

# **What kind of organization?**

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# Contents

The situation preceding JAF's demise in 1968 . . . . .	3
1. JAF's Political Failure . . . . .	3
2. The 'New Left' in Japan . . . . .	5
3. JAF's Death Agony . . . . .	7

One way or another, few anarchists in Japan these days are able to ignore the current debate over the need for a new national organization. The ball was first put into play two years ago by young Kyoto activists who then, last summer, suddenly issued a program and statement of principles for the new organization they advocated. The clearness with which these two drafts were set out suggested a great deal of preparation, and most people were taken by surprise. Once they recovered, however, the issue of anarchists' attitudes towards organization in no time became the central one within the Japanese movement. While not everyone supported the suggestion, few people were left untouched by the succession of arguments which exploded everywhere.

What was it that made young Japanese anarchists, almost without exception, throw themselves into this discussion despite the suddenness with which it emerged? The answer lies, beyond a doubt, in the current low ebb in anti-establishment activities in Japan, and the need which most people feel for a basic re-evaluation of the anarchist movement's fundamental tenets.

In the immediate aftermath of the voluntary dissolution of the Japan Anarchist Federation (JAF) in 1968, discussion of forming a new national organization was sporadic and uncoordinated. Once the heady days of the late 60s / early 70s passed, however, and the anarchists entered upon a period of circumspection - the "period of winter", as they call it - voices again began to be heard urging the rebuilding of group relations: in particular, the reconstruction of the national federation. The realization that the "summer" had not been fully exploited (see below) made these voices the more strident.

At the centre of the new movement were the 'Japan Anarchists' League Preparatory Committees' in the Tokyo, Nagoya, and Kansai (Kobe-Osaka-Kyoto) districts. Their minimum suggestions were, first, concrete contacts between Tokyo and the provinces; and second, a national information centre.

In this three-part article we'll summarize the proposals of the Preparatory committees and the criticisms that have been made of them, describe the progress of the new movement to date, and finally add some notes of our own. First of all, however, in this first part it'd be useful to look back briefly at conditions before and after 1968, for the arguments surrounding the recent revival of the national federation issue can be said to date back to JAF's self-dissolution in that year. Hence the main theme of the arguments coming from the preparatory committees has been the old JAF and the situation which it left in the wake of its disappearance.

## **The situation preceding JAF's demise in 1968**

### **1. JAF's Political Failure**

The best English-language source on the recent circumstances of the anarchist movement in Japan is Tsuzuki Chushichi's article 'Anarchism in Japan' in Apter & Joll's *Anarchism Today* (see 'Now Read On...' in this issue). The paper is brief and to the point, especially in its evaluation of the post-war movement. After quickly dealing with pre-war conditions, Professor Tsuzuki then focuses on the anti-war activities launched by students and local citizens' groups all over Japan in the 60s and 70s. In particular, he makes the important point that, while these did not call themselves anarchist movements, they should be recognized as having been highly anarchistic in their aims and methods. In choosing to lay the stress on this area, Tsuzuki accurately reflects the post-war development of the Japanese anarchist movement.

After the war, Japanese Marxists, skillfully riding the waves of 'Potsdam Democracy', succeeded in seizing the lead of the labour and social movements, and quickly turned them to their own purposes. The anarchists, meanwhile, missed the bus, failed utterly to expand their support, and never neared achieving anything which might truthfully have been called a real movement. Despite the vigorousness of the labour and student movements in those early years, very few anarchists took an active part, and it must be confessed that what few activities they did promote were largely ineffectual. The one exception was their work in the pacifist movement - such as the Japanese branch of War Resisters International - yet this bore little relation to the dominant trends of the time.

JAF, for its own part, concentrated on putting out its bulletins, and one would have been hard-put to pinpoint any concrete activities amongst its isolated and scattered groups of members (except however, for a few in the Tokyo, Nagoya and Kansai regions). Meanwhile, social conditions in Japan, and the overall trend of the Left in general, were changing dramatically.

In common with developments in the rest of the world, the violent confrontation policy of the Japan Communist Party's (JCP) immediate post-war days was bankrupted by the events in Hungary in 1956 and the international criticism of Stalinism which followed. The myth of the CP as the pre-ordained vanguard of the revolution crashed. The effect on Party members and on the Japanese Left in general was catastrophic. The first indication of the new state of affairs was the eruption in 1960 of the AMPO (Amerika-Japan Joint Security Treaty) struggle - the first great popular outburst in post-war Japan.

JAF, unlike most other revolutionary organizations, was left far behind by the rapidly accelerating rate of change. For the anarchists, this new criticism of Stalinism was already a fundamental part of their programme. The repression in Hungary should merely have confirmed their arguments: the opportunity was a golden one, but did they exploit it? Far from it - JAF completely underestimated the traumas which the events had sparked off among the Marxists. As a result, when the anti-AMPO struggle broke out, JAF took no part, and members ignored it as they threw themselves into their own local activities.

Criticism of JAF's obvious impotence began almost at once. "JAF is just another group; while it may claim national boundaries, it has absolutely no meaning as a federation. We should concentrate on our own local activities and ignore it." Views of this sort were commonly held - particularly among the Kansai members - and were voiced as early as the autumn of 1953 in a speech entitled 'On Rebuilding the Federation, and the Present State of the Movement', delivered to that year's National Conference by the delegate Yamaguchi:

"We have an elaborate programme for current activities, but have never considered how to put it into practice. We have an ideal set of principles, but they remain unrealized. We have a few members dotted around the country - most are simply names on the register who make no real contribution; others are just sympathizer types, whose allegiance we can never rely on. Then there are a few "old" anarchists who, if you run across them, give you a little money "for the cause" and chat a bit, and finally the young ones who, no sooner than they become members, withdraw again. With only these people to call upon, cooperation between local branches has become comatose. Instead, we have a few scattered efforts, and that's the lot.

”On the positive side then, what do we have? Well, we have an irregular bulletin, *Anakizumu*; and then we have sporadic, unplanned meetings which nobody pays much attention to...”

While JAF thus amounted to little more than a political contemplation circle, there were in fact some who wanted to make it into something more, such as the same delegate Yamaguchi:

”Since the federation is no more than a circle, why don’t we just face facts and re-organize it accordingly? I don’t mean that we should destroy the federation - it is what it is, so we simply acknowledge the truth by changing both the form of the organization and our own attitudes accordingly. We have three tasks: number one, to face the facts; number two, on the basis of these facts, to make a clear-cut decision as to what direction we want to go in; and number three, after considering concrete measures to take us in that direction, to agree amongst ourselves to concentrate the strength of all members of the federation to implement those measures.” [quoted in Mukai Ko” *Yamaga Taiji*, p 1771]

Consequently, in 1962, just as people were beginning to assess the meaning of the now-finished anti-AMPO struggle, JAF at last amended its principles to state specifically: ”JAF is not a movement organization”, but a ”study group on theory and ideology”. Few practical changes followed, however, as this merely made the name fit the facts.

On the other hand, unforeseen consequences were to follow. What - the principles it laid down for itself, just the name ’Japan Anarchist Federation’ gave the impression of a revolutionary organization engaged in practical and useful activities. Hence many young people drawn to it for this reason were quickly disillusioned. Behind the decision to turn the federation into a pure study group had been the desire to prevent disillusionment with the federation by reducing the gap between theory and practice. By retaining the name ’Anarchist Federation’, however, the effect was to destroy people’s faith in anarchism itself, as well as in JAF.

## 2. The ’New Left’ in Japan

The 1960-1970 period witnessed a new flowering within the anti-establishment movement of the Japanese Left. Most significant was the growth in the late 60s of the ’non-sect radicals’ - anti-Stalinist militants opposed to the hegemony of the JCP. This was the principal factor distinguishing the first anti-AMPO struggle, peaking in 1960 - which was led for the most part by the established (ie, JCP-dominated) Left - from the second, aimed at preventing the renewal of the Treaty in 1970. In fact, this second phase was no more than one aspect of a broad popular movement emerging simultaneously on several fronts.

The movement at that time comprised a union of students, particularly the non-JCP radicals, under the banner of the ’Students’ Joint Struggle Committee’ (*Zenkyōtō*), and the group representative of the anti-war sentiments strong among the Japanese people, the ’Citizens’ Committee for Peace in Vietnam’ (*Beheiren*). The students’ tactic, that of making each university a separate ”storm centre” of the revolutionary struggle, had a great effect, one which continues to this day even though the movement itself has entered a quiet phase.

## BEHEIREN

In the mid- to late 60s, Beheiren groups were born all over the country, and immediately began to initiate local struggles to eradicate local grievances through their own efforts. While they recognized, people like Oda Makoto, the first to advocate a citizens' movement, as their theoretical and practical leaders, this anti-war, anti-JCP popular movement was certainly not one to allow itself to be led by the nose. It was a genuine social movement capable of drawing in all people living in Japan, free of domination by either the labour movement or the students.

'Citizens' group' was simply a generic term to apply to a whole multitude of spontaneous popular activities. When activists decided to come together to give their spontaneity some kind of "movement form", therefore, the idea of an 'organization' was strongly resisted. "Beheiren is born when we ourselves declare it so!"; "Not an organization, but a movement!" Consequently, Beheiren existed so long as there was an active movement involving its members in their own local struggles. Since that movement has itself disappeared because of the new conditions in Indochina, Beheiren too has been dissolved.

Beheiren was like a breath of fresh air to the Japanese Left, its style something completely new in the history of popular movements in Japan. In its dependence upon horizontal relationships, based on a nationwide mutual consciousness of solidarity in the same struggle, it was a manifest criticism of the centralized organizations hitherto dominant on the left. In the *Beheiren* movement, we caught a glimpse of the kind of solidarity which only a free federation could achieve.

The characteristics of the *Beheiren* movement may be listed as follows:

1. Rejecting the 'leaders and led' syndrome, it stressed the spontaneity of individual groups;
2. Once the movement's aims had been clearly set out, any political tendency was acceptable on condition that it contributed to these aims, and did not seek to coerce others' acceptance of its own premises. Consequently, *Beheiren* activists included Marxists, anarchists, social democrats, liberals, and all the shades in between.
3. A positive appeal was made to people who belonged to no organization, and who had hitherto been denied a chance to take part in any activity.
4. The concept of 'organization' was rejected in favour of that of 'movement'. As noted before, this amounted to a rejection of the centralized power structure common to most Left groupings in the past.

## ZENKYŌTŌ

Japan was no exception to the ferment which hit the world's universities following the 1968 May Days in Paris, and the non-sect radicals played a major role. Although the alliance later degenerated into a struggle for hegemony over the student movement, in the beginning these groups placed a premium upon spontaneous activity. The organization which they created, *Zenkyōtō*, constituted a major revolt against the establishment, and it is significant that the most violent attacks on the new style, physical as well as political, were launched by the JCP-oriented section of the students (known as Minsei). This period of student rebellion is usually referred to as the "*Zenkyōtō* Movement".

*Zenkyōtō*, with branches in every university, rebelled specifically and violently against the university authorities. From here, the struggle exploded naturally and simultaneously against the authority of the Japanese system itself. The solidarity created by the realization of a common aim was the strongest characteristic of the *Zenkyōtō* Movement. In the most popular slogan of the time "Strength in Solidarity, Without Fear of Isolation" - can be seen the all-important combination: self-reliance and determination, and the knowledge of complete solidarity within the movement. In short, the characteristics which we already noted as typical of *Beheiren*, were equally representative of *Zenkyōtō*.<sup>1</sup>

In terms of political results, these two movements, *Beheiren* and *Zenkyōtō*, achieved little. However, what they did achieve was something far greater - through their concrete activities and agitation, they played an immeasurable educative role which affected not only those taking part, but also the consciousness of vast numbers of people throughout Japan. This effect can now be seen in the multitude of anti-pollution, anti-inflation, anti-war and other groups existing all over the country. Practically every issue, however minor, is capable of giving rise to a new citizens' group.

The conditions of the time were a thorough exoneration of anarchist theory. In fact, one could say that, for a time, to use a time-worn phrase, "anarchy prevailed". There was a general tendency to look beyond Marx to explain the theoretical meaning of this multi-centred, spontaneous movement. So fertile was the soil at this time! The only problem for the anarchists was that, while this great upsurge was taking place, JAF was nowhere to be seen.

### 3. JAF's Death Agony

In the late 60s, 'Anarchism Study Groups' had sprung up in practically every university of Japan. Members took an active part in the *Zenkyōtō* Movement, gaining a reputation as the 'Black Helmet Brigade' (although, since they generally abstained from the kind of street-fighting designed to enhance one's own group's position as ideological standard-bearer of the Left, they did not receive the international acclaim that many of the quasi-Trotskyist factions did).

JAF was way out of line with all this activity. Most members of the federation simply forgot it as they got on with their own thing. JAF therefore found itself stranded - both by the movement itself and by the rapidly-changing social situation. Subsequently observing the difficulty of raising any enthusiasm in its ideology study groups, and seeing its mutual contacts with local groups falling off, JAF, via a succession of self-critical reviews (an anachronistic occupation at the time, for a start!), gradually began to get the message.

At the same time, however, the attitude towards it of anarchist activists also began to harden. From "the movement can get along fine without a national federation", the general feeling turned to "this national federation is a positive hindrance to the movement!" The final breakdown came as a result of the crack which yawned within the federation itself over the *Haihansha* (Society of Rebels) Incident. This was a raid on a Nagoya factory carried out in the name of the anti-war movement by a small anarchist group affiliated to JAF. From this incident may be dated JAF's last days. In 1968, at long last, it resolved upon voluntary dissolution. The last issue of its bulletin, *Free*

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<sup>1</sup> "Zenkyōtō" should not be confused with "Zengakuren," the National Union of Japanese Students, which was a child of the 60s and played no role in this new struggle. Although it continued in name, after the first anti-AMPO struggle ended in defeat, its organization was fragmented and fell apart. Moreover, while Zengakuren was a single organization, Zenkyōtō should rightly be regarded as a movement.

*Federation* (Jiyū Rengo), which appeared in January 1969, announced the move as "progressive dissolution", and even as "deployment in the face of the enemy". Be that as it may, JAF, in 1968, finally acknowledged what had been the truth since the early 60's, and voluntarily put an end to itself. Ironically enough, this ignominious end came at the peak of a new upsurge in the anarchist movement, and amongst increasing activity by the "new" anarchists. As for the reasons for JAF's demise, only now, midway through the 70's, is the work of evaluation beginning.

The Japan Anarchist Federation (JAF) dissolved itself in 1968. In the words of its dissolution manifesto, the move was a "deployment in the face of the enemy." Social conditions were heading for a new high point, and all sorts of new social movements were being born. JAF's decision to deploy was thus based on the expectation of a re-birth (of the anarchist movement, that is) in the midst of this refreshing atmosphere. What it amounted to was, in fact, JAF's admission of failure to relate to people as it was currently constituted.

Of these new social movements, two are most worthy of notice. One was the student rebellion (Zenkyōtō), a link in the world-wide chain of student outbursts of the late 60s. The other was Beheiren (see part 1), a movement which denounced the rape of, Vietnam by U.S. imperialism and the Japanese government's complicity therein. Although with the subsequent lapse of the overall social movement into a "quiet" phase, the former fell into the hands of the so-called "New Left" Marxist-Leninist sects, both Beheiren and Zenkyōtō were once distinguishable by their reliance on individual spontaneity.

Neither of the two were movements of anarchists, nor did either of them profess anarchist beliefs. Truth to say, very few people involved made the connection between their activities and "anarchist" ones. In any case, the nature of the two movements made such distinctions irrelevant. When a movement is prospering, and in practical terms moving towards the realization of anarchy, not only do such arguments and false distinctions not arise, there is no time even for debating them.

Overall, conditions at the time were very close to the theoretical projections of anarchism. That is, the movement seemed to be heading towards a state of anarchy, to judge from the attitudes and actions of its participants. Even the mass media were forced to confess that the revolutionary doctrine of anarchy, so long hidden under the shadow of Marxism, had been rediscovered. For the first time, reflected in the mass media as well as in general publishing activities, anarchism began to receive the serious attention it deserved. For example, it was at this time that Daniel Guerin's *Anarchism* was published and attracted a wide readership, to be followed by a spate of publications concerning anarchism. The appearance of Guerin's book marked the first time since the war that the ideas of anarchism had been made available in a genuine, complete, compact and, moreover, cheap form. For many young Japanese, I think, this book worked as an introductory course to anarchism.

With the popular movement at its height, interest in anarchism was widespread, and many "new" anarchists were appearing. The problem was, to what extent were the anarchists themselves able to grasp the significance of the fact that many people were becoming acquainted with anarchism through a movement which was developing, by and large, independent of the anarchists? Frankly speaking, not well enough, though some people admittedly worked hard to realize their proposals for restructuring anarchist theory to suit the changing social conditions and to anticipate future developments.

Even after JAF's dissolution, local anarchists continued to form their own groups and engage in local activities as before. For some, indeed, it could even be said that the end of JAF offered a fresh

opportunity for action. Apart from the anarchism study circles up and down the country, other groups which immediately spring to mind are the Mugi Sha (Barley Society - so named because the character used to transliterate the "ba" of "Bakunin" into Japanese means literally "barley") and the Libertaire group in Tokyo; the Rebel Association (Futei Sha), Osaka Anarchism Study Society and Kyoto Anarchism Study Society, both in Kansai; and the Liberty and the Pale Horse Society groups in northern Japan. There must surely have been many more than that which we don't know about. Most of them seem to have been small. The biggest was the Libertaire group in Tokyo, still active today, holding regular meetings and putting out a small magazine, Libertaire (in Japanese). However, one more group which formed at this time demands attention. This comprised the people who formed around the monthly Osaka publication *Jiyū Rengō* (*Free Federation*).

The Osaka *Jiyū Rengō* published its first "preparatory issue" on March 10, 1969, and ceased publication 3 1/2 years later on October 15, 1972. Circulation grew from 1000 at the outset, through 1800 a year later, to 2500 when publication ceased. The regular readership also grew, from 800 after the first year to 1800 at the end. While many of the readers lived either in Tokyo or in the Kyoto-Osaka-Kobe areas, distribution was nationwide. In social terms, while a large proportion of the readership naturally comprised young people and students, in fact there was a very broad mix. Space does not allow a detailed examination of the part played by the Osaka *Jiyū Rengō*. What follows are just the impressions left by its most outstanding features.

In the first place, it should be pointed out that the Osaka *Jiyū Rengō* took its name from that of an earlier JAF broadsheet of the same name. However, as the *Osaka Jiren* (we use this abbreviation to distinguish it from the JAF paper, which was usually known as *Jiren*) stated time and time again, while it retained the name of the JAF paper, it was not the organ of any one group. Instead, it insisted, by paying for the paper through taking out subscriptions the readership was expressing and concretely proving its "sincere desire to create a free federation within the movement." Thus was a new kind of managerial form created. The idea which its title suggested, of an anarchist organ, was wrong.

"Through this paper we are aiming at a broad, anti-establishment, free-federated movement, including but not restricted to anarchists. This is because we believe that, above all else, the complete equality of every movement, joined together in a federation allowing complete freedom of action, is essential if the present anti-establishment struggle is to wage a successful fight.

"Jiren must at all times correspond to actual conditions. The idea of a 'free federation' with no relationship to current conditions is simply nonsense. This is why the backbone of Jiren is on-the-spot, subjective reports from actual participants in concrete struggles." (No. 13, 20/3/70)

In other words, what the *Osaka Jiren* was aiming at was to encourage awareness that the kind of organizational forms then being created within the Beheiren and Zenkyōtō movements amounted to free federation forms. For this purpose, it would provide an open forum and a meeting place for people actually involved in these struggles. While anticipating that it would be confused with the old JAF Jiyu Rengo, the Osaka Jiren insisted that the name was simply the most appropriate to express the position of the Osaka group. So the question which cropped up over and over again during the 3 1/2 years of the paper's life was: What is a free federation?

As the above quote made clear, *Osaka Jiren* did not want to be labelled an anarchist paper produced by anarchists, and deliberately assumed a posture which rejected such a position. For outsiders this must have seemed a highly curious situation. The paper was rich in information about anarchism and news of anarchist groups - in fact it was the only national outlet for such material. For people trying to find out more about anarchism (as we said, great numbers of young people were then turning on to anarchism), and for the anarchists themselves, there was simply no other source covering the whole country. Hence the impression of an "anarchist monthly" which *Osaka Jiren* gave was quite inevitable.

Nevertheless, the paper rejected the strict anarchist standpoint, on the grounds that it sought to create a much broader-based, federated social movement. For the establishment of the "open forum" envisaged by *Osaka Jiren*, its members felt that to accept the label of "anarchists" would have been a hindrance.

That they were reasonably successful in this attempt can be seen from the figures for circulation and subscription. Very few other libertarian papers went beyond the groups which published them, and almost all circulated only in a limited area. For people without a strong interest in anarchism, they were extremely boring and suggested a closed shop. *Osaka Jiren*, on the other hand, was somewhat different. The "liberated" impression which it gave was largely due to its attempts to break away from the anarchist framework. Its subscribers, scattered all over the country, and including senior and middle-school students and many non-anarchists, were the measure of its success.

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