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*Purge policy after the collapse
of Japanese militarism*

by
Hiroshi Masuda

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PURGE POLICY AFTER THE COLLAPSE
OF JAPANESE MILITARISM

H i r o s h i M a s u d a

1. J a p a n e s e F a s c i s m

On August 15 1945 Japan surrendered to the Allied Powers, bringing an end both to the Sino-Japanese War begun in July 1937 and to the Pacific War begun in December 1941. The surrender also marked the end of World War II which had broken out in September 1939.

How did a fascist system establish itself in Japan and lead the country to war? Japanese militarism, totalitarianism and authoritarianism had its roots in military aggression. In the 1920s the military was feeling dissatisfied with arm reduction policies and parliamentary politics that centered on political parties. Taking advantage of the general mood of anxiety and economic instability brought on by the world-wide depression, the military invaded Manchuria suddenly in September 1931. Prime Minister Inukai, who had tried to hold back military aggression, was assassinated by the army in May 1932, marking the end of party government. Subsequently the military established the puppet state Manchukuo. Recognition of the state by the Japanese government was internationally censured and resulted in Japan's withdrawal from the League of

Nations in March 1933. Sino-Japanese relations continued to worsen as the military tried to expand into northern China. At the same time, the military allied itself with Hitler's Nazi Germany, forming the Anti-Comintern Pact in November 1936. The Japanese government no longer had the power to stave off military aggression. In September 1937 Japanese and Chinese forces came to blows near Beijing. This is known as the Marco Polo Bridge Incident and soon led to full-scale war with China.

Prime Minister Konoé wanted to create a strong political system that could both control the military and resolve the war. His plan was to create a new party that would encompass all of the people. Finally, in 1940, under the influence of Germany's one party leadership, each of the political parties was dissolved and the Imperial Rule Assistance Association was formed. However, the Association, stripped of all power by the military and turned into a purely spiritual organization, was ultimately unable to achieve any of its proposed goals. In September 1940, Japan formed the Tripartite Pact with Germany and Italy and in December 1941 entered into war with the United States.

The Japanese political system of this era was characterized ideologically by a denial of liberalism, communism and internationalism and by an affirmation of totalitarianism, nationalism, militarism and racism. In this sense, Japanese fascism resembled that of Germany and Italy. There were, however,

some major differences: The power structure in Japan was not one-dimensional, but multi-dimensional and diffuse; there was no charismatic leader that resembled Hitler or Mussolini; there was no national movement stemming from the masses; constitutionalism and parliamentarism were not repudiated; and the Emperor, even while having credence with the people, was little more than a symbolic figure much in the manner of the Pope, real power lying in the hands of his advisers.

2. An Outline of Purge Policy

Removal from public office or "purge," along with the establishment of a new constitution, land reform and the dissolution of the zaibatsu, were among the policies of the American Occupation forces attempting to demilitarize and democratize Japan. The purge is a significant event in postwar Japanese history. However, in contrast to such issues as "the new constitution" and "land reform," which were considered the "goals" to be reached, the purge functioned simply as a "means" to achieve these goals, albeit an extremely powerful "means." The GHQ Purge Directive was like a knife thrust into the heart of Japan, dividing its people into two clear groups. On the one side there are the militarists, ultranationalists and totalitarians who had actively cooperated with the war effort; on the other there were the democrats, liberals and pacifists who had

either objected to or opposed the war. Of course, the former had to be weeded out as inappropriate for a peace-loving nation; it was the latter who had to be given center stage in the new Japan.

In fact, before the Purge Directive was issued by the Japanese government, GHQ debated its contents. Colonel Kades, who headed the Public Administration Division of GS, wanted to be faithful to the spirit of the Potsdam Declaration and drew up a strict purge proposal modeled after the de-Nazification policies carried out in Germany. A group of career officers headed by General Willoughby (General Staff Section G-2) was directly opposed to this. Willoughby predicted that the United States would face a conflict with the Soviet Union in the near future, and wanting to make as much use as possible of Japan's latent economic and military potential, opted for a more moderate purge. The compromise proposal was the Purge Directive released on January 4, 1946. The directive was composed of seven categories, listing its targets from A to G. A: war criminals; B: military authorities; C: ultranationalists, patriots; D: political leaders in the Imperial Rule Assistance Association and affiliated organizations; E: economic leaders; F: governors of occupied territories; and G: additional militarists and ultranationalists. The final G category, which was not included in the German purge directive, was a catch-all that gave the Americans more than ample leeway to purge Japanese.

How did the Japanese feel about their defeat and how did they interpret their war responsibility? The first postwar prime minister Higashikuni Naruhiko spoke of "100 million repentences," but except for a few politicians and militarists, most Japanese felt that they were rather the victims of the war. The number of Japanese who actually resigned their jobs was minimal: nine Diet members who left out of responsibility for the defeat; the executives of the powerful zaibatsu such as Mitsui, Mitsubishi and Sumitomo who resigned en masse; and a small number of college professors. In October 1945, GHQ dismissed six thousand people connected with the Special Higher Police (the "thought police") who had been responsible for arresting and suppressing liberals, etc., and at the same time released from jail three thousand communists and other political prisoners. Notwithstanding, the mood throughout Japan was optimistic. Thus when General Headquarters made public the Purge Directive with its far-reaching categories the shock was great and Japanese with guilty consciences began to feel nervous. Most of the candidates for the first post-war general election had gotten into office with endorsement of the government in the general election of 1942; since they all qualified as purge targets, the political world fell into a state of general confusion. The Progressive Party, the largest of the political parties, would be ruined, with 375 (80%) out its 466 Diet members qualifying as purge targets. The aim of

General Headquarters was to use purge policies to weaken the conservative Progressive and Liberal Parties and hand political power over to the Socialist Party. However, contrary to GS expectations, the Liberal Party took the lead by a small margin and its head, Hatoyama Ichiro, began forming a new cabinet. At this point GS put its Purge Directive to use and Hatoyama became the first to be removed from public office.

Purge targets did not stop at the political center, but extended into local regions. By May 1948, in just over two years, 210,000 people, mostly former military personnel, but also people in the political, government, financial, public information and educational spheres were purged. GHQ supplies us with statistics for the seven categories: A; 3,400; B: 122,000; C: 3,400; D: 35,000; E: 500; F: 90; G: 46,000 for a total of 210,000. Divided by occupation, the figures come to: 167,000 in the military at 79.6%; 1,800 in the bureaucracy at 0.9%; 35,000 politicians at 16.5%; 3,400 ultranationalists at 1.6%; 1,900 businessmen at 0.9%; and 1,200 in public information at 0.5%. In addition, 5,000 people in the educational field were purged. If we include those who resigned their posts in fear of being purged and the families and relations of those who were purged, more than one million Japanese were affected by the Occupation's large-scale "housecleaning." It would be no exaggeration to say that the intensity of the purge chilled the hearts of the Japanese at that time.

There were two purposes to the purge: first, to immediately dismiss people presently in public office; and secondly, to prevent such people from returning to public office, even if they so desired. Of course, these people were not given any monetary compensation. Inevitably they were shut out from society at large. If they were politicians, they would be placed on good behavior and would not be allowed to engage in open political activity. If they were financiers, they would be forbidden access to their company. Even though there was no imprisonment, loss of civil rights or deportation as was in the case of Germany, victims of the purge were for all intents and purposes obliterated from society. Surely the expression "even fretting children turn quiet out of fear in front of the Occupation army" can be directly related to the purge,

3. Results of Purge Policy

How was the purge carried out? As is commonly known, the American government, following the case of Germany, chose to rule Japan through indirect rather than direct means. Accordingly, while the Americans presented the Japanese with the basic framework for the purge, they left the details and the actual carrying out to the Japanese government. Representatives from the Ministry of Home Affairs and the other ministries and government offices set up purge criteria, and with the approval of GHQ, formed the Central Screening

Committee. However, GHQ concluded that the organization, cetering on bureaucrats, would be too lenient and reorganized the committee (under ten members) to include such members as the scholars Minobe Tatsukichi and Makino Eiichi, lawyers from the Socialist Party and liberal journalists. The committee would examine each case individually, deciding whether or not it fell under the purge categories. The great majority of cases was decided automatically by simply following the guidelines, and in that sense, one could say that the proceedings were more or less equitable. However, examples of inexplicable purges were not uncommon. Hatoyama Ichiro was purged on the verge of becoming prime minister. When Finance Minister Ishibashi Tanzan protested GHQ economic policy, he was unjustifiably purged. The purge of Hirano Rikizo, for example, was connected to confrontation not just within the Socialist Party but also within GHQ. Such cases occurred because purge policy was carried out not judicially, but administratively. As a result, even while GHQ was using the purge as a lever to intervene in Japanese internal politics, the Japanese themselves were trying to take advantage of the absolute power GHQ represented to make use of purges for personal benefit. As such pernicious political warfare spread, public criticism mounted.

Criticism toward purge policy was not limited to Japan, but occurred in America as well. Reporters such as Newsweek's Harry Kern were in the vanguard.

They criticized the purge for being controlled by the GS while being ostensibly run by the Japanese government, and appealed to Washington that the economic purges would deprive Japan of its most capable leaders, hindering economic recovery and exposing Japan to communist threat. At this time, the cold war was already breaking out in Europe, and in early 1948 Washington was seriously reevaluating its policies toward Japan. The new policies, which promoted Japan's economic independence instead of demilitarization and democratization, were meant to turn Japan into both an Asian anti-communist breakwater and an Asian factory. In this regard the continuation of the purge program was no longer deemed necessary. In March of the same year Whitney, chief of Government Section, announced that the purge would be discontinued by May at which time the Japanese Central Screening Committee ceased operation. In light of the American government's change of policy, the purge became a rather vague concept. Moreover, the red purge of communists in the 50s and the exoneration of large numbers of former militarists and politicians is clear indication of a reverse course for which the American government should be held accountable.

And yet there is no doubt that the purge has made a large contribution to reforming Japanese society. The purge removed most of the militarists in one sweep, brought in new younger blood to the political, governmental, economic

and public information worlds and democratized conservative local farm villages. Particularly because high-ranking members of the governmental and economic worlds were purged, there was a large number of cases where men in their forties were given positions of importance for a long period of time, and it is this generation who was responsible for Japan's high economic growth--the so-called economic miracle--of the 1960s.

In a certain sense the purge is analogous to the Meiji Restoration in which the entrenched elites were removed from power. And yet neither can be considered a real revolution. For the Japanese, the purge experience was an authoritarian "democracy from above" rather than a "democracy from below" of the kind the popular movement made possible in 18th century France; and this difference was a crucial factor in shaping the vague nature of post-war Japanese democracy.

TABLE 1
GENERAL SUMMARY OF PURGE INCIDENCE BY CATEGORY

Category	Purged cases							Total
	Screening of incumbents			"Provisional Designation"			SIB (SCAPIN 548)	
	Central	Local	Total	Central	Local	Total		
A. War criminals	145	5	150	3,272		3,272		3,422
B. Career military personnel	7,219	1,604	8,823	113,412		113,412		122,235
C. Influential members of secret ultra-nationalistic societies	65	8	73	2,991		2,991	317	3,381
D. Influential members of IRAA and affiliates	225	598	823	1,261	32,312	33,573		34,396
E. Officers of financial or development organizations	88	9	97	391		391		488
F. Governors of occupied territories	46		46	43		43		89
G. Additional militarists and ultra-nationalists	1,027	2,479	3,506	3,526	39,244	42,770		46,276
Total	8,815	4,703	13,518	124,896	71,556	196,452	317	210,287

John D. Montgomery, The Purge in Occupied Japan: A Study in the Use of Civilian Agencies Under Military Government, The Johns Hopkins University, (Chevy chase, MD, 1953), p. 23.