

[English translation of article in SHUKAN GENDAI, 10-4-2008, pp.20-21]

British, Australian newspapers reported that Aso Mining owned by Takakichi Aso, father of Taro Aso, had used Allied POWs for forced labor

It is well known that South Korea and China are wary of Taro Aso for his hawkish words and actions. It is not known, however, that Aso has some hidden "bombs" in his relations with Australia and Britain, which are former Allies.

The so-called Aso Company Report is kept at the U.S. National Archives in Maryland.

After World War II, the company report was submitted by Aso Mining Co. in Fukuoka Prefecture to Occupation authorities investigating war crimes against prisoners of war (POWs).

Aso Mining was owned by Takakichi Aso, former Lower House member and the father of Taro Aso. Taro Aso himself had run Aso Cement Co. before he entered the political world.

Since Aso Mining employed many Koreans during the war, the South Korean government in 2005 asked [Aso Cement] to submit detailed documents. But Koreans were not the only foreigners employed by Aso Mining. According to the Aso Company Report, Aso Mining employed also Allied POWs in its Yoshikuma mine in Fukuoka.

William Underwood, a former lecturer at Kurume Institute of Technology, who researches postwar reparations by various countries, pointed out:

"British and Australian newspapers covered this issue around April and May 2006 one after the other. I have confirmed that the Aso Company Report writes that Aso mining used 300 Australian, British and Dutch POWs as forced labor."

This weekly magazine verified the fact. There are two company reports. One was a letter, dated on June 22, 1945, to the Japan War Ministry requesting the use of 300 Allied POWs for forced labor under a 12-hour shift system.

The other was a report detailing how Aso Mining was treating POWs. The report dated Jan. 24, 1946, compiled by Aso Mining, was submitted to the Allied Occupation POW Information Bureau. The company report claims the Westerners were fed, clothed and housed better than Aso's Japanese workers. Underwood, however, questions this report, saying:

"It's hardly possible that POWs were treated well. I interviewed an Australian POW employed in the Aso Yoshikuma mine. He told me that he had been forced to work under severe conditions."

Let's examine the specifics. Although the company report writes that Allied POWs were

dressed in military uniforms that were of superior quality than clothing for ordinary people, the Australian POW said: "We were down to absolute tatters by the end of the war. I don't think we had have seen it through another winter." The company report also claims that, soon after Japan's surrender, prisoners thanked Aso officials for their kind treatment by giving them gifts. But the Australian POW said: "There was no such thing. That's absolute rubbish."

The company report writes that about one yen was paid and the higher wage was paid to those who had special skills. But the Australian POW said: "I was not paid at all."

When the British and Australian newspapers covered this problem two years ago, Aso, then foreign minister, would not talk about his view, only rejecting the reports. Regarding Aso Mining's use of Koreans for forced labor, Aso was quoted in a Mainichi Shimbun article on Nov. 3, 2005, as saying: "I have no intention to explain. Basically, the issue was resolved under the Treaty on Basic Relations between Japan and the Republic of Korea." He avoided giving a specific answer.

This magazine inquired about his intention, but he did not respond. Underwood said:

"Of course, Mr. Aso was not involved in the forced labor. However, if he plans to take part in the international community as Japan's prime minister, he should reveal the historical facts about Aso Mining."