Editor’s Note: Itō Noe (1895–1923) was a Japanese anarchist feminist and later the companion of Osugi Sakae, with whom she was murdered by the Japanese military police in 1923. She was a leading figure in the Japanese feminist Bluestocking Society, and translated Emma Goldman into Japanese. The following excerpts are taken from her article, “The Facts of Anarchy,” originally published in 1921 in Rodo Undo (the Labour Movement). Itō Noe argues that the Japanese peasant village was a functioning anarchist society based on mutual agreement and mutual aid. The translation by Yoshiharu Hashimoto, originally published in A Short History of the Anarchist Movement in Japan (Tokyo: Idea Publishing, 1979), has been modified by the editor for stylistic reasons.

WE HAVE OFTEN HEARD THE ABUSE that the ideal of anarchist communism is an unrealizable fancy. Everyone clings to the superstitious belief that autonomy cannot be achieved without the support of a central government. In particular, some socialists ... sneer at the “dream” of anarchism. Yet I have found that it is not a
dream, but something aspects of which have been realized in the
autonomy of the villages inherited from our ancestors. In some
remote districts where there is no so-called “culture,” I have dis-
covered a simple mutual aid ... and a social life based on mutual
agreement. It is completely different from “administration” under
central government, being a mutual aid organization generated by
necessity and continued in parallel with the official administration
since before the time when there was an “administrative organ.”

Now I want to depict the facts that I have seen personally at my
native village ...

There are sixty to seventy houses divided into six small associ-
ations, and these six associations federate with each other as the
occasion demands ... There are no chains of command or officials.
The spirit of the associations, inherited from their ancestors, is “to
assist each other in times of trouble.”

... [At village meetings] everyone frankly speaks his own
thoughts ... There is no fearful atmosphere to make one too timid
to express his own opinion ... In fact, there is no discrimination,
whether he is a village master or a daily labourer ... There is neither
haughtiness nor humility ...

How are decisions made? They do it together. Generally, if it is
practical or based on clear facts, even more if everyone has offered
his knowledge and opinions, the decision will be reached sponta-
neously ... 

When a sick person must take to his bed, the news will be
reported to the association. The members will rush to the house.
Some will get a doctor, others will report it to his relatives; they
go on these errands or nurse him kindly ...

In cases of childbirth, the women of the association come to-
gether. They take care of everything until the mother rises again.
Everything else, whenever help is needed, the association will pro-
vide it without complaint. Of course there will be two or three fam-
ilies out of favour with the members. With respect to helping such
families, although the members may speak ill of them or even com-
plain, they will never refuse to help, for they distinguish between
their work for the association and their personal antipathies.

Administrative tasks are shared by the members. If a particular
task is long lasting, shifts are arranged so that there is no inconve-
nience. The responsibility of each member to the association is not
coerced or unwilling. He performs his role ... so as to follow his
conscience ... No command or supervision is needed ...

After the satisfactory resolution of a particular task, an associa-
tion formed for that purpose is dissolved. The unit of federation [in
each village] is not the association, but each home ...

The police seem useless to the association. Quarrels ... are mainly
settled by the association ... A couple from a certain family stole
something. The victim had proof and previous knowledge. The vic-
timized family summoned the couple [before the association] and
scolded them. Both the victims and the thieves agreed as a settle-
ment of the matter to the announcement that the couple would be
expelled from the assembly if they committed the crime again ...

Expulsion is the last resort ... When one receives this punish-
ment, no one dares to associate with him ... So they think of the
seriousness of this punishment and do not impose it on someone
unless his deed is intolerable. As far as I know, I have not heard of
this great punishment being imposed on a family ...

Egoistic urban life is intolerable to those accustomed to village
life. Where there is no hope of success besides poverty, it is far more
comfortable and warm to support each other under the protection
of the association.