

EDITORIAL

Okinawa's voice is heard

The angry reaction of Okinawa Prefecture residents to the deletion of references in history textbooks to the Imperial Japanese Armed Force's use of coercion and other forms of involvement in the mass suicides of local residents during the Battle of Okinawa has forced a change in the government's attitude. In an abrupt departure from the past policy for screening textbooks, it was the government that had ordered the references deleted.

Some 116,000 Okinawan residents, including conservative Gov. Hirokazu Nakaima, attended a Sept. 29 rally demanding that the education ministry withdraw its rewrite orders. All 41 municipalities in Okinawa and the Okinawa prefectural assembly also have adopted written opinions demanding retraction of the orders. As a face-saving measure, the ministry will let textbook publishers submit requests to correct their screened textbooks so that the original references can be restored.

Testimonies by survivors of the Battle Okinawa indicate that the army's policies of indoctrination and pressure led to mass suicides. Many people killed themselves with hand grenades distributed by the army. The hysteria even drove some to kill family members. Rev. Shigeaki Kinjo, who with his brother killed his mother, writes that many families on Tokashiki Island started killing themselves with hand grenades after hearing that the army had issued suicide orders.

The ministry says that retracting the rewrite orders would undermine the screening system and pave the way for political interference in the system. The rewrite orders are based on recommendations by the Textbook Authorization Research Council, which serves as a fig leaf for the government. But its discussions are based on opinions submitted by the ministry's textbook screeners. At the very least, the ministry should make public what kinds of academic research formed the basis of the screeners' opinions,

and what discussions the council held, so that the rewrite orders can be discussed academically in the open.

The Japan Times: Saturday, Oct. 6, 2007
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