

# **The Anarchist Movement in Japan, 1906–1996**

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## Preface by the ACF

The Anarchist Communist Federation have decided to reprint John Crump's pamphlet *The Anarchist Movement in Japan* (which is a summary of his book *Hatta Shûzô and Pure Anarchism in Interwar Japan*) for a variety of reasons.

One is as a tribute to the continuing struggle of the libertarian movement in Japan, bringing to the attention of English-speaking comrades what is unfortunately a little known part of the global struggle for a free and equal society. We hope this will be a starting point for greater understanding of a valuable tradition of anti-authoritarian communism and may lead to increased co-operation with Japanese anarchists today, on the road to a truly world-wide anarchist movement.

As well as being an inspirational example of struggle against a powerful authoritarian state, this history of Japanese anarchism is also of great value in providing an example of the development of anarchist theory. The clear and cogent arguments against the reformism of the trade unions and social democracy are still relevant today, as is the critique of Bolshevism, revealing its inherent hierarchical nature in contradiction to the oft repeated claims of Trotskyists that it only degenerated under Stalin. It also serves as a historical lesson in the futility of resorting to terrorism when faced with state repression, and in the danger of anti-organisational tendencies.

Even more important for anarchists today is the record of the debate between the anarcho-syndicalists and anarchist communists in the movement. While we in the ACF have criticisms about some of the positions taken by anarchist communists in Japan at different periods, such as formation of a party, working within the trade union structure, making a distinction between class struggle and insurrection, as well as their vision of how the future anarchist society will be organised, we think that the rejection of syndicalism as a strategy for social revolution is correct, particularly for the reason that it can only duplicate the economic structure of capitalism.

We do not aim to offer in this short preface an in-depth analysis of these or the many other important issues raised by the Japanese movement. The pamphlet speaks for itself, and as is often the case with timely anarchist literature, its success will be judged by its influence on the practical activity of working class militants today.

Anarchist Communist Federation, Summer 1996

## Author's Dedication

This pamphlet is dedicated to Ôshima Eizaburô, whose undiminished passion for anarchist communism, despite his advanced years, is an inspiration to many younger comrades.

Not only that, but how many can enliven a flagging conversation with the casual remark: "When I set off a smoke bomb at the imperial palace..."? Ôshima-san can.

## Author's Note

Japanese names are given in the customary East Asian form, i.e. family name (e.g. Kôtoku) followed by personal name (e.g. Shûsui). Long vowels in Japanese words are indicated by accents (e.g. ô).

# **The Anarchist Movement in Japan**

# Chapter 1: 1906–1911

Anarchists in Japan! For many the very idea is surprising. Japan's popular image is of a hierarchical and regimented society, while the Japanese are widely regarded as unswervingly loyal servants of the company and the state. Even within Japan there are many Japanese who are unaware of the anarchist movement's existence, of the martyrs who have died for the cause, and of the sustained struggle that has been fought against the capitalist state and the inhumanity it has perpetrated over the years. Not so long ago a young Japanese who happened to be studying at an American university wrote to me for information on the anarchist movement in Japan after she had read one of my articles in the *Bulletin of Anarchist Research*. That she should have discovered the anarchist movement only after leaving Japan is a good illustration of the extent to which the existence of Japanese anarchism has been omitted from the officially sponsored historical record, filtered out of the education curriculum and ignored by the mass media.

## Historical and Economic Background

Of course, there is an (albeit one-sided) element of truth in the popular image of Japan and the Japanese. This has much to do with the way Japan modernised in the years of major social upheaval following 1868. In 1868 power had fallen into the hands of a narrow circle of young samurai who were determined to make Japan a wealthy and militarily strong country. In order to achieve this, they were intent on creating a highly centralised state, an industrialised economy and an overseas empire which would compensate for Japan's lack of raw materials. These were ambitious goals for what was at that stage still a small, weak and backward country on the edge of world civilisation. To realise these ambitions the Japanese people had to be dragooned into conformity, partly persuaded and partly threatened into putting the state's interests before their own, and fed an ideology of national pride and service to the Emperor.

For many years after 1868 the bulk of the population remained peasants, toiling on the land. Agriculture was the basis of the economy, since industries could only be established by squeezing wealth out of the peasants and channelling it into the factories, shipyards and mines which were set up with the state's encouragement. To achieve this transfer of wealth from the agricultural sector of the economy to the developing industries a heavy land tax was imposed. One effect of this was that many peasants who could not pay their taxes were forced to sell their land and become tenant farmers. From a society composed mainly of peasant families engaged in the intensive farming of small parcels of land which they owned themselves, Japan was transformed into one where the bulk of the land was worked by tenants who surrendered typically half their crops in the form of rent to often absentee landlords. As the conditions of the agricultural population deteriorated in this way, some cut their links with the land, drifted into the towns and sought work in the mushrooming industrial and commercial enterprises.

It was among this emerging working class that the first attempts were made towards the end of the nineteenth century to organise unions, but the state reacted swiftly by introducing in 1900

a “public peace police law” which effectively outlawed all workers’ organisations and, needless to say, strikes.

Not only were the peasants for many years the backbone of the economy; they were also the mainstay of the sizeable conscript army which the new state rapidly established. The formative years of the average peasant or working class lad were spent being moulded and disciplined, first in elementary school and later in the army. The Emperor’s pronouncement of 30 October 1890, known as the *Imperial Rescript on Education*, well conveys the beliefs which the authorities attempted to implant in youngsters’ minds. It read in part:

Always respect the Constitution and observe the laws; should emergency arise, offer yourselves courageously to the State; and thus guard and maintain the prosperity of Our Imperial Throne coeval with heaven and earth. So shall ye not only be Our good and faithful subjects, but render illustrious the best traditions of your forefathers.<sup>1</sup>

Peasant and working class girls escaped some of this organised brain-washing, partly because they were more likely than their brothers to be kept off school in order to help out around the home even during the few years of compulsory education. Nevertheless, the weight of convention burdened young women too, as they were urged to turn themselves into “a good wife and a wise mother” and were taught from an early age that a woman’s fate is to obey the three men in her life — her father in her youth, her husband in her prime and her eldest son in old age.

Not surprisingly, even though the state leaders were successful in achieving most of their aims to turn Japan into a richer and more powerful country, and even though most Japanese men and women conformed to the roles prescribed for them, some brave individuals resisted the trend of the times. Moreover, just because Japan was such a highly conformist society, so the reaction against conformity was all the more intense when it occurred, since the state’s demands for absolute obedience and loyalty left little room for compromise, liberal half-measures or the escape route of eccentricity. The principal structures of the modern Japanese state were established by the end of the nineteenth century and opponents of the regime were first inclined to embrace Western ideologies such as Christianity and social democracy, in the belief that these offered alternative and more humane models for modernisation. What exposed the inadequacies of Christianity and social democracy alike was Japan’s first major war of the twentieth century, the Russo-Japanese War of 1904–5. Despite its unmistakably imperialist nature, many Japanese Christians were prepared to support this war as a means of ingratiating themselves with the state, while many social democrats throughout the world favoured a Japanese victory, on the grounds that this would precipitate revolution in Russia. Those who were determined to resist both the state and the war turned elsewhere for political inspiration — and, in so doing, lay the foundations of the Japanese anarchist movement.

## Kôtoku Shûsui and the Emergence of Japanese Anarchism

Kôtoku Shûsui played a major role in introducing anarchism to Japan.<sup>2</sup> He was born in 1871 in the provincial town of Nakamura in Kôchi Prefecture, about 700 kilometres West of Tôkyô as the crow flies. Even today, if you visit Nakamura, you will find that his grave is well cared for and

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<sup>1</sup>Borton (1970) p. 205.

<sup>2</sup>See Notehelfer (1971)



ample evidence that it is still a place which people visit in order to acknowledge their intellectual and political debts to Kôtoku. After moving to Tôkyô in his mid-teens, Kôtoku became a journalist in 1893 and from 1898 he was a popular columnist on the most radical daily paper of the period, the *Every Morning News* (*Yorozu Chôhô*). Politically, Kôtoku moved from the liberalism which initially attracted him to social democracy and he was one of a small group which attempted to organise a Social Democratic Party in Tôkyô in May 1901, only to see it immediately banned by the government.

Kôtoku was a man of considerable integrity and courage, who stuck to his principles, no matter how painful or dangerous the consequences. As war with Russia approached, the liberal and previously anti-war *Every Morning News* fell into line with government-orchestrated opinion and became increasingly belligerent. Kôtoku refused to toe the paper's new line and instead chose to resign from the job which up till now had provided him with both a steady income and a "voice" in respectable society. Together with another *Every Morning News* journalist, called Sakai Toshihiko, he now took the risky step of launching an outspokenly anti-war journal at a time of increasingly hysterical militarism. This was the weekly *Common People's Newspaper* (*Heimin Shinbun*), the first issue of which appeared in November 1903 and which battled on bravely against the war-mongering government until being forced out of existence in January 1905. Throughout its brief existence, the *Common People's Newspaper's* editors and journalists were repeatedly prosecuted, fined and imprisoned for infringements of the stifling press laws and in February 1905 Kôtoku started to serve a five months jail sentence for one such offence.

The *Common People's Newspaper* was not an anarchist journal. Its *raison d'être* was opposition to the war and, to the extent that its supporters had any other commonly held political views, these were largely social democratic. This, of course, was a period when far and away the most influential social democratic party in the world was the German SPD. To be a "Marxist" in this era before the Russian Revolution meant not to be a Leninist, but to share the political outlook of Kautsky, Bernstein and the other SPD leaders. When Kôtoku and others had attempted to found the Japanese Social Democratic Party (*Shakai Minshutô*) in 1901, they had opted for a programme of political reforms resembling the SPD's and similar influences were acting on Kôtoku and Sakai when they jointly translated Marx's and Engels' *The Communist Manifesto* and published it in the *Common People's Newspaper* in November 1904. This was the first ever translation into Japanese of *The Communist Manifesto* and not only was the issue of the *Common People's Newspaper* which carried it banned from sale, but Kôtoku and Sakai were heavily fined.

After Kôtoku emerged in July 1905 from the five months he had spent in prison, he claimed that he "had gone [to jail] as a Marxian Socialist and returned as a radical Anarchist".<sup>3</sup> In fact, the change in his political views was less clear-cut than this suggests, but there can be no doubt that his ideas were moving in an anarchist direction. While in prison, Kôtoku had read Kropotkin's *Fields, Factories and Workshops* and he had also thought long and hard about the position of the Emperor in Japanese society. Like the German SPD, the Japanese social democrats largely kept silent on the imperial institution. At worst, this was because some of them regarded social democracy as purely a question of installing a new government, but otherwise leaving the bases of Japanese society (from the imperial household to the wages system) unchanged. At best, more radical social democrats thought it wise simply to ignore the Emperor and leave the resolution of this problem to the future. However, Kôtoku was becoming increasingly aware of the extent to

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<sup>3</sup>Shiota (1965) p. 433.

which the Emperor was the linchpin of both the ideology and the machinery of the state, which together kept capitalism in existence in Japan.

With this increased awareness that capitalism and the state could only be brought to an end in Japan if the Emperor institution were abolished too, Kôtoku decided after his release from prison to get away from Japan for a while so that he could “criticize freely the position of ‘His Majesty’ and the political and economic institutions from a foreign land where the pernicious hand of ‘His Majesty’ cannot reach.”<sup>4</sup> It was in this frame of mind that Kôtoku left Japan in November 1905 to spend six months in the USA. As reading material for the long sea voyage, he took with him Kropotkin’s *Memoirs of a Revolutionist*.

## “American” Influences

Kôtoku remained in the USA (mainly California) until June 1906 and absorbed many influences which proved to be crucial not only for him but for Japanese anarchism as a whole. In the first place, there was the anarchist communism advocated by Kropotkin and others. Kôtoku started to correspond with Kropotkin during his time in the USA, but was also exposed to anarchist communist ideas from many other quarters as he interacted with the numerous political activists in California who held such views in the early years of this century. The anarchist communist influence acting on Kôtoku (and through him on the movement in Japan) is best symbolised by what many regard as Kropotkin’s greatest work, *The Conquest of Bread*. Kôtoku acquired a copy of this book in English translation while he was in the USA and started to translate it when he returned to Japan. Eventually a clandestine edition of one thousand copies was published in March 1909 and was widely distributed among students and workers.

The second important influence was syndicalism, partly in the shape of the newly formed Industrial Workers of the World (IWW), which had been organised in Chicago in June 1905, and partly as pamphlets and articles on the European syndicalist movement, which were readily available in California. We know that shortly after Kôtoku arrived in San Francisco, three members of the IWW called on him and invited him to speak at one of their meetings.<sup>5</sup> As for European syndicalism, the German anarchist Siegfried Nacht’s pamphlet *The Social General Strike* had been published in English over the pseudonym “Arnold Roller” in Chicago in June 1905 to coincide with the IWW’s founding conference. Again, Kôtoku obtained a copy of this pamphlet and translated it into Japanese after returning from the USA. In 1907 it was published clandestinely, using the ploy of giving it the innocuous title *The Future of Economic Organisation* so as to throw the authorities off the scent. Once again, it achieved a nationwide distribution among political militants.

The third major influence was political terrorism, which impinged on Kôtoku and others less from anarchist sources than by means of the example set by the Russian Social Revolutionary Party (the SRs), whose “fighting organisation” had carried out numerous assassinations of tsarist officials. The SRs’ exploits were widely known about even in the USA and were much admired by the political activists with whom Kôtoku came into contact in California. Shortly before Kôtoku returned to Japan, more than 50 Japanese immigrants (out of the more than 70,000 who had

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<sup>4</sup>Ibid., p. 434. (Kôtoku’s faulty English in this letter to an American anarchist has been corrected without altering his meaning.)

<sup>5</sup>*Hikari* (20 January 1906) p. 6.

settled on the West coast) gathered in Oakland in California on 1 June 1906 to found a Social Revolutionary Party (*Shakai Kakumeitô* in Japanese).

This Social Revolutionary Party lacked the resources to sustain organised activity for long, but during 1906–7 it did publish several issues of a journal called *Revolution* (*Kakumei*), the contents of which were revealing. *Revolution* declared that “reformism and the parliamentary policy” were “like trying to fight a raging fire with a child’s water pistol”. As an alternative, it believed that the only effective means of revolution was armed violence:

The sole means is the bomb. The means whereby the revolution can be funded too is the bomb. The means to destroy the bourgeois class is the bomb.<sup>6</sup>

Revolution also described the Japanese Emperor as “a tool controlled by the present ruling class for the purpose of enslaving the masses”.<sup>7</sup> On the Emperor’s birthday, on 3 November 1907, some of those associated with the Social Revolutionary Party issued in the USA a leaflet headed “Terrorism” (*Ansatsushugi*) which threatened an armed assault on the Emperor. Addressing the Emperor by his personal name of Mutsuhito, the leaflet ended with the words:

Mutsuhito, poor Mutsuhito! Your life is almost at an end. The bombs are all around you and are on the point of exploding. It is goodbye for you.<sup>8</sup>

News of the distribution of this leaflet in the USA was relayed back to Japan and created a sensation in ruling circles. Outraged officials could scarcely believe that any Japanese would dare to address the supposedly sacred Emperor in such a fashion and vowed to exact revenge whenever the opportunity presented. Some three years later they were to have their chance.

## Kôtoku’s Return and the Anarchists Organise in Japan

As soon as Kôtoku returned from the USA, a large public meeting was organised in Tôkyô to welcome him back and to give him the opportunity to report on how his ideas had developed while in America. At this meeting, held on 28 June 1906, Kôtoku spoke on “The Tide of the World Revolutionary Movement”, which he asserted was flowing against parliamentarism and towards the general strike as “the means for the future revolution”.<sup>9</sup> He followed up his speech with numerous articles in the revolutionary press, all of which repudiated social democratic parliamentarism and argued for direct action. The best-known of these articles was “The Change in My Thought (On Universal Suffrage)”, which was published on 5 February 1907. A few extracts from this lengthy article will convey the extent to which Kôtoku’s political outlook had altered:

I want to make an honest confession. My views on the methods and policy to be adopted by the socialist movement started to change a little from the time that I went into prison a couple of years ago. Then, during my travels last year, they changed dramatically. If I recall how I was a few years back, I get the feeling that I am now almost like a different person.

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<sup>6</sup>Suzuki (1964) p. 467.

<sup>7</sup>Ibid., p. 478.

<sup>8</sup>Supplement to Suzuki (1964).

<sup>9</sup>*Hikari* (5 July 1906) p. 1.

...If I were to put in a nutshell the way I think now, it would be along the following lines: "A real social revolution cannot possibly be achieved by means of universal suffrage and a parliamentary policy. There is no way to reach our goal of socialism other than by the direct action of the workers, united as one."

...Formerly I listened only to the theories of the German socialists and those in the same current and laid far too much emphasis on the effectiveness of votes and of parliament. I used to think: "If universal suffrage is achieved, then surely a majority of our comrades will be elected. And if a majority of the seats in parliament are occupied by our comrades, then socialism can be put into effect by means of a parliamentary resolution." It is true, of course, that I recognised at the same time the urgent need for workers' solidarity, but still I believed that at least the first priority for the social movement in Japan was universal suffrage. My speeches and articles were full of this, but I now think of it as an extremely childish and naive idea.

...What the working class needs is not the conquest of political power — it is the "conquest of bread". It is not laws — but food and clothing. Hence it follows that parliament has almost no use for the working class. Suppose we were to go as far as putting our faith and trust simply in such things as introducing a paragraph into a parliamentary law here or revising several clauses in some bill or other there. In that case we could get our aims carried out merely by putting our trust in the advocates of social reform and the state socialists. But if instead of this what we want is to carry out a genuine social revolution and to improve and maintain the real living standards of the working class, we must concentrate all our efforts not on parliamentary power but on developing the workers' solidarity. And the workers themselves too must be ready not to rely on such creatures as bourgeois MPs and politicians but to achieve their aims by means of their own power and their own direct action. To repeat: the last thing the workers should do is to put their trust in votes and MPs.

...I hope that from now on our socialist movement in Japan will abandon its commitment to a parliamentary policy and will adopt as its method and policy the direct action of the workers united as one.<sup>10</sup>

Kôtoku's new ideas astounded his comrades. Most were accustomed to accept the SPD's assurance that its doctrine represented the forces of reason, progress and good order within society, whereas they had been taught by the same source that anarchism was a primitive and chaotic reaction to political repression, which had nothing in common with "scientific socialism". Yet here was the best known and intellectually most accomplished socialist of his day challenging the SPD's teachings and arguing coherently and persuasively for anarchism. Some of the Japanese social democrats were resistant to the new train of thought. For example, in September 1907 Katayama Sen, who pioneered social democratic and labourist ideas in Japan and who in later years went on to become one of Stalin's yes-men in the Comintern (there is a plaque commemorating him on the Kremlin wall in Moscow), scornfully rejected Kôtoku's anarchism as follows:

The Socialist movement of Japan is somewhat crippled and hindered on account of anarchistic views held by some who profess to be...socialists and hold some influence

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<sup>10</sup>*Nikkan Heimin Shinbun* (5 February 1907) p. 1. (A complete translation of this article appears in Crump [1983] pp.

among their Comrades. Those who have gone over to Anarchism oppose legislative and parliamentary tactics and political movement, and preached so-called direct action or a revolutionary or destructive general strike. We are sorry that some of our best Comrades have changed to the above views and no longer go with us...<sup>11</sup>

Katayama was right in one respect — that it was often the most able social democrats who responded positively to Kôtoku's challenge to their previously held views. For many younger socialists, Kôtoku's call to anarchism came like a breath of fresh air and he soon gathered round him an impressive body of support. Ôsugi Sakae, Arahata Kanson, Yamakawa Hitoshi and many others played important roles at this time in popularising ideas of self-liberation and direct action, although in later years some like Arahata and Yamakawa were to succumb to the illusory promise of Bolshevism.

While Kôtoku had been away in the USA, a second attempt had been made to form a social democratic party. Known this time as the Socialist Party of Japan (*Nippon Shakaitô*), it was founded in February 1906 and was initially tolerated by the authorities, principally because it courted respectability and undertook to "advocate socialism within the limits of the law of the land".<sup>12</sup> A related development which occurred was that in January 1907 the *Common People's Newspaper* (*Heimin Shinbun*) was relaunched, this time as a daily. Although the Socialist Party of Japan was a small organisation, with only about 200 members, Kôtoku correctly described it in December 1906 as an amalgam of many different elements:

Social-Democrats, Social Revolutionists, and even Christian Socialists...Most of our comrades are inclined to take the tactics of Parliamentarism rather than Syndicalism or Anarchism. But it is not because they are assuredly convinced which is true, but because of their ignorance of Anarchist Communism. Therefore our most important work at present is the translation and publication of Anarchist and Free-thought literature.<sup>13</sup>

The issues raised by Kôtoku's new stance were thoroughly debated at a conference of the Socialist Party of Japan which was held in Tôkyô on 17 February 1907. Many of the views advanced there represented a clean break with social democracy and the delegates supported a call to strike out from the party rules the commitment to operate "within the limits of the law of the land". Not only did this lead to the government banning the Socialist Party of Japan on 22 February 1907, but the tense relations between social democrats and anarchists swiftly reached the point of an outright split. When the daily *Common People's Newspaper* folded in April 1907, due to the combined effects of financial difficulties and government persecution, it was replaced in June 1907 by two separate journals — the weekly *Social News* (*Shakai Shinbun*), which was under the control of the social democrats, and the bi-monthly *Ôsaka Common People's Newspaper* (*Ôsaka Heimin Shinbun*), which argued strongly for direct action. This development represented the definitive split between social democrats and anarchists in Japan. From this time on, anarchism has remained a separately organised, distinctive current, which is as much opposed to social democracy (and later Bolshevism) as it is to conventional capitalism.<sup>14</sup>

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341–51.)

<sup>11</sup> *Shakai Shinbun* (15 September 1907) p. 1.

<sup>12</sup> *Hikari* (5 March 1906) p. 6.

<sup>13</sup> Shiota (1965) p. 441.

<sup>14</sup> Crump (1983) pp. 250ff.

## Mounting Repression

It was mentioned earlier that the anarchist ideas which Kôtoku brought back from the USA were a mixture of anarchist communism, syndicalism and terrorism. Kôtoku himself was first and foremost an anarchist communist (a “Kropotkinist”, if one wishes to use the term). Conditions in Japan made anarchist communism seem highly relevant and attractive. Like the Russia which had inspired Kropotkin’s vision of a society based on common ownership, libertarian federation and mutual aid, Japan too was a largely agrarian society. Its agricultural villages seemed ready made for conversion into anarchist communes, especially since the practices associated with rice production had given rise to deeply ingrained cooperation and solidarity among the farmers. Many anarchists besides Kôtoku were enthused by the anarchist communist vision and threw themselves into the effort to popularise this view of how society could be organised. One example among many was Akaba Hajime, who in 1910 wrote the pamphlet *The Farmers’ Gospel* (*Nômin no Fukuin*). Here Akaba skilfully bridged the gap between the village community of the past, which the corrosive effects of the market were undermining, and the revolutionary commune of the anticipated future. He wrote:

We must send the land robbers [i.e. the landlords] to the revolutionary guillotine and return to the “village community” of long ago, which our remote ancestors enjoyed. We must construct the free paradise of “anarchist communism”, which will flesh out the bones of the village community with the most advanced scientific understanding and with the lofty morality of mutual aid.<sup>15</sup>

The political methods employed by anarchist communists were, by and large, the spreading of their ideas by means of written and oral propaganda. In attempting to spread the word, however, they came up against the intense repression enforced by the state. After the forced dissolution of the Socialist Party of Japan in 1907, public meetings were routinely disrupted, distribution of publications was prohibited and anarchists were subjected to many types of everyday persecution, ranging from police violence to dismissal from work to tailing by detectives. What happened to Akaba is a case in point. After the publication of *The Farmers’ Gospel*, he was forced to go underground because of the same pamphlet’s criticism of the Emperor, was eventually arrested by the police and died in Chiba Prison on 1 March 1912 after a period of hunger strike.

Syndicalism was attractive to many anarchists because it seemed to be in tune both with the rapid expansion of industry, which was under way in Japan at the time, and with the marked combativity of sections of the working class, such as the miners. There was a belief among syndicalist-inclined anarchists that, however many trump cards were in the hands of the state and the bosses, they still had their Achilles’ heel. The line of reasoning at work here was that the capitalist state needed to industrialise in order to realise its economic and military ambitions but that, since industry depended on the working class, the stronger Japan became industrially the more it became vulnerable to a general strike carried out by determined and well organised workers. This train of thought was given added plausibility by the frequency with which exploited workers were answering the bosses’ arrogance with strikes, some of which reached insurrectionary proportions. The most famous case in this period of a strike which escalated into violence against the company and armed confrontation with the military was the dispute at the Ashio copper

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<sup>15</sup> Akaba (1960) p. 294.

mine in February 1907. After the Ashio miners went on strike, they cut the electricity supply, blew up and set fire to company buildings, gave the head manager a severe beating with their pickaxe handles, attacked a nearby police station and ultimately did battle with three companies of infantry which were sent into action against them. Although the Ashio dispute was the best known instance of an insurrectionary strike at this time, it was far from being the only one. In the months that followed, a series of conflicts in other mines boiled over into violence, and attacks on company officials and destruction of company property were by no means unknown in other industries.<sup>16</sup>

Although anarchists obviously welcomed signs that workers were prepared to struggle to improve their conditions, the situation never showed any signs at this stage of getting beyond the point where the state could control it. As long as labour disputes occurred one by one, the state could concentrate its resources first here and then there in order to break the resistance of isolated bodies of workers. What the situation demanded, as syndicalist theory taught, was a federation of industrial unions which could coordinate disjointed actions, overcome the weakness brought about by isolation, and raise the struggle to the level of a general strike. This proved impossible to achieve in this period, however, because of the provisions of the already mentioned “public peace police law”.

Perhaps because the capitalist state was aware of the fact that it was more vulnerable on the economic than the political front, it was even more Draconian in its handling of labour organisations than it was of socialist groups and journals. Even the mildest of trade unions were not tolerated, so that any which attempted to form were immediately hounded out of existence.

With the anarchist communist and anarchist syndicalist routes thus effectively blocked, it was hardly surprising that some anarchists should have turned to terrorism, the third of the major influences acting on the Japanese anarchist movement. Yet even when, from about 1908, a few anarchists did start to toy with the idea of meeting state violence with their own violence, hoping thereby to spark off a wider popular uprising, their plans never got beyond the stage of experimenting with explosives. As a fraction of the anarchist movement as a whole, the merest handful was involved. Furthermore, in a highly repressive society such as Japan, where all known dissidents were kept under close watch, it took considerable time to acquire the necessary information and materials. When four anarchists were arrested on 25 May 1910 following the police discovering a stash of bomb-making equipment, not a single attack had yet been carried out on any target whatsoever. The most that had been achieved was the successful detonation of a trial bomb in the mountains. Nevertheless, here was the opportunity the authorities had been waiting for ever since the “Terrorism” leaflet of 1907. Hundreds of suspects were taken into custody and a case was fabricated that 26 of these had been involved in a plot to assassinate the Emperor.<sup>17</sup>

When the trial was held in December 1910, it was closed to the public and the state’s handling of the entire investigation indicated that it was not going to let legal niceties interfere with its determination to cripple the anarchist movement. The only thing that prevented the authorities from involving even larger numbers in the affair was that various prominent anarchists, such as Ōsugi Sakae, were already serving prison sentences for other offences and could hardly be implicated in plotting which was supposed to have taken place while they were behind bars. Predictably, all 26 defendants were found guilty and all except two were sentenced to death

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<sup>16</sup>Crump (1983) pp. 158–67.

<sup>17</sup>Notehelfer (1971) pp. 163ff; Crump (1983) pp. 301ff; Anarkowic (1994).

Although twelve of those awaiting execution subsequently had their sentences commuted to life imprisonment, the remaining twelve whom the state was determined to hang included Kôtoku Shûsui. By the time of Kôtoku's execution on 24 January 1911 the Japanese anarchist movement was already reduced to a state of near hibernation in what became known as its "winter period". The state was determined to close down all journals, ban all meetings and generally make life intolerable for anarchists who attempted to sustain any form of activity. For many there was no alternative but to withdraw to the countryside, eke out some kind of living off the land and bide their time as they waited over the next few years for a change of circumstances. Others went into exile. Ishikawa Sanshirô, who had repeatedly been imprisoned for offences under the press laws, left Japan for Europe in 1913 and did not return until 1920. However, the important thing was that the ideas did not die. Nor was the flame extinguished. The movement somehow survived the long years of almost total obliteration which now ensued, so that when a change in conditions following the First World War forced the state to relax slightly its stranglehold, anarchism resurfaced stronger than ever.



## Chapter 2: 1912–1936

Throughout the years 1912–36, anarchist communism, syndicalism and terrorism remained identifiable trends within Japanese anarchism. During the first half of this period, it was syndicalism which predominated intellectually, whereas in the latter half the pendulum swung towards anarchist communism. Compared to these two major theoretical influences, terrorism was never more than a minor sub-current in the anarchist movement but, although those inclined to armed struggle were always a small minority, unremitting state repression ensured that there were invariably some anarchists whose anger and frustration boiled over into attempts to pay back in kind their oppressors.

There are a number of reasons why syndicalism should have predominated initially. During the “winter period”, which lasted until 1918, anarchists were aware that they were all but defenceless in the face of a particularly vicious state which had overwhelming force at its disposal and would not stop at even legally sanctioned murder to suppress anarchism. Although the organisation of labour unions was still prohibited, at least as a theoretical proposition the idea that a mass union movement could provide a bulwark against the power of the state had strong appeal. Second, with the death of Kōtoku, Ōsugi Sakae was left as the most talented thinker and most productive writer in the anarchists’ ranks and he happened to be greatly inspired by the growth of the French syndicalist union federation, the CGT. It was mainly through Ōsugi’s articles that the CGT was held up as an example for Japanese workers to emulate. Third, the reputation of anarchist communism was tarnished, albeit temporarily, when Kropotkin succumbed to French chauvinism following the outbreak of the First World War. Subsequently, anarchist communists were reassured when Malatesta and others reiterated principled opposition to the war, but Kropotkin’s defection nevertheless delivered a severe shock to those who had absorbed anarchist communism from sources such as *The Conquest of Bread*.

One fortuitous stroke of luck for the anarchist syndicalists was their success in managing to publish the journal *Modern Thought* (*Kindai Shisō*) even in the depths of the “winter period”. Throughout the “winter period” there were many attempts by anarchists to launch different journals but, almost without exception, they were closed down and their editors fined and imprisoned. The one exception was *Modern Thought*, which Arahata Kanson and Ōsugi Sakae started in October 1912 and which they managed to publish monthly until September 1914. *Modern Thought* survived for two years, mainly because it contrived to present syndicalist ideas in the guise of philosophical discussion rather than as a practicable proposition. In association with *Modern Thought*, Arahata and Ōsugi also organised a Syndicalism Study Group (*Sanjikirizumu Kenkyū Kai*) which held numerous public meetings between 1913 and 1916. Again, the authorities probably failed to appreciate the true significance of the Syndicalism Study Group’s meetings because they attracted mainly young intellectuals rather than workers. Despite this drawback, they were an important morale booster in what was otherwise a period of unrelieved gloom and continuing defeat.

## End of the “Winter Period”

What brought the “winter period” to an end was the spontaneous outbreak of popular anger which expressed itself in the summer of 1918 in the form of nationwide “rice riots”. The years of the First World War were a period of boom for Japanese capitalism as Japanese companies took advantage of the problems, brought about by the war, which interfered with the operations of their European rivals. As the economy boomed, inflation took hold and the price of rice, the staple food, spiralled upwards in a frightening fashion in the closing year of the war, leaving wages far behind. As a result, a small demonstration by fisherwomen in Toyama Prefecture on 23 July 1918, in protest against the shipping of rice out of their district, unleashed a torrent of anger which spread across the length and breadth of Japan over the next few weeks, involving hundreds of “incidents” of one sort or another. Not all these disturbances attained the proportions of full-scale riots, but in one major city after another there were pitched battles between tens of thousands of rioters and the police, with the army being called out in many instances. To people in Ōsaka on 12 August 1918, for instance, it felt “as though a revolution had really come”.<sup>1</sup> Here at last was the kind of situation the anarchists had dreamed about during the bleak years of the “winter period”. The state was no longer firmly in control, there were too many disturbances for it to be able to concentrate its forces and smother the protests one at a time, and the ruling class was scared into making concessions. Japan by no means became a liberal democracy overnight as a result of the 1918 rice riots. On the contrary, the “public peace police law” and its 1925 replacement, the “maintenance of public peace act”, remained on the books throughout the years to come and the anarchists continued to be prime targets of the state’s repression. But the blanket suppression of all activity was no longer possible and the anarchists were quick to seize the opportunities that presented to regroup, launch new journals and involve themselves in the workers’ and peasants’ movements.

Not only was there widespread rioting on the streets in this period, but in the factories too labour disputes were commonplace. In 1918 more than 66,000 workers were involved in 417 separate disputes. These figures might sound meagre by present-day standards, but they need to be set against the figure of less than 1.5 million workers employed in all factories at the time. Even though unions remained technically illegal, the state was no longer in a position to enforce the letter of the law entirely. A Friendly Society (*Yûaikai*), which had been formed in 1912 with a mere 15 members, had expanded its organisation and membership to 30,000 by 1918 and in 1921 changed its name to the Japanese Confederation of Labour (*Nihon Rôdô Sôdômei*). It is true that most newly formed unions, both inside and outside the Japanese Confederation of Labour, were led by out and out reformists, who were simply looking to improve the position of the workers *within* capitalism, at the same time as they sought to carve out careers for themselves. Nevertheless, among the unions that emerged in this period were some which embraced anarchism, both as the goal of their struggle and as an organisational method. One such union was the *Shinyûkai* printworkers’ union which, although when it was first formed in 1916 had a purely reformist outlook, had by 1919 expanded its membership to 1,500 and opted for anarchism. Also in 1919 another anarchist-inclined printworkers’ union, the *Seishinkai*, was formed by 500 newspaper workers. The *Shinyûkai* and *Seishinkai* linked up in 1923 to establish a printworkers’ federation and by 1924 this had attained a combined membership of 3,850, a not inconsiderable number by

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<sup>1</sup> *Shakaishugi Kenkyû* (October 1921) p. 12.

the standards of the time.

The *Shinyūkai* and *Seishinkai* have been singled out for special mention here since the print-workers formed the backbone of the anarchist union movement throughout the prewar years. Yet anarchist unions were by no means confined to the printing industry alone. A declaration issued in November 1922 by workers' groups which favoured organisation based on "libertarian federation" and rejected "centralised authority" was signed by unions representing, among other sections of the workforce, watchmakers, general labourers, tramworkers, shipbuilders, engineering workers and communication workers.<sup>2</sup> This provided an indication of the spread of anarchist ideas among the working class generally.

One important anarchist group which was formed in 1919 in response to the developments described above was the *Labour Movement (Rôdô Undô)* Group, which issued a journal of the same name. The most striking feature of the journal *Labour Movement* was that, whereas previously a journal such as *Modern Thought* had recommended syndicalism as a course of action to be followed and a goal to struggle towards, *Labour Movement* was more concerned with reporting and analysing on-going struggles, which often assumed an anarchist form, no matter whether the workers were aware of syndicalist theory or not. What this signified was that, with the ending of the "winter period", anarchist syndicalism moved from the realm of theory to the field of practice. In one sense this represented the maturing of anarchist syndicalism in a Japanese context, but in another it forced many Japanese anarchists to face up to problems inherent in syndicalism of which they had previously been unaware. We shall return to this below when we discuss the split between anarchist communists and anarchist syndicalists which occurred in 1928.

## Anarchism versus Bolshevism

In Japan, as in many countries, it took some time to grasp the true nature of the 1917 Russian Revolution. Initially there were many anarchists in Japan who were sympathetic to the little they knew about the Bolsheviks. In the immediate aftermath of the revolution, all that was known about Lenin and his followers was that they had executed the tsar, extricated Russia from the war and thereby earned themselves the hatred of the bourgeoisie and the reformist social democrats alike. At first glance, this appeared to be a course of action which many anarchists might have pursued under the circumstances. Hence it was hardly surprising that, to start with, Bolshevism attracted the sympathetic interest of many Japanese anarchists and that, although some swiftly grasped that Lenin and his fellow leaders were simply a new ruling class which was intent on consolidating its power, others were taken in by the new creed and were lost to anarchism. Indeed, when the Communist Party of Japan was founded in 1922, among its leaders were Arahata Kanson (formerly co-editor with Ôsugi of *Modern Thought*) and Yamakawa Hitoshi (who had been one of the first to rally to Kôtoku after his "change of thought" and had helped to translate *The Conquest of Bread*). Furthermore, the Party's first chairman was none other than Kôtoku's old friend, Sakai Toshihiko (who, while never having been an anarchist, had resigned in 1903 from the *Every Morning News* and had helped Kôtoku to launch the *Common People's Newspaper*). It is interesting to note that, while none of these had any further association with anarchism, neither did any of them last long in the ranks of the Communist Party, since their capacity for independent thinking

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<sup>2</sup> *Rôdô Undô* (1 November 1922) p. 2.

prevented them from swallowing every twist and turn of Comintern policy.<sup>3</sup>

Although Ôsugi never showed any signs of abandoning anarchism for Bolshevism, even he was prepared to accept an invitation to visit Shanghai in October 1920 for discussions with Comintern agents. He returned with ¥2,000 to be used for restarting *Labour Movement*, which had temporarily ceased publication in June 1920. The result of this Comintern funding was the second series of *Labour Movement*, which lasted from January to June 1921 and coincided with the high point of cooperation between anarchists and the Japanese supporters of Bolshevism.<sup>4</sup> During this brief period articles written from both anarchist and Bolshevik perspectives appeared side by side in *Labour Movement*, but it was not long before the strains in the relationship started to show. Lenin's regime put down the Kronstadt uprising against Bolshevik despotism in March 1921, Ôsugi soon started to translate eyewitness reports by Emma Goldman and Alexander Berkman of Bolshevik repression of the Russian anarchists and before long Ôsugi had concluded that there was nothing to choose between Russian state capitalism and Western private capitalism. Bolshevik policy, he wrote, "has cast the chains of wage slavery for the Russian proletariat and has dragged the workers down into a worse situation than the conditions of labour found in other capitalist countries".<sup>5</sup> *Labour Movement* continued to be published intermittently until October 1927 but, after the brief anarchist-Bolshevik flirtation which was a feature of its early numbers, it soon settled down into a 100 per cent anarchist journal which was unambiguously opposed to Bolshevism.

Parallel to the temporary cooperation between anarchists and Bolsheviks in the field of publishing, which has been described above, there were also attempts in the early days of the union movement to bridge the ideological divide. Unions of different ideological persuasions jointly organised the first ever May Day demonstration in Japan in 1920 and out of this emerged a Labour Union Alliance (*Rôdô Kumiai Dômeikai*). Yet, when a May Day rally was held again the following year, members of anarchist and reformist unions came to blows and the Labour Union Alliance foundered. In 1922 there was one last attempt to form an all-encompassing federation of unions, this time in the shape of the All-Japan General Federation of Labour Unions (*Zenkoku Rôdô Kumiai Sôrengô*). Its founding conference was held in Ôsaka on 30 September 1922 and was attended by 106 delegates, representing 59 organisations with a combined membership of over 27,000. The unions represented were split three ways ideologically between anarchists, reformists and Bolsheviks. Although there was no love lost between the reformists and the Bolsheviks, they cooperated temporarily to oppose the anarchists' preference for a decentralised federation and insisted instead that the union movement should have a centralised leadership with powers to enforce its decisions. Naturally, where the reformists and Bolsheviks disagreed was over which of them should be exercising leadership. This antagonism was to come to a head three years later in 1925 when the Bolshevik-controlled unions broke with the reformists to set up the Japanese Labour Union Council (*Nihon Rôdô Kumiai Hyôgikai*). From the point of view of this account, however, the most significant outcome of the failed attempt in 1922 to establish the All-Japan General Federation of Labour Unions was that 20 unions revealed their strong preference for anarchist organisational principles by signing in November 1922 the "Announcement to Workers Throughout the Country" to which reference has already been made.<sup>6</sup> Four years later this core support

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<sup>3</sup>Beckmann & Ôkubo (1969) pp. 8–78.

<sup>4</sup>Stanley (1982) pp. 127ff.

<sup>5</sup>*Rôdô Undô* (1 January 1923) p. 9.

<sup>6</sup>See note 19.

was to be the focus around which the first nationwide federation of anarchist-inclined unions, the All-Japan Libertarian Federation of Labour Unions (*Zenkoku Rôdô Kumiai Jiyû Rengôkai*) was to crystallise.

By 1922, then, antagonism between anarchists and Bolsheviks had reached a level of intensity which made all future cooperation impossible. From that point on, anarchist hostility to the Communist Party of Japan equalled the long standing contempt in which anarchists held the reformist social democrats.

## Ôsugi's Death and Fresh Attempts at Terrorism

In September 1923 anarchism in Japan was dealt a blow as hard as the execution of Kôtoku and his comrades twelve years earlier. It has already been mentioned that, after Kôtoku's death, Ôsugi was indisputably the most talented thinker and writer in the anarchists' ranks. Throughout the harsh repression of the "winter period" and into the years of resurgence that followed, his combination of passionate commitment to personal liberation with an equally ardent enthusiasm for the aims and methods of anarchist syndicalism had provided inspiration for many. Now, tragically, he was to be cut down in his prime. On 1 September 1923, Eastern Japan (the Kantô region) was hit by a major earthquake. More than 90,000 people died and close to half a million buildings were destroyed, partly from the initial effects of the earthquake but mainly from the subsequent fires which burnt out of control for days on end. As swathes of fire cut through Tôkyô, Yokohama and elsewhere, rumours that arsonists and revolutionaries were out on the streets spread as frighteningly as the flames themselves. Hysteria took hold and led to lynchings, many of the victims of which were Korean immigrants. In this situation of panic and chaos, the authorities were presented with another golden opportunity for eliminating enemies of the state. Ôsugi Sakae, his partner Itô Noe (who was herself an outstanding anarchist) and Ôsugi's six year-old nephew Tachibana Munekazu (who happened to be with them) were seized by a squad of military police and all three were brutally put to death. Taken into custody on 16 September 1923, their battered bodies were discovered four days later where they had been dumped in a well.<sup>7</sup>

The brutality of Ôsugi's and his companions' murders was compounded by the state's hypocrisy. Amakasu Masahiko, the captain in command of the military police unit, was put on trial and sentenced to ten years' imprisonment, but within three years he was free again and back on duty. Comrades of Ôsugi who had known him personally, as well as others who knew him as an inspired propagandist and an irrepressible champion of freedom only through his writings, were incensed by the casual ease with which the state had killed the ablest anarchist of his generation, as though it were swatting a fly. Not surprisingly, there were those who vowed to exact revenge. In September 1924, an anarchist group which was aptly named the Guillotine Society (*Girochin Sha*) made two attempts on the life of Fukuda Masatarô, the general ultimately in command of the troops who had murdered Ôsugi. In the first attempt one of Ôsugi's old comrades, Wada Kyûtarô, shot General Fukuda but only succeeded in wounding him, while in the second Fukuda's house was bombed, although he was not at home at the time. Wada was tried and sentenced to life imprisonment, but committed suicide while in prison in 1928. Other members of the Guillotine Society were given long prison sentences and two, Furuta Daijirô and Nakahama

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<sup>7</sup>Stanley (1982) pp. 155ff.

Tetsu, were executed for their part in a bank robbery which was undertaken in October 1923 in order to raise funds and in the course of which a bank employee was killed.

However righteous the indignation which fired these attempts to retaliate against the cruelty perpetrated by the ruling class, terrorism proved to be totally unproductive in advancing the anarchist cause. Mass arrests and stepped up repression were the inevitable outcome of attacks which mostly missed their targets and inflicted insignificant damage on the structures of power. Despite the evident failure of these various incidents, however, they did not finally lay the terrorist ghost to rest. Terrorism was the result of the systematic inhumanity practised by the capitalist state and the persistence of this causative factor guaranteed that in years to come a minority of anarchists would continue to be provoked into attempts to pay back the ruling class in kind.

## The Resurgence of Anarchist Communism

Many accounts of anarchism in Japan, particularly those which are sympathetic to Bolshevism, suggest that from about the time of Ôsugi's death anarchism was locked into a downwards spiral. This is far from being the case. During the 1920s the anarchists in Japan were organisationally stronger than ever before, and there was a corresponding flowering of ideas and theories, particularly among the anarchist communists.

In 1926 two nationwide federations of anarchists were formed. The first, organised in January 1926, was the Black Youth League (*Kokushoku Seinen Renmei*) which was usually known by its Japanese abbreviation of Kokuren. When Kokuren was set up it was mainly composed of young anarchists from Eastern Japan (the Kantô region) but it swiftly expanded to take in all generations and to extend its federal organisation throughout Japan and even beyond into Japanese colonies such as Korea and Taiwan. The second federation was the All-Japan Libertarian Federation of Labour Unions (*Zenkoku Rôdô Kumiai Jiyû Rengôkai*) whose name was generally abbreviated in Japanese to Zenkoku Jiren. At its founding conference on 24 May 1926, 400 delegates attended, representing 25 unions with a combined membership of 8,400. These figures compared with the 35 unions (with around 20,000 members) which had remained in the reformist Japanese Confederation of Labour when 32 of its constituent unions (with 12,500 members) had split away in 1925 to form the Bolshevik-led Japanese Labour Union Council. Although Zenkoku Jiren was thus smaller than its reformist and Bolshevik rivals, the unions which comprised it were implanted in virtually all areas of Japan, from the island of Hokkaidô in the far North, through major urban centres such as Tôkyô and Ôsaka in Japan's industrial heartland, to cities in the South-West of the country, such as Hiroshima. In addition to the wide geographical spread of Zenkoku Jiren, it also had roots in most major industries. Its unions were organised along industrial lines and encompassed sectors of the workforce as varied as printworkers, textile workers, engineering workers, food workers, rubber workers, general labourers and so on.<sup>8</sup>

There was another sense too in which Kokuren and Zenkoku Jiren could be said to have been widely based when first formed. This was that they took in most shades of anarchism, from anarchist syndicalism to anarchist communism. For example, although the heavy presence of anarchist communists in Kokuren's and Zenkoku Jiren's ranks was obvious from the start, the programme which the latter's founding conference adopted was nevertheless clearly influenced by the classic statement of syndicalist principles — the French CGT's Charter of Amiens (1906).

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<sup>8</sup>Crump (1993) pp. 69ff.

Zenkoku Jiren's founding programme declared:

- We take the class struggle as the basis for the movement to liberate the workers and tenant farmers.
- We reject all political movements and insist on economic action alone.
- We advocate libertarian federation organised industry by industry and we reject centralised authoritarianism.
- We oppose imperialist aggression and advocate the international solidarity of the working class.<sup>9</sup>

Relations between Kokuren and Zenkoku Jiren were extremely close, with the former acting as a hard core of committed and battle-hardened activists within the wider ranks of the latter. When unions affiliated to Zenkoku Jiren became involved in industrial disputes, it was often Kokuren militants who took on the most dangerous forms of direct action, such as battling with the police and firebombing the bosses' houses. In this respect, the relationship between Kokuren and Zenkoku Jiren has often been compared to that between the FAI and CNT in Spain. However, this analogy cannot be pressed too far since, as we shall see, the ideas which inspired many Japanese anarchists increasingly diverged from those held by their counterparts in Spain and elsewhere.

The story of the next few years is of an ever-sharpening antagonism between anarchist communism and anarchist syndicalism, which led the anarchist syndicalists to withdraw from both Kokuren and Zenkoku Jiren in 1927/28 in a mood of considerable bitterness and to set up their own independent organisations. The reasons for this confrontation are various. One of the easiest to identify is the influence of two outstanding anarchist communist theoreticians and propagandists, called Hatta Shûzô and Iwasa Sakutarô.<sup>10</sup> Although Hatta was active in the anarchist movement only during the last ten years of his relatively short life (1886–1934) he was widely acclaimed as “the greatest theoretician of anarchist communism in Japan”.<sup>11</sup> Iwasa lived much longer (1879–1967) and increasingly came to be regarded, with a mixture of affection and respect, as the grand old man of Japanese anarchism. Although different types in many ways, Hatta and Iwasa complemented one another extremely effectively and what they shared was a profound distrust of both syndicalism and the conventional labour movement. As a lapsed Protestant clergyman, Hatta was a masterly public speaker, the sort of man who could hold an audience of tenant farmers or workers spellbound for hours on end, moving them to tears with his description of the iniquity of both conventional capitalism and Bolshevism, and firing them with passion for an alternative society which would successfully combine individual freedom and communal solidarity. Iwasa was a quieter, less flamboyant type, who was at his best in informal chats and discussions. Forever on the move, he travelled the length and breadth of Japan, quietly making friends and implanting the ideas of anarchist communism wherever he went.

Yet, however talented Hatta and Iwasa might have been as exponents of anarchist communism, the resurgence of this doctrine in Japan at this particular time cannot be adequately explained in

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<sup>9</sup>Ibid., p. 77.

<sup>10</sup>See *ibid.*

<sup>11</sup>Hatta (1981) p. 309.

terms of their influence alone. For anarchist communism to have enjoyed the popularity it did in Japan in the late 1920s, it had to provide a convincing explanation for the oppression which so many were experiencing and, equally, had to correspond with their aspirations for a new life. Many tenant farmers and workers found that anarchist communism could fulfil these roles far more effectively than anarchist syndicalism could. From the point of view of the desperately poor tenant farmers, who comprised the bulk of Japan's population in this period and far outnumbered factory workers, the reasons for this are perhaps not difficult to understand. When the anarchist communists talked about converting by revolutionary means the miserably impoverished farming villages into flourishing, self-supporting communes, their message seemed directly relevant to the tenant farmers in a way in which the predominantly urbanised, industrialised and unionised approach of the anarchist syndicalists could never be.

Nevertheless, the split between anarchist communism and anarchist syndicalism cannot be adequately grasped simply in terms of the different social positions of tenant farmers and industrial workers. For one thing, there was a good deal of movement between the countryside and the towns, with new workers being absorbed by the factories as the economy periodically expanded and just as regularly discharged whenever the inevitable economic downturns occurred. For another, even among permanently town-based workers, anarchist communism impressed many as constituting a more fundamental break with the structures and values of capitalism than anarchist syndicalism could ever achieve.

Many of these workers found Hatta's argument convincing when he insisted that, because anarchist syndicalism based itself on union organisations that were outgrowths of the capitalist workplaces, it would replicate in its social relations the centralisation, hierarchy and power found under capitalism. Hatta argued that, by adopting a form of organisation which mirrored capitalist industry, anarchist syndicalism would perpetuate the division of labour. It was predicted that, even if the bosses were eliminated so that the mines were controlled by the miners, the steel mills by the steelworkers and so on, tensions would still arise between different industrial sectors and different bodies of workers. Even though it was recognised that anarchist syndicalism was ideologically committed to abolishing the state, Hatta maintained that there would be an inherent tendency for some form of arbitrating or coordinating body to emerge in order to deal with conflicts of interest between different economic sectors and those who worked in them. Not only would the danger thus exist that there would be a new state in the making, but those able to exert control over this coordinating body were likely to become an emergent ruling class. As Hatta put it:

In a society which is based on the division of labour, those engaged in vital production (since it forms the basis of production) would have more power over the machinery of coordination than those engaged in other lines of production. There would therefore be a real danger of the appearance of classes.<sup>12</sup>

Hatta and Iwasa were also highly critical of anarchist syndicalism's belief that the revolution could be pursued via class struggle. In the first place, they pointed out that the social relations which existed between the millions of tenant farmers and the landlords from whom they rented their land were closer to feudalism than to capitalism. Hence Japanese society could not be reduced to a schematic class structure of workers versus capitalists, as anarchist syndicalists (and

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<sup>12</sup>Hatta (1983) pp. 14–15.



the Communist Party of Japan, for that matter) tended to assert. Secondly, and more fundamentally, it was argued that victory in the class struggle at most changes the pecking order between classes but does not bring about the classless condition which is implicit in anarchism. Iwasa expressed this by means of an analogy which became famous among Japanese anarchists — the analogy of a gang of mountain bandits. If the bandit chief (equivalent to the capitalists) was ousted and replaced by one or more of his henchmen (equivalent to the conventional labour movement), the pecking order (class structure) could be said to have changed, but not the exploitative nature of society (represented in Iwasa's analogy by the continued marauding activity of the bandit gang).<sup>13</sup> It was on grounds such as this that Hatta drew the conclusion:

If we understand...that the class struggle and the revolution are different things, then we are forced to say that it is a major mistake to declare, as the syndicalists do, that the revolution will be brought about by the class struggle. Even if a change in society came about by means of the class struggle, it would not mean that a genuine revolution had occurred.<sup>14</sup>

Allied to these criticisms of anarchist syndicalism, Hatta in particular wrote extensively about how an anarchist communist society could overcome the division of labour and, in doing so, he pushed forward the theoretical frontiers of anarchist communism in a way which had not been done since the days of Kropotkin. His vision of anarchist communism was essentially of an array of "small societies" (communes), each of which would be largely self-supporting by virtue of engaging in all-round agricultural as well as (small-scale) industrial activity. In theorising about how this might work in practice, he developed further some of the ideas which had remained in a fairly rudimentary form in Kropotkin's writings (e.g. the notion of a "physiology of society"<sup>15</sup>) and made some important contributions towards developing an economic theory of anarchist communism.<sup>16</sup>

What was at least as striking as the high calibre of Hatta's theoretical writings was the extent to which such ideas struck a responsive chord among many workers, even those accustomed to living in an industrial and urban setting. To take just one example, a Tōkyō printworker wrote an article entitled "Let's Abandon the Cities" in Zenkoku Jiren's journal *Libertarian Federation* (*Jiyū Rengō*) in December 1926. Here the argument was made that the industrial workers should not aim to take over the cities from the capitalists and run them in their own interests. Rather they should rise against the bosses and take their industrial skills to the countryside, thereby enriching village life and achieving unity with their brothers and sisters on the farms.<sup>17</sup> As for anarchist syndicalism, an article that appeared in the Kokuren journal *Black Youth* (*Kokushoku Seinen*) in December 1929 forcefully put what became the majority view when it declared:

The anarchist movement is progressing a great deal in Japan at the present time. In other countries we find an anarchist movement which links up with the syndicalists. But in this country we do not approve of them, driving them away just as we do the

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<sup>13</sup>Crump (1993) pp. 111–13.

<sup>14</sup>Hatta (1983) p. 29.

<sup>15</sup>Kropotkin (1972) p. 191.

<sup>16</sup>Crump (1993) pp. 137ff.

<sup>17</sup>*Jiyū Rengō* (5 December 1926) p. 3.

bolsheviks. We are even against anarchist syndicalism and we adhere to anarchist communism.<sup>18</sup>

## The Split

The split between anarchist communists and anarchist syndicalists occurred first in Kokuren. As 1927 progressed, the anarchist communist majority in Kokuren expressed their opposition to syndicalism increasingly openly, leading the minority of anarchist syndicalists first to group around a new journal, *The Anti-Political Party Movement* (*Han Seitô Undô*), which they started in June, and eventually to withdraw from Kokuren entirely. From Kokuren the tension spilt over into Zenkoku Jiren, leading to chaotic proceedings at its second conference, which was held in November and had to be adjourned as the debates degenerated into slanging matches.<sup>19</sup> By this stage, reports of the impending split between anarchist communists (who were sometimes known in Japan as “pure anarchists”) and anarchist syndicalists had spread beyond Japan and one of those who became alarmed was Augustin Souchy, secretary of the anarchist syndicalist International Workers’ Association (IWA, or AIT when known by its French initials). In a letter addressed to Zenkoku Jiren’s second conference, Souchy wrote:

Comrades! We have heard something about a current theoretical dispute between the pure anarchists and pure syndicalists within the Japanese libertarian labour movement. If we might express our opinion, now is not really the time for a dispute over such an issue. It has taken on an entirely theoretical character. On this occasion, we would like to draw your attention to Argentina and to the South American countries in general. In these countries the labour movement acts in the spirit of Mikhail Bakunin and also, at the same time, is under the spiritual guidance of our indomitable pioneer Errico Malatesta. In these countries, all anarchists heroically take part in the syndicalist movement, while, at the same time, all syndicalists are fighting to abolish the oppressive machinery of the state and to resist capitalist exploitation. In Spain too, anarchists and syndicalists apportion between them concern for economic questions and for the spiritual side of things in such a way that theoretical disputes do not arise.<sup>20</sup>

Although Souchy’s letter was published on the front page of Zenkoku Jiren’s *Libertarian Federation* in January 1928, it did not have the desired effect. Instead, Kokuren’s *Black Youth* carried an article “On the International Workers’ Association’s Message” in its February issue which stated uncompromisingly that since 1927 it had been struggling against “the betrayers, opportunists and union imperialists” in Zenkoku Jiren’s ranks.<sup>21</sup> This attitude was carried over into Zenkoku Jiren’s second conference when it reconvened in March 1928. After hours of bitter debate, with the insults flying thick and fast from both sides, the anarchist syndicalists decided to recognise the inevitable, unfurled their banners and marched out of the hall. Not only did this formalise the split within the anarchist union movement, but subsequently the same open opposition between

<sup>18</sup> *Kokushoku Seinen* (10 December 1929) p. 1.

<sup>19</sup> Crump (1993) pp. 83–6.

<sup>20</sup> *Jiyû Rengô* (10 January 1928) p. 1 (in Japanese).

<sup>21</sup> *Kokushoku Seinen* (5 February 1928) p. 8.

anarchist communists and anarchist syndicalists manifested itself in all the other fields where anarchists were active. For example, the flourishing anarchist literary and cultural movement split in the same way into communist and syndicalist wings which were henceforth at daggers drawn.<sup>22</sup>

It might have been thought that the split between the anarchist communists and anarchist syndicalists would have had a negative effect on the growth of the anarchist movement in its entirety, but this was not the case. It is true that Zenkoku Jiren lost several unions outright and the syndicalist-inclined branches of other unions too in the split of 1928. In addition, its backbone, in the form of the 5,000 strong Tōkyō Printworkers' Union, divided in April 1929 into hostile anarchist communist and anarchist syndicalist organisations. Yet, by 1931, the by now exclusively anarchist communist Zenkoku Jiren had a total membership of 16,300, which made it virtually twice as big as it had been at the time of its formation in 1926. As for the anarchist syndicalist unions which withdrew from Zenkoku Jiren, most of them eventually federated under the name of the Libertarian Federal Council of Labour Unions of Japan (*Nihon Rōdō Kumiai Jiyū Rengō Kyōgikai*), generally known by the abbreviation Jikyō. Although considerably smaller than Zenkoku Jiren, by 1931 Jikyō too had grown to the point where it had a membership of almost 3,000.<sup>23</sup>

It is important to differentiate between anti-syndicalism and anti-unionism when seeking to understand the theory and practice of the anarchist communists. The basis of their opposition to syndicalism has already been explained by summarising the theories of Hatta Shūzō and Iwasa Sakutarō. However, anti-syndicalism should not be taken as implying hostility to union activity. Zenkoku Jiren remained a federation of labour unions even after the anarchist syndicalists had withdrawn from its ranks. As we have seen, over the next few years it continued to attract significant numbers of workers into its ranks. Furthermore, its constituent unions were ever ready to confront the bosses over wages and working conditions, and were involved in some notable disputes, such as the struggle by 1,300 workers against redundancies and wage cuts at the Shibaura Works of the Mitsui Company and the American General Electric Company in 1930.

What distinguished the anarchist communist attitude towards the union movement were basically two factors. First, they constantly emphasised the wider struggle for a new society which lay above and beyond the immediate issues such as wages and working conditions. Second, even though Zenkoku Jiren's unions were comprised of industrial workers, they focused attention on the tenant farmers as the crucial social force which could bring about the commune-based, alternative society to capitalism. It was the importance they attached to these two factors which induced them to channel considerable time and energy into theoretical work aimed at clarifying the nature of the new society and the social forces which could bring it into existence.

By way of contrast, the Japanese anarchist syndicalists were less accomplished in the realm of theory. It is probably fair to say that there was no-one in Japan who made a major, original contribution to anarchist syndicalist theory. In this regard, it is significant that the most prominent theoretician on the anarchist syndicalist side is generally considered to be Ishikawa Sanshirō. Yet, although the fact that Ishikawa refused to dismiss anarchist syndicalism out of hand made him something of a counterweight to anarchist communists such as Hatta and Iwasa, he was primarily oriented towards agrarian anarchism (and, incidentally, towards Christian anarchism

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<sup>22</sup>Crump (1993) p. 88.

<sup>23</sup>Ibid., pp. 87ff.

too). Hence one can say that, in the Japanese context, the most significant contributions made by anarchist syndicalism were not in the realm of theory but on the field of action. For example, in a dispute at the Nihon Senjû Company in April 1931, the Jikyô-affiliated union not only occupied the factory but used innovative methods of struggle, such as the hunger strike and the extensive involvement of women in the surrounding community. One Jikyô militant, Chiba Hiroshi, successfully dramatised the struggle in order to win public support by climbing the factory chimney and remaining perched there 40 metres above ground over the next fourteen days. Although the Nihon Senjû dispute ended in compromise, this in itself was an achievement under the conditions prevailing at the time, when all the cards were stacked against the workers.

## Death Throes of the Prewar Anarchist Movement

The turning point for the prewar anarchist movement came in 1931, when the so-called Manchurian Incident occurred. Under the influence of the world economic depression, which took effect from 1929, all the imperialist powers started to erect higher tariff barriers within the territories they controlled so as to use their colonial possessions as a cushion against economic crisis. Yet, compared to major imperialist powers, such as the USA, Britain or France, Japan's colonial territories were insufficient to provide it with adequate markets or sufficient supplies of cheap raw materials. The Manchurian Incident was the beginning of the process whereby the Japanese capitalist state attempted to extend its control over ever larger slices of Chinese territory in order to make up for these deficiencies. If the process described here began in Manchuria in 1931, it was to culminate in the attack on Pearl Harbour in 1941 and full-scale war with the USA, for as Zenkoku Jiren's journal summarised the situation in November 1931:

The true cause of the mobilisation to China is none other than the ambition of the Japanese capitalist class and military to conquer Manchuria. Japan has its own Monroe doctrine. Japanese capitalism cannot develop, or even survive, without Manchuria. That is why its government has made up its mind to risk anything so as not to lose its many privileges in China...American capital has flowed into China in larger and larger amounts. This represents an enormous menace to the Japanese capitalist class. In other words, now Japan is forced to oppose American capital in China.<sup>24</sup>

As the Japanese state moved towards a life-and-death struggle with its international rivals, so it became increasingly determined to crush any dissension on the home front and the anarchists were high on the list of those to be eliminated. Kokuren was driven out of existence in 1931 and, from their peak memberships in that year, both Zenkoku Jiren and Jikyô saw their numbers start to fall as the screws of repression were relentlessly tightened. By 1933, Zenkoku Jiren had shrunk to 4,400 members and Jikyô to 1,100. With their backs to the wall, three strategies for attempted survival emerged within the ranks of the anarchists. One was for Zenkoku Jiren and Jikyô to sink their differences, reunite as a union federation encompassing both anarchist communists and anarchist syndicalists, and engage in united front-style resistance to fascism. Reunification came in January 1934, when Jikyô disbanded and the majority of its members and constituent

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<sup>24</sup> *Jiyû Rengô Shinbun* (10 November 1931) p. 4.

unions re-entered Zenkoku Jiren. Despite this closing of the ranks, however, it did not halt the atrophy of the anarchist union movement. Whether organisationally separate or united, unions were simply no match for the power at the disposal of the state once it had decided to drive them out of existence. By 1935 the membership of even the reunified Zenkoku Jiren was down to a mere 2,300.<sup>25</sup>

A second strategy for meeting the state's repression was that employed by the Farming Villages Youth Association (*Nôson Seinen Sha*), which was generally called Nôseisha for short. Formed in February 1931, Nôseisha was a network of anarchist communists which pushed decentralisation to its furthest limits. Nôseisha favoured extreme decentralisation in its organisation, not only because this prefigured the type of anarchism it wished to achieve, but also because it believed that this would reduce the vulnerability of anarchists to state repression. The expectation was that, without any recognisable centre to strike at, the state would not know where to direct its blows. Nôseisha criticised those anarchists (Bakunin was a case they cited) who thought it sufficient to replace the top-down system of control found in authoritarian organisations with a supposedly libertarian, bottom-up system. What was needed, argued Nôseisha, was not to have the base in control of the apex, nor the periphery in control of the centre, but an organisational form which dispensed altogether with apices or centres.

Another distinctive feature of Nôseisha was that it advocated a form of "practical anarchism" that could be implemented immediately and which would be based entirely in the villages. In the seminal text *Appeal to the Farmers*, which was written by Miyazaki Akira, the farmers in their villages were urged to delink from the cities, refuse to pay taxes or recognise the state in any other way, and switch immediately to a communist system of production and consumption. Nôseisha recognised that, at least initially, the result would be a communism based on shared poverty, but their conviction was that, even in the early stages of social reconstruction, the advantages of communal solidarity would more than offset economic hardship.

Even this brief account of Nôseisha's ideas conveys the point that, in its theory as well as organisationally, it was an outgrowth from the main current of anarchist communism. Nôseisha's members took some of the elements which were already present in anarchist communist theory and practice and developed them further into a distinctive approach to anarchist organisation and activity. Perhaps it was predictable that, given their emphasis on extreme decentralisation, they would gradually come to question the need for their own organised existence.

In taking the decision to dissolve, they were undoubtedly influenced by the fact that most of their members in Tôkyô were arrested early in 1932, following a campaign of robbery to raise funds. Hence, it was partly as an act of self-preservation that Nôseisha was disbanded in September 1932. This does not mean that its members ceased to be anarchist communists or that they lapsed into inactivity. Rather, it was just that from then on they immersed themselves in local work, often in the poverty-stricken villages of the mountainous districts, and maintained only informal contacts. As we shall see, however, this strategy of dispersion did not save Nôseisha's ex-members when the state's crackdown eventually came.<sup>26</sup>

The third strategy aimed at preserving the anarchist movement in the face of a state which was determined to crush it was that put into practice by the Anarchist Communist Party (*Mu-seifu Kyôsentô*). In many ways, this strategy was precisely the opposite of that favoured by Nô-

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<sup>25</sup>Crump (1993) pp. 160–72.

<sup>26</sup>Ibid., pp. 172–80.

seisha. As its name suggests, the Anarchist Communist Party was established in January 1934 by a small group of militants who remained committed to bringing about the kind of stateless and free communist society with which the term anarchist communism had always been identified. Yet, if the *ends* to which the struggle was directed remained unchanged, the *means* to be employed were a different matter altogether. As far as the means were concerned, those who set up the Anarchist Communist Party were determined to use Bolshevik organisational methods for anarchist purposes! The Party was founded as a highly secretive group, whose existence was not openly proclaimed and whose membership was restricted to a hand-picked elite. One of the Anarchist Communist Party's frequently employed tactics was to manoeuvre its members into key positions in larger organisations, which could then be manipulated from within. For example, by applying these tactics, the Party largely took over the *Libertarian Federation Newspaper*, which had served as Zenkoku Jiren's journal ever since it was launched in September 1928. Indeed, Anarchist Communist Party members like Aizawa Hisao, who was one of the *Libertarian Federation Newspaper's* editors, played an important behind-the-scenes role in bringing about the reunification of Zenkoku Jiren and Jikyô, since this coincided with the Party's promotion of a united front.

For anarchists, there will be few surprises about to where this flirting with Bolshevik methods led. The atmosphere within the Anarchist Communist Party soon became infused with the paranoia habitually found in vanguard organisations. Fears of betrayal and sell-out became the order of the day and culminated in one Party member, called Futami Toshio, shooting another, known as Shibahara Junzô, because of suspicions that the latter was a police spy. Following Shibahara's murder in October 1935, there was a bungled armed robbery the next month, in which Futami, Aizawa and another Party member attempted to seize money from a bank. Both the murder and the attempted bank robbery set the police on the trail of the Party's activists and, once Aizawa was arrested and tortured, details of the Anarchist Communist Party's organisation were revealed.<sup>27</sup>

Here, once again, was a godsend for a state which was seeking to throttle the anarchist movement entirely. The police cast their net as wide as it would stretch and some 400 anarchists were taken into custody in the closing months of 1935. As the level of repression escalated, Zenkoku Jiren was forced out of existence early in 1936 and that anarchist stronghold, the Tôkyô Printworkers' Union, was crippled when approaching one hundred of its members were arrested. Nor did the decimation of the anarchists' ranks stop there. As more and more of those arrested were interrogated, the police pieced together an increasingly accurate picture of the long since disbanded Nôseisha network. Despite the fact that Nôseisha had ceased coordinated activity more than three years before in September 1932, another wave of arrests, targeted at its ex-members and beyond, was unleashed in May 1936. This time a further 300 anarchists were apprehended.

As in the case of Kôtoku and his comrades a generation earlier, only a small proportion of those arrested were eventually brought to trial. On this occasion, it was only Shibahara's murderer, Futami Toshio, who was sentenced to death and, as it turned out, even his sentence was commuted to twenty years' imprisonment. Other prominent members of the Anarchist Communist Party and Nôseisha received shorter sentences than Futami. For example, Aizawa Hisao, the principal organiser of the Anarchist Communist Party, was sentenced to six years in prison, while Miyazaki Akira, the author of *Appeal to the Farmers*, and others judged to be Nôseisha's

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<sup>27</sup>Ibid., pp. 180–6.

“leaders” were given terms of up to three years. Although the individual punishments were less Draconian than in Kôtoku’s day, the pressure brought to bear on the anarchist movement generally was even worse than during the “winter period”. From 1936 onwards, organised activity became literally impossible. This does not mean that anarchists disappeared from Japan after that date. Obviously, they remained a presence within Japanese society throughout the war years, but there was no longer any way in which they could give organised expression to their existence. For each individual anarchist, survival now became the top priority and most had no alternative but to maintain a low profile, keep their thoughts to themselves, and wait...

Full-scale war with China from 1937 merged into war with the USA and its allies after 1941 and ultimately led to the carpet bombing of Tôkyô and other major cities in 1945, not to mention the ultimate horrors of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. More than three million Japanese died during these years of slaughter and it hardly needs mentioning that the bombs and the bullets made no distinction between rabid militarists and those who opposed the war, like the anarchists. Not a few anarchists disappeared without trace, victims of the blitz or of some other disaster brought about by the war. Although the Japanese state was finally forced to surrender in August 1945, its machinery of repression remained intact until the very last. As a result, when the war finally came to an end, the anarchists had to attempt to rebuild their movement from scratch.

## Chapter 3: 1945 to the Present

In the postwar years, anarchism has existed in Japan on a much reduced scale compared to earlier periods. This can be explained by the major changes which have affected postwar Japan and which have deprived anarchism of the substantial support it previously attracted from tenant farmers and unionised workers. Nevertheless, anarchism has survived, despite the often difficult conditions which have confronted it over the past fifty years, and it may be that recent developments are now producing a more promising set of circumstances for anarchists to work in.

Between 1945 and 1952 Japan was occupied by a nominally “Allied”, but in reality American, military force. One of the most important measures which the Occupation Headquarters pushed through was a sweeping land reform, which abolished the old divisions between landlords and tenants, and created instead a new class of landowning small farmers. These farmers then became a bastion of political conservatism, using their votes mainly to support the corrupt Liberal Democratic Party (*Jiyû Minshutô*), which continually formed the government during 38 long years from 1955 to 1993. In exchange for the farmers’ votes, the Liberal Democratic Party kept the prices of agricultural produce high behind trade barriers which excluded rival products from abroad. In this way, the price of Japanese rice, for example, has been artificially maintained at a level at least six times higher than that found on the world market generally.

As for the union movement, the Occupation Headquarters first encouraged the formation of unions, since the unreconstructed Right wing was initially seen as the major threat to American interests, and then moved against the unions (and reached an accommodation with the rehabilitated Right) with the onset of the Cold War. One of the clearest examples of this reversal of American policy was that the so-called “purge” regulations, which the Occupation Headquarters first used to remove Rightists from public office, were subsequently redirected against the Left around 1950 in what became known as the “red purge”. This see-saw in American policy led to a situation in which Japanese society was politically polarised between the Right and the Left, with the anarchists targeted from both sides. On the one hand, even under the conditions of much-vaunted “democracy”, the anarchists were discriminated against on account of the policy of “anti-communism” which both the American Occupation authorities and the Japanese government pursued. For example, not a few anarchists were victims of the “red purge”.<sup>1</sup> The fact that neither the American nor the Japanese states had the faintest inkling of what constituted communism did not make their “anti-communism” any less repressive. On the other hand, in the unions and elsewhere anarchists were frequently obstructed and all but silenced by the control exercised by Left-leaning officials, who often used confrontation with the state and the siege mentality it induced as an excuse for expelling critics. It was not that anarchists disappeared from the unions entirely, but more that the scope for acting openly *as anarchists* virtually disappeared.

The biggest problem of all for the anarchists has been the frame of mind that has prevailed among a majority of working men and women. In the years following defeat, mass unemploy-

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<sup>1</sup>Hagiwara (1969) pp. 192, 226.



ment and destitution were the order of the day and “the politics of hunger” predominated. Ambitious politicians dangled illusory promises of full rice bowls under the noses of electors whose gullibility was proportional to their privation. Then, with the outbreak of the Korean War (1950–3), Japan’s economic circumstances improved dramatically. War was good business for Japanese industry as it started to work flat out in order to supply the American war machine in adjacent Korea (and later Vietnam). In addition, following the Communist Party’s taking power in China in 1949, the USA needed a showcase in East Asia to demonstrate the superiority of “capitalism” over “communism”. Japan was selected to fulfil this role and, such was the strategic importance of Japan for the USA, America put up with Japan’s discriminatory trade practices without too much complaint for as long as the Cold War lasted. Against the background of this trade-off between capitalist states in (albeit temporary) alliance, where Japan served the USA’s strategic interests and gained economic advantages in return, Japanese capitalism enjoyed boom conditions for many years. Worried by the Left-Right polarisation of Japanese politics in the early postwar years, from the 1960s Japan’s leaders followed a conscious policy of depoliticising the population by ensuring that crumbs from capitalism’s feast fell onto the previously well nigh empty plates of the workforce in the factories and offices. Crass consumerism was promoted like a new religion and, as long as there were scraps and left-overs from the feast, it had the desired effect. Given the qualitative poverty of people’s lives, however, the spectre has always haunted Japanese capitalism of what would happen if the feast ever came to an end.

Obviously, this thumbnail sketch of Japan’s postwar history is written with the benefit of hindsight. None of this was discernible to the anarchists as they attempted from 1945 to rebuild their movement. The Anarchist Federation of Japan (*Nihon Anakisuto Renmei*) was formed amid great enthusiasm in May 1946 and care was taken at that stage not to allow the old antagonism between anarchist communists and anarchist syndicalists to re-emerge and jeopardise the effectiveness of the new organisation. Older men and women who had belonged to one wing of the anarchist movement or the other now readily cooperated and were joined by younger comrades to whom the prewar divisions meant little. For a time, anything seemed possible. The hated militarist state lay shattered, such police forces as survived lacked confidence and were unsure of themselves in the new “democratic” climate, and overseeing everything was an apparently benign Occupation force which initially encouraged all expressions of opposition to the old regime. The Anarchist Federation launched its journal in June 1946 and emphasised its links with the struggles of the past by resurrecting Kōtoku’s old masthead, the *Common People’s Newspaper* (*Heimin Shinbun*). Enormous effort was poured into distributing the journal nationwide, with novel sales methods (such as anarchists travelling back and forth on the rail network to sell it on long-distance trains) being used to boost sales. Yet the fact that such methods had to be employed illustrated the extent to which anarchism had lost what had hitherto appeared to be its “natural constituencies” on the farms and in the factories.

As frustration mounted due to the lack of headway achieved (the result of the obstacles outlined in the paragraphs above) so the old tensions between anarchists of different persuasions started to resurface. In May 1950 the Anarchist Federation held its fifth conference in Kyōto and this proved to be the occasion when antagonism between anarchist syndicalists and anarchist communists boiled over once more. In the same month a distinct Anarcho-Syndicalist Group (*Anaruko Sanjīkarisuto Gurūpu*) was formed. By October 1950 the Anarchist Federation had split and, in effect, had ceased to function. It is true that the Anarchist Federation was reconstituted in June 1951, but the organisation which continued under this name was largely composed of

those sympathetic to syndicalism. In the same month the anarchist communists set up the Japan Anarchist Club (*Nihon Anakisuto Kurabu*), with the result that the Japanese anarchist movement was once more back to the divided condition it had been in between 1928 and 1934.<sup>2</sup> To a large extent, this was a re-run of previous history and even some of the principal figures involved were the same. Hatta Shûzô might have died in 1934, but Iwasa Sakutarô was still very much the key personality on the anarchist communist side, while Ishikawa Sanshirô once more supported the anarchist syndicalists.

The Anarchist Federation limped on until 1968, but recognised the inevitable in November of that year when it decided “creatively to dissolve” itself.<sup>3</sup> Although for many years after that there was no federated network covering the whole of the country claiming to be *the* Anarchist Federation, 1968 by no means marked the end of anarchism in Japan. Indeed, the Anarchist Club long outlived its anarchist syndicalist rival and continued to publish the journal *Anarchist Movement* (*Museifushugi Undô*) until March 1980. Besides this body, composed mainly of old anarchist communists from the prewar days, numerous other anarchist groups and publications have existed at any one time. Although many have survived for only a few years, or even a few months, they have continually been replaced by others. In other words, anarchist publishing and propaganda activity has continued unabated, even if on a limited scale, and isolated cases of direct action have erupted periodically.

A new Anarchist Federation was formed in October 1988 and has continued to publish its journal *Free Will* (*Jiyû Ishi*) up till the present time. Although this new Anarchist Federation has a nationwide network of contacts, the scale of its support is much smaller than its namesake of the 1940s, let alone the prewar federations, such as Kokuren or Zenkoku Jiren. Anarchist syndicalism is represented by the small group called the Workers’ Solidarity Movement (*Rôdôsha Rentai Undô*) which has existed in its present form since 1983. The Workers’ Solidarity Movement is affiliated to the IWA/AIT (the Syndicalist International) and since 1989 has published the journal *Libertarian Communism* (*Zettai Jiyû Kyôsanshugi*). As for anarchist communism, its most visible manifestation today is the small but active publishing house called the Black Battlefront Company (*Kokushoku Sensen Sha*) which is grouped round the old militant, Ôshima Eizaburô. Among recent Black Battlefront publications, the multivolume *Materials on the Nôseisha Incident* (*Nôson Seinen Sha Jiken Shiryô*, 1991 onwards) reflects the belief of many postwar anarchists that there are important lessons to be learnt from studying the theories and practice of earlier generations of anarchists.

One point which has often been made regarding postwar anarchism is that, while the self-declared anarchist movement is smaller than previously, unconsciously “anarchist” organisation and activity have been noticeable among various groups engaged in struggle. This argument was frequently heard at the height of the student movement during the 1960s and 1970s, and more recently similar claims have been made regarding the “citizens’ movements” (grass roots campaigns, generally directed towards a single issue).<sup>4</sup> Those who have used this type of argument have mainly pointed to the decentralised methods of organisation favoured by the groups in question and their emphasis on autonomy and (sometimes) spontaneity. Yet, while there may be something “anarchist” about these attributes, surely it is appropriate to insist that by themselves they fall short of anarchism. Opposed though the students’ groups were to the existing state, few

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., pp. 227–8; Libertaire Group (1979) p. 27.

<sup>3</sup>Hagiwara (1969) p. 228.

<sup>4</sup>Tsuzuki (1971) pp. 105–6; Mihara (1993) pp. 135–7.

doubted the need for a political state of some sort. As for the citizens' movements, most focus on a single problem, which they seek to solve in isolation from the "big questions", such as the nature of the state, because they feel (probably rightly) that these wider issues would divide them politically and therefore undermine their campaigns. In the light of this, to refer to the students' groups or citizens' movements as "anarchist" would be to stretch the meaning of the term way beyond that employed in this study.

What is remarkable about the present juncture is that so many of the factors which have acted in combination to frustrate anarchism during the postwar years are currently being undermined. As was mentioned previously, from 1955 politics in Japan was set in a mould of perpetual Liberal Democratic Party domination. The second largest political party, the social democratic Japan Socialist Party (*Nihon Shakaitô*), was permanently excluded from power and could thus engage in the politics of moral postures from the lofty remoteness of opposition. For 38 years these two parties were in effect the foundation stones of the moribund political system. The Liberal Democratic Party used its position in government to distribute the spoils which maintained the status quo, while the holier-than-thou Japan Socialist Party struck postures for the sake of those who failed to benefit from the largesse or who found it morally unacceptable. The system cracked when the Liberal Democratic Party failed to secure its customary majority in the general election of 1993. Then in 1994 the Liberal Democratic Party saw its chance to re-enter the government, providing it was prepared to make common cause with its supposed arch-enemy, the Japan Socialist Party. Without so much as a blush, both parties hastened to embrace one another, so that at the time of writing there is a government headed by the leader of the Japan Socialist Party with a majority of Cabinet Ministers drawn from the Liberal Democratic Party. Needless to say, in his enthusiasm for gaining power, Prime Minister Murayama has found no difficulty in embracing all those capitalist policies which were supposedly unacceptable as long as the Japan Socialist Party was in opposition. The whole sordid business has been an object-lesson in the opportunism of politicians and the nonsense of parliamentary shadow boxing. Hence it is no wonder that cynicism and disillusionment are now the prevailing political attitudes among most working men and women.

Associated with these political shenanigans have been the changes in Japan's economic fortunes. The economy is presently passing through the longest and deepest economic downturn since the war. Crumbs from the capitalist feast are in decidedly short supply, so much so that 1993 saw the first decline in average wage rates since 1950. Pressed by rival capitalist states (above all, the USA) Japan is being forced to open its agricultural markets, which in turn is leading to political disaffection on the part of the farmers.

Given Japan's position as one of the most powerful economic forces within world capitalism, its importance as a linchpin of the present international system can scarcely be exaggerated. This is why it is by no means insignificant, even for those of us living on the other side of the world, that the opportunities for spreading anti-state and anti-capitalist ideas in Japan are better now than they have been for many a long year. Whether Japanese anarchists can rise to the challenge is something which concerns us all.

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