

# THE RICE RIOTS AND THE SOCIAL PROBLEMS

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## I. AN OUTLINE OF THE RICE RIOTS

At a time when a series of special functions celebrating the "Meiji Centenary" are under preparation in Japan with a rising concern in reviewing the course of "modernization" over a century, I believe that there is the need to recollect the "rice riots" which took place in the summer of 1918 or just half a century after the Meiji Restoration of 1868. In other words, I believe, we must be aware in particular that the centenary of the Restoration is simultaneously the fiftieth anniversary of the "rice riots." The "rice riots" represented, in a word, a spontaneous mass uprising against a steep rise in commodity prices, particularly the price of rice, the staple food of the Japanese. What is more, it signified an epoch-making event in modern Japanese history in that it marked the real starting point of the "social problems" of Japan today. The course of developments may be summarized in the following.

At the end of July 1918, women in a fishing village of Toyama 富山 Prefecture facing the Sea of Japan made a complaint about the difficulty of living and started a campaign to appeal to the village officials and merchants against the shipment of rice out of the prefecture and for selling the staple food at a reduced price. As the news of these moves was conveyed by the press, it caused a chain reaction throughout the country at a surprising speed. A similar movement successively took place in such large cities as Kyōto 京都, Ōsaka 大阪, Kōbe 神戸 and Tokyo 東京, where the masses of common people rushed out to the streets to hold demonstrations with the cry of "sell rice cheap" and "down with wicked dealers," raided rice shops and war profiteers' houses and got up riots to burn down police boxes and stations. The mass uprisings expanded further, ranging from smaller cities to farming and fishing villages, and, in some districts, developed in connexion with factory and mine workers' strikes for better wages and working conditions.

In the end, it is estimated that the people who rose in riots num-

bered some 10 million in 33 cities, 104 towns and 97 villages of 36 prefectures throughout Japan for about two months from the end of July to that of September. Not only did the police do everything in their power to suppress the riots but an army of total 50,000 men was put into operation in 60 cities, towns and villages where much bloodshed was caused by bayonets and bullets. As the government and court adopted a severe punishment policy, 8,185 persons were arrested and 94 per cent of them indicted throughout the country. Out of the indicted, 5,112 persons were found guilty in 1918, including 7 sentenced to life imprisonment.

The "rice riots" were characterized by the fact that, although beginning as spontaneous mass movements, they developed into a broad uprising without any organization or plan. Most of the participants were workers. Also it has been noted that members of the socially despised outcast communities in such cities as Kyōto and Ōsaka took the most militant part in the riots. Since most newspapers took a sympathetic attitude towards the people in the economic distress, it may be said that their reports played the role of helping the uprisings to expand throughout the country. Opposed to the outdated, unconstitutional government under the hegemony of the military and bureaucracy, those newspapers appealed for safeguarding the "freedom of speech" and attacked the cabinet in defiance of its news ban policy concerning the disturbances. In the end, the cabinet then headed by General Terauchi Masatake 寺内正毅 was compelled to resign and take the blame for the "rice riots." It was replaced by the Hara Cabinet. Although he was originally a member of the bureaucracy, Hara Takashi 原敬 was the first Japanese Prime Minister who did not enjoy the privileges of nobility and hence was called a "commoner premier" (*Heimin Saisyō* 平民宰相). The ruling groups certainly sought to neutralize pressure from the people by the pretence of a democratic party government.

The "rice riots" had been prone to be regarded merely as an accidental, unfortunate episode and its historical significance made little of until it was first appreciated as it should be by Katayama Sen 片山潜 who was then in exile in America and who later ranked among the executive officers of the Comintern. Katayama writes:

"In Japanese history, no revolt had been more important than this. The Rice Riots apparently represented the first, encouraging start of the general awakening of the people in Japan and can be taken to have launched the present revolutionary movement. The revolutionary movement of Japan grew thousand times as much stronger from the moment of the rice riots."

"Unlike the peasant revolts of the past, this uprising was controlled by urban workers

and was of nation-wide nature. It proved deep-rooted discontents among the workers, their growing power of resistance, and their resolute determination to end the hardship of living. In addition, this revolt was further inflamed by an unusual rise in the price of rice which was its direct cause. The real cause lay in the wide scope of the profound discontents of the people aggravated under the influence of the sudden economic changes resultant from the World War. The gap separating the rich from the poor was growing deeper every moment. Not only the extreme luxury and arrogance of the ruling classes and the increasing misery and poverty of the working class inflamed the people's indignation. But above all the initial, vague interest in the tacit consequences of the Russian Revolution steadily grew strong and finally found an expression in a national uprising."<sup>1</sup>

## II. THE BACKGROUND OF THE RICE RIOTS

The immediate cause of the "rice riots" was the difficulty of living for workers and others of the labouring populace who suffered from a steep rise in the price of rice. The inflation following the World War resulted in a rise of commodity prices which pressed hard on the people's livelihood, and the price of rice in particular went up unusually or twice as much from 20 *sen* 錢 per *shō* 升 (1.805 lit.) of the spring to 45 or 50 *sen* of the summer of 1918. This was caused directly by a decline of transport capacity due to freight bottom shortage during the war and a decline of yields on account of unseasonable weather. Fundamentally, however, it is attributable to the fact that, due to a rapid development of capitalist industry during the war, population in mining and industry increased fast, with the resultant expansion of urban population and increase in the number of those employed in domestic handicrafts in the rural areas, and that consequently there was a much greater demand for rice than before which could hardly be met by the agricultural production still placed under the pressures of semi-feudal, parasitic landlordism that prevented rice yields from increasing. In short, the balance of demand and supply in rice was suddenly destroyed. Yet the government, in a position to protect the interests of big landowners and merchants, had been following the policy of maintaining or raising the price of rice, and so such big dealers importing rice from abroad as the Mitsui Bussan 三井物産 (Mitsui & Co.) and the Suzuki Shōten took advantage of that policy to raise the price of rice through speculation. In addition, the rise of the price of rice was further stimulated by

<sup>1</sup> Katayama Sen 片山潜, "Taisen-go ni okeru Nihon Kaikyū-undō no Hihan-teki Sōkan 大戦後に於る日本階級運動の批判的總観 (A Critical Survey of the Japanese Class Movement after the World War)," *Chūōkōron* 中央公論, Apr., 1931. Also *Katayama Sen Chosaku-shū* 片山潜著作集 (Collected works of Katayama Sen), compiled and published by the Society for Celebration of the 100th Anniversary of Katayama Sen's Birth, Vol. III, Tokyo, 1960, pp. 210-211.

speculation on a military reserve for the Siberian Expedition declared just then (on August 3) in an attempt at intervention in the Russian Revolution.

The First World War was said to have brought about to Japan "a neutral's economic benefits and a belligerent's political benefits." During the five years of war, production in the major industries increased by nearly five times, and the amount of foreign trade by nearly four times. The heavy and chemical industries grew, and their centres began to shape in the Tokyo-Yokohama, Ōsaka-Kōbe, and northern Kyūshū 九州 areas. Having established itself as industrial capitalism by 1900, Japanese capitalism marked the stage of monopoly capitalism with the World War as a turning-point. Within the state power machine under the Emperor system, the relative strength of the bourgeoisie increased and established a position of predominance over the landlord class. In the 13 years from the end of the Russo-Japanese War in 1905 to the end of the First World War in 1918, the total number of factories in Japan increased by 2.3 times, and particularly that of ones equipped with motors by nearly 3.6 times. The number of factory employees increased drastically during the War, from 854,000 of 1914 to 1,817,000 of 1919. Further concentration of workers into big factories of the metal, machine, and chemical industries also marked a new development. So far the leading industry of Japan was the textile industry where young women from the rural areas accounted for an overwhelming proportion of workers. Throughout the Meiji period, 60 per cent of all the factory workers were women, but after the World War, married male workers began to settle in factory towns.

At the same time, it became notable that as the war went on, longer working hours, increased intensity of labour and higher prices were lowering the real wages. To take 1914, the year the War broke out, as 100, real wages went down steadily to 97 in 1915, 74 in 1916, 71 in 1917, and 61 in 1918. The fact that at a time the war brought about unprecedented "prosperity" to Japan and produced quite a few war profiteers, big and small, who enjoyed a luxurious life, the livelihood of the workers was deteriorating all the more explains why the "rice riots" were staged with the active participation of many workers.

As Katayama Sen pointed out, the "rice riots" were strongly influenced by the Russian Revolution. Originally the First World War was thought to have an aspect of fighting to protect democracy against the aggression of German militarism, and in Japan as a country which entered war on the side of the Allies, a cry for "democracy" had been

rising to change the social atmosphere. Also the constitutional government protection movement of 1913 which succeeded in forcing the unconstitutional cabinet of General Katsura Tarō 桂太郎 out of office, as well as the disclosure of bribery between the German firm, Siemens, and leading figures of the Japanese Navy in 1914 proved to be the successful cases of the people's experience in expressing by action their will of protest against the ruling groups. Then, in March 1917, came the information about a revolution in which the despotic Tsarism of Russia was overthrown, and it was followed in November by news that the world's first socialist revolution was carried out by the uprising of workers and peasants. The success of the Russian Revolution greatly shocked the whole world and particularly gave strong impetus to the labour movements in Europe and the national liberation movements in Asia. Japan was not an exception. It was a year after the Russian Revolution that the "rice riots" took place in Japan as if it were to respond to it. In the subsequent year of 1919, the people of Korea then under the Japanese colonial rule rose in a "March First Independence Struggle" against Japanese imperialism. In the same year, was started in China the "May Fourth" movement which was to provide a signal-fire for the New Democratic Revolution. The "rice riots" of Japan was thus a link in the new development of world history.

### III. THE UPSURGING OF THE LABOUR MOVEMENT

Following the "rice riots," Japanese society began to change its old aspect drastically. As new social ideas spread, people began to turn attention to the new "social problems" with the class conflict between labour and capital as the central issue. The labour and other social movements were organized quickly and began to develop with a striking tempo.

The changes of the times were most symbolically represented by the writings of Dr. Kawakami Hajime 河上肇. A professor of economics at the Imperial University of Kyōto, Kawakami studied in Europe where he witnessed the outbreak of the First World War, and, on return home, began to publish in serial form his "*Bimbō Monogatari* 貧乏物語 (An Account of Poverty)" in the *Ōsaka Asahi Shimbun* 大阪朝日新聞. This was an attempt at bringing under spotlight the question of poverty of the working masses created by the "prosperity" of the capitalist economy as the central theme of "social problems" and suggesting that it was the central issue of the times requiring a solution. This serial

article provoked such great repercussions that in 1914 when it was printed in book form, it was a best seller that ran into 30 editions. When he wrote *Bimbō Monogatari*, Kawakami took the position of Confucian moralism in which he sought to appeal to the ruling groups for the solution of the problem of poverty through reform measures. After the Russian Revolution, he devoted himself to the study of Marxism. Subsequently he began to move to the viewpoint of class struggle and since 1919 launched his own magazine, *Shakaimondai Kenkyū* 社會問題研究 (Studies in Social Problems) in which he published the results of his studies with great vigour. This magazine found eager readers among many intellectuals and students and contributed greatly to the expansion of Marxist influence in the country. As seen in this example, the "social problems" which began to get spotlighted around the time of the "rice riots" were now to develop rapidly in the direction of seeking a solution through an organized movement of the people who became aware of their own role as a class.

It has been already pointed out that the "rice riots" represented a spontaneous uprising from which organization and planning were fatally absent. Accordingly it failed to continue as movement. However, now that the masses of people experienced the outburst of great energy latent within themselves which shook the society and demonstrated political influence enough to force the government to resign *en masse*, they were awakened to their own worth and strength and became aware of the need for an organized movement as well. With the "rice riots" the period of organization for the masses of people set in. First of all the labour union movement expanded and gained strength.

Up to that time, labour unions had had little influence. The Public Safety and Police Law (*Chian Keisatsu-hō* 治安警察法) enacted in 1900 suppressed the labour union movement which it regarded as a criminal activity, and the working class was not yet strong enough to advance beyond that barrier. Only the *Yuaikai* 友愛會 (Friendship Association) formed in 1912 declared its existence as a workers' organization. It was based on the principle of labour-capital reconciliation and in the nature of a mutual aid and moral culture association at its start when Suzuki Bunji 鈴木文治, a graduate from the Imperial University of Tokyo, organized a small number of workers with assistance from such a big capitalist as Shibusawa Eiichi 澁澤榮一. As its membership grew during the First World War, it began to entertain more or less influence through mediation in labour disputes. Its members increased fast from only 15 in 1912 to 1,300 in 1913, 18,000 in 1917 and 30,000 in 1919.

Now from 1919 or one year after the "rice riots," the labour movement started developing remarkably. The organization of labour unions and the rise of labour disputes gave impetus to one another, and the labour movement began to attain greater organizational ability and militancy. According to official figures, the number of unions which registered 107 in 1918 increased to 187 in 1919 and to 273 in 1920. Not only blue-collared workers but white-collared clerks, and school teachers began to be organized, and even a salaried men's union came into being.

The number of labour disputes registered a record of 497 in 1919. Guided by labour unions, disputes were more often conducted organizationally and purposefully. Also progress was made in their tactics. In addition to strikes, sabotage, picketing, obstructionism, and referendum were adopted. Furthermore, along with printed strike reports which helped to generalize experiences in struggles, joint struggles and industrial strikes staged in concert marked the starting of joints actions of the working class. In 1920, twenty and several thousand workers at the government-operated Yawata Iron Works went on a large-scale strike demanding better labour conditions, and stopped kindling in the blast furnance. In 1921, 30,000 workers of Mitsubishi and Kawasaki dockyards at Kōbe continued on strike for as many as 50 days. This was the largest of all strikes that took place in Japan before the Second World War. Besides, a number of large-scale strikes occurred in various parts of the country. Also in 1920, the first May Day was held in Tokyo with the participation of 5,000 workers, and from the next year the function extended to other districts of the country.

As the labour movement rose, the *Yūaikai* began to change its nature so as to undertake the role of a central organization of militant labour unions throughout the country. This change was symbolized in the fact that at its annual convention of 1919, this organization renamed itself as *Dai Nihon Rōdō Sōdōmei Yūaikai* 大日本労働總同盟友愛會 (Japan Federation of Labour—Yūaikai). Also at this convention, its leadership was removed from the President, Suzuki, himself to a group of executives and the organizational principle based on occupations instead of districts was adopted. At the convention of next year, the infant name of Yūaikai was finally discarded in favour of one suitable for a labour organization, *Nihon Rōdō Sōdōmei* 日本労働總同盟 (Japan Federation of Labour). As its organization grew, younger and militant workers markedly advanced into leading positions.

The ruling groups of Japan continued to deny labour unions a legal

status until 1945 when they were defeated in the Pacific War. Although they were too extremely undemocratic and hostile to the working class to approve of their right of unity Japan's entry into the International Labour Organization established in 1919 brought the Japanese government to face the dilemma that it had to approve of, out of consideration for decency in the international community, the workers' right to chose their delegates to the conference of that international organization. After 1924, therefore, the government had to give indirect and *de facto* recognition to labour unions. The ruling groups, however, continued to put heavy pressure on the activities of labour unions.

#### IV. THE PERIOD OF ORGANIZATION

Not only the working class but the peasants and other social groups developed their own organized movements.

Tenant farmers' movements resisting pressure from the parasitic landlordism, which took place sporadically in various parts of the country during the Meiji period, now began to grow in number and become organized also following the "rice riots." Many tenant farmers took part in the "rice riots" because with about one half of their yields of rice taken away by landowners, they were in such difficulties that they would suffer shortage of their household consumption and have to join the "Let's have rice" movement.

In April 1922, the *Nihon Nōmin Kumiai* 日本農民組合 (Japan Peasants' Union) was formed as a national organization of the farmers' movements. At first it got started under the moderate leadership including such reformists as Kagawa Toyohiko 賀川豊彦 and Sugiyama Motojirō 杉山元治郎 but as its movement expanded and developed, it came to attain a militant character. Under the slogan of "land and freedom," tenant disputes developed throughout the country to demand reduction or exemption of tenant rent, establishment of the right of cultivation and "land for peasants." According to official figures, the number of tenant disputes increased strikingly from 85 of 1917 to 1,680 of 1921 with a participation of 146,000 persons.

As already pointed out, members of the despised communities worked with great militancy in the "rice riots," and this reflected the particular instability and hardship of their living and their antagonism to the social discrimination to which they were subject usually. Also the authorities' suppression was especially harsh to them. These experiences served to awaken the members of those communities to self-



reliance and a greater fighting spirit as well. Especially in March 1922, the *Zenkoku Suiheisha* 全國水平社 (National Association of Levellers) was formed as an instrument of the outcast communities liberation movement, which has since continued to develop until the present time. The organization is now known as *Buraku Kaihō Dōmei* 部落解放同盟 (Outcast Communities Liberation League).

The women's liberation movement of Japan made a spectacular start in 1911 when *Seitōsha* 青鞜社 (Blue Stockings Society) was formed to launch a movement for the establishment of human rights from a bourgeois point of view. After the "rice riots," however, it made a new start as a specific political movement to seek women's suffrage and also as a socialist women's movement from the proletarian point of view. To achieve these purposes, *Shinfujin Kyōkai* 新婦人協會 (New Women's Association) was formed in 1920, and it was followed by *Fujin Sanseiken Kakutoku Kisei Dōmei* 婦人參政權獲得期成同盟會 (League for Female Suffrage) in 1924, *Sekiran-kai* 赤瀾會 (Red Waves Society) in 1921 and *Yōka-kai* 八日會 (8th Day Society) in 1922. In labour unions, moves to create a women's department began to be seen.

Another development was that the intellectuals began to voice their views on government and society and started activity in organizations. In December, 1918, a group of progressive thinkers called *Reimei-kai* 黎明會 (Dawn Association) was formed by Dr. Yoshino Sakuzō 吉野作造 and Dr. Fukuda Tokuzō 福田德三 for the purpose of promoting democratic movements. A professor of politics at the Imperial University of Tokyo, Yoshino was an opinion leader at that time and known as an "apostle of democracy." Fukuda was a professor of economics at the Tokyo University of Commerce and had a liberal inclination. Also, Ōyama Ikuo 大山郁夫, a professor of politics at Waseda University played a great role in enlightenment about and popularization of democracy. He was to take part in the practice of the socialist movement with a view to pushing forward democracy of the people. These moves provoked a sharp conflict with the ruling groups and reactionary right-wing organizations. Typical in this connexion was the "Morito Case 森戸事件" of 1920 in which a scholarly article, "Kuropotokin no Shakaishisō no Kenkyū クロポトキンの社會思想の研究" (Studies in the Social Ideas of Kropotkin) published by Morito Tatsuo 森戸辰男, Assistant Professor of economics at the Imperial University of Tokyo, was judged guilty of disturbing public peace and order at the court, and eventually Morito was ousted from office at the university.

One aspect of the intellectuals' movement which created more

distinct impressions of the breaking of new times was the student social movement.

Such exciting events in the history of the world and Japan as the First World War, the Russian Revolution, and the "rice riots" invited sensitive reaction from the intellectual youth, students. The students' concern which had so far been directed at personal careerism or engrossment in their inner world was now turned to social problems, and consequently a number of them, with a burning passion for social reform established contact with the labour and farmer' movements. In November, 1918, students of the Imperial University of Kyōto organized a body called *Rōgakukai* 勞學會 (Labour-Student Association) in co-operation with workers from the *Yūaikai*. In December students of the Imperial University of Tokyo formed *Shinjin-kai* 新入會 (New Men's Association) which was followed next year by Waseda University students who organized *Kensetsusha Dōmei* 建設者同盟 (Builders' League). The platform of the *Shinjinkai* includes the following declaration of purposes.

1. We will co-operate to promote the tendency towards human liberation which is now the general cultural trend of the world.
2. We will participate in the rightful reform movements of Japan today.

The platform of the *Kensetsusha Dōmei* likewise reads, "This League seeks to build the most rational, new society." The students were convinced that "the new tendency towards human liberation" represented "the general cultural trend of the world," and declared that instead of "the bureaucrats, military cliques, party politicians, capitalists, university professors and other leaders who were now discredited by the people, they, the young students, with pure conscience, intelligent mind and passionate spirit, were qualified as promoters of "the rightful reform movements of Japan today." The *Shinjinkai* organ journal, which was at first called "*Demokurashī* デモクラシー" (Democracy), changed its name successively to "*Senku* 先驅" (Forerunner), "*Dōbō* 同胞" (Fellow-countrymen) and "*Narōdo* ナロード" (Narod). This process symbolized that the guiding principle of their movement shifted quickly from democracy to socialism and, in substance, from syndicalism to Marxism. Members of those student organizations would go out to labour districts and farming villages to speak on "the ideal society of freedom and equality" before workers and peasants, assist in forming labour or farmers' unions, and staging strikes and tenant disputes. Not a few of them become, on graduation, leaders of the labour union or farmers' union movements and even of the socialist movement. Some of the known examples are Akamatsu Katsumaro 赤松克磨, Asō Hisashi 麻生久,

Tanahashi Kotora 棚橋小虎, Sano Manabu 佐野學, Nosaka Sanzō 野坂參三, Asanuma Inejirō 淺沼稻次郎 and Hirano Rikizō 平野力三. In the course of later changes and developments of the Japanese social movements, they were divided into a variety of ideological positions ranging from communism to right-wing social democracy.

In short, a new type of young students, who were determined to make use of their knowledge for the liberation of workers and peasants and who did not hesitate to work "in the people," were produced in a great number in Japan following the "rice riots," out of the universities which had so far played the role of a training institute for leaders of developing capitalism.

In reaction to the development of such progressive movements, Shibusawa Eiichi and others sponsored organization of *Kyōchōkai* 協調會 (Reconciliation Society) as a device to lead the labour movement into the channel of labour-capital reconciliation. On the other hand, such terrorist right wing organizations as *Dai Nihon Kokusuikai* 大日本國粹會 (Great Japan National Virtues Association) and *Dai Nihon Sekka Bōshu Dan* 大日本赤化防止團 (Great Japan Anti-Bolshevization Organization) were also brought into existence in 1919 and 1922 respectively.

## V. THE RISE OF THE SOCIALIST MOVEMENT

Consequent on the "Treason Incident" or *Taigyaku Jiken* 大逆事件 of 1910, the Japanese socialist movement was temporarily choked and experienced what is called the "winter season." Influenced by the socialist ideas of Europe and America, the socialist movement was started in Japan, too, by a few precursors towards the end of the 19th century, and began to draw public attention with its campaign against the Russo-Japanese War, 1904-1905. Then, the group led by Kōtoku Shūsui 幸徳秋水, who turned to anarcho-communism on his return from a trip in the United States, was charged with a plot against the life of Emperor Meiji, and the police and procurators rounded up anarchists, socialists and their sympathizers throughout the country and put 24 of them to death after a secret trial. This was an attempt at a thorough-going suppression of those radical elements, and most of them actually fell victims of a frame-up on an unfounded accusation. Of the 24 under death sentence were "commuted" to life imprisonment after the verdict, but the remaining were hanged as sentenced.

The socialists who survived the Treason Incident, so to speak, by a stroke of good luck spent several years in almost complete inaction.

Katayama Sen was compelled to seek asylum in the United States, while Ishikawa Sanshiro 石川三四郎 went to Europe. Active young men such as Ōsugi Sakae 大杉榮 and Arahata Kanson 荒畑寒村 tried to resume propaganda activity by launching a magazine, *Kindai Shisō* 近代思想 (Modern Thought) in 1912, but this was not allowed to be anything more than a literary and intellectual journal deprived of the freedom of discussing political and social problems.

Witnessing the atmosphere of society begin changing with the First World War, Sakai Toshihiko 堺利彦, leader of the socialist movement, launched, in 1915, a journal *Shin Shakai* 新社會 (New Society) in which he declared a "minor flag-raising," and wrote:

"This is of course not so much of a rising with battle cries and in high spirits and courage, but it is certainly a raising anyhow of a small paper-flag on the tip of a worn-out fountainpen. . . . Yet we believe that we are fairly firmly resolved to bide the time while barely co-operating with and mutually encouraging and consoling members from the same family far and near."<sup>2</sup>

Just at a time the socialists had for the first time in many years their own organ journal and gradually resumed their movement, the Russian Revolution broke out and was followed by the "rice riots" in Japan, where the labour movement was to upsurge. As seen in the example of Kawakami Hajime, some university professors took steps forward to study and popularize Marxism in search of a solution for social problems. The socialist movement thus began to take the rising tide. Given impetus by the Russian Revolution, the influence of Marxism in particular began to expand fast. As a result, Sakai Toshihiko's *Shin Shakai* came to carry a "Marxist Manifesto" in its January 1920 issue. Sakai wrote:

"The duty of this journal can no longer be in merely 'barely co-operating with and mutually encouraging and consoling members from the same family far and near.' If we can, we would like to define our slogan clearly and move greatly the minds of the whole country. This is what we mean by 'preparations' and the way to quicken the 'opportunity.' What then is our slogan? It is Marxism."<sup>3</sup>

Further in 1919, a theoretical journal, *Shakai-shugi Kenkyū* 社会主義研究 (Studies in Socialism) was founded by Sakai, Yamakawa, and others and devoted to the interpretation and propagation of Marxism and the supplying of factual information about the Revolution and the socialist construction in Soviet Russia. Marxist documents were actively translated into Japanese, and a full translation of *Das Kapital* was completed by Takabatake Motoyuki 高島素之 in 1920-1924. The *Com-*

<sup>2</sup> *Shin Shakai*, Preface, Vol I, No. 1 (1915).

<sup>3</sup> *Shin Shakai*, Preface, Vol II, No. 1 (1919).

*munist Manifesto* was also translated and widely read through secret publication. At the same time, Ōsugi Sakae and others published a magazine, *Rōdōundō* 労働運動 (Labour Movement) and worked in propaganda for anarcho-syndicalism (after 1919).

The influence of socialism took hold of the student movement as seen above and it now began to expand among the workers. Even the *Yūaikai*, which had declared "to fight socialism to the death" at its inauguration in 1912, underwent a change to the point of inviting Sakai Toshihiko and other socialists as guests to its 1919 annual convention.

After the "rice riots," the socialist movement not only came to life again but expanded with the participation of workers and intellectuals and began to get linked with the labour movement. In 1920, *Nihon Shakai-shugi Dōmei* 日本社會主義同盟 (Japan Socialist League) was formed to provide unity for all socialist elements. One of the leaders in this movement, Yamakawa Hitoshi gave his impressions and wrote:

"Up to the present, the Japanese socialist movement has been a small light. A storm was raging there. A small number of comrades were standing close to each other around the small light so that they could somehow hold it from dying out. Now the small light has blazed up in a flame. Around it is a circle of the masses of people. The light has been passed over to the people to whom it should be, and it grew into a fire really burning out of the people."<sup>4</sup>

Although the *Shakai-shugi Dōmei* had a membership of 1,000, it was a promiscuous group comprising socialists, labour unions, and student organizations representative of various views, and therefore lacking in ideological unity. It was thus troubled with internal antagonism. Especially antagonism between Marxists (Bolshevists) and Anarchists was intensifying day after day. The tradition of anarchism and syndicalism, handed down from Kōtoku Shūsui's period to some revolutionary intellectuals and workers whom it attracted, and continued and developed by such an able leader as Ōsugi Sakae, enjoyed considerable influence. On the other hand, under the influence of the Russian Revolution, militant workers and progressive intellectuals successively came into the scene to add strength to Marxism. Also some old anarchists and syndicalists were seen moving to the position of Marxism. Thereupon what was known as anarchist-bolshevist controversies took place and intensified ideological and organizational antagonism on the stage of the *Shakai-shugi Dōmei*. This League was banned by the government in May, 1921, but had it been without such an act of suppression, it would not

<sup>4</sup> *Shakai-shugi*, June, 1921.

have been able to remain united as an organization. This also can be said of the unsuccessful *Sōrengō* 總聯合 (General Federation) movement which attempted to unify labour union movements. By the time its rally to form a united labour front was finally ordered dissolved by the police, it had been thrown into irretrievable confusion because of the anarchist-bolshevist antagonism.

Through the controversies with the bolsheviks and through experiences in the actual labour movement, anarchism and syndicalism lost influence to Communism, which in turn came to assume leadership in the revolutionary movement.

On July 15, 1922, the Japan Communist Party was founded in Tokyo. It had the status of the Japanese branch of the Communist International organized at Moscow in 1919, and was an illegal, clandestine association under the circumstances prevailing in Japan at that time. (The Japan Communist Party continued to be a secret society for twenty-three years ending in October, 1945 when it was approved of as a legal political party as a result of the defeat in the Pacific War.)

“With the founding of the Japan Communist Party, the Japanese working class and people for the first time had their headquarters which, under the guidance of Marxism-Leninism and in firm connexion with the struggles of the international working class, persistently opens the way for the people’s revolution in Japan. In this sense, the founding of our Party is an epoch-making event in the history of the strife for social progress of the Japanese working class and working populace in general.”<sup>5</sup>

The Japan Communist Party so appreciates the historical significance of its founding.

The “Draft Platform of the Japan Communist Party” which the party discussed shortly after its inauguration is worth noticing as the first written attempt at an all-out analysis of Japanese capitalism from the revolutionary point of view. In its words, Japanese capitalism “made remarkable growth during the War. But at the same time Japanese capitalism still demonstrates characteristics of the former feudal relationships” and “the greater part of the land is today in the hands of semi-feudal big landlords; moreover, the biggest of these is the Emperor, who heads the Japanese government”; and “Remnants of feudal relationships are manifested in the structure of the state which is controlled by a bloc consisting of a definite part of the commercial and industrial capitalists and of the big landlords.” Furthermore, “under such conditions, the opposition to state power emanates not only from

<sup>5</sup> The Japan Communist Party Central Committee, *Nihon Kyōsantō no Shijū-nen* 日本共産黨の四十年 (The Forty Years of the Japan Communist Party), Tokyo, 1962, p. 13.

A publication of the Publications Department, the Central Committee, JCP.

the working class, peasants, and petty bourgeoisies but also from a great segment of the liberalistic bourgeoisie who are also deprived of the possibility of functioning in the state machine." These lead to the prospect of revolution as follows: "Since the completion of the bourgeois revolution in Japan is dependent upon a powerful proletariat and the mass of revolutionary peasants, who have as their aim the abolition of farm rent, it can be a direct prelude to the proletarian revolution, which has as its aim the overthrow of bourgeois control and the realization of proletarian dictatorship."

Although, reflecting the changing situation, the Communist Party's platform grew more precise from the 1927 Theses to the 1932 Theses, the analysis of characteristics in Japanese politics and economy and the strategy of holding as the immediate objective the completion of the bourgeois-democratic revolution through the abolition of the emperor system and of seeking, through that, development towards the socialist revolution did not change basically.

Katayama Sen, who, as a leading officer of the Comintern, gave guidance to the founding of the Japan Communist Party, wrote in an article appreciating the significance of the "rice riots," as follows:

"The rice riots strongly stimulated the Japanese labour movement and placed it on the broad way to the revolution. The experience of the rice riots and the gigantic waves of strikes proved that a spontaneous mass movement of the proletariat would not win a victory. The key to revolutionary struggles lies in organization. This is the very lesson that the Japanese proletariat has learned from the struggle. Shortly after that, the best representatives of the Japanese proletariat formed the Japan Communist Party. Under this flag the workers, peasants, and the oppressed in the Japanese colonies, thirsty for freedom, began to unite."<sup>6</sup>

## VI. COMMUNISM AND SOCIAL DEMOCRACY

As the thought and movement of Communism began to spread, those of social democracy, in opposition to that, also began to take clear shape. In the place of the old conflict between anarchism and bolshevism (in this case, meaning vaguely the position favouring the Russian Revolution rather than Marxism-Leninism in the strict sense of the words), a new conflict between Communism and social democracy became the central issue drawing great attention in terms of social

<sup>6</sup> Katayama Sen, "Nihon ni okeru Sen-kyūhyaku-jūhachi-nen no Kome-sōdō no Jūgo-shūnen ni yosete 日本に於る1918年の米騒動の15周年によせて (Celebrating the 15th Anniversary of the Rice Riots of 1918 in Japan)," in *Katayama Sen Chosakushū*, Vol. III, pp. 330-331. The present quotation is a translation from this Japanese edition though the original appears in the *Communist International*, October, 1933.

thought and movement. These two currents of thought have continued to constitute the major trends in social thought and movement in Japan up to the present time.

The Japan Communist Party suffered a round-up in June, 1923, less than one year after its founding, with almost all members of its organized body taken away to prison. Shortly after that, on September 1, 1923, a great earthquake fell on the Kantō 關東 district around Tokyo and Yokohama. As the result of this earthquake and the subsequent fire, some 100,000 persons lost their lives and society was thrown into great confusion, in the course of which a horrible terror of the ruling classes raged. More than 6,000 Korean residents were slaughtered and 9 militant Japanese labour movement activists murdered at the Kameido 龜戸 Police Station. In addition, leaders of the anarchist movement, Ōsugi Sakae and his wife were assassinated at the Military Police Headquarters. This white terrorism profoundly shocked those concerned in the labour and socialist movements. It was warned by object lesson that one must be prepared for the menace of death if one takes part in the revolutionary movement. Arguments for dissolution rose within the Communist Party and led to a resolution to disband the Party. Also, the course of reformism and social democracy in favour of labour-capital reconciliation began to take clear shape. On the other hand, a militant course challenging ruthless state power with a revolutionary struggle was also to become solid despite the difficulties. The Communist Party organization was rebuilt in December, 1926.

In the new circumstances, the ruling groups changed their policy. In 1925, the Imperial Diet passed the Universal Suffrage Law (*Futsū-senkyo-hō* 普通選舉法) and the Peace Preservation Law (*Chianiji-hō* 治安維持法) in one set. A universal suffrage election had been a long-continued demand of the workers, peasant, and petty bourgeoisie. As a gesture of concession to that demand, the government abolished the old property qualification for voting and decided to give the franchise to all men over 25 of age. In the meantime, it enacted the Peace Preservation Law designed to place under police control any "extreme" social movement such as the Communist one. This repressive regulation, which was originally to enable to inflict the maximum penalty of 10 years in prison was later so amended as to apply capital punishment to the offender. When it was interpreted extensively by the police and prison authorities, not only the Communists but social democrats, liberals, and pacifists had to suffer persecution as well. Under this Law, many publicists, university professors, students, and religious men, as well as the workers



and peasants, were arrested and imprisoned. During the 20 years from its enactment to its abolition following the defeat in the Pacific War, 80,000 persons were arrested. The executive body of this Law, namely the *Tokubetsu Kōtō Keisatsu* 特別高等警察 or *Tokkō* 特高 (Special Higher Police) made its name well known in the world for the most elaborate activities and cruel tortures. The simultaneous enforcement of the Universal Suffrage Law and the Peace Preservation Law was typical of the cunning policy of holding "a cake in the right hand and a poison cup in the left" or of one of "whip and candy," so is it called.

The conflict between Communists and social democrats was carried on fiercely within the *Nihon Rōdō Sōdōmei* 日本労働總同盟 (Japan Federation of Labour) which had developed into the most powerful labour organization by that time. In opposition to such right-wing social democrats as Suzuki Bunji, Matsuoka Komakichi 松岡駒吉, and Nishio Suehiro 西尾末廣, who had held leadership since the organization of the federation, Watanabe Masanosuke 渡邊政之輔, Kokuryō Goichirō 國領五一郎, and Yamamoto Kenzō 山本懸藏, emerging from the younger generation of workers, had their Communist influence increased to the point of menacing the right-wing leadership. The right-wing worked quickly to hold down the advancing left-wing by means of expulsion and other disciplinary measures, while the latter, still immature in tactics, faced the situation mechanically and eventually ran into frontal collision with the former. Finally in 1925 the Federation split into two bodies, with the left-wing organizing *Nihon Rōdōkumiai Hyōgikai* 日本労働組合評議會 or *Hyōgikai* 評議會 (Japan Council of Trade Unions) with an initial membership of 12,500 workers. Those unionists who stayed in the *Sōdōmei* numbered 13,000. Next year, centrist elements among them broke with the *Sōdōmei* to form *Nihon Rōdōkumiai Dōmei* 日本労働組合同盟 (Japan League of Trade Unions). A similar development took place in the farmers' union movement, too.

Such adverse circumstances where the organizational split and confusion of labour unions and other mass organizations arose from the difference of ideology have been repeatedly experienced up to the present time and formed a sinister tradition of the social movements in Japan. In any case, the two conflicting currents of labour-capital reconciliation and reformism, on the one hand, and class struggle and revolutionism, on the other, have since then taken definite shape in the labour and farmers' movements.

The breaking up of labour unions and farmers' unions was closely related to the meeting and parting of socialist political parties. The

enactment of the Universal Suffrage Law, no matter whatever it may have meant, expanded the freedom of political activity for the workers and peasants and made the organization of socialist parties (then called legal proletarian parties as distinct from the illegal Communist Party) possible. In 1925, the *Nōmin Rōdōtō* 農民労働黨 (Farmer-Labour Party) was founded as a single national party of workers and peasants, but it was ordered dissolved on the charge of Communist influence only three hours after its inaugural meeting. Then the left-wing elements receded backward, and the *Rōdō Nōmintō* 労働農民黨 (Labour-Farmer Party) was founded anew in March, 1926. As soon as this party started activity, the left-wing influence intensified again and caused a split. Consequently the right-wing formed the *Shakai Minshutō* 社会民主黨 (Social Democratic Party), while the centrists the *Nihon Rōnōtō* 日本労働黨 (Japan Labour-Farmer Party). Thus, Japanese socialist parties made a start in the three groups, right-wing, left-wing, and centrist. This basic pattern, with its ideological and personal lineage, has continued and is still alive today.

Furthermore, the organizational development and merger of labour and farmers' unions were linked with the alignment of socialist parties. The *Rōdō Nōmintō* and *Hyōgikai* (behind these was standing the Communist Party underground), the *Nihon Rōnōtō* and *Kumiai Dōmei*, and the *Shakai Minsyutō* and *Sōdōmei* made direct combinations of a party and a labour federation. This particularly Japanese tradition that, as a mass organization, the labour union becomes the ground of strength of a specific party and, especially through election campaigns, establishes a close tie and thus mutually restricts the other's independence has not been overcome basically and is still alive today. Today, the Japan Socialist Party and *Sōhyō* 総評 (General Council of Trade Unions), the Democratic Socialist Party and *Dōmei* 同盟 (Japan General Federation of Trade Unions) maintain their direct party-union relationship respectively, and this lies in the way of achieving the unity of labour unions as mass organizations, on the one hand, and prevents the socialist parties from fully developing the organization and activities on their own, leaving a great weakness to the social movement.

#### CONCLUSION

As outlined above, the social problems and movements marked a new phase of remarkable development, with the "rice riots" as a turning-point. In view of what happened, the 1920's was a period when the Japanese social movement experienced the most spectacular advance and

exaltation. It witnessed the rise and coming to the fore of many issues such as the labour problems produced out of monopoly capitalism; the agrarian questions under the remnants of parasitic landlordism; the labour and farmers' union and other movements seeking to settle these questions; and furthermore, varied currents in the socialist ideologies and movements revolving around the pivot of the confrontation of Communism and social democracy. All these are issues which still remain alive in Japan of today.

Since the financial panic of 1927, the stage of history revolved in a large way once again to bring about drastic changes in the appearance of the social problems and movements. The extreme hardship of workers' and peasants' living under the successive crises ranging from the financial panic of 1927 to the world depression of 1929 and the fierce resistance movements arising therefrom; the Japanese policy of aggression in China beginning with the Shantung expedition of 1927 for intervention in the Chinese Revolution, which was escalated to a 15 years war from the invasion in Manchuria (Manchurian Incident: *Man-syū Jihen* 満州事變) of 1931 to August 15, 1945, in which Japan was over whelmed by militarism; and the process in which the Peace Preservation Law completely trampled down Japanese democracy, beginning with the large-scale round-up of the Communists on March 15 immediately following the first universal suffrage election of February, 1928—all these should be taken up for discussion in relation to what has been stated above. To this end, however, another article will be prepared by the author.