

Subsequent to the closure of World War I Japan appeared to embrace a political system of liberal democracy where party governments dominated. However this system was relatively short lived, with a form of military dictatorship overtaking in just over a decade. The reasons behind ~~such~~ the transformation from two ~~distinct~~ diametrically opposed forms of government is a question which often attracts significant discussion from various historians, with a range of factors which are required to be considered. ~~When~~ The political parties seemed not be 'liberal' enough in their form of democratic government and consequently failed to gain ~~any~~ support from the Japanese masses. In addition to this the insubordinate actions of the undemocratic nationalistic army were never checked by the political parties, and consequently military power escalated to uncontrollable levels. Ultimately however it was the failure of



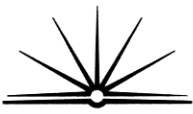
the 'Taisho' democratic period to modify the Meiji constitution and the interpreted 'kokuten' or national polity that resulted in the failure of liberal democracy between 1918 and 1932 inevitable.

The closure of World War I saw Japan for the first time appear to adopt a form of liberal democracy where party government dominated. Historian Richard Storry suggest the ultimate reason for this adoption was the Japanese new found respect for the victorious democratic allied powers in the Great Conflict. Other ~~the~~ historians such as W. G. Beasley argues the non party governments incapacity to cope with the War time boom collapse and the consequent Rice Riots which broke out in 1918, ^{as the fundamental reason.} irrespective of the historical debate, liberal democracy was officially adopted in 1918 with the

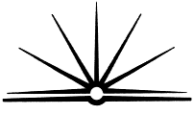


Chaired the 'great commoner'
election of Hara Kei and his Seiyūkai
party to government. However ultimately
within twelve years this ~~was~~
and idealistic hope of Japan becoming
a sustained liberal democracy was
shattered with the rise of imperialist
militarism and the adoption of a
form of fascism.

One fundamental reason
for the failure of this idealistic
liberal democracy was the party
government's inability to appeal to the
Japanese masses ~~to~~ for support. There
are a range of factors to consider
for this. While Japan may have
appeared to support democracy in this
period, ultimately the party government
remained intensely conservative and
oppressive of both ~~the~~ urban and rural
working and middle class Japanese.

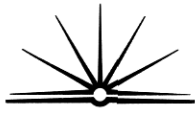


Hawa Kei began his term of leadership with severe suppression of the Rice Riots which had erupted as a result of the dramatically rising price of rice. The Wakatsuki cabinet of 1925 introduced the renowned 'Peace Preservation Act' which effectively hindered the liberal rights of Japanese citizens to an ever greater extent than had occurred prior to 'democracy.' Under this people could be arrested and imprisoned for ~~the~~ mere harboring of 'dangerous thoughts.' In 1928 ~~this~~ the conditions of this act were extended to ~~the~~ include punishment of imprisonment ~~of~~ to of up to ten years or the death penalty for ~~attending~~ against harboring 'dangerous thoughts' or challenging the strict 'kokutai' or 'National polity.' Any left wing



Movements were also ruthlessly suppressed including the trade Union movement and the Communist party which was banned hours after its formation by the Hara government in 1922. Ultimately for the Japanese masses both in urban and rural areas perceived little support from party governments and consequently failed to offer support for the liberal democracy in the 1920's. When the New Democratic system began to be seriously challenged towards the latter half of the decade, party politicians were not in the position where they could appeal to the Japanese people for support or recognition. This greatly undermined their hope of survival. ~~The~~ ~~the~~ ~~from~~ 1918 to 1932
The period from 1918

to 1932 saw a series of profound economic crisis for Japan. These included the Rice Riots of 1918, the ~~Great Tokyo~~ Great Tokyo Earthquake of 1923 which devastated the Japanese economy, the banking crisis of 1927 with the closure of 36 Japanese banks as well as the onset of the worldwide Great Depression which led to the collapse of the ~~central~~ silk market, central to Japan's ~~economic~~ ~~economic~~ ~~economic~~ ~~economic~~ ~~economic~~ ~~economic~~ foreign trading market. In all of these crises it was again the Japanese working and middle classes which suffered most. Very rapidly party governments which epitomized the idea of liberal democracy began to be associated with the interests of the profoundly wealthy zaibatsu, at the expense of the Japanese masses.

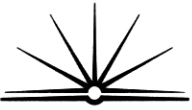


This ~~perception~~ negative perception of the Japanese political ~~system~~ parties in the eyes of the Japanese masses was again a central factor in the inevitable ~~failure~~ failure of liberal ~~to~~ democracy from 1918 to 1932 or 'Taisho' democracy as it came to be known as.

The military played a central role in the destruction and failure of the period of Taisho Democracy. As an intensely imperialistic and nationalistic ~~they~~ institution, they were constantly in opposition with the peaceful and diplomatic policies of democratic party government. Ultimately the military found a position where they could gain support ~~from the~~ for their policies from the Japanese

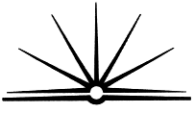
working and middle classes, as well as began to exercise unchecked power and ultimately bring down the system of liberal democracy. ~~Using~~ propaganda and plays, ~~the army was able to generate support~~

The army generated support from the Japanese masses in a range of ways. They stressed the lack of regard party governments had for the common Japanese man both in rural and urban institutions. They capitalized on ~~a~~ Japanese nationalism and imperialist sentiment within the masses, stressing US ~~and~~ ^{and western} unjustified racism towards Japan shown at the Paris Peace Treaty where the racial equality clause was left out and US and Australia immigration acts, limiting Japanese immigration. By stressing these examples they effectively generated



Nationalistic support for their imperialistic policies over the peaceful policies of party & government. In addition they offered opportunities for urban and rural working class Japanese to join the army and effectively raise their social position. Ultimately driven by generating such profound support from the Japanese masses over the party government, they were securing their triumph of over the democratic system of politics and government.

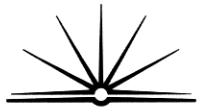
Throughout the 1920's the Japanese military engaged in a range of both internal and foreign incidents which undermined the power of the political parties and liberal democracy. Here Ke, Hamaguchi and Inukai



were all presidents which were assassinated by factions of the army. The Manchurian incident in September 1931 as well as the May 15 incident 1932 were ~~the~~ each two more examples military insubordination went ~~to~~ unchecked.

Richard Storry argues it was the lack of discipline imposed upon the military which when such acts of disobedience occurred which led to the escalation of unprecedented power and their ultimate destruction of party government and liberal democracy from 1918-1932.

The ultimate and fundamental cause of the failure of liberal democracy however stems from party government failure to modify the Meiji

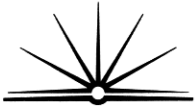


Constitution of 1868. Such an argument is supported and greatly stressed by Marcus Jansen.

The Meiji Constitution he argues was ~~desigate~~ designed to give the appearance of democracy with the ultimate reality of power being allocated to the narrow minority.

By the late 1920's when the remaining Meiji institutions of the Genro were all dying, ultimately the army began to utilize their ^{profound} constitutional power, ~~being~~ where they had to answer only to the Emperor. Therefore it was

inevitable that as the army began to ~~utilize~~ utilize their profound position of influence under the constitution, liberal democracy and party government which



was in opposition of with
the army would fail, as it
did in 1932 with the
assassination of Premier Inukai.

Therefore the failure of
Party government and liberal
democracy, stemmed from party
governments failure to appeal to
the Japanese masses as
well as the position and influence
of the army.

* Post WWI. * Kokutai *

* Constitution

* Liberal → not enough

* unable to control military

* Conflict between gov't & military actions

* didn't get support from masses

* racism (international).

Japanese People.

Military actions

Constitution