

Kotoku, Osugi, and Japanese Anarchism

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Contents

I	3
II	10

The first inspiration for Anarchism in Japan is said to have come from the assassination of the Russian Czar in 1881. It coincided with the rise of the Jiyu-Minken (Liberty and People's Rights) movement, and the ideal figure for Liberal extremists was said to be an assassin. In 1882 the 'Socialist Party of Far East,' itself a fleeting episode, appeared in Nagasaki and called itself the 'Nihilist party of Far East.' Its founder claimed that 'Nihilism...has been practised in Far East for five thousand years.' Kotoku once described the writings of Lao-Tse and even of Buddha as 'the most extreme books...of Anarchism.' Osugi himself, while he was in prison, read Lao-Tse as well as Kropotkin and Malatesta. Sanshiro Ishikawa, an Anarchist writer, later drew attention to the peculiarities of the way of thinking among the average Japanese, which he characterised as 'nihilistic unity,' saying that 'a rice riot breaks out...suddenly from the dreary world of negation and self-abnegation.' What these writers meant by Nihilism was deeply moral as well as mystic.¹ Indeed, Nihilism in Japan, as elsewhere, lacked a theory of society and social reconstruction and ought to be distinguished from Anarchism, but it had provided the moral basis upon which western Anarchism, when it was introduced, could grow and attract considerable attention. The following is an attempt to trace the lives of two prominent Anarchists, Kotoku and Osugi, and thereby to present a brief account of Japanese Anarchism during the Meiji-Taisho period.

I

Denjiro Kotoku (or Shusui by which name he is commonly known) was born in 1871, 4th year of Meiji, at Nakamura, a small town in Tosa. His father was a dealer in medicinal herbs and also a small brewer, but died shortly after he was born. His mother came from a lower samurai family. As a result he grew up as a boy sensitive to the distinction of feudal status.

Tosa was one of the four western clans which supplied the main driving forces of the Meiji Restoration. When in 1873 Itagaki and Goto, the representatives of Tosa in the central government, withdrew for patriotic reasons, it became a stronghold of the opposition to the central clan government and the tightening oligarchy of its bureaucrats. Thus began the movement for Jiyu-Minken demanding a representative government. Its main strength came from dissatisfied politicians and discontented samurais. Extremists among them often resorted to acts of violence and terrorism, and riots took place among the peasants and workmen who sought to redress their own grievances by joining the anti-government movement. Among them there were organized such bodies as the Tenants' party, the Poor Man's party, and even the Debtors' party. The cult of violence, however, was an old samurai tradition, and the peasant rioting had a long history of its own, though the extremists were certainly encouraged by the self-sacrificing deeds of the Russian Nihilists (or rather Populists). The young Kotoku became an ardent supporter of the Liberal party and admired Itagaki, its chief, who visited Nakamura for hunting at the time. Meanwhile, the destruction of his school by a typhoon left Kotoku without adequate means for education. Thus in September 1887 he went to Tokyo to attend a private school of English.

Kotoku, now at the age of 17, found himself in the midst of the public agitation for the abolition of what was generally regarded as unfair treaties with the western powers. The Jiyu-Minken Liberals demanded the 'revitalization of foreign policy' i.e. a vigorous and expansionist foreign policy, alleviation of the burden caused by the heavy land-tax, and freedom of speech. The gov-

¹ Sanshiro Ishikawa, *Horo Hachinen-ki (Eight Years of Wanderings)*, Tokyo 1922, 553; Kotoku in *Hikari (Light)*, 15 Dec. 1906; Osugi, *Works* (1926), IV, 398-9.

ernment answer was an intensification of its authoritarian rule: under the Peace Preservation Ordinance issued in December 1887, more than 500 radicals including Kotoku himself were ordered not to approach within seven miles of the Imperial Palace.

In November 1888 he moved to Osaka where he worked as a servant-student for Chomin Nakae, himself one of the deportees affected by this ordinance. Kotoku, trained as a good Confucianist, was devoted to his master as deeply as he was to his mother. Nakae, then 41 years old, came from a samurai family of Tosa. He had studied French at Nagasaki long before the Meiji Restoration, and in 1871, while serving in the Ministry of Justice, he was sent to France where his attention was attracted to the works of Enlightenment by Montesquieu, Voltaire and Rousseau. In 1878 Nakae, together with Prince Saionji, whom he had met in Paris, founded the *Toyo-Jiyu-Shinbun (Far Eastern Liberal Newspaper)* with the declared purpose of 'strengthening the right of liberty among the Japanese people and extending it to the rest of the Far Eastern countries.' Thereafter he became an ideologue of the Minken movement. With the promulgation of the Meiji Constitution in 1889, an amnesty was now granted to the former deportees, and Nakae, accompanied by his faithful disciple, returned to Tokyo.

In 1893 Kotoku was given through his master a job as a translator for the *Jiyu-Shinbun (Liberal Newspaper)*, the organ of the Liberal Party. In the following year, however, with the conclusion of a new treaty with Great Britain and the outbreak of war against China, the main source of Liberal grievances seemed to have gone. Kotoku, for some unknown reason, left the war-like Liberal newspaper in 1895, but still remained under Nakae's Liberal tutelage. He endeavoured to bring about unity of the two opposition parties, the Liberals and the Progressives, as the first step to destroy the clan government which was increasingly penetrated by business as well as military interests. In 1900 when the Liberal Party, now called the Constitutionalist Party (Kenseito), united with the followers of Ito, the clan politician responsible for the authoritarian constitution, and formed a new party called Rikken-Seiyukai or the Friends of Constitutional Politics, Kotoku wrote an article lamenting the death of the Liberal Party which, he said, was finally reduced to an ornament of its own enemy, autocracy.² This article also marked the end of Kotoku as a Liberal, and indeed he had already been attracted to a new political doctrine, Socialism, which seemed to him to provide more formidable weapons in his struggle against the government.

Interest among the intellectuals in social problems had been cultivated by various writers since the early 1880's. Yet the rise of any significant movement designed to take up the cause of the workers was delayed until after the rapid industrialisation following the Sino-Japanese war. In 1897 a 'Society for Promoting Trade Unions' was formed with several workmen trained in America as its nucleus, and soon succeeded in organizing the Union of Iron Workers, the first notable trade union in Japan. In the same year the Shakai-mondai Kenkyukai (Society for the Study of Social Problems) was founded by leading intellectuals of the day. Sen Katayama, a graduate of Yale University, who was under the influence of Richard Ely's moderate Socialism, played an active part in these two organisations. Kotoku, who was soon to become Katayama's rival in the Socialist movement, participated only in the latter, and in fact, his neglect of the trade union movement left its mark on his understanding of Socialism and Anarchism.

In the following year Kotoku gave a talk on 'the corruption of society' at a meeting of the Kenkyukai, now called the Society for the Study of Socialism. He emphasized the glaring distinction of wealth and poverty, quoting Henry George, and declared that 'great destruction and

² Shusui Kotoku, *Hyoron-to-Zuiso (Comments and Reflections)*, ed. by Hiromichi Kono Tokyo 1950 152-3.

great reform could only be achieved by a group of high-minded men of justice and benevolence (jinjin-gishi).³ Indeed he was approaching Socialism in terms not of working-class politics but of the self-sacrificing devotion of an idealist like those early Liberals who fought and died in their struggle against the dictatorial clan government. A keen sense of grudge and an urge for retaliation were indeed the main undercurrent that finally carried him to the shore of Anarchism.

In the same year Kotoku joined the staff of the *Yorozuchoho* (*Thousand Morning News*), edited by Ruiko Kuroiwa, a journalist of talent, and he wrote among others an eloquent article condemning war in reference to the Japanese expeditions to northern China in 1900. In 1901 he published his first book entitled *Nijusseiki-no-Kaibutsu. Teikokushugi* (*Imperialism, Monster of the Twentieth Century*). Kotoku, however, claimed no originality and made ample acknowledgements to such diverse writers as Tolstoy, Bebel and John Morley. Yet it was a monumental work in the history of Japanese Socialism, for it for the first time vigorously criticised Japanese imperialism as well as its western predecessors from the point of view of a revolutionary Socialist. The slogan of Son-no (Reverence for the Emperor), he declared, did very little to the advancement of civilisation and welfare in this country. He criticised militarism, saying that Count Yamagata, 'the Moltke of Far East,' should be remembered in the social and political history of Meiji only for his 'criminal intervention in elections' and his taking of bribes which was indeed scandalous. He was set against the boast of arms and the cult of conscription. The problem of poverty, he said, should be dealt with not as an excuse for emigration but as an issue of the economic system, and new markets should be sought for not overseas but within the nation. 'Let us start the movement for a world-wide revolution,' he declared: 'Let the state dominated by oligarchy be transformed into the state governed by the majority of the people. Let the state of the army and navy be replaced by the state of the farmers, artisans and traders. Let the society of aristocratic despotism be supplanted by the society of democratic autonomy. Let the society of capitalist oppression be changed into the society of common ownership by the workers. And the cause of justice and fraternity should triumph over narrow patriotism, scientific socialism should destroy barbarous militarism, and cosmopolitanism of brotherhood should expell and exterminate plundering imperialism.' Indeed, a motley of promiscuous ideas of liberalism, Socialism and Anarchism well served his purpose of challenging the authoritarian state dominated as it was by the triple alliance of aristocracy, militarism and capitalism.

In the previous year the government had issued the Security Police Act which severely restricted the sphere of collective bargaining. The demand for political action grew, and in 1901 the first Socialist party in Japan, the Shakai-Minshu-to (Social-Democratic Party) was formed with a view to abolishing the notorious act, legalizing trade unions, and obtaining universal suffrage. The abolition of armaments and class-system, and the public ownership of land and capital were included in its ultimate programme. Its six founders included Katayama and Kotoku who was still a good parliamentarian. Yet the party was immediately dissolved by the government. It was also in this period that Kotoku seriously studied Socialism, and the result was the publication of his book entitled *Shakaishugi-Shinzui* (*Quintessence of Socialism*) in 1903. His acknowledgements to Marx, Engels, Ely and W. Bliss again illustrated his eclecticism. Revolution, he said, was ordained by Heaven as a process of inevitable evolution which would lead to a co-operative commonwealth. His Confucianist as well as Socialist upbringing would account for this striking assertion.

³ *Yorozuchoho*, 18 Nov. 1898, quoted in Sogoro Tanaka, *Kotoku.-Shu.sui*, Tokyo 1955, 129–131.

As war with Russia became imminent, Kotoku, together with two of his colleagues in the *Yorozuchoho*, Toshihiko Sakai, formerly a school teacher, and Kanzo Uchimura, a Christian pacifist, started a vigorous campaign against war. As the editor decided to support war efforts, they withdrew, and in November 1903 Kotoku and Sakai with the support of the Society for the Study of Socialism started the weekly *Heimin-Shinbun* (*People's Newspaper*) with Democracy, Socialism and Pacifism as its slogans. In its issue of 13 March 1904, the *Heimin* published an appeal 'To the Socialists in Russia' and an English translation appeared in the following number: Dear comrades! it read: 'Your government and our government have plunged into fighting at last in order to satisfy their imperialistic desires, but to socialists there is no barrier of race, territory or nationality. We are comrades, brothers and sisters and have no reason to fight each other— But permit us to say a few words more. We are neither Nihilists nor Terrorist, but Social Democrats, and are always fighting for peace. We object absolutely to using military force in our fighting. We have to fight by peaceful means, by reason and speech. It may be very difficult for you to fight with speech and produce a revolution by peaceful means in Russia where there is no constitution, and consequently you may be tempted to overthrow the government by force. But those who are fighting for humanity must remember that the end does not justify the means.' These are courageous words indeed, and Kotoku and his colleagues were still under the illusion that they themselves could overthrow the authoritarian government by peaceful means. In the anniversary issue of the *Heimin* there appeared the first Japanese translation of *Communist Manifesto* which, according to Sakai, no Japanese Socialists had ever read in full. The paper was suppressed, and its last number printed in red came out in January 1905. The *Heimin* was immediately succeeded by a new weekly, the *Chokugen* (*Candid Word*), but Kotoku as the printing manager of the suppressed paper was sent to the Sugamo prison in February.

The last number of the *Heimin* had reported the outbreak of the Russian revolution of 1905 and in the same issue there was an article on Tolstoy and Kropotkin sent by a Japanese student studying in America. In prison Kotoku read Kropotkin's *Fields, Factories and Workshops* and other Anarchist and Atheist works, and naturally had opportunities to observe 'many of so-called "criminals" "I...became convinced,' he wrote to Albert Johnson, a veteran Anarchist in California: 'that the governmental institutions—court, law, prison are only responsible for them [criminals]—poverty and crime... Indeed, I had gone (to Sugamo Prison) as a Marxian Socialist and returned as a radical Anarchist.'⁴ He was also convinced that there was no other means to get freedom of speech and press than to quit the soil of the state of siege and go to a more civilised country,⁵ and left for America in November of the same year.

On his arrival at San Francisco he was welcomed by Johnson himself who introduced him to a cosmopolitan community of revolutionary Socialists and Anarchists. He was also visited by members of the Industrial Workers of the World (I.W.W.), the newly formed organization of industrial unionists. He came to know Emma Goldman's Anarchist newspaper *Mother Earth*. His conversion to Anarchism was complete. In April an earthquake and fire destroyed San Francisco, and Kotoku moved to Oakland where he organised a Social Revolutionary Party among the Japanese immigrants. Though he returned to Yokohama in June, the small revolutionary body in California grew increasingly militant, and distributed a leaflet called 'Assassination' among the Japanese residents on the emperor's birthday in the following year.

⁴ Kotoku to Johnson, 10 Aug. 1905, in Guy A. Aldred, *Pioneers of Anti-Parliamentarism*, Glasgow, 1940, 81–2.

⁵ Kotoku to Johnson, 11 Oct. 1905, *Ibid.*, 82.

In February 1906 when Kotoku was still in America, Sakai and his associates set up the Socialist Party of Japan, which under the moderate Saionji government, started its campaign to 'advocate Socialism within the limits of the law.' On his return from America Kotoku gave an address to his colleagues, advocating the General Strike as the only effective means for a social revolution. The shocked members of the party soon divided into two camps, commonly called 'soft' and 'hard.' As Katayama, the leader of the 'soft' faction, left for America at that time, Kotoku and his 'hard' supporters virtually controlled the organ of the party, the new daily *Heimin*. Moreover, the extensive and violent riot which broke out at the Ashio Copper mines in February 1907 only encouraged Kotoku as to the prospect of a direct action. Thus at the second party congress which was held in the same month, he and his followers successfully overcame criticisms from the parliamentarians. But within a few days, the party itself was suppressed, the daily *Heimin* issued its last number in April, and thereafter only the factional struggle of 'hard' and soft continued to simmer.

In June 1907, Unpei Morichika, an agricultural expert with Socialist sympathies, started the weekly *Osaka Heimin* at Osaka. In this paper Kotoku translated the resolutions passed at the Amsterdam International Anarchist Congress held in August, which approved of general strikes, armed insurrections and even terrorist actions. It has been said that a Japanese delegate attended this congress,⁶ though the fact does not appear to have been known to the Anarchists in Japan. A Japanese delegate, Tokijiro Kato, a doctor, who had been associated with the *Heimin* group, did attend the Stuttgart Congress of the Second International held in the same month, and he may have travelled from Stuttgart to Amsterdam. In the same month when Keir Hardie visited Japan on his way to India, Kotoku was very critical of what he called 'Hardie's State Socialism.'⁷

Meanwhile, Kotoku made contacts with Chinese and Indian nationalists living in Tokyo. He seems to have made some attempts to convert them to Anarchism. In August 1907, a Society for the Study of Socialism was set up by some of the Chinese students, and Kotoku was invited to speak at its inaugural meeting. 'The audience was about 90,' wrote Kotoku: 'I spoke on Libertarian Socialism for two hours. It is most hopeful that these Chinese are not content with their old slogans of People's rights and opposition to the Manchu dynasty and have made a step forward ... China is the Russia of Far East. Japan has become for China what Switzerland was for Russia, namely a training-school of young revolutionaries ... I believe, a Nihilist party would shortly make its appearance in China.'⁸ Revolutionary propaganda among the Russian prisoners of war had not only been tolerated but even encouraged by the government. A group of Russian revolutionaries, too, had sought refuge in Nagasaki. In March 1907 Kotoku received a letter from Kropotkin in which the veteran Anarchist asked him to distribute copies of his own Russian journal *Bread and Freedom* to the Russians in Japan. Again it is not known how Kotoku acted on Kropotkin's request. He was ill at the time and in October 1907 left for Nakamura, his native town in Kochi, to recuperate.

Indeed, Kotoku and his followers had fiercely attacked the parliamentarians, but within the 'hard' group itself little attention had been paid to the differences between various Anarchist doctrines and to the problem of applying them to the Japanese scene. The 'Japanese Socialist movement... shall now produce many, many Direct-Actionists, Anti-Militarists, General Strikers,

⁶ George Woodcock, *Anarchism*, 249.

⁷ *Osaka Heimin Shinbun*, 5 Sept. 1907.

⁸ *Osaka Heimin Shinbun*, 20 Sept. 1907.

and even Terrorists,' declared Kotoku in a letter to Johnson.⁹ He drew the same inspiration from the American I.W.W. and the French Syndicalists as from the terrorists of the Russian Social Revolutionary party who were not even Anarchists. Indeed, there was enough of inspiration, but little insight into the circumstances which had been responsible for any success attained by oversea Anarchists. Thus Kotoku, while he was absorbed in the work of popularizing the Anarchist faith, was carried away by the very force of circumstances until he found himself charged with high treason.

The first circumstance which conditioned his Anarchism was the absence of an effective trade union movement. In spite of sporadic strikes and riots, trade unionism had not taken roots among the workers, and the constant failure of organising attempts even led the optimist Katayama to the brink of desperation. Moreover, the Socialist and Anarchist propaganda made little progress, and the number of the convinced Socialists, according to the reports of the Police Headquarters, dwindled from about 3000 in 1904 to a mere handful of 532 in 1908. Apparently a general strike as the means for an Anarchist revolution was ruled out, and armed insurrections, too, appeared hopeless.

An incident which was to determine the course of Kotoku's Anarchism took place in June 1908. Some of his stalwarts including Osugi and his colleague Kanson Arahata, a selfeducated worker, started light-heartedly an offensive against the 'soft' faction, and red flags with the inscriptions of Anarchist Communism were displayed at a joint open-air rally which was held to welcome their mutual friend on his release from prison. The police attacked the rally and arrested Osugi, Arahata, Sakai and many others : most of them received brutal treatment. Kotoku, who was away in Kochi, was indignant. Urge for retaliation, the old samurai virtue, which had been a latent motive for his anti-government activities, now helped to strengthen the element of militancy in his Anarchist propaganda.

He left for Tokyo in July and on his way visited Seinosuke Oishi, a doctor, at Shingu,

Wakayama prefecture. Oishi was a graduate of the University of Oregon where he studied medicine. He later became a Socialist and assisted Kotoku financially on many occasions. Kotoku also visited Gudo Uchiyama, a Buddhist priest, at Hakone, who had a secret printing machine at his temple. In October, Uchiyama produced a pamphlet on 'Anarchist Communism' which criticised the Emperor system and urged the peasants to refuse military service and boycott the payment of rent and tax. Copies of this pamphlet were sent to several Anarchist sympathisers including Takichi Miyashita, an iron worker, who lived near Nagoya

at the time. Miyashita tried to distribute these among the crowd who came to have a glimpse of the Emperor at a near-by railway station while the living god was passing it at a high speed. Obviously very few took interest in his 'disloyal' appeal. Miyashita now made up his mind to assassinate the Emperor in order to show to his superstitious co-patriots that the object of their worship was merely an earthly being capable of bleeding.

Meanwhile in November, Oishi visited Kotoku in Tokyo and diagnosed his abdominal trouble which turned out to be tuberculosis. According to Oishi, Kotoku realised that he could not live long, and told the doctor that if he could muster 50 'determined men,' he would start an uprising, destroying government buildings, and expropriating millionaires for the benefit of the poor.¹⁰

⁹ Kotoku to Johnson, 6 Dec. 1907, Aldred. *op. cit.*, 84.

¹⁰ Shobei Shioda and Junzo Watanabe (ed.). *Daigyaku-Jiken (Treason Incident)*, Tokyo, 1959, Vol. II. 21-22, 44, 65. Kotoku stated to his lawyers that the words 'determined men' had been 'invented' by the prosecution. *Ibid.*, II. 180.

Kotoku's affirmation of these extremist tactics, however, ought to be read in its proper context. He did not propose to do what he stated. He only believed that the Government persecution of the Socialists as well as the economic depression at the time would one day necessitate determined action. But apparently he was getting impatient.

Another circumstance which would explain his increasing impatience was his love affair with Miss Suga Kanno, formerly a journalist and herself an ardent Socialist. She was one of those arrested at the Red Flag incident, and her appeal made on her release was 'Not Condolence but Retaliation.' Kotoku himself, however, had been a married man for ten years, while Suga was the acknowledged wife of Arahata who was then in prison. It is not surprising that Kotoku suddenly found himself alienated by most of his former colleagues who resented his attitude. He and Miss Kanno started a small journal called *Jiyu-shiso* (*Free Thought*) in May 1909, but the paper was suppressed in July. It appears that Kotoku was then more or less compelled to consider the possibilities of a revolutionary uprising. Earlier in the year he had met Miyashita, and according to Miss Kanno, he thought that with a terrorist like this man Japan would become somewhat like Russia.

Miyashita pursued his plan against the sovereign and concentrated on manufacturing a 'bomb.' He managed to obtain certain chemicals for his explosive weapons. To this daring scheme he soon secured the support of the three of Kotoku's confidants, Miss Kanno, Tadao Niimura, a Socialist journalist of peasant origin, and Rikisaku Furukawa, a gardener who co-operated in the ill-starred *Jiyu-shiso*. Kotoku at one stage did support Miyashita and his scheme and even took the trouble to get necessary informations for his 'bomb.' Miyashita had moved to a lumber-mill at Akeshina, Nagano prefecture, where his effort finally came to fruition. On the birth-day of the Emperor in November an experimental bomb exploded in a lonely valley near Matsumoto, but the sinister sound was soon muffled by the fireworks of festivities and was not detected.

It was at this stage that Kotoku became hesitant: he apparently had second thoughts. He thought of his aged mother and persuaded himself that he could serve the cause better as a writer than as a martyr. When he took part in a little exercise of throwing a bomb at his house, he appeared reluctant. It was decided by the rest of the group that Kotoku was to be 'spared' for the future advance of Japanese Anarchism. He withdrew from the plot, the details of which were earnestly discussed by the other four. Kotoku, for his part, started writing a new book entitled 'Elimination of Christ' at an inn at Yugawara near Hakone. He had been violently critical of the Christian religion in Japan. 'The most comical fact of the results of the late war,' he wrote shortly after the Russo-Japanese War, 'is the conciliation (or rather embrace) of Christianity with Buddhism and Shintoism ... Japanese Christianity, which was before the war the religion of the poor, literally now changed within only two years to a great bourgeois religion and a machine of the State and militarism!'¹¹ In his new book he sought to assert that Christ was 'a myth' and the Bible was 'forgery.'¹² His seclusion at Yugawara, however, did not last long.

In May 1910 the plot was suddenly frustrated. Miyashita had already been closely watched by the police, and through his fellow workman the nature of his activities was disclosed. Kotoku was arrested in June at his inn. Under the Government now led by the veteran clan politician Katsura, it was to be expected that the disclosure of the plot involving Kotoku was merely a prelude to a determined effort on the part of the prosecution to make it appear as a subversive nation-wide

¹¹ Kotoku to Johnson, 18 Dec. 1906, Aldred, *op. cit.*, 82-4.

¹² Kotoku to Johnson, 11 April 1910, *Ibid.* 84.

movement. Evidences given at the investigation were naturally twisted and garbled. Indeed, it was Anarchism as an ideology that was under trial. As a result, the leaders of three local Anarchist groups—Morichika and his Osaka group, Kumamoto Anarchists in Kyushu whose organ, the *Kumamoto Review* had kept close contact with Kotoku, and a Wakayama group who gathered around Oishi—were arrested. The emotional Kanno and the priest Uchiyama had already been put in prison for other offences. Altogether 26 persons were indicted. All but one were heimin, i.e. of non-samurai origin. Only two were classified as working-men, and there were 4 peasants, 3 artisans and 3 Buddhist priests, among others. Most of them were perhaps Anarchists of some kind, but there was no evidence for them to have conspired to commit high treason except four or five, namely Miyashita, Niimura, Furukawa, Miss Kanno, and possibly Kotoku himself. Their trial began in December in secret, and in January 1911, 24 were sentenced to death, of which 12 were commuted to imprisonment for life. The remaining 12 headed by Kotoku were executed in the same month.

The treason trial disclosed the nature of Anarchism as well as that of justice in Japan. Kotoku had been much influenced by Kropotkin and his Anarchist Communism and also by the I.W.W. and its revolutionary unionism, but when a handful of Japanese Anarchists under his inspiration took a fancy for direct action, they aimed not at the capitalist system itself or its agents but at the mythical symbol of the authoritarian clan government. After the ‘incident’ as it was called, the Socialist as well as Anarchist movement was dead for several years. It was Sakae Osugi, whom Kotoku called ‘my own brother’ that revived the Anarchist movement and sought to set it on a new footing when the time came. ‘Haru-Shigatsu, Kukuri-nokosare, Hana-ni mau’ (Spring has come and now April, I, left unchanged, dance in the blossoms)— this is a piece of Haiku Osugi wrote, for he had remained in prison long enough not to be involved in the alleged movement to overthrow the government.

II

Osugi was born in a family of considerable military distinction. His father, a native of Owari (Aichi-prefecture), was a graduate of the Military Academy. One of his uncles on his mother’s side was a Major-General, and the general’s son was later to distinguish himself as the commander of the Kyoto Division. Osugi was born in 1885 at Marugame in Shikoku, where his father was stationed at the time. Soon his family moved to Tokyo and thence to Shibata, regimental town in Niigata. When he was a school boy, he made an oath to help avenging the ‘national disgrace’ that had been widely felt at the intervention of Russia, France and Germany after the Sino-Japanese war. In 1899 he entered the Nagoya Cadet School where he was taught that Bushido was a philosophy of death, and he himself studied seriously how an ancient samurai had met his death. He was however reprimanded for a homosexual offence : as a result he suffered from neurosis accompanied with violent fits, and finally was ordered to leave the school. Osugi stayed at home for a while as an invalid, but soon persuaded his father that he should go to Tokyo to study foreign languages. Indeed a good knowledge of western languages was regarded among the military circle as one of the best qualifications for promotion. But ironically enough, it was also an asset with which one could seek prominence in the nascent Socialist movement.

He studied French at the Tokyo School of Foreign Languages for three years from 1903, but soon joined the anti-war movement of the Heimin group, introducing himself as ‘the son of a

murderer.' Indeed, he had been a failure in the world of rigid discipline and blind obedience, and he now admired Kotoku for his vigorous attack on war. The young rebel's earliest writings included an article entitled 'Shoot Those Who Order It' which was a brief summary of the anti-war movement in France.¹³ Thus his initiation into Anarchism was prepared by his anti-militarist agitation, which, however, meant a revolt against his own family. When he was in prison under the charge of 'collecting a dangerous mob,' he challenged his father who had come to see him: 'You are here with all your paternal authority and seeking to influence the thought of your son who has already taken responsibility for himself. This act of yours is indeed the greatest and gravest crime of all.' He wrote to Sakai from prison: 'Social revolution must start with family' which is 'the basis of our present society,' and 'I have already set fire on my family.'¹⁴

Meanwhile, the difference of opinion between the 'soft' and 'hard' factions of the Socialist party became serious. In the daily *Heimin* Osugi serialised an essay on the Socialist movement in Europe in which he declared that he himself came to believe in direct action by the workers as the only means for revolution. He was then fully engaged in his self-appointed task of publicising the works of Kropotkin: copies of *An Appeal to the Young* translated by him and printed by the Social Revolutionary Party in California were smuggled into Japan; he also translated *Conquest of Bread* and parts of Kropotkin's autobiography. 'For his age he was quite mature or perhaps premature in every respect, and his Anarchism was probably more advanced than Kotoku's,' recalled Hitoshi Yamakawa, a pioneer Socialist who had been a stalwart of the 'hard' faction.¹⁵

Osugi had been sent to prison on many occasions, and after the Red Flag incident he was given the hard sentence of two and a half years' imprisonment. He was sent to the newly built Chiba Prison. Indeed, prison became a university for him. From Chiba he wrote to his father, asking him for a considerable amount of money which would enable him to study 'the mutual relationships of three new sciences, biology, anthropology and sociology (which is quite distinct from Socialism).' His father refused, and it was his wife Yasuko Hori whom he had married in free love, who raised money for the books.

After the Treason 'incident' the history of Japanese Socialism entered a period often referred to as the 'dark age': any Socialist movement was indeed out of the question. Yet these were fruitful years for Osugi, for he was able to continue his study which he had started in prison, and publish its results in his new monthly journal *Kindai-shiso (Modern Thought)* founded in October 1912. In his articles he dealt mainly with the problems of Individualist Anarchism, Anarchist Communism, and Syndicalism, and in this he was closely following the development of Anarchism in Europe. At the same time, however, he shared with a contemporary group of literary men an idealist philosophy which was indigenous to Japan and which was concerned with such ideas as the perfection of one's self and the harmony of it with the universe. In an article entitled 'The Chain Factory,' Osugi summarised his views on Anarchism. It is true, he said, that the workers who are chained to their factory only produce their own chains. It is doubtful, however, that a new factory system free from chains could be obtained by sending workers' representatives to a parliament. The nature of a system which would come as the result of 'economic processes' depends largely upon 'an unknown factor' in man's reasoning, that is to say 'the development of life itself.' Osugi pinned his faith to 'the minority who would fight for the expansion of each one's self.'¹⁶ In his

¹³ *Hikari*, 5 March 1906.

¹⁴ Osugi, *Works IV*, 388–9.

¹⁵ Hitoshi Yamakawa, *Jiden (Autobiography)*, Tokyo 1961, 263–4.

¹⁶ *Kindai-shiso*, Sept. 1913.

opinion, even a strike of the workers was an act of ‘momentary supermen.’ It is apparent that he was also under the influence of Bergson and Sorel, Stirner and Nietzsche. Then he came across with the writings of the Populist leader Peter Lavrov. ‘Isolation is death,’ Osugi now declared. With this conviction he sought to go into the mass of the workers and published the new *Heimin-shinbun* of his own, ‘an organ of subversive class war’ as he called it, but the paper was immediately suppressed.

The outbreak of the European war and the attitude of the European Socialists to it brought him disillusionment. Moreover, the Japanese Socialists remained too powerless even to raise a feeble voice of protest. He, therefore, returned to his *Kindai-shiso* and wrote on the ‘philosophy of the labour movement’ which was an exposition of Syndicalism.¹⁷ A free man, he also declared, cannot be a slave of Marx or even of Kropotkin. Yet the paper suffered a heavy financial loss owing to frequent suppressions and was soon discontinued.

He had gradually alienated himself from his former colleagues who disliked his tendency towards irrationalism and hero-worship, and his isolation seemed almost complete when his experiments in free love caused a scandal. Osugi had appealed to his women readers to discard their ‘slave-like docility’ and ‘flee from the hands of those who trample on (them).’ In fact, two women fled and came to him: Ichiko Kamichika and Noe Ito, both regular contributors to the *Seito (Blue-Stocking)*, an organ of the ‘New Women’ movement in Japan. Miss Ito who had already been married approached Osugi with her own translation of Emma Goldman’s writings on women, while Miss Kamichika made personal contacts with him by attending his private classes for the study of French literature. There three made a curious

agreement that they should be left free on sexual matters, but should help each other on any question of money, and co-habitation should be recognised only as an exception. The result was calamitous : Osugi and Miss Ito lived together, while Miss Kamichika who alone had a stable job bore all the financial burdens. This led to the famous ‘Hayama incident’ in November 1916, when Osugi was stabbed by the unhappy girl at a tea-house at Hayama, a seaside resort near Tokyo, and narrowly escaped death. Indeed, what he called the development of his own life through free love ended in a tragic fiasco.

Meanwhile, Osugi and Miss Ito, now his wife, managed to start a new journal *Bunmei-hihyo (Criticism of Civilisation)* in January 1918, in which they advocated Syndicalism and even terrorism. ‘I love the spirit,’ he wrote, ‘but I hate an attempt to theorise the spirit, for the process of theorising generally involves conservative compromise with the realities ... I hate Socialism and even sometimes Anarchism as a theory ... What I like best is man’s blind action, an explosion of the spirit itself.’ ‘After all, life is a revenge,’ he said: ‘To live is to revenge oneself constantly upon those who stand in the way of one’s own living and development.’¹⁸ It was about this time that he moved to Kameido, the East End of Tokyo, in order to obtain ‘the sense of unity with the average working men.’

Osugi’s daring acts and heroic words had already gained him a number of followers. With them he now started a short-lived daily, the *Rodo-shinbun (Labour Newspaper)*, which was said to have reached a circulation of several thousands. The rapid expansion of industries during the European war and inspiration given by the Russian Revolution brought about the real awakening of the labour movement in Japan : the number of trade unions increased from 6 in 1914 to 187 in

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, Oct. 1915.

¹⁸ *Bunmei-hihyo*, Jan., Feb. 1918, reprinted in *Works* I, 618, II. 743.

1919 and 300 in 1921. The Bolshevik Revolution certainly encouraged a group of Marxists such as Sakai, Yamakawa, and Arahata, who with a new sense of urgency advocated a similar revolution for Japan. Osugi, too, supported the revolution for a while. His attitude to it was similar to his response to the Rice Riot which broke out in the summer of 1918: he remained an onlooker, expecting that these events would provide a moral atmosphere for the rise of Syndicalism in Japan. In this he was not mistaken. The Yuaikai (Friendly Society), a great union founded by a Christian Socialist, had become a fighting body. Even Syndicalist unions were organised among the printers and the newspaper men. In October 1919 Osugi started a new monthly the *Rodo-undo* (*Labour Movement*) and tried to direct the new union movement. It was a remarkable paper of its kind, but even here his favourite 'spirit' asserted itself. The labour movement, he said, was 'an attempt to regain one's self on the part of the working man' and 'the problem of life itself.'¹⁹ The commercial crisis in the spring of 1920 and a set-back suffered by the movement for universal suffrage at the time appeared to strengthen the Anarcho-Syndicalist elements in the trade union movement. The first May Day in Japan, which was celebrated in this year, was sponsored by the Syndicalist printers and newspaper-men.

Meanwhile, Osugi, having been persuaded to participate in an attempt to form a united Socialist party, suspended his journal *Rodo-undo*. He even accepted an invitation from the Comintern and in October 1920 made a trip to Shanghai, where he attended the conference of the Far Eastern Socialists. He met Chen Tu-Hsin of the Chinese Communist Party, Yo Woon Yong of the Korean nationalist movement and a Comintern representative, and conferred with them on the problem of forming a Communist party in Japan. It was finally arranged that on his return to Japan Osugi should start a militant Socialist newspaper with an appropriate Bolshevik as its editor, and he returned home with two thousands yen in his pocket. In December he took part in the formation of the Socialist League of Japan. This body, however, had nothing to do with the Comintern and merely embodied a kind of united front of progressive intellectuals, Socialists, pro-Bolsheviks and Anarcho-Syndicalists. After a brief existence, however, the League was suppressed in May 1921.

With the money from the Comintern, now Osugi started his second *Rodo-undo*, its editorial staff including a Bolshevik Eizo Kondo who had recently returned from New York where he had been an active member of a group of Japanese Communists. In its first issue of 29 January 1921 Osugi wrote on 'the Fate of Japan': 'Our country could do nothing about the so-called Boshevisation of Siberia ... the nationalist movement in Korea ... the rise of New China ... There is no doubt that Japan will soon have to fight against Russia, Korea, and China ... When war comes, and it will come probably within one year, then the fate of Japan will be decided... The split between the new Japanese and the old Japanese will then ... take place.' Shortly afterwards Osugi was taken to hospital for the treatment of typhoid, and consequently he was no longer able to control the paper sponsored by the Comintern. Kondo, one of the sub-editors, who apparently resented his chief's latent anti-Bolshevism, himself went over to Shanghai and obtained new funds. He was a careless and unscrupulous man, and was arrested by the police in Kyushu where he had been squandering some of the funds. With the exhaustion of the funds the second *Rodo-undo* came to an end in June.

With this unpleasant incident, the Anarchists parted company with the Bolsheviks. The latter somehow managed to keep in touch with the Comintern and formed the Communist Party of

¹⁹ *Rodo-undo*, Oct. 1919, June 1920.

Japan in the summer of 1922. Meanwhile, the trade union movement was recovering from the effects of the depression and made another attempt for unity of the front. In September 1922 the inaugural conference of the Rodo-kumiai-Sorengo (General Federation of Trade Unions) was held in Osaka. The Yuai-kai (now called the Rodo-so-domei or General Confederation of Labour) and its allies including the Communists supported the principle of centralised amalgamation, while the anti-Sodomei unions and the Anarcho-Syndicalists led by Osugi insisted on trade union autonomy and loose federation.²⁰ In the midst of a heated debate, however, the conference was declared illegal and ordered to disperse. In his third *Rodo-undo* Osugi once more asserted the principle of 'libertarian association' which was to 'foster in ourselves rudiments of our ideal society' by securing 'relative independence and freedom' to each trade union and each individual.²¹ After the Osaka conference, however, Syndicalism quickly lost its hold on trade unions.

It was about this time that Osugi received a letter of invitation to attend the International Anarchist Congress which was to be held in Berlin. In December 1922 he proceeded to Shanghai where he secured a false Chinese passport and sailed for Marseilles. He was perhaps too late for the congress which met on 22 December. In the following year he addressed a May Day meeting held in a northern suburb of Paris, where he was arrested. He was ordered to leave France and returned to Japan in July 1923.

In a letter he sent from Lyons to his wife, he wrote: 'I am still unable to decide whether I should work with the masses or carry on the purest Anarchist movement we have now.'²² Some of his followers had already been absorbed in the 'purest' movement, terrorism. In the summer of 1921, for instance, an active member of the 'Osugi clique' was secretly planning the assassination of the Prime Minister Hara. In September of that year, Zenjiro Yasuda, the head of the Yasuda zaibatsu was stabbed to death by an extreme nationalist, and in November Hara himself was murdered by a right-wing hothead who was only nineteen years old. Indeed, ultra-nationalists got the upperhand in acts of terrorism. Even so, Osugi was aware of the possibility of 'the second treason incident' in which his own followers would be involved. In fact, several of his confidants sought to assassinate the English Prince of Wales who visited Japan in 1922, and when they failed, they formed a secret society called the Girochinsha (Guillotine Society) with a view now to assassinating the heir apparent of Japan. Osugi probably had not made up his mind on the course of Anarchism for him to take, when he himself fell in the hands of the right-wing terrorists immediately after the Kanto earthquake.

On 16 September 1923 when the last tremors died down and the morbidly excited citizens of Tokyo seemed to be coming to their senses, Osugi, his wife Noe Ito, and his 7-years-old nephew, were kidnapped and murdered by Captain Amakasu and his men of the Military Police Force. Violence, however, did not end with his death. When his funeral was held in December, his ashes were snatched away by a right-wing firing squad. Anarchist terrorists, on their part, sought to revenge themselves for the murder of their chief, and several of them were arrested and executed.

Meanwhile, Captain Amakasu, who had been sentenced to ten years' imprisonment, was released after four years, later became a prominent leader in Manchukou, and committed suicide only in 1945. He was a graduate of the Nagoya Cadet School where Osugi himself had studied. It is indeed a curious coincidence that an ultra-nationalist and an Anarchist were both trained at

²⁰ *Kaizo*, Nov. 1922.

²¹ *Rodo-undo*, Jan. 1923.

²² *Works* IV, 522.

the same army school. But when we take into account the mystic ideas such as 'nihil,' 'fulness of life,' and 'superman' which characterised Osugi as a man of action and a thinker, the coincidence may not be altogether so curious.

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