

# *We Are Kidding Ourselves In Japan*



by Romney Wheeler

GORO KIMURA, a Japanese book-seller, put it this way: "I'm not a Communist, but I think perhaps you Yanks have made a mistake. Instead of trying to convert us into third-class Americans, why don't you help us to become first-class Asiatics?"

Some of us who have watched the five-year effort to democratize Japan are ready to concede the propriety of Goro's question. The democratization effort has been vigorous and well-meaning enough; its asserted progress has been tolled in the organ tones of MacArthur. But unless we insist on being deluded by our own propaganda, we must admit some doubts as to effectiveness.

According to General MacArthur and his marvelously efficient Public Information Office, we have created a "New Japan." We gave the Japanese a new constitution. We overhauled their

schools. We rewrote their laws and revised their courts. We cracked down on Big Business and gave Labor the green light. We broke up the big estates and forced land reform. We shook up the tax laws and streamlined public service. We supplied know-how and whooped up production. And we did it all with assembly-line speed.

To hear ourselves talk we have been terrific — and hardworking Occupation mimeographs can grind out any number of statistics to make us look even better. But the time has come for us to slow down the mimeographs and make a calm appraisal.

Take Japan's new constitution — we "gave" it to them. The word "gave" is worth nothing. The Japanese themselves didn't demand or even request a constitution. They weren't particularly interested in it, not even the poli-

ticians who had the job of enacting it. A task force in MacArthur's Government Section worked night and day drafting the document. When it was completed the Supreme Commander himself inserted two paragraphs making Japan renounce war forevermore. Then the draft was handed to the Japanese Diet committee which was supposed to be writing the new constitution. The committee was given just forty-eight hours to adopt the draft as its own.

Eventually — with prodding from GHQ — the Japanese Diet enacted this document as the basic law of Japan. It was hailed repeatedly by MacArthur as "the product of enlightened Japanese thought." But when one Japanese asked another what he thought of the new constitution, the waggish reply was always: "I don't know; I don't read English."

Within one year after the surrender in Tokyo Bay, MacArthur proclaimed that the Japanese already had grasped the democratic way of life. A spiritual revolution, he said on September 2, 1946, had "almost overnight torn asunder a theory and practice of life built upon 2000 years of history, tradition and legend."

Said the Supreme Commander with supreme confidence: "This revolution of spirit among the

Japanese people represents no thin veneer to serve the purposes of the present. It represents an unparalleled convulsion in the social history of the world."

Three years later, on September 2, 1949, the general declared: "The basic causes of social unrest throughout Asia have largely been eradicated in Japan by a redesign of the social structure to permit the equalization of individual opportunity and personal liberty."

The general is a matchless orator, let's concede it. Maybe he is a greater orator than Churchill. And there is no denying that he and his eager reformers, bright-eyed and bushy-tailed, attacked the Japanese guinea pig with gusto. But while listening to MacArthur speak, one discouraged educator said:

"MacArthur has the gift of looking at problems through the wrong end of a telescope. Any problem can be neatly solved by an order. After that it ceases to exist. A directive has been published, and that's that!"

The only trouble with the general's heroic pronouncements is that the Japanese don't understand them. Democracy in Japan remains an English word, not a way of life, and certainly not a cherished right.

And what troubles the objective American in Japan is this

question: Can democracy be "given" by one people to another? Or can it even be imposed by one people on another?

## II

One of the things that has distinguished our "democratization" program has been a really magnificent ability to work at cross-purposes. Each group of experts has toiled in its own vineyard, oblivious of the effect that its reforms might have on someone else.

When MacArthur's Labor Division approved higher wages for workers, the Industry Division approved bigger subsidies for industry — a cat-chasing-its-tail which contributed substantially to Japan's inflation. When inflation became alarming, we brought in a Detroit banker named Joseph M. Dodge. He was a poor man's Sir Stafford Cripps. His job was to make strength through austerity. He evolved the "Dodge Plan," which meant cutting expenses, balancing the national budget, denying wage increases and prohibiting subsidies. This checked inflation, but without subsidies, steel and other commodities had to increase in price to a point where they could not compete in international markets.

Our labor reforms already had upset the delicate price-cost re-

lationship in Japan. For generations Japan's labor relations had been paternalistic. In return for a worker's loyalty, the boss looked after him for life. He got a raise when he married, and other raises as children were born. He got periodic bonuses and allowances, and finally, when he died, his employer buried him.

Now everything was changed. To offset monopoly-minded Management, we set out to make Labor independent. Before the war labor unions never had a membership of more than 450,000. Within a year after we had occupied Japan, Labor claimed 4,500,000 members, and it now claims around seven million, including 1,500,000 women. We even created a Japanese-style AFL and CIO which feuded with one another. All that has been lacking is a Japanese John L. Lewis.

For a period Labor got whatever it wanted. Wages climbed and so did inflation. But here came the imbalance. Human labor has always been Japan's biggest surplus. Thus it was standard practice for an employer to hire three workers to do the work of one. Under the old system this was no handicap, the wages of three Japanese being still below the cost of one European doing the same type of work.

In 1950, however, it costs perhaps \$120 a month for three

Japanese to produce the same merchandise as one European who was paid \$90. Result: Japanese cameras are being undersold by superior German makes; Japanese watches are quoted higher than Swiss competition; Japanese heavy machinery is undersold by British and Swedish makers.

Aside from economics, the theoretical approach to Japanese labor problems often has been ludicrous. Labor Division decided that Buddhist and Shinto priests were subject to wage-hour legislation and unemployment insurance. When priests were transferred to rituals after having handled temple business, Labor Division ruled that they must be given "dismissal indemnity," like any clerk who had been fired. And when the great Ise Shrine held its customary midnight services at New Year's, American experts ruled that the wage-hour law prohibited women from working after 10 P.M. Hence female temple dancers couldn't perform their age-old rituals.

The Japanese protested that they had always done it this way. They appealed to MacArthur's Division of Religions and Cultural Resources, which flew to their defense. Finally Labor Division conceded that the dancers could dance — provided they were paid time-and-a-half for overtime gyrations.

In education our planners have had another field day. We have not only purged the schools of militaristic books and teachers, we insisted on reorganizing the whole structure — American style!

Instead of the old plan guaranteeing a child six years of grammar school, we installed the "6-3-3" plan: six years of elementary school, three of junior high, and three of senior high. We broke up the old central administration and made each prefecture responsible for its schools.

Unfortunately, five years after the war, only 30 per cent of Japan's war-damaged schools have been rebuilt. There aren't enough schoolrooms even for grammar schools, yet we have installed a new system demanding one-third more schooling, and the school-age population has been increasing by more than a million a year. Local school administrators are distracted and many of them have petitioned for an end of the reform.

A veteran British educator remarked sadly: "The Occupation has given Japan an educational system she can't afford — unless, that is, you Yanks want to pay for it."

In our efforts to convert the Japanese into Americans we have often overlooked the language barrier. There are many American

ideas which simply can't be expressed in Japanese.

Take the word *majority*. The nearest the Japanese can come to it is a word meaning "many numbers"; it conveys only the idea of plurality.

Or *incidental*. The Japanese translate it as "accidental." And they have no word like *program*, no way to express the idea of an organized plan of action.

Or *debate*, meaning democratic discussion. The Japanese terms invariably convey the idea of struggle. They have no word resembling *initiative*.

The words *accept* and *adopt* have no difference in meaning to the Japanese, nor can they translate *voting* as a means of reaching a decision. Their word *to-hyo* means to "throw paper."

These thought barriers have gone generally unrecognized by the eager American reformers. When we try to tell the Japanese about the American way of life we call it *information*. But the Japanese can translate it only as "propaganda," and they react accordingly.

There has been no end of difficulty rising from the word *recommend*. American officials, trying to be diplomatic, have "recommended" that this or that be done. And they have been pleased at the alacrity with which the Japanese "accept the recommen-

dations." What the Americans have not understood is that for centuries the "recommendations" of higher authority have been equivalent to a direct order in Japan. Thus when a village mayor receives a "recommendation" from MacArthur, the "recommendation" is accepted without question.

It seems never to occur to our career Army men that there is anything puzzling to the Japanese about Western democracy. When the Japanese bow solemnly and declare that they love "demokrassie," our reformers glow with satisfaction.

I recall Col. Julian Dayton. He was commander of the Kanto Region Military Government, later known as Civil Affairs. The Japanese (prudently, behind his back) called him "King of the Kanto."

Colonel Dayton is a sincere and honest administrator. He takes himself seriously, and he took everything the Japanese told him as Gospel truth. He conducted English lessons for his domestic servants for fifteen minutes, morning and evening, seven days a week. He also led them in prayer and hymns. "Just give 'em a chance at Christianity!" he boomed. "They eat it up!"

Late in 1949, when Civil Affairs Teams were being abolished, the colonel made his final swing

around his region. At Nagano he addressed the governors of seven prefectures. He lectured them forcefully about their new constitution. He said they would come to bless it and love it as he blessed and loved the Constitution of the United States of America. He closed in a blaze of rhetoric that would have won the respect of William Jennings Bryan.

The governors — none of them speaking English — listened respectfully. When an interpreter gave them a quick summary, they bowed and exclaimed: "Ah, yes! Is it not so!" Then they presented Colonel Dayton with a scroll expressing humble gratification for his "fatherly advice and counsel."

The colonel was enchanted. In his private railroad car he had the scroll read to him again and again by his interpreter.

"Y' know," he exclaimed happily, "I guess I *am* like a father to those guys!"

### III

General MacArthur will disagree, but as one thoughtful American who watched our five-year effort to convert the Japanese into people like ourselves, I am forced to this conclusion: we have managed to create a maximum of confusion with only a minimum of good. In some ways the Japanese are worse off because of our "reforms."

Our exceedingly efficient Public Health and Welfare Section has succeeded in driving down Japan's death rate from 29.2 per thousand in 1945 to only 10.9 per thousand in 1949. The birthrate, meanwhile, was rising to 32.8. Thus, with our help, Japan's population is now increasing at the rate of 1,800,000 a year. Every morning there are five thousand more Japanese than yesterday.

Yet population — and population control — was strictly "off-limits" to the Occupation. It was a hot potato that was bound to result in one or another line of argument: birth control or emigration. Either or both were politically embarrassing.

This reluctance on our part to come to grips with the population problem seems almost criminal. How can we say that we have helped Japan when Japan is less self-sufficient today than she has ever been?

Economically we have solved none of the basic problems of Japan: our reforms have only intensified the urgency of these problems. We have succeeded in raising Japan's requirements without raising her ability to satisfy them.

We gave the Japanese a fine new system of health insurance. The system is already ridden by hopeless debt.

We gave Japan land reform, and

left the new peasant-landowners dependent for crop-loans on new farm co-operatives. But most of the co-ops have now gone broke, and the commercial banks are refusing to lend money.

We raised Japan's production for export with no idea of where she'd sell what she produced. In consequence, her warehouses are now loaded with goods which can't be moved, unless we allow trade with Red China.

(As an example of Occupation economics, consider the order issued in February 1950 by Maj. Gen. William F. Marquat, head of MacArthur's Economic and Scientific Section. He directed that plans be "implemented" [a favorite Army term] to increase Japan's tourist business to \$50,000,000 in 1950-51. When flabbergasted subordinates reminded him that this was *five times* the amount spent by all non-Occupation foreigners, including traders, since Japan's surrender, the astronomic goal was hastily abandoned.)

Some of the cultural advice we have given the Japanese has been fantastic. One general release to Japanese magazines included: "Suggestions for Cooking Turkey," "Homemade Mixes for Biscuits," and "The Most Plentiful Foods on U. S. Markets in March."

In too many sad cases we have been the well-meaning guy stand-

ing behind the bakery window holding out cakes to a hungry child — a child who has no money, or prospect of money, to buy them.

The Japanese have met some of our good offers with quiet but effective resistance. The distribution of Bibles is a case in point. More than ten million Bibles have been distributed in a country where fewer than three hundred thousand are of the Christian faith. I saw a young Japanese pause on the street one day and pull a pocket Bible from his coat. But he didn't read. Instead, he carefully tore out a page and rolled a cigarette.

Why? Well, he explained, cigarette paper cost twenty yen for one hundred sheets. Bibles were being sold for fifty yen, and had five hundred pages. Besides, he smiled, Bible paper burned better.

Most of the ten million Bibles we have sent to Japan have, quite literally, gone up in smoke.

#### IV

Is there any hope that our efforts may not prove to have been in vain? Yes, there is some, but I have an idea that it lies in our placing, more and more, the destiny of Japan in Japanese hands. We have turned Japan in a new direction, and if we will now

think more in terms of what Japan *needs*, and less in terms of what *we* want, then something better may result.

The Japanese are the natural leaders of Asia; they are easily the most valuable people in Asia. Consequently we should interest the Japanese in exerting non-Communist Asiatic leadership upon other Asiatics. We must think in terms of what Japan can afford rather than in terms of what our reformers think she ought to have.

Up to this moment we have insisted on giving Japan a jazzed-up

democracy which is as unsuited to her habitat as it is to her purse, and thus, unwittingly, we have risked delivering a broken and disillusioned Japan into the hands of the Communists.

If we can now get down to the good earth of reality; if we can free Japan from much foolish bureaucratic "planning"; if we can enlist able and alert Japanese minds — then perhaps we can find some practical, applicable solutions to the problem of eighty-four million people living on a few tiny islands, with their population bulging every day.

*Romney Wheeler has been a newspaper man for several years. For about a year and a half he was a member of General MacArthur's civilian staff in Tokyo.*



*and Radio*

## ***Coaxial Blues***

AT HIS TELEVISION debut the noted cynic and knife-thrower, Fred Allen, was made up beyond recognition but he delivered some observations which left no doubt of his identity. Allen is a man who hates radio because it made him a fortune and then turned around and bit him. Wary now and deeply suspicious of making any more money at so great a cost, Allen bit television at his first opportunity.

Puppets, he predicted, will take over television. He gave people six more months. The audience thought this was funny, but it is safe to say that the network executives and the producers and the sponsors, and in general everyone behind the cameras could manage nothing better than a grimace. For people continue to be television's number

one problem, whether they are cluttering up the theatres and studios or whether they sit in ominous silence at the other end of the high-frequency waves, in the hitherto unpenetrated privacy of their homes.

The wet nurses who suckle this bawling infant industry remember what happened to radio listeners when the big money finally took over. Radio staggered and fell under the blows of its innumerable sponsors until it lay helpless and weary in a morass of quiz shows and giveaways.

Deplorable as this may have been to the listeners, no one questioned radio's power as an advertising medium, and television, when it came, opened the staggering prospect of making that medium visual and animated, thus potentially placing