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JAPAN'S STREAMLINED HOMEFRONT

BY ERNEST O. HAUSER

Finance Minister Ikeda Digs Down In Japanese Pockets

AFTER observing for some time the seemingly nonchalant attitude of the Japanese population toward the war measures imposed within the last year, one may find two possible explanations: the proverbial self-discipline of the Japanese race, or—plain indifference. Several signs give convincing proof that the latter is the answer. Old-timers who were in Japan during the Russo-Japanese War voice their astonishment at the lack of excitement on the part of the populace, and government and army officers have begun to express their consternation. Yet, it is the government's own propaganda which is coming right back, a most embarrassing boomerang.

Contrary to a widespread belief, Japan does not apply two different sets of propaganda: one for domestic use and another for consumption abroad. The Japanese public has been fed with the same story as the American, with the only difference that it was taken at face value in Japan. Thus, Japanese behind the lines actually believe that their armies are marching to help the Chinese, to establish peace and to rid the world of the communist evil. Consequently, there is no hatred against the Chinese people. The often cited example of the Chinese community, living in Tokyo undisturbed and at ease, is no figment. Chinese, dressed in their national costumes, have been among crowds that

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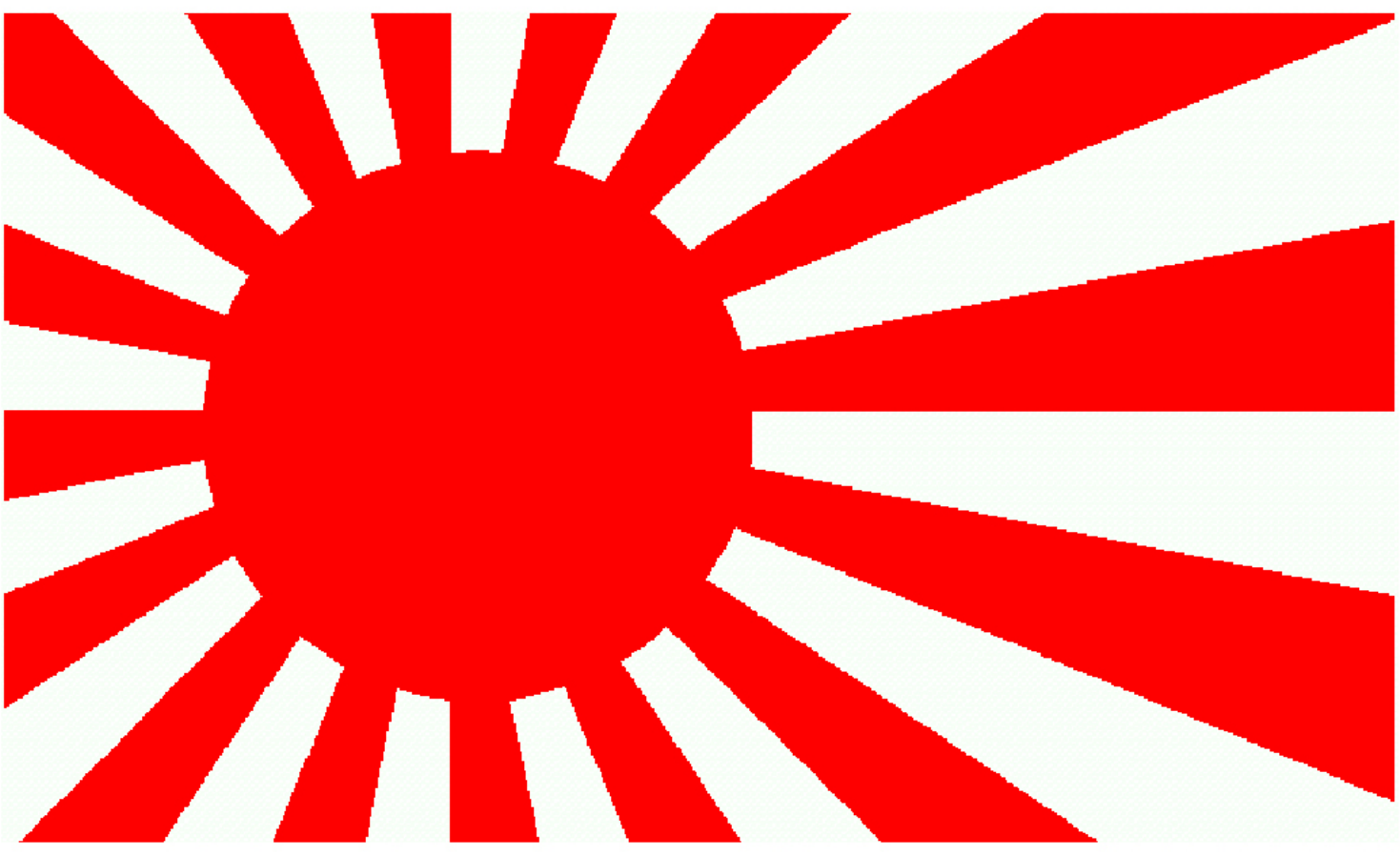

saw Nipponese soldiers march to the front, and they were not molested. And Japanese teachers have told Japanese children to "go home and to pray for the poor Chinese babies whose parents are killed and whose homes have been destroyed."

This is a paradoxical situation. For, despite all the lofty ideals which may or may not be in the minds of those who map national policies, war is a realistic and bitter thing, and you cannot successfully conduct it without bitter feelings. Hatred, as it is, remains one of the most essential factors in warfare, and those remembering the World War will recall the value attached to it on all fronts. Japanese soldiers who came home were shocked to see their people indolent and unconcerned, and those responsible began to see that they have gone too far in their propagation of love and international good will. It was no use to campaign for "spiritual mobilization" as long as people were under the impression that Japanese soldiers conquered Chinese cities for the sole purpose of posing for the *Asahi News* with Chinese babies on their laps.

"It is with marked dread," said Navy Minister Admiral Yonai in a recent address, "that I have heard and seen words and actions betraying a lack of appreciation of the situation." Yet, it seems hard to remedy this state of affairs without a complete about-face on the part of the government. For the interpretation of the war as a charity bazaar was supported by a censorship which worked somewhat like a sundial: it registered the sunny moments only. Reverses were never made known to the public, and very few people were aware of the fact that Japan was facing a most serious situation. Hence the new motto "Let the people *know*," which has been adopted by a considerable part of the press and which has been

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voiced by several government officials, in particular Finance and Commerce Minister Ikeda.

Mr. Ikeda knows why. He wants the people to save, to put part of their earnings in the bank, and to spend the remainder with great discretion. While the effect of such a policy would be to counteract an inflationary boom as the outcome of the swollen budget, it would also set aside huge amounts of stale cash (as much as eight billion yen has been mentioned as anticipated result of the savings campaign) which could be drawn upon by the government in case of emergency. The absorption of national bonds would be greatly facilitated, and the pressure on the shrinking supplies of raw materials would be lessened.

Elaborate plans for national thrift have been mapped by the Finance Ministry's "thrift encouragement commission." Three to ten per cent of monthly salaries or wages are to be put aside, according to the scales of pay and to the marital status. Thus, higher officials with yearly salaries of between 3,000 and 4,000 yen, are expected to save six per cent of the total by curtailing their expenses for food and clothing. White-collar people whose salaries fall just short of 1,000 yen will have to save four per cent, while employees who live on something like 500 yen a year are required to spend ten per cent less chiefly by cutting down their "miscellaneous" expenditures.

The stupidity of this scale, which applies the most drastic cuts to the lowest pay, is evident. But the employees of the Finance Ministry are giving the nation a wonderful example of how to "streamline" individual budgets. They have all decided to go around without neckties during the warm season, to "save" them for the winter, and they have renounced the luxuries of coffee, black tea and fresh fruits which were served, heretofore, in the Ministry's dining room. And the proper sacrifices in cash are taken out of their pay envelopes before they ever see the meager rest. Three semi-official banks have announced similar schemes. An illustration of what is likely to happen to the money thus deducted from salaries and wages is given by a department store whose

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4,000 workers had been compelled to save for the last ten years and which intends to use the accumulated capital to buy "China Incident" bonds.

While the murmur of disapproval is expected to come from millions of urban employees who do not see why they should spend less money to enable their soldiers to nurse Chinese babies, the problem of "streamlining" personal expenditures is far more delicate in the country. Both the Central Bank of Co-operative Societies and the Central Council of Co-operative Societies have decided on "aggressive action" in helping the peasants to save. Yet, because of the already precarious situation in the villages, their resolutions made it clear that the campaign would be carried out with much tact. While urban households are expected to register three savings accounts, each exceeding 25 yen, agrarian households will get away with a single account.

Much emphasis is placed on the idea that those who benefit from the present war should make higher sacrifices. As a rule, they are supposed to save the entire amount of the increase in wages or salary, or even more. While this measure is apt to interfere with the enthusiasm of the ammunition workers, the Thrift Commission's onslaught on the semi-annual bonuses may prove to be still more unpopular. People who can hardly make ends meet are patiently waiting for these bonuses—only to have them taken away through the clever device of a "national savings week" as soon as they arrive.

It seems that the heaviest burden of the "streamlining" campaign will fall upon the frail shoulders of Japan's women. It is generally felt that the co-operation of housewives could spell success for the entire movement, for, as the *Nichi Nichi* recently pointed out, "they are in charge of the kitchen, which has the closest bearing on questions of economy of consumption." The editorial stressed the point that "the development of the situation into one which finds us preparing to meet prolonged warfare has added to the duties of women," and found the sight of widows of soldiers worshiping at the Yasukuni Shrine "inspiring."

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The Emperor himself has deemed it fit to set a stimulating example by discarding one of the two cars used by imperial messengers, and by removing gold frames and crests from imperial gifts and invitation cards. At the same time, he ordered his officials to serve *saké* instead of foreign wines and Japanese cigars and cigarettes instead of foreign makes at ceremonial occasions.

Surprisingly enough, open or flimsily veiled criticism is forthcoming from various quarters. The *Miyako*, a popular newspaper with a strong foothold in Tokyo's amusement districts, congratulates the government on its noble aims, but expresses hope that "the Government will set a salutary example before the nation, saving as many unnecessary expenses as possible. It may be an instance of thrift if high officials wear foreign-style clothing mixed with staple fiber, but that is a trifling matter. The government must economize on a broad scale. It has been an open secret that it usually spends a large amount of money during the closing period of each fiscal year, when it produces surplus expenses. That is an unfavorable aspect, to say the least, and must be remedied at once." The paper also mentions large army and navy expenditures, used "in a reckless manner," and suggests to begin with national savings at the top instead of the bottom.

While the very suggestion of curtailing army and navy expenses at the present moment sounds preposterous, efforts have been made to get considerable amounts of money from the big capitalists. Takakimi Mitsui, who became head of his branch of the Mitsui family in December, 1936, will have to pay an inheritance tax of nearly 5,000 yen a day for the next seven years. Baron Kichizaemon Sumitomo, present head of the powerful Sumitomo clan, was assessed ten million yen when he ascended to that position. However, within the framework of the national wealth draining campaign, the largest fortunes are still earmarked in the least obtrusive way. Apart from taxes and voluntary cash contributions, well-to-do families may show their appreciation of the

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present emergency by donating gold articles to the "patriotic gold campaign" which is sponsored by the *Osaka Mainichi* and *Tokyo Nichi Nichi* newspaper chain.

It seems that the ricksha pullers are the only ones who have reason to be fully satisfied with the new trend. Just about seven months ago, the ricksha boys were forced to retreat from Tokyo Station on account of the motor taxi competition. Now, when the new gasoline rationing system induced taxi drivers to raise their fares, they staged a spectacular comeback and—got the riders. In fact, the restriction which the fuel rationing places on the freedom of cruising taxis has become very obvious. One may stand at one of Tokyo's busiest street corners and wait for half an hour, without any vacant car in sight. Streetcars are packed all day long, and buses are used, for the first time, by higher-ups. Private car owners are even facing a ban on Sunday rides for pleasure. Meanwhile, all the trucks—streamlined or not—are painted brown, which shows that the time may come when the difference between private and public ownership will be canceled, as far as automobiles are concerned.

Thus, the government's efforts to streamline the homefront affect all classes of the population, cutting deeply into the private sphere of the individual citizen. The individual citizen, in turn, abides by the law, gives what he is obliged to give, willingly shouts *banzai* whenever the emergency arises, but that is as far as he goes. For, when he comes home, he still finds his bowl of rice, and his dish of raw, fried, smoked, salted or dried fish, and he sits down and eats. Japan is practically self-sufficient in food, especially with regard to the two staple foods, rice and fish, and here is an additional factor which makes for indifference. A starving population can much more easily be swung into "spiritual mobilization" than people who have sufficient to eat. As things are today, there is even plenty of rice that can be spared for the manufacture of *saké*, and both civilians and soldiers go to the restaurants along the Sumida River and make merry

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just as they did in the good old days.

In the face of all this, economists have invented a new, big sounding and comforting phrase: the "elasticity" of Japan's economic system. As soon as the slogan was coined, it was readily accepted and very widely used, although nobody seemed to know its exact meaning. Apparently, it is meant to point out that the Japanese are modest people by their very nature, that spiritual elements are very important to them, and that Japanese belts can be tightened more easily and more drastically than other belts. However, all this requires genuine enthusiasm, and this enthusiasm has yet to be stirred up.

This behavior on the part of Japan's civilian population should not be confounded with disapproval. It is, to an overwhelming extent, plain indifference. Even people who showed some measure of excitement when the war had just started, have become fed up with too many victories, inasmuch as the names of most captured cities do not mean a thing to them. They let the army run things, and they are looking forward to the days of the great Asiatic empire which has been promised to them; they are looking forward to it with that skepticism and that sophisticated frown which is an international characteristic of the petty bourgeois.

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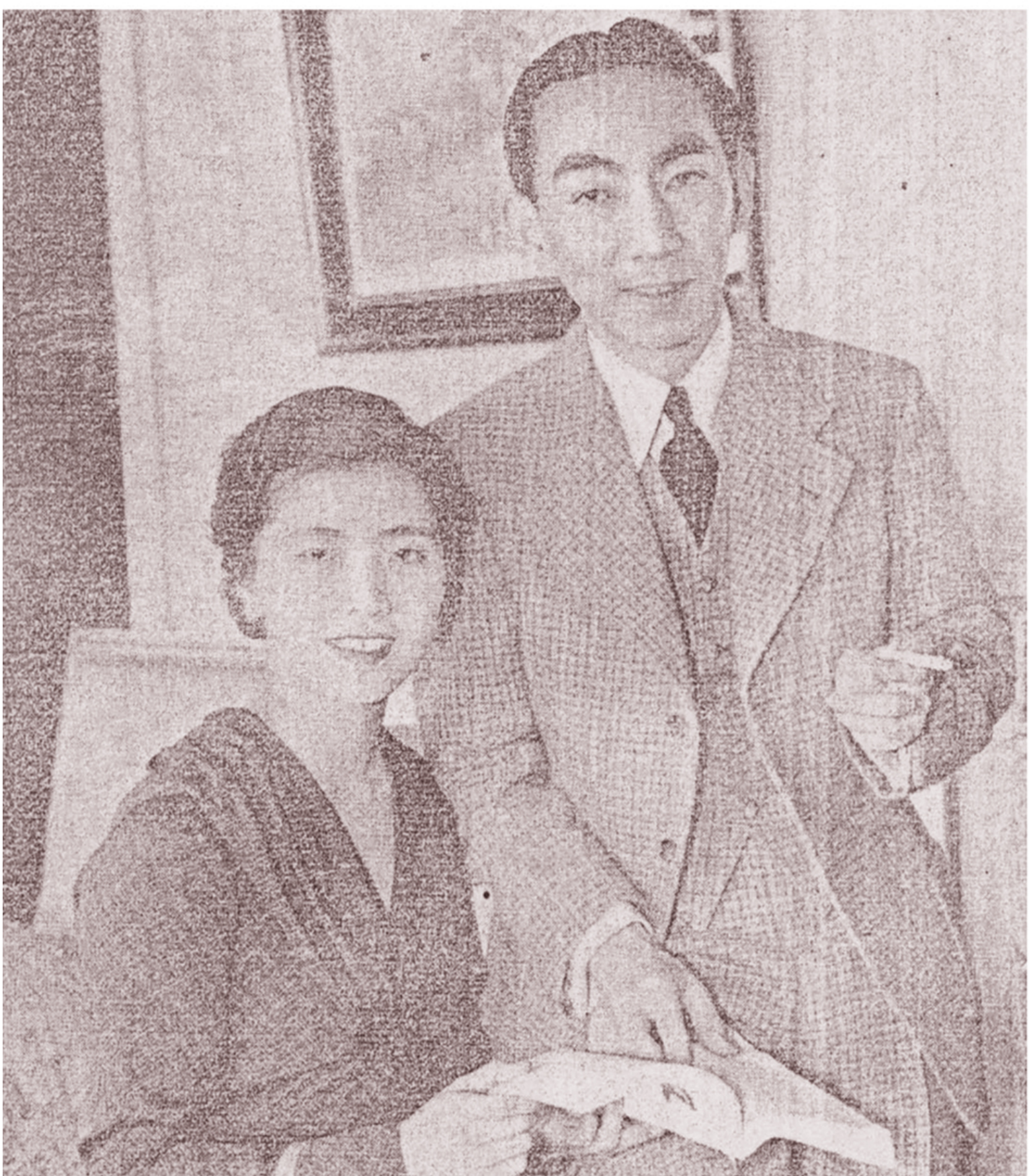
The Japanese Homefront

Four family corporations control Japan's Industries. Herewith the Rockefellers, Mellons, Fords and Du Ponts of Nippon: Baron Kichizaemon Sumitomo (above left) embodies Nipponese metal interests, while Baron Takakimi Mitsui (above right) is president of the Mitsui Co., specialists in finance.

The Yasuda family, of which Hirozo Mori (above left) is now the head, practically financed Japan's wars with Russia and China. Baron Koyata Iwasaki (above right) represents Japan's heavy industry. An atmosphere of intense group rivalry and feudal loyalty prevails among these Big Four.



Of the Mitsui clan, best known in the U. S. is Takanaru Mitsui, who has toured this country with his wife, one of the reigning beauties of Japan. Sixty per cent of the ten and one-half billion dollars invested in all Japanese joint stock companies is controlled by these four families.

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