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STORIES FROM THE COAL MOUTH

An ethnographic account of a Japanese coalmining community's past and present

*My wing is ready for flight,
I would like to turn back.
If I could have stayed timeless time,
I would have little luck.*

Gerard Scholem, *Gruss vom Angelus*

Matthew Allen

Thesis submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, Department of Anthropology, University of Sydney, February 1991

This thesis is dedicated to my friend, Fujito Hisao, who so tragically passed away in 1990

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Fiona George who has had to endure the tortuous demands placed on our private and financial commitments for almost four years, and who has given birth to a beautiful child in the process, has been a source of strength throughout the project. Her proof-reading of the thesis probably saved the marker from the agonies of having to read an illiterate text. My parents, too, have been a source of both encouragement and assistance, and I owe a great debt to my father for his reading of the last draft.

I would also like to thank the Department of Economic History at Sydney University for their generous financial and moral support over the past months. Employing an anthropologist as a lecturer in an economic history department was a decision that I imagine was not taken lightly by the department. Yet this is hopefully a sign that there will be more interdisciplinary communication between the humanities in the years ahead.

I am also grateful for the support I received from the students and staff at Kyushu University while I was conducting the research.

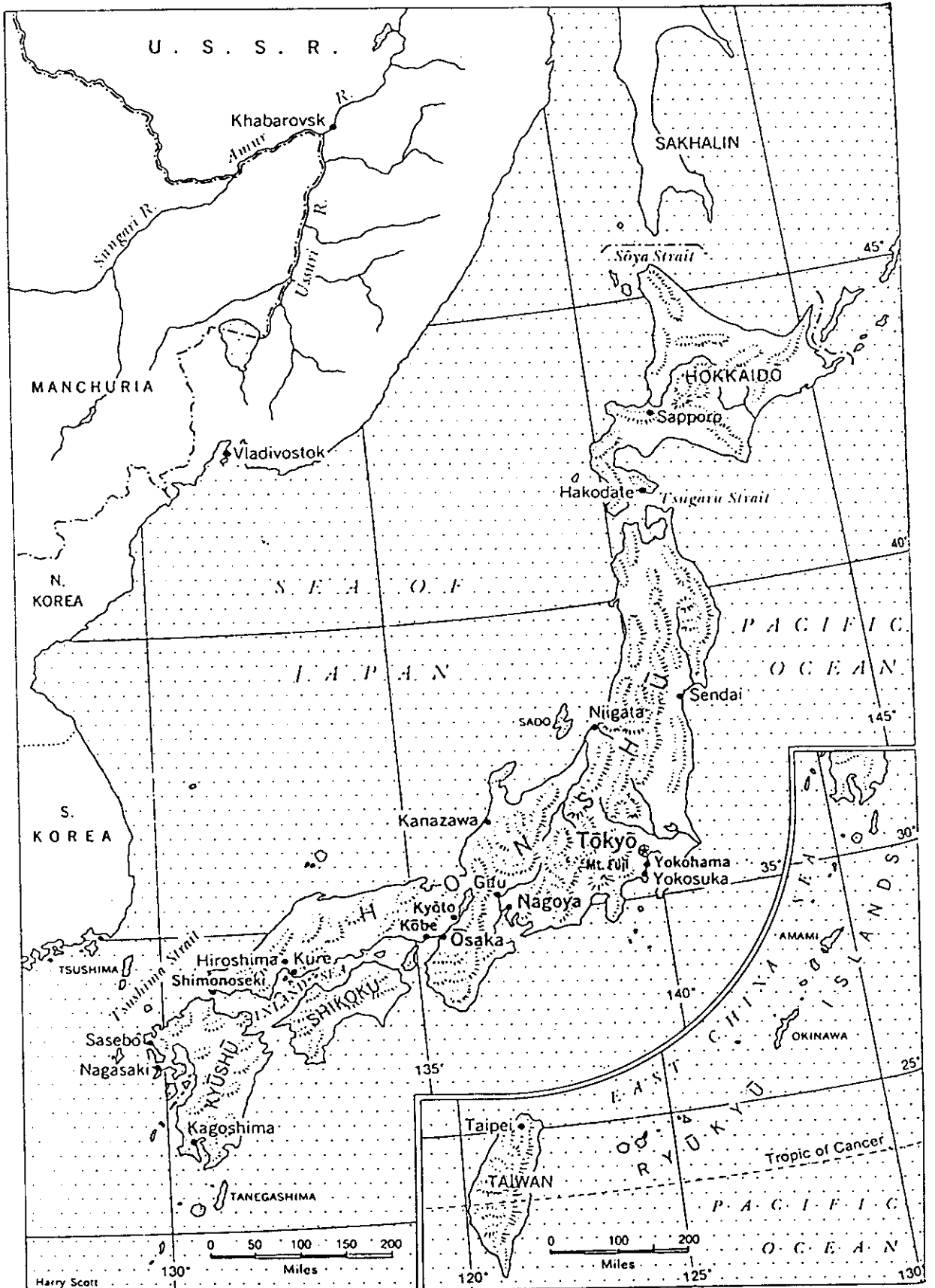
It is the Chikuho people whom I have quoted or paraphrased in the thesis to whom I owe the greatest debts. Amongst many others are Tatefuji Kazuko, the woman who adopted me as her son; Idegawa Hanako, who showed me something of the underbelly of life in Chikuho; Onishi Keisuke, whose constant haranguing and arguments forced me to adopt a critical approach to the information I received; Nakanishi Mikie, for her help in translating local dialect into standard Japanese and her hospitality in the early days of the research; the people from the local welfare office; and Mr Sato, who showed me that you do not necessarily have to be cruel to be kind, but that it can be fun. I hope that I have been able to represent the area in a manner of which these people approve.

Notes on the translation

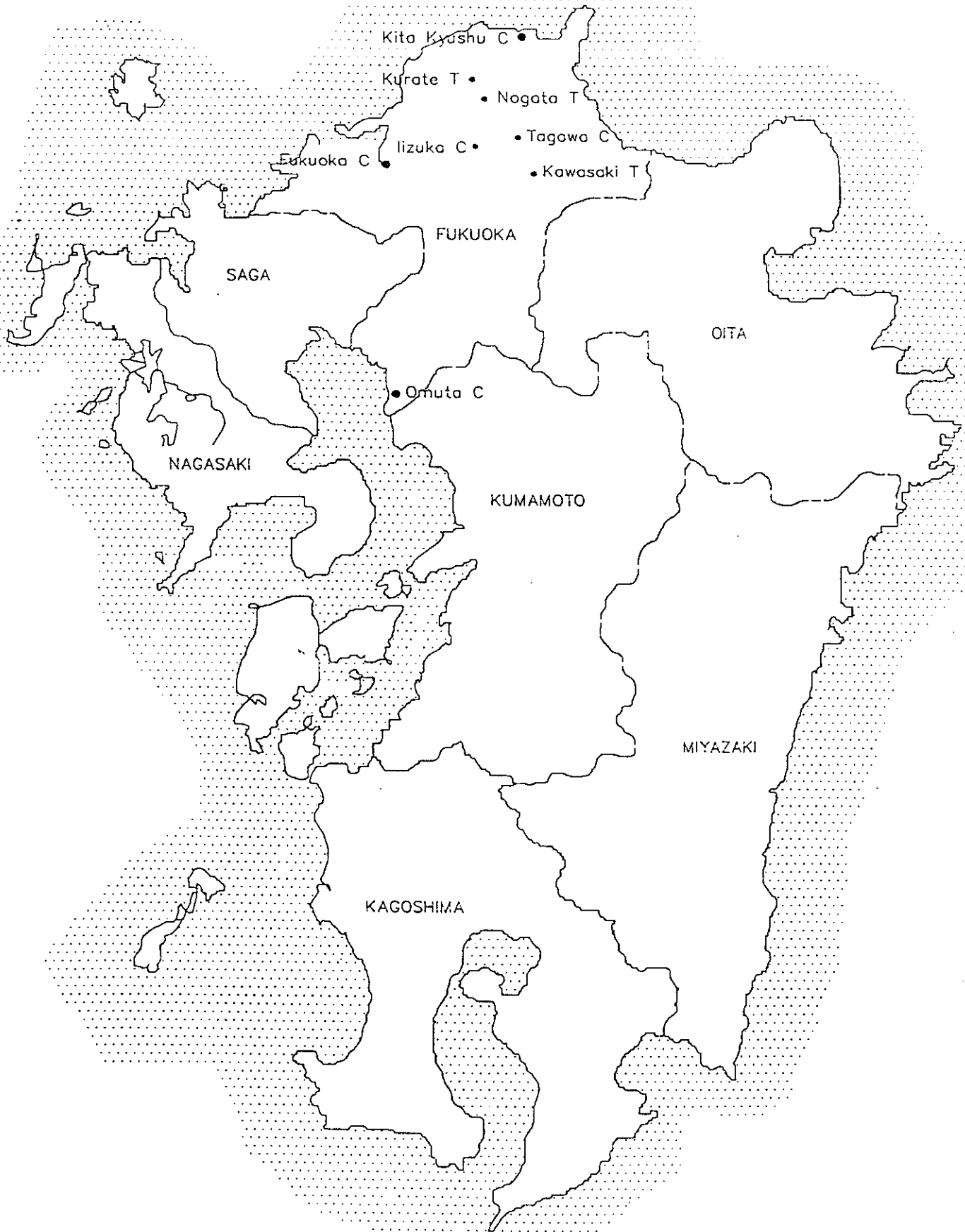
All the Japanese language material was translated by myself, and I take full responsibility for some of the more colourful interpretations. I have tried to render the content of informants' accounts true to form, and I have chosen to use some vigorous English slang to give these comments the same power to shock that they have in Japanese. I hope that the style in which I have portrayed them is not offensive.

The material I have used for quotations is from taped interviews I conducted with Chikuho people during the course of two years' research in Kyushu between 1987 and 1989.

Map 1



MODERN JAPAN.

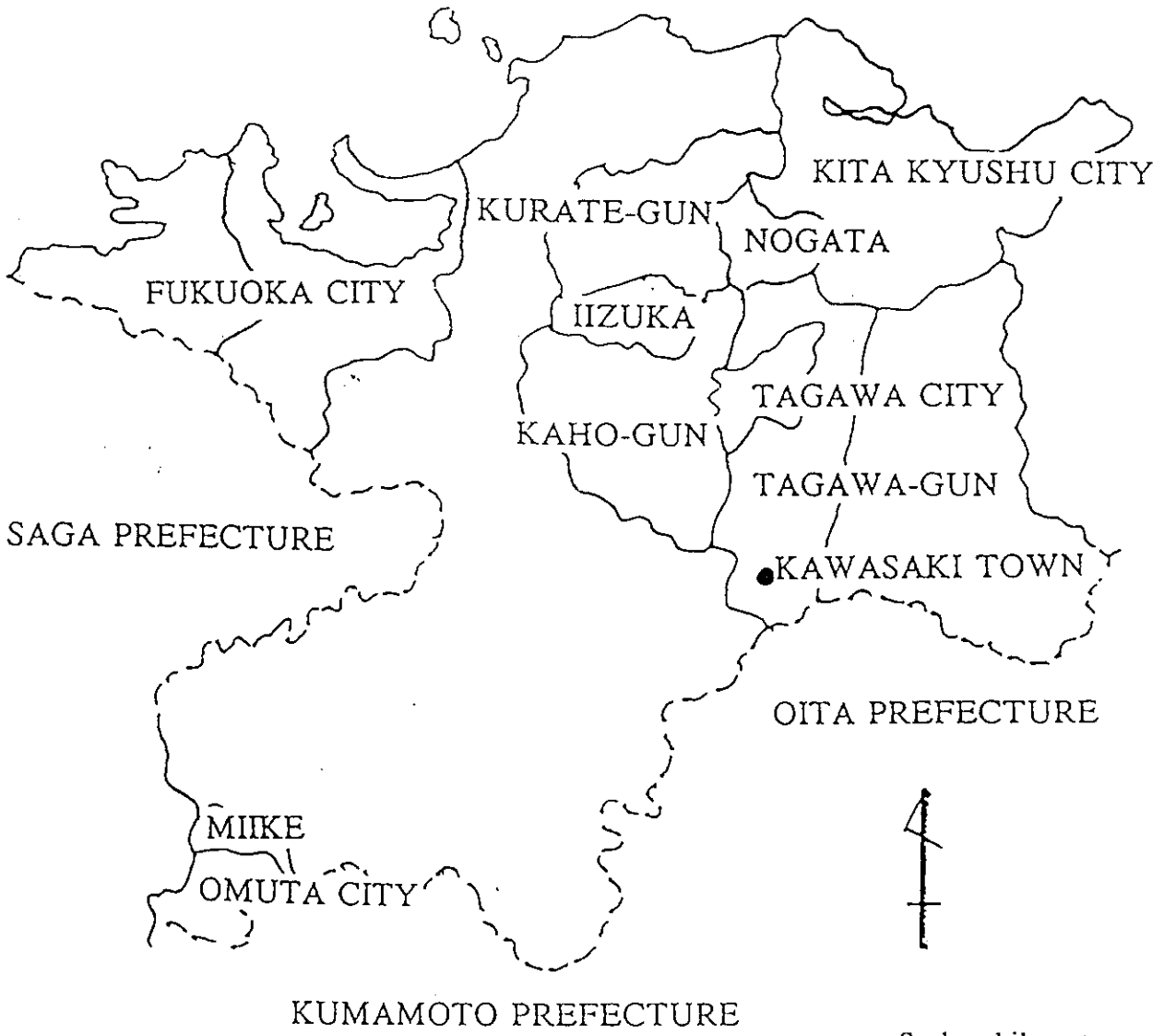


SCALE — KILOMETRES

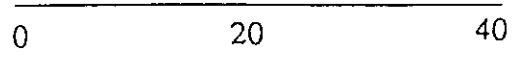


Map 3

FUKUOKA PREFECTURE AND CHIKUHO



Scale - kilometres



INTRODUCTION

There is a widespread impression in the west that Japanese society is qualitatively different to the rest of the world. "The Japanese," "the salary man," "the blue collar worker," "the traditional housewife" are labels which are used to describe different types of Japanese. The style of analysis which has dominated the English language literature on Japan since the 1960s and 1970s essentially expresses the view that Japan is unique, and that its economic, cultural, religious and social development is based on the historical development of Japan's idiosyncratic culture.

In Australia, Mouer and Sugimoto (1986) have attempted to revise some of these interpretations of Japanese society, variously called *nihonjinron* (Japanese theory), *nihonbunkaron* (Japanese cultural theory), and *nihonshakairon* (Japanese social theory). They have identified a number of problems associated with the *nihonjinron* approach. Firstly they have criticised the depiction of Japan as a single, monolithic entity, based on a "holistic" model of society, which refutes the notion that there is a range of individuals and groups operating independently within society. Secondly they have criticised the often cited and complementary model of Japan as a unique, consensus-based, vertically integrated society described along the lines articulated first by Aruga in the 1940s¹, and modified only slightly by the work of Nakane (1970, 1971), Doi (1962, 1973), De Vos (1973, 1975) and the popular school of Japan experts which arose in the wake of Japan's rapid economic development in the 1970s. Their fundamental criticism of these works is that the concepts of social, political and economic conflict cannot be accommodated within the models. Their criticisms are quite pertinent, I believe, to developing an informed understanding of Japanese society - one which considers Japan not as a single, insular society which is either a model for western nations to emulate or to be cautious of, but as one of a great

¹see, for example *Nihon Kazoku Seido to Kōsaku Seido* (The Japanese Family System and Tenant System) 1943

number of capitalist societies, which has had some spectacular economic successes in the years following the Second World War.

The rise of interest in Japan was precipitated by its success as a net exporter of manufactured goods from the 1960s onwards. The "economic miracle," an expression which was first quoted in *The Economist* magazine in 1963, was the subject of much controversy within economic and political circles. Some analysts like Kahn (1970) and Johnson (1982) maintained that Japan's meteoric rise to success was achieved through bureaucratic and private enterprise cooperation, long term, sophisticated planning, and the ability to identify market niches for their products. The wage-labour/capital relation was typified as including harmonious, cooperative enterprise unionism. Certainly the manufacturers' ability to keep prices low and quality high was evidence that industrial cooperation at management/government and worker/management levels was more developed in Japan than in most other OECD countries.

Many studies then concentrated on "learning from Japan," emphasising lessons which foreign countries in general, and the United States in particular, could learn about management techniques and labour relations.² These studies, to varying degrees, were driven by the desire to analyse the success of Japanese economic practice in relation to western management theory. As Dore pointed out in *British Factory-Japanese Factory*, there is an overwhelming concern amongst western economists to see Japanese economics as somehow unnatural, and to explain the differences between neo-classical western economic theory and Japanese economic theory as being caused by "very special 'cultural factors'."³ Dore's position is eminently sensible and can be substantiated in light of the mass of information and opinion about Japan which was published during the 1970s and 80s. Studies of companies are interesting and revealing in that they reflect the ideals of their authors as much as their empirical content.

²see, for example, Abeggan, 1970 and 1973; Pascale and Athos, 1981; Reischauer, 1978; and Vogel, 1980

³1973: 418

The work of Kamata (1982) which describes in horrifying detail his experience on the Toyota production line, is in marked contrast with the work of Morita Akira, the Sony chairman, in his book, *Made in Japan*. Both books deal with the concept of Japanese industrial competitiveness, but from different ends of the spectrum. Kamata describes the slave-like pace at which the workers are expected to perform, the pressures placed on the men to conform to company regulations after hours as well as on the line, and the way he actually does, unconsciously sometimes, himself conform to the system. Morita describes the efficiency of management methods, the streamlining approach to quality control, and the cooperation between workers, both within their work groups, and vertically with their union bosses and management. He depicts a system of paternalistic benevolence. Two very different books about companies within the same system are almost diametrically opposed in their attitudes towards how the company is portrayed. Essentially this is an example of the split within the discipline between liberal and Marxist commentators.

Although Japanese Marxists have done a considerable amount of work on companies in the Marxist vein, the United States' liberal, anti-Marxist stance, prevents much of this work being translated or published in the United States. Criticisms of Japan, especially from the United States, therefore tend to accept the structural constraints which have been imposed by ethnocentric western economic analyses, and arguments are housed within this dominant paradigm. Particularly the arguments that Japanese government agencies are too supportive of industry and agriculture, that there is a need for Japan to become more credit and less savings oriented, that the labour force is too passive, that non-tariff barriers are impermeable, and that the people work too hard and do not have enough leisure time, would have been patently ridiculous just a few years ago. But these are the substance of the United States' current grievances with Japan, and are based on the same economic principles on which the United States itself based its international trade policies until recently.⁴

⁴see, for example *Structural Impediments Initiative*, the Interim Report of which was published in April 1990

Underpinning these concepts of economic relativism are the behaviourist concepts of the *nihonjinron* theorists. Economic rationalism has been a strong incentive for United States scholars to attempt to understand more fully aspects of Japanese society in the "learn from Japan" mould, because the alternatives couched within a Marxist dialectic are inadequate. As such, many authors have turned to the Japan experts from the *nihonjinron* field. One leader in the field of behaviourists is Nakane Chie. In her book she states that Japanese society is organised around the concept of vertical integration. Conflicts, when they occur do not occur vertically between workers and capitalists, but between companies, which are horizontally integrated and controlled environments. Thus social disturbances, such as the 1960 Tokyo Student Movement riots, can be dismissed as "mass hysteria," rather than being seen within the context of other social and economic rebellions.⁵

The work of De Vos, a social psychologist, follows closely the guidelines established by Nakane, in reifying the "cultural characteristics of the Japanese." Comparing Japanese with people of "western nations" - which for him is the United States generalised - using primary and secondary sociological data, he concludes that Japanese are hierarchically bound by formal relationships and place great emphasis on group solidarity, while westerners are much more horizontally oriented, placing emphasis on individualism.⁶ Many Japanese authors have corroborated this emphasis on the group, and the vertical structure of society. However, like views which reduce culture to a single variable in the recipe for economic success, the cultural uniqueness argument is unable to deal with concepts such as violence, intimidation, coercion, power and repression, which are as pervasive in Japanese society as in other developed economies.

These overarching macro perspectives have their place, and they certainly include elements which "ring true" about certain social classes and values, but they neglect fundamental issues which lie at the root of most attempts to analyse society.

⁵see Nakane, 1970; cited in Mouer and Sugimoto, 1986: 11

⁶De Vos, 1973

There is a need to seek deeper understandings. Just as in any other society, Japan is made up of individuals. Yet on reading the literature on "the Japanese" which the *nihonjinron* people have produced over the years, one receives the impression that there is a peculiar "Japanese character," and that there is no place for individuals within their models of social structure. Statistical interpretations of Japanese society often stress the emphasis which Japanese themselves place on the concept of "middle class." This image of a homogeneous, classless society is implicit within the writing of many *nihonjinron* authors.

However people who live in Japan do not necessarily conform to the stereotypical images of "Mr and Mrs Salaryman" and their children. There are criminals, jokers, conmen, drug addicts, hookers, Neo Nazi cultists, *yakuza*, Bikies, Red Army personnel, Buraku Liberation League people, and Early Morning Housewives' Club members, to name just a few. While it cannot be argued that there is no consensus in Japanese society, and while it is also true to say that there appears to be a more group-oriented consciousness within Japan than in many western developed nations, there is also conflict, violence, poverty, sorrow and isolation. The writings of the *nihonjinron* school, and the culture and personality approaches to sociological understanding of Japanese society have basically employed an Americo-centric methodology to confirm the impression that there are substantial differences between Japanese and American societies.

There is a need, therefore, to investigate some of the conflict in society on a more fundamental level - one that allows an interpretation of the flexibility of social discourse. For all the erstwhile attempts at understanding the miracle of Japanese economic recovery, and for all the attempts to flesh out the cultural and behavioural aspects of Japanese society, there has been little fine-grained community level study of Japanese society.

During the 1930s Embree (1972) wrote what was to become a seminal piece of work on a village in Kyushu. As a piece of anthropology it was well-argued but conservative, avoiding conclusions about difficult topics such as power and the relationship the village had with the outside world. More recently other studies by a group of anthropologists and other social scientists from UCLA, and

Dore's study of Shinohata (1978) have been welcome additions to the field. However, overall the anthropology of foreigners in Japan is noteworthy for its minimal production of text.

Coalmining in Japan

Coalmining in Japan has, for the most part, been ignored by sociologists and anthropologists. Yet coalmining in other countries has received considerable attention. Since the 1950s when Henriques, Dennis and Slaughter (1956) wrote about Ashton, a town in the north of England, and revolutionised the perception of coalmining communities by sociology, a considerable amount of anthropological and sociological research in this area has been conducted. Nash (1979), in her influential study of tin miners in Bolivia, used powerful prose to describe the relationship between the miners and their capacity to transform commodity fetishism into an idiosyncratic synthesis of culture and history, while still emphasising the relations of an exploitative capitalist economy which depended on the extraction of minerals. In the United States, Gaventa (1980) described an Appalachian coalmining community, reifying Stephen Lukes' thesis of power relations. In Australia, Metcalfe (1988) has recently produced a sophisticated interpretative account of coalmining in Kurri using a Marxist frame of analysis. In Great Britain, Douglass and Krieger (1983) wrote a seminal ethnographic account of how coalminers perceive their world and their work.

Perhaps because mining is seen as one of the more archetypal examples of capitalist exploitation of workers, most anthropology of this industry has been couched in Marxist terms. Indeed it is hard to avoid coming to the conclusion that workers are tied to the means of production in a more obvious, physical manner than in most other industries. In Japan, where there is a strong tradition of Marxist thought, it is surprising that so little work has been done on the mining industry, which was the cornerstone of the economy for many years of the twentieth century. Of the work that has been done in this area, only the writing of Ueno Eishin has emphasised the Marxist tradition within an anthropological framework. Other writing on the subject has tended to view the

coal industry as being part of the overall economy within which Japan has moved to change its status from "developing country" to "industrial power." While acknowledging the role of the coal industry in Japan's economic development, this interpretation of coalmining has inevitably overlooked the nature of work within the industry, and has conspicuously by-passed the role of the people of the coalmining communities.

Today, as the last of the coal is being dug from the Mitsui Miike mine in Omuta City in Fukuoka Prefecture, and from the Hokutan and Mitsubishi mines in Hokkaido, the coalfields typically are areas where there is high welfare dependence, endemic poverty and a wide range of social "problems," which ostensibly are not found in other areas of Japan (although the Osaka and Yokohama areas display some statistical similarities in relation to crime, in particular). Government policy favouring oil as a source of energy has seen the decline of the coal industry over the past 35 years. While the large corporations which had controlled mining have diversified to other industries, the human remnants of the mining years remain on the former coalfields, living in poverty and dependent on welfare. It is their story which is the subject of this thesis.

The relationship between the existence of the coal companies and the existence of high welfare dependence in Chikuho is neither coincidental nor particularly unexpected. However the exceptionally high (30%) and continuing incidence of welfare dependence in some areas within Chikuho, some 30 years after the mines closed down, is noteworthy. Chikuho was perhaps best known for its coal production, the labour riots in the 1960s, and its history of violence, usually associated with the *yakuza*, the gangs of criminals generally referred to as the "Japanese mafia." These days it is known as a backwater, a place where the remnants of a bygone era still make their presence felt; the slag heaps dominate the landscape, and deserted, dilapidated buildings abound.

It was the stories of violence within the mines at the turn of the century which first drew my attention in the area. I heard stories of men being killed over a cup of *sake*, Korean miners lynched after trying to escape, *yakuza*

assassins going down the mines, killing troublemakers and leaving their bodies at the face. These stories were told to me in a very matter-of-fact manner. It was assumed that I would believe them because they were ostensibly true.

Further enquiries revealed that there was more to these stories than I had at first thought. Stories emerged of darkest despair, of pernicious violence which reached levels I could not have imagined, of terror in the mines which paralleled the accounts of Nash of the tinminers of Bolivia. But the most disturbing aspect of these stories was that they were stories of only 30 years ago, the time when Japan embarked upon its path to economic success.

Methodology

Over recent years the links between anthropology and other disciplines have become more substantial, reflecting the anthropologist's concern with a wider range of issues, not necessarily within traditional paradigms. Clifford and Marcus (1986), for example, have concerned themselves with the links between anthropology and literature. I have attempted to link ethnography with history, both oral and written. Further, by imposing a necessarily selective interpretation of events and ideas I have thrust myself into the thesis, with the aim of documenting the past and the present day attempts of miners and ex-miners to resuscitate their future.

Rather than employing a conventional class analysis, I have chosen to concentrate on how people think about their past. Unfortunately people do not necessarily remember the past with clarity, and seldom do they see events in the same way that academics interpret them with the benefit of hindsight. Historically, the introduction of energy related legislation which promoted the widespread use of oil over coal as Japan's major energy source had a profound influence on the coal communities, but to many people who lived in the communities, the legislation itself was peripheral. They were more concerned with the basic stuff of human existence - food, shelter, clothing and incomes. Moreover, for many coalminers and their families a major concern they faced

when the industry was in decline was surviving the violence which was so pervasive, particularly in the smaller coal companies.

To grasp something of how Chikuho people themselves perceive their past I have employed an approach which owes a debt to, amongst others, Walter Benjamin (1977). His concept of the storyteller helps to understand how people see themselves in society and how they remember the past. Although there are perhaps apocryphal elements involved in many of the stories I was told, the important thing to bear in mind is that these stories are validated within the community. The tradition of storytelling in Japan is well established, and the role of storytellers in performing a cohesive, binding community function is widely accepted, particularly within coalmining communities where technology was always slow to penetrate. Within the thesis I have inserted a number of character portraits of storytellers, each with different, specialised stories to tell. This is to create an effect of montage, much in the way that Taussig (1987) attempted in his book on the South American rubber traders.

It is my opinion that "scientific inquiry" into the human condition is doomed to failure, because approaches which purport to understand "objectively" the nature of man necessarily are reliant on statistical pictures painted from unreliable and selective sampling. I think that inquiries related to human beings are intrinsically subjective, reflecting the author's personal viewpoint, background, training, and personality. Because of this stance I have chosen to represent this study as truly subjective, including myself within the text. In this sense I too, am a storyteller, albeit one with a limited and ethnocentric understanding of a society which is as complicated as any other, and one who presents his own, selective interpretation of certain aspects of society.

The story I will present reveals some aspects of Japanese society which have been largely ignored. It attempts to extract concepts of power which underlie the accounts of the actions and the consciousness which developed. It attempts to isolate ideas, thoughts, and a sense of purpose which pervaded the region in the wake of the revivalists.

I hope that I will be able to offer some insights into extremes of behaviour within an extreme industry. Just as most positive actions have, at

some stage, a negative reaction, Chikuho mining stands out as an example of the manipulation of raw power in an environment which itself was totally manipulated. Like the angel who can no longer close his wings and fly against the storm of progress in Benjamin's *Theses on the Philosophy of History*,⁷ the coal industry was swept toward the future, leaving debris in its wake. This human debris, and their children have become the new poor - the welfare dependents of the present. That the welfare situation today revolves around the past dependence of the Chikuho communities on the coal industry should speak for itself.

Part I is an overview. I describe the area, the history of coalmining and introduce a man who is a storyteller. The overview of coalmining is rather political-economic in orientation to provide the reader with a background in which to place the stories. I also introduce some of my own experiences with the media, which is concluded in Part IV.

In Part II, I look at the issue of violence, and at how the miners within Chikuho learned to accept that violence and terror were part of their daily lives. The apparent equanimity with which they approached this extraordinarily brutal regime I have called the routinisation of violence, in much the same way that Hannah Arendt described the Nazi decimation of the Jews in the Second World War.⁸ Following this trend, I look at the most brutal of the Chikuho mines, the Hoshu mine in Kawasaki. Relying on newspaper accounts of the day, and informant accounts I attempt to reconstruct the events which occurred when the mine flooded. I view these events as a reactionary attempt to coerce the workforce to accept negligible compensation. The miners' fear and the co-option of the union in the face of extremely violent sanctions allowed the mine owner to steer the blame, and hence the responsibility for the accident away from himself.

⁷1977: 259

⁸1977: 33-34

In contrast to the Hoshu mine, I will then introduce the Kyo no Ue mine, a mine where the No1 union went on strike for 101 days in 1962. Management attempts to compromise the union using the standard (for Chikuho) method of direct violence will be examined. The union's ability to stand up to the pressure of the mine over a matter of principle is in stark contrast to the situation at Hoshu. I shall examine the issue of the development of labour related consciousness in that conclusion. A character sketch of another storyteller who was employed in the Hoshu mine is also presented.

In Part III I introduce the people I call the Chikuho revivalists, some of their attempts to oppose the official interpretations of coalmining history in Chikuho, and some of the ways they have attempted to alter community consciousness about the industry. I also discuss outside intervention in the miners' labour movement. Seen in historical context, the development of an alternative ideology with which to oppose the overwhelmingly powerful and centralised versions of history was a major step in establishing a sense of pride in an area which had deteriorated to the status of "ghost town."

The concept of outside intervention is expanded in the next two chapters, and I describe two instances of how some of the inchoate power of the unions is harnessed as union consciousness expands. I also introduce two individual activists within the revivalist ranks, and their roles in the development of alternative perspectives of history are outlined. The litigation proceedings against Mitsui are emphasised, and the further development of consciousness, this time seen within a more humanistic social context is expanded. I introduce another storyteller who is concerned with changing the image of the village of which he is headman.

Part IV is concerned with welfare in Chikuho. The first chapter looks briefly and generally at the history of the development of welfare in Japan, while the second chapter analyses one particular case in Kawasaki Town. Some insights into an alternative work ethic are presented in the discussion, and the relationship between the presence of the coal companies and the high incidence of welfare and poverty in the region is investigated. I conclude the media section started in Part I, and draw some conclusions about the nature of power

in Chikuho. I present the view that the present welfare situation in Chikuho is related to both the routinisation and reification of violence in the mines, and to a weakly organised and uncommitted union structure. I also briefly investigate the power of the media to influence interpretations of events, both in the present and in the past.

PART I
CHIKUHO
The place

Chapter 1

THE MEDIA AND I: Part I

"OK, Matt. Now, move up the hill a little. Watch your feet. The grass is wet. Don't drop the coal! OK. That's fine. Now, look straight at the camera. Now this time, PLEASE, do it seriously! "*We Love Kyushu*." Opening scene, take five. Three. Two. One. Go."

Somehow I had become a celebrity of sorts in the place where I was conducting my research. This time, a camera crew from the TNC 9 Network in Fukuoka City had ventured out to *yakuza* country to interview me and to convince me that I should be the host for their rather quaintly entitled television series called "We Rub Kyushu" (*We Love Kyushu*). With serious misgivings I agreed to front a program on the Kyushu coal industry.

And here I was standing on the edge of a sheer drop on a very shaky 300 metre high slag heap overlooking the *tanjū* where I lived. Grimly holding on to a lump of coal which weighed about two and a half kilograms, I was trying to repeat the innocuous script that had been written for me and not fall down the mountain. But as the director kept telling me, it added to the authenticity of the program to have the introduction conducted on top of one of the symbols of the coal industry. Never mind that the slag heap had been condemned as "dangerous," fenced off by the local government, and surrounded with signs warning that trespassers did so at their own risk.

How did this situation come about?

The media moves in

The whole process had started quite innocently. I arrived in Chikuho to start my research about welfare in Tagawa and Kawasaki. Being an anthropologist, I thought that it was not unnatural that I should move into one of the old coalmining shacks so that I could "experience" the society in which I was to immerse myself. Unfortunately it seemed that I was about the only person in the country who thought that it was a "normal" thing to do. No sooner had I taken my "alien registration" card up to the town office to

register as a legal alien, than I was spotted by a couple of very eager local government clerks, who, excited by the prospect of a foreigner coming to live in their town¹ asked me where I was going to stay. I told them that I had arranged to stay in the old Mitsui Ita *tanjū* (coal village). They expressed aghast disbelief. It seemed that no-one in their right mind would voluntarily stay in a filthy rat and ferret infested place like that. And the people were so "rough," I was told by these clerks. There were no private baths, the toilets were primitive without running water, the roofs leaked, the public bath was in disrepair, the place was full of criminals and *yakuza* types, and no-one would talk to me anyway.

Exactly one week after I had settled into my new place, the first of what was to be an inordinate number of media visitors arrived. It seems that the only people who were not particularly concerned by my presence in the village were the villagers themselves, who took an immediate proprietary interest in my welfare. When I expressed distress at the number of callers from the media over the subsequent weeks, some of the local women took turns to keep them away from my house, threatening to attack strangers if they came too close. Unfortunately this tended to fan the flames of the interest in me, rather than dampen them.

Over a period of six months or so, and particularly for the first two months, I was hounded by different sections of both the local and national media in their hunt for a story. Their presence became such a distraction that I could not even have a bath in the public baths without a film crew coming in. Not surprisingly, after the initial pleasure of appearing on local and national television wore off, the villagers became rather annoyed by the constant attention I was attracting. No-one would talk to me in the baths, or anywhere else for that matter because they were afraid that what they said would be aired in one form or another in the media. I eventually imposed a ban on all media coming to the area to interview me without first asking my

¹I was the first non-Asian foreigner. There had been a number of Filipino doing the "entertainment" circuit in the 1950s and 1960s.

express permission. This helped to relieve the situation, and over time people's confidence in me was restored, and I was able to get on with my fieldwork.

The questions posed earlier remain. Why was I the target of so much media attention? Why was it that a Ph.D student in anthropology who came to a small *tanjū* to study welfare and coalmining history would receive such an extraordinary amount of attention, so much so that when I went to Fukuoka on a visit and stopped to buy petrol, beer or whatever, I was often given the goods free, because I was that "strange" foreigner whom the shopkeeper had seen on television? Was the research that I was conducting so eccentric?

To answer these questions it is necessary to look at what it was that I was studying in the first place, and to consider how it was that I came to Chikuho to start my research.

The beginning of a topic

In September, 1987, I first ventured into the field to study the phenomenon of the dramatically high incidence of welfare in the Chikuho region of Fukuoka Prefecture. There were some startling anomalies when one looked at the statistical representation of the region compared to "mainstream" Japanese society. Firstly, the area was renowned for its excessive dependence on welfare - overall the Chikuho region had a welfare dependence of more than 14%.² Secondly, the area had been the centre of some notorious episodes of labour violence, none of which had been adequately examined. Thirdly, the incidences of crime in general, and drug abuse, gambling, extortion, and personal violence - all traditional arenas of the *yakuza* - were exceptionally high.³ None of the stories that I heard from academics, and local politicians and bureaucrats about Chikuho were consistent with the image

²Fukuoka Prefecture Social Welfare Statistics, 1988: 14

³see Ueno, 1985a-e

that I had of contemporary Japanese society - that of a group-oriented, passive, well-educated and ordered society.

Through contacts at two welfare offices, and through the efforts of one local historian I was able to find accommodation in one of the old coalmining villages in Tagawa city, something which had not been done by any researcher before. The *tanjū* where I finally settled was dark, dilapidated and in imminent danger of being demolished to make way for the new five storey apartments which the local government was building on the old coalmining sites.⁴ Welfare dependence was a way of life for many of the people in the village, which was to all intents isolated from the city which surrounded it. People wore traditional Japanese clothing, often made out of homespun cloth, and the pace of life was remarkably slow, even when compared to Tagawa city. Two central shops which had been built at the same time as the village itself catered for most of the local people's needs selling, at highly inflated prices, everything from *sake* and *shōchū*⁵ to dried fish and vegetables; to kimono. The people living in the village had little need to venture outside the boundaries of the village, and it was widely held, in outside society, that outsiders had no reason to enter the precinct of the village.

A suspicion of outsiders was often articulated to me by villagers, too, during the course of my fieldwork, and a number of apocryphal stories about outsiders coming into the village to steal petrol from cars and motorbikes, to break into the houses, to start fires, and to cause violent confrontations with local people were widely circulated. Strangers' cars driving through the village were closely watched, and any unusual happenings were commented on at local gatherings.

⁴The *tanjū* in which I lived was in fact demolished in February, 1990. The residents of that group of houses were moved into the new apartment blocks across the road.

⁵Japanese "vodka"; a cheap and potent alcoholic beverage, the most popular variant in the Chikuho region being *mugi shōchū*, or wheat vodka. Usually drunk diluted with a small amount of hot water. It was rumoured to get one very drunk, and not cause a hangover.

Into this tight-knit and relatively closed society went I, the ultimate stranger, complete with big nose, big feet - my shoes which were left in the entrance way of my house often elicited the comment that they looked like canoes - and an affected Tokyo style Japanese accent.⁶ I asked locals rude, often ignorant questions about their pasts. I used my influence with the town headman to make every family in the village fill in what were to become almost totally useless questionnaires. I turned up at funerals to which I was invited by the friends of relatives of the dead. I invited foreigners to stay and go out with locals to the usual watering holes. I consumed more than accustomed amounts of alcohol on a number of occasions while trying to establish rapport with some villagers at the local bars. I attracted unwanted *yakuza* attention through my imprudent comments about the pervasive nature of their drug dealings. In short I was a conspicuous, and often extremely irksome outsider whom the local people treated with extraordinary kindness and patience.

However all this was to come in the future. The press, and the electronic media were attracted to this disreputable village by virtue of my presence, and my presence alone. As my stay in the village continued, my relationship with the media changed, but in the first instance their interest in me was as an oddity. It was almost as though I was in a special cage in a zoo - a rare and exotic animal which fortunately spoke Japanese, and so could communicate its strange, alien thoughts.

The first wave

The first media people to have any interest in me were the local newspapers. These people had been alerted to my presence by the clerks at

⁶My Japanese language ability, while competent and academic was the source of much mirth in the formative stages of fieldwork. As my language degenerated into the local dialect during the course of the studies, and I started to speak in Chikuho-ben (the local dialect) it was a source of even more mirth, though usually from outsiders rather than from locals.

the City Office who had registered me as an alien. Looking over the first newspaper stories published when I had just arrived in the *tanjū* I am now quite gratified to see how I was represented. I was viewed as a harmless idiot - an academic with some strange interests. In fact the main emphasis of the stories was that I was a foreign student at the prestigious Kyushu University, that I liked to ride 750 cc motorcycles, do karate, and go swimming. I was asked what my hobbies were in the course of the interviews that I had with local newspapers, but I did not expect these issues to become the focus of the articles that were written. These "human interest" articles also focused on how I was coping with the village lifestyle, whether I was married, what sort of food I ate and whether I could eat Japanese food, whether I was interested in Japanese women, how tall I was, how much I weighed etc. I was seldom asked anything but superficial questions.

Other newspapers, the main national and regional dailies, and a series of gossip magazines picked up the story subsequently, and for two months or so I was subjected to almost daily interviews by members of the press. There was a certain irony in that I was ostensibly trying to conduct interviews with Japanese people to determine what sort of events had occurred in the place, yet I was the subject of interviews myself.

The type of media interview was so predictable that I was able to print a small autobiographical note and hand it to visiting media people. Sometimes reporters whom I had never actually met wrote articles about me based on these handouts, liberally peppering the article with fictional "quotes." Photographers typically posed me outside the dilapidated facade of the house with my hand holding on to the low roof, looking suitably whimsical. Alternatively I was asked to sit on the Honda with helmet in hand, chatting with the neighbours. Great emphasis was placed on my "deep and emotive" understanding of Chikuho culture and of the "human warmth" which the inhabitants of the village and I exuded to each other. Almost anything I actually said about the town, my background, my thoughts on social prejudices or the coalfields history were either ignored completely, or were translated into what was purported to be academic jargon.

After this initial surge of interest in my presence per se wore off, it was my actions within the community that attracted attention, in particular any actions which came under public scrutiny, such as my appearance at the local *Bon Odori*.⁷ Speeches I made at local welfare, labour and handicapped associations were widely reported and my reasons for participating in these organisations were speculated upon, although the actual content of the speeches I made was ignored. With time, as I began to get to know the Fukuoka reporters better I realised that some of the newspapers were more liberal than others, an impression which is hard to believe given the monolithic way in which news is generally reported. In fact I developed quite a reasonable relationship with two or three reporters from the major newspapers, who regularly contacted me for progress reports on my research, amongst other things.

The second wave

The number of reports about me in both local and national newspapers and magazines seemed to prompt other forms of the media to become interested in me. Television companies soon wrote to me asking whether they would be able to visit and interview me for news and current affairs programs, whether I would be available to appear on quiz shows, even at one stage whether I would like to host a cooking program, and whether I would be interested in compering a series on coalmining in Kyushu, the first program which I eventually agreed to. I also agreed, after close consultations with the headman and the people with whom I spent the most time, to appear on the television news. This was after ascertaining that they would not mind being filmed, and perhaps interviewed by the television crews.

⁷The dance of the Festival of the Dead, where local people celebrate their dead ancestors in an all night drunken whirl of activity and dancing. Traditional dances are danced, and coalmining songs are sung. On the night before the actual festival these are performed in front of the homes of those who have lost close relatives in the 12 months preceding the festival, and on the subsequent night at the local car park, for the benefit of the general public.

return when a local resident - a *chimpira*⁸ for the local *yakuza* gang, complete with tattoos from head to toe - stood point duty for a week outside my house on condition that I give him enough *shōchū* to keep him drunk and aggressive. He certainly was effective in frightening off the barrage of interruptions, and when the old women in my row of houses got together to make sure I was not disturbed a veritable and impassable wall was erected.

This was my introduction to Mitsui Ita and Tagawa-gun.

⁸literally "an embryo hooligan; a punk". More commonly used to refer to a junior soldier in the *yakuza*.

Chapter 2

CHIKUHO: A Short Description

The Chikuho region, where this study is based, is situated in the northern central area of Kyushu, Japan's southernmost island. It lies between Fukuoka city to the south west, and the large industrial cities of Kita Kyushu and Kokura, to the north. Chikuho consists of a triangle of three major cities which, in past years were concerned primarily with the production of coal - Nogata to the north, Iizuka to the south, and Tagawa to the east. Lying within the imaginary lines which join these three cities are a number of smaller towns which were also primarily coal producing cities.

Chikuho is situated in what is locally referred to as a "basin" (*bonchi*), surrounded by mountains. The climate is more extreme than the coastal plains where the sea breezes tend to be cool in the heat of summer, and warm in the winter. Chikuho's geographical position offers little relief from the intense summer heat, and the winters are noticeably colder than in the coastal regions.

Approaching Chikuho from Fukuoka, one drives through the Yakiyama mountains, and from the summit the basin is clearly visible below. The rice paddies dominate the scenery, stretching east toward the Hikosan range and the border with Oita Prefecture, the Onga River winding through the greenery. Iizuka and Tagawa are immediately recognisable by the palls of grey smoke emanating from the cement works and other large industry. The slag heaps (*bota yama*) which rise incongruously from the predominantly rural landscape are cone shaped and perfectly symmetrical, the once black hills now grassed over, silent testimony to the coal industry's past presence in the area. From up in the mountains Chikuho looks remarkably green and peaceful. Only the scars of the cities and towns spoil an otherwise idyllic view.

On the plain however the scars left from the mining days are ever present - hundreds of *bota yama* dominate the skyline. The rice paddies, which from the mountains appeared to be symmetrical and untainted have sunk well below the level of the roads they adjoin as a result of underground subsidence caused by the mines. The soil is bad, and the water in many of the irrigation streams and waterways badly polluted by waste products from the coal days.

And the smells of the towns are pervasive. There is the putrefying stench of the meatworks in Tagawa, the sickly sweet smells from the *sake* factories in Iizuka, and the dusty, choking black smoke from the cement works and the stench of the open drainage in Tagawa.

The *tanjū*, or coalmining villages, neglected since the companies pulled out of the industry in the 1950s and 60s, still stand in many towns, the tiny weatherboard shacks linked together in the *nagaya seido* (barn arrangement) - open drains are evidence of the poor conditions in which the coalminers once lived, and still live, in many cases. Gradually replacing these so-called "eye-sores" are the newer concrete apartments which are generally five storied government sponsored buildings, most noticeable for the way they are crowded together on narrow plots of land, complete with the message "Improved" conspicuously etched into the concrete under the eaves.

Huge concrete and lime works, once coal processing plants owned by Mitsui Concrete, dominate the landscape, the maze of rusted pipes and conduits criss-crossing the main streets into town. Even a Chikuho symbol, the famous Mount Asahi, has been strip-mined by the lime companies, the top of the mountain severed, and the scars from the work, which look like snow-skiing runs from a distance are visible throughout the region.

The seasons have a marked impact on the impression the region makes on the observer. In summer with the temperature often in the mid 30s, and humidity approaching 95%, a greyish haze hangs over the landscape, low pregnant clouds promising the afternoon storm that never seems to come. In winter the clouds are back, this time bringing sleet or occasionally snow, which temporarily purges the brownish sludge from roadways and factories, casting a surreal luminescent glow on the towns. The temperature drops to freezing overnight and the eaves hang with temporary stalactites until the day's warmth melts them in the late morning. The early morning commuter procession of white cars is turned brown by the appalling condition of the roads, churned into a quagmire by the number of drivers who fit their cars with steel spiked tyres for added winter traction. Both spring and autumn are mild and often clear -

the skies seldom cloud over, and the wet season is still far enough away to reduce the humidity to bearable levels.

The Onga River which flows from Hikosan, the biggest mountain in the region, through Tagawa north to the sea at Kokura is seen as one of the symbols of the area. Many local historians regard the river as the "lifeblood of Chikuho"¹ primarily because it was the means by which coal was transported to the big industrial ports until the 1940s, when the railways were introduced to replace the system of river barges. However the river still plays an important part in the lives of many of Chikuho's inhabitants in a symbolic and even in a ritualistic sense. Many local festivals are associated with the river, such as the Tagawa Jinko Matsuri, which is held every May and involves thousands of participants dragging enormous floats from one side of the river to the other, watched by tens of thousands of spectators and television viewers. The people who live in the area are often classified as possessing the *kawasuji kishitsu*, the ostensible "riverside dwellers' character." It is by this euphemism that the local people are often referred to when they move outside the area, the implications of the name more sinister than they first appear, often implying something "dirty" or dangerous.

Chikuho is serviced by buses from Fukuoka and Kita Kyushu, and by a railway system which is perhaps the oldest in Japan.² In a country where public transport is almost always reliable, the Chikuho line stands out as an example of ineptitude and inconvenience. Trains to the major centres leave only once an hour or so, and the last train runs at 7.30 pm. As a result the trains are not well patronised. The local line has been in some financial difficulty over the last few years, and in February 1989 a plan to rebuild the existing system and to cut services to the stations least patronised was approved by Japan Rail. The plan was adopted, and at the time of writing rail services in the region had been cut by half since 1989.

¹Idegawa, 1984: 5; Ueno, 1985a: 5-6

²Onishi, interview: 1988

Chikuho is also accessible by road from Fukuoka, but there is serious traffic congestion which means that from 7.30 am to 6.30 pm a 40 kilometre trip to Fukuoka takes about two hours by car, if one goes by the expensive tollway from Iizuka. Driving on the "normal" roads increases travelling time to about three hours. The roads to Kita Kyushu and Kokura are also congested, although the relatively new Kyushu Tollway which extends from Omuta to Kokura has an inter-change at Nogata, so local people have access to the expensive expressway, albeit by a roundabout route.

Although the major centres in Kyushu are geographically near, travelling is so time consuming that the area is still isolated to a large extent. Lack of transportation is one factor which has contributed to the depression of certain towns in Chikuho, in particular Tagawa and Kawasaki. Moves to prepare land for industrial development have failed over the years to produce any marked improvement in local economies primarily because the transportation costs have become so expensive that these ventures have proved to be untenable, according to one official government source.³

Within Chikuho there have been some conspicuous post-coal success stories, and many failures. Iizuka and Nogata stand out as two towns which have been able to shrug off the stigma of associations with the coal industry and develop competitive local industries - generally service sector oriented. Tagawa, Kawasaki, Hojo, Miyada, Sueda, Inatsuki, Shonai and Kurate are examples of towns which have not been able to rid themselves of the economic depression which hit the area in the wake of the rationalisation of the coal industry. It has been argued by some local activists that both Iizuka and Nogata, by virtue of their proximity to Fukuoka and Kita Kyushu respectively, have been able to take advantage of the high cost of land in the big cities to make their towns appeal to workers in the cities as commuter satellites, or *beddo taunzu*, as they are referred to. Land is relatively cheap in these towns, and it is possible for young people to buy their own homes. In the big cities this is not really possible for

³Tagawa City survey of transport problems, 1988

many people unless there is some family property involved, and the young people are prepared to accommodate the parents of the husband.

Iizuka has rezoned many industrial and agricultural areas so that they can be developed, and at the time of writing, the building sector was the city's fastest growing industry. Nogata too has bought out many small farmers, and has allowed the development of housing estates in previously rural sectors. Both towns boast good access to the main centres, and modern shopping arcades and consumer services, unlike most of Chikuho. The "entertainment areas" are thriving in both towns, and the service sector is going through a boom period at the moment. The rapidly growing population figures attest to the way the towns are attracting outside interest.

In stark contrast are the bulk of the towns in Chikuho. Particularly within the Tagawa region, which includes Kawasaki, poverty and welfare dependence are rife, consumer facilities remain undeveloped, access to the major centres is still poor, and employment opportunities are limited. Tagawa, which lies 25 kilometres west of Iizuka is too far from the main Kyushu cities to be considered a potential *beddo taun* and has had to rely on outside interests setting up business ventures within the town. Expressions of interest in Tagawa and Kawasaki have been few, and the towns have continued to display the highest unemployment and welfare statistics in the country. Kawasaki, in 1986, had almost 28% welfare dependence, according to official figures.⁴ Statistics in 1986 showed that there was less than 2% welfare dependence nationally. This same trend continued into 1988-89, national statistics dropping to less than 1%, while Tagawa-gun⁵ and Kawasaki in particular maintained high levels of welfare

⁴Fukuoka Prefecture Statistics, 1989: 18-20

⁵A "gun" is a district within the Prefecture, which is responsible to the appropriate prefectural bureaucracy. Under the umbrella of the "gun" are communities not large enough to be called cities. The administration of government services to these communities is the responsibility of the prefectural government, through their agents in the "gun" representative offices.

dependence. In 1989, Kawasaki had the highest level of welfare recipients per capita in the nation with 25.3%.⁶

The welfare dependence of people within the region is in large part a legacy of the coal industry withdrawing when the switch over to oil was in full swing in the 1960s. When the big coal companies closed down there were few alternative industries which were able to take their place within the local economy, which was in large part due to the monopolistic nature of the industry. Communities which had been totally dependent on coal were left with few options and fewer resources to tackle the task of reviving local economies. Not only primary, but secondary and tertiary sectors which had been dependent on the coal industry were forced out of business when the population in the towns decreased and cash flow almost halted in the immediate post-coal period. Government aid was introduced to help offset some of the disadvantages of this situation, but the mining companies' and local governments' neglect in developing any contingency plans for the region was remarkable.

Unemployment increased dramatically and because compensation for the coal companies' damage to their fields was not forthcoming from the mining companies responsible - fields had sunk as they were undermined, water had become polluted, and flooding was common - many farmers faced bankruptcy for the first time. Traditionally the agricultural sector in Japan benefits from a gerrymander and farmers often find themselves well looked after politically. In this case, however, the coal owners' lobby had too powerful an arrangement with the government for the farmers' associations to successfully press their own interests, and being poorly compensated, many farmers were forced off their land. This in turn had the effect of opening up a quite substantial amount of land near the main towns for either industrial or private development, and concurrently added to the welfare statistics.⁷ Secondary and tertiary industry have rallied over the past ten years or so in some of the main centres, but this

⁶National Association of Welfare Statistics, June 1990: 47

⁷By 1986 the percentage of rural households in Tagawa, for example, had decreased to less than 4% - even fewer than in Fukuoka City. Source - Fukuoka Prefecture Statistics, 1988: 50

has always been at the expense of the primary sector. In fact the situation has become so serious for the farmers that they have been dubbed "welfare farmers." The majority of the farmers in the region are only part-timers who are forced to take what seasonal work there is available - labouring, truck driving, forestry work, for example.

Tagawa City

Tagawa is the largest city in Tagawa-gun, with a population of approximately 59,000. Within the city are a number of discrete ex-coalmining villages, which, although once relatively autonomous, are now officially part of the city's jurisdiction. A "Mitsui town,"⁸ Tagawa was almost totally dependent on the coal industry, and on the company's goodwill. The company supplied housing, and finance for consumer services which were established to service the coalminers and their families. City officials were often seconded from the company, as were the police chiefs and other community leaders. A succession of company managers were mayors of the city from the 1920s, when operations started, until 1975.

Although the city is moving slowly into the late 1980s, facilities are still poor: shopping arcades have been built, but these are so poorly developed that the majority of shoppers goes to Iizuka where the range of department stores offer wider choices of consumer items at cheaper prices. Some cultural facilities have been developed, such as the Cultural Centre, which was completed in 1982, and in 1985 a new central gymnasium was built on a demolished coalmine site. There is talk of building a new art gallery if the funds can be allocated, but this seems unlikely to be started within the next five years. There is one hospital, but medical services are strictly limited, so serious cases are taken to Iizuka or Nogata, where the facilities are much better. A public library employs

⁸Mitsui owned the coal franchise for Tagawa City, and also owned many smaller enterprises in town. As a result, in its heyday in the 1950s and 60s, more than 70% of the work force was employed by Mitsui or its subsidiaries.

three people, and is in a state of disrepair matched only by the Mitsui real estate offices.

Education facilities are also poor. There are four high schools which have the reputation of being among the worst in the prefecture academically, and although there is a junior university, which specialises in welfare and kindergarten teaching, in 1988 there was not one student at the university from Tagawa. It is a public university and as such is difficult to enter, and because the level of education in the city is so poor it is an unfortunate fact that the students who go to the city schools cannot hope to get into such an illustrious university. Ironically it is the students who ostensibly want to help the impoverished welfare dependent Tagawa people who are keeping the local students out.

Mitsui's lack of interest in the city has prevented the revival of the local economy. When the last of the four main Tagawa mines closed in 1970, with the exception of the Mitsui Tile factory which employed approximately 250 workers, Mitsui withdrew its financial support from the region. The company has also maintained real estate offices to collect rent from the miners and miners' families who live in the *tanjū*, before they are rebuilt (at government expense). Responsibility for the maintenance of the *tanjū* has been delegated to local government as part of a deal the company reached with the national government before the mines closed, which in effect has meant that the miners themselves are expected to maintain the rented housing at their own expense.

Mitsui has also invested a considerable sum in building a mining museum at the site of the number two mine, which is next to the Ita *tanjū*. This museum is a self-congratulatory tribute to the generosity of the company in allowing many miners the experience of working for a big well-managed company. There are no records of the accidents, deaths, violence or crime which accompanied mining. It is so antiseptic that an uncritical observer would assume that the happy miners lived in luxury within a system of paternal guidance, working in only the most modern conditions that technology allowed. The stories of the miners are decidedly contradictory to this official view, however, and the local population has dismissed the museum as an example of Mitsui propaganda.

Tagawa's local economy

The economy of Tagawa is gradually on the rise, according to the government figures and reports, as excesses within the system are trimmed and strengths consolidated.⁹ However although the statistics support this position, there have been many conspicuous business failures within the city over the past ten years. Particularly the high yen has had a damaging effect on many export oriented factories. For example, the Pioneer Car Stereo factory established in 1971 originally employed more than 500 workers, selling its products through an arrangement with Datsun (Nissan) America, but in 1987 was forced to close down as the increasing price of the yen reduced the relative value of the products overseas.

Although quite a number of clothing and electronics factories have been established within the Tagawa region in the post-coal years, these employ predominantly women as "part-time" labour, a peculiarly Japanese classification which means that the women work as hard, or harder than the men, but are paid much less because they are "casual" workers. This is justified by a notion that women are not to be given responsible work because they have the "natural" job of procreation, and employment is only something to augment the husband's income. The fact that the vast majority of the women employed in these factories are over 55 years old, do not have the urge to procreate, nor suffer from the "feminine malaise," as Japanese men refer to the period pains which women suffer (another reason they are not as productive as the men, according to the common argument), is conveniently glossed over by company owners who are not keen to have their source of cheap labour either unionised or replaced by the manifestly less productive and more expensive male workforce. These part-timers are an indispensable part of the Chikuho economy yet they seldom receive recognition for the work they do.

The owners have resisted unionisation because unions mean "trouble," as I was often told, and so the women sell their labour for between 300 and 500

⁹*Tagawa Shishi*, 1979: 441-460

yen an hour¹⁰, without the benefits received by full-time company workers, such as bonuses in lieu of holidays. The fact is that there is a huge pool of unemployed women desperately in need of work in the area, so they are prepared to take whatever work they can get, and the owners of these factories are prepared to get what they can from the women at the cheapest price possible.

If you join a union, or even try to join a union the company just fires you. It's as simple as that. At the clothing factory there are more than 50 people employed but no-one is in the union. You see it's just asking for trouble, and we're lucky to have any work at all, so we take what we can get even though the men there get more than five times the hourly rate we do. Of course we don't get sick pay or bonuses like the men do, but we're lucky to have the work so although we know that it's unfair we don't complain about it.¹¹

A breakdown of the workforce statistics shows three major growth sectors within the local economy - small business, the service sector and local government. The building industry was hit by a mini recession in the early part of 1984 and has not yet recovered. Agriculture figures show that there are still some 2000 or so people officially employed within this sector, but the majority of these are working part-time and are dependent on welfare to tide them over the lean winter months, according to the Department of Welfare Services. The manufacturing industry which was the industry voted most likely to succeed in the post-coal period, after an initially strong showing has been severely damaged by the high yen and by the lack of development capital. Only the service sector, small businesses and the local bureaucracy have really developed. The implications of this are wide ranging.

For a start, the numbers of Tagawa residents who work outside the city are increasing every year because the local economic infrastructure cannot cope

¹⁰This was equivalent to between approximately 20% and 25% of the average wage in 1987, according to figures released by the Ministry of Labour in 1988.

¹¹Nishiguchi, interview: 1989

with the size of the working population. As a result the only businesses which seem to be able to remain solvent are those which are sponsored by outside interests, and employ predominantly women, and those which cater to the consumerism of the local population. Bars, eateries and nightclubs are still viable concerns, many of these being run by women on a part-time basis. Corner shops still abound, as do *sake* shops, and small supermarkets, and in recent years, video stores. There is only one department store in Tagawa, but this is overpriced and has a limited range of stock. For major consumer purchases, such as electronic equipment, vehicles, furniture, white goods etc most local people go to Iizuka or Fukuoka where prices are more reasonable than in Tagawa.

The marked increase in government personnel coincides with the recent government initiative to reduce welfare spending. It seems as though a large number of additional personnel are required to handle the added burden of cutting welfare payments to local people. There is irony here, as one Tagawa City welfare worker says, in that the government is spending more money on wages for welfare workers and establishing complex and expensive procedures to limit government spending.¹² Certainly this is not the only reason that the numbers of local government staff have increased - city officials cite the new medical insurance scheme as being very labour intensive for example, but there is a serious issue raised with respect to welfare, traditionally a source of great prefectural and national government expense. The rebuilding of the *tanjū* in the city has also resulted in employment within official government ranks for workers who would otherwise have been classified as building industry personnel.

Tagawa-gun and Kawasaki

Kawasaki has a population of approximately 22,000 and lies about 12 kilometres to the east of Tagawa City. Predominantly a rural settlement these

¹²Miyoshi, interview: 1988

days, it was once a major coal producing town, being the headquarters of the Ueda mining company. The infamous Hoshu mine, once regarded as the most dangerous and violent of all the coalmines, was run by the then mayor of the town Ueda Seijiro and was located within the town itself. Laid out like many coal towns with streets barely wide enough to allow two cars to pass, and dwellings cramped together on either side of the streets, the town looks like a Hollywood western set. Few buildings are more than two storeys high, dating from the early 1940s, and most are made of weatherboard stained dark brown. There are *sake* shops, many bars and eateries, and some grocery shops, but although there are general stores, a Seven Eleven, and other "convenience stores" most locals go into the bigger cities like Iizuka to buy most of their consumer items.

Near the centre of town are a number of the so-called "improved housing" areas. These apartments fall into two categories: the five storey concrete and rusting steel slums, and the two storey concrete and rusting steel slums. Both types in Kawasaki were among the first to be rebuilt under the Coal Slums Rebuilding Program, and the age of the buildings is immediately noticeable. When the buildings were first erected in the early 1950s to replace the old *nagaya seido* they were no doubt an improvement on the dilapidated Ueda-owned company housing, but today they are testimony to the lack of foresight of local and national governments which seem to have simply built slums to replace slums. Especially in the two storey apartments the locals have collected a variety of multi-hued tin sheets and old weatherboards, and added ramshackle extensions to the original design in order to house the increasing number of family members, creating a flamboyant mosaic of shapes, materials and colours. In some of these apartments, which are rented by the residents, there are more than ten people, crammed together in two bedrooms.

There are three junior high schools, and one high school in town, generally used as feeder schools for the Tagawa high schools. The reputation of the violence in these schools is second to none. There are a large number of criminal charges brought against students annually, and the majority of teachers

have had some sort of violent attacks made against their person.¹³ Knives, nunchaku, kendo sticks, and occasionally firearms are confiscated from students in the course of the year, according to the principal of the local high school. Not surprisingly the level of scholastic achievement is abysmal.

There is one small local hospital which caters primarily for the aged and infirm, and one mental hospital. Because medical facilities have not really been developed since the coalmining days, seriously ill patients are taken to hospitals in Nogata or Iizuka. Unfortunately the ambulance service is almost non-existent. Consequently the local people rely on the Tagawa service, which is expensive and inconvenient.

The building industry has gone through a revival recently with the contract to rebuild a local coalminers' settlement awarded to a consortium of local companies run by the local *yakuza* organisation. Other building projects, generally associated with the Coal Slums Rebuilding Program are also flourishing as the program reaches its nexus - work is scheduled to be completed on this project by 1995 - and employment in this sector is relatively high at the time of writing. Also Nishikawa Hausu, a large building firm, has bought some of the old slag heaps and is in the process of levelling them and building housing estates on the land to cater for the demand for private housing in the area. However the service sector and other small businesses in the town have yet to experience the growth which is so widespread in the service sector throughout most of the Chikuho region. No figures were available on the breakdown of industry in the town.

Welfare

Although I will treat this topic in much more detail in later chapters I think it is necessary to outline the situation in Tagawa here. Since the mid 1960s Tagawa-gun has had the highest per capita ratio of welfare recipients in Japan. This is related not only to the coal industry withdrawing its support from

¹³interview with the staff of Kawasaki Ikeijiri High School, 1988

the region, but also to the poor economic infrastructure which was established during this period. Nagasue has pointed out that the government was negligent in allowing the coal companies to get away with what he refers to as a "scandalous abuse of human rights" when they quit the region.¹⁴ He goes on to say that the influence which Mitsui was able to exert on the government, supported by the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP), in delegating the responsibility of cleaning up the area to local governments was equal to "signing the death warrant of Tagawa."¹⁵

The onus of restructuring the economy was placed firmly with the local Chamber of Commerce, a group of mainly ex-Mitsui men with good coal industry connections, and very little incentive for doing anything. Rather than trying to foster interest in the region, they concentrated their efforts in getting government grants to support public works programs. The result of this policy was that Tagawa had some excellent roads within six months of the introduction of the plan and huge numbers of unemployed workers receiving the 12 month coal unemployment benefit. Unemployment had reached 45% by 1965, and the unemployed were encouraged to leave town and get work elsewhere, rather than draining local coffers of funds. (The local government was required to subsidise 30% of the unemployment funds, the prefecture 50%, and the national government 20% under the law). Although Tagawa was severely affected by the demise of the coal industry, other towns such as Kawasaki were even more seriously crippled. Tagawa had some secondary industry, but in Kawasaki's case, there was virtually nothing other than coal and its by-products. This history of unemployment has had a potent effect on the present welfare situation.

Tagawa-gun has not only the highest per capita welfare recipience, but also the highest ratio of drug abuse and violent crime in Japan. Although Tagawa City has recently made inroads into cutting welfare spending, Kawasaki has remained the town most dependent on welfare. In 1984 the national government introduced a new policy which was aimed at reducing the number

¹⁴1974: 132

¹⁵ibid: 136

of Japanese dependent on welfare. This was to be achieved through the narrowing of eligibility and a shift of the burden of support to the recipients' relatives. For example, if an applicant for welfare had immediate family (father, son, brother, sister, cousin, uncle, aunt etc) who was earning more than the designated poverty line, the social worker employed to handle the case was required to write a letter to these family members asking whether they would financially support the applicant, "for their country." On top of this, the applicant was required to demonstrate that he or she had no visible means of support, and no property which could be sold for cash (farmers being the exception here).

This policy has severely limited the number of people who are eligible for welfare, and also placed enormous financial pressure on the families of the elderly, unemployed, sick and handicapped people who might apply for welfare. In Tagawa-gun, where there is a very high per capita aged population (more than 15%), the local, already low income people have had to bear the added financial burden of a government policy which denies them a reasonable and equitable pension and welfare scheme. According to the head of one welfare office in Tagawa-gun, the government is desperate to reduce welfare dependence statistics to less than 1% nationally to impress overseas countries regarding the strength of the Japanese work ethic. Tagawa has been identified as the main problem area.¹⁶

I interviewed a number of both male and female high school students in the Tagawa region in March, 1988, asking them what they intended to do after they left school. One in three answered that they would be quite happy to go on the welfare like their parents, and become what is known in the local dialect as "pachinko pros." That is, they would use their welfare incomes to support a lifestyle based on one of the only methods of gambling legitimately available to Japanese - the pinball-like pachinko. Other students were quick to tell me that they were not interested in this rather mindless past-time, and that they would

¹⁶Kumo, interview: 1988

choose to join the ranks of the *bōsōzoku* or street car gangs, traditionally the first step in the move towards becoming a *yakuza*.

Recently some academics from the Japan National University of Welfare Studies in Nagoya have targeted the region as a prime example of the inequalities of the legal system of welfare distribution. One of these academics, Dr Otoma, who has concentrated his research in Kawasaki and Miyada, concluded that the welfare dependence of the region has come about through a number of variables which frustrate the efforts of local people to develop an alternative and viable economic framework in accord with local values and interpretations. He maintains the system of welfare is both inadequate and too lenient, allowing corruption of the system and the awarding of welfare to people who do not need it, such as the local *yakuza*, while the needy are denied their legitimate right to government support.¹⁷ This opinion is ratified by many welfare recipients.

Many welfare social workers confided in me that they were aware that the system had been 'squeezed' by the parsimonious bureaucracy from above, and by the coercive crime syndicates from below. It is certainly more than coincidence that more than 95% of the official *yakuza* members in Tagawa-gun are also welfare recipients.¹⁸ Yet there is widespread poverty within the region, and in the two years I lived there I heard of four cases of people refused welfare who subsequently died of starvation. These cases were not reported by the press, but the welfare workers were quite aware of them. In fact two social worker informants confirmed these cases to me individually.

Crime

Crime in Tagawa-gun is a major problem for police and local administrators. Organised crime, run by the notorious Taishukai *yakuza* group, has caused many social problems over the years. In Tagawa-gun, the 300 strong

¹⁷Otoma, 1986: 45-48

¹⁸Sato, interview: 1988

Taishukai have had a pervasive and destructive influence on local issues since pre-war days. This group controls the drug trade in the region, and is responsible for the introduction, from Thailand of narcotics and amphetamines into Tagawa. The amphetamines are taken intravenously, and constitute a big social problem, especially for many of the older members of the *yakuza*, many of whom are addicts themselves. The group uses a wide variety of people to distribute the drugs, often through channels selected for their innocuous nature, such as hospitals. In the press there were more than 35 recorded instances of individuals arrested for possessing and selling drugs in hospitals when I was in the area. In five instances old women over the age of 65 were caught passing the drugs to clients within hospital grounds.¹⁹

Apart from the drug trade, the *yakuza* are well-known for their involvement with protection rackets. It appears that most, if not all, the night clubs and bars in Tagawa and Kawasaki pay protection money to *yakuza* to prevent "unfortunate accidents" occurring.²⁰ The *yakuza* justify this extortion by depicting it as a form of insurance to prevent gangsters from outside the area coming into town to demand the same sort of protection from the owners of these establishments. *Yakuza* interests also include pachinko parlours,²¹ the so-called "love motels," prostitution and building companies.

A number of *yakuza* are well connected politically, and the *mochi ritsu mota retsu* (give and take) principal applies in most political dealings involving these people. In 1985 the Socialist mayor of Soeda was assassinated by the *yakuza*, ostensibly as a response to his plan to outlaw the Taishukai gang in his town by stripping them of their rights to own and operate on local property. The killers of the mayor were never caught, and in the subsequent election an LDP mayor was elected without opposition. Despite the conspicuous nature of the police's anti-*yakuza* campaigns - slogans in place outside town halls

¹⁹see Nishi Nihon Shinbun, Asahi Shinbun: Chikuho sections Jan 17, 1988; Feb 23, 1988; July 6, 1988 for example

²⁰Sato, interview: 1988

²¹gaudy legal slot machine gambling premises

throughout Chikugo exhort the population to "Clean up the city from the *yakuza*" - the police presence seems to be mainly symbolic. For example, twice a year police and the local Tagawa City government mount vociferous anti-*yakuza* campaigns - trucks emblazoned with signs such as "Stamp out the *yakuza* presence now!" and "Report your local *yakuza* to the police and help your fellow citizen" drive through the city streets blasting out these and other slogans from loudspeakers mounted on the truck roofs - but the people largely ignore them. They seem to be too afraid to rebel openly against the *yakuza*.

I was told many stories by a number of locals about the repercussions of informing on the *yakuza* - most of them involved violent sanctions being invoked, but some entailed the imposition of economic strictures, reinforced by the political system. For instance, one story an old man told me concerned him challenging the head of the *yakuza* about some "low" *yakuza* soldiers (*chimplira*) receiving welfare while he and his wife were forced to live on soy beans and radishes. The local gangsters called at his home and desecrated the small plot of land on which he grew his vegetables and then applied pressure to the local welfare workers to make sure that he was unable to claim any welfare benefits.²²

The Tagawa *yakuza* are also notorious throughout southern Japan in relation to insurance scams. The modus operandi seems to be that two or three *yakuza* cars (generally black luxury Toyota Crown or Nissan Cedric saloons) surround a single car on the main local roads, and force the driver to brake suddenly, crashing into the back or side of one of their cars. Because the system of litigation is undeveloped in Japan, parties in accidents where no injury is occasioned must sort out the issue of insurance between themselves, generally employing a third party who specialises in this sort of work. In these instances the *yakuza* use standover tactics to ensure that the insurance policy is paid out to their headquarters, and that their own cars are repaired gratis by using their own paid up "third party." When I was living in the *tanjū* I received in the mail the following notice:

²²Shiroiwa, interview: 1988

All drivers in the Tagawa region are asked to beware of drivers in the following types of cars, and with the following types of number plates. (List of about 30 cars and their number plates).. When drivers see these cars it is best to pull off the road immediately, and where possible contact your local police station.

(Signed by the local police chief)

Nevertheless these days most citizens regard the *yakuza* as a weakened and relatively harmless group. Most people seem to think that they confine their most serious violence to internecine fights, with the occasional venture into mainstream society being confined to right wing political activism, a traditional *yakuza* arena.

Perhaps the most insidious influence that the *yakuza* have had on the region is to blacken the name of Chikuho, and Tagawa in particular, as "*Yakuza* Territory," thus reinforcing outsiders' prejudices towards local people. Even within Chikuho, Tagawa and Kawasaki are regarded as "dangerous" places. Before I moved into the *tanjū* at Tagawa I was warned by most of my fellow Kurate (a town in Chikuho) residents to "be careful" when I was driving in Tagawa, to watch out for black Toyota Crown sedans, and to be careful about what I said to the locals for fear of some sort of repercussions. In Fukuoka many car parks will not allow cars with Chikuho number plates in, because they fear for the welfare of their regular customers.

This attitude that the Tagawa people are all "dark" and "dangerous" is reinforced by the local car mania, which culminates every year with the New Year's Eve parade of "hot" cars complete with Japanese flags, no mufflers, gaudy paint work, and half naked occupants hanging out every window, driving two abreast up the dual carriageways from Tagawa to Kita Kyushu. This procession starts at about 8.00 pm and carries on until 5.00 or 6.00 the next day. The drivers are drunk or drugged, and accidents are common, but the police keep a prudently low profile, not having the numbers to deal with the thousands of cars on the roads. These car gangs are referred to as *bōsōzoku*, a generic term which includes bikies as well as young delinquent groups. The police make a point of publicly prosecuting a number of these gangs every year,

presumably to reassure the public that they are doing something about this rebelliousness.

Youth gangs, often related to the *bōsōzoku* have been responsible for some exceptionally violent crimes over the past few years. The most memorable of these was picked up by the national press in January 1989, and concerned a group of five youths, three boys and two girls in their early to late teens, who hijacked a 23 year old man in his small car after he refused to give them a ride, set fire to his car, and incinerated him on a mountain pass near Tagawa. The public outrage this act engendered was nationwide in scope, and was made worse by the fact that only one of the gang was of an age where he could be brought to trial under the legal system. Because the other members were officially minors, they were held to be exempt from the judicial process and have all been exonerated because of their youth. In February of the same year in another well reported case two brothers, aged 12 and 13 strangled their grandmother in her bath because she would not give them their "pocket money." These types of incidents help to reinforce outsiders' attitudes that Chikuho people are "dangerous," "violent" and "social outcasts," and no doubt have some effect on outside interests choosing to ignore the area as having investment potential.

Tagawa-ben

Another aspect of the Tagawa region which is worthy of mention is its local dialect of Japanese. Although each region in Japan has its own dialect, and some are more obscure and incomprehensible than others, the Tagawa dialect stands out as one of the "dirtiest" of all of them. Tagawa-ben, as it is called, uses not only all the swear words of Japanese, often indiscriminately and liberally thrown into general conversation, but also a peculiar inflection which has caused outsiders to remark that the participants in the conversation must be fighting with each other.

Surprisingly the women also use this variation of Japanese in their daily conversation, even with men, something which is unheard of in most parts of Japan, doing away with the niceties of the traditionally feminine, so-called

"standard Japanese." Many of my informants were quick to point out that using the local dialect was one way of getting to know people, and that when one used the "cold and impersonal" standard Japanese one could never get to know the person hiding behind the mask of civility the language erected.

However from outside, the Tagawa language appears uncouth in a country where educated people pride themselves on their linguistic standardisation and ability. It has become a social stigma, so that Fukuoka people, for example, are instantly aware of a person's peasant or coalfields background when they open their mouths. Although there has been a revival of pride in the dialect over recent years, largely due to the conspicuous efforts of some locally prominent older people, the young people who move to other cities and towns try to adopt standard Japanese as their means of communication, lapsing into local dialect only when they are drunk or return home to visit their parents. In many ways it is analogous to a situation when a Geordie gets a job in London, assumes the airs of the business community there, and reassumes the mantle of the Liverpool accent, with all the social loadings associated with it, when he or she comes home.

Tagawa-gun is distinguished by a number of factors which makes it a potentially interesting place to study. Most of the features described above would fit into a pattern of depressed working class existence in many societies, but what makes it noteworthy is that in Japan, where the government has been conspicuously busy trying to develop the impression that society is controlled, well-mannered, politic, and free of many of the social upheavals of overseas societies, Chikuho, and Tagawa in particular, have retained their individuality. The economic depression of the area and the concomitant high incidence of crime and welfare dependency mark the region as anathema to the concept that most Japanese and foreigners alike hold about Japanese society today. Contemporary Chikuho owes many of its problems to the legacy of the coal industry, and it will be one of the aims of the rest of the thesis to demonstrate this.

Chapter 3

THE URGE TO BE HEARD

3.30 pm. The quiet of the *tanjū* is shattered by raucous children's songs being played at such a high volume that the melody and lyrics are lost in distortion. Emerging from my house I notice the small children running out onto the roads in the direction of the car park, behind the new apartment blocks. I yell at a couple of the children, "What's all the noise?" They yell back, "It's the *kami shibai* man," without stopping. Like the flute of the Pied Piper, the "music" seems to have a desperate appeal to the small children as they race towards the source. I follow them. In the car park is a cream coloured Toyota Corolla station wagon, the back opened, surrounded by about 15 children and a couple of elderly relatives. Standing in the middle of the crowd is a man in his late 30s or early 40s. Quite large, dressed in jeans and a T-shirt and wearing thick-lensed glasses, his gravelly, high pitched voice has a remarkable penetrating quality, as he tells the children to calm down.

Set up on the wagon's tailgate is a small wooden frame about one metre square, carved to look like the facade of a theatre stage. Within this frame is a lurid painting of a boy fighting a wolf, blood dripping from the knife in the boy's grasp. The antics of the crowd distract my attention from the painting as I take in the scene that is unfolding around me. The children are all shouting, "*Ojisan* (uncle), I want one of those ones on a stick!," "I want one of those paper thin ones!" and the man is handing out sweets to them in exchange for ten yen coins. "I've finished it. Look! The middle's still OK. Give me a new one!" screams one of the littlest children. The man takes the proffered sweet, critically analyses it, and with a slight scowl says, "Alright, here's the new one. You did it just right," giving the child another sweet.

By this time totally bemused, I look at all the other children who are very carefully sucking on their sweets, pulling them out of their mouths every couple of seconds to examine them, and then popping them back in again. More children are clamouring for new sweets by this stage, and the *kami shibai* man examines each one carefully, sometimes giving them a new one, sometimes saying, "No, look at that. You've eaten some of the middle bit." or, "You've already had a second one. You're not getting any more, you rat." The children who have been refused scream that he is a "tight-fisted old uncle," to which he seems impervious.

After about ten minutes of this the show starts. The story is about a boy who is the son of a coalminer. He goes into the forest one day, and is met by a wolf who asks him the way to town. The boy tells him, and thinks nothing more of it. When he returns home, his parents are missing, and he sees the wolf running from the house, with his dead and bloody mother between its jaws. He discovers the father lying in a pool of blood on the floor. Angry, his innocence lost, he realises what he has done by showing the wolf the way to town. The ghosts of his mother and father come to him that night to tell him that until the wolf has been killed they will have no rest in the spirit world. The ghosts are just as they were when they were killed - the torn flesh hanging from their wounds, the blood congealed, their faces hideous parodies of the human form. The boy eventually tracks down the wolf, and kills it in a bloody climax. His parents are then able to take their rest in the spirit world and are no longer *yūrei* (ghosts of unsatisfied people).

The story is told in a matter of fact way, each dramatic event illustrated by the introduction of a new picture into the frame, rather than by the narrator's voice. The violent scenes are particularly vividly portrayed, blood and gore rather graphically painted in vermilion. The death of the wolf is described over four frames, the slow, agonising death being a satisfactory ending. The *kami shibai* man's rough voice every now and then betrays emotion, but generally he seems to be going through the motions as he tells the tale. The children, enraptured at first, gradually lose interest over the ten minute tale, becoming alert only at certain graphically violent scenes. The ending is a big success with the children screaming their delight at the hideous death of the wolf.

The story over, the children once more clamour for sweets. The *kami shibai* man obliges, the ritual of the selective sweet sucking played out again. After this ritual is over, he shuts the tailgate of the wagon, and drives off, the dulcet tones of the children's music fading into the distance behind him.

The *Kami Shibai* Man

Onishi, the Picture Show man is an anachronism. From Kansai, near Osaka, he came to Kawasaki with the famous "Caravan Movement," a Christian students'

movement organised to bring aid and education to the people of Chikuho in 1968, when the plight of the miners was again brought to national attention. They were only a small group - about 50 in number - yet they established kindergartens, child minding centres, playgrounds, informal education centres, nursing care, old peoples' recreation centres and many other facilities throughout, in particular, the small towns in the Chikuho region.

Onishi was first employed as a carpenter for this group and, after being involved with them for a couple of years, moved into a *tanjū* in Kawasaki with his family. In 1970 he took a job with the World Council of Churches, a job which took him to most of the Asian subcontinent in the capacity of construction adviser and general handyman. When he returned to his family in 1973, his wife immediately divorced him because she maintained that he was "not really a very Christian person, and was more concerned with travel than with his family." He remarried two years later, and as he says, was "fortunate" enough to be living in a *tanjū* when it was flattened by a typhoon. The rebuilding of the *tanjū* was sponsored by the local and prefectural governments' Special Relief Fund, which meant that the old buildings were torn down, and at the instigation of Sato, the *ex-yakuza* boss, new self-contained three bedroom houses were built on the site of the *tanjū*. The rental of these places is fixed at the same rates the inhabitants paid for the old *tanjū* - 4,500 yen a month. Interestingly Onishi himself had no coal experience, although he had worked in a number of different labouring jobs for coal company subcontractors, yet was able, through his first wife's contacts (her father was a miner), to get into the *tanjū*.

In 1974, while on a *toroko tsuaa* (massage parlour tour) of Kita Kyushu, he met an old man who had been a miner and a *kami shibai* man. In a room in a dirty hotel in the red light district of Kita Kyushu the old man showed him some of the pictures he used to display to the children in *tanjū* all over the country. Onishi, who was always looking for a way to make a quick buck, was so impressed with the art work and the stories which went with the pictures he decided to buy them. Altogether he purchased more than 6000 pictures at a cost of 300,000 yen. There were enough stories to last for more than ten years, he says. He decided then to become a *kami shibai* man for a living, after being convinced that it was both a money making proposition, and a worthwhile cause.

The *Kami Shibai* Tradition

Kami shibai is traditionally associated with *burakumin*¹ as a profession. It started in the early 1920s, in the wake of the first full length silent movies. Originally conceived as an alternative to movie theatres, the *kami shibai* rapidly grew in popularity in poor communities. Using the concept of the silent movies and the narrator, the *kami shibai* relied on a series of pictures which were displayed in a small theatre-like frame. On the back of these pictures were the sequential elements of the story to be presented, so that the *kami shibai* man was able to read the stories out loud to his audience, each picture being presented with the relevant dialogue. The pictures were about one square metre in size, and were painted in bright colours. Typically the stories were moral or cautionary tales, often graphically violent. The people in the stories were often eaten by wild animals, killed by foreigners, or bashed by soldiers and police if they made mistakes. The tattooed *yakuza* also became the heroes of many of these tales.

Up until the 1930s a huge range of social commentary was possible within this medium; from cautions about how to deal with outsiders, to issues concerning sexual relationships, to criticisms of the policies of government. However in 1932 the dreaded Thought Police, responsible for the curtailment of unpatriotic thoughts, and activities "not in the national interests," decided to investigate the people presenting the *kami shibai*. After this investigation they decided that from that point on, all *kami shibai* would have to be licensed, and the material censored so that nothing which was critical of the Emperor or the Japanese status quo was to be presented. Moreover, in the strict

¹The *burakumin* are a group of people who are racially Japanese, but have been socially, economically, and geographically isolated since the imperial adoption of Buddhist doctrines in early feudal Japan. Originally called the *eta* (literally "full of filth"), they occupied a sub-human position in the social and economic hierarchy during feudal times, based primarily on vocational discrimination. People who worked in professions which were seen as being ritually defiling, such as butchers, tanners, graveyard guards and *zori* (straw sandals) makers were put into this category.

Although since 1868, when the Emancipation Edict was declared, it has been illegal to discriminate against *burakumin*, discrimination, especially in relation to work and marriage, continues today. It is estimated that there are more than three million *burakumin* in Japan today, according to the *Buraku Kaihō Dōmei*.

moral climate of the 1930s, topics which discussed sex, poverty, and crime were made illegal. During the war transgressions of the law were punishable by death.

Certain stories and themes were allowed such as those which justified the invasions of Manchuria and Korea, the inalienable right of the Emperor to rule, the value of the Imperial forces, and the integrity of the farmers' contribution to the Divine Cause of the Emperor. In effect the medium became a propaganda exercise for the government. Standardisation did however bring a much higher quality of art work, and by the end of the Second World War the standard was more than just a representation of the authors' imagination. Artists had been commissioned to draw complex and subtle images for the Association of *Kami Shibai* People, and some of these pictures are today worth many thousands of dollars. In fact many of the artists who drew the *kami shibai* in the postwar era are some of Japan's best-known modern cartoonists.

In the period of liberalisation following the war the content of *kami shibai* was no longer so tightly controlled although the popularity of the shows decreased owing to the spread of cinema. Cynical, non-aligned criticisms of the coal industry and stories of greed and usury started to appear, but for the most part the *kami shibai* remained fairly conservative in content. This was mainly due to the declining fortunes of the people who presented the shows. Only rarely were the presenters also artists, so new stories had to be commissioned from good artists. This was expensive, and few *kami shibai* people could afford to buy new stories.

Origins of the *Kami Shibai*

The people who presented the *kami shibai* apparently started when they realised that there was a gap to be filled in a society where entertainment was limited. The mining communities, particularly the small ones, were an obvious choice because of their geographical and social isolation. In Chikuhō, the movement started in 1923 according to Onishi, when the first *kami shibai* people came down from Osaka. These people were from an Osaka *buraku*,² and had acquired the skills through a guild of

²literally "hamlet, settlement or village", and the source word for the contemporary "Burakumin" expression. To be specific, it had its origins in the expression *tokushu burakumin*, or "Special Settlement" people.

actors and puppeteers. As competition in the Kansai region increased, some of their number decided that there might be a better living to be had in Kyushu, so they moved to the Chikuho coalfields.

The *kami shibai* presenters had a set area within which they performed their shows; territories were established by mutual agreement. Up until the 1960s these men (they were always male) would push their carts with the picture show set up on the back around the *tanjū*. Their cries were children's songs, with the occasional flute accompaniment, and the beating of a *taiko* (drum). *Tanjū* children and adults would come out of their homes and go to see the show, buying the sweets which were the *kami shibai* man's sole source of income. The sweets were sugar and water, square wafers with shapes of animals impressed in the centres. The children had to try to suck the outside of the sweet away so that only the animal in the centre was left. If they could leave only the shape, with no indentations - the rules were strict - they were entitled to a second free sweet. The challenge was only rarely met in the days when poverty was endemic in the region. Sugar was a luxury that few could afford, and generally the children succumbed instantly to the sickly sweetness, gulping the sweets down.

After the sweets had been bought, the *kami shibai* man would present his show.

Not only were the *kami shibai* men entertainers, they also brought news to the people in the *tanjū*. Calling in at as many as ten or twelve *tanjū* in the course of their rounds, the *kami shibai* men were able to collect news of big events, rumours of trouble, messages from people in one *tanjū* for those in another etc. They were then, unofficial, but trusted news services in their own right. Their position as "trusted outsiders" in many *tanjū* was an ambiguous role, but certainly they were able to make and exploit many contacts, finding out controversial information about sensitive issues. Because they were outsiders they were not subject to the arbitrary punishments *tanjū* people were, for disclosing company "secrets," such as the extremes of violence a company used. However they were required to be discreet because the company could ban them from entering company property if they thought that they were spreading dissent.

The fact that many of these men were *burakumin*, the despised and "different" people who lived in settlements removed from the coal company *tanjū*, meant that there

were ambiguous feelings towards them. Many *burakumin* worked in the mines, though the majority of these people laboured in the "badger holes." Therefore, within the *buraku* strongholds *kami shibai* men were regarded as being somewhat unusual because their contacts with the outside world were so developed. The *buraku* communities were dependent on the *kami shibai* men for news of the world outside their isolated existence. They brought letters, and sometimes newspapers into the *burakumin* communities, and they also carried word of how the other *buraku* communities were organising themselves, and news of the politicisation of the *buraku* cause, and violence directed at *burakumin*.

Onishi and his personal cause

These days, Onishi is one of the last remaining *kami shibai* men in Japan. Driving his Toyota from *tanjū* to *tanjū* he makes a reasonable living in much the same way the *kami shibai* of old did: telling stories to a new generation of miners' relatives; collecting and passing on gossip; making contacts within *tanjū*. Although the style of his presentations is more modern and in line with contemporary society's mores, he relies heavily on the work of traditional *kami shibai* artists. In fact the stories he presents are the same stories that have been presented for a generation, though they are presented with the Onishi style - laconic, cynical and inevitably delivered in the gravel voice trademark. Having his car enables him to reach a wider audience than he would have been able to had he been reliant on the old hand carts, but with audiences dropping off, he needs to be able to reach more *tanjū* to make the business pay off.

It might be expected that a person performing in such a venerable profession would be informed about the roots and history of the profession, and deeply motivated to carry on delivering messages traditionally associated with *kami shibai*. In Onishi's case, nothing is further from the truth. He says;

I do the work because it pays the bills, gives me time to relax - I don't work when it rains, for example, so I can go mountain climbing - and because it's a better job than carpentry. I was lucky to find that man in Osaka, because doing this job has made a huge difference to my life. I get to talk to many new people, and have contact with people I have

always had an interest in. I'm also able to get involved in social movements, and research what happened in Chikuho in the coal days. I mean, it beats labouring, that's for sure.³

Over a year, Onishi maintains that he makes about 250,000 yen a month, which puts him in the higher income bracket for Kawasaki. His wife is a potter, and between them and their two children they have a fairly comfortable existence. He is active in local politics, largely thanks to his myriad contacts, and organises children's days, welfare outings for the aged, festivals, dances, and many other events within the *tanjū*. Because of the diversity of his contacts he has also become interested in the development of the Yamano Coal Mine disaster relief organisation, the Mitsubishi Takashima accident, and the Anti-Emperor movement. He has become committed to the idea that Chikuho is being eroded from within and without by the totalitarianism of the elite, and that this revolves around the way that history is represented to the local people. He is always willing to discuss the workings of the power elite in Chikuho.

Not everyone shares Onishi's enthusiasm for this topic, and this situation is exacerbated by his sometimes ill-informed but very confident comments. He is tolerated by intellectuals with whom he deals, such as Idegawa and Yano, who will be described in later chapters. These people are aware of the wide audience he has in his daily routine, but the majority of people who regularly associate with him said that he often gets so carried away with the subject that fact and fantasy are indiscriminately mixed. He also alienates many because of his lack of etiquette, something which is strictly adhered to within coal communities. However his contacts are many, and it was through Onishi that I was able to meet a huge number of Kawasaki residents and social activists. This was in part due, no doubt, to the fact that he prided himself on his "internationalism," and his contacts with foreigners, enhanced by the fact that he spoke some English. In fact he often lapsed into a jumble of English and pidgin Japanese, which was as bemusing to me as it was amusing to any Japanese listeners.

On many occasions I was forced to take gifts to people we had visited together to apologise about the impropriety of Onishi's remarks. Some examples are: when we visited a *burakumin* woman's home, he said loudly, that it was a pity that *burakumin*

³Onishi, interview; 1988

had had such a bad time in Japanese society, but that they had brought the situation on themselves by their outrageous public behaviour. In a meeting with members of the Red Army, a notoriously violent leftist organisation, he said that he thought that the Japanese Communist Party would never make it in big time politics, because they were too radical for most of the population. With a *yakuza* boss in the car he claimed that the *yakuza* these days were really a bunch of weaklings with identity problems. One of my informants confided in me that the man was not to be trusted, not because he would intentionally say anything damaging, but because he would accidentally say something which could be disastrous. I was asked to be careful what I said to Onishi.

These small, but potentially deadly faux pas aside, he proved to have an interesting, if sometimes simplistic approach to life in Chikuho. As a young man working with the Caravan movement, with three others, he undertook a study of the number of mining accidents in Chikuho in the postwar period. This study has become the seminal study of accidents, not so much for what it discovered about the dreadfully high accident rate, but for what it could not discover. The accident rate statistics which the companies issued were not concomitant with the statistics his group collected from looking through the official company records. The official statistics were less than 10% of the number his group unearthed. More importantly, small mines were not required by law to disclose their accident records, so the huge number of mining deaths in the more dangerous small mines were never actually recorded.

Onishi is a powerful singer, who performs every year in the local *Bon Odori Taikai*, the festival of the dead celebrations. He is the Kawasaki MC, and one of the organisers of the event, which every year attracts thousands of participants and spectators. He has been responsible for the resurgence of popularity of many of the local festivals, actively promoting them on his rounds, petitioning local councils and government to act decisively to reintroduce "culture" to the region. Because he has a relatively large amount of free time, he is able to actively involve himself with many of the fringe groups in the region, which he has contacted during his rounds. The Yamano Widows' protest movement, which he decided was a worthwhile cause in the mid 1970s, has profited through his attention and his ability to bring matters to the attention of influential local politicians. The issues of poverty, welfare and crime in Kawasaki have also been looked at by Onishi. He has contacts within the police

department, and has been instrumental in getting local juvenile delinquents involved in community projects as part of their punishment, rather than having them incarcerated in borstals.

As a motivator, he is successful in convincing many young people to become involved in community life, something which is rare in the coalfields. He now believes that it is essential that young people be able to understand that they are the products of a corrupt and uncaring government/big business policy. Once this is understood,

they can throw off their need to be recognised by the city people and concentrate on developing their own character with pride. The people here have a history of being squashed by the powerful who have never cared what happens to them, as long as they performed well in their factories and mines. When the mines got out of Kawasaki, the companies did pretty well out of it - Ueda made a lot of money from the government out of Hoshu, for instance. But they were responsible for the scrapping of the town too. And with the town went the people. No wonder we have the highest unemployment and welfare rates in the country. No-one ever cared whether Kawasaki people lived or died, and because of this, "survival of the fittest" became the lifestyle here.

The *yakuza* were around, and because they always drove the biggest, best cars, and wore the best clothes, they became the role model for many young men, who had nothing else to offer the community, and few means of achieving wealth. The *yakuza* and the *yakuza* image are probably responsible for the way the people in this town are hooked on cars and motorbikes. I guess the macho image of the *yakuza* is well established in Kawasaki. I mean, young men make a big show of talking tough, and swaggering when they walk, bullying some of the shopkeepers. But these guys are really good kids - they're just bored and unmotivated. That's what the Youth Camps scheme we set up is about. We're trying to give these kids some direction - you know, to get them into helping within the community. The big problem is that most of the kids who come from families on welfare think that it is "cool" (*kakui*) to be tough and on welfare, and that it's "girlish" to be involved in community problems (unless you cause them yourself).⁴

Onishi's range of acquaintances and contacts have taken him in many ideological directions. However he remains consistent in that he is concerned with the way people

⁴Onishi, interview: 1988

have been abused by the system, whether it be the mining companies, local government, the courts, the police, the welfare system, or local employers. In 1983, while doing his rounds of the local *tanjū*, he was approached by a woman at the Yamano settlement, who mentioned to him that the Yamano Widows' Movement (YWM) were having a celebration because they had been successful in getting their case to the supreme court. He was asked if he would like to come to the celebration and perform one of the more famous *kami shibai*. This contact was important in that by going to the party he was able to see for himself something of the way that the workers at this mine were organised, and how cases could be lost within the legal system for years if it served the interests of the powerful to do so. Through his subsequent involvement with the YWM he came into contact with a group of people who were opposed to the system of government and management which allowed miscarriages of justice of the scale of the Yamano disaster's scope.

Although he is a sexist braggart, who displays violent anti-Christian values, while ostensibly embracing Christianity, is ignorant, outspoken, uncouth and generally an extreme character, Onishi is a passionate, larger-than-life person. For all his bad points, he has a gentle disposition and really is totally unselfish, as one would expect from anyone who dedicated his life to a series of causes. To an outsider it seems as though he desperately wants to be liked and revered by all, and the transparent nature of his attempts to manipulate this were rather pathetic. Yet he was an agitator, a very rare breed in Kawasaki where the disease of apathy has spread to all parts of the town, and thanks to his unlikely pairing with Sato, the *yakuza* boss, he has used his position to fulfil and exceed parts of the original charter of the *kami shibai* man.

PART II

VIOLENCE AND PROTEST

A long history of oppression and a short history of labour protest

Chapter 4 A SHORT HISTORY OF COAL MINING

Chikuho in context

Chikuho was one of Japan's major coal producing areas. During the immediate postwar years and into the 1950s and 1960s Chikuho's coal mines produced between 35% and 50% of Japan's total coal output. It has been pointed out by many Japanese observers that there was a conspiracy of silence amongst the members of the successive pre and post-war governments and the major coal producing companies, to conceal the violent and coercive nature of the coalmines.¹ When the coal industry went into decline in the late 1950s and early 1960s Chikuho, which was almost completely dominated by the production of coal and by secondary related industries, was left in a position where there were few economic alternatives available. The domination of the coal industry was such that in reality there was a monopoly of the local industrial work force. When the coal companies started to rationalise operations in the 1950s and 1960s in response to the first of many Coal Rationalisation Plans there was widespread unemployment, poverty and general discontent which culminated in a series of national strikes and protest movements, all of which proved to be of little use in reversing the trend away from coal, and towards oil.

In describing this process I will first look at the national level. I shall then focus on Chikuho itself, drawing on the accounts of informants from a cross-section of the local society. There are significant divergences between the "official" history and that remembered by the people of Chikuho today. These differences provide fertile grounds for reinterpreting events in the region over the past 40 years.

¹see Idegawa, 1984; Yada, 1975; Ueno, 1985a,b,c

Pre World War II - The discovery and use of coal

Coal was first discovered in Chikuho in the early 16th century and was exploited at that time by the *daimyō*, or feudal lords, of the area.² The "mines" were confined to producing small amounts of domestic coal for the purposes of heating and lighting the homes of the lords. Coal was not really perceived as a viable source of energy at that stage, perhaps because the lords were reluctant to commit themselves to the concept of capital investment which in turn would lead to further economic dependence on the *shōgun*. This was because each *daimyō* had to pay tithes to the *shōgun* for profits gained from any enterprise. Also the "crudity" of merchandising was seen as being below the station of the feudal lords.

At the beginning of the Meiji period in the late 1860s there was a surge of interest in western culture, ideology and technology. In order to achieve the potential for industrial development, a locally produced energy source to fuel the proposed industry became necessary. The so-called Meiji Revolution saw central power passing from the hands of the traditional feudal lords to the hands of the "modernist" merchant oriented samurai class. In essence this transfer of power led to the establishment of groups of the "new rich" which were associated with the old order of "merchant" samurai who had held the financial power. These groups became the all powerful *zaibatsu*, the group of multi-faceted companies which was to dominate the political and economic scene in Japan until its official demise at the end of the Second World War. This group was heavily involved in the coal industry - controlling the lion's share of the industry from the early days of the twentieth century to the end of the coal era.

The need for fuel, established by the growth of industry, was augmented as the country moved onto a war footing at the beginning of the century, when hostilities with Russia began. Coal was the primary fuel source, powering munitions factories, and the steel and shipbuilding industries. The *zaibatsu* companies were all involved in the war effort, expanding considerably during

²Shinfuji, 1985: 234

this period. The increasing demand for coal by industry was one of a number of frequently cited reasons for the invasion of the coal rich Manchuria Peninsula in the 1920s. In the 1930s and 1940s a large number of men from Chikuho were sent to Manchuria to work in the mines.³ Japan could not get too much coal for its military and industrial machines during this period.

Despite overall expansion there was turmoil within the coal industry. The small companies in particular were affected by fluctuations in the market, and in 1931 a representative group protested against the importation of Manchurian coal which was being mined by a consortium of large Japanese coal companies. Cheap coal was flooding the market, and because it was produced by the large Japanese companies offshore, they were able to come to an agreement with the government over an unlimited import quota. The government meanwhile had asked the smaller companies to either reduce output or reduce the cost of their product to further the war effort. However the smaller companies objected to this policy, saying that the imported coal, which was being sold at eight yen a tonne less than cost, was forcing them into bankruptcy. After a lengthy protest movement which led to a confrontation in Fukuoka with the Governor, the big companies agreed to shoulder some of the financial burden of this policy, and the demands that coal production be slowed in the smaller mines were mollified.⁴

The years of the Second World War were characterised by a shortage of domestic manpower within industries which were necessary for the continuation of the war effort. To counter this shortage two main policies were instigated by the government with the assistance of the major coal producers. Mitsui was the first of the big mining companies to allow women back in the pits after the national union, in perhaps its only decisive move before the end of World War II, had banned them from this work in 1928. Many other mining companies soon followed suit and by 1943 fully one quarter of the coalminers in the large

³Okushima, interview: 1988

⁴For a full treatment of this topic see Shinfuji, 1985; Takazaki, 1961; *Tagawa Shishi*, 1979 (all in Japanese) and Samuels, 1987

mines were women.⁵ The second method which was employed to counter the labour shortage was the introduction of forced labour. Koreans were the first men to be brought over to labour in the mines following the annexation of Korea in 1910. They were followed by Chinese after the Manchuria invasion in 1931-2.

In the 1920s and 30s few Koreans were necessary in the coalmines, but as hostilities escalated between Japan and other nations, more and more were brought to Japan to alleviate the labour shortage. By the end of the Second World War it is estimated that there were more than 60,000 Koreans working in the pits nationwide.⁶ Of these people probably 75% were in Kyushu, of whom most were in the Chikuho region. Along with the Korean forced labourers, other POW's were set to work in the mines as the situation got more serious and the demand for mine labour increased. By the end of the war there were altogether more than 100,000 foreign forced labourers in the pits.⁷

Recently, the Korean Forced Labourers' Movement (*Kyōsei Renkō*) has estimated that there were more than 1,000,000 Koreans brought to Japan to work in mines, factories, and domestic building projects from 1911 to 1945.⁸ Many of these men were in the Kyushu mines.⁹ It is important to bear in mind that these forced labourers worked mainly in the large mines owned by the *zaibatsu*, and in *zaibatsu* affiliated companies. This is attributable to the strong influence the large companies were able to exert on the government's allocation of POW labour. The importance the government attached to the coal industry is reflected in the labour force statistics. In 1932 there were 140,000 miners employed in coalmines nationally. This figure, which included a large number of women miners, had increased to 440,000 by 1945.

⁵Takazaki, 1961: 132; Shinfuji, 1985: 246

⁶Kim, personal communication: 1988

⁷Shinfuji, 1985: 225

⁸*Kyōsei Renkō* Documents, 1989: 44

⁹Kim, personal communication: 1988

Throughout the Second World War coal production continued to increase. In the period from 1930 to 1945 production was up by 200%.¹⁰ Coal production had in effect become the cornerstone of the economy,¹¹ a position which was emphasised by the importance attached to reviving the postwar coal industry under the US Occupation. At the end of the war the coalminers who were forced labourers were freed and the formerly "free" women miners were forced to give up their work.

The post World War II boom

The mining industry was in disarray after the war. The repatriation of forced labourers left a huge gap in the labour force, and in 1945, after the war, there were only 100,000 coalminers working in mines throughout the country. Two typhoons also devastated the coalmining areas in Kyushu in 1946, flooding many mines and halting production. Because of labour shortages and mining disasters production had fallen to 550,000 tonnes in 1945 - the lowest coal production figures since Meiji.¹²

Policy decisions concerning the mines were taken by the new government in co-operation with the US Occupation authorities. They decided that it was essential the mines be kept open and production increased, for underproduction by the coal and steel industries was slowing an industrial revival. Thus at the end of 1946 the Occupation forces, with the approval of the Diet passed the Coal Priority Production legislation. This legislation was designed to give the State more control of the coal industry by allowing it direct control of market prices and quotas of coal produced. The venture was capitalised by the Japan Reconstruction Bank at 33.5 billion yen in the first year alone. Ironically *Kōdan* (the Solid Fuels Distribution Public Corporation), which was the administrative organ of the legislation, consisted mainly of ex-*Nittan* (Japan Coal Industry

¹⁰Samuels, 1987: 89

¹¹ibid: 90

¹²Shin Fuji, 1985: 334

Council) chiefs. In other words, the leaders of the large coal companies were given almost totalitarian control of policy and decision making. According to one source, of the 33.5 billion yen that was given to the mines to increase production and improve safety standards, more than half the funding went on building housing for miners and stockpiling equipment for when the market was freed.¹³

Following the war certain incentives were introduced to swell the labour force in the mines under the Priority Production program. One such was the *bento* (lunch box) ration of rice which was supplied to coalminers while the rest of the work force was suffering from malnutrition and a lack of even the most basic daily necessities. Other incentives were free housing, which was offered with work, and relatively good pay in large companies. Partly as a result of these policies the labour force had increased to 350,000 by November 1946.¹⁴

The first independent coalminers' union (*Tanrō*) was formed during this period under the auspices of the Occupation, and by 1948, fifty per cent of coalminers were members of a union - an unprecedentedly high statistic.¹⁶ This number increased after the government, under pressure from the Occupation, made it the right of all miners to join unions in 1948, and by 1950 most miners were involved in some sort of union. However, like today, most of these unions were in reality company unions, and as such were affiliated with the ruling political party. These unions offered support to the companies, rather than to the miners and were often headed by men supported or controlled by management. They were not officially affiliated with *Tanrō* and they did not accept the recommendations of that union, which was associated with the Japan Socialist Party (JSP).

The period between 1945 and 1950 can best be described as a boom period for both the coalmines and the people who lived in the mining areas. Production increased dramatically to over 30 million tonnes, and the number of

¹³Shinjuji, 1985: 243; Yada, 1981: 95; Samuels, 1987: 94

¹⁴Takazaki, 1961: 57

¹⁶Shinjuji, 1985: 146

miners increased to more than 300,000 nationally. The population in Tagawa, for example, grew from 75,000 to 100,000 over this period (see figure 1, page 73). Other towns and cities in Chikuho, which based their economies on the fortunes of the coal industry went through similarly dramatic population increases as their coalmines attracted a broad spectrum of coalminers and associated industries - especially service related industry (see figure 2, page 74).

With the population increases came the benefits that are often associated with large settlements - improved roads, service sectors and city facilities such as public transport. However the boom period was to be short lived, and by the mid 1950s widespread unemployment had become characteristic of the area as a whole.

The Korean War

The onset of the Korean War in 1950 brought about the need for coal to be used once again in the manufacturing and heavy industries, and in the US factories which had been established in Japan over the post World War II years. Although coal production had been steadily increasing since 1946 there was still a relative coal shortage. Once again the government stepped in to encourage the coal companies to increase production. To this end a series of laws were passed making it easy to get interest free loans to start coalmining operations in any certified coal field. This was in reality much more complex than it appears because of the nature of the coal field ownership and leases¹⁷. In the years from 1948 to 1960, in the Chikuho region alone 559 mainly small mining companies started operations. In the same period 520 companies folded.¹⁸ The market was volatile.

During this period the national coal labour force increased to 370,000 and production reached the highest levels since the Second World War - 48 million tonnes in a single year. Within Chikuho, production increased in line with the

¹⁷see Violence chapter for description

¹⁸Takazaki, 1961: 26

TAGAWA CITY POP MOVEMENT 1943 TO 1987

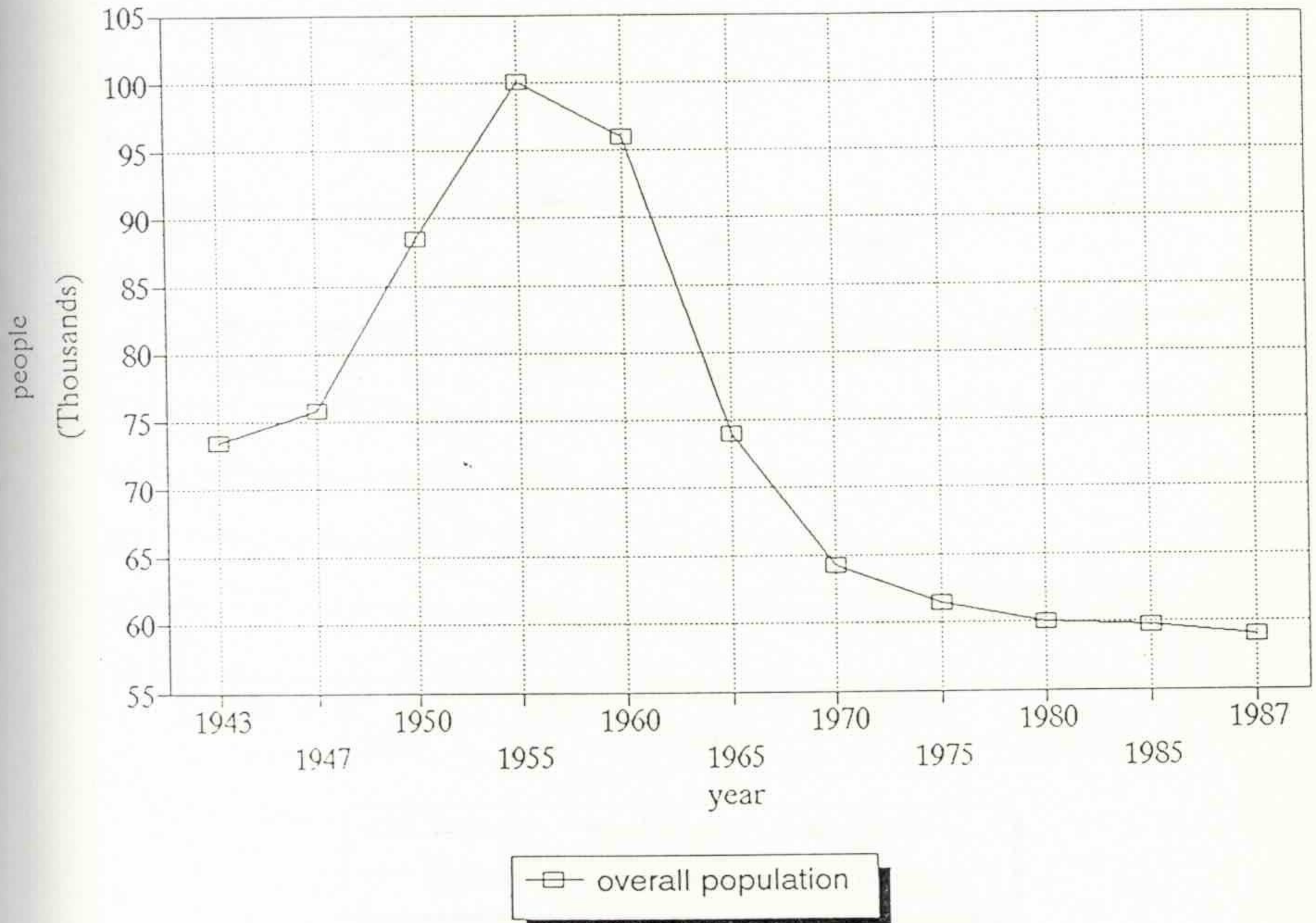


figure 1: source - Tagawa City Council statistics. June 1987

CHIKUHO POPULATION MOVEMENT 1955 to 1985

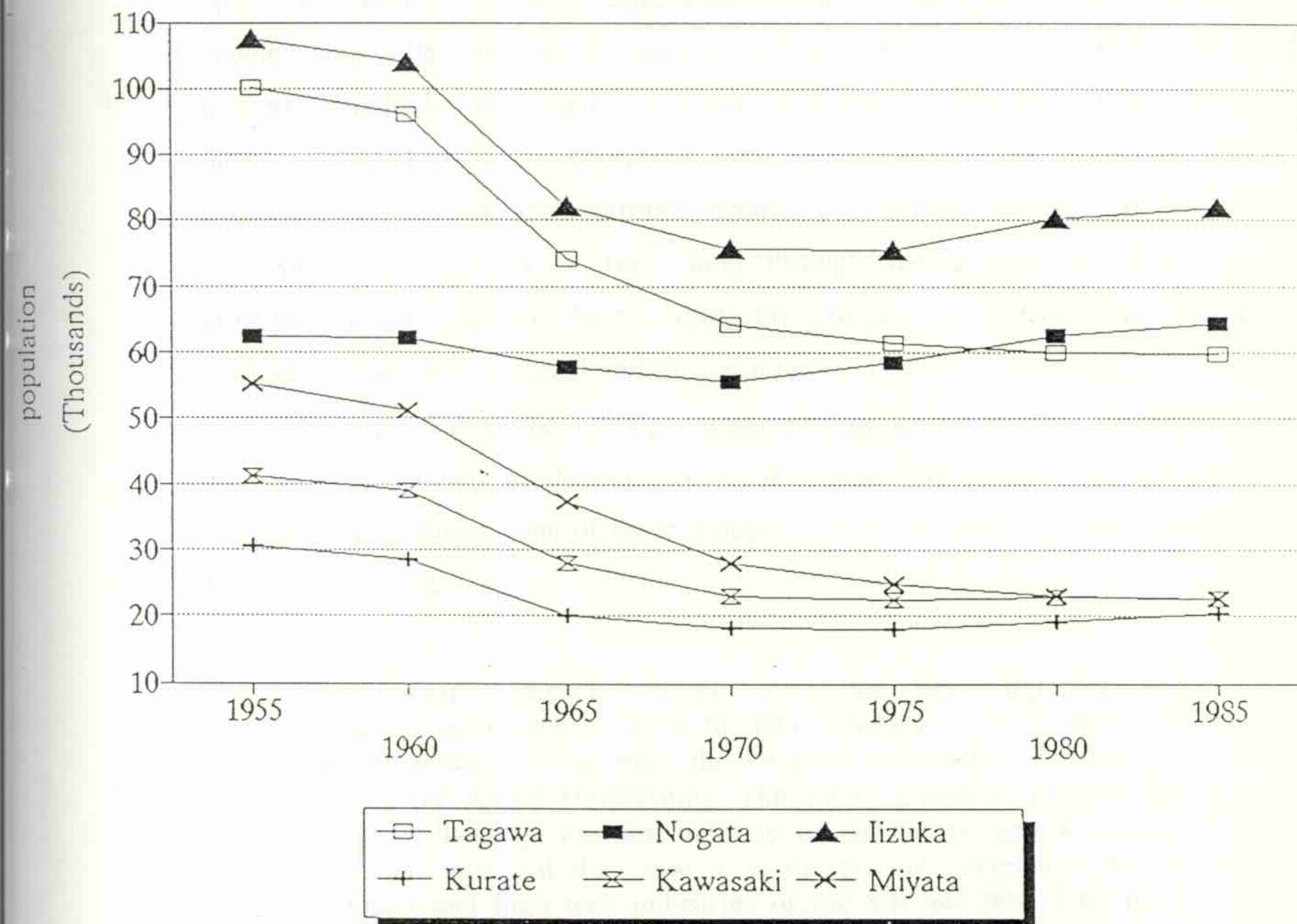


figure 2: source - Fukuoka Prefecture Census 1986: 7-21

national trends, as figure 3, page 76, shows, output from the three major cities in Chikuho reaching close to 15 million tonnes in 1951.

The labour force had been recruited from a number of areas within the economy in the post-war boom period. Returning ex-servicemen filled a large number of the available posts within the industry - many of these men had been miners, or were related to pre-war miners. Other ex-service personnel were too young to have had any work experience outside of the armed forces, and these people were often trained to occupy positions such as barrowmen and pit support, which did not require industry experience. Apart from these people, those who worked in the depressed rural sector, which was struggling under carry-over effects of the wartime economic restraints which had virtually destroyed large sections of rural land through forced overproduction, were attracted by the relatively high wages, the prospect of free housing, and the relative job security the coal industry offered.

On top of this, the mining companies had set up a drive to recruit the best of the young academics from the better universities to fill lower management positions. One of these academics from Kyushu University described the situation thus:

The mining companies sought only the best engineers and economics graduates to work in their companies, which was why they drew their quotas from the imperial universities like Kyushu, Tokyo, and Kyoto Universities. The young graduates thought that the mine industry was the industry of the future, and I suppose you could say that they saw it as the present generation see the computer and high tech industries of the 80s and 90s. That is, it held a magnetic attraction for the young go-ahead type of man. The companies had a lot of money and were very powerful, so the young men were very keen to get work with these industrial giants.¹⁹

¹⁹Yada, interview: 1988

CHIKUHO COAL PRODUCTION 1946 to 1974

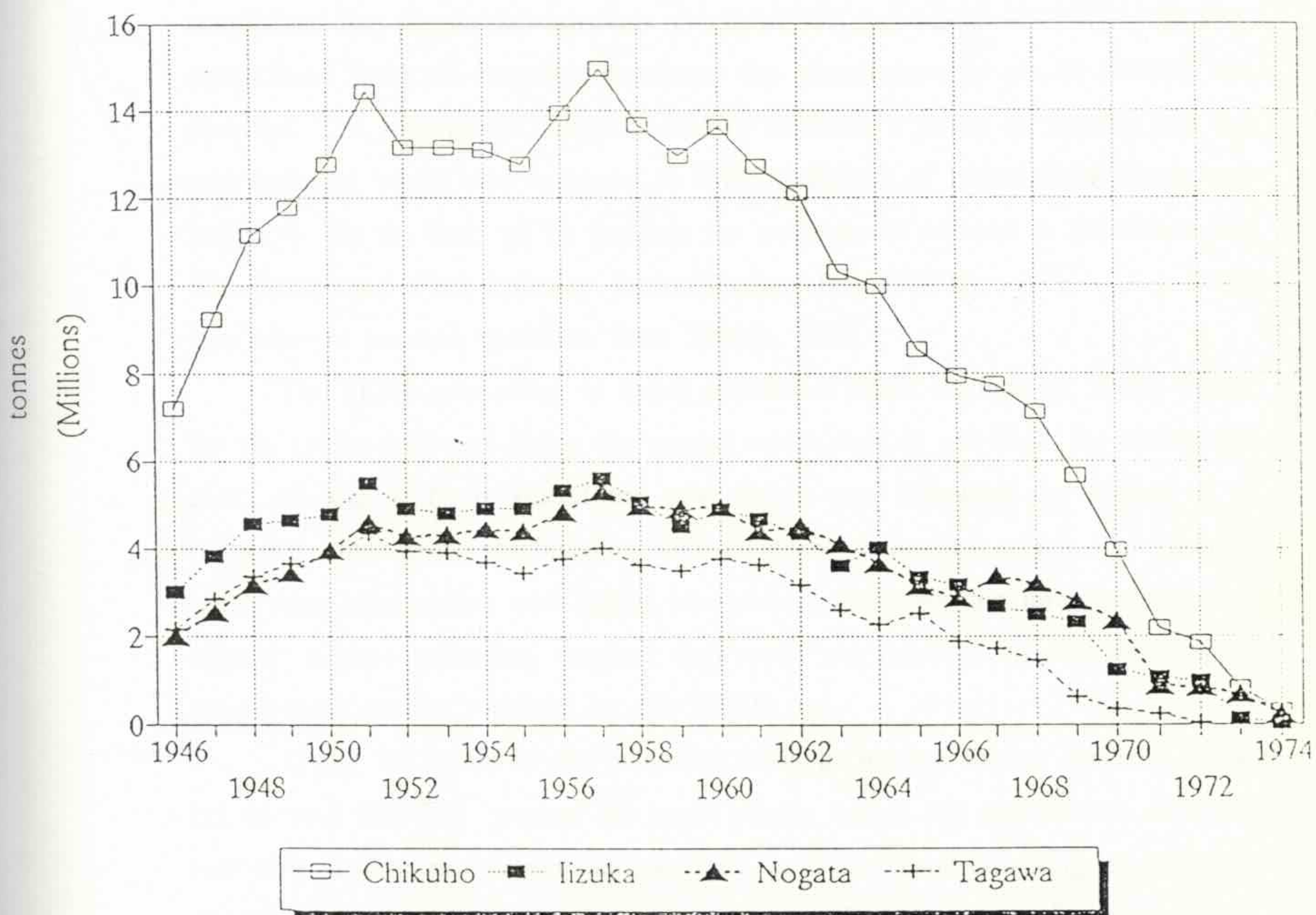


figure 3: source - Kyushu Coal Research Centre 1980

The decline and rationalisation of the coal industry

By the end of the Korean War there were massive coal stockpiles. Supply far exceeded demand. This caused many problems for the government, mainly because it had passed legislation after the outbreak of the Korean War encouraging investment in coal, particularly by the small to medium sized companies, many of which were going bankrupt. The large companies complained that the market was too restricted, and faced with annually increasing competition from oil imports, pressured the government to act to remedy the situation. The government response was to establish a Board of Inquiry into the coal industry, which was to report to MITI (Ministry of International Trade and Industry). On the basis of its findings the government decided to implement the first Temporary Coal Industry Rationalisation Bill (TCRB) which was a three year plan to go into operation from March, 1952.

The TCRB was aimed at fixing production based on locality, fixing prices for the production, and fixing the market which was to use coal. By setting the quota of coal to be produced the government was following the wishes of in particular, the steel, shipbuilding and electrical industries which had become more vocal, demanding coal prices be reduced. However the mining companies rejected a price reduction, because they were not prepared to shoulder any of the financial burden required by the TCRB.

Under the terms of the bill they stood to receive further tax free loans, but because they had invested too much money during and immediately after the war in improving production facilities they were unable or unwilling to undertake the responsibility of further loan repayments. The big companies prepared to diversify their investments and many of them invested in subsidiary interests, offshore opportunities, steel, and oil and petroleum production and importation, relinquishing many of their coal interests. Workers at collieries all over the country were concerned about the probable effects of the TCRB, and a series of strikes occurred in some of the smaller mines in Chikuhō during the early 1950s as a protest against the impending closures.

At this stage it should be emphasised that the union response was conservative in light of the severe rationalisations which were taking place within the industry. The mine operators were not investing in their mines, and not improving safety standards. Rather they were trying to increase production with the facilities and the work force that existed at the time. The mining accident rate for the years 1950 to 1960 is remarkably high. It has been estimated that there were 5,000 deaths in the Chikuho area in this period due to coalmining accidents.²⁰ Because of the nature of the mining structures in operation at the time it is difficult to calculate the number of deaths from the smaller mines, but other sources have said that this is a conservative estimate.²¹ Coupled with the increased danger at the work site, the companies, in their attempts to get what they could from the mines while they were still viable concerns, continued to employ *yakuza*-like overseers (*rōmu kakari*) as they had done during the war, to keep the workers controlled and productive. Violence became a way of life for many of the miners, yet because there was such a poorly developed union consciousness it was very rare that protest against the poor working and living conditions was voiced.²²

The methods of labour control employed during the war were dependent on the goodwill of the crime syndicates who supplied the men to work in the roles of overseers, keeping the forced foreign labourers in particular under tight control. After the war, when the large companies had the pick of the labour force, the smaller companies were able to induce some of the Korean labourers to continue working in their mines. Among the Kyushu mines, Hoshu, a mine owned by Ueda Seijiro, was among the most notorious for its abuse of both Japanese and Korean workers. The system of forced labour was continued

²⁰Onishi, 1975

²¹Idegawa, interview: 1988; Takazaki Report, 1961: 15

²²Ueno, 1985c: 276

throughout the 1950s and into the 1960s in certain small, notoriously violent mines.²³

As the labour situation grew more desperate, the National Coalminers' Union (*Tanrō*) stepped in and in October, 1952, when coal stockpiles had reached their "peak," *Tanrō* affiliated unions went on rolling strikes in the bigger mines for two months over wage and job security claims, greatly effecting production. This series of strikes and the violence that occurred in settling the dispute over working conditions became famous in mining folklore. However the miners won few concessions in this action. Partly as a response to the militancy of the action, market demand dropped because industries which needed fuel were reluctant to commit themselves to coal in the light of the potential disruptions to supply. This in turn affected the overall production of the mines, which led to a large number of miners losing their jobs. The smaller mines continued to produce, but overall production had dropped by 6,000,000 tonnes from the previous year.²⁴

The timing was critical here, because during the months of the strike when there was widespread lack of confidence in the coal industry, the government had moved to relax the tariffs on oil imports in line with other industry demands. The lack of confidence in the industry was compounded the following year when coal production dropped considerably again as the industry was reeling from the effects of the 1953 recession. Petroleum share of the primary fuel market jumped from 5% in 1950 to almost 18% in 1953.²⁵

The national lack of confidence in the industry was reflected in Chikuho, as figure 3 shows. Production dropped noticeably in 1952 and 1953, but there was a revival, as demonstrated in the artificial peak reached in the late 1950s during the Suez Crisis. By 1954 more than 90,000 miners had lost their jobs nationwide, and the Chikuho miners in particular were severely affected (see figure 4, page 80). The demand for coal was limited, and because the

²³see chapters on Violence, and Kyo no Ue

²⁴Yada, 1974: 138; Samuels, 1987: 105

²⁵Sonoda, 1970; 53

COALMINERS IN CHIKUHO 1947 to 1973

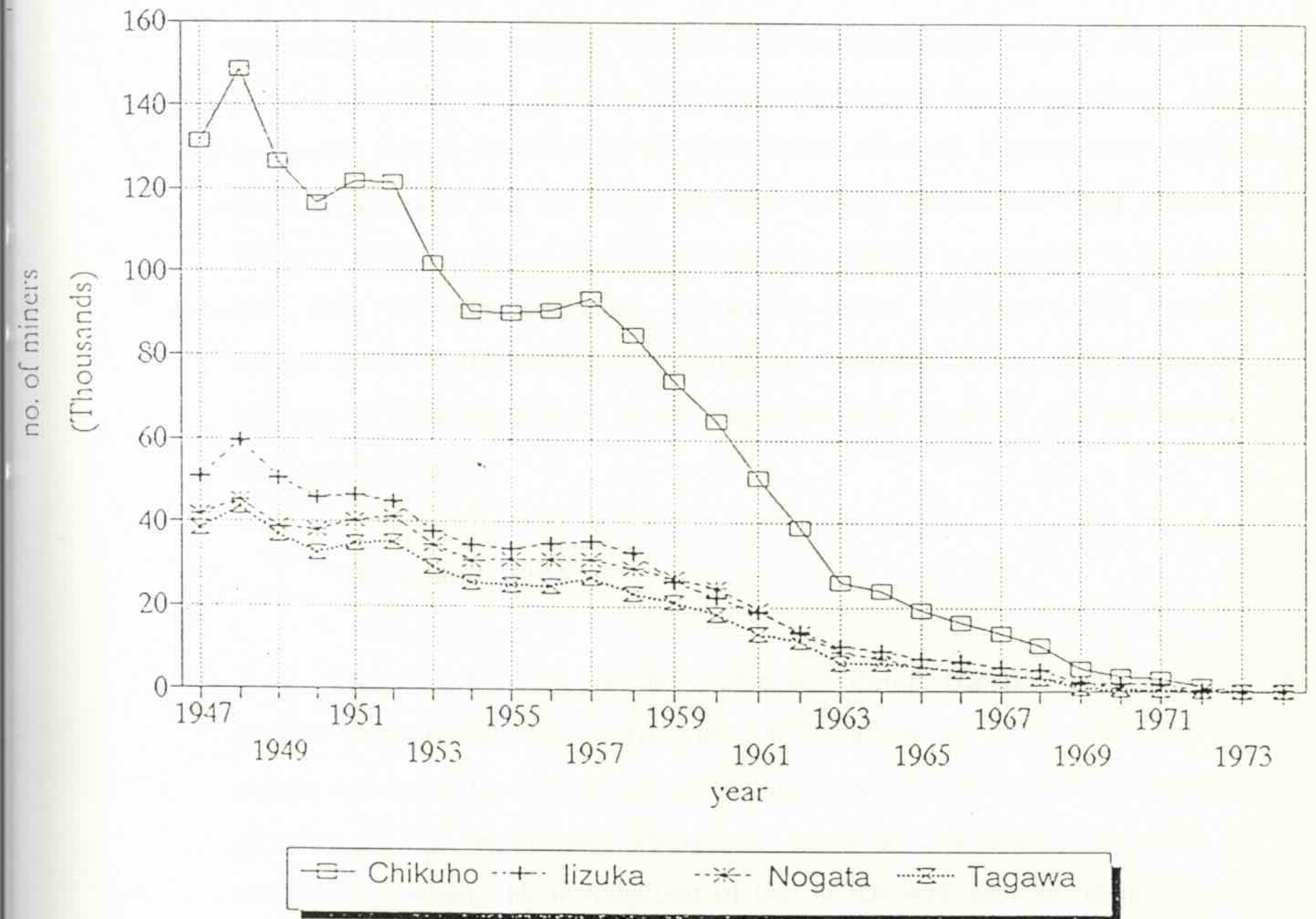


figure 4: source - *Chikuho* by Mizue 1978: 237

distribution system favoured the large companies, the smaller companies could not sell their coal. As a result many companies folded and the unemployment statistics continued to grow.

The government was being put under more pressure to do something about the state of the mining industry by industry leaders, manufacturing leaders, local governments, and unions alike as the situation deteriorated. Unemployment was at the highest levels Japan had seen, there were no job vacancies in the coal areas, and the housing that the coal companies had owned was often left without electricity and water as the companies closed down operations. After the temporary revival provided by the Suez Crisis when oil imports were threatened, the coal industry was no better off than it was before the crisis started. The Ministry of International Trade and Industry (MITI), in response to the cries for help from the mine operators, introduced before the Diet a bill designed to relieve some of the problems plaguing the industry. A major objective of the bill was to place the burden of the implementation squarely with prefectural and local governments.

"Scrap and Build"

The second TCRB, or the "Scrap and Build" (*Gorika*) plan, as it was to become known, was first introduced for discussion in 1954, and after lengthy debate was made law in May the following year. Because the rapid rate of mine closures in the region was recognised as a serious social, as much as an economic problem, the introduction of the TCRB was seen as being an essential step in alleviating some of the pressure from Chikuho, and the other coal producing areas. The law was a short term measure and was based around five main points.

1. It was to stretch over five years, and by 1959 total coal production should not exceed 49,500,000 tonnes. There was a condition attached that in order to maintain the high production capacity coal prices were to be dropped by 20%. This was to make coal competitive with imported energy.

2. The Coal Industry Maintenance Operations Group was to be formed to control the distribution of 3,000,000 tonnes of low quality coking coal. This would effectively regulate how many new mines would be opened. (The small mines often produced poor quality coal because of the type of lease that was available in low quality seams).

3. As it was necessary to provide some protection for the industry over what was regarded as a temporary period, it was decided that to keep coal competitive with oil, the crude oil tax would be resurrected. Also the flow of crude oil would be limited by restricting the use of oil boilers.

4. The government would buy out coalmines that were having difficulties remaining solvent.

5. A commission of inquiry was to be established to review the conditions of the present coal industry strategy, with the aim of presenting these findings to MITI. MITI, in turn, would attempt to deal with all future problems in the industry on the basis of this report.²⁶

The intention of the legislation was to reduce the overall levels of coal pricing while still guaranteeing production quotas. This was tied in with the government's commitment to establish oil as the fuel of the future, and with the eventual close down of the coal industry. The coal companies were able, through their ability to manipulate the political agenda, to maintain their profitability for the short term, and still be guaranteed the sale of their mines as assets under this legislation. Notwithstanding the bill, MITI soon adjusted the Oil Boiler Act to suit its own policies, allowing payments of the Oil Tariff to be deferred by industry.

Perhaps one of the most neglected considerations of this bill is the fourth point. It has been suggested by some local informants that following the establishment of this clause the mining accident rate increased tenfold in the succeeding year.²⁷ This is certainly difficult to corroborate because statistics on

²⁶Tagawa Shishi, 1979: 485-6

²⁷Onishi, Idegawa, interviews: 1988

accidents during this period are conspicuously absent, but from looking through the newspapers at the time, it does appear that the accident rate increased substantially. One sub-clause attached to this condition stated that if a mine was closed because the conditions had been proved to be dangerous to the miners, the company was entitled to full indemnification from the government. It is no coincidence that the accident rate reached horrific proportions in the late 1950s and early 1960s as the mine owners attempted to pull out of the industry and cut their losses. According to Onishi, who compiled accident statistics in the region, certain mines went as far as to actually precipitate accidents which resulted in the deaths of miners to take advantage of this provision.²⁸ Interestingly there has never been any legal action against companies which seemed to have acted in their own interests by starting, or certainly not preventing, mining disasters.

The coalminers' unions associated with *Tanrō* decided to start a campaign of nationally coordinated industrial action against the proposed introduction of the "Scrap and Build" legislation. Local governments were also concerned that because so many mines were closing down, they would be forced to financially support large numbers of unemployed miners. However despite their opposition, the second TCRB - the "Scrap and Build" Bill - became law.

By 1958 mining towns in Chikuho and Hokkaido had opened discussions to protest the drain on local public finances caused by the law, and to demand compensation from the national government to support the rapidly rising numbers of unemployed. They also demanded that outside interference in coalmining matters be stopped.²⁹ *Sōhyō* (The Council of Trade Unions) supported this stance, and strike action started in many major coal centres, mainly within the big companies.³⁰

²⁸see *Gisei no Tō* (The Tower of Self-Sacrifice) 1975

²⁹The oil companies and steel industry had combined at various points to lobby the government to pressure the coal industry to lower its basic price.

³⁰*Tagawa Shishi*, 1979: 487

MITI responded to these demands by establishing a "mine damages" fund. This allowed for compensation to be paid to local governments for land which was damaged as a direct result of the underground land subsidence caused by the mining. MITI also instigated the National Unemployed Workers Strategy which was intended to employ ex-miners in public works programs. There were three parts to this legislation.

1. Sewers, roads, and running water services would be improved, which would in turn improve the lot of the average resident of the coal towns;
2. House building and the laying of power lines to the *tanjū* would be started; and
3. Unemployed miners would be retrained to be absorbed into the salt manufacturing and other industries that were being encouraged under the rationalisation program.³¹

Unemployed coalminers were to be employed on the public works programs outlined above at the respective local governments' expense, so that not only would the local people benefit from improved facilities, but also the miners would be gainfully employed. The fact of the matter was that there were too many unemployed to fit into the public works scheme, mainly because too many small companies had hastily decided to halt operations under the terms of the TCRB. The third provision was also largely ineffective and the numbers of unemployed rapidly increased.³²

"Divine prosperity" and new industry problems

The introduction of the TCRB, ironically, coincided with the second post-war boom, the so-called "divine prosperity" (*jimmu keiki*). When the Suez Crisis occurred in 1956 the demand for coal rose sharply and the domestic coal

³¹ibid: 490

³²ibid: 490

industry was once again able to set its own price levels.³³ During the crisis the industry, rather than being depressed enjoyed the advantages of having government support. While the government would buy out obsolete mines on the one hand, on the other, the mines could control coal prices based on industry demand. The number of coalmines increased by 40% in 1956-7. This was contrary to all MITI's expectations.³⁴

However this was the last real boom period for coal, and from 1959 the figures tell the story of the collapse of the industry in the face of cheap coal imports and the government's promotion of crude oil boilers for electrical energy. In August that year more than 10,000,000 tonnes of coal were stockpiled throughout the country. Throughout this period large companies were continuing their strategy of investing in other industries rather than putting more money into an industry which was inherently unstable. To this end they were able to reinforce the leasing system whereby small companies would work the seams around the main coalmines, pay the production costs, but sell the coal they produced through the network established by the "parent" company. This effectively reduced the risk for the large companies, but made the smaller companies susceptible to market fluctuations which ultimately resulted in many of them going bankrupt. The statistics reflect this trend, particularly in the 1950s. The large companies were responsible for 72% of coal production in 1950, but by 1958 this figure had dropped to 64%.³⁵

Scrapped, but not rebuilt

Although one of the aims of the TCRB was to limit coal production, by May 1959 the total estimated production for the year had already been reached, mainly due to the enormous stockpiles of coal which could not be sold. In Chikuhō 81 mines had been bought out by the government and between 1956

³³ibid: 487

³⁴Yada, 1975: 122

³⁵Samuels, 1987: 111

and 1959 22,900 workers in the region had become unemployed. Earlier, in the first recession of 1953-4, some 31,000 workers had been made redundant in the region, and most of these workers had remained in Chikuho either looking, often unsuccessfully, for work, or working in the special programs which the government had established. Altogether there were more than 50,000 out of work miners by the end of the 1950s, and the prospect of more mine closures was becoming a pressing issue which the government was not prepared to face.³⁶

Very little had actually been done to alleviate the suffering that massive unemployment and the erosion of the industry was causing. The promised new roads had not been built. The *tanjū* had not been rebuilt. There were almost no retraining programs. The new railway had been scrapped. Running water was still not available in many homes. The so-called "Scrap and Build" program was very much a "Scrap" only program, and to all appearances it seemed as though the government was prepared to write the area off by the end of the 1950s. The only people to have benefited from the program were the mine owners.³⁷ This was all in the name of the Energy Revolution - the need to change from coal to oil. Industries which were related to the coal industry were also hit hard by the closures. Although it is hard to estimate exactly how many people lost their jobs indirectly when the mines closed some sources have claimed that 70% of the workforce were affected in Tagawa.³⁸

The standard unemployment strategy, rather than creating employment opportunities for the unemployed, was to delegate responsibility for the unemployed to the local governments. This placed a big burden on the local people who were forced to support the unemployment schemes tabled in Tokyo and passed

³⁶Yada, 1975: 140

³⁷Takazaki Report, 1961: 143

³⁸Takazaki, personal communication: 1988; Nagasue, 1974: 236

down through the prefecture. The locals were required to prop up the schemes with their own local taxes.³⁹

In Tagawa's case, of the thousands left without work, the national government only budgeted for retraining programs for 337 people a day, each program restricted to a two year limit. The rest of the financial burden rested squarely with local governments, which was a major problem given the limited resources at their disposal. The national government extended the program and aid to local and prefectural governments in 1959, supporting 340 unemployed workers per day.

Under the welfare system unemployed miners were entitled to 315 yen a day, which was just under 40% of the average mining wage. 40% of the financial responsibility for this scheme was delegated to the city, 40% to the prefectural government, and 20% was supported by the national government. In 1959 49.4% of all families in Tagawa City were receiving welfare payments.⁴⁰ Unemployment had become endemic, and a long term solution was not forthcoming.

Labour unrest - Mitsui Miike

In 1959, following the lead of the United States, Japan decided to make a final commitment to switching from coal to oil as their major energy source. The Japanese government was afraid that the United States would develop an insurmountable lead in manufacturing through the implementation of their oil policy, which would effectively cut their manufacturing costs. Japan then finalised measures to rationalise coal and transfer its allegiance to oil by signing contracts with Middle East countries. The oil they contracted to purchase was a third of the price of United States oil at the time. This was seen as something of a coup within government circles, and it was widely felt that if the

³⁹*Tagawa Shishi*, 1979: 494

⁴⁰*ibid*: 496

dependence on coal was transferred to oil, a broad-based manufacturing sector led economic recovery would be possible.⁴¹

However the move to change over to oil was not popular within the coal industry for fairly obvious economic reasons. The coal companies wanted to maintain their strong performance, and especially in Chikuho the need to maintain profitability in the face of declining profit margins resulted in widespread wage cuts. The coal unions responded with some militancy to the reluctance of the companies to allow their wages to keep up with the cost of living increases. Stop work meetings were held, and many small strike actions were started protesting both the decline in the relative wage levels and the impending closure of the mining industry, which threatened workers' job security. Mining companies typically refused to negotiate with the disgruntled miners, citing declining profits and union aggression as being obstructions to any dialogue.

From the end of 1959 labour strife began to take hold in Chikuho, organised under the banner of *Tanrō*. For the first time since the 101 day strike at Kyo No Ue Mine in Kurate, when all members of *Tanrō* went on strike for one day to protest the actions of that company's management,⁴² the concept of class consciousness was developed within the national labour movement. This time the focus was on the impending mine closures, and the TCRB. Donations were asked for, and received from unions in all industries across the country, and a nationwide campaign originating in Miike was started which attempted to recruit support from members of the working classes. The united labour offensive was launched in 1960 with a budget of two billion yen, and a total membership of 3.8 million workers who subsequently demonstrated their sympathy for the coalminers' position.

In January of 1960 the Mitsui Miike mine had posted a notice proclaiming 1300 miners were to be retrenched. These miners were all members of the *Tanrō* affiliated union at the mine. In the period after the government

⁴¹Shinfuji, 1985: 247

⁴²see chapter on Kyo no Ue for a full description of this action

had finalised its intentions of rationalising the coal industry, these men had participated in a number of meetings which condemned the decision of the government. They also denounced Mitsui management for conspiring to keep wages at below standard levels and were opposed to accepting a deal which management offered them after the 1959 plan to rationalise the industry was announced. Management in turn accused the men of being "industrial saboteurs" and acted quickly to retrench them.

At the time the men were sacked, of the 40,000 Mitsui coalminers employed throughout Japan there were 13,500 men employed by Mitsui Miike Coal, and it was widely felt that if the company could easily dismiss such a large percentage from one mine, then other similar retrenchments would follow. The *Tanrō*-led union went on strike over these dismissals. They also demanded that job retraining programs be instituted so that the miners could find work outside the industry, and that wage increases and medical insurance for the remaining period of time in which they worked be employed. These demands were met by a "compromise agreement" put forward by management where the company suggested that the union accept a five percent wage increase, with no other benefits, apart from guaranteed work, in return for increased productivity. The union was unmoved by this offer, and because they would not return to work the company locked the workers out.⁴³

On January 5th, 1960, two days after the workers were sacked, 30,000 miners from Chikuho marched to the company head office to protest the dismissals. Police and the army were called in, and helicopters were also used to break up the protest. The company instituted another lockout to show their disapproval for the action. This precipitated strike action on a scale previously unseen in Japan. For more than a year the Miike Miners' Union stayed on strike, regularly marching on the company headquarters, demanding their claims be met, and that their workmates be reinstated.

During the time the miners were protesting the actions of the company, the company moved to create a second, company union within the workforce,

⁴³*Miike Tankō Rōdōkumiai Nōto*, 1985: 16

to oppose the militant stance of the *Tanrō*-led union. By this stage the company was desperate to get production going again, and a number of material incentives were introduced to entice workers to continue working under the second union's directives. According to Shinfuji, Mitsui encouraged conflict between the unions, and actively supported discrimination against the striking workers in their efforts to maintain the separation between groups.⁴⁴ By March 1960 it was clear that the company was not prepared to mediate with the striking workers, and at the April meeting of *Sōhyō* the union made the commitment to utilise all its strength to mount a series of demonstrations against the new TCRB. The new bill threatened the livelihoods of more than 100,000 miners nationally, and the Mitsui Miike case had become a symbol of the mine owners' refusal to accommodate the needs of its workers. The company's hardline stance against the unions, and the desperation that was bred within miners' ranks forced the miners to consider using violence if necessary to make their demands heard.

By August their demands and their high public profile had generated heated debate within local and national government. In September, after a series of violent confrontations with the police and Mitsui employed gangsters, which resulted in more than 50 miners losing their lives⁴⁵ the union received the official support of all the major political parties except the LDP. The popularity of the miners' stance against the company's rationalisation plan was reified in the city election held that month, where support for the Japan Socialist Party (JSP) increased from 52% to 63% at the expense of the LDP.

Yet while support for the miners continued to increase, especially among other unions, at the grass roots level the union split at Miike was beginning to have a profound effect on the miners. Animosity between the two groups developed into all out war, and there were numerous instances of both groups attacking each other, with the police inevitably siding with the miners from the "New" union. Gradually Mitsui was able to increase the relative number of miners in the "New" union so that only a small percentage of miners in the

⁴⁴Shinfuji, 1985: 258

⁴⁵*Miike Tankō Rōdōkumiai Nōto*, 1985: 54

"Old" union were left to offer resistance to wage and rationalisation proposals put forward by the company. Although this group from the "Old" union had plenty of support among the population at large, there was gradually less support from the rank and file, who were getting edgy about the lack of a solution as time wore on. Defections from the "Old" union to the "New" union became common, as the reason for the strike was obscured in rhetoric from the company, the "New" union and the media. The media focused primarily on the problem of the violence and hatred which permeated the mine. The real issues - the impending closure of the mine, the decreasing wage levels, the lack of available work and the lack of retraining skills were neglected in this rhetoric. What became important was individual, short-term survival. No-one really considered that the industry would have a future. They were concerned about getting through the next 24 hours, according to one striker.⁴⁶

Mitsui Miike and the Black Feather Movement

The Miike strike gained a considerable amount of media attention, and in response to this the *Kuroi Hane* (Black Feather) movement began in mid 1960 with the intention of collecting charity for the workers. This movement was started by a collective of women in Fukuoka and aimed to collect from five to ten yen per person throughout the nation.⁴⁷ As the *Kuroi Hane* movement began to gain momentum the press picked up this story, emphasising the humanitarian side of the women's response. Simultaneously the miners' strike and the general depression and unemployment in Chikuho became nationally reported events.

However the press, perhaps in response to mining company and government pressures, soon began running stories denigrating the efforts of the women's movement. These stories claimed that the movement had not been able to realise its aims, and was therefore ineffectual. One series published at the end

⁴⁶Hanno, interview: 1988

⁴⁷It should be pointed out that the miners were without pay for the duration of the strike

of 1960 in the Asahi Shinbun suggested that the movement had only been able to collect one quarter of the amount it intended in the Fukuoka region, while the Tokyo appeals had been much more successful. The newspaper went on to suggest that the people of Fukuoka, who were physically closer to the problem areas than those in Honshu, were turning their backs on the miners because they really understood the situation. That is, that the miners were not in need of the aid that the public was supplying. This story was picked up in all the mass media and within a month the miners' plight was old news at a national level - outbreaks of violence notwithstanding - and the *Kuroi Hane* movement slowly faded into obscurity because without public support it was futile to continue.⁴⁸ Nevertheless, before the end it had collected and distributed more than 140 million yen to the miners.

Mitsui eventually was able to break the strike one year after it started following a series of riots in which hundreds of miners and police were seriously injured. The company adopted a strategy which was the standard in dealing with labour unrest in the mines. They offered wage and housing concessions, and guaranteed employment to miners who would break from the "Old" union and join the company union, while on the other hand continued the "rationalisation" of the miners who opted to stay with the "Old" *Tanrō* affiliated union. The *Tanrō* workers were locked out and many were sacked, even though national strike action was threatened. Worker solidarity was broken as large numbers of miners, unhappy with the lack of action from their union leaders, defected to the new union. The strike ended soon after. Other large companies followed suit, rationalising their workforces in succession.

A temporary truce - the government sells out

The coal unions changed tactics in 1961, protesting to the government rather than against the companies about the work rationalisations. In December there was a general protest in Tokyo where 50,000 miners convened in front of

⁴⁸Idegawa, interview: 1988

the home of the Prime Minister to confront the government about the problems which the mining industry was facing. The representatives made it clear that the unrestrained shift to oil from coal was causing large scale social and economic problems. The government again attempted to prop up the industry, finally introducing the First Coal Program. This measure subsidised the industry by guaranteeing production levels of 55 million tonnes a year with the condition that heavy industry continue to buy coal. This was to be achieved through an 800 yen per tonne price reduction which a cartel of big coal companies agreed on, to be reached by 1963.

Steel and other manufacturing industries demanded a price cut of 1500 yen per tonne by 1962 however, if they were to buy the coal that was produced.⁴⁹ MITI intervened and settled on a 1200 yen per tonne price cut, with the 400 yen difference to be budgeted for in the form of indemnification for the end users. A 2.14 billion yen interest-free loan scheme for the modernisation of the mines and of mining equipment was also approved. In many cases this money was not used by the companies to improve facilities. Rather, as with earlier government funded schemes, it was invested in companies' other diversified interests.⁵⁰

Under the agreement reached, both supply and demand for coal were guaranteed. But this was not made law. Rather it was a "gentleman's agreement" between the coal, steel and electrical industrial giants, with the government acting as go-between.⁵¹

In short, this arrangement meant that the government would order the construction of new coal fired electrical power generators to absorb much of the domestic coal, maintain the competitive pricing of coal so that other industries would continue to use coal, and provide subsidies for companies which employed ex-miners. However the plan, which ostensibly aimed to retard the changeover to oil was largely ineffective, and social and economic problems with relation

⁴⁹Samuels, 1987: 115

⁵⁰Yada, 1975: 224

⁵¹Samuels, 1987: 115

to the coal industry increased at a hitherto unseen rate as mine owners prepared to leave the embattled industry.

With the government offering to buy out all the obsolete mines at reasonable prices if the companies were bankrupted for reasons beyond their control, such as flooding, cave-ins, gas explosions, and serious labour disputes, the closure of the mines was in full swing in the period from 1956 to 1965. And by 1967, when the effects of the TCRB were being seen nationwide, it was Chikuho which showed the most dramatic closure rate (see figures 5 and 6, pages 95 and 96). It should be emphasised here that the government was determined to bail out the industry through the "Scrap and Build" policy. This was to become the hallmark of the government policy on coal, and was something the government was inordinately proud of. Press releases were full of the news that the "rationalisation" of the industry was going ahead as planned, and that the competitive mines were now producing coal of better quality at lower cost than in earlier periods.⁵²

Cheap overseas coal which in some cases was being produced by Japanese owned companies, was heavy competition for local producers, and the government was under pressure from other industry to relax the restrictions on crude oil. Because the big companies did not want to invest their own funds in developing the mines that already existed they exploited the subcontracting system, becoming gradually more dependent on the output of the smaller mines whose coal carried the parent company's name. This allowed the big companies the freedom of being able to close down their major operations and sell out to the government, take advantage of the reduced wages in the smaller mines, and invest in other unrelated ventures.

As a result of these policies many smaller mines, which to all appearances seemed to be independent were really working under the control of the big coal companies. They were also receiving financial assistance from the parent company, so that during times of low demand they had some financial

⁵²see, for example, Asahi Shinbun throughout December 1961, especially Chikuho section

RETRENCHED MINERS 1963 - 1967

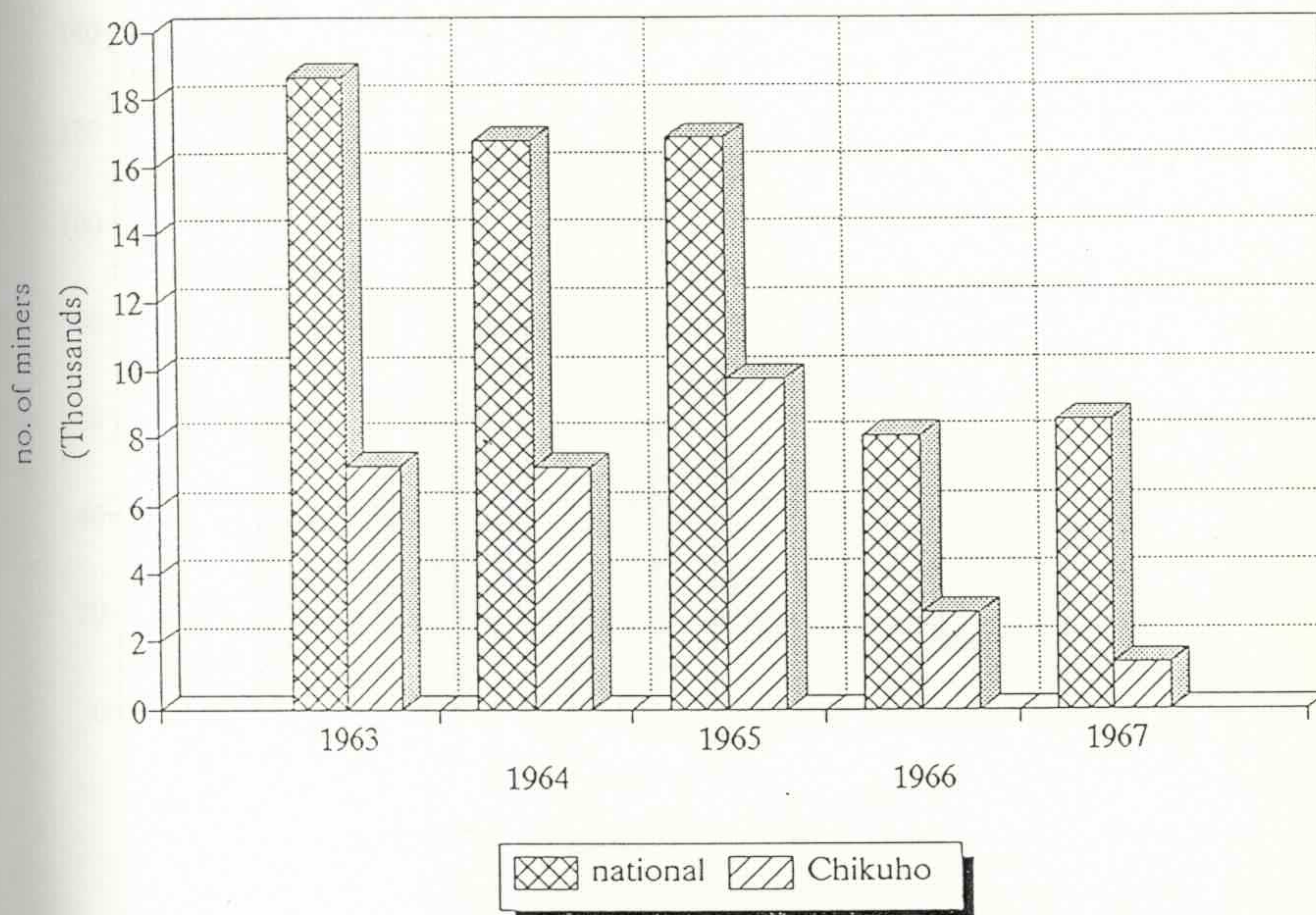


figure 5: source - *Chikuho* by Mizue 1978: 237

TCRB MINE CLOSURES 1963 - 1967

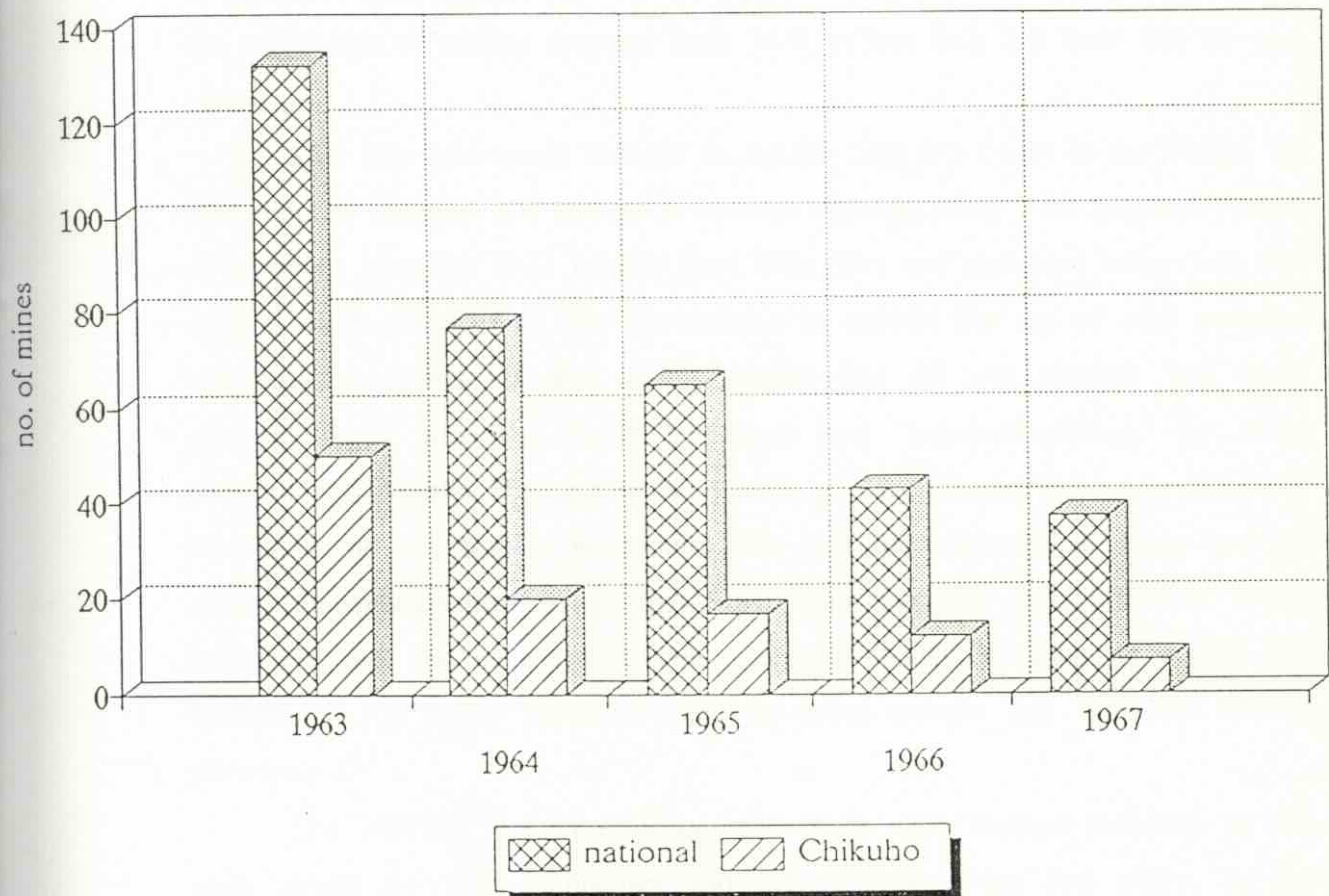


figure 6: source - *Chikaho* by Mizue 1978: 237

security. Many of the small, truly independent companies were forced out of the market by this strategy. They had no financial benefactor, and in the period from 1955 to 1970 90% of the small to medium sized mines in Japan closed down. The big companies too had rationalised their operations so that by 1970 less than one third of the number of large mining companies' mines operating in 1955 were still solvent.⁵³ This trend is reflected in the industrial breakdown of the Chikuhō region, where the percentage of workers in individual industries is compared (see figures 7,8 and 9, pages 98,99,100). Note in particular that the percentage of mining dropped from 34% to less than 1% over this 15 year period.

After the mini boom brought on by the first Oil Crisis in the 1960s, the coal industry slumped and has never revived although there were temporary signs of recovery after the 1973 Middle East War. The anti pollution lobby was also able to exert pressure on the government to restrict the use of coal powered electrical generators. It was widely touted that oil was cheaper and burnt cleaner. Japan was also being pressured into "internationalising" by many Western and Middle East countries, which in effect meant importing their oil. Inevitably the Oil Boilers Restriction Act was soon allowed to lapse and the almost unrestricted flow of oil into Japan from overseas soon followed. It has been said that the only reason coal managed to last as long as it did was because of the heavy influence that the mine owners had with the central government.⁵⁴

The industry was in disarray, and there were serious problems in the areas where the coal companies had monopolised towns and cities. In the Chikuhō region there was mass unemployment, high welfare dependency, major land damage as a result of the mines, polluted water, no work opportunities for many unemployed, no new industry coming into the area and widespread poverty, starvation and a general deterioration of living standards.

⁵³Yada, 1975: 223

⁵⁴Ueno, 1985e: 36; Yada, 1975: 120

CHIKUHO INDUSTRY

Industry/Personnel Breakdown 1955

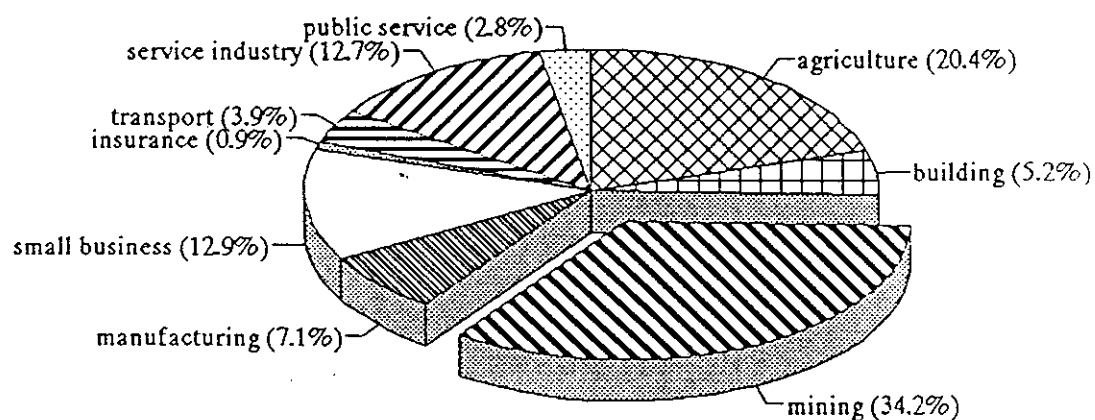


figure 7: source - National Census 1975, in *Chikuhō Fukko Kyoto Kaigi* 1978

CHIKUHO INDUSTRY Industry/Personnel Breakdown 1965

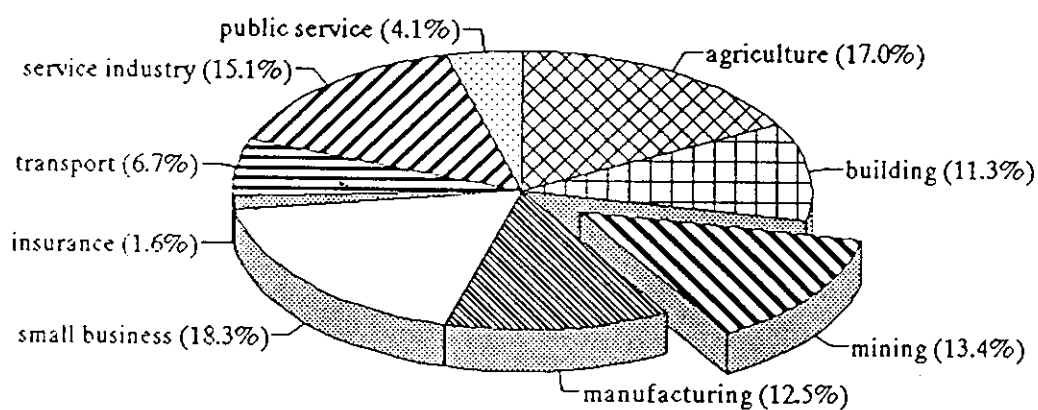


figure 8: source - National Census 1975, in *Chikuhō Fukko Kyoto Kaigi* 1978

CHIKUHO INDUSTRY Industry/Personnel Breakdown 1970

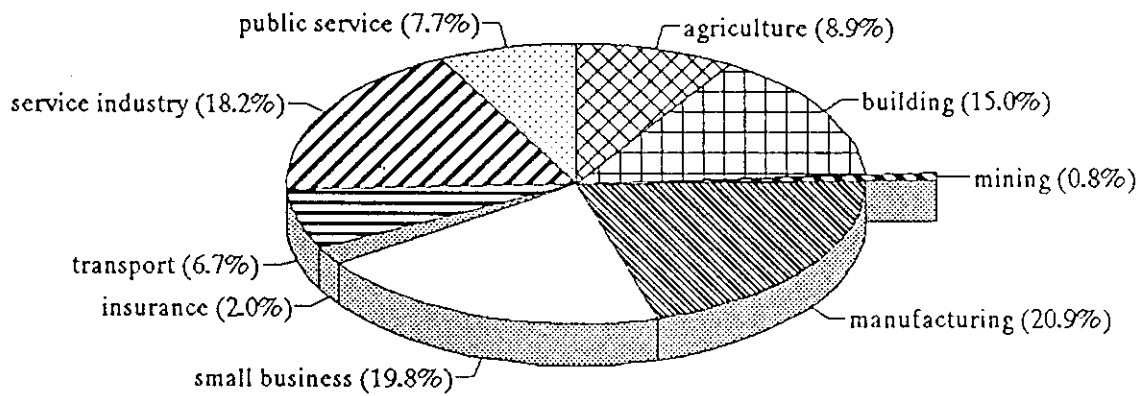


figure 9: source - National Census 1975, in *Chikuhō Fukko Kyoto Kaigi* 1978

Chikuho and the series of Temporary Coal Rationalisation Bills

The closure of the mines meant that a generation of miners became transient within the industry, always looking for whatever work was available in coalmines. This trend was particularly pronounced in Chikuho, where the mining industry was much more volatile than in other areas. Even at the end of the coalmining era the skilled Chikuho miners would take their trade to other towns where the mines were still operating, searching for work. For the Tagawa people Omuta, where the Miike mines were situated, was particularly appealing. Because both Omuta and Tagawa were Mitsui towns there was a fairly strong relationship between them. When the Tagawa Mitsui mines closed in 1963 and 1964 many of the young workers went to Omuta to look for work.

One miner at both the Tagawa Mitsui No 3 Mine and at the No 2 Mine at Mitsui Miike said the following about the process of moving to Omuta:

I'd lived in Tagawa all my life. My father was a miner, and most of my family were miners too. We'd all worked in Sanko (Tagawa), me since I was a kid. Anyway, in 1964 the mine closed and we all got paid off with a bit of superannuation which was our right anyway. Well the money wasn't going to last forever, so I thought that I'd better go and look for another job. At that time Mitsui in Miike was still looking for good pit men, and because that was my skill I decided that I'd take my family and go to Omuta. I was one of the lucky ones. I got a job pretty quick, and the work was easier than at Sanko (Tagawa), because there was a lot more new machinery for digging, and we only had to work nine hour shifts.

But my family was upset at having to leave our relatives. You see we had never been out of Tagawa before, and although there were quite a few other young families from Tagawa, no-one came from the *tanjū* so we were really isolated. But the thing was that there was no other work that I could do. The only thing I knew was mining, and the only people I knew were miners. I didn't want to have to go on some work scheme making roads where my skills would be wasted and I'd be just another labourer. I also didn't want to have to move too far from the rest of my family who are all in Tagawa, so it was out of the question to go to Osaka or Tokyo to look for work.

So I took the job and the housing that came with it and I have been working here since then. Well up to last year actually. They retrenched me because I am 53. That's the new cut off figure, and after 35 years for the company they give me a 7,500,000 yen (equivalent to 2 years wages) lump sum, and that's it. Now how am I going to find a job? Who'd employ an old man who has no useful work skills? I guess that I'll have to become a labourer after all.

But as I said I was one of the lucky ones. I was young and had a trade so I was OK, but none of my brothers got jobs because they were too old or too young. The company only wanted those between 18 and 25 with experience, who were prepared to join the company union. This was after the big strike you see and the company didn't want any problems with the workers. So I said OK, but I reckon they didn't employ anyone with any strength of character. You know, anyone who said that the wages were bad, or that the work was dangerous, or was a member of *Tanrō* or something.⁵⁵

Amid promises that the coal industry could still be saved, the government introduced further new legislation, subsequently establishing the third TCRB. Perhaps this was in response to the lack of success of the previous two TCRBs. The scrapping of inefficient mines had gone ahead at a far greater speed than the government had anticipated as the mine owners attempted to make use of the legislation to get out of the business with huge amounts of government compensation in their pockets. The mine accident rate had increased 300% since the introduction of the measure.⁵⁶ Unemployment was high (see figure 10, page 103) and local governments were feeling the financial pinch through the unemployment assistance programs they had been forced to adopt. The forecast coal production figures which the government had guaranteed in its agreement with steel and electrical industries were ten million tonnes short in 1964. Although coal prices were being subsidised by government funding, the coal companies had decided that they wanted to get out of the industry as soon as

⁵⁵Hamasaki, interview: 1988

⁵⁶Onishi, Idegawa, interviews: 1988

CHIKUHO UNEMPLOYED STATISTICS 1963 to 1966

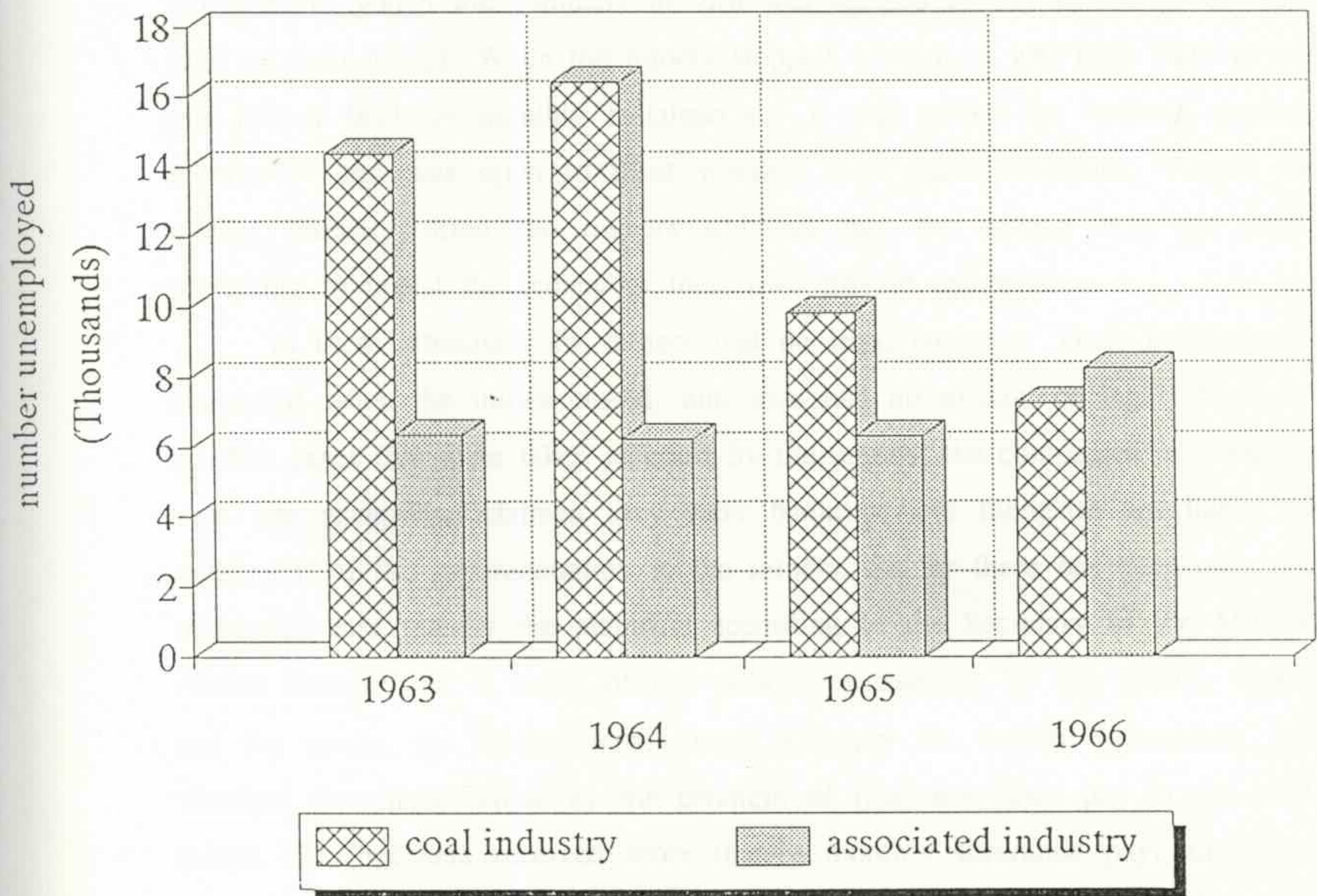


figure 10: source - *Chikaho* by Mizue 1978: 237

possible. So a situation MITI had not considered arose - demand exceeded supply.

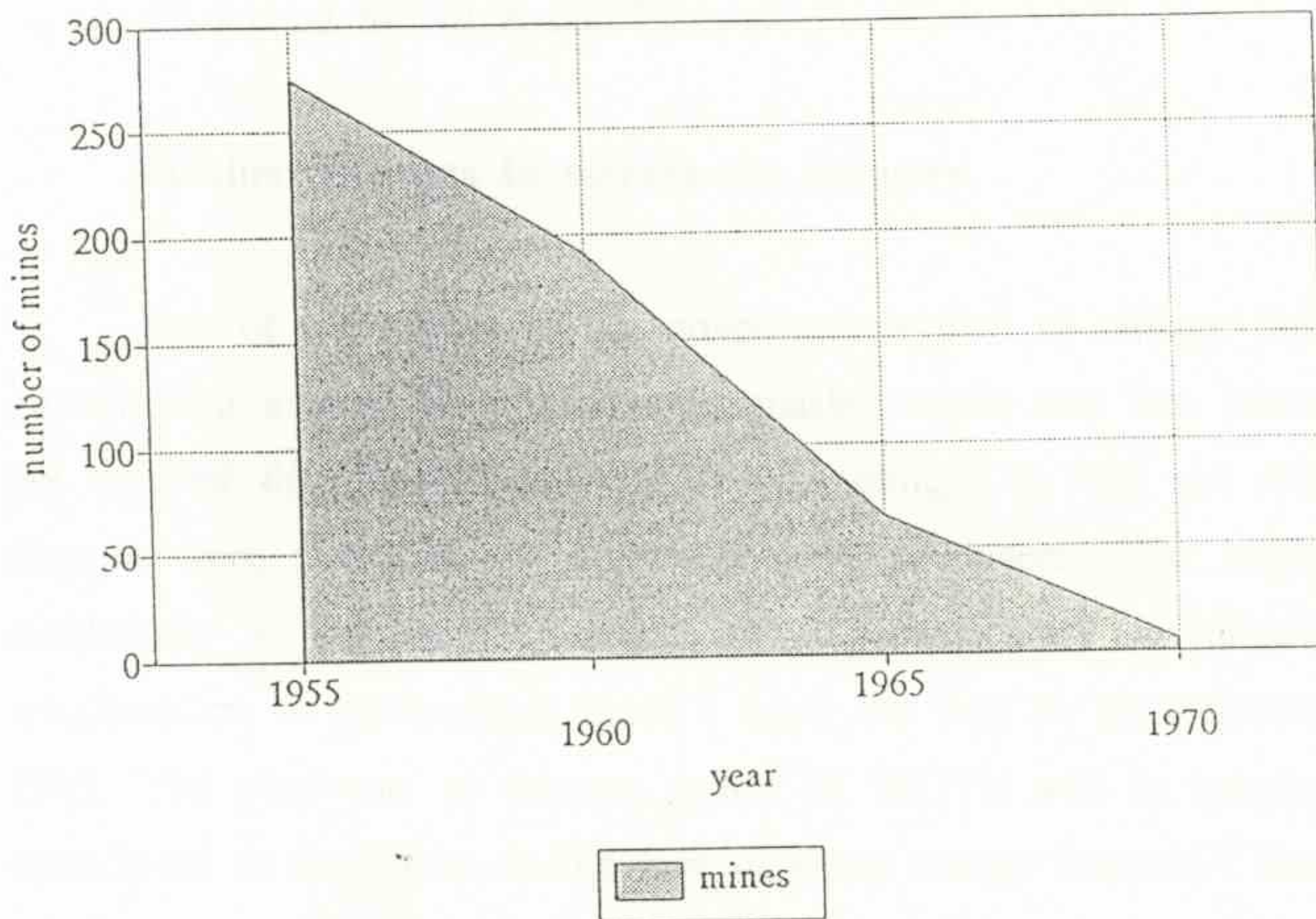
By 1964 the numbers of miners forecast by MITI for 1967 had been reached. Smaller mines were closing at a tremendous pace, and the big companies were also attempting to abandon the industry as soon as it was feasible (see figure 11, page 105). Often the owners of the smaller companies were escaping without paying money owed to the miners from their private superannuation schemes. The super contribution scheme involved miners paying into a fund, which the company in turn was obliged to pay to the government fund on their behalf. When the miners stopped working it was their right to get this money back in monthly instalments - it was called the "private pension scheme" - and was open to most workers from most industries. Within the mining industry often the owners did not pay the money into the fund, preferring to invest the money in their own private enterprises.

In these situations the miners had no legal recourse. Their unions were disbanded when the mines closed, and thus had no official or legal status. In the few cases that were taken to court by the unions, the companies in question, with one exception, claimed they were bankrupt and therefore not liable for repayment of the superannuation to the miners. So far there has been only one successful case put by the plaintiffs according to the Secretary of the Miners' Action Group.⁵⁷ As a result of this action, or inaction by the unions, *Tanrō* and the courts, the miners were forced to apply for welfare to survive. The situation was made worse by the problem of final severance pay in the small mines. Few workers received more than a month's severance pay, and many were forced to leave with no compensation at all while the owners pocketed the money that MITI had earmarked for the closure support fund.⁵⁸ One informant had the following to say about the system:

⁵⁷Kurata, interview: 1987

⁵⁸Idegawa, Takazaki, interview: 1987

FUKUOKA PREFECTURE MINES SITUATION 1955 to 1970



FUKUOKA PREFECTURE MINERS' SITUATION 1955 to 1970

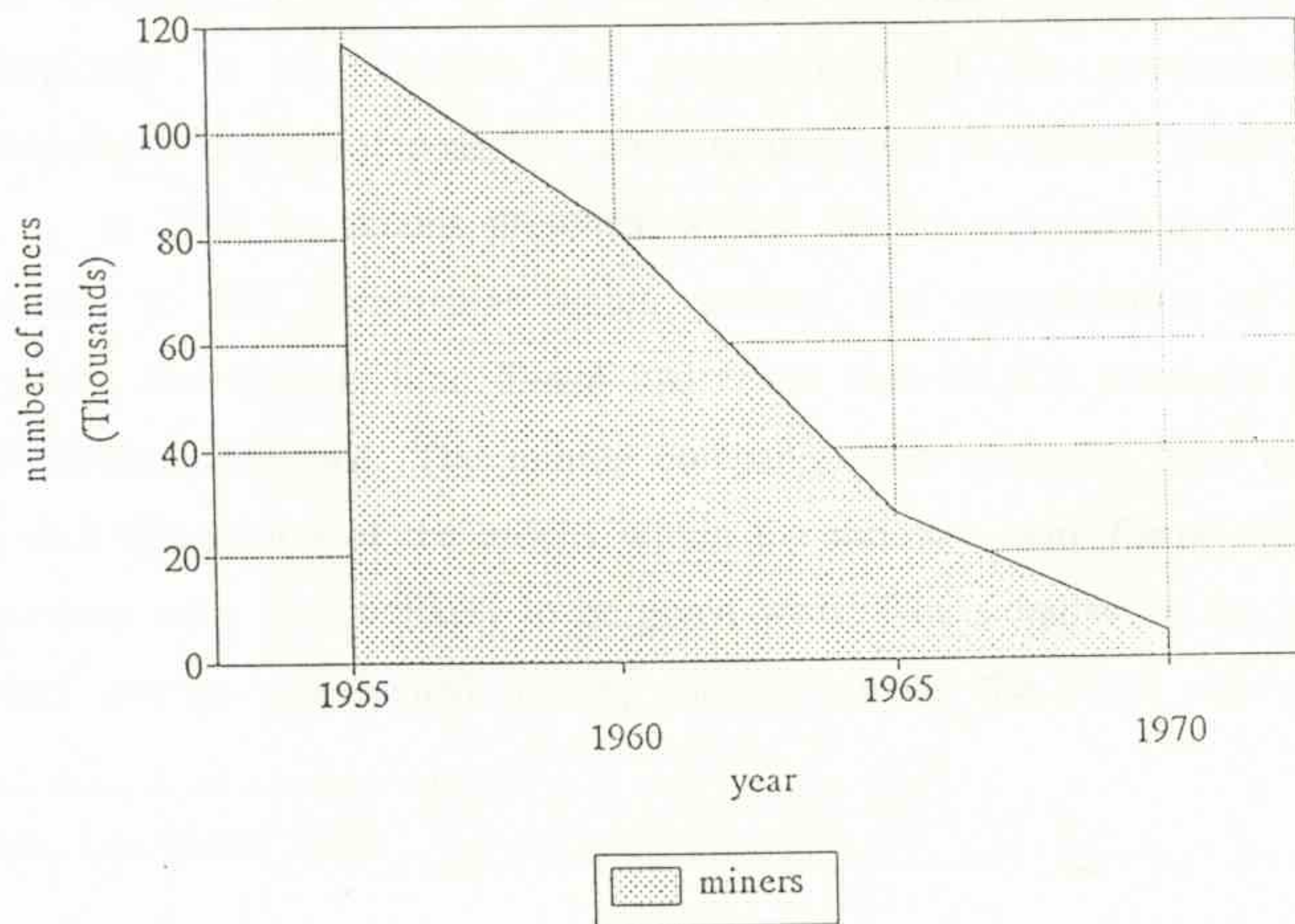


figure 11: source - National Census 1975, in *Chikuho Fukko Kyoto Kaigi* 1978

Those bastards just took the money and ran. We had no chance to do anything. One day we were working, thinking that at least when the mines closed we would have some money to look forward to. And then we're all sacked, and all that money that they took from our pay is gone. We were left with nothing. I suppose it couldn't be helped, but we were really angry, and we all wanted to kill A-san.⁵⁹

Further attempts to salvage the industry

One of the effects of the government's plan to salvage the industry by guaranteeing annual 55 million tonne market levels was that when supply had not reached the desired levels MITI was obliged to bail out mines which it thought were potential, or approved good producers. The Kaijima mines - incidentally at present the subject of a parliamentary investigation into the misallocation of government funds - were the first to be officially assisted in 1963. The plan was to become a test of MITI's will in keeping the mines operational in the future; in the face of cheap energy imports.⁶⁰ But the process of change was firmly under way.

The coal industry's 56% share of the electrical generating market in 1965 had dropped to 5.1% by 1975 as the electrical utilities switched almost completely to oil. Despite the ministrations of the government and the compulsory buying of coal, the coal industry was in serious trouble.⁶¹

In 1964 the unions presented a plan for the nationalisation of the mining industry to the government which stressed the consolidation of the mining districts. But by this time *Tanrō* had fewer than 65,000 members and little or no political influence. The mining companies had generally been quite ruthless in their dissolution of the unions within the industry, and *Tanrō* affiliated union members were now unlikely to be given work. The situation in the Mitsui Miike mines was perhaps typical. During the 1960 strike the union was compromised

⁵⁹Sasaki, interview: 1988

⁶⁰Samuels, 1987: 119

⁶¹ibid: 55

to form two unions, one of which was the company's union, the other being the "Old" *Tanrō* union. By the end of the strike the number of miners in the new union was only slightly higher than the old union, but by 1964, thanks to a policy of conscious discrimination implemented against *Tanrō* members, the new union had fully 75% of the workers on their books.

The attitude of *Tanrō*, and the case presented to the government in 1964 can be summarised by the leader of the current *Tanrō* union in Miike in January 1989:

If Japan continues to cut resources what will be left? Like rice, energy is necessary but it's all being imported apart from nuclear reactors, which are crazy anyway. They're dangerous and Japan is prone to earthquakes. Yet we have the technology, equipment and resources necessary to mine coal here for a long time to come. If we did that not only would we not be completely dependent on overseas energy we would also be able to stimulate local economies. But we needed the government's help with this, and the only way we could see this dream coming true was for the industry to be nationalised. They soon put an end to our hopes by forcing the TCRB plans down our throats, and pushing oil at the expense of coal.⁶²

The big companies, with the notable exception of Hokkaido's Hokutan, opposed nationalisation, and by the time the other companies came round to this way of thinking it was too late to save the industry. The deterioration of the industry continued, with the remaining big companies, notably Mitsui and Mitsubishi, dominating the industry and putting pressure on the government to support coal. This meant that they wanted the government to continue the process of providing aid for the companies that they considered worth bailing out - i.e. themselves. They put together a very powerful lobby that resulted in the formation of the Third Coal Task Force which was to report to parliament about the state of the industry with recommendations on how to save it. This was headed by Aso, the proprietor of one of Kyushu's largest remaining

⁶²Mori, interview: 1988

coalmines. On the basis of his committee's findings the Third Coal Program was introduced in 1966.

The appalling accident rate continued because the mine owners were still reluctant to improve mine safety (See figure 12, page 109, for the total number of mining accident deaths in Chikuho). Unemployment continued to rise as the closure of the mines was accelerated, contrary to the official aim of the program. The mine owners were now in a rather secure position. They knew that there was guaranteed demand for coal over the next five years, and that there were many displaced miners who wanted to work in the mines for almost any amount of money, in any conditions. The unions were powerless, their power quashed in the wake of the Miike incidents, so the companies continued to take risks in hastening the production of coal to keep up with demand. One miner, a union member who saw this period out in one of the smaller mines said of the situation in the late 1960s:

We were concerned with workers' rights, with basic human rights, and with the work conditions. These things were completely ignored by the company. On average we worked in the mine itself from between 12 and 15 hours a shift. The wages were incredibly poor. It was hard to maintain even the most basic standard of living. But most of the miners were frightened of the company and of the way the company could not only sack them, but could also cause them physical pain and force them to work. But what could any of us do? We were miners and we needed work, and this was about all that was going so we had to make the best of it.

Of course the number of accidents increased too, because the company knew that they were going to have to close down soon enough and they meant to get what they could from the mine while they could. That meant they demanded we work long shifts on the quota system, so that a miner could not come out of the pit until he had produced his daily quota. And that quota went up and up as time went by. So tired men were still working the seam 14 or 15 hours after they had come to work, and of course tired men make mistakes. There were a lot of cave-ins where one or two people were killed at a time, mainly through carelessness caused by exhaustion. The company also told us to work under any circumstances. For example when someone was sick the company would send two or three of the overseers to drag the

CHIKUHO MINING DEATHS 1936 - 1970

Companies responsible

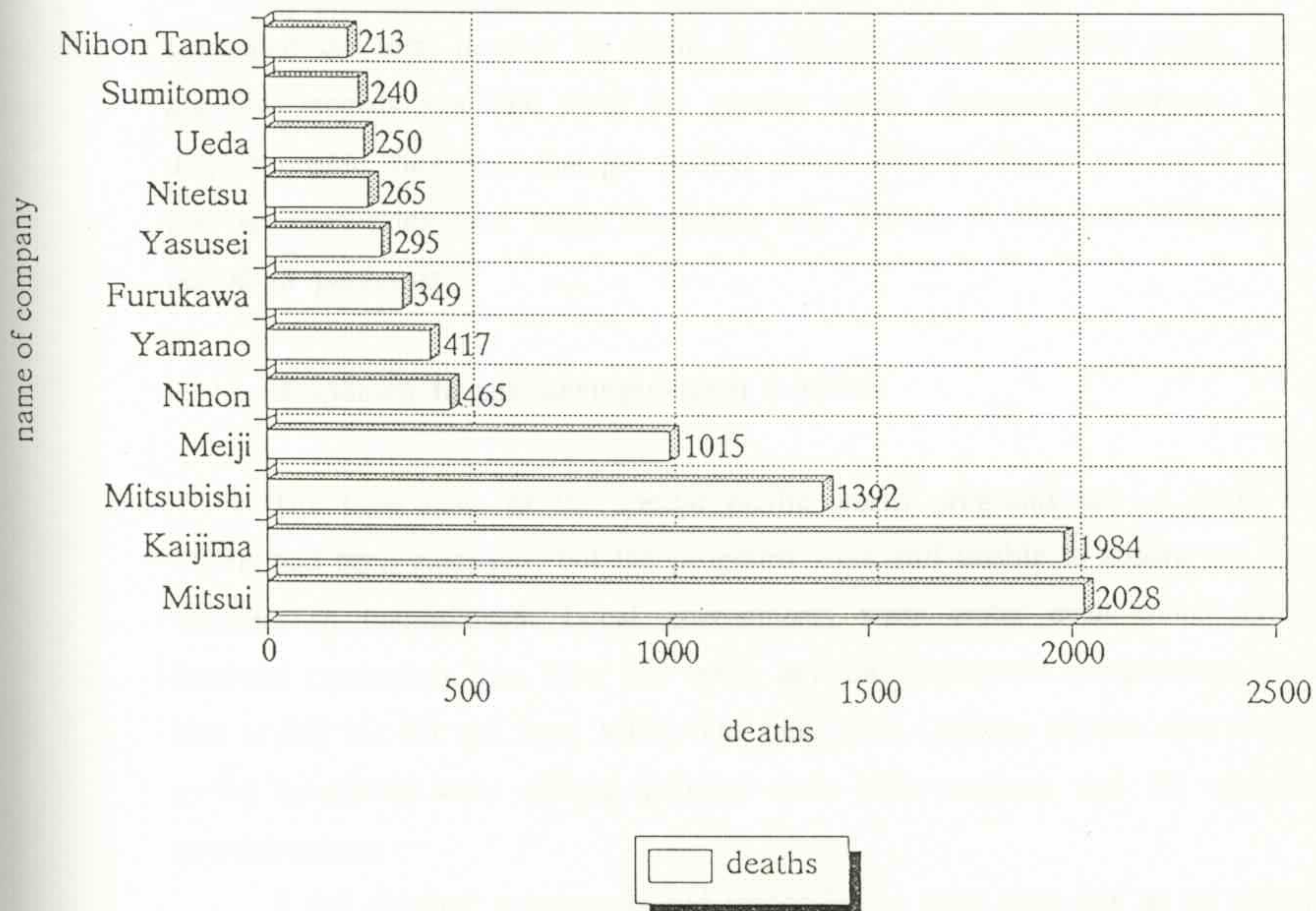


figure 12: source - *Gisei no Tō*, 1975

man out of bed and send him down the mine. If he wouldn't go he was beaten.⁶³

The Miike statistics (figures 13 and 14, pages 111 and 112) which show the official number of deaths and injuries at this mine illustrate the high accident rate of the safer, large enterprises. Between 1944 and 1983, 1157 miners died, 42,801 miners were seriously injured, and 45,482 miners suffered minor injuries, in the Mitsui Miike mine alone. Unfortunately, with the exception of *Gisei no Tō* (The Tower of Sacrifice), which, by using media reports of accidents, has calculated the total number of deaths in Chikuho mines (previous page), there are few records available from the smaller mines concerning accidents. It is unquestionable, however, that the smaller mines suffered higher per capita death and accident rates than large companies like Miike, in the post-Miike strike period in particular.

Responses to the unemployment problem

The time scale of the special public works programs set up under the TCRB had been extended, but the programs were still unable to absorb the huge numbers of unemployed. Local governments were under even more serious financial constraints than they had been, and the prefectural governments were also crying out for aid from MITI. The only local Chikuho people who seemed to be benefiting from official policies were mine owners, and oil company representatives.

Local citizens' movements had responded to what they saw as an attempt by the government to escape facing its responsibilities caused by the introduction of the TCRB. In Chikuho the Coal Industry Co-operative Council (CICC) had been formed in 1959. This group intended to unite the local coal areas in the fight against the restrictions imposed under the current version of the TCRB. There were altogether 45 cities, towns and villages involved in the movement

⁶³Nishioka, interview: 1988

MIIKE MINE ACCIDENTS DEATHS 1944 - 1983

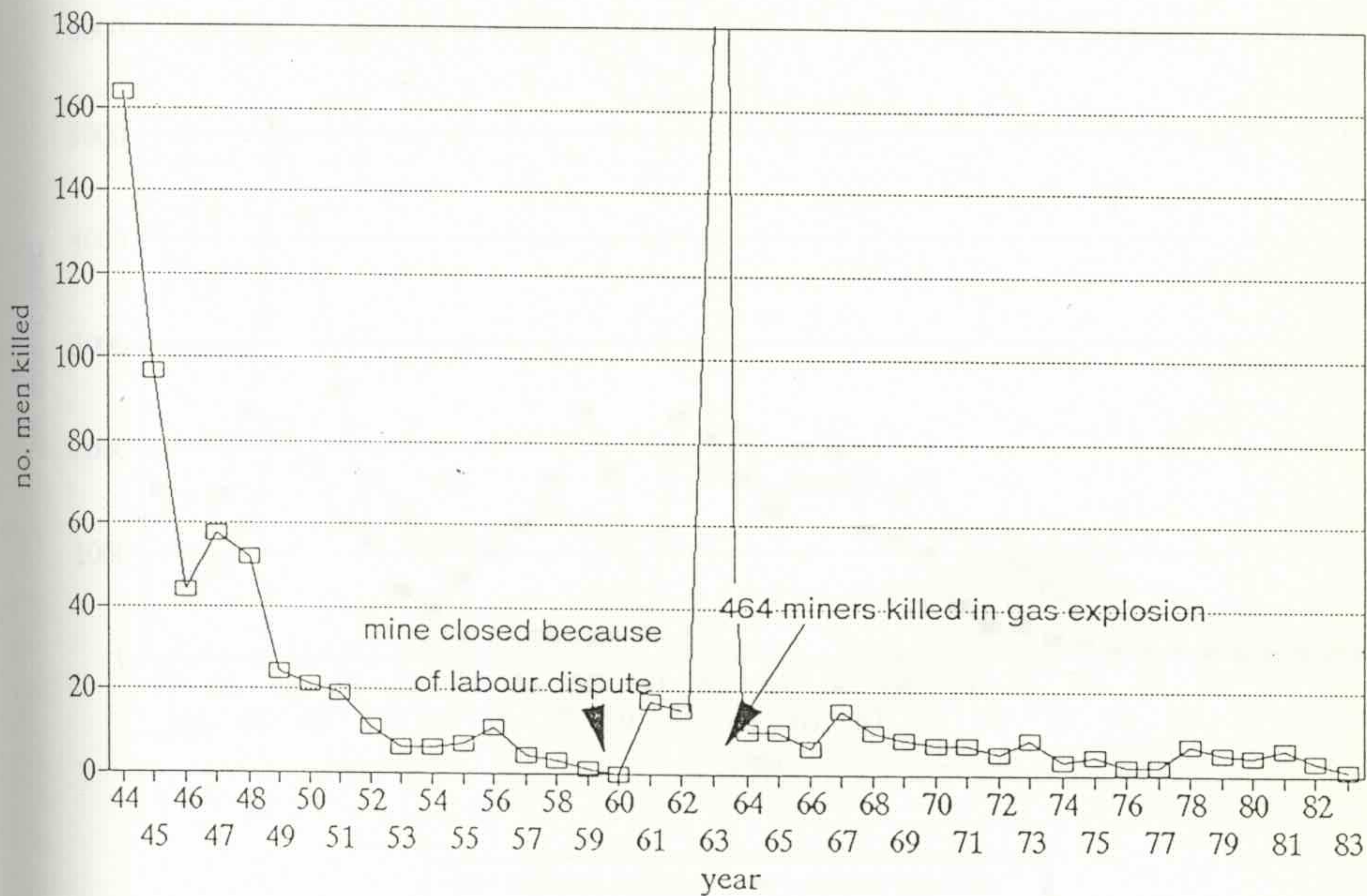


figure 13: source - Miike Safety Council, in *Kanashime o Ikari ni Kaete*. 1985
Miike Tankō Rōdōkumiai

MITSUI MIIKE MINE ACCIDENTS 1944 - 1983

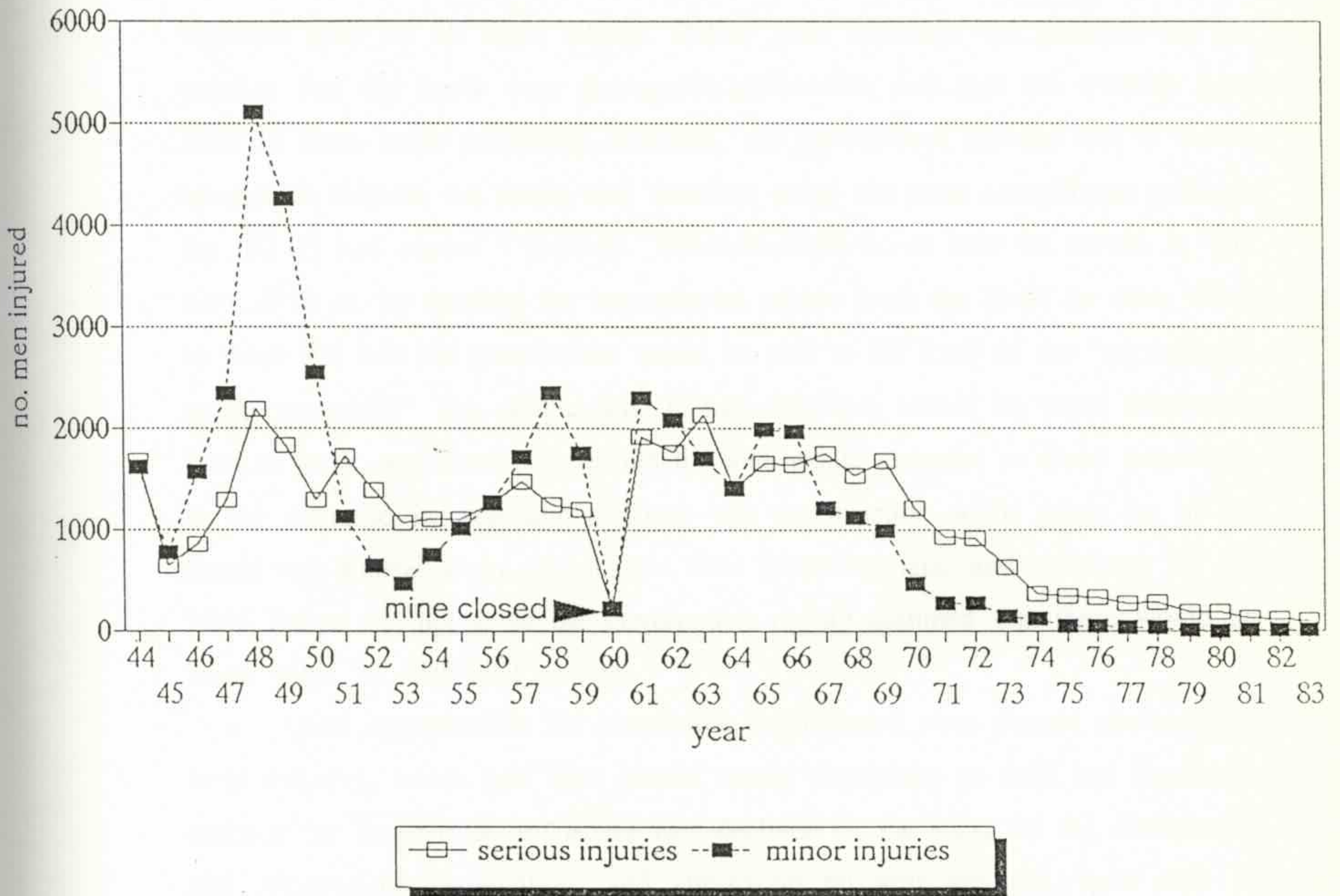


figure 14: source - Miike Safety Council, in *Kanashime o Ikari ni Kaete*. 1985
Miike Tankō Rōdōkumiai

which had its headquarters in Fukuoka city. At the first general meeting in 1959 the CICC passed recommendations that the TCRB was inadequate, and demanded that certain conditions be redressed. The current unemployment benefits were inadequate. The conditions in the coal villages (*tanjū*) were appalling - there was no electricity and running water in many. More money was needed from the government urgently.⁶⁴

This case was presented to the central government. The Diet gave its response after an all night sitting. Rather than approach the problem on the premise that the *tanjū* were permanent settlements, and that the workers who lived in them were permanent residents, the government decided that it would attempt to disperse the *tanjū*, and therefore solve the most conspicuous problem the TCRB had caused - poverty. Unemployment could also be solved in this way. That is, by sending the unemployed people from the *tanjū* to other areas to work and live the government would be able to rid itself of the "unemployed group mentality." The people left, it was assumed, would be those who were keen to work, and local competition for jobs would decrease in direct proportion to the decrease in population. There was construction work going on in the Kanto and Kansai areas around this time preparing land and buildings for the 1964 Tokyo Olympics, so the government rightly assumed that there would be much work for displaced miners.

Local opportunities for alternative employment were almost non-existent; local industry, which had been almost totally dependent on coal had dissolved, demand for the service industries had declined in the wake of the diminishing and impoverished population, and alternative business ventures were slow in setting up operations. Consequently many miners found that their pensions were cut off and that they were being exhorted to leave their homes and go to Honshu to work, in line with the government policies.

I tell you, when the mines closed no-one could afford to go out and enjoy themselves. You know, drinking and all that. It was because the only people left were ex-miners, and none of us had

⁶⁴Tagawa Shishi, 1979: 403

any money or any future. Some of us in our 40s and 50s were too old to go packing up and looking for work in some strange place where we had never been before. Most of my work mates left town though, and went to look for work in Kansai, Kanto and Nagoya. Some of them got jobs in construction projects like the Olympics, and in Toyota.

Everyone was a bit disturbed about leaving (to go to Tokyo) and in my case I couldn't. Many of the guys who went up there came home after looking for work and failing. Lots of them hated it away from their friends and they were treated like outcasts. They lived in groups of Chikuho people, and when they told anyone that they came from Tagawa they were always shunned. Anyway, even if the pay was good I just couldn't go. I was born and bred here, so rather than packing up my family and leaving all my friends I decided that I'd settle for doing day labouring in Tagawa - even though the pay was terrible.⁶⁵

The government went one step further in dealing with unemployment. The policy of exhorting the miners to leave town to work in other areas, or to become unemployed in other areas, had the effect of reducing the unemployment statistics in Chikuho, so after this success the government decided that a larger scale program was required. In response to the CICC's demands they established a seven billion yen fund to help miners resettle overseas, mainly in Brazil, Columbia, and Argentina. They had decided to export their unemployed.⁶⁶ In a political move not unlike Britain's wholesale transportation of convicts to Australia, the government felt that they would be able to solve the problem by moving it elsewhere.

In fact masses of unemployed did not go overseas, and many of the people who did go soon returned to Japan after "failing" away from home. Unemployment needed to be dealt with in a more direct manner, and with the exception of the Special Coal Workers Temporary Unemployment Scheme there was little machinery in action to achieve this. Even this scheme, which was constantly revamped, was hopelessly inadequate, and the numbers of unemployed

⁶⁵Sasaki, interview: 1988

⁶⁶*Tagawa Shishi*, 1979: 506

coalminers increased to previously unheard of levels in some of the coal areas - notably in Chikuhō. In Kawasaki and in Tagawa 45% of the local workforce was either unemployed or living on welfare in 1960.⁶⁷

In the late 1950s *Tanrō* estimated that by 1963 the TCRB would be responsible for the loss of a further 60,000 jobs. The unions demanded that the government take responsibility for the situation, and pass new laws guaranteeing the workers some rights to employment and security. Keidanren (Ministry of Economic Planning) put forward a plan based on the recommendations of the unions whereby the government would attempt to deal with the estimated 90,000 unemployed miners. 7,000 would be transferred to other mining companies, 34,000 would be retrained to work in other industries, 11,000 would be fitted into community unemployment programs, and 1,000 would be given "special training." The remaining workers - about 38,000 of them - would just have to make do as best they could.⁶⁸

The Temporary Unemployed Coal Workers' Measure (TUCWM) was made law in October 1959. The main points were as follows.

1. The government would make plans to move the workers from the seriously afflicted areas to other areas where they could find work. Also, the unemployed coalminers' groups would start up operations where unemployed miners would have their welfare cut off if they didn't take part in the public works programs sponsored by individual local governments.

2. Coal workers would be given preference in employment situations over other unemployed.

3. Retraining in other professions would be given to coalminers who indicated their intention of changing jobs.

4. A Coal Unemployment Commission (CUC) would be established with the aim of distributing benefits to those coalminers they decided were disadvantaged. Also money and training would be provided to ex coalminers who

⁶⁷Fukuoka Prefectural Records, in *Yomigaere Chikuhō*, 1966: 72

⁶⁸*Tagawa Shishi*, 1979: 506

wanted to migrate to South America. Money would also be provided for house repairs, and employers willing to employ coalminers would be able to claim special interest free loans for the expansion of their business.

5. The plan was to have a five year limit, and there was to be a probationary period of six months after which the success of the plan would be evaluated, and further aid considered.⁶⁹

But this plan, like all the measures that the government came up with, was absolutely insufficient. People could not live on these minimum subsistence levels (under the terms of the CUC) in the first place and the law didn't address the really important, basic issues like job creation and compensation for the workforce. This law was purely *tatema*, (an act; lipservice) and was ineffective. The relief that had been promised in all the discussions before the measure was made law was not relief at all in the end. In fact the law was responsible for escalating the victimisation of many people. People were forced to live off each other, as they do today in this area, because they didn't qualify for the restricted welfare benefits.⁷⁰

The unions complained that the government was not doing enough, and local governments complained that their own financial responsibility was heavy enough without the added burden of the new measure. They maintained that they would soon be bankrupted by the introduction of the law. While local government supported the aims of the legislation they demanded that the national and prefectural governments be more involved with the financing of these projects.

But the biggest problem was that these measures were largely lipservice, and very few workers were actually "retrained." The real effect was that there were now quite a number of ex miners working on public works projects at minimum wages, and in construction - it has been estimated that there were 100,000 miners involved nationally in construction work - a few miners working in new mines, even fewer miners going overseas, more miners receiving welfare

⁶⁹ibid: 505

⁷⁰Idegawa, interview: 1987

payments, and others living "hand to mouth."⁷¹ The TUCWM legislation had the desired effect then - it was a placebo; a piece of legislation which was designed to show the government's supposed deep concern with the miners' situation without costing the treasury much money. The government continued with its rationalisation plans for the industry and the changeover to oil was in full swing as this measure was announced.

The same informant, Idegawa, said this about the situation in Chikuho at the time:

The situation had deteriorated to such an extent in the smaller mining *tanjū* that people were relying on food tickets handed out by the company and redeemable only in the company stores. Of course no-one could save any money and the future looked bleak. In Chikuho prospects were negligible for middle aged and older miners, and the kids had little chance of an education. There was large scale, but temporary movement out of the area in the early 1960s as workers went elsewhere to search for work. The general feeling was that Chikuho was dead. Welfare recipients outnumbered workers and many people suffered from malnutrition. In short the situation was desperate.⁷²

Although the smaller companies were the first to be affected by the TCRB the larger companies also began to rationalise their operations in earnest after consultations with MITI. The government was still actively involved in developing legislation to keep coal companies operational, and had negotiated with the leaders of the big coal companies and the major coal purchasers to ensure that production targets and prices be met. With mass closures looming over the industry the coal producers were determined to make a stand to reduce any chance of loss of profits.

Aso Shigeki, the leader of the mineowners' cartel, pressured MITI into making some hard decisions as to how far they were prepared to go to help out the industry. His task force demanded that the government invest 100 billion yen

⁷¹Idegawa, personal communication: 1989

⁷²Idegawa, interview: 1987

to take over the superannuation payments and the running of all mines slated for scrapping in the near future; that 70% to 80% interest free capital be given to the mining companies for the modernisation of equipment; and that an additional 500 yen a tonne be paid by the government as a subsidy to the coal producers. The surprising thing about these demands was that the government seriously considered them, and in fact, when the program went through the legislation process some were met. The final version of the new Coal Program announced in July 1966 allowed for a production target of 50 million tonnes, with public funds allocated to the companies set at treble their previous levels. A 100 billion yen interest free loan scheme was also extended to the industry in an attempt to protect the mine owners.⁷³

Operating deficits had doubled within two years to 200 billion yen, yet the banks continued to extend funds to the coal industry in the expectation that the government would step in and help them out, as they had done many times in the past. The industries which were to buy the bulk of the coal were dissatisfied with the price the cartel of big coal companies had required, and demanded that the price be dropped, and that the government pay compensation to them. The electrical utilities agreed to take 23 million tonnes if the price that they paid was not higher than the price that had been agreed upon in the earlier programs. The steel industry also agreed to take the 10 million tonnes they had been slated for only if full government indemnification was included. MITI agreed to supply the steel industry with 53 billion yen as indemnification for taking even this low quantity of domestic coal. Ironically the steel industry grew so fast and the coal industry shrank so fast that they were soon importing large quantities of coking and steam quality coal from Australia and Canada to fuel the steel industry.⁷⁴

The assumption of mine debts was to prove embarrassing for the government because no sooner had the announcement of the new program been made than Dai Nippon, one of the largest mining firms, failed. Other firms followed

⁷³Samuels, 1987: 122

⁷⁴ibid: 123

suit and when the results of the policy had been tabulated it was clear that 13 big companies were responsible for more than 90% of the industry's debt, which the government had assumed. The small companies gained little or nothing.⁷⁵ The banks withdrew their support from the industry and many of the private larger companies were no longer able to provide capital for operations, and fell into receivership. The diversified industrial giants like Sumitomo, Mitsui and Mitsubishi, which controlled their own banks, were not so adversely affected, and used government support to continue operations, though they too had made preparations to get out of the industry.

The industry was on its last legs by the mid 1960s, yet there were still few contingency plans developed which would help ease the plight of the displaced miners. Rather than spend public funds on developing industries in areas where there was massive unemployment, and rather than spend money on the retraining of many of the displaced miners and improving conditions in which they lived, the government succumbed to pressure from the mine owners. Huge amounts of public funds were spent on trying to revive a dying industry, with most of this money going into the pockets of the big mine owners.⁷⁶

Another informant had this to say about the closure of Mitsui Tagawa, one of the big companies where she worked for 32 years:

When the mines closed there was only one thing on everyone's mind - what do we do now? There was despair at the way the government had manipulated us, and now they were just ignoring the problem that they had caused. I went to work in a tile factory because that was all that there was available, and the money was less than one third of the pay that I got with Mitsui. I was a foreman with Mitsui but when I went to work in the tile factory, which was also owned by the company, I was forced to work for almost slave wages because I was a woman. I didn't know any of the people there so the camaraderie that we had at the mine was gone, but I had to support my son.

⁷⁵Yada, 1975: 225

⁷⁶Ueno, 1985b: 56

You see I wanted to send him to high school and that was expensive so I just had to take whatever work was available, and the job that I got with the tile company was a lot better than many of my friends'. Lots of them didn't get any work, and depended on their families, and the government hand outs to survive. There was no way that two of us could eat on what the government was paying out so what could I do? I just had to work, and really, anything would have done at the time.⁷⁷

Throughout this period of disruption and social change the unions were remarkable for their apparent acquiescence to government policy. After the Miike strike, and a number of smaller strikes, the labour situation was resolved in favour of the companies. The unions did not have the political credibility necessary to lead the workers in protests at the wage cuts, the redundancies, and the drop in living standards. Although *Tanrō* made a number of demands about retirement pay, the continuation and nationalisation of the industry, and support of retrenched workers after the industry had become redundant, few of the demands were met. Union support had declined to the extent that by the mid 1960s few active coalminers were members of *Tanrō*. Although the miners were required to be members of unions, the majority chose the so-called *goyo kumiai*, or enterprise unions, over *Tanrō* basically because members of *Tanrō* were unlikely to find work in the industry in the wake of the Miike labour unrest. The most militant unions in Japan's history slowly faded from view with no more than a whimper, and with them went the power of the workers to influence any policy decisions about wages, working conditions, or the future of the mines.

By 1970 there were only five mines operational in the Chikuho region, and nationally only the Mitsui Miike, the Mitsubishi Takashima and Yubari, and the Hokutan Hokkaido mines employed more than a handful of miners. These mines were still operating at close to maximum capacity in the environment of co-operation and near government welfare support that existed following the demands of the last coal taskforce. Mitsui, Mitsubishi and Hokutan gradually reduced

⁷⁷Tatefuji, interview: 1989

the size of their respective mining workforces, and when the Hokutan and Mitsubishi enterprises closed in 1985 and 1987, only Miike was left operating. Today Miike employs approximately 2000 miners, and these numbers are rapidly decreasing as management further rationalises the labour force and moves toward closure. The miners are concerned only about reasonable retrenchment pay, and the order of the dismissal notices - that is, which age group is to be pensioned off first. The dream that the industry could still be a viable concern, and that the men would have some say in the working conditions and wage claims was shattered many years ago. The unions involved say they have only the aim of making the severance from the industry as painless as possible for the men.

Conclusion

Violence, subversion, and large-scale political and economic manipulation have underlaid the history of the coalmining industry in Japan, and hence in Chikuho. It could be said that government bureaucracy, through its intimate relationship with coal industry leaders, was the active agent in allowing the misallocation of both local and national funds for an industry which was in reality in rapid decline, and beyond redemption. Rather than investigating ways in which the allocation of resources could have been made to best alleviate the suffering within communities which were dependent on coal, the government chose to support the companies which had helped bring about the situation. By ignoring the nature of its own involvement in the industry, the government, through its delegation of fiscal responsibility away from the coal companies and on to the local communities which were dependent on the coal industry for survival in the first instance, maintained its hegemonic relationship with the *ex-zaibatsu*.

There were no safeguards on how public money was spent in attempting to resurrect the industry, the parties involved choosing to honour "a gentlemen's agreement." In effect the government was supporting the coal companies' economic diversification of business interests. Although the publicity surrounding the payments made to the companies under various coal programs indicated that the money would be used to improve safety standards, company housing etc, this

money was simply diverted to other company businesses, such as oil, petroleum, chemicals, textiles, and cement. Equally, the government ignored the implications of their ambiguously worded series of TCRBs and Coal Programs which allowed coalmine owners to add to the already onerous demands of their workforce, forcing them to increase production in increasingly unsafe conditions. The thesis, so often expressed amongst Chikuho residents, that the coal companies actually caused accidents within their mines so that they could close the mine under the more than favourable terms of relevant TCRB clauses which allowed for closures due to "misfortune beyond management control," appears to have some credibility when it is seen in the context of the number of accidents which occurred in the years immediately following the introduction of the legislation. The mining companies themselves had been able to avoid paying compensation for damage to body or property as a result of accidents, and were able to remove the concept of the payment of compensation from the political agenda by claiming their inability to pay.

The government, in what appeared to be a form of collusion with the industry leaders, chose not to investigate what had happened to the massive sums of money they had invested in the companies, which suddenly had appeared to go bankrupt. Rather they chose to undertake the process of paying compensation to the mining communities on the companies' behalf through the political process - that is, by supplying all of the legislation, and a percentage of the actual money - usually 30% - delegating all other responsibility to the communities and prefectures.

In sum, the government, through its reluctance to support the coal industry until it was too late, and through its approval of the switchover to oil and imported coal, presumably under pressure from its international trading partners, facilitated the development of a political system in which a repressive system of mining practices came to be standardised. By establishing the tone of political conspiracy, the government, through its manipulation of the legal agenda, worked in cooperation with the large mining companies' owners who were able to manipulate the economic agenda by imposing tight margins for small producers, who in turn responded by tightening labour control to retain

profitability, and a system of vertically integrated hegemony emerged. Labour control was of key importance, and the development of the strategy to split the unions through coercion and co-option weakened the power of the once all-powerful *Tanrō*, which by the mid 1960s was a rather impotent organisation with a limited number of members.

The companies' ability to organise as a cartel and to fight the imposition of a new energy source was also of importance. But on top of this, the pervasive influence of the *zaibatsu* and the strength of the contacts between this group and the government gave them the tools needed to tackle the new energy regime.

Although all the outward trappings of democracy were present in the political system, in practice an elitist group of very powerful men were able to influence other groups of powerful men that their best interests lay in supporting the coal industry over the short term. By removing political opposition, through reaching agreement with other members of private enterprise who stood to benefit by the actions of the coal cartel, the coal companies were able to maximise profitability over the medium term, in an economically "safe" environment, with a guaranteed return for any investment they made. The unions were compromised at the national level, and at the local level there was no fear of protest because of the system of labour control using the *yakuza*-like *rōmu*, which the smaller mines had imposed.

By gradually reinvesting in other business, and by applying pressure on the smaller companies to produce coal on their behalf and sell it in their name, the large companies were able to honour their agreements with the steel makers and other industrialists under the final coal program, without jeopardising their own profitability. Thus the big companies were able to withdraw from the industry gracefully and profitably, leaving the problem of cleaning up the local economies to the smaller companies and to local governments.

Chapter 5

VIOLENCE

A number of discussions about violence have appeared within anthropology over the years. Taussig's discussion of the colonialists' rubber plantations in Colombia is a good example of the way the issue of violence has been made a central theme. Other writers have attempted to situate the topic within the field of the sociology of violence.¹ Yet others have tried to develop a Marxist dialectic, by focusing on the issue of violence in class conflict.²

Within the anthropology of mining there is also considerable discussion devoted to the concept of violence. Recently Metcalfe has commented on two forms of violence which were found in the Coalfields of Maitland. Employing a critical Marxist approach, he identified direct and indirect violence.³ He describes how direct violence is not "a measure of the significance of violence in Coalfields history," and continues that because it is so difficult to identify the agent in the case of indirect violence, it has limited import in his study. However he moves onto a further position, stating that anticipations of violence are critical in understanding Coalfields history.⁴ This concept pivots around the notion that unions, and labour organisations are central to his discussion.

Although in Chikho unions existed, as I have described in the previous chapter, these unions were generally company, or enterprise unions, which had at their core a philosophy of non-confrontation, and co-operation with management. Whereas the concept of the anticipation of violence was a determining factor in their complacency and conformity, the incidences of violence which were conducted on a personal level, rather than on an institutional level, were so frequent that they acted as a deterrent to the

¹see Girard, 1977; Riches, 1986

²see for example, Douglass and Krieger, 1983

³Metcalfe, 1988: 139

⁴ibid: 159

formation of an alternative, solidarity-based ideology with which to oppose management.

I see violence, and its implementation, as an extreme manifestation of the unequal relationship between the holders of power and the powerless. This position swings around the definition of violence. Riches has said that the commonsensical meaning of violence is "the intentional rendering of physical hurt on another human being."⁵ He has also said that violence is used when the power-holders in any given relationship are "confident that their actions command a legitimacy (and) they are able .. to satisfy their ambitions through deploying physical harm."⁶ That is, violence is used to forestall challenges to the control of the powerful by the powerless, and this violence is legitimated by employing the rationale that it maintains social equanimity. Violence is seen by the victim, on the other hand as an unambiguous use of illegitimate force.

Therefore the definition Riches settles on is that violence is:

an act of physical hurt deemed legitimate by the performer and illegitimate by some witnesses and by victims. The tension in the relationship between performer, victim, and witness consists of two elements: an element of political competition, and an element of consensus about the nature of the violent act... What marks the contestability of violence is that, as acts of physical hurt unfold, performers, witnesses, and even victims may be expected to alter their opinions about this legitimacy."⁷

By implication this definition of violence is inextricably concerned with the concept of power, and with the uses of power in society. I think this is an admirable concern and worthy of further investigation. To this end I will look at the coal industry in Chikuho, placing emphasis on the different forms of violence used and the frequency of these violent acts. Particularly the

⁵Riches, 1986: 4

⁶ibid: 4

⁷ibid: 8-9

concept that the victims themselves accepted the legitimation of violence needs to be examined in context.

Over time the use of violence has been well documented, from the early British colonial days to contemporary labour struggles such as the 1985 miners' strike in Britain, to uprisings in the Middle East, the South African situation and elsewhere. In fact the concept of violence as part of our everyday existence is so pervasive that perhaps the majority of us are not even aware of the extent of the violence we are either party or witness to. It is only when the level of violence exceeds the "norm" that we are privileged enough to see it on our televisions, as an event which is newsworthy. Yet this sort of violence is always remote, somehow not quite relevant to the way we live our lives.

I think it can be said that many of us are now inured to the violence we see on our television screens every day. When we see wars being waged in remote parts of the world on the news, these items are given the value of 'just another story' by the television news producers. We, the witnesses, have come to be complaisant about what we call violence. Movies, like the *Indiana Jones* series, which are widely touted as "good adventure films for the whole family" are laced with violence, albeit in "good fun." Other films like *Batman*, *Angel Heart*, *Rocky*, *The Karate Kid*, *Friday the Thirteenth*, and *Die Hard* - all very successful at the box office - are really vehicles which sell the concept of violence, yet are widely accepted as "entertainment." Violence has become such an integral part of our lives that we have become insensitive to it to a large extent.

If we have become so immune to the effects of violence as witnesses then, is it unreasonable to suggest that the victims of violence have also become immune to some of the effects? When violence occurs on a daily basis in some form or other I think that it is not unreasonable to assume a certain resignation on the part of the victims to the fact that violence is both a routine and necessary evil. If this is the case, it is probably due in part to the legitimation of violent episodes in the past, which have slipped into folklore. I think the fear of further violent reprisals by the powerful and their

agents has, to some extent resulted in a form of observed acquiescence amongst the coalminers, for example, which has been perpetuated by the knowledge that life is livable if one does not go beyond the bounds of "accepted" social obligations. That is, one does not challenge the status quo overtly. This is not to say that there exists consensus, because this is a quite misleading label.

This seems to fit into Gaventa's argument that "the most insidious use of power is that which maintains non-challenge of the powerless, even after the powerful have fallen."⁸

I would like to investigate this premise in more detail, with specific reference to the Chikuho mining situation.

Violence in the Mines

The history of the Chikuho mines is etched in violent episodes - from the day to day violence of the overseers, exhorting the miners to work under pain of reprisals - which often meant death in the smaller mines, to the violence which existed intrinsically in the type of work the miners did at the pit face, to the violent confrontations between the miners' unions and the police and *yakuza* in the 1960s. These episodes have been obscured over time, but the fear that the violence engendered within the miners' ranks is still well remembered.

To put the violence into context I will look first at, the structure of the coal industry. It is my view that the smaller the company, the greater the incidence of violence in day to day situations, but the threat of violence was still an undercurrent even in the biggest mines.

Local coalmining people distinguished three types of mine: *daikigyō* (large companies); *chōkokigyō* (small to medium sized mines, which were often subcontractors for the *daikigyō*); and *tanuki bori* (badger holes).

⁸1980: 82

Daikigyō were mines owned and operated by Mitsui, Mitsubishi, Sumitomo, and Furikawa, and typically employed large numbers of miners and sorters. These mines were the most desirable to work in for a number of reasons. The popular conception was that the big companies would "look after" the employees, by offering secure employment and reasonable housing, in the best traditions of the Japanese industrial giants. Also, the working conditions themselves had a reputation for being relatively safe because the big companies invested a great deal of money in maintaining their operations. On top of this was the popular view that people who worked in the big companies were the best in the industry - real professionals.

The *chukokigyō* were the next rank down. As the nomenclature implies, a vast number of mines of different size were included in this category. The smallest of these mines employed approximately 60 people, while the Ueda mines, which were the largest in the local area, employed more than 500 miners in a number of separate pits. The owners of these mines, like their *daikigyō* counterparts, were also responsible for supplying housing for their miners, although in many cases they managed to make this work to their advantage. Within this group were mines which the local people regarded as "reasonable" places of work, and others which were regarded as "pressure mines" (*asseiyama*). The latter term refers to the high incidence of violence in management techniques usually perpetrated by the feared *rōmu kakari*, men with *yakuza* backgrounds who were employed to ensure that production levels were maintained. The former term refers to places where management was "relatively human," although these mines were definitely in the minority.⁹

The *tanuki bori* were the very bottom rank in the local system and were small digs which people often worked as husband and wife teams. These mines were either leased from a company which had stopped production because of dangerous working conditions, poor quality of deposits, inaccessibility of the coal etc, or were illegally mined. Typically they were

⁹Idegawa, Sato, Sasaki interviews: 1987 and 1988

very small shafts, not big enough to stand in, and while the husband dug the coal out lying down, the wife carted it to the surface in *sura* (sleds). The people who worked these mines were often from the *tokushu buraku*, the outcasts who were not considered employable by the bigger companies, by virtue of their birth. The term "badger holes" was used because these mines were small and shallow, and as one deposit dried up, the shaft was abandoned, and another dug and exploited. Consequently the countryside was dotted with old shafts. The accident rate in these mines was extremely high by all accounts, but because of the informal nature of the leasing agreements there are no figures available.¹⁰

The aim of this account is to put into context the attitudes of the miners towards the hierarchical system of mines they perceived existed. Many Japanese commentators have concentrated on the idea of monopoly capitalism in respect to analysing the system of land and mining ownership in Chikuho.¹¹ I think that, while this type of explanation has some relevance in understanding the structures involved, it tends to neglect the way the local people themselves perceived their own working and living environments. The focus of this chapter will be on the comparative uses of violence in the daily lives of people working in the different categories of mines. I would like to concentrate particularly on the smaller mines, and on the accounts that I have been given about the nature of the work, and about the nature of the workers' acquiescence to the pervasive violence.

¹⁰see Takazaki, 1966: 45-49

¹¹see, for example, Takazaki, 1961; Yada, 1975, 1981; Ueda, 1985a,b,c,d; Sonoda, 1970

The *rōmu kakari*

Of the violence in the mines, it has to be said that almost always the direct perpetrators of these acts were the *rōmu kakari*, or overseers.¹² Although these men were only carrying out their duties, the enthusiasm with which they attacked their work was perhaps uncalled for. Regardless of a mine's size, there was always a *rōmu* (labour office). There is an obvious reluctance to speak out about the *rōmu kakari* in Tagawa, even though the last Tagawa mine closed more than 15 years ago. The few people who were prepared to talk about the past, and about the roles the *rōmu* played, were prepared to do so only on the condition that I not use their real names. Obviously there is still fear, and sanctions which lie below the fear, in evidence in contemporary Chikuho regarding the *rōmu*. This is perhaps because of the number of men from *rōmu* ranks who joined *yakuza* ranks, and still play an active part in instilling fear within the local population.

Describing the *rōmu kakari* he dealt with on a daily basis for nearly 30 years in the pits, one unionist said:

Officially they were there to make sure that we turned up for work, and to take the attendance figures for the day. That is, they were there to force us not to take holidays for any reason. If a miner was sick they would investigate it, and would accuse the miner of faking the sickness etc. They would come around to the houses where we lived and wait outside and call out that the miner was slacking, and that he should go to work and stop pretending to be sick. When there were union elections they would go around to the miners' homes and tell the workers to vote for the company representatives, and not to vote for the alternative union leaders, like us for example. (He was a member of the JCP). They'd also watch the voting process and take note of who voted for the non-company leaders.

When there were workers who tried to get labour movements going which would cause trouble for the company,

¹²see Takazaki, 1961; Ueno, 1985a,b,c,d; Sato, interview: 1988; Idegawa, interviews: 1987-8, for example

such as genuine trade union movements and movements which would lead to industrial strife the *rōmu* would go to the troublemakers' houses with pistols and iron bars in hand and threaten the would-be leaders to behave themselves. This was standard for the Ueda mines.

If there were too many of these worker related "troubles" the company would simply send in the *rōmu kakari* to sort things out.¹³

Another informant saw the control exerted by the *rōmu kakari* in military terms:

The same situation happened in the mines as happened in the Army. You know how there was a *kacho* (section chief)? Well if we did something which the *kacho* didn't approve of, we were hit by one of the strong arm men in the *rōmu*, who told us that by not doing the right thing by the *kacho* we were "hitting the president in the face." For instance, if we had said that we weren't going to work because the water in the mine was too high the *rōmu* would have just come around to the *tanjū* to make us go. The union wouldn't have done anything about it at all. The fact was that the company was too strong for us, and there was nothing that we could do about it. Just like the Army. The people with the power squash the people without it. And what makes me mad is that the Emperor is the head of the whole lot, and even today we have to support the Emperor as though we're still living in the feudal era. Fuck him.¹⁴

This opinion was often voiced by people who lived in the *tanjū*. That is, many people told me that the system of violence and discipline which operated within the mines was very similar to that of the Army. Perhaps, given that the Emperor is seen as the supreme head of the Army, it is not surprising that the contemporary Anti-Emperor Movement is strongly supported by the people of Chikuho.

¹³Nishioka, interview: 1988

¹⁴Okushima, interview: 1988

Although the level of violence used on the workforce was monitored most of the time by the *rōmu* boss, individual *rōmu* did have a certain amount of freedom in dealing with "worker troubles." This freedom depended on a number of factors - the type of owner, the type of *rōmu* boss, and the individual *rōmu*'s temperament. In cases where any of the above people were prone to employing violence to combat rebelliousness, *rōmu* were able to pick out certain workers for special treatment if they could justify their actions to the *rōmu* boss as being in "the company's best interests."¹⁵

Reasons for the violence

There were two offences which the management of most of the smaller, and in some cases, the larger mines as well, could not tolerate. These were: first, any attempt to start an independent union - that is one independent of the *goyo* (company) union; and second, the inability to meet production requirements set through "discussions" between the company union and management.

The former stipulation was strictly policed, particularly in the smaller mines, where the work force was contained within highly localised *tanjū*. The miners and their families living in close proximity in recorded addresses gave the *rōmu* the advantage of being able to monitor discontent and potential discontent, through informants loyal to the company. When challenges to management's authority were manifest they were thus able to react swiftly and efficiently, going directly to the homes of the trouble makers, and dealing with them with whatever level of violence they deemed appropriate.

Okushima describes one such instance at Hoshu Tanko, one of the more violent mines, in the late 1950s:

Although there was a union in Hoshu, the company bosses made sure that we didn't get too strong, by taking the guys who were the leaders aside and telling them that if they were

¹⁵Ueno, 1985a: 78

"good" (i.e, if they followed company policy) they would get rapid promotion. This meant that the union leaders were usually the company "dogs." So we didn't get any real benefits from the union in the time that I was there. I remember one man who was a pretty strong sort of guy. You know, he didn't take the shit that was put on him at work from the management and all that. Well he was sick of the way the union men pushed the rest of us around, and sick of the way the wages never seemed to go up, so he decided to start a second union.

At first he had a fair bit of support from a lot of other miners like me, who knew that we were being taken for a ride while the management was making lots of money. Anyway one day when we were about to go down the mine the *rōmu* boss says to us: "I hear you men are thinking about starting a union. Perhaps you'd like to see someone who had the same idea." So they trotted out this man who had been so tough, and he was a mess. He could hardly stand up and his face was covered with blood. He looked at us and said that he didn't think that starting a new union was such a good idea after all.

After that we all decided to let it go for a while and make do with what we had. That way we could keep enough food in our bellies and keep our families happy. This guy, though, couldn't do that, now that he was out of work and messed up. That was the way that the unions were handled by the company toughs.¹⁶

Within the *tanjū*, and at the workplace the company made the laws and the *rōmu* policed them. The *rōmu* played not only the role of the local police, but also the roles of judge, jury and executioner. Moreover they were the jailers of the miners, forcing the miners to stay within the physical boundaries of the *tanjū*. Both at the workplace and within the *tanjū* the miners abided by a set of laws which bore little resemblance to those of the outside world, laws which were in contradiction to the democratic principles of mainstream society. These were the laws the *rōmu* policed, and transgressions were dealt with harshly. The outside police seldom intervened in these violent episodes, choosing to regard the daily violence as a "company matter." Because the incidents occurred within the *tanjū*, officially

¹⁶Okushima, interview: 1988

the police accepted the word of the owners that the situation was under control. Doubtless the prominent position the mine owners held in society, and the fact that the police chiefs in the towns I researched were almost always former employees of the coal companies, influenced the hands-off policy the police adopted.

In essence then, the coal companies were able to exert whatever pressure they felt appropriate in order to achieve desired production levels. Unions were seen as a threat to both their autonomous control and the unimpaired continuation of production, and given the freedom to use violence without fear of redress from the outside world, the *rōmu* were exhorted to quell the tide of "red rebellion," as it was referred to in the press in the 1950s.¹⁷ This policy of attempting to destroy democratic unions was widespread within the coal industry, but its enforcement was particularly brutal in the smaller mines.

The second heinous crime, in the eyes of management, was obstructing production in other ways. The most obvious way production can be slowed, short of concerted industrial action, is through worker absenteeism, and "go-slows," and in most coal producing nations this situation occurs.¹⁸ In Japan, however, through the judicious use of violence, management was able to prevent this situation arising.

Traditionally, miners throughout the Western world have had the reputation of being rough, but existentialist in philosophy, choosing to live for the immediate future, rather than saving for the long term. It has been postulated by a number of authors that there is an economic rationale in place here. That is, the long hours, and the arduous and dangerous nature of the job could be balanced by the miners taking days off when their savings

¹⁷The 1950s was a period where the doctrine of McCarthyism became dominant in Japan, following the example of the United States.

¹⁸see Dennis, Henriques and Slaughter, 1956; Gaventa, 1987; Metcalfe, 1988

had reached the point that they could afford not to work.¹⁹ In Britain, absenteeism was the major problem recognised by the National Coal Board in a survey on production problems in 1984.²⁰

In Japan this problem was confined to the bigger companies because their management methods were less forceful than those used in the smaller mines. However, in these small companies violence was used on a daily basis to induce the miners to work. It has to be said that this method was quite successful in maintaining production.

Indiscriminate violence

Miners regarded two coalmines - Hoshu, an Ueda mine in Kawasaki, and Sensui, a small Kurate mine - as being particularly violent. People living in Kurate regarded the Kawasaki mine as the worst. On the other hand, those living in Tagawa or Kawasaki regarded the Kurate mine as the worst. Because there was a fair amount of movement between mines, stories of the nature of violence employed in these mines became commonplace as miners discussed their old jobs with their new workmates. The big companies were very selective as to the sort of workers they employed, so a miner, who for whatever reason was not able to be employed by one of the big companies, became dependent on the smaller mines for work. Miners in the smaller companies constantly compared mines - discussing the unions, the *rōmu* and the extent of violence used by management, wages, mine safety, company housing, and job availability.

In the immediate post war boom, many small companies had difficulty keeping up with demand and holding on to their labour force. The work was dangerous and not very well paid, and miners typically were forced to work 12 to 14 hour shifts. They were often beaten if they did not go to work.

¹⁹see, for example, Dennis, Henriques and Slaughter, 1956: Chapter 2, on Britain; and Metcalfe, 1988: 34-5 and 78-9, on Australia

²⁰see National Coal Board Report on Absenteeism, 1984

Many men were not prepared to be treated in this manner, and wanted to look for mining work elsewhere. The companies were aware of the demand for qualified miners and took steps to prevent the labour force from leaving their mines. The first step was to keep the workers in an area where they could be supervised, both at work and at home. This was achieved in part through the structural manipulation of the *tanjū*. Potential troublemakers were usually segregated from the other miners, and the location of any individual miner was always known to the *rōmu*. Consequently when there was any sort of worker strife, the *rōmu* were able to get to the offenders immediately. Through this system the management were also able to control the miners' standard of housing, differentiating between those who followed the company's policies without complaint, and those who resisted.

The next step was to restrict both the scope and frequency of worker contact with the outside world. Many people talk about the isolated nature of the Chikuho region - how that although the area is situated in a geographically advantageous position, the outside world is largely ignored by the local communities, and vice versa.²¹ The isolation of the region was a major factor in allowing the development and maintenance of the mine owners' control of the labour force. As there was so little contact with the outside world the mine owners were able to exert illegal and violent sanctions over the workers without fear of recrimination.

Historically there are a number of precedents for the type of management which was practised within the Japanese mining industry. The salt mines of Siberia during the Stalinist purges, and the incarceration of African diamond miners in South Africa offer similar perimeters to those employed by the coal companies. Particularly during World War II many local mines relied on forced foreign, or POW labour to continue operations. It is worth noting that I draw the distinction here between the two groups: by foreign labourers I mean Koreans, who made up the vast majority of the non-Japanese workforce. There were also a large number of Chinese,

²¹see Ueno, 1985a,b,c,d; Ishizaki, 1987

Filipinos, and European labourers involved, but these people were usually genuine POWs. The Koreans, on the other hand, were often not soldiers, but young men who had been conscripted by the invading Japanese to support the Japanese war effort. These days there is an organisation known as the *Kyōsei Renkō* (Korean Forced Labourers' Society), which is quite active in condemning the Japanese government for allowing mine companies to exert violence over the Koreans, both during and after the war.

In the above cases the forced labourers were closely guarded at all times, and slept together in a section of the *tanjū* removed from the local workers. There are many stories of atrocities committed against the Koreans during the war by the *rōmu*, but the most insidious use of violence was the pressure placed on individual Koreans to stay on in the mine after the war. During the war extremes of violence could be justified in a number of ways: the foreigners could be attempting to escape, start a riot, or sabotage production. They could be seen to be endangering the security of the country, and the rationale employed was that they should be dealt with severely.

When the war was over the demand for labour was higher than it had ever been in the industry, in line with SCAP's (The Supreme Command of Allied Personnel) plans to revitalise the economy. The smaller mines in particular were desperate for mining staff, because as the Korean and other foreign workers were gradually repatriated production dropped off dramatically. The solution to the problem of how to maintain a productive workforce was really quite simple. The Koreans were not allowed to go home.

This was not an original solution to labour problems. The internment system had been used successfully for many years during the feudal periods, in both the East and the West. But in this case the overarching political context was "democracy," not feudalism. Thanks in large part to the "hands-off" policies of the authorities, the mine owners were able to continue the practice of interning Korean workers. The mines were legally, politically, economically, geographically and socially separate from the wider society, so events which took place within the mines were seen to be the responsibility

of the individual mine's management. So long as any internal violence did not spill over into mainstream society the law turned a blind eye. There were no complaints from the miners themselves, apart from the so-called union "troublemakers," and the police accepted the company's word that these men were untrustworthy and violent themselves - potential criminals.²² There was no reason for the police to interfere in events they officially knew nothing of, and as contact between the mining communities and the mainstream communities was negligible the companies were able to continue to abuse the miners. In fact the levels of abuse rose markedly after the war. Not only Koreans but also Japanese miners were used as forced labourers as the demand for coal increased.

In Kurate in the immediate post-war years a frequent greeting between miners was, "Haven't seen you for a while. What number wife are you on now?"²³ This referred to the problem of incarceration. That is, when the miners were able to escape from the *tanjū*, they were forced to leave their families behind to fend for themselves, because the families would have slowed the escapee to such an extent that he would have been caught by the *rōmu*.²⁴ As a result of separation from their families many miners were remarried to women from other mining towns.

Retributions against escaped miners who were caught by the *rōmu* were savage. The English word "lynch" has now entered the local dialect, and also the mainstream language because of the frequency with which the escaped miners were caught and lynched. Escaped miners were systematically beaten and then displayed to the other miners at the workplace. Depending on the mine and the seriousness of the offence, sometimes the escapee was subsequently hanged, or cut to death with a sword or knife in front of the

²²Kashiwagi, interview: 1988

²³Idegawa, interview: 1987

²⁴Takazaki, interview: 1988

workforce as an example.²⁵ This process, from capture to punishment and sometimes, summary execution has become known as "lynching" in the Japanese language. Even though the miners escaped from the bounded confines of the *tanjū* into mainstream society, the police were still prepared to allow the *rōmu* to hunt down the men and deal with them as they saw fit, as long as the punishment was carried out within the *tanjū*.²⁶ The concept that the *rōmu* were behaving in an illegal manner was never suggested. Nor was the authority and legitimacy of the mine owners ever challenged.

One informant, talking about the *rōmu*, pointed out the route from the *tanjū* which many miners, mainly Korean, had followed in their attempts to escape from the Ueda mines in Kawasaki. It led over a mountain range into a village in Oita prefecture called Otomura, about 40 kilometres away, where Ueda's mine management had reliable informers who were quick to tell them if new people came to town.

When the miners ran away over the hills they went to Otomura. You can see that big mountain in the distance.. that's called Mount Gonge. If you draw a line from the base of that mountain to the base of Mount Hiko, about halfway along that line you'd be in Otomura. But they never escaped. They just ran away. They were soon caught, and of course they were punished immediately after their return - usually killed to show the others what happens to escapees.

These were regular events, the escapes. I suppose that at least one person a week (in the late 1940s, and early 1950s) tried to get away from the violence, and was caught. You just can't imagine the sorts of violence used against the miners here.²⁷

It can be said then, that the miners who escaped, or attempted to escape from these so-called "pressure mines" were desperate enough to risk

²⁵Sato, interview: 1988

²⁶Takazaki, 1966: 14

²⁷Ishizaki, interview: 1988

the wrath of the *rōmu* and the loss of their families for their freedom. Sadly, a large number were caught and severely punished, losing their freedom, families, employment, and, in some cases their lives in the process. Certainly the fear of failure in an escape attempt was strong motivation for the miners to endure the hardships of work, and for many years the vast majority did just that. Moreover, the fear of the overtly violent nature of the *rōmu* themselves served to encourage the miners to remain quiescent. Although the miners themselves were physically strong people, the *rōmu*, being bound only by the laws of the company, carried weapons which allowed them to assert their physical superiority over the workers without fear of recrimination from either inside, or outside the *tanjū*. As one informant, who was associated with the *rōmu* for 25 years in one of Kawasaki's Ueda mines said:

We weren't scared of anyone. The only people we were responsible to were the (*rōmu*) Boss, and the boss of the *yakuza gumi* (gang), if we were in one. We could do anything to anyone in the *tanjū*. The police were all in the mine owner's pocket so we never had any trouble with those idiots. In fact I think they relied on us to keep the peace.²⁸

Because the *rōmu* had such unrestricted power on both the group and individual levels, they were an unpredictably violent force which generated widespread fear within the *tanjū*. This fear was certainly a potent motivation in convincing the miners to stay within the *tanjū*, and to be productive for the company.

More discriminating violence?

Levels of violence against the miners rose and fell with the economic climate, according to one source.²⁹ But even throughout periods where there

²⁸Sato, interview: 1988

²⁹Sasaki, interview: 1988

was little actual physical violence, the threat of violence remained, personified in the physical presence of the *rōmu*. With one notable exception (see Chapter 8), it wasn't until the mines were threatened with closure that the miners developed some form of organised resistance to the status quo, and even then, the resistance was confined to a minority of miners, usually those from the larger companies.

As far as miners in the smaller companies were concerned, the violent day to day relationship with the company continued, even after the general strikes and labour unrest of 1960-1 had finished. Working conditions were not markedly ameliorated by the industrial action which *Tanrō* had taken. In fact the situation became more desperate for many miners as demand for their labour lessened with the "Energy Revolution" in the mid-1960s, which saw government policies set to destroy the coal industry in favour of oil. In response to the lessening demand for the miners' labour, smaller companies were prepared to let some of the workforce they had interned leave, because there were many miners desperately seeking work. Those miners who remained were forced to work for poorer wages in more difficult conditions, living in rapidly deteriorating company accommodation. Protest from the miners about any of the above conditions was met with the comment, "If you don't like the way the company is run, leave!"³⁰

While this was an improvement on the summary violence that would have been the response to protest a few years earlier, the workers were still dependent on the company in a number of ways which did not allow them to leave. Their housing and services such as gas, water and electricity were company controlled. Gambling, to which many of the miners were addicted was also a problem, because the *yakuza* often killed bad debtors. The miners could not save coupons, which they received in lieu of wages because they were only redeemable in the company stores, so general savings were very low. In short they had become economically dependent on the mine and the *tanjū*. Thus, summary dismissals resulted in total destitution for many miners.

³⁰Kawano, interview: 1988

The general feeling was that "the actions of the *rōmu* can't be helped" and that the best thing to do was to endure the privations, because "at least you were working, and if you were working you were eating."³¹

Even with these economic sanctions hanging over their heads, the miners continued to be subjected to daily violence right through the 1960s and '70s. The nation wide labour strife of the 1960s had not solved the basic problem of management-labour relations. In simple terms, the management of the smaller companies were themselves being pressured into increasing production. They were asked to produce cheaper coal than they had before to meet the requirements of the government quota system, which had been designed by the *daikigyō* cartel.³² They could not compete with the larger companies on the same scale, so they exerted great pressure on the workers to increase production, while simultaneously trying to reduce expenditure on safety measures and cut other production costs. The simplest way of increasing production was to force the workers to work longer hours on a piece work system. One informant describes the work conditions in a medium mine (800 employees) in the early 1960s:

There were only two shifts which we worked, not three like many of the big mines. Therefore instead of working eight hour shifts, we worked 12 hours at a time. We left home at 8.00 am, and worked until 8.00 pm. We had to work a total of 300 hours a month, so often we worked 13 and 14 hour shifts. When we were working past the time we were rostered to work, the next shift had to wait until we were finished. The men coming on shift at 8.00 pm, for example were fresh, but sometimes they had to wait until 12.00 p.m. or even 1.00 a.m. until we finished the time we were rostered on to work. So after working 13 or 14 hours a day, when we came home we had a bath and something to eat and collapsed completely exhausted. On top of that, working in the mines had become very dangerous as a result of the company neglecting safety regulations. Cave-ins, floods, etc.. On top of that the wages

³¹Interviews, Sasaki: 1988; Okushima: 1988; Tajima: 1989

³²Takazaki, 1961: 25

were incredibly poor. It was hard to maintain even the most basic standard of living.³³

Sanctions related to the lifestyles of the miners were easily imposed without recourse to physical violence. These coercive measures were implemented by management and concerned basic needs - control of food, shelter, money, and water. The same informant continues:

We workers didn't have access to running water. That is, there was water but we were only allowed to use it twice a day - before and after work. So when we had families it was a real hardship. We were all so relieved when the water was finally connected by the city and we could use it freely. But before then we had only one hour, twice a day when the water was available.³⁴

Throughout this period the *rōmu* continued to use violence, or the threat of it, on the workers. Particularly if there was the possibility of a non-company union being formed, the *rōmu* would be called out to deal with the leaders with as much force as they deemed necessary to persuade them to desist. When pressure to produce coal cheaply was placed on management from above, notwithstanding government support that was supplied to the mine, the levels of violence increased correspondingly as the *rōmu* coerced the workforce to dig more coal, more cheaply.

Nishioka, who was a JCP member within the company union, refers to the intimate relationship he developed with the *rōmu* at the Buzen mine:

As we were involved with the JCP, the company used the *rōmu* to keep us under control. They stood above us and put pressure on us to disperse, by attempting to get the other workers to join together against us in fear of the company.

³³Nishioka, interview: 1988

³⁴Nishioka, interview: 1988

The *rōmu* called us all (JCP members) together and said, "What's the matter with you people? Don't you know that we do our best to help you, and then you go and post bills saying that the mine is terrible and that you are worked too hard."

After the mine had closed these guys approached me directly and said that I was a real troublemaker and that they were glad that the whole business was over. They had tried to stab me in the balls on a number of occasions, but I had always managed to avoid them. They really had it in for me though, they did. They said that I was sick, and I told them that I thought that they were complete bastards (after the mine closed).

Today I can talk to them as though they are human beings, but at the time we were real enemies and any talks that we had were abusive. I was always worried about the violence that they could do to me at the time, and thus regarded them as real enemies who would only do me harm.³⁵

Management was reluctant to enrage the official political parties, and because of his official association with the JCP, Nishioka was able to avoid being the target of much direct *rōmu* violence. However pressure was brought to bear on Nishioka and his JCP colleagues in other ways. For example:

We were discriminated against very badly. We got lousy wages, and were made to work in areas where there was little contact with the other workers. In sum we (JCP) workers got about half the wages of the usual miners for doing the same work. In other words the company hoped that by putting the pressure on us in this way, we would quit of our own volition. There was no reason to sack us because we did the work that was required. But, because the wages were so low, often the workers just had enough, saying that they couldn't live on those wages, and just quit. This was in line with the strategy adopted by the company.³⁶

If Nishioka, who was to a large degree removed from direct violent confrontations, suffered physically at the hands of the *rōmu*, what was the

³⁵Nishioka, interview: 1988

³⁶Nishioka, interview: 1988

extent of the violence perpetrated on the non-JCP members? This is an extremely difficult question to answer, simply because the relatives of the dead and seriously injured are still too frightened to talk. However it illustrates quite clearly the concept that the *rōmu* used not only coercion and violence to maintain labour control, but also intimidation which was so successful that even 20 years after the mines have closed there is widespread reticence.

Officially there was no violence within the mines, except for intra-miner quarrels, usually over gambling, or so the local histories of the mining towns would like the reader to believe.³⁷ And it seems that many Japanese are quite comfortable with the "official facts." After I had made a speech at a public meeting about the extent of violence in Chikuho, one city dwelling informant exclaimed:

Surely those prominent, upright citizens of the community (the mine owners) would never have allowed that sort of violence to go on within their companies!³⁸

Obviously the coalmines were rough places. One informant goes so far as to call Chikuho "Japan's Texas,"³⁹ in a reference to the rough and untamed nature of the place. Most outsiders' perception of Chikuho was, and still is, that the area is very violent, crime is high, and there are many *yakuza*. Few are aware of the nature of the violence, and even fewer are aware of the extent and history of the violence. This is in large part due to the influence of the coal companies, who have been ruthless in suppressing the violent nature of the mines and of labour relations, by instilling fear of economic and physical sanctions within the local populations. They have also been able to censor the information going to the mass media through their

³⁷see *Tagawa Shishi*(1979) and *Kawasaki Chōshi*(1951), for example

³⁸Nakano - local dentist - interview: 1989

³⁹Nakayama - local doctor - interview: 1989

jinmyaku, or contact, networks in much the same way as they were able to censor information coming into the *tanjū* in the immediate post war years.

In Ueno Eishin's books are a number of pointed references about the state of the mining community. As a miner himself he was subjected to many of the indignities the men and women of these communities suffered. In the case of the Kyo no Ue mine, he describes the actions of the *rōmu*, and places them within the context of social and production control. Just how were the miners coerced into working the long hours in such terrible conditions? Particularly in light of the fact that Japan was modernising at a rapid rate, the position of the coalminers was anathema to the concept of a free and democratic United States-backed society.

Ueno describes the conditions:

There were no areas for the children to play. No *tatami* in the houses. No response from the company if fire broke out. The houses were in disrepair. To all this the company turned a blind eye. The goods in the company store were two to three times the price of other local stores, but when the people complained about any of the above, they were told by the management that if they had any complaints they were free to quit their jobs.

In fact, people who complained about the situation were often subjected to wage cuts and special physical cruelty.

The leader of the Women's Group (*fujinkai*) said that when she complained about the wages not being enough to live on one time, she was told by the *rōmu* boss that,

"All you ever do is complain, saying how hard life is, how you don't have enough money. Don't you drink hot *sake* in the evenings? Don't you think that it is a luxury to do so? If it's really so hard on you, sell your daughters. After all you have two daughters, right?" This man became the police chief the next year!⁴⁰

Violence in Chikuho coalmines was widespread and endemic. It became the modus operandi for many small mines, and the concept of coercion, as

⁴⁰Ueno, 1985a: 24

opposed to blatant violence, was found in many of the larger mines as well. The *rōmu*'s position as proxy police within the confines of the *tanjū* gave them almost unlimited power over the miners, something which was conveniently ignored by the authorities. Their ability to kill or beat miners who were too militant, or were not prepared to work within the rules established by the company allowed them to maintain control over the workforce. In this way violence was used to legitimate the ideology of management and to resist workers' challenge to the existing social and economic structures.

In communities where, apart from joining the *yakuza*, mining was the only legitimate occupation, few options existed for local men other than to enter the mines. Those who joined the miners' ranks accepted the strictures which went with the work. Violence was such a common occurrence that people became inured to it. This is not to say that they were immune to it. Rather they accepted that it was a part of the job. It is not unreasonable to assume that the majority of miners in the smaller mines accepted equally the dangers of the *rōmu* and the violence of which they were capable, and the dangers of the mine itself. The miners knew what was expected of them, and because there were few occupational choices available, made the best of the situation.

The values which were forced upon them in the mines became the norm, so that when the mines were closed, the miners, certainly initially, retained those values in most cases. Yet accepting these values as being part of a limited range of occupational choice, and accepting them as their own values are rather different concepts. It would be expected that exposure to the wider community following the closure of the mines, would expand the range of individual miners' experiences, and with this expansion of experience would come a developing consciousness of the extremes of violence to which they were subjected in the mines. This in turn would generate feelings of animosity towards the mines and the *rōmu* which would result in a catharsis of aggression and outspokenness. However, in the small mining communities the *rōmu* are still feared today as much as they were in the past, and few

people are willing to discuss their role in the mines. This could be related to the movement of many *rōmu* into the ranks of the local *yakuza gumi*, which wield great coercive power in today's society. But probably it is also related to the power that the company held over the ideological indoctrination of the workers.

The consciousness of some miners is changing as the days of the mines slip further into the past. But the miners who are critical of company policies are still very much in the minority. Because many ex-mining families still live in the *tanjū* where they have lived for many years, there is a subliminal feeling of gratitude towards the company for not destroying the village, according to Ishizaki.⁴¹ On top of this is the understanding that they have survived the ordeal of the mines - that it is over, and that because they are still alive, they have won. There is no point in reminiscing about the violence they suffered, or the scars they received at the hands of the *rōmu*, because they believe it is uninteresting, and because it is painful to recall these events.

Although union activists like Nishioka, who reluctantly agreed to discuss the past with me because I am an outsider - and therefore need to be educated - still exist, the majority of the people who worked in the violent mines don't want to, or choose not to remember.

In the next chapter I will look at the famous Hoshu Mine disaster where, even though the inaction of the company in helping to rescue 67 miners trapped in the flooded mine shaft was regarded as appalling by the majority of miners, past instances of pervasive violence were able to forestall any miners' protest.

⁴¹interview: 1988

Chapter 6

HOSHU TANKO

It is said that it is the peculiar quality of time to conserve fact, and that it does so by rendering our past falsehoods true.

(Gene Wolfe. *The Shadow of the Torturer*. 1981: 121)

Hoshu Tanko was owned by Ueda Seijiro, then mayor of Kawasaki town, and operated from the early 1920s through to 1961, the year after the dramatic mineshaft flood in which 67 miners died. Throughout the period it carried out operations the mine was renowned as one of the most violent of all Japanese mines. The expression *asseiyama*, or "pressure mine" was first coined in relation to the Ueda mines, and referred to the system of indentured, and often forced labour. The number of workers killed in the mine in incidents concerning the *rōmu* (overseers) is difficult to estimate, but one source has put the figure at more than 500 over a 45 year period.¹

When the flooding occurred locals were outraged at the lack of action taken by Ueda and his management to commit the necessary resources to exhume the bodies of the dead miners after it was finally decided that there could be no survivors. The memory of this lack of goodwill is still strong within the local community.

I will use the newspaper reports from the Nishi Nihon Shinbun, the largest of the Kyushu newspapers (circulation 5 million daily), and the most in touch with local events, to describe the mining disaster at Hoshu. The newspaper accounts are relevant here because they show how the accident was communicated to the local population. The power of the press to influence the course of events is an issue which is often neglected in anthropology. Over time, as memories fade, we become more reliant on written accounts of the time to understand the past. In effect these accounts become history. To understand the nature of these historical "truths," we must then deal with the media accounts of the time.

¹Ishizaki, personal communication: 1988

I will intersperse the newspaper extracts with comments from three informant accounts to contextualise the accident and the events which both preceded and succeeded the disaster. These informants are:

1. Okushima, a man who worked in the pits at Hoshu for 25 years, who is now resident at Mitsui Ita in Tagawa;

2. Ishizaki, a woman who was born *burakumin*, and who laboured in many small mines in the Kawasaki region before she became a nurse. Her husband was seriously injured in a cave-in at Hoshu. She is the author of a number of books on discrimination and the abuse of power in Kyushu;

3. Kashiwagi, the head of the mine construction unit at Hoshu. A conservative man, he will not tolerate criticism of the mine, because he feels that it is counter-productive to the "rebuilding of Chikuho," the project he is involved with at present.

Background to the accident

It is the flooding of the mineshaft for which the mine is best remembered today. Whenever Chikuho people mentioned anything about Hoshu in the course of interviews or discussions, the overriding concern was with the fact that there had been a major disaster at the mine. This concern with the disaster was linked in folklore with the idea that the closure of the mine, which followed the accident, was the beginning of the end of the coal industry in the region. Moreover, local people are still resentful of the company's reluctance to exhume the dead bodies after the flood.

For a solid fortnight before the accident torrential monsoon rain had fallen in Kawasaki. Because the mine was built under the Chukanji River, the supports which held up the ceiling of the shaft were apparently in danger of collapsing. Against the advice of the Fukuoka Mine Safety Commission, mine management had decided to open the shaft which eventually flooded.

Twelve months after the accident a decision was made by the company to halt operations at the mine, and to sell out to the government under the favourable terms of the TCRB. The workers were paid little in compensation but

were permitted to stay on in the company housing, even though they were no longer working for the company. This became a critical factor in company policy. It was essential that the company maintain control of the workers' economic circumstances if they were to maintain the public fictions they had painstakingly developed over the years - that the company was not as bad as it was always made out to be by disenchanted workers; that there was very little violence within the company, and what there was, was always perpetrated by the miners against each other or against the *rōmu*; that the miners were a poorly disciplined group of people, who needed to be closely watched - they were gamblers, and had "unstable tendencies," hence restrictive practices when invoked could be seen to be necessary.²

By keeping the miners within the system of *on* and *giri* - that is, by reinforcing the concept that the miners were still beholden to the company for their present lifestyles - the miners would not rock the proverbial boat. By supplying housing, or in reality, by not evicting the miners, the company maintained its control of the people. It was low cost - the maintenance of the housing was passed on to the individuals living in them - and the company maintained its power base by allowing only "sponsored" ex-miners in. When the government decided to rebuild the *tanjū*, the company supplied a list of "genuine" occupants, who were to receive preference in moving into the new housing. Thus the process of manipulation continued.

²Kashiwagi, interview: 1989

The Accident

The newspaper accounts

DAY 1:

21st September, 1960. Nishi Nihon Shinbun, Page 1.

FEARFUL ACCIDENT IN HOSHU TANKO

Rescue Efforts Halted

Hoshu Mine Flooded

Families Stare at the Mine Entrance

(Tagawa) In a matter of minutes 67 miners were lost in Hoshu mine, as the families of the miners and others who had joined the rescue parties attempted to get into the mine to help them. However the efforts of the people were in vain, as the black and muddy waters rose minute by minute to levels approaching 15 metres in height, sabotaging efforts to free the men trapped in the no. 2 shaft. About 50 rescue workers worked the pumps desperately trying to reduce the water levels but it became apparent that the water level had not dropped even a little. All the families of the trapped miners could do was to stare at the mine entrance and wait.

The people concerned gathered around Yoshida Seijiro (45) who miraculously survived the ordeal. Mr Yoshida said, "When I was working in the right hand tunnel on the face the electricity was suddenly cut off. So there was a call from the *rōmu kakari* who said that there was an emergency, and he told me to tell the men to get out of there! We rushed to get out but the water was already up to our chests, and was pushing us under and back down the mine." With the terror rising in his chest he concentrated all his efforts to escape from the mine.

Because the muddy waters from the river had flooded into the mine the efforts of the rescue workers were severely hampered. More than 100 men from the local fire brigade as well as volunteers and the official rescue teams from the mine itself were involved with the attempts to reduce the levels of the water

through the use of the three pumps that were available, but it was almost impossible. By midday they had made almost no progress, and the water was still flooding into the shaft. While the men were pumping the water out, one man (Kobayashi, 34) who was miraculously able to make his way to the surface, even though the water was up to his head at times, said the following:

"About midnight someone noticed that something had happened to the mine entrance. The order to evacuate was given by the man in charge of operations, who ran from the mine himself. When we saw him running for his life, we dropped tools and ran for our lives too. Just as I reached the tunnels intersection there was a loud crashing noise which was accompanied by a wall of water about three metres high which looked like a *tsunami* bearing down on top of us. In a matter of seconds the water was past our heads. It's on top of us, we thought, and like a nightmare the electricity lines which were on the ceiling peeled away, and I watched as three or four of the men were swept away in the rush of water, just their cap lamps showing in the distance as they disappeared.

As the water reached our heads we managed to keep treading water until we were swept to the old ventilation shaft, where we were able to climb out. The guys who were in the left hand shaft, although they heard the evacuation order were probably not able to find any way out, I think."

The sheer volume of water seemed to have overcome a large number of the workers in the initial flood, especially those in a section of the mine where there was no communication with the surface. In effect, the men who were working in the section which could still be contacted by the supervisor on the surface stood a reasonably good chance of getting out of the mine alive, but those working on the face where the telephone lines were cut had no advance warning of the disaster. Of the men working on this face, 70% or so were trapped within the mine.

The union, in line with its attitude towards the company, made a public announcement that there was to be a meeting to discuss who would pay the

potential funeral expenses. The following is a notice that was posted around the *tanjū*:

Meeting Called Immediately

A message from the leader of the Hoshu Tanko Union:

I wish to hold a meeting to discuss with all those concerned the problems that this disaster has caused us all - from the cost of the funerals, to the issue of whether it was the company's responsibility, to what improvements must be made to the mine before it reopens. These are all items on the agenda for the meeting.

Up till now we have all been concerned about the rain, and we have gone as far as to organise a Rain Period Control Group, but we never imagined that the river banks would give in as they did. It appears that it was a very old excavation which gave way under pressure.

It is worth noting here that the union did not publicly announce any criticism of company policy in opening the mine on the day of the accident, nor did it call for an investigation into the disappearance of its members. In fact, it offered partial excuses on behalf of the company for the disaster occurring, and even neglected to consider that the miners trapped in the mine could still be alive.

21st September. Nishi Nihon Shinbun, Evening edition, Chikuho section

"ALL WE CAN DO IS PRAY FOR THEIR SAFETY"

The Hoshu Tanko Flood Disaster

The Devastated Wives Run to the Mine Entrance

"The War with the Water" - This is what the accident which occurred on the morning of the 20th September at Ueda Kogyo's Hoshu Tanko has become. "Please get the water out, and quickly

bring out the 67 men from within the mine safely," are the prayers of those concerned as they watch the attempts of the rescue workers to free the men from the waters of the Chukanji River. These silent thoughts of the families of the trapped men go out to the rescue workers as they work. Under hot autumn skies the men are struggling in extremely harsh conditions to get at the men.

Soon after the accident the names of the missing men were posted in the *tanjū*, and in front of the Union office. As the people looked at the list of husbands, sons, and workmates, they thought as they wrote the relevant names down, "Him too?" Others commented that, "He's late coming home tonight, so I guess..." Their brows wrinkled in worry, and the strength drained from their faces, the wives of the missing men rushed to the mine, the hot autumn sun beating down on them, mocking them with dramatic irony, after the heavy rain of recent weeks.

That afternoon a sign saying "Entry into the Mine is Prohibited" was erected as the Emergency Rescue crews started preparations to try to get the water out. The two 30 h.p. and the two 25 h.p. pumps are able to pump out 240 cubic metres of water an hour. However the face of the man in charge of the project is beginning to show signs of impatience as the work has still not got underway, although they have been desperately trying to get the preparations finished from the early morning.

Because the motors had not been installed properly before, and because the work on the Chukanji River project had not been completed, work getting the water out was delayed. The head of the underground repair section in the mine, Mr Tomoda (48), said that according to those who escaped and those who know a lot about the mine, it was just bad luck which caused the accident to be much worse than was to be expected.

The water started flooding into the mine at midnight on the late shift. The place the water broke through into the mine was about 200 metres from the entrance and couldn't be seen by those on the surface. It was exactly half way between the face workers and the machinery operators, and neither of these groups had a good opportunity to see the water coming - this was one bit of bad luck. As the whole tunnel was flooded there was no way for any of the workers to get out of the shaft to the entrance. If the hole had been a little higher, the surface workers would have been able to see it and therefore been able to give early warning to the miners. Although the hole was small, the water which flooded the shaft was so powerful it cut off the electricity in one section and cut off the telephone in the other.

The embankment walls of the river were originally built in 1922, and they were able to cope with the river rising up to one metre from the average. The fortnight's rain which had preceded the accident was exceptional for this time of year. Kyushu typically gets a monsoon season which finishes at the end of July or the beginning of August. 1960 was a particularly wet year, and because of the excessive rain a number of mines, including Hoshu had been investigated by the FMSC to check for high water levels, the integrity of the underground excavations, and general safety standards.³ However reports made by this body were usually only recommendations, and thus carried little weight. The investigators for the FMSC were ex-coalmining supervisors or engineers, and it has been argued that their interests were in keeping the mines productive at the minimum operating costs.⁴

When the high water level of the river exceeded the one metre limit enormous pressure was exerted on the earth in the nearby area as the water overflowed the banks. Because the land by the river was undercut with tunnels from present and past excavations, the potential for some sort of cave-in occurring was high. The company management was aware of this, according to Kashiwagi, yet could not justify the financial outlay to improve the quality of the digs.⁵ The rescue attempts were in trouble from the start because they could not determine where the accident had actually occurred. This was exacerbated by a number of mechanical problems they had to contend with. Because the pumps were not able to cope with normal levels of water in the mine, according to one worker who was in the mine at the time, and because they were always breaking down due to lack of maintenance, work was delayed from the moment the extent of the disaster was known.⁶

³F.M.S.C. Report, 1961: 1-3

⁴Onishi, interview: 1988

⁵Kashiwagi, interview: 1988

⁶Okushima, interview: 1988

21st September. Nishi Nihon Shinbun, Page 17

INADVISABLE TO DIG, SAFETY COMMISSION RECOMMENDED

The Fukuoka Mining Safety Commission had recommended to the management of the Ueda Hoshu Tanko that operations be stopped after heavy rain made the river embankments unsafe. Because the mine is situated under the river there were fears that the mine would be in danger, said a spokesman from the FMSC today. Mine management has not commented.

This paragraph was placed next to the produce market prices in perhaps the least read section of the newspaper. Although it cannot be argued that the press were neglectful of the situation, I think it can be said that they were party to obscuring the proceedings of the FMSC.

The cave-in site was found by the afternoon of the 21st.

21st September. Nishi Nihon Shinbun, Evening edition

CAVE-IN SITE FOUND AT SECOND ATTEMPT

The red-eyed exhausted families of the missing miners who had gathered at the mine entrance today voiced their complaints about the situation at Hoshu. "Why couldn't they have told the men about the danger earlier?" they exclaimed. So, what were the problems that led to so many men being trapped? According to sources who are working on the site at the moment, the late discovery of the cave-in and the telephone being cut off to the mine were the fatal errors.

The first problem occurred at about 8.40 pm last night, when a large booming noise heard from near the *tanjū* was accompanied by a huge wall of water vapour which came pouring over the retaining walls. To deal with this problem the local fire brigade were called in, and teams from Tagawa also arrived. At this time they could not find a hole in the earth.

But at midnight when they went out to double check the site they found the cave-in, and water was pouring into the mine by this stage. Immediately they called the mine, but of the two internal phones, only one was working, so they told the miners there what had happened. This took altogether about five minutes from the time the hole was discovered. There were 154 men in the tunnel where the phone was working, and of these men 25 are missing. In the other tunnel where 64 men were working, there are still 42 missing.

By the time the telephone call was made to the tunnel the leak was already bad, apparently. According to one of the men who got out of the Yakiso tunnel, when the electricity was cut off they realised that they were cut off from above ground, and that an accident had occurred.

Overall, you could say that if the cave-in site had been discovered earlier, and if there was not a problem with the electricity and telephone, the accident would have been a minor one.

A plethora of errors affected the miners, as even the conservative NNS implies in its back page article above. The first problem was that all work should have been suspended following the recommendation of the FMSC. The second problem was that as the company said in its defence, the mine supervisor was not aware of the seriousness of the flood. By the time management did in fact realise the extent of the flood, and the damage which could be caused by a massive amount of water flooding into the mine, the water pressure had already destroyed the telephone connection - the one link the miners in one section of the mine had with the outside world. This severely limited their chances of survival. The third problem was that there was a certain complacency about the mine being able to withstand the pressure of the river, even though the earth under the river had been dug out with the application of minimal safety standards. This also contributed to the accident. A fourth problem which was to develop as the rescue workers set about trying to free possible survivors was that there were no maps of the underground mining regions. Although this was also to cause problems later in the excavation process, it had immediate implications as to why the earth had collapsed so dramatically under the water

pressure. Because neither the mining which had been performed in the pre-war days, nor the more recent Hoshu unsupervised excavations were recorded on maps there was no way of ascertaining where the earth had become weakened. Hence there was no way of either strengthening the weak places, or determining where, in relation to the above ground maps the miners were trapped.

DAY 2:

22nd September. Nishi Nihon Shinbun, Page 1

IT MAY TAKE A NUMBER OF DAYS TO PUNCH THROUGH TO THE TUNNEL

It is already two days after the accident which has trapped 67 miners in the tunnels at Hoshu Tanko and the emergency rescue crews have not yet managed to reach the site of the first cave-in, nor start to pump the water out. The outlook is that it will take many more days to get to the site of what appears to be a second cave-in, and even more days to get the water out from there. In fact it will take another three days or so to get to the workers in the first cave-in site, the head of the rescue operations said. Because they don't know the depth of the water, nor how far the water has penetrated into the mine itself best estimates are that it will take another four or five days before they can start pumping the water out, because they need to shore up the collapsed sections properly. Where the river flows above the mine there is a huge area to shore up, and so far more than 150 wooden struts have been placed in the mine approaching the site of the cave-in.

As the rescue work encountered more obstructions the tension at the mine mounted as the chances of there being any survivors lessened. The pumping progress was agonisingly slow, and the families of the trapped men were starting to voice their dissatisfaction at the length of time the work was taking.

To be fair to the rescue workers, because of the state of neglect into which the mine and the maintenance work on the river had fallen, their first priority was to make sure that there would not be a repetition of the accident, which required rebuilding the river banks, and shoring up the sections of the

mine which had been damaged by the flood. This was a time consuming process, and given the negligence of the company in not having adequate geographical maps of the area, they were working in extremely difficult conditions.

The other consideration was the weather. There were fears that the rain would return and result in the river swelling which would endanger the lives of those working in the rescue operation.

22nd September. Nishi Nihon Shinbun, Evening edition, Chikuho section

HEAVY RAIN MEANS DANGER

Worried Faces as They Watch the Rain

(Tagawa) Two days after the accident heavy rain clouds were building up over Hoshu, as the rescue attempts were spurred on to a faster pace. If it rains, the rain will probably wash away the earth retaining walls which have been especially built. If the rain is heavy there is a good chance that the river will flood the repaired embankments. The families and colleagues of the trapped men who are watching the "Devil's Hole" are praying with all the local people that it doesn't rain.

The forecast is for heavy rain to eventuate in the near future however. Although the reconstruction of the embankment walls is basically finished the river has already swollen about one metre, and the height of the wall above the water level is about one metre. However over the 90 days up to the accident on many occasions more than 100 mm of rain had fallen on a single day and the depth of the river had often risen to more than 2.5 metres. In other words, if there is another 100 mm on one day then there will be a repeat of the danger which flooded the mine, as the river bursts its banks. If the rain follows the trend of past weeks, then the river will overflow, and because of the positioning of the new wall, another hole will open in a place which is still exposed, leaving the rescue excavation operations to face the full force of the river.

22nd September. Nishi Nihon Shinbun, Chikuho section

PUMPING PROGRESS HALTED

Families becoming anxious and impatient

Although it has been two days since the disaster the families of the miners trapped in the mine have yet to see the pumping operation begin. Even if the miners were still breathing, the chances of getting them out alive are rapidly diminishing. The news for the families has all been black so far. Not only are their husbands still in dire trouble, but the extent of the damage to the *tanjū* and to the housing where they live is becoming so bad that they have had to be evacuated from the area. It's been a day characterised by anxiety and impatience at the lack of progress, as the families fear for the men they are separated from.

Today there were so many more people at the mine entrance than the previous day that rescue workers' access to the mine was partially obstructed. However the families of the missing men didn't take their eyes off the mine and the men working there for a second. Those who had been standing around the mine for a long time were yelling out, "Oi! Mrs K can't see what's going on! Get out of the way!" showing the concern the miners felt for the wives of their colleagues. A feeling of desperation crept into the excavation proceedings as the men were aware of the urgency of the situation and attempted to get the water out of the cave-in site fast. But by evening they had only managed to get part of the supporting framework erected, and it didn't look as though they had progressed at all from the previous day.

This morning we waited for the embankment walls to be finished to stop the flooding waters. First the earth was brought in to fill the hole, and then work started on getting a causeway built. This has been done by getting fill from within the mine and sending it to the surface with the belt conveyer, with the aim of first plugging the hole. The retaining wall which has been built is only about half the height needed, so if it rains again there is a good possibility that not only will the first hole open up again, but that a second hole will appear which will wash the mine out completely. To this end the company has decided to fill the hole with cement because the company housing which is situated on the land by the river will also be endangered if the river overflows its banks. The company does not want to lose any houses to the river so it is proceeding at full speed.

The company reacted quickly to the threat of loss of property by immediately rebuilding the river banks around the company housing. This was in marked contrast to the speed with which the rescue work was going on underground.

As far as that work was concerned, the fear of a second cave-in was soon realised when there was a major collapse in a previously uncharted area directly over the tunnel where the rescuers were working.

DAY 3:

23rd September. Nishi Nihon Shinbun, back page

FEAR OF NEW CRACKS IN THE EARTH

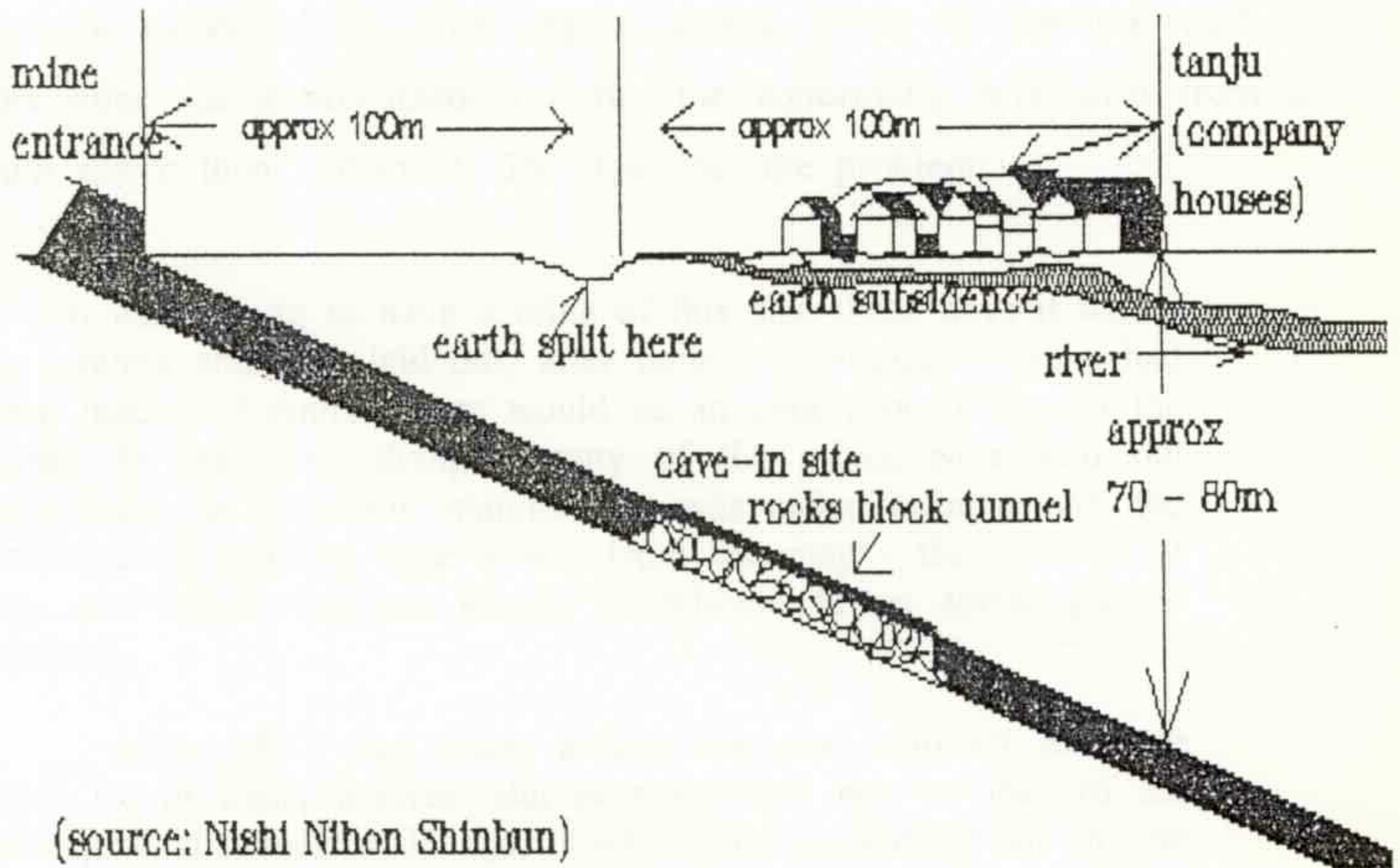
Earth split right above the tunnel at Hoshu Tanko

The families of the missing men and the rescue workers face new problems and hardship with the discovery of a second rupture in the earth immediately above the tunnel where excavation is proceeding. At this stage the rescue workers are not sure whether it was caused by the original earth movement following the flooding, or whether it is a new and completely unrelated problem. Regardless, it is making the task the men have set out to do much harder (see diagram 1 page 163).

On the morning of the 22nd, Mr Ishihara (38), who lives in the *tanjū* at the mine site noticed that gaping cracks had appeared in the walls of his house. Because the homes of Ishihara and many others are situated near the cave-in site (between 70 and 80 metres away) there are fears that the whole village will collapse, hence the order for a temporary evacuation.

This effect of the disaster on the people who lived in the *tanjū* and in the nearby areas was played down by the press, who generally confined their reports to the progress, or lack of progress of the rescue work and the pathos engendered by the images of the bereaved families. The people who lived in the company houses by the river were all evacuated, and were forced to move into

diagram 1: HOSHU TANKO ACCIDENT SITE
23rd September, 1980



temporary shelters for periods of up to two years, as a result of the subsidence. These workers lost not only their incomes but also their homes, and were largely neglected by the media and the company.

The farmers who worked the nearby fields were also severely affected by the disaster. One man's rice paddy sank 50 metres in a matter of minutes when the initial cave-in occurred. The company was not deemed liable for damages here. Rather the government eventually footed the bill.

The discovery of the second rupture above the rescuers compounded the frustration many of the people watching felt. Ishizaki says that the cave-in occurred because the company had been negligent of worker safety standards when they had excavated the entire region. Hence, when the rescuers tried to get to the mine via a non-standard route, the abnormally soft earth from a tunnel built above them collapsed. She describes the problem:

If you were going to have a mine of this size these days it would be spotless and well laid out, after correct geological surveys had been made. Of course there would be an underground map of the mine. At that time though, many of the mines were laid out willy-nilly, in a random manner that was called *tokutsu*. All the previous excavations were absent from the map - the position of any one tunnel was not known in relation to an above ground position.

Also, MITI had made a law that one couldn't excavate close to, or under a river. But because there was no map of the underground tunnels at Hoshu, it was almost impossible for anyone to confirm where, in fact the mining had reached. The company then, ignored the law and went ahead with the mining in obviously unsafe conditions.⁷

23rd September. Nishi Nihon Shinbun, page 7

The Fukuoka Mining Safety Committee Announces Investigation Into Accident

⁷Ishizaki, interview: 1988

The second tunnel collapse was unexpected, and there was a need to investigate the circumstances of both cave-ins, the FMSC said today. The earth in this area had been undisturbed for decades, and it was assumed that the roof of the mine was intact and in good condition. If the place where the stones were blocking the tunnel had given in and collapsed under the pressure even a little more, it would have been directly over where the rescue workers were attempting to do their work, and it would have been more trouble than bears thinking about.

Although the investigation has not yet been completed some points have become clear about the rock fall: 1. it is probably related to part of the roof caving in; 2. the area around the original cave-in site has been structurally weakened, and the earth has been split under pressure, which has contributed to the underground rockfalls occurring. In the case of point one, one has to consider the possibility that the tunnel is completely flooded, and if that is the case then the water must be pumped out before rescue operations can begin properly. If this is not done then there is the fear that even a small fall will trigger a further cave-in of the magnitude of the first cave-in.

At a meeting held in the Ikejiri public hall about the dissatisfaction felt by the families of the missing miners and the people whose houses had been undermined by the cave-in, an unemployed miner, Mr Daiike, said, "When two houses collapsed after the earth split there was no mistaking the fact that the earth movement had been very close, and the people here were terrified. There is no way that any of the men in the mine could have survived a cave-in of that magnitude. Even if they give us one million yen, those men won't return home." The representatives of the families of the trapped men also voiced their discontent saying, "If only they could break through the rocks which have blocked the tunnel, then they will be able to tell whether our husbands and fathers are still alive."

The fact that the newspaper reported the local people's discontent, rather than just their bereavement is noteworthy. Although the tone of the article is politically neutral, and no criticism of the mine is implicit in the report, there is an air of concern for the people who have been disadvantaged by the disaster. This is consistent with much Japanese media reporting.

DAY 5:

The following articles appeared on the same page of the NNS. The headline for the earlier article was smaller than that of the second, and the respective contents of the reports were rather contradictory.

It is worth noting that in this case the emphasis was placed on finding, and then defending a potential scapegoat for the accident. This was done through implying the mine supervisor had acted independently of management wishes.

25th September. Nishi Nihon Shinbun, back page

SUPERVISOR WAS NEGLIGENT

Tagawa-gun Council calls Conference into Hoshu Disaster

(Tagawa) The Tagawa-gun Council will open a discussion on the Hoshu mining disaster on the 26th September, taking the stand that on the day of the disaster the supervisor was negligent. This opinion that the blame for the disaster lies with the supervisor of the mine is supported by the Kyushu head of MITI, and the head of the Kyushu Business and Development Organisation. These men will speak at the conference.

Head of River Transportation and Safety Bureau Investigates the Hoshu Disaster

The head of the RTSB, who is investigating the Hoshu disaster, had the following to say after listening to the explanation from the man responsible for opening the mine on the day in question, "He, the mine supervisor, said that they had intended investigating the old excavations properly, but that the collapse and the accident had happened before they were able to. He was surprised at the scope of the accident. In response to the charges recently made that he was negligent in opening the mine on the day, he said that he had made no mistakes.

"However, although it was true that there was no map of the area where the miners were trapped, for the past three years the company had employed surveyors at a cost of five or six million yen a year to survey the underground region, and the map would be finished in the near future, he said. He went on to say that the Fukuoka Mine Safety Commission had not told him that it was inadvisable to work on that day."

The investigation is continuing.

The mayor of Tagawa and the group he represented are shown to be concerned about the nature of the accident, and the need to affix responsibility for the accident to some source. The mine owners were really beyond the law, so the supervisor at the mine on the day was charged with negligence - a charge he tried to refute at first.

This is the last article about the investigation which appeared in any of the local papers. The tone of the commissioner's report is that the company had acted correctly by instigating action to remedy the poor state of the mine maps, and was certainly not negligent on this count. The forces of nature were just too powerful and too fast to be countered by human action. There is doubt cast on the actions of the supervisor however, in line with the company's decision that a scapegoat needed to be found. Although the article states that the investigators from the RTSB were interested in his actions on the day in question, the report states only what he had said to the investigator - there is no opinion offered by the RTSB.

This is in line with much media reporting in Japan. Reporters sometimes write an article which can swing one of two ways, depending on the outcome of a potentially catalytic event or decision. It saves face and allows the newspaper to keep its options open, so that it can ride with the tide. In this case, the issue was whether the blame for the disaster was to be attached to the mine supervisor of the day. The newspaper thus reserves the option not to pass an opinion which may be politically damaging to its own interests.

The following investigative article, which appeared in an editorial section of the same newspaper about the disaster is in marked contrast:

DAY 7:

27th September. Nishi Nihon Shinbun, back page

"TOMORROW IT'LL BE THE ENTIRE COMMUNITY, TOO"**280 Mine Accidents in Chikuho this year. The Pain of the Accidents Continues at the Mine**

Following on the heels of the Hoshu flooding disaster, the gas explosion at Momii *tankō* has emphasised the two sided problem that the people of Chikuho face today. The mining accident rate has increased, and on top of this there is the added problem of the future of the industry, in light of the poor economic environment. Decaying with decrepitude, having to dig deeper and deeper in search of coal deposits is the destiny of the Chikuho coal fields. "Today it's some people at risk, tomorrow it's the whole community" sums up the way the coalfields are reacting to the continual bad news.

Last year, according to the figures released by the FMSC, there were approximately 350 accidents where miners were killed or seriously injured, and there were 221 official deaths. This year already there have been 280 accidents, and 140 deaths, not including the 67 men missing at Hoshu. September has been called the "month of disasters." In Tagawa alone there is a monthly average of 7.5 accidents overall for the nine months, but this September, with the casualties mounting almost daily, more than three times the average number of men have been killed. The FMSC has mounted a campaign to "Get Rid of the Jinx," but so far that is all they have done.

Mining started in the area in the Meiji period, and especially among small to medium sized mines, a number have not improved facilities at all since that period, according to one source. The fact that the maps of the mines were burnt in the war should have been enough to stop production until the facts of the matter were sorted out.

The second issue which affects the running of the small to medium sized mines is that as management are forced to dig deeper to recover the coal from their mines, the levels of gas increase as does the danger of flooding from striking an underground river, or being flooded from above as the ground is weakened from all the underground activity.

The third issue is that the FMSC, which should be monitoring the new excavations, is either not listened to by the companies, or is unaware of the new work. The FMSC says that although they try to apply stringent safety sanctions which include shoring up new work after it has been properly surveyed, the smaller mines neglect to inform them of new work so that they can save money by not complying with all the safety instructions. There are obviously a large number of problems which need to be reconsidered. On top of this, the recent long and heavy rains at the beginning of the month, which increased pressure on the earthworks, and on the river itself, should have been ample warning to the mines to apply adequate safety measures. They didn't.

"Rather than thinking about tomorrow, the ticket to the coal industry is thinking about the present," said one coal administrator. The president of a mine in Iizuka said, "When I heard about this accident, I thought that it was an economic decision which was responsible for the slowness in recovering the bodies." He went on to say, "Of course the FMSC comes to investigate the accident and this is the only time dissatisfaction about the mine surfaces."

One miner in Tagawa said, "Whenever an accident like this happens, I always think that tomorrow it will be me who gets it." This sums up the attitudes of the miners here at the moment.

Some very important and previously neglected points were raised in this article about mining safety, management negligence, and the horrific mining accident rate in Chikuho in 1960. Insofar as the scope of the article is concerned, these are cogent issues, and each is worthy of fuller investigation.

First, the accident rate, and the number of deaths in the mines needs to be contextualised. This was the second year after the implementation of the TCRB (Temporary Coal Rationalisation Bill) which allowed for mines to be sold to the government if some "natural" catastrophe halted or severely disrupted production. In this period, following the temporary boom which was prompted by the Korean War, there were vast stockpiles of coal left unsold, and the general outlook for coal mining was not optimistic. In the rush to increase production and cut costs, the smaller mines, which had to compete with the cartel of large coal companies and government subsidised price cuts, often neglected to consider the safety of the workers. The coal deposits were buried

further underground, so there was a need for the companies to step up the expensive business of excavating new tunnels and faces. The deeper they dug the greater the risk of cave-ins or methane gas concentrations.

The unions had been compromised in most cases by management manipulation and were not prepared to interfere on the miners' behalf. The demand for mining labour had dropped concurrently with the drop in demand for coal. There was an abundance of labour available and the miners were not able to press for improved working and living conditions with any discernible measure of success.

The FMSC's role in policing the safety conditions in the mines was also severely compromised by a number of factors, some of which are indicated in the article. Because the mines were not under any legal obligation to inform the FMSC about new work that was being done underground, very few of the smaller mines actually did contact them, according to one management informant.⁸ The FMSC was purely an advisory and investigative body, organised along *tatemaie* lines. It was in effect a token body which the big companies had instituted to placate the growing number of complaints that the industry was dangerous. The fact of the matter is that the FMSC, like similar bodies in other mining areas, was an organ of the mining companies' cartel, and was intimately associated with the mine owners' federation. It was guaranteed that this body would not find the owners guilty of negligence in the case of an accident.⁹ Rather, the process generally employed in these cases was that the person who was in charge of the mine on the day on which a given accident happened was indicted. This person was charged with negligence, or misconduct, was publicly denounced by the company and the FMSC, and then sacked. However in other cases the responsible individual was transferred within the company to another section and given equal or increased responsibility and salary.¹⁰ This meant the public was able to vent its frustration and anger on a scapegoat, while still

⁸Kashiwagi, interview: 1988

⁹Yano, interview: 1989

¹⁰see Yamano disaster, 1965; Mitsui Miike, 1964, for example

allowing the company to continue operations unchallenged. Thus the idea that the true causes of accidents lay in the type and extent of mining techniques employed by the management of the mines was obscured.

Back to the accident:

DAY 15:

The rescue workers continued to push on into the mine in their attempts to reach the miners, although by the beginning of October, even the most optimistic people were resigned to the fact that the trapped miners were probably dead by then. There were a number of mechanical problems encountered with the digging and pumping machinery, but the most severe problems concerned the map of the mine itself, as explained in the newspaper reports below.

When the rescue team realised that there was little chance of being able to gain access to the mine because of the rockfall which had blocked the main tunnel, they decided to dig towards the elevator tunnel in the faint hope that some of the trapped miners had been able to reach it. Also it seemed to be the most direct access, and the least dangerous to the rescuers. Of course, the fact that it took more than two weeks to get to the shaft seriously reduced the chances of rescuing any miners still alive.

4th October. Nishi Nihon Shinbun, back page

THERE IS NO CHANCE THAT ANYONE IS LEFT ALIVE

Elevator Tunnel Reached

The rescue team at Hoshu Tanko, the mine that has swallowed 67 miners, has been making steady progress in working its way to the site where the accident occurred by digging into the elevator access tunnel. Using a bore they have come to the point where

just two metres separates them from where the access tunnel starts. Using a probe inside the bore they have been able to determine that there is an exceptionally high build up of methane and coal gas, both over 12 percent, on the other side of the rock barrier. This means that there is no chance that there could be any survivors left in the access tunnel.

When work began on the rescue operation they had forecast that after 61 metres they would reach the blocked tunnel, but because of gross errors in the map of the mine, and slight errors in the actual digging, they missed the place. The problem was that they were urged to work with maximum speed to reach the miners in the first four days, and it was carelessness which led to the errors.

While the rescue workers waited at the mine entrance to be equipped with gas masks after discovering the extent of the gas in the mine, the families withdrew to a place where they gathered together in silence. The mine was tense. Some 25 men who had escaped from the mine came to see the water being pumped out, and they were unanimous in thinking that the miners who were trapped could not have survived in even half the volume of water.

The families of the miners had had their hopes pinned on the success of the operation to clear the way to get into the elevator tunnel, but when the announcement came that the gas in the mine was at dangerous levels, and that no miners had made their way into the shaft, the community prepared to mourn their dead.¹¹

According to one source, when the rescuers went to get their gas masks so they could look into the excavated section of the elevator shaft, the people waiting for news of their men instantly knew the worst. The fears that the men were all dead had been compounded over the weeks since the accident by the public attitude of Ueda, who had made it quite clear that he did not regard the company as being liable for the rescue work expenses or funeral costs. This attitude was made to appear even more callous in the eyes of the bereaved

¹¹Ishizaki, interview: 1988

families when the pumps broke down, and the rescuers got lost underground, further delaying reaching the cave-in site.¹²

5th October. Nishi Nihon Shinbun, Evening edition, back page.

NO EVIDENCE OF ANYONE HAVING CLIMBED THE SHAFT

Excavation Operation to take a Long Time

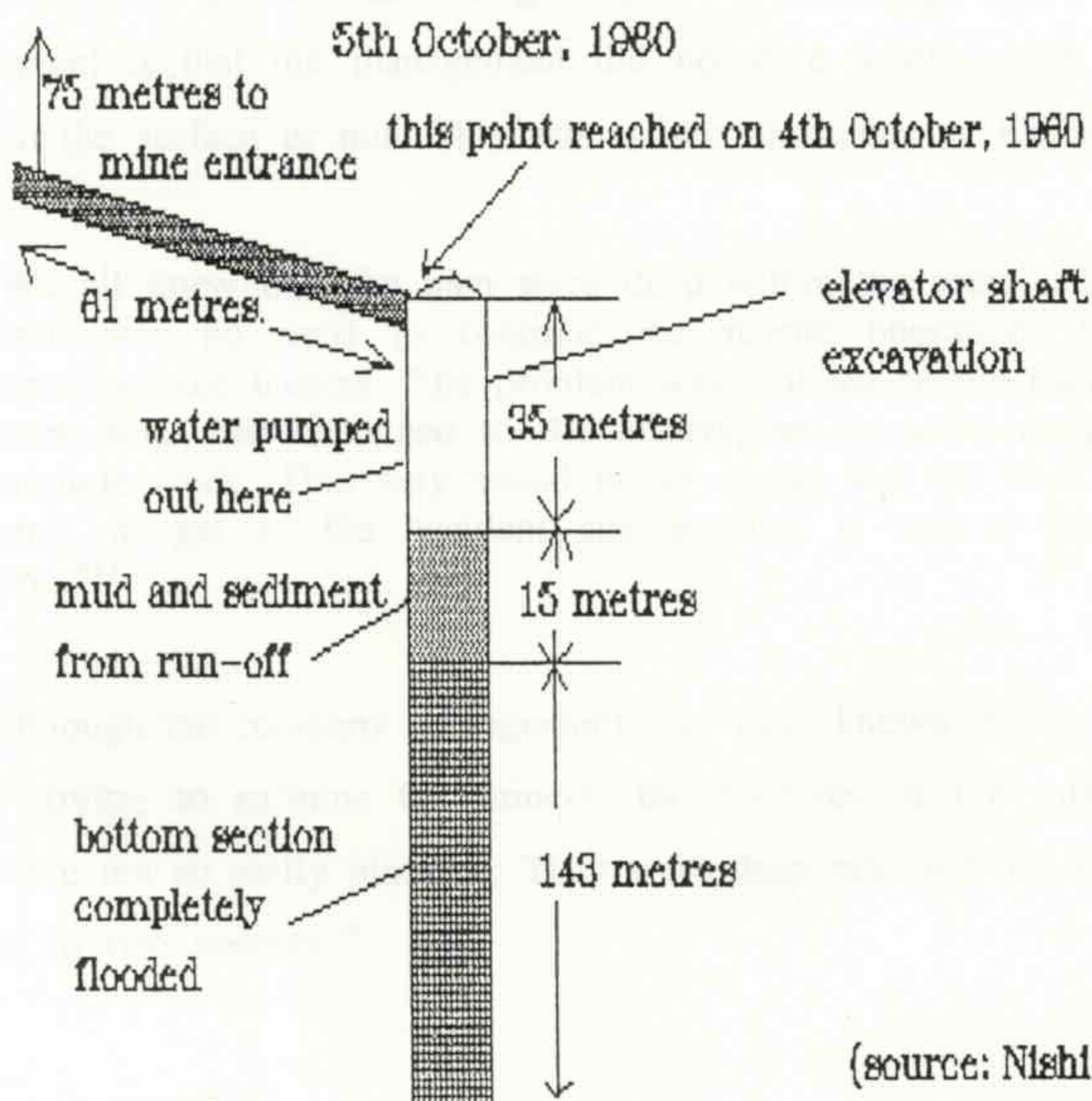
Today, 15 days after the flooding disaster at Hoshu, the rescue workers finally broke through to the elevator access shaft at 5.55 p.m. where they could see the state of the mine (see diagram 2, page 174). But there was no sign that any of the missing men were able to make it to the shaft. The elevator shaft is blocked with mud and rubble from the cave-in at a depth of about 50 metres, which means that any excavation will now take much longer than was originally thought. The families of the missing men now hold very little hope of ever seeing their men again, and many are now becoming more desperate than ever.

The outlook is bleak for a number of reasons. There is an area of about 35 metres where the water has drained through to the next level of about 15 metres of sludge. Under this level there is only water. The thoughts of the rescue workers are that once they reach the lower levels the pressure of the water will force the sludge up the shaft again, making any attempts to get the men out futile.

The rescue workers will attempt to pump the water out of the shaft but there will be a delay of at least one day as the men organise the pumps and machinery. And because the pumps are being used to clear the water from three other tunnels at the moment, they are not expected to be able to progress at full speed in the immediate future.

¹²Okushima, interview: 1988

diagram 2: HOSHU - RESCUE WORK PROGRESS



(source: Nishi Nihon Shinbun)

Ueda Seijiro, the president, comments:

"We have had to cancel this morning's forecast that we would be able to start bringing men out, but the rescue work has been able to proceed according to the plan we made at the very beginning."

The normal excuse from the company president that regardless of the incompetence and excessive time that the rescue efforts had taken, the operation had been able "to proceed according to plan" is revealing. The implication of this statement is that the management did not care whether the miners were brought to the surface or not. This was in fact the case, as Kashiwagi states:

"We all knew that the men were dead within the mine, and that there was no need to continue the rescue operation. It was expensive and useless. The problem was that the public needed to know what had happened to the miners, so we were obliged to continue work. This may sound rather crude, but we were in no hurry to get to the accident site because it was a waste of time."¹³

Although the company management may have known that it was a "waste of time" trying to exhume the miners, the relatives of the missing and the friends were not so easily placated. They were desperate that the work continue, according to two sources.¹⁴

5th October. Nishi Nihon Shinbun, Evening edition

WHERE ARE THE FATHERS AND SONS?

The Families of the Missing Cry with Desperation

¹³Kashiwagi, interview: 1988

¹⁴Okushima and Ishizaki, personal communications: 1988

Although it is probably a waste of time waiting at the mine entrance, a huge number of people from the families of the missing miners still performed their waiting vigil in silence on the evening of the 4th at the mine entrance. The news that the rescue team had been able to break through to the access tunnel and the elevator was soon spread around the *tanjū* at about 6.00 pm last night. Noguchi, the head of the rescue operation, and the man who had gone into the tunnel first, called a meeting with representatives of the families of the missing men. When the people saw the expression on his face they knew there was not a lot of hope.

A spokesman for the families said, "It is difficult to hold out much hope that the men are still alive. We should all start crying now."

On top of this there are problems - they don't know where the men in the mine actually are. Consequently they don't know when the men will be brought out of the mine. After confirming that no-one was inside the elevator shaft, the rescue workers are stumped as to what to do next.

It was here that the newspapers dropped the story, and the final chapters of the saga were left undocumented officially. Unofficially Ueda, the president, decided that the rescue operation was both too costly and too dangerous for the workers because of the methane gas which had built up in the mine, and so he suspended the rescue. In fact, he went one step further, and had the entrance to the flooded shaft, as well as all the cave-in sites cemented shut. Although this was contrary to the wishes of the families of the missing men, it was typical of the way in which the management of this particular mine dealt with the workforce, and the concreting of the entrance has been used as a symbol of the oppressive environment of Hoshu by local activists.¹⁵

Cement the dead

The miners' families were concerned with the recovery of the bodies from the mine, even if the men were dead. There was a great fear that the dead

¹⁵see, for example, Ishizaki in her book, *Less than the Dregs of Life*, 1987: 32-50

would be left to rot inside the mine, and that their spirits would not be able to rest. This attitude is consistent with standard Japanese perceptions of death and the need for a decent Buddhist burial, particularly amongst the miners.¹⁶ There was an over-riding concern that the men would become *yūrei*, the ghosts of those who are never laid to rest properly. Although this may seem implausible in contemporary Japan, there is still a widespread belief in the concept of *yūrei*. In fact some Japanese anthropologists conducted research into the concept after the atomic bombs at Hiroshima and Nagasaki. According to these studies many people believed that *yūrei* were with them for many years after the bombs had been dropped. The idea was that the *yūrei* would only ever go away when their souls had been laid to rest. Similar attitudes were apparent at Hoshu.

Within a very short time the shaft was concreted shut, you know, with all the dead people inside. It was because of the danger of a gas explosion in the shaft, or so the management said anyway. That was pretty bad as far as we were concerned but management said that it was dangerous to leave the mine as it was, and it was impossible to get the dead out so..

The relatives and friends said that the company's attitude was terrible and that it was disgusting that they could ignore the presence of the dead. Especially as the rats which you would have expected to come out of the shaft when it flooded, didn't. Why the rats didn't come out was pretty obvious - they had enough to eat in the mine. One of my friends, who was the same age as me, and who was a really good artist died in the accident. Some of my relatives also died. I was worried that they would never rest properly.¹⁷

As Okushima has said, with the shaft concreted shut, the matter was officially closed. This act alone caused a great deal of resentment amongst the workforce at Hoshu, who had lost their friends and workmates in the disaster, and also their own employment.

¹⁶see Idegawa, 1984: 114-120

¹⁷Okushima, interview: 1988

However the circumstances surrounding the cementing of the mine were not as straightforward as Okushima has described. One of the more important issues was the issue of compensation for the families of the dead, and of course for the miners who had been put out of work. Here the company used its standard methods of dealing with their employees. Ishizaki is quite succinct about the situation which developed:

They (the miners' families) were told that there was no chance of getting the dead men out of the mine when the decision was taken to shut it permanently. The union told the men to be tolerant, saying that it couldn't be helped. And when the question of what sort of compensation would be paid out to the families of the dead was raised, the company which had been unable or unwilling to pump the water out of the mine made the people an offer.

They offered to pay out between 200,000 and 500,000 yen per miner to the families of the dead (one to three years wages depending on the length of service of the individual miner¹⁸) on the condition that the families of the dead accept that there was no way that the company would be able to exhume the bodies. "If you're not satisfied with the amount we're offering then we'll dynamite the mine, and blow the bodies into mincemeat," they said.¹⁹

This type of coercion was no different to the style of management the mine had used since the war years - threats of destruction and violence which were softened by offers of monetary compensation far below the amounts needed for people to survive. The families were then, placed in the position where they had to make either a moral or economic choice. The union encouraged them to take

¹⁸The companies were required by law to contribute superannuation and life insurance premiums on behalf of each worker. In the case of an accident, the workers' families were to be paid out the full value of the insurance policy. In Hoshu, however, although the company maintained that it had paid the contributions to the relevant funds on behalf of the workers, the workers' families were offered only a small part of the compensation which was their legal right. The remainder of the money went to the union and to company management, which incidentally owned the life insurance company to which the mining company contributed.

¹⁹Ishizaki, interview: 1988

what they called the "generous offer"²⁰ in this case, and in desperation the vast majority of the people concurred. The mine shaft was concreted and, although work in the No. 2 shaft continued for another 12 months, the majority of men were made redundant.

Okushima describes his feelings about the accident:

I was cut. I'll never forget what happened. Yamanaka, who was like my brother, died and every year when we go to visit the graves of our ancestors I think of him, and wonder what he would have been doing if he hadn't been killed. His children have all grown up now, but at the time I was really concerned for the welfare of his family, because they had almost nothing to live on at all. All the money that they had went on the kids, and there was no-one to help raise them, with their father gone. Yamanaka-san dying like that was just terrible. I tried to help them out for a while, but it was hard for us too... We were like brothers, and ... when they told me that he was dead, well I was devastated, and then they said that his body would not be brought up. Well, it was the last straw. Even if the mine was operating I would have quit anyway.²¹

²⁰According to Kashiwagi it was a "generous offer," although this was hotly disputed by my other informants. Kashiwagi maintained that the company was not "really" required to pay out any compensation, and that they were co-operating with the FMSC, which had suggested that it would be the humane thing to do under the circumstances.

²¹Okushima, interview: 1988

Discussion

The newspaper reports were written with a tone of concern for the miners and the families, but with one or two exceptions were roundly convinced that the accident was unavoidable. This accident was the 280th accident of 1960 in Chikuho alone. Yet inquiries into the accidents failed to link the responsibility of the disasters with the company involved in any single case. If the responsibility was apportioned at all, it was the mine supervisor of the day of the accident who was indicted.

The disaster at Hoshu was followed four days later by a major gas explosion at Momii, another local mine. However, comments about safety considerations which had been largely ignored by the companies involved, were restricted to small paragraphs hidden away in some of the more "liberal" newspapers. By early October most newspapers had relegated the disaster stories to the less read pages, or had confined themselves to editorials on the "human side" of the disaster, although the Nishi Nihon Shinbun also sporadically reported the progress of the rescue work.

The union's public statement was revealing in that the nature of the company union mentality was quite apparent in the bland style of the press release. There was no hint of miners' resistance nor of the movement for compensation for widows and families of the dead. They also ignored the poor organisation of the rescuers, the lack of proper maps, and the number of mechanical breakdowns which reduced the chances of reaching possible survivors. Rather, they were more concerned about whether they would continue to be employed with the company. I will discuss the union in more detail below. It is only today, 30 years after the event, that criticism of the company has been publicly aired. Why has it taken so long for people to say what they think about a situation which was emotionally and economically untenable? The brutal way in which the mine was run is a major contributing factor in understanding this.

To contextualize this comment I will look at some of the accounts of men who worked in the Hoshu mine about the nature of violence which

accompanied them in everyday situations. The issue of mining safety which, although moot in the eyes of the government, was a critical issue in the eyes of the miners, and something which both the management and the union had ignored at Hoshu up to the time of the flood.

One informant, who lost a close relative in the Hoshu flood had the following incisive comment to make about the disaster:

The Hoshu Tanko disaster is the best locally known incident which involved mismanagement - at least that is what is said about it.

When the flood occurred the electricity was suddenly cut off. The men in the mine who got out were the ones who heard voices shouting "Get out of there!" But the ones who died had probably not heard the shouts, and because there had been so many cases when the electricity was suddenly cut off in the past were prepared to wait until it was restored (my emphasis).

If you've done physical labouring work I'm sure you'll understand this.. They started at 10.00 am and sometimes worked through until 10.00 or 12.00 pm. When they had worked until eight or nine in the evening they only had an hour or so left until they were officially entitled to a full day's pay. So the workers were prepared to hang around and wait for the time to pass.

Therefore when the electricity was cut off the workers who were waiting around to get their full day's pay would likely have stayed where they were because they thought that it was only another one of the many incidents that had happened over the years, and if they waited then there was a good chance that they would get their pay for no work with no problems. However the men who survived were the ones who got out as soon as the electricity was cut off. I've heard this story on a number of occasions. This is what the people who made it out alive had to say about the accident.²²

The frequent occurrences of electricity being cut off in the past was one facet which was largely ignored by the investigation into the disaster which

²²Onishi Hanako, interview: 1988

found that the company was within its rights to operate as it had, on the day in question. The accident was judged a "natural occurrence," and out of the hands of men.²³ The fact that the mine management had misjudged the conditions in the light of the recommendation of the FMSC to abandon mining because of the danger of flooding, was perhaps indicative of the way management viewed the workforce. Okushima recalls that many times the men were told to work in water up to their waists, sometimes even when it had reached their chests. Consequently, they may not have noticed the height of the water.

This begs the question, what sort of mine was Hoshu to work in? I will draw on Okushima's account of his own experience.

Work at Hoshu

Okushima is 63 years old, and apart from being blind in one eye, is in remarkably good health. He started working in Hoshu when he was eight years old, in 1933, following his father into the pit as did many of the pre-war generation coalfields children. At that time he was employed to look after the horses, and to help the driver with his duties, in a similar manner to the work the young apprentices did in the Yorkshire mines in the early 20th century. He is an outspoken critic of the unions and of the government, refusing to vote, or take part in what he considers a travesty of justice - the unions themselves.

Although he is retired, he still lives in the company housing at Mitsui Ita in Tagawa, the last mine he worked in. He came to this mine when, after more than 20 years with Hoshu the mine was closed down following the flooding disaster.

He told me of the hardships of the pre-war miners in an off-hand manner:

²³Fukuoka Mining Safety Commission Report, 1961: 3

I went to Hoshu in 1933, and Father was injured in 1936... That was when the economy was in trouble. At that time the mine wasn't really such a violent one - the violence came after the war really. The wages weren't wages though - they used to pay us in ration coupons, not in real wages, so that we were forced to buy all our food through the company stores. On average, no matter how hard you worked you never got more than 10% to 20% of your wages in cash - the rest was in those coupons.

This was because the coal economy wasn't really working very well, and there was a general shortage of cash I guess. The companies couldn't afford to pay the miners their wages in cash, so they gave us the coupons. Transportation was poor at that time too. Hardly any trains came to the local stations, so we were pretty isolated.

The miners used to take their rations and move from house to house, combining what they had with the others so that they could eat. You see the problem was that the rations weren't enough, so we had to combine our rice, with say, someone's fish so that we could eat properly. You'd look for smoke coming from someone's chimney, and you'd go to their place with your rations, give them to the person who was cooking, and share the food that they served up.

The company houses were very small, you know. Four and a half *tatami*²⁴. Of course there were no toilets either. We had to use the public toilets. The people here all used to wash together at the wells which is where the *idobata kaigi* (discussion at the well) started. There was usually one well per *kumi* (block of ten to twelve houses), which the residents shared. The same applied with the toilets.²⁵

Ishizaki, today an active Chikuho revivalist, and member of the anti-Emperor movement, was married to a Hoshu miner. She worked as a cleaner at the hospital in Hoshu and lived in the company housing at Hoshu for 25 years with her husband. She explains that the living standards within the *tanjū* were sub-human:

²⁴Although the size of each *tatami* is getting smaller these days, one *tatami* equals approximately 1.8 metres by 90 centimetres.

²⁵Okushima, interview: 1988

Before this place was rebuilt, it used to be an Ueda *tanjū*. It was not a place that people could realistically be expected to live in. It was an abysmally poor place. There were open sewers, and the roads turned to mud after the slightest rain. There was no clean water except at the wells, and that water was always a little dangerous. There was never enough to eat, and the food that we did get was rarely fresh - we were lucky to get enough rice to make *bento* (lunch boxes).

The houses were only one or two rooms, and in many places there were more than three generations living under the one roof. The houses were so small we lived in each other's pockets, and because the walls were so thin all the neighbours knew exactly what was going on in the house next door. There was no privacy of any sort. I am talking about the post-war situation here. It was much worse for the Koreans, the other foreign labourers and even us Japanese during the wars.²⁶

This was in many ways a typical small Japanese coalmining village, by all accounts.²⁷ As in many other *tanjū* there were community toilets, baths, and water supplies, and the families of the miners lived in cramped quarters which were supplied by the company. However Hoshu was distinguished from other Kyushu mines by its exceptionally repressive management policy.

Management was able to exert pressure on the workers either through the union, or if that failed, through the *yakuza* personnel they employed as *rōmu* if the union was not persuasive enough. In one way or another, miners were forced into conforming. Complaint and resistance must have seemed impossible. Okushima describes below the way he saw the process which took place after the flood at Hoshu. He emphasises two very important points - first, that the accidents became more frequent as the pressure to increase production became greater; and second, the passive and compliant attitude of the men to the demands which were placed on them.

²⁶Ishizaki, interview: 1988

²⁷see Ueno's collection of stories, 1985 a-e; Hayashi, 1987; Idegawa, 1984

After the flood was a time when the closures of the mines proceeded at a rapid rate, because the companies were trying to get out of the business as cheaply as possible. The heads of the companies also tried to get away with as much as they could - they didn't want to pay out money if they could avoid it.

To this end they charged their subsidiary companies fines of up to 2,000,000 yen if they could not keep up with production. But because the end of the coal business was at hand, the accidents kept on getting worse and worse as the companies tried to push us to work harder, even though there were almost no safety measures used. This economic pressure was transferred directly to us, the workers. This was really bad. But it was typical of the way that Japan has treated its people. The people at the top ordered the people at the bottom to do things which affected their homes and their work negatively, while the elite never suffered at all.

But the strange thing about the business was that when the workers heard that the company was going to get fined so much if they didn't improve output, they (the unions) said that we should just forget about the safety standards, and get to work. That's the way this country works.

Industry comes first, and the workers believe that human life isn't worth much at all if the bosses tell them that it is so. Down the mines the same thing happened. The miners believed what they were told and always did what the bosses ordered. When we were forced to work naked because of the water which came up to our waists, no-one complained. They just did it because they were told to. I used to see this happening all the time - in fact I was one of these monkeys.²⁸

The union leadership at Hoshu was made up of men who had been hand picked by the management to control the workforce. This union employed its own gangs of overseers, usually recruited from local *yakuza gumi*, who exerted pressure on the workers to increase production. The close ties the union had with management were manifest in the day to day running of the mine.

²⁸Okushima, interview: 1988

We used to see rice delivered to the union leaders, but the workers never got any. It was always kept amongst the people at the top of the chain.

Around here though, although there was a union it was only a company union. It just supported whatever the company said about the workers' position. It was meaningless. It was like a babysitter really. They didn't do anything at all for the workers, just supported the capitalists. For example, when we asked them to ask the company to lower the rents they just ignored us completely.

The problem was that there were a number of men from the union who wanted to get on in the company, and these men would ignore anything we said which could have jeopardised their status within the company. It was quite surprising how many of the leaders made it to *kacho* (section manager) rank.

It's just like today. They are prepared to back the company over the workers at any cost. The leaders follow orders from the company and gradually work their way up the ladder to the top of the lower management. The rule was the company was always first for these guys, and the workers were always second, after themselves, of course.

These guys were really the eyes and ears of the company within the union. The same workers with different aims. They would tell the president who were the bad workers and who were talking about how bad the company was, and these men were always fired. They didn't work for the men - they worked against the men! They prepared a list of the "Best Five" which was really the worst five men on the job in their eyes. It didn't matter if you were good at your job. They were only concerned with company loyalty.²⁹

The idea that the union officials were able to "cement" ties with the company so that they would be promoted to the lower management levels was already in evidence at Hoshu. There was no other organisation that the miners could turn to at the mine for help, so the attitudes of the vast majority seemed to be that they should just endure the situation as best they could.

²⁹Okushima, interview: 1988

Further evidence of the nature of the relationship the union leaders had with the company was witnessed in the way the mine fell into receivership after the flood. When the accident occurred, the owner of the mine, Ueda, was in Tokyo. He flew back to Fukuoka immediately and was interviewed by a reporter for the Nishi Nihon Shinbun at the airport when he stepped from the plane. Ueda said that the company was not going to be liable for any damages, that the accident was "an act of the gods," and that he was sure his staff were blameless. He went on to say that although it was unfortunate, the fact that so many men were injured or killed "could not have been helped." He blamed the FMSC for not taking sufficient precautions in their surveys of the mine.³⁰

His comments attracted quite a lot of attention, and in the uproar that followed he declared he was going to sell the mine within twelve months, because the accident, and the delays in production which had succeeded it, were effectively bankrupting the mine. The FMSC and MITI together decided that it would be fit and proper for the management to appoint an advance auditing body to check the company's records before it was to be sold to the government. The Hoshu Mine Union was asked to carry out this task by Ueda personally. The ties with management were so strong that Ueda had complete confidence in the union's "independent" assessment of the financial state of the mine.

Conclusion

Hoshu Tanko was an extreme case of a trend within the industry to push workers to their limits of endurance. The closure of the mine was a dramatic event which has become symbolic of the way the mine was run. The power of the company over the workers was so complete that even some 30 years after the mine closed, the majority of miners are still not prepared to discuss their work in the mine, nor the accident. This is related to the autonomous control

³⁰Asahi Shinbun, 3rd September, 1960: 3

the company was able to exert not only over the people within its employ, but also over the local government and political institutions. Largely through Ueda's manipulation of the political agenda, the company was able to consolidate its power base with a respectable political presence, and a responsible public image, which the publicists for the company worked hard to maintain.

By making worker rights, company violence and legal transgressions non-issues, the company was able to maintain its control over the workers, even in the more democratic post war period. This left an impression that the miners were acquiescent about the nature of the work they did and the conditions in which they performed their duties. However if one digs a little deeper, it becomes obvious that the methods employed to keep issues from becoming issues, were nothing short of coercion and violence. Violence became so embedded in the fabric of the *tanjū* that people became inured to it to a large extent. In effect, then, the politics of violence became the politics of the mundane.

Workers knew how far they could push the authorities without being punished, just as they knew that they had to feed their families. Although many men were consumed by anger at the way the company used them like commodities, rather than humans, they were still aware of the imperative of working in a society which did not support its unemployed for very long. Given the complicated and discriminatory classification of mines and mining types, and the difficulties which the industry was going through, many of the people who worked for Ueda had few options other than to continue work if they wanted to stay afloat.

Isolation, fear, hunger, and ignorance all worked against the miners from the start, and by the time they were aware of the nature of the work they had undertaken, it was too late to back down. Following the endemic attitude of *shiō ga nai* (it cannot be helped) they continued to work and suffer at the hands of the overseers. It wasn't until the mine was actually closed that any real criticism of the mine was publicly aired, and even then it was aired by independent people and groups - not the miners. Most miners were only concerned about not being thrown out of the *tanjū* when the closure came into effect. To a large

extent the fear of the Ueda days is still quite tangible in the town. Few people discuss the past, and most choose to forget what happened. Those who are now living in the public housing blocks think that they are there because Ueda allowed them to be, and are not keen to risk expulsion just because they say what they think about the company.

However rumours are, and have always been, in evidence about the mine. Even in the big mining *tanjū*, people discuss what a "tragedy" the Hōshu case was, and that how sad it was that

the bodies of the miners were all eaten by rats, but the miners have no-one to blame for this but themselves. It was bound to happen someday because Ueda was such an evil man. He was only ever concerned about money and always pushed the men harder and harder to produce more for him. No-one apart from the management, government and police really benefited from this mine. He didn't care whether men died, just as long as they were making money for him.³¹

The Hoshu case, and the lack of action by the union in presenting any opposition to the company either before or after the accident can be contrasted with the Yamano case which is described in detail in Chapter 11. At Yamano, probably largely because of the influence of outside radical groups, the families of men killed in the mine were able to commence litigation against the company for compensation far in excess of the poor amount offered.

However it is not simply a matter of outsider intervention which provides the difference. Management techniques, and in particular the violence that was a day to day occurrence had a profound influence in maintaining worker acquiescence in Hoshu. In mines like this, where unions had been compromised by management intervention, worker-management confrontation was rare and cases of unchecked violence delivered by company *rōmu* were common.

In contrast to the Hoshu case, the Kyo no Ue mine's No.1 union's stance against the power of the company stands out as an example of the extremes to

³¹K. Onishi, interview: 1988

which some workers were prepared to go when confronted by what they considered repressive and unfair management practices. In essence, the style of management against which they protested was very similar to that of the Hoshu management - violent, repressive and production intensive. But in Kyo no Ue the leaders of the union movement were not prepared to compromise their ideals in the face of overwhelming physical violence threatened and sometimes implemented by the company. The impact of a single, charismatic leader in Kurata at Kyo no Ue may have had a strong influence in developing the revolutionary ideology which swept through the mine in the 1950s.

Although Hoshu and Kyo no Ue were similar in size, production capacity, worker numbers and situated within 30 kilometres of each other, in terms of ideological commitment they were at opposite ends of the spectrum. The next main chapter, which is preceeded by a character portrait of a man who worked at Hoshu, investigates the Kyo no Ue case.

Chapter 7

IN WATER HE WAITS

I arrived home at around 7.30 that night in October. The streets and lanes in the *tanjū* were deserted. As usual the street lights were not working and as I rode the motorbike through the maze of housing the exhaust echoed from the concrete walls and culverts. The front of the houses were in darkness - the residents had obviously moved into the main room to eat and watch television, and only the muted sounds of conversation and game show music disturbed the cold clear night. Dismounting, I was approached by my neighbour.

"Matt-san, Okushima-san is still waiting in the baths for you. He's been there since five o'clock. By now he'll look like a prune. Go on, get over there." she urged me. Groaning under my breath I realised that I had forgotten that it was Tuesday, and that the baths were open. For the five days a week that they were open, Okushima, the man who lived for the baths, waited for me so that he could retell stories of the coalmines. The schedule of the bath opening times had changed in the last week, and I had totally forgotten. Okushima would not be impressed.

The ultimate storyteller, more adept at chronicling stories than Onishi, the *kami shibai* man could ever be, he has a range of tales which encompass everything from moral cautions to tales of personal violence, to tales of the war and the foreigners who lived in the area. A miner for more than 20 years with the Ueda owned Hoshu mine in Kawasaki, he moved to the Mitsui *tanjū* 23 years ago, when he was lucky enough to get a job at the coalface. A man who has suffered his share of pain and hardship, he has converted to Buddhism since he was hit on the head at a factory and declared clinically dead for an hour.

Although he is 63 years old, I first thought he was in his early 50s, so young and relaxed does he appear. In the baths he wears a small towel around his shaved head to keep the sweat from his eyes which twinkle constantly. Possessed of a wicked sense of humour, he merrily abuses and teases other miners and myself about our physical anomalies. Sasaki, his best

friend, is exactly the same age but quite thin, wiry even. Okushima always says that the reason Sasaki is so thin is that he is living in a de facto relationship with a woman who is 15 years younger than he is, and she "keeps him going flat out in the saddle." Sasaki is always embarrassed by this, and Okushima always plays the game out.

The baths are very old: they were built in 1910, and the state of dilapidation is advanced. There is no paint left on the walls, and the concrete floor which was once tiled is now stained and cracked. The windows which look out onto the *tanjū* are broken, some are boarded up, and others are left as they are, the panes of glass miraculously defying gravity. Originally the pit-top baths for the miners, they have been left to degenerate by Mitsui in the almost 30 years since the mine closed down. Heated by a coal-fired boiler with a mass of rusting pipes which lead to a central boiler in the middle of an elliptical pool, the water is unbelievably hot. Just dipping the plastic bowl one takes to the bath into the water and pouring it over yourself can actually scald you. In fact for more than a week I was not able to get into the bath, attempts to do so rendering my very white skin crimson in seconds after immersion. Gradually I got used to it, and was able to relax and enjoy it but I could only stand the heat for five minutes or so at a time.

As a comparison, Japanese friends from Fukuoka, who ostensibly are quite accustomed to the heat of Japanese baths, were unable to enter the water at all. Okushima spends on average three hours a day immersed in the water. It has been suggested by some of the other men at the baths that this is why he has such flawless skin, though others have suggested that it is the reason for his perceived craziness.

Recording stories in the bath which was prohibitively hot, wet and steamy was to become one of my main problems. Unlike Okushima I am not possessed of an eidetic memory for tales, and because I needed to record the information somehow I had to try to overcome some logistic problems. In the end, I decided that I would compromise. I would get out of the bath, and retire to the change room, where, naked and sweating copiously, I would write his story in a notebook, trying to recapture the mood and the content

of what he had told me. Then I would return to the baths, again facing the slow boiling torture, listening to either the continuation of the old, or the start of a new story. I used to dream of a waterproofed Walkman, or at the least a waterproofed pen and paper, neither of which I could find.

The following is an extract from my diary, dated June 16 1988:

Since I started this file Okushima and I have become mates and I think that I hear more about the history of the area from him than I do from anyone else. He knows a lot about the local customs, the history of the temples and shrines, the way that the coal mining developed in the region, who was killed in what gas explosions, the forms of education that were prevalent in the prewar period, the different festivals that are held at different times of the year etc. All in all he has become one of my best informants.

This is all due to the fact that he likes two things in life better than all else - talking and bathing. It just happens that I am often in the right place at the right time. In fact I often have difficulty escaping from the baths because he does like to talk! We have become a famous pair at the baths, and no-one interrupts us when we are engrossed in conversation. I say nothing at all on most occasions because I don't have a chance to get a word in edgewise. It is all good learning experience.

As a consummate storyteller, he need not rely on the accurate rendition of stories. However, as Benjamin recognised in *The Storyteller*, he tells his stories as more than stories. They are useful tales, tales which have counsel "woven into the fabric of real life."¹ They are full of wisdom and wit, and

¹Benjamin, 1977: 87

are the result of the experience of a full life. He recognises this, as he recognises that there are certain restraints incumbent on the anthropologist to render people's accounts fairly:

I want you to write about the real history of the place - not just some silly stuff which tells people about the good things about the coal industry. You have to tell them about the bad things as well, because if you don't probably no-one else will, and the people who worked in the mines are all dying off in this town, so you have to be quick.

Okushima was born in Kawasaki town, the youngest of three boys. He was educated up to the fourth grade of primary school in Kawasaki. He left school at eight years of age to work in the mines at Kawasaki Hoshu mine. His parents were also miners, and when he was ten years old his father was severely injured in a mining cave-in, and was forced to give up working, so the family relied on the efforts of the children to support them.

As a child he was a gifted artist, and spent a lot of time drawing pictures of the miners as they came home from the mines. He also drew many landscapes of the area one of which I have in my possession. He learnt to draw with charcoal, which is not surprising given his background, and then progressed to water colours, the medium that he chose to use for the rest of his life. While he was working in the mines he spent a lot of time after work drawing, making sketches of the workers and of the scenery. Eventually, after his parents had both died, he attempted to learn formally but a mining accident left him with only one good eye, and with the other eye only partially intact, he lost the will to continue. He decided that in order to eat it was necessary to work as a labourer so he continued to work in the mines, moving to the Mitsui Ita mine in 1957. He has been there ever since.

His knowledge of local customs is quite profound and he is regarded as the "guardian of knowledge" by many of his ex-miner friends. He is an outspoken and often aggressive speaker.

Physically he is quite distinctive. He is short and stocky, weighing about 65 kilograms, with thick forearms and legs, and a shaved head. He shaves his head because of an accident that he had at work in 1970. He collapsed after a blow to the head and was declared dead by the doctor at the accident site. However as the ambulance was taking him to the morgue he miraculously recovered, apparently scaring the doctor badly. The near death experience where he says that he entered a tunnel with brilliant light on the one side and a horrible cloistering darkness on the other which smelt terrible, prompted him to convert seriously to Buddhism and to shave his head as a sign of his conversion. He went as far as to take a new first name in the Buddhist manner and went about changing his lifestyle in what could only be described as a radical manner - he gave up drinking.

At this point it must be said that for a miner to give up drinking there has to be a formidable reason because there is tremendous social pressure incumbent on the miner to drink with his mates. In this there are some close parallels to the Australian notion of "mateship." That is, if a man does not drink with his mates he is often regarded as not being a "real" man. The social pressure that is brought to bear is exceptional. Particularly in this community the ability to be able to drink with your friends is the sign of a man who is a good man. That is, it is regarded by those both inside and outside the community as a "typical" behaviour pattern within the mining community, part of the so-called *kawasuji kishitsu* (riverside character, the name used to describe the mining regions in Chikuho).

As a storyteller, his main strength is that he does not let the truth stand in the way of a good story. Further, he manages to load his stories with essential ingredients to keep his listeners interested - violence, prejudice, sex, and racism. Like many miners, he reviles Koreans. They were lower than the *burakumin*, yet like the *burakumin*, he feels that they have received

substantially more than Japanese miners in the years after the coal mines closed.

He tells stories of the bombs which the Allies dropped on the region in their efforts to blow up the ammunition dump which was hidden in the mountains: "they blew the fucking mountain apart," he said. He talks about the invasion of the Americans. He says that they thought these men were really devils. Their skin was red, as was their hair, they were huge by Japanese standards and they were rich beyond the dreams of the locals. The first time that he ever tasted caramel or chocolate was when the Americans were there. But the overriding feeling was fear - a complete lack of control over their own environment, and a general feeling of being completely outclassed by the enemy. He tells of how many locals felt obliged to give the Yankees presents as tokens of their esteem for them as fighters. He tells of the jealousy they felt that they were so well fed compared to the Japanese who were starving after the war - the US forces had meat and rice and potatoes, and other luxury items that he could not have even imagined existed, and they got to eat three times a day.

He tells of the fighting between the Japanese and the Chinese in Manchuria, the fighting between the Japanese and the Koreans in the Chikuho mines, and the fighting between Japanese in Hoshu. He remembers the violence, and wants others to know its extent, now that he can look back and see it in perspective. He tells stories of the politics of Japan - the need for politicians to lie, and to cheat the people of Chikuho, while they get rich on taxes and money they steal from corporations like Lockheed and Recruit.

A prejudiced, likeable, eccentric man with very outspoken views, his interpretations of Chikuho society were of immeasurable value to my research. He still keeps the idea of the storyteller alive in a different and more subtle way than the *kami shibai* man, complete with his props. His only prop is his memory, and that is quite spectacular.

Chapter 8 THE CASE OF THE KYO NO UE UNION ACTION

The working class movement in Japan began when the Japanese Communist Party (JCP) was established in 1922, after Japan had become a military force in East Asia. At this time much of the government consisted of highly placed military officers, and any opposition to the government was dealt with harshly. The JCP was perceived as "opposition" to the government, and all communist organisations were outlawed in the years preceding the Second World War. In such oppressive conditions union consciousness was poorly developed, and although labour organisations were in evidence in the 1920s, their power was severely compromised by the Police Regulation Law of 1923. This effectively destroyed the unions, based as they were on "democratic and socialist" principles. Although some unions maintained their presence, these were company-type unions. The working classes en masse did not unite and confront those people who held power in society.

The development of union consciousness is directly linked to Japan losing the war. That is, the Occupation, in compliance with its strategy to limit the power of the *zaibatsu*, sought to increase worker participation in unions. The inalienable right to democracy, the catchcry of the Occupation, underpinned the development of this policy. In actual fact the development of unions in compliance with the laws went ahead, but the running of the new unions was compromised in that companies controlled the way the movement progressed to a large degree. Wages were controlled and the annual Spring Wage Offensive became little more than a conspicuous social outing - the protests of the Council of Trade Unions (*Sōhyō*) notwithstanding - as industry and government, after consultations with employer and union representatives, dictated what sort of pay increases would be awarded.

The formal introduction of unionism into the mines, though, had a sweeping effect on the industry. For the first time there was talk of wage standardisation, restricted working hours, increased safety standards, and improved accommodation for miners. However, notwithstanding the ideals, the companies moved as early as 1945 to increase their own power over the

workforce by creating unions of their own. These unions were company unions in every sense, often being organised by lower management or upwardly mobile workers to cause as little disruption to production as possible. In direct opposition to these enterprise unions' stance *Tanrō* was formed in 1945 under the auspices of the Japan Socialist Party (JSP). *Tanrō* aimed to be the first union which would bring the workers together under a single banner, and to some extent it was successful.

Tanrō attempted to alleviate the oppressive working conditions in the mines through the network of affiliated unions they established in the early 1950s.¹ *Tanrō* had problems in that the structure of the mines in Japan did not allow for any central organisation, despite the new laws. Although they were well represented in the larger companies, the smaller companies, *asseiyama* - literally "pressure mountains," as they were called by the miners - would not allow the formation of any union other than a company union.

In 1956 in response to a downturn in the economy, the companies strengthened their power base by introducing a number of coordinated moves which were intended to disperse even further the already weakened power of the *Tanrō* affiliated unions, after the go ahead for the Temporary Coal Rationalisation Bill (TCRB) had been given. The measures included more vigilant supervision of the miners, increased quotas for individual miners, increased rent for company housing, and the tacit agreement to ignore safety standards. The last position was taken as mine owners attempted to reinvest the capital which had been set aside by the National Coal Board for safety equipment into other industry, with the aim of maximising profits before the summary shutdown of the industry.

Anticipating trouble from *Tanrō* in response to this aggressive stance, the coal companies offered incentives to workers in many mines to leave *Tanrō* affiliated unions and join company unions. These incentives included the pick of work at the face, improved housing, an increase in pay, and guaranteed work in what was fast becoming an economically hostile working environment. The

¹Tagawa Shishi, 1979: 426

motivation behind this move was obvious to many of the workers. The miners perceived that their legal right to join a union of their choice was compromised and that the companies were moving again towards total labour force control which included automatic redundancies in the event of the predicted mass mine closures. These complaints were to become the centre of the industrial action which followed - the most violent labour action in Japan's history.

To illustrate some of the labour problems that occurred I will draw on accounts of one labour confrontation which happened in 1959-60. The Kyo no Ue strike action continued for a long time - 101 days to be exact - and within that time the miners were without support from *Tanrō* for 100 of those days. Kyo no Ue was a small Mitsubishi subcontractor in Chikuho, and because of its insignificance it received almost no press coverage throughout the duration of the strike. The newspapers which did pick up the story presented the miners as irresponsible law breakers who were threatening the economy of the mines, on the one hand, and the national economy on the other.

The Kyo no Ue case offers some insight into the processes behind union action in the smaller companies, and contrasts starkly with the situation in the bigger companies. Although the processes of fragmentation of unions and union infiltration by "company men" were typically used by all mining companies regardless of size, the small scale of the labour force at Kyo no Ue (about 350) allowed the company to maintain its authority through the use of selective violence, in a manner similar to Hoshu mine.

Union types

Before I attempt to look at these events in any detail it is important to look at the structure of the unions that were operating in the coal fields in the postwar period in Japan. The internal structure of these unions is relevant to any attempt to analyse the events of 1960.

There were four types of unions: firstly, the *chūō ōte* which represented the big companies - i.e., Mitsui, Mitsubishi, Sumitomo, Furukawa, and Meiji. These unions were officially organised under the *Tanrō* banner but unofficially

operated on the premise that they were individual unions representing only the individual union members' interests, and that disputes were to be settled amicably with management. These were without exception company unions.

Secondly, the *chihō ōte* which represented the big regionally powerful mines -for example, Kaijima, and Aso. These unions were also company unions and were also organised under *Tanrō* in much the same way that the bigger unions were organised, although they had considerably less bargaining power than the *chūō ōte* unions.

Thirdly, the *chūko chū*, which represented the interests of the medium sized mines. These unions were company unions which operated independently from the larger unions although in some cases they had ties with *Tanrō*. These were tied together under the Small-Medium Mines Labour Organisation, a politically conservative group which operated in co-operation with the small-medium mine owners organisation.

Fourthly, the *chūko ko*, which represented the interests of the small companies - i.e, mines which employed less than 500 people. These unions were also tied in with the *chūko chū* and their respective alliances.

In summary, there was no cohesion in the union structure. If there was any form of consensus amongst the union leadership, it was that antagonising management would serve no positive purpose; that it would only make the workers sacrifice some of their wages for time out on strike, and make life more difficult for them. This view was especially prevalent in the bigger companies which had a reputation for employing the mining elite. Hence the miners at these companies tended to view the workers at the smaller mines with some distaste, calling them "peasants and outcastes."²

One informant who was a union representative with a Mitsui coal company union told me that "of course" the unions operated in the interests of the workers, and suggestions that there was any sort of violence by the overseers in the big mines was untenable. However when asked to comment on the extent of the violent sanctions imposed on Koreans and Burakumin, in

²Sasaki, interview: 1988

particular in the smaller mines, he maintained that these miners were not really human in the first place, and the fact that they were employed was evidence of the magnanimity of the coal companies. The reason that emphasis is placed on violent and destructive episodes by a number of local historians and social commentators is that no-one would be interested in the area if there were not a number of dramatic incidents with which to identify.³

Locality was also a feature of the way that the miners viewed themselves and the people with whom they came into contact. In Hokkaido the labour movement never reached the violent climaxes that were typical of Chikuho labour relations, for instance. Another example of the problem of the legitimation of locality was made apparent after the mines had closed in the Chikuho region. A number of miners at the Mitsui Tagawa mine moved to Miike to find work with the same company, believing they would be looked after. However the miners in Miike regarded the miners from Tagawa with a certain amount of animosity probably influenced by the commonly held belief that all outsiders were strangers, and that the Tagawa people were particularly unpleasant outsiders. This attitude was also apparent within the unions and within the coal towns themselves, and had a profound effect on labour relations and local union structure.

We were considered to be strong but stupid by the other workers, but the fact of the matter is that we only did what we were told, and what's wrong with that? We also would not become union members because the company had told us that we had to join the second (company) union. We were just looking after our own interests, and we kept our heads down and worked the seam... Lots of the local men didn't like us because we didn't complain about the sort of work that we were doing. But we knew what it was like to be out of work, and the fact that the company had got us this work, even though it was a long way from Tagawa meant that we had somewhere to live, and enough to eat. We owed the company our loyalty, even though sometimes we didn't agree with what was asked of us.⁴

³Kariya, interview: 1988

⁴Hamasaki, interview: 1989

The company employed many compliant miners like Hamasaki, who were prepared to work for them uncomplainingly. Bringing in men who were desperate for work, and had work experience with the company in another town had the effect of undermining the solidarity of the unions from within. These workers were not prepared to risk further unemployment by disobeying the orders of the company. Moving some of the workers to their new jobs was also good public relations for the company, which could maintain the humanistic pretension that the company was concerned with finding work for its newly redundant employees. It is important to note that by using this form of coercion the company was employing only one of a number of subtle strategies designed to maintain control over a workforce which was gradually getting out of hand.

This form of management policy was similar to the policy adopted by the Kyo no Ue management, and the results of enacting this policy were similar in many respects. That is, short term goals were achieved by the unions, but over the longer term the company was able to reassert control over production, wages and the working conditions of the employees, in the Miike case laying off more than 10,000 workers over a five year period following the 12 month strike in 1960-61.

I will rely on two main sources when dealing with the Kyo no Ue strike. The first source is a series of interviews with Kurata, the leader of the independent, non company union at the mine during the strike, which were recorded between January 1987 and November 1988. The second source is the writing of Ueno Eishin, a sociologist who worked in the Kyo no Ue mine for one year as a miner. His work on the mining communities in Chikuho is widely regarded by both academics and coalminers as being the most authentic of all the studies conducted in the region. His position as an authority on the coal communities was reinforced when, at his funeral in 1988, eulogies were delivered by both academics from prestigious institutions like Kyoto University, where he had been a professor, and from the leader of the Kyushu *Tanrō*.

Kurata is currently the head of the Mining Relocation and Resettlement Committee, which is responsible for the employment of ex-coalminers and their families in the Chikuho region. It is also responsible for the development of

policies which lead to legal action taken against mining companies which have reneged on superannuation payouts to workers.

The Kyo no Ue mine was one of a number of small mines owned by individuals who worked a seam whose rights they had leased from one of the big companies. In this case the seam was owned by Mitsubishi Shinyu, one of the bigger mines in Chikuho in the postwar period. Both the KNU mine and the Mitsubishi mine were situated in Kurate, which lies to the north of Nogata, in the Chikuho region.

The following is Kurata's story, told in his own words:

Kyo no Ue: Anatomy of a strike in a small mine

Company background

The name of the company was Nishikawa Kogyosho, the management for the KNU mine. They were also the managers of Sensui. I was an electrical worker.⁵ When I was in Siberia I thought that unions were all communist in orientation and wasn't interested at all. When I got back there was a ban on communism anyway. Actually when I joined the company independent unionism was banned, and because of that I decided that we needed a real union.

The more I worked at KNU the more I realised that the company was run badly. It was an *asseiyama*, and the company

⁵Because he was an electrician he was sent to Siberia to work in a supervisory capacity in the coal mines there during the war.

heavies bullied the workers and beat up people who didn't follow the company line. In different mines the same sort of people existed, variously called *rōmu kakari*, *kinrō kakari* etc. These people went around the *shataku* (company housing - equivalent to *tanjū*) forcing the men to go to work. If someone was sick the *rōmu* wouldn't listen, and would tell him to get to work. If he still wouldn't, or couldn't, he was told to report to the *rōmu* office where they used sticks on the workers to make them go down the pits. A lot of men were seriously injured in these exchanges, many with bleeding mouths and head wounds. After the damage had been done to them, the *rōmu* would say to them that even with these sorts of injuries they would have to work, and that it was a fair punishment for their slothfulness.

These sorts of criminal acts were by no means rare. The men were called into the office, punched in the head, and had ashtrays thrown at them. This was the way that the company ran the mine in actual fact.

In everyday life it was the *rōmu* who did this sort of work, but in reality it was the management who made them do what they did. The company president was the man who decided how to run the operation and it was he who told the *rōmu* to use violence to "encourage" the workers to go to work.

Up until 1956 the company was run by a local man named Kunagamichi who was not very successful. It was sold to Yasunaga in 1956. At that time the relationship with Mitsubishi was one of *kinsaki seido*.⁶

⁶Mining right lease agreement. The company had the right to work Mitsubishi's land if they sold the coal they produced through Mitsubishi, with the Mitsubishi trademark attached at a price that Mitsubishi fixed. They were also required to pay a levy on each tonne they dug up.

When I joined the company in 1949 Yasunaga was the boss, and there was already a union there. This union was a union in name only. It couldn't strike or do anything at all. It was completely dominated by the company and the company policies. There was no way that the union could even complain about the company - it was just a name. Because the union was so weak I didn't think that it was worth joining at first. It really couldn't do anything that a union was supposed to do, you see.

After I had been there for a year there was the annual union re-election. The election was to be held on a Sunday in 1950 because the company would only allow the workers to hold meetings on Sundays. At that time I didn't live in the *shataku* with the other workers. I lived about four or five kilometres from the mine, and thus walked to work everyday. Anyway it was my day off on that particular Sunday, so I didn't attend the meeting.

The next day when I went to work I was told that I had been elected the new union leader! When I joined the company I had said some things about the sort of pressure that the company was putting the workers under, saying that this was a worry etc, and so they voted me the leader in my absence.

I was the leader for a year. Just before the year's term was up there was an incident in the spring. Nearby, a coalminers' shrine called the *Yama no Kami Jinja* had been built, but because the mine was small it was still a small and poor looking *jinja*. But as that period was a boom period for the mines, KNU also had a relative amount of success, the number of workers increased and the company made a lot of money... so Yasunaga rebuilt the *jinja*. It was where all the local people, the workers and those who were related to the workers went to pray and to hold festivals each year.

At the festival that year the office manager, a man named Morifuji said to the assembled personages that the way the *jinja*

had been rebuilt was cheap and shoddy and that the money could have been used for better things - all of which was quite true. The son of the president was the vice-president, and he was present at the time. The vice-president, hearing the implied slur on his family name by this man, attacked Morifuji in front of the office and in front of the assembled crowd. The president was also there, and far from trying to stop his son he joined in and started hitting Morifuji with enthusiasm. A number of people had come to the festival including the local police chief, and they were all gathered on the field below watching the whole event. The president and his son got away scot-free and no action was taken to prevent them, nor subsequently to prosecute them. Such was the influence of the family.⁷

Anyway, after this happened we decided to start a democratic movement within the union. Seeing this sort of violence - the man was not a union member nor even a miner - but the principle of seeing the man getting beaten up by the president and his son affected us all, and we decided that it was unforgivable so we started the movement. This movement was designed to stop the sort of violence that had come to characterise the management style of the mine. The office workers didn't have a union of their own but they approached us and we discussed how best to do this thing.⁸

⁷The police chief, a former Kyo no Ue manager, who was in the crowd when the assault took place, eventually filed a report that Kurata and his union members had incited Morifuji to physically attack the president, and that the vice-president had only acted to save his father's honour. This record was obtained by Takazaki, then head of the local court.

⁸It is doubtful whether Kurata's union movement was really based on this event, given the rather different accounts of other men who worked in the mine. Rather it seemed as though this instance of violence, which was perpetrated at the highest level on what was regarded as sacred ground - the shrine - was the last straw. It gave focus to the widespread feelings of resentment directed at the management, for allowing the mine to be run in a repressive and violent manner.

We decided that the best way would be to look at how Mitsubishi forced the sub-contractor, Yasunaga, to dig unrealistic amounts of coal as part of their agreement. First there was something called *sōgo hokken* (mutual insurance) which covered both the Mitsubishi Shinyu mine and the KNU. Therefore if Mitsubishi didn't put the pressure on KNU management to produce excessive quantities of coal the insurance would cover both parties. By reducing this pressure we felt that the need for the sort of violent management that we had come to see would be eliminated. Therefore we thought that if we made public the way that the KNU management was running the mine then it would hurt Mitsubishi. Our aim was for Mitsubishi to stop Yasunaga from running the mine in the way he had been, because we had enough of the violence, and knowing that it would hurt Mitsubishi if this became public we moved in this direction.⁹

To this end we approached the local police, the prefectural police, the courts and the Department of Judicial Affairs with the aim of securing our basic human rights under the law. We applied to the Department of Judicial Affairs to help us stop the violent way of running the company, as was our right. We asked the police and the courts to issue orders to arrest violent offenders. However there were some big problems here for us, especially in relation to the police. You'll remember that the police chief was present when the company president and his son attacked Morifuji at the festival. Not only did he not stop the violence as his duty required him to, but the main point of my complaint against him is (his name is Ueki) that he treated with contempt our protests against his behaviour concerning the actions of the company

⁹It should be noted that the union seriously underestimated the extent of Mitsubishi's interests, thinking as they did, that the company would be damaged by adverse publicity. The problem for the union was that no newspapers would publish information which could be considered damaging to Mitsubishi.

president and his son. I felt complete contempt for the law at this stage.

This became really important to me. The man who was regarded as the defender of the masses did nothing at all to prevent this miscarriage of power, and as a result we took him to court, too, on a charge of negligence, because it was an unforgivable thing which he did. Of course we wrote this down in the official letter of complaint and in the Supporters' Notebook (a newsletter). In the official complaint Morifuji made his case clear. This is what happened. We wrote a petition demanding that Yasunaga pressure Ueki into resigning. As a result of this petitioning, the new "police problem" committee was established in Iizuka to investigate these instances of corruption. Even today the Hyakujo Investigation committee is still running in Iizuka. That's what we did at that time. I was called as a witness on a number of occasions to appear at the Investigation.¹⁰

As this movement gained momentum, we started to push for the democratic method of management which was really our right. You see, throughout the postwar period, whenever there was a union which threatened the status quo, the company moved in and put great pressure on its leaders to quit. Therefore we moved to oppose this trend. We didn't go as far as to say "let's get rid of the president," but we did want the vice president, who was in a nepotistic position, to get fired. So we presented the company with a list of demands.

At that time the KNU union was affiliated with *Fukutanrō*¹¹, the Fukuoka branch of *Tanrō*, which was really

¹⁰In 1980 the Hyakujo Investigation found that the Kyo no Ue management had acted outside the law, and that the police chief was guilty of negligence of his duties. By the time the Investigation published their findings it was almost 20 years after the incident, and the results of this inquiry were no longer pertinent. The police chief, Ueki, died in 1977.

¹¹*Fukuoka Tankō Rōdōkumiai* - Fukuoka Coalminers' Union

little more than a trade guild. While our movement was gaining ground the *Fukutanrō* was nominally supportive of our position. Not surprisingly *Fukutanrō* based itself on the premise that the company and the unions should be able to sort out any problems through discussion.

Anyway after all the trouble we went to over Morifuji and Ueki, the company fired Morifuji. The president approached me and told me that he was not interested at all in the proposals that we had put to him. He threatened us by saying that if we wanted to continue to work in Kurate we had better do the right thing by the company and keep out of trouble. I remember this well. He said that if we continued in this way there might just be an explosion in the mine which would accidentally kill us. We were very surprised at the open nature of the threat. I thought that there was nothing that we could do to change the man's mind at the time, so I said.. "That's all right with me, President. If you burn the slag to blow us up you'll have to explain yourselves to Mitsubishi, and I don't think that you'd like to do that. Mitsubishi won't help you out."

I went on to say to him that my union was different to the sycophantic body that he assumed it was. That because we were associated with *Tanrō*, if there was a problem with the slag being burnt in an attempt on our lives, 280,000 workers would be around helping us out.

Anyway after this exchange we, the leaders of the union, Nakanishi, the head of the office, and the president all got together to discuss the problems that we were complaining about. There were some conciliatory attempts made by the company which said that they would put money into the *Fukutanrō* to support the union movement. The president said that we should leave the matter of the firing of the vice-president for him to deal with, and that he would discipline the man. As to the issue of

whether they would blow up the slag heaps, this was left alone because we had reached a compromise in relation to the future of the vice-president. On top of this we were promised a democratic form of management from that time on.¹²

However as far as the police chief affair went, the union really couldn't take this any further than the Hyakujo Investigation. The case was taken before this commission and I was called there on many occasions. Finally it became clear that there was prejudice against those who worked in the mines, and the fact that we were miners seemed to have a derogatory effect on the case. The hearing was delayed until after the police chief retired in 1965.

The Spring Offensive

In 1956 there was the annual spring wage offensive. We presented a list of wage demands, and when they were not settled we went on strike. At the beginning it was only a 24 hour strike, yet the company immediately proceeded to enforce a lock out. At that time a massive amount of excess coal had been produced following the Korean War, and the company was happy not to pay wages, even if it was only for one day. Further they approached the media to fight us. It wasn't as if we were on an unlimited strike. In fact it was the first time that we had ever gone on strike, and suddenly the company had imposed a lockout. That night at the union meeting, after considering the general state of affairs we were surprised by the outrageous press reports roundly

¹²The company's sudden change of tactics here is hard to understand given Kurata's account of their uncompromising attitude towards the union. In a discussion with Idegawa about the interview afterwards, she said that this form of diplomacy was *tatemaie* and was only meant to pacify the miners while the company developed a more sophisticated strategy to deal with the miners. It served to keep production going, reduce management-worker conflict and give the company "breathing space." (personal communication: 1988)

condemning us and supporting the stance of the company. The company continued the lockout for another 24 hours and when we went back to work we accepted a compromise wage agreement.¹³

The second union

It was then that the company decided it was time for a second union which would support the company line without complaint, so the No2 union was formed, with the express aim of opposing the No1 union. I was beaten by the *rōmu* on that occasion because I had dared to speak out against the company, saying that the formation of another union within the company was an infringement of our democratic rights.

In short, the 24 hour strike occurred in 1956, and immediately after this the company formed the No2 union. This was contrary to the agreement which was reached in the discussions that we had in 1950 as described before. The first union was broken up, and of course we fought them about this, but the reality of the matter was that the management had not changed, and the violence was just starting all over again. In 1956 we got involved in more action. This time from September to October the mine became a battle field. The Kyushu *Tanrō* were actively involved in the issue, and vehemently protested to the KNU management against the forming of the No2 union. The protests we started then were a portent of the trouble to come.

¹³The militancy displayed by the union in this case - actually going on strike - was highly unusual in 1956 in Japan. The company's response to the union's action, though, was to become a standard within the industry for dealing with formalised worker unrest.

Kurata understates his role in the action here. According to other labour union sources he was the prime agitator in the strike, basing his stance on the success of overseas trade union movements. In particular, the success of the British coalminers' actions in the mid 1950s, which were reported in the JCP newspaper *Akahata* (Red Flag) influenced him in deciding to take action. Although the action was ultimately unsuccessful it enhanced the solidarity of the union members.

The police took us down to the station and charged us with unlawful assembly. We were jostled and pushed around by the cops who wanted to show us that they were tough.¹⁴

Working conditions

To describe the work conditions with any degree of accuracy, you would have to say that the miners were working on a quota system. They weren't paid on a daily basis, but rather on the basis of how much the shift as a group, dug out. However the situation wasn't as simple as it appears. When the coal is dug out it is obviously unprocessed and there is a lot of slag mixed with it. The dug out coal was examined and payment was awarded on the basis of its purity. For example, if a shift dug out one tonne, and it was determined to be 80% pure they got paid for 0.8 tonnes of coal. In bad cases the purity of the coal was as low as 60%, so the workers only received the equivalent of digging 0.6 tonnes.

Every day there was a work quota to be filled which was based on one shift working eight hours. The quota was based on an agreement drawn up between the union and the company, and it ranged from two tonnes to three tonnes. Of course there were times when it was impossible to dig the quota. On those occasions we were forced to work until the quota was satisfied. To ensure

¹⁴Ueno wrote in his book, *Moyashitsukusu Hibi*, that the action which the union precipitated against the company was the first such labour action in the coalfields. The animosity of the union was supported by *Tanrō* which sent 50 men to help the miners physically fight the company *rōmu* and the police. More than 20 men were hospitalised, and it is a source of some pride for the miners that of these 15 were police. The violence continued for more than a month in a series of running battles, with the miners torching company property until the police requested reinforcement from the prefectural government, which effectively broke up the demonstration. No miners were prosecuted individually by the company or police on this occasion.

this the company sent the *rōmu* down the pits to make sure that no-one left their work place, even though there might be two or three hours overtime involved.

What we wanted was not to get a different system of wages instituted though, but to get paid for the extra hours that we were forced to work in the mines, if something untoward prevented the quota being filled. But KNU would not pay any money for work done in this manner - no overtime, and not even pay normal hourly rates for all the extra hours we were asked to work. When you consider all the problems of that year, it was not just one thing which caused the trouble that was to come, but a series of events.¹⁵

Thus we moved into 1957. That year the same sorts of wages problems developed. The same problems plus a new one - the No2 union had been formed in the interim. As far as the company was concerned the No2 union was now the official union and we (the No1) had ceased to exist in relation to the Spring Wage Offensive. We discussed the wage offensive with the leaders of the No2 union, but they chose to accept a company offer of a 50 yen a day wage increase which we felt was too little. So we

¹⁵Ueno Eishin wrote about his experience with the mine, corroborating the story of Kurata:

Kyo no Ue was seen as the most repressive and violent mine in the region. The company used to take the law into its own hands to force production up... Miners often had to work 12 to 13 hours to fulfil the company quota per shift. If we didn't manage to make the quota the difference was taken from our pay. The overseers (*rōmu*) never saw the inside of a pit in most cases, yet they blithely raised the production quota to unrealistic levels. Sometimes those who could not make the quota and whose work was not seen to be satisfactory were attacked with pick handles after work by the *rōmu*. But because this was officially just "keeping the work force in line" and because no-one would come forward to challenge the company, or supply the law with evidence to prosecute these people, the villains who beat and sometimes killed miners escaped scot-free (1985a: 14).

ended up fighting with the No2 union, and splitting from them completely.

We were told by the No2 union and by the company that a wage agreement had been reached with the complete co-operation of the union and the company and that our opinions were no longer considered germane. They said that there was no way that they would make allowances for our claims that the wage increases were too small. So at that stage our union decided to go on strike. The strike got gradually longer and longer and eventually continued for 101 days."

The 101 day strike

The following is an extract from Ueno Eishin's book, *Moyashitsukusu hibi*, and describes Ueno coming back to the mine after an absence of 3 months.

I got off the bus at Kyo no Ue. There were the barricades. To the north of the narrow bus road was the mining complex, to the south the home of Yasunaga, the president. A coal cart emerged from the mine mouth and dumped its load onto a conveyer belt which took the coal to the sorters at the north. Around each of the buildings at the dark northern end were high fences, and in the middle of the compound was a barbed wire fence which stretched across the width of the land, separating the dirty workers' section from the president's home.

In the rain I walked to the Labour Control office and through the windows I could see the bustling activity inside. A heavy barricade surrounded the building, and to one side of this barricade the coal and the slag sorting was going on. All this activity was because of the No2 union - it depressed me and made we want to howl like a dog.

A little further to the north was the No1 union office, but around here the mud had settled - no-one had been here for some time. I could find no sign of life. No union members, no leaders. Deserted. There was one sign which hung at a strange angle from a wall of one of the *tanjū*, the red ink faded on the waste paper. It read:

Do your best fathers.

We, the wives, will do our best
 To bring peace to our households and
 To bring about an open and democratic mine.
 Signed: The Kyo no Ue Women's Co-operative.¹⁶

Kurata returns to the story:

One big problem that soon appeared was that when we were on strike we needed to be able to eat while we were on strike. The *Fujinkai* (Women's Association) and *Tanrō* helped us out by giving us *nigiri* (rice balls) and rice as part of the strike aid fund, but we were not able to survive on just that. Everyone started to do part-time work to support themselves. We all got some sort of labouring work in the vicinity outside the mine. But the No2 union leader approached the bosses where we were working and told them not to employ us, and said that they would sabotage the operations if we were allowed to continue to work. They went all over the place threatening the labouring companies with disruption if we were employed. We could not physically attack the No2 union, so we decided to hold a meeting with the leaders of the No2 union to try to resolve the problem, outside the union shrine in the field nearby.

"Why are you doing this? We're all workers and the fact that you are disrupting our means of living is unforgivable," we said. Eating was important to us, and if we were on strike it was not adversely affecting those in the No2 union, so why were they out to get us, we wanted to know. Rather than a meeting this was really a protest. The protest ended up taking a long time but it certainly wasn't getting anywhere. As the meeting was breaking up I said that the threat of disruption to our lifestyles was intolerable,

¹⁶ibid: 9-10

and we ended up by calling for a demonstration. That is, we were joined by the *Fujinkai* in the demo against the No2 union and the way that they were trying to starve us.

If the whole affair had ended there it would have been good I think, but tempers were up and the No2 union head was attacked by some of our members, knocked over and kicked and punched. He didn't get up. This became another problem for us. After this the company accused us of being violent, something which was used as a rationale to prevent any attempt at conciliation. As a result of this affair I was prosecuted by the police for the assault, and for causing a riot. There were five of us who faced these charges. Eventually the case got to court where I was found to be the responsible party for the assault. This happened during the 101 day strike.¹⁷

The company used this affair as an excuse to dismiss me from work while I was on strike (all five of us were fired). However I took a civil suit out against them, because when I was dismissed the charges were still pending, and nothing had been decided by the courts. The substance of my suit was that I was dismissed on unreasonable grounds. I won this case.¹⁸

Ueno wrote the strike up in some detail, but this sort of incident was not written up. During the 101 day strike there were many sorts of problems.

¹⁷This demonstration that Kurata refers to was a major riot. The police were called in to try to calm the warring groups who had attacked each other ferociously, according to witnesses (Otani, Suzuki, interviews: 1988). They were unsuccessful, and late, and by the time they arrived the miners from the No1 union had succeeded in bashing a number of *rōmu* and members from the No2 union.

Equally, a number of men from the No1 union were seriously beaten by the police and by the *rōmu* who were armed with iron bars and lumps of wood.

¹⁸This was a landmark case for the unions, and Kurata was the first person to successfully take legal action against a coal company, according to Takazaki (interview: 1988).

While I was leader of the No1 union I was very aware of the gangsters who were employed by the company, and made a lot of comments about them at the time. Therefore I personally was in danger from these hoodlums. I was threatened on many occasions, and of course I was chosen as the big troublemaker and was picked on often.

On one occasion I was called by the boss of the company and asked to attend a meeting to try to settle the strike. He told me to come with just the other leaders of our union and said that we would be able to resolve the situation somehow together. Well, when we got there (there were three of us) we were met by eight or nine of the *yakuza* who worked for Mitsubishi, and no company president. We realised that we were in big trouble, but we smiled and said that we would wait for the president who was due to come at any moment. My young lieutenant said that he had to go to the toilet, and he slipped out the window and went for help. Unfortunately by the time the rest of the union members had been contacted and had come over the *yakuza* had already beaten us severely. I was hospitalised for two months. You see they broke my hands and most of my ribs. But I didn't let that slow me down at all. As soon as I was out of hospital I was back into it again.

Friction between the two unions

During the 101 day strike there was torrential rain and the houses flooded, and the roofs leaked. Although it was the company's duty to repair the houses, and to make sure the roofs didn't leak, when anyone from the No1 union went to the office to ask about repairs they were refused point blank. They were told to "fuck off home," by the office workers. Much of the friction was generated by the No2 union leader who hated us with

passion, and used his influence where he could to make things hard for us, with the aim of breaking us up.

Of course there were also a number of quarrels with the No2 union members directly too, and in some cases the wives of the different unions also took to quarrelling with each other. Within the *tanjū* this caused big problems for everyone because the places were so tightly packed together. They were telling each other to fuck off, and to stuff themselves. The situation was really getting pretty grim.

Sometimes the company supplied the No2 union officials with free drinks after work at the company store. When this happened the No2 union members got drunk and smashed the windows in the No1 union office on a number of occasions. If any worker had any sort of connection with the No1 union they were often beaten up.

The company sent the gangsters around to our houses to tell us to get out. But that wasn't all. They would come around the *shataku* with clubs in hand and beat the people who were supporting our stance. Although no-one was killed in these exchanges, they were violent and people were hurt and frightened. After the gangsters had been around the leader of the No2 union would then come to the *tanjū* and tell us that if we stayed with the No1 union these incidents would continue to happen. However if we joined the No2 union there would be no more of this sort of thing, and our houses would soon be repaired because he would talk to the company and convince them to do this. This was all prearranged, as the timing of the No2 union leader was always exact.

Within our ranks there were some weak people, who had had enough by this time and joined the No2 union. Their houses were soon cleaned up.

There was a vacant lot nearby the *tanjū* and here, using the company's money the No2 union built some new houses. This was done to help break the No1 union. That is, we could see what sort of benefits the No2 union was enjoying while we were starving and living in hovels. There were quite a lot of people from the No2 union living in the new housing. This problem came out in the last meeting of the two unions and the company. That is, the company said, "Such and such is paying this amount for rent on his new place." In the last instance I protested strongly about this. When you think about this, it's pretty obvious that the company was doing this for special reasons - i.e, to let the No1 union members see how the other people were having all these benefits, with the aim of disrupting our unity.

There were people within the No1 union who were affected by the way the No2 union was getting these advantages, but in the end, everyone within our union said that although you can buy things with money, you can't buy someone's loyalty.

As Ueno said, seeing all this luxury in front of our eyes was sorely tempting but the men who remained were the ones who were the real workers, the ones who would not compromise their principles. The men who eventually joined the No2 union were predominantly those who weren't skilled at their jobs and had no confidence in the cause that they were fighting for. I think that the men who switched sides were these types, don't you? Those of us who remained were the ones who were secure in the knowledge that we were skilled at different aspects of mining work, and we had confidence in our ability to win the battle. At the time I thought that, and even now I have no reason to change my beliefs on this score. Those who had confidence in their skills and pride in their work could endure the temptations while those who didn't were left in the position that they had to switch sides. The ones left in the No1 union were mainly this type of serious

miner. I think that it was because of this the union did not break up.

Production was affected at the beginning of the strike - that is, it fell off. But after the company created the new No2 union and built new *tanjū* for the new workers they brought in, production increased again, as the No2 union increased its numbers. The numbers increased to such an extent that the No2 union was soon larger than us. This was part of the strategy to ignore our union's existence.¹⁹

However no-one from the No1 union was fired. As we went off to our part-time jobs in the mornings we saw the results of the No2 union's efforts reflected in the coal being sorted outside the pit entrance, and the coal being moved along the conveyer. We were very worried that we had become quite redundant at the time, to be honest. The No2 union was not really a union, and they had not won any wage increases in the time we were on strike. The wages stayed the same, at the levels that the company dictated, and the union's worth was absolutely zero. Whatever the company said the union followed, you see. As far as we were concerned we would fight for our rights even if it took a year or more, because that was the only way to do things, but the No2 union would not fight. We were angry with the No2 union, and our anger had nothing to do with the wages battle. It had become a matter of protecting the right to have an organisation which was free. While this was the main issue, there were other issues which were tied up with this, namely that the company's method of management had to be opposed at all costs, and a form of democratic management had to be instigated.

¹⁹These miners were recruited from the ranks of farmers and locals who had little or no experience in the coal industry, but who were happy to work for the (relatively) good pay and housing.

Breaking the strike

After the strike had reached the 100 day mark, *Tanrō* called a national 24 hour strike to pressure the company to stop bullying us. Before it got to that stage the Kyushu Small-Medium Mines Labour Organisation had called a two hour strike to protest the actions of the company, which affected all Kyushu small to medium sized mines. This was a temporary strike in sympathy for our cause. Even after this the company waited things out, and weren't prepared to settle the affair. When we reached the 100th day all mines nationally went on strike for 24 hours in sympathy. After this occurred the *Kōgyō Renmei* (Mine Owners' Association) convened and held discussions with *Tanrō*. Eventually the strike was settled.²⁰

As you'll remember, the official reason for the strike was that the No2 union had accepted the company offer of 50 yen a day pay increase which we had opposed as being too cheap. Well, as a result of the strike we eventually received a settlement of 52 yen a day pay increase. After all that trouble there was only a two yen a day gain!

But as I said before, the reason we were on strike was not really because of an increase in wages, but to oppose the way management ran the company, to give us democracy in the work place, and to protect our right to a free union. So even a two yen wage increase was a victory of sorts. That was how the strike ended.

During the strike a large number of men from the No1 union joined the No2 union as I mentioned earlier. However, on

²⁰The settlement was made after a week long series of meetings between management and *Tanro* officials and representatives of both unions.

the other hand, there were a lot of defections from the No2 union to our union after we won. These men were often new recruits who had seen what the management style was like, were surprised by it, and left the company union, because they thought that the No1 union was right in fighting against these violent management practices. These people often joined our union to look for a certain amount of freedom which they didn't have in the No2 union. Particularly after the members of the No2 union saw the results of the strike with their own eyes they gradually came over to our ranks, in twos and threes.

After these mass defections to our union in 1958 the company formed the No3 union! The aim of this union also was to destroy us for what we stood for. This union existed purely for the purpose of allowing the company to interfere with the work force. We realised the nature of this very early and called a meeting with the management to present a case to them that if they continued with this union we would take them to court and sue them for breach of the labour laws. So the person responsible for the labour control at the mine was fired, because the company had no other choices in the matter. They maintained that the president didn't know about the affair at all, and the labour manager was sacrificed. And with him being fired the No3 union was officially disbanded.²¹

From that time on the labour force was organised on the basis of the No1 and No2 unions, and in 1959 there were discussions about the new bonus schemes which had been introduced that year. Anyway we went on strike over this in 1959.

²¹The No3 union was formed because the other unions had, by this stage, reconciled many of their differences. Although they were not officially united under the *Tanrō* banner until 1960, they expressed similar aims. The company was apparently under the impression that the same methods employed in breaking the solidarity of the workers in the first instance would work again, hence the move to form a third union.

The wage strike that we went on continued for 101 days as you know, but this one went on for 114 days! This one has never been written about.

After all this, a new office manager came to the company. He was responsible for the labour force in general. He was a man named Hashimoto who hailed from the *Kōgyō Renmei*. He said that the method of labour control being used at KNU was no good. He didn't say this to us directly but he did make these comments within management circles. In response to this responsible attitude the two unions united in 1960. At that time there was talk about the *Zentankō* (the right-wing National Miners' Union) and the *Tanrō* affiliations of the respective unions, and eventually it was decided that *Zentankō* was doing nothing at all, and that therefore there was no reason to have any affiliation with it. The No2 union joined the No1 union unconditionally. Shortly after, in 1962, the mine was closed.

The time that we united the two unions was around the same time that the Miike striking workers split into two unions. After we had joined together the Miike miners' two union movements started, for sure. I probably can't be trusted to remember properly but the Hopper Incident at Miike was in May, 1960. I'm pretty sure that the date's right.

Before the mine closed down there were incidents like the Yasunaga one I talked about, and of course there was the problem of strikes too, but when the mine actually closed down the idea that we were there to stay as a union had been accepted by the company to a large extent. Because of this, when we made demands as to what we expected after the mine closed a final agreement was reached between the company and the union."

The end of the interview.

Discussion

Kurata's story highlights some repressive practices used by management in dealing with workers. These are still employed by some of the more hardline companies within Japan, according to some of my informants. Yet in the 1950s and 1960s, the use of violence to manipulate unions and control the workforce was widespread, particularly within the mining companies. Often, perhaps due to their isolation and their disproportionate share of political power, small mining companies tended to be more violent and less democratic than large companies, though it has to be said that the larger companies were in a position to employ only men they were confident would not join one of the radical leftist unions.

From the company's view, in order to deal with the problem of worker power, the first and most important step was to establish which people were involved in the unions, and which people were leading them. The next step was to attempt to isolate these men by creating an alternative which offered financial incentives in the short term, as with the establishment of a No2 union. The third step was to apply conspicuously violent sanctions to members of the old union in order to convince the members that not only did the new union offer more financial rewards than the old one, but also that members who joined the new union were to be given favourable treatment. The fourth step was to enlist the aid of "officials" to deter the public from sympathising with the strikers. The police and the mass media were involved, and through this alliance the newspapers published accounts of the irresponsibility of the miners, and of their wanton destructive rampages which the police had documented at the company's instigation.

Lockouts became the method of dealing with problem demonstrations against the company, and the police were mobilised to deal with the miners. The courts were geared to make the miners pay for any disruption to production caused by industrial action. But the main problem for the miners was the defection of miners from the old union to the new one, in the face of protests from within the union. The workers who defected generally maintained that they

had to eat, which is why they wanted to continue working, against the advice of the union leadership.

Surprisingly the concept of "scabs" was not really evident in any of the miners' actions and picket lines were not organised. There is certainly resentment that the other miners were not prepared to support their fellow workers, but there seems to have been a certain amount of sympathy towards their position.

Yeah, they went back to work and left us in the lurch. But most of these guys had families to support and had a lot of debts, so we understood why they went back to work. In the end it was a simple matter of choosing between eating and starvation for some I suppose.²²

From a historical perspective, it has often been said that one of the main reasons that Japan's unions have never held very much power is that there is little or no solidarity within the rank and file. Yada went as far as to say that the unions existed only to support the companies.²³ The concept of a unified union under an independent leadership was anathema to the Japan of the post war economic boom. The economy was moving in many directions as it made inroads into international markets, labour was constantly undervalued domestically, and publicly the unions were seen as a hindrance to the development of the economy. The ruling LDP continued to govern well in the electorate's eyes because the standard of living had markedly improved after the war. Socialism was seen as a form of anti-capitalism, and thus anti-development. Hence the unions were portrayed as a "disruptive and violent group," attempting to blackmail the country through their heinous actions.²⁴

The companies were able to break down whatever solidarity existed within the unions by introducing new labourers in times when work was scarce. These

²²Kurata, interview: 1988

²³Yada, 1975: 143

²⁴see for example, the Asahi Shinbun, 14th January, 1961, editorial on the miners' strike at Miike

labourers were employed on the condition that they joined the company union. Generally the members, and where possible the leaders of the troublesome union, were made redundant to make room for the new workers, as in the Kyo no Ue case. It is sufficient to note here that there are a number of significant factors involved concerning socialisation and the development of a form of political numbness which has come to be representative of many Japanese people's attitudes towards government in Japan.

From an outsider's perspective, it may seem extraordinary that the Kyo no Ue miners had not taken any form of action before the time of the strike, especially considering the violent labour control techniques used by management. Apart from the labour control which was enforced in the mine itself, the company was able to control the miners' financial, residential, social, religious, and in some cases, family lives. This was made possible first through the control of the miners' place of residence - the *tanjū*. The mine owners were under an obligation to supply housing for the miners, and managed to turn this to their own advantage in many cases by supplying controlled institutions throughout the *tanjū*. Shops, entertainment areas, religious festivals, currency, schools, and banks were all controlled by the mine. A monopoly had been firmly established which extended to miners' lives. Not only was their labour bought and sold as a commodity, but the commodities that the miners traded in were also owned by the company. The practical situation for many miners was that they were totally dependent on the mines, not only for their livelihoods but also for their social, political, and religious activities. Strong feelings of local identity developed, fuelled by the twin concepts of the company as common foe and as necessary evil. These feelings were exacerbated by the way that the miners were viewed by outsiders. That is they were seen as "an overpaid, militant, selfish group which acted always purely in their own interests."²⁵

Idegawa, a person who has written a considerable amount on the history of Chikuho and the coalmines said:

²⁵Nakayama - local doctor - interview: 1988

They were regarded by non-miners as separate from the rest of the community - a hard headed bunch who drank and gambled too much, and who had no idea of social obligations. In short they were regarded with fear, and with a certain amount of respect for the dirty, hard and dangerous work that they did.²⁶

The way that they were seen by the outside world reified the position the miners allotted for themselves in the scheme of things.²⁷ This in turn had a powerful influence on the way the miners dealt with labour problems. For many miners mining was the only work they knew, and because of the way that they lived and worked they felt that they could not do work outside the industry. Consequently the attitude of many men was similar to that of Okushima who worked in the infamous Hoshu Mine in Kawasaki-machi:

If the working conditions were too bad you simply quit the job and went to look for work at some other mine. That was if you were allowed to quit. Sometimes the management would put pressure on you to stay by sending the *rōmu* around to tell you what would happen if you left the mine. Usually these threats were quite serious, so when you left one of the small companies you had to be careful that you used a different name in your new job, and often people ended up leaving their families in order to escape.²⁸

In a society where, according to many eminent Japanese social psychologists, sociologists, and behaviourists, the group is the centre of all social activities, the lack of cohesion within the labour movement stands out. Simply put, the company, through its monopoly of not only the means of production, but also of the environment in which the workers lived, was able to enforce the concept of the company group over worker solidarity. This was achieved through the use of violence and intimidation on the one hand, and coercion on the other.

²⁶Idegawa, interview: 1989

²⁷Metcalfe has noted that miners in Maitland saw themselves as entering hell when they descended into the pit (1988)

²⁸Okushima, interview: 1989

However this situation changed when the demand for coal, and the resultant demand for labour, dropped sharply in the wake of the Energy Revolution. Certain elements in the labour force realised the tenuous nature of their own job security, and the threats of violent sanctions from the company notwithstanding, formed groups to protect their jobs by protesting the impending closures. This issue became the rallying cry for the labour protests of the 1960s which were arguably the most powerful expression of worker dissatisfaction in Japan's industrial history.

The Kyo no Ue case was exceptional in that there was a strong independent labour movement which acted in the workers' interests despite pressure from management. Mines which had relatively strong non-company unions were regarded by other miners as the "good" mines - that is, where the working conditions were fair, the incidence of violent repressive management techniques were limited, safety equipment and training was properly catered for, and as a result few men were killed at the pit face. Mines where the development of labour consciousness was retarded were seen as being dangerous. The statistics of mining accidents bear out the assumption that the more repressive mines were the scene of the most mine deaths, both at the workplace and at home, the latter applying to violent deaths, officially unexplained.

One estimate of the total number of deaths in the Chikuho area alone, which does not include the very small *tanuki bori* (badger holes) for the period from 1922 to 1965 is over 11,000.²⁹ This figure is exceptionally high, especially when compared to figures for similar enterprises outside Japan. It is in fact more than 20 times the accident death total in Britain for the same period where the mining work force was 40 times greater than in Chikuho, according to Dennis, Henriques and Slaughter.³⁰ Yet union action like the Kyo no Ue incidents notwithstanding, labour consciousness did not really become active until the mines were threatened with closure in the late 1950s and early 1960s and the unions were able to organise themselves into a powerful political

²⁹Onishi, *Gisei no Tō*, (The Tower of Self Sacrifice) 1975: 2

³⁰1956: 132

lobby. Although *Tanrō* was the agency responsible for this consciousness developing, it is noteworthy that the larger companies were the only participants in the action of the 1960s, Mitsui Miike mine being the focus of attention. The smaller companies, although subject to the same rationalisation pressures, were often not affiliated with *Tanrō* because these companies had seen to the establishment of company unions at the expense of independent unions. Subsequently smaller companies were not involved in the action precipitated by *Tanrō*. This seriously weakened the solidarity and the effectiveness of the movement when the TCRB came into effect and demonstrations and strikes were called for on a national level.

It is axiomatic that in times of adversity labour unions develop solidarity to protect their positions. In the Japanese coal fields it is noticeable that the unions did not develop any form of consciousness until a huge number of jobs were threatened. It was only in response to this pressure that the unions were able to break away from the oppressive environment of the company. One of the major problems was that the unions, even the "independent" ones, were inherently conservative and the concept of strikes and industrial action was really not well developed within the mining industry. Partly this was a response to management methods - violence was used routinely on individual workers while any hint of action was even more harshly dealt with. Lockouts were often the first step taken by the company in opposing industrial action, and these had a powerful influence on the striking miners. The drop in demand for coal after the Korean War meant that there was a glut of workers. They had little or no bargaining power, and because there was so little cohesion within the unions, management was able to dominate industrial relations for a long time.

The TCRB and the unemployment which was to be generated by the introduction of this short sighted policy, proved to be the catalysts in the development of the miners' union unrest. Shortly following this action by the Kyo no Ue union, the Mitsui Miike miners went on strike for one full year in an offensive which culminated in one of the most violent expressions of worker dissatisfaction in Japan's history. The Miike action, which has been well documented in Japanese, had at its roots the issue of survival in the face of

serious redundancies the miners faced rather than the more "principled" reasons of the Kyo no Ue case. Yet the companies' responses to both actions were remarkably similar - the fragmentation of the offending union, "compromise" deals with the "enlightened" new union leaders, and promises of long term changes and worker security, none of which actually came to pass.

Perhaps one of the sadder aspects of the Kyo no Ue case was that after all the sacrifices the workers made the mine was closed within 24 months of the resolution of the strike, and within 12 months of the reconciliation of the unions. I think that the union had enough by this stage, and management, under the new direction of Hashimoto, was much more reasonable about redundancy packages for the men. However, notwithstanding the softer line which the company eventually took, the workers from the Kyo no Ue union won few concessions in the longer term.

I think that the Kyo no Ue case should be seen as the first of a number of union actions which moved towards establishing better working conditions for workers. The motivation for the Kyo no Ue action was fairly narrow, and the development of a working class consciousness was not on their political agenda, as evidenced by their relaxed attitude towards non-unionists. Rather they were concerned with establishing a more equitable system of management than the system which was in operation. The type of management they opposed could be seen as a hangover from the war, where violence and coercion were standard practices. Given the United States' Occupation decrees that unions were to be "democratised," and that every worker had the right to join a union, theirs was a response aimed at simply improving the daily quality of their lives.

It could be suggested that the Kyo no Ue case was a landmark in Japanese industrial relations for a number of reasons. The first is that the union acted on its own behalf - admittedly with the tacit approval of *Tanrō*, which had been very quiet politically up to this time - with no real outside support. Secondly, Kurata, as leader of the union, was not prepared to compromise his stance even in the face of extreme pressure exerted by the company. This strength of leadership should not be underestimated, just as the fact that he, and the members of the No1 union were prepared to be stood down on a matter of

principle. Thirdly, although the legal framework existed to support the stance of unions against employers, it had not been tested until Kurata successfully sued the Kyo no Ue management to protest his unlawful dismissal following the incident outside the company office. Finally, the power that *Tanrō* was able to wield was demonstrated decisively when they finally did enter, and solve the dispute.

The Miike industrial action which followed on the heels of the Kyo no Ue action was seen as a catalyst for the development of union consciousness in Japan. The student protests, protests against industrial pollution, consumer movements, anti-war, and anti-nuclear power movements, to name just a few, all seemed to gain momentum after the dramatic events of the confrontation between miners and police at Miike. But before the Miike action the actions of a small group of principled miners in Kurate established the perception that union protest was viable in a society where the union movement had been largely cauterised. It is conceivable that the industrial actions precipitated by the Kyo no Ue union, and the unprecedented, if tardy response from *Tanrō* in coming out in support of this small union were responsible for the development of the more militant and conspicuous labour conflicts of the 1960s.

Interestingly there are no other cases of even marginally successful industrial action recorded until the Miike strike in 1960, although there were many miners in a similar position to the Kyo no Ue workers. It seems almost as though as soon as the case was resolved it was forgotten by local people, or at best dismissed as being a single, unprecedented instance of an individual leader's power to influence others. The Miike strike on the other hand, attracted widespread interest nationally, presumably because of its scale and the publicity it engendered, and also because of the developing consciousness of miners that their jobs were in danger following the formalisation of the new energy policy. They could no longer afford to be apathetic about labour issues. In the Miike case and in subsequent labour actions, the miners were helped considerably by the new wave of Marxism which was sweeping the country. Outsiders acted positively to support the miners, and the consciousness that flowed from

outsiders who came to the coalfields was one of the great strengths of the new, rather short-lived labour movement.

In Part III I will describe the development of what I have referred to as the Chikuho revivalists. Although inchoate and informal, this group of people who have similar ideals, has been able to present a series of reinterpretations of Chikuho coalmining history which differ markedly from official versions. Using instances like the Kyo no Ue strike and the Hoshu flood, they have individually attempted to analyse the roles of companies, government, unions and miners in the fortunes of the area. Without exception they are critical of the official versions of history and of the roles of the "officials."

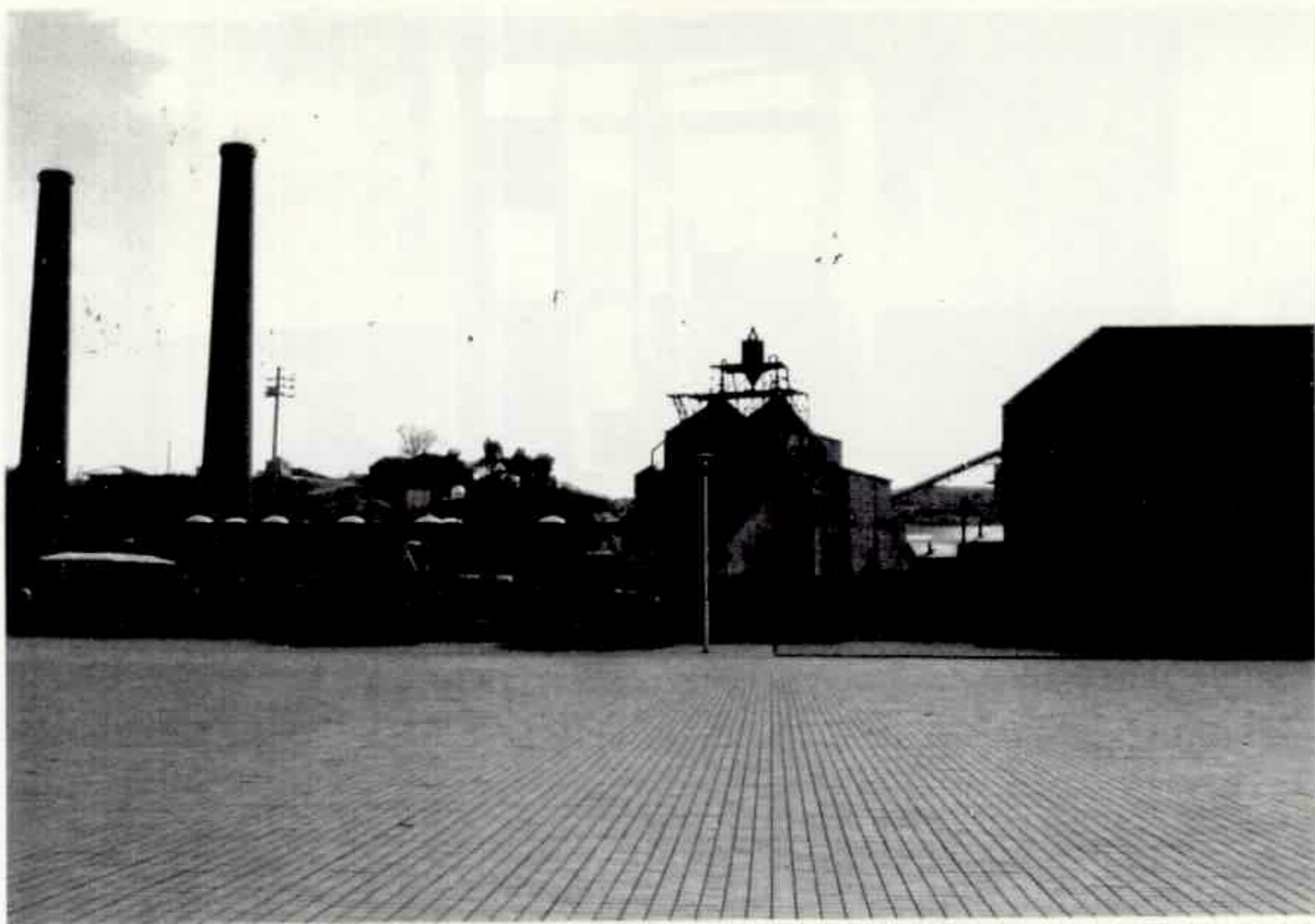
The effect that outsiders have had on two cases of labour conflicts which are similar to the two cases described earlier is drawn out in the chapters on Taisho and Yamano. The spontaneity of the support which was generated in these cases is in marked contrast to the relative isolation of Hoshu and Kyo no Ue. To a large extent this is the result of the activities of outsiders.



Mitsui Ita *tanju*, the new apartments buildings looming over the *nagaya*



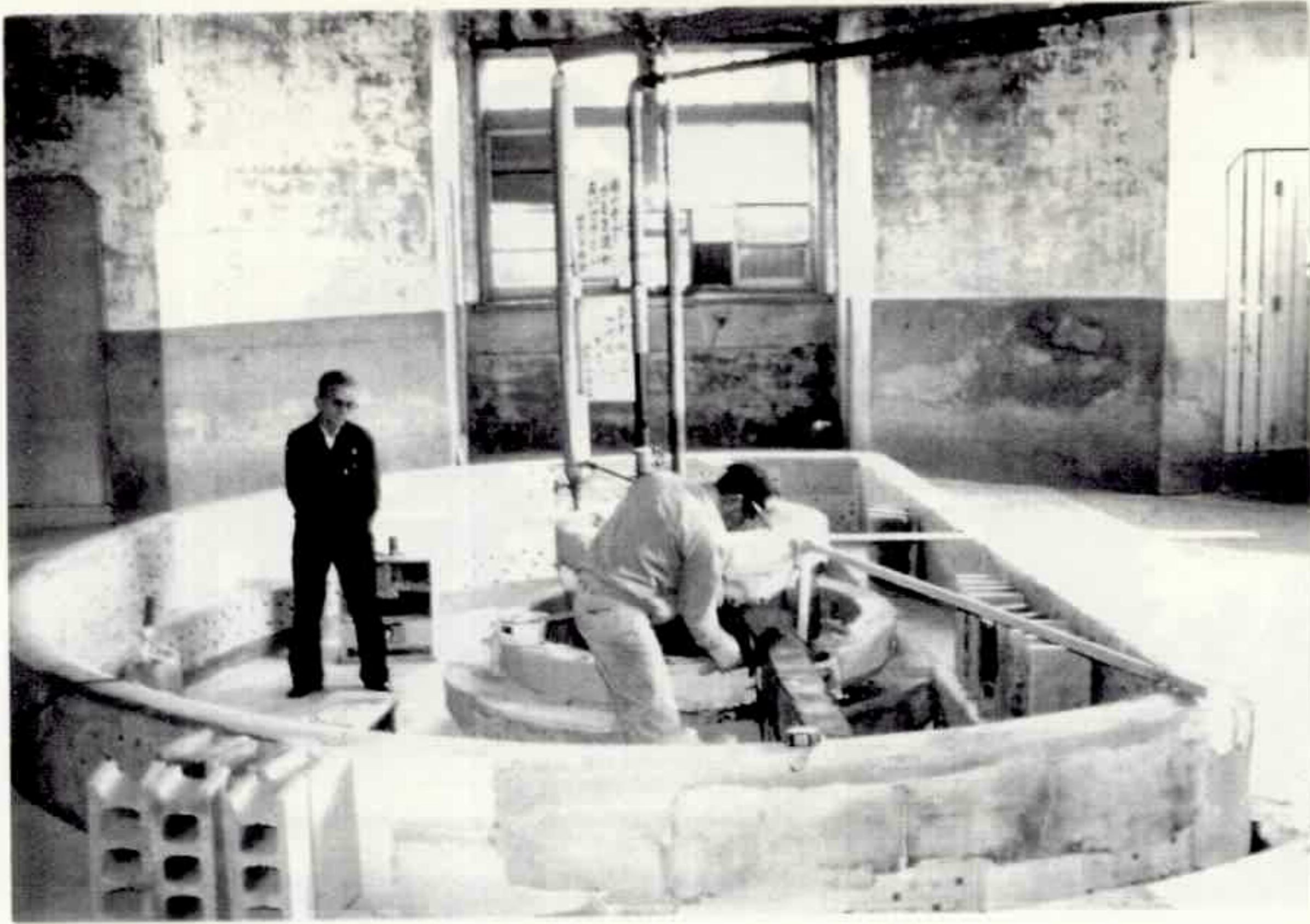
Another view of the *tanju*, this time with the symbol of the area - Mount Asahi - its lime excavations plainly visible



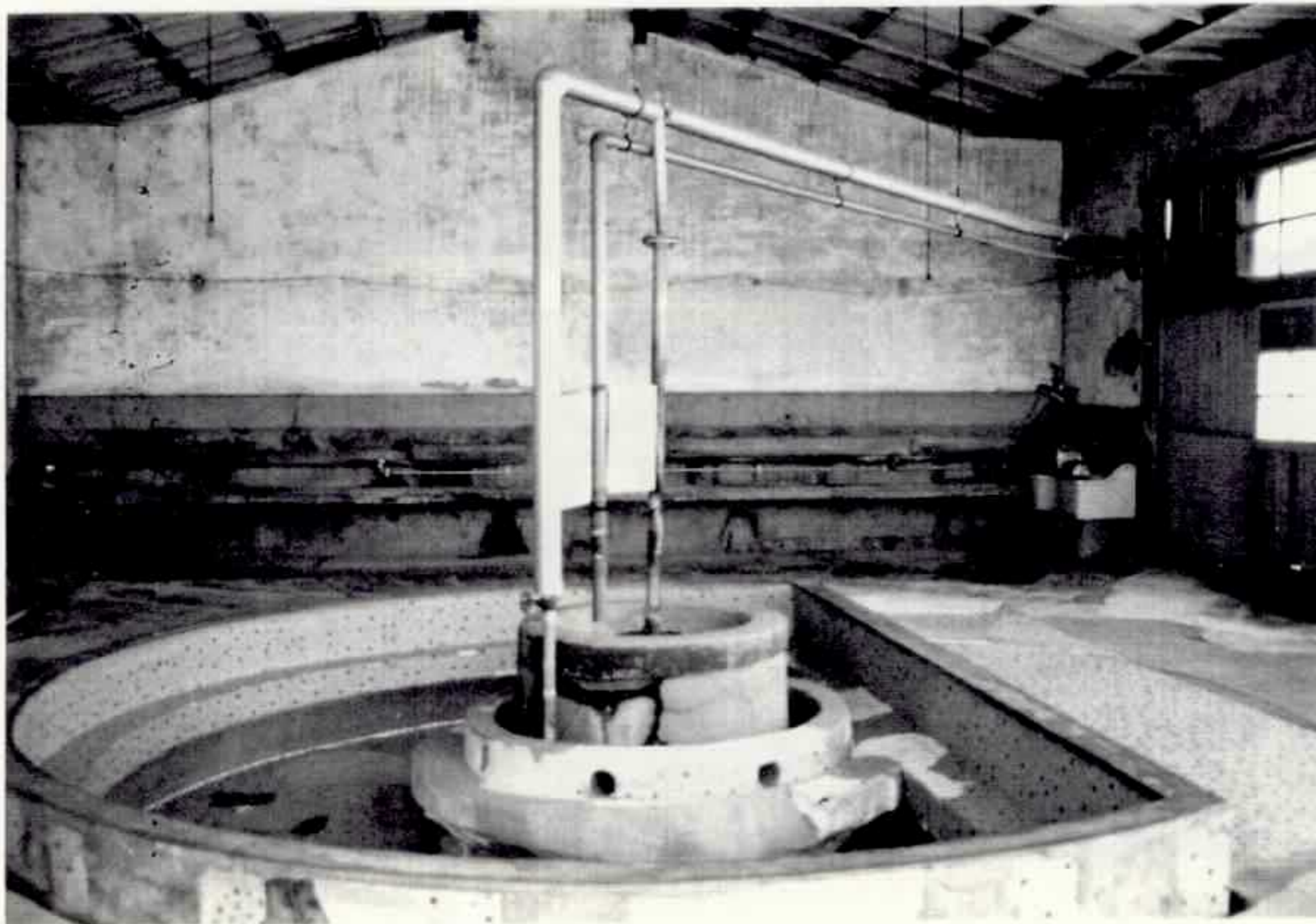
The Mitsui Coal Museum at Tagawa, the twin chimneys and the restored trams in the background



The restored hopper at the Tagawa Museum



Reducing the size of the men's baths to reduce heating costs at the Mitsui Real Estate's request - Mitsui Ita, mid-winter 1988



The women's baths - Mitsui Ita, 1988



Ueda Seijiro's home in Kawasaki Town



Two informants outside their Ueda *tanju* at Kawasaki



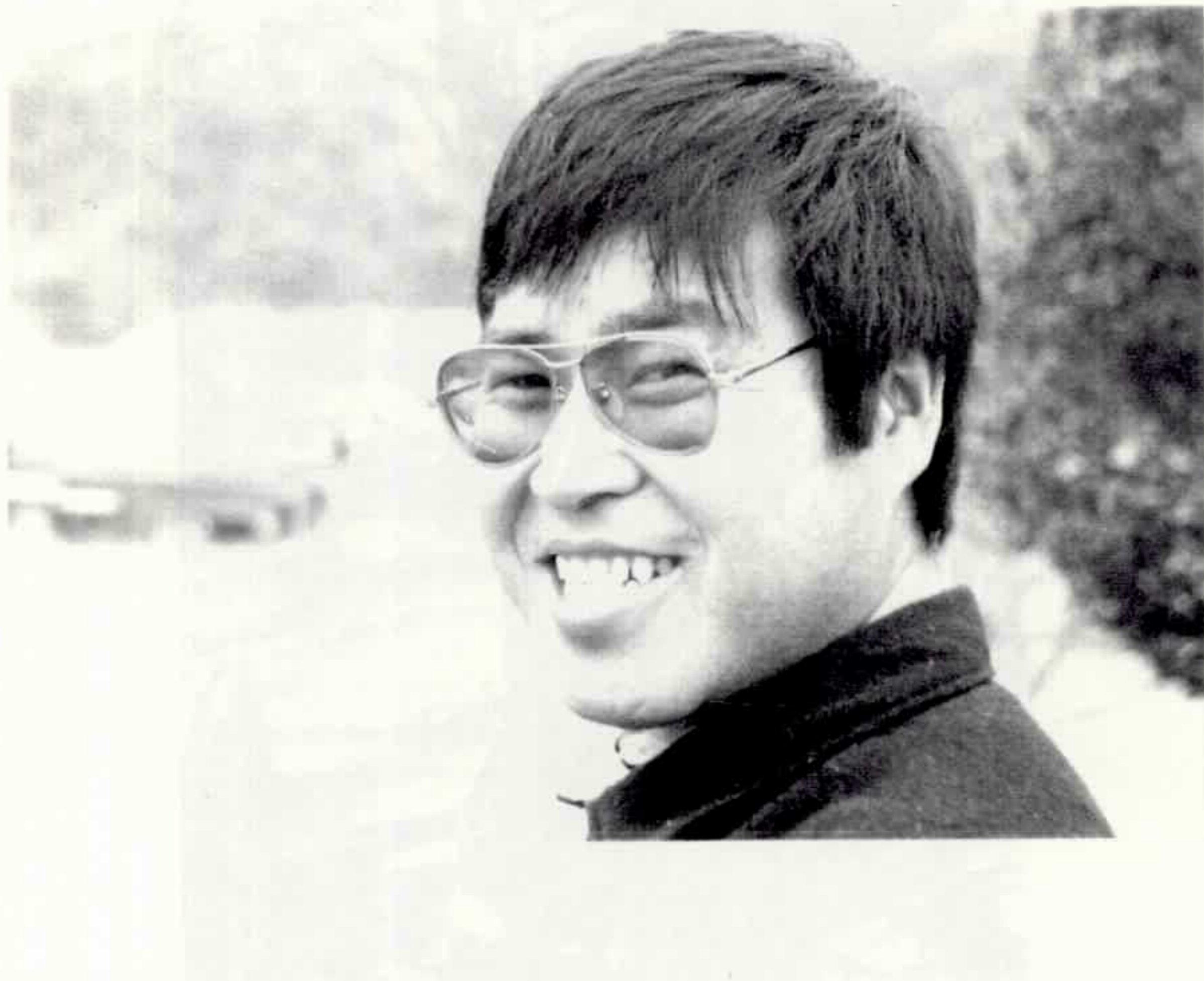
Tatefuji Kazuko at
Mitsui Ita



Tatefuji and two neighbours
at Mitsui Ita



Idegawa Hanako at Kurate, October 1987



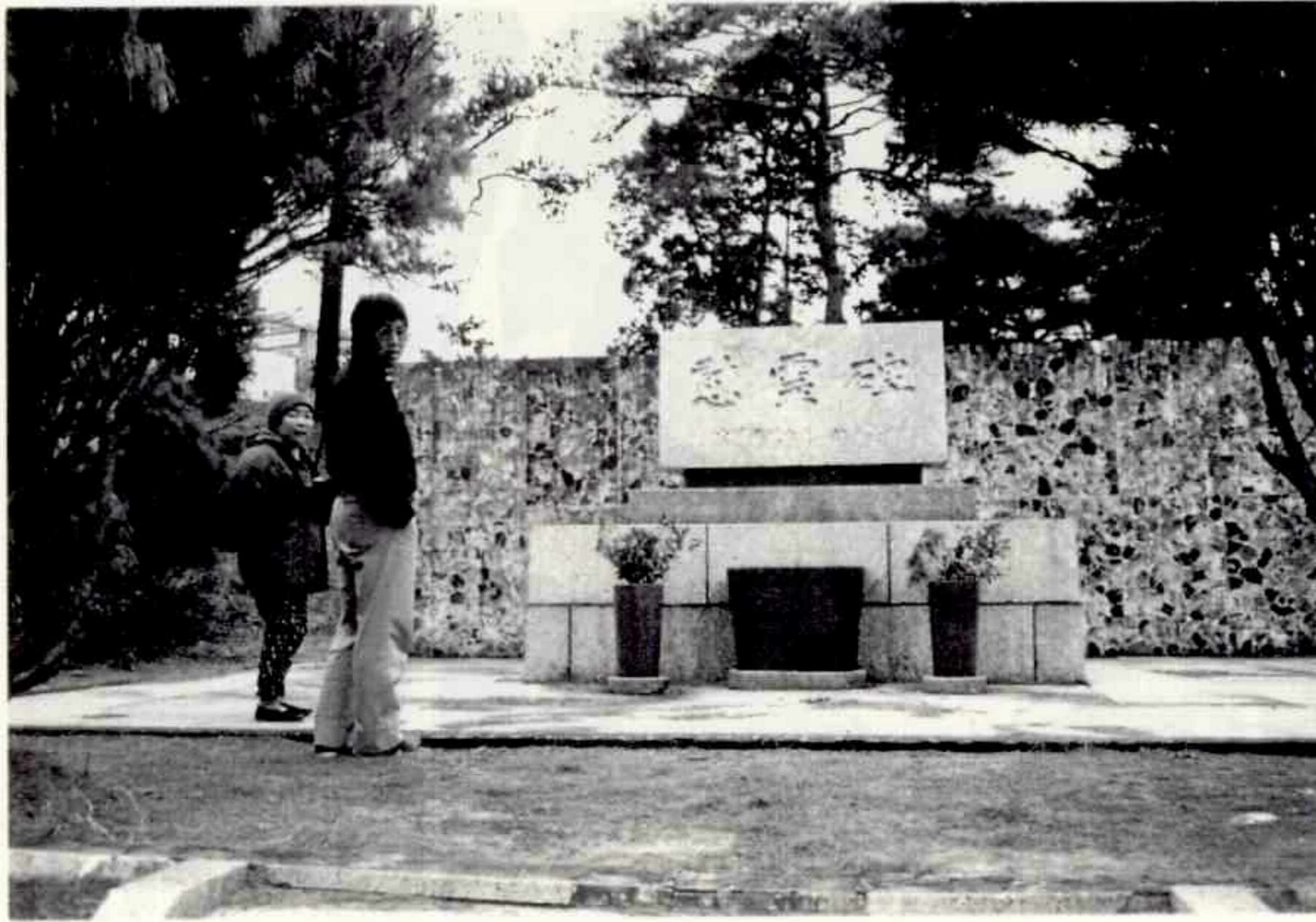
Onishi, the *Kami Shibai* Man



Takazaki, the author of numerous reports - Kurate, 1988



Ishizaki at the tombstones of Korean miners killed attempting to escape from Ueda's mine



Ishizaki and Onishi at the Yamano Accident Memorial - Yamano Mine



The Yamano Widows' *tanju* - Yamano, 1988



PART II

The television crews arrive for the *bon odori* to film the *gaijin* in action

as they are involved in the night's activities



Even my (*gaijin*) girlfriend is publicly swept up in the event

PART III
CONFLICT AND LITIGATION
Outsiders involved in changing the system

Chapter 9

THE CHIKUHO REVIVALISTS

Recently the "City Building" (*machizukuri*) Movement, a movement which seeks to distance itself from Chikuho's past "negative" experience, has become dominant within Chikuho politics. Many of the past violent confrontations between miners and company officials, police and *yakuza* have been forgotten, unions are remembered as "socially disruptive forces," and the legendary warmth of the coal communities is forgotten as local governments attempt to throw off the stigma of the coal years. This is to facilitate new economic and social plans which are sanctioned by both the prefectural and national governments. The intention of those who thus rewrite Chikuho history is to soothe the fears of would-be investors in the region.

Analyses of the coal companies' roles in the development of Chikuho's economy have been well documented, especially in academic journals and local histories. However the companies' withdrawal of economic support from the region and the reasons for the subsequent economic and social decline of the area have, for the most part been neglected. And while numerous studies have emphasised the economic role of the companies, studies which deal with the people who worked for the companies are rare.

Although it is reasonable to say that the majority of young people in the area are aware of the region's coal background, few have experienced the coal industry at first hand. These young people are becoming more and more dependent on the education system to teach them about the past. To a large extent this is because the tradition of oral folk history which is passed on by senior members of the family to younger members is being eroded as society moves away from the extended family, once common in Chikuho, to the nuclear family geared to the electronic media. Television, video, and computer games have had a widely felt and powerful influence on the population. Discussion within the family is becoming less common, as the difference between generations is made more formal, something reinforced by the mass media.¹

¹see Otoma, 1986: 55

Young people are targeted by aggressive television companies which aim a large percentage of their early evening and early morning programs at them. Rather than relying on the written media, there is a strong tendency for young people to get any news information from the television. Reading is, understandably, often perceived of as "study," and the distinction between study and play is well understood in a society which places overwhelming educational demands on its youth. As a result, reading for relaxation is often confined to reading comics, generally escapist in content, although sometimes the young people I associated with were known to actually read "educational comics."

The so-called "generation gap" has become an abyss with the invasion of the electronic media. Rather than calling it a "generation gap" it is probably fairer to call this quite tangible separation of values an "information gap." The older generation, although self-confessed television addicts and themselves as susceptible to suggestion as the younger people, still read newspapers and books. This is not the case with many young people, especially those who do not go on to tertiary education. Consequently young people in particular are exposed to only three consistent sources of information concerning contemporary and past events - television, comics and school.

For all its working class background, people living in Chikuho towns and cities have embraced the values of middle class consumer society with as much vigour as people living in more cosmopolitan regions. Therefore, with education, as with many aspects of society, the system promotes those standards which are deemed to be necessary to produce "good" citizens - that is, middle class standards. Although the Chikuho students are not particularly scholarly on the average, the value of education is constantly reinforced to students. Without entering into a discussion on the relative merits of the Japanese system, it can be said that the onus is placed on individuals within the education system to learn "facts," so that these facts can be regurgitated at will in exams. Interpretation of information is not necessary to pass examinations in the humanities. Also, by stressing the importance of other subjects at the expense of local history - an understanding of local history is not going to improve a student's chances of passing university entrance exams - educators have been

quite successful in diverting attention away from the region's past and focusing attention on the future, "preparing" these people to become the administrators of the 21st century. Those controlling the Japanese education system therefore can choose what sort of material to present to the youth as "history." History has become a commodity in the hands of a cynical and conservative government.

Because there are few sources which would refute official versions of history, or even modify accounts, the monopoly of information control would seem to be complete, and it could be assumed that mass perceptions of history have been, or will be standardised. Those who could criticise official versions of Chikuho history are gradually dying off, and with them will go the last oral histories of the region, seen from the bottom up, as it were. Yet underneath this all encompassing view of history is an underlying chord of discontent. Although it is only just starting to be articulated, the rumblings of disquiet are being felt throughout Chikuho, as gradually more people come forward to give their versions of their own history.

In recent years there have been a number of attempts by local people to develop an alternative history to the so-called "official" history of the Chikuho region. These efforts have been diverse in scope and content, but have had the common thread that they, like the local governments, are attempting to disperse the dark image of Chikuho. However the aims of the groups could not be more different. The government appears to be trying to mould the views of young people to conform with their plan to "attack the future." In doing this it seems to think that the dark events of the past must be forgotten.

On the other hand, opposition to this approach to understanding history starts from the basic position that the official coal histories are inaccurate and serve only to protect the interests and reputations of capitalist coalmine owners and government officials. Although they have no formal association with any political party, the individuals involved share the common belief that the ruling LDP is corrupt and that the Emperor system of government, which is based on the assumption that Japanese society is ordered by divine decree, is flawed. They have attempted in their own ways to develop a folk history, or series of folk histories, with the intention of creating a counter-culture within the region.

To some extent these efforts have not been in vain, although they are complicated by a population diverse in both class and culture.

In recent years one woman has had a powerful influence on the actions of this group. Idegawa Hanako, an employee of the Kurate town museum, and an author of a book on women coalminers, and many papers published in different journals and newsletters, has been vocal in her criticisms of how the area is perceived. To a large extent though, she owes a professional debt to the writing of Ueno Eishin, a Kyoto University Professor who worked as a coalminer in the region and published a series of books and photographic collections of Chikuho coalminers. Ueno, an avowed Marxist, came to the area in the 1960s, before it was fashionable amongst leftist scholars to do so, and stayed on to write about his understanding of the coal industry until his death in 1988. Idegawa, who became his close friend, has adopted by proxy the mantle of responsibility for carrying on his work, although she has a very different political orientation, steering clear of Marxist academic rhetoric, while maintaining the integrity of Eishin's philosophy.

Idegawa is only one of a number of people involved in reconstructing the history of Chikuho from a humanist perspective. Other people, from teachers at local schools to an outspoken, often radical group led by a former Red Army operative, have also played roles in attempting to change the perception of Chikuho people about their own history. I will look at the actions of some of these individuals and organisations in later chapters.

The traditional view

The official history of Chikuho is that allowed by the coal companies. Local politicians have been instrumental in publishing official city and town histories under the auspices of the companies, thanks in large part to the influence of ex-company men in high government positions. Japanese cities and towns traditionally have written local histories which are published by the relevant prefectural governments. These histories have been selective about what information is disseminated on controversial and potentially politically damaging

topics, such as the misallocation of company funds, political corruption, poverty, crime, unemployment, and social upheavals. Although in Tagawa's case some of these items are touched upon within the history, most are either neglected, or hidden within the statistical sections. As the purpose of these histories is to provide a record of the relevant city's and town's development from feudal times, it is not surprising that local governments would prefer the authors to concentrate on the more romantic and positive aspects of their histories, such as local archaeological finds and the rapid transition cities have made into the twentieth century because of the efforts of local industries. While there is certainly more than an element of truth in these histories, they are very selective in which information is used.

In none of the histories which are relevant to my account have I found any indication that there have been social and economic problems of the magnitude which my informants have described, although the *Tagawa Shishi* does have references to labour strikes in the region. There is a large section on the problems that followed the withdrawal of the coal industry from Tagawa in this series, but the relationship between the coal industry and, for example, unemployment is ignored. Comprehensive sections of the history describe in detail the measures introduced by the local and prefectural governments to counter the wide range of social problems that erupted in the wake of the industry's demise, but these sections are primarily concerned with statistics, describing, for example, how much money was paid by which government to which fund. Conspicuously there are no references to company involvement in the reconstruction of the areas - mainly because there was none. For entirely different reasons, there are also no specific references to the nature of the work, particularly to accident statistics and incidences of violence, *yakuza* involvement, and labour confrontations.

The argument presented by city officials to support the integrity of such official histories is that they are only concerned with concrete "facts," specifically facts which are recorded by government sources at the time of the event. Opinions and interpretations are seen as being potentially misleading to the reader, because they represent only what individual authors perceive as the

truth. Therefore in the case of the series of labour strikes which rocked the industry in the 1960s, official histories are restricted to presenting the statistics of how many production days were lost, how many men were in which union, when the strike was settled, and the material extent of any damage to company property by the strikers.² Company and police violence, methods employed in breaking a strike, the reasons for a strike, and the number of strikers injured or sacked are irrelevant to the accounts in these publications.

Perhaps the most important neglected data concerns the people themselves. Official local histories are concerned with government initiatives, industry planning and economic statistics in the period since records have been kept, and not with any ideological standpoint, as city and town officials explained to me on numerous occasions. In other words, although the histories purport to disclaim individual bias, and concentrate on the macro perspective of the towns without the need for "personalised, and therefore subjective accounts,"³ by disregarding the opinions of the people who have lived and worked in the area their entire lives, they have effectively nullified the value of their efforts.

It is to fill these gaps that what I will henceforth refer to as the Chikuho revivalists came into being. This is an artificial construct which I have employed to encompass a wide range of alternative approaches to "official" versions of Chikuho history and contemporary society. There is no association in Chikuho which goes by this name. This group has come into being in my imagination because of the efforts of Idegawa and Onishi, the *kami shibai* man, who have acted as "go-betweens," bringing together, physically as well as in context, people who otherwise would often never have met, but who are nevertheless bound by a tie of history. Within the alternative paradigms which are gradually emerging are the perceptions of people like Sato, the ex-*yakuza* assassin who is now the head man of the village in which Onishi lives, who has taken it upon himself to make the prefectural and national governments pay up for the damage they have done to the area. Onishi, with his seemingly endless range of stories

²see *Tagawa Shishi*, 1979: 450-520

³Fujimori, interview: 1988

about the coalmines, and his myriad contacts throughout the area's still numerous *tanjū*, has a permanent, if gradually diminishing audience for his interpretations of Chikuho coal history. Teachers, priests, and even a couple of journalists are keeping the alternative view of history alive amongst the younger Chikuho people.

Of all the people I have grouped together under this "umbrella" of the Chikuho revivalists, only Idegawa and Ishizaki are today consciously involved in passing on their textual interpretations of local history to the people of Chikuho. Other people are the forces behind the reconstruction of local history - the people who actually experienced it, and who have come forward to express their parts in it. They are integral to the text, involved in the text, but removed from the process of textual construction. Their activities in attempting to change the perception of the area and its history have become part of a new wave of energy directed at a new generation of people. To a degree they are history themselves, and it is their history which is represented in the museums.

The coal museums

Within the Chikuho region are a number of coal museums established in cities which have had close associations with the coal industry. With the exception of the Kurate museum these have been funded by the coal companies. In Tagawa, Mitsui sponsored the building and staffing of a very impressive edifice dedicated to the industry. In Nogata, Mitsubishi built and staffed a coal museum on the site of the old number four mine. In Iizuka, Sumitomo has erected a coal museum also staffed by retired mine managers and senior managerial staff. Only in Kurate has the town council had any influence in appointing people to work in the museum, and it is quite noticeable that the Kurate museum operates on a smaller and less conspicuous scale than the big company sponsored institutions. Ms Idegawa is the curator of the museum, and thanks to her efforts it has become an example of an alternative perspective of the influence of the coal industry.

The Tagawa museum

The Tagawa museum stands out as a means of purveying company propaganda. It is a four storey red brick building erected on the site of one of the company's mines, settled within expansive grounds dotted with statues of the heroic miners at work. There is more than half a square kilometre of paved brick work, a park, and a ground where local sports days, carnivals and festivals are held. The old elevator towers loom above the buildings, repainted, shining examples of the efficiency of Mitsui's business. Coal trams and other machinery have been restored to pristine condition within an enclosure at the western end of the reserve. The scale of the museum, the grounds and the machinery are all designed to impress the casual observer of the power that the company was able to exert - the sheer size of the exhibits both inside and outside the museum is overwhelming.

In stark contrast are the *tanjū* which border the museum. Mean, decrepit mud adobe and wooden huts, their sagging roofs and precariously leaning walls supported by liberal quantities of corrugated iron, extend up the hill to where the new, characterless concrete five storey apartments are gradually creeping down the hill, absorbing the old company housing. The road to the *tanjū* is not accessible to outsiders who have come to visit the museum, as a sign prominently declares that it is "private property" and that visitors should keep out. In stark contrast with the people who visit, and work in the museum dressed in smart suits and clothes are the inhabitants of the *tanjū*, dressed in clothes that look like they have been picked up in a rummage sale. Men dressed in long underwear and *zori* (straw sandals) with *haramaki* (ribbed woollen bands wrapped tightly around their waists) mingle with women, some in heavy dark coloured kimono, some in quilted *happi* (coats with overlapping front flaps, like karate jackets) and long grey trousers.

The museum has a series of second and third floor conference rooms, an archive devoted to coal literature situated on the fourth floor which is not accessible to the public, and on the ground floor, a series of exhibits which are the Mitsui mining centrepiece. The exhibits are worthy of comment. When one

enters the main foyer, immediately ahead is a huge tile mural which depicts the heroism of the miners as they struggle to carry coal from the mines in the pre-mechanised days of the industry. Further sections show the wheels of progress as the miners move from the "dark ages" of horses and carts and manual labour to the "modern age" of Mitsui, new shining digging machinery replacing the shovels and pick axes, electric trams and elevators replacing the horses and carts, and sophisticated breathing apparatus and gas detection devices replacing the cloth masks, candles and canaries. But most noticeable of all is the difference in clothing and the light which permeates the mineshaft, thanks to the introduction of electricity into the mines. The miners, once forced to labour naked beneath the earth, are depicted as healthy, smiling men, clothed in company overalls, their faces glowing with pride.

After paying the 500 yen admission charge, one moves into a spacious hall where memorabilia, machinery, work clothes, gas masks and a huge three dimensional relief map of the town and the underground network of tunnels are displayed. The map shows in awesome detail the extent of the underground diggings, giving the observer the uneasy feeling that should an earthquake strike there would not be very much left of Tagawa at all. There are many paintings around the hall, most showing the miners at work, and aerial photographs which graphically illustrate the extent of the mining work over the postwar period. As one moves from exhibit to exhibit, regarding the numerous machines and equipment, it is quite striking that although for the most part the uniforms and equipment on display are concerned with rescue work, there is no mention of this equipment being employed. There are plaques describing how the advancement of science allowed the company to be prepared for disasters and explosions within the mines, and how new medical technology was able to cope with on the spot resuscitation of workers burned or injured in gas leaks, yet there is no mention of any of this technology being used.

Right in the centre of the hall is the highlight of the exhibit. This is a full sized reconstruction of one of the company *tanjū*, complete with life sized, motorised Disney-like characters. Within this spotless *tatami* covered house sit three figures: a husband, relaxing in a suit, his wife, dressed in a beautifully

made ceremonial kimono, and a cloth salesman, complete with a bolt of cloth which presumably is to be made into kimono for the wife. The husband and the salesman are drinking tea which the wife pours into their cups, as they discuss the sale. All three characters are smiling. The people living in the *tanjū* next to the museum found this exhibit the most amusing of all. As one man said to me:

Do they really think we are that stupid that we forget how things were? Who in their right mind would wear a suit in their own house, unless someone had died? That's probably what it was, you know. The wife of the man had just lost a brother in another mining accident and the salesman was selling her some material to make a decent kimono to wear to the funeral. That would explain why they were wearing their best clothes. No-one had more than one suit, of course, and you'd need a really good reason to wear one, that's for sure.

And the state of the house. I have never seen such a perfectly clean *tanjū* in my life. Where are the cockroaches? the mice? the ferrets?! Didn't this mining family have any shoes? There are none of the *jikatabi* which we always left in the entrance hall. It's a joke.⁴

The majority of visitors to the museum are school and community groups, mainly from outside the area, who come as part of a field trip to the mining regions. Guides, and sometimes the director, take groups of more than half a dozen people around the museum, commenting on the nature of the industry, and explaining the exhibits. The standard commentary used by the guides describes the advances in technology which Mitsui introduced to their mines, and the regrettable but inevitable closure of the region's coalmines in the face of cheap foreign, high quality imports. They compare working conditions within the mines before and after Mitsui became involved in high technology coal production, emphasising the dangerous mining conditions in the prewar period. I assume this is to highlight the fact that the introduction of high technology from overseas was successful in preventing many of the earlier disasters which affected the

⁴Iwai, interview: 1988

industry. The increased production figures per worker are also used to illustrate the efficiency of the system Mitsui employed.

Although the Tagawa museum has an extensive archival section, this is not available to the public as a reference source. On two separate occasions, I approached the curator to ask to be admitted to the archives and was refused on the grounds that only company and government officials were allowed access. It should be said that this reluctance to divulge information about the economic state of the company is not restricted to Mitsui. Mitsubishi, Ueda, Furukawa, Aso, Kajima, and Sumitomo all had similar policies concerning company records. Figures from the prewar period have also been classified as restricted information.

The Nogata museum

The Nogata museum, although lacking the obvious funding that the Tagawa museum has, follows a similar pattern. Free pamphlets extol the virtues of Mitsubishi, and the profound effect the company had on local commerce. Within the museum are some dramatic colour photos showing methane gas explosions, balls of fire ten metres in diameter spewing hundreds of metres out of the mine entrance, miners running for their lives amidst the billowing black smoke. The caption describes this phenomenon simply as "gas explosion." The usual relief map of the company's operations stands inside the door, and the exhibits are similar to those of the Tagawa museum, although the scale is somewhat smaller. Gas masks, safety equipment, photos and paintings of the miners at work, pieces of machinery, and mining tools line the walls, and between these exhibits are letters of appreciation from local government and business for the generosity of the company in financing certain projects and helping the local economy. Given the much smaller scale, and the comparatively smaller budget, there is no Disney show of electric moving characters.

The curator of this museum was a little more willing to let visitors have access to the archives, but he stipulated that "because the books are so old" they not be allowed to either borrow or copy them. And because it was working

hours, he said he was sorry but he couldn't really let visitors sit down and read them in the office because of the "rules." Different response, same result as the Tagawa museum. In fact after visits to another half dozen coal museums in the area, I became convinced that with the exception of Idegawa's Kurate institution, museums would use either of the above responses to refuse me permission to look at the archives, notwithstanding letters of reference from academic institutions. As a non-Japanese, access may have been denied me on the basis that I was an "outsider," and the possibility that Japanese may be allowed to peruse the old records exists, although two university colleagues I know were also refused entry into the archives in the above museums.

The Kurate museum

The Kurate museum, officially designated the Kurate Town Coal Industry Records Museum, is run by three people - Idegawa, Koda, a 25 year old university graduate from Fukuoka, and a secretary. Although smaller than the Nogata museum, because it is sponsored by the town council as part of the "culturation" of Kurate scheme, it enjoys relative autonomy from company pressure as to what it can display.

The museum constantly changes its exhibits to coincide with national holidays, seasons, and anniversaries of coal industry related events. It displays what Idegawa considers items which reflect the culture of Chikuho: children's essays and books from the war years, describing in detail the loss of parents to the enemy, or to the mines; photographs of coalminers returning from work in the twilight; old hand digging tools which the miners in the "badger holes" used to use, complete with commentaries about the high percentage of *burakumin* who were forced to work in these mines. It has a number of documents which the Ministry of Propaganda (MOP) released about the bombings which decimated Kita Kyushu, exhorting the people to stand firm in the face of temporary adversity. Pictures of children in school uniforms being marched out of schools to volunteer for front line duty are mixed with violently conflicting reports of damage sustained at the end of the war in the region. Casualty figures the MOP

released to the press, dramatically low after major bombing raids on the industrial centres, are contrasted with local government estimates which are often 20 and 30 times greater.

Some of Ueno's books, and his photographs of miners are also exhibited, the dark heavy monochrome prints conveying the Dickensian gloom which permeated the coalmines. Faces and bodies blackened from the coal dust, men and women miners' images are captured as they emerge naked except for loin cloths, from their "badger holes." The miners outside their homes with their wives and children, are caught by the camera as they relax in their *haramaki* and long underwear, dogs running up the narrow roads between the houses kicking up small clouds of dust as they play with the children. Photographs of men sitting in the communal baths at the end of a shift, smiling and drinking *sake*, their eyes gleaming out of blackened faces are mounted next to photographs of ex-coalminers and their families standing nervously, dressed in their best clothes in front of their banana trees and timber shacks in the jungles of Colombia, where they had emigrated as part of the Japanese government's Coalminers Repatriation Scheme in the 1960s. It is these images that Idegawa says best represent the culture of the coalmines, not the rapid introduction of high technology scientific production techniques, nor economic statistics which illustrate the efficiency, or lack thereof, of the industry. It is the people who lived in the primitive mining housing, and who worked in the holes in the earth, who are important, who are the history of coal, she says.

Access to the library in the museum is virtually unrestricted. In fact local people went so far as to bring documents for me to use which had not been listed in the archive's filing system. Coalminers' personal diaries, notes from meetings with coal company executives when the mines were closed down, union notes, production statistics, accident statistics, and information about the system of welfare introduced following the closure of the mines were all supplied to me by local residents at Idegawa's request.

The difference between this museum and the other Chikuho museums is striking. The Kurate museum stands alone as a record of human actions during the coal industry's prominence in the region. This is due in no small part to the

influence Idegawa has been able to exert on the town council to allow her to display local culture. It is also due in part to the declining interest Mitsubishi has shown in the town, and to the fact that they were not interested in helping to fund the museum.

At this point I shall briefly describe Idegawa, her life, and the work she undertakes in both her role as museum curator and author.

Idegawa Hanako

Idegawa was born in Kokura, Kita Kyushu in 1932, the only daughter of a post office worker. When she was 12 her parents moved to Kurate-machi after their home was destroyed in Allied bombing raids, where they stayed for a period of about six months. At that time Kurate was both a coal town and an agricultural centre.

My father's family came from Kurate - they were farmers. He had been brought up here, so he knew everyone in town, but I knew no-one when we first came here. I looked for children I could be friends with. The school was overcrowded - there would have been more than 60 children in one class - and of these about half were from coalmining families, and half from farmers' families. The children from the coalmining families were open and friendly with me because they were used to moving from place to place and seeing lots of new faces, but the farmers' children were quite cold towards me. They were always so controlled and stuck with their own groups.

Of course I wanted to play with the coalmining children, so I often used to go to the *tanjū* to play after school. The Koyama *Tanjū* in those days was a very primitive place compared to the village where I was staying, and I was shocked by the terrible conditions the people lived in. When my parents found out that I was going to play with the coalmining children they were angry and said that I must not go to that dirty and dangerous place. They were very aware of the difference between "normal people" (*ippanjin*) and coalminers (*tankōfu*). I was told to stay within the confines of the village, and to play with "my own kind," not with the "strange" coalminers' children.

It was at this time that I realised that there was something strange going on. Why did my parents discriminate against the coalminers? They didn't seem any better or worse than everyone else, after all. I soon realised that it was not just my parents, but most of the people in the village community who felt this way about the miners. They had the same feelings of unease and otherness about Koreans and *burakumin*, who also lived in separate settlements.⁵

It was this period of her life that made the greatest impression on her, and strengthened her resolve to become involved in local work. Living in Kurate opened her eyes to poverty and discrimination.

After graduating from high school in 1946 she took work in the local post office, where she worked until she married in 1956. The man she married was working for the Coal Workers' Relief Organisation in Kurate at the time, so she moved back to the area she had always wanted to return to. She had two children and when they were at school became aware of the lack of education they were receiving about local history. When she realised that this lack of education was mainly because there had been little or no research done in the area, she decided to devote her time to understanding local coal related issues with the aim of rectifying the situation.

There were a number of problems at first, the biggest being that people were reluctant to talk about the difficult conditions in which they had lived, and continue to live in. Only after a long period was I accepted as someone who could be trusted.

In the late 1950s and early 1960s when the small mines began to shut down there was a lot of hardship and suffering in Kurate. Although some people were lucky enough to get jobs in Kansai, Tohoku, and Hokkaido, the majority remained here, unemployed. During this period of extreme poverty I decided to join the *Kuroi Hane* Movement. This was a women's movement dedicated to helping the poverty stricken miners and their families, by collecting money on the streets of the big cities. By the mid 1960s many of the miners at the small companies were depending on charity handouts just to eat, so I got caught up in the

⁵Idegawa, interview: 1987

movement. I guess that it was my involvement with the *Kuroi Hane* that allowed people to recognise that I was a serious person.⁶

Following the *Kuroi Hane* Movement's eventual demise, she became an active member of a number of other social reform organisations, including the first Kyushu branch of the Women's Democratic Group, and the *Kyōsei Renkō* (the Korean Forced Labourers' Association). She developed contacts within the populous *buraku* community in Kurate, and it was from these contacts that her interest in women coalminers became focused. In order to understand the circumstances in which these *burakumin* women worked she found it necessary to conduct research into coalmining in general. Because many women who worked the "badger holes" were from *burakumin* families she decided that she had to investigate the subject of *burakumin* discrimination, which in turn led to her participation in a number of conferences on the subject.

Collecting verbal histories of the women miners became her first priority in the early 1970s, and by 1975 she had an extensive collection of stories and interviews on tape. She decided to write a book about the women, and eventually, in 1984 her first book, *The Mothers who Gave Birth to Fire* was released to limited, but enthusiastic public acclaim. In 1972 she took a job in the clerical section of the local town office, a position she kept while she wrote the book and a series of papers which were published in a variety of journals. The fame that spread before her was instrumental in her obtaining employment in the coal museum.

These days she is busy with her museum duties and researching a second book, this time about *burakumin* and Korean coalminers and the life of miners in "badger holes." She also presents papers about her research to interested groups throughout the region, particularly to feminist organisations. She is involved in the anti-discrimination movement, the Korean Forced Labourers' Association, social welfare protests, and lobbying national and prefectural governments over their inaction in dealing with the land damages claims made

⁶Idegawa, interview: 1987

by many residents of the coal producing areas. She has a wide range of interests, and is constantly searching for new intellectual stimuli. Although not officially a member of a feminist organisation, she has pushed for women's rights to work for equal pay with men for many years, and along with some of the women whose stories she has recorded, is regarded as one of Chikuhō's most outspoken feminist critics.

Meeting Idegawa

The first time I met Idegawa was at the museum in Kurate. I had a reference from an academic who knew her slightly, and having no idea what to expect from this famous "radical" I arrived at the museum at the appointed time. I looked in the office window in the entrance hall and was beckoned inside by a man in his late twenties and a short, neat woman of middle age. As I was explaining who I was and that I had come to the museum to meet Idegawa, the woman disappeared and returned quickly with Japanese tea and biscuits. As she gave me the cup she bowed very low, and asked me to forgive her for not having coffee. She then poured the tea for the man and myself, and waited for us to drink before she introduced herself as Idegawa.

Standing about 150 cms, she is a slight, bespectacled, somewhat school-marmish woman. Her greying hair, conservative dress sense and the air of reserved modesty about her would seem more suitable, one would think for a department store assistant than for a museum curator and firebrand author of repute. She seems to really believe that she is "just an average housewife," as she told me on many occasions. Although she speaks in honorific Japanese (*keigo*) most of the time, the content of her speech is severely critical of many of the institutions that most Japanese seem to take for granted. She is slow to get started on a topic, and always waits to hear what others say before she states, with conviction, her opinions on a wide range of social issues. I have never heard her raise her voice, though I have seen her quietly fuming on a number of occasions (often over sexist remarks made by her male colleagues), but always maintaining an air of equanimity.

Her husband and daughter live with her in a house which lies next to the old Kurate coal railway. Because of underground mining damage the foundations have sustained, the house tilts at a crazy angle and looks like it will collapse in the slightest gust of wind. However she says that they do not want to move from the place because it is standing proof of the inaction of government in dealing with environmental damage claims, on the one hand, and a vivid reminder of the coalminers' culture, on the other. Amongst others, they have groups of students who are interested in welfare issues stay with them over the summer holidays so that they can experience for themselves the way people in the coal fields used to live. The rooms where the young people sleep are on the second floor, where the *tatami* forms a pyramid right in the centre of the house, the result of an earth tremor which shook the house in 1980. Idegawa says that the guests look like kindling on a fire, packed in the small rooms, their heads raised half a metre above their feet thanks to the 25 degree slope, fanning out from the peak in the centre of the floor, their bright coloured futon the colour of the flames.

The entire family works in some welfare related field. Her husband has been the director of the *shitaijigyōdan*, the city and government sponsored "Special Coal Re-employment Scheme," which is due to be closed down after 30 years in 1991, for more than 25 years. Her son is a welfare worker at Kawasaki-machi, and her daughter a librarian and record keeper at the Miyada town welfare office. Because of their vast number of contacts the house is always full of guests, some over to discuss specific issues, some over just to visit. At night, always the noise of many people talking at once can be heard from the street outside their house. Folk guitarists and singers blast out coalminers' songs into the early hours of most nights, their enthusiasm stimulated by the copious *sake* and *shōchū* they consume.

It is this camaraderie and warmth which she wants the young people to remember about Chikuho, not just the soiled, violent image generated by the publicity about the labour strikes in the 1960s. She says that coalmining in Chikuho is culture, and culture in Chikuho is coalmining, and that young people in the area are the products of that culture. They should be aware of their

roots, and not be forced to identify with only the big city culture which they see on television and videos, hear on the radio, and read in comics. They should also have pride in their origins, and their own special culture, and not feel inadequate when comparing themselves to the big city people. Perhaps the strongest motivation for her research is that the people she wants to interview are slowly dying off. The youngest of the women who worked in the mines are in their 60s these days, and she feels that it is urgent that she record these women's stories while they are still alive, while they are still able to remember their experiences. With the passing of these people goes a chapter of the history of the region.

She is afraid that the very fabric of Chikuho is being changed at such a pace that the past will soon be only what is left in the official history books, the people who lived and worked here forgotten in the reckless charge towards the utopia of the 21st century megalopolis, the stated goal of the prefectural government. It is because of this fear that she wants to disseminate an alternative view to the "dark image of Chikuho" to the young people, because they are the future. She hopes that they will learn from her own generation's mistakes, though she despairs of this ever coming to pass. In particular she wishes to convey the effects of the monopoly of an industry, and the power that the industry has to ruthlessly control the lives of their employees. Yet she sees the same processes that led to the dissolution of the coal industry in Chikuho occurring in other areas - the decline of Omuta City as Mitsui extracts its last coal from the mines, and the wastelands of the North Kyushu shipyards, forced to close down in the wake of the high yen and cheap Korean technology.

In this sense Idegawa is not only concerned with history for its own sake, but also for the practical lessons it teaches us in the present. To this end she has become involved in numerous movements, inevitably concerned with the problems of the present. She maintains that the present is dependent on the past, and therefore the truth of what went before us has to be understood if we are to positively change the present. By first recognising that there have been many complex, and rarely confessed, negative problems in society, one can take reasonable steps to deal with the problems these issues have created. If one

adopts the government approach of censorship of the past, one loses the identity of one's culture, and sacrifices the wisdom which comes from learning from history, she says. When asked about her permanently amicable and polite manner she said,

I think that we can only convince people of the worth of our cause by being rational. Would you listen to a crazy person, who shouts at you, telling you what you're meant to think about things? There are many causes worth spending time on, I think, and you have to be totally committed to these causes if you decide to become involved. But you must approach it in a reasonable and rational manner. Screaming at people does not help.⁷

This calm approach to such emotive issues is very rare amongst the radical critics of official history, who typically protest in a strident manner. The radical left and right fringes are good examples of this. They drive around towns and cities in military style vehicles, loudly proclaiming their points of view through loudspeakers mounted on the roofs of their trucks. These loud messages are inevitably emotive in content, whether they be demanding the return of Sakhalin Island from the Russians, as the ultra-nationalists do, or whether they are exhorting the public to remove the LDP from office, and throw the Americans out of Japan, as do the JCP. The high profile Buraku Liberation Organisation (BKD), publicly and loudly denounce individuals they believe are guilty of discrimination against them. They rely on inducing fear within the public, so that the process of discrimination is in some ways slowed by the process of intimidation. When a person has been found to have committed some offence against any member of the BKD, crowds of up to a hundred people gather outside the guilty party's home and chant slogans condemning the person, and then demand a public apology.

The examples of high profile protests in Japan are many, and almost without exception, ineffective in changing anything. The Narita Airport protest,

⁷Idegawa, interview: 1988

dragged out over more than ten years of bitter fighting by farmers, supported by radical student groups, has yet to see any material result, apart from delaying construction work temporarily. Anti-nuclear protests, vociferous, and widely supported, are ignored by the government which is determined to go ahead with the "nuclearisation" of Japan at any cost. The annual May Day labour marches, are further examples of loud public demonstrations, which are dutifully conducted every year despite the fact that wage levels are decided by company and company union officials before the marches. Public, emotive demonstrations appear to fulfil a ritually cathartic role for disgruntled Japanese, and the government welcomes the opportunity to allow people to "let off steam" and direct it in ways that are not damaging to the fabric of society.

Idegawa, and some of the other people involved in the Chikuho revivalists are opposed to the public outcry syndrome, and believe that the most effective protest is to subvert contemporary views of history, subtly affecting the educational, and then the social infrastructure. Idegawa attempts to correct perceptions about Chikuho through the use of her contacts, and through the power of the written word, though these days this power is being rapidly undermined by the pervasive visual and electronic media. To bring her message home to the youth, she and her colleagues struggle to gain access to radio and television. However there are a number of obstacles which prevent them accessing this essentially conservative media. Their lack of political affiliations, their lack of cohesion as a group, the un-"newsworthiness" of their cause, their inexperience with media technicalities, and the apparently parochial nature of their subject matter are some examples of the problems they face. Such handicaps are shared with other groups outside the mainstream of Japanese official ideology.

Notwithstanding the limited audience for her views, Idegawa is still able to deliver a potent message about the nature of Chikuho society, albeit "preaching to the converted" in many instances. As more older people become aware of the problems in the region, and the debt that the coal industry owes them, particularly in relation to the abuse of farmers' land and human resources, there is a groundswell movement developing which is critical of the coal

companies' actions. Idegawa and the other activists in the Chikuho revivalists fulfil a need for information which supports this position.

Her attitude can best be summed up by the following excerpt from the first interview I had with her in December 1987,

The Japanese government these days is so wealthy, and it keeps getting wealthier, but little of this wealth is distributed to the needy people in our society. According to the government the coalfields have already made an economic recovery. In fact the term "coalfields" is no longer used when referring to Chikuho, officially. In 20 or 30 years, the concept of there having been coalfields here will be lost. There is no need for any government money to be invested in this area any more - that time has passed. We have recovered economically, you see, and money invested in the area would seem strange.

This is *tatema*. But in actual fact, as you have seen for yourself, there are still many instances of damage, both physical and psychological left from the coal industry. But I think that no matter how long we wait, those responsible for the damage to the area will be able to comfortably avoid having to pay any form of compensation to the people of the region. Rather than accepting responsibility for Chikuho, the government has chosen to refuse to acknowledge that there is a problem here. This means that they are able to stop relief payments to the needy. Cut the payments, cut the payments - that's all we hear when they discuss what to do with Chikuho.

But you see, the money which has been coming into the region is insurance money - insurance money that the government has at its disposal to be used for relief work - but even though the country is as wealthy as it is now, they have decided that there are priorities more important than people. With the money that some of the insurance companies have in trust on behalf of the coal companies we could build a number of schools, rebuild a number of houses and buildings, establish community halls. Nothing is forthcoming.

What about the coal companies, you ask? They were not seen to be liable for any of the damage they caused to the land, the buildings, or the people. They had insurance companies which handled these things, so they have been able to escape by paying less than 30% of the required compensation for the region's land damage. The bottom line is that as far as Tokyo is concerned the "Chikuho problem" is solved. Look at welfare, unemployment,

poverty, drug abuse, alcoholism, violence, and crime in Chikuho. The problem is not solved. And the country owes Chikuho something for the service we performed for so many years, supplying the national energy needs.⁸

Through her network of similarly minded people Idegawa has been able to spread her version of the events which constitute the human side of Chikuho history beyond Chikuho itself. She has intimate associations with many academics from Honshu and other Kyushu centres, who formerly knew and respected the work of Ueno. Over recent years, she has gradually used these contacts to instigate discussions, situated within alternative paradigms, about the nature of Chikuho and coalmining in general to the universities where these academics work. These discussions have prompted the regular visits by young students to her home. Within the Chikuho region she is well known and her contacts are numerous. Although there is no single paradigm within which all the protagonists of alternative understandings of Chikuho history can be placed, there does seem to be a sort of camaraderie between them. Because of her reputation within these circles as a woman of integrity and intelligence, she knows, and perhaps subtly influences the work of, many minority groups. In fact, almost all the informants I contacted in the first 12 months of fieldwork were contacts of Idegawa.

Other organisations and individuals who have similar views to Idegawa about the "real" history of Chikuho have had a profound influence on the course of Chikuho events over the years. These people, for the most part, have been outsiders, generally Marxist in orientation, who have heard about the suffering within the region and have come to give their expert assistance to the mining communities at different points in time. The influence of the Yamano Red Flag Organisation in the Yamano Widows' litigation against Mitsui following the disaster in 1965, and the influence of students who came to Chikuho from the Tokyo Students' Movement, in the Taisho case, are two prominent examples.

⁸Idegawa, interview: 1987

The Tokyo students' connection

The All-Japan Federation of Student Self-Governing Associations (*Zengakuren*) was formed in 1948, and aligned itself with the Japan Communist Party. It was a committed leftist organisation which opposed any curtailment of academic freedom, the strengthening of the powers of central government and the police, rearmament, and nuclear warfare.⁹ When the influence of the JCP began to wane in the mid 1950s the students' political autonomy brought about a number of ideological differences within their ranks. Some members, often radical anti-JCP (Red Army and New Left) factions, were keen to continue the violent revolution against central authority, while others chose more moderate means to protest against the government.

The US-Japan Security Treaty of 1960 sparked one of the most virulent protests in which the students participated. After this series of demonstrations, where thousands of students and equal numbers of riot police fought a running battle over many months, the factionalisation of the students became extreme. The fundamental aims of the movement remained fairly constant, regardless of the means by which different factions attempted to achieve them. Within the movement were Christian elements, radical Marxist elements, intellectual New Left factions, the Red Army factions - dedicated to terrorism - and a large number of esoteric groups.

The miners' action at Kyo no Ue was reported by Ueno to other university and college academics. In fact, Ueno's influence at Kyoto University, one of Japan's leading Imperial universities, resulted in a number of sympathetic Marxist lecturers discussing the mining communities and some of the problems they faced with their students. By the late 1950s, with the publication of the Energy Revolution policies and the Coal Rationalisation Bills, considerable numbers of students and academics were made aware of the nature of the Chikaho miners' hardships. It was at this time that the Caravan Movement, a Christian based student organisation which had its origins in the Tokyo

⁹Hunter, 1984: 214

University students' movement, first came into the area, on what was to be a regular series of visits. They distributed food and clothing which had been collected in Tokyo charity drives to the families of miners who had been retrenched under the terms of the TCRB. Some of these people stayed on in the area, using their skills to provide assistance to the communities which were hardest hit by the local recession. They built and staffed kindergartens, schools, soup kitchens, and community centres over a ten year period. Onishi, the *kami shibai* man, was one of these people.

Other students heard about the Chikuho "problem" after the Miike riots had started in 1960. The Miike "Old" union admits that many of their most militant organisers and protesters were from the Tokyo students' ranks. These students were often inclined to be militant, and were generally involved with the extreme left of the movement. Some of these students who joined the protests had become members of radical leftist factions, and had gone to China to undertake special weapons training. They became expert in building home-made explosives and mortars, and in operating a wide range of automatic and semi-automatic machine pistols. Their aim was to allow the miners to fight back against the system. Yano, the man who was to help organise the Yamano Widows' Movement legal action in the mid 1960s was one of these people.

A third type of student activist was also apparent within Chikuho during this period. Some members of the JCP, who were also members of the students' movement, were concerned at how few coalmining unions had been able to win concessions from companies, especially in regard to retrenchment and superannuation payments. The JCP faction of the union decided that the basic problem was that there were not enough knowledgeable union staff, on the one hand, and that the unions which dominated the industry were corrupt, on the other. They thought that the miners needed people who were able to explain to them what their rights were under the laws which had been introduced after the war. As a result, students were successfully able to penetrate the offices of some conservative unions, and work as clerks and office personnel, influencing decisions made by, and subsequently actions taken by the union. Kawano, the organiser of the Taisho union action was one of these people.

However, although there appears to be some consistency of policy here, it is important to realise that there was no single strategy employed by the Tokyo students. In fact, the students often seemed to just drift into Chikuho, their potential for employment in the cities negligible as a result of their student activities.¹⁰ Some moved back to Tokyo. Some adopted alternative lifestyles, moving into the mountains and isolating themselves along Western hippy lines. But the majority chose to stay within Chikuho society, contributing what they could to the society and becoming accepted.

The Chikuho connection

All of these people are Chikuho revivalists, this nebulous network of connections: these people are all acquainted with each other, although they do not see eye to eye on all issues. But the revivalists are not restricted to just these people. Others from inside the area are also members of this network. I have mentioned some of them: Idegawa, Sato and Ishizaki. Other people actively involved in issues which critically affect the day to day lives of people in Chikuho, such as the welfare problem, are also aware of the nature of the coal industry and Chikuho's past. Kumo, the head of the Welfare Workers' Union in Tagawa-gun certainly is aware of the esoteric background of the area - something he tries to communicate to the brash young caseworkers from outside the region. I was introduced to him by Idegawa.

Members of the *Kyōsei Renkō*, who are committed to seeing the government apologise for its decimation of their families' numbers during and after the war, have a powerful message to deliver to the community at large, and members of this organisation are also involved in the Chikuho revivalists network of formal and informal contacts. People from the *buraku* community, also deeply involved in the coal industry, have their own perspectives on the

¹⁰In the 1960s Japanese corporations adopted a policy of not employing ex-student radicals - in fact any person who had been member of the *Zengakuren* was seen to be unemployable. This policy was upheld by a District Court decision in the 1970s and is still used.

industry and their own, discriminated against role in the "badger holes." The *Kyōsei Renkō* and the *buraku* community groups are closing ranks these days as they present a more concerted and more committed front to both Chikuho and to the outside world.

Underlying these individual groups is the thought of Idegawa. She has the ability to bring together people who have forgotten their own passions and roles in the past, and to revitalise their interests in local history. She has in mind the reconstruction of Chikuho's history, and as I have described, the development of a new ethos for understanding the present Chikuho. Of the people she associates with, there are two distinct groups - those from within the region and those from without, as I have described above. However, apart from locality, there is a further distinction which separates these groups - that of involvement.

The people who moved to the area during the period of labour unrest and extreme poverty were activists. They were people who were dedicated to trying to ameliorate some of Chikuho's problems. Regardless of their political persuasion these people were involved in protest, rebuilding, political agitation or distributing charity to the needy. Their positions were clearly marked by their commitment to a course of action. At the time they may not have seen their actions as being part of history, but they have become that. Most of these activists have stayed on in the area, being absorbed into Chikuho society, and in doing so adopting the parochial viewpoints of many locals. This has resulted in many of these radicals losing their ability to see the political context in which the area is situated, and developing a form of isolationist myopia. These days they are not very active in any political sense - their enthusiasm seems to have been slowed by the natural processes of age and attrition.

Those from inside Chikuho on the other hand have maintained their commitment to the causes they believe in. Idegawa in particular has continued to be outspoken in attempting to generate enthusiasm for reconstructing the past. She has moved to shake people out of their apathy, and to make them realise that the world is still going on outside Chikuho. The slide into welfare dependence, and the indifference which she feels is being engendered by this, is having a more serious effect on the population than anything the government

could do. Only through revitalising an interest in the past, and through showing insiders, as much as outsiders, both the positive and the negative sides of human action and thought within Chikuho's history can people's anger, interest, passion, and then finally pride in the area be restored.

Other Chikuho people, from Sato the *yakuza* through to Kumo the welfare worker, have vested interests in revitalising an interest in the region's present, and it is not surprising that they also have an interest in understanding the nature of history. Historical precedent has to be grasped if they are to affect the present and the future, whether it be related to asking for financial assistance from the government for rebuilding dilapidated coal villages where the residents hope to keep the original communal plan of the *tanjū* intact, or whether it be accepting an otherwise unacceptable application for welfare on the grounds that an individual ex-miner deserves to get a break once in his life.

It can be said therefore, that the makers of history are reluctantly retelling their stories to people like Idegawa, who is collecting oral histories from a number of sources, and is publishing them for wider consumption. These versions of history are becoming more widely accepted within local society as people are ascribing value to their own lives. In particular the posthumous respect accorded to the writing of Ueno has had a profound influence over many local people. Teachers, children of miners, and priests, amongst others, are discussing openly the nature of some labour disputes, and are even discussing the sort of violence which was prevalent within the industry. Conferences and nostalgic tours of the old coalmine sites, normally for the benefit of ex-miners, are organised regularly by people like Ishizaki and Idegawa, and by groups like the *Kyōsei Renkō*. A groundswell movement is under way.

In the next chapter I will look at how one of the Tokyo students was able to affect the outcome of the Taisho labour conflict. Although this has to be seen in the context of the political economic climate in which it occurred, the influence of outsiders was a potent consideration.

Chapter 10

TAISHO AND THE STUDENT

An informant named Kawano, a former member of the Tokyo Students' Movement, who worked in the office of the Taisho Tanko union during the 1960s was forthcoming in expressing his views on the nature of labour related violence that took place in the mine. The student movement was active over a wide range of issues, but the common theme of these actions was the fight against capitalism. They viewed the miners as an especially oppressed group, not only because of the intrinsic nature of their work, but also because of the violence which had been traditionally associated with the mines in Chikuho. After the miners' actions were given widespread press coverage following the labour protests in the late 1950s and 60s, some of the students were motivated to come to Chikuho to support the workers by volunteering to work with the unions, often in the union offices. The students thought that with some organisational help the miners, who were being abused under the present system would be able to stand up to the power holders. They took upon themselves the role of the educated, concerned, altruistic Marxists, determined to win for the miners the rights they themselves could not win under the oppressive conditions of the legal system. Given the ignorance of labour dispute strategy within miners' ranks, often because of the isolation of the profession, it has been said that the students were the catalyst in bringing about concerted action against the mine owners.¹ However Kawano saw the situation differently. He saw the students' role as primarily a teaching and supportive one in the fight against the violent and unfair practices of a large number of mines in the region.

Background

In 1962 there was a major strike at Taisho Tanko. Taisho Tanko was a big coalmine, employing over 1800 miners in a number of pits, and was

¹See Ueno, 1985a: 118-126

owned by Nittan PL (The Japanese Coal Company). Not all the workers struck, but those who did seriously disrupted the company's operations. It was the first instance in the mining industry where workers occupied the premises in a sit-in. The strike was a response to the pressure to which management had subjected the workers over a long period, and according to Kawano, the sight of the Miike workers striking for a year in 1961 was great encouragement for the men to stand up for their democratic rights. In relation to daily violence, this was one of the more notorious large mines, mainly because of the mine owner's close association with the head of the local *yakuza* organisation. Consequently many of the labour overseers were employed from the ranks of local *yakuza*. This was not necessarily a bad thing, Kawano says, because generally they were men who were known to the miners, and as such were not considered "evil" by the men. It was because they were familiar to the miners that they were tolerated. This has to be seen within the context of the coalmining societies, and within the context of Chikuho itself.

Within Chikuho there is an awareness about some things which is quite different to other areas. For example, the *yakuza* are held with contempt by most people living in "normal" society; they're seen as being below contempt actually - the *yakuza*, *bōryokudan*, *uyoku* etc. However for many young people, when the area was being destroyed (the coalmines being closed down) the *yakuza* had an alluring image. To become a *yakuza* was to do the ideal work. The kids would say: "If I do well I'll become a fantastic *yakuza*, or a great and famous criminal." So young men learnt how to fight, extort and gamble rather than learn how to pass exams. Being a *yakuza* was about all they could look forward to, these coal kids.

That is an example of the way the Chikuho people used their own culture to assimilate and reinterpret outside information in a quite localised manner. They simply did the opposite of what was expected of them.²

²Kawano, interview: 1989

Many informants told of the sympathies they had towards the *yakuza*, particularly the young ones, who being unemployed and ineligible for welfare, turned to crime in order to survive. Despite their violent acts they were regarded generally as victims of their environment.³

In Taisho there was a single company union within which two violently opposed factions had developed by 1960. One faction was controlled by those miners sympathetic with the Tokyo Students and the actions of the Miike miners in going out on strike. The other faction was controlled by men who were worried that any form of labour action would deny them the opportunity to work in the mine. The latter faction was supported by the company which, although it had made plans for closing down in 1963, had decided to extract as cheaply as possible the coal that was left. The rumblings of revolution that were started in Miike were soon felt in Taisho, and by early 1961 the socialist faction of the union was trying to get some guarantees about safety standards, wage increases, and redundancy packages from management. The company employed some tough young men from a *yakuza gumi*, run by a man named Ito from Kita Kyushu, to ensure the socialist faction did not become too troublesome.

Kawano elaborates the point:

When compared to other Nittan mines, the Taisho workers were subjected to pressures not evident elsewhere. Family pressure was brought to bear on individuals to conform to the management concept of what a "good union man" should be.

Mr Ito's *yakuza gumi* were the ones responsible for running the labour control section. These guys infiltrated our union organisation from the bottom up, gradually assuming responsibility at the top of the hierarchy. If this had been in the past they would have been thrown out, but as it was, within a short time they had assumed control of some of the major positions of power within the union. There were a number of young men within this faction who were known as the *tankō-kai* because of their naturally violent tendencies. They were really just *yakuza*, and you could see this in their dealings

³Idegawa, interview, 1988; Ishizaki, interview: 1988; Onishi, interview: 1988

with those within the coal fields - walking around bullying the workers who would not join the company union. However they were not connected with the company officially. Rather they were responsible to the Labour Overseer, and thus were employed by him personally, but paid out of company funds.

I suppose you could say these guys were the strong arm of management, and they were certainly "in" with each other. They were often bought drinks after work by management.

They existed solely to bully us, to try to put us in our places. In the end we couldn't stand up to the pressures that we were subjected to. We were picked on, beaten up, excluded from the union, and our wives were raped and bashed. This pressure was put on us to make us modify our views about a democratic union!

Anyway, these guys would stand around looking tough, drinking at work, but doing nothing. They were the parasites - not us. We wanted to be paid a fair rate for the work we did. They did little, and yet got well paid. If one of us was severely beaten, or involved in a melee with these men, the police were called in and the fighting parties were both taken to the cells and locked up. But while the *tankō-kai* men were bailed out by the *yakuza* boss, we had to bail out our members, or else wait until the court case was heard, in many instances.

Although this sort of thing happened dozens of times the police were never called in to sort out the trouble at the mine itself. Rather the company waited until the *romu* had decided who were the guilty parties, and only then did they contact the police who hauled both sides off to the police station. The *romu* themselves were never arrested by the police because they were regarded as the unofficial police deputies in the coalmine precinct. It was the combination of the pressure which was placed on us to conform, the violence which was tightly controlled by the *yakuza* and the company *romu*, and the police absence in internal conflicts which made the system work in this mine.⁴

Kawano says that the miners were always regarded as the aggressors in the eyes of the law. Like many other towns within the coalfields, this

⁴Kawano, interview: 1989

town's mayor and the head of police had a strong relationship with the mine owners, which tended to influence the way the miners were treated by both the police and the judiciary. It was not until the major court case, finally settled in 1975, that the Taisho miners had any decisions made in their favour within the legal system, and that decision followed a widespread publicity campaign which the miners had initiated.

As I have briefly remarked, Chikuho was regarded by outsiders as one of the wildest places in Japan - untamed, and dangerous for "normal" people. This image was perpetuated by the media, and by the actions of the miners themselves in disputes. Accounts of miners attacking riot police, and *yakuza* attacking the miners in turn, led to the reputation of the area as a violent and unsafe one. In a country where the system of *on* and *giri* (obligation and reciprocal obligation, in simple terms) is regarded as an essential part of the social order, and there is a general requirement that people constrain and control themselves for the sake of the country,⁵ the miners appeared to be an atypically violent group. Kawano maintains that desperation drove the men to the extremes of behaviour they exhibited during the Taisho strike. It is reasonable to assume that the miners' desperation was brought on by a combination of the threat to their incomes, under the TCRB and the ever present threats of violence. In the end they themselves had recourse to violence as it had become the currency of everyday dealings they had with those who held power over them.

The strike

The strike was over the company refusing to pay the miners for work they had done, and their refusal to pay retrenched miners severance and retirement pay (the mine was already slowing production and sacking workers as the demand for coal slackened). Yet, regardless of the seriousness of the claims, only the Kawano faction took the decision to strike - about half the

⁵See Nakane, 1971, for example; and Benedict, 1946

miners. The faction which was attached to the company was seduced by company promises to pay the men the pay that was owing. Moreover they were too intimidated by the company to consider joining the action at first, and they continued working for more than a week while the Kawano faction occupied the Number 2 shaft. The Kawano men were locked out of the mine, but a group of 20 had overcome this minor problem in a rather imaginative fashion, sneaking into the mine and eventually halting production.

Kawano describes one incident during the strike which played a key role in the development of a more unified union consciousness:

You see, at first we took over and held the entrance to the Number 2 shaft. According to the injunction taken out against us by the company, we were trespassing on company property. A group of 20 men didn't care about the legality of their actions, and had sneaked into the mine, hiding under the trucks in the space where the gas masks and breathing apparatus were stored. They then got off the trucks at the bottom of the railway, near the end of the Endless Windlass and sabotaged the railway by sticking the carriage pins into the tracks and machinery. One man picked up a truck and physically derailed it by himself.

It was on about the tenth day that the company made an appearance. They didn't know what was going on in the mine, but they certainly did know that the miners had stopped production. So, in order to compel the men down the mine to give up they decided to send the riot police down the mine to where the men were holed up. Even using a guide the riot police weren't sure exactly where the men were down there, so they were not confident of immediate success.

We, on the surface, and the men down the pit all knew that the guys holed up in the mine were committing a felony, so they had gone all the way and placed dynamite strategically throughout the tunnels. We reckoned that if anyone tried to get in there to get them out, there would be an explosion and the police, the miners and the mine would all be blown up. When the police realised this they quickly retreated. At about the same time our group entered the mine to stop the police from removing the miners down the pit - we were ready to fight, but then we found out about the dynamite as well, and we headed for the surface as fast as we could.

So the guys in the mine wouldn't come out no matter what sort of persuasion was attempted. The fact that they were able to defeat the riot police was pretty tough I think, and admirable. Those of us on the surface decided that we'd help those underground, regardless of whether we were in the same union faction or not, and it was through this action that we were able to close down all company production.⁶

Although the union had been seriously factionalised following the infiltration of the pro-company men, the concept of community became the focus for the unification of the union in the face of threats of *rōmu* and *yakuza* violence. When the Kawano faction staged the sit-in the Ito faction came to work, but they brought *sake* and food for the opposing faction members.

The company was really angry about this, and many of the Ito faction workers were beaten by the *rōmu* for their actions. Still they helped the striking workers even though they weren't in their faction. These guys kept the assistance up right to the end. Although the union was divided at leadership level, the men themselves didn't separate really. There was no hatred between the men of different factions. Rather there was a growth of sympathy and camaraderie as the strike progressed. This is because both sides slowly changed their stances. The Ito faction members also came to challenge both their own leaders and company policy as the strike continued, and they saw the level of violence directed against their workmates.

Up till then there were a large number of men who thought that the strike would only endanger their livelihoods, and that they wouldn't be able to survive, so they removed themselves from the action. But when they excluded themselves they were forced to become independent and accept company policies, which included a condition that they receive half pay, because the company couldn't afford to pay them proper wages. As they watched one person, and then another join the battle with the company, the majority of these men switched sides.⁷

⁶Kawano, interview: 1989

⁷Kawano, interview: 1989

When the miners emerged after more than two weeks underground they were given a heroes' welcome by the other miners. However the company immediately started court proceedings against the union for halting production, trespassing and jeopardising mine safety, and injunctions were also taken out against prominent individual union members.

You know those long rubber riot batons? The company said that we had threatened their men with not only these batons, but also with knives and of course the dynamite, while the sit-in was going on. And that we had shouted "Let's kill them!" and then charged at the police and the *yakuza*.

It was a futile effort by the company. We had a good lawyer who convinced the court that expressions like "I'll kill you!" and "I'll beat you up!" were normal daily expressions within the mining community, and that they carried little literal weight. If it was a city society perhaps we would have been indicted for these verbal threats, but because it was a coal town there were no problems for us. You see, people talked like this in their own homes - couples arguing, parents and children talking etc. Threatening people was just a part of daily life within the coal communities, so this charge was basically dropped. The judge handed down a suspended sentence.⁸

Following legal action taken by the union against the company over the non-payment of back wages and severance benefits, which came in the wake of the industrial action, the company was forced to make a commitment to pay the miners money owed. However the company said that they did not have the money at the time and offered to settle the dispute by paying the men back their money in 30,000 yen monthly instalments over a period of ten months.

But after everyone got their first 30,000 yen the company decided that it didn't want to pay out any more, and after that no-one got even 1,000 yen. When you consider that, it stands to reason that the company would try to degrade our position in

⁸Kawano, interview: 1989

court, to protect their reputation and turn the issue away from the wages issue.⁹

It is revealing that the mine owners closed down the mine within three months of the action, claiming insolvency. This declaration legally exonerated management from having to pay the agreed severance pay and back wages, because it was expected that the government would assume responsibility for all company debts when they bought the mine out under the terms of the TCRB. When it was revealed that the company had been declared bankrupt, and that there was no work available for the miners, a new union strategy was developed which concentrated on the concept of worker ownership of the mine.

The miners went as far afield as Fukuoka with their protests, actively targeting the mining company's creditors, the Fukuoka Bank. By foreclosing on the company it effectively put the miners out of work. Thus their response, instigated by Kawano, was to talk to the bank president to try to get him to either change his mind about the foreclosure, or to support a plan for the workers to buy the mine from the company, using the superannuation funds which the company had deposited in the bank on the miners' behalf. However the president would not see their deputation, publicly declaring that any money which the company had deposited in the bank, whether it be on the miners' behalf or not, was the property of the bank. He went on to say that he would not support a charity like the coalminers who were not to be trusted.

In response, the miners decided to start a process of civil disobedience and disruption. They marched the 50 kilometres to Fukuoka, and painted slogans on the walls of the bank, held rallies outside the banks, disrupted customers and finally closed the main thoroughfares in their attempts to get a fair hearing for their case. Many miners were arrested, and subsequently

⁹Kawano, interview: 1989

imprisoned and fined for their part in "disrupting the peace." Much of the sensation was reported in the press, both locally and nationally. The miners were criticised by the media for being lawless and irresponsible,¹⁰ and when Kawano was fined 30,000 yen for breaching the public peace, the press crowed that "justice had been done."¹¹ The company went into receivership and the mine was closed. Eventually (in 1975!) a compromise was reached between the now unified union and the government, where the government agreed to supply the miners with enough company land so that they could build their own homes. Although the miners received only a pittance in cash, the land was a major concession, and they finally won a moral victory.

Analysis

The methods of protest employed by Kawano and the union were quite unlike any labour action seen within the mining community before. Certainly the Kawano faction was influenced by the conspicuous Miike strike the year before, although the miners in that case met with little success. The union action was much more sophisticated than previous actions, employing both confrontationist and litigation-related tactics to combat the company's attempt to force them to back down.

Aware of the dangers of a union which displayed solidarity, the company had employed men from the local *yakuza gumi* to infiltrate, and disrupt the union. Although perhaps half the miners were convinced that the only way to be paid for work already performed and simultaneously keep their jobs was to conform with management demands, after the success of the sit-in they actively supported the Kawano faction. An all-in confrontation with an outside *yakuza gumi*, brought in by the head of the *rōmu*, occurred in a last-ditch effort to break the union when the men emerged from the mine, defiant and successful. But the union, flushed from its new-found solidarity

¹⁰see for example, Asahi Shinbun, 11 October, 1962: 3

¹¹see Nishi Nihon Shinbun, 25 November, 1962: 2, for example

were effective in physically repelling the attack. In fact the miners forced the *yakuza* to retreat to their Fukuoka city headquarters where they surrounded the building threatening to "kill the bastards."¹²

When the company decided to take out an injunction against the union for trespass, assault, and threats of violence, the union hired the best lawyers they could find and took the unprecedented step of placing the violence and the threats of violence they made within the overall context of the coalmines. They contended that expressions of violence were the normal expressions of miners in their everyday lives, and that the miners themselves lived under threat of violence at the hands of gangsters. Therefore this expression of violence and the reaction of the miners in physically defending their position were justifiable. In suspending the sentence, the courts supported their position, implicitly granting that violence, or the threat of violence, was a way of life for the miners. The court case was a landmark decision in coalmining labour litigation, and affected the Yamano incident litigation which occurred some ten years later.¹³

The union correctly identified company shortcomings when they took further unprecedented action against the company's creditors when the mine was put into receivership. Their actions were not supported by *Tanrō*, which, after the resounding defeat at Miike, had been seriously weakened and moved further right politically. However the miners were so conspicuous in their public protest that the government was forced to make a compromise arrangement with them. After legal action taken this time by the union against the government, as the company's agents, the government agreed to supply them with land and building materials formerly owned by Taisho, with which to construct a new community. The miners were also paid some of the money they were owed by the company from the government's TCRB fund. The union's tenacity and the ability to analyse the legal and financial restraints won them the opportunity to at least rebuild their lifestyles.

¹²Kawano, interview: 1989

¹³see Chapter 11

The Kawano union's sophisticated understanding of their legal position established an important precedent in the development of labour related conflict in the coalfields. They were aware of their rights under the law, and of their ability to successfully defend themselves against unjust litigation. While it is probably true that desperation drove them to take action in the first place, the subsequent development of a unified consciousness was important in establishing the grounds on which they could act. The relative success they had repelling both the police and the *yakuza* on a number of occasions was instrumental in establishing the necessary confidence to pursue other, litigation-related courses of action.

The action against the bank in Fukuoka, while partially conducted outside the law, was calculated to cause such disruption that the government would eventually have to settle with the union. The union displayed solidarity in the face of extreme provocation by the company and the law, and were able, with a relative degree of success, to resolve the dispute in their favour.

One of the main reasons for their success was the presence of Kawano, who brought with him a sophisticated understanding of the economic and legal structures of society. But the miners' developing consciousness of their own legal rights, and of their ability to challenge repressive, often violent management techniques employed by the company in keeping them complacent, were critical factors which cannot be underestimated. Although the consciousness which they developed was not really an archetypal class consciousness per se, their views on their own position in the world were considerably modified by the influence of the Miike strike, and by Kawano's arrival at the union office. The concepts that there was life outside the confines of the Taisho mine, and that they were able to oppose the constraints imposed by management, which were designed to denigrate the value of their labour and their lives, were grasped with enthusiasm by the miners. This understanding that they could take action to ameliorate the conditions in which they found themselves was essential in the long run.

These days the township is still settled by the miners and their families. The union started a registered construction company, which is now one of the more successful companies in the region, with funds which the miners received from the government in lieu of the back pay and severance awards they were due. Other miners were able to develop small secondary and service related businesses in town, and compared to many other areas in Chikuho, the town is financially quite solvent.

Kawano

The role of Kawano in this action was critical. He first joined the union when he heard about the violence at the mine when he was at Miike in 1959. He had gone to the office of the "Old" union to help organise resistance to the move to split the union into two factions which was just starting. As a member of the *Zengakuren's* more moderate JCP affiliated faction he thought that he would be able to do more for the union by helping to organise staff within the office than by joining the protest lines. He was studying economics at Tokyo University at the time majoring in labour relations, and his studies led him to an understanding of the nature of political resistance in Great Britain and the United States. He became one of a number of advisers for the union.

At the end of 1959 a friend who worked in the Taisho mine contacted him and explained the situation there. He told him that the union was corrupt and that the miners were being abused by the system of piecework contracts which the company had implemented to attempt to defray some labour costs. He was afraid that the union would capitulate to demands by the company to accept further decreases in wages. The violence which was so pervasive in the mine, and the leader of the *rōmu's* well-known connection with the local *yakuza*, were good reasons why the workforce might be compromised.

Kawano went to the office of the union in 1960, where he worked as a clerk for six months or so, before entering the pit. He was elected leader of the union in April of that year, but because of his JCP background was

against the idea of any one individual holding the leadership of any group, and so convened a committee to examine any proposals put forward by the membership. This committee published newsletters, distributed union propaganda to the miners and the public, and attempted to bail its members out of jail when they were in trouble.

He was the force behind the move to employ legal assistance for the union when it was in trouble, a decision based on the experience of other mines' labour actions which had generally been conducted without official legal advice. He gathered an experienced team of politically astute activists from outside the area around him in 1962, and together they were able to develop the strategy for taking on the company in both legal and civil arenas.

As an individual he generates great power, both physical and psychological. He is a broad-shouldered, fit-looking 45 year old. He has a ready laugh, and an impish sense of humour, obviously taking great pleasure in regaling me with stories of the miners' outrageous victories against the *yakuza*, a group of people he regards as being socially and mentally retarded. He thoroughly enjoyed discussing the miners' sit-in in the mine, holed up with their sticks of dynamite, merrily threatening the riot police and the gangsters - two of the most feared organisations in the country.

Modest to the point of being self-denigrating, he is still completely open, seemingly unaffected by the esteem in which he is held by the local community. He is highly educated, eventually finishing his economics degree, and then studying medicine, acupuncture and *shiatsu* (acupressure). Although his education is apparent when he speaks, he seems to make a point of conducting conversation on the level of the person with whom he is talking, without sounding patronising. Very confident and generating charisma, it is easy to see how this man was able to instil within the miners the need for taking concerted action against the company.

He is now well-known for his acupuncturist and alternative healing skills, and he has a reputation for performing miracles for his patients. He

lives, with his wife and many chickens, in the converted union office of the Taisho mine.

In the next chapter I will look at the Yamano incident, and in particular at how the changes in attitude towards litigation affected the outcome of a lengthy court procedure. Once more the influence of outsiders cannot be underestimated.

Chapter 11

THE YAMANO DISASTER

The Yamano mine disaster occurred at the Yamano mine, which was officially owned by the independent Yamano Mine Company, a subcontractor for the Mitsui Mining Corporation. In 1965 a methane gas explosion ripped through the Number 2 shaft, killing 267 miners and seriously injuring another 150 men. This disaster was Japan's second worst postwar accident, and was remarkable for the number of errors which occurred before and after the explosion. Although an internal company inquiry found that the management of the day were correct in their actions, an independent inquiry conducted by the Fukuoka Mine Safety Commission found that there were "suspicions of improper behaviour" on the part of management, but that these suspicions could not be proved beyond all doubt.¹

The families of the dead and injured men took the unprecedented step of filing a civil suit against both the Yamano company and Mitsui, suing them for compensation. This case was started even though the company and the union put considerable pressure on the widows and families of the dead and the injured miners to give up the case and take a small settlement.

It was a landmark case for a number of reasons, not the least of which was that the courts found that Mitsui was criminally negligent - the first time a mining company had been put in this position. This decision established a precedent which has affected the outcome of other civil suits within the Japanese legal system over recent years. However, before I look at the outcome of the case it is worth investigating in detail the circumstances surrounding the disaster, and the subsequent actions that took place.

¹FMSC Report, 1974

Historical background

Since the 1930s Mitsui had owned the colliery in the town of Yamano which is situated in Kago-gun, in Chikuho. A large mine which in its heyday employed more than 1000 men, it was an archetypal big Japanese colliery in that all other industry in the town revolved around the mine. When the TCRB was introduced in the early 1960s the company decided to sell the mine to the government under the terms of the bill because it had been operating at a loss for some years. This was announced to the local population, who reacted with some consternation.

In a number of cases in Japan, a major mining company publicly declared that it could no longer remain operational because of escalating labour, equipment, and maintenance costs, and because of the low market price of coal. When public despair at this turn of events reached a crescendo, the company stepped in with a compromise arrangement, by which the company would be "sold" to a subsidiary company with lower running costs, and higher production, with the aim of making the company solvent again. By this stage local workers were so desperate for work that they were prepared to accept the compromise package, and work for reduced wages in more demanding, and often more dangerous conditions. This process of debt selling and subcontracting occurred not only in Yamano, but in Hokkaido's Hokutan coalmine, in the Mitsubishi Takashima coalmine, and in the Aichi Prefecture shipbuilding industry.²

In Yamano, when the company declared its ostensible intention of closing the mine, the local workers, apparently unaware of the company strategy involved, called a meeting of the local townspeople with the aim of discussing their future job prospects. The township decided to plead with the company to show compassion, and to continue their operations in the town. The company's stance was firm from the outset though, and there seemed to be no chance of any agreement being reached. Five months after the company's initial

²see *Chikuho Noto*, June 1978: 41-54

announcement that the mine would close, Mitsui responded to the town committee, saying that the possibility of a second company taking over the running of the mine was not out of the question. However, the workers would have to be prepared for a salary drop, and for an increase in working hours, with the additional rider that the overall production of the mine would have to increase. The union fully supported the move to second company status, and exhorted the miners to accept the terms of the agreement.

In short, the company wanted a rationale that could be employed to justify cutting wages and costs, whilst maintaining and even increasing production. The "takeover" by the second company - a company wholly owned by Mitsui - was the answer. Mitsui was prepared to outwait the workers, a ploy which often has been used with success by Japanese companies when negotiating with overseas companies. In effect the company was able to change an unprofitable enterprise into an extremely profitable enterprise by renaming the company, and officially transferring the responsibility of running the company to the management of the second company. However, notwithstanding the new name, the company's management remained unchanged. The profits from the second company's operations would still end up in the Mitsui coffers, yet Mitsui itself would not be required to continue paying miners the previous wage levels, and would in theory be exempt from having to conform to the strict mining safety conditions imposed by the FMSC. It was a move designed to pass the legal responsibility away from Mitsui and on to the new company. While the second company was operating in the black, and while there were few problems within the labour force, this system was quite effective, but as the subsequent legal case showed, when problems developed within the second company, the ultimate responsibility was found to rest with Mitsui.

One Chikuho revivalist had the following to say about the process described above:

At the meeting of the townspeople, the people begged Mitsui to continue the operations. Mitsui probably really had intended to continue the operations all along but from the very beginning had released a load of bullshit that they were closing the place down.

In reality they were just waiting for the town and the union to say, "The number 2 company would be fine, please do it for our sakes." So Mitsui said that for the sakes of the workers they would just have to sell out to the number 2 company because it couldn't be helped. And by doing this Mitsui was able to lower wages and increase the working hours with no obstruction. The union was not prepared to fight the company. They were afraid that if they argued with the company, the company would take steps to close the mine down. Therefore they tended to agree with them.³

Another informant further described the situation:

The president of the old company became the president of the new company. The mine was backed with capital from Mitsui. They owned the lease and were paid off by the Yamano company. The company changed names but in actual fact was being run by Mitsui from start to finish. Nothing had changed except that the company was able to make money thanks to the tighter labour rules and work conditions - and looser safety standards. The mechanism of the mine was economically the sole responsibility of Mitsui, and they ran the company.⁴

Although the townspeople had desperately wanted the company to continue operations, the reality of the second company was difficult for many of the miners to deal with. Wages dropped to 75% of the original Mitsui wages, working hours increased on average to 14 hour shifts, and production demands increased by 250%. Safety standards were allowed to lapse, and not surprisingly, considering the nature of the work, the long hours and the lack of investment in safety equipment, the accident rate climbed dramatically in the first year after the "takeover." A number of men who had worked many years for Mitsui under the original company, quit the new company and looked for work elsewhere. Only 18% of the original workers remained. A chronic labour shortage resulted. This in turn led to the situation where the mine was forced to advertise for

³Ikeda, interview: 1989

⁴Yano, interview: 1989

miners, offering to train them and house them in the emptying *tanjū*.⁵ Because of the depressed state of the economy in the early 1960s, and the tightening of the rural economy, many young farmers who had never worked in mines came to join the company's new sub-contractors, attracted by the prospect of a reasonable wage (compared to farming), free housing, and secure employment with a big company.

Thus only a small percentage of the miners had long term mining experience. This was to become a pivotal point in the case that followed the disaster.

Working conditions in Yamano mine

The facilities within the mine were allowed to remain in poor condition. None of the safety, digging, or coal moving equipment was updated since the new ownership. Much of the digging at the face was done by hand, and then manually passed on to the conveyor belt, which had been unchanged since the 1950s. The miners were expected to work long hours in excessive heat for poor wages. On top of this, little or no training in the use of the safety equipment that was available was given to the men, especially the new recruits. This proved to be a major contributing factor to the high death toll after the explosion. The Yamano mine had "safety tunnels," like all the mines, but unfortunately the new miners were not aware of the location of these emergency exits, as it transpired.

A critical view of the mine operations

Yano, an informant whom I would classify as a member of the Chikuho revivalists, was forthcoming in his criticism of the running of the Yamano mine, and of the handling of the accident. As a radical socialist, he was a vocal and often active political agitator for the rights of the people he regarded as

⁵Yano, interview: 1989

oppressed by the "bonds of monopoly capitalism." The miners were his archetypal proletariat. When he first came to the region in 1964 he, like Kawano from the Taisho union, was a member of the Tokyo Students' Movement. Embracing the Communist Manifesto, he took his message around the coalmines in the 1960s with the aim of recruiting unions to the cause. In 1960 he went to China for three years to undergo weapons training courses. Soon after he returned the disaster at Yamano occurred.

The disaster was, as he says, "like a personal attack on (his) values," and subsequently he was determined to investigate the circumstances surrounding the deaths of so many men. To a large extent he and his group were responsible for motivating the Yamano Widows' Movement to take legal action against the company, after they had publicised the nature of the accident through their leftist press contacts. After a prolonged investigation, he said that the accident which occurred was traceable to the way the company ran the mine. That is, the safety of the miners was a secondary consideration, listed well below the concept of profitability for the company.

It was definitely mining safety that was the issue. As far as human lives were concerned, no matter how many hundred metres the mine was below the surface there were really no standards of safety enforced. It was the cost of the mine which was the determining factor in these cases - to make the dig as cheap as possible was the only factor that counted. The company just thought that it was the only way to do business. When an accident occurred the company directors just nodded their heads and made placating noises.

In the case of Yamano Tanko, for example there were on average 240 workers on every shift and the company knew that methane gas build-up was a problem with this dig. However there were only 190 gas masks placed in the mine in case of emergency! So even if a person knew that there had been a gas explosion in the mine there was nothing that some of the people could do about it.⁶

⁶Yano, interview: 1988

The company was able to neglect safety standards and training. This is indicative of the nature of the company's influence over the union, and through the union, over the men. It also highlights the power the company had to ignore the recommendations of the seemingly powerless, but officious FMSC.

Some miners referred to the union as the "dogs of the company," saying that their position (the union's) undermined any attempts by the miners to have independent representation. The union's response to workers' requests to the company to improve wages, or safety and working conditions, was that if they didn't like the situation they could "get out, because there was always someone else ready to come to work in their place."⁷ As in the Hoshu case, the union had a strongly pro-company stance which severely compromised miners', and in the longer term, miners' families' human rights.

Mine management was under extreme pressure from Mitsui head office to increase production and to make the mine profitable. This was achieved through employing semi-skilled, cheap sub-contractors, and through ignoring the expensive demands of the FMSC to monitor, and improve safety standards. In order to meet the new production requirements working conditions were made more demanding, and wages were cut. According to Yano:

To get away with this the company employed "temporary workers" who were basically inexperienced in the mines, as subcontractors. They had nothing to compare the work with and therefore were fairly easily manipulated. The numbers of these men increased dramatically, and as a result of these policies the company was able to move out of the red.⁸

The above ground staff numbers were also cut, so that among other staff reductions, the engineering section, which was responsible for monitoring gas build-ups, mine construction projects, and the general excavation of coal, was operating with barely a skeleton staff. Certainly staff and wage cuts had a powerful influence on the company's economic performance. The mine's

⁷Onishi, interview: 1989

⁸Yada, interview: 1989

improved production figures in 1965, as compared to 1963, produced a huge leap in profitability.⁹ They moved from operating at a large deficit to operating at a considerable profit. However, as the 1965 accident illustrated, this was achieved at an enormous cost, measured in human lives.

In relation to the safety issue, because it would cost a lot of money to train the men in the correct safety procedures, management decided not to do it. So as far as the company was concerned they were prepared to send workers into these dangerous conditions without any training - it was the maximum production at the lowest cost ethic which was used. In Yamano's case the above statements were made publicly and became the crux of the court action against the company that followed.¹⁰

One widow said about the conditions in which her husband worked:

My husband left home every morning before 7.00 am and more often than not didn't get home until after 10.00 pm, when he completed work. This was because he was forced to work two shifts in a row. In the mine the heat was appalling - for 99% of the time it was more than 40 degrees. Because they had to go to work 26 or 27 times a month, sometimes doing two or even three shifts in a row at a time, the men had to be extremely strong. If they only had to work 15 shifts straight before they got a day off they were called "lucky" by their workmates.¹¹

The opinion of the woman above as to the conditions in the mine were verified by an informant who worked in the mine, both before and after the new company "takeover." The following extract refers to the new company.

The mine was stinking hot. In fact there were no places on earth that were hotter than where I worked, I think. Just walking to the face from the elevator was exhausting, and by the time we

⁹The figures rose 59% in 18 months, according to Yada at the Fukuoka Coal Research Centre at Kyushu University in 1988

¹⁰Yano, interview: 1989

¹¹Ikejiri, interview; quoted in *Chitei: Gasu Daibakuhatsu*, 1978: 27

finished shifts which went on for up to 20 hours, we were so tired we could hardly see. If we were slow in digging, or if we were caught resting, I heard of many cases where the *rōmu* beat the men with those big wooden batons.¹²

As in many other mines management employed overseers to maintain the production. The union at this mine, like the union in Hoshu, was a company, or enterprise union, and as such were not concerned whether their members were overworked, or mistreated by the *rōmu*. They were as committed to keeping up with production as management, especially given the tenuous circumstances of their employment in the mine.¹³

The Accident

On June 1st, 1965, the explosion rocked Yamano. Methane gas levels had increased to five times the safe limit over a period of hours within the Number 2 shaft at a depth of approximately 780 metres. Although the actual cause of ignition is difficult to determine because the damage to the equipment was so extensive, it is thought that a spark from one of the old conveyer belts started the explosion. The concussion from the blast was felt 20 kilometres away by residents of a small farming village, and the pall of black smoke was visible from as far away as Iizuka, 30 kilometres to the south-east, according to reports in the *Asahi Shinbun*.¹⁴

One man who was working in the mine on the day of the explosion described how he perceived what happened. He was 17 years old at the time,

¹²Saito, interview; quoted in *Chikuhō Tsūshin*, March 1978: 34

¹³Because the union perceived that they were able to work in the mine because of, firstly the goodwill of management, and secondly, the company's continued profitability which depended on the efforts of the workers, they were not prepared to compromise their position by making demands of the company about working or wage conditions.

¹⁴see *Asahi Shinbun*, 2nd June, 1965: front page

and had little mining experience, like the majority of the men in the shaft he was in.

I didn't hear the explosion, you know. The first thing that I knew of the accident was when the lights and the electricity went out. I was down the Number 1 shaft, so I was quite a way from where the accident occurred. The tunnels didn't connect, you see, so there was no way that I could have known what was going on. Anyway, because the lights had gone out I thought that it would be a good idea to get to the elevator shaft and to make my way to the surface to see what had happened. When I got there, the union representative told me that there was no need for panic, that we should all go back to our work and use our cap lamps until the lighting was restored.

We all worked until the shift finished you know - for perhaps five hours after the explosion. Anyway, when we got out of the mine, we went into the baths and I noticed that the men from the other shaft weren't there, so I assumed that they had been forced to work overtime again - this happened all the time. As we were all leaving the gates I noticed the smoke in the air - it was heavier than usual - and asked one of the security men what was going on. He told me that the company had said that it was nothing to worry about, and that we should all go home.

I went home, and my mother told me that there had been a huge "bang" from the mine, and she asked me did I know what it was. I didn't. I suppose that it was about three hours after this that I was rung up at home by the *rōmu* at the mine, and asked to come to work to help clear up the mess that a "minor accident" had caused. When I arrived back at work, there were fire engines, ambulances, and police crawling all over the place - it was crazy. The *rōmu* boss asked me to go down the shaft with the rescue crew to help the men who were stuck down the mine.

After that day I never felt the same about mining again. Down in the shaft there was torn and broken machinery which was buckled and twisted. Dust was everywhere - you could hardly see in front of your own eyes. And because the pumps had been turned off the water was up to our waists. And the smell - it was like a terrible fart. I could smell it through the gas mask. When we got out of the elevator I stumbled in the water and fell. When I got up I was holding a human hand. It was terrible. There were dismembered bodies everywhere. Further down the tunnel, away from the site of the explosion, the mine looked like it had always

looked. There was no obvious damage to the machinery or the roof, although there was water everywhere. It was in the tunnels at the bottom of the mine that we discovered the first of the miners who had died of methane poisoning. Their bodies were lying all over the place, but none had gasmasks on, and their faces were twisted in pain. I was so frightened I had to get out.¹⁵

Iwano's story highlights the lack of communication with the workers in the Number 1 shaft, something which was emphasised in the legal proceedings. However the extent of the company's negligence went far beyond this. When the build-up of methane gas had first been detected in the Number 2 shaft the chief of operations within the mine had tried to contact the surface engineering section to tell them to turn off all the electricity. This was standard practice in cases where there was a sudden build-up in gas levels, because a spark from any of the machinery could have started an explosion. Unfortunately for the miners there was no-one at the engineers' office at the time, management having decided that it was not necessary to have superfluous safety staff on call throughout the shifts. The miners then contacted management head office, and notified them that the gas levels had exceeded the safe levels by a factor of four, and that they needed to have the electricity turned off.

Management suggested to the miners that their instruments were wrong, that they should check the gas levels, and then get back to them about it. In the meantime, the management would get someone over to the engineering section to check the gas from there. Fifteen minutes later the explosion occurred.¹⁶

¹⁵Iwano, interview: 1988

¹⁶Matsumoto, interview: 1988

The company didn't let the miners in the other shaft know what was going on (that an explosion had taken place) because they didn't want to lose production from a premature shutdown.¹⁷

Even after the explosion, management continued to act irresponsibly. A junior member of the office staff immediately called the emergency services, notifying them of the explosion, and asking for assistance. Management were informed, and they immediately overturned this decision to get help from outside. They rang the emergency services and told them that the situation was under control and that outside help would not be necessary. Miners in the Number 1 shaft, rather than being contacted to help with the rescue operation, were left undisturbed to finish their shift. The inquiry found that these actions, presumably performed to save "face" and to keep production running, were negligent.¹⁸

Of all the miners killed in the explosion, only about 20 workers died as a direct result of the explosion. The other 200 or so died as a result of gas poisoning as the gas circulated after the explosion. The men that survived were the ones with considerable experience. They knew right away that the gas was around and tried to make their way to the surface as quickly as possible.

70% of the miners who were on that shift were employed with the subcontractors, working for low wages because they didn't have any direct mining experience. This was because it was the number 2 company. These were the inexperienced temporary workers who had entered the mines for the first time and didn't know much about the mines at all. The issue was that the company was required to teach these people about mine safety but in actual fact they didn't. So the majority of these people had no idea where the gas masks were kept nor how to escape from the mine. The people who got out were generally the veterans who knew where the exits were.¹⁹

¹⁷Yano, interview: 1989

¹⁸FMSC Report, 1966: 3

¹⁹*Chikuhō Tsūshin*, July 1978: 36-7

The accident site was a long way underground, so even if luck was with them the quickest time possible to get to the surface from that site was about 40 minutes. And the gas masks only had enough air in them for 30 minutes. While the masks conformed to the letter of the safety regulations the specifications that the FMSC had enforced were really not very useful at all.²⁰ Not only were the numbers of gas masks insufficient and the air in them inadequate for the trip to the surface in case of emergency, but also few of the miners knew where the masks were kept or how to use them. This was because company policy had dictated that safety training was not an essential part of their role, particularly in the case of subcontractors.²¹

The delays in turning the electricity off, in making the miners and the engineers recheck the gas levels, and in calling the emergency services doubtless contributed to the extremely high death toll, but on top of these immediate problems the safety issue and the relative inexperience and lack of training of the young subcontractors was a significant factor.

A cynical perspective would be that the company was determined not to lose production, and that it would go to any lengths to achieve this end. The reluctance to call in the emergency authorities for fear of a public investigation which would result in the mine being closed for an indefinite period is relevant here. The delay in calling in the emergency services probably cost many miners their lives; in the five hour delay most of the men suffocated. Those who survived managed to do so through escaping into tunnels least affected by the gas, and waiting for the rescuers. By not having anyone stationed at the engineering section for emergencies, especially given the established problems that the mine had with methane gas build-up, the company also contributed to the disaster.

However the accident has to be seen in the economic context in which it occurred. The mid 1960s were the most severe years for coalmining Japan

²⁰Yano, interview: 1988

²¹Iwano, interview: 1988

had seen. Under the terms of the TCRB Chikuho mines were being closed at a tremendous rate, the market was being "undermined" by cheap high quality coal imports from Australia, the US and Canada, and domestic sales had shrunk to a fraction of the 1950s levels as oil and petroleum products competed directly, and successfully, with coal for a large section of the domestic energy market. Unemployment was becoming an even more serious problem in the coal areas than it had been, and work opportunities in the Chikuho region in particular, were extremely limited. Coal companies were no longer seen as the "shining light of industry," and few could offer the so-called "life-time employment" that so pervasively characterises foreign perceptions of Japanese business. Given these circumstances, and notwithstanding the safety issue, it is understandable, though barely so, that the Yamano mine management would consider carefully whether they could afford to slow production for the sake of what was, after all only a "little bit of gas."²²

²²Kurashige, the operations manager, quoted as saying this in his own defence at the first trial, in *Chikuhō Tsūshin*, February 1979: 116.

The Process of Litigation - Offers from the company

After the accident the company offered to pay the families of the dead men an individual settlement of 400,000 yen each. This was equivalent to about three months' wages. However, the families of the subcontractors who lived in the *tanjū* were required to either pay rent and other expenses from the date of the settlement, or get out of the *tanjū*. The other families were allowed to stay in the *tanjū* for up to two months after the accident, and were then moved to a run-down section of the company housing. The company said that it couldn't afford to support the women and their families any longer.

The widows were not happy with this arrangement because they had to continue to feed, house and clothe their children, and they felt that this was not possible on the amount of money they were offered. Also they wanted the company to erect a monument to the dead, so that they would have something to be proud of - to show their children, when they grew up, what their fathers had done. On top of this, the families of the dead wanted the company to acknowledge its responsibility for the accident, removing the responsibility from the dead miners.

The union was adamantly against any further compensation, or money to build a monument to the dead. The union leaders believed that the only hope the men who were left working in the pit had of keeping their jobs was for the company to relinquish any responsibility for the families of the dead men. By doing this the company would save money and be able to continue operating in the black, and work would still be available. Their attitude was summed up in the following statement by one of the widows.

The union leaders said to us, after we had gathered together to complain about the company's treatment of us, "Even though you are widows, it is foolish to think that the company, or that we, will look after you forever. Neither the union nor the company can afford to look after you, you know. Sooner or later you're going to have to stand up for yourselves, and learn to look after your families. We are not the welfare agency." The fact of the

matter is that we were the first widows to have got any money out of the company, even though there had been many deaths in the mine in the year and a half since the new company took over.²³

Notwithstanding the pressure from both the company and the union to take the settlement, some of the families of the dead men were determined to win concessions from the company. But fractionalisation had taken place within the women's group. Some women thought that they would be able to take the company on, and that they would be successful in agitating for some further compensation, but the majority thought that by themselves they could never oppose the company, and that they should be satisfied with the offer:

We are just ignorant women, the wives of ignorant men. What chance have we of winning against the powerful company? They can throw us out of the *tanjū* the moment we cause trouble. We need someone who knows about these things, and whom we can trust.²⁴

Another problem was that the money was to be paid into the union funds, because the union was seen by the company to be the representative of the men who were killed. The union decided that although the arrangement was for the widows to be paid from this fund, union expenses, legal fees, and a large percentage of the money to be used for the building of a monument to the dead, would be withheld. As a result the widows individually were to receive 230,000 yen.

A year after the accident, the widows had been moved into the "new slum," the dilapidated section of the *tanjū* which the subcontractors had occupied originally. The wives and families of the subcontractors had moved to other towns and cities, so that only about 60% of the women remained within the *tanjū*.

²³*Chikuhō Tsūshin*, March 1978: 33

²⁴*ibid*: 36

The stocking company ploy

At this stage, the company decided that the women who remained were becoming a real nuisance. To placate the women they donated a section of unused company land and a shed to a local stocking manufacturer, so that this company could establish a factory for the women to work in. This was because the company had said that it could not afford to pay the women all the money up front, and that the pay would have to be in monthly instalments. This move would deflect responsibility from the company to look after the women, and be inexpensive to set up. The average monthly pay for the workers in the factory was 11,000 yen, less than a quarter of the official poverty cut-off line. Although the pay was poor, compared to most small to medium sized mines, where average compensation for miners killed in accidents was between 30,000 and 50,000 yen, the Yamano deal of an average of 400,000 yen, and employment, albeit poorly paid, was exceptional for Chikuho.²⁵ Within twelve months, though, the factory had gone bankrupt and the women once more were without income, a situation which was exacerbated by the company's reluctance to pay the monthly stipend to the widows, citing cash flow problems, amongst other reasons for not complying with the law.

In 1967 the Criminal Investigation Committee found that the company was guilty of criminal negligence in regard to the accident. Four men from the company, including the mine manager were put on trial, found guilty of negligence of safety standards, and incompetence in dealing promptly with the accident, and were sacked by Mitsui.

Outsiders' involvement

The result of the criminal prosecution had a profound effect on the Yanos, who decided that the case was worth serious investigation. Yano and his

²⁵Idegawa, interview: 1987

wife, who at this stage were living in the vicinity of the mine, volunteered to help organise the bereaved families into a political group with the aim of taking legal action against the company. The case which followed was a protracted and bitter legal struggle, which resulted in the 1978 decision by the district court to award damages of five million yen to each of the plaintiffs, a decision which was hotly contested by the company. However the decision stood, and the company was forced to pay. Once again the company cited cash flow problems and suggested payments be made to the families on a monthly basis, again through the union, which was now defunct (the mine closed in 1973). Once more the Yamano Widows' Movement (YWM) had trouble getting any money out of the company or the union, even though they had won the case.

Fragmentation of the group's interests and members was perhaps the most difficult problem to overcome in the short term. By the time the case was heard by the courts, some ten years after the original legal action had been started, many of the women from the YWM had moved to other more hospitable climes, some had died, and others had lost interest in the outcome of the case. In 1977, when the case first reached the district courts there were 178 members of the YWM left, of whom some wanted to pursue the case to its bitter end, while others were content to let the matter drop, maintaining that it had taken so long up to that point that it was unlikely they would receive anything from the courts, and anyway their lives had become so hard that they were used to poverty.²⁶ There were many reasons cited at an impromptu meeting held in the *tanjū* just before the case was scheduled to start, as to why they should continue with the struggle. Some of these were:

to be able to hold a memorial service for the dead miners, who had not been exonerated legally for the accident;

to display their anger and resentment over the way the company had treated them over all these years;

to apologise to the dead for allowing the company to treat them as fools;

²⁶Idegawa, interview: 1987

to be able to explain to their children that their fathers were not evil and wasteful men, and that they had died doing their duty;

to expose the discrimination which existed against Chikuho people, and miners in particular;

and to expose the nature of the company and the union - those agencies which had tried to prevent the women seeking justice under the law.²⁷

The formalisation of these ideals followed the involvement of Yano and his political faction. After the 1967 court decision that the company was criminally negligent, the Yanos utilised many of their legal and press connections to ensure that the case had some publicity, even though this publicity was generally confined to the left-wing radical press. The feasibility of launching an action against the company was not a real problem, but the divergent aims and attitudes of the bereaved widows made collective action almost impossible. To unify the group and to formalise its structure, Yano set up a name (the Yamano Bereaved Families Group, which became known as the Yamano Widows' Movement) and an agenda for action. This allowed the group to focus on what they thought they were entitled to receive under the law. Lawyers associated with the JCP were employed on a commission basis to handle the case, acting on instructions issued by the YWM.

Other well-known Chikuho people took an interest in the case, including Ueno, Idegawa, Kawano, Takazaki, Onishi, and Ishizaki. These people combined their resources with the YWM to outline the type of strategy that was necessary to force Mitsui to capitulate to their demands. A series of meetings was arranged, with guest speakers from other coalmines who had similar experiences, litigation experts, coal history and economic experts all taking part in the ensuing discussions. On the basis of these discussions it was decided that the YWM would take legal action against the company, because for the first time they had a case whereby the company had been convicted of a criminal charge. According to the lawyers, this meant that the YWM had the opportunity to cash

²⁷notes from the meeting, September 1977, courtesy of Yano

in on this unusual decision of the criminal courts, and win concessions from the company on a level never before seen within the industry.

Publicity for the plight of the women had been a problem from the day of the accident. Although journalists from the major newspapers came to the mine to cover the explosion, it received front page treatment for the day, and then was all but neglected by the media. The committee of experts - the Chikuho revivalists - were aware of this, so publicity about the women's movement was arranged through leftist press connections initially, and then through the writing of Ueno, Idegawa and Ishizaki, published within academic journals and collections of local histories. The group started a privately funded and produced journal called *Chikuhō Tsūshin*, which was concerned with the inequalities found in Chikuho. Of course, the Yamano case was frequently discussed within this monthly magazine, and court updates were published monthly, as were two columns concerning the case - one by Yano, and the other by the leader of the YWM. The distribution of these journals was limited at first, but because there were so many people in the Chikuho region who were classified as "disadvantaged," and because the journal used language accessible to the poorly educated, using simple kanji and grammar, its circulation increased to such an extent that by 1970 four full-time staff were required to handle its publication.

Support for the women came from as far away as Hokkaido where mining was undergoing a severe rationalisation process at the hands of Mitsui, Mitsubishi and Hokutan - all these companies closing mines during the 1960s, 70s, and 80s. However, particularly effusive support was received from the families of the miners killed in the Mitsui Miike disaster of 1963, where 458 men lost their lives. The company had never admitted liability for causing the accident, and the investigation into that disaster had exonerated the company from any responsibility. As a result the families of the men killed had been offered a similar settlement to the Yamano women. Because no criminal conviction had occurred in this case, and because the women were inconsistent in their demands from the company, no serious challenge to the settlement was ever issued. Consequently these people were hopeful that if a precedent could

be established in the Yamano case, they too would have the opportunity to redress what they considered a miscarriage of justice.

Settlement

In 1978, after an eleven year campaign, the YWM agreed to an out of court settlement on the advice of their lawyers. They would each receive five million yen compensation for the deaths of their husbands. Accommodation within the *tanjū* would remain as it had, the women subjected to living in the segregated and dilapidated houses. The company, although it had been convicted of negligence, refused to make a public admission to that effect, and also refused to supply additional finances for the building of a memorial. A further stipulation of the agreement was that the company continue to pay the women on a monthly instalment basis over 15 years, and that the money would be paid through an independent body - the old company union. The first instalments would cover the building of a memorial, which the company would erect on land which the YWM were required to buy. After legal fees had been subtracted from the sum, individuals received approximately 120,000 yen a month and were liable for all living expenses occurred in the *tanjū* in which they lived. This was approximately the same amount as the average monthly wage for a miner in 1965. For the purpose of comparison, a miner's average earnings in 1978 were about 250,000 yen a month.

Considering the length of time the case had taken to get to court, the terms of the agreement, and the restrictions imposed by the company, the settlement was not generous, but compared to other mining accident settlements, it was exceptionally good. The families of the miners killed at Hoshu mine had been forced to agree to a total settlement of 500,000 yen.²⁸ What, then, was the difference between these two cases? How was it that the Yamano women, given their disparate aims and poor self-image were able to take successful, unprecedented legal action against the might of Mitsui?

²⁸Ishizaki, interview: 1988

Hoshu and Yamano Compared

Hoshu

At Hoshu mine the overt nature of violence and coercion that the *rōmu* had used so freely over a long period, and the intimidation and forced adoption of company values and ideology that this punitive system brought about within the miners' community, served as the structural basis which prevented the families of the dead even considering taking action against the company. Not only the usual physical threats of violence were employed, but also economic and isolationist policies to deal with potential trouble makers were instituted. The women were told that if they wanted more money from the company, they would be on their own. Their right to company housing, and subsequently to the new state sponsored Coal Villages Restoration Scheme Housing apartments would be waived, and they would have to find their own accommodation and incomes. Given the ignorance of these women about their legal rights, and their appalling self-image as "dumb coalminers' wives," the option of getting any compensation from the company at all, and a guaranteed place to live in was eminently preferable to the alternatives.

The size and structure of the respective companies were also relevant. In the smaller, more cloistered environment which typified the Hoshu mine, all the miners and their families were known to the *rōmu* and the union. The union played a vital role in reinforcing the company's policy after the accident, as they did in Yamano, but within Hoshu it was a role which was made more powerful by the lack of opposition. As I have discussed in earlier chapters, opposition to company policy was mercilessly suppressed through the use of the *rōmu* and where necessary, outside intervention. The economic circumstances within which the miners and their families found themselves, and the lack of alternative employment within the industry during the "Scrap and Build" era forced many miners, at least on the face of it, to conform to company demands. On top of this was the threat of economic sanctions, especially the threat to remove them

from their housing. This was a powerful weapon which the company, through the union, sought to exploit.

Whereas the local media kept the story of the trapped miners running in the newspapers for more than two weeks, editorials about the accident were limited to technical matters concerning the rescue efforts, and occasionally the odd comment about with whom the responsibility for the accident rested. The miners and their families were, for the most part, ignored. Reports about the widows were restricted to local newspapers, and these reports dealt with the "unfortunate circumstances" into which the widows had fallen, and how "courageously these strong women stood up to the unfairness of life."²⁹ Because reports were restricted to the local area, and because within Chikuho the reputation of the mine as a violent and uncompromising place was well understood, insiders were loathe to act to help the women. Ueda had publicly and conspicuously said that the mine would look after the families of the dead, and it was assumed by most that this would happen, it appears. Apathy was also relevant.

Little information, after the initial sensational headlines, appeared in the media. It may well have been that outsiders would have helped the miners but were simply unaware of developments after the disaster.

Not only the ideological isolation, but also the physical isolation of the community had a profound effect on the lack of resistance. The Hoshu people's contacts generally were restricted to the *tanjū*, or to other small mining communities, and within these communities miners and their families had a profound understanding of mining company compensation policies, so disasters of national scope became trivialised to some extent. Although there was a great deal of bitterness about these policies, the overwhelming sentiment expressed was "*shiyō ga nai*" (it can't be helped). As Okushima said:

Miners were always sympathetic towards each others' tales about how they had been hard done by, but they had heard it all before. Nothing that they could do would affect the outcome and

²⁹Nishi Nihon Shinbun, Chikuho section, 28th June, 1960

make the mine management change their minds, and treat miners like human beings, after all. Basically we were all individually concerned with keeping our heads above water, and so miners, as a whole, really were only concerned with what was directly in front of their own eyes. It's hard to believe, but even in that period, we were all too scared to stand up to the company. I mean, you all had to eat. And the union was corrupt. There was nowhere to turn. The company had all of us in their pocket. If we tried to resist we were beaten or worse, thrown out of the company with nothing.³⁰

Because of the small size of the company, management was able to take measures to prevent powerful or charismatic workers from taking a stand against the company, weeding out the leaders and making examples of them. The threat of violence was constantly present, and although the miners were inured to the violence to a large extent, they knew the rules and how to play the game accordingly. There was no protest.

Because Ueda never acknowledged the company's responsibility for the accident, and because, for whatever reasons, legal action was not taken against the company by the FMSC, as it was in Yamano, criminal liability was never established against Hoshu mine.

In short, intimidation and coercion in the short term, and the memory of violence meted out by the company as reprisals for non-conformity over the long term, helped to maintain the status quo within Hoshu. Miners, although disillusioned with the mine in many cases, and certainly disillusioned with the paltry compensation offered by the company as a result of the inevitable closure of the mine following the disaster, were not able to develop a collective and powerful enough counter-consciousness to challenge the ideology of the company. The same argument could be applied to the widows of the disaster. Because management had acted to narrow the widows' choices, through controlling their physical and ideological environment, they were able to make a deal with the women which did not compromise the company severely. This was reinforced

³⁰Okushima, interview: 1988

by the support of the union, by the lack of opposition to the scheme, and by the financial position of the company after the accident.

Yamano

Although, in the first instance, the Yamano women were in a similar position structurally - they were not conscious of alternatives to the amount of compensation the company offered, and were certainly ignorant of the possibility of litigation against the company - outsiders helped them gain the consciousness that, first, there was a miscarriage of justice in that their husbands' lives had been lost at too cheap a cost, and second, that without a collective understanding and approach to solving the problem they would be incapable of changing the situation. Perhaps even more importantly, the knowledge that there were steps which could be taken to redress the situation, in light of the criminal charges brought against the company, allowed the widows to develop a strong and initially uncompromising stance. It is in regard to this that the Yanos and the Chikuho revivalists strongly influenced the outcome of the situation.

The Yamano community was as isolated as the Hoshu community in almost every respect, the union was as severely compromised, violent sanctions had been imposed on recalcitrant workers, and company pressure had been brought to bear on the widows after the accident to accept what was, for the coal industry, a reasonable compensation deal. The major differences were that the Yamano mine was still operating after the event, it was supported by a large infusion of capital from Mitsui, and it was successfully prosecuted by the FMSC for negligence.

Yano's group initially, and other prominent Chikuho people subsequently, through hard work and often radical tactics, were able to persuade both the courts and the company to alter their stances with regard to both the accident and the widows. The Yano faction was actively involved from the beginning in organising the widows into a political group with a common cause. Given company pressure to force the women to accept the compensation offered by the company, it is indicative of the solidarity of the women that they were not

distracted from the original purpose of their action. The motivation for continuing with the case was powerful enough for them to endure slanderous attacks on their character by the union, physical attacks on their families and friends, and a malicious strategy which attempted to ostracise them from the remainder of the *tanjū* - the so-called "*burakumin* treatment."³¹ However this solidarity was made possible only by the intervention and support of the group of outsiders.

The process of making the case public over the long period before it was heard by the courts was instrumental in maintaining morale within the group. The publicity that the activists generated was able to reach a wider audience than any efforts by the women alone. In this sense some Chikuho teachers who were involved with the academics who took up the case were also able to influence their students as to what had taken place at the mine after the accident. One eleven year old schoolboy who was interested in Yamano wrote the following in an article which was published in a left-wing political magazine:

When I went to Yamano for the first time it was because I was interested in finding out what happened to all the people at the mine. The reason that the explosion happened was because there was lots of gas in the mine and something like a spark ignited it, and it blew up and 237 miners were killed.... But the company was only concerned with making money and they didn't care that there were all those people down there. The people doing the hardest work were the ones who got killed, not the ones in the office. And then the company said that the miners' families were only allowed to get a small amount of money from the company to live on.

They couldn't live on the money that the company gave them, and all those other kids who are about my age are in real trouble these days - they can hardly afford to eat. But when the YWM complains that they don't have enough food and that their houses are falling down, the company just says that, "It's become a habit,

³¹Onishi quoted this phrase, meaning that they were treated as total outcasts. (Interview: 1988).

all this complaining - and it's getting really irritating." That's discrimination isn't it?³²

Rumours flew about the new pressures which were being applied to the women, whether they were still holding on, how much money they would likely receive, and why they bothered with taking the company to court in the first place. Onishi, in particular, was a source of information, because Yamano *tanjū* was one of his regular stops. He would gather the rumours from threads of conversation and pass his own, rather obtuse interpretation of what was transpiring on to people in other coal villages on his route. Idegawa, Ueno, and the Yanos, who actively discussed the issue amongst their diverse connections, were instrumental in keeping the case alive in the minds of the local people. Ironically the only group to oppose the action, apart from the company, was the remainder of the workers at the mine, who were afraid that the company would be forced to close on account of the hefty claims that the women were making. However, the downturn in the economic fortunes of the coal industry in the early 1970s was enough to force the mine to close well before the case was heard in 1978, making the objections to the case from local residents untenable.

One other point worth mentioning is that the YWM gained considerable support from other socially disadvantaged groups who perceived their case as the watershed it was to become. Notably the *Buraku Kaihō Undō* (Buraku Liberation Movement), the *Kyōsei Renkō* (Korean Forced Workers Organisation), and many women activists were conspicuously supportive of the action, sending in letters of encouragement over the years leading up to the case, and sharing in their somewhat muted joy when the women agreed upon the out of court settlement in 1978.

³²"U"-kun, in *Chikuhō Nōto*, June 1978: 51

Conclusion

The contrast with the Hoshu case is enlightening because it illustrates quite clearly how the mechanisms of power can be overturned if there is enough outside, informed help available for seriously disadvantaged groups. This is consistent with the approach of Gramsci who maintained that it was up to the "intellectuals" from the Party to act on behalf of the masses who were ideologically still children, and therefore incapable of dealing with the subtle and manipulative pressures brought to bear on them by a cynical and self-centred power elite.

From another perspective, Lukes' conception that the powerful act to prevent potentially explosive matters becoming issues is illustrated clearly by the dichotomy above. In the Hoshu case, the powerful controlled not only the means of production and the environment in which the people lived, they were also able to exert sociological and economic pressure on the individuals who may have caused trouble to accept the arrangement which they promulgated. Above and beyond this, the company had the tacit backing of the system of litigation, which was made more pervasive by the declaration of financial insolvency which followed the accident, thereby eliminating even the potential for the miners' families to claim further compensation under the law. The company remained immune from FMSC or government prosecution even though its record for violence and irresponsibility was well established in folklore. In turn this worked to prevent the families of the dead men instigating litigation of their own.

Isolation, both physical and ideological, reinforced the notion that the miners and their families were totally dependent on the company, which had the effect of restricting the range of political, legal and economic alternatives they had at their disposal. This was reinforced by the role of the union as the company's watchdogs, employed to maintain the status quo, and to encourage the miners to keep out of "trouble." The feared *yakuza*-like *rōmu* were also employed in this capacity, their actions totally unhindered by any outside interference, such as police. This was achieved through the mine owner's connections at City Hall, and through the placement of his senior, ex-mine

managers in the most exalted positions within the local police force and judiciary. The police never interfered in internal "disputes," a position which was never questioned by either the miners or the police, the latter preferring to leave any problems to the mine to handle.

Although the Yamano women had to contend with this type of prejudice and segregation, they were able to break the chain, as it were, through the influence of outsiders who came to know about the case. Through the efforts of people like Onishi, the *kami shibai* man, the Yanos, Ueno, Idegawa and Kawano, others who were concerned about the problems which coalminers and their families faced acted together in a spontaneous display of solidarity and support for the women. The sheer numbers of publications produced to support the women, and the number of organisations which offered both financial and moral support doubtless had a major effect in influencing the company's lawyers to do a deal with the women.

Perhaps the glimmer of hope that the case offered for other abused groups was reason enough to excite the gossip which was so widespread at the time. Years of physical and economic oppression, with little hope of financial freedom had taken its toll on the miners and their families. The impending collapse of the industry, the bleak future ahead, and the even more sobering thought that they had lived through the "good days" were reasons in themselves to see the Yamano case as a positive sign that there was change in the air.

Society had changed in the years since the Hoshu disaster. Politically Japan was still conservative, the students were still active, and the JSP was still in political opposition with just enough support to block constitutional amendments in the Upper House. But the political climate had changed considerably. Japan had moved from being a second-rate developing economy to a first-rate developing economy. For the first time it had a positive savings ratio. There was more money in the country and the trend which was to become overwhelming in the years ahead - that of consumerism - was starting to gain ground. Television had come to the *tanjū* and with it came the widening of people's outlooks. No longer were they restricted by the area in which they lived. They had the opportunity to experience a new range of activities, and to

see representations of a new range of cultures besides their own on television. According to Onishi, the introduction of this one consumable changed the whole perspective of the mining communities overnight.³³

The older miners were generally illiterate, and therefore the introduction of television had a profound influence on the amount of information which they were able to receive. Although radio had been around for years, Chikuho's geographical situation in a "basin" made it difficult to get reasonable reception. Sato, another informant said that the mining communities went from being ignorant places where some people had not even crossed over the nearest mountain range, to communities where people were able to discuss national political and economic events with a surprising degree of sophistication, after television came. In other words, the miners started to realise that they did in fact make up part of a world where events which did not directly concern them, affected them, such as the changeover from coal to oil.

People were becoming better educated generally. The level of literacy had increased to such an extent that within the postwar generations most children were attending school until they were at least 14 years of age. Therefore they could read, something which the majority of the older miners and their wives could not. In the early 1960s there was an information boom and it finally reached Chikuho.

Because the Yamano company was larger, and more open than Hoshu, and because the town in which it was situated was larger and more cosmopolitan than Hoshu, information concerning the mine could not be so effectively dampened through the old boy network, as in the case of Hoshu. The leaking of information about the disaster, and the widespread, if somewhat leftist, publications and groups which supported the stance of the widows were relevant in the case gaining a reasonable hearing in the courts. One of the reasons that many of the Chikuho revivalists got behind the widows was that they felt that it was a symbolic case which could change the perceptions of local people about litigation, which in turn could help to alleviate the "dark image" of the Chikuho

³³personal communication: 1989

people. If this case was seen to be successful, and other cases could be brought to the attention of the courts then it seemed likely that the "official" versions of history which had labelled the miners an unruly, untruthful, violent, slothful group of human beings with no pride in themselves, could be turned around, and the slow process of re-educating the population of not only Chikuho, but also of Japan, could begin.

More than anything, according to Idegawa, there was a need to explain why the people of Chikuho had become so dependent on welfare - that it was related to companies like Mitsui discarding the miners and their families "as if they were old socks" - as in the Yamano case.³⁴ Furthermore, the companies refused to supply any aid to the areas they had stripped of the resources they used as a foundation on which to build their international empires. This "injustice," and the lack of respect the companies showed the people who laboured all their lives for them, is in one sense truly Japanese, according to Ikeda.

The powerful in Japan can always walk over the powerless. It has happened since the days of the earliest samurai, and is still happening. While things are going well, the companies are happy to encourage the workers to do their best for the company, but at the first sign of trouble, it is those who have dedicated their lives to an industry who will be the first to be made redundant.³⁵

Idegawa supports this view and added that the thing most people had difficulty accepting about this was that the companies refused to acknowledge two fundamental principles of Japanese society - *on* and *giri*. It was to have the satisfaction of seeing the company proven wrong that was the women's driving force for the action. Only through successful action were the people able to rest, because the *giri* had been returned, the husbands of the widows set to rest, and the gates opened for further action by the relatively powerless against the

³⁴Idegawa, personal communication: 1988

³⁵Ikeda, interview: 1988

powerful in society. As Takashima said, "The truth had to come out in the end. The companies couldn't keep lying and getting away with it forever. I was glad that I saw it, because it made my heart sing."³⁶

The relevance of the Yamano case for the development of local consciousness

This protracted incident, which from the time of the disaster to the time the women received compensation took more than 13 years, was notable for reasons other than the success of the litigation, and the opening of the way for future litigation. The group of people I have described as the Chikuho revivalists first came together around this issue. Yano's wife, Eiko, was working at the office of the mine when the disaster occurred. Through her efforts they were able to collect a large amount of information about the running of the company, and then present it to the widows to use as evidence in any action they might like to take against the company.

The public manner in which the Yanos attacked the case, producing newsletters which were given away to local people, and then starting the publication of the *Chikuhō Tsūshin* magazine, which paid for itself for more than 12 years, attracted attention from other minority groups within the region. There was an emotive response to the cause for justice in this case. Perhaps because Mitsui was such a big company, the pressure they placed on a small group of women who seemed, quite apocryphally as it turned out, to be defenceless, was widely regarded amongst Chikuho society as unreasonable. Moreover, the fact that the company had been charged and prosecuted over the incident seemed ample reason for them to adopt a conciliatory approach. Yet they continued to bully the women.

As a result of Mitsui's actions, the individuals who made their expertise available to the women were motivated by a number of personal reasons, but the sense of there being a fundamental injustice being done which needed to be

³⁶Takashima, interview: 1988

redressed was pervasive. The minority groups which contributed to the newspapers and magazines had their own political positions which they wanted to express, but underlying these positions was the thread that certain injustices needed to be set right. It was a moral campaign, concerned with changing the widows' present circumstances, offering them support, while promoting their own perceptions of society, and its problems.

This collection of individuals, all with a history of radicalism, allowed for the exchange of similar ideas, though often couched within different political paradigms. From the desire to change the present circumstances of the women in the Yamano Widows' Movement, this informal collection of intellectuals and radicals realised that to change commonly held perceptions of contemporary society it was necessary to also change the perceptions of the past. Either to dismiss the coalmining industry as a necessary evil and to denigrate accordingly the value of the labour of the miners, or to deify the industry as the "backbone" of the region, was upholding a false consciousness which would disguise the true nature of Chikuho society.

Although this position was not formally taken, the trend of the articles in the *Chikuho Tsūshin* moved monthly more toward this end. Onishi's stories became more violent as he relayed not only the rumours of the present litigation, but also the rumours of past violent episodes. Idegawa began her research on the coalmining women, starting with the *burakumin* who worked in the "badger holes." Ueno concentrated his efforts on producing the definitive series of Marxist critique of the coal industry in Chikuho. Yano continued to edit *Chikuho Tsūshin*, and hold classes for disenchanting radicals in weapons skills. Ishizaki decided that she would have to publish her book on the hardships of being a *burakumin* in the repressive society Japan was.

The groundswell movement which was directed at implementing social change in Chikuho was underway, though its power was limited.

The removal of the issue of "the coalfields" from the media over the last ten years or so because the "problems" have been "solved," has brought about a situation where only those people passionately committed to changing the status

quo like Idegawa and Ishizaki still make the attempt. To some extent the poverty which was widespread in the years following the withdrawal of the coal companies has been alleviated with the belated introduction of welfare benefits. However, although the face of the area is being modernised as the decrepit old *tanjū* are demolished to make way for more sanitary government-sponsored high rise accommodation, a more insidious movement to remove people from their dependence on welfare was instigated by the government in 1984.

The 123 Legislation, which is designed to reduce welfare payouts by the government and transfer the cost of welfare to the extended family, has so incensed residents that there is once again fairly broad participation in anti-government rallies in the region. Yet this draconic legislation, which has been designed to reduce government expenditure on the poor notwithstanding, welfare dependence in Chikuho remains abnormally high. In Part IV I will examine some of the factors which contribute to this statistic.

Chapter 12

A YAKUZA STORY

"Four beers," he says holding up one finger. The waitress looks bemused, and asks him if he wanted one beer. "No, stupid woman," he says, "Four beers. Are you blind? Count them. One. Two. Three. Four." Winking at me, he counts off each finger of his left hand. Only then does the truth penetrate. He only has one full finger on his left hand, the others have been severed at the last joint. Blanching noticeably the waitress murmurs her apologies and rushes to the refrigerator where she gets the beers. Bringing them back, she says that they are "on the house". All four of us wait silently until she has left, then Sato bursts into raucous laughter. "It works every time," he informs us.

Onishi, Iwai and myself are sitting with Sato in a dimly lit bar in Tagawa City where we have come at Sato's invitation to discuss the political direction of a small Kawasaki municipality. Sato, the headman of the village, and Onishi and Iwai, his supporters, are concerned that the new government policy to restrict welfare payments is having a detrimental affect on the old people in the village.

A member of the *yakuza* for more than 35 years, Sato creates the impression of a coiled spring about to release. Everything he says and does is committed and powerful. His energy seems boundless, although it is probably related to the copious quantities of amphetamines he has pumped straight into his system over the past 15 years. As a junior member, or *chimpira* of the *yakuza* he often disobeyed orders, and following the rules of the organisation, he was required to sever a joint of a finger for each infraction. On both hands altogether he has five full fingers left, including the thumbs.

The general public is aware of the *yakuza* custom of severing fingers and in this case, when the waitress finally realised that she was dealing with a gangster, she became instantly attentive and ingratiating. Seeing her pale demeanour underneath the powdered and painted mask of her smile as she

served us beer after beer, reinforced the idea that the power of the *yakuza* is still very much in evidence in Chikuho.

Sato was born in 1932 in Kawasaki Town. He dropped out of school at the age of ten and immediately went to work in the mines. By the time he was 15, he decided that mining involved too much physical labour and joined a local gang as the lowest level *chimpira*. Always physically strong, the work in the mines had made him tougher, and when a more senior man offered to teach him how to use the *katana*¹ he quickly became skilled in handling the weapon. In fact although he learnt to use many other weapons, the *katana* was always his favourite. He was trained as a killer, and when he was 16 he killed his first victim, a Korean coalminer.

Throughout his professional career with the *yakuza* he killed more than 50 people, he says with some pride. Others who know him well agree that it is quite possible that he did kill this number of people while in the service. The group he belonged to were informally contracted to the Ueda mining company, the company renowned for owning Hoshu mine among other reputedly dangerous holdings. He maintains that the people he killed were generally those who escaped from the mines: that is, Koreans. They had broken the rules, and rule breakers were always unmercifully punished according to local *yakuza* and company directives.

He has been married twice and has a son who is now 18 years old from the earlier marriage. He has also had a long-term relationship with amphetamines, particularly speed, which he has used intravenously for more than 20 years. Although for the last eight years or so he has kept clear of drugs he says that if he didn't have the support of his wife in helping him stay "clean" then he would be using again. When he "retired" from the *yakuza* nine years ago he made a decision to give up not only the violent lifestyle but also drugs. Although he drinks considerable quantities of scotch, *shōchū* and beer, he says that he has not wanted to touch amphetamines for

¹traditional long *samurai* sword

many years, and that this has happened because his wife has threatened to leave him if he does drugs again.

By getting out of the *yakuza* Sato took the first in a number of steps which were to take him from the realm of the criminal to the realm of the respectable. He bought into the construction business with money that he made from his gangster activities, paid off his debts to the *oyabun*², and became a rare example of a senior gangster who has made the transition into legitimate society. As partner in a construction company he is able to control who is employed within the industry locally, and he looks to give young local people the opportunity to work in the area when possible. Involvement within the construction industry gave him some experience with local government bureaucracy. On the basis of this experience he decided that it was badly run, more corrupt than any *yakuza* gang, and incapable of providing industry support. Always an ardent supporter of the LDP, he changed allegiance to the JSP after a series of run-ins with local politicians and bureaucratic obstruction to his plans to encourage more local involvement in industry. Never short of confidence, he campaigned successfully with his usual tactics of intimidation and charm to become headman in his local village, and was elected in Kawasaki Kamihoshu in 1983.

These days in Kamihoshu there is widespread participation in community projects. Sato instigated programs which encourage local children to understand their natural environment through nature camping trips. These trips always include the *kami shibai* man who tells stories about the old coalmining days, reinforcing the cultural link with the past. Monthly trips for both children and adults to different towns and cities, which aim to broaden perspectives, are also organised by Sato and Onishi. Apart from the standard rent payers' association, old people's groups, the farmers' association, the village planning committee, and the local council, there are groups which promote the development of local culture and art, and the sports and activities group, of which most children are members. The community has a roster

²*Yakuza* Boss - literally "honourable father"

system to organise parents to take the children to the weekly activities in the village minibus.

Apart from organising these committees and groups, and purchasing the minibus, through "voluntary" contributions from every household in town, Sato has two roles for which he is well-respected. First, he is the representative of the village at the regional government; and second, he is the arbitrator in disputes between Kamihoshu people. In the first role he has been successful in gaining funding for a number of local building activities - paving the roads, installing new drainage pipes, erecting road signs extolling the virtues of safe driving, and building a new public hall. He has also extracted both funds from the Coal Villages Rebuilding Committee to keep the houses in good repair, and a promise to maintain the rents at their current level. Furthermore he actively lobbies federal politicians to push the government to increase compensation to the coal communities in Chikuho. To a large extent through intimidation Sato has been able to increase the local politicians' commitment to reviving the area.

In the second role he has played a formative part in developing community consciousness about their past, the common origins, the pride of the coal communities, and the dangers of allowing things to just happen. His involvement at the community level as an informal justice of the peace has helped eliminate many traditional rivalries among residents. He constantly draws on his own experience with the *yakuza* to formulate tactics with which to deal with problems. Furthermore, his loyalty which was once so fiercely partisan towards the *yakuza*, is now directed at the people with whom he lives. His energies have been devoted to improving the quality of life for most of the people in Kamihoshu.

A man who is used to getting his own way, Sato is a persuasive and somewhat intimidating speaker. He compels one to listen to him. His shaven, bullet-shaped head and powerful wrists and forearms lend him credibility when he talks so casually of the violent deaths of tens of men in the mines. His eyes, which are small, black and bright remind one of a ferret, and unlike many Japanese who regard it as rude to look directly at a person's

eyes and hence gaze at or around one's chin, Sato stares directly at one's eyes, unblinking.

Describing a confrontation with the local Member of the Diet over the lack of government compensation which had been promised Kamihoshu following further land subsidence, he said:

I said.. "Do something about this you slack bastard. The people are relying on you and you just sit on your arse in your office doing nothing. Get them their money!" I wouldn't take "no" for an answer so I just kept at him. He kept making excuses that for the sake of Tagawa-gun they couldn't afford to pay up because it was the whole region which would have to support us. I had heard this crap from government many times before, just like everyone else - you know, the old line that we all have to do our duty for the government, be considerate.

Fuck that. I told him that we all had had enough bullshit and that if he didn't do something very quickly I would come into the office and kill him where he sat. He was such a lazy animal. It worked though. Within a week we got our special compensation payouts.³

The double standards that he employs are worth expanding because they are surprisingly successful. In a society where bureaucracy is overwhelmingly powerful, and its actions, or inactions, hinder and obstruct the implementation of legislation designed to improve the quality of people's lives, Sato is an anathema. When he needs to achieve something which operating within mainstream social values cannot achieve, he operates outside "normal" social boundaries. In other words he switches to his *yakuza* role, threatening violence and eschewing social strictures. In this sense he moves from being on the inside to being on the outside, in much the same manner as the traditional *kami shibai* men. However, while the *kami shibai* men were restricted by their role as entertainers to what sort of information and gossip they could disseminate throughout the community, Sato is virtually unrestrained. Not only does he have credibility on a political level, thanks to

³interview, 1988

his involvement in village politics, he also has credibility on the level of being an accomplished assassin through the contacts he has maintained with the gangs.

However, although he maintains contact with the gangs, he believes that the spirit has disappeared from the gangs and that the *yakuza* are now a bunch of dispirited bullies with little real power individually. He says that in the past, when the *yakuza* held real political control in Chikuho, an individual *yakuza* was as tough as three policemen, but now they are weak, and one policeman could arrest three *yakuza*.

Sato says that what he is doing politically is only representative of the traditional *yakuza* who, while they were prone to extremely violent behaviour, also performed many socially cohesive roles. Sasaki, a Tagawa coalminer reinforces this position:

In the old days a man could walk around the *tanjū* at night with no fear of attack even if he was drunk and carrying his monthly pay packet. This was not due to any great community spirit or to a high police presence. The *yakuza* were the ones who looked after social problems and kept the peace. Up until the war they were honourable men, and then for some reason, after the war ended they became bitter, less traditional, more involved with drugs and money lending - they changed.⁴

Regardless of whether or not traditionally the *yakuza* were really philanthropists in gangsters' clothing, Sato's loyalty to and concern for the community, his ability to stand up to local and prefectural government bureaucracies, and his boundless success in motivating the community to stand up for its own rights appear to stand Kamihoshu in good stead for the future.

⁴Sasaki, interview, 1988

PART IV
WELFARE
The coal legacy

Up until World War II welfare had never been an integral part of the Japanese political economic scenario. The fact that it took the Occupation forces' intervention to instigate changes within local mandates concerning welfare is evidence of this. However, once the groundwork for a welfare system had been established, the Japanese government undertook the task to make the system idiosyncratically Japanese in content. Japanese cultural standards were introduced into the legislation, which sought to make the family unit, rather than the individual, the basic component of the welfare system. This trend has continued to the present day, though it has become more cynical as the need for welfare cuts has been rationalised at all government levels, and the fiscal responsibility for the maintenance of welfare programs has been transferred in large part to the families of those who are incapable of supporting themselves.

Legislation which has been introduced since World War II in theory has had to conform to, amongst other clauses, two basic premises written into the Constitution of Japan, Article 25 that says, "all people shall have the right to maintain minimum standards of wholesome and cultured living." A second clause states that, "the State must make every effort to promote and expand social welfare, social security and public health services to cover every aspect of the life of the people."

This discussion centres on these premises, with the aim of discerning to what extent the pledges have been upheld, on both a macro and a micro level. To understand the nature of the macro perspective it is necessary to look at the evolution of the welfare process in Japan over the years, and to isolate the key cultural, economic and political issues which have been closely associated with the passage of welfare legislation. Without delving too deeply into the legislation per se, I think it is worth digging out some of the more momentous welfare related decisions, and airing them within the context of the current political economic climate.

The micro perspective, while in some ways less comprehensive than the macro perspective, allows a depth of insight into the ways that the passing of

laws have affected individuals living within the system. In the second chapter in this section I will concentrate on one case, with the aim of understanding how the changes in the law, and the attitudes of the community and welfare personnel have affected one young family. Particularly within the coalfields, where high unemployment is the rule rather than the exception, and many people appear to be living in poverty, an analysis of the circumstances within which this family has found itself, is revealing. This view will challenge the official wisdom of the politicians, who blithely assure the local population that the government only has their best interests at heart in cutting welfare payments, from child allowances to old age pensions.

History of welfare

Before 1945 Japanese politicians were reluctant to introduce legislation which provided adequate welfare for the population of Japan. The Poor Relief Law of 1932 was the first law passed by the government since the 1874 Indigent Person Relief Regulation. This sought to introduce aid such as livelihood assistance, medical care, and maternal and childcare assistance. However, this period in Japan's history was marked by its aggressive overseas military presence, which eventually escalated to its attack on Pearl Harbour in 1941. With Japan's involvement in the Pacific War, all social welfare programs came under the jurisdiction of the military, and the reforms started in the early 1930s were lost as funding was cut to welfare areas. This situation continued until the end of the war.

The Occupation Army in 1946 included in its many legislative reforms attempts to introduce welfare measures to support a devastated economy. Guidelines were established in 1946 to include a wide ranging and comprehensive system of welfare modelled on the US system, but it was not long before the Japanese government was able to manipulate the legislation under the guise of "cultural esoterism" so that the system, while conforming at the surface level to the mandates established in the US's policy guidelines, was fundamentally different in structure and costing to the US system.

The guidelines established by the Supreme Command of Allied Powers (SCAP) were:

1. national relief should be carried out on an equal basis without discrimination;
2. the protection of those who are poor and in need of daily necessities should be assisted by the nation;
3. the responsibility for welfare should be placed not on others, but on the nation;
4. the amount of the budget for assistance should be sufficient for the protection of the poor and should not be limited;¹

Although the structure was established by the introduction of these guidelines, for a number of reasons the State was reluctant to assume full financial liability for welfare. The scale of the assistance which was required in the postwar period was so large that other private institutions were soon established to fill the gaps in the official welfare system. Article 89 of the Constitution of Japan states that public money or other public property should not be used for "charitable educational or benevolent enterprises work not under the control of the public authority."² This legislation was introduced to prevent the government establishing and funding elitist educational institutions which would allow a revival of the nationalist fervour which led to Japan's aggressive military stance. However assistance from the government was a necessary step for the establishment of private welfare associations, and the government sidestepped the limitations of the legislation by establishing "semi-government" bodies which were officially under government control, but in effect were able to act autonomously with the help of government grants-in-aid.

In 1951 the Social Welfare Service Law was enacted. This established the structure within which the current welfare laws are situated. Welfare offices were set up as agencies for social welfare administration and private welfare agencies and the so-called "social welfare corporations" were also established. As Japan

¹Notice to Japanese Government - SCAPIN 775, 1946, quoted in Takashima, 1988

²Dazai, 1986:9

became more economically solvent in the early 1960s, welfare legislation changed, and the emphasis was placed on private superannuation schemes, pension plans, medical care and child minding facilities, which were all partially supported by national funds. Large companies in particular funded these plans, and many smaller companies also took part in the superannuation schemes. In areas where endemic unemployment and poverty were prevalent though, these funds and the associated private bodies which controlled them had little influence. The financial responsibility for maintaining programs designed to employ and/or support these people rested with national, prefectural and local governments. Government expenditure which was concentrated within the poorer areas had started to become a liability for the governments at all levels.

Within the coalfields, as unemployment became a major problem as a result of the government's plan to phase out coalmining, more state funds were diverted to maintaining the special programs which Tokyo had introduced to handle the situation. These special programs were officially public works sponsored, and organised ex-coalminers to be employed on local construction projects. Nowhere in Japan was the program more widespread than in Chikuho. The wide, smooth arterial roads which were rebuilt as part of the initiative during the 1960s are still mute testimony to the scale of the projects.

The special public works programs in which the coalminers took part were originally funded by the nation under the terms of the TCRB, but as the length of time and the scale of the programs increased, the national government was less than happy to continue its unconditional support. Consequently the a large part of the burden of the special measures legislated by the central government to support the out of work coalminers was passed on to both the prefectural and local governments. This was consistent with welfare legislation which was amended in the mid-1960s to force local governments to shoulder a larger part of the economic responsibility for their own welfare programs.

This trend of shifting the responsibility of funding welfare systems to local and prefectural governments has continued until the present. The percentage of funding welfare which is the national government's responsibility is constantly under review by the Tentative Administrative Research Council and the Tentative

Administrative Reform Committee. For example, since 1986, 50% of the funding of care for the physically and mentally disabled has been supplied by the national government, while the remaining 50% comes from local government. In the case of public assistance - i.e., living expenses for the infirm and unemployable - 70% is funded by national government coffers, while the remaining 30% comes from local funds. However, this is presently under review, and it has been proposed that the cost of maintaining this program should be shared equally by both local and national governments.³

Moving some of the financial responsibility from the national to the local and prefectural levels has had a profound effect on the nature of welfare spending. Local governments are unable to effectively support official welfare agencies to the extent that they would like, and there has been a trend over recent years to privatise the welfare industry, particularly in relation to childcare centres and old peoples' homes. On top of this, the call for volunteers to supply not only their own time to maintain certain welfare programs, but also to provide amenities for welfare recipients, has been vociferous. In 1988 60% of the people involved in the welfare industry were "volunteers", some of whom received token allowances from government sub agencies, but the majority of whom worked gratis.⁴

In the early 1970s welfare in Japan was reformed quite radically. Child allowance was introduced, and the National Health Insurance was reformed so that medical care became free for all people over 70 years of age, with the exception of the affluent. On top of this, the system of old age pensions which had been introduced in 1961 was revised so that all Japanese were covered by either the superannuation scheme or the "people's pension plan." Revision of the system was due in large part to agitation by radical elements in local government who had promised their constituents that they would be looked after. The system of government in Japan, as in many other nations, allows local, prefectural and national governments to be of different political persuasions. For

³Dazai, 1986: 14

⁴Takashima, 1988: 43

example, in Tagawa City the local government and the mayor are JSP, while the Fukuoka Prefectural government is LDP, as is the national government. This conflict of political interests has had the effect of forcing change from the bottom up, as it were, not necessarily from the national government level down. If local governments decide to liberalise local welfare conditions then the prefectural and national governments also often are forced to follow suit eventually.

A somewhat neglected piece of legislation introduced in 1975 was the Employment Insurance Act which replaced the Unemployment Allowance Act. This Act separated two types of unemployment benefit - the Employment Insurance and the Public Assistance Allowance. The former was to be given to those insured with companies, the latter to those who were not insured, or whose insurance benefits had lapsed. The Employment Insurance Act, which is still law, categorises individuals in arbitrary age groups, and considers the duration for which the individual contributes to the insurance fund. On the basis of these criteria, a benefit is paid over a length of time determined by the age of the individual. It is partially (20%) funded by the Ministry of Health and Welfare, but is in large part self-supporting. The Public Assistance Allowance is a standard welfare allowance which the government pays - 70% by the national government, and 15% each by the local and prefectural governments. I will discuss this in more detail below.

In 1983, after the economy had slowed somewhat, the government decided that it was subsidising too many welfare costs, and health insurance for the aged was introduced, whereby all Japanese over 65 years old were required to pay insurance premiums and a percentage of the medical fee for services used. Consequently, even for the aged, a patient charge was introduced. In 1986 the pension system was overhauled again, this time reducing in real terms the amount that an old age pensioner who had no other source of income would receive.

Decline of Welfare

Although welfare spending has increased significantly over the past four or five years, welfare for the aged has, as a percentage of national welfare expenditure, actually decreased.⁵ This is in spite of a rapidly aging population which has a low birth rate. Government initiatives to lower welfare spending have come about as a result of a number of financial analyses of national government expenditure on pension programs commissioned by the Ministry of Finance. These analyses showed that the surpluses generated from the current pension plans were not adequate to take the pension schemes into the 21st century, and that individual contributions to the schemes would have to rise to unacceptable levels to maintain the program. In large part this was because of the high rate of contribution amongst the population to the government subsidised pension programs on the one hand, and because the population was ageing very rapidly, on the other.⁶ On top of this, the demand for welfare has increased from other sectors of the population, not least from working couples, single mothers and the unemployed.

To the government, excessive reliance on welfare is anathema to the concept of a sophisticated and cosmopolitan culture, an image which the government has tried to foster over the years. It was with some alarm that an increasing trend in welfare payouts was noticed in the early 1980s. This brought about the need to rationalise the welfare system so that the government could take the country into the 21st century.

The national government's subsequent commitment to lowering welfare spending spawned the 123 Legislation - an attempt to reinstate a major Japanese cultural tradition, the extended family, and in the process reduce welfare expenditure. Simply put, the 123 Legislation dictates that the social welfare worker must request that all members of a welfare applicant's family support the applicant where possible. The applicant then receives the difference between the

⁵ibid: 12

⁶Noguchi, 1986: 174-7

sum pledged by the family members and the lowest acceptable standard living (LASL) allowance for the area classification in which the applicant lives, which is covered by the Welfare Act. For example, in Tagawa the LASL allowance is 48,000 yen a month. If the welfare office can get pledges of 30,000 yen a month from an applicant's relatives, the welfare office pays the applicant 18,000 yen a month to bring the allowance into line with the figure required to sustain life. In other words, the system works to reify the role of the extended two or three generation family, and by so doing cuts government welfare expenditure considerably for a number of reasons which I will look at in more detail later in the chapter.

According to Takashima, publications which substantiate official government claims that the standard of living in Japan is now as good as anywhere, that education levels are the highest in the world, that adequate measures are taken within traditional cultural structures to care for the rapidly aging population, and that there is no need for welfare in this, the truly lucky country, are perpetuating a fiction.⁷ The system of lifelong employment which still pervasively underlies social consciousness, the strong Japanese work ethic, co-operation between labour and management within the corporation, and the notion that the company takes care of its own, are often raised by sympathetic analysts to demonstrate the point that Japan is a culturally discrete, benevolent and economically successful culture. The statistics on Japan released by the government support this stance. Low unemployment, low demand for welfare, and an ironclad social security system are evidence of the highly efficient way the country is governed. From my perspective though, the statistical picture which is so glibly presented to information and figure hungry domestic and foreign analysts is representative not of the actual situation in Japan, but rather of a process of "information manipulation."

In contemporary Japan, there are still a large number of impoverished and discriminated-against people. Many of the people subject to discrimination are Koreans and *burakumin*, but more and more, as Japan's oft-stated aims of

⁷1988: 8

"officially" attaining the world's highest GNP and standard of living comes closer to being reality, economic discrimination is becoming prevalent. It is socially stigmatising to be classified as a "welfare recipient," and the widespread knowledge that it is stigmatising to have to live off the government has had the effect of gradually reducing the number of successful applications for welfare support, even in cases when there has been a real need. This has been achieved through a number of methods, including the application of the 123 Legislation, the introduction of tougher interpretations of the welfare laws by case workers, and the very detailed investigation to which applicants and their property are subjected as a matter of course.

Other policies aside from the 123 Legislation which have been introduced since 1984 have attempted to bring pressure to bear on groups and individuals to reduce welfare expenditure. Local governments, through the policy of "administrative reform" have been asked to reduce local welfare spending by turning present welfare facilities into third party-run institutions, effectively transforming the system into a "user pays" system. The privatisation process of welfare corporations - retirement homes, home helpers, childcare centres, education groups, handicapped groups' helpers - has led to many people not getting the care they need, as provided for in the original welfare legislation. Specifically the people with the poorest working conditions are most at risk within this system. Company employees more often than not contribute to company superannuation schemes, public servants are covered by a special government superannuation scheme, and farmers, fishermen and other self-employed people are covered by their own schemes. However casual and part-time workers, the majority of them women, are not entitled to either superannuation benefits or childcare facilities at the workplace, because regardless of the work that they are doing, they are officially seen as "non-permanent" staff, and thus their company privileges are limited.

Privatising rest homes for the aged has had a devastating effect on the aged population. The government old age pension scheme (*kokumin nenkin*), which has been supported by the state since the 1960s, has changed so that since 1986 an assets test is applied to potential recipients. The poor payments

awarded under the pension scheme are evidenced in the fact that more Japanese over 65 are currently seeking work than any other age group.⁸ This is because people cannot live on the low allowances they receive from the government alone, and are forced to seek employment to boost their incomes. Notwithstanding this, the gradual decrease in real welfare expenditure is used by the government to imply that Japan has dealt with its welfare so effectively that the government can concentrate on more important issues.

Takashima sums up one attitude which is becoming prevalent as public welfare groups become more organised within Japan:

You might think that high economic growth would increase people's income and solve social welfare needs. The reverse is, in fact, the case. It was rather, high economic growth which created many sorts of new needs and made social services an indispensable commodity not just to low income groups, but to working families as well. This is because economic growth has seriously weakened family and community ties. Adequate social services are required for not only the poor within the community, but also for the working family who are not able to rely on the traditional family structure because of their work commitments. We cannot allow the government to take us back to the dark days before World War II when there was no welfare for anyone.⁹

Takashima's comments are quite appropriate considering the introduction of the 123 Legislation which has as its core the cultural principle that the family is the centre of society. While this is consistent with many people's interpretations of traditional Japanese society it is difficult to reconcile in contemporary Japan. The job and education markets are such that it is, more often than not, the case amongst university graduates and high school leavers that they leave the area they grew up in to search for work. As distances between cities are reduced by improved communication and transport facilities, more and more people seem to feel comfortable about leaving their birthplaces

⁸Takashima, 1989: 12

⁹1989: 8

and travelling to areas where there are better work opportunities. Particularly within the rural areas, traditionally the bastion of conservative Japan, there is an ever increasing trend for young people to leave home and migrate to the big cities. Old people too, seem resigned to their fate, realising that the countryside and the land and work that goes with it no longer have such an appeal to many younger people, who are attracted by the pace, excitement and financial potential of the cities. Certainly the visual and comic media are responsible to some extent for constantly romanticising the city. Regardless of the reasons, the traditional family unit, still said to be the cornerstone of Japanese society by official government sources and a number of sociologists, is no longer the basic force it used to be.

Stresses are being placed on the welfare structure not only in the cities, as country people migrate in large numbers, but also in the rural regions, as human resources dwindle, and investment declines. In Chikuho there is a much higher than average concentration of people over 65 years of age. This is due in large part to the lack of vocational opportunities in local towns and cities, which has pushed the young out, and left only the old. Unless there is an industrial revival in the region over the next few years, welfare payments will continue to increase until the coalminers and their families start dying off. Whether they will be replaced by another generation of people dependent on welfare depends to a great extent on the actions of government, and whether or not it will squarely face up to dealing with the issue of welfare. Welfare dependence is symptomatic of an alternative work-related ideology which is becoming prevalent in economically depressed areas like Chikuho. It cannot be made a non issue, by slowly reducing funding, and ignoring the social and economic consequences. Nor can the burden for this "non problem" be passed on to local government and the private sector. In Chikuho, where high unemployment and high welfare rates have continued for more than 30 years, cutting funding to needy people is not an adequate solution. There is a need to review the reasons for the development of the so-called welfare mentality of the region, and to consider ways in which the economic health of the region can be restored.

The next chapter looks at welfare in Chikuho, and deals with a single welfare case. A young family who live in the town which boasts the highest unemployment and welfare ratios in the country, tells a story which can help to contextualise some of the contemporary problems of the families of ex-coalminers. To balance what is basically a one-sided and critical discussion about the problems associated with the distribution of welfare, I have included sections from a series of interviews I conducted with a senior welfare "case worker."

Chapter 14

WELFARE IN CHIKUHO

The Chikuho region has the highest per capita welfare recipience rate in Japan. The authorities have made strenuous efforts to reduce this to more typically Japanese levels over the years. Nationally, welfare statistics show that Japan has one of the lowest per capita dependence rates in the world - less than two percent in 1989; and the extremely high dependence in Chikuho has become anathema for the authorities, for whom welfare dependence contradicts the prevailing image of Japanese industriousness and efficiency.

Tagawa-gun informants are inclined to blame the coal industry for the extent of poverty and welfare dependence.¹ The withdrawal of the coal industry from the area left the local people with few directions to move economically or socially. It was tantamount to an economic death sentence, particularly within the smaller towns and cities whose socio-economic infrastructures were undeveloped. Tertiary or service sectors were poorly developed and poorly funded, locals being dependent on the coal companies for economic, political, social and religious direction. This dependence on the coal companies for most facets of daily life was an integral part of the management techniques employed by the companies to keep workers complacent and malleable. However, as the small monopolies folded, or withdrew in line with the so-called Energy Revolution policies introduced at the macro-economic level, the local people transferred their dependence from the coal companies to the government - and especially to the welfare agencies.

That welfare dependence is endemic is unarguable - there are masses of statistics which support this position.² What is contestable is how the welfare is distributed, to whom it is distributed, and how the people to whom it is distributed use it to survive in contemporary Japan. As I have described in the previous chapter, the 123 Legislation has had a profound influence on welfare

¹Idegawa, Ishizaki, Takashima, Sato: interviews

²see for example, Fukuoka Prefecture Annual Welfare Statistics, 1980 to 1989; Tagawa *Kotoshi no Tōkei* - Tagawa City, 1989; Otoma Report on Welfare, 1986

distribution in Japan, and even in Chikugo where the welfare dependence is still extremely high, the introduction of this policy has reduced the potential number of welfare recipients considerably.

It is my intention to examine in more detail the implications of this policy, though this time, rather than focusing on the macro perspective, I will focus on the micro. To achieve this end I will attempt to situate the discussion within the context of everyday social interaction, examining in some detail the day to day existence of a couple of informants who are dependent on welfare. I will contrast this with accounts from two prominent and active senior social workers. Both men work in Tagawa but whereas one man is a section head of the prefectural welfare office, the other is a section head of the city welfare office.

Distribution of welfare

It is necessary to introduce briefly the political context in which the distribution of welfare is carried out. Structurally, welfare is distributed on two levels - the prefectural level, and the city level. The prefectural welfare office is responsible for the distribution of welfare to towns and villages in their prefectures which are not classified as cities - that is, to the towns and villages which are not large enough to have developed the bureaucratic institutions that cities possess. Because these towns do not have their own welfare offices, applications for welfare can be made at the local town halls, or post offices if there is no town hall. The applications are then passed on to the relevant prefectural welfare office, normally situated in the region's major city, within the prefectural government building. Although the funds made available for welfare in these cases come from the national government and the prefectural government, the *gun* system of local government control is used to determine which area is responsible for what towns and villages.

In Fukuoka Prefecture there are 28 towns and their associated villages which come under the control of the prefectural welfare office. Seven *gun* welfare offices handle the applications for, and distribution of welfare to the

people within these towns. Tagawa-gun for instance, is responsible for the distribution of welfare to nine towns and their associated villages. In contrast, the city welfare offices have a clear and unambiguous charter which provides for the distribution of welfare to only those who are registered inhabitants of the city.

Logistically the prefectural welfare offices are under a great deal more strain than the city offices because applications are made from a geographically diverse area. Sending welfare officers to the towns to investigate individual cases is made more difficult by the distances involved, because the welfare workers have to make the central welfare office their base. This means that cases are considered with sometimes only sketchy knowledge of an applicant, and without due regard for the social and economic circumstances in which the applicant lives. Since the introduction of the 123 Legislation the government has been keen to reduce the number of welfare workers, and these reductions are being felt within the prefectural welfare offices in particular, as demands are made of the welfare workers to reduce the number of successful welfare applications. The fact that by successfully implementing the 123 directive, the welfare workers are in danger of making themselves redundant, is not emphasised.

The city welfare offices have less pressure to conform to the letter of the 123 Legislation, although within certain cities with unacceptably high levels of welfare dependence there has been a strong movement in this direction. Generally, the level of welfare dependence in the cities is considerably lower than in the towns which come under the umbrella of the prefectural welfare offices. This reflects in large part the relative wealth of the respective societies. It also indicates the type of history which has brought about the present circumstances - that is, those areas which, since World War II, have been able to develop relatively complex and diversified economies have extremely low levels of welfare dependence, while those societies with poorly developed economic infrastructures tend to have high ratios of welfare dependence. In the case of Chikuho, towns like Nogata which developed alternative industries to coal were able to ride out the post-coal depression with relative ease, whereas towns like Kawasaki, which were almost totally dependent on coal, suffered

considerably, and even today reflect the past in their extraordinary welfare dependence rates, high crime rates, and pervasive social problems.

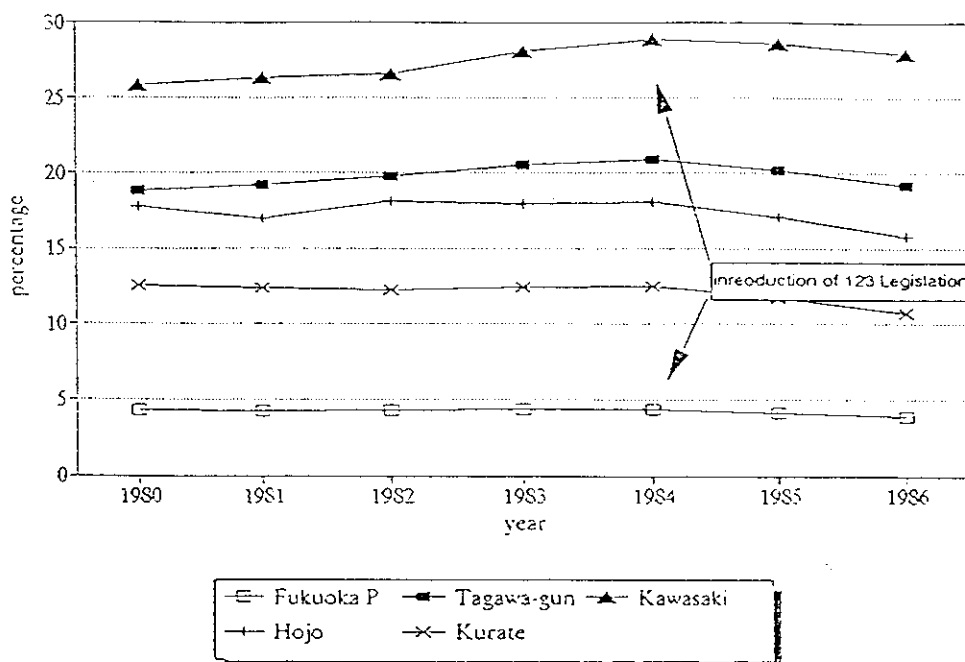
The problem areas

Before the coal companies came, Kawasaki was a small agricultural town of about 1500 people who grew rice and produced *sake*. A tight-knit community, isolated in a remote part of the Chikuho Basin, it was separated from the outside world by a ring of mountains. The discovery of coal brought with it a huge influx of people from other parts of Kyushu seeking the relatively well paid work in the mines. The proliferation of small mining communities in the Kawasaki region, although often self-encapsulated entities, brought about the development of a fairly sizeable entertainment sector in the town itself. Bars, brothels and gambling houses started appearing soon after the first coal mines opened. The coal companies' presence also allowed for the development of a railway system, which is now defunct, and improved communications between Kawasaki and other towns and cities.

As coal interests withdrew from the region it became apparent that the remaining commercial infrastructure, which had been developed to enhance the economic performance of the coal industries, was unable to cope with the growing number of unemployed miners and their families. Many farmers had been forced to sell their land to the mining companies as their fields started to subside owing to undermining. Agricultural production all but ceased on a commercial scale. In short the agricultural, social and economic infrastructures were unable to deal with the demands that were placed on them by the people following the exodus of the mining concerns.

Contemporary Kawasaki still suffers from a poorly organised commercial centre, poorly developed public facilities - though in recent years a new public hall has been erected - and, by Japanese standards, astronomical welfare dependence (see figure 15, page 334). Within Japan Kawasaki is famous for three reasons: Ueda's Hoshu mine and its violent reputation; crime, and in

FUKUOKA PREFECTURE WELFARE 1986 - Percentages



KAWASAKI AND TAGAWA-GUN WELFARE RATES 1980 TO 1986

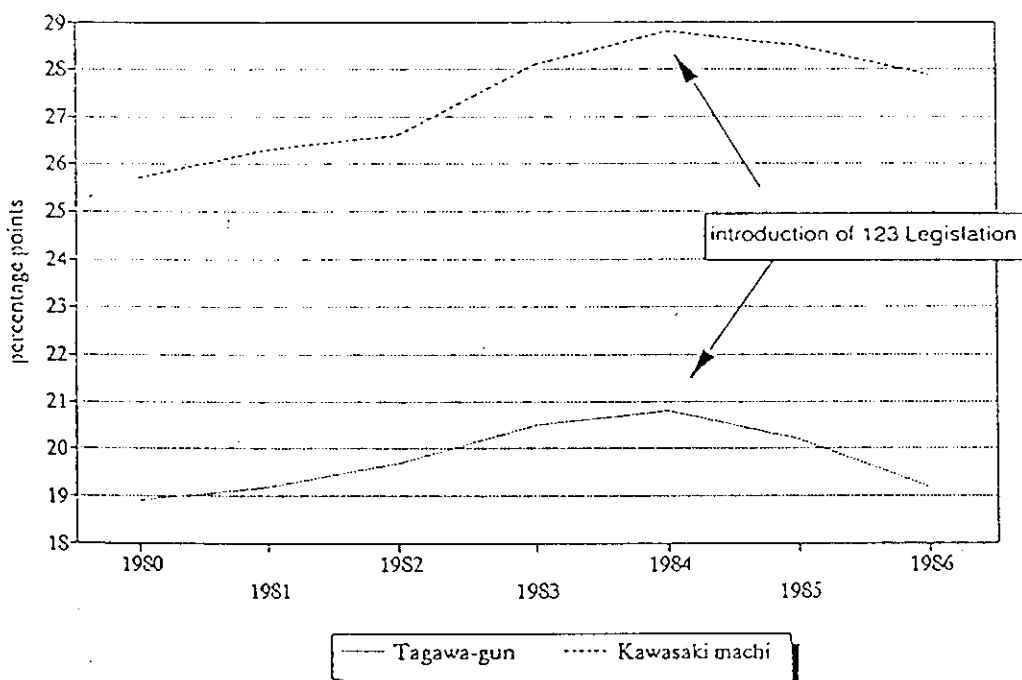


figure 15: source - Tagawa-gun Welfare Office. Social Welfare Statistics. 1987

particular the *yakuza* involvement in the region's business interests; and poverty, with its accompanying welfare dependence. The welfare situation in particular has attracted a reasonable amount of interest from a diverse group of commentators over the years, so much so in fact, that the Japan University of Welfare Studies has conducted annual economic and sociological studies in the region over many years. These studies have attempted to measure any changes in welfare dependence, the economic climate, or the high crime rate, using sociological data gathering and analysis techniques. Professor Otoma, who heads the group of academics investigating the situation, has identified the following issues as worthy of further study:

1. the nature of the withdrawal of capital from the region, and the lack of either moral or financial responsibility taken by the coal companies immediately after the closures;

2. the nature of second and third generation welfare dependence, particularly within the under 20 years of age bracket;

3. the need to overhaul the welfare system to cope with chronic, perennially depressed areas such as Chikuho.³

Attitudes towards welfare recipients vary according to position in society. Professional people, government employees, many welfare officers, and industry in general tend to view them as a group of literally hopeless people, and have no sympathy for their predicament. This opinion is based on the perception that welfare payments are responsible for the government budget deficit which in turn has resulted in increased State and prefectural charges and taxes. The make-up of the welfare recipients - in particular the high percentage of elderly people - is ignored. A Tagawa doctor summed up the feeling amongst many of those opposed to welfare as a principle, saying that people on welfare are:

users, and lazy. They use our taxes to support their gambling and drug habits. Many of them are Koreans or *burakumin*, you know. It's a disgrace that we support their worthless lives.⁴

³Otoma, 1986: 78-9

⁴Aoyama, interview: 1989

Local governments too, while acknowledging the role that the Energy Revolution had in the destruction of Chikuho's economy, are roundly critical of "excessively generous welfare benefits,"⁵ and are supportive of the move to restrict payments. This support is rationalised in purely economic terms. Governments maintain that if welfare recipience is reduced, business investment from outside will increase because there will be greater confidence in the local workforce. This in turn would greatly enhance the area's future economic potential, alleviating the need for welfare. It is a circular argument, but one which is getting more prominence within Chikuho. The race for investment orders from outside the area is on, and the development of a viable communications and commercial infrastructure is now incumbent on any would-be contenders. The prevalent government attitude in areas where there is chronic welfare dependence is that money spent on welfare could better be spent on building roads and housing, developing factory sites, and beautifying the environment in attempts to lure industrial investment.

From many ex-miners' perspective, this talk of "developing a new economic infrastructure and creating new business" is just rhetoric. People say that the only money that Kawasaki, or Chikuho will ever attract is *yakuza* money, and that the only sort of work that would come into town would be gambling, drug running, or prostitution - traditional Kawasaki work niches.

Okushima, a 65 year old ex-coal miner, said:

Politicians say that they're going to do something about the region - they've been saying this for years. But what have they done? Nothing! When they do build a new factory or do something to get new businesses into the area it's women who get the jobs because the factory only wants to employ part-timers. The only people who actually benefit from this sort of investment are the politicians who try to win votes, and the companies who make profits by employing cheap women labour. The rest of us get

⁵Fukushiro - government employee - interview: 1988

nothing. They don't care what happens to the area. It's *tatema*.⁶

This attitude is prevalent within low income groups in Chikuho, although often it is not articulated so clearly. Within Tagawa-gun, as the elderly population increases at a rapid rate, more and more people are becoming dependent, at least in part, on welfare. Already the majority of those welfare recipients over 65 years of age take part-time or casual work as labourers so that they can afford luxuries.⁷ Cuts to welfare proposed by the government, if introduced, will have resounding repercussions within this group of people who are predominantly coalminers and coalminers' families. Already financially stretched, the cuts will debilitate their efforts to maintain a relatively independent lifestyle.

Tatefuji, a woman who worked for more than 25 years in the Mitsui coalmines, and who lives in Tagawa's Mitsui Ita *tanjū*, said that welfare is not a privilege. It is a right. Like many others who are subsisting on welfare, she had given most of her working life to the coal industry, and when the mines closed she was left with nothing except her superannuation. The super benefits she is entitled to only just pay for her basic living expenses. She receives 85,000 yen a month from the superannuation and because this is 20,000 yen below the official minimum standard of living, she receives the balance from welfare. However, she states that she is considerably more comfortable than the miners from the smaller mines, like the Kawasaki industry. Statistics I obtained about general income levels support this position (see figure 16, page 338).

There is a strong feeling among many older ex-miners that they deserve welfare support, given that they laboured for so long within the industry which was the backbone of Japan's post-war economic recovery. Moreover, because of the conditions they endured, the sacrifices they made, and the violent and inhospitable nature of the industry in general, there is a commonly held assumption that the government should recognise the extent of their efforts and

⁶Okushima, interview: 1988

⁷Otoma, 1986: 34

AVERAGE MONTHLY HOUSEHOLD INCOME National Statistics 1986 compared

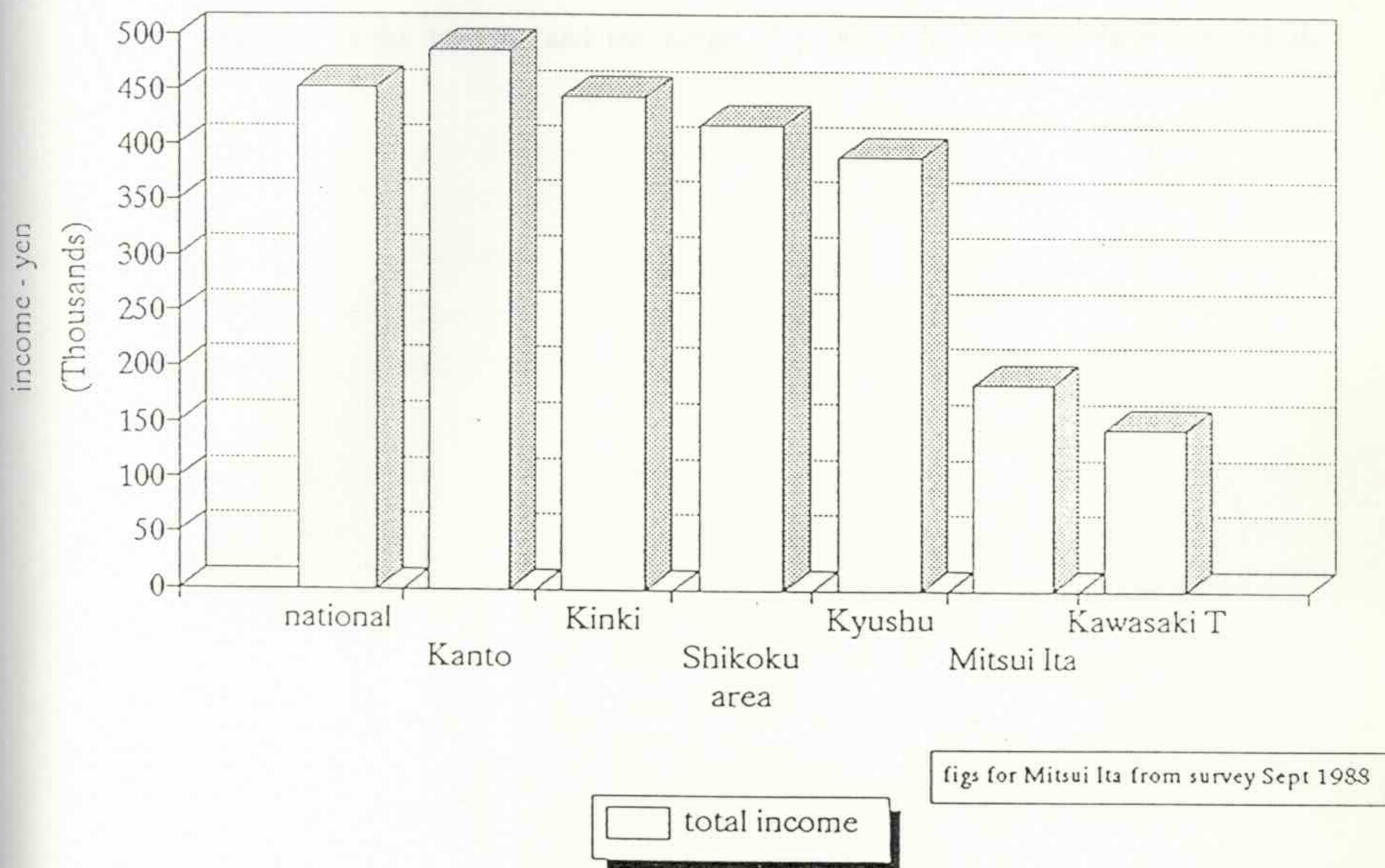


figure 16: source - National Survey by National Statistics Bureau. 1986

reward them. A number of bureaucratic and attitudinal obstacles make this recognition highly unlikely, however. Some of these obstacles originate at governmental levels, but others are quite apparent at different levels of society. The issue of second and third generation welfare dependence raised by Otoma, the illegal pooling of welfare within single households, and the series of scams perpetrated against the welfare office, often by *yakuza*, are examples of obstacles that the authorities believe exist. These present powerful rationales for the development of a policy which actively seeks to decrease, rather than increase, the size of the benefit, and the range of people who are eligible to receive it.

A case study

In the following pages I will present two interviews I conducted in the early part of 1989. The people I spoke to in the interviews did not know each other, but the subjects and themes discussed converged as the respective informants described their views on controversial issues.

Kumo

Kumo is a supervisor for case workers at the Tagawa-gun welfare office and is responsible for the distribution of welfare benefits to applicants from, amongst other areas, Kawasaki town. He has worked in the welfare system for more than 20 years, and although critical of the current system of welfare distribution and especially the 123 Legislation, he continues to work under the guidelines established by the government, imposing his own interpretations of the relevant laws in cases where he sees fit. He has a comprehensive knowledge of the welfare system, and is forthcoming in explaining some of the contradictions inherent in the current policies. However, like many other welfare workers I spoke with, his personal feelings are balanced with both a sense of duty and a sense of self-preservation, which in effect means that although privately critical of policy decisions taken at a higher level, he feels obliged to follow the welfare laws in practice.

Kumo has taken his personal feelings further than most in that he has become an active campaigner within welfare worker ranks, agitating for reform of the system. He has gone so far as to publish articles and supporting statistics in local union publications which show that the government's position on welfare is cynical and unjustified. His opposition for welfare policies notwithstanding, his views on the distribution system are sometimes at odds with the views expressed by the informants in the other interview, who display recipients' attitudes towards the system, and sometimes remarkably convergent with their views, especially in relation to practical welfare considerations.

The Hari Family

Hari, is a 30 year old man who lives in Kawasaki. He is married and has a two year old daughter. While working at a dry cleaners where he had worked since he left school, he fell down the stairs at home and injured his back. He was hospitalised for one month, and when he left hospital he was told to stay in bed for two more months. He has been unemployed for 11 months officially, but he personally has had no income for more than 18 months since he hurt his back. Because his wife was not working, the family had no income apart from the unemployment insurance to which he had contributed for more than 10 years. This insurance gave him 70% of his basic wage for a period of six months, after which, when he had not found a new, less physically demanding job, he was forced to apply for unemployment welfare (*seikatsu hōgo*).

In the time since he applied for and received the *seikatsu hōgo*, he has had a number of jobs, none of which he has been able to continue for any length of time. He has been hospitalised on 12 occasions with lower back pain, for periods of up to six weeks. His wife's and his own views on the welfare process offer some insights into the effects of the 123 Legislation on a small family in Kawasaki.

The Hari family lives in a housing estate built for ex-coalminers and their families at Kamihoshu. Standing out like an isthmus in an ocean of rice paddies, the *tanjū* is visible as you drive out of town, towards the southern mountain range. A small general store, a potter's shop, and the requisite *sake* store, with the ever present automatic drink machines, the back-lit red and white Coca Cola sign smashed and flickering fitfully, do little to inspire confidence as you approach the village along a narrow causeway raised a metre or so above the paddies. Their house, is white painted stucco concrete of identical design to all the other houses on the street, with a small garden, which in this case is showing some signs of neglect. It has two bedrooms, a small living area, an

internal bathroom and kitchen, an external laundry, and a *genkan* (sunken entrance-way).

When a typhoon devastated the old *tanjū* in 1980 the residents were entitled to government compensation. With the funds they decided to build a series of two storey semi detached homes, so that both the older and younger generations would be able to live in the same vicinity without encroaching on each other's privacy, where possible. That is, the elderly parents would live in one half of the semi, and the children would live in the other half, the latter being able to keep an eye on the elderly. Of course, in cases where there were no second or third generations, the semis were considered stand alone dwellings and people who didn't know each other well lived on either side of the walls. The residents of the housing estate consider themselves very lucky for having suffered the typhoon, without which they would not have been able to build such comparatively comfortable housing.

The Hari family was able to move into Kamihoshu because Tazuko's mother and father both worked in the local mines and they had lived in the *tanjū* for more than 40 years. By proxy, the children of miners are entitled to take first option on vacant housing when it becomes available. As the local mine closed in 1963, most of the people who worked there is getting quite old, and as they die a new generation of their children and young relatives are moving into the *tanjū* - people who have never experienced working in the mines for themselves.

The interviews

I approached their house at a safe distance from the irrepressible Onishi, the *kami shibai* man with an insatiable appetite for monologue. Because I did not know the family well, I was relying on Onishi to help me with the initial introductions, and as usual he introduced me in the least sympathetic manner possible:

This is the Kyushu University lecturer, the expert on welfare, who wants to know why you're still living on the dole after all these months.

Fortunately I was able to work around this introduction and after we were invited into the house, seated at the low table under the *kotatsu* (a heated quilt with which the people sitting at the table cover their lower bodies), with cups of steaming green tea and rice biscuits in front of us, I was able to start the interview with Tazuko, Hari's wife. Hari was out, presumably moonlighting, according to a later remark of Onishi.

The following is an extract from an interview with Hari, his wife Tazuko, Onishi and myself. I will employ a dualistic structure in this chapter, using the interview with the Hari family as the base, inserting the relevant parts of Kumo's interview into the text to present a picture of his perceptions of the same issues.

T: When we first claimed welfare, my husband was ill and unable to work so we thought that it was our obvious right to get on the dole because we were unable to make ends meet. That was when he was injured - in February.

O: He fell down the stairs (laughs)

M: How exactly was he injured?

T: It was his back and hip. He'd hurt his back at work before you see. Anyway, he got some nerve damage this time, and his legs became numb so he was hospitalised. He was in hospital for a month or so. He'd been working in a dry cleaner up till then.

As far as the welfare was concerned there was a problem, you see, which affected us later on. About six months before that my grandmother had put her savings into our bank account because

she thought that her great grandchild could use it when she grew up.

Her grandmother worked in the local relief program and had her retirement pay in a savings account, and in order to qualify for the pension she was required to dispose of her savings. Hence she put the savings - 600,000 yen - into her grandchild's account. Because the money was officially in Tazuko's name, when her husband lost his job they weren't eligible for welfare themselves because they had too much money in the savings account. It was only after they had exhausted the money that they became eligible for the welfare.⁸

T: If we had admitted that it was her money she would not have been able to claim pension benefits for more than a year. So we thought that it couldn't be helped and lived with it..

Commentary:

From this point on I will insert Kumo's interview into the text to illustrate the differences and similarities between respective understanding of the welfare situation. Kumo's interview will be written with single line spacing.

K: Legally, with savings, the applicant is allowed to have one third of the minimum monthly amount as dictated by the

⁸When her grandmother put the money into their account her husband was working so it was seen as a way for the grandmother to contribute something towards her great grand daughter's upbringing, and still, by claiming the *seikatsu hōgo*, allow her to maintain a reasonable standard of living. Further, it increased the sense of obligation which the children owed her.

Unfortunately, although it was well thought out, she didn't take into consideration Hari becoming unemployed. This effectively meant that the gesture, and the ploy to deceive the authorities by transferring the funds, became meaningless. The money was soon discovered, and the Haris had to spend all the money over a period of six months in a "proper and responsible manner," providing receipts to the welfare office before they became eligible for welfare.

government's directive governing this. For example, for a three person family the minimum wage is set at between 120,000 and 130,000 yen a month. So in this case the applicant is allowed to have 35,000 or so in savings and still be entitled to welfare if they meet the other criteria. If they have more than this amount in savings welfare will not be distributed, and their application will be refused.

So, for example if a person earns 70,000 yen it is the difference between that amount and the minimum that is used to determine his need. Therefore if this person applies for welfare and the minimum level for supporting life is decided to be 120,000 he receives 50,000 yen from the welfare. (Laughs) I don't think that you can believe this, can you? But that's the way it works here.

The 123 Legislation is of considerable importance in determining whether an applicant is eligible for benefits. The case worker from the welfare office comes to the applicant's house and asks which relatives are able to assist them.

T: The case worker discussed the structure of the family with us. That is, he asked about our parents, our relatives generally, whether or not there was someone who would be able to help us out. Basically all he wanted to know was, weren't there some people who would be able to give us some money so that we would be able to live.

Living in Kawasaki, which is rather isolated, the Haris had owned a car, but they had heard that if they were to receive welfare they had to dispose of it. Realising that if they were without a car they would be totally isolated, they disposed of it illegally, assuring themselves of its use.

We had a car, but we knew that if we had a car when we applied for welfare the money would be refused. It was only an old car, but it gave us some freedom of movement. So we registered the car in my younger brother's name. We thought that even if we sold it we would hardly get any money for it, so we

might as well get some use from it. It would be a waste to just get rid of it after all. Anyway it sits around at my brother's place and we use it when we need it.

Kumo corroborates the information that the Haris had about the car, and makes the welfare bureaucracy's stance on this matter very clear:

K: To be quite concrete about it, the first thing that the worker looks for is whether the applicant has a car. As far as the government is concerned, the applicant, apart from in special circumstances, is not allowed to own a car. The exceptions are in the case of physically handicapped people, and when a car is being used as a means of transport to get the applicant to work. Apart from these exceptions an applicant cannot receive welfare if they own a car. A car is regarded as being personal property which can be disposed of for cash, you see.

M: I see. So if an applicant had an old car for example, and said that they would scrap it, then if they re-applied for the welfare they would have the potential of receiving it, is that right?

K: Yes, that's the story.

The case worker

Tazuko describes her first contact with the local case worker, a man in his late twenties.

T: The first man who came around was pretty easy going.. He was very young though. He looked as though he had just graduated from university and started work. When I say he was easy going what I mean is that he seemed to believe our story. But there have been a number of case workers we have seen - two or three anyway. They are often changing. But some of them.. When you tell them what has happened, what you're trying to do, they just don't even seem to be listening half the time, and when they look at you they seem to be saying that you're a liar.

The new case worker's visits are rather frequent. He pressures my husband into working even though physically he is unable to - it's the sort of thing that he says, and the way he says it - it's a violation of our privacy.

Kumo first explains the discretion that an individual case worker has, and then, critically explains the sort of person who is employed by the welfare office these days. He makes a point of criticising government policy which is geared to reducing welfare expenditure at the expense of people who really need it.

K: The case worker does have a little discretion, but not a lot. Just a little. In reference to this discretion, the case worker decides how far to investigate the application and as a supervisor I find that I have to decide what is applicable in each case based on the material that I receive. We take the position of the applicant into consideration, and we think about not doing the immoral thing by the person who has applied. However there are many case workers who do not think like this, and will follow the rules that the government has made to the limit - devoted to the government, these people. If the case worker thinks like this, then the investigation that they make into the applicant's case is necessarily tough. They have become overwhelmingly numerous actually.

From where I stand it seems that the young case workers are generally very keen to do their jobs in the spirit in which they are employed, which means that they are quite devoted to the government's position. But perhaps they do not really consider what the issue of welfare is all about.

He describes the unthinking complicity of new, inexperienced case workers as a tool of current government policy to reduce welfare. Over time, as government policy on welfare expenditure gets tighter, those who stay within a particular welfare office can see the changes in policy as part of the course of history. These case workers are more likely to be sympathetic to the hardships which people like the Haris endure.

The new breed of welfare workers, however, recruited from universities outside the region often have no previous training in welfare, little sympathy for

the sometimes singularly local conditions of employment, and no recognition of either the way welfare distribution has been conducted in the past, or the historical circumstances which have given rise to the contemporary welfare related problems.

K: They follow the rules if they can, and the things that obstruct them in the fulfilment of their duty are the only things that they are really concerned about. However the rules change as we enter a new era. If you work in the welfare office for a long time you can see the process of change in action.

To prevent the young case workers getting too sympathetic with local welfare recipients, the prefectural government has adopted a policy of transferring them to other districts every five years.

K: It's the prefecture's human relations strategy. To speak quite frankly here, it is best to have as much experience as possible in the one area when dealing with welfare in general, but in Japan right throughout the country the same thing applies - the work transfer cycle is extremely fast.

This is one of the human strategies that applies to the welfare service with the aim of constraining the distribution of welfare payments. In Fukuoka prefecture the cycle is five years.

In connection with the case workers, Tazuko rationalises her husband's predicament, saying that although he has a "bad back," because it is a sporadic thing which sometimes cripples him, and at other times allows him relative freedom of movement, it is difficult for the case workers to understand the nature of his pain. Consequently they put extreme pressure on him to return to work.

T: If he's not at home and he's not at the hospital the case workers think that he is at work pulling the wool over their eyes (that is, claiming benefits even though he is working). He comes two or three times a week. The same case worker. Sometimes he

comes in the morning, sometimes during the day - it's completely random. We are never told when he is coming so it's not possible to always wait for him - I mean we sometimes have to go out and do things after all.

They never tell us when they are coming. You see they think that if he is secretly working then if they come around at odd times they might catch him when he is at work.. Get him while he's ripping the system off - that's what they think. So they come without warning. When they come we talk in the *genkan*. They don't say they are going to cut the welfare, but they tell us to hurry up and quit applying for it. They say "Go to work, do something.." They tell us that even if a month's pay for the work he does is not enough to support the family they will supply the difference so that we will be able to survive.

- Tazuko's husband, Hari, comes home and joins in the discussion -

H: OK, as far as I am concerned, if I was to become totally dependent on the welfare it would be the end of me. I've had a taste and I can tell you that it has already disgraced me. Because of this all I wanted to do was to give up living.

I think that young people on welfare are picked out for special treatment by the case workers. I was asked to get work of any sort, and I know that I should take some work, but because I have a back injury I just can't get any. It's the same everywhere. It's a really vexing situation (because I want to work) and the hardest thing about it is that I have to stand there and take it. (the case workers' scorn).

Hari displays a sound, working knowledge of current welfare policy, and the case workers' attitudes in particular:

H: It's not really as though the case worker is always disbelieving me about the pain I have in my back.. the fact is that they just want to make the numbers work out alright. You see, if I give up welfare and take work regardless of how badly it pays, the numbers are balanced for the case worker. It doesn't really matter that I've got a bad back.

M: It's been said that people on welfare view the case worker as their enemy and vice versa. How do you feel about them yourself?

H: (Long pause) I suppose you could say that I have these feelings about them, but I couldn't say it aloud. It's partly because the case workers are afraid of us I think. That we're going to do something to them. Enemies don't get away with coming to certain areas, and this is one of them - Kawasaki.

You know Omine (a suburb in Kawasaki)? After the last case worker was chased out of there by welfare recipients no one has wanted to go there, and I don't blame them. I think that the people gang up on them. So over there the case workers contact them by phone and ask them what's happening.

Just as they are starting to know the people and the conditions in which people live they transfer them to other areas. As a person who has had the actual experience of being on welfare I think that as far as the case workers go, I think that it's only a job to the welfare workers, but to us it's the opposite - there's all this

pressure.. As far as they're concerned, they want to change the position I am in, to get me to work, regardless of what I do. It's the welfare bosses, you see. The aim is to make me stop applying for welfare no matter what is required.

Kumo supports Hari's comments to a certain extent, but qualifies them, saying that people like himself apply a more liberal interpretation to the letter of the law.

K: The case workers seem to feel that they have to be hard in their application of the laws but.. well they feel that they must be businesslike in their dealings with the people. However case workers like myself who have studied something of the welfare system at university are quite different I think. We listen to the way that the person describes their household and to what they have to say carefully, and on the basis of what they say we develop a relationship of trust and then suggest to them how they could work, for example. However the way that this work is being done at present is not like this at all.

These workers listen to only what they regard as being necessary. Apart from that, they don't listen to what the applicant has to say. They only ask questions which are necessary to the performance of the investigation into the circumstances of the applicant. They perform the investigation and then decide on this basis whether it is necessary to give out the welfare. In this case there is no human relationship involved at all - no understanding.

As far as I am concerned, of course we have to look into the way that welfare applications should or shouldn't be handled, but we also try to develop some sort of depth of understanding with the applicant. Of course whether this is successful or not is another story, but regardless we have to try our best to do this. In this area the way things are done is a little different.

According to Kumo, case workers are subjected to pressure to reduce welfare expenditure, and moreover, more senior welfare workers like himself are also pressured. This in turn increases the pressure to which the case workers are subjected. He describes the process:

K: I don't get told not to give out welfare, no. However, the welfare rate here is very high so there are a lot of ways in which I am asked to lower the welfare rate where possible. Because of these measures which are introduced at the work place the welfare rate is being lowered, that is if I conform to the demands placed on me. However we are never told to reduce the welfare spending in as many words. But we are told to lower the welfare rate. There is this sort of pressure.

The pressure comes from the national government I think. The national government develops these policies, which the prefecture is bound to follow, and in turn this is made into a form of action which affects each welfare office. Then the head of the individual welfare office is told to follow these directions. He tells the *kacho* to do the same, and eventually it is passed on to me. To speak quite frankly, it is a policy to reduce welfare spending which the national government has made.

It's a case of *honne* and *tatemae*⁹. As far as the meaning that I get from this system of buck passing goes, it is a simple matter of the fact that I am being told to reduce welfare spending.

In actual fact, Kumo is as cynical as Hari about the reasons for reducing welfare expenditure. The need to reduce the statistics of welfare dependency is mentioned by both Hari and Kumo, although Kumo displays a more sophisticated understanding of the problem.

K: Last year in April or May the national figures for welfare reached less than one percent. This is extremely low when compared to any other developed capitalist country. When the rate fell to 0.99 percent for the first time, even though the national government said that the economy was performing well, I could not believe that given the actual state of affairs, the employment rate had really improved at all. Therefore you can say that the lowering of the rate of welfare was just a strategy to show statistically that the economy was performing better than it actually was.

⁹Roughly translates, in this context as "true intentions", and "a diplomatic face"

Welfare, the Kawasaki work ethos and the *yakuza*

An alternative work ethos has developed in Kawasaki over the years since the coalmining days - something which is related to the limited opportunities for employment in the region. Following the withdrawal of Ueda and the other coal companies, many ex-miners became dependent on welfare as their main form of subsistence. The development of the town's economic infrastructure was slow, and apart from day labouring on building sites and in the public works programs initiated under the Temporary Coal Rationalisation Bill, employment opportunities for skilled miners were rare.

The new-found dependence on welfare left many people with the consciousness that, even after they had found work, they had the right to remain on the welfare. In fact, as in the halcyon days of the coal companies' presence, the local community developed an alternative consciousness to the authorities of where they fitted into the scheme of things. A series of welfare scams was implemented, which involved most Kawasaki employers, almost all *yakuza* personnel and many government bureaucrats. To a certain extent, many of these scams are still perpetrated today.

Old habits died hard, and especially the habits traditionally associated with coalmining - gambling and drinking - were expensive. In order to maintain these luxuries on greatly reduced incomes, many people turned to unofficial suppliers for capital - the loan sharks. The loan sharks were often *yakuza* or *yakuza*-connected, and could be relied on not to inform the welfare office of a person's financial commitments or status. The *yakuza* also ran almost all the gambling in town, from SP bookmakers to the *pachinko* parlours, and they controlled the booming "love motel" and prostitution businesses. Moreover they had diversified interests in the construction industry, one of the only industries to employ ex-miners in the harsh economic climate. They were therefore able to monitor the movements of many people's leisure activities, and could determine how people actually earned, spent, borrowed and lost money.

Given the limited opportunities for many ex-miners to earn money, apart from labouring and gambling, the *yakuza* were in favour of a system of

government subsidised payments for the masses. By guaranteeing the people a steady base income, the gangsters were able to estimate with great accuracy how much money they could afford to lend to whom, when the money would be returned, and how the money would be spent in town. The welfare system lent itself to abuse. Apart from their obvious crime-related interests, the *yakuza* also had interests in politics. In the formative days of welfare distribution in Kawasaki in the 1960s, when it was conducted virtually without prefectural government interference under the Scrap and Build program, the local *yakuza* were able to offer local government officials percentages as incentives to allow almost any applicant free rein to receive benefits. The welfare cheque would be paid to the *yakuza* directly, the amount owed for services deducted, and the remainder, if there was any, passed on to the official recipient. If there was still money owed, the recipient would be forced to borrow more money until the next welfare cheque arrived. It was a vicious circle.

Further, the *yakuza* themselves were also on the welfare payroll, because they were not officially working.

However, the introduction of the 123 Legislation had a profound effect on the system. The national and prefectural governments identified some of the problems associated with what was becoming an excessive welfare bill in the area, and moved to create a much stricter environment, as I have described in the previous chapter. It has been suggested by one of my *yakuza* informants that although the appearance of the welfare distribution system has changed, the same processes are in action. Having identified the case worker as the weak link in the bureaucratic chain of command, they are targeted by the *yakuza*. That is, they are threatened with personal violence if they will not support the application of a person whom the *yakuza* has recommended.

Kumo supports the argument that "in the past" these sort of occurrences were common, but says that they have largely disappeared today. This may be either naive or very well-informed. Certainly few case workers seemed prepared to discuss this issue. Hari, on the other hand, suggests that many people who are living quite comfortably on welfare, and are working or using the money to gamble, owe it to the influence of the *yakuza*. Certainly the incidences of

direct *yakuza* involvement are decreasing, just as the influence of the gangsters is waning, but there is a strong link between the mentality caused by their intervention in the formative days of welfare distribution in Kawasaki and the contemporary work ethos. Hari explains his interpretation of the Kawasaki work ethos:

H: The problem conditions from the past have continued on into the present. What I mean is that there are many people in Kawasaki who get welfare support (*seikatsu hōgo*) and take the money and use it on the racetrack, or in gambling generally. It's part of Kawasaki's language - the welfare (laughs).

In Kawasaki there are other, different sorts of pressure placed (on the case workers) I'd say - you know, like the *yakuza* used to do..... When all the people in a small area get welfare there is a sort of group solidarity. Everyone boasts about how easy it is to get on the welfare, and I suppose that there is a sort of consciousness that it is everyone's right, not a privilege. They sort of use it to balance their wages so that they make a good living.

Onishi describes it more succinctly:

O: Around here you see because there are so many people in the same boat, if you went to work in a factory there is a good chance that many of the others who are working there would also be on the dole. Because everyone is in the same position no-one says anything and the case workers never find out. If someone who everyone knows becomes *Minseiin* (town welfare investigation officer) he knows what everyone is doing but because he wants to keep his position of respect amongst the people he knows that there is little he can do to make people report their "secret work."

You see, everyone around here likes to think that they're equal, and if others are working on the dole there is no reason why you can't - it's a form of egalitarianism. If someone has no money then he thinks that he is below everyone else, and that is not how things are around here. That's the sort of character that this place has - it's important for everyone to feel about the same level.

Searching for work

The availability of work is of critical importance in determining whether or not a person is eligible for welfare. Formally the government employment system consists of an office called the *shokugyō anteisho*, a public funded "job introduction centre" to which applicants are referred by the case worker. The case workers, like many others in the public service are ignorant of the way the centre functions, and therefore place their trust in its capacity to gainfully employ welfare recipients. Welfare recipients on the other hand, thanks to experience gained from having to deal with the centre, are aware of its shortcomings and are appropriately cynical of its capacity to solve their unemployment dilemmas. Hari, for example, says that there is a "pecking order" of regulars at the centre who always get the good jobs, and that people like himself are only offered casual day labouring. Because this is not the sort of work he wants, he often refuses to take it.

There have been times when he has been asked to go to interviews with big companies which may have been able to employ him on a full-time basis, but he has not managed to get past the first interview because of his back problem. It seems that the companies were not willing to employ a person with a history of medical trouble, the introduction from the job centre notwithstanding.

In Tagawa-gun, like in most areas in Japan, once a person has passed the initial "recruiting age" - usually after they leave university or school - there is a very limited job market, and this market is dependent on personal contacts. In Hari's case he has few contacts who are able to offer him anything other

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than the advice that he should stay on the dole and work "secretly" as other people in town do.

H: I hate being on welfare. Once you've been on the dole there is no way that you can get back your sense of self-esteem. When I look at the people around here who basically do nothing other than lie around a couple of days a week, gamble a bit, maybe work a day or two on a construction site and take the dole money, I get really pissed off.

And they all put pressure on me to be like them. They think that we're arrogant because I really want to work, and because I'm not playing any games with the dole. They're just lazy, useless bastards who only want to preserve their selfish ways of life. That's why we get pressured. It's to make us conform to what they are, so that we won't tell. Of course we won't tell anyone, but I hate it all the same.

Discussion

There are a number of contradictory values expressed in this section which probably need further clarification. Perhaps it would be worth looking at the issues individually, so that the respective attitudes of the informants are made clear within the context of the discussion.

The Haris were well aware of how the relevant sections of the welfare regulations affected them when they decided that it was essential to apply for the welfare. They were quite aware, for instance that as prospective welfare beneficiaries they were obliged to dispose of their car, and of their savings, before they would become eligible to receive any benefits. They chose to "dispose" of the car in a rather simple and effective way which allowed them to keep the use of it, yet not be penalised for what they regarded as a stupid regulation, a regulation which only served to restrict their movements and their

independence and to make their lives more difficult. That they were able to justify this, on the one hand, and still condemn others in town for receiving welfare benefits in an "immoral manner" may appear to be hypocritical, yet as far as they were concerned, there was no conflict of interests. This was because of their strongly held assumptions that they were in the "right," that they were trying to work, and not abuse the system, and that owning the car was important if Hari was to find work because public transport was so bad in the area. In other words, bending the law, as they did in this instance, could be justified on the grounds that the law in respect of car ownership was stupid and unfair for people living in rural areas, and was a law made for people on welfare in the cities where car ownership was a luxury.

Kumo said in subsequent conversations, that he could not understand that a car could be considered a means of making finding work easier for welfare recipients. He perceived the situation as simply that, if an applicant had a car, it didn't matter where they lived, or how difficult it was to find public transport, it was essential that they transfer this property into cash and in doing so realise their full financial potential. This was because he believes that welfare exists for those who need it, and if there is any superfluous property it should be converted into cash.

The issue of savings also caused Kumo a great deal of difficulty. He was aware that the law provided only for those who had nothing, and that the applicant had to demonstrate that he or she was basically bankrupted before claiming benefits. In effect this meant that applicants who had used up their resources so that they qualified for welfare, had absolutely no resources. Because the welfare benefits take about two weeks to process, applicants are forced to borrow money to make ends meet over that period, sometimes from relatives, and rarely from the welfare office, but more commonly from loan sharks, who charge usurious rates of interest. This forces the applicant into a debt cycle from which it is hard to escape. Kumo was opposed to this strict method of means testing, but was in the position where he was unable to offer any way of modifying it within the framework of the overall welfare system.

Opinions varied regarding the young welfare workers. Both the Haris and Kumo agreed that they were inexperienced and not given a chance to gain the experience necessary to perform their jobs with distinction. They both agreed that the young case workers were brash and abrupt on the whole, and that they lacked empathy with their clients.

However, Hari said that the reason the case workers were so hostile toward them was that the case workers were afraid of the people of the area. This was because the locals had developed a powerful network of welfare contacts, and had connections with the *yakuza*, amongst others. The case workers tried to compensate for this uneven and unfair distribution of the welfare budget by putting pressure on those welfare recipients who were unable to resist the social and economic pressures the welfare office was able to bring to bear on them. This meant that some who did not need benefits received allowances, and others who desperately needed funds were ineligible. Hari saw this as a result of pressure brought to bear on the welfare workers by the welfare office to reduce the number of people on the dole.

Although Kumo was in agreement about some of these comments, he disputed the notion that those who should not be receiving welfare were, in fact, getting benefits. To some extent this reflected pride in his position of responsibility at work. He developed this position by saying that the *yakuza* were no longer able to exert pressure on the welfare workers, because the young workers were "politically aware these days." I consider that this is a naive view, although it is difficult to prove or disprove. However, I was told on many occasions by both welfare workers and *yakuza* members alike, that if a person who knew a senior man in the *yakuza* wanted to be on the dole, then it was arranged. The Tagawa and Kawasaki police also corroborated this in part by informing me that all the records they had of the *yakuza* personnel in Kawasaki and Tagawa showed that, with the exception of the top level "bosses" the men were on the dole.¹⁰

¹⁰Kawano - a detective with the Tagawa Police - interview: 1989

Conclusion

What is of importance is that the perceptions which Hari and his wife, Takuzo have of the social welfare system are very different to the perceptions which the welfare workers have of the same system. Hari goes on to say that there is a need for the welfare distribution process to be rectified so that only the people who need welfare support from the government should be entitled to benefits, a situation which Kumo says already exists.

The ambiguity which Hari displays about the nature of the local community is also noteworthy in the context of the discussion. He emphasises the closed nature of the community, and says that he feels sorry for the case workers who are forced to have to deal with the recalcitrant welfare recipients. But on the other hand he agrees with Onishi that there is a strong community spirit which has extended from the past coalmining days to the present. It might be maintained that this spirit had its negative aspects if one is to take his comments about his own self worth at face value.

Both Hari and his wife emphasise the pressure which is brought to bear not only by the case workers, but also by the community in general. The difficulties he had in finding work which was reasonably well paid, and held some intrinsic interest for him, were exacerbated by the bureaucracy, and by the *shokugyō anteisho* in particular. The job introduction centre is a local government organisation which gets some of its funding (30%) from Tokyo. The charter of this organisation is to secure employment for all those without jobs, who are actively seeking work. As Hari described, the bureaucrats who run this service are not concerned with what sort of work is available for qualified people. They are concerned primarily with reducing the number of people who come to them seeking work. Rather they are more concerned with finding jobs for their friends, and discouraging individuals like Hari from approaching them, thus making the unemployment figures for the area appear lower than they actually are. For example, in Hari's case, although he had been on the *seikatsu hōgo* for some time, because he hadn't registered at the *shokugyō anteisho* the fact that he was unemployed was officially ignored in the statistical breakdown

of unemployment in the region. There is little or no coordination between the respective welfare agencies.

What is of more interest to an anthropological inquiry is why Hari decided not to register with the *shokugyō anteisho* in the first instance. When I asked him about this he was rather direct, saying that they were "a useless group of bureaucratic idiots who didn't care what happened to those who were forced to come to see them." He extended this comment to include the fact that "they give all the good jobs to the men they know the best - their old school friends, work mates - you know." Hari maintained that the best way to find a decent job was to use the network of contacts a person develops over the years. In his case, because he felt "stigmatised" by his "lack of social worth" he was reluctant to call on his contacts at first, but as the necessity for further income became more evident he decided that he would have to take whatever work he could find. At least through contacts there was no problem of his working being reported to the authorities, so he was able to earn a little extra pocket money without fear of losing his welfare benefits.

As Tazuko explained, they both know the system and are prepared to manipulate it to their own ends, but they draw the line at the welfare excesses which occur in Kawasaki. In some ways this may seem hypocritical, but to the Haris there is no conflict of interest here at all. They feel that he is making a concerted effort to find work which is suitable, given his back injury, and that the majority of people who are living on the welfare are people who are abusing the system so that they can continue to support a lifestyle of gambling and sloth. It is probably not unreasonable to suggest that the attitude of this family is more vehemently anti-Welfare State than the attitudes of the population at large.

Within the local community, Hari has adopted the role of voluntary pariah, shunning contact with most of their neighbours, partly in shame because he feels that he cannot hold his head up in public knowing that he is not contributing to society, and partly because he reviles the type of people who are their neighbours. This increases the pressure on both himself and his family who are left alone, in turn, by the community. Reciprocal ostracisation has been an

integral part of village life in Japan for hundreds of years, according to well-documented sources,¹¹ and the pressure to conform to social stereotypes, whether they be positive or negative, is intense within the context of *on* and *giri*. When, on top of the financial and social pressures, case workers demand that welfare recipients either transfer the responsibility for their livelihoods to their relatives, through the 123 Legislation, or withdraw voluntarily from the scheme, the pressures to which the welfare recipients are subjected become extreme. Particularly the social stigma which attaches to welfare recipience in a nation which emphasises from a young age the need for all Japanese to conform to a so-called standard Japanese work ethic, is debilitating.

In this case perhaps one of the more interesting aspects is the notion of reverse stigmatisation, the concept that by not claiming the dole and working, Hari has become an outsider in his own community. The small community which depends on inside allegiances and contacts has all but shunned the Hari family, even though their background is the same as their own. Onishi remarked in private that people in the *tanjū* thought that the Hari family regarded themselves as superior, and that there was a lack of mutual trust.¹² As he said:

It's the fault of the fucking welfare office that Hari's in such trouble in the *tanjū*. Those bastards should come here to see what's going on for themselves. They send kids out here who don't know what they're doing, and when they make a mistake, they get transferred, and another new idiot replaces them. Everyone around here knows how to screw the system, and when someone like Hari, who genuinely needs support, applies for welfare, he gets dragged over the coals by enthusiastic, dumb kids. It's all crazy.¹³

¹¹see Nakane, 1971, for example

¹²Onishi, personal communication: 1989

¹³Onishi, interview: 1989

Chapter 15

THE MEDIA AND I: Part II

This second part of the media section is designed to provide an illustration of some of the mechanisms which are used to convey information to the population, and how the population reacts to the way an issue is reported. Whereas my own role in this is of some relevance, of more importance is the way in which both I and the area in which I was conducting research were represented.

The plethora of articles and television items about me when I first moved to Mitsui Ita had both positive and negative effects on my research. After the first series of human interest stories I was contacted by a number of both local people and outsiders for various reasons. The following extract from my diary immediately after the first newspaper articles were published is a good example of the negative side of these contacts.

This afternoon when I got home I was surprised to find quite a substantial amount of mail from people I have never met who live in all parts of Fukuoka Prefecture, saying they had seen an article about me in the papers, and would I mind teaching them English, if it wasn't too much trouble. The last thing I want now is to be hassled by English sycophants who want a pet *gaijin*¹, so I will pass on this.

There was also a missive written in the most appalling English telling me "welcome Tagawa" and would I mind coming to the Ikeijiri Chugakko² because they are "interested in my life." I have to include some of the message. It read as follows:

¹a commonly used word which literally means "outside person," and is usually used to refer to Caucasian foreigners.

²Junior High School

"Dear Allen.

Welcome Tagawa.

We are the member of the announcement club at Ikeijiri junior high school. We know you, because we saw an article of newspaper about you. We are interest in your life (sic)....."

It deteriorates from this point on so I won't go into it in any more painful detail. Suffice it to say that the articles in the paper have had a not 100% beneficial effect on my existence. Only time will tell how things will turn out over the longer period however.³

Of course many people I met were sceptical about the motivation for my research. I was accused of being a Marxist agitator, a "revolutionary," and a troublemaker. Although these people were in the minority I was under the impression that they thought I was trying to attract publicity for myself with the ultimate aim of undermining the nature of Japanese society.

Others who contacted me on the basis of these articles were to become good friends and valued informants. Further, because of my reasonably high public profile, I was asked to speak in public on many occasions at institutions where I would have had little or no credibility were I to have approached them unannounced. In a way, the newspapers acted as a public introduction service. Through some of these contacts, I was able to meet and discuss issues with many people which I regarded as pressing to my research, such as welfare participation, crime, and the large *yakuza* presence in the region. Mainly because of these discussions which followed the early newspaper reports, I made a point of using the contacts I developed in the press as a means of expressing not only my own views on the area, but also the views of the Chikuhō revivalists. Members of this group included welfare activists, informal handicapped people's support groups, ex-union activists,

³4th March, 1988

academics from tertiary welfare institutions, case workers from the welfare offices in two towns, ex-coal miners, teachers, people from Burakumin communities, and private researchers.

One of this group's problems was that they had limited access to the electronic media. Although they were able to articulate their comparatively radical views amongst groups of people who were already converted to their cause, as it were, they had little exposure to the wider population. Further, there were other, general constraints imposed by the media, which often were related as much to the concept of "newsworthiness" as to any coercive or restrictive censorship policies implemented by the respective television and radio networks. On top of this, there were a number of self-imposed constraints applied by the Chikuho revivalists themselves, due perhaps to their acceptance of the restrictions of "polite sociological discourse" - a somewhat ironical position given their outspoken rhetoric within the group - and due also to their lack of experience and confidence within this media. Other, often draconian censorship restrictions were imposed by bodies which determined what material was "suitable" within individual media organisations when other self-regulating censorship methods had failed. Therefore, even if they were able to gain access to broadcasting facilities, critics of government and company policies, particularly if they operated outside formally defined political paradigms, were unable to freely articulate their thoughts.

As I will show below, my position as an outsider allowed me to move beyond the boundaries of what was accepted as being politic, and actually say what many people could not say about the welfare situation and the power that the coal companies were able to exert over the lives of workers during the halcyon days of the coal boom and in the lean years which followed. However, my outsider status still did not permit me to cross all the boundaries of television censorship in the programs in which I appeared. The cuts imposed from within the production company, and ultimately from the network itself, were severe. It was only on the news programs, which typically allowed me two to three minutes to express my views - a very long time by news standards, but a very short time to

express a complicated hypothesis about local power relations which was diametrically opposed to the commonly accepted versions of local history - that I was in a position to state my case. However, as I described above, certainly in the formative stages of my relationship with the media, most of my comments on the sort of research I was conducting were cut, as was anything which could be construed as being overtly critical of the powers that be.

In order to produce a three minute news segment, it was not uncommon for a news team to be filming and interviewing for eight hours. The potential, therefore, for representing any particular viewpoint which coincided with the producer's ideological position was very high, thanks to film cutting and splicing techniques. Hence, in most cases the representation of myself as an oddity, an amusing and harmless buffoon, was the norm. While this may well be a true representation of my personal character, to my chagrin the substance of my research was totally neglected, commentators describing my work as "too technical" for the average person to understand. Therefore they were able to concentrate on the *gaijin*, his life up to now, and a few cameo appearances from the locals to show that "internationalism" was alive and well even in remote areas like Chikuho.

The following is an analysis of my somewhat unsuccessful attempts to change this perception by the media of both myself and the area. I used my position as the "professional stranger" to express views on air which were not able to be expressed by the Chikuho revivalists. Although the televised version of the *We Love Kyushu* series was a bitter disappointment to me, especially after extensive and unsuccessful attempts to convince the producers to leave in certain critical sections of interviews which were ultimately edited, my role as a presenter gave me access to a wide audience who otherwise would never have heard anything about possible reinterpretations of the nature of the coal industry in Japan.

I Love Kyushu

In late September we had left for Omuta in the south of Fukuoka Prefecture, the place where the Miike labour strife had continued for more than a year. I was to participate in a *machizukuri* (city-building) conference, and the film crew had thought that it was a perfect opportunity to start filming the program. There would be a gathering of local and prefectural officials at the conference, and a number of prominent academics from all over the country would also be there, as would union delegates from other coal producing areas, most notably Hokkaido. After a rather wet and cold bike ride from Tagawa, approximately 60 kilometres away, I arrived and took my place on the stage with the other main delegates. Speeches were made about the appalling state into which the coalfields had fallen. Union delegates from among the gathered audience of about 500 people stood up and described the trials that their members were going through, and the problems that they were having receiving adequate severance pay from the companies concerned. Academics described how coal production was almost non-existent in Japan at the time, with the exception of the local Miike coal mine and the Hokutan coalfields in Hokkaido, which were both soon to close down. The appalling conditions in which many miners lived, and the limited opportunities the older men in particular had, given their limited and now redundant training, were discussed by almost all the delegates. I discussed the nature of violence in Japanese coal mines, and welfare dependence in contemporary Chikuho.

Throughout this discussion, which lasted more than five hours and was often conducted with some passion, the camera was almost without exception focused on me. The content of the speeches was ignored, and the urgency of the cases presented by people whose livelihoods and whose futures were currently being threatened, and whose working prospects were being severely constrained, was also ignored. This was a highly emotive and topical issue and was trivialised by the *We Love Kyushu* crew. However, I was not aware that this was the case at the time. The type of program that it was became

clearer to me as we continued our trek into the wilderness of the Miike wastelands after the conference.

The British Raj in the coalfields

Once more the camera was focused on me as I rode the Honda out of the car park and down the road to the Mitsui Minato Club which was not far from the conference centre. This club was once the most elite club in town, the home away from home for the coal industry gentry. It was designed along English country manor lines, set within luxurious, meticulously maintained English-style grounds complete with lawns, clipped hedgerows, a croquet lawn, and enormous oak trees especially imported by Mitsui. The club itself was white painted three storey timber with stained timber eaves and frontispieces. Stained glass picture windows overlooked the enormous expanse of lawn which stretched a couple of hundred metres in all directions to the two metre high concrete walls surrounding the grounds. Outside the walls were the mean mud adobe huts of the coal miners. Although the club has been opened to the general public for the last few years or so, it is prohibitively expensive to eat in, and while it is ostensibly available to be booked by anyone for wedding receptions, parties, conferences etc, it is still in reality an elite club.

We were to interview the manager. The director was insistent that it didn't matter what I asked him on camera - as it turned out he (the director) had the ability to edit anything that he felt was ideologically unsound. The first questions I asked him were, why the club was surrounded by such high walls, and why there used to be barbed wire on top of the walls. He appeared to be discomfited by these questions and muttered something about the coal miners and their dirty village, and possible contamination. The camera was stopped and the director had a "serious discussion" with me about my lack of sensitivity. From this point on I was restricted to asking about the nature of the club in contemporary Omuta, the history of the

architecture and other equally aesthetic questions.⁴ The opulence of the club was breathtaking, especially when compared to the poverty which seemed to be endemic elsewhere in town.

The reasons that the director had gone to the club were quite contradictory to the reasons that I assumed he had gone there. I thought that in his search for "a story" he was prepared to go to any lengths to convincingly research and interview, in depth, people who were representative of the coal days. However, on the contrary, he was convinced that I, as a foreigner, would be enchanted by the old world charm and sophistication of the place. He had not considered that for many locals, as ultimately for myself, the club stood as a symbol of the company's misplaced priorities.

In my filmed summary of the visit I mentioned that, particularly in the 1960s, Mitsui had been at the centre of some quite considerable controversy. The company's reluctance to admit liability for, or to pay compensation to the families of miners who died in the gas explosion which killed more than 400 and injured twice that number in 1964, was a problem for me, given the excesses of the Minato Club with all its British Raj pretensions. Further, the Mitsui Miike labour riots of 1961, which were centred around the miners' opposition to planned mine closures and union rationalisation, and which resulted in more than 50 miners being killed and hundreds injured at the hands of company hoodlums and police, also seemed rather important. Company management said at the time that managers were making as many sacrifices as the miners themselves, and that they couldn't afford to pay the usurious wages and severance pay that the miners were asking. Yet, incongruously, in the middle of the company slums was this edifice to prosperity, sporting autographed photographs of the Emperor on his visit to Miike Mine and the ghosts of other famous capitalist figures.

⁴A more cynical person than I might have quit at this point, but because I was hopelessly naive about the way the electronic media operated, and also about the nature of litigation in this area I persevered, assuming that the final program would vindicate my confidence in the director.

It was my understanding that I presented only my opinions. It was not necessarily fact that I was espousing, but it was regarded as being inflammatory enough to be edited from the final version of the program. Why was this so? Was the television station fearful that the Mitsui Corporation would withdraw its advertising? Did they think that my interpretation of events was unfair and biased? Why, in fact were my comments considered inflammatory?⁵ And by whom? In fact, what sort of comments were considered inflammatory in a general sense? And why? I was to answer some of these questions as the filming continued over the course of the next couple of days.

He was only a coalminer's son

From the excesses of the Minato Club we moved onto one of my informants' homes in one of the more run down coal villages. This man was a coalminer, the son of a coalminer, who had moved to Omuta to work with Mitsui when the Tagawa mine closed in the 1960's. As he was over 55 years of age he had just been retrenched, in line with the company's policy, which was to rationalise the industry at a rapid rate following the introduction of the latest in a series of coal rationalisation bills. Union members had voted that, because there were to be widespread retrenchments, it was reasonable that those men who had been working in the industry for the longest time voluntarily accept "early retirement." This was because they had a reasonable superannuation contribution rate, and because it would not matter if they were retrenched as they would be able to make ends meet thanks to the generous redundancy contributions made by the company and the government.

⁵My comments definitely were considered inflammatory according to the apology I received from the director of the series after the show went to air.

We arrived at his home in a downpour. The dirt roads leading to his home were a quagmire. In his *gumi*⁶ where originally there were more than 20 families, only one house besides his own was occupied. The retrenchments had taken their toll and the miners had moved to other areas to look for work. Most of the buildings were dilapidated, many were overgrown with vegetation which had penetrated the mud and timber walls, some were without rooves, windows were broken, and open doorways exposed the innards of deserted and defiled living quarters. Hamasaki's house stood as a monument to life in a place where little life remained, its immaculately tended vegetable garden and freshly painted exterior testimony to the effort he and his wife had put in to making the place habitable.

He was rather nervous about being interviewed on national television but because he knew me well he had agreed to talk in front of the camera. His friend from the other house, a younger man in his 40s, who worked as a miner on the face in the last remaining workable shaft at Mitsui had come over to see the action, and also consented to be interviewed.

The interview was eminently successful. Both men talked in great detail about the destruction of their livelihoods that would follow their retrenchment, and how they would sooner or later be dependent on welfare because there was so little work in the area that the best they could hope for was some sort of menial day labour. They discussed frankly the "troubles" in the 1960s which resulted in the union being split into an enterprise union and a national consolidated union, and the larger, more powerful company union's total capitulation to Mitsui's demands that the men accept patently unrealistic retrenchment packages equivalent to twelve month's base salary. They told how they were both to be forcibly removed from their housing six months after they were retrenched, and that during the six month period they stayed on the company had demanded that they pay a "reasonable" rent which was the equivalent of a housing estate lease in one of the new apartments in town. They were critical of the company, the union, their fellow workers, the

⁶row of houses, which were originally organised as one neighbourhood group.

government and the media - especially the media, which they said was responsible for spreading lies about the state of the industry and the way that the company was dealing with the mine closures. In short, they were wonderfully outspoken. Their commentary made a deep impression on the director who appeared speechless in the face of their forthright comments and their complaints about an eminently respectable company.

That evening when we went back to the hotel in the city we discussed the interviews and their relevance to the program. We looked at the footage of the interviews, and after a telephone call to the Director of Programming at the television station, the director said that we might be able to use some of the footage in the final program, if he subtly edited portions. After all, he had a scoop on what miners at one of the last mines in Japan really thought of the company for which they worked. But he was worried that if too much footage was used the television station would cancel his company's contract to produce documentaries for them.

However that night at about 10.00 p.m. we received a call from the lobby of the hotel. Hamasaki had come to the hotel in an extremely agitated frame of mind to say that after serious consideration he had decided that he did not want any of his critical comments included in the program. The reason he gave was that he was worried about his friend's future with the company which he felt was endangered by speaking too openly about the union and the company. Also he said that he was concerned that he would not be able to find any work in any of the day labour centres if the comments he made were attributed to him, and the people who ran the centres were to see the program. Of course we complied with his wishes, which gave the director an easy solution to the moral bind he was in.

Subsequently I found out that some locals at Hamasaki's village had seen the television truck and myself arrive and had contacted the union. The union had then contacted the company to tell them that reporters had come to see Hamasaki. Shortly after we left, according to his wife, he was visited by the local mine manager and the head of the Day Labour Program at the local council who suggested that it would be in his best interests for his part in

the program not to be aired. This tacit intimidation was enough to make Hamasaki, perhaps not one of the most confident people I have ever met, review his decision to talk to us. Hence the plea at the hotel that night. The speed at which pressure was applied in this case was quite appalling.

The end product

On October 23rd the program went to air. I had not been part of the final production process so I was dependent on the goodwill of the director to keep me informed as to what shape the program would take. It was a one hour documentary screened at prime time in Kyushu and at off peak time elsewhere in Japan. I was devastated at the final form the program took. It was simply a Chikuho travelogue interspersed with a few comments I made, heavily edited, showing "the foreigner's perspective." Commentary which was critical of the coal industry was generally cut from the program. On the whole, it avoided any real attempt to explain why the coal industry had declined at such a rapid rate in the 1960s. Mostly this was attributed to the stepping up of cheap coal imports with which local companies could not compete. The implications of the coal rationalisation bills, which allowed companies to shut down operations and sell their enterprises to the government if they were losing money or if the mines had life endangering accidents, were completely ignored in deference to the wisdom of the foreign imports argument. The current welfare dependent position of people from the coalfields was also avoided, as was the issue of coal company and government complicity in allowing this situation to materialise. In fact, in relation to these points, only my own offhand and decontextualised comments, recorded at the conference, that unemployment levels had reached more than 15% in certain coalfields, and that second and third generation welfare dependence was becoming common in Chikuho, were aired. Issues of power relations, vested interests, and the development of the industrial base on the macro level, and how people themselves reacted to the changes imposed from above at the micro level - the central focus of my own work - were omitted.

Generally the program was a romantic and somewhat whimsical account of the nature of coal mining, with many references to the debt the coalfields communities owed the coal companies. There were many scenes of me riding my motorcycle in front of coal symbol backdrops, me looking wise listening to comments from people I interviewed, taken out of context, Professor Yada explaining that the coal industry was the key industry in Japan's postwar expansion and that unfortunately it was no longer a viable concern, and a cultured, concerned voice-over which explained that I, the Australian Ph.D student from a coal mining background was determined to grasp the nature of the glory of the industry.

The director contacted me to ask whether I had seen the program and whether it was successful in capturing the "romantic" nature of the coal industry, the richness of the people involved, and the difficulties miners had in their day to day existence. (They had included a scene where the director's uncle, a member of the enterprise union, had explained the dirty nature of the underground work). I told him that I was a little disappointed with the final product, that I felt I had been used as a centrepiece unnecessarily, and that editing my comments to the extent that they had been was unnecessary. He apologised and said that there had been five or six re-editing sessions, and that the owner of the television station had personally taken a hand in deciding what could and could not be screened. He, the director, had done his best to ensure that there was some critical content in the program, he said. He went on to explain that because I was a foreigner it was acceptable to include some of the comments that I made on air, which would never have made it to the final production stages if I had been Japanese.

An analysis

Some of the questions I raised earlier are worth reconsidering at this point, especially those concerning which topics are regarded as "suitable" for mass consumption, and to what extent I personally, as an outsider, was able

to break through the barriers, or *tatema*, which are so tangible within media circles.

The newspapers, almost without exception, are supportive of big business, presumably because the success of business is perceived as being the cornerstone of Japan's current and future international success - political, social, and cultural, as well as economic. This is based, to a large extent, on the Japanised version of the western view of economics which sees economics as the new religion, of which, implicitly, we are all members. To continue the metaphor, if economics is indeed the new religion, then Japanese policy makers and business leaders are the high priests, and large corporations are the new temples at which people worship. Blasphemy by those from inside the flock is not tolerated. And blasphemy is perceived as anything which is too critical of the formalised version of the contemporary religious text; in short, anything which contradicts the cliches of government and company dogma is regarded as heretical at worst, and below consideration at best - a non issue.

A good example is the year long Miike strike at Omuta. In this case the media applied a four stage process, starting with the sensation of the "happening." This was followed by the representation of the demonstration as an unlawful obstruction to public order. The third stage was the refusal to acknowledge that there was a story. The final stage was the agreement between the unions and the company, which was seen as a triumph of diplomacy. The first stage was banner headlines and lurid articles describing the confrontation between police and miners. The second stage was typified by vitriol condemning the miners as leftist, radical, economically irresponsible, anti-progress, militant, and as a threat to national security. The third stage, which developed some time after the negative editorials had ceased, was not so much a tangible stage, as a non-stage. If the press did not mention the issue, it was then, in Lukes' parlance a "non-issue."⁷ Although in actual point of fact, there was a war of attrition going on at Miike, it was widely

⁷see Lukes, 1974: 21-26

and intentionally ignored by the press, a conscious non-action which contributed strongly to the perception that the incident was solved. When the fourth stage - settlement - was reported, it was typically given a small headline on the bottom of the front page, and an editorial in the industrial section.

Foreigners, with their peculiar, cultural peccadillos are often regarded as amiable eccentrics⁸ who are representative of their own white American middle-class society. Perhaps the most conspicuous foreigners in Japan are those who appear on television, more often than not in the great Japanese quiz shows. Programs like *Sekai Maru Goto: Hau Matchi?*⁹, *Naruhodo Za Waarudo*¹⁰ and a range of pop shows, cooking shows, talk shows, and celebrity game shows have contributed to the popular stereotype of *gaijin* as amusing, light weight Americans (which they are in most cases) who speak Japanese in broad foreign accents, and are usually very entertaining - often because of their accents - and incredibly well paid.¹¹ Many regulars from the networks appear every week on the same quiz show as a matter of course because their presence ensures high ratings. The sort of show that these people appear on is almost inevitably related to some form of international or "outside" topic, such as the two shows mentioned above, which purport to extend Japanese people's understanding of overseas culture.

For instance, the *Naruhodo Za Waarudo* show is a program which basically lampoons other cultures under the guise of being an intellectual

⁸It is assumed that they'd have to be eccentric to come to Japan to live in the first place.

⁹*How Much are Things From Around the World?* - one of Japan's top ranking quiz shows.

¹⁰*Aah, The World* - another popular quiz show.

¹¹Listening to a broad American accent in Japanese causes most Japanese people I know to become hysterical. It is a form of linguistic humour similar to the version in English of the classic Chinese or Japanese visitor who can't differentiate the "l" and "r" sounds.

attempt by a group of celebrities to guess the form or function of a particular, unexplained artefact removed from a foreign society. A good example of the type of artefacts that are brought back to be used on the show is the penis gourd from Kenya, which was introduced on the show in July 1988. Alternatively, clips from film footage are shown to the panel which has to guess where the clips come from, what is going to happen next on the film, what a particular item is used for, or how much an item costs. This show is evidence of the trend towards regarding other societies and their representatives as being amusing, educational in a gross way, distracting, disquietful,¹² and occasionally enlightening. On this particular program the token foreigner usually performs considerably better than his/her Japanese counterparts. It is assumed that because *gaijin* are more cosmopolitan than Japanese, and because they are *gaijin*, it is therefore obvious that they are much more knowledgeable than Japanese people on foreign issues. Hence the foreign personalities on shows like this are viewed as being pseudo "experts" in fields in which they really are not expert at all. However their knowledge of overseas cultures is eminently more sophisticated than that of the Japanese show business personalities who appear on the program. In other words, these foreigners are assumed to be representative of not just white American culture, but by proxy, of all overseas cultures, and therefore knowledgeable about all things foreign. In fact often the *gaijin* who appear on these shows are totally unremarkable people whose sole claim to fame is that they can speak Japanese. On the basis of their communication skills alone, therefore, they are stereotyped as archetypal foreigners.

However in relation to affairs which are esoterically Japanese in content the perception of foreigners is quite different. No longer are they seen as having credibility even as entertainment, although there are one or two exceptions. Rather, their views, while still seen as being representative of European and American society in general, are regarded as potentially uninformed, naive, and incapable of perceiving the complexity of Japanese

¹²in the sense that Geertz used the term in his article, *the Balinese Cockfight*, 1973

sociological thought. The image of outsiders being incapable of detailed analysis of Japanese society has been reinforced by the mass media's complicity in supporting the stance taken by the *nihonjinron* approach which aims to understand Japanese society as a truly unique model. This view of a unique "Japaneseness" has been extended through a number of popular Readers' Digest-type books which have tended to overemphasise the "truth" of the cultural homogeneity model which Benedict originally proposed to describe the Japanese in 1946.¹³ Over the years many books which follow Benedict's original thesis, demonstrating the uniqueness of Japanese culture, language, and political and economic practices have been published in Japan and overseas.¹⁴

There is a certain irony in that the model on which the so-called "consensus" model of Japanese society was based by Japanese sociologists is itself a foreign model. Without going into detail, it is probably reasonable to say that the acceptance of this model within mainstream society has been uncritically encouraged by the media and the government. A society which believes itself to be a consensus-based, traditional, homogeneous group-oriented society is eminently preferable, from a governmental perspective, to a society where the emphasis is on freedom of expression, and cultural heterogeneity which carries with it the detrimental side-effects of potential public disorder through excessive conflict between interest groups. Therefore, when publications, and especially prominent foreign publications,¹⁵ appear which criticise the policies of the bastions of Japanese society - the high priests and their temples, if you like - they are seen to be eroding Japan's economic and hence by implication, its cultural foundations. When this situation occurs it is incumbent upon the government to take action to

¹³ *The Chrysanthemum and the Sword, 1946*

¹⁴ see, for example, the work of Nakane, 1970; Vogel, 1963, 1980; Doi, 1973; Reischauer, 1978

¹⁵ see, for example, the denigrating and defensive comments in *Japan Update*, Autumn 1990, on Van Wolferen's so-called Japan-bashing book, *The Enigma of Japanese Power*, 1989

minimise the effect that these criticisms can have on public perceptions of their own society. Often this is done through the media. In these cases common rationales are employed. For example, it is often said that a foreign commentator may have a good theoretical understanding of a given situation, but that empirically the commentator can not have too much credibility because he/she is an outsider and therefore does not know what it means to be Japanese.

The concepts of "self" and "other" are well established as far as foreigners are concerned. Although many western trends have made their mark in Japanese society, and the trend of academia is certainly one of these, foreigners are, and always will be, *gaijin* - people on the outside. Because people like myself are from overseas we are given the honorary status of spokespeople for, and experts on, non-Japanese culture. The concomitant ambiguity as both "expert" and "ignorant" commentator lends credibility to the commentator, while simultaneously discrediting the account he/she produces of Japanese society. Therefore it is safe to interview foreigners, by and large, because their views are so radical that they tend to discredit themselves if the reporters let them.

Conclusion

In my case, the process of media interest went through two distinct, linked stages. The first, as I have mentioned, was as an entertainer, much in the same vein as the *gaijin* described in the shows above. I was newsworthy mainly because the work that I was doing was unusual by Japanese standards,¹⁶ and in part because of my local dialect Japanese. I was questioned in a lightweight, folksy manner, and the results of interviews were often embellished to make a story interesting enough for general consumption.

¹⁶However I have my doubts that a Japanese anthropologist conducting research in Australia would attract such overwhelming attention from the Australian media.

The second stage was preceded by a gradual metamorphosis from the buffoon/idiot to the committed intellectual/idiot. This was not an instantaneous process. Rather, as I have indicated, it occurred over a considerable length of time and was, to a large extent, dependent on my contacts within media circles. However, once I had reached this second stage and my "expertise" in coal mining and welfare matters had been established, it was also assumed that I would be subjected to similar, though in reality less prohibitive, constraints as other so-called local experts. This was due to my "otherness," a position which at times I reviled and at times I blessed. In theory therefore, I was able to say what I wanted to reporters, although my views, which were rather biased towards local citizens' movements and against local government and powerful companies' interests, were often edited from interviews and other commentary. But as in the *We Love Kyushu* program, I had a considerable amount of leeway, compared to other commentators, to make a minority position clear.

This transformation from fool to academic fool was an interesting one. From the first, the media regarded me as a form of mild entertainment, partly because of my atrocious combination of affected accents. Because I was laughed at, like many foreigners who speak Japanese, I was quick to take steps to change the basis of the laughter so that I was consciously involved in making others laugh. In this sense I was a clown, someone who became used to making people laugh and shocking them with statements I knew they would have difficulty dealing with. This applied particularly to the press, who were such a serious group of people - self-appointed purveyors of Truth, Justice and the Japanese Way. I guess that in the formative stages of our relationship it was so difficult getting anything serious out of me that they were forced to invent fictional stories to publish. Moreover, as it was essential for me to develop rapport with the people with whom I was living I also adopted the rough, affected black humour of the coalfields community. No doubt this coarseness affected my attitude towards the media, who in turn found me both amusing and baffling.

However as they got to know me better, some of the members of the press, from regarding me as either a "token" *gaijin*, or a foolish *gaijin*, moved to regarding me as someone who was something of an expert on subjects which the majority of people were not prepared to discuss, namely, the socially stigmatising welfare and unemployment issues, the specific matter of gang violence, and the relationship that the coal companies had with miners, the violence and the "black" side of life in the past. In the first instance, these people, like the television people, had regarded me as being someone who was rather harmless, and certainly intellectually bereft - why else would I live in the *tanjū*? It followed that when a considerable amount of local interest was focused on me, and groups like the Chikuho revivalists gained more momentum as my profile continued to rise, the media started to revise their opinions of whether the things which this particular *gaijin* had to say were necessarily gormless.

As a result of this reassessment of me I was occasionally harassed by the press continued until the day I left, when the Kyushu Television Network arrived to film my departure, and I was often asked to comment on issues on which I knew little or nothing, from the Seoul Olympics and the World Series Baseball to the comments Nakasone made on the relatively low intelligence of non-White Americans. It is also fair to say that often comments were attributed to me in the local newspapers, without my being aware of it at the time, as being typical of the foreigners' point of view.

In the longer term, because my presence in the area was so short-lived I think that little permanent change came from my media participation, short of allowing people who were not aware of the extent of Chikuho's economic woes to grasp, in a very general sense, the situation. Although I was able to exercise some discretion in discussing political issues with selected media contacts, in general, I too, was tied by the media's unexpurgated code, which ties most Japanese political activists to the corollary of "acceptable" public behaviour. In the short term though, I think I was able to influence a number of people to articulate what they considered dangerous and inflammatory interpretations of history as it affected them. This no doubt had

a positive effect on the development of groups like the Chikuho revivalists, who were at the time of my research looking for further focus to advance the scope of their movement. While my position was very much one of self-interest, in that I was attempting to make contacts who would help me understand the nature of contemporary welfare structures, and the history which precipitated the present situation, it is possible that my high profile presence was able to influence television, radio and the press to the extent that for the first time in many years, attention was focused on Chikuho.

Certainly to some extent the thesis owes a debt of gratitude to the media for their constant, if sometimes unwelcome attention. For without the level of publicity, many of the informants whose stories I recorded and have used in the body of this text would not have made themselves available.

Chapter 16

CONCLUSION

This thesis has been concerned with two main issues which have stemmed from an original inquiry into the state of contemporary welfare dependence in Chikuho. The first issue concerns the nature of the history of coal mining in Japan, and the violence and terror which has accompanied its rise and fall. The coal industry is undoubtedly one of the most violent and repressive industries Japan has ever seen. The second issue is the power that underlies this violence. I am not concerned with attempting to analyse whether or not the application of violence was a "rational" exercise. That is an issue beyond the scope of this thesis. However the nature of power utilised to maintain the structures which keep workers compliant is something which underlies not only the miners' situation, but also workers' roles in many industries in Japan today. It is this power, the conscious and unconscious application and acceptance or rejection of which, that it is essential to grasp if one is to come to understand a wide range of aspects of contemporary Japanese society. Furthermore, in order to understand the nature of contemporary welfare dependence in Chikuho this issue must be addressed.

Although I have not made the line of inquiry explicit throughout the thesis, I thought it essential that the reader be able to experience some of the confusion that the miners felt - the threads of discontent and harmony within the community, the alienation from the workplace in the face of excessive violence, the richness of the relationships which were developed amongst people who shared the same oppressive working conditions, and the hopelessness which followed the end of the coal era. But the strands of power which underlie and support the almost unhindered application of violence - the legitimisation of the actions - must also be seen in context. The legitimating bodies - the government, police, courts, gangsters and the mine management - were able, through their manipulation of the political agenda, to prevent the development of the miners' consciousness as a class, as an oppressed group, and as a potentially powerful labour force.

Violence itself was a way of life for many miners - from the coal face and the violence that it naturally engendered, to the *tanjū* and the violence that was dispensed so freely by the labour overseers. There was no escaping it, even if a miner was able to run away from the mine. Sooner or later, he would be either caught, or voluntarily move on to another mine. There were few options for the miners. The desperation of their situation and the traditional pastimes of drinking and gambling made the miners appealing targets for the *yakuza* with their hard-nosed attitudes about making quick, easy money. Wherever the miners turned they faced animosity. The police seemed to swallow the propaganda of the companies which labelled the miners as "dangerous, irresponsible and wilful." As a result of this attitude the police were seen by the miners as enemies. Compared to the local institutionalised *rōmu* they were fairly harmless, but they were still enemies. The *yakuza*, also usually the mortal enemies of the police, were seen as "temporary sheriffs,"¹ able to dispense summary violence on demand from the companies.

The unions, perhaps the last line of defence for many miners, were, with very few exceptions, co-opted to such an extent that they supported the company line on labour rules and regulations - there was to be no help from this quarter. The system of violence and coercion was established beyond challenge.

Metcalf, in his work on Maitland coalminers, has identified three types of violence which were employed against the miners in their class actions, and reactions, to management pressures. Direct, indirect, and anticipated violence were all used at different times to maintain an equilibrium which supported the position of management and the state. In the Chikuho coalmines these same types of violence were employed against the miners, although within different structural constraints.

Whereas Metcalf emphasised the wage-labour/capital relationship in reference to the application of these methods of violence and coercion, the

¹Sasaki, personal communication: 1987

Chikuho coalminers were involved in different class/capital relations. The general lack of a cohesive, industry-wide labour movement, and the emphasis on enterprise unions led to the Chikuho coalminers developing a far narrower sense of wage-labour/capital relations. Furthermore, the companies' overt, and sometimes apparently excessive use of violence against miners within the confines of their own property prevented the need for either juridico-legal or outright state intervention in most cases. Sending in the riot police was a last resort, and only used in extreme cases of labour conflict, such as the Taisho strike.

First, indirect violence, as Metcalfe maintains, is a difficult concept to deal with because it is hard to distinguish the source, but the notion of direct violence is a useful one when dealing with some of the actions of the mine management in keeping the workers under control. Unlike the situation in Maitland, where police action was aimed at opposing the unions which had developed their power base, in Chikuho, action was taken to prevent the unions from even developing a power base. Although there were certainly a number of violent police confrontations with miners' unions, particularly in the 1960s, which led to serious injuries and deaths on both sides, up to this time these confrontations had been rare, because of the high incidence of selective violence which had decimated the core of the labour leadership. The situation was often made more complex by the violent intervention of the *yakuza*, who were often in the employ of the companies. Union leaders were often "eliminated" by simple violence, perpetrated by either the *rōmu* at an individual mine, or the *yakuza*, both at the request of the mine owners.

The notion of violence as a *prima facie* means of eliminating opposition to the profitability of mining was widely accepted within the mine owners' ranks, and over a period of 20 or 30 years, it became accepted within the ranks of the miners themselves as the status quo - something which necessarily flowed on with the concept of coalmining. This was what I have called, with apologies to Weber, the routinisation of violence. In this case it refers to the miners' ability to accept as normal, or at least unremarkable, the deaths and serious injuries of miner friends and

acquaintances from direct, personal violence perpetrated by hired killers. Sato gives an example of one of his kills:

The time I had to go and get that stupid Korean kid, I remember well. He had been taken in 1944 when he was 15 and brought back here. Two years later, when Ueda decided that he still needed these guys and wouldn't be sending them home, he lost control and went crazy.

Everyone knew that if they stayed in the *tanjū* they wouldn't get into trouble, but this kid - he waited until his shift was finished and instead of going to the bath, made for the fence where there was a hole he had torn some time before.

It took us two days to track him down, and when we got him he was on the other side of Mount Gonge. He could climb all right.

The Boss had told us to kill him and bring the body back as an example, but because he had tried so hard I respected him. I thought that I would let him live long enough to say good-bye to his friends.

We brought him back to the *tanjū*. He said "good-bye" to his friends, then I cut his throat in front of the other miners who the Boss had assembled in front of the houses. No one said a thing. They all looked at the body. Then they went back to work. And no one tried escaping for six months.²

Furthermore, the minor incidences of violence and bullying which were carried out daily were constant reminders of the power relations at the mines. Workers were hit and kicked for being late to work. They were given no sick leave. They were verbally abused and forced to work overtime for no extra pay. Dissenters and communists, or those associated with a major labour organisation, were summarily beaten, had their pay reduced or were left to work in the most arduous jobs. Yet these were natural occurrences in the scheme of things. At least that was how the miners seemed to perceive the situation.

²Sato, interview:1988

The concept of anticipated violence is worth investigating briefly here. If it can be said that the workers knew the ground rules management had established, then it is reasonable to assume that they knew the consequences for their actions if they transgressed the rules. In Chikuho the rules were very clear, and the punishment for transgression of these rules was quite unambiguous. In this sense anticipated violence occurred, because those who attempted to escape from the extremely violent small mines were almost inevitably caught, then beaten or killed, and they knew before they attempted to escape the consequences of their actions. It is indicative of how desperate some of these people became that they would risk everything to get out of the mines.

However it is also useful to bear in mind the distinction between the three types of mines, and the management styles which they employed. The basic rule was that the smaller the mine, the greater the violence, and the higher the per capita death rate. The larger mines, while allowing enterprise unions, were not so concerned with forcing miners to the extremes of the smaller mines, presumably because they had better productivity and profit margins. However they also employed the *rōmu* as overseers, and workers were "encouraged" not to be late by beatings and brandings.³

The union blues

Given the extent of the violence and the reign of terror which was imposed through the *yakuza*-like *rōmu*'s actions against dissenters, it is not surprising that the workforce's reaction was slow and in most cases, moderate. Terror had forced many workers to accept that they had to forego class consciousness-related actions, if they were to avoid personal and physical repercussions. Yet, throughout the period when the mines were able to

³Tatefuji, interview: 1988. She talked about her husband coming home from work at the giant Mitsui Tagawa mine with the brand-mark "*Namakemunja*" (slacker) on his buttocks. He was branded in front of his workmates because he arrived at the pit-head three minutes late for his shift.

impose their own violent and repressive values on the miners, as if to balance the fear these actions generated, a sort of economic rationality dominated the individuals within the unions. Striking was seen as counter-productive, and even in periods when pay decreases were forced on the miners, there seemed to be a collective consciousness that if they themselves did not perform the work, it would be simple for the company to employ others who could do the work just as easily. Therefore when there was a downturn in the economic circumstances, and working conditions became harsher, the miners accepted the fact that they were commodities themselves, and that the "reserve army" of unemployed miners would always be standing by to replace them.

The Kyo no Ue case highlighted the lack of consciousness of the "scab," as was so profoundly evident in coalmining actions in Great Britain and Australia. Again, a sense of rationality permeated perceptions on this point. Yet the rationale offered by union leaders for the mass defections from their own unions in the face of company terror tactics, and the introduction of non-union workers from outside was that these were common men, who needed to make a living, and although union members disagreed with them working in unionists' places, they could understand it. There was resentment for their actions in upsetting the cohesion of the movement, but there was also a sense of understanding and compassion for others' plights.

This dialectic was common in the cases I have presented. To what extent this understanding attitude to scabs was linked to the notions of class interest is difficult to determine. However, there may have been some connection with the fact that all miners faced repercussions from the same terrifying source, and that only those with great conviction in the justness of their stance, who were able to withstand the overt nature of company intimidation, would be able to hold out. Others who collapsed under pressure were regarded with something akin to sympathy. Moreover, those miners who were skilled men with work experience on the face were able to withstand more pressure than others without these skills. Thus their pride in their own abilities was seen to be the reason that they would hold out for a settlement

against all odds. However, without the support of their wives, who actively encouraged them, as in the Kyo no Ue case, they would not have been able to take such long-term action.

At Kyo no Ue, the striking methods employed by the No1 union were rather crude, without external co-ordination, and were uncomplicated in their aims. Formally concerned with a minimum wage increase, and informally concerned with demanding a more humane management system which allowed them some personal freedom and the right to organise a democratic union, they were successful in that the company eventually submitted, in part, to both their demands. However this was only made clear after pressure was brought to bear on the company by its masters, Mitsubishi, who acted to preserve the integrity of the industry in the face of *Tanrō* threats to strike for as long as it took to resolve the situation.

The individual actions of Kurata at the mine no doubt influenced his small group of miners to stand firm in the face of gangster, *rōmu*, and police pressure. That he took his lessons from the actions of miners overseas is revealing. It indicates the importance of information flows into the coalfields of Chikuho, something which was very rare in the 1950s.

Outsiders in the system

Notwithstanding his successes, the influence of outsiders on the miners was an even more potent force than the individual influence of charismatic leaders, like Kurata. Firstly, at Taisho the miners were organised by Kawano who brought with him some of the methods of opposing authority developed in the early days of the student movement. For the first time after the Miike strike, when it was realised by the miners that they had to stand by themselves and oppose the terror which had been an integral part of their lives for a long time, there was a groundswell of animosity for the mine management which developed into outright hatred and a determination to reverse the situation. The feelings of injustice were so strong that even after the tried and true method of union diffraction had been applied, the miners

became so incensed that they were prepared to physically oppose the might of the feared *rōmu* and the imported *yakuza*, as well as the riot police.

What were the chords which Kawano struck which enabled him to lead a revolt against a system of routinisation of violence? After all, the company had employed the same system in a variety of political economic contexts over the years.

I think that it was because the miners' livelihoods were under attack - their superannuation and pay for work already performed were threatened - that a growing consciousness that the system to which they belonged was not inviolate, started to grow. Kawano, with his sophisticated understanding of the nature of company and government political policy, was able to harness this growing doubt that the company was unchallengeable, to mount a challenge in both a physical and a legalistic sense.

The nature of violence which was so pervasive within the mine was not an issue with the miners. They were in fact so inured to the consequences of violence that it seemed a totally routine company management method. It was the company's stated inability to pay the miners which sowed the seeds of doubt in the miners' minds that the company was the ultimate authority, and it was Kawano and his radical action group which made the concept of action against the company real. That the action that they were to take would include challenges not only to management but also to the state was not a problem for the miners once they had overcome the initial hurdle of the ideological blocks the company had put in place.

From coercion to co-operation

Yamano was the ultimate conflict in the industry. This was precipitated in a similar manner to the Taisho action, though it was concerned with a material disaster, rather than an economic disaster. Litigation consciousness was only developed after a marked shift in the courts' attitudes towards the mines. Only a year before the Yamano disaster, the Miike gas explosion cost 483 miners their lives, and the company managed to convince an official

government inquiry that they were not to be held responsible for the accident - it was one of the unfortunate dangers of mining that the miners had to learn to face. In the Yamano case, the criminal proceedings started by the FMSC against the company opened the possibility for miners, or their bereaved families, to claim compensation from the company deemed responsible.

The shift in power from the hands of the mining companies to the courts has been underplayed, but it was a substantial shift, and one which perhaps was linked to the decreasing influence of the big mining companies in a political-economic environment which was ostensibly concerned about the issue of human rights. People who were involved with many aspects of the coal industry welcomed the change, and the action at Yamano, although it received almost no press coverage, was closely followed by many of the people I have referred to as the Chikuho revivalists. Although the company was criminally negligent regarding the accident, and although there had been efforts to quash protests by the families of the dead miners through compromising the union, these were certainly not new grounds for starting litigation against the company. Many companies had been in similar circumstances before and none had been forced to settle on anything other than their own terms.

It was the decision of the courts which found the manager guilty of negligence that opened the way for further action. Once the decision had been taken by the women of the Yamano Widows' Movement to initiate legal proceedings against the company, a large number of intellectuals and public activists gave their support to the cause. This was precipitated largely by the presence of Yano Noriko in the office of the mine, who while keeping a low profile, reported to her husband the events at the company. He, in turn, published them in his local newspaper. The publicity that this action attracted was remarkable, considering the lack of publicity in the press that the case

itself had.⁴ People from diverse walks of life contributed to the cause. These contributions were not only financial, but included the contributions of experience and knowledge. The huge cash settlement which the women were eventually able to arrange was a victory which heralded a new wave of litigation consciousness in Chikuho. The Miike widows organised a group to arrange legal action against the company there, and on Takashima, a Mitsubishi island off Nagasaki where a gas explosion claimed 13 lives in 1986, action was also started against the company.

More important than the single instance of compensation which was deemed payable to the widows were two key factors: the development of an ideology which allowed for litigation consciousness amongst people who had only been considered victims beforehand; and the development of a group of informal contacts who had the same fundamental interests in the area, but had been only vaguely aware of each others' presence and activities up to that time.

Although they have different perceptions of the political-economic sphere of relations, and are often quite vehemently in opposition to each other, there is still a trend amongst these people to criticise the government and the directions in which the government has moved to reconstruct Chikuho. Some people like Idegawa have attempted to situate history as an accessible resource for others to see, hear and touch, through photographs, museum exhibits, books, song, and experience. The aim is to allow the roots of the people to spread and for the community to grow from their past.

Others, like Ishizaki, are concerned with shocking Chikuho people into realising that it is not a nice world in which they live. By discussing the dark side of life and the dark, violent side of coalmining, she says that she wants people to become less apathetic and more involved in their area - they are history, and if they want things to change then they have to move

⁴ This is not to be confused with the publicity of the accident, which was in the news for a number of days. The legal case was widely ignored by the media. Even when it was eventually settled out of court, only one mainstream newspaper, the Asahi Shinbun, reported it.

themselves. Yano is in agreement with Ishizaki, he informed me. These days he is a moderate man and no longer advocates world-wide revolution - his stash of mortar bombs, and sub-machine guns under the house notwithstanding. But Onishi is still uneasy in his presence, and Idegawa in Onishi's. There is a very awkward truce between these people who are trying to change others' perceptions of what Chikuho is today, and why.

Welfare, poverty, the coalminers and Chikuho

Today the welfare issue dominates Chikuho statistics. There is a move to change the perception of Chikuho from gangster headquarters to an image of a newly revived, rebuilt, energetic area which is facing the challenge of the 21st century head on. The image of the city planners is somewhat unconvincing given the scale of social, economic and legal deviancy involved. Although towns like Nogata and Iizuka have new shopping centres and train stations, parks with landscaped hedges and fountains complete with statues of miners depicting the glory of the days of the coalmines, just around the corner are the *tanjū*, ramshackle reminders of where people used to live. Soaring above the plains of the Chikuho Basin are the slag heaps, some slowly disintegrating, others consolidating and sprouting trees and grass on the sides. These *bota yama* symbolise Chikuho for many people.

Yet the past is fading, obscured by a film of technology, which is insidiously entering not only the environment, but also the consciousness of the people of Chikuho. Even those living on welfare, who do not seem aware that they are undergoing a process of change, are absorbing the images and values that go with the 21st century "megalopolis" - the dream of the city councils. As Kumo from the welfare office said, "Where are their priorities?", referring to the councils' inability to solve the welfare problems, and their high profile, no holds barred leap into the future. As he might have said, what about the human garbage - those thrown out after the coalmines closed? Will they take it with them? Or will they just jettison it?

When the rest of Japan is comfortably settled in their futuristic megalopolis what will the poor in Chikuho coalmining villages be doing? Starving quietly?

Media - help or hindrance?

Throughout the history of the coalmines the press and the media in general have had a powerful hand in how information concerning the coalmines has been presented for mass consumption. The miners have been represented at different times in the mainstream press as poor, uneducated, unfortunate, dismembered, gassed, drowned, restless, unruly, violent, dangerous, callous, murderous, hopeless and eventually pathetic. The mine owners have been largely ignored by the press, except for odd comments made about their contributions to society as a group, or to mention the immortal words of individual leaders after an accident, a closure or a labour-related incident.

The sheer number of accidents in coalmines kept the press busy in the 1950s and 60s. As I have shown in the story of Hoshu, a style lacking in interpretation yet filled with emotive nuances was the norm. The miners were seen as objects of pity as a result of the carnage in which they were caught, and the rescue workers as heroic. The bereaved families, waiting at the pit-mouth were described in great detail to highlight the pathos of the situation, as the "efforts of the rescuers continued into the night." In other words, the sensationalism of the accidents was milked at the expense of any investigative research into possible causes, although at Hoshu one article did actually raise questions about some of the circumstances surrounding the accident.

During the period when many disasters occurred in the Chikuho mines, the miners were portrayed with some ambivalence. On the one hand they were described as being the downtrodden unfortunates who were sacrificed by the earth, yet on the other they were described as uncouth, rather eccentric, different, and potentially violent. As time went by, and the accidents became so numerous that only the really major ones were mentioned in the newspapers, reporters started to focus on the developing labour disputes

generated by the impending closure of the mines. By emphasising the violence which the miners directed at the police and mine management during the disputes, the internecine rivalry between *yakuza* organisations, the high incidences of crime and social deviancy and the social irresponsibility of the miners, the Fukuoka newspapers confirmed the non-mining community's fears about the industry, reinforcing the stereotypes which they had built up.

When the decision to close the mines was made public, although there was great consternation within the coalfields, there was relief within the neighbouring towns and cities. National government decisions to improve welfare standards to accommodate unemployed miners, whilst simultaneously improving civic facilities, were written up in glowing terms in the press. There was no shortage of encouraging commentary on the development of the "new economic infrastructure" which was being constructed, based on an injection of capital from public and private funds. This type of reporting confirmed the legitimacy of the actions of the powerful.

The coal companies' subsequent, almost total, withdrawal from the area following the decline, was commented on in remarkably conciliatory tones, the press actually thanking the companies for making the towns and cities what they were.⁵ The role of the press as local economic cheerleader was soon established.

My own experiences with the press suggest that there is a strong element of restraint imposed on the news. Excessively controversial stories which challenge contemporary, or at least predominant values, are either edited to make them acceptable for public consumption, or cut completely. Although I would like to suggest that this restraint, which I feel stops just short of outright censorship, is imposed by influential individuals who are protecting either their own or other powerful groups' or individuals' interests, I cannot. Unlike Van Wolferen I do not have comprehensive information on such matters.

⁵There may have been some irony there, for which I have not given the reporters credit.

However, from a concrete micro perspective, the dissemination of this form of power is extremely insidious. Information, or more importantly, opinions of individuals outside the boundaries of what *nihonjinron* analysts would perhaps refer to as "normal society," are restricted to a local and highly specialised audience. There is no room for too much dissent in a society which places such strictures on its media.

The same threads of power which are apparent today are those which were dominant throughout the coalmining period. The institutionalised ability to turn away from unpleasantness, to refuse to publicly acknowledge controversy, to counter overt challenge to the status quo with whatever means are available, to press economic rationalism as ideology on the population, and to constrain the organs of information dissemination, are still evident in today's society.

A stain on Japan's postwar industrial record of continued economic success, the failure of government and business to apply to the Chikuho miners and their relatives the commonly espoused Confucian principles of paternal benevolence, is revealing. The excesses of individual Chikuho mining companies' power, which led to a localised reign of terror, tacitly supported by the authorities and publicly supported by the media, was only one face of a story of epic proportions, part of which I have relayed.

List of Informants

Aoyama Junichi	67	Tagawa optometrist
Fujimori Tadeo	47	Tagawa City bureaucrat
Fukushiro Ken-ichi	46	Tagawa City bureaucrat
Hamasaki Masayuki	52	retired Mitsui coalminer
Hanno Eiichi	66	retired coalminer - Kyo no Ue mine
Hari Tazuko	29	welfare recipient
Hari Nobuhiro	32	welfare recipient
Idegawa Hanako	59	author, social historian, museum curator
Ikeda Osamu	41	social historian, photographer
Ishizaki Shigeko	61	author, social rights activist
Iwai Michio	60	retired coalminer - Mitsui Tagawa
Iwano Yotaro	42	drainage supervisor, Mitsui Engineering; ex-

		coalminer, Yamano Mine
Kashiwagi Isao	61	retired head of construction unit at Hoshu Mine. Company museum curator
Kariya Shigeaki	68	retired Mitsui company union representative
Kawano Hideo	45	acupuncturist, herbalist, ex-leader, Taisho Mine union
Kawano Junichi	35	Tagawa Police detective
Kim Pak Sung	67	author, Korean Rights activist
Kumo Noboru	46	Social Welfare Section Chief. Case workers' section - Tagawa-gun welfare office
Kurata Akira	65	Director, Coal Resources Allocation Board, Iizuka, ex-leader Kyo no Ue union
Matusmoto Shuntaro	57	ex-office manager, Yamano Mine

Miyoshi Mitsuko	43	Social Welfare women's case worker - Tagawa- gun welfare office
Mori Hideaki	59	leader, Mitsui Miike "Old" union
Nakano Mizuo	62	Tagawa dentist
Nakayama Hiroshi	58	Tagawa doctor
Nishioka Saburo	68	leader, Ueda Buzen Mine union
Okushima Shigeru	62	pensioner, retired coalminer - Tagawa Mitsui and Ueda Hoshu
Onishi Keisuke	45	<i>kami shibai</i> man
Onishi Hanako	41	potter
Sasaki Yoichi	64	pensioner, retired coalminer - Mitsui Tagawa
Sato Konosuke	60	headman of Kamihoshu village, <i>ex-yakuza</i> assassin
Shiroiwa Yoichi	32	Social Welfare case worker - Tagawa-gun

welfare office

Takashima Susumu	64	Professor, Japan University of Welfare Studies
Takazaki Yoshifume	70	author, retired bureaucrat
Tatefuji Kazuko	63	pensioner, retired coalminer - Mitsui Tagawa
Yada Toshifumi	63	author, academic Kyushu University Coal Research Centre
Yano Kenichi	45	alternative community leader, ex-radical student activist

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