

“For Good or for Evil”: Australia, labour reform and the military occupation of Japan’¹

Dr Christine de Matos
University of Western Sydney

In September 1946, the British Commonwealth Occupation Force (BCOF) Monthly Occupation Intelligence Review published the following:

A most significant change in the Japanese way of life came about in the shape of Labour Unions. These Unions are increasing in number, membership and power. Whether they are to be powers for evil or good is yet to be proved, but the possibility of their being selfishly used by unscrupulous Japanese or other foreign nationals is too obvious to require stressing.²

The above captures the essence of the conflicting relationship between BCOF as a military force with definite strategic interests and its very *political* role (that is, of ‘democratisation’) in the Allied Occupation of Japan (1945-1952). The occupation was both a civilian and a military operation, and these two aspects were not always reconcilable: this very irreconcilability was

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² Australian War Memorial (AWM)114: 423/11/5, British Commonwealth Occupation Forces (BCOF) Monthly Occupation Intelligence Review (MOIR), No 5, 20 September 1946, p. 1. An earlier version appears in AWM114: 423/11/2 BCOF MOIR, No 2, 20 June 1946, p. 3.

most apparent in politically and ideologically volatile areas, such as labour reform, the focus of this paper.

The civilian bodies through which the Australian government attempted to influence the progress and form of the Occupation were the Allied Council for Japan (ACJ) in Tokyo and the Far Eastern Commission (FEC), based in Washington DC. Australia participated militarily by providing an occupation force (34th Brigade) as part of BCOF, and the Commander-in-Chief of BCOF. Australians were also involved in the translator and interpreter functions of BCOF (the Combined Services Detailed Interrogation Unit, CSDIC) and in intelligence gathering operations, especially via 36 Field Security. All were based in the Hiroshima prefecture, the Australian base being Hiro, and BCOF headquarters at Kure.

36 Field Security was involved in intelligence gathering, especially of political activities.³ It liaised with US Military Government Units, the US Civil Censorship Detachments and Counter Intelligence Corps via a US liaison officer. Field Security was headed by Captain Bill Cole,⁴ and had detachments in Etajima, Hiro, Ujina, Onomichi, Myoshi and Kure.⁵ It was found that the best way to gain intelligence information from Japanese sources was ‘by offering sweets and cigarettes’. Thus Field Security had the maximum monthly canteen supply of:

4000 cigarettes
4 gross chewing gum
12 doz peanut bars
4 doz chocolate blocks
8 doz packets of sweets.⁶

Field Security encountered other dilemmas that prevented their intelligence gathering capabilities. A complaint was made that they were not fully operational as their vehicles were substandard: ‘at any one time at least 50 percent of the vehicles are in workshops’.⁷

To compare with BCOF, the civilian aims of the Chifley Australian Labor Party (ALP) government (1945-1949) towards labour reform in Japan, as emanating from External Affairs,

³ James Wood, *The Forgotten Force: The Australian Military Contribution to the Occupation of Japan, 1945-1952*, St Leonards: Allen and Unwin, 1998, 71.

⁴ Colin Funch, *Linguists in Uniform: The Japanese Experience 1917-1945*, unpublished manuscript in possession of author, c. 1993, p. 316.

⁵ AWM114: 883/2/93.

⁶ This list is from c. October 1946. The rations were reduced in 1947. AWM114: 883/2/94.

⁷ AWM114: 883/2/93.

was to encourage a strong labour movement in Japan as an antidote to militarism. This stance was actively pursued via the ACJ and the FEC, as well as the normal diplomatic channels.⁸ For BCOF, communicating with a different government department (Defence) and the Joint Chiefs of Staff Australia (JCOSA, based in Melbourne), policies towards labour reform were constructed within a rather different paradigm: the primary relationship between it and the Japanese labour movement was based more negatively on monitoring, intelligence gathering and surveillance. The differences in approaches to labour reform in Japan reflected the intrinsic problems of Australian foreign policy: competition between the Department of Defence and its Secretary Sir Frederick Shedden, and the Department of External Affairs under Dr John Burton.⁹ This competition was reflected in the structure of Australian representation in Occupied Japan – there were no formal measures of cooperation between the civilian representatives in Tokyo and BCOF based in Hiroshima-ken.¹⁰ William Macmahon Ball, and Australian representing the British Commonwealth on the Allied Council for Japan (ACJ) between 1946-1947, and H.C.H. Robertson, an Australian in the role of Commander-in-Chief of BCOF for much of the Occupation, in many ways personified the conflict between Defence and External Affairs’ policies via their own antagonistic relationship. Robertson told Macmahon Ball that Japan was

a military area under military administration. If there were trouble here, you hundreds of civilians would be a terrible responsibility for us to protect. After the Peace Treaty, it is alright for you to move in and we should move out, but until then, civilians simply have no place in Japan.¹¹

The oft confusion between the military and political aims of Australian participation in the Occupation was expressed to BCOF by one described as a ‘progressive Japanese’ – usually a term given to left-wing activists deemed *not* to be communists – who said ‘he was mystified by the fact that the BCOF, representing three socialist countries [sic – all three had labour governments in power], did not attempt to encourage similar thought in Japan.’¹² The speaker

⁸ For an extensive survey of these policies, see Christine de Matos, ‘Imposing Peace and Prosperity: Australia, Labour Reform and Social Justice in Occupied Japan, 1945-1949’, PhD Dissertation, University of Western Sydney, 2003.

⁹ David Horner, ‘The Security Dimension of Australian Foreign Policy’ in F.A. Mediansky (ed), *Australia in a Changing World: New Foreign Policy Directions*, Botany: Maxwell Macmillan Publishing, 1992, pp. 87-88; Wood, *op. cit.*, p. 214.

¹⁰ Peter Bates, *Japan and the British Commonwealth Occupation Force 1946-52*, London: Brassey's (UK), 1993, p. 122.

¹¹ Robertson to Macmahon Ball, 3 March 1947 in Alan Rix (ed), *Intermittent Diplomat: The Japan and Batavia Diaries of W. Macmahon Ball*, Collingwood: Melbourne University Press, 1988, p. 184.

¹² AWM114: 423/11/11 BCOF MOIR, No 11, March 1947.

appeared unaware that ‘similar thought’ was being encouraged, but via the most distant and detached ACJ and FEC, rather than through BCOF.

The ways which BCOF interacted with the Japanese left broadly and labour in particular requires examination. First, though, it is interesting to note that the majority of BCOF participants had no real interaction with Japanese labour, no doubt primarily due to non-fraternisation policies. For instance, many I, and others, have interviewed have no recollection of labour demonstrations or strike activity, or even political activity in general, in the Hiroshima prefecture.¹³ Yet, detailed records were maintained on all political and labour organisations in the Hiroshima prefecture (examples are abundant in the archives). This once again highlights the priority of *surveillance* rather than advice, encouragement, education or example.

One of the activities performed by BCOF intelligence bodies was to approve and attend demonstrations. In one May 1946 example, a BCOF intelligence officer attended a demonstration outside Hiroshima Station, attended by a variety of parties including the Communist Party, the Koreans’ Association, Tōyōkōgyō Workers’ Association, the Waterside Workers’ Association, Asahi Coy Workers’ Association, the Coalminers and Ironworkers’ Associations, the Hiroshima Repatriates’ Committee and the Hiroshima War Sufferers’ Association.¹⁴ Speakers mainly addressed issues such as the unfair distribution of rations and produce. The observer then describes the following proceedings, with some evidence of perplexity:

A manifesto ... was read out amid loud cheers and it was decided to march to the Prefectural Office, to present the manifesto to the Governor. (full arrangements had been made beforehand and it was carried out with B.C.O.F.’s permission). The crowd dwindled and only a comparatively small percentage marched. All the group leaders carried their respective banners and the ‘Red Flag’, ‘Internationale’ and other songs were sung on the way. About four lorries were also used to carry members of the groups. The procession marched via side streets to the ken Office at Mukainada and was orderly. On arrival at the ken Office the leaders in front unfurled four large red flags and waved them in front of the crowd who immediately formed into a long conga line and started to jog trot from one side of the road to the other, weaving in and out. They entered the ken building and emerged again by a side door. All the time they were doing this they were calling out “Wassho wassho wassho” ... A policeman explained that it had no special significance but was just a thing that Japanese crowds do to let off steam. Finally the crowd was called to a halt and a committee of about 30 men led by Mr Iwamura ... was

¹³ For example: Air Commodore Geoff Michael, Interview April 1999; Hugh Shackcloth, Interview April 1999; Colonel Colin East, Interview April 1999.

¹⁴ AWM114: 423/10/5, CSDIC Daily Intelligence Reports of BCOF in Japan, Intelligence Report 491, 3 June 1946.

taken to see the Governor (who was probably wringing his hands in the gentlemen's cloak room).¹⁵

BCOF intelligence officers also attended meetings held by left-wing and labour groups. Their main role appears to have been to report on the content of the meeting, whether it had been conducted in an 'orderly manner', and whether there were any 'incidents'.¹⁶ One report on a conference held by the western cell of the Kure Branch of the Japan Communist Party in June 1948 was described by the observer as 'generally dull, partly because the place was lighted by candles due to the electricity cut. Although some questions were asked by non-Communist listeners, the Chairman's answers to them lacked enthusiasm'.¹⁷ Sometimes the presence of BCOF observers was not tolerated. When Nozaka Sanzo, president of the JCP, toured the BCOF area in 1947, it was noted that at one of his meetings, 'security personnel and agents were requested to leave the meeting as their presence was considered incompatible with the principles of democracy and free speech'.¹⁸ At other times, the meetings attempted to use the observers for their own agenda. One BCOF report noted the troubling problem of attempts made by communists 'in some areas' to 'misconstrue' BCOF covering of communist meetings 'in such a way as to give the impression that any speeches made or action carried out by Communists are done with the full approval' of BCOF.¹⁹ Two cases were noted: one where the BCOF officer's remarks were "'accidentally" misquoted ... to give the impression that he more or less approved of the Communist policy regarding the rice delivery programme';²⁰ another where an officer was applauded as he entered the communist-sponsored meeting, and then attempts were 'made to draw him into the meeting in order to create the impression that his presence indicated Occupation Force support'.²¹

Of obvious importance was the monitoring of communist activity, such as that of Nozaka. Educational institutions and teachers' unions were also monitored for such activity. It was alleged that communist cells were gaining influence in universities via "scientific" and "cultural"

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁶ For example AWM114: 130/1/8 Part 1, BCOF Daily Intelligence Reports Nos 117-205, August-October 1946, Report No 139, Meeting of Hiroshima Branch of the Seaman's Federation, Ujima.

¹⁷ AWM114: 423/10/2, [Intelligence – Reports, Postwar Japan:] BCOF, CSDIC – newspaper translations, BCOF reports dealing with Japanese Communist Activities, 1947, Document No 6, pp. 8-9. The report states that the meeting was attended by 35 men, no women, of whom about 17-18 were JCP members.

¹⁸ AWM114: 423/11/10, BCOF MOIR, No 10, February 1947, Nozaka Tour, pp. 29-30.

¹⁹ AWM114: 423/11/15, BCOF MOIR, No 15, August 1947, p.14.

²⁰ *Ibid.*

²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 15.

societies and generally tak[ing] the lead in student demonstrations'.²² BCOF intelligence reports stated that the JCP's plan was

to destroy economic recovery by control of Labour Unions, Trade Unions, Production Farm Associations and Chinese and Korean Blackmarket. It is believed that when the government has been sufficiently discredited, they intend to step in as a Party and control and redirect the government.²³

This report goes on to state that the JCP was intending to establish more cells in 'Farmers' Unions, Labour Unions and all industries' and had 'well-organised cells' already 'operating in the heavy industries around Mihara and Itozaki, Hiroshima and Niihama' which had the aim 'to either incite strikes or to influence others and so gain control of the Union'.²⁴ The influence of Cold War rhetoric was palpable, and provides an interesting contrast to the diplomatic policies and views of External Affairs under Evatt.

A great deal of intelligence was gathered through CSDIC, who interacted with Field Security units. Wood has referred to the interpreters of CSDIC as 'the "barometer" by which the occupiers were enabled to read the "nationals" real feelings'.²⁵ CSDIC translated Japanese material, including intercepted mail. One writer whose letter was intercepted claimed that 'Teachers are infusing Communistic thoughts into the pupils and are neglecting to give them regular lessons'.²⁶ Another letter by a communist writer 'deplore[d] the fact that local communist organizations have frequently been "swallowed by labour unions" which has unfortunately limited the activities of the Party as it "serve[d] to profit labour unions instead of serving as a development of the Communist Party".²⁷ Naturally, communist newspaper and other publications were translated, such as *Akahata* and *Lot*. Even poetry and the arts were censored and translated. Here is one example from *Lot*:

I gaze at my hands,
They are rough soaked with oil
My hands make machines
My hands make roads
Along the path of the red flag,
My hands are progressing
My hands are contributing to Japan's progress
My dirty hands.

²² AWM114: 423/11/13, BCOF MOIR, No 13, May 1947, pp. 12-13.

²³ AWM114: 423/11/15, BCOF MOIR, No 15, August 1947, p. 3.

²⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁵ Wood, *op. cit.*, p. 73.

²⁶ AWM114: 423/11/13, BCOF MOIR, No 13, May 1947, p. 13.

²⁷ AWM114: 423/11/7, BCOF (Japan) MOIR, No 7, 20 November 1946, p. 25.

And another:

A Price of Good Fortune

Is it a fact that rice cakes fall from the skies?
Ask your Manager and you will be surprised at the answer
They speedily dispose of the fruits of our labour
Which is endless.
They find no complaints with the results our efforts produce
After our strenuous efforts, we receive our allowance
Then after giving us this miserable pittance with an overbearing air
They force us to work all night doing extra work
Standing by with folded arms when we get our monthly pay
What of this comrades, is it true or not?
Arise, comrades, battle on anew.²⁸

The Civil Censorship component of General Headquarters, Supreme Commander for the Allied Powers (GHQ/SCAP) developed 'guidelines' for the translation of 'Poetry, Popular Songs and Communist Propaganda Media'.²⁹ The document claimed that

[p]oems published in *Akahata* and other leftist journals and publications invariably follow the prescribed Japan Communist Party ... line. Militant songs urging revenge for "fallen comrades" are frequently used by organizers for rallying purposes of Communist-led demonstrations and strikes. Parodies [which] caricature current popular songs denounce the Yoshida Government and its policies.³⁰

Plays also came under scrutiny. One US field survey report lamented that Australian Field Security forces were not censoring communist plays, which were being shown about three times a month.³¹ Both the local communist leaders and BCOF were chastised for their error.

BCOF intelligence was also often used to forestall strikes, especially if they were deemed to interfere with the Occupation forces. A potential strike by postal employees that 'could have disrupted the Occupation Forces [sic] communications' was said to have been 'averted by the combined efforts of Military Government and the Japanese Government' – note the date of July 1946, well before the intervention of MacArthur in the proposed general strike for 1 February 1947.³² In another, also in 1946, workers in a company were striking in the Yamaguchi prefecture over salary issues. The company had a contract with Occupation forces to supply

²⁸ From *Rotto Magazine No 6*, incorporated in *Akahata*, 10 September 1947. AWM114: 423/10/31, BCOF, CSDIC newspaper translations.

²⁹ National Archives and Records Administration (NARA) 331: 1803(L), Box 8562, Folder: Drafts CCD Section Periodical Summaries No 44.

³⁰ *Ibid.*

³¹ NARA 331 UD: 1803(L), Box 8574, Folder: Field Trips, 'CCD District II PPB Section APO 25', 6 December 1948, p. 1.

³² AWM114: 423/11/3, BCOF MOIR, No 3, 20 July 1946, p. 1.

cement, therefore it was stated that '[a]ction has been initiated to remedy this matter'.³³ Strikes by repatriation ships were also not tolerated. When the crew of a repatriation ship decided to strike at Senzaki in August 1946, the officer in charge of the repatriation centre threatened the captain of the ship 'with disciplinary action', and it thus it sailed.³⁴ Robertson remarked in passing during a discussion on the peace treaty at the Canberra Conference of August-September 1947 that '[o]n one occasion during ... a strike electricity was cut off from the block in which my headquarters are situated. When I spoke to General MacArthur about it, he ordered the strike to cease'.³⁵

Another issue BCOF had to deal with was the soldiers repatriated from the Soviet Union and other theatres of the Asia-Pacific war. This was not just a military-bureaucratic exercise: it had political implications that became more intense further into the Occupation. BCOF monitored three repatriation centres: Ujina, Senzaki and Otake.³⁶ While Japanese ran the centres, they were overseen by BCOF infantry.³⁷ Approximately 700,000 Japanese were repatriated through these centres.³⁸ Roles of the repatriation centres included medical inspection, stripping of military ranks, supply of civilian clothes and sending repatriates home.³⁹ However, another was intelligence gathering, conducted by 36 Field Security. One report from 1947 indicated that 'several of the repatriates, including senior officers, are interviewed to ascertain their views on returning to Japan, political views etc. Special attention to be paid to any being repatriated from Manchuria'.⁴⁰

Early reports were favourable on the political 'aspirations' of the repatriates. A Colonel Fukumoto Majiro, repatriated from Singapore, said 'he was "strongly against Communism and is

³³ AWM114: 423/11/8, BCOF MOIR, No 8, 20 December 1946, pp. 13-14.

³⁴ AWM114: 130/1/8 Part 1, BCOF Daily Intelligence Reports Nos 117-205, August-October 1946 Part 1, Daily Intelligence Report No 143.

³⁵ National Australian Archives (NAA): A1838/283 538/6 Part 1, Verbatim Minutes Canberra Conference, 27 August 1947, p. G4.

³⁶ Bates, *op. cit.*, p. 72.

³⁷ *Ibid.*

³⁸ *Ibid.*; Keith Howes, *BCOF Pictorial: A Pictorial History of Australians who Served in the Armed Forces with the British Commonwealth Occupation Forces in Japan, 1945-1952*, Elsternwick, Victoria: Self-published, 1998, p. 208.

³⁹ Howes, *op. cit.*, p. 208.

⁴⁰ AWM54: 779/9/22, [Prisoner of War and Internees- Exchange and Repatriation:] Statements made by repatriated Japanese Prisoners of War on such matters as treatment in camps, Postwar aims and Japanese Political aspirations [sic], Det 36 Australian Field Security Section, Ujima, 1947.

of the opinion that Communism will never get a stronghold in Japan”.⁴¹ Another, Colonel Kudo Arata, repatriated from Burma, not only criticised communism, but said

in his estimation war between Russian and America [sic] was inevitable because Democracy and Communism could never inter-mingle. He said that when such a war did eventuate Japan could be relied upon to fight on the side of America as Japan would never want to be ruled over by a barbaric country such as Russia.⁴²

BCOF intelligence was concerned, though, that the JCP would try to recruit from the repatriates, especially those later repatriated directly from the USSR. A 1948 report indicated that this was just the case: the communists were ‘by far the most active of the Political groups in the Prefecture’ and could make gains as the repatriates ‘already in most cases had a grounding in the teachings of Communism, [and] by exaggerating the poor living conditions existant in Japan today, and offering lengthy programmes for reform.’⁴³ Intelligence gathered in this manner from the repatriates was shared with the United States.

The banned general strike, scheduled for 1 February 1947, provided more material for intelligence gathering on labour and communism. Prior to the scheduled strike, a BCOF intelligence report referred to the increasing number of strikes around the Prefecture, with many demonstrators waving the red flag and singing the ‘Internationale’. The report notes that ‘[i]t is evident that the Labour Unions are becoming more and more powerful, and the managers of companies are conceding to workers’ demands on an ever-widening scale’.⁴⁴ In Kure, a pre-strike demonstration attracted 1800 members from the Kure Area Communication Department, the Railway Department, a transportation company, and secondary school teachers.⁴⁵ All political parties were noted to be represented, bar the Progressives, and all speeches encouraged participation in the 1 February strike, except one – the Liberal spokesperson. He was, however, ‘shouted down by the mob’.⁴⁶ Reasons given for the strike included the unfair distribution of foodstuffs and the ‘rough treatment the working classes are getting at the hands of the capitalists’.⁴⁷ The report comments that ‘[i]t is not difficult to determine the political origin of this time-worn outcry’.⁴⁸

⁴¹ Statement made on 17 November 1947 in *Ibid.*

⁴² Statement made on 24 July 1947 in *Ibid.*

⁴³ AWM114: 423/11/21 [Intelligence – Intelligence Summaries, Bulleting, Memoranda, Newsletters] BCOF (Japan) Quarterly Occupation Intelligence Review No 3, July-September 1948, p. 6.

⁴⁴ AWM114: 423/11/9, BCOF MOIR, No 9, January 1947, p. 10.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

Unions around the prefecture, especially in Kure, did give assurances to BCOF ‘that there would be NO interference with any Occupation Force projects or hold up in transportation’.⁴⁹ In fact, the Railways and Tramways Departments provided BCOF with a schedule of trains, trams and buses that would be made available to them if the strike went ahead,⁵⁰ thus demonstrating good intention to carry out this promise. The municipal office in Kure intended to keep open ‘vital and humanitarian’ offices and ‘any other department ordered to function by the Allied powers’.⁵¹ Yet the scheduled strike did not eventuate, banned by SCAP the day before. Early intelligence reports on the results of the strike ban indicated that most Japanese ‘looked upon [it] in an economic and NOT a political light’ and the general apathy of most towards the strike.⁵² Interestingly, the Nippon Tsuun Kabushiki Kaisha (Japan Transportation Company) planned to go ahead with its own nationwide strike on its own, but this was forbidden by US Military Government on 2 February 1947.⁵³ Other reports referred to the ‘gratefulness’ of many Japanese for the strike ban – ‘Thank God for General MacArthur,’ one woman is noted as saying, ‘without him the Japanese people would surely have starved.’⁵⁴

There were some who did speak out against the ban. Tokuda Kuichi of the JCP was reported, ‘according to reliable sources of information’, to have criticised the Occupation Forces and declared the ban an illegal violation of the Potsdam Declaration. Further, Tokuda was alleged to have wanted to get hold of the names of Occupation officers who attended communist meeting in order to send them to the Far Eastern Commission (FEC) in Washington so they could ‘have such individuals removed’.⁵⁵ This is an interesting example of how some Japanese left-wing leaders saw the FEC and ACJ as possible avenues through which to criticise the policies of General MacArthur and the United States.

One of the most interesting cases of industrial unrest in the Australian occupied zone occurred in mid-1949, and became known in Australian and United States’ sources as the ‘Hiroshima Incident’. The context in which the ‘Incident’ occurred is significant – this includes the Dodge economic reforms, the ‘reverse course’ of US policy, retrenchment of large numbers of workers,

⁴⁹ AWM114: 423/10/64, BCOF Monthly Occupation Intelligence Summaries, January 1947, p. 1.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

⁵¹ AWM114: 423/10/64, BCOF Monthly Occupation Intelligence Summaries, February 1947, pp. 5-6.

⁵² *Ibid.*

⁵³ *Ibid.*

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 2.

⁵⁵ AWM114: 423/11/15 BCOF MOIR, No 15, August 1947.

the increase in the number of communists elected to the Diet in the 1949 elections, and the escalation of the Cold War in general. On 2 June 1949, the Nihon Seikosho, or the Hiroshima plant of the Japan Steel Manufacturing Company, announced that around 700 workers (out of around 2000) would be dismissed due to the financial hardship of the company.⁵⁶ On 10 June, employees went on strike and demands were made by the union, aided by the use of intimidation tactics, for an interview with the company president.⁵⁷ Demonstrations were carried on around the factory, and other groups sympathising with the cause joined forces.⁵⁸ Occupation authorities ordered the workers to disperse, but they were ignored.⁵⁹

About 1800 members of the Iron and Steel Company Workers' Union and their supporters (the report referred to them as a 'mob') entered the factory by use of force on 12 June.⁶⁰ The factory was closed on the 14th, and on the 15th events came to a head with 2100 demonstrators on the factory site.⁶¹ Around 750 Japanese police entered the plant and dispersed the demonstrators, and 30 police were injured.⁶² Twenty-eight demonstrators were arrested on charges of unlawful entry into the building and/or illegal detention and causing injury.⁶³

BCOF military police, Field Security and Military Government representatives attended the demonstration as observers, and on the night of the 15th, two platoons of BCOF troops entered the factory to support the Japanese police in anticipation that workers would attempt to reoccupy the

⁵⁶ Figures of the workers to be dismissed varies: 720-730 in NARA 331: Series 1387(L), Box 2196, Folder: Hiroshima Labor Disputes, Government Section Central Files, Miscellaneous Subject Files; 712 in MacArthur Memorial Archives (MMA): RG-6, Box 105, Folder: 3, Spot Intelligence, November 1947-August 1949, 'Labor Disorder in Hiroshima, Spot Intelligence Report to Chief of Staff', 16 June 1949; 622 in NARA 331: 1402(L), Box 2275EE, Folder: Hiroshima Area Committee Incident, 'Memorandum for General Napier' 10 February 1950; 6000 in NAA: A1838/280 3103/2/1/1 Part 1, Cablegram Australian Mission Japan to External Affairs, 10 October 1949, p. 3. The latter Australian report probably confused the number of demonstrators with the number of workers to be dismissed.

⁵⁷ NARA 331: 1402(L), Box 2275EE, Folder: Hiroshima Area Committee Incident, 'Memorandum for Major Napier', 10 February 1950.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

⁶⁰ MMA: RG-6, Box 105, Folder: 3, Spot Intelligence November 1947-August 1949, 'Spot Intelligence Labor Disorder in Hiroshima to Chief of Staff', 16 June 1949. Supporters included the Electrical Workers' Union, Private Railway Workers' Union and Teacher Unions.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*

⁶² *Ibid.* Early reports stated that 200-300 demonstrators were injured and two workers died, but these claims were later refuted.

⁶³ NARA 331: 1402(L), Box 2275EE, Folder: Hiroshima Area Committee Incident, list of those arrested and on trial at Hiroshima District Court. All were later released. [NARA 331: Series 1386(L), Box 2196, Folder: Hiroshima Incident Files, GHQ/SCAP Government Section Memorandum for the Record, 12 July 1949.]

building.⁶⁴ The Australian troops reported that there were only about 150 workers outside the building, singing ‘The Internationale’, and after a ‘routine inspection’ of several hours, withdrew once satisfied that the police had things under control.⁶⁵

The BCOF involvement in the Hiroshima Incident may have been small, but it had wider political repercussions. The Japan Steel Manufacturing Company was scheduled as a reparations plant, and therefore under military government surveillance.⁶⁶ Thus the incident was of interest beyond Hiroshima. Additionally, on the FEC a debate was underway concerning the revisions to the National Public Service Law (NPSL) in Japan, and both Australia and the Soviet Union had presented proposals to restore the rights of government workers to strike and/or access independent arbitration machinery that the revisions had removed. During one such debate, the Soviet representative raised the issue of Australian troop involvement in the ‘Hiroshima Incident’ ‘when the mobbing of workers by the Jap[anese] police occurred’.⁶⁷ This was an obvious attempt to discredit the Australian FEC representative. The leftist magazine, *New Times*, also referred to the use of Australian soldiers ‘to suppress the workers of Hiroshima’.⁶⁸ The ideological repercussions of troop involvement in the incident were obvious: it was used by the Soviets to embarrass the Australian government on the FEC, who at that time were attempting to portray themselves as the Allied representative of Japanese labour interests. It also articulated the divide between political/diplomatic and military interests, where military action was taken to maintain order, reopen the plant and support management, in contradiction to the political stance of Australian diplomats to protect the perceived rights of Japanese workers.

BCOF had another relationship with Japanese workers, as it was a large employer of labour. This compromised any role it might play in advocating worker interests in its role to promote ‘democratisation’ and a pro-labour government agenda. Approximately 40,000 Japanese were hired by BCOF for various roles, including domestic duties, labouring and cleaning.⁶⁹ These

⁶⁴ NAA: A1838/280 3103/2/1/1 Part 1, Cablegram Australian Mission Japan to External Affairs, 10 October 1949; NARA 331: UD 1803(L), Box 8571, Folder: 24, ‘Aussie Troops Enter Hiroshima Factory’, John Rich (International News Service Staff Correspondent), 16 June 1949.

⁶⁵ NAA: A1838/280 3103/2/1/1 Part 1, Cablegram Australian Mission Japan to External Affairs, 10 October 1949; NARA 331: UD 1803(L), Box 8571, Folder: 24, ‘Aussie Troops Enter Hiroshima Factory’, John Rich (International News Service Staff Correspondent), 16 June 1949.

⁶⁶ NAA: A1838/280 3103/2/1/1 Part 1, Cablegram Australian Mission Japan to External Affairs, 10 October 1949.

⁶⁷ MMA: Department of Army to SCAP, 23 July 1949.

⁶⁸ V. Krylov, ‘Four Years After: Tokyo Letter’, *New Times*, No 40, 1949, p. 27.

⁶⁹ Wood, *op. cit.*, p. 80.

workers formed their own unions based nationwide on area or region, rather than occupation. For example, there was the Kure District Union of Occupation Workers, or the Hiro Occupation Force Employees' Association.⁷⁰ The Occupation Workers unions did not have 'the bargaining power of a normal union', and had instructions from Military government:

- A) that in case of political action they may not represent themselves as being supported by the Occupation Force.
- B) that they make no demands on either the Japanese Government or the Occupation Forces that will embarrass the objectives of the Occupation.⁷¹

Nevertheless, there were a number of strikes held by employees of BCOF over the course of the Occupation. For instance, in 1946 a decision was made to increase the wages of Japanese labourers for BCOF from ¥600 to ¥900 a month after 'labour troubles', though it was noted that strikes were continuing and 'evidence of communist influence appears to be increasing'.⁷² In 1947, it was noted that 'the Chief of the Communist Party' in the Yamaguchi area had been making speeches and putting up posters that stated: 'Japanese employed by the Occupation Forces were not receiving sufficient wages' and therefore he was 'being closely watched by tactical troops in the area'.⁷³ Concern with communist influence on BCOF workers continued throughout the Occupation, and only became more intense towards the end of the Occupation with the outbreak of the Korean War.

Strategic and military interests combined with political roles created a confused relationship between BCOF and the Japanese labour movement. A number of anecdotes further demonstrate this. The BCOF Quarterly Occupation Intelligence Review, from mid-1948, stated: 'People in Hiroshima Prefecture are not on the whole politically-minded but the few sections of the community who do show interest in political affairs are worthy of note'.⁷⁴ Political activity was nearly always conceived in negative terms. Those 'worthy of note' obviously referred to communists or communist-sympathisers generally, but also often to specific groups that had known discrimination under Japanese government and, due to this history of oppression and

⁷⁰ AWM114: 423/11/25 [Intelligence – Intelligence Summaries, Bulleting, Memoranda, Newletters:] BCOF (Japan) Security Bulletin Nos 5,6,10,11,13,14, October 1946-July 1947, Security Bulletin No 13, 25 June 1947, p. 4; AWM114: 423/10/5 [Intelligence – Reports, Postwar Japan:] BCOF, CSDIC Daily Intelligence Reports of BCOF Japan.

⁷¹ AWM114: 423/11/25 [Intelligence – Intelligence Summaries, Bulleting, Memoranda, Newletters:] BCOF (Japan) Security Bulletin Nos 5,6,10,11,13,14, October 1946-July 1947, 'Report from 904 British Field Security', 16 May 1947.

⁷² AWM114: 423/11/6, BCOF MOIR, No 6, 20 October 1946, p. 1.

⁷³ AWM114: 423/11/6, BCOF MOIR, No 10, February 1947, p. 4.

⁷⁴ AWM114: 423/11/21 [Intelligence Summaries, Bulletins, Memoranda, Newsletters:] BCOF (Japan) Quarterly Occupation Intelligence Review, No 3, July-September 1948, p. 6.

economic hardship, had become 'politicised'. One group was the Koreans. 'The main nuisance value attributed to these people,' went one Royal Australian Air Force (RAAF) report, 'is the fact that they are always in the vanguard of any demonstrations and parades that may be held in the area.'⁷⁵ Also noted were the burakumin (or eta), and their Liberation League. In reaction to one demonstration, it was said 'Communists in the area evidently urged the Liberation League into staging the demonstration and thereby gain more friends among the 'ETA' class'.⁷⁶ By equating these groups and their political activities *solely* with communism, and thereby inhibiting their political development, BCOF was complicit in allowing discrimination against these groups to continue.

Examples from within BCOF can further illuminate these attitudes. A young Australian school teacher, Colin Cullen, went to teach the children of BCOF families in Nijimura. However, he liked to read George Bernard Shaw, and was reading *An Intelligent Woman's Guide to Capitalism, Socialism and Communism*. It concerned one Brigadier that such a person was instructing their children. Cullen was eventually discharged, and seemed to fulfil the concerns who shared the Brigadier's disapproval by becoming an official of the Australian Labor Party.⁷⁷ In a further example, a planned strike by the BCOF teachers was averted, and subsequently the head of the Australian Army's education services in Japan wrote in his memoirs: 'It would have been a major calamity had there been an outbreak of the Australian disease in a community such as ours.'⁷⁸

Thus, there was an obvious tension between the political aims of the Australian Chifley Labor government and the military/strategic concerns and practices of the Australian occupation forces. In the context of the Cold War and the 'reverse course'⁷⁹ of US policy in occupied Japan, the BCOF approach to labour issues paralleled the anti-communist, anti-labour, pro-management concerns of later US policy. The Australian government, at least until late 1949,⁸⁰ continued to pursue a different, pro-labour policy agenda on the FEC and the ACJ. At certain times, as with

⁷⁵ AWM114: 423/10/20, BCOF: RAAF No 77 (Fighter) Squadron – Intelligence security survey of Iwakuni Area, p. 20.

⁷⁶ AWM54: 883/2/95, [Security-Allied:] Routine Reports 36 Australian Field Security Okayama Part 1 – Military, Part II - Civil Security, 1948, 'Routine Report', 30 November 1948, p. 6.

⁷⁷ Arthur John, *Uneasy Lies the Head that Wears the Crown*, Cheltenham, 1987, p. 115.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 99-100.

⁷⁹ The 'reverse course' is a label given to the ostensible policy change of the US government in Japan, one that moved from reform to rebuilding the economy and signaled the end of the early occupation influence from the 'New Dealers'. One manifestation of the 'reverse course' was changes to labour policy, especially the NPSL that removed the right to strike for all government employees (1948-1949).

⁸⁰ In December 1949 the ALP lost government to the Menzies' Liberal government.

the 'Hiroshima Incident', one approach served to directly undermine the other. While the Labor government viewed the Japanese labour movement as a positive antidote to Japanese militarism, BCOF views were far more ambivalent – they could be used for 'good', but were more often perceived to be siding with the 'evil' of communism. The example of BCOF and labour reform in Japan demonstrates the great paradox that is the ostensible pursuit of civilian political ideals of 'democratisation' by the means of foreign military occupation.