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# Anarchist Communism and Leadership

The Case of Iwasa Sakutaro

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*Nihon Anakisuto Kurabu Kikanshi* Tokyo: Kokushoku Sensen Sha,  
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Iwasa's day to offer themselves for conversion into the communes favoured by anarchist communists, it has created a highly educated and accomplished population who are demonstrably far removed from the condition described by Confucius: 'the common people can be made to follow a path but not to understand it'. (Confucius 1979: viii, 9) Capitalist development has undermined the need for leadership and this should be particularly apparent to those, like anarchist communists, who wish to transcend capitalism.

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Iwasa Sakutaro (1879–1967) possessed many of the qualities which make for a successful Japanese politician. First, he was long-lived, being 87 at the time when he died. Second, he enjoyed robust health throughout his long life and retained his vitality almost to the end. Third, he was highly educated by the standards of his day, having graduated from Tokyo Law College (*Tokyo Hogakuin* – the forerunner of Chuo University) in 1898. Fourth, he came from an affluent background, being the son of a wealthy farmer. Fifth, he was well-connected; as a young man he lodged with and was tutored by some of the leading scholars of the time, whose houses were frequented by powerful members of the Meiji elite, such as Yamagata Aritomo. (Noguchi 1931: 161) Sixth, he was naturally gregarious, thriving on human contact and being a skilled conversationalist. Seventh, as a young man he was ambitious and had a keen desire to become a politician in order to improve Japanese society. Eighth, without making any special effort, he inspired respect from those around him, so much so that from the age of 25 or 26 he was already known as *Iwasa Ro* (literally, 'the aged Iwasa'), a respectful term which Japanese are inclined to employ when referring to venerable scholars or elder statesmen. (Museifushugi Undo 10 April 1967: 3) Finally, he had a breadth of international experience which was unusual for the time, having spent thirteen years in the USA between 1901 and 1914.

Many Japanese politicians have achieved success with far fewer attributes than these. For a single individual to have possessed so many advantages indicates an unusual convergence of good fortune and talent in the case of the young Iwasa. Yet possession of these advantages was to bring anything but success for him. As his life unfolded, it became a long history of setbacks, persecution and frustration, all connected with the fact that the road which Iwasa chose to walk was the path of anarchist communism. If one analyses the reasons for Iwasa's lack of worldly success, one can see that the roots of this were twofold. On the one hand, anarchist

communism threatened all the foundations on which the modern Japanese state rested. It rejected the capitalist system of producing and distributing wealth; it opposed militarization internally and imperialist expansion externally; and it challenged status and hierarchy within society, symbolized above all by the existence of the Emperor. With goals such as these, which subverted the very bases of the existing system, Iwasa and his comrades brought down on their heads the unbridled hostility of the state. On the other hand, although being advantageously placed for launching himself into a career as a political leader, Iwasa refused to play the game by the rules of conventional leadership. He made no promises to people, neither sought nor offered patronage, had no interest in acquiring power and did not pursue personal advantage.

Despite this, it would be quite wrong to imagine that Iwasa rejected leadership in any shape or form. As we shall see, he regarded the anarchist communists as an intellectual vanguard and believed that they had an exemplary function to fulfil as challengers of authority. What he was at pains to emphasise, however, was that undertaking such roles held no promise of either fame or material reward for the anarchist communists. On the contrary, by questioning the dominant values of society and challenging the existing power structures, anarchist communists exposed themselves to ridicule, danger and often thankless toil. Iwasa's own life provided ample evidence of this. To take just one example, even in his sixties and seventies, at a time of life when conventional politicians would be devoting their energy to wheeling and dealing in the backrooms of the Diet or in the luxurious surroundings provided by expensive restaurants and hotels, Iwasa was still walking the streets, with a signboard slung round his neck, selling unpopular journals. (Museum Undo 10 April 1967: 3) It was his engaging in activity such as this, which was so conspicuously at odds with the conventions of mainstream politics, that enables us to say that Iwasa was an anarchist communist leader who refused to lead in any sense that the word is conventionally understood.

grass. Let the wind blow over the grass and it is sure to bend. (Confucius 1979: xii, 19)

Out of this Confucian prescription for good government, Iwasa excised government itself and its attendant implications, such as a naturally hierarchical social order. What he retained was the basic division between a minority of 'gentlemen' (in his case, the anarchist communist revolutionaries) and the majority of 'small persons' (in his case, the masses of working men and women) at least for the duration of the revolutionary process which was expected to bring about anarchist communism. The drawbacks of this approach were twofold. First, it relied on the revolutionary minority not harbouring 'any sinister designs'. That Iwasa himself was free of such self-serving ambitions seems obvious enough from the foregoing account, but the same cannot be said of numerous other revolutionaries who, at different times and places, have appointed themselves to lead the masses to the promised land. Requiring the masses to trust the good intentions of their leaders is a strategy fraught with peril, as history has repeatedly shown. Second, as was mentioned earlier, there is a fundamental contradiction in relying on leaders (even anarchist communist leaders) to achieve the leaderless condition of anarchist communism. For that reason, Iwasa should have recognized that Confucianism is not adaptable for anarchist communist purposes. To stick to the Confucian metaphor, for anarchist communism to come about, it would take more than the wind to bend the grass. Wind and grass would have to become one; the masses would have to be anarchist communists. In Iwasa's day, this no doubt seemed virtually as improbable as it would have been 2,500 years earlier in the time of Confucius himself, since society remained composed very largely of ignorant peasants, with little education, a narrow range of experience and poorly developed conceptual powers. In the light of this, the post-war development of capitalism in Japan has brought mixed blessings. While it has destroyed so many of the rural communities which seemed in

Whatever the period, whatever the world of that time, these people equipped with initiatives and proposals are a minority. Furthermore, this minority are anonymous people (*mumei no hitobito*)! In the era of revolution which is coming, they will certainly be a minority and they will equally be anonymous. (Iwasa 1982:137)

Why, in Iwasa's estimation, was this minority of anarchist communists so important? Essentially, the answer was that he believed they would think through, refine, and articulate in more systematic and therefore attractive form, the inchoate aspirations of the masses, who were assumed to be incapable of doing so themselves. Iwasa wrote:

If this minority of anonymous people can make their ideas, in other words their initiatives and plans, coincide with the hopes and demands of the masses, and if without any sinister designs they are inspired by great ideals, the masses will not desert them. (Iwasa 1982:138)

To this he added, in a passage which conveyed both his basic assumptions and the influences acting on him:

The people with initiatives and plans are the wind. The masses are just like the grass. The grass will bend with the wind. (Iwasa 1982:138)

The parallel here with Confucius' teaching in the *Analects* is striking. Confucius is reported as having said:

In administering your government, what need is there for you to kill? Just desire the good yourself and the common people will be good. The virtue of the gentleman is like wind; the virtue of the small person is like

Nevertheless, this paper will also take the opportunity to question the residual form of leadership which Iwasa did attribute to anarchist communists. Iwasa understood perfectly well that anarchist communism was an alternative form of society which, by virtue of abolishing the state and holding wealth communally, would eradicate leadership. In such a society, decisions would be taken as a community and no one would be provided with either the power or the wealth to impose their will on others. Even with this clear perception, however, the question remained how to get from society as it was presently organized to a society exhibiting these features. Opposed though they were to existing society, its practices and its values, Iwasa and his comrades remained products of it themselves and therefore could not jettison entirely all the assumptions on which it rested. Particularly for someone of Iwasa's generation, born only twelve years into the Meiji era, the heroic exploits of the Meiji Restoration of 1868 had a lingering influence, despite the fact that he was conscious of the Restoration's shortcomings as a revolutionary transformation. Undoubtedly, the Meiji Restoration was one of the sources from which Iwasa's selfimage of anarchist communists as a heroic and self-sacrificing minority derived.

In addition, Iwasa was well aware of the extent to which the mass of the people had had their courage and independence sapped by oppression and insecurity. Understandably perhaps, Iwasa and most of his comrades reacted to the social order they opposed by concluding, somewhat paradoxically, that the way to bring about an alternative, leaderless society was to rely on the (albeit highly unconventional) leading role of the minority of anarchist communists. Seeing the problem in this way imposed on the anarchist communists the arduous responsibility of bringing new ideas to ordinary working men and women and the risky tactics of galvanizing the masses into rebellion by engaging as a minority in acts of defiance against the state and confrontation with the capitalists. Had Iwasa and his comrades rejected this strategy of assigning a particular leading role to themselves as anarchist commu-

nists, in their eyes the effect would have been to have put back the prospect of revolution by many years, since it was obvious that most people were currently socialized into accepting capitalism and lacked the determination to confront those who exercised power. With the benefit of hindsight, however, we can see that such a rethinking of the relationship between anarchist communists and the masses would have had the advantage of realism, since the revolution which inspired Iwasa throughout his adult life has remained a remote prospect even several decades after his death.

Had Iwasa and his fellow anarchist communists realized that the revolution to which they were committed lay far ahead in an indeterminate future, it would have had an effect on their perception of themselves and their self-assigned role. Less of their energy would have been poured into ephemeral activism, allowing more of their time and effort to be redirected towards research into the nature of an anarchist communist society and the means to achieve it. In this regard, it was incongruous that, despite his talents, Iwasa published only three works throughout his long life, some of them mere pamphlets and all essentially collections of articles written for immediate purposes in agitational journals. These were *Workers and the Masses (Rodosha to Taishu)* (1925), *Anarchists Answer Like This (Museumshugisha wa Kaku Kotau)* (1927) and *Random Thoughts on Revolution (Kakumei Danso)* (1931). To these can be added the autobiographical essays which were republished posthumously under the title *One Anarchist's Recollections (Ichi Anakisuto no Omoide)*.

Erasing the distinction between the anarchist communists and the masses would not have deprived the former of any role at all. As part of the masses, they would still have been free to put forward their views and argue for the type of society they wished to achieve. Nevertheless, by eliminating any special anarchist communist responsibility for the outcome of events, it would have been brought home that only determined action by self-organized masses who are intent on freeing themselves can bring about a free society

Iwasa Sakutaro whom all of us who called ourselves anarchists held in esteem as high as the mountains and the stars', Mochizuki Kei recalled that 'Iwasa had a gentle personality which inspired love and affection from everybody'. (Museifushugi Undo 10 April 1967: 1, 4) Even political opponents, such as Yamakawa Kikue, recollected Iwasa as an 'eternal youth', on account of his ready laugh and general disposition, while others who had met him only once or twice still called to mind a man who epitomized 'the very model of what an anarchist should be'. (Museifushugi Undo 10 April 1967:2-3)

## CONCLUSION

Clearly, the Iwasa Sakutaro who has been described in this article was far removed from the conventional type of political leader. Although the article started by listing various qualities which Iwasa possessed that make for a successful Japanese politician, he refused to use those attributes for achieving political success. In that sense, Iwasa rejected leadership and this squared with his egalitarian and communal vision of what an anarchist communist society should be. Yet, as was made clear earlier, in another sense Iwasa was not opposed to leadership, since he believed that it was a minority of anarchist communists who would supply the intellectual spark and courageous audacity for the revolution. According to Iwasa, this minority was to be intimately connected with the mass of the people. Indeed, the minority would arise out of the masses, would enjoy no power or privileges separate from the masses and, far from being famous, would be composed of essentially 'anonymous people (*imumei no hitobito*) who, in this sense, too, would be indistinguishable from the masses. Nevertheless, having laid down all these provisos and qualifications, Iwasa still insisted that the role of the minority of anarchist communists was crucial:

frustration, so the old tensions between anarchist syndicalists and 'pure anarchists' resurfaced. In May 1950 an Anarcho-Syndicalist Group (*Anaruko Sanjīkarisuto Guriipu*) was formed and in June 1951 the Japanese Anarchist Club (*Nihon Anakisuto Kurabu*) was organised. The latter was essentially anarchist communist in its orientation and at its centre were Iwasa Sakutaro and other veterans of the pre-war 'pure anarchist' wing of the movement. From September 1951 the Japanese Anarchist Club started to publish the journal *Anarchist Club (Anakisuto Kurabu)* and, passing through various changes of name to first *Anarchist News (Museifu Shimbun)* and later *Anarchist Movement (Museifushugi Undo)*, this continued to be published until March 1980, long after Iwasa had died in February 1967. For as long as it existed, the Japanese Anarchist Club and its journal adhered to the theory and practice of anarchist communism which was grounded in Kropotkin's writings of the 1880s and 1890s, had first been introduced to Japan by Kotoku in the 1900s, and which had been adapted and refined to meet Japanese conditions by Hatta, Iwasa and others in the 1920s and 1930s. That this doctrine has survived into the 1980s and 1990s, in a period when each successive phase of capitalism has taken Japan further away from everything that anarchist communists regard as important, is testimony in part to the lasting influence of Iwasa's intellectual and, above all, moral stature.

When Iwasa died in 1967 his comrades tried, individually and collectively, to summarize the essence of the man and his thought. In a commemorative issue of *Anarchist Movement*, his comrades eulogised Iwasa as someone who had 'spent his whole life as a warrior fighting humankind's battle without end' and Oshima Eizaburo spoke for many when he declared 'a giant has fallen'. (*Museifushugi Undo* 10 April 1967:4–5) Yet, at the same time that they recognized Iwasa's heroic proportions, none of them overlooked the childlike simplicity, honesty and integrity which had characterized him and which had worked to make him a figure of affection rather than of awe. Thus, while Yamaga Taiji remembered the 'Comrade

based on mass self-organization. In other words, the contradiction implicit in the proposition that achieving a society without leadership depends on the leading role of a minority of anarchist communists would have been eliminated and a greater degree of consistency achieved between the means of struggle employed and the ends to which that struggle was directed.

## FORMATIVE INFLUENCES

Iwasa was born in 1879 in a farming hamlet in Chiba Prefecture. His father was a land-owning farmer who acted as the headman of a group of five villages. (*Museifu Shimbun* 15 March 1956:2) His grandfather had been headman, too, and had strongly encouraged communal production and cooperative practices within the area for which he was responsible. Under Iwasa's grandfather, the paddy fields were farmed communally and the hill land was owned in common by the villagers. As a result, the community had the character of a 'half-communist village' (*han kyosan mura*). Iwasa came under the influence of his grandfather during his childhood and for the rest of his life he perceived anarchist communism not as an ideal project waiting to be tested, but as a form of social organization which comes naturally to local communities, providing the state does not interfere. (Noguchi 1931:161)

Iwasa received a traditional form of primary education and learnt Chinese characters (*kanji*) by means of the rote reading of the late Edo text *The Unofficial History of Japan (Nihon Gaishi)* by Rai Sanyo. In addition to absorbing Chinese characters by reading such books, young Iwasa was evidently highly receptive to the heroic stories in which they abounded. At one point in *The Unofficial History of Japan*, Taira no Masakado surveys Kyoto from Mount Hiei and expresses his determination to rule Japan from there. Reading this, Iwasa is said to have pounded his desk and shouted: 'This is it; this is it! I am going to hold society [*tenka*

— literally ‘all under heaven’] in the palm of my hand.’ As a result, the village children henceforth gave Iwasa the nickname ‘*Masakado*’. (Museifu Shimbun 25 September 1955:1) Similarly, Iwasa further astounded his teacher when, in an essay written at the age of 13, he declared his intention to become one day the ruler of Japan. (Museifu Shimbun 25 September 1955:1) Obviously, it would not do to make too much of these childish flights of fancy, but they do give an indication of the extent to which Iwasa was inspired by the heroism which permeated his reading primers.

Nevertheless, Iwasa was far from being putty in the hands of his teachers. Much of the formal education to which he was exposed struck him as uninteresting and he therefore dropped out of middle school. Eventually, he progressed to Tokyo Law College, but only to conclude that the lessons there, too, were uninspiring and that there was little point in continuing. Only his mother’s tears, who feared that the family’s reputation would not survive her son dropping out for a second time, persuaded Iwasa to press on to graduation in 1898. (Museifu Shimbun 25 September 1955: 1) Like many other young intellectuals of this period, Iwasa was exposed to Christian ideas and for a time took lodgings in the house of a Christian convert. However, he did not himself become a Christian, on the grounds that ‘Jesus was a person. Buddha and Confucius were persons. And I am a person too’. (Museifu Shimbun 25 September 1955: 1) What these various episodes indicate are Iwasa’s independent spirit and his own perennial reluctance to follow leaders, either secular or divine.

As was mentioned previously, Iwasa was fired with political ambition at this stage of his life and realized that, in order to make an impact on society, he would need to acquire knowledge and equip himself with learning. He therefore decided to prepare himself for enrolment in Tokyo Imperial University and took up further studies under Yamai Kanroku, who was a disciple of Yasui Sokken, a major Confucian scholar during the final years of Tokugawa power (the *Bakumatsu* period). (Museifu Shimbun 25 September 1955:1)

a converted country temple (*yamadera*) growing potatoes and pumpkins for food. (Museifu Shugi Undo 10 April 1967:1)

Despite the best efforts of Iwasa and his comrades, the anarchist movement was unable to attain the sizeable proportions it had achieved in pre-war days. This had less to do with any deficiencies on the part of the anarchists than it had with the altered circumstances in which they now operated. In the early postwar years Japanese society was politically polarized between the Left and the Right, with the anarchists targeted from both sides. They were discriminated against on account of the policy of ‘anticommunism’ which both the American Occupation authorities and the Japanese government pursued (not a few anarchists were victims of the ‘red purge’, for example) (Hagiwara 1969: 192) while in the unions and elsewhere anarchists were frequently obstructed and all but silenced by the control exercised by Communist Party and other officials. In addition, first land reform and then rapid economic growth changed Japanese society in ways that were disadvantageous to anarchism. In pre-war days the ‘pure anarchists’ in particular had seen the tenant farmers as the core of any potential movement for achieving anarchist communism. However, post-war land reform eliminated both landlords and tenants as significant social groups and created instead a politically conservative class of land-owning, small farmers who were incorporated into the networks supporting the Liberal Democratic Party and its forerunners. Similarly, high economic growth uprooted people from their long-established village communities and deposited them as factory-fodder and office-fodder in anomic, urban conglomerations where only the crass pursuit of consumerism offered any compensation for the vanished solidarity and mutual aid on which rural life had depended.

The expectations triggered by the end of the war had induced anarchists of all persuasions to sink their differences and from 1946 to cooperate under the umbrella of the Japanese Anarchist Federation. However, as changing social conditions brought difficulties and

anarchism could survive, despite the prevailing climate of hysterical nationalism. If this was his intention, he did not succeed. From 1936 organized anarchist activity became impossible. After a failed attempt to make a living by opening a cafe (*yakitoriya*) in Tokyo in 1935, Iwasa returned to his native village and eked out an existence by growing his own food during the years of the Second World War. (Yomiuri Shimbun 29 December 1935: 7)

## POSTWAR YEARS

Iwasa was already an old man of 66 when the war ended, but he nevertheless threw himself into the efforts to relaunch the anarchist movement. The Japanese Anarchist Federation (*Nihon Anakisuto Rertmei*) was formed in May 1946 and Iwasa was elected chairman of its National Committee. Throughout all the trials and tribulations brought about by his political beliefs, Iwasa was always deeply conscious of what he regarded as 'the honour of being an anarchist communist', (Kakumei Shiso 16 June 1951) but he neither sought nor received either honour or rewards for occupying one of the 'top' posts in the Japanese Anarchist Federation. He was well known for advising others 'you mustn't go about thinking of yourselves as important [*erai*]' and, in that respect, he led by example. (Museifiishugi Undo 10 April 1967:3) The job of chairing the National Committee was unpaid and arduous, involving endless organizational work and much travelling across the length and breadth of Japan. On these journeys Iwasa thought nothing of regularly hanging placards round his neck to advertise anarchist journals, for as he explained: 'Since I'm an old person and can't be as active as I might, I want to be of some use to the movement by selling newspapers with a signboard slung round my body. (Museifiishugi Undo 10 April 1967: 3) His lack of affectation was also revealed by the fact that, when he was not away on propaganda trips, he lived with his wife, Fumie, in

With the same overall purpose in mind, Iwasa lodged in the houses of a number of politicians and scholars, but the experience proved to be disillusioning. Such houses were frequented by 'the great and the good' of Meiji society and, observed at close quarters, Iwasa saw little to admire or emulate in their behaviour. (Noguchi 1931:161) One strong influence acting on Iwasa at this stage of his life was a book he read at about the time he graduated in 1898. Known in Japanese translation as *The Secret Fraternity* (*Himitsu Kessha*), this was a study of late nineteenth-century anarchism written by a French priest whose name was rendered 'Rigiyoru' in *katakana* syllabary. It is said that it was via this book that Iwasa first came to know about anarchism and that it was influential in finally dissuading him from following a conventional career in the law or in politics. (Museifiishugi Undo 10 April 1967:1)

## THE AMERICAN YEARS

Iwasa left Japan for the USA in 1901 and remained there until 1914. It was during his extended stay in America that he became an anarchist communist and, as with many others, it was the impact of the Russo-Japanese War (1904–5) that particularly radicalized his political views. The Japanese government had refused to allow the famous novelist Jack London into Japan as a war correspondent on the grounds that he was an 'anarchist' and Iwasa shared the platform with London at a public meeting held in San Francisco to protest against this. (Museifu Shimbun 25 September 1955: 1) Following the war, the most famous socialist in Japan, Kotoku Shusui, arrived in the USA in December 1905 and spent the next six months in California. During his time in America Kotoku's ideas also moved in an

anarchist communist direction, which drew Kotoku and Iwasa together, although Iwasa was never reticent about criticizing as 'stupid' the ideas of even celebrities like Kotoku when the occa-

sion demanded it. (Iwasa 1982:145) Iwasa became a member of the Social Revolutionary Party (*Shakai Kakumei To*) which Kotoku organized in California in June 1906 shortly before his return to Japan. The Social Revolutionary Party's programme stated:

Our party seeks to destroy the present economic and industrial competitive system and, by placing all land and capital under the common ownership of the whole people, to eradicate all vestiges of poverty.

Our party seeks to overhaul the current class system, which depends on superstition and convention, and to secure equal freedom and rights for all people.

Our party seeks to eliminate national bias and racial prejudice and to realise genuine world peace for all people everywhere.

Our party recognises that, in order to attain the objectives given above, it is necessary to unite and cooperate with comrades throughout the world and to bring about a great social revolution. (Hikari 20 July 1906:7)

The name adopted by the Social Revolutionary Party indicates the influence of the terrorist-inclined Russian Social Revolutionaries (SRs) on those who formed it and this impression was strengthened when the journal *Revolution (Kakumei)* was issued in the Party's name from December 1906. Iwasa was one of the key people involved in writing and producing *Revolution*. Taking its lead from the SRs, *Revolution* advocated violent social revolution, declaring that:

The sole means is the bomb. The means whereby the revolution can be funded too is the bomb. The means to destroy the bourgeois class is the bomb. (Suzuki 1964:467)

From 1931 anarchism in Japan was increasingly put on the defensive as, following the Manchurian Incident in September of that year, militarization and repression intensified. As the state vice closed on the anarchist movement, particularly some of the younger activists were inclined to grasp at illusionary solutions to the dilemma which faced them. One such illusion was the belief that Bolshevik organizational methods would provide a defence against the state's intention to crush the anarchists. This was the line of thought that lay behind the ill-fated attempt by Aizawa Hisao and others to launch the Anarchist Communist Party of Japan (*Nihon Museifu Kyosanto*) in 1934. (Crump 1993: 180 ff) Iwasa was scornful of the idea that Bolshevik methods could be made to serve anarchist ends, denouncing such illusions as 'complete rubbish'. (Crump 1993: 183) In this respect his assessment proved correct, since the Anarchist Communist Party's conspiratorial methods led to the destruction of the entire anarchist movement in 1935–6 as the state unleashed a wave of terror.

Although Iwasa was perceptive with regard to the contradictions inherent in anarchists resorting to Bolshevik organizational methods, this was a difficult time for all anarchists and he did not avoid committing mistakes of his own. In February 1937 an essay entitled *Outline of the Theory of the State (Kokka Ron Taiko)* was published over his name. In this essay Iwasa appeared to be offering an olive branch to the advocates of nationalism and statism. For example, at one point he posed the rhetorical question: 'isn't it only our unique Great Japanese Empire which is a naturally generated state and the others which are all artificially constructed states, no matter whether they are monarchical or democratic?' (Iwasa 1974: 337) Some anarchists, such as Oshima Eizaburo, denied that Iwasa was the author of *Outline of the Theory of the State*, arguing that it was a forgery perpetrated by the 'special police' and rightists. (Iwasa 1982:180; Iwasa 1984: 44) However, a more likely explanation is that the reason Iwasa wrote *Outline of the Theory of the State* was that he was trying to create some ideological space within which

the All-Japan Libertarian Federation of Labour Unions (*Zenkoku Rodo Kumiai Jiyii Rengdkai*, or *Zenkoku Jiren* for short) held its founding conference on 24 May 1926. Starting with 8,400 members, it reached a peak membership of 16,300 in 1931. (Crump 1993: 69 ff) Within the space of two years, the anarchist syndicalists were driven out of *Kokuren* and *Zenkoku Jiren* by the 'pure anarchist' majority in these federations, the final split occurring at the latter organization's reconvened second conference on 17–18 March 1928. Iwasa was absent from this conference and hence played no direct part in the split between 'pure anarchists' and anarchist syndicalists. This was because in 1927 he had been invited by some Chinese anarchists to take part in their activities in Fukien and Shanghai. Responding to this invitation, Iwasa was away from Japan for two years, during which he participated in the armed struggle prosecuted by the anarchists in Fukien and taught at the Labour University in Shanghai. (Museifushugi Undo 10 April 1967:1)

Since Iwasa did not return to Japan until November 1929, he was not directly involved in the confrontations between 'pure anarchists' and anarchist syndicalists which led to their organizational separation over the next six years, but his influence was nevertheless felt due to the 'labour union mountain bandit theory'. After the anarchist syndicalists withdrew from its ranks in March 1928, *Zenkoku Jiren* remained a federation of labour unions, but its activity was in marked contrast to that castigated by Iwasa as typical of the 'labour movement'. *Zenkoku Jiren* continually sought to direct the attention of the workers beyond immediate struggles over wages and working conditions to the ultimate battle to establish a new society. Similarly, although *Zenkoku Jiren's* members were mostly industrial workers in the big cities, its aim was to dissolve both existing industries and urban centres in order to replace them with a network of autonomous communes, each of which would be a balanced amalgam of fields, factories and workshops, as Kropotkin had put it. (Kropotkin 1974)

The handful of Japanese revolutionaries in California lacked the resources to sustain either the Social Revolutionary Party or the journal *Revolution* for long, but they created a major incident when they marked the Meiji Emperor's birthday on 3 November 1907 by issuing an 'Open Letter to Mutsuhito the Emperor of Japan from Anarchists-Terrorists'. With bravado that verged on the reckless, the 'Open Letter' proclaimed:

Mutsuhito, poor Mutsuhito! Your life is almost at an end. The bombs are all around you and are on the point of exploding. It is goodbye for you. (Suzuki 1964: Supplement)

In view of the subsequent execution in 1911 of Kotoku Shusui and others who were involved in the High Treason Incident (*Taigyaku Jikeri*), there were perhaps good reasons why Iwasa steadfastly denied over the years any involvement in the production of the 1907 'Open Letter', but it was nevertheless widely believed that he was one of those responsible for its publication. (Crump 1983: 210) What Iwasa never made any attempt to hide was his support for Kotoku and the others implicated in the High Treason Incident. This was clearly expressed in another 'Open Letter', this time unambiguously signed by Iwasa and which he addressed 'To the Japanese Emperor and Senior Statesmen' in November 1910. (Iwasa 1982:174–9) When news of the execution of Kotoku and his comrades in January 1911 reached Iwasa in the USA, it had a traumatic effect. The shock of losing such a respected comrade was so severe for a sensitive man like Iwasa (who was then 31) that he immediately became impotent. (Suzuki 1964: 534–5)

## HOUSE ARREST

What eventually induced Iwasa to take the considerable risk of returning to Japan was a message received from his younger brother, telling him that his mother was ill. He arrived back at the family home in June 1914 and for the next five years was placed under house arrest. The hamlet where Iwasa had grown up and to which he now returned was a tiny rural community comprised of only about 50 farmhouses, but three police substations were erected to house the officers who were assigned to keep him under constant surveillance. (Museifu Shimbun 15 February 1956: 2) With characteristic wit, Iwasa referred to the police buildings as 'dog kennels' ('dogs' was widely used anarchist slang for the police) and he needed all his reserves of fortitude and humour to survive the years of isolation that now ensued. Iwasa was not formally prohibited from receiving visitors, but it required great courage for anyone to call on him. Not only were any visitors likely to bring upon themselves intense surveillance (with its attendant consequences, such as loss of jobs) but they also ran the risk of gratuitous violence from the police. Many years later, Yamada Seiichi recalled calling on Iwasa in the latter half of the Taisho period (1912–26) and being beaten up by the 'special police' (*tokko*) simply because the mood took them to do so;

Without any reason I was surrounded by several 'special police' and knocked about like the ball in a game of volleyball. It was that sort of era. (Museifushugi Undo 10 April 1967:2)

## ARCHETYPAL PURE ANARCHIST

After Iwasa died, it was said about him that 'the road which Iwasa *Ro* [the aged Iwasa] walked, extending through the Meiji [1868–1912], Taisho [1912–26] and pre-war and post-war Showa

from the class struggle between the capitalists and the 'labour movement' would leave the basically exploitative nature of society unaffected. By way of contrast, Iwasa insisted that the 'mass workers' movement' encompassed the vast majority of working men and women, both in the towns and in the countryside. It did not depend on union organization, since, whether 'organized' or not, what defined the working masses as a 'movement' were their common experiences of exploitation and oppression. Likewise, since the working masses had no privileges to maintain within capitalism, the logic of their disadvantaged position would lead them to seek revolutionary solutions to their problems. (Crump 1993: III ff)

Iwasa's 'labour union mountain bandit theory' lent itself well to 'pure anarchist' criticism of syndicalism. The importance which anarchist syndicalists attached to the union form of organization, their essentially urbanized and industrial vision of an alternative society, and their ambition to take over the capitalist means of production and maintain them so that they could be used for different purposes, were all cited as evidence that (like the Bolsheviks) they intended to substitute themselves for the capitalists but not fundamentally to eradicate capitalism. It was maintained that syndicalism would leave intact capitalism's division of labour, its privileging of production relative to consumption, its centralization of power and its advantaging of the towns over the countryside. Such theoretical arguments lay behind the rising tension between 'pure anarchists' and anarchist syndicalists which was such a marked feature of Japanese anarchism in the latter half of the 1920s.

In 1926 two nationwide anarchist federations were formed which each had several thousand members and were thus larger than any previous organizations the anarchists had set up. The Black Youth League (*Kokushoku Seinen Renmei*, or *Kokuren* for short) was founded in January 1926 as a group of young militants in the Kanto area, but it soon expanded into a nationwide federation with members in all age groups. Four months later,

given their entirely different assessment of the efficacy of union organisation, such as Iwasa's rapport with rank and file workers that many responded positively to his denunciation of the very movement which was supposed to represent their interests. As his fellow anarchist, Kawamoto Kenji, commented:

Bearing in mind the situation of workers, who usually have no opportunity to read books and are not endowed with knowledge, Iwasa *Rd* adopted the frame of mind of the workers and explained anarchism in a friendly fashion so that it was easily understood and could be simply grasped. Yet what stood out about his approach was that at its core was a superlative and well thought out theory of anarchism. (Museifishugi Undo 10 April 1967:2)

In his 'labour union mountain bandit theory', Iwasa distinguished between the 'labour movement' and the 'mass workers' movement'. By 'labour movement' Iwasa meant the union movement of a minority of urban, male workers who occupied a relatively advantageous position within the working class. According to Iwasa, what characterized this movement was its incorporation into capitalism as a labour aristocracy and its reformist concern with maintaining its privileges relative to the rest of the working class. The analogy of a gang of mountain bandits was introduced to convey the relationship which, Iwasa argued, existed between the capitalists and this 'labour movement'. Just as squabbles might occur between a bandit chief and his henchmen, with the latter harbouring the ambition to lead the gang themselves, so the 'labour movement' was likely to clash with the capitalist class. Yet, to continue with the analogy, just as whoever might seize the leadership of a gang of mountain bandits would have no influence on their pillaging relationship with the surrounding villages, so whichever side emerged victorious

[1926–89] eras, was the history of the Japanese anarchist movement itself' (Museifushugi Undo 10 April 1967:2) That this was so is illustrated by the way in which Iwasa's personal circumstances fluctuated in harmony with the ups and downs of the anarchist movement as a whole. In 1919 Iwasa was able to shake off the restrictions of house arrest and head for Tokyo. This reflected the anarchist movement's emergence from its 'winter period', during which it had forcibly been kept dormant by the state ever since the High Treason Incident. An upsurge in rank-and-file militancy, brought about by the economic conditions following the First World War, created a situation beyond the state's ability to control and those like Iwasa were quick to seize the opportunities that presented.

From 1919 Iwasa threw himself into the burgeoning movement and life became a whirl of attending meetings, writing articles, distributing journals and, least conspicuous but probably most important of all, spreading the word through chats with individuals or informal discussions. This last form of activity was something at which Iwasa excelled. In 1931 Noguchi Yoshiaki published a volume of biographical sketches of all the prominent militants in the proletarian movement. The entry on Iwasa included a passage which read:

His special feature could be said to lie in the fact that, together with being a founder of anarchism in Japan, he excels in the underground movement. What I mean by that is that he has the knack of informal conversation. He has travelled the country on one journey after another, having talks with comrades [in one place after another]. He gathers comrades around him by the attractiveness of his personality and the skill of his conversation. (Noguchi 1931:162)

Iwasa joined the Labour Movement (*Rodo Undo*) group, which from October 1919 published the journal of the same name. This

was a group which included Osugi Sakae, Ito Noe, Mochizuki Kei, Wada Kyutaro, Mizunuma Tatsuo and Kondo Kenji, all of whom played important roles in the development of Japanese anarchism and several of whom paid with their lives for their prominence in the movement. What distinguished Iwasa from other anarchists like Osugi was that, while they were deeply influenced by syndicalism, his vision of a new society and the means to achieve it were rooted in the theoretical principles of anarchist communism as defined by Kropotkin. It was this feature of Iwasa's thought that caused the term 'pure anarchist' to be applied to him from an early stage. As Noguchi also wrote about him:

It is said that he was the sole pure anarchist in Japan. In other words, there was none of the deficiencies of the type found in Osugi or Kotoku. (Noguchi 1931:161)

In September 1920 an attempt was made to form an umbrella organization which would encompass all shades of opinion claiming allegiance to socialism. This was the Japanese Socialist League (*Nihon Shakaishugi Domei*). It published the journal *Socialism (Shakaishugi)* and Iwasa was named as its editor. However, both attempts by the Socialist League to hold major conferences (attended by several thousand participants) in December 1920 and May 1921 were disrupted by the police and Iwasa was given a six months prison sentence when the organisation was banned and its journal prohibited. At this juncture Iwasa was even more popular than Osugi among the anarchists, although the latter's martyrdom in 1923 subsequently elevated his status to a prime position.

After Osugi was murdered by the military police in the chaos accompanying the Great Kanto Earthquake, Iwasa's 'pure anarchism' gradually became the dominant current within the Japanese anarchist movement. 'Pure anarchism' was not a term regularly employed by Iwasa and his comrades. They believed that their ideas represented authentic anarchism and hence that it was sufficient to

refer to their doctrine simply as 'anarchism' or, when they wanted to be more specific, 'anarchist communism'. They were anarchists because they opposed state power and communists because they believed that the form of social organization which comes naturally to humans is one based on communal solidarity and mutual aid. Thus, echoing Kropotkin, they argued that 'Anarchy leads to Communism, and Communism to Anarchy'. (Kropotkin 1972:61) It was their anarchist syndicalist opponents who sneeringly dubbed this doctrine 'pure anarchism', in an effort to ridicule what they regarded as the holier-than-thou attitude of, if not Iwasa, at least many of his young supporters. What caused the name to stick was that it certainly conveyed the intention of Iwasa and others to eliminate from anarchism extraneous elements, such as syndicalism.

The theories of 'pure anarchism' were mainly formulated by two people — Iwasa and Hatta Shuzo, with Hatta playing the more important role in this respect. Not only did Hatta write more profusely than Iwasa, but he was also a more systematic and innovative thinker, whose writings ranged over a wide area of economic, sociological and philosophical investigation. Indeed, Hatta was widely regarded among the 'pure anarchists' as 'the greatest theoretician of anarchist communism in Japan'. (Hatta 1981: 309) Nevertheless, despite being somewhat overshadowed by Hatta as a writer, Iwasa did make original contributions to the theories of 'pure anarchism'. Iwasa's role in this regard will be exemplified by reference to his 'labour union mountain bandit theory'. Before examining this, however, it is worth stressing that Iwasa's popularity within the anarchist movement and the high regard in which he was held did not derive from a reputation for bookish learning. Even on paper, Iwasa adopted an unadorned and chatty style of writing, but it was above all through the spoken word, and in his everyday dealings with his comrades, that he built up support for his ideas and came to exert influence on theoretical questions. Although it was natural that Iwasa's negative evaluation of labour unions should have provoked criticism from anarchist syndicalists,