined the IMF-JC), and Mito proved to be much less militant than Shitomi or the late 1950s Tekkō Rōren leadership. In 1968 Miyata became Tekkō Rōren chair. See *Tekkō rōdō undōshi*, appendix, my source for all such information.

Afterword

Why does this study stop in 1984? The reasons are both practical and historical. I began my research into this topic shortly after 1984 and did most of it while in Japan between 1986 and 1988. Almost all of the books I have used (most of the books that I considered relevant to this study) were published by the late 1980s. I have felt the historian's caution about discussing very recent events, especially events that occurred during my research and writing, believing that perspective remains important even in our (would be) postmodern age.

Beyond these practical and historiographical considerations, I believe that the mid-1980s marks a watershed for developments considered in this study. In the short retrospect available to us at century's end, it seems that the Plaza Accord (among the G-7 [group of the world's seven largest economies] finance ministers) of 1985 marked the end of an era for Japan's postwar economy and society. It sparked the rise in the value of the yen and set off the Bubble Economy of the late 1980s, which in turn led to the deep recession of the 1990s. Japan's long race to catch up with the Americans and Europeans had ended—not entirely happily. The Cold War soon ended as well (save with North Korea) and with it the monopoly on high political office of the Liberal Democratic Party. The issues of recovery, industrial rationalization, and democracy, which had dominated national discourse about the political economy, have receded. Other, more personal, transitions also marked the middle 1980s. Nagano Shigeo, Iriye Tomio, and Nakakado Isao had recently passed away, while Miyata Yoshiji had just retired. Nakamura Takuhiko did, to be sure, succeed Miyata as leader of the IMF-JC, and Inayama Yoshihiro remained head of Japan's most important business organization, the Keidanren, to be succeeded by his former assistant at Yahata Steel, Saitō Eishirō. (Indeed, even today, steel industry executives and labor leaders continue to shape industrial policy.) Yet the continued

Individuals Discussed

Akieda Tetsuji: Communist active in early postwar Nittetsu Muroran union; editor of union newspapers; white-collar staff employee.

Asahara Kenzō: 1897–1967; radical labor leader and politician; son of a small-scale coal-mine operator in Kyūshū; some secondary education but no university; founder with Nishida Kentarō of radical Yahata steelworker union, Rōyūkai, in 1919; leader of 1920 Yahata strike; elected to Diet in first universal manhood suffrage election in 1928; reelected in 1930; author of best-seller about 1920 strike (*Yōkōro no hi wa kietari*) published during 1930 campaign; active in Manchuria during 1930s (switch from radical left to radical right); not purged after war but inactive until *c.*1949, when group of his supporters within the Yahata union (the Seiken group) formed; Diet candidate in 1952, defeated.

Asano Shōzō: b. 1888, younger son of Asano Sōichirō, founder of Asano *zaibatsu*; grad. Harvard 1912; president of NKK after the war; confronted by striking Tsurutetsu workers at NKK head-quarters in January 1946; purged for wartime activities later the same year; said to have intervened successfully with former Harvard classmates to prevent the breakup of NKK into separate steel-making and shipbuilding companies.

Barlow, David: captain, U.S. Army; labor officer of Fukuoka Prefecture Military Government Team during 1947; author of detailed report on late-1947 union sabotage activities.

Chong So-ryong: Korean laborer employed at Yahata steelworks in early 1940s; interviewed by Fukada Shunsuke for his 1971 book on laborers, *Shin Nittetsu no teihen kara*; unlike other Korean laborers later forcibly conscripted for work at the steelworks, Chong had been hired as a laborer.

Cohen, Theodore: 1918–83; head of SCAP Labor Division in 1946 and early 1947; had studied Japanese language, history, and

Terms, Institutions, Organizations

All Metalworkers: Communist Party–affiliated radical union federation, established in 1948, combining the radical steel-worker union federation, Zentetsurō, with metalworkers and rolling-stock producer unions; officers included Hayashi Takeo, Tokuhara Hiroshi, and Takano Hiroo; supported by few large unions, the exception being Yahata in 1949–50.

Amagasaki Steel: medium-sized steel producer in Hanshin region; known for militant unions in early postwar period; experienced bitter strike over layoffs, resulting in company bankruptcy in 1954; taken over by Kōbe Steel interests afterward.

Asano *zaibatsu:* industrial and financial conglomerate founded by Asano Sōichirō, who purchased the Meiji government's pilot cement factory; established NKK in 1912; added Tsurumi Steel-works (Tsurutetsu) to Tsurumi shipyard in 1918; experienced financial difficulties in 1920s and came under influence of Yasuda ; last Asano (president, Asano Ryōzō) purged from NKK in 1946.

Ashida government: coalition government of Socialists and Democrats, succeeding Katayama government; in power March–October 1948; Ashida a former diplomat and leader of the Democratic Party (formerly the Progressives); government collapsed as a result of the Shōwa Denkō scandal.

Chiba works: first postwar fully modernized and integrated iron and steelworks, built by Kawasaki Steel across Tokyo Bay from the Keihin industrial zone; prototype of other such mills built by all the major producers in the late 1950s and 1960s.

Council for Economic Reconstruction (Keizai Fukkō Kaigi): established early 1947 with support of the government, SCAP, and the leading political parties to encourage national economic recovery; brainchild of leaders from the Sōdōmei and the Dōyūkai, in particular Takano Minoru and Ōtsuka Banjō; headed by Socialist Suzuki Mōsaburō; preached a modified

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