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By Roger N. Baldwin

Since my return from Japan a few weeks ago, where I went as a guest of the Occupation to survey civil liberties, I have been amazed at the extent of skepticism expressed in response to my enthusiastic estimate of the role of General Douglas MacArthur. The Supreme Commander dominates the Occupation. He is, in relation to Japan, what the old shoguns were up to the coming of Commodore Perry almost a century ago, the military ruler above the emperor. His power in executing the Allied objectives of disarming, demilitarizing and democratizing Japan is nominally subject to control in Washington by the U.S. and the Allied governments, but in fact it is very little limited. The Occupation must therefore be judged mainly by his attitudes and abilities.

The General is engaged in a crusade. It is a crusade for democracy, a spiritually powerful Japan, and an ultimately self-supporting Japan. For the first time in history an autocratic military machine is succeeding in establishing the practices of democracy in a land dominated for centuries by feudal lords, despots and family oligarchies. The evidence of success on the political and psychological fronts is overwhelming. It is not the invention of press agents or MacArthur idolators.

But what my skeptical critics ask is how can a general never known to be a liberal so change his outlook, and can it be genuine when he is so warmly supported in the United States by some of the most unreconstructed Tories in our national politics? Was I not taken in by personal charm or surface appearances? Do I not minimize the blunders and faitures, and discount the unsolved problems?

association with Americans and Japanese from top to bottom in Tokyo, Kyoto, Osaka and the villages. And I testify without reservations. I went as an independent American citizen under no obligations to the Occupation. The last thing General MacArthur said to me was not to pull my punches in speaking

and writing of the Occupation, and feel free to criticize as the facts deserved. I do.

I know little of the General's past in relation to his understanding of democracy, but I do not hesitate to say that today he is one of the few men I have met in public life with an amost missionary spirit of promoting it. On every point we discussed I found him at once sensitive to the highest concepts of our democratic ideals. That covers not only political and social democracy, but economic, too, - the issues of trade union rights, monopolies, special privilege in any form. He not only thinks in democratic terms but feels deeply and with assured conviction their value. His attitude is that of a man with a profound sense of religion in its human relationships. Some of his associates call it "mystical". It is, in the sense of an abused word, "spiritual". The element of faith in democracy and in people is so strong as often, no doubt, to make him unduly optimistic over the progress of the Occupation. But with reasonable discount, he is not far off reality.

I cannot explain so readily why Tories think he is their man. I don't know any well enough to ask. I assume they take to a distinguished military commander far enough from home to have about him a legendary conservatism, and a proved ability in leadership thought to be transferable to politics. I doubt if MacArthur has any political ambitions, and I am sure he would in any event disappoint those who figure him out as a defender of the status quo. He is, on the record of his surrender speech on the "Missouri" and his pronouncements since, an idealist, innovator, liberal, with a vivid consciousness of the recesses of history. The Tories either do not read the record or do not believe it. I have heard that they are given to fixed ideas, and MacArthur as one of their sort is among them. The result among liberals is to repudiate of question the genuineness of his democracy. Hence the skepticism with which my testimony is greeted.

But the view I express is almost universally shared by the Japanese.

They look upon the general as a liberator from their militarists. They believe

in his policies. They want him to stay until the process of democratisation is firmly rooted. Even the Communist leaders, with whom I had a long session, felt it would be dangerous to withdraw in the near future, until the economy of Japan had been put on popular foundations of control beyond the power of reaction to capture. They did not like MacArthur's anti-Communism, of course, but they felt he had given them a fair break. Some of the Japanese have doubtless transferred to MacArthur some of the emotional loyalty formerly expressed for the emperor. "Don't treat MacArthur like a god", warned a Japanese editorial widely reprinted. Not many do, but the Japanese need to be warned against following the leader. It's the vice that got them into war. It is a substantial obstacle to the democracy that requires citizens to be boss, and governments their servants. Emperor-worship long insured against that attitude.

The Emperor was used by the ruling cliques as their mouth-piece. As the apex of the hierarchy of Japanese feudal organization he became the symbol of authority above the people. He has been cut down now to man-sase. The Imperial Household has been democratized. When I asked the Occupation authorities whether they approved my accepting an invitation to interview the Emperor, they at once encouraged me. "We seek no interviews for Americans", they said, "but we are delighted to approve his contact with representatives of U.S. democracy".

So my appointment with the Emperor came off as scheduled. It was a forty minute conversation with a shy little man surrounded by chamberlains, all in cut-aways, the Emperor indistinguishable from them. But he talked easily via an interpreter. We sat in gold and scarlet chairs in the commodious reception-room of the palace administration building. I told him about the Japanese in the US and their better prospects because the Nisei fought so well for the Allies (which seemed to clease himt) He responded to my questions quickly in his high small voice, expressing his faith in the UN, peace, Genl. MacArthur, the occupation, which was making only "small mistakes", and

winding up by saying he hoped it would stick till its job was done. I told him I thought the Americans had good sense to keep him, though I was no judge of the utility of royalty - at which the interpreter gasped a bit but did his duty. The interview wound up with the Emperor rising and grasping my hand to thank me for bringing him a tin of candy and two more for his sons from my sons. He got really voluble over the boys. We were in fact for a few minutes just a couple of fathers swapping remarks over the kids and their schools.

When the interview was over I asked the rules about quoting the Emperor. It appeared that there are none, and I was politely advised to use my own discretion. I got out a brief account for the press, knowing they would be unfavorable after me, checked it with our public relations section, and waited for and come-back. Instead the entire apanese press seemed perfectly delighted with what the Emperor said. It appeared that the Emperor had not before and what he said struck a universal response in agreement. expressed his views of the Occupation nor of the United Nations, /#But that was striking was not the publicity but the reaction of my Japanese friends in public life. They plied me with questions as to the Emperor's attitude, manner and words. At first I thought it the old reverence, with nothing much changed from Emperor-worship. But I quickly concluded that what they were seeking was an estimate of what the Emperor really was like in his new role of being himself, not the mouth-piece of a government. They wanted to know him as a man freed for the first time for frank speech. Was he really a liberal and a democrat? I could answer that he struck me as both, and a simple, unassuming and gentle character as well. He was about as remote from the Hirohito of war-time cartoons as a man could be.

The Emperor doubtless has a vast influence as the symbol of the nation, but his political role has been reduced to zero. He is not even, like the British king, the head of a nobility, for all but imperial titles were abolished by the new constitution. I heard outspoken opposition in meetings to continuing the luxury of so useless an institution, but it comes from a small

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minority of the Communist persuasion. Republicanism seems unlikely to make headway against so traditional a national symbol of unity.

It was a wise move to retain the Emperor. It has made General MacArthur's task far easier. The two men apparently understand and genuinely respect each other. Soon a peace treaty will retire the Shogun from the scene, with the great drama of democratizing Japan played through its first act. The Emperor will remain, a changed figure, reduced to a size commensurate with democracy, but with undiminished prestige as the living symbol of the nation.

I left apan with the same feeling of enthusiasm at the end of seven weeks that I felt the first. It was enthusiasm flowing from the recognition of the historic miracle created by a conqueror's role as liberator, and by the genuine Japanese response, from Emperor to Communists, to the best we Americans offer from our ideals and practices of democracy.

Correspondence-Organizational Matters: Roger Baldwin Trips To Japan And Germany, Volume 61. Dec. 19, 1945-March 11, 1951. MS The Roger Baldwin Years, 1912-1950: Sub-Series 18: Organizational Matters – Correspondence, 1917-1951. Mudd Library, Princeton University. American Civil Liberties Union Papers, 1912-1990, http://tinyurl.galegroup.com/tinyurl/AAKyM9. Accessed 30 May 2019.