

No more mistakes

During my brief visit to South Africa I was interested to read Terry McCarthy's article "Hiroshima: now a war of words" (The Star, November 14).

In 1950 I was probably the first journalist to interview the mayors of Hiroshima and Nagasaki during a visit they made to the West. For the first time since the end of the war, and with special permission of General Douglas MacArthur, a delegation of some 60 Japanese was invited to attend the Moral ReArmament World Assembly in Caux, Switzerland.

They represented a wide cross-section of society in the new Japan which was only then, five years after the dropping of the atom bombs on their country,

beginning to lift their heads and venture out among former enemies.

As a young Australian I was conscious of what our prisoners of war had suffered in Japanese concentration camps or during the building of the notorious Thai-Burma railway. I was also becoming aware of what Australia's, and other Western, trade and economic policies had done to strengthen the arguments of the militarists during the late 1930s that Japan was being encircled.

As I spoke with the two mayors, I was impressed by their humility and by their regret for what Japan had done to its neighbours during the war.

In the atmosphere of honest

dialogue and reconciliation which the Caux meetings provided, the mayor of Hiroshima, Shinzo Hamai, revised his concept of how the bombing should be remembered by posterity.

He decided to change the proposed wording on the Peace Memorial. It was to have been: "Sleep in peace. We shall never let them make the same mistake again." After his experience at Caux, he decided that the wording should read: "Sleep in peace. We shall never make the same mistake again."

May they, indeed, sleep in peace; and may we all learn the lessons of those horrific events.

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