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The Change in My Thinking

Shūsui Kōtoku, Michael H. Brown

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1907

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INTRODUCTION

Koutoku Shuusui (1871-1911) published his "confession" to his comrades, a rousing injection of anarchism into the socialist movement in late Meiji-era Japan and an appeal for a strategy of working class Direct Action, in the socialist daily *The Commoners' News* on February 5, 1907. Later anarchists in Japan would dub him "the anarchist of direct action"¹, and in *The Change in My Thinking*, it is clear why he received such a moniker. Less a work of pure theory than a manifesto and call for his comrades to rouse themselves from an electoralism-induced trance, Koutoku, one of the most, if not the most, influential Japanese socialists of the time, laid out the reasons for his conversion to anarcho-syndicalism, argued that for the socialist movement to continue prioritizing an electoralist strategy would prove to be a dangerous trap, and urged his comrades to carefully reevaluate —root and branch—their strategies as socialists. As the Japanese socialist movement's premier propagandist, Koutoku had everyone's attention. His "confession" landed with a shockwave. His comrades were stunned. Heated debates ensued. Many were persuaded to anarcho-socialism. Many were not. Anarchism had arrived on the scene in Japan, and the socialist movement in the late Meiji-era would never be the same.

Anarchism was not, of course, unheard of in Japan before *The Change in My Thinking* was published. Koutoku did not introduce anarchism. Be that as it may, *The Change in My Thinking* marked the beginning, more or less, of a discrete anarchist tendency in Japan. Koutoku's anarchist approach centered on the latent power of the working class, to be brought forth through Direct Action, which for Koutoku meant, ultimately, a General Strike—the method through which he envisioned a social revolution could truly be realized.

¹ *A Short History of the Anarchist Movement in Japan*. 1979. See Bibliography.

He was writerly, an intellectual force, a passionate advocate, and undoubtedly the movement's foremost propagandist. Yet, despite his legacy as "the anarchist of direct action", he was not particularly known for actually organizing workers. Even if he had been more engaged in attempts to organize labor, intense state suppression of worker organizations severely limited the power of labor. And so, as the anarchist movement developed in Japan, Koutoku's anarcho-syndicalism would not be the only strain of anarchist thought to take hold in the months and years after the publishing of *The Change in My Thinking*. For many, "direct action" did not equate to only organizing labor and the prospect of a General Strike. For instance, anarcho-communism was exhorted in the countryside by figures like the radical firebrand and Zen Buddhist monk Uchiyama Gudou, whose clandestine tracts and pamphlets delivered scathing denunciations of the imperial household, urged tenant farmers to stop paying rent to landlords, and encouraged mass desertions from the military. And inclinations more open to a diversity of tactics—more immediate, insurrectionary, and violent—than Koutoku's own preferred methods percolated among some of those very closest to him, including his final romantic partner—the feminist journalist and pioneering anarchist in her own right, Kanno Sugako.

When a factory worker was caught with explosive material a few years after Koutoku's "confession" had ignited the anarchist movement in Japan, state authorities uncovered a plot to assassinate the Emperor. Only a handful of dissidents were involved, including Kanno. However, the government, fearful of the movement as a whole, found the plot to be a useful pretext to round up hundreds of anarchists and socialists across Japan.

Eventually, 24 defendants would be charged and tried for high treason, not for any act they had committed (no attack was attempted, after all), but for what they allegedly wanted to do as anarchists and socialists—in other words, the accused were put on

Kōtoku Shūsui: Founder of Modern Anarchism in Japan. 1975. CIRA- Nippon.⁶⁹

Three Japanese Anarchists: Kotoku, Osugi, and Yamaga. 1975/2000. Victor Garcia (1975). Translated by Paul Sharkey (2000) from Ruta No. 24. Kate Sharpley Library.⁷⁰

A Short History of the Anarchist Movement in Japan. 1979. Le Libertaire Group (Ed). The Idea Publishing House, Tokyo.⁷¹

Against the God Emperor. 1994. Stefan Anarkowic. Kate Sharpley Library.⁷²

Chapter One: 1906-1911 in The Anarchist Movement in Japan. 1998. John Crump. Re-print published by Anarchist Communist Federation (Anarchist Federation). Originally published in 1996 by Pirate Press.⁷³

Japan and the High Treason Incident. 2013. Masako Gavin & Ben Middleton (Eds.). Routledge.

Monster of the Twentieth Century: Kōtoku Shūsui and Japan's First Anti-imperialist Movement. 2015. Robert T. Tiernery. University of California Press.

⊠ ⊠ ⊠ (Taigyaku Jiken): *An Introduction to the Anarchists of Japan*. 2020. Samuel Clarke. In *The Commoner*.⁷⁴

Pre-war Anarchism in Japan. 2023. Nadine Williams. In *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Asian History*.

About the editor & translator

⁶⁹ Text freely available at: <https://theanarchistlibrary.org/library/cira-nippon-kotoku-shusui>

⁷⁰ Digitized pamphlet available at: <https://libcom.org/article/three-japanese-anarchists-kotoku-osugi-and-yamaga-victor-garcia>

⁷¹ Archived at: <https://archive.org/details/ashort-historyofthe-anarchist-movementin-japan-marc/>

⁷² Text freely available at: <https://theanarchistlibrary.org/library/stefan-anarkowic-against-the-god-emperor>

⁷³ Text freely available at: <https://libcom.org/library/anarchist-movement-japan-1>

⁷⁴ Text freely available at: <https://www.thecommoner.org.uk/taigyaku-jiken-an-introduction-to-the-japanese-anarchists/>

BIBLIOGRAPHY & FURTHER READING

Photographs⁶⁴ of portions of the physical article (original) are freely available online.

A Japanese-language arrangement of *The Change in My Thinking* is available in the Internet Archive⁶⁵. In this arrangement, the Japanese text has been converted to a horizontal left-to-right format; furthermore, kanji (漢字) have, in general, been converted into their shinjitai (新字体)⁶⁶ versions (for example, 国 as 国). However, some obscure or seldom used kanji have been converted into kana (for example, 国 as くに). Characters that were accompanied by emphasis marks in the original are in bold in this arrangement. In addition, in some sections punctuation marks have been added.

English language texts about Koutoku Shuusui and the context and aftermath of *The Change in My Thinking* include the following (ordered by publication date):

Kotoku, Osugi and Japanese Anarchism. 1966. Chushichi Tsuzuki. In *Hitotsubashi Journal of Social Studies* 3(1(3)), pp.30-42.⁶⁷

Kōtoku Shūsui: The Change in Thought. 1967. George Elison. In *Monumenta Nipponica* 22(3/4), pp.437-467.

Anarchism in Japan: Part One: The Pre-war Movement. 1971. Boris Badinoff and Hiroshi Ozeki. In *Anarchy* (magazine) No.5, pp.2-7.⁶⁸

Kōtoku Shūsui and Nationalism. 1971. Fred G. Notehelfer. In *The Journal of Asian Studies* 31(1), pp.31-39.

Kōtoku Shūsui: Portrait of a Japanese Radical. 1971. Fred G. Notehelfer. Cambridge University Press.

⁶⁴ Available at: <http://1906-1909.blog.jp/archives/1051497053.html>

⁶⁵ Archive URL: https://archive.org/details/20240418_20240418

⁶⁶ Post-1946 simplified forms.

⁶⁷ PDF archived in Hitotsubashi University Repository: <https://hermes-ir.lib.hit-u.ac.jp/hermes/ir/re/8492/HJsoc0030100300.pdf>

⁶⁸ Digitized copy available at: <https://libcom.org/article/anarchy-05-1971>

trial for their beliefs, put on trial for being anarchists and socialists. Koutoku was one of the 24.

While not unsympathetic to the potential role of violence or the feelings of the plotters, Koutoku had been mostly unaware of the plot's details. In fact, the little he knew, he opposed; the would-be assassins had stopped trying to talk to him about it because of his opposition to their plans. In ill-health, as well as impoverished and exhausted due in large part to intense state surveillance and harassment, he had actually taken a break from most of his activism and efforts to spread anarchist thought at the time he was arrested.

In the eyes of the government, however, Koutoku's high-profile made him the ringleader of a seditious conspiracy; or at least that would be the state's public narrative. In fact, the state was determined to finally neutralize him once and for all and hoped the entire movement would be destroyed. The trial was irregular, to say the least. In hurried, closed, and rigged court proceedings, all 24 defendants, most totally uninvolved with the plot to assassinate the Emperor, were convicted. All 24 were sentenced to die. For 12 of them, their death sentences were commuted to life-imprisonment the next day, but not Koutoku's. He and 10 comrades were executed on January 24, 1911, the week after the verdict; his partner Kanno was executed the following day.

Killed at 39 years of age, Koutoku left a legacy of pioneering anarchist thought in Japan and a huge corpus of written material. He had grown up in liberal political circles, developed into an influential anti-war agitator, came to be a leading figure in the socialist movement, and, finally, became the individual most clearly responsible for raising the possibilities of anarchism in the latter years of the Meiji-era. Among his most influential works, *The Change in My Thinking* is rightly considered a classic piece of literature of the anarchist movement in Japan. Before his "confession", anarchism was an interesting idea; after his "confession", it was a movement.

ABOUT THIS TRANSLATION

1. Rationale. Although this is not the first English translation of *The Change in My Thinking*, this new translation has some crucial differences when compared to others. Two differences in particular stand out. First, **this translation is much more extensively annotated** than others with contextual notes explaining translation decisions, ambiguous points and alternative translations, Japanese terms and sayings, events and people mentioned by Koutoku, and other elaborations that may make things clearer for readers (including readers who may be relatively, or almost entirely, unfamiliar with Koutoku, anarchist history in Japan, or the sociopolitical situation of Meiji-era Japan). Second, it is also **the only complete English translation that contains Koutoku's own preface** to *The Change in My Thinking*. While this preface is left out of other nearly complete translations, it appeared with *The Change in My Thinking* when it was originally published in 1907, and so its absence makes any purportedly complete translation appear to be, in fact, incomplete.

2. Names. Japanese names follow the surname-first pattern. For example, in the name “Koutoku Shuusui”, “Koutoku” is the surname.

3. Transliterations. The romanization of Japanese terms and names generally follows a modified macron-free Hepburn system, e.g., *Koutoku* rather than *Kōtoku* for 久徳 (久徳); similarly, sequences such as 途 (tu) and 途 (too) are distinguished, unlike in a *tō*-style romanization which uses macrons.

4. “Socialists”. Koutoku frequently refers to himself and his comrades as socialists and as members of the Socialist Party—he never calls himself an anarchist in this “confession”. In Japan at the time, ‘socialist’ functioned somewhat as an umbrella term for a variety of left and left-leaning positions which dissented in varying degrees from the status quo of capitalism and the imperialist state. Anarchism as an explicit “dissenting ideology and lever for social trans-

advanced condition than Middle-Age Feudalism to modern capitalism with its accompanying Socialism; if, I say, they have thus been able to rush through social stages in one lifetime, which it cost empires that preceded them centuries to traverse, what might not the Socialist Party accomplish by organized and fearless effort, now that we know we are ready for the next great change? Have not we Socialists become somewhat too automatic and evolutionary, in the somnolent sense, of late years?

I think we have. I have, for instance, the deepest regard for the German Social-Democratic Party. It is by far the greatest in any nation. [...] But there are 3,000,000 of them, at least; they have not less than two-fifths of the German army at their control; they know precisely what they want; [...]; they have reached the economic period when transformation is easy. They see all this and still they wait.

But are they not just a trifle tame? Are not their knowledge, their moderation and their discipline almost too complete? Is not their long-suffering almost too humble? Is not their self-restraint even excessively courageous? They have been a revolutionary party for forty years—just the time of the Japanese uprising. Where is their revolution? [...] At any rate, as I compare the socialist ideal of the Westerns with the far lower ideal of the Easterns; as I look on what is being achieved by the latter and what is not being done by the former, I feel inclined to ask our German comrades what is the use of their millions of trained men who vote? And I could put the same question to the nationalities not so well educated and organized. Is death in Europe and America so much more terrible than it is out there in Manchuria? Tell me that.

of the empire comingles with denunciations of Russia. Hyndman uses his impressions of the devoted-to-the-cause character of the Japanese people to make an argument that socialists should be more like the naturally self-sacrificing Japanese, and that socialist parties have been too timid and have wasted resources and influence on acquiring voters rather than bringing forth a revolution. Hyndman calls for socialist parties to act with more urgency, and to be even more resolute than the Japanese forces in Manchuria whose spirit he so admires.

Koutoku does not concentrate on Hyndman's bombastic descriptions of the Japanese as people who are willing (and then some) to give their lives for national glory. He does, however, utilize the comparison of Japan's development with the lack of revolutionary progress accomplished by socialist parties; moreover, his focus is trained on the argument about socialist parties being too concerned with winning votes over making change. To support his own exhortation to his comrades to cease prioritizing a parliamentary approach in Japan, in section 4 of *The Change in My Thinking*, Koutoku partly translates and paraphrases portions of the final two paragraphs of Hyndman's article. For comparison with Koutoku's translation and paraphrasing, those portions, along with some surrounding context, are reproduced in Appendix B.

A full-text reprint edition is archived in the HathiTrust Digital Library.⁶³

Appendix B: Death and the Socialist Ideal (excerpt)

[...] If the [Japanese], to hark back a little, have been able within the short period of forty years, by dint of sheer intelligence and determination, so to master their own economic and social conditions, that they have passed easily within one man's lifetime, from a less

⁶³ Archive URL: <https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=uiug.30112033644813&seq=31>

formation"² was only just emerging in Japan; organizing as 'anarchists' wasn't a thing just yet. In other words, in *The Change in My Thinking*, Koutoku was advocating anarchist thought from within existing left-wing groups and movements.

5. Appendices. Two appendices are attached. The first appendix is a letter, written by Koutoku in English, to Albert Johnson, an anarchist friend who lived in San Francisco in the United States. The second appendix is an excerpted portion of a 1904 article by Henry Hyndman titled *Death and the Socialist Ideal*, which Koutoku partly translates and paraphrases in section 4 of *The Change in My Thinking*.

THE CHANGE IN MY THINKING

(*The Daily Commoners' News*, February 5, 1907)

Preface

To begin with, this small piece of writing, published on February 5 of this year in the daily *Commoners' News*, is titled "The Change in My Thinking"³.

Despite the ideals and principles that I embrace today being not at all different from those advocated in this publication, even so over the past few years I have been unable to remain unchanged, more or less, on the means and methods behind the grounds⁴ of their realization. Concerning universal suffrage and so-called 'par-

² *Pre-war Anarchism in Japan*. 2023. Nadine Williams. See Bibliography.

³ 〃〃〃〃〃〃 (yo ga shisou no henka).

⁴ 〃 (archaic: *yuwen*; current: *yuen*). Alternatively: reason, cause, the basis of something, the way of doing something. Koutoku is describing the "means and methods" that would underlie, inform, or lead to the 'thing that causes' (or as translated here, "grounds of") the realization of socialist ideals and principles.

liamentarism⁵, especially, I keenly feel that my earlier beliefs were sorely mistaken.

Consequently, in this article, I make a confession about the circumstances of the change in my thinking regarding these points. In particular, I state, by way of the preface set out here, that I will divulge my convictions as they are at this very moment.

- Author's Notice⁶

{1}

I must frankly confess something. From my time in prison the year before last⁷, my opinions on the means and policies of the socialist movement changed somewhat. Then, last year during my travels⁸, my opinions changed a great deal. Looking over the past several years, I feel that I am now almost entirely a different person.

⁵ 国政 (gikai seisaku). Parliamentary policy, or measures. The 'parliamentary policy' alluded to here, and which was subscribed to by virtually all organized Japanese socialists at the time, is the following aspirational sequence: secure universal suffrage → get socialists elected to parliament → realize socialism through legislation. As such, I have opted to translate this as "parliamentarism".

⁶ 告白 (choshashiki). A term indicating that the author (of the article) is responsible for the preface as well.

⁷ Koutoku had been imprisoned in 1905 (February to July), for circulating anti-war material in the 庶民新聞 (heimin shinbun; The Commoners' News[paper]), the main organ of the 庶民社 (heiminsha; The Commoners' Society), of which Koutoku was one of the founders. The paper was also forced to close. After his release, in an English-language letter to a friend, Koutoku credited his time in prison with turning him toward anarchism. See Appendix A.

⁸ After his imprisonment, Koutoku traveled to the United States in November 1905, and remained there until June 1906. His activities there suggest that his ideas regarding reformist approaches and radical approaches were in flux, but by the time he returned to Japan, he was firmly committed to anarcho-syndicalism.

(2) To visit the leaders of many foreign revolutionists and learn something from their movements.

(3) To criticize freely the position of the "His Majesty" and the political, economic and institutions from foreign land where the pernicious hand of "His Majesty" cannot reach. If my health allows and money, that is to be borrowed from my relations and friends, could be raised I will start in the coming winter or next spring.

Although we are now at Odawara, we will return to Tokio at next month.

Yours fraternally, Denjiro Kotoku P. S.—My wife was pleased very much with many pictures enveloped in your letter.

About Appendix B

Henry Hyndman's *Death and the Socialist Ideal in Wilshire's Magazine* (November, 1904; pp. 7 & 15) demonstrates a somewhat awestruck and approving view among some socialists in Europe and America at the time regarding the 'modernization' of Japan—in grandiose, essentialist, and Orientalist terms, he praises the character of "pagan" Japan, the people as rapidly modernizing "fanatics of materialism", single-minded with "no belief in an individual future life", "a disregard for family ties and personal discomfort", and "such an ideal of patriotic self-immolation" in their "devotion to the Emperor, as the incarnation of their ideal country" that they desire death for the imperial cause, even "to be blown to atoms for the sake of Japan".

Part of this attitude is conditioned by his condemnatory views on Russia, with whom Japan was at war in Manchuria. Hyndman supported Japan's war effort, which put him at odds with socialists in Japan. He admits that "our socialist comrades in Japan [...] declared against the war, and ran great risk in doing so", but he is "not quite sure they were right" because he believes it is "an indispensable condition of socialist progress" for Russia to be "crushed". Indeed, his lofty rhetoric about Japanese self-negation for the good

thankfulness in knowing that you would have had the dinner in your house to celebrate my release.

August 6th we came to the sea-shore of Odawara, a town about fifty miles south-westernward from Tokio, to restore my health. The building in which we are now staying is a villa owned by Dr. Kato, who is devoted Socialist and is kindly attending my sickness.

Five months' imprisonment not a little injured my health, but it gave me many lessons of the social questions. I have seen and studied great many of so-called "criminals" and became convinced that the governmental institutions—court, law, prison—are only responsible for them—poverty and crime.

Among the many books which I have read in the prison were Draper's "Conflict Between Religion and Science," Haeckel's "The Riddle of the Universe," Renan's "Life of Jesus," and so forth. Besides I repeated again two interesting books which you sent me—Mr. Ladd's "Hebrew and Christian Mythology" and Mr. Kropotkin's "Fields, Factories and Workshops." (By the way, Mr. Ladd often mentions Buddha as a Chinese philosopher. It is true that the greater part of Chinese population is now Buddhist, but Buddha or Gautama is not Chinese. He was born in India. He is Hindu. Several centuries after the death of Buddha his religion was introduced into China.)

Indeed, I had gone as a Marxian Socialist and returned as a radical Anarchist. To propagate Anarchism in this country, however, it means the death or lifelong, at least several years', imprisonment. Therefore its movement must be entirely secret, and its progress and success will need long, long time and endurance.

I am now intending to live in America and Europe during several years for the following purpose:

(1) To study foreign conversation and writing which are most important instruments for the International Movement of Communists or Anarchists. I can only read English literature, but cannot speak. And writing in English, as you see, is very hard for me.

Stemming from this, Sakai⁹ and I have engaged in dozens of impassioned discussions. I have also frequently talked about it with two or three other friends. Moreover, I have written on some aspects of the matter in the pages of *Light*¹⁰, so some others may be familiar with the general outline, too.

Alas, for lack of a suitable organ¹¹, and the difficulty of writing caused by my illness¹², I have been unable to share the basics with all of my comrades. Now, the opportunity has arrived. Maintaining a lengthy silence could never be faithful to my principles. Therefore, I must frankly confess: "A true social revolution cannot be realized through universal suffrage and parliamentarism. There is no way to achieve the goals of socialism except through *chokusetsu koudou* (Direct Action) by workers who are united-as-one." Indeed, such is my current thinking.

{2}

I used to pay great attention only to the theories of the German socialists¹³ and the precursors for their current of thought, and that is why I myself emphasized too strongly the effectiveness of vot-

⁹ Sakai Toshihiko, influential socialist and the behind-the-scenes complement to Koutoku's public-facing role at The Commoners' Society. In the debates following the publication of *The Change in My Thinking*, Sakai urged cooperation between the Direct Action faction led by Koutoku and the parliamentarists.

¹⁰ While abroad, Koutoku had published a number of dispatches from the United States in the socialist outlet 光 (*hikari*; Light) in which, over time, his movement toward anarcho-syndicalism is evident. Shortly after returning to Japan, Koutoku gave a speech which was then published in *Light* on July 5, 1906, the contents of which would be further elaborated in *The Change in My Thinking*.

¹¹ After *The Commoners' News* had been shut down, different factions had set up competing organs, and therefore *Light* was not recognized and read by many in the socialist movement. To reach a wider readership, and at the urging of Sakai Toshihiko, some factions cooperated on restarting *The Commoners' News*.

¹² Chronic intestinal tuberculosis. It was extremely debilitating on Koutoku.

¹³ Koutoku is referring to social-democrats such as Ferdinand Lasalle and others associated with the Social Democratic Party of Germany.

ing and parliamentary politics. I thought: “If there were universal suffrage, surely a great number of our comrades would be elected. And if our comrades held a majority of seats, socialism could be established through parliamentary resolutions.” Of course, I also recognized the urgent need for unity among workers. But as for the priority for the socialist movement in Japan, I believed universal suffrage was the only option. I advocated such not only with my mouth, but with my pen¹⁴, too. Upon reflection, I realize how childishly simplistic such thinking was.

More specifically, there is no way that happiness for the majority of people can be realized under the so-called representative system of today. Members of parliament are elected out of a tangle of candidates, activists, goons¹⁵, newspapers, deceit, threats, entertainment¹⁶, bribery, and so on. But do any of them hold serious ideas about the state or the people? Even if some worthy people are elected, as members of parliament their minds are changed from when they were candidates. Politicians in the capital stop being those selfless volunteers from the countryside. Do any of them remain true to their pre-election character? For every one of them, or at least a great many, status comes first, then power, then profit. They consider nobody but themselves and their own families. Even for the most high-minded, their consideration extends no further than their party.

¹⁴ 筆 (*fude*). A writing brush or pen.

¹⁵ 暴徒 (*soushi*). A militant and/or professional political operative, especially associated with the 1880s’ Freedom and People’s Rights Movement. Many of them later came to be members of early 20th-century 義勇隊 (*ingaidan*; extra-parliamentary political groups), and *ingaidan* members are probably to whom Koutoku is referring. Members of *ingaidan* around the turn of the 20th century would provide security at party events, escort party officials, intimidate opposition voters, and even physically attack or invade speeches or other functions of their political opponents; they were the ‘footsoldiers’ and ‘muscle’ of the parties.

¹⁶ 遊藝 (*kyou’ou*). Translated here as “entertainment”, it includes parties or banquets that featured an amalgam of skits, music, dancing, and sex work provided by women and girls.

APPENDICES

About Appendix A

This letter, written after his release from prison, is part of a series of letters Koutoku exchanged with Albert Johnson, a friend in San Francisco. Koutoku’s letters in this exchange were posthumously published in *Kotoku’s Correspondence with Albert Johnson* (H. Havel) in *Mother Earth*, Vol. VI, No. 6 (August, 1911), pp. 180-184.

In it, Koutoku credits his anarchist turn to his experiences during his imprisonment and expresses his determination to continue learning and to develop relationships with anarchists outside of Japan. He also anticipates, with tragic accuracy, that introducing and promoting anarchism in Japan may precipitate his death at the hands of the state.

Note: Koutoku signs his name as “Denjiro”, his legal personal name (藤野野矢/Denjirou).(藤野野矢/Shuusui) is a chosen/pen name of his.

A reprint edition of the *Mother Earth* collection of letters is archived in the HathiTrust Digital Library⁶²

Appendix A: A Letter to Albert Johnson

Odawara, Japan, Aug. 10th, 1905.

Mr. A. Johnson.

Dear Comrade:—I have just received your letter of July 16th, and translated it orally with great pleasure for my wife, who listened very attentively with most gratitude for your friendship and kindness.

We could not help shedding tears of sympathy with your youngest daughter having lost her husband recently, and of

⁶² Archive URL: <https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=mdp.39015037032805&seq=210>

tion world, among the factory workers, among the peasantry, and throughout all of society and among all classes, I would also rejoice in seeing the number of comrades in parliament rise. Accordingly, it would be good for there to be some electoral competition. But, I cannot recognize it as an urgent matter that we, being the Socialist Party in particular, must take up!

The most basic point is that to accomplish our goal of a radical revolution of the organization of the economy, namely the abolition of the wage system, as a socialist, as a member of the Socialist Party, I believe that it is much more vital that we stir the consciousness of 10 workers than get 1000 signatures petitioning for universal suffrage. I believe that spending 10 yen on organizing workers is a matter of greater urgency than spending 2,000 yen on an election campaign. I believe that a single discussion with workers is far more effective than making 10 speeches in parliament.

You, my comrades! For the reasons stated above, **I hope that our socialist movement in Japan will from now on cease pursuing parliamentarism, and take up as our means and policies the Direct Action of workers united-as-one.**

It is with great reluctance that I should say these words at a time when you, my comrades, have been so ardently campaigning for universal suffrage. I have picked up my pen many times, but hesitated. However, my conscience would not permit me to maintain a lengthy silence. I felt that a lengthy silence would be exceedingly unfaithful to my principles. And then, too, some of you fine people engaged in the aforementioned campaigning graciously encouraged my confession⁶¹, so I venture past my reluctance and ask for your criticism and teaching.

Fine people! I beg your understanding that this is what I sincerely think in my heart.

⁶¹ The implication is that his friends and comrades suggested that Koutoku should publish his “confession” even if they disagreed with (some of) it.

This is not an issue only in Japan today, nor is it an issue just of Japan’s system of limited elections¹⁷. In Switzerland, Germany, France, the United States, or any other place with a system featuring universal suffrage¹⁸, the people who win elections are most often the richest, or the most shameless¹⁹, or the most charismatic²⁰. It is an exceedingly rare thing for a country’s, or a party’s, top-quality people to win elections. Therefore, it may be said that, in a strict sense, there is no parliament in all the world that has represented the popular will. Given that, there are countless scholars across the world who agree that parliaments can never fully represent the will of the people. This is a problem to which a variety of remedial measures might be put in place, such as a Fair Elections Law (proportional representation), direct voting (referenda), or people’s motions (initiatives).

However, I must put aside for the moment a detailed examination of the benefits and drawbacks of such remedial measures. For it is a fact, after all, that parliament is not organized out of the majority of people, that is, the working class. Rather, parliament is organized out of the bourgeoisie, who view the working class with hostility and as mere stepping stones. In *The Wage System*, old Kropotkin²¹ wrote that the system of representative government developed by the middle class is a single instrument that can take

¹⁷ Voting for the lower house of the Diet (parliament) was limited to male landowners, 25 years and older, who paid more than 15 yen in annual taxes; approximately 1% of the population.

¹⁸ Universal suffrage was not actually fully established in all of these places in 1907.

¹⁹ 倨 (tetsumen). Alternatively: arrogant, brazen, impudent.

²⁰ 人前巧 (ninkitori ni takumi naru mono). Translated here as “charismatic”, this expression describes someone skilled at gaining popularity; one who ‘plays to the crowd’ or ‘plays to the gallery’.

²¹ Peter Kropotkin. Koutoku’s re-reading of *Fields, Factories, and Workshops* while imprisoned left a large impression on him. During his time in America he began exchanging letters with Kropotkin and received approval to translate his works into Japanese. See also Note 56.

on the monarchy, but also, simultaneously, dominate and restrain the working class. That is, Kropotkin identified—and is spot on—that it is a form peculiar to the rule of the middle class. Of course, not all members of parliament will come from the bourgeoisie, and with universal suffrage, there could be many who come from the working class. Already last year in Britain, 50 workers were elected. Alas, upon taking up their positions, many of these legislators immediately lost their working class spirit and become infatuated²² with luxurious clothing and food of the bourgeois style; and for that, are they not fiercely denounced?

A shop clerk will do many things for the shopkeeper; a lawyer will do many things for the client; only politicians do absolutely nothing for the working class as a whole. Even if they amend or repeal some law that is harmful to the people, or even pass a useful law, it is always the case that it coincides with temporarily raising their own status or gaining profit. Or it's preparation for a re-election campaign!

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There is a theory that even if the current members of parliament are as terrible as I claim, were the legislators serious-minded socialists, there would not be any danger of them betraying the popular will. And indeed, all Japanese socialists today are serious-minded. No matter their faction, in times of adversity, there are very few who compromise their values. This is because the superficial do not in the first place come and join those who are fighting uphill due to the fact that there is no advantage to be gained from it. And

²² 風俗を誇る (kafurete tokutoku taru no; 'being proud of a skin rash'). Translated here as "infatuation", this saying means that one has developed an obsession or affectation for all things related to something; for example, a non-French person obsessed with French culture changing their dress and habits to put on an air of 'Frenchness'. Note: *taru* is an old form of the modern copula's attributive *de aru* (ある) form.

geois legislators, politicians, or others. I repeat: voting and politicians are never going to be something which can be relied upon!

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Having said all this, I absolutely do not think there is anything wrong with acquiring the right to vote. I have no strong opposition toward the campaign to revise election laws. If universal suffrage were in place, parliament would have to take into account the will of the workers to some extent when enacting, amending, or repealing laws. There are definitely some benefits. What these benefits would equate to are the benefits, no further, of labor insurance, factory regulations, and tenant farmer laws; the amendment or repeal of the Public Order and Police Law⁵⁹ or the Newspaper Ordinance⁶⁰; or all sorts of other social reform projects including labor protections and laws to provide relief to the poor. Therefore, carrying out these campaigns is not a bad thing, nay! It is in fact a good thing. But, I don't think being socialists particularly means it is something we absolutely have to take up.

Nor am I someone who sees anything wrong at all with you fine people, my comrades, standing as parliamentary candidates or contesting elections. I am in no way a person who objects to actions that would see you fine people seated in parliament. For the same reasons as to why I would rejoice in seeing comrades multiply in government, industrial circles, the armed forces, the educa-

⁵⁹ 治安維持法 (*chian keisatsu hou*). Established in 1900 in response to—that is, in order to suppress—rising interest in labor movements and labor organizing. It was part of a series of so-called 'peace preservation laws' enacted from 1894 to 1925 to suppress political dissent, each one ratcheting up the forces and tools of suppression.

⁶⁰ 新聞紙法 (*shinbun jourei*). Formally: 新聞紙法 (*shinbunshi jourei*). The Newspaper Ordinance was first enacted in 1875 and updated several times (the last update being in 1897), until it was replaced in 1909 by the Newspaper Law (新聞紙法; *shinbunshi hou*). Intended to suppress speech critical of the government, this ordinance was the law under which Koutoku had been imprisoned.

lators, gradually have seen a reduction in membership and reserve funds. These are points that a Japanese socialist party ought to be most cautious about.

What the working class demands is not the conquest⁵⁵ of administrative power, but “the conquest of bread⁵⁶”. Not laws; but food and clothing! With regard to parliament, accordingly, there is almost no use for it. If we are content with just creating or amending individual sections in some parliamentary ordinances or a few clauses in some bills, then we should entrust much of our affairs to the social reformists and the National Socialist Party⁵⁷. If, on the other hand, we truly want to carry out a social revolution, and improve and preserve the actual livelihoods of the working class, we must pour all of our energy into cultivating worker unity, rather than into parliamentary influence. However, workers, you fine people⁵⁸, must also resolve to carry out your own goals by means of your own power, your own Direct Action, without relying on bour-

⁵⁵ 略奪 (*ryakushu*). This term is often translated as ‘abduction’ or ‘seizure’, but in this context “conquest” seems more appropriate given the rest of the sentence. See also Footnote 56.

⁵⁶ A reference to the book *The Conquest of Bread* (French: *La Conquête du Pain*) by Peter Kropotkin. Koutoku would complete a Japanese translation of it in 1909, with the title as he had written here: 食の略奪 (*pan no ryakushu*). See also Notes 21 and 55.

⁵⁷ 国家社会党 (*kokka shakai tou*). Now *kokka shakai* may refer to either ‘state socialism’ or ‘national socialism (nazism)’, but in Meiji Japan the National Socialists were politicians alarmed by capitalism’s social effects, but who rejected class struggle, embraced imperialism, and believed social reforms should come via state power wielded by, or on behalf of, the Emperor. The National Socialist Party (1905-1910) was founded in opposition to the Socialist party. Still, the two parties at times cooperated (e.g., they jointly protested Tokyo transit fare increases in 1906). It was effectively an imperialist-nationalist party interested in social reforms.

⁵⁸ 貴様 (*shokun*). This is a rather special term for ‘you’; it may be used for addressing groups, and if the group consists of men, it is akin to addressing the group as ‘Gentleman!’, and if the group consists of women, it is akin to addressing the group as ‘Ladies!’. Here I have opted for “you fine people”.

if the day comes that socialism gains momentum and a majority in the terrain of elections? At that time the many candidates who advocated socialism and battled for votes will assuredly be found to be unlike the current serious-minded people. Indeed, there is no doubt whatsoever that some who join the Socialist Party²³ will do so for status, power, and profit; or for nothing more than to hold a seat in parliament. Nor is there any doubt that most of those who are elected will be the richest, the most shameless, and the most charismatic.

Take the old Liberal Party²⁴. When it was battling uphill, its members were all public-spirited people²⁵ brimming with righteous indignation, whose fervor and passion outstripped even that of socialists today. However, as soon as they gained some power in parliament, they became more concerned with maintaining their power than with the interests of the people. All urgency was directed to securing their seats and promoting their own interests. Behind the facades of cooperation, compromises, concessions, and so forth, the erstwhile revolutionary party soon became utter thralls to that bitter enemy: the oligarchy²⁶. About

²³ 社会党 (*shakai tou*; the Socialist Party). The Japan Socialist Party was founded in February, 1906, while Koutoku was in the United States (not to be confused with the Japan Socialist Party founded in 1945). The 1906 Japan Socialist Party was banned in 1907.

²⁴ 自由党 (*jiyuu tou*; the Liberal Party). There were two “old” Liberal parties, or two iterations of one. The first iteration was established in 1881. Divisions between the working class membership and the aristocratic leadership arose, and the party dissolved in Autumn 1884. The second iteration was formed in 1890. It was the largest party in the Diet, holding a plurality of seats from 1890 to 1898. It ended when it merged with another party in 1898 in a successful bid to oust the Prime Minister.

²⁵ 貴様 (*shishi*). Often translated as ‘patriot’, the word indicates someone who devotes themselves to the good of the State/Emperor, or to their fellow citizens, the people, or the general welfare.

²⁶ 藩閥 (*hanbatsu*). The (new) ruling class during the Meiji Era (1868-1912), initially populated largely by elites from the clans who had led the overthrow of the Tokugawa Shogunate; nowadays referred to in English as the Meiji Oligarchy.

this, no smidgen of doubt is warranted. It is only to be expected that a political party that advances simply for the purposes of establishing a parliament and garnering a majority in that parliament, will immediately be totally corrupted upon achieving those goals. And if the Socialist Party were to be dazzled by and drool over the worldly power of large numbers of votes and seats, and prioritize such a project? Well, the final fate of the Liberal Party is a ‘model for the Yin’²⁷; it must be said, immense danger would lie-in-wait on the path ahead.

And it is not just the late Liberal Party²⁸. Even while being part of a socialist party, Millerand²⁹ in France caved to the bourgeoisie and joined the cabinet there, didn’t he? Isn’t it the same for John Burns³⁰ in Britain, who at this time has joined the cabinet there and taken to working hand-in-hand with the individualists³¹. I respect Millerand and Burns as individuals. Nonetheless, for revolutionary parties, it is unquestionably a corruptive step to take. A heart that lusts for garnering a majority of votes and seats is a heart that lusts

²⁷ 陰の模範 (inkan tookarazu; ‘the model for the Yin is not far away’). The proverb *inkan tookarazu* is derived from a passage in the Chinese *Shijing* (the Classic of Poetry) which relates the idea that the Yin dynasty needs only to look at the collapse of the Xia dynasty, its immediate predecessor, for a model of what not to do. To be “a model for the Yin” is to be a cautionary example.

²⁸ Ironically, given his attitude here, Koutoku had published in August 1900 a short article titled: *In praise of the Liberal Party* (自由党の称賛, *jiyuu tou wo matsuru bun*).

²⁹ Alexandre Millerand had been a socialist when he joined a coalition cabinet in 1899, as Minister of Commerce. This saw him working alongside figures such as the Marquis de Gallifet, who had led the brutal suppression of the 1871 Paris Commune. It sparked a heated debate among French socialists about participation in bourgeois administrations.

³⁰ John Burns had been a radical trade unionist. In the early 1900s, he aligned with the Liberal Party rather than the socialists, and was rewarded with a cabinet post in 1906: President of the Local Government Board. Burns’ previously radical politics tempered, his time as a minister was a major disappointment to the labor movement in Britain, and he was heavily criticized by his former friends.

³¹ 野心家 (*kojin shugisha*). The “individualists” must mean the Liberals.

cate the workers. However, it cannot be disputed that the bulk of their operation has been devoted to the sole-purpose of elections.

Of course, even the proponents of universal suffrage and parliamentarism need the consciousness and unity of the workers. They realize that even if universal suffrage were in place, they could get nothing done in parliament without the worker’s consciousness and unity. However, if the workers were truly conscious and united, then couldn’t they do anything they want through their own Direct Action? At that point, there wouldn’t be any need to elect representatives or depend on parliament.

If a politician is corrupted, that’s all there is to it. If parliament is dissolved, that’s all there is to it. A social revolution, that is to say, a workers’ revolution, must ultimately depend on the power of the workers themselves. Rather than become stepping stones for parliamentary candidates who are power-seekers⁵⁴ from the bourgeoisie, workers should immediately proceed with designs on livelihood stability and securing food and clothing that meets their needs.

Movements for universal suffrage, even elections of legislators, might involve a kind of proselytizing. However, if those are done for the sake of proselytizing, then why take such indirect means rather than proselytize directly? Are we going to go without cultivating a potent unity and instead put our trust in the ephemeral vote? Currently in Japan, the cost for just one individual to contest an election is, at least, no less than 2,000 yen. From even just this amount, if it were spent completely on proselytizing and workers’ unity, how mighty an effect we might see.

The majority of socialist parties in Europe have now grown weary of the ineffectiveness of parliamentary strength. In the continental countries, tendencies of disharmony between socialist party members and the working class have persistently arisen. It is a fact that the British labor unions, which rush about wildly to elect legis-

⁵⁴ 野心家 (*yashinka*). Alternatively: ambitious person(s); striver(s).

two years ago or so⁴⁶, the right to vote was severely restricted in the regions of the German Confederation⁴⁷ where socialism is most active, such as Saxony, Lübeck, and Hamburg. And yet, the people did not rise up in defiance, but instead cried themselves to sleep⁴⁸. Bebel⁴⁹ says that a general strike and other forms of Direct Action are a last resort, and that while we hold the right to vote, as a matter of course we should do battle through parliament. I can't help but suspect that the same events will repeat again and again.

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If the socialist party in Germany had actually spent the time, toil, tears⁵⁰, and treasure⁵¹ that it spent on electoral campaigns over the past 40 years on the consciousness and unification of workers instead, then the Emperor and Chancellor⁵² presumably wouldn't be allowed to roar in triumph⁵³ as they are today. I am not saying that the socialist party in Germany has done nothing at all to edu-

⁴⁶ It is unclear why Koutoku says the election was "two years ago or so" when he must be referring to the January 1907 election following the December 1906 Reichstag dissolution.

⁴⁷ 徳意志連邦 (doitsu renbou). The German Confederation was an earlier state which was dissolved in 1866. Koutoku is actually discussing the German Empire (徳意志帝国; doitsu teikoku), also known as the Second Reich.

⁴⁸ なきねいり (naki'neiri). This saying expresses the idea that someone 'quits in frustration' or 'meekly accepts the situation'.

⁴⁹ August Bebel, the Social Democratic Party (Germany) chair from 1892 until his 1913 death.

⁵⁰ 苦 (kushin). Alternatively: hardships, suffering.

⁵¹ 金 (kinsen). Alternatively: money, funds, finances.

⁵² Bernhard von Bülow; appointed Chancellor by Wilhelm II, he carried out the dissolution of parliament.

⁵³ ばんざい (banzai wo sakebashimuru; shout banzai). The term *banzai* is often compared to 'long live [x]' or 'viva la [x]'. It has, however, a variety of uses.. One use of *banzai* is as a common celebratory yell; thus, the translation here of "roar in triumph". Note: The shimuru ending is an archaic auxiliary verb that attaches to a lexical verb, and means 'made/caused/allowed to do [lexical verb]'; thus, "allowed to roar in triumph".

to draw near to power³². And isn't the lust to draw near to power the basis of such alliances and compromises?

Fortunately, the socialist parties in Britain and France have not corrupted themselves with them, but parted ways with them, and retained their own honor. Nevertheless, going back to the origins of the matter, we must grasp that Millerand and Burns are actually products of the electoral and parliamentary strategies of their socialist parties overall.

{4}

If I yield 100 steps³³, then let's assume that elections are indeed held fairly, that worthy politicians are elected, and furthermore that it is certain that they always faithfully represent the popular will. Would all of that really enable us to implement socialism? Under universal suffrage, Germany, the country of Marx and Lasalle, elected a mere two comrades at first. And then it took them more than 30 years, working day after day and month after month, to reach a count of 81. Nevertheless, the results of more than 30 years of hard-fought struggle have been blown away, with no resistance practicable, because of some measly edict of dissolution³⁴. What an ephemeral thing is an electoral majority, is it not?

³² 権 (seiken). Political power. Alternatively: ruling regime; administrative control/power.

³³ 百歩譲 (hyappo yuzutte); plain form: 百歩譲る (hyappo yuzuru). 'Yield 100 steps'. This saying conveys the following: 'for the sake of the argument, I will concede (or let's assume) that I am entirely mistaken'.

³⁴ In the 1903 elections, the Social Democratic Party won a plurality of the vote and 81 seats in the Reichstag (German parliament), the second most number of seats. The Reichstag was dissolved in December 1906 due to insufficient support in parliament for the colonial policy of the Emperor, Wilhelm II; the policy in dispute was an active genocide (1904-1908) being committed by German forces against the Herero and Nama peoples in what is now called Namibia. A new election was held in January 1907, and a parliament supportive of the colonial policy was seated; the Social Democratic Party again won a plurality of the vote, but was reduced to the fourth largest party with just 43 seats.

There are times when the constitution is suspended; times when universal suffrage is stolen; times when parliament is dissolved. If a socialist party's strength in parliament is kindled enough that it appears uncontainable, the tyrannical powers-that-be will inevitably employ such measures. They have, in fact, been employed often in Germany. At such a juncture, there is nothing to be done except await the power of unified workers; nothing to be done except await the Direct Action of united workers! But still, is it at all plausible that Direct Action could be taken without efforts being made for cultivating unity³⁵ among the ordinary working class themselves?

Hyndman³⁶, the head of Britain's Social Democratic Federation³⁷, last year in the American publication *Wilshire's Magazine*³⁸, lamenting, remarked³⁹: How the Japanese rushed from a medieval feudal system to a modern⁴⁰ capitalist system in barely 40 years! They accomplished in 40 years that which other empires took centuries to do. But what have we, the socialist parties, accomplished in those same forty years? The German Social Democratic Party

³⁵ 団練 (danketsu kunren; 'unity training'). The notion here is of developing consciousness, organizing methods, and habits of solidaristic discipline among the working class. I have opted to translate this as "cultivating unity".

³⁶ Henry Hyndman, a high-profile and domineering figure in the British Marxist movement.

³⁷ Originally launched as the Democratic Federation in 1881, the Social Democratic Federation (as it was renamed in 1884) was Britain's first socialist political party.

³⁸ A socialist periodical in the United States that ran from 1900 to 1915, published by Gaylord Wilshire.

³⁹ Although Koutoku writes that the article was from "last year" (1906), the article that he is referring to is actually from November 1904. See Appendix B.

⁴⁰ 新 (kinsei). This term now denotes the so-called 'early modern period', while 現代 (kindai) denotes 'the modern period'. However, the technical distinction only sharpened several decades after Koutoku wrote *The Change in My Thinking*, and both terms could be used to indicate 'modern'. Moreover, in Hyndman's article, the word that Koutoku renders as kinsei is "modern". Therefore, "modern" is selected as the appropriate translation, or re-translation, over the current understanding of kinsei as 'early modern'.

has three million members. They, who number more than 2/5 of the German army, know their purpose and know that their time has come. That they have not risen up yet is down to an excessive surplus of self-restraint⁴¹, modesty⁴², and gentleness⁴³, is it not? They have been a revolutionary party for 40 years; what are they ever going to accomplish? I ask them, as well as other peoples: Is death in Europe and America so much more terrifying than death in Manchuria⁴⁴? Do tell!

Hyndman's acerbic language is absolutely not unreasonable. If those three million party members were truly conscious, the revolution ought to have taken place ages ago. However, voting party members and conscious party members are different things. Even three million trained for the purposes of elections are of no use for the purposes of revolution. The proponents of universal suffrage and parliamentarism always preach "Vote! Vote!" to the working class, "If you elect our comrades to parliament, and if our comrades hold a majority in parliament, there will be a social revolution. Workers need only to vote!" And honest workers believe this and soon put their trust in parliament; and they vote; accordingly, the vote tally reaches more than three million. But this three million is just voters—it is not a conscious and unified three million. And then when they are told, "Come now, for the revolution! Rise up!"—something that was never supposed to happen—they will see that voting has failed, and, furthermore, everything must be re-assessed. This is how it works: As a parliamentary strategy accrues more influence, the revolutionary movement loses steam⁴⁵. In the election

⁴¹ 剛毅 (nin'niku). Alternatively: endurance, forbearance.

⁴² 謙遜 (kenson). Alternatively: humility, meekness.

⁴³ 和善 (onryou). Alternatively: amiability, kindness.

⁴⁴ This is a reference by Hyndman to the on-going, at the time of his article, Russo-Japanese War (1904-1905), in which Manchuria was a primary battleground.

⁴⁵ 失気 (sosou suru). Translated here as "lose[s] steam", the term means becoming 'dejected', 'demoralized', or 'spirits dropping'.