

**THE 1921 MITSUBISHI KAWASAKI STRIKE**  
**The Past and Present World of the Kobe Shipyard Workers**

by

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## ABSTRACT

This thesis explores the background and events of the 1921 strike at Mitsubishi and Kawasaki shipyards in Kobe, Japan. The dispute, the largest in Japan's pre-World War II history, occurred in a period of labor turbulence that had begun in 1917. At issue in the 1921 strike was the workers' demand for autonomy in the workplace.

This study of the strike challenges prevailing works which have explained labor unrest in this period as a rational response to adverse economic conditions and as action stimulated by non-Japanese ideologies. Counterpoised is my findings that the Kobe shipyard workers' demand for autonomy in the 1921 strike was rooted in an inherited concept, and that the struggle to attain autonomy occurred as a result of the complexities of economic and social change. An influx of new workers into the Kobe shipyards during the World War I economic boom meant that the character of the workforce changed—from artisans, who had constituted the bulk of the workforce, to workers of rural origins. The new workers had a heritage of autonomy. This legacy, and an improved economic and social position, gave these workers attitudinal and financial resources to fight for a new organization in the workplace that would better suit their needs than the existing one.

This essay analyzes the meaning of the change in the workforce, and in doing so, explores the world of labor more than labor itself. Changes in Tokugawa rural society, transformations in Meiji industrial and rural society, and the character of workers' society from 1917 to 1921, become the focus of the study. These factors had an impact on the nature of the post-1917 shipyard worker at Mitsubishi and Kawasaki.

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## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

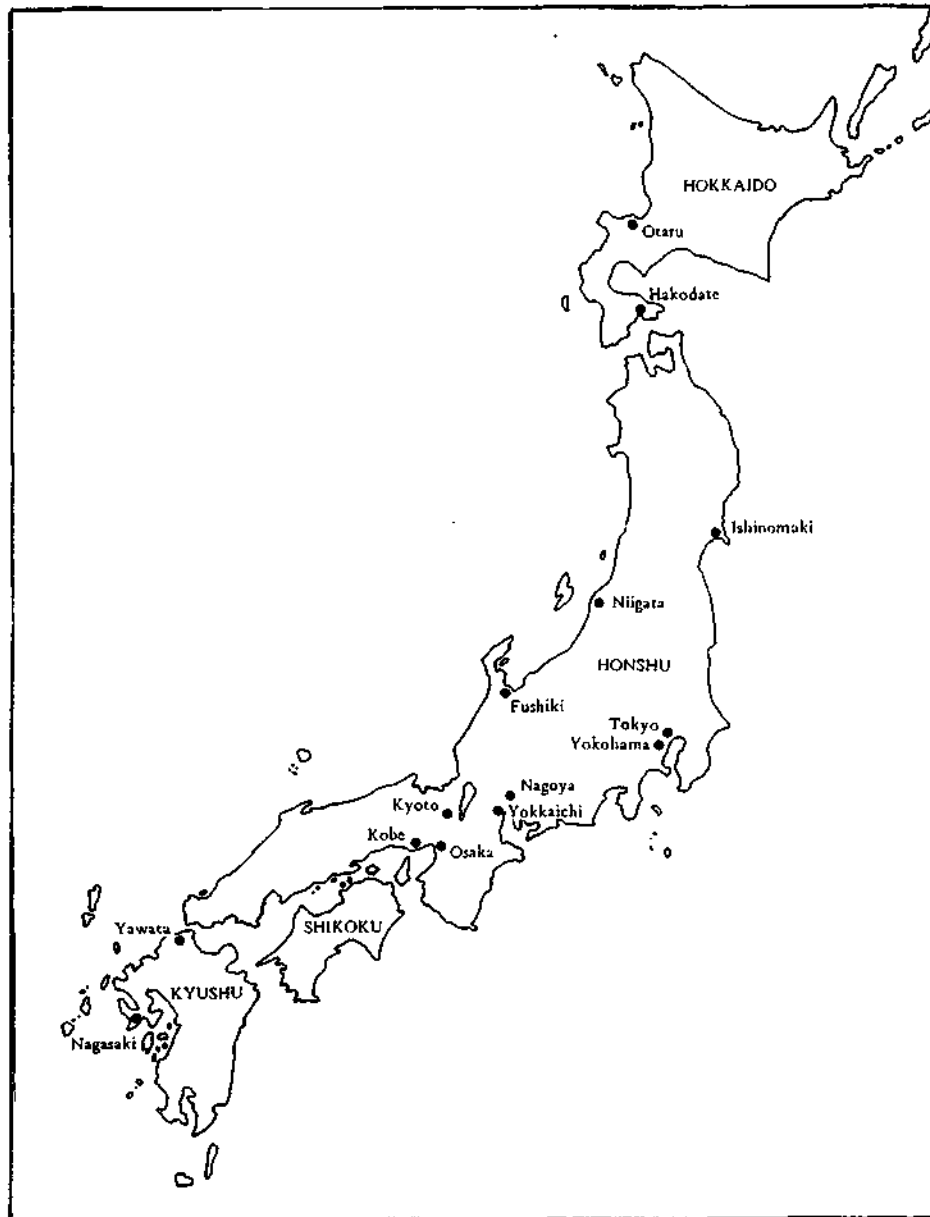
- NRUS Ikeda, Makoto, and Sakurō Ōmae. *Nihon rōdō undō shi ron, Taishō 10 nen Kawasaki Mitsubishi Kōbe ryō zōsenjo sōgi no kenkyū*. (The history of the Japanese labor movement, the study of the 1921 Kobe Kawasaki and Mitsubishi strike). Tokyo: Nihon Hyōronsha, 1966.
- LTES Ohkawa, Kazushi, Miyohei Shinohara, and Mataji Umemura, eds. *Chōki keizai tōkei*. (Long term economic statistics of Japan). Tokyo: Tōyō Keizai Shimpōsha, 1965-1983.

## NOTES

1. In the text, Japanese names, except those who live and publish outside Japan, are written with the family name first.
2. The macron is omitted in Japanese names and geographical names in the English text.
3. When subsequent reference is made to a Japanese novelist, for example, Shimazaki Toson, the personal name is used.
4. Japanese historical periods:  
Tokugawa, 1600-1867  
Meiji, 1868-1912  
Taisho, 1912-1926



Map 1. - Japan



Source: William D. Wray, *Mitsubishi and the N.Y. K., 1870-1914, Business Strategy in the Japanese Shipping Industry* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1984), 101.

## INTRODUCTION

In July 1921 in the city of Kobe, workers from two firms, Mitsubishi and Kawasaki, staged the largest strike in Japan's pre-World War II history. The participants, primarily shipyard workers, totaled almost 28,000.<sup>1</sup> As the industrial works were in the same neighborhood (see map 2), their laborers formed a united front. The workers submitted demands to their managements, but when no replies were forthcoming, the Kawasaki workers prepared to take over the running of their shipyard. This proposed takeover was a first ever in Japan and it prompted a quick reaction. The governor of the prefecture, Hyogo, called in the army. Despite arrests and a clash with troops which resulted in injuries and a death, workers continued to strike until August 9 when they returned defeated to their jobs.

These workers were demanding autonomy in their workplaces; this was the main issue in the confrontation. Claiming a right to on-the-job decision making, they put forth concepts of a workplace organization that suited their needs better than existing ones. Out of these choices came a sense of consciousness as a worker. This consciousness was the first dimension of their demands for worker autonomy. The second was external. In order to attain autonomy, these workers rejected intervention from outsiders. For the

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<sup>1</sup>*NRUS*, 159, 165-66. On July 1, 1921, Kawasaki and Mitsubishi employed a total of 27,652 workers in their shipyards: 10,353 workers were at Mitsubishi, 13,317 at Kawasaki's Kobe factories, and 3,982 at other Kawasaki branch factories.

Mitsubishi and Kawasaki employees, this meant independence not only from management but also from the local union.<sup>2</sup>

Why did the Mitsubishi and Kawasaki workers in the 1921 strike demand autonomy in the workplace? What change or changes that took place before the strike stimulated labor unrest? How did such changes interact to initiate the conflict?

I suggest that Kobe workers demanded autonomy in 1921 because it was an integral ingredient of Japanese society itself. Because the larger society contained this feature, workers reacted against labor policies designed by company management—policies which failed to allow workers to make choices in workshop matters. The character of management had been established at the turn of the century. It was challenged by industrial workers only after 1920.<sup>3</sup> The 1921 strike was the apex of this phenomenon. Why did this demand appear at this time? I suggest it surfaced at this time because of changes in both industry and society and their combined effect on the character of the workforce. These conclusions, however, are contrary to those offered in many mainstream analyses of labor disputes in this period.

Most labor historians, in explaining the "why" of post-1917 labor conflicts, focus on the impact of the economy or on ideological influences from outside Japan. They see 1920 to 1921 strikes as part of unprecedented Japanese labor turbulence which they date from the end of World War I. This post-war surge in labor struggles is viewed as part of "Taisho democracy," broad-based action by a variety of groups to have a greater say in public and personal affairs. Labor, as one of the participating groups, demonstrated its

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<sup>2</sup>This definition of autonomy is consistent with that used in psychology: "Autonomy involves a personal ownership of choices, irrespective of whether the particulars involved coincide with, or differ from, the preference of others." Alan S. Waterman, *The Psychology of Individualism* (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1984), 58.

<sup>3</sup>There was resistance to company management before this time, for example, by labor groups between 1907 and 1912. I suggest that at that time the ideology of these groups did not penetrate to the factory level. There was no conflict by workers before 1920 which challenged management's established organization.

assertiveness after 1917. Between 1916 and 1917, the number of strikes in Japan rose from 108 to 398, while those taking part increased from 8,413 to 57,309, and such increases became a trend.<sup>4</sup> In explaining this sudden upsurge, Koji Taira states that strikes between 1917 and 1919 were due "mainly to workers' demands for higher wages in view of the rapid inflation," and "strikes against wage cuts occurred in reaction to a sharp postwar recession between 1920 and 1922."<sup>5</sup> He also refers to outside ideological influences: "The leftist bent of the labor movement during and immediately after the War was largely a product of the ideology and tactics learned from the West, stimulated to a great extent by the success of the Russian Revolution."<sup>6</sup> Although this is the general accepted view, the degree of these influences is a matter of dispute.

Andrew Gordon in a recent analysis of labor in heavy industry (including such industries as engine and steel manufacturing, railways, and shipbuilding), diminishes the impact of the external influences mentioned above. He does this by concentrating on another variable—the relationship between labor and management. He contends that the key contribution to labor unrest was the ongoing conflict between labor and management that surfaced after 1917 as a result of these adverse economic conditions and outside ideological influences.<sup>7</sup>

Regardless of the degree of influence given to outside variables, Japanese industrial

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<sup>4</sup>Andrew Gordon, *The Evolution of Labor Relations in Japan; Heavy Industry, 1853-1955* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1985), 440. See appendix for detailed number of strikes and strikers, 1900-1921.

<sup>5</sup>Koji Taira, "Economic Development, Labor Markets, and Industrial Relations in Japan, 1905-1955," in *The Cambridge History of Japan*, Volume 6, *The Twentieth Century*, ed. Peter Duus (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 365.

<sup>6</sup>Koji Taira, *Economic Development and the Labor Market in Japan* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1970), 143. George Totton supports this view in a study of work councils in the 1920s: "They [workers' leaders] were all engaged in eclectic borrowing from the trade union movements of the West." George Totton, "Collective Bargaining and Work Councils as Innovations in Industrial Relations in Japan during the 1920's," in *Aspects of Social Change in Modern Japan*, ed. R. P. Dore (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1967), 205.

<sup>7</sup>Gordon, *The Evolution*, 81-82.

workers have been seen as either reacting to the post-1917 environment or developing a new awareness. Some historians have viewed the factory workers as meek, docile, and obedient, and therefore have given attention to economic or new ideological factors.<sup>8</sup> Gordon skirted this problem of dealing with a docile labor force by focusing on the independent artisan as actors in heavy industry factories. In a study of the Mitsubishi and Kawasaki strike by Ikeda Makoto and Omae Sakuro, these authors suggest that "labor escaped from the old artisan [*shokunin*] character, and with new knowledge and ability, the workers in manufacturing acquired new insight."<sup>9</sup> This acquired perception of workers' rights gave workers their assertiveness. In my findings of labor histories, I found little recognition that features of Japanese society itself offered workers concepts that caused labor disputes.

My focus is consistent with Gordon's in that it also concentrates on a problematic relationship between labor and management. The key difference lies, however, in the character of the worker: I argue that the shipbuilding workforce changed from artisans to individuals with rural origins. While in Gordon's account conflict arose because of the artisans' inherited independence, in mine it occurred because of the rural workers' inherited autonomy. Many authors of general accounts of labor history have noted the connection between rural society and factories at this time. However, my conclusion differs from theirs because it argues that it was the rural workers themselves who instigated the confrontation. In other words, if farmers had not come to industry, would the 1921 strike have occurred. I believe not. Their heritage furnished them with a concept of autonomy. And in contrast to general assumptions about the negative influences of the economy, I stress that the improved relative social and economic

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<sup>8</sup>For an alternative view see E. Patricia Tsurumi, *Factory Girls, Women in the Thread Mills of Meiji Japan* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990). Tsurumi does not portray female workers of rural origin, working in spinning mills, as docile or subservient.

<sup>9</sup>*NRUS*, 105.

position of workers helped set the stage for the strike.<sup>10</sup>

This study of the 1921 strike brings to light several other factors at work on a more general level. First, the analysis cannot ignore other issues, such as the reason for enterprise unions, the dismissal issue in Japanese companies, and the ideological gap between labor and management. Second, the approach used in this study leads to an expansion of the field of investigation usually employed in historical analyses of Japanese labor in this period. Whereas much work has concentrated on analyzing labor history within the world of industry—the interrelationship between management, labor, technological change in industry, and economic conditions—I found it helpful to examine influences of the structural context of the 1917 "new worker" by exploring his past and present society. Nevertheless, the scope of this analysis has its limits. Although it includes a review of some aspects of Japanese society, examination of potentially important factors such as education, newspapers, military service, and changes in the character of the middle class and government was not possible within the bounds of this study.

Interpretations regarding the Mitsubishi and Kawasaki strike have not been documented in any detail in English. The most attention this dispute has received is a chapter in the book, *Japan in Recent Times, 1912-1926*, written in 1926 by Arthur Morgan Young.<sup>11</sup> On the other hand, there have been detail studies done in the Japanese language. In particular, the research by Ikeda and Omae is an extensive scholarly exploration of the strike. Despite the lack of attention given the study of the 1921 strike in English, it marked an important development in Japanese labor history. It appears to have been the first time in modern Japan that workers attempted to change company

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<sup>10</sup>Ron Napier suggests that the increased share of the national income of post World War I laborers contributed to the rise of worker disputes. Ron Napier, "The Transformation of the Japanese Labor Market, 1894-1937," in *Conflict in Modern Japanese History: The Neglected Tradition*, eds. Tetsuo Najita and J. Victor Koschmann, 342-65 (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1982).

<sup>11</sup>A. Morgan Young, *Japan in Recent Times, 1912-1926* (New York: William Marrow & Company, 1929; repr. Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1973), cpt. 26.

organization. It was unlike earlier ones that concentrated on improving remuneration or working conditions. In my view this was a turning point in the evolution of Japanese labor-management relations that had an important impact on both company management and government labor policies.

Understanding the world of the post-1917 laborers is crucial to understanding the Mitsubishi and Kawasaki strikers and their dispute in 1921. Thus, the first part of this thesis presents the historical background of the 1917 worker through an analysis of changes in industry and rural Japan. The second part examines the character of Mitsubishi and Kawasaki workers' society from 1917 to 1921.

Map 2. - Kobe Harbor, 1923.



Source: *Nihon kindai toshi hensen chizu shūsei* (A collection of city maps in modern Japan) (Tokyo: Kashiwa shobō, 1987).



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## **PART 1**

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### **BACKGROUND OF THE 1917 MITSUBISHI AND KAWASAKI WORKERS**

Changes in industry, society, and labor, and their interrelationship, reveal why and how workers became employed in the shipyards at Mitsubishi and Kawasaki in the post-World War I period. Many developments in industry occurred between 1868 when the port of Kobe opened to foreign trade, and 1917 when the shipyard workers began their struggle for autonomy in the workplace. In Kobe the influx of new workers into the Mitsubishi and Kawasaki factories that accompanied the growth of heavy industry after 1913, altered the personality of the workforce. These new employees were of rural origin.

A closer look at these new workers may help us to understand the character of the post-1917 industrial workers in Japan. An exploration of developments in late Tokugawa and Meiji rural society shows that the transformation of industry in Japan involved more than a simple adjustment to new industrial requirements. Japanese society was also forced to respond, and these changes that came from societal reactions had an impact on the country's workforce.

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## CHAPTER 1

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### **Economic Developments and Their Impact on the Mitsubishi and Kawasaki Workforce: 1868-1917**

The industrial workforce, in the years 1868 to 1914, was molded by the needs of new industries, which during this time were laying foundations for subsequent expansion. From 1914 to 1917, an economic boom altered industrial society and in turn the nature of its workforce. This transformation did not start abruptly in 1914; rather, it was gradual. Nevertheless, by 1917, the personality of the workforce had changed. This metamorphosis occurred on a macro scale as well as on a local level, in Kobe, and in the Kobe shipyards. The question is, which parts of the change influenced the post-1917 labor unrest?

#### *Character of the Early Shipbuilding Workforce*

Shipbuilding had been established just prior to the Restoration of 1868, but even in the mid-Meiji period, was still a relatively insignificant component of the total industrial output of the nation. In 1889, the gross value of the production of ships and their parts was just over one million yen, which was approximately the same as that for lacquerware, one-fifth of that for paper products such as fans or lanterns, and only twice that of straw goods such as footwear and raincoats.<sup>1</sup> The entire production of machinery was 7.4

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<sup>1</sup>*LTES*, 13, 79-82. Statistics in *LTES* are recorded from 1885 on. A summary of the main statistics

million yen while soy sauce was 9.1 and sake was 41.6.<sup>2</sup> In the early industrial period, a major part of the manufacturing output was non-factory production, mostly handicrafts.<sup>3</sup> The total output from new "modern" industries (large factories using imported techniques) was modest compared to that of the traditional sector; for example, in 1892, factory production is estimated to have been only 5% of all manufacturing output.<sup>4</sup>

Not only was shipbuilding production a minimal segment of total manufacturing, but it was also only a small part of modern industry. In the decades after the Restoration, the textile industry had one of the highest annual growth rates.<sup>5</sup> By the 1890s, textile production began and continued to occupy more than 30% of total manufacturing output.<sup>6</sup> Compared to textiles, heavy industry output was around only 16% until the early 1900s.<sup>7</sup> Although part of textile production still depended on cottage industry, it had been one of the first to adopt modern equipment and the factory method of production. By 1909, approximately 75% of all textile output was from factories.<sup>8</sup> In the Meiji period, textiles dominated the modern manufacturing sector, and therefore, a high proportion of the workforce in modern industry was female. Many girls were hired from rural areas to work in the factories.

In heavy industry, artisans constituted the bulk of the workforce. The skills demanded by heavy industry overlapped with their indigenous craft abilities in metal and

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of *LTES* was published in English by Ohkawa et al., eds., *Patterns of Japanese Economic Development: A Quantitative Appraisal* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1979).

<sup>2</sup>Figures for machinery from *LTES*, 10, 140-41. Figures for sake and soy sauce from *LTES*, 13, 64-65.

<sup>3</sup>Ohkawa et al., *Patterns*, 37.

<sup>4</sup>Takafusa Nakamura, *Economic Growth in Prewar Japan*, trans. Robert A. Feldman (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1983), 80. In 1884, factory production was 3.7% of total manufacturing output. Nakamura suggests these figures may be lower than actual amounts because not all factories were included.

<sup>5</sup>Ohkawa et al., *Patterns*, 110. Another sector which had a high growth rate was printing and publishing.

<sup>6</sup>*LTES*, 10, 140-41.

<sup>7</sup>Nakamura, *Economic Growth*, 23.

<sup>8</sup>*Ibid.*, 82. Textile's average factory output of total output in 1909 was 44.2%; food's was 24.3%, and machinery's was 44.5%.

wood crafts. Table 1 shows that a high percentage of the employed in Yokosuka Naval Arsenal and at Mitsubishi's Nagasaki Shipyards in the late 1800s were artisans.

Table 1. - Occupational Background of Meiji Workers in Heavy Industry (Percentage)

Factory & Date	New Trades *	Trades Using Indigenous Skills**
Yokosuka Naval Arsenal, 1878	17.2	82.8
Nagasaki Shipyard, 1884	23.8	76.2

Source: Abbreviated from Gordon, *Evolution*, 20-21.

\* New trade classifications were lathe worker and finisher assembler.

\*\* Trades using indigenous skills were (1) metal trades which included casting, forging, boiler-making and other, and (2) wood trades which covered wood pattern, carpenter, sawyer, painter, rigging, and others.

In sum, during the first period of industrialization, because modern industries were just being established, employees in factories were few in number. Textiles dominated the modern sector, and within this division, workers were predominantly female. Heavy industry, which included shipbuilding, remained small, and employed males who had an artisan background.

Statistics show an increase in real GNP growth rates of between 2.5 and 3.5% per year during the Meiji period.<sup>9</sup> When compared to Japan's post World War II period of high growth, the rate was low, but it was similar to that of other industrialized countries during the same period. England's economy for example grew at 2.1%, Germany at 2.7%, and the United States at 4.6%.<sup>10</sup> As might be expected, the growth rates for different sectors of the Japanese economy varied from 1868 to 1914. Non-primary industry grew more rapidly than primary.<sup>11</sup> Within the non-primary sector,

<sup>9</sup>Ibid., 1-2. For the period 1887-1913, Nakamura estimates a growth rate of 3.6%; Ohkawa estimates 2.4 %. Nakamura's table 1.7 shows there was steady growth from 1888-1914; however, there were small peaks and troughs. Ibid., 10.

<sup>10</sup>Ibid., 2. For England and Germany, the rate cited is for 1870-1913, for the United States, an average of 1869-78 to 1913.

manufacturing and mining output increased more than the average;<sup>12</sup> in the manufacturing sector, gains in modern factory production were higher than in traditional industries.<sup>13</sup> Many new industries, such as shipbuilding, textiles, weapon manufacturing, and railways, had been established. The high growth rate in factory production in this period indicates an initial establishment of a modern industrial base. Expansion in this sector would eventually affect the character of the industrial workforce.

### *An Economic Boom Changes the Shipbuilding Workforce*

By 1917, shipyard workers in Mitsubishi and Kawasaki factories numbered over 30,000, 5% of Kobe's population, and the importance of the shipbuilding industry was illustrated by the choice of the Kawasaki crane as the symbol of the city.<sup>14</sup> Across the nation developments were similar: the economic boom during World War I and its accompanying industrial developments were transforming the character of Japan's workforce. By 1917, (1) the total number employed in modern industry rose; (2) there was a substantial increase in the number of males working in the modern sector; and (3) the modern industrial sector occupied a more visible position in society.

In the forty years before the War, industrial production had grown at an annual rate of 4.8 %; however, it jumped to 8.3 % in 1915, to 11.1% in 1916, then fell to 10.0% in 1917.<sup>15</sup> The value of manufacturing production increased from 2.6 billion yen in 1914 to 6.4 billion yen in 1917.<sup>16</sup> Within this sector, output was especially high in the

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<sup>11</sup>Ibid, 14. From 1885-1900, the primary growth rate was 1.7% and non-primary was 3.8%; from 1900-1913, the primary rate was 1.4%, and the non-primary was 2.8%.

<sup>12</sup>Ibid., 7. From 1885-1900, manufacturing and mining production grew an annual rate of 5.4%; from 1900-1913, the rate was 5.0%. See previous note for average figures.

<sup>13</sup>Ibid., 80.

<sup>14</sup>For numbers employed, *NRUS*, 25. For the importance of the shipbuilding industry, Hyōgokenshi henshū iinkai, ed., *Hyōgoken hyakunen shi* (The one hundred year history of Hyogo prefecture) (Kyoto: Hyōgoken, 1967), 629.

<sup>15</sup>Nakamura, *Economic Growth*, 77, 79.

<sup>16</sup>*LTES*, 10, 143.

modern sector. As shown in the factory statistics in table 2, the 1914 to 1919 five-year period had much larger gains in the number of factories and number of employees compared to the periods before and after. From 1914 to 1919, the number of factories rose by 39% and the number of workers almost doubled. During the three-year War period, the number employed in factories was nearly two-and-a-half times that of the preceding five-year period.<sup>17</sup> The modern sector experienced the highest percentage increase in the number of workers during the boom years.

Table 2. - Number of Factories (with over 5 employees) and Number of Workers, 1909-1924

Date	Number of Factories	Index No.	Number of Workers	Index No.
1909	32,390	100	917,896	100
1914	31,859	98	1,085,808	118
1919	44,087	136	1,777,171	194
1920	46,150	142	1,742,591	190
1921	49,754	154	1,820,776	198
1922	46,427	143	1,691,019	184
1924	48,394	149	1,789,618	195

Source: Shōkō daijin kanbō tōkei-ka, *Kōjō tōkeihyō* (Factory statistics) (1925), 1.

The growth in modern industry during the Meiji period was gradual but by 1914 factory production had already surpassed cottage industry.<sup>18</sup> The first national census, held in 1920, confirmed that the number of workers in modern industry was increasing. Of the 12 million employed in the non-primary sector, 5.1 million were in modern industry while 7 million were reported to be in traditional industry.<sup>19</sup> The numbers

<sup>17</sup>The 1917 figures are not available from the *Kōjō tōkeihyō* (see table 2). To calculate the 1914-1917 increase, figures were taken from Ohara shakai mondai kenkyū sho, *Nihon rōdō nenkan* (The Labour Year-Book of Japan) (Third Issue, 1922), 65-66, and from Iwao F. Ayusawa, *Industrial Conditions and Labor Legislation in Japan*, International Labor Office, Studies and Reports, Series B, No. 16 (London: P.S. King and Son, Ltd, 1926), 9. These two sets of figures were compatible.

<sup>18</sup>Nakamura, *Economic Growth*, 80. In 1914, factory production was 1.5 billion yen compared to 1.1 in the cottage industry. This represented 58.2 % of total production. As Nakamura notes, this signified "an important symbolic turning point." Ibid.

employed in factories were catching up to those of the traditional sector.

Table 3. - Number of Employees in Factories, 1915-1918

Category *	1915	1916	1917	1918
1. textiles	561	639	613	777
2. machine	105	149	222	290
shipbuilding**	40	55	103	121
3. chemicals	97	125	141	159
4. food	51	55	62	68
5. misc.	85	102	113	105
6. special	9	22	27	7

Source: Ohara, *Nihon rōdō nenkan*, 1922, 65-66.

\* Misc. includes such industries as bookprinting, paper, bamboo and wood, feathers and hair, tusk, jewels, stone, shells, etc.

Special includes electric, gas, metal smelting, mining.

\*\* These figures are included in the machine category.

Although there was an overall increase in the modern manufacturing sector during this period, development was not uniform. Some industries achieved greater growth than others. Table 3 shows that between 1915 and 1917, the greatest gain in the number of employees was in the machine sector, which rose 111%, followed by chemicals, which increased 49%. Textiles, on the other hand, rose only 9%. By 1915 heavy industry had gained almost an equal share of manufacturing production, which had previously been dominated by light industries such as textiles and foods.<sup>20</sup> It had, for the first time,

<sup>19</sup>The 1920 census was the first national census to record occupations. Non-primary labor was divided into three categories: modern, traditional, and new traditional. Traditional included such employment as family businesses in noodle shops or shopkeepers, carpenters and tatami makers, and service industries, for example, geisha or barbers. Employees in modern industry, which were classified as industries introduced from abroad including railways, telephone, or steam powered shipping, numbered 3.5 million. New traditional industry, which were industries in which new techniques were introduced to old industry such as spinning and textiles, numbered 1.6 million. Ibid., 25, 27. The 1920 categories of modern and new traditional fit the term "modern" used in this paper.

<sup>20</sup>Nakamura, *Economic Growth*, 23. In the early Meiji period light industry—food and textiles—controlled the manufacturing sector. In 1915 heavy industry production was 840.5 million yen (29.2% of

produced more than the food section and was catching up with the textile production. This new structure in Japanese industry lasted until the late 1930s.

Figures in table 3 also indicate that within the machine industry, some areas experienced greater gains than others. The number of workers in shipbuilding rose 225% (a higher than average increase), reflecting the boom in the shipbuilding industry during the war period. The number of ships built rose from 79 in 1914 to 377 by 1918. The 82,000 tons built in 1914 grew to 626,000 in 1918. The number of companies was 5 in 1913, but 52 by 1918.<sup>21</sup> As a result of greater expansion in industries requiring male workers, the proportion of females declined (although the absolute number rose), and the proportion of males increased in the modern sector. From 1914 to 1917, 71,000 more males than females were hired in the modern sector. (See table 4.)

Table 4. - Total Number of Workers by Gender and Industry, 1906-1919 ( in 000's)

Year	Secondary		Manufacturing		Modern	
	M	F	M	F	M	F
1906	2,724	1,324	1,903	1,274	242	369
1914	3,159	1,280	2,111	1,198	319	535
1917	3,707	1,513	2,601	1,436	568	713
1919	3,980	1,606	2,800	1,495	706	814

Sources: For secondary and manufacturing total, from *LTES*, 2, 204-5. For modern, from Ohara, *Nihon rōdō nenkan*, 1922, 64.

Did changes in the size and gender of the workforce in modern industry during the boom years have any influence on post-1917 labor unrest? By 1917 modern industry, heavy industry, and shipbuilding workers had increased in number. It is logical that many analysts give weight to the greater number of workers and increase of males compared to females when explaining the labor unrest starting at this time.<sup>22</sup> Larger numbers no

total production), textiles was 955.1 ( 33.2%), and food was 784.4 (27.2%).

<sup>21</sup>S. Ueyehara, *The Industry and Trade of Japan* (London: P.S. King and Son, Ltd., 1926), 230-31.

<sup>22</sup>See for example Andrew Gordon, *Labor and Imperial Democracy in Prewar Japan* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991), 87-89. Gordon states that increased number of males in heavy



doubt gave potential strength; however, the relevance of the increase in the number of males must be questioned. Arguments that female employees dominated modern industry during the early Meiji era, and that the proportion of males increased in the war period, are not incorrect. But, if the entire secondary industry is considered, as table 4 shows, the number of males was always higher than females. Even in 1906, the total number of males in industry was almost 5 times the number in modern factories in 1917. Secondary industries, such as mining, quarrying, and construction, hired mainly male workers. Traditional manufacturing industries, such as food processing, stone-cutting, and bamboo crafts, also employed mostly men.<sup>23</sup> Women prevailed in modern industrial factories. Therefore, the increase in the number of males alone was not crucial to the post-1917 labor militancy and upsurge of labor union organization. If the presence of males was necessary for labor assertiveness, there would have been many more strikes before 1917. Something else had changed. Was something different about the new male workers? Or was it the situation in the workplace?

Labor assertiveness, unions, and strikes were most conspicuous in modern factories that employed mainly male workers. We know that these factories had many new employees; the question is whether the changes in industry and influx of new workers somehow influenced the rise of the labor movement and demands for autonomy in the workplace. In trying to understand more about the character of the workers in 1917, the boundaries of analysis of the impact of industrial development must be expanded to include social changes.

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industry "provided a firmer base for union organization . . . thus, as their numbers and relative weight increased during the war, the Yuaikai gained support." In chapter 4 of this paper it is suggested that an increase in Yuaikai membership in Kobe occurred only after union policies changed.

<sup>23</sup>Females worked in some of these industries, for example, in mining, food processing, and in the bamboo crafts.

### *Rural Workers in Heavy Industry*

Who filled the many job vacancies in modern factories? When industry was first established during the early decades of Meiji, samurai often worked in the factories. Later, farm girls were hired in textile mills and, as already noted, artisans worked in heavy industry—at least before the turn of the century. With the increase in the number of workers in heavy industry, especially in shipbuilding, the question is, was the newly-recruited worker in this sector different from the earlier artisan?

Because so many workers were needed in heavy industry, especially during the war boom, there are indications that by 1917 most heavy industry workers came from farms. This kind of movement in a developing industrial society was not new. Roger Magraw, in a study of labor developments in France in the nineteenth century, states that "the shift of population towards new industries in new regions and the rapid expansion of a new working class of miners, railmen and metal workers, heralded a shift in the balance away from the world of the artisan."<sup>24</sup> There is ample evidence to indicate that by 1917, Japanese farmers were working in heavy industry.

In Japan, as in France, there was a shift of population from rural to urban industrializing centres. Between 1898 and 1920, population in rural areas decreased relative to urban centres, and the number of communities with a population of over 10,000 (the demarcation point between urban and rural units) rose while the number under 10,000 decreased.<sup>25</sup> In 1898, 82% of the total population dwelt in rural places, but by 1920 that figure fell to 68%. During this period the population of urban areas grew almost 18 times more than rural areas—in urban areas by almost 10 million, while in rural areas by 567,000. After 1913 rural population began to decline in absolute terms.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>24</sup>Roger Magraw, "Socialism, Syndicalism and French Labour Before 1914," in *Labour and Socialist Movements in Europe Before 1914*, ed. Dick Geary (Oxford: Berg Publishers Limited, 1989), 53.

<sup>25</sup>Ryoichi Ishii, *Population Pressure and Economic Life in Japan* (London: P.S. King & Son, Ltd.), 70. The International Statistical Institute established the rural town as having a population under 2000, however, the Japanese use 10,000. According to Ishii this reflects the early Meiji government's effort to organize the *mura* or village by combining several old villages for administrative purposes.

<sup>26</sup>*Ibid.*, 71-72.

With high growth in industry during the war period, it can be surmised that many industrial workers came from an agricultural background. As there was a shift in population from rural to urban centres, the proportion of workers employed in agriculture dropped while in industry it rose.<sup>27</sup> Umemura Mataji, in his study of population and labor, found that the largest outflow of the agricultural working force before World War II was from 1910 to 1920.<sup>28</sup> According to his calculations, this outflow accounted for more than 80% of the increase in the number of non-agriculture jobs—the highest percentage in modern Japan's labor history.<sup>29</sup> The relocation of population was most pronounced during the boom period. As Umemura notes, "at the time of the World War I boom both the increase in nonagricultural employment and the percentage of that increase accounted for by workers shifting out of agriculture jumped."<sup>30</sup>

Although macro migration statistics do not indicate how many went to work in industry, government surveys on factories reveal that there was a substantial number of workers with agrarian backgrounds in factories in the late 1910s. A 1917 report by the Ministry of Agriculture and Commerce confirms that the number of factory workers with a rural origin had increased. Of the 253,598 workers surveyed, 65% of the 160,000 new employees were found to have had backgrounds in agriculture.<sup>31</sup> A 1923 survey, conducted by the Osaka City Office on 90,000 persons employed in factories with 100 persons or more, showed that the number of workers who had no experience in industry ranged from 60 to 80%. Among the male inexperienced workers, 40 to 50% had farming backgrounds.<sup>32</sup> By 1917, an important consideration is that unlike their predecessors,

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<sup>27</sup>Ibid., 80. In 1872, workers in agriculture were 77.1% of the gainfully employed; in 1920 they were 51.8%.

<sup>28</sup>Mataji Umemura, "Population and Labor Force," in *Patterns*, ed. Ohkawa et al., 246.

<sup>29</sup>Ibid. Umemura estimates that from 1910 to 1920 the outflow was 3.6 million. This accounted for 82.7% of the increase in employment, an amount high compared to that during the Meiji period. The greatest outflow from agriculture occurred after World War II.

<sup>30</sup>Ibid.

<sup>31</sup>Cited in Taira, "Economic Development," 616.

<sup>32</sup>Cited in Shuzo Teruoka, "Japanese Capitalism and its Agricultural Problems," *The Developing Economies* 4.4 (1966): 490. Taken from Osaka City Office, Department of Social Welfare, *Kōgyō rōdō koyō kankei* (Employment relations among industrial workers) (Tokyo: Kōbundō, 1924).

many of the workers had been employed previously in agriculture.

Although in both surveys heavy industries had a lower-than-average number of inexperienced workers, there were still significant numbers of agricultural origin. In the 1917 survey, 23.9% in machinery came directly from agriculture.<sup>33</sup> In the Osaka survey, the number of "unskilled" in heavy industry was still high: 30 to 46% were inexperienced and 45% of male workers had rural origins.<sup>34</sup> Teruoka Shuzo, in his review of this survey, suggests that estimates of rural workers in heavy industry were probably lower than was the actual case. Of those classified as "unskilled," agriculture was claimed as the predominant background, and this was followed by "student," "unemployed," "housework," "commerce," "domestic," and "miscellaneous." Teruoka surmises that many of the workers from "student" to "miscellaneous" may have previously been members of agricultural households, thereby raising rural influences in industry.<sup>35</sup>

A crucial change, as noted above, had taken place in the workforce of heavy industry. Gordon, in his study of labor in heavy industry, notes that in the late 1800s heavy industry employees were mostly artisan, and although there is no dispute that artisans made up the labor force of the industry at that time, Gordon analyzes labor developments of the post-1917 period neglecting the change in the workforce between 1900 and 1917.<sup>36</sup> He overlooks the influx of new employees and, in fact, the continuing presence of the artisan is central to his argument. He suggests that artisans brought not only their skills, but also "set the tone of worker behavior in heavy industry with frequent job changes, movement from small shop to large factory and back, disregard for ineffective craft restrictions, and the desire for independence."<sup>37</sup> Gordon reasons that because artisans were undisciplined and "travelers," in the early 1900s management

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<sup>33</sup>Hiroshi Hazama, "Historical Changes in the Life Style of Industrial Workers," *Japanese Industrialization and its Social Consequences*, ed. Hugh Patrick (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1976), 36.

<sup>34</sup>Teruoka, "Japanese Capitalism," 490-91.

<sup>35</sup>Ibid.

<sup>36</sup>Gordon, *The Evolution*, chap. 1 and 3.

<sup>37</sup>Ibid., 25.

attempted to establish a more stable labor force by changing from the *oyakata* system (*oyakata* were bosses who were contracted by the company) to direct control by the company. Management increased workers' benefits to encourage them to stay in the company and proclaimed paternalism. Gordon concludes that heavy industry labor, with the aid of new organization and ideology, responded to managements' policies with strikes after 1917.

By 1917, management in heavy industry was no longer dealing mainly with "travelers" but with farmers who had different characteristics. It is doubtful that the change from artisan to farmer was sudden, rather, it was a gradual process with an added thrust in the boom years. As Hazama Hiroshi notes, when large factories began to directly control labor policy, they "began to select their own workers rather than recruit them publicly or hire them through *oyakata*. . . . Those considered most suitable were children from middle-level farm households, or a level close to it, with no occupational experience."<sup>38</sup> Part of the shift from the *oyakata* system to direct control by management was therefore a change also from artisan to "unskilled" labor.

The availability of jobs in industry, especially after 1914, and a wage differential between agriculture and manufacturing after 1914, were "pull" factors luring workers from the countryside to urban centres.<sup>39</sup> This was a time unique in labor history when workers in factories would have been most rural in character. In early Meiji, "skilled" artisans predominated, and in the 1930s, manufacturing depended less on agricultural sources to fill the vacancies in its workforce.<sup>40</sup> But in 1917, workers with a farming background were playing an important part in modern factories, including the heavy industry sector. This is the overall picture, but the question is, did these changes also occur in Mitsubishi and Kawasaki in Kobe?

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<sup>38</sup>Hazama, "Historical Changes," 35.

<sup>39</sup>Taira, "Economic Development," 618. This differential in wage started in 1914 but widened in the 1920s. See also Akira Ono and Tsunehiko Watanabe, "Changes in Income Inequality in the Japanese Economy," in *Japanese Industrialization*, ed. Patrick, 367. They state, "the typical movement of the real income differential for the prewar period is constancy up to 1915 and a subsequent widening."

<sup>40</sup>Taira, "Economic Development," 617. Taira notes that in 1938, 42 to 47% of the net increase in the workforce came from agriculture. This was a decrease from two-thirds in the World War I period. See also Umemura, "Population," 246. The agricultural contribution rate fell after the 1910-1920 period.

### *Local Changes*

The above examination of developments in industry, changes in the structure of rural and urban society, and migration patterns, gives an overview of how Japan's workforce changed. It is a macro analysis, so the findings may not necessarily apply on a micro scale; many areas actually took a different path. With that in mind, the next section reviews developments at a local level to confirm that what happened on a macro scale also took place at Mitsubishi and Kawasaki. It examines changes in Kobe, Hyogo (the prefecture in which Kobe is located), and the shipbuilding companies. In this period, the changes at the local level followed the macro direction, for what took place in Hyogo occurred at an even more rapid rate than national trends.

When a group of foreigners first came to the port of Kobe, which was to be opened in the beginning of 1868, they saw a "long sandy beach, lined for most of the way with old gnarled pine trees, that stretched towards Osaka. . . . To the west the straggling village of Kobe, a few sake breweries and godowns, and some straw-thatched fishing huts."<sup>41</sup> First reports from the settlement were disappointing. In the May 1868 issue of the *Japan Times Overland Mail*, a correspondent referred to Kobe as follows: "The foreign concession, or the "Sand Path" "Swamp" or "Desert", as the residents appropriately term it."<sup>42</sup>

However, this scene quickly changed: Western traders and Japanese built new homes, banks, and clubs, and by the time the extra-territorial part of Kobe was returned to the Japanese in 1899, it was a town of over 200,000 people.<sup>43</sup> At that time, a French consul stated that "thirty years ago . . . the land was all but valueless . . . To-day we hand back to the Japanese authorities the very same site transformed into a regular town."<sup>44</sup> Kobe had

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<sup>41</sup>Harold S. Williams, *Tales of the Foreign Settlements in Japan* (Tokyo: Charles E. Tuttle Company, 1958), 65.

<sup>42</sup>Quoted in *ibid.*, 69.

<sup>43</sup>Irene B. Taeuber, *Population and Labor Force in the Industrialization of Japan, 1850-1950* (Conference on Economic Growth in Selected Countries, April, 1952), 14. The population in 1898 was 216,000.

become the "Model Settlement in the Far East."<sup>45</sup>

The growth of modern industry was part of the many transformations in the city. Kobe was chosen as one of the ports to be opened to foreigners for trade because of its natural deep harbor. Trade flourished, and commodities exported indicate the changing pattern in production. In 1891, the most prominent exports were rice, tea, matches and camphor.<sup>46</sup> By 1903, exports had changed to cotton thread and matches.<sup>47</sup> The type of industry to develop in Kobe was stimulated by the port and trade: docks for shipbuilding could be built into the sea; such industries as spinning, weaving, and rubber had access to imported materials as the port was on the main line from Singapore; and, match production began because Kobe was one of the ports through which foreign matches were first imported, and some local people appreciated their value.<sup>48</sup> Modern industry established a firm base by the middle of the Meiji period. The manufacturing of matches, which started in 1875, was important during the Meiji period. Kobe became one of the main centres of that industry in Japan and had sixty match factories by 1897.<sup>49</sup> The cotton spinning industry in Hyogo developed after the 1880s. Kanegafuchi Cotton Spinning Company of Mitsui started a factory in Kobe. Amagasaki C. S. Company (renamed Dainippon in 1918) built its mill in Amagasaki city in Hyogo. The shipbuilding companies, Kawasaki and Mitsubishi, also became an important part of the Kobe scene.

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<sup>44</sup>Williams, *Foreign Settlements*, 84, citing the French Consul, Doyen of Consular Corps, 17 July 1899.

<sup>45</sup>Ibid., 86.

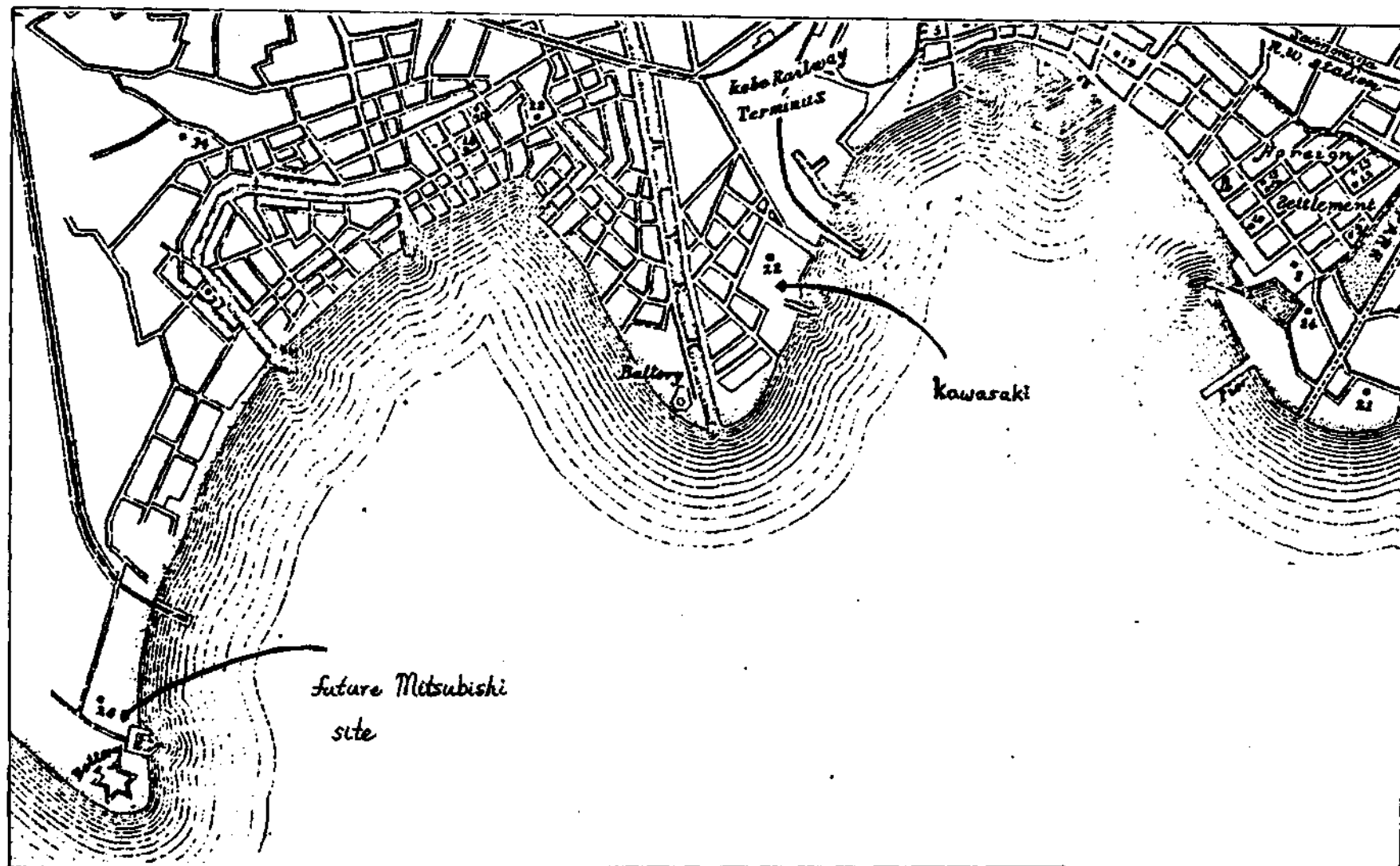
<sup>46</sup>Bureau of Commerce and Industry, Department of Agriculture and Commerce Japan, *General View of Commerce and Industry in the Empire of Japan* (Tokyo: printed by M. Onuki, 1893), 21.

<sup>47</sup>Hyōgokenshi, *Hyōgoken*, 464.

<sup>48</sup>John E. Orchard, *Japan's Economic Position: The Progress of Industrialization* (New York: Whittlesey House, 1930), 148-51.

<sup>49</sup>Masamitsu Maeshima, Yoshiharu Hasuie, and Shōtarō Nakayama, *Hyōgoken no hyakunen* (The hundred years of Hyogo prefecture) (Tokyo: Kabushiki Gaisha Yamakawa Shuppansha, 1989), 33. See also Orchard, *Economic Position*, 149-50. Orchard states that by 1930, the Kobe match industry was the largest in Japan, producing 90% of the country's output in value although it started out and remained mainly a home industry. Osaka was another center for the match industry but gradually lost its industry after 1913 when countries they exported to, put a ban on the use of white phosphorous matches which Osaka made. In 1921, Japan prohibited the production of these matches and the Osaka industry disappeared. Kobe produced safety matches.

Map.3 - Kobe Harbor, circa, 1893.



Source: Bureau of Commerce and Industry, *General View of Commerce*.



### *Developments in Kobe Shipbuilding*

First there was an empty beach, then came a small iron works and trading company, followed by shipbuilding companies that provided transport to the world. This was the story of Kobe's shipbuilding companies, Mitsubishi and Kawasaki. Shipbuilding started in Kobe soon after the port opened. As for Kawasaki, its origins can be traced back to 1871 when the government started a factory in Kobe.<sup>50</sup> A year later it bought first an ironworks company in Kanazawa, next, the American owned Balkan Ironworks, and then started shipbuilding. When the government decided to sell some of its industries to the private sector in the 1880s, Kawasaki Shozo purchased the Hyogo Shipyard in 1886.<sup>51</sup> It became the Kawasaki Shipyard Company.<sup>52</sup>

The origin of the Mitsubishi Shipbuilding Co., Ltd. in Kobe can be traced back to an Englishman's trading company, E. C. Kilby.<sup>53</sup> In 1878, this company bought an ironworks and began building ships. In 1894, the government naval department purchased the company. Mitsubishi acquired these facilities in 1905. The company was located close to Kawasaki's shipyard. (See map 3.) Mitsubishi had experience in the shipbuilding industry: it had owned a small dockyard in Tokyo, and then it first leased, and later bought the government shipbuilding facility in Nagasaki in 1887.

By the end of Meiji, modern industries had established an important role in the Hyogo economy, and shipbuilding began to take a more notable place in manufacturing. At that time, the three main modern industries in Hyogo were spinning, match manufacturing, and shipbuilding.<sup>54</sup> As shown in figure 1, in 1913 these industries alone

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<sup>50</sup>Maeshima, Hasuike, and Nakayama, *Hyōgoken*, 32.

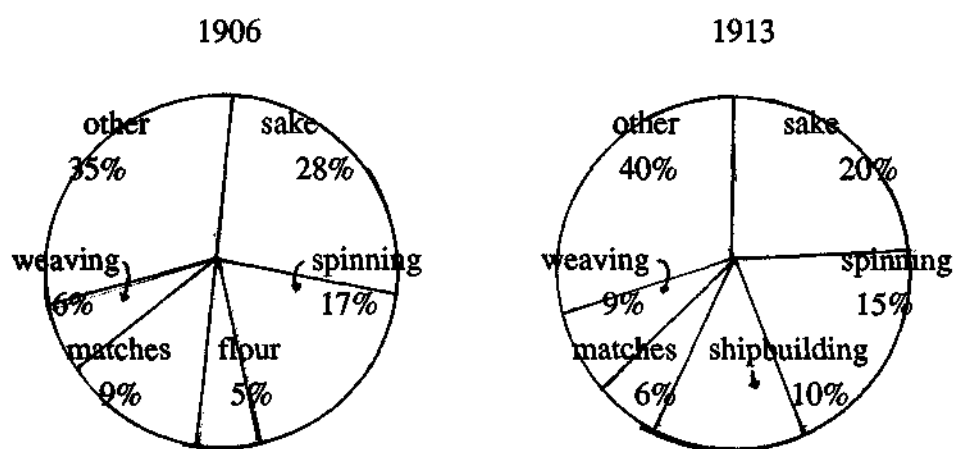
<sup>51</sup>For information about the 1880s government sales to Kawasaki and Mitsubishi, see Masaaki Kobayashi, "Japan's Early Industrialization and the Transfer of Government Enterprises: Government and Business," in *Japanese Yearbook on Business History* 2:1985 (Tokyo: Japan Business History Institute, 1985), 66-72.

<sup>52</sup>Kawasaki Shozo had established a shipyard in Tokyo in 1878, the Kawasaki Tsukiji Shipyard. The Tokyo and Kobe shipyard companies merged in 1896 to form the Kawasaki Shipyard Company.

<sup>53</sup>Maeshima, Hasuike, and Nakayama, *Hyōgoken*, 32. The founder of Mitsubishi was Iwasaki Yataro. His first venture was the shipping business which he started immediately after the Meiji Restoration.

made up 31% of the total industrial output. Shipbuilding had a 10% share, up from 1906 when it was negligible, illustrating the transformations in the modern industrial sector. Changing percentages also illustrate that during this period, there was higher growth in heavy industry and in weaving, and less in spinning. The cotton spinning industry, as previously mentioned, enjoyed high growth in mid-Meiji. Already in 1910, for example, of a total of 55,000 employed in manufacturing, 52.1% worked in these three industries. The match industry had 11,000 workers, textiles had 6,000; and, shipbuilding had 10,000.<sup>55</sup> Paralleling macro trends, these modern industries were rivaling a still strong traditional sector: in Hyogo, the sake industry continued to hold the number one position.<sup>56</sup>

Figure 1. - Industrial Output in Hyogo, 1906 and 1913. (Percentage of Total Output).  
Illustration from Hyōgokenshi, *Hyōgoken*, 421.



In keeping with national economic trends, Hyogo's modern industrial production and number of employees displayed a significant shift upwards after 1914. Between 1915 and 1919, the value of industrial output grew almost four times, from 227 million yen to 820 million yen, approximately the same as on the national scale.<sup>57</sup> The number of

<sup>54</sup>Hyogokenshi, *Hyōgoken*, 626.

<sup>55</sup>*Ibid.*, 449.

<sup>56</sup>*Ibid.*, 448.

<sup>57</sup>*Ibid.*, 629. National figures taken from *LTES*, 10, 143. Between 1915 and 1919, Hyogo's increase

companies and factories in the prefecture increased rapidly during the war years. By 1919 there were 1735 companies recorded in Hyogo, 2.5 times the number in 1913. By 1919 the number of companies with factories was 582, twice that of 1913. Between 1915 and 1917, factory buildings increased from 415 to 2932. During 1916 and 1917 there were 10 new building starts a month.<sup>58</sup> The three main industries, spinning, matches, and shipbuilding, all increased output.<sup>59</sup> Some sectors experienced phenomenal expansion; for example, the rubber industry grew 40 times between 1913 and 1914 due to a demand for industrial rubber belts.<sup>60</sup> These increases resulted in an overall rise in employment. From 1914 to 1919, the numbers employed in Hyogo's factories jumped from 96,000 to 165,000—the same percentage increase as on a macro scale.<sup>61</sup> From 1915 to 1917, when the 2517 new factories were being built, the number of factory employees rose from 99,000 to 130,000.<sup>62</sup>

The growth of the shipbuilding industry in Hyogo also resulted in more workers in its factories. The total production in the machine sector was 62 million yen in 1915, but by 1919 it was 243 million yen, and shipbuilding accounted for much of the gain.<sup>63</sup> As shipbuilding production increased, the total number of employees in the prefecture climbed from 13,181 in 1914, to 32,192 in 1919.<sup>64</sup> Kawasaki and Mitsubishi, as the main employers in the shipbuilding industry in Hyogo, hired many new employees.<sup>65</sup> The number of workers in Kawasaki shipbuilding was 12,504 in 1915 and 20,351 in 1917, while in Mitsubishi it was 3,686 and 10,316 respectively.<sup>66</sup>

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was 3.6 times; Japan's was 3.9 times.

<sup>58</sup>Hyōgokenshi, *Hyōgoken*, 627. From 1913 to 1919, the number of small companies, defined as those with less than 50,000 yen capital, increased from 186 to 274, 1.5 times. Those with over 50,000 yen capital increased from 18 to 116 companies, 6.5 times.

<sup>59</sup>Ibid., 629-42, *passim*.

<sup>60</sup>Hyōgokenshi, *Hyōgoken*, 644. Orchard notes that by 1930, the Kobe rubber industry employed 40% of the total workers in this industry in Japan. The Kobe factories also made rubber boots and shoes. Orchard, *Economic Position*, 150. The English company, Dunlop, was one of the largest in Kobe; Sumitomo Rubber Industries bought Dunlop in 1985.

<sup>61</sup>Shōkō, *Kōjō*, 206. See table 2 for national figures.

<sup>62</sup>Hyōgokenshi, *Hyōgoken*, 627.

<sup>63</sup>Ibid., 629.

<sup>64</sup>*NRUS*, 8.

<sup>65</sup>The other company was Harima.

With the growth of heavy industry in Hyogo, in accord with macro changes during this period, the proportion of males increased in the modern sector. At the beginning of the century, because of the large cotton spinning mills in the Hyogo area, the number of females working in modern industries was more than double that of males—44,226 to 19,433 males.<sup>67</sup> But in the Hyogo prefecture, unlike the national scene, the number of males rapidly outnumbered females in the modern sector. From 1903 on, the number of males was higher than the number of females; at the end of Meiji, it was almost one and a half times.<sup>68</sup> In 1919, of the 161,000 working in modern industry in Hyogo, 100,000 were men and 61,000 were women.<sup>69</sup> In the case of Hyogo, males were predominant in modern industry from the early 1900s, which indicates that, especially in this area, the increase of male workers in the war period was an unlikely cause for the post-1917 labor unrest.

After 1868, Hyogo's population redistributed itself to industrial centres. Hyogo's population in 1903 was 1,834,000, and in 1918, 2,321,000, representing an increase during this period of 26% compared to the national average of 19%.<sup>70</sup> Adding to Hyogo's population was in-migration from other prefectures. Because of the rapid industrialization in the area, Hyogo was one of the prefectures which made net gains in this period. Migration between prefectures allowed 9 of them to grow at the expense of 38 others.<sup>71</sup> However, despite an above average increase in population, the growth was not in rural areas. The percentage of the population residing in places of less than 10,000 decreased from 79.4 to 63.2% in the first two decades of the 1900s.<sup>72</sup> And, although the total number of farm households in Japan, as well as in most prefectures remained constant, Hyogo's fell from 215,000 in 1880, to 184,000 in 1917.<sup>73</sup> Urbanization was

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<sup>66</sup>NRUS, 25.

<sup>67</sup>Hyōgokenshi, *Hyōgoken*, 449.

<sup>68</sup>Ibid.

<sup>69</sup>Shōko, *Kōjō*, 206.

<sup>70</sup>For Hyogo's figures see Irene Taeuber, *The Population of Japan* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1958), 48. For national figures see Ishii, *Population Pressure*, 72.

<sup>71</sup>Ishii, *Population Pressure*, 67.

<sup>72</sup>Taeuber, *Population of Japan*, 48.

especially rapid in six cities during this period, and Kobe was the fastest growing of the "Big Six."<sup>74</sup> In relation to the year 1888, by 1918 Kobe's population ratio was 511. By comparison, Tokyo's was 179.<sup>75</sup>

Because Hyogo's economic trends followed the same pattern as national industrial developments, with even a higher rate of migration from rural to urban centres, one can infer that by the end of the war period a large number of workers in Kobe industry would likewise have had a rural background. Records from Mitsubishi show that even in 1914 there was a considerable number of workers hired who had rural backgrounds. Of 632 new employees that year, 335 came from other companies (from Kawasaki, 78; rail companies, 35; firms in Kobe, 75; and Osaka, 45), while 297 came from farms or had been students.<sup>76</sup> This, like Teruoka's observation of Osaka workers, could also be misleading. Many of the workers from other companies may have had rural backgrounds. Examples of work histories of those employed at Kawasaki in 1921 illustrate the varied backgrounds as well as the connection between farm work and industry.

1. Kinoshita Kihachiro, from Hyogo ken: graduated from elementary school, worked in the following: farm, Siebu rail, general labor, army, electric company in Wakayama ken, steelworks in Osaka, Kawasaki, shipyard in Osaka, steelworks in Osaka, Kawasaki
2. Ono Tsuyoshi, from Fukui ken: graduated from elementary school, worked in the following: railway company, fire station, weaving company in Osaka, army, farm, Kawasaki, Mitsubishi, Kawasaki<sup>77</sup>

In the boom years, when many new employees were needed, even more farmers may have been hired. For example, in a nine month period in 1917, Mitsubishi had to hire over 5,000 new workers.<sup>78</sup> A Ministry of Agriculture survey noted that in Hyogo

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<sup>73</sup>LTES, 2, 218, 222. In 1880, the total number of farm households in Japan was 5,499,441; in 1917, it was 5,550,336. Most prefectures remained about the same. Hyogo's decrease was second only to Kanagawa's.

<sup>74</sup>The others were Tokyo, Osaka, Yokohama, Kyoto, and Nagoya.

<sup>75</sup>Taeuber, *Population and Labor*, 14.

<sup>76</sup>NRUS, 10.

<sup>77</sup>Ibid., 20-21.

prefecture during the war period, so many farmers left their villages to work in Kobe that the farm work was left to women and old men.<sup>79</sup> Ikeda and Omae suggest that most workers were second and third sons of farmers, or sons of small businessmen, with little factory experience.<sup>80</sup> However, it is doubtful if this transition was sudden. Mitsubishi, for example, had started direct control of its shipyard employees in the late 1890s. As noted by Nishinarita Yutaka in his study of Mitsubishi shipbuilding, many of the shipyard workers at Nagasaki, even at the turn of the century, had agricultural origins.<sup>81</sup>

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The above discussion of economic and labor changes provides some important information about the Mitsubishi and Kawasaki workers. As the number of males was always high in manufacturing, the increase during the boom years cannot be considered crucial to the surge of labor unrest after the War. This suggests that there was something different about new workers who came to heavy industries. By 1917, many workers had agricultural, not artisan backgrounds. These workers became part of the new character of industry and society in the late teens. Despite the information this approach offers about Japanese factory workers, it fails to give enough to fully understand the post-1917 workers and their motives in the conflict in 1921. Did the origin of the workers or condition of their move to the shipyards have any influence on the post-1917 labor movement or 1921 strike? These are the questions which will be addressed in the next chapter.

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<sup>78</sup>Ibid., 109.

<sup>79</sup>Nōshōmushō Nōmukyoku, *Kosaku sōgi ni kansuru chōsa* (A survey of tenant disputes), Vol. 2 (Tokyo: 1922), 51. See also Ann Waswo, *Japanese Landlords; The Decline of A Rural Elite* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1977), 104.

<sup>80</sup>NRUS, 17-18.

<sup>81</sup>Yutaka Nishinarita, "Nichiro sensōgo ni okeru zaibatsu zōsen kigyō no keiei kōzō to rōshi kankei: Mitsubishi zōsenjo no bunseki" (The business analysis and industrial relations of zaibatsu shipbuilding company after the Russo-Japanese War—a study of Mitsubishi Shipbuilding Company), *Ryūkoku daigaku keizai keiei ronshū* (The Journal of Economic and Business Studies of Ryukoku University) 18.1 (June 1978): 53.

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## CHAPTER 2

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### **Changes in Rural Society and Their Impact on the Character of the 1917 Worker**

Why is it important to know that workers in Mitsubishi and Kawasaki in 1917 were of rural origin? It is because they brought with them a background different from that of the artisan, and they came to industry under particular circumstances. Because these workers were from rural society, understanding them means that a study of rural developments becomes just as important to the analysis as an account of changes within industry itself. In this chapter, I study the rural-labor connection.

Labor historians have described farmers in industry as docile, diligent workers; few see them as likely catalysts for the unrest after 1917.<sup>1</sup> And, because farmers are viewed as subservient, historians are forced to find other reasons, such as the introduction of new ideology, labor organization, or economic hardship to explain the rise of conflict. If we examine rural society in the late Tokugawa and Meiji periods, a different picture of these people emerge. What is not recognized in accounts of labor history is that rural society in Japan had a variety of unique characteristics that affected farmers' personalities and their reasons for coming to work in heavy industry—features which ultimately propelled them towards conflict.

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<sup>1</sup>See for example Hazama, "Historical Changes," 40. Hazama describes traditional concepts valued by farmers as "diligence and thrift" and "harmony." He states, "this attitude towards life influenced the workers who came from farm villages." See also Gordon, *The Evolution*, 214. Gordon attributes the lack of a strong labor group at a steelmill in the 1920s in part to the "nature of the steelworkers" who had rural origins. For an alternate view of rural workers' character in industry, see Tsurumi, *Factory Girls*.

The Tokugawa farmer, unlike his Western counterpart, was in a unique situation because rural, rather than urban, society had become industrialized. Therefore, when talking about the Tokugawa farmer, the word "farmer" must be qualified. The Tokugawa farmer did more than simply cultivate rice and obediently pay taxes to the shogunate or daimyo. There is now a fair amount of scholarly agreement that especially in the latter part of the Tokugawa period, significant economic and social transformations took place.<sup>2</sup> Farm households were involved in such activities as cotton and silk weaving, and paper, umbrella, and paper lantern production as by-employment. Industries which required relatively greater capital investment had also developed in rural areas, such as sake brewing, pottery, sugar, and weaving.<sup>3</sup> These industries offered members of farm households opportunities for part-time work for wages.

At the time of the Restoration most rural areas had some industrial features, although the extent varied from region to region. Like other rural areas, Settsu (named Hyogo after the Restoration), was not a "farming" community in the latter part of the Tokugawa period. Settsu was in one of the economically advanced regions, Osaka Bay, where it is estimated that 30 to 40% of the population did not engage in agriculture at all.<sup>4</sup> Settsu was, after all, in the Kinai area. (See map 4.) The Kinai region, which included four other provinces, was situated near the city of Osaka and the ancient capitals of Kyoto and

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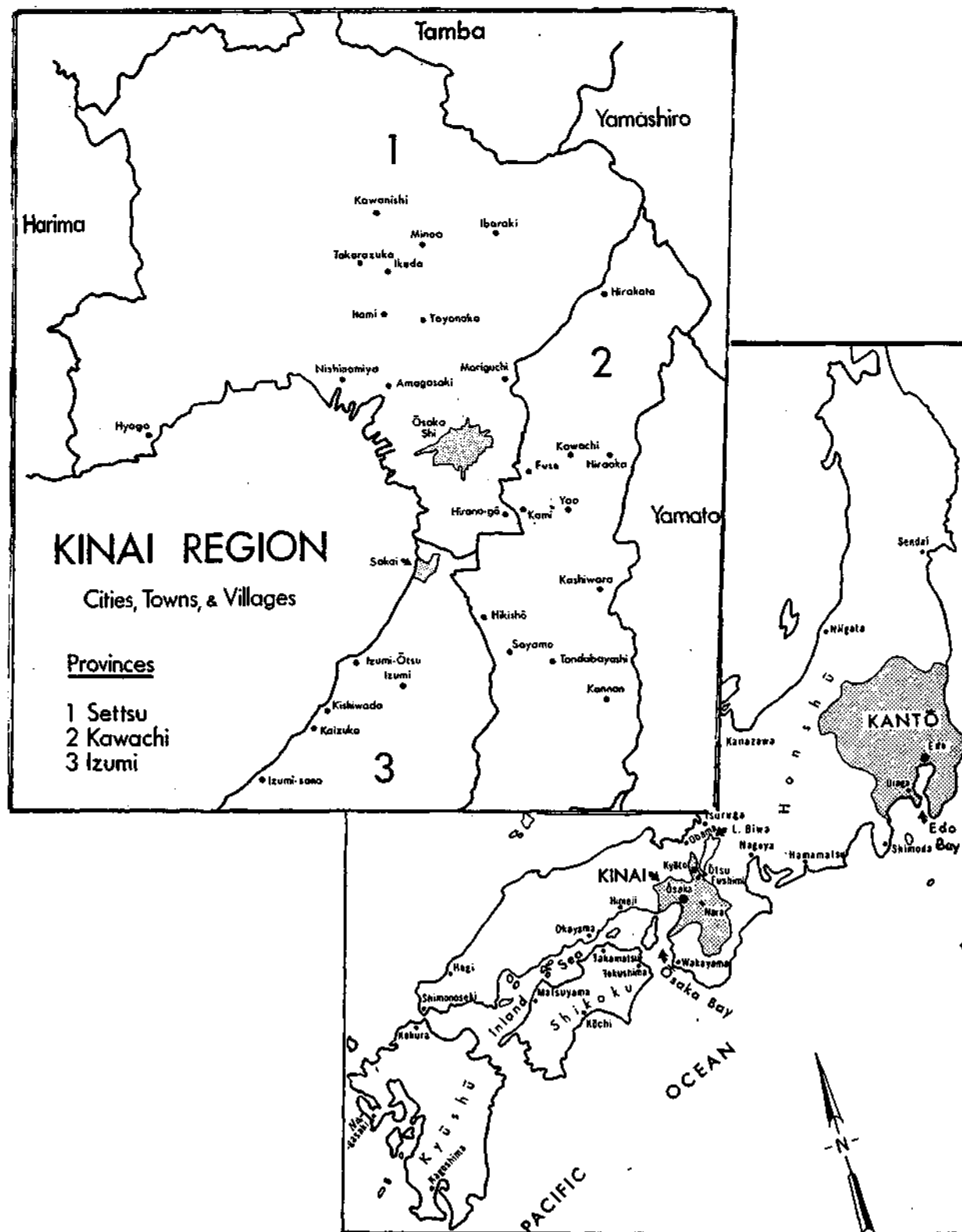
<sup>2</sup>Nishikawa Shunsaku found the following about the economy of Choshu in the early 1840s: "Fully 80% of the commoner households were agricultural, but this does not mean that Choshu was a 'backward' agrarian economy. . . . Half of the landless peasants were already engaged in commerce, transportation, and other non-agricultural occupations. And even those who were occupied in agriculture turned, due to the land-tax-based revenue system, to non-agricultural by-employments to supplement their farming income." Shunsaku Nishikawa, "The Economy of Choshu on the Eve of Industrialization," *The Economic Studies Quarterly* 38.4 (December 1987): 335. Reviewing the Tokugawa period through the analysis of the basic source of population data, the *shūmon-aratame-chō*, registers by temples or villages, provides a new insight to population as well as occupations, mobility, standards of living, and social status in rural Tokugawa communities. For information about the *shūmon-aratame-chō*, see Robert J. Smith, "Small families, small households, and residential instability: town and city in 'pre-modern' Japan," in *Household and Family in Past Time*, ed. Peter Laslett (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1972), 431-36.

<sup>3</sup>Mataji Miyamoto, Yotaro Sakudo, and Yasukichi Yasuba, "Economic Development in Preindustrial Japan, 1859-1894," *Journal of Economic History* 25. 4 (December 1965): 544-45.

<sup>4</sup>E. Sydney Crawcour, "Aspects of Economic Transition in Japan, 1840-1906," *Papers on Far Eastern History* 24 (September 1981): 56-57. Crawcour suggests that many people classified as farmers were actually working in industry either full or part-time.



Map 4. - 18th and 19th Century Japan: Kinai Region.



Source: William B. Hauser, *Economic Institutional Change in Tokugawa Japan: Osaka and the Kinai Cotton Trade* (London: Cambridge University Press), 12, 127.

Nara. Even at the beginning of the Tokugawa shogunate's rule in the early 1600s, this area was far advanced economically compared to other regions in Japan.<sup>5</sup> Located near Osaka (the commercial centre of Japan), and the sea, its fertile plains therefore became part of a developed irrigation, river, and land network. It was a centre of commerce and handicraft production in one of the most urbanized parts of Japan. According to a 1638 report by Matsue Shigeyori, who listed "all the famous local products" in Japan, slightly under 40% of all well-known products—706 in all—were produced in Kinai. Of this total, 126 were from Settsu.<sup>6</sup> Writing about the region in the Tokugawa period, Susan Hanley and Kozo Yamamura say that "despite its size, the economic importance of the Kinai in Tokugawa Japan is beyond dispute."<sup>7</sup> Cotton and sake, as the most important products in Kinai and Settsu, developed in the Tokugawa period and helped alter the economic and social structure of the rural community. Following this process of transformation reveals that autonomy was part of the rural way of life.

### *Economic Change and Autonomy in Settsu*

Farmers in Settsu responded very early to market forces: cotton had already become an important product of the region in the 1600s. According to a farmer's biography in the 1680s, "in the villages of the five Kinai provinces, cotton production excelled all other regions."<sup>8</sup> In a study of Settsu in the late 1600s, Yagi Akihiro found that 20.6 to 61.8% of total paddy production was allotted to cotton.<sup>9</sup>

Farmers were not content simply to cultivate cotton: they quickly became involved in

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<sup>5</sup>Susan B. Hanley and Kozo Yamamura, *Economic and Demographic Change in Preindustrial Japan, 1600-1968* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1977), 91.

<sup>6</sup>Quoted in *ibid.*, 92.

<sup>7</sup>*Ibid.*, 91.

<sup>8</sup>Akihiro Yagi, *Kinsei no shōhin ryūtsū* (Commerce in Tokugawa Japan) (Tokyo: Hanawa Shobō, 1962), 22.

<sup>9</sup>*Ibid.*, 25.

cotton processing. Cotton-related employment soon began to be an important part of rural economic life. For example, in the area around the town of Nishinomiya in Settsu, in the early 1700s women wove and spun cotton and received wages for their work.<sup>10</sup> By-employment gradually became part of the economy and culture of the farmer's household. For the Ujita family of Nishikoya village, cotton cloth sales from 1792 to 1837 ranged from 5.2 to 11.9% of their total income.<sup>11</sup> Since much of the hand work in cotton processing was done by farm women, they had to be accomplished in the art of weaving before they married. In fact, they were expected to dye and weave the cloth for their wedding clothes and bedding.<sup>12</sup>

Farming families became involved with cotton goods production as by-employments not only in their homes but also as outside jobs. In the 1730s there were three main employment categories in cotton processing: cultivation, spinning, and weaving. One hundred years later there were ten categories, including dying, brokering, and selling.<sup>13</sup> As the industry became larger, some of the work became centralized in factories. By the beginning of the nineteenth century, some establishments in the Kinai area had 1,000 households working for them; one workshop was reported to have eighty weaving machines.<sup>14</sup> Numerous recent studies have found that in the latter part of the Tokugawa period, members of farm households left their village to work elsewhere for short periods of time—a practice termed *dekasegi*.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>10</sup>Sōgorō Uozumi, ed., *Nishinomiya shi* (The history of Nishinomiya city) (Nishinomiya: Nishinomiya Shiyakusho, 1960), 241.

<sup>11</sup>William B. Hauser, *Economic Institutional Change in Tokugawa Japan: Osaka and the Kinai Cotton Trade* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1974), 141. For this family, rice production constituted only 33.3-39.8% of their income. See also Thomas C. Smith, "Farm Family By-Employments in Preindustrial Japan," chap. in *Native Sources of Japanese Industrialization, 1750-1920* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988), 78-79. Smith found that in an area in Choshu, non-agricultural income was 55%, and in some districts 70%.

<sup>12</sup>Chihōshi kenkyū kyōgi kai, ed., *Nihon sangyō shi taikēi 6, Kinki chihō hen* (An outline of the history of Japanese industry, no. 6, Kinki district) (Tokyo: Zaidan Hōjin Tōkyō Daigaku Shuppan kai, 1960), 148.

<sup>13</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>14</sup>Hanley and Yamamura, *Economic and Demographic Change*, 362, note no. 44.

<sup>15</sup>Studies confirm this development; there are examples of both "push" and "pull" factors. See for example, Akira Hayami, "Labor Migration in a Pre-Industrial Society: A Study Tracing the Life Histories of the Inhabitants of a Village," *Keio Economic Studies* 10.2 (1973): 1-18. Hayami contributes the

Sake brewing, the other main industry in Settsu, provided employment for many farmers during the winter months. Data on exports of sake from Osaka (sake supplied from surrounding provinces) reveal that production grew in the latter half of the Tokugawa period. In 1726, Osaka exported a total of 117,000 barrels to Edo (present-day Tokyo). This represented 22% of Edo's imported sake.<sup>16</sup> By 1856, the amount shipped by Osaka to Edo was over 1,000,000 barrels. This was 86% of Edo's sake imports.<sup>17</sup> Although Osaka, Ikeda, and Itami had been the major producers of sake in the latter half of the Tokugawa period, the Nada district in Settsu took the lead.<sup>18</sup> Some factories in this region were employing up to 300 men.<sup>19</sup>

By the end of the Tokugawa period, farmers in rural Settsu had developed their own economy. The manner in which the rural economy developed meant that farmers were familiar with making their own choices in economic matters. Their decision making illustrates the internal dimension of autonomy. Besides rice cultivation, which was a supplementary crop, they had cash crops such as cotton and seeds, plus by-employment opportunities in cotton-related activities as well as in other industries that had developed in the district. From the beginning of Tokugawa, when the saying was "go to cotton areas to become rich," farmers were able to switch to crops according to market demand, and to supplement their income with by-employment. As Hayami Akira points out, the "economic mind" of the Japanese common people had already begun to develop in the seventeenth century.<sup>20</sup>

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occurrence of *dekasegi* in the latter part of the Tokugawa period in a village in Mino to the growth of industry which needed a labor force. See also Mark Fruin, "A social geography of preindustrial labour migration in Japan: Tajima and Kurome villages in the nineteenth century," *Journal of Historical Geography* 4.2 (1978): 105-28. Fruin stresses in his study the "push" factor of natural disasters.

<sup>16</sup>Hauser, *Change in Tokugawa*, 39.

<sup>17</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>18</sup>Hanley and Yamamura, *Economic and Demographic Change*, 105, 362. Nada, which in 1793 had 141 sake makers, had 161 by 1837. Seven produced more than 5,000 koku (1 koku = 39.7033 gallons).

<sup>19</sup>*Ibid.*, 96.

<sup>20</sup>Akira Hayami, "A Great Transformation: Social and Economic Change in Sixteenth and Seventeenth Century Japan," in *Silkworms, Oil, and Chips . . . Proceedings of the Economics and Economic History Section of the Fourth International Conference on Japanese Studies*, ed. Erich Pauer (Bonn: University of Bonn, 1986).

Autonomy in rural society was attained by avoiding intervention from outside parties. In Settsu, those involved in the cotton business simply managed to avoid government-supported guilds, for example, the Osaka traders.<sup>21</sup> This rural business had become so independent of the guilds that by 1856, only 18% of the cotton cloth imported by Edo was supplied by Osaka.<sup>22</sup> In the early 1800s, when government tried to gain control of the rural cotton business, a total of 1007 villages in Settsu and Kawachi petitioned the Osaka government in 1823 for the right to trade free of the Osaka guilds.<sup>23</sup> As revealed in a government report issued under the Tokugawa bakufu in the early 1800s, farmers wanted to conduct their affairs without outside interference. The article confirms both the internal and external dimensions of autonomy in rural society.

In the three districts of Osaka as well as throughout Settsu and Kawachi we have issued strict orders to the farmers to correct their habits, increase the volume of cotton they ship to Osaka, and lower their prices. Nevertheless, the volume of cotton shipped directly to Edo and other regions by rural merchants has continued to increase and the high prices from these sales have become dominant. . . . [these conditions, which included the hoarding of cotton by farmers] continue and will become the base desire of those engaged in agriculture even if we were to attempt to prevent participation by the farmers.<sup>24</sup>

In late Tokugawa, many groups in rural areas, including those engaged in agriculture, succeeded in maintaining their autonomy—thanks to their growing power vis-a-vis the government.<sup>25</sup> Rural society displayed solidarity when faced with threats from

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<sup>21</sup>For details about the relationship between those in the rural cotton business in Kinai and merchants in the Osaka guilds, see Hauser, *Change in Tokugawa*, 86-116.

<sup>22</sup>*Ibid.*, 39.

<sup>23</sup>*Ibid.*, 98-99.

<sup>24</sup>Quoted in *ibid.*, 101-2. Written in 1842/3 by Abe Totomi, an official of the bakufu administration.

<sup>25</sup>In the 1823 case mentioned, the Osaka magistrate was forced to decide whether or not to support the bakufu cotton trade policy; his final decision was to favor unrestricted rural trade while still supporting the Osaka guilds in the Osaka district. As Thomas C. Smith notes, the government "could no longer enforce its will in the countryside in the details of daily life, except through the co-operation of self-governing villages run by those it would tax." Thomas C. Smith, "Premodern Economic Growth, Japan and the West," *Past and Present* 60 (August 1973): 155. Smith notes that Kinai area sake brewers also petitioned against monopolies. *Ibid.*, 145. For a detailed account of protest in an area where there was sake brewing, see William W. Kelly, *Deference and Defiance in Nineteenth-Century Japan* (Princeton:

the outside, but, in the latter half of the Tokugawa period the society was not one of consensus. Nor was it simply authoritarian with bosses and docile workers. Economic changes in the Tokugawa period had created a new rural social structure quite different from that planned by Tokugawa policy. Despite the autonomy farmers had, or rather, because of it, conflict arose between groups in rural communities. Although the many complexities of that society cannot be fully comprehended, conflicts that resulted because of autonomy are relevant. They defined rural farmers' concept of autonomy and gave it a distinct identity.

### *Conflict in Rural Society*

Within Tokugawa rural society, economic developments created several levels based on financial means, and disputes arose between the poorer and richer groups. Society became diverse because some farmers established industries, and thus became rich. There appears to be no study that specifically examines the new rural rich; however, there is evidence that wealth became concentrated in the countryside. A statute written in a castle town in the mid-eighteenth century complained that "farmer and tradesmen have exchanged positions."<sup>26</sup> As Nishikawa Shunsaku points out, "both the producer and workers in the proto-industries which developed during the 18th century, especially in its latter half, were from the farming class."<sup>27</sup> By the last decades of Tokugawa, records indicate that in some districts four-fifths of the rich lived in rural rather than in urban areas.<sup>28</sup> Shimazaki Toson, in his biographical novel *Before the Dawn*, offers a picture of the new rich. He writes about the wealthiest man in town, Kimbei, the sake brewer:

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Princeton University Press, 1985).

<sup>26</sup>Quoted in Smith, "Premodern Economic Growth," 140. Thomas C. Smith found that with the increase of industry in rural areas, merchants in castle towns lost business and the population of castle towns decreased.

<sup>27</sup>Nishikawa, "Economy of Choshu," 335.

<sup>28</sup>Smith, "Premodern Economic Growth," 141.

The master [Kimbei's grandfather] of the new Masudaya was no longer a mere peasant. He was now a townsman who ran an inn and who was going bit by bit into other lines of trade. . . . Throughout his [Kimbei's father] life he continued to carry to extremes his father's struggle to escape poverty. . . . By then he was sitting in his huge sake brewery . . . He taught them [his children] to think of money as the treasure of Japan. . . . Kimbei was not just a brewer and sake shop keeper. He also ran a pawnshop on the side. He had horses and croplands and from time to time he dabbled in the rice market. He had even lent money to the great shogunal vassals in Kukuri in Mino province.<sup>29</sup>

But not everyone became rich. And when the survival of poorer farmers was threatened, they reacted against those they perceived as curtailing their survival—the new rural elite. Economic transformations of rural society meant that farmers' livelihood and interests were no longer dependent on policies of the government, but now were intertwined with those of the new "townsmen." Means of protesting was different from the early Tokugawa period: farmers no longer submitted humble petitions to the government, but instead showed their disapproval with violence in the countryside. As Stephen Vlastos summarizes in his study of late Tokugawa rural conflict, "when peasants mobilized under crisis conditions they turned inward: collective action took the form of property smashings and not political action against the ruling class."<sup>30</sup>

This kind of protest was evident in rural Settsu, which had its share of unrest. During the Tokugawa period, the Kinki area (around Osaka) ranked second in Japan in terms of the number of peasant conflicts.<sup>31</sup> In Settsu, from 1800 to 1868, there are records of over one hundred disputes.<sup>32</sup> Protests were similar in pattern to those Vlastos

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<sup>29</sup>Toson Shimazaki, *Before the Dawn*, trans. William E. Naff (Hawaii: University of Hawaii Press, 1987), 25-26. The Japanese version, *Yo-ake Mae*, was published in 1932 by Shinchōsha. See also Smith, "Premodern Economic Growth," 151-52, for a similar description of the new businessmen in Tokugawa.

<sup>30</sup>Stephen Vlastos, *Peasant Protests and Uprisings in Tokugawa Japan* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986), 159.

<sup>31</sup>Roger W. Bowen, *Rebellion and Democracy in Meiji Japan* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980), 73. In the Tokugawa period in the Kinki area, 519 uprisings were recorded.

<sup>32</sup>Kōji Aoki, *Hyakushō ikki no nenjiteki kenkyū* (A chronological study of peasant uprisings) (Tokyo: Shinseisha, 1966), appendix. In Settsu there were 33 protests in rural areas, 25 in towns, and 56 in villages.

described; they were directed against the rural elite. Some riots occurred because of the authorities' fraud.<sup>33</sup> Other protests started when there were poor harvests. Farmers vandalised rice shops or attacked the homes of the owners. In 1866, farmers smashed twenty-five homes because of a rice price hike.<sup>34</sup> About the same time, women in Nishinomiya demanded cheap rice from a local merchant which triggered protests in hundreds of villages in the area. The rioting lasted two weeks and destroyed the property of 885 wealthy commoners.<sup>35</sup> Farmers displayed their right to protect their interests.

These conflicts in rural society defined the concept of autonomy held by farmers in the lower economic strata. The concept gave these farmers an identity. As Vlastos points out, the protests did not include a desire to return to earlier modes of production; they were demands for protection under the new relationships.<sup>36</sup> The lower strata wanted autonomy to include security in the face of unfamiliar situations. A right to decision making was not disputed; however, the amount of monetary benefit that could be taken by an individual was limited. Choices and profits of the new rich could not threaten the survival of members of the community. In this context, lower strata were determined to pull the new rich back into the community.

From the protests in rural society one can gain only an impression of a different identity of the new elite, and thus the reasons for antagonism between the strata. This is explained by Toson's comparison between the character of the new rich and old village headmen. Toson suggests that the new rich had a concept of autonomy that placed production ahead of the responsibility for survival of community members. According to Toson, traditional headmen believed their role was to protect villagers under their jurisdiction. Although there must have been a great variety in personalities among headmen, his image of a government representative is consistent with John Henry Wigmore's description, that "a 'farmer-destroyer' was a role utterly opposed to the economic policy of the founder of the dynasty and of his successors. Taxation might be

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<sup>33</sup>Ibid., appendix. For example in 1840 and again in 1857, farmers in Sodo rioted because of authorities' fraud.

<sup>34</sup>Ibid., appendix.

<sup>35</sup>Junnosuke Sasaki, *Yonaoshi* (World rectification)(Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 1979), 73-74.

<sup>36</sup>Vlastos, *Peasant Protests*, 157.



pushed to the utmost ability to pay, but it was never permitted to go beyond this and to force an industrious farmer into bankruptcy or to borrowing on a mortgage."<sup>37</sup> Although Toson does not show disrespect for his character Kimbei, the rich sake brewer, he stresses the difference between Kimbei and the traditional headman of farmer background. Kichizaemon, the headman, and Kimbei shared the responsibilities of the village administration, but the headman stated the following about Kimbei.

*Kimbei's family and our family are different. . . . he's really tightfisted. He puts paper bags over the pears on the pear tree out in front of his storehouse and he will tell you that of the three pears that fell in the last windstorm, the largest one weighed eighteen ounces and the smallest seven ounces.*

Toson explained:

The source of the feelings that led Kichizaemon, but not his neighbor Kimbei, to look upon the farmers of the village almost as though they were his own sons lay in this distant past.<sup>38</sup>

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When Japan opened to the world, Settsu society had a distinct character, and autonomy was an integral part. It was an important ingredient, for farmers had survived not because of government policies, but because of their own choices. Both the wealthy and struggling, valued, survived, and prospered because of autonomy. This was the internal dimension of autonomy. Farmers strove to retain their identity by resisting outside interference; this was the external dimension. The less fortunate farmers defined the concept of autonomy with limited choices for the rich in order to safeguard their survival. Protest was the means used to ensure that the new elite took into account members of the community. These choices gave farmers an identity. This was the

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<sup>37</sup>John Henry Wigmore, ed., *Law and Justice in Tokugawa Japan Part 1: Introduction* (*Transactions of the Asiatic Society of Japan*, 1892; repr., Tokyo: University of Tokyo Press, 1969), 16-18.

<sup>38</sup>Shimazaki, *Before the Dawn*, 27, 28, 169. Italics own.

background of the 1917 rural worker who came to the Mitsubishi and Kawasaki shipyards. This legacy provided them with a rich heritage. The internal and external dimensions of autonomy, plus the definition of a concept which ensured survival, was the essence of the 1921 demands.

By the end of Tokugawa, problems between groups in rural society still remained. For example, cries for *yonaoshi*, literally translated as "world rectification,"—a sharing of wealth and punishment for the immoral rich—threatened the local elite in early Meiji.<sup>39</sup> The formation of a new society was already underway in the latter half of the Tokugawa period, and according to Toson, the official liberty of Meiji only intensified the "pear tree" culture of the rural rich. Pursuit of wealth became the slogan of Meiji society. Industry grew, and it had an impact on the old rural way of life described above. Some of the changes brought Settsu farmers into industry. But, how and why did they begin to work in the factories? The transformations in Meiji rural society would also affect the world of the 1917 worker.

### *Transformations in Meiji Rural Society*

Although a review of Tokugawa rural society provides some understanding of its economic and social character, it does not by itself explain why the farmer began to work in factories. According to statistics presented in the first chapter, one could gather the impression that it was a smooth transition. However, by understanding the structure of Tokugawa rural society and then examining the lives of people after 1868, one realizes that the old society was turned upside down; economic developments altered where people lived, what they did, and how they worked. In Hyogo, this transformation was gradual; it would continue until the late 1910s. These changes would affect the character of the workforce and labor movement in 1917. In the rural household, opportunity for by-

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<sup>39</sup>Definition from Vlastos, *Peasant Protests*, 164.

employment was lost, and workers were forced to choose between full-time employment in agriculture or full-time work in other sectors. As a result, for the first time in several centuries, workers who left home for jobs could no longer be termed *dekasegi*; now they were in the city to stay. This situation influenced workers to make a serious effort to change their new environment, the factory organization, in a hope for a better future. Changes in Meiji rural society limited the choices of the 1917 worker; therefore, rural society must be taken into account when trying to determine the character of new factory workers.

Economic developments after the Restoration crippled the rural economy in some areas. Kagawa Toyohiko, a well-known Christian and activist in the 1921 strike, offers a description of the nature of change in the countryside, recorded in his autobiographical novel *Before the Dawn*.<sup>40</sup> Kagawa grew up in Tokushima, a prefecture across the Inland Sea from Kobe, an area which had a monopoly on indigo production and trade during the Tokugawa period. The indigo industry was destroyed with the import of synthetic dyes. The degree of poverty certainly varied between districts, but Kagawa's description offers a picture of the chaos and adjustments of those in the countryside during the transformation period. In the story, Kagawa (named Niimi Eiichi), visits his stepmother and describes his old home.

The main stock of the Niimis, even in the time of the Tamiyas [large landowners], had the biggest house and grounds . . . Eiichi's grandfather, being Headman of eighteen villages. Being an enterprising man of strong character he had constructed two outhouses for fermenting indigo, one 150 feet by 30 feet, and the other, to the west, 75 feet by 25 feet. . . . There was still another one in front of the western outhouse,—a high, two-storied building

. . . . but what distressed Eiichi . . . was the total disappearance of the big outhouses and the stable and the storerooms and the big two-storied house. All

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<sup>40</sup>Toyohiko Kagawa, *Before the Dawn*, trans. I. Fukumoro and T. Satchell (London: Chatto and Windus, 1925). First title in English was *Across the Death-line*; it was then changed to *Before the Dawn*. The Japanese version, *Shisen wo Koete*, was first published in 1920 and it was estimated 150,000 copies were sold by 1925. Ibid., preface.

that was left was the two-roomed house at the back, where his stepmother lived alone. . . . Eiichi was surprised to find the same depravity in the country as he found in the slums.<sup>41</sup>

While the basis of Tokushima's economy was undermined after the ports were opened, reactions in other areas depended on the character of the local economy. Regions which produced traditional crops that were in demand as exports, such as silk and tea, prospered. In the first decade after international trade began, silk was Japan's main export, accounting for 50 to 80% of exports, followed by tea and silkworm eggs.<sup>42</sup> The ratio of silk exports to total exports fell after the 1870s, but its absolute value continued to increase, from 9.8 million yen in the 1870s to 41.6 million in the 1890s.<sup>43</sup> Such areas did not experience the fate of Tokushima. Hyogo was somewhere in-between: the changing economic realities of the Meiji period caused the disintegration of its traditional rural society—in a piecemeal fashion. In Hyogo, cotton and sake production were under siege, and although agricultural production increased and many traditional industries grew, by the late teens opportunities for by-employment for members of farm households had diminished.<sup>44</sup>

Until the 1890s we do not see indications that the structure of the traditional industry of rural Hyogo was affected. Cotton cultivation decreased in some areas;<sup>45</sup> it then stabilized, and actually increased slightly in the late 1880s. Cloth was the main import, but there were no symptoms of decline in the cotton industry in Hyogo during the first

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<sup>41</sup>Ibid., 66, 311-12.

<sup>42</sup>Miyamoto, Sakudo, and Yasuba, "Economic Development," 548. Sugar, firearms, and vessels compromised almost all of the remaining imports.

<sup>43</sup>Shinya Sugiyama, *Japan's Industrialization in the World Economy 1859-1899* (London: The Athlone Press, 1988), 79.

<sup>44</sup>Saito Osamu argues that the economy of rural Japan in the Meiji era did not dissolve so as to offer a reservoir of cheap labor for industry, rather conditions in rural areas improved. He concludes that it was only in the 1920s that rural wage was lowered. See Osamu Saito, "The Rural Economy: Commercial Agriculture, By-Employment, and Wage Work," in *Japan in Transition: From Tokugawa to Meiji*, eds. Marius B. Jansen and Gilbert Rozman, 400-420 (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1986). One of Saito's measures was the number of households which did not decrease on a national level before 1920. Hyogo did not follow this national pattern; the number of households decreased substantially.

<sup>45</sup>Yagi, *Kinsei*, 314. Yagi found that between the 1860s and 1890s some farmers decreased their production of cotton while others did not.

decades of the Meiji period. Cotton and woolen fabrics, mainly from Britain, accounted for 67% of the total imports in 1872, and although that figure dropped slightly in the 1880s, fabrics remained an important import until World War I.<sup>46</sup> Although cloth was imported, the import of yarns increased more rapidly than piecegoods up to the late 1880s because of the demand by domestic weavers.<sup>47</sup> Rural industry changed only after the Japanese began to develop their own cotton spinning industry. The first modern spinning company, the Osaka Spinning Company (later named Toyo), was established in 1882. Businessmen started building big spinning mills in 1887-89 and large scale production started.<sup>48</sup> In the Hyogo area, Amagasaki C. S. Company, located in the city of Amagasaki, was established in 1889, and by 1894 had 2009 employees. The other cotton spinning company, Kanegafuchi C. S. Co. (located in Kobe), started production in 1896 and had 3348 employees.<sup>49</sup> As a result of this new industry in Japan, the import of yarns decreased and the import of cheap raw cotton increased.<sup>50</sup> It was this change that affected the old Settsu economic structure.

Table 5 shows that the average cotton cultivation in Hyogo dropped between 1890 and 1895, corresponding to the establishment of spinning mills. The average production of cotton in relation to total crop output in 1890 was 4.5%; in three districts it constituted between 11.3 and 16.4%.<sup>51</sup> The table shows that the general trend after 1890 was towards a reduction in cotton and rapeseed production and an increase in rice and wheat cultivation.<sup>52</sup> As a local example, by 1894, the Kobayashi family's cultivated crops were

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<sup>46</sup>Sugiyama, *Japan's Industrialization*, 65.

<sup>47</sup>Ibid. It reached its peak in 1888 and then declined. Others argue the weaving industry in both silk and cotton were affected. See Miyamoto, Sakudo, and Yasuba, "Economic Development," 548.

<sup>48</sup>Shin-ichi Yonekawa, "The Growth of Cotton Spinning Firms: A Comparative Study," in *The Textile Industry and Its Business Climate: Proceedings of the Fuji Conference*, eds. Akio Okochi and Shin-ichi Yonekawa, The International Conference on Business History, 8 (Tokyo: University of Tokyo Press, 1982), 21. From 1887-89 there was a share-floating boom.

<sup>49</sup>Hyōgokenshi, *Hyōgoken*, 422-23.

<sup>50</sup>Sugiyama, *Japan's Industrialization*, 66. Between 1890 and 1900, raw cotton imports increased from 34 to 328 million pounds. In the same decade, cotton yarn imports decreased from 42 to 12 million pounds.

<sup>51</sup>Yagi, *Kinsei*, 307.

<sup>52</sup>Ibid., 304.

as follows: 1.5% of the crop was cotton, down from 33.7% recorded in 1848; rapeseed was 5.4%, down from 11.2%; rice was 90.1%, up from 49.8%.<sup>53</sup> By the beginning of the Taisho era in 1912, cotton planting in all areas of Hyogo had virtually stopped.

Table 5.- Changes in Crop Production in Western Hyogo\*, 1885-1910

Year	Rice Area Cultivated**	Cotton Area Cultivated	Cotton % of Total Crops***
1885	13,897	1021	4.2
1890	14,165	1120	4.5
1895	14,406	569	2.3
1900	14,212	288	1.2
1905	14,265	28	0.001
1910	13,925	5	

Source: Data taken from Yagi, *Kinsei*, 305.

\* For five areas: Kawabe, Muko, Tsuhara, Yabe, and Arima.

\*\* In hectare: (chō) 2.45 acres.

\*\*\* The other crops were wheat and rapeseed.

With the establishment of cotton spinning mills, farmers lost a source of home by-employment. Spinning was taken over by the new factories. By 1912 the cotton spinning industry output made up 15% of the total industrial production in the prefecture.<sup>54</sup> The new factories offered work for females but lessened opportunity to do spinning as by-employment at the home or village level.

On the other hand, the weaving industry was not greatly affected in the Meiji period. Initially, large looms which were imported from England were not suitable for weaving the narrower widths needed for traditional Japanese cloth. Spinning mills concentrated on the profitable business of spinning yarns and left weaving to others. Amagasaki, for example, established itself in an area where weaving thrived. For most of the Meiji period, weaving was done on hand looms by the putting-out system (piece work done in

<sup>53</sup>Ibid., 314.

<sup>54</sup>Hyōgokenshi, *Hyōgoken*, 421.

the home).<sup>55</sup>

These weaving jobs provided by-employment for Hyogo farm households, but by the late teens this opportunity was diminishing quickly. Production increased in the early part of the Meiji period.<sup>56</sup> This change was due to the improvement of looms, such as the new wooden loom invented by Toyoda Sakichi.<sup>57</sup> By the end of Meiji, forty-four weaving firms had been established in Hyogo; wool and cotton weaving had increased 80 to 90% in the same period, and it ranked fourth in production in the prefecture.<sup>58</sup> Although there was an increase in production, it was the mode of production which began to change. In Hyogo in 1902, 89.2% of looms were hand looms, but by 1912, only 48.1% were.<sup>59</sup> Weaving was shifting to factories.

As economic conditions and technology changed, large cotton spinning companies, which at first concentrated only on yarn production, gradually diversified into weaving. When competition over the market for yarns intensified, companies were forced to consider weaving as an alternative source of revenue. In the early 1900's, for example, the Osaka Spinning Company responded to this challenge by becoming the first to go into cloth production. By 1911, its weaving section used 60% of its produced yarns so that yardage became its main product line.<sup>60</sup>

In the teens, companies were faced with another problem. China, as one of the industry's main importers, had gradually built up its own cotton spinning industry and

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<sup>55</sup>Miyamoto, Sakudo, and Yasuba, "Economic Development," 558. For example, in 1897 only 36,000 of 1,041,000 weavers worked in factories.

<sup>56</sup>Chihōshi, *Nihon Sangyō*, 152.

<sup>57</sup>Toyoda invented a wooden power loom for the narrower widths in the 1890s which became popular in small textiles manufacturing companies. In the 1920s he started making the automatic looms which became popular in major textile mills. Toyota Motor Corporation, ed., *Toyota, History of the First 50 Years* (Toyota City: Toyota Motor Corporation, 1988), 23-38, passim.

<sup>58</sup>Hyōgokenshi, *Hyōgoken*, 431. Orchard notes that in 1926-27, Hyogo ranked first in the weaving of woolen, and wool and cotton-mixed cloth, and seventh in the weaving of cotton cloth. Orchard, *Economic Position*, 150.

<sup>59</sup>Hyōgokenshi, *Hyōgoken*, 431.

<sup>60</sup>Tetsuya Kuwahara, "The Business Strategy of Japanese Cotton Spinners: Overseas Operations 1890 to 1931," in *The Textile Industry*, ed. Okochi and Yonekawa, 148. Osaka C. S. lost its large share of exported yarns and changed to cotton cloth production. It then moved to export to a wider market—Korea, Manchuria, and North China.

therefore began to present a challenge to Japanese spinning companies. By 1916, China's yarn production surpassed its imports; this, and a higher tax on imported yarns, affected exports from Japan.<sup>61</sup> From 1915 on, exports of Japanese yarn to China began to fall.<sup>62</sup>

The effects of these developments were also apparent in Hyogo. Amagasaki started a weaving department in 1909 and by 1914 had the third largest weaving capacity in Japan.<sup>63</sup> Kanegafuchi also had begun to manufacture cloth for export purposes. By 1917 its usage rate of yarns for weaving cloth within the company was 25%, Amagasaki's was 17%.<sup>64</sup> Amagasaki and Kanegafuchi were already major weaving establishments by World War I. By 1918 Japan's cloth exports to China surpassed those of cotton yarn.<sup>65</sup> The strides in China's cotton industry, an increase in the use of electricity, and changing dress styles in Japan, encouraged spinning companies to look towards weaving's potential. As Muto Sanji, managing director of Kanegafuchi, stated, "It is rather on the export of cotton cloth that the future of Japan's cotton industry depends."<sup>66</sup> By the late teens the farm household had lost another source of income.

The other significant traditional industry in Settsu, sake production, experienced a fate similar to that of weaving. Although new liquors such as beer started to be produced in Japan, sake production increased and was still the industry with the largest output in Hyogo in 1912.<sup>67</sup> In traditional society, employment in this industry was seasonal, that is, only in the winter time. By the 1910s, the industry underwent modernization, and production continued throughout the year, again taking away by-employment from the farmer.

In sum, as industry moved to urban centers and became concentrated in modern factories, the Hyogo farm household lost the opportunity for by-employment. The rural

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<sup>61</sup>Ibid., 141.

<sup>62</sup>Sanji Muto, "Cotton—Past, Present, and Future," *Contemporary Japan* 1.2 (September 1932): 231.

<sup>63</sup>Kuwahara, "Japanese Cotton Spinners," 147.

<sup>64</sup>Ibid., 151.

<sup>65</sup>Ibid., 141.

<sup>66</sup>Muto, "Cotton," 231.

<sup>67</sup>Hyōgokenshi, *Hyōgoken*, 421.



employment system, which depended on part-time farming and part-time work in industry, gradually changed to a choice of either full-time farming or employment in the non-primary sector. As Sydney Crawcour concludes, the release of labor from farm to industry was "a result of the separation of industry and agriculture," caused by industries' move out of the cottage handicraft stage.<sup>68</sup> These two factors, the lack of job opportunity and separation of employment, created a "push" factor from rural to urban centers.

There are several studies on migration during this period that correlate the lack of rural by-employment with out-migration. Saito Osamu, in a study of migration in Shizuoka Prefecture from 1872 to 1920, found that crop production, such as tea, or industries such as weaving or paper manufacturing, restrained out-migration.<sup>69</sup> He suggests that the Meiji labor market was regulated by the rural economy, and not only the "pull" of new industry. In another study of rural migration during this period, Regine Mathias found that out-migrants, from a village near Hiroshima, were the ones most dependent on industry as part of their income.<sup>70</sup> For Hyogo the "push" factor must have been especially important; Hyogo was one of few prefectures that showed a substantial decrease in the number of farm households. After the opening of Kobe, both "push" and "pull" factors were at work at different times in various districts.<sup>71</sup> With the decline in rural industry in the region, we know that by 1917 many workers could not return to their home areas for employment. There are indications supporting the theory that factory workers at this time were settling into a new, more permanent society. Marriages, for example, began to increase in urban centers.<sup>72</sup>

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<sup>68</sup>Crawcour, "Economic Transition," 56-57.

<sup>69</sup>Osamu Saito, "Migration and the Labour Market in Japan 1872-1920: A Regional Study," *Keio Economic Studies* 19.2 (1973): 47-60.

<sup>70</sup>Regine Mathias, "Obayashi-mura: A Case Study in Pre-war Labour Migration," in *Silkworms, Oil, and Chips*, ed. Pauer, 91-104.

<sup>71</sup>For the "pull" factor in migration, see for example, James W. White, "Internal Migration in Prewar Japan," *Journal of Japanese Studies* 4.1 (Winter 1978): 81-124. White found workers who had migrated to Tokyo were generally better educated than those who remained in the countryside and were able to improve their employment position by migrating.

<sup>72</sup>Osamu Saitō, *Odana no sekai, uradana no sekai: Edo to Ōsaka no hikaku toshi-shi* (The world of the big merchant houses and emerging labor class in the Tokugawa era: the historical comparison of Edo and Osaka) (Tokyo: Riburopōto, 1987), 187.

From the preceding review it is evident that in this period, labor relations developed not only within the boundaries of industrial life: other factors helped mold the personality of 1917 workers. The preliminary investigation of the interrelationship between rural society and labor in this chapter and chapter one may help us understand these workers in modern industry. Much more research must be done to uncover other factors that affected the character of industrial labor by 1917. Nevertheless, the analysis here indicates two important points about "farmers" in the Kobe factories in 1917: (1) they had a heritage which incorporated autonomy as part of a way of living and surviving. The external and internal dimensions and distinct identity associated with the concept, were apparent in the struggle for autonomy in Kobe's post-1917 workers' movement and in the 1921 shipyard strike. Thus, there may very well be a connection between the post-1917 unrest and the presence of new workers with this rural background. (2) When these farmers entered industrial society they did so to stay. Because these rural workers were no longer *dekasegi*, they had a motive for changing the order in their factories. The desire for a more suitable organization in the workplace surfaced. It did so, however, only because of the situation workers met and position they assumed in this new society. What was the nature of workers' new society in 1917? This will be examined next.

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## **PART 2**

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### **THE MITSUBISHI AND KAWASAKI WORKERS' POST-1917 SOCIETY AND 1921 STRIKE**

By 1917 economic developments had changed not only rural Japanese society; they had also created a new society for the Mitsubishi and Kawasaki worker. An examination of this society's characteristics—macro and micro economic trends from 1917 to 1921, the diversity of the labor world, and the nature of company labor policy—shows why workers were discontent and why they made the demands they did.

For these employees, the issue was not economic. By 1917, workers were greeted with comprehensive labor policies designed by management. By 1921, improvements won as a result of strikes between 1917 and 1920 gave workers a relatively good position in society. It was precisely because of this circumstance, not hardship, that the rural workers' sense of justice was able to surface. Their fight for autonomy started in 1917, in the Kobe labor union; it came into the open during the strike of 1921.

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## CHAPTER 3

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### **The World of the Mitsubishi and Kawasaki Worker 1917 to 1921**

#### *Mitsubishi and Kawasaki Workers' Position in Society*

In the diverse world of labor, the shipyard workers in Kobe assumed an elite position. Mitsubishi and Kawasaki workers were closer to the middle class than to the lower class, known as *kasō*. This fact is one key to understanding why among these workers, the labor movement took the course it did and why economic issues were not paramount in the 1921 strike. It was this elite status, not poverty, that drew the shipyard workers towards a union. In Kobe, as in the early 1800s in Britain, "trade unionism was not a device peculiar to the economically strong workers . . . What is most notable, however, is the development of unionism around some of the elite occupations of the factory system: the foundry workers, the steam engine makers, the cotton mule spinners, the potters all had developed trade societies . . ." <sup>1</sup>

The separation of some factory workers from the poor was evident in early Meiji. Records show that even before the 20th century one cannot ignore the diversity of the laboring class. In studies of society at this time, scholars divided the *kasō* into three

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<sup>1</sup>Gordon Phillips, "The British Labour Movement Before 1914," in *Labour and Socialist Movements in Europe Before 1914*, ed. Dick Geary (Oxford: Berg Publishers Limited, 1989), 28.

groups according to their degree of deprivation and lifestyle: the highest were the *saimin* (*sai* meaning lean; *min*, people); a middle group called the *hinmin* (*hin*, poor), which had a pejorative connotation; and the lowest, the *kyūmin* (*kyū*, destitute). Observers noted that those in the two lowest categories lived in urban slums and performed certain jobs. Yokoyama Gennosuke, who wrote in the 1890s about the lower class, found that most people living in slums were day laborers—working in construction, road building, or community service. Next came rickshawmen, cart drawers, followed by scrap pickers. Other occupations cited for slum dwellers were such jobs as bamboo or pipe menders, frog catchers, ditch and lavatory sweepers, masseurs, and street storytellers.<sup>2</sup> Yokoyama noted the following in regard to Tokyo slums: "It is unusual but a fact that of the many inhabitants of the slums of Tokyo only a few are engaged directly in industrial production."<sup>3</sup> Those employed in iron works were not listed by Yokoyama as poor. Their wages were comparable with those of some day laborers whose daily wage ranged from 10 to 50 sen, but iron workers had steady employment. Furthermore, they could earn up to 50 to 60 sen a day with overtime.<sup>4</sup> (In 1900 the average day wage in modern industries was 26 sen; for men it was 41 sen.)<sup>5</sup>

Although Yokoyama found little evidence of factory workers living in Tokyo slums, he noticed that there were great differences in working conditions between regions and even within one industry.<sup>6</sup> For example, he did find that in Osaka many factory workers lived

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<sup>2</sup>Gennosuke Yokoyama, *Nihon no kasō shakai* (Japan's lower class society), trans. with an introduction by Eiji Yutani (Ph.D diss., University of California, 1985), 162, 170-71. Other occupations listed are as follows: physiognomists, wood-clog menders, watering workers, secondhand-*geta* (wooden sandals) sellers, comic dancers, beggar priests, street performers, blind beggars, and guides for the blind. *Ibid.*, 164.

<sup>3</sup>*Ibid.*, 174.

<sup>4</sup>*Ibid.* (100 sen = 1 yen)

<sup>5</sup>*LTES*, 8, 243.

<sup>6</sup>Yokoyama, *kasō shakai*, 314-17, 348. For example, Yokoyama noted that in Osaka many factories in the match industry employed children (70 to 80% under ten years old), and therefore machines were not needed. On the other hand, machines were being used in Kobe. And although conditions in match factories were generally very poor, he described one factory in Kobe (run by a Christian) which had good

in such areas. In 1897, he also visited Kobe, which had a high percentage of poor, and described the slums as "unbelievably hideous."<sup>7</sup> A 1897 report on Hyogo prefecture showed that, of Kobe's total population of 193,000, 67,450 were *saimin*, of which 28,000 were considered very poor.<sup>8</sup> Although some factory workers lived in slums in certain cities, there is no evidence from Yokoyama's report that iron workers lived as the "poor" or the "destitute" at the turn of the century. By 1911, a Home Ministry report on people in poverty showed a closer tie between factories and ghettos; however, this connection was not valid for heavy industry workers.<sup>9</sup> Kagawa supports this contention with his description of slum dwellers in Kobe in the teens. He found that the majority were *Buraku-min*, outcastes, engaged in such jobs as leather tanning or cleaning toilets.<sup>10</sup> They were not shipyard workers.

Workers in certain modern factories were always separate from the poor, and from the turn of the century to 1920, the gap between these workers and the poor became more evident than before. Chubachi Masayoshi and Taira Koji, in a study of poverty in Japan, suggest that "around 1920 [factory] workers were already fairly well integrated into the process of Japanese society's structural evolution, whereas the poor probably had weaker linkages with this process and were, for this reason, more alienated from society at large."<sup>11</sup> Despite some observers categorizing factory workers according to such traits as "poverty, drinking, gambling, spendthrift ways, and limited horizons,"<sup>12</sup> (traits that could

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working conditions and an orderly workforce. He also found that in Kobe, only a few children were working with spinning machines; this was also different from conditions in Osaka.

<sup>7</sup>Quoted in Masayoshi Chubachi and Koji Taira, "Poverty in Modern Japan: Perceptions and Realities," in *Silkworms, Oil, and Chips*, ed. Pauer, 405.

<sup>8</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>9</sup>*Ibid.*, 409.

<sup>10</sup>Kagawa Toyohiko senshū kankōkai, ed., *Kagawa Toyohiko zenshū* 8 (The works of Toyohiko Kagawa) (Tokyo: Kirisuto Shinbunsha, 1962), 460. See also Kagawa, *Before the Dawn*. Kagawa mentions such occupations as dockworkers, beggars, rickshawmen, or workers in match companies.

<sup>11</sup>Chubachi and Taira, "Poverty in Modern Japan," 423.

<sup>12</sup>Gordon, *The Evolution*, 29. This view is based on several reports made around 1900, for example, the well-known government report, *Shokkō jijō* (The conditions of the workers), 1903. This survey

also apply to some rich)<sup>13</sup> the diversity in the laboring class, plus changes from the time these characteristics were noted in the early 1900s, point out that heavy industry workers in the late teens were distinct socially and economically from the poor. Mitsubishi and Kawasaki workers in 1921 were different in behavior and lifestyle from those classified as "poor" or described as factory workers in 1900. With their relatively high position, they did not feel a need to try to jump into the "middle class"; in their view their worth had already been established.<sup>14</sup>

### *Disparities Between Macro and Micro Economic Conditions*

Although many factory workers enjoyed an elite position in the labor pyramid, this did not mean they did not experience economic hardship. Undoubtedly, this was the fate of many; however, the 1921 demands show that ideological, not economic issues, were the prime concern of the Mitsubishi and Kawasaki workers. Why then are economic conditions usually viewed by labor historians as the cause of labor unrest throughout this period? It can be argued that the 1917 to 1919 strikes revolved around economic issues, and labor in some segments of industry were affected by the 1920 panic and its repercussions. However, disparities between macro and micro views show that in 1921, Mitsubishi and Kawasaki workers were not threatened with layoffs or wage cuts, and could still have been optimistic about their employment positions. This is contrary to the view that the panic of

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found, for example, a worker who claimed that "he and his friends spent their money on gambling and women, went into debt, and then borrowed at high interest." Quoted in Ibid., 29.

<sup>13</sup>For a description of the new rich (*narikin*, or pawns crossing a chess board), see Young, *Recent Japan*, 112-14.

<sup>14</sup>Some labor historians emphasize the low position of workers and as a result conclude that a main goal of workers, even in the post World War I period, was to raise their status. See for example, Gordon, *The Evolution*, and Thomas C. Smith, "The Right to Benevolence: Dignity and Japanese Workers, 1890-1920," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 26.4 (Oct. 1984). I would argue that their view of workers relies too heavily on a picture defined in the early 1900s.

1920 was the source of increased unrest. With specific reference to the 1921 Kobe strike, Sheldon Garon tells us:

In the spring of 1920 . . . the Japanese economy began to experience a postwar recession and growing unemployment. . . . As the bargaining position of organized labor weakened, industrialists initiated widespread dismissals and wage reductions. . . . Yet the strikes themselves became longer, larger, and more violent as workers defensively strove to resist wage cuts and layoffs . . . In the summer of 1921, these trends culminated in Japan's largest labor dispute before 1945 . . . <sup>15</sup>

The downturn in the economy in Japan generally, as well as in the shipbuilding industry, gives support to the view that it was the economic context that ignited labor discontent. The argument is tenable because the 1920 panic did halt the wartime economic boom in many industries; wholesale prices fell by 41%, and bankruptcies were rampant.<sup>16</sup> Following these national trends, as well as a world-wide decline in shipbuilding, Japan's shipbuilding industry was severely hit.<sup>17</sup> The number of ships built and total tonnage in Japan had already begun to decline by 1919, and the number of shipbuilding companies decreased from 52 in 1918 to 21 by 1921.<sup>18</sup> Thus, many conclude that the Mitsubishi Kawasaki strike was due to the companies' decreases in output. This view is supported, for

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<sup>15</sup>Sheldon Garon, *The State and Labor in Modern Japan* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987), 70-71.

<sup>16</sup>Nakamura, *Economic Growth*, 153.

<sup>17</sup> A Comparison of the English and World Shipping Conditions, 1919-1922

Year	England/1920 as 100	World/in 1,000 tons
1919		7,144
1920	100.0	5,861
1921	37.6	4,341
1922	29.7	2,467

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Source: Shashiki Muneto and Horikawa Umpei, *Zōsen* (Shipbuilding) (Tokyo: Yūhikaku, 1960), 16.

<sup>18</sup>Uyehara, *Industry and Trade*, 230-31. This does not appear to be a result of amalgamations as the number of factories decreased from 57 to 27 in the same period. *Ibid.*, 231.



example, by the observations of Mishima Yasuo in his study of Mitsubishi. He notes that between 1919 and 1924 the total tonnage of ships over 1,000 tons launched by Mitsubishi fell from 67,523 tons to 7,000 tons.<sup>19</sup>

Labor historians emphasize the decrease in the number of workers as a result of this recession. Figures in table 6 show a decline in the number of employees in the machine and shipbuilding sectors from 1919 to 1921. The statistics also indicate that between 1920 and 1921, the number of workers in the machine sector fell by 16,000, with the shipbuilding industry accounting for 14,000 of the loss.

Table 6. - Total Number of Employees in Factories, 1918-1923

Category	1918	1919	1920	1921	1922	1923
1. textiles	777	839	818	978	859	938
2. machine	290	244				
		187	184	168	244	229*
shipbuilding	121	97	96	84	103	
3. chemicals	159	177	181	185	189	173
4. food	68	99	102	136	161	189
5. misc.	105	136				
		212	212	214	250	247*
6. special	7	23				
		6	7	6	6	6

Source: For figures from 1918-19, Ohara, *Nihon rōdō nenkan*, 1922, 65-66. For figures from 1919-1923, *Nihon rōdō nenkan*, 1927, 70.

\* Figures from *Nihon rōdō nenkan*, 1927; in these categories, figures differ from those in the 1922 yearbook.

Note: This table is a continuation of table 3, page 14; the above categories are explained below that table.

Disparities between macro and micro figures show that this view of the impact of the 1920 panic is misleading; there were many repercussions, but on a macro scale there was

<sup>19</sup>Yasuo Mishima, *The Mitsubishi, Its Challenge and Strategy*, trans. Emiko Yamaguchi (Greenwich: JAI Inc., 1989), 207.

overall economic growth and an increase in the number of workers between 1920 and 1921.<sup>20</sup> As Nakamura Takafusa points out, the Japanese economy in the 1920s "was actually growing fast by international standards, quite contrary to the general impression of overall recession."<sup>21</sup> Although some companies were declining, there was a continuing increase in the number of factories. Between 1920 and 1921, 3,604 new factories opened.<sup>22</sup> Between 1919 and 1921, the number actually grew by 12% (a drop is noted only in 1922).<sup>23</sup> And, although the downturn in some industries caused layoffs, again on a macro scale the number of factory workers rose in 1921. Figures in table 6 confirm this trend. In machine and shipbuilding categories the number of workers declined; however, most other categories show gains. In total numbers, there was a decrease of 54,024 in 1920 but an increase of 196,000 in 1921.<sup>24</sup> In sum, at the time of the strike the number of alternative jobs on a macro scale was more than the previous year.

On a local level, from 1920 to 1921, Hyogo also experienced overall growth. The number of factories and number of employees decreased in 1920 but increased again in 1921.<sup>25</sup> In the textile industry, the number of employees had dropped but again rose in 1921.<sup>26</sup> The rubber industry was still in good health and continued to expand.<sup>27</sup> Match

<sup>20</sup>Nakamura, *Economic Growth*, 78. Real GDP (1934-36 = 100) in industrial production fell from 44.1 in 1919 to 41.2 in 1920 but rose to 43.6 in 1921 and 48.0 in 1922; total production fell from 67.7 to 63.4 and rose to 70.4 and 70.2 respectively.

<sup>21</sup>Ibid., 156.

<sup>22</sup>Shōkō, *Kōjō*, 1.

<sup>23</sup>Ibid. In 1922, the number decreased by 3,327. Ishi and Ayusawa also note a decrease in the number of factories in 1922. Ishii, *Population Pressure*, 227; Ayusawa, *Industrial Conditions*, 9. Ayusawa and Orchard suggest that the drop in numbers was due to amalgamations which took place at that time. Orchard, *Japan's Economic Position*, 235. This seems probable as 1922 shows a decline in the number of factories yet an increase in the number of workers.

<sup>24</sup>Ishii records the same trend. According to his figures, there was a decrease in the number of workers in 1920 of 34,024, and in 1921 an increase of 199,600. Ishii, *Population Pressure*, 227.

<sup>25</sup>Shōkō, *Kōjō*, 206.

<sup>26</sup>Hyōgokenshi, *Hyōgoken*, 638.

<sup>27</sup>LTES, 10, 207. On a macro scale, production increased from 37,727 thousand yen (in current prices) in 1920 to 47,756 in 1921.

production, however, did start to decline in 1920.<sup>28</sup>

There were production decreases in Kobe's shipyards; however, their economic position cannot be assumed from macro trends. Statistics show that Mitsubishi's total production in tons of ships (ships over 1000 gross tons) in fact climbed from 1919 to 1920, but decreased in 1921 by approximately 30%. Kawasaki's production fell around 40% in 1920, and 40% again in 1921.<sup>29</sup> Despite the declines in output in 1921, there is evidence that workers and management may not have perceived an economic problem at that time.

Shiba Takao, in a study of business strategy in Mitsubishi and Kawasaki, demonstrates that the state of Kobe shipbuilding after 1919 differed from the macro picture.<sup>30</sup> As both Mitsubishi and Kawasaki depended on military orders for much of their revenue, the navy's plan in the late teens to expand its fleet was promising. In anticipation of these orders, Mitsubishi and Kawasaki spent substantial amounts to enlarge their shipbuilding facilities between 1917 and 1921.<sup>31</sup> By 1921, Mitsubishi had built one battleship, the *Tosa*, and had a battle cruiser, the *Takao*, under construction. Kawasaki had similar orders from the government. In addition, Kawasaki was also busy building ships for its subsidiary, Kawasaki Shipping Company. As Shiba notes, "despite the depression affecting both shipbuilding and shipping, Kawasaki forged ahead, ordering ships built for its own use."<sup>32</sup> Besides shipbuilding, Mitsubishi has a ship repair business which was an important part of its stability. Mitsubishi's Kobe and Nagasaki yards were able to maintain this business because of their improved repair facilities. Mitsubishi had

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<sup>28</sup>Ibid., 206. The match industry reached a peak in 1920. Production dropped from 48,971 thousand yen in 1920 to 34,316 in 1921. Orchard also notes the same trend; see Orchard, *Japan's Economic Position*, 49.

<sup>29</sup>Takao Shiba, "Succeeding Against Odds, Courting Collapse: How Mitsubishi Shipbuilding and Kawasaki Dockyard Managed the Post-WWI Slump," in *Japanese Yearbook on Business History 2: 1985* (Tokyo: Japanese Business History Institute, 1985), 101.

<sup>30</sup>See *ibid.*

<sup>31</sup>Ibid., 107-10. In this period Mitsubishi invested a total of 37.5 million yen in its shipyards in Nagasaki and Kobe. Kawasaki spent 110 million yen.

<sup>32</sup>Ibid., 109.

modern repair services at Nagasaki and built its first repair facility in Kobe in 1905, another in 1908, and a third in 1919.<sup>33</sup>

Thus, in 1921, both the Mitsubishi and Kawasaki shipyards were not experiencing the same fate as other shipbuilding firms. In that year, 203,000 tons of ships were built in Japan and some company had to build them.<sup>34</sup> It is evident, however, that problems did arise in 1922. The navy's orders, essential for both companies, were cancelled because of the Washington Disarmament Agreement of 1922. This agreement forced Japan's military to postpone its planned expansion of the naval fleet.<sup>35</sup> There is no doubt that in that year, the Kobe shipbuilding companies realized they had a problem. Output decreased in Mitsubishi by 60% and in Kawasaki by 70%.<sup>36</sup> In 1922, Mitsubishi dismissed 10% of its labor force from the Nagasaki works, and from 1922 to 1929, they let go 729 workers from the Kobe works.<sup>37</sup> Rather than dismiss workers, Kawasaki refrained from hiring new ones.<sup>38</sup> If a main cause for the 1921 strike was dismissals, we would expect strikes to occur in 1922, but they did not.

In 1921 there is no evidence that dismissals were taking place in Kobe shipyards because of the general shipbuilding recession. Although the number of workers in Kobe's shipbuilding decreased, an examination of the situation in the first six months of that year illustrates again that there was a discrepancy between macro (annual figures) and micro (monthly figures) trends. Table 7, an account of the numbers of factory employees in

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<sup>33</sup>Ibid., 104, 106.

<sup>34</sup>Uyehara, *Industry and Trade*, 232. For example, in 1914, the total produced in Japan was 82,000 tons; in 1919, it was 626,000.

<sup>35</sup>This is the usual reason given for the cancellation of the navy's orders, but it may not be the total picture. In Y. Takenob, *The Japan Yearbook, 1920-21* (Tokyo: The Japan Year Book Office, 1921), 424, it is noted that in 1921 the Japanese government was trying to persuade the navy to postpone its expansion plans because of government financial difficulties.

<sup>36</sup>Shiba, "Succeeding Against Odds," 101.

<sup>37</sup>Ibid., 112. The company discharged the workers at Nagasaki less than a month after the agreement was concluded. They later fired 2,000 more workers.

<sup>38</sup>Ibid. Shiba attributes this to the president's paternalism and his desire to keep skilled workers for future expansion.

Mitsubishi shipbuilding, shows that there was an increase between 1919 and 1920, corresponding with the rise in production. In 1921 the number of workers in the Kobe shipyard declined. These figures, however, are misleading; they do not mean that a recession caused losses in employment. Rather, when considering the micro situation, the numbers and reasons for workers leaving from Mitsubishi and Kawasaki shipbuilding in the months just prior to the strike reveal that more workers left of their own accord than were dismissed—even most of the dismissals were a result of workers leaving without permission. (See table 8.) Table 9 shows the nature of the decrease in the number of workers; while many left, fewer were hired. It must be noted that Mitsubishi was still hiring workers, and in fact, within this six month period they engaged 230 new workers.

Although there is no evidence that management discharged employees in shipbuilding due to lack of work, Ikeda and Omae suggest that there were layoffs in the Internal Combustion Engine Manufacturing Company, one of the new works started at the Kobe Mitsubishi shipyards.<sup>39</sup> Again, there is a discrepancy between macro and micro figures.

Table 7. - Total Number of Factory Employees in Mitsubishi Shipbuilding and at the Kobe Works, 1918-1922

Year	Total No. in Shipbuilding	Kobe	Internal Combustion	Electric
1918	25,509	10,334	-	-
1919	27,780	10,049	1,004	-
1920	30,473		1,156	1,129
1921	26,974	9,469*	1,646	1,130
1922	19,698		2,238	1,646

Source: Abbreviated from Isao Hadate, *Nihon no zaibatsu to Mitsubishi* (Japanese zaibatsu and Mitsubishi) (Tokyo, 1979), 174, 248, citing Mitsubishi, *Mitsubishisha shi*.

\*Figure taken from table 9.

<sup>39</sup>The company also established the Mitsubishi Electric Company.

Table 8. - Number and Reasons for Workers Leaving Mitsubishi and Kawasaki Shipbuilding; January to June, 1921

month	Mitsubishi				Kawasaki			
	I*	II	III	IV	I	II	III	IV
Jan	94	9	9	135	126	4	10	82
Feb	82	4	11	138	99	5	5	90
Mar	83	5	16	129	129	5	19	84
Apr	159	14	13	164	65	10	13	105
May	69	4	12	119	74	13	11	96
June	37	4	5	79	40	11	19	77

Source: *NRUS*, 146, citing *Kyōchōkai, Honbuute hōkokusho* (Reports to head office); *Mitsubishi Kōbe zōsenjo rōdō tōkei* (Labor statistics at Kobe Mitsubishi shipyards).

\*Categories: I. dismissal for leaving work without permission; II. dismissal for some offense; III. death or illness; IV. on own accord.

Table 9. - Number of Employees Entering and Leaving at Kobe Mitsubishi Shipbuilding; January to June, 1921

	Total.	Hired	Left	Difference
Jan	9,469	17	247	-230
Feb	9,239	19	235	-216
Mar	9,023	23	233	-210
Apr	8,813	120	350	-230
May	8,583	27	204	-177
June	8,406	14	125	-111
Total		220	1,394	-1,174

Source: *NRUS*, 146, citing *Kyōchōkai, Honbuute hōkokusho*; *Mitsubishi Kōbe zōsenjo rōdō tōkei*.

The figures from table 7 show an annual increase in the number of workers in this section, giving an impression of economic solidity. However, just before the beginning of the strike, there was a 10% drop in one month (1091 to 866 workers).<sup>40</sup> It is not known how many left of their own accord or failed to show up for work, but at this time there was a marked decrease in business. Nevertheless, 1921 demands show that dismissal was not the prime concern.

Nor were wages the main issues on the lists of demands. Employees in Mitsubishi and Kawasaki shipyards were not experiencing economic hardship in 1921; in fact, they were better off financially than they had been in previous years. Table 10 shows the index for living expenses and real wages for workers in Mitsubishi shipbuilding from 1917 to 1921. The real wage increased from 1917. Living expenses increased until 1920, but decreased in 1921. Compared to the year 1914, workers experienced the greatest decrease in 1918 and had the largest gains between 1920 and 1921.

Table 10. - Index for Living Expenses and Real Wage in Mitsubishi Shipbuilding, 1917-1921 (index 100 - 1914)

	1917	1918	1919	1920	1921
Living expenses a)	124	174	217	235	208
Real Income b)*	120	153	204	286	291
b/a	97	88	94	121	140

Source: Abbreviated from *NRUS*, 78. For living expenses, citing T. Ueda, *Nihon jinkō mondai kenkyū* (The study of the Japanese population problem) (1937), 3; hours and wages, *Mitsubishi Kōbe zōsenjo rōdō tōkei*.

\*real income = actual wage/hours worked

The day wage had increased from 1.64.7 yen in June 1920 to 1.74.8 yen in June of 1921.<sup>41</sup> Including overtime, however, their total pay decreased from 2.48.0 yen from June

<sup>40</sup>*NRUS*, 160.

1920 to 2.17.2 yen a year later.<sup>42</sup> This decrease, however, did not signify economic hardship, for during that same period the price of rice fell from 49.7 sen to 33.8 sen per *shō*.<sup>43</sup> This meant that they still enjoyed a real increase in their standard of living. In 1921, Mitsubishi workers' actual wage was 1.4 times greater than the cost of living—the highest level since 1917.

Inquiries into the household budgets of Japanese workers conducted after 1917 confirm that the standard of living of workers increased substantially between 1920 and 1921.<sup>44</sup> In an analysis of this data, Chubachi and Taira calculated that the 1919 factory workers (average wage of 144 sen day wage) had an income that was 40% higher than the 1920 income of the average poor, and that in 1919, the average worker in factories had a surplus after expenses, whereas the poor could not make enough to cover the purchase of daily necessities.<sup>45</sup> Mainly because of the reduction in rice price, by 1921, even the poor, with an average monthly wage of 60 to 70 yen, had a "surplus".<sup>46</sup>

The survey confirms that by 1921 the average factory workers lived above the poverty line. Mitsubishi and Kawasaki workers were considerably better off than the average industrial laborer. Shipbuilding was one of the highest paying jobs in the factory wage hierarchy. In 1919 workers earning a wage of over 200 sen a day in selected industries included 65% in shipbuilding, 41% in tools, and 18% in chemicals.<sup>47</sup> Mitsubishi workers' surplus is evident in their company savings plan. Only 4.9% of the workers contributed to it in 1917 compared to almost 70% by 1921. By this time their average savings was 87.46 yen.<sup>48</sup> The Kobe shipyard workers were not on the brink of poverty.

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<sup>41</sup>Ibid., 148. (10 rin = 1 sen)

<sup>42</sup>Ibid.

<sup>43</sup>Ibid., 149. (1 *shō* = 1.8 liters)

<sup>44</sup>This data is summarized in Chubachi and Taira, "Poverty in Modern Japan," 418-23. Data was taken from surveys from the Home Ministry (Naimushō, 1922) and Tokyo city survey (Tōkyōshi, 1921).

<sup>45</sup>Ibid., 419.

<sup>46</sup>Ibid., 420. Between 1920 and 1921, the price of rice fell. In January 1920 it was 63.0 sen per *shō* and in June of 1921 it was 33.8 sen. *NRUS*, 149.

<sup>47</sup>*NRUS*, 75.



### *Working Conditions in Mitsubishi and Kawasaki in 1921*

By 1921, the working conditions in Mitsubishi and Kawasaki were alike, and compared to many companies at the time, company labor policy towards workers was "benevolent," making workers' positions attractive compared to those in other firms. Tracing the development of such policies in Mitsubishi shows that until 1917 they were initiated by management and carried out at the shop floor level. By contrast, after 1917, improvements in wages, bonuses, and working hours at both Mitsubishi and Kawasaki were obtained in the aftermath of strikes.

The first labor policy for shipyard workers in Mitsubishi, designed by one of the company's most influential managers, Shoda Heigoro, improved working conditions.<sup>49</sup> In 1898, he started a welfare program for workers, and the next year a school for training new shipyard employees which was the first of its kind in modern industry in the private sector.<sup>50</sup> Before that time the labor policy in Mitsubishi shipyards was simple: it was the *oyakata* system, in which a labor boss who was part of the workers' ranks, and not the company, controlled workers. In 1890 the wage system for the Nagasaki shipyard workers was written by management in one line: "The wage is based on skill; therefore, the remuneration must suitably reflect this."<sup>51</sup> Nishinarita, in his study of the Nagasaki shipyard, suggests that at this time the lack of a written policy was the main characteristic of Mitsubishi's labor policy.<sup>52</sup> By the early 1900s, however, control had been taken from the

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<sup>48</sup>Ibid., 95.

<sup>49</sup>See Shigeichi Shukuri, *Shōda Heigorō* (A biography) (Tokyo: Hōkyōsha, 1932).

<sup>50</sup>Solomon B. Levine and Hisashi Kawada, *Human Resources in Japanese Industrial Development* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980), 169 -71. Levine and Kawada note that the school started with 42 students, but by 1912, half of them had left the company. Nevertheless, by World War I, it is estimated that foremen at Mitsubishi plants had been trained internally. Ibid., 170-71. Sumitomo started a school in 1904 and Yahata in 1910. Mitsubishi Kobe Shipbuilding started its school in 1919. Ibid., 161, 172.

<sup>51</sup>Nishinarita, "Nichiro sensōgo," 18.2: 64.

<sup>52</sup>Ibid.

*oyakata* and the company proclaimed that "all workers in shipyards are dealt with directly. Supervision, wage determination and disbursement are all handled directly without the intervention of any other party."<sup>53</sup>

The 1898 labor policy for Nagasaki shipyard workers included a new hospital, an employee health insurance plan, and a plan for retirement and severance pay. Compensation for these benefits as well as for wages was decided according to rank and length of service. There were 6 ranks in the factory: supervisors were in the top three, and factory workers in the bottom three. For health insurance, a fund was set up into which both the employee and employer contributed. From this fund, payments were made for illness and injuries, and to families in the case of death. When injured, workers received their regular day wage; for illness, they were given half their day wage; and in the case of death, a sum of money was given to the family.<sup>54</sup> Table 11 shows the amounts of the payments and the differences between the ranks.

Table 11.- Mitsubishi Nagasaki Shipbuilding Health Insurance Plan, 1898

Rank	Death	Injury	Illness
1	2,000 yen	1 yen/day	50 sen/day
2	1,500	60 sen/day	30
3	1,000	40	20
4	500	20	10
5	375	15	8
6	50	same as day over 15	half of day over 16

Source: Shukuri, *Shōda*, 517.

<sup>53</sup>Quoted in W. Mark Fruin, "Instead of Management: Internal Contracting and the Genesis of Modern Labor Relations," in *Japanese Management in Historical Perspective: Proceedings of the Fuji Conference*, ed. Tsunehiko Yui and Keiichiro Nakagawa, The International Conference on Business History, 15 (Tokyo: University of Tokyo Press, 1989), 119. Fruin suggests that companies that could gain control of their workers were successful in the 20th century.

<sup>54</sup>Shukuri, *Shōda*, 513-21.

Payments were also made in the same manner for employees retiring and leaving of their own accord. These benefits were given only to employees who had worked at the company for more than sixty months. When retiring, or in case of death at work, payments ranged from 44 yen (approximately 3 months salary) for those in the fifth and sixth rank with five years of service, to 16,343 yen for those in the first rank with fifty years of service.<sup>55</sup> When leaving (with the company's approval) or when fired, workers received from 3 to 150 yen, depending on years of service.<sup>56</sup> This seniority system was also evident in the wage system as illustrated in table 12.

Table 12. - Wages at Nagasaki for Factory Workers (1899) and Apprentices (1900)

Period of work	Factory Workers	Apprentices
1 year	day wage up to 10 sen	
2 years	" " 18	day wage of 6-50 sen
3 "	" " 25	
4 "	" " 35	
5 "	" " 45	

Source: Nishinarita, "Nichiro sensōgo," 18.2: 64, citing *Nagasaki zōsenjo rōmu shi* (Nagasaki Shipbuilding labor history) (1928), 41, 49.

Labor policy in Mitsubishi's shipyards became more firmly established in the 1910s. One of the main planners of this transformation was Okumura Masao whose main job became the rationalization of the company and the formation of a written labor policy.<sup>57</sup> He stated that his job was to "revise those rules that were necessary to revise, throw out those that had to be thrown out and to systematically record them. The many regulations which were made at that time became the base for Mitsubishi labor policy until the end of the

<sup>55</sup>Ibid., 518-19.

<sup>56</sup>Ibid., 519-20.

<sup>57</sup>Okumura joined Mitsubishi in 1906. In 1914 he transferred to the General Affairs Department which had been established in 1911.

war and the zaibatsu dissolution."<sup>58</sup>

In 1917, an extensive written labor policy shows that the system at Kobe Mitsubishi shipyards followed Shoda's earlier design. There was a health insurance plan, retirement and severance pay, school, and company medical service, and compensation was similarly based on rank and length of service.<sup>59</sup> Until 1917, this package was designed solely by management. Strikes from 1917 to 1919 in both Mitsubishi and Kawasaki shipyards won better wages and bonuses, and fewer working hours for workers. Chart 1 shows that in 1921, both Mitsubishi and Kawasaki labor policies covered allowances for illness, injury, death, and for women and minors' traveling expenses. In addition to the policies concerning remuneration, both companies had put into effect other facilities such as eating halls, lockers, and baths, as shown in chart 2. Mitsubishi also had such benefits as a savings plan, in-company sale of rice, wheat, and other daily necessities available at lower than retail cost.<sup>60</sup>

The work in these companies was by no means free of danger or hardship. There were reports of illness, injuries, and death on the job.<sup>61</sup> Nevertheless, in terms of wage and benefits, company policies placed these workers in an elite position in the laboring world. Because of these policies and because of economic conditions, wage and dismissal were not central issues in workers' demands in 1921. On the contrary, it was this improved relative economic and social position which contributed to union organization. The union in Kobe was not simply a "labor" union; it represented workers from only a few companies, not all labor in Kobe. As in England, the less fortunate workers were not able to sustain such organizations. The Kobe union was a select group with the majority of its members

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<sup>58</sup>Nihon Keizai Shimbunsha, ed., *Watashi no rirekisho* ( My personal history), Vol 17 (Tokyo: Nihon Keizai Shimbunsha, 1962), 48.

<sup>59</sup>Mitsubishi Gōshi Kaisha, *Mitsubishisha shi* (Records of the Mitsubishi Company) (Tokyo: Tōkyō Daigaku Shuppankai), 26: 3240-61.

<sup>60</sup>*NRUS*, 97-98. Kawasaki did not have these benefits. Mitsubishi started selling rice to both regular and temporary workers in 1911. In 1918 the company also sold other miscellaneous goods and grains.

<sup>61</sup>*Ibid.*, 45-46.

Chart 1.-Illness, Death, Accident and Returning Home Benefits at Mitsubishi and Kawasaki, 1921

Benefit	Kawasaki	Mitsubishi
1.unable to work	150-250 day wage	200 day wage or bonus
2.sick	100-180 day wage	120 day wage
3.injured	30-100 day wage	50 day wage
4.death	170-300 day wage	200 day wage or condolence money
5.funeral allowance	10-200 yen	10-200 yen
6.injury/sick for over 3 years	170 day wage or more	170 day wage and more with no limit
7.travel money for minors and women	actual cost	third class fare,10 sen/1 ri*, and less than 1 yen/day

Source: *NRUS*, 91, citing *Kyōchōkai, Honbuate Hōkokusho*.

\* 1 ri = 2.44 miles

Chart 2.- Facilities for Workers at Mitsubishi and Kawasaki, 1921

Facility	Kawasaki	Mitsubishi
1. eating	none	2 halls; 752.55 tsubo; capacity; 4664 people; facilities; chairs and tables; place for boiling water
2.sinks	7 places,for 329 people water faucets	2 places at halls,water faucets
3.washrooms	32 places 1.283 toilets/1000 people	24 places 3.541 toilets/1000 people
4. bath houses	none	for workers and their families 3 for men, 2 for women 2 sen for adults, 1 sen for child
5. lockers	1/person	1 clothing box per person

Source: *NRUS*, 99, citing *Kyōchōkai, Honbuate Hōkokusho*.

coming from three companies—Mitsubishi, Kawasaki, and Kobe Steel. In 1921 these workers would demand autonomy in their workplaces. How did this bid for autonomy become the central issue in the 1921 demands? This development is reviewed next.

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## CHAPTER 4

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### The Struggle for Autonomy, 1917-1921

From the turn of the century until 1917, there is no evidence that workers in Mitsubishi and Kawasaki shipyards regarded the factory committee system an important issue. It was the arrival of workers with rural origins that was crucial to their struggle for autonomy in the workplace. When rural folk came to the shipyards, they brought with them a heritage that had incorporated the autonomy as a necessary ingredient for survival and prosperity in the countryside. Autonomy was part of Japanese rural society. As the agrarian scholar Gondo Seikyo wrote in the 1920s, "since antiquity the national essence of our country has been the system of people's self-rule based on farmers."<sup>1</sup>

The new workers' presence alone, however, was not the only factor that influenced workers' bid for autonomy. Circumstances also played a part. These formerly rural workers were in the city to stay. Realization of this gave them an incentive to change the established system for a better future. The fact that they were settling down is indicated by the declining turnover rate at Mitsubishi and Kawasaki. For example, in 1919 at Mitsubishi, 37% of the workforce quit; by 1926, only 5% left.<sup>2</sup> Their financial situation allowed them to look beyond simply improvements in wage or working

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<sup>1</sup>Thomas R. Havens, *Farm and Nation in Modern Japan; Agrarian Nationalism, 1870-1940* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1974), 210.

<sup>2</sup>*NRUS* 9, 25-26.

conditions. Workers in the shipyards were in an elite position in the labor society and played an important role in the Kobe economy. They had reasons to stay in the company and they had attitudinal and financial resources to fight for autonomy. In perspective, the struggle was not for all labor; it was a prerogative for only a few.

Developments in the Kobe union suggest that after 1917 autonomy became one of the main goals of the union. The leaders and most union members were from Mitsubishi and Kawasaki; they were workers. Their actions and rhetoric demonstrate that autonomy was an important concept to shipyard workers. Union activities dominated the first phase of the struggle. It prepared the way for the 1921 confrontation.

### *The Character of the Kobe Union Before 1917*

The aspiration for autonomy was not apparent in the policies of the Kobe union before 1917. This union, a branch of the national Yuaikai (Friendly Society), followed the philosophy of the central office. Suzuki Bunji, an intellectual and Christian, started the Yuaikai in Tokyo in 1912.<sup>3</sup> Contrary to the radical direction of some labor factions before 1912 (these labor activities ended with the hanging of one of the leaders, Kotoku Shusui, in 1911), Suzuki planned to work in harmony with management. As expressed in the first issue of the Yuaikai newspaper, the *Yūaishimpō*, the organization stood for friendship and cooperation. The goals were to work towards love and mutual aid, obey the ideals of society, and strive to improve the position of workers.<sup>4</sup> Suzuki stated that the intent of the organization was "not to unite the workers and face the capitalists in

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<sup>3</sup>While at Tokyo Imperial University, Suzuki joined the church and became aware of social problems. Worked for Shūeisha and Asahi Newspaper. In 1911 he became an executive in a Unitarian organization. R. Takeuchi and M. Takayanagi, *Nihonshi jiten* (Japanese history dictionary) (Tokyo: Kadokawa Shoten, 1967), 521.

<sup>4</sup>*Yūaishimpō*, 3 November 1912, in Sōdōmei gojūnenshi kankō iinkai, ed., *Yūaishimpō Shūsei* (A Collection of the Yuaishimpō) (Tokyo: 1964).



a destructive manner. It is to cooperate in harmony with them and to endeavor to raise the status of the workers by rational means."<sup>5</sup>

Thirty workers from the Kobe Steel Company started a Kobe branch of the Yuaikai in November 1914. This first branch in the Kansai area stated that it had been established as a "seminar" to discuss workers' problems.<sup>6</sup> As the number of members from Mitsubishi and Kawasaki increased, the Kansai local split into Kobe and Hyogo branches in 1915. Workers from Kawasaki controlled the former, Mitsubishi the latter. This is the first indication that the workers did not want to be governed by a group outside of their own workplace.

During this initial phase, the Yuaikai groups in Kobe followed Suzuki's philosophy of harmonious relations. One of the lines of the workers' "struggle song" was: "We should progress so as not to be left behind because the world trends never stop."<sup>7</sup> The song indicates that their "struggle" was for the country and therefore their jobs were "sacred."<sup>8</sup> In 1915, the Kobe Yuaikai published the following statement: "The loyalty of the people pours from true hearts with deep respect to the Emperor in an expression of sincerity."<sup>9</sup> Like the central Yuaikai, they strove for social acceptance.

As Ikeda and Omae suggest in their portrayal of the Kobe Yuaikai, its members endorsed the Meiji slogan to build a strong and rich nation.<sup>10</sup> They describe the early organization as "friendly and self-disciplined," and state that as a result of the union's careful patriotic position, the attitude of both company management and government was that of non-intervention: "Kawasaki and Kobe Steel took a position of laissez-faire; Mitsubishi viewed it suspiciously but did not repress it. The Hyogo governor was

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<sup>5</sup>Stephen S. Large, *The Rise of Labor in Japan: the Yuaikai, 1912-19* (Tokyo: Sophia University, 1972), 92, citing Bunji Suzuki, "Kaiin shokun ni tsugu" (To my Fellow Members), *Rōdō oyobi sangyō*, February 1918, 21.

<sup>6</sup>Yagi and Ishida, *Hyōgoken no rekishi*, 317.

<sup>7</sup>*NRUS*, 104-05.

<sup>8</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>9</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>10</sup>*Ibid.*, 105.

sympathetic towards the labor cause and the police did not interfere with the labor activities."<sup>11</sup>

Until 1917, Yuaikai workers in Kobe did not take an aggressive stand. There was one minor dispute at Mitsubishi in 1916 which started because of a disagreement with a foreman who had been transferred from the Nagasaki shipyard. It was soon settled by other foremen.<sup>12</sup> The Yuaikai philosophy was so congenial that one of the Meiji labor leaders, Katayama Sen, who himself had taken a moderate stance in the pre-1912 labor organization, accused the Yuaikai of being "yellow" and an agent of the government.<sup>13</sup>

From 1914 to 1917, the Kobe Yuaikai failed to attract many members. As table 13 shows, by 1916 there were four Yuaikai branches in Kobe and the number of members did not grow. Membership even decreased during the early months of 1917. That year the total number in the union was only 1462 people—a minimal segment of total eligible members. After 1917, membership increased; workers' heightened interest in the organization paralleled changes in the Kobe Yuaikai.

Table 13. - Number of Yuaikai Members in Kobe

Branch	1916 July	1916 Oct	1917 April
Kobe	1,180	1,193	1,038
Hyogo	421	516	246
Fukiai	243	239	140
Shiriike	76	65	38

Source: *NRUS*, 108. Citing from *Rōdō oyobi sangyō* (formerly named the *Yūaishimpō*).

<sup>11</sup>*Ibid.*, 104.

<sup>12</sup>Mitsubishi, *Mitsubishisha shi*, 25: 3087-88.

<sup>13</sup>Sen Katayama, *The Labor Movement in Japan* (Chicago: Charles H Kerr and Company, 1918), 6. He stated: "Even the Yu-Ai-Kai, the yellowest labor movement in Japan, supported by philanthropic capitalists like Baron Shibusawa, is controlled by the despots."

### *The Push for Autonomy*

Beginning in 1917, the Kobe local changed its stance and began making its own decisions, rejecting the central office intervention. Instead of singing about working for the country, the Kobe members concentrated on their own situation. The new platform appealed to workers; union membership increased to over 5000 by 1919.<sup>14</sup>

The Kobe Yuaikai demonstrated its desire for autonomy when it challenged the control of the central Yuaikai office. The Kobe branches decided to change their local union structure by consolidating the groups into one. The aim was to make the Kobe Yuaikai stronger. Reorganization was completed by May; it included appointing committee heads from Kawasaki, Mitsubishi, and Kobe Steel. The independent thinking of the Kobe union members was clearly demonstrated when Suzuki urged them to start an ironworkers' union. The Kobe branch refused, arguing that it was too early to form a union based on trade.<sup>15</sup> The appearance of unions independent of the Yuaikai was already undermining Suzuki's vision of a central Yuaikai office as the governing body and of laborers organized by trade.<sup>16</sup> He believed that "the soundest labor organizations are those related to the same occupations and same trades which are similar in interest, spirit, and emotion."<sup>17</sup> Now he faced opposition from within the Yuaikai ranks.

In his study of the Yuaikai, Stephen Large notes that Suzuki failed to get the cooperation of the Kansai leaders, who "believed their autonomy and independence in the

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<sup>14</sup>Hyōgokenshi, *Hyōgoken*, 759.

<sup>15</sup>Sōdōmei 50-shūnen kinen jigyō shiryō shūshū iinkai, ed., *Yūaikai-Sōdōmei 50 nen shi nempyō* (Yuaikai Sodomei 50 year chronology) (Tokyo: Sōdōmei, 1963), 211. One might suggest that the Kobe Yuaikai wanted their own exclusive group. Considering the diversity in the labor world as discussed previously, workers in heavy industry were the "elite" group. Heavy industry workers were the leaders of, and almost sole participants in, the Kobe labor movement, and may not have envisioned their Kobe group as including other workers.

<sup>16</sup>For example, in 1916, an Osaka union, the Doshikai, was started, and in April 1917, the printers' union, the Shin'yukai, was begun.

<sup>17</sup>Large, *The Rise of Labor*, 112, citing from *Rōdo oyobi sangyō*, March 1918.

labor movement were more precious than the immediate establishment of unionism under Suzuki's direction."<sup>18</sup> Suzuki reacted to the independent moves with an earnest effort to encourage Yuaikai membership in the autumn of 1917, but with little success.<sup>19</sup> Neither rank-and-file workers nor local leaders rushed to join his cause. The behavior of both Suzuki and the locals in 1917 is significant. Workers and their local leaders were willing to organize, but were not drawn to Suzuki's vision of a horizontal union with central control. Their choice was to organize in small local groups.<sup>20</sup>

In 1918, articles in workers' newspapers clearly indicated a new direction for the Yuaikai. Labor was no longer content to be slaves of the state, nor to be used as machines. Workers asked to be recognized as "human." Specifically this meant autonomy—to be allowed to make choices in the workplace. Workers identified capitalists as the force that prevented them from being human. These ideas are illustrated in the March 1918 Yuaikai newspaper.

If we in this age are asked what we want to become, we would reply very clearly that we want to become human. Are we given the full duties of a citizen? Are we given the freedom of rights of humans? Are we recognized as humans? We do not hesitate to give our reply: no.

Alas, we want to become human. No, we have to become human. We readily admit to wanting the rights and freedom of humans [ningen toshite no kenri to jiyū]. . . . Up to now it has not been recognized that we have the free will of humans [ningen toshite no jiyūishi o mitomerarete inai]. We are not provided with the right to live—the guarantee of a livelihood. We are treated not as humans but as machines in manufacturing. We suffer. We cry out to be human.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>18</sup>Ibid., 119. He also states that the Kansai leaders wanted to "march down the path to unionism at their own pace, not according to Suzuki's timetable."

<sup>19</sup>See *ibid.*, chp. 6. According to Large, the growing strength and independence of local unions, for example the new Kobe union, became a concern for the central Yuaikai in 1917. Despite Suzuki's efforts, large unions, such as the Kyobashi branch in Tokyo, composed of workers from the Ishikawajima Shipyard Company, and the Shibaura branch, made up of workers from Shibaura Steel Manufacturing, refused to join the union. *Ibid.*, 116.

<sup>20</sup>Some suggest that trade unions were not successful in Japanese industry because of the lack of a heritage of trade unions from Japanese traditional society. See for example, Gordon, *The Evolution*, 49.

In August of that year, the Kobe branch started its own newspaper, the *Shin Kōbe*. This can be viewed as another move towards shedding central control, as the Yuaikai head office had published its own paper since 1912. The first issue stated that, "today's laborer wishes for complete freedom and independence, and to depend on his own labor. We are humans who possess advanced skills. Therefore, capitalism has to completely change its attitude towards workers. It has to respect workers' personalities [rōdōsha no jinkaku o mitomeyo] and give them suitable salaries."<sup>22</sup> These statements represented a dramatic change from the earlier avowals of harmony and set the stage for what was to come.

In late 1918 and throughout 1919, the Kobe Yuaikai's goal for worker autonomy became one of the most important issues. Their decision making produced a concrete labor platform in which recognition of workers' organizations became a central concern. For example, in the New Year edition of the *Shin Kōbe*, a report from a labor conference stated that the participants' concerns were as follows: 13 wanted union recognition; 9, fewer work hours; 5, revision of the police law; 5, universal suffrage; and 3, a minimum wage system. The union began to attack those elements seen as hindering worker autonomy. What began to grip local unionists' attention the most was the abolition of Article 17 of the Peace Police Law of 1900. This article did not bar unions outright, but prohibited organizations which aimed "at cooperative action concerning conditions of work or remuneration."<sup>23</sup> In February the Kobe union started a petition against Article 17; it collected a total of 4600 names from Kobe, Osaka, and Tokyo.<sup>24</sup> In the March 15

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<sup>21</sup>NRUS, 107, citing from *Rōdō oyobi sangyō*, March 1918.

<sup>22</sup>*Shin Kōbe*, 22 August 1918. Both Gordon and T. C. Smith define workers' desire to become "human" as the need to improve their status. This view is based more on demands by labor in the early 1900s and also more on their perception of workers' position than on primary material which confirms this definition. Thus, Smith defines *jinkaku* as "moral equality" which would "transcend status." Smith, "The Right to Benevolence," 608. This definition may have been a dimension of *jinkaku*, however, I would argue that the Kobe workers' idea of "human" was to exercise their will, making their concept of "human" closer to that of Socrates.

<sup>23</sup>Quoted in Large, *The Rise of Labor*, 3.

<sup>24</sup>*Rōdōsha Shinbun*, 15 March 1919. The petition stated the following: "We workers demand the cancellation of the main section #2 of the Police Law # 17 which prevents the development of a sound

edition of *Rōdōsha Shinbun* (the new name for the *Shin Kōbe*), there was a proclamation against Article 17.

It [Article 17] prohibits strikes, gives out punishments for union organization, and uses fines as threats. Striking is the last defense of the workers. Union organization is the tool of our class to defend ourselves. . . . Workers should become human: this would ensure survival as citizens.  
These rights should be recognized

On March 10 the petition was submitted to the government. There was no reply from the government.

That spring the Kobe union continued to distance itself from the central Yuaikai's authority. This time the local proposed a regrouping of the Kansai area unions which would make them even more independent of Suzuki's leadership. The Osaka, Kobe, and Kyoto groups joined together to form their own federation, the Kansai Rodo Domeikai. In their first convention in April 1919, the list of their goals reflected the new union's direction. It was a bold move, for it was an official proclamation of positions and aims. Included were such goals as the abolition of Article 17, an eight-hour day and establishment of a minimum wage, a labor insurance system, democratization of the factories, equal pay for men and women, and abolition of unemployment.<sup>25</sup> In August of 1919, the Yuaikai central office changed its name to Dai Nippon Rodokumiai Sodomei Yuaikai, and adopted aims similar to those of the new Kansai federation. As Ikeda and Omae note, "the general rules had already been established by the Kansai Rodo Domeikai."<sup>26</sup> By this time, Suzuki was no longer determining the course of the Yuaikai or the labor movement in Japan; workers were.

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labor group." The beginning of the year was filled with labor activity: January 16, speeches in Kansai; February 2, speeches in Kobe; February 15, a demonstration in Kyoto for universal suffrage and on February 16, one in Kobe.

<sup>25</sup>NRUS, 112.

<sup>26</sup>Ibid., 113.

Workers played a central role in the direction of the Kobe union's activities after 1917. Intellectuals involved in the union organization in Kobe undoubtedly influenced the movement, especially through their writings in the *Shin Kōbe*. They were, however, probably more catalysts than initiators; changes in the union direction had started before they joined.<sup>27</sup> At this time perhaps many of the ideas of these intellectuals overlapped with those of workers.<sup>28</sup> In 1919, the organization of the new Kansai federation ensured that workers would determine the direction of their labor organization: the board of directors was elected, and the president and two vice-presidents had to be workers, not intellectuals. One person could not gain power as Suzuki had attempted to do in the Yuaikai; it was clearly understood that this board collectively controlled the federation. The organization was basically run by worker leadership, but as Large notes, it made room "for certain select intellectuals who were indispensable to the movement."<sup>29</sup> Within this new group, however, Kobe held the most power; it had the largest number of representatives on the board.<sup>30</sup>

The desire for autonomy was not handed to workers by the intellectuals or union leaders such as Suzuki, rather, it appears it was the crux of workers' idealism. The members of the Kobe union strove for their independence from the central Yuaikai, and were successful. The union's objective to gain more autonomy in the workplace met with agreement from workers. During these years, more workers joined the Kobe Yuaikai.

Between 1917 and 1919, workers at Mitsubishi and Kawasaki, with the help of the

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<sup>27</sup>Kagawa took a leading position in October 1917; Hisatome Kozo joined in 1918. An influential intellectual in the Kansai labor movement, Kawakami Hajime, sided with labor only after he was urged by the Kyoto Yuaikai group to openly state his exact position. See Gail Lee Bernstein, *Japanese Marxist, A Portrait of Kawakami Hajime, 1879-1946* (Cambridge, Mass.: University of Harvard Press, 1990), 101.

<sup>28</sup>See Large, *The Rise of Labor*, 126-28, for a summary of Kagawa's beliefs. Kagawa had also proclaimed Christianity, but this doctrine failed to get the support his idea of "the autonomy of the workers" did.

<sup>29</sup>*Ibid.*, 139.

<sup>30</sup>*Ibid.*

Yuaikai, planned strikes together and submitted demands to their respective managements. The strikes were successful and workers got better remuneration and benefits. The 1918 strike, however, deviated from this pattern: it was part of the rice riots, in it workers did not organize, but simply reacted to the rampant inflation of the time. Although none of the strikes from 1917 to 1919 included a demand for autonomy in the workplace, workers' actions indicate a first step towards the goal of workers participation in workplace decision making.

The demand for autonomy surfaced in 1921. Autonomy had been on the Yuaikai agenda for several years; by then local Yuaikai members had managed to resist the authority of their union's head office. Workers had successfully conducted their strikes and were in a good economic position. These factors surely elevated workers' optimism. By 1921, Suzuki was on the workers' side. During the 1921 strike he was in his shirtsleeves alongside Kawaga, helping lead the Mitsubishi and Kawasaki strikers in the Sodomei song: "The capitalists, who are greedy and do not know when they are full, have deprived the laborers of their fruits of toil . . . Rise up, ye laborers, rise up, capture the strongholds of capital because the time for taking the industries into your own hands has now arrived."<sup>31</sup> Suzuki explained that this strike was a turning point, brought about because "workers are unwilling to recognize the capitalistic system of production; the workers want to abolish the wage system altogether and substitute some method of self-government of industry."<sup>32</sup> This conflict was not a reaction to economic conditions; workers were simply ready to fight for autonomy.

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<sup>31</sup>Ibid., 189, citing from Katsuji Kato, "The Labor Movement in Japan," *The Japan Review* (October 1921): 219.

<sup>32</sup>Ibid.



### *Workers Submit Demands*

Striving for autonomy was not reserved for any one level in the world of labor; by 1920, industrial workers were ready to challenge not only management control but also the local Yuaikai. The Kobe union found itself in a similar situation to the one the central Yuaikai had been in three years earlier; its leadership was challenged by the ordinary workers in individual plants. Membership in the Kobe union fell in 1920 from 5000 to barely 1500.<sup>33</sup> For workers, autonomy in the workplace meant laborers themselves made decisions about their work. At a meeting during the conflict, workers stated that this strike was a *workers'* movement, and those with higher rank were to help.<sup>34</sup> Workers, not the union, were central in the 1921 strike: they began the conflict, continued to control its direction, and designed the demands. The events of the strike illustrate the presence and dimensions of the issue of autonomy.

On June 24, 1921, the unrest started in one of Mitsubishi's new works in Kobe, the Internal Combustion Engine Manufacturing Company. One hundred workers gathered at the site.<sup>35</sup> It is not clear what exactly instigated this meeting: dismissals may have ignited discontent, however, as noted earlier, dismissal was not the prime issue in the demands. To the workers, it may have seemed an appropriate time to resist management's policy. Osaka Electric Company workers had already begun a strike. On May 1, the second annual May Day parade took place in Tokyo, and the first in Kobe.

On the evening of the 24th, the Combustion workers met and decided to submit demands to the company. Before submitting the list, Maruyama Kiyosasa, a regular worker who had assumed leadership, went that evening to the Kobe Yuaikai for help.

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<sup>33</sup>Hyōgokenshi, *Hyōgoken*, 759.

<sup>34</sup>*NRUS*, 167.

<sup>35</sup>The following summary of events is from *NRUS*, chap. 4-7; Hyōgokenshi, ed., *Hyōgoken*, 757-58; Shin Mitsubishi Jūkōgyō, ed., *Kōbe zōsenjo 50 nen shi* (Fifty-year history of the Kobe Shipyard) (Kobe: 1957), 18-22; Young, *Recent Times*, 235-39.

Workers wanted control, but this did not mean they would not use the *Yuaikai*. The next day, the workers gave their list of demands to management and asked them to respond in three days. Two days later, management still had not replied. Therefore, on the evening of the 27th, thirty workers gathered and drew up a statement which said that if their June 25 demands were ignored, they would stage a slowdown. The next day five workers, acting as official representatives for 300 workers, gave their statement to management. On June 29, the three days had passed; slowdowns began. They continued the following day and again on July first.

Meanwhile, there was growing discontent in the Kawasaki electric division. According to the *Kōbe Shinbun*, June 19, 1921, the firm's wage distribution practice was one of the reasons Kawasaki electric workers were unhappy. The article stated that the unrest at Kawasaki stemmed from "the factory committee problem and workers' bonuses."<sup>36</sup> In the Kawasaki factory, workers had recently received bonuses, but because the money had been given to supervisors to distribute, complaints of unfairness arose. About the same time, workers got a 25th company anniversary bonus, but only those who had been with the company for a long time qualified. Newer employees became dissatisfied. Therefore, one of the Kawasaki demands stated that "the issue of the 25th anniversary bonus should be clarified." Another incident also angered workers. A worker had recently fallen to his death, and the company had not found his body. Workers interpreted this as a lack of management concern for employees.

On June 28, Kawasaki electric workers began singing labor songs and shouting slogans. Eventually they stopped working. That night, a gathering of sixty-eight workers decided to draw up demands. The next morning, the appointed leaders handed out leaflets to encourage others to go back to work, which they did, signifying the power of these leaders. The same day, workers elected committee members. They later decided to present the company with demands which would represent the common

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<sup>36</sup>In *Taishō nyusu jiten hensan iinkai*, ed., *Taishō nyusu jiten* (Taisho news dictionary), vol.5 (Tokyo: Mainichi Communications, 1988), 734.

needs of all factory workers.

Managements' actions only fanned the flames. Although management in neither companies formally answered their workers' demands, this did not signify management passivity. According to Young's account of the strike, an incident that occurred outside of work angered workers. While some Kawasaki workers were discussing the state of affairs, a gang of bullies (hired by Kawasaki management) brutally attacked the workers and caused many injuries.<sup>37</sup> At Mitsubishi, management was dismissing worker leaders. On the 28th, they fired Maruyama. On the 30th, they discharged six workers who were members of the workers' committee, and on July 1 an employee named Shibuya.

Unrest spread to the shipyard workers. In the afternoon of the 29th, a large conference of workers from the shipyard trades was held; 800 workers from Kawasaki, 400 from the Hyogo Kawasaki factory, and 500 from the Mitsubishi companies attended. After considerable discussion, a list of demands were approved. Workers made demands at their respective companies. At Kawasaki electric, 820 singing employees—with women workers in the lead—marched through the rain to deliver their petition to the director's office.

Kobe workers not only initiated the protest actions. They had submitted their lists of demands by the time the Yuaikai decided to take an active part on July 4th. The union had been consulted but it was only after this date that it helped with negotiations and encouraged worker unity during the strike. On the 4th, the Yuaikai members held a meeting in which they elected a negotiating team—an eight-member executive committee which included Kagawa and Suzuki. The next day the committee gave the following statement to Kobe Steel, Mitsubishi, and Kawasaki management: "It must be recognized that factory workers can freely join other unions, and unions which are currently in the factory must also be recognized."<sup>38</sup> On July 8, Mitsubishi, Kawasaki,

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<sup>37</sup>This incident is recorded in Young, *Recent Times*, 235.

and Kobe Steel workers began a slowdown. That night 25,000 workers gathered for a demonstration and the next day 30,000 did so. Two days later Mitsubishi closed its doors for 10 days.<sup>39</sup>

### *Workers' Plans for Autonomy*

The desire for autonomy in the workplace was the central issue in the demands submitted to management. By requesting the recognition of their right to their own organization and labor policies, workers rejected management control, displaying both the external and internal dimensions of autonomy. The choices workers made resulted in concrete ideas regarding management that would better suit their needs. (See appendix for lists of submitted demands.)

The goals of the 1921 workers illustrate a concept found in rural Settsu society in late Tokugawa. A system that did not endorse means to ensure the survival of its members was not acceptable. In Tokugawa, farmers insisted on consideration from the rich when there was a poor harvest, fraud, or rising prices which affected their lives. Likewise, the 1921 demands show the same kind of insistence. Management had given adequate wages, but had failed to take responsibility for misfortunes that were outside of the workers' control. The demands indicate that workers wanted protection in the face of unfamiliar situations—such as cases of illness, leaves, injury, and absence because of military service. As Mitsubishi's combustion workers summarized, "The above demands are designed so as not to produce a victim."

The first request on workers' lists submitted to management was for the recognition of workers' right to have their own organizations. This was the workers' means to protect their identity. The other demands regarding wage and dismissal concretely

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<sup>38</sup>NRUS, 172-73.

<sup>39</sup>Young, *Recent Times*, 235. Young wrote that Mitsubishi gave workers half pay during this period.

defined this identity. These demands were not bids to simply get higher wages and job security; rather, they were designed to ensure the survival of workers. The muted role wage and dismissal concerns played in the lists reflected the relatively healthy financial situation of both worker and company.

As workers could not control the economy, health, or old age, they wanted protection in cases of dismissal, illness, and retirement. These issues all received careful attention. Workers asked for more money and for a shorter waiting period before eligibility. The amounts requested were substantially higher than those given at that time. For example, in December 1920, Mitsubishi offered ten day wages of severance payments after one year of service.<sup>40</sup> Mitsubishi workers demanded four months salary when dismissed; Kawasaki, fifty days of wages. Kawasaki workers' proposed policies were as follows:

3. For dismissal pay—for continuous service of:
  - a) over 6 months and under 1 year: a payment of 50 days
  - b) for each month past 1 year: 3 day wages
  - c) " " 5 years: 4 day wages
  - d) " " 10 years: 5 day wages
4. 1. When retiring after the age of 50, and continuous service of 10 years, the full amount (as in paragraph three).
2. In case of illness, and with continuous service of 6 months, and no longer able to work, the full amount.
3. If leaving for other reasons than the above two, and the working period is more than 6 months, half the amount.

The dismissal demands illustrate that workers wanted the more fortunate members of the organization, management, to ensure the survival of the less fortunate workers. But, this responsibility was directed not only at management; it applied also to the higher paid workers in the shipyards. These employees would receive a lower increase in wage in order that more money could be given to the poorer workers. Women would get the

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<sup>40</sup>NRUS, 94.

highest amounts since they were the lowest paid. This plan for levelling wages ensured that all workers had an adequate amount to live on. This is illustrated in the Kawasaki workers' wage demand:

5. To increase the day wage:		
men	below 2 yen	24 sen increase
	below 2 yen 50 sen	20 sen " "
	below 3 yen	14 sen " "
women	below 1 yen	30 sen " "
	above 1 yen 1 sen	24 sen " "

The 1921 demands also disclose other characteristics of the workers' ideal organization. Workers wanted remuneration to correspond more to circumstance than to productivity or seniority. As Suzuki had stated, the workers wanted to abolish the capitalist's wage system altogether.<sup>41</sup> The pay system workers had in mind made sure all the workers had sufficient funds to live on; the hierarchy of wages was reserved for when employees were not producing. This proposed system also reduced the power of superiors to reward and punish workers through the distribution of wages. Management had discretionary power to decide promotions, wage increases, and amounts of bonus.

The new policies ensured not only workers' survival, but also recognized the needs of their families. For example, if a worker's family depended on him, he should get more severance pay. This is illustrated in the combustion group's demand which stated that, "if the company discharges an employee without due cause, even if he worked for a short period, the company must pay day wages of four months. If the employee is living with a family, and has an obligation to support it, the company should pay 30 yen; this applies also for those who have a common-law wife."

The preceding statement reveals workers' thoughts about dismissal: workers did not

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<sup>41</sup>See note # 32.

dispute the "without due cause," only the amount of compensation. This attitude suggests they did not perceive a right to life-time employment. This conclusion is supported by a Kobe Yuaikai survey conducted in 1918. In this survey workers stated that, "when dismissed, we should get a bonus. If work becomes less, the company shouldn't dismiss workers, but should decrease the wage or regular work hours—this way is not so hard on workers financially." Although this suggests a desire for job security, the statement continues, "this would give us time to find some other job."<sup>42</sup> The manner in which workers dealt with the firing of Shibuya from Mitsubishi on July 1, also confirms this attitude. Two hundred employees went to the main office at Mitsubishi and submitted demands with a warning that if these were not accepted, they would strike. As number two and number five on the list illustrate, severance pay, not dismissal, was not negotiable.

2. Management must deal with the matter of reinstating Shibuya.

5. If Shibuya is not reinstated, he must be compensated with a dismissal bonus.<sup>43</sup>

It is not surprising that workers did not envision the right to life-time employment at this time, as there is also evidence that management did not view it as a right. In the first charter made for management personnel in Mitsubishi in 1876, Shoda (who later designed the shipyard workers' policies), stated clearly that salaried employees were not guaranteed job security. He acknowledged the position of the owners, the Iwasaki family, and he wrote that salaried employees had a right to a share of profits when the company was doing well, but if the company was losing money, they would have lower wages and could be dismissed.<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>42</sup>NRUS, 112.

<sup>43</sup>Ibid., 165.

<sup>44</sup>See Eisuke Daito, "Recruitment and Training of Middle Managers in Japan, 1900-1930," in *Development of Managerial Enterprise*, ed. K. Kobayashi and H. Morikawa, 151-79 (Tokyo: Tokyo University Press, 1986). Daito suggests that by the late 1910s white collar workers at Mitsubishi enjoyed job security. He found that while blue collar workers were dismissed during hard times, the

Article three stated:

3. When the company does well and makes a profit, some of the increase must become part of the monthly salary as a whole. Likewise, when the company does poorly, and perhaps has a loss, some of the monthly salary must drop as a whole. Furthermore, this situation will affect the employment situation.<sup>45</sup>

Mitsubishi and Kawasaki workers in 1921 were trying to change the established organization in order to include their needs. Higher remuneration may have satisfied artisans, but for workers with a rural background, a higher wage was not the answer. The system had to support its members adequately, not only at work, but also when they were unable to work. Negotiations may have won these demands, but management was not willing to yield. How else could workers enforce their autonomy?

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The Kobe shipyard workers' lists of demands were submitted to management, but the companies refused to negotiate with workers. Workers confirmed their concept of a right to decision making on the factory floor: they decided to exercise this right by preparing to take over management of the workshops. On the 12th, Kawasaki shipyard workers met in a hall, elected their factory committee members, and drew up articles to govern the workplace. The Kawasaki workers stated that since these articles documented the first worker management of a factory in Japan's history, they offered a model for the future.<sup>46</sup> Kagawa explained that "factory management is not a takeover of industry by violence; it is a

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number of white collar employees increased or decreased only slightly. I suggest that the increase in the number of white collar employees during a post-1907 slump may have been due to the change in the organization in the company at that time which required the hiring of many white collar employees. In the 1922 downturn, the numbers of both white and blue collar workers declined.

<sup>45</sup>Shukuri, *Shōda*, 412-13.

<sup>46</sup>*NRUS*, 197.



constructive plan by the agreement of all workers."<sup>47</sup> The workers' statement was as follows:

It has come to the point of managing the Kawasaki factory production. . . . the company representative, Nagatomi and Yamamoto, have not replied in good faith, giving the excuse the director was away. . . . It was never our intention to destroy the Japanese economy. . . . The company has taken a tyrannical attitude and has continued to act without good faith. If we counterattack this with strikes, it will give rise to unrest in the factory which will weaken Japan's industry. . . . Thus we will take over the running of the factory."<sup>48</sup>

Workers showed no desire to abolish management; they were only dissatisfied with its behavior. In the proposed factory committee system, each section of the factory would elect groups to represent workers, and from those groups, a central council would be elected.<sup>49</sup> The willingness of workers to be responsible for their own on-the-job production, further illustrates their desire for autonomy. The factory committees would be in charge of work, hours, and discipline, as illustrated in the following plan:

1. The factory committees will manage all work.
2. Subordinate clerks will do the work allotted by the committees and participate in the committees.
3. Wages will be dispersed as previously, by the company.
4. Work time temporarily will be 6 hours, but workers would produce as much as now done in 8 hours; however, the committee will decide when to lengthen or shorten the work day.
5. Anyone disrupting the usual peace of the factory or affecting the efficiency will be judged by a discipline committee.<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>47</sup>*Rōdōsha Shinbun*, 8 September 1921.

<sup>48</sup>*Ōsaka Mainichi*, 13 July 1921, in *Taishō nyusu*, 738. According to Young, the director was in Europe buying paintings.

<sup>49</sup>*NRUS*, 200.

<sup>50</sup>*Ibid.*

On the 13th, Kawasaki workers submitted the above plan to management. On the 14th in the *Ōsaka Mainichi*, Kawasaki management was quoted as saying that "the problem of factory management [by workers] was not taken seriously at all, as it is impossible to be put into practice—which everyone knows. However, if the action continues, it will be totally rejected."<sup>51</sup> They pointed out that "the factory belongs to the company and not to workers. Factory management [by workers] is unacceptable from any legal point of view."<sup>52</sup> In the *Rōdōsha Shinbun*, workers' response was that "factory management is the natural right (tōzen no senjutsu) of workers."<sup>53</sup> That day, Kawasaki closed its factories and the Hyogo governor called in the army.

The dispute continued until August 9. Both Mitsubishi and Kawasaki management dismissed workers from the negotiating teams and many labor leaders were arrested. The Yuaikai tried to keep the workers busy by organizing special sports events. On the 23rd, both companies reopened; however, few employees showed up for work. On the 28th of the month, the strikers came into conflict with the police. On their way to visit local shrines, workers passed the dockyards and began shouting, "To the yards!" The police on guard drew their swords; a striker was killed and around twenty were injured. Kagawa denounced the police action and was subsequently arrested.<sup>54</sup> Workers continued to strike, but on August 9 decided to go back to work. The strike ended in defeat. The last statement from the workers of the 1921 strike in the *Ōsaka Mainichi* newspaper read as follows:

We have experienced overwhelming defeat in negotiations in the dispute. In the 40 days of hardship and battles, our swords are broken and our arrows exhausted. At this time, we must swallow our hatred and withdraw our soldiers.<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>51</sup>*Ōsaka Mainichi*, 14 July 1921, in *Taishō nyusu*, 738.

<sup>52</sup>*Hyōgoken, rōdō undō shi*, 141.

<sup>53</sup>*Rōdōsha Shinbun*, 15 August 1920.

<sup>54</sup>This incident is related by Young, *Recent Times*, 238-39.

<sup>55</sup>*Ōsaka Mainichi*, 12 August 1921, in *Taishō nyusu*, 745.

## CONCLUSION

This analysis has probed Mitsubishi and Kawasaki workers' demand for autonomy in the 1921 strike. The findings suggest that this demand was rooted in an inherited concept and that the struggle to attain autonomy occurred as a result of the complexities of economic and social change. Despite the defeat of the Mitsubishi and Kawasaki workers in 1921, their experience offers significant implications for our understanding of Japanese labor history.

### *Implications of the 1921 Strike*

The strike was a turning point in Japan's labor history. It was one of the strikes in the 1920 to 1921 period during which workers proposed a new kind of factory organization. From a historical perspective, the 1921 strike obliges us to consider whether indeed the plan for a factory committee system in fact did serve as a model for the future as the Kawasaki workers hoped it would do. Some recent historical analyses, for example Gordon's, suggest labor helped mold Japanese labor policies, denying that they were designed solely by management.<sup>1</sup> In addition to labor's contributions to wage or life-time employment systems, did labor also help design company organization? Today's "bottom up management" is a noted characteristic of Japanese management.<sup>2</sup> Was the 1921 strike one of its predecessors? My findings suggest that it was, but of course proof requires much further research. What is clear, however, is that the 1921 strike marks a

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<sup>1</sup>Gordon, *The Evolution*.

<sup>2</sup>Ezra F. Vogel, *Japan as No. 1, Lessons for America* (Tokyo: Charles E. Tuttle Co., 1984), 144-45.

first step towards greater worker participation in management. For despite defeat, it forced change in factory organization.

The autonomy of industrial workers was dependent on workers' ability to force company management to change. The surfacing of the demand for autonomy in 1921 was in part a result of the relatively favorable position of the Kobe workers at that time. In 1921 management defeated workers who still did not have enough power to accomplish this goal. Companies proved to be too strong an adversary to bargain with—in part because they had the support of government. This was acknowledged by both the public and strikers. According to a report in the *Tōyō Keizai Shimpō* (a business journal), the companies had refused to negotiate, or even to accept proposals made by members of the National Diet. The writer stated: "It is not known what degree of endurance the labor side has, but, the capitalist side has an absolute resolution not to yield. I suspect that behind this, is the influence of government support. The government has been on the capitalists' side, and the capitalists have therefore taken this strong attitude."<sup>3</sup> In *Rōdōsha Shinbun* articles, workers agreed with this analysis:

Labor disputes since June have ended in defeat. However, workers and labor movements have learned important lessons. . . . Power for power. If capitalists and the authorities impede workers' progress by way of force, workers who believe in justice should stop advocating justice and humanity, which is the way of the weak. We workers have no other choice than to counteract with force.<sup>4</sup>

Kagawa gave another reason for workers' weakness—workers would sell their freedom for bread.<sup>5</sup>

Despite the management victory, workers were still too strong to be ignored.

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<sup>3</sup>*Tōyō Keizai Shimpō*, 30 July 1921.

<sup>4</sup>*Rōdōsha Shinbun*, 8 September 1921. This view was also expressed in an article, 25 August 1921: "Defeat is clearly defeat. . . . Unless labor unions gain more power, workers should cry sour grapes or admit defeat."

<sup>5</sup>*Rōdōsha Shinbun*, 5 May 1921.

According to a reporter in the *Tōkyō Asahi* newspaper, "the one situation in Kobe is not a problem, but this is the situation all over Japan."<sup>6</sup> At this time, workers did have power. For example, Young notes workers had no fear or respect for the "Kokusuikai" (National Essence Society), a group of hired, "made-respectable" bullies, sent by the Home Minister Tokonami to settle strikes.<sup>7</sup> Young also pointed out that during the 1921 strike, government was worried that the troops might side with labor, and accordingly, soldiers were hidden away in the port quarantine station and not seen in the streets.<sup>8</sup> Workers also had support from the public. For example, a reporter from the *Tōyō Keizai* wrote: "Who is responsible? Who does not compromise even if they can, and prolong this conflict? I regretfully must say, it is the company side."<sup>9</sup> With workers' strength and public support, labor, in fact, was forceful enough to pose a serious threat to companies.

Thus, management did react. Companies in Hyogo with over 300 employees decided to form an association to study the problem of labor.<sup>10</sup> Some companies started factory councils. Mitsubishi, despite its strong stand, opted to do so.<sup>11</sup> A council was set up to discuss such items as increased production efficiency and workers' welfare programs. The chairman and sub-chairman, however, would be appointed from the staff, not workers. Many people were critical; Kagawa, however, was optimistic. He felt that the new Mitsubishi factory system was "lukewarm," but it "was the first step in the path of progress"—a step towards the goal of destroying "the autocratic nature of the capitalist system."<sup>12</sup> In the same year, other companies in Kobe, such as Sumitomo and Dunlop

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<sup>6</sup>*Tōkyō Asahi*, 14 July 1921, in *Taishō nyusu*, 738.

<sup>7</sup>Young, *Recent Times*, 172-74. The Home Minister Tokonami was responsible for starting the "Kyochokai," a committee set up to help solve labor-management problems.

<sup>8</sup>*Ibid.*, 236-37.

<sup>9</sup>*Tōyō Keizai*, 13 August 1921.

<sup>10</sup>*Hyōgokenshi, Hyōgoken*, 757-58.

<sup>11</sup>It is difficult to know why Mitsubishi decided to start the factory committee system. One can only speculate that it was requested by head office, as it seemed more flexible during the strike than the Kobe local management. For example, shipyard workers' representatives went to Tokyo and were able to talk with personnel in the head office. They seemed understanding but concluded that negotiations of the dispute be settled at the local level.

Rubber, also established worker councils.<sup>13</sup> Kawasaki chose not to change.

The 1921 strike also forced the government to respond. Up to this point, at least publicly, it had taken a middle road. Government's position was now in the open: suspicion that it was on the capitalist side was now confirmed. Repressive measures became more common after the strike, and understandably its efforts were directed at labor leaders (the "socialists"), and newspaper reporters. Details of the strike were available in newspapers, and many readers sympathized with labor. The outcry from the public against the use of force and resulting injuries and death in the 1921 strike did have some effect: government, after some deliberation, decided to shorten soldiers' swords by a couple of inches.<sup>14</sup> Whether the strike, some change in government, or society encouraged the enforcement of more repressive measures is subject to dispute; nevertheless, the passing of the Peace Preservation Law in 1925 set the legal framework for handling "thought criminals."

The demand for worker autonomy in factories is one aspect of the 1921 strike, but this concept affected other characteristics of company organization. Workers used, and, at the same time, rejected outside authority, for example, the local Yuaikai union. The demand for autonomy was directed at anyone who might pose a threat to labor identity; capitalists were not singled out, they were only seen as more difficult to deal with. Workers actions indicate that they, more than management or government (who are often seen as influential forces), contributed to the establishment of enterprise unions.

The autonomous nature of these workers reveals the identity of their chosen labor policies. Most important, workers indicated that they believed the organization must be designed to guarantee survival. Autonomy was connected to survival—preserving workers identity and not starving were synonymous. Survival applied to not only the individual worker but also to the community of workers and their families. Survival

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<sup>12</sup>*Rōdōsha Shinbun*, 8 September 1921.

<sup>13</sup>*Hyōgoken, rōdō undō shi*, 160.

<sup>14</sup>Young, *Recent Japan*, 239.

meant that those in higher positions, both in the factory and in management, had to limit their benefits in order that all could subsist. Wages were not geared to productivity; their function was to ensure a decent living wage for all. Differentials in remuneration were acceptable when leaving. Dismissal was not appreciated, but accepted. Therefore, it was the *terms of leaving* which became an issue. Workers' ideas were very concrete. Their vision of a company organization suggests that workers were not seeking membership in their firms or society, but were trying to "pull" management into their community with its set rules for survival. These were the objectives of the 1921 Kobe shipyard workers. The question remains, did the rural workers and agrarian heritage contribute to the "Japanese employment system?"

The conclusions of this study differ from many other analyses of labor in this period, primarily because of the approach used. The post-1917 labor action was not solely the result of industrialization, or of capitalist society; it was also influenced by Japan's rural heritage and changing society. The strike and the labor unrest were part of, and example of a much broader historical change in society before and after 1868. Concerning methodology, two points must be made. One, the study of the post-1917 workers is not complete. Many aspects of the workers' world and the larger society are not included. Second, I suspect the focus of the connection between rural society and labor may be most applicable during this period of labor history, and possibly in the post World War II period when rural migration was at an all time high. Nevertheless, broad societal influences cannot be overlooked in any analysis of labor. The problem, however, is to identify exactly what in society affects historical change. One aim of this study is to stimulate further examinations of the interrelationships among society and labor.

### *Workers' Demand for Autonomy From Non-Worker Points of View*

If the 1921 demand for autonomy is left at this point, it can too easily be assumed that management, despite its efforts to design a workable labor package, failed to consider the "human" side of labor. Managers appear oppressive, and no doubt many individual ones were so to varying degrees. However, this general assumption is misleading. By examining the motives of Mitsubishi management for starting company labor policies, workers' 1921 demand for autonomy is placed in a different perspective. Management and labor were not so different. Managers designed their labor policies to retain their autonomy, and also to ensure that their lives in the company would be "human." The gap between management and labor was very large but perhaps the goals of these two groups had similarities. Did the struggle for autonomy permeate various levels of Japanese society?

Scholars dispute the degree of autonomy of Japanese management, but many propose that in Mitsubishi, the Iwasaki family entrusted much of the planning to paid managers, thereby allowing them considerable autonomy.<sup>15</sup> It is understandable how managers such as Shoda were able to gain so much power. As Morikawa Hidemasa points out, their skills were needed in the modern firms.<sup>16</sup> When Mitsubishi bought the Nagasaki Shipyard, it not only got an industry from the government, it also inherited problems that

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<sup>15</sup>William Wray notes Iwasaki's "rhetoric of one-man leadership had a dictatorial ring, but he was possibly the most effective businessman in early Meiji at recruiting skilled managers with a knowledge of English and at giving them specific administrative responsibilities." William D. Wray, "Shipping: From Sail to Steam," in *Japan in Transition*, eds. Jansen and Rozman, 258.

Iwasaki was a friend of Fukuzawa Yukichi, an educator and journalist, and may have been influenced by his ideas. For example, Fukuzawa gave the management of the school over to the teachers, believing that "the founding of a school could never have been one man's work. All human affairs proceed best, I think, when they are not meddled with too much but entrusted to the discretion of those concerned." Yukichi Fukuzawa, *The Autobiography of Fukuzawa Yukichi, with Preface to the Collected Works of Fukuzawa*, trans. by Eiichi Kiyooka and introduction by Shinzo Koizumi (Tokyo: Hokuseido Press, 1981), 224.

<sup>16</sup>Hidemasa Morikawa, "The Increasing Power of Salaried Managers in Japan's Large Corporations," in *Managing Industrial Enterprise; Cases from Japan's Prewar Experience*, ed. William D. Wray, 27-52 (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1989).



had faced government—the need to find qualified personnel.<sup>17</sup> William Wray, in a study of Mitsubishi and the N.Y.K. shipping lines, concludes that "the first attribute of management strategy was its *autonomy*."<sup>18</sup> In this analysis of management autonomy, Wray is concerned with business decisions, however, the management strategy can be extended to labor policy design. Similarly, in the establishment of personnel policies, they strove to avoid outside interference.

Shoda did attempt to prevent intrusion from outside forces. First, he took control away from the *oyakata*. He did not want government intervention either. He believed that matters regarding employees should only be the concern of management. He stated: "My own view of the labor problem is that it should be left entirely alone. . . . It is absolutely impossible to intervene or to protect by laws or other man-made means."<sup>19</sup> In the *Tōyō Keizai* in 1910, Shoda stated that "employees loved their masters, and peace was maintained in industry through mutual dependence and mutual aid."<sup>20</sup> Most observers are suspicious of Shoda's benevolence, however, as suggested by Socrates, benevolence and independence go hand in hand. Socrates explained that a man will treat his subjects very kindly when he is alone, because the subjects could easily turn against him and he would have no protection. On the other hand, a man could treat his subjects cruelly, if he had, or was willing to use the support of others in the community if there

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<sup>17</sup>Government, for example, from 1870-85, was forced to rely on foreigners and pay them exorbitant wages; the Ministry of Industry was using 42% of its budget for foreign teachers. Levine and Kawada, *Human Resources*, 97-98. Some Western advisors were paid three times the top Japanese executives. In Mitsubishi Nagasaki Shipyard, some foreigners were paid 300 to 350 yen a month compared to, for example, Shoda, who earned 100 yen. Morikawa, "Increasing Power," 29.

<sup>18</sup>William D. Wray, *Mitsubishi and the N.Y.K., 1870-1914; Business Strategy in the Japanese Shipping Industry* (Cambridge: Council on East Asian Studies, Harvard University, 1984), 7.

<sup>19</sup>*Tōyō Keizai*, 1907. Quoted in Byron K. Marshall, *Capitalism and Nationalism in Prewar Japan: The Ideology of the Business Elite, 1868-1941* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1967), 75. Some of Shoda's ideas can be connected to Fukuzawa. Shoda had been a pupil of Fukuzawa's and had taught at his school, the Keio Gijuku. "Independence" was the motto of Fukuzawa's school. He believed strongly that government should remain outside private affairs and even extended this belief to education. His school remained a private institution. See Fukuzawa, *The Autobiography*. Shukuri suggests Shoda copied the first Mitsubishi company charter from the Keio Mita charter. Shukuri, *Shoda*.

<sup>20</sup>*Tōyō Keizai*, 1910. Quoted in Marshall, *Ideology of the Business Elite*, 76.

was an uprising against him.<sup>21</sup> What Shoda was doing in his design of labor policies—the schools, hospitals, welfare programs, recreation facilities, and food and travel subsidies—reflects the independence he wanted from outside sources. Following Shoda's policies, Mitsubishi was creating what Socrates called a "city."

The nature of decision making for labor policy by management in Mitsubishi, like the choices by the workers, was connected with survival. Economic pragmatism was part of the character of Shoda's labor policy. Shoda gave two reasons for starting his labor policy for Nagasaki shipyard workers in 1898. One, because it would improve the company, and the other, because it benefited labor. When he built the school the following year, Shoda reasoned that the company was expected to expand in the future and it needed to secure a stronger foundation.<sup>22</sup> Government had started vocational and craftsmen schools in 1882, but these had failed to fill the needs of growing companies.<sup>23</sup> Laborers, he claimed, had physical strength and ability to learn a skill, but needed education.<sup>24</sup> Shoda's reasoning points to strategic planning for the future of the shipbuilding company. This may have been an important factor, as the company noted, the labor policy for shipyard workers "differs from employee relations in the coal and metals mining division of our company."<sup>25</sup>

Another dimension of labor strategy, revealed in the drafting of a retirement system for senior staff, shows how similar managers' concerns were to those of factory workers. Managers also wanted the organization to ensure their survival when not producing, for example, when retiring. Okumura, who was responsible for initiating this retirement system, gave three reasons for its commencement.<sup>26</sup> First, he stated that the idea came

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<sup>21</sup>Plato's *Republic*, trans. G.M.A. Grube (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1974), 226.

<sup>22</sup>Shukuri, *Shōda*, 529.

<sup>23</sup>Levine and Kawada, *Human Resources*, 98-100. They suggest many of the government schools moved on to higher level educational centres.

<sup>24</sup>Shukuri, *Shōda*, 524.

<sup>25</sup>Quoted in Fruin, "Instead of Management," 119.

<sup>26</sup>Nihon, *rirekisho*, 50-52.

from the army, which had had a retirement system since mid-Meiji. Okumura's reference to the military for ideas of organization should be briefly examined, for it is rarely cited as an influence on labor policy of companies.<sup>27</sup> Under the Pension Law enacted in 1890, those persons who retired from military service above the sergeant-major rank and who had served 11 years, were paid an amount that varied according to rank and length of service. Additional amounts were paid if a person were disabled on duty, and if an officer died, one-third of his pension amount was granted to his family, which might also include his grandparents.<sup>28</sup>

Second, Okumura reasoned that early retirement would give young people a chance to make decisions; their new ideas would be better for the company than those of the older, more conservative men. Third, and most important to Okumura, was the fact that up to that time most upper managers in the company retired at the age of 60 or 70, giving their productive years to the company with little time left for themselves. Humans, he claimed, were not like pets—dogs and birds, for they could hope to act on their own accord, directed by their values. He reasoned that if individuals had to work until they were almost dead, it would mean that they gave up their whole life for the company at the expense of their freedom and independence. Retirement should therefore be at age fifty-five. Okumura was also concerned with being treated as "human"—a term usually reserved for the goals of blue collar workers.

Mitsubishi's retirement system began in 1917, the first such system in the private sector in Japan. An employee with over 30 years of service was given a basic payment of 200 months pay. This amount, if deposited in the bank at 5% interest, could guarantee a monthly salary equal to his income.<sup>29</sup> The ease at which managers could become

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<sup>27</sup>See D. Eleanor Westney, "The Military," in *Japan in Transition*, eds. Jansen and Gilbert, 193. She suggests that the Meiji army served as a model for many organizations throughout Japanese society.

<sup>28</sup>Takenob, *The Japan Yearbook*, 1923, 103-4. In 1920, the government decided to increase pensions an average of 70%. In that year, the total number of recipients for military pensions was 105,284, receiving a total of 24 million yen. The annuities to families numbering 87,169 was 10 million yen.

<sup>29</sup>Nihon, *rirekisho*, 51. According to Okumura, Sumitomo started a retirement system a few years later.

"human" illustrates their power in the company at that time. As Okumura stated, "when I was in General Affairs, I had great influence."<sup>30</sup>

Outside the company, Mitsubishi managers battled government to maintain their separate identity. Inside, they had autonomy because of their position. However, only further study would reveal if they were able to retain their power. For example, the pension fund for managers was cut in half in the late 1920s.<sup>31</sup> Further research may tell more about similarities between labor and management. For example, we know that some of management problems and personnel policies were not so different from those of factory workers. In Mitsubishi the upper white collar employees had a high turnover rate in their workforce in the Meiji period;<sup>32</sup> they became subject to personnel polices, designed in the second decade of the 20th century, that were strict and based on rank and seniority;<sup>33</sup> and they were not exempt from dismissal in bad times. But in the teens, what managers had attained in Mitsubishi—their autonomy and a more "human" workplace—were also the goals of the 1921 factory workers. With a secure wage, confidence in their skill, and a high social position, workers were ready to push for the kind of autonomy managers had achieved. Workers were attempting to adjust the upper-strata's autonomy that Toson noted was used to produce the "pears".

Although laborers in Kobe were unable to win the autonomy they had wanted at this

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<sup>30</sup>Ibid., 52.

<sup>31</sup>Ibid., 50-51. Okumura notes that after he retired, payments were cut in half. The excuse given was poor profits, but Okumura thought that because management was younger, it simply couldn't see ahead.

<sup>32</sup>Of a total of 45 graduates hired before 1906, 5 remained. Of the 5 who stayed, 2 had been there 20 years or more; 1, between 10 and 15 years; and 2, under 5 years. Turnover of managers was high; for example, in the Takashima mine in 1881, 50 men were recruited to manage the mine but 50% left within two years. Shin'ichi Yonekawa, "University Graduates in Japanese Enterprises before the Second World War," *Business History* 26.2 (July 1984), 205.

<sup>33</sup>Regular recruitments of graduates began after 1908 when Mitsubishi changed its organization. By 1914 it was recorded that Mitsubishi Goshi (head office) had 409 graduates, and shipbuilding had 269. Ibid., 196. These new *seiin*—top level personnel—had to be approved by the Goshi department heads and president. They were to be hired from a university and have "excellent scholastic records, good health, and a steady character." Mitsubishi, *Mitsubishisha shi* 21, 1,347-49. In 1913 Mitsubishi started a ranking system for senior-class employees. In 1916 a bylaw for promotions of *seiin*, which included salary according to rank and grade, was initiated. *Mitsubishisha shi* 22, 1,624-25; 24, 3,188-90.

time, this study has shown that they considered it important to their way of life. Its importance was emphasized in struggles in rural areas in the Tokugawa period, in the Kobe union and in Kobe's industrial workplaces in the Taisho era. Struggles for autonomy can be seen not only at different levels in labor society, but also in management. It appears that this kind of tension observed was part of the complex functions of Japanese society. If autonomy can be confirmed to be part of Japanese culture, and since autonomy has the same potential qualities as freedom, this raises a question. Is the autonomy desired by the 1921 shipyard workers the "energy" that has contributed to Japan's economic success?

As Westerners search for reasons of Japan's success, many attribute the lack of freedom in Japanese companies as an element that has helped bring about the "economic miracle." Scholars like Ezra Vogel and Ronald Dore see such lessons for Western nations in Japan's historical experience.<sup>34</sup> These scholars suggest Japan supposedly became successful because of a lack of freedom, and in order for Western industrial societies to become as competitive as Japanese industry, we Westerners must curb our freedoms. This view produces a paradox. On one hand, our early philosophers and psychologists today tell us freedom gives opportunity to individuals to reach their highest potential. On the other hand, distinguished scholars suggest a lack of personal freedom gives success. But if we believe that freedom is important for success, then is it not possible that contemporary Japan's industrial "energy" stems from an effective version of freedom in the workplace, and that the West may be falling behind because of a lack of freedom.

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<sup>34</sup>See Vogel, *No.1*, and Ronald Dore, *Taking Japan Seriously, A Confucian Perspective on Leading Economic Issues* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1987). This reason given for Japan's success is not new; it was suggested in 1912. See Garrett Droppers, "The Secret of Japanese Success," *The Journal of Race Development* 2.4 (April 1912): 424-38.

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# APPENDIX

Table A.- Number of Strikes and Strikers in All Industry, 1900-1921

Year	Strikes	Strikers
1900	11	2,316
1901	18	1,948
1902	8	1,849
1903	9	1,359
1904	6	897
1905	19	5,013
1906	13	2,037
1907	60	11,483
1908	13	822
1909	11	310
1910	10	2,937
1911	22	2,100
1912	49	5,736
1913	47	5,242
1914	50	7,904
1915	64	7,852
1916	108	8,413
1917	398	57,309
1918	417	66,457
1919	497	63,137
1920	282	36,371
1921	246	58,225

Source: Gordon, *The Evolution*, appendix, 440.

## 1921 WORKERS' DEMANDS

Mitsubishi Internal Combustion Engine Company; June 25, 1921.

1. To recognize outside union groups [*odan*].
2. To confirm the right to bargain for the following items:
  - a) work hours
  - b) factory facilities
  - c) dismissal bonuses
  - d) wage
3. To bring in the 8-hour work day.
4. An increase of 50 sen, and for those who are below the standard of living, a suitable raise.
5. If the company dismisses an employee without due cause, even if the employee worked for a short period, the company must pay day wages of 4 months or more; if the employee is living with a family, and has an obligation to support them, the company should pay 30 yen; this applies also for those who have a common-law wife.
6. If a person leaves and has had one year of service, he is to be paid one months day wage; and for each additional month of work is to be paid 1 day wage.
7. Workers have the right to a regular raise after 6 months, regardless of work performance.
8. In the case of being drafted, to be paid half a months day wage.
9. The above demands are designed so as not to produce a victim.

Source: Ohara, *Nihon rōdō nenkan*, 1922, 55.

# Kawasaki Shipbuilding Workers' Demands; July 2, 1921

1. To have a factory committee system.
2. To freely join outside unions.
3. For dismissal pay—for continuous service of:
  - a) over 6 months and under 1 year: a payment of 50 days
  - b) for each month past 1 year: 3 day wages
  - c) " " 5 years: 4 " "
  - d) " " 10 years: 5 " "
4. 1. When retiring after the age of 50, and continuous service of 10 years, the full amount (as in paragraph three).
  2. In case of illness, and with continuous service of 6 months or more, and no longer able to work, the full amount.
  3. If leaving for other reasons than the above two, and the working period is more than 6 months, half the amount.
5. To increase the day wage:
 

men	below 2 yen	24 sen increase
	below 2 " 50 sen	20 " "
	below 3 "	14 " "
women	below 1 "	30 " "
	above 1 " 1 sen	24 " "
6. The issue concerning the 25th anniversary should be clarified.
7. In case of illness:
  - absence of less than 30 days: 70% of wage
  - absence of more than 31 days and less than 70 day: half wage
8. In case of military draft: half wage.
9. To start facilities to prevent a dangerous situation.
10. The demands are to be answered by July 15, noon.

Source: *Mitsubishi Kawasaki rōdō sōgi tenmatsu* (The details of the Mitsubishi Kawasaki labor dispute) (Kobe: Maruichi Shoten, 1921; repr. 1977), 15-17.

**Mitsubishi Shipbuilding Workers' Demands; July 5, 1921**

1. To recognize the factory committee system
2. To recognize the freedom to join workers' unions.
3. To bring in the 8-hour work day.
4. To increase the day wage:

under 1 yen	60 sen
2 "	50 "
2 " 50 sen	40 "
3 "	30 "
5. Concerning dismissal and retirement pay:
  - a) dismissal

under 1 year	3 months day wage
each month after 1 year	3 day wages
" " 5 years	4 " "
" " 10 years	5 " "
  - b) leaving, half the above.
  - c) sick leave, over 6 months, the full amount.
6. Travel allowance when dismissed:

30 yen for married
20 yen for single
7. The demands are to be answered by noon, July 8.

Source: Hyōgoken, *rōdō undō shi*, 135.