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A Brief History of Japanese Anarchism

Anarchy in Nippon

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This timeline covers 1882 to 1970

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- “Kokusyoku Sensen Sya” (Society for the Black-colored Front) was formed by Eizaburo Oshima and has published some new books and mostly facsimile editions of old anarchism publications.

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1951

- Japan Anarchist Federation split into two groups. “Pure” anarchists including Sakutaro Iwasa and Syuzou Yata left the group and formed their organization called “Japan Anarchist Club” which had no platform and no committee and published their organ called “**Anarchist Club**” which changed its name to “**Anarchist Movement**”. Anarcho-Syndicalists including Kenji Kondo formed “Anarchist Federation.”

1955

- Anarchist Federation changed its name to “Japan Anarchist Federation.”

1956

- The organ of Japan Anarchist Federation, **Kuro Hata** (**Black Flag**) published.
- Sanshiro Ishikawa died.

1962

- **Black Flag**, the organ of Japan Anarchist Federation, renamed to **Free Association**.
- Masamichi Osawa published “**The Steps of Freedom and Resistance**” which was the history of Japanese anarchist thought.

1968

- Japan Anarchist Federation broke up.

1970

1938

- “Sangyo Houkoku Renmei” (Industrial Federation for the State) was organized. This group was a puppet labor union of Japanese government for breaking left labor unions and forcing workers to work for the State.
- Tokyo Printing Workers Union broke up due to Jinmin Sengen Incident.
- Anarchist movement vanished.

1945

- Japan was defeated and surrendered to the Allies.
- The first Yomiuri dispute happened. Many ex-members of Seishin Kai, which had had an anarchist tendency before the Second World War, participated. A tendency to form an anarchist organization increased.

1946

- Japan Anarchist Federation was formed with more than 200 members. Sakutaro Iwasa was a chairman and Kenji Kondo was a chief secretary. Sanshiro Ishikawa was an advisor. They published “**The Commoners News.**”

1948

- Several anarchist labor unions including Free Federation of Labor Unions in Nerima Ward and Conference for Labor Unions in Fuji District were organized.

1950

- At the fifth convention of Japan Anarchist Federation, the conflicts between “Pure” Anarchism and Anarcho-Syndicalism came up to the surface,

Meiji — From Socialism to Anarchism

1882

- Tokichi Tarui and others organized The Oriental Socialist Party in Nagasaki prefecture which had about forty members and proclaimed equality, maximum well-being of the public, common ownership of property, joint management of companies, and cooperative child rearing. However, about two months after its formation, this party was banned and dissolved.

1889

- Dai Nippon Teikoku Kenpou (The first constitution granted by the sovereign) was promulgated.

1897

- Farmers around the Watarase River went to Tokyo several times (1897–1900) to make petitions concerning Ashio Copper Mine Pollution and clashed with police.
- Social Issues Study Group was organized by Tarui and others. Syusui Kotoku and Sen Katayama were also members of this group.
- The first Labour Issue Speech Meeting was held by Katayama and others.
- The Association for the Attainment of Labour Unions was formed.

1898

- Isoo Abe, Kotoku, Katayama, and others started Socialism Study Group.

1899

- Katayama and others organized the Association for the Attainment of the Universal Suffrage.

1900

- The Security Police Act was promulgated.
- Japanese government sent troops to the Boxer Rebellion.
- Socialism Study Group changed their name to the Association for the Socialists.

1901

- Japanese Social Democratic Party was organized by Katayama, Abe, Kotoku, Naoe Kinoshita, and others, but was banned on the very same day by the government.
- Kotoku and others formed Socialist Commoners Party which was also banned on the very same day.
- Kotoku published a book called “**The monster of 20th century, Imperialism,**” revealed the relationship between patriotism, militarism, and imperialism, and criticized them.
- Shozo Tanaka made a direct appeal to the emperor Meiji about Ashio Copper Mine Pollution. Being asked by Tanaka, Kotoku wrote the letter of the petition.

1902

- “**The modern anarchism**” was written by Sentaro Kemuyama. However he introduced mostly terrorism.

1903

- Dynamic was ceased to publish.

1935

- The Communist Party finally broke up because of continuous suppression.
- After assaulting the Takada Nousei Bank to get funds for Anarcho-Communist Party by its members, 400 anarchists around the country were arrested, just because they were anarchists. Due to this incident, Tokyo Printing Workers Union, which was central to the Free Association of National Labor Unions, broke up. Also Federation of Cultural Liberty broke up.

1936

- 350 members of Society for the Youth in Farm Villages were arrested and thirty-some anarchists were prosecuted which was the first time to be applied the public peace regulation to anarchists.
- Tokyo Printing Workers Union reformed (250 members).
- May Day was banned.

1937

- Tokyo Printing Workers Union and Tokyo Publishers Union, which was an affiliated union of a legal leftist group called Zen Hyou, formed City Printing Workers Advocacy Alliance.
- Jinmin Sensen Incident happened (the government suppressed the leftists and left intelligentsias under the pretext that they followed 7th convention of the communist international, and 400 leftists were arrested.)

organized “Nouson Seinen Sya” (Society for the Youth in Farm Villages). They were planning to build free farm communes around the country and also planned the uprisings.

- The Conference for Free Confederated National Groups reorganized as The Conference for Free Association of Japanese Labor Unions.
- This Year, the members of Free Association of National Labor Unions were 11000, The Conference for Free Association of Japanese Labor Unions 2850, and Cultural Association of Farmers Autonomy (National Association of Farmers Council and Artistic Federation of National Farmers) 1000.

1932

- The Conference for Free Association of Japanese Labor Unions led twenty-some strikes of small and middle-sized companies.
- Both Free Association of National Labor Unions and The Conference for Free Association of Japanese Labor Unions participated in the anti-nazi, anti-fascism alliance. The tendency to unite both groups increased and The Conference passed a resolution for its dissolution into Free Association of National Labor Unions.

1934

- The Conference formally returned to Free Association and its total member became 4000.
- Naoto Aizawa, Tei Uemura, Toshio Futami formed Anarcho-Communist Party to unite workers and poor farmers.

- Kotoku and Toshihiko Sakai left a newspaper company called “**Yorozu Choho News**” due to the company’s pro-war argument. They started “**Heiminsya**” (**The Commoners Society**) with other anti-war socialist comrades, and published a periodical “**Syukan Heimin Shinbun**” (**Weekly Commoners News**) which was the only anti-war newspaper.
- *Kotoku published “**The Essence of Socialism**” in which he mostly argued as Marxist.

1904

- Russo-Japanese War broke out.
- Kotoku published an article, “**An Appeal to the Russian Socialist Party**,” on the Weekly Commoners News and the Russian Socialist Party replied to it.
- Sakai, a chief editor of the Weekly Commoners News, was indicted for violating the Press Ordinance by publishing an article “**Alas, Taxes Increase!**” by Kotoku and imprisoned.
- An anti-war article by Leo Tolstoy was translated and published on the Weekly Commoners News.
- “**The Manifesto of the Communist Party**” was translated and published on the Weekly Commoners News and this issue was banned to be sold.

1905

- The first May Day was held by the Commoners Society.
- The Weekly Commoners News ceased to publish and the Commoners Society was dissolved by suppression.

Sakai, Kotoku and other materialistic socialists published “**Chokugen**” (**Speak Frankly**), followed by “**Hikari**” (**The Light**), while Sansiro Ishikawa, Naoe Kinoshita and other christian socialists published “**Shin Kigen**” (**The New Era**).

- Kotoku was indicted for violating the Press Ordinance by publishing an article called “**Listen, Elementary School Teachers!**” by Sanshiro Ishikawa on the Weekly Commons News and imprisoned for 5 months.
- During his imprisonment, Kotoku was changing his thought from Marxist to Anarchist.
- Kotoku made contact with an anarchist in San Francisco and went to the United States after being discharged from prison.

1906

- Japan Socialist Party was organized.
- Kotoku came back from the United States under the influence of American anarchists and IWW. He gave a speech which insisted eagerly on the direct action instead of electioneering and parliamentary politics. Sakae Osugi supported Kotoku’s opinion.
- Japanese anarchists who lived in the United States including Sakutaro Iwasa formed Social Revolutionary Party and published their organ “**Kakumei**” (**Revolution**).
- Osugi helped to form the Japan Esperanto Association.
- Osugi, Mitsujiro Nishikawa and others arrested in Tokyo Streetcar Fare Incident.

- The syndicalists of Free Association of National Labor Unions formed “Nippon Roudou Kumiai Jiyu Rengou Kyougikai” (The Conference for Free Association of Japanese Labor Unions) and published their movement organ “**Roudousya Sinbun**” (**Workers News**) and literary oriented magazine “**Kokusyoku Sensen**” (**Black-colored Youth**).
- Sanshiro Ishikawa published a periodical “**Dynamic**.”
- Syuzou Yata published “**Failure of Class Struggle**.”

1930

- The Conference for Free Association of Japanese Labor Unions broke up and reorganized under the name of “Jiyu Rengou Dantai Zenkoku Kyougikai” (The Conference for Free Confederated National Groups).
- Central Japan Black-colored Youth Federation re-organized.
- Federation of Young Anarchists (which was a re-organization of Black-colored Youth Federation in Kansai and Western Honshu) was formed and its theoretically oriented organ “**Kuro Hata**”(**Black Flag**) was published.
- “**The complete works of Michael Bakunin**” was published.
- Sakutaro Iwasa published “**The role of anarchists on liberation**”

1931

- Yasuyuki Suzuki, Akira Miyazaki, Junji Hoshino, Akiko Yagi, and others around Tokyo and Nagano prefecture

- The delegates from Free Association of National Labor Unions attended to the Convention of Pan-pacific Labor Unions (a branch of the third international)
- Noumin Jichi Kai (Farmers' Autonomous Society) organized the national confederation, which consisted of 6300 members from various areas of Japan and had 243 branches.
- Iwasa and Kondo published the fifth **"Roudou Undou."**
- Sanshiro Ishikawa organized **"Kyou Gaku Sya" (Learning Together Society)** and practiced of an oriental autonomous lifestyle which he worked in the field in fine weather and read at home in wet weather.

1928

- 3/15 incident. Thousands of radical leftists including members of the communist party were arrested and about seven hundreds were prosecuted.
- Free Association of National Labor Unions broke up when it held the second convention because of the conflicts between anarchists and syndicalists.
- Korean anarchist groups formed "Kokusyoku Roudousya Renmei" (Black-colored Workers Association).
- **"The complete works of Peter Kropotkin"** was published.

1929

- 4/16 incident. About hundreds of radical leftists were prosecuted, again.

1907

- Japan Socialist Party published the **"Daily Commoners News."**
- The riots at Ashio Copper Mine broke out. Several strikes and workers' riots around the country happened in this year.
- Because of their debates between direct action and parliamentary politics, Japan Socialist Party split into two groups (also the government banned the Party from organizing). The direct actionaries published **"Osaka Commoners News"** which changed the name to **"Japan Commoners News"** later and the other published **"Syakai Shinbun" (Social News)**.
- Kotoku left Tokyo and went back to his hometown in Kochi prefecture.
- The Chinese students who studied in Japan organized the Socialism Study Group.
- Syusui Kotoku published an article called **"The Change of My Thought"** which was the first Japanese article that rejected the electioneering and strongly urged the necessity of the direct action.

1908

- Red Flags (Akahata) incident. At the welcome back party of Koken Yamaguchi's discharge from a prison, Osugi, Kanson Arahata and other young direct actionaries wove the red flags which said "Museifu Kyousan" (Anarchist Communism) or "Kakumei" (Revolution) and sung the revolution songs. When they went out and tried to demonstrate, the police brutally attacked them and

several people including Osugi, Arahata, Yamaguchi, Hitoshi Yamakawa, were arrested.

1909

- Kotoku and his comrades published “**Heimin Hyoron**” (**The Commoners Review**) in Kumamoto prefecture and “**Jiyu Shisou**” (**Free Thoughts**) in Tokyo.
- Kotoku translated and secretly published “**The Conquest of Bread**” by Peter Kropotkin.

1910

- The case of the high treason. Kotoku and other socialists were arrested on suspicion of planning the assassination of the Emperor Meiji. The truth was that only four people including Sugako Kanno and Takichi Miyashita did plan it (though this was very immature plan) and Kotoku was rather against it. However 26 anarchists were arrested and prosecuted. The trials were closed to the public and after only 16 trials, all 26 radicals were demanded the death penalty (in the end, 12 people including Kotoku were sentenced to death next year).
- “Winter time” for socialists began.
- Toshihiko Sakai was released from prison and founded “Baibun Sya” (Selling Sentences Company).

1911

- Kotoku, Kanno, and 9 other anarchists were executed.
- Feminist magazine “**Seitou**” (**Bluestocking**) published.

- “Kansai Kurohata Renmei” (Kansai Black Flag Federation) and “Tyubu Kokusyoku Seinen Renmei” (Central Japan Black-colored Youth Federation) were formed.
- Black-colored Youth Federation supported Keisei Train, Hitachi, and Nippon Gakki strikes.
- Black-colored Youth Federation united with the pro-anarchist unions around the country, organized Zenkoku Roudou Kumiai Jiyu Rengou Kai (Free Association of National Labor Unions), and published the organ of “**Free Association**” that had twenty-nine groups and 15760 members.
- Te-Gu incident happened by Korean anarchist group “Shin Yu Kai.”
- Worker-Farmers Party formed and soon split.

Shouwa — Death, Rebirth, and Whither Anarchism?

1927

- Free Association of National Labor Unions and Black-colored Youth Federation started campaign against Sacco and Vanzetti Death Penalty and also participated in the movement against the intervention in China.
- Black-colored Youth Federation formed Association for Farm Village Movement and published “**Kosakunin**” (**Tenant Farmers**).
- Iwasa, Ishikawa, Yamaga, and others went to the National University of Kouwan Labor Movement to give the series of lectures.

1925

- Japanese Workers Association finally split out.
- Anarchists demonstrated against the organization of Farmer-Workers Party. This demonstration led the formation of Kokusyoku Seinen Renmei (Black-colored Youth Federation) which consisted of seventeen anarchist groups in Kanto area and supporters from labor unions. Their organ **“Kokusyoku Seinen” (Black-colored Youth)** continued to be banned from publishing.
- The Universal Suffrage Act and Public Peace Act were established. The purpose of Public Peace Act was to suppress the radical movements. It banned organizations and movements which “tries to change the national polity and/or disapprove the private property.”
- Association for Japanese Proletariat Literary Arts was formed.
- Febian Association broke up because anarchists took it over.
- Kazuo Kato, Inosuke Nakanishi, and others established Noumin Jichi Kai (Farmers’ Autonomous Society).
- Hisataro Wada published, **“Facing the Death Penalty.”**

1926

- Black-colored Youth Federation held the first speech meeting. After the meeting, they demonstrated at the Ginza shopping street and broke windows. Seven people were arrested.

Taisho — Anarcho-syndicalism, Bolshevism and Massacre

1912

- Sakae Osugi and Kanson Arahata published a periodical **“Kindai Shiso”(Modern Thoughts)**. They held a gathering of “Kindai Shiso Sya” (Modern Thoughts Society). Osugi published several important theoretical papers including **“The Amplification of Ego”** and **“On Slavery Spirit.”**
- Bunji Suzuki and other fifteen people organized the Yuaikai (Friendship Society) and published the organ called Friendship News. At first, this society was more a spirit-relief and mind-cultivating group, but got more members of workers around Tokyo area later.

1913

- Osugi, Genjiro Muraki, Arahata, and others started a Syndicalism Study Group.
- Sansiro Ishikawa went to Europe.

1914

- Osugi and others ceased to publish **“Modern Thoughts,”** calling it “an intellectual masturbation” and started to publish **“The Commoners News”** for working people. They thoroughly criticized the First World War. However, except for the fourth issue, every issue was banned from publishing and this paper was finally discontinued.
- Friendship Society got more and more workers support and changed the name of the organ to **“Labor and Industry.”**

1915

- Osugi and others changed the name of “Syndicalism Study Group” to “The Commoners Lecture Meeting.”
- Osugi had an affair with Ichiko Kamichika.
- Seitaro Watanabe, Unosuke Hisaita, and others started “The Study Group” which also had an anarcho-syndicalistic tendency.
- Sakai and others published a periodical “**Shin Syakai**” (**The New Society**).
- Osugi and his comrades reissued the “**Modern Thoughts**.” However, every issue was banned from publishing and the magazine was discontinued.

1916

- The idea of democracy prospered.
- Osugi had an affair with Noe Ito who was an editor of Bluestocking. Mass media attacked Osugi, Ito, and Kamichika for their immorality.
- Hikage Teahouse Incident happened. Osugi was attacked with knife by one of his girlfriends, Kamichika and severely wounded. Many comrades left Osugi and Ito.
- Arahata also took leave from Osugi and published a periodical “**Roudou Kumiai**” (Labor Union).

1917

- A printing labor union, “Shinyukai” was organized.

- Osugi went to Europe to attend the International Anarchist Convention in Berlin.
- Japan Communist Party was formed illegally.

1923

- The third Labor Movements ceased to publish.
- Osugi made a speech at a May Day gathering in Paris, was arrested, and deported. He came back to Japan.
- Kanto great earthquake disaster. Suppression of Korean people and socialists started.
- 16 members of Korean anarchist group “Futei Sya” were arrested. Two of the members, Pak Yol and Fumiko Kaneko were sentenced to death (1926), being made up a false story that they were planning the murder of the Emperor.
- Osugi, Ito, and their nephew (only 6 years old) were killed by several members of military police.
- Daisuke Nanba shot Hirohito (the Emperor Shouwa) but missed. He was arrested and sentenced to death.
- Daijiro Furuta and others committed bank robbery to get the funds of Guillotine Society. They killed a bank clerk and 8 members were arrested, but Furuta run away.

1924

- Tetsu Nakahama and others attacked the president of Kanebo Co. and were arrested.
- Wada shot Masataro Fukuda, a general, to take revenge of Osugi’s murder, but missed and was arrested. Muraki and Furuta made bombs to assassinate Fukuda, but were arrested.

- Mitsubishi shipbuilding company dispute in Kawasaki happened.
- Kanson Arahata wrote “**The breakdown of syndicalism**” and became a Bolshevik.
- Osugi and comrades published the second Labor Movement with two Bolsheviks, Kei Ii (pseudonym of Eizou Kondo) and Masamichi Takatsu. Osugi still planned a joint struggle of anarchists and Bolsheviks on the journal. Several comrades such as Iwasa, Sukeo Miyajima, Heibei Takao, disappointed Osugi’s attitude and published “**Roudousya**” (**Workers**). Kei Ito betrayed Osugi’s trust and six months later, the second Labor Movement ceased to publish.
- Daijiro Furuta organized “Kosakuninsya”(Tenant Farmers Society).
- Takao, Kiichiro Wada, Sentaro Kitaura attended to Far East Ethnic Convention at Moscow.
- Around the end of the year, Osugi, Wada, Kondo and others published the third Labor Movement without Bolsheviks. Osugi rejected his idea of a joint struggle and thoroughly criticized Russian Revolution after Soviet oppressed Kronstadt Uprising and Makhnovist Movement.

1922

- “Zenkokoku Suiheisya” (National Levellers Society) was formed. More than 3000 Buraku people who have (still) been discriminated were gathered in Kyoto and adopted the “Manifesto of Levellers Society.”
- Tetsu Nakahama, Daijiro Furuta and others made their mind to be terrorists and organized Guillotine Society.

- Osugi, Hisataro Wada, and others started “Roudou Mondai Zadankai” (Labor Issue Discussion Meeting).
- Osugi divorced his wife, Yasuko Hori.
- Osugi and Ito published a periodical “**Bunmei Hihyo**” (**Critical Review of Civilization**). However, it ceased to publish after the third issue was banned to publish.
- Kanson Arahata, Hitoshi Yamakawa, and Seitaro Watanabe joined editing administration of a journal, **The New Society**. *
- General Strikes increased. 398 general strikes happened in this year.

1918

- Seitaro Watanabe died.
- “Study Group” and “Labor Issue Discussion Meeting” got together and became “Hokufukai” (Northern Wind Society) whose name came from Seitaro Watanabe’s pen name.
- Osugi, Wada, Hisaita, and their comrades published a periodical “**Roudou Shinbun**” (**Labor News**). Arahata, Yamakawa, Kenji Kondou and their comrades published “**Sei Fuku**” (**Blue Uniform**). However, both journals were banned from publishing.
- Friendship Society got thirty thousand members and 120 branches.
- 417 general strikes happened in this year.

1919

- Labor movements and socialist movements prospered. There were 71 labor unions this year.
- 497 general strikes happened. In Tokyo, sixteen newspaper-printing workers went on a general strike. This was the first strike of newspaper workers.
- Shinyu Kai (Tatuo Mizunuma and his comrades) acquired more anarchist tendency.
- Union of Newspaper workers organized the most radical labor union, Seisinkai (Kei Furukawa, Hono Watanuki and others) which also had an anarchist tendency.
- Taiji Yamaga and others were arrested when they published secretly the books of Kropotkin and Kotoku in Kyoto.
- Osugi, Wada, Kondo and Ito issued the first “**Roudou Undou**” (**Labor Movements**) and created the branches in Osaka (Wada, Naozo Itsumi), Nagoya (Eiji Igushi), Kobe (Hirokazu Yasutani), and Kyoto (Yoshiro Okuda) to appeal to the labor unions.
- Arahata helped Kinjiro Iwade to publish “**Nippon Roudou Shinbun**” (**Labor News in Japan**) which became the leading section of Kansai Left Labor Movements.

1920

- May Day was held in the outdoors for the first time. 5000 workers participated with red or black flags.
- “Roudou Kumiai Doumeikai” (Federation of Labor Unions) was formed.
- Universal suffrage movement reached the climax.

- The syndicalist tendency ruled the labor movements.
- The Association of Japanese Socialists was organized and published the house organ “**Syakaisyugi**” (**Socialism**) with the editor, Sakutaro Iwasa. This association was an joint struggle of anarchists and Bolsheviks.
- Freeman Association was formed by Kazuo Kato and others.
- The first “**Labor Movements**” ceased to publish.
- Osugi attended the convention for their Communist International for Far East Socialists. Osugi stuck to his anarchist position.
- Sanshiro Ishikawa returned from Europe.
- Tatsuo Morito who was an associate professor at Tokyo University, published “**A Study of Social Thoughts of Kropotkin**” in the first issue of a pure scholarly periodical, “**Journal of Economics**.” He was indicted, attacked by the rightist groups of the University, found guilty, and suspended.

1921

- Friendship Society changed the name to the Japanese Workers Association. While the workers in the Japanese Workers Association got more syndicalistic tendency, the leaders criticized it by saying “Go back to labor Union.” The chasm within the Association became deep.
- Japanese Workers Association clashed with anarchist unions during the May Day gathering.
- The Association for Japanese Socialists broke down due to the chasm between anarcho-syndicalists and Bolsheviks.