

Against the God Emperor

The Anarchist Treason Trials in Japan

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Author's Introduction

The methods of State repression are universal... all use exactly the same methods to repress, to kill, to suppress discontent, using any and all dirty tricks possible to maintain themselves in power. Sometimes to understand what is happening around us very clearly, it is necessary to step outside the situation, to see the wood for the trees, so to speak. By using the example of Japan which is, both geographically and culturally, so different from Europe and North America, we can see what is happening to us who live inside these countries.

If we can recognize the methods of repression in Japan as being the same as those which we have to suffer, then we have the possibility of understanding them, so as to combat them both physically, mentally and spiritually. To know the enemy and to know the rules of the game are important; not only to survive, but also to stand some chance of defeating the enemy. Hence this pamphlet is designed to show some of the methods or dirty tricks of the Japanese state.

However, it is also our intention to show the less well known history of an Anarchist movement: the characters involved, their actions and their ideas. This movement deserves to be better known than it is, and clearly stands as one of the finest in Anarchist and Revolutionary history. The parallels between what these Japanese Anarchists did (their actions), such as the creation of organizations, printing presses, publications, centers etc., and our own actions, so very similar, if not identical today, should not go unnoticed. Neither should their motives for doing so, their ideals, along with their integrity for maintaining them, especially against such unfair opponents, the state and capitalism. By concentrating on a handful of individuals we keep alive the spirits of these people, and thereby the movement of which they are the symbolic representatives. To show that they as individuals confronted the same basic problems as us today indicates that we too are part of the same tradition: Anarchist and thereby anti-capitalist and anti-statist. This shows too that we are not just individuals, but form part of a "wider-we," a collective. Despite being separated by time (80 years), space (a different continent) and culture (language), the recognition that their lives and struggles are the same as ours is sufficient to demonstrate that we do form part of the same struggle and movement.

If their struggle is the same as our struggle today, then this also indicates that what we are struggling against is still the same: injustice and tyranny. That the State and capitalism, despite undergoing important structural changes are fundamentally the same, and that we are the present representatives of a movement that has no frontier, or cultural limits. That our contribution to this movement, no matter how great or small, is still an important contribution, and that this movement can only continue as long as the causes for its existence are still in existence. Namely, injustice and tyranny, the state and capitalism.

Taigyaku Jiken: "High Treason Case"

On 18th January 1911 the cry of "Museifu Shugi Banzai!" (Long Live Anarchy!) was heard in a Japanese courtroom. It was shouted by Kanno Suga, one of the twenty six defendants, in response to a verdict of death by hanging for twenty four of them, and jail terms of eight and eleven years for the other two. The defendants were charged with conspiring to assassinate the emperor of Japan in what has become known as the "High Treason Case" (Taigyaku Jiken).

A series of preliminary hearings for the trial began on 10th December: the defendants were allowed one chance to present their views, and all defense witnesses were rejected by the judge. When the trial began it was held in camera (secretly) which was to stop the defendants using the dock as a platform for their ideas; to prevent them from becoming martyrs by becoming public figures; and, for Yamagata Arimoto, the mastermind of the State's conspiracy theory, the very idea of a public trial was an insult to the throne. The procurator, Hiranuma Kiichiro, (of whom we shall hear much of later, along with Yamagata) got through reams of evidence and called for the death penalty by 25th December 1910. The defense lawyers had just three days to present a case for all the defendants, 27th-29th December. The decision of the judges was unanimous.

The international outcry and demonstrations that took place in Europe and America¹ were such that on 19th January twelve of the condemned defendants had their sentences commuted to life imprisonment, by imperial decree. However, at 8 a.m. on 24th January 1911, eleven were hanged; Kanno Suga shouting "Banzai!" from the gallows was hanged the following day. A brutal discipline was meted out to those serving prison sentences: Takagi Kennei died in Chiba prison in 1914, and Okabayashi Toramatsu in Nagasaki prison was driven insane; others tried to commit suicide.

The names of those legally murdered are: Kotoku Shusui; Kanno Suga; Morichika Umpei, former editor of the Osaka Heimin Shimbun; Niimura Tadao, peasant -turned journalist; Miyashita Takichi, factory worker; Furukawa Rikisaku, gardener, Okumiya Tateyuki, veteran people's Rights Movement activist; Oishi Seinosuke, Kotoku's doctor; Naruishi Heishiro, shopkeeper; Matsuo Uita, journalist; Niimi Uichiro, journalist; and Uchiyama Gudo, Zen priest. Their ages ranged from Okumiya, who was 55, through Oishi (45) and Kotoku (41) to Niimura (25) and Furukawa (28).

It has been claimed that: what the government "had in fact done in order to concoct its conspiracy was to throw together three completely separate cases, hoping thus to deal a blow to the movement that would not be forgotten. These three were the actual 'assassination group', composed of four people; Uchiyama Gudo's secret printing activities; and the personal and medical relationship between Kotoku and the doctor Oishi Seinosuke, who had once met with Morichika Umpei to discuss the nature of the Japanese revolution'. None of the protagonists in these three affairs knew of the doings of the others, and there was no conspiracy except in the minds of certain reactionary politicians."² So, what were the events of the time?

On 25th May 1910, Miyashita Takichi, Niimura Tadao, Nitta Toru and Furukawa Rikisaku were arrested after the police had found a stockpile of bomb-making materials, which Miyashita had obtained. Kanno Suga had already entered prison on 18th May instead of paying a hefty censorship fine, so had no need to be re-arrested. Kotoku was arrested on 1st June and sent to Ichigaya prison in Tokyo. This sparked off the arrests, interrogations and torture of literally hundreds of Anarchist and Socialists. From the pre trial interrogations and trial testimony it is clear that the government could have made the arrests earlier than they did, but deliberately delayed, in order to "incriminate" as many people as possible.³

¹ Mother Earth, associated with Emma Goldman, immediately carried out a protest campaign, along with other socialist publications. Apparently, "...even the London Times condescended to murmur apprehensively at the verdict." *Museifushugi: The Revolutionary Idea in Japan*, V. Garcia & Wat Tyler, p.77.

² V.Garcia & Wat Tyler, op cit p. 78.

³ Shioida Shobei & Watanabe Junzo, (eds), Hiroku Taigyaku Jiken, quoted in Sharon Slevers, *Flowers in Salt: The Beginnings of Feminist Consciousness in Modern Japan*, p.223, n.40.

It is generally agreed that Kanno, Miyashita, Niimura and possibly two or three others were involved in an assassination plot. In fact, these three had drawn lots on 17th May to see who would throw the first bomb; Kanno had won and would make the attempt in August after her release from prison. Kotoku himself became the “connecting link between all the defendants. It was part of the prosecution’s case that Kotoku had provided information on how to make bombs to Miyashita, information he had received from Okumiya Kenshi and his friends, all of whom had been active in the “People’s Rights Movement of the 1880’s.”⁴ Kotoku had commented upon an article by Oishi in the *Shakai Shimbun* (Social News) in July 1907, and afterwards they had become friends. On his way to Tokyo from Nakamura, in July 1908, just after finishing his translation of Kropotkin’s “The Conquest of Bread” (which was secretly published in January 1909) he called in to see Oishi, Oishi was so alarmed by Kotoku’s physical condition, that as a doctor, he recommended a month’s complete rest. Kotoku refused and continued, visiting Uchiyama in Hakone. The latter ran one of the many underground presses and had published clandestinely, amongst other things, the German Anarchist Arnold Roller’s pamphlet “The Social General Strike” in 1907. This pamphlet⁵ Kotoku had acquired when visiting San Francisco in 1906, where he was fully converted to Anarchism by the personal influence of Albert Johnson, and the writings of Kropotkin. This pamphlet, along with Kotoku’s notion of direct action stemming from his Anarchism, paved the way for Anarcho Syndicalism in Japan. It was published in *Shorai no Keizan Shoshiki* (“The Economic System of the Future”).

The police themselves were well aware that not more than five individuals were involved in the plot : Kanno, Kotoku, Miyashita, Niimura and Furakawa.⁶ Furakawa had pulled out a few months before May, and even according to Kanno’s testimony at the trial, Kotoku had not only rejected the plot the preceding January (1910), but later that spring, they didn’t even dare mention it in front of him because he would have given a “disapproving lecture.”⁷ However, the death penalty was mandatory even for the intent for those wishing to cause harm to the emperor of Japan. Technically, then, these five could have been found guilty as charged; but this does not apply to the other twenty-one defendants, and certainly excludes all those others (hundreds) arrested, imprisoned and tortured. Part of Kanno’s prison diary, which was discovered in the 1950’s, written after the trial and before her legal murder absolves all the others: “...Oh, my poor friends and comrades! The most of them have been unhappily entangled into a scheme contrived by 5 or 6 persons. Merely because of our acquaintanceship they have been forced to be martyrs...”⁸

The records of the trial were not made publicly available until half a century later, until 1963, and even then they were incomplete. They proved quite conclusively that a State conspiracy had taken place. Thus: “The implications behind the trial were taken to heart by all those that still nursed radical sympathies. Kotoku and the others had been hanged for ‘intent’ to harm the emperor. In other words, it was for their ideas that they had been put on trial, and radical intellectuals were simultaneously stunned and chastened. Only half a decade later would the Japanese Anar-

⁴ J.Crump, op cit, p. 315.

⁵ J.Crump, *ibid*, pp. 242–250 for the importance of A.Roller’s pamphlet, and., chapter 8, “Kotoku Shusui and the American Connection.”

⁶ Taigyaku jiken arubamu, comp. Kotoku Shusui zenshu henshu jinkai (1972) pp 130–133. Quoted in S.Sievers, op cit, p. 222.

⁷ S.Sievers, op cit, p. 157.

⁸ Kanno Sugako, translated by Y. Hasimoto and published in *Libertaire* magazine, vol. 6, No.11 (November 1975) cited in V.Garcia & Wat Tyler, op. cit, p.76..

chist and socialist movements completely recover from this bitter blow. In the meantime, during a period known as the 'winter of socialism', the socialist movement disappeared completely."⁹

The Emperor Myth

To know why this handful of people should adopt this course of action we have to know what the social and political conditions were, and in doing that we can reveal the cowardly and barbaric methods the Japanese ruling class (and all rulers) use to suppress discontent. For up to now we have shown how the Japanese State deliberately used the Taigyaku jiken for certain purposes — arrest, torture, murder and intimidation — based on evidence now provided by the Japanese State itself: its own trial records. However, this does not explain why a few individuals would adopt a policy of killing one person (an emperor); of why such a policy was considered necessary; and whether any other courses of action was open to them.

Miyashita Takichi was a machine operator in a saw mill at Akeshina, Nagano prefecture, three hours by train ride from Tokyo. After completing a primary school course he obtained a knowledge of machinery whilst working in various plants. In January 1907 he became acquainted with the Heimin Shubun (Common Peoples Newspaper) and visited Kotoku, who was editor. In 1908 Uchiyama Gudo published Nyugoku Kinen, Museifu Kyosan ("In commemoration of their Imprisonment for Anarcho-Communism") when the sentences were passed on the defendants in the Akahata Jiken ("The Red Flag Incident") — which will be discussed later. In it Uchiyama expressed his contempt for the emperor, amongst others: "There are blood-sucking ticks — the emperor, the rich, the big landlords." Miyashita had become converted to Anarchism after reading the clandestine publications of Uchiyama, Heimin Shimbun, Kemuriyama Sentaro's Kinsei Museifushugi ("Modern Anarchism") Published in 1902, and hearing Morichika Umpei talk about the bloody origins of the imperial family.

Miyashita had made several attempts at organizing his workmates, but grew disillusioned when every strike was viciously suppressed by the police. Also, whilst he could obtain agreement from his workmates about government injustices, there was an impenetrable superstitious brick wall concerning the emperor himself. This became obvious to him on 10th November 1908, when the emperor was about to pass by train through Obu station. He began by giving out Uchiyama's pamphlet and discussing it, only to realize that not only was criticism of the emperor rejected out of hand, but that when the police instructed that there could be no work done in adjacent fields the peasant-workers willingly complied. From this moment on he resolved to kill the emperor, to dispel the myth of imperial divinity. : On 13th November 1908 Miyashita wrote to Morichika expressing his conviction that the emperor had to be killed in order for socialism to progress in Japan. Morichika showed this letter to Kotoku. On 13th February 1909 Miyashita visited Kotoku, staying at the Heiminsha office and expressed again his belief that the emperor had to be killed, the best way being to: "...make bombs..(and)... throw them at the Imperial carriage."¹⁰ Kotoku agreed with Miyashita's reasoning concerning the emperor and said that: "...such measures will no doubt be necessary; hereafter there will arise individuals who will see that such measures are

⁹ V.Garcia & Wat Tyler, op cit, p.78.

¹⁰ Shioda Shobei & Watanabe Junzo (eds.), Hiroku Taigyaku jiken, Vol. 1 p. 126, cited in F. Nolehelfer, Kotoku Shusui: Portrait of a Japanese Radical, p.170.

carried out.”¹¹ Miyashita wrote to Kotoku on 25th May 1909 stating how far his bomb-making activities had progressed, as well as confirming his willingness to “die for the cause.” In early June he visited the Heiminsha again and discussed his ideas on assassination with both Kotoku and Kanno Suga. Kotoku recommended Niimura and Furakawa to Miyashita as persons who could be thoroughly trusted as well as having “firm ideas.” The latter had first met Niimura in the preceding February, when visiting the Heiminsha, and Miyashita voiced his assassination ideas to Niimura who readily agreed.

Niimura had decided to visit Kotoku in February, just after he was released from Maebashi prison for violation of the press laws in regard to the socialist journal *Tohoku Hyoron*. Out of work, he stayed at the Heiminsha, until Kotoku managed to secure him a job with Oishi’s pharmacy in Shingu. Miyashita wrote to him there in June 1909, saying that he had begun experimenting with the construction of bombs. He had obtained 2lbs of sandarac from a friend under the pretext of refining steel from iron ore. After consulting an encyclopedia as well as talking to a friend who worked in a fireworks plant, he realized that ten parts of potassium chlorate with five parts of relagar (arsenic monosulfide) could cause a powerful explosion. However, these chemicals were difficult to get, and believing that he had exhausted the limit of a safe purchasable supply he wrote to Niimura requesting further materials.

In July or August. 1 lb of chlorate of potash was procured from a pharmacy; and in September a muller for crushing sandarac was borrowed from a friend of Niimura’s (Niimura’s elder brother, who knew nothing of this, but who had stood security for Miyashita at the saw mill, received eight years imprisonment because of this). Miyashita’s workmate, Milita Yasura, helped make five zinc-coated cans of approximately 2.38 in length by 1.19 in diameter for which Milita received 10 years imprisonment.

During the first couple of weeks of September 1909, Kanno, Kotoku and Niimura discussed the best way of assassinating the emperor. Niimura, enthused, immediately visited Miyashita to relate this, only to find that the latter’s experiments were unsuccessful. He needed more chemicals and, if possible, to consult with someone who had successfully made a bomb. Niimura related this to Kotoku; but it wasn’t until Okumiya Tateyuki, by chance, visited Kanno at the Heiminsha in the middle of October that Kotoku thought seriously about Miyashita’s request...

Okumiya had been involved in the People’s Rights Movement as a young man, where explosives were used on several occasions, and so Kotoku guessed that he must know something about them. He didn’t, but he did know the person who had made the bombs used in the Osaka Incident and would ask that person. A new chemical formula along with details for its use was provided by Okumiya, which Kotoku duly passed on to Miyashita via Niimura. Using that formula a successful explosion was caused in the mountains not far from the city of Matsumoto on 3rd November 1909. Ironically, the noise of Miyashita’s explosion was concealed by the fireworks being set off to commemorate the emperor’s birthday.

It was very apparent then that the emperor-deity system was universally accepted in Japan. The hardships endured by the peasant-workers were seen to add to the greater glory of the imperial god in his palace. The analogy with Christianity, where the suffering in this life will be rewarded in the next, should not go unnoticed here. Later, we shall elaborate upon this ideological con-trick, but Miyashita, who had been influenced by the Russian populists commitment to

¹¹ *ibid.*, p. 127, cited in Notehelfer, *ibid.*, p. 170.

regicide, was certainly not conned. He had read about them in Sentaro's book, and similarities between the two countries' autocratic-feudalism must have been very clear.

Additionally, there seemed to be a general acceptance that Japanese Anarchism (and socialism) would also go through a phase of "terrorism" (individual acts), mainly brought on by the severity of State (terrorist) repression. Arahata Kanson in *Yanaka Mura Metsubo Shi* ("A History of the Destruction of Yanaka Village") published in August 1907, which deals with the polluted Yanaka village by waste from the Ashio copper mine, and the villagers fight for compensation which was met with continual deception and repression states: "Let us look to the day which will surely come when we will revenge ourselves on them, using exactly the same methods as they used on the people of Yanaka village."¹²

Kotoku in a letter to Albert Johnson also believed that a "terrorist" phase was likely: "...Japan, which has already produced Social-Democrats and Anarchist-Communists, shall now produce many Direct-Actionists, Anti-Militarists, General Strikers and even Terrorists."¹³ However, this belief — or prediction — certainly doesn't prove his guilt; and, neither does it prove his complicity in an assassination plot. The prosecution case made Kotoku the center of activity, the "connecting links," which really means guilt by association. It was certainly true that Kotoku knew Miyashita personally, since February 1908; Oishi from July 1907, who was his physician; Uchiyama Gudo, who was his friend as well as operating one of the underground presses that had printed Kotoku's labors; Niimura Tadao and Furukawa Rikisaku, both *Heiminsha* members; and, Kanno Suga, who had worked with Kotoku on publication ventures, as well as living together as lovers. Certainly, discussions of the plot were made in the *Heiminsha* offices in the Sendagaya district of Tokyo, and Kotoku, who had re-established the old *Heiminsha*, had become a rallying point because he was one of the few radicals not in prison and was still prepared to make a public stand. So, Kotoku was often perceived as a mentor in the eyes of Anarchists and socialists; but, as a ringleader in the eyes of the State. It was this difference in perception that was to cost Kotoku, and many others, their lives; and it was also due to the Japanese State's repressive policies of fines and imprisonment, for any kind of outspokenness, that made Kotoku and the others the "remaining few." It was also due in part, to the reaction of some Anarchists to this repression and the emperor system.

Why Kotoku?

Japan's rulers also had their own reasons for singling out Kotoku, as well as maintaining a vendetta to silence him. Six years before they murdered him, the *Heimin Shimbun* was finally banned for "offending public morality," because it had printed a translation of "The Communist Manifesto" by Marx and Engels. The paper was part of the anti-war movement, whilst the Russo-Japanese war was needlessly destroying thousands of lives. Kotoku and Nishikawa Kojiro, who were the editors, received jail sentences of five years and seven months respectively, and the printing presses were confiscated, Kotoku spent February to July 1905 in Sugamo prison where he read Kropotkin's "Fields Factories and Workshops," along with other Anarchist literature and anti-religious works. On 10th August 1905 in a letter to Albert Johnson he claimed: "In deed I had

¹² Arahata Kanson, *Yanaka Village*, p.17; cited in J. Crump, op cit, p.30.

¹³ "Letter to Albert Johnson, 6th December, 1907." in Shoida Shobei (ed.) *The Diaries and Letters of Kotoku Shusui*, translated in J.Crump, *ibid.*, p. 308.

gone as a Marxian Socialist and returned a radical Anarchist.”¹⁴ Although his immediate claim can be doubted,¹⁵ it is certainly true that his ideas were in a state of flux and that very shortly a full conversion was to take place.

It was while he was in this prison that the beginnings of intestinal tuberculosis were to appear, and because the Heiminsha was in serious financial difficulties, and his latest publication Chokugen (“Straight Talking”) was banned that he declared his intention to carry on abroad. On 14th November 1905 he embarked for Seattle, where he was met by Iwasa Sakutaro – later on an influential Anarchist – who took him to San Francisco. There he met Albert Johnson, local members of the I.W.W., and the staff of “Mother Earth” and branch members of a local Heiminsha. In the radical community of Oakland where he became well known, he met socialists of all varieties and helped to organize students and immigrants into the Shakai Kakumeito (Social Revolutionary Party). Soon afterwards a dual-language magazine Kakumei (“The Revolution”) was produced

His exposure to direct action leading to the General Strike, police brutality and disillusionment with American parliamentary “democracy,” as well as witnessing mutual aid and a moneyless economy during the San Francisco earthquake in 1906, all convinced him of the viability of Anarcho-Communism. On 5th June of that year he agreed to return to Japan to help work on a paper that the newly formed Nihon Shakaito (Japan Socialist Party) wished to publish.

That party had been legally recognized in February and the outbreak of social unrest following the war was an added incentive to return. The programme, however, was an acceptance of parliamentarism: “Socialism within the limits of the law.” Invited to speak at the meeting on 28th June, his talk was on “The Tide of the World Revolutionary Movement where he denounced the ballot-box, ‘toothless reformers’ and advocated direct action culminating in the General Strike and a Social Revolution. This led to a schism, but Kotoku’s ill-health forced him to retire to Nakamura. Exactly what Japan’s rulers had always feared would happen, had happened: “dangerous” Western ideas had landed in Japan.

In his absence, pro-parliamentarians tried to hold sway, but an attempt at increasing Tokyo tramway fares in April, at a time of recession, had led to a thousand people spontaneously marching on company offices and attacking government buildings and smashing street-car windows. In September the increases were quietly introduced and a boycott was organized. Kotoku was asked to return to Tokyo to dovetail the paper with this discontent. 5th January 1907 saw the publication of the Heimin Shimbun which sold 30,000 copies on its first issue. The police, alarmed, called a conference of local police chiefs, who were also concerned by the Oakland paper Kakumei (December, 1906), which had promised to overthrow “Mikados, Kings and Presidents.” This had caused an uproar in California and consternation in Japan. The connecting link was Kokotu,

On 4th February, 3,600 farmers attacked the Ashio copper mine for polluting the area, nearly destroying the mine and its equipment. It was only crushed when 6,000 rifle and saber-carrying troops arrived. The following day Kokotu had published in the Heimin Shimbun, on the front page, Yoga Shiso no Henka; “The Change in My Thought (on Universal Suffrage).” It was a clear statement of direct action, Anarcho-Communism and Social Revolution, basing itself on Kropotkin’s “The Conquest of Bread.” The party conference convened on 17th February 1907 and

¹⁴ J.Crump, *ibid.*, p. 138.

¹⁵ There is an excellent discussion of Kotoku’s “conversion” and the reasons for it, based upon his experiences in America and of socialism, the I.W.W. and Anarchism in J.Crump, *ibid.*, chapter 8, “Kotoku Shusui and the American Connection.”

Kokotu's fiery speeches attacking parliamentarism drew 22 votes, with 2 against. A "legalist" motion was passed with a 6 vote majority, but because it proposed "raising the class consciousness of the workers and helping them achieve solidarity" an emphasis on militancy was retained. Over a third of the delegates had accepted Anarcho-Syndicalism, and Kokotu had managed to remove the clause "within the limits of the law" from the party programme. This repudiation of legality at a time of labor unrest provoked Yaamagata Aritomo to outlaw the Nihon Shakaito (J.S.P.) on 22nd February, and take legal action against the paper for printing Kokotu's article, as well as a conference report. The paper finally dissolved after 75 issues on 14th April, because many of its staff were in prison with a split amongst the rest. Within two months the Osaka (later Nihon) Heimin Shimbun became the voice of the direct-actionists, edited by Morichika Umpei until it was closed in. My 1908.

The factionalism degenerated into mutual slander and even rival associations: the Kinyo Kai ("Friday Society") direct actionists and the Doshi Kai ("Comrades Society") reformist. Kotoku had returned to Tokyo from the hot springs of Yugawara that autumn and helped form the Kinyo Kai. In September he moved to Tosa to finish the translation work started in Yugawara (Roller, Kropotkin) but mainly to do a tour of local villages resurrecting the spirit of rebellion of forty years before which brought about revolutionary change: a change in emperors and eras, Tokugawa to Meiji, and which opened Japan to Western influences.

The Open Letter

In California, on 3rd November 1907, the emperor's birth day, an "Open Letter to Mutsuhito, the Japanese Emperor, from Anarchists-Terrorists," written in Japanese, was nailed to the doorway of the Consulate in San Francisco. This leaflet Ansatsbugi ("The Terrorism") was said to have been translated into English, French and German and widely distributed.

It was an open attack on the emperor in just about every sense. The emperor was referred to throughout as sokka, a neutral and therefore highly disrespectful form of "you" as well as being referred to by name, which convention demanded he should never be addressed. It rejected the official dogma that he was 'descended from the gods, and like everyone else was descended from apes. Like his ancestors, he had come to power by "evil" methods, was a "premeditated murderer and a "butcher and had enslaved the Japanese people. It asserted the necessity of change, from propaganda to assassination, such as had happened in France and Russia (at that time) and that this was not a mere empty threat:

"Matsuhito, poor Matsuhito! 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.

3rd November, 1907
your birthday.¹⁶

The origins of the letter were traced to the Social Revolutionary Party, which Kotoku had helped to form the previous year. Although he denied any involvement, and there is no evidence to show he was involved, the wording and sentiment was unmistakably his. Kotoku couldn't be

¹⁶ J. Crump, *ibid.*, p. 205.

held (directly) responsible; and neither could Iwasa Sakutaro and Takemouchi Tetsugoro (the authors) be deported, because they claimed that they had been radicalized in the U.S.A., under the influence of Jack London (the novelist), and therefore were not “undesirable” when they entered the U.S.A. Whatever dislike Japan’s rulers had for Kotoku now changed into total hatred. Yamagata Aritomo took the letter personally to the emperor to show him, and it should be pointed out that in Japan, resignations or suicides for “failing in one’s duty” (to the emperor) was commonplace. For this personal attack, a person would be held responsible. That person was Kotoku.

This affair brought a change of policy towards both Anarchists and Socialists by the Saionji cabinet: stiffer penalties and increased police harassment. At a Kinyo Kai (“Fri day Society Group”) meeting on 17th January 1908, the police observers ordered the meeting closed because of the topic, “Thomas More’s Utopia.” Osugi Sakai, Sakai Toshihiko and Yamakawa Hitoshi ignored this and carried on. The police shut down the meeting. Those that remained argued with the police, the lights went out and a struggle occurred. Osugi climbed on the roof and shouted protests to passers-by until he was thrown off by the police. Others took his place and the police response was the same: more brutality. Six were taken by about 30 police officers to the police station, but, unexpectedly, the local crowd attempted to free them as they objected to the police’s unwarranted behavior. Osugi received 45 days imprisonment and the others between 30 and 60 days. This event is known as Okuju Enzetsu Jiken (“Roof Speeches Incident”).

For Yamagata and his military clique these sentences were too lenient and they engineered Saionji’s downfall. Their opportunity came when the police provoked the Akahata Jiken (“Red Flag Incident”) of 22nd June 1908. A reception was held in Tokyo’s Kanda district for the release from prison of Yamaguchi Gizo (or Koken). Ishikawa Sanshiro called for the reception in the hope of reconciling the split in the socialist movement. On the 19th June, however, when Yamaguchi arrived in Tokyo, the Doshi Kai faction met him holding flags with “socialism” and “revolution” written on them. As the 22nd June meetings closed, Osugi, Arahata Kanson and others unfurled flags with “Anarchism,” “Anarcho-Communism” and “Revolution” written on them. They began singing revolutionary songs and when the moderates refused to join in, as was anticipated, they burst out of the hall into the street where the police, waiting for them, pounced. For an hour the struggles and confusion went on, and Sakai Toshihiko and Yamakowa Hitoshi, who were not originally involved, were arrested for acting as intermediaries, along with Osugi, Arahata and others. Kanno Suga and Kamikawa Matsuko crossed the street from the meeting hall to the police station to see what was happening to Osugi and Arahata, where they were detained. When Kamikawa protested, they were threatened and pushed around by the police. Kanno was knocked to the ground and was prevented from getting up by the police, who were twisting her arm to pin her down. They were then dragged into police headquarters where they were reunited with Osuga Satoka, Kokurai Rei and all the others who had been arrested. They were all put into police carriages and taken to the central police station; en route they were shouting, “Long Live Anarchism!” and singing revolutionary songs.

On arrival, looking at the high walled compound, Kanno said: “So this is where they shackle the freedom of those of us who have not committed any crime.”¹⁷ The men and women were separated but not before an emotional farewell, along with shouts of advice on how to survive in prison from jailed veterans. They were all imprisoned for two months waiting for a hearing, and the Kumamoto Hyoron (Kumamoto Review), who visited the women, reported that all of

¹⁷ S. Sievers, *op cit.*, p. 154.

them were:” ‘Angry about things that had been done to them’ in jail, and hoped they could repay some of the people responsible after their release”¹⁸ In the men’s cells they all immediately demanded to be released, and soon started shouting catcalls to the police. When the police tried to quieten them they were welcomed by being spat upon. Osugi and Arahata were taken from their cells, stripped naked, dragged by their feet on stone flooring and kicked and beaten. The police relented when Arahata was beaten into unconsciousness and because the noise from the cells was so loud. They were then returned to their cells with their clothes. Next, they all demanded to go to the toilet, but when permission was refused urinated through the bars. The cell corridor soon resembled a sewer.

Sentences on Socialism

Yamagata, via the emperor, put pressure on Saionji to resign, which he was forced to do on 4th July 1908. General Katsura Taro, Yamagata’s protege, headed the cabinet and announced further restrictions. The surviving socialist groups were suppressed, police harassed meetings, and rights of assembly and free expression were restricted. Katsura also ordered the courts to pass heavy sentences for the Akahata Jiken (“Red Flag Incident”). In court on 29th August 1908, prosecution witnesses statements were fervently challenged by the defendants; and, those defendants who claimed, like Sakai, that they were only acting as intermediaries were ignored. Osugi received 2&112 years, plus a fine of 25 yen; Sakai, Arahata, Yamakawa Hitoshi and others 2 years and most of the rest at least a year. Kanno and Kamikawa, despite their admission of sympathy towards Anarchism, were released without fines or further imprisonment. Additionally, the authorities were incensed over a scrap of poetry which was scribbled on a police cell wall in Chinese. The poem praised the French King’s execution during the revolution, which was regarded as lese-majeste. Sato Saturo was held responsible, and despite his claims of innocence, supported by the other defendants, he still received 3&314 years imprisonment. The severity of the sentences shocked the defendants and created an uproar. When they recovered; shouts of “Long Live Anarchy!” along with the singing of revolutionary songs were heard from the dock...

For Osugi, the only possible ‘consolation’ was that the 1 & 1/2 year sentence recently announced for the Tokyo tramway “Streetcar Incident riot was to pass concurrently. He entered Chiba prison in September 1908, after having waited 3 months in pre-trial detention, and was eventually released in November 1910. For Osugi this event was to have saved his life; he couldn’t be implicated in the Taigyaku Jiiken (“High Treason Case”). It also saved the lives of Sakai, Yamakawa and Arahata, but Kanno, who was released, was later hanged. All were questioned about it whilst in prison, the public prosecutors insisting that the plot was hatched some four or five years earlier, so that they could have known about it, plus other conspirators had already named Osugi. The latter was questioned only once about it, but his jailers treated him with suspicion from then onwards and refused him his twice-monthly letters and visits, which worried him. In jail he actually met Taigyaku Jiken. defendants but only dared speak to speak in a whisper to Kotoku, but as the latter was partially deaf he did not hear him.

As we mentioned much earlier, Kotoku, after hearing about the “Red Flag Incident,” quickly completed his translation of Kropotkin before returning to Tokyo on the 21st June 1908, visiting Oishi and Gudo en route, and to re-establish the old Heiminsha. Although he was not involved

¹⁸ S. Sievers, *ibid.*, pp. 154–155.

in these events, his presence did not go unnoticed by Japan's rulers. Ever since the "Open Letter" event (November 1907) his house in Nakamura was so carefully watched; and meticulously, that the family's sake business began to decline. After the "Red Flag Incident" and Katsuar's new repressive policies, surveillance on Kotoku was increased: "...his house was guarded by four police men, two in front and two in back. Everyone who visited him was forced to give their name, and then this person was also followed by a detective."¹⁹

The police set up a tent in a field adjacent to the Heiminsha and interrogated anyone visiting it and followed them in turn. Kotoku wrote: "During the time I was in Tokyo the policemen always followed me. All my business and movements were so illegally and cowardly interfered with by them that I became unable to get any livelihood."²⁰ The purpose of all this being: "...not merely to keep watch on the socialists but to make life impossible for them... Few employers would give work to men and women whom the police agents were ostentatiously shadowing and many socialists were reduced to the direst poverty."²¹ Also: "The police openly boasted that, when it came to controlling the socialist movement, they did not consider themselves bound by the constitution and it was widely rumored that a directive had gone out to army units throughout the country early in 1907, instructing them to hold themselves in readiness 'to destroy the socialist movement at its roots.'²²

Although State repression had increased with Katsura in July 1908, the following account, taken from the *Shakai Shimbun* (Socialist Weekly) for 26th April 1908, entitled "Intimidation the way of Suppressing (the) Socialist Movement, is very illuminating:

"The police then go to the employers and advise them to prohibit the Socialist Weekly (i.e. *Shakai Shimbun*). The employers are glad to do so and order the workers not to read the paper and say that they will be dismissed if they disobey the order. We have several cases of dismissals of workers because they read the S.W. or received a letter from our editor. If our organizer goes to a worker's house the police go to the worker and cross-examine him as if he be connected with some criminals. On the road where we sell the Socialist papers or books the police stand by to investigate and put down buyers' names and places of living. By this way the authority has been attempting to kill the movement and above all boycott the Socialist Weekly."²³

As far as Kotoku was concerned, at this time, his intention was to work on the Heiminsha. That summer. Kanno was secretary to the paper, and a relationship developed between the two. This had consequences in more ways than one. Kanno had registered at the prison that she was Arahata's "common-law wife" which gave the impression that Kanno and Kotoku had betrayed Arahata, who was serving two years for the "Red Flag Incident." They both received a lot of flak for this from within the Anarchist and socialist movements. Kanno always insisted that she did this as a ruse to obtain prison visiting rights, and that Arahata himself was aware of that, and that their relationship had ended prior to their being imprisoned awaiting trial. Kanno always

¹⁹ Katayama Sen, *The Labour movement in Japan*, Chicago, 1918. pp. 132-135; cited in S.Sievers, *ibid.* p.221,n.28.

²⁰ Kotoku to Albert Johnson 11th April 1910, cited in J.Crump, *op cit.*, p. 306.

²¹ J. Crump, *ibid.*, p. 306.

²² J. Crump, *ibid.* p.306. The quote is from Ishikawa Kyokuzan (Sanshiro) and Kokotu Shusul, *Nihon Shakalshugi Shi* (A History of Japanese Socialism) in *Meiji Bunku zenshu* (Collected Works on the Culture of the Meiji Era), Tokyo, 1929, Vol. 21. p.370.

²³ Cited in J. Crump, *ibid.*, pp. 303-304.

maintained her commitment to those left behind in prison. In fact this made them a constant source of police harassment. Kotoku was also receiving criticism because of his lack of drive, especially when he had been put on a bit of a pedestal as a mentor: he just wasn't living up to (somebody's) expectations. This left them somewhat isolated both ideologically and socially.

Kanno's militancy certainly was a source of inspiration for Kotoku, and his ideas about direct action certainly appealed to her as well. This combination, in conjunction with the State's brutal repressive policies, could make assassination of an emperor-deity seem a really good idea. There is one other important factor as well; they were both aware that they were each dying from tuberculosis and didn't have much longer to live. Kanno had caught that terrible disease when she was nursing her sister Kanno Hide. In December 1906, Kanno (Suga) and Hide moved to Tokyo where Suga managed to get a job with the *Mainichi Denpo* ("Daily Telegraph"). She was also writing for the *Sekai Fujin* ("Women of the World"), a feminist paper, which first appeared in 1st January 1907, and celebrations commemorating the first issue of the *Heimin Shimbun* were held at her house. By February though her sister's condition had deteriorated seriously; and from the 9th to the 21st February she, and Arahata, whom she was living with, watched helplessly as the life slowly drained out of her. Hide died at the age of twenty-one, and was buried at Tokyo's Seishunji temple at 6 a.m. "...without Buddhist or Shinto priests; without flowers or flags. (It was a ceremony of)...only true feelings."²⁴

Near the end, Arahata and Kanno talked of obtaining hospital treatment for Hide, but with only 40 yen between them this last minute effort wouldn't have helped much. After her death, Kanno took a leave of absence from her job and went to the health spa of Ito to test and reflect. Her own condition had already been diagnosed as positive, and feeling totally drained from caring for Hide this only served to emphasize her own illness. When she returned to Tokyo in the late summer of 1907 she worked again for the *Mainichi Denpo*, mainly to obtain a wage. She felt the loss of her sister very deeply, and she was becoming estranged from Arahata, both personally and politically. She spent most of her time within the socialist community, especially with the Sakai family: Sakai Toshihiko, Nobuaka Tameko (who were married) and their children.

Tameko, with whom she became friends, had become involved with the *Heimin Shimbun* in May 1905 after hearing Matsuoka give a lecture on behalf of the women's socialist group, called "The Mission of Today's Socialist Woman." The offices of the *Heiminsha* were being used on Saturday afternoons for women's meetings, where lectures, food and companionship were offered. Apart from women based articles originating from there that appeared in a variety of socialist papers at this time, Tameko and Matsuoka encouraged everyone using the *Heiminsha* of fice to use the same neutral form of address, thus eliminating (verbal) distinctions of class and sex.

A Target for the State

During this period, late summer through to her own arrest in the "Red Flag Incident" in June 1908, she listened to all the debates raging within socialist circles about direct action and parliamentarism. As she professed in court, in August 1908, she was sympathetic to Anarchism. Her sister had died of tuberculosis, which affected her profoundly, and she was dying from it also. There had been social discontent on a large scale ranging from strikes, particularly at Ashio, as

²⁴ Arahata Kanson, *Hitosuji no michi*, p. 153. 1954; cited in S.Sievers, *op cit.*, p. 152.

well as the street-car riots in Tokyo; additionally, the State's repressive policies towards Anarchists, socialists and feminists, whom she knew personally, highlighted her feelings of social injustice. She herself had spent two months in prison for having committed no crime, was brutally treated whilst in custody, was eventually found not guilty and to top it all her illness was made worse by her imprisonment, and she had lost her job with the Mainichi Denpo, which refused to employ someone under constant police surveillance. She was now a target for the State, and she was aware that she would remain so, given her views and commitment to those in prison.

Despite these horrendous conditions under which Kanno and Kotoku individually lived, along with the malicious rumor campaign permeating radical circles about their relationship which isolated them, they tried once more to produce a paper. On 25th May 1909 Jiyu Shiso ("Free Thought") was published, but it was banned immediately. Kanno was fined 140 yen and Kotoku 70 yen on the 10th of August for an article that advocated the destruction of the family. On 1st September Kanno was caught illegally distributing a second issue and was fined the staggering sum of 400 yen. Also, in late May 1909 the Rinsenji Temple in Hakone was raided by the police. They discovered twelve sticks of dynamite, four packages of explosive gelatin, a supply of fuses and a variety of Anarchist literature. Uchiyama, with these explosives, along with five or six "...death defying men..." was hoping to kill the emperor. Six days later, on 29th May, Uchiyama was arrested when he returned to Hakone. He was charged with illegal possession of explosives, as well as violating the press and publication laws. He was found guilty and sentenced to twelve years imprisonment. He was later re-arrested, charged, found guilty and hanged in the Taigyaku jiken.

Uchiyama was a member of the Soto sect attached to the Rinsenji Temple, and became concerned about the dire state of the impoverished peasants in the local mountainous region in which he served. His interest in socialism began after reading Yano Fumio's Shin Sekai, and in 1905. He met Kotoku at Kato Tokijiro's hospital in Odawara. This is when he became seriously interested in revolutionary activity. Uchiyama went to Tokyo in September 1908 to consult with Kotoku, specifically about Kropotkin's ideas, as well as obtaining the equipment to start an underground press in Hakone. Kotoku orally translated passages from Roller's "Social General Strike," to explain how Kropotkin's Anarcho-Communist ideas could be achieved. Uchiyama, convinced by the principles of Anarcho-Communism, and the strategy of Anarcho-Syndicalism, as well as being impressed by Kotoku's ability to provide the desired printing equipment, returned to Hakone. There he quickly printed Roller's pamphlet, published in Japanese as Shorai no Keizan Shoshiki ("The Economic System of the Future") and, subsequently, other literature as well.

Bomb Throwing

In September, discussions about an assassination attempt were carried on in the Heiminsha offices. By October, Kanno's health was failing, she was coughing up blood, and she suffered a nervous breakdown. November saw the first successful explosion by Miyashita, and on New Year's Day they practiced throwing cans.

Kanno was all in favor of killing the emperor, and Niimura suggested that she could act like Sophia Perovskaia, when the latter had taken part in assassinating Tsar Alexander II. Kotoku however, although sympathetic to the idea, was warned by Koizumi Shanshin of the imminent danger, especially after Uchiyama's arrest, in which they all were. Kotoku, aware of his own

imminent death by tuberculosis: "... realized that he had only a few years left; and that given this state of affairs he was determined to do his 'utmost' for the revolution...he was now 'entering the field of battle', and was fully prepared to die either of 'illness' or the death sentence' in the next few years."²⁵ however, Niimura, Koizumi and Matsui Hakken persuaded him not to actually get involved in the assassination attempt, but to use his literary talents, which were considerable, for the benefit of the movement. Koizumi even suggested that if Kotoku were to concentrate on writing history for a while, perhaps the State would ease up in its persecution of him, as well as Kanno. Exhausted from his years of struggle against the Japanese State, he felt that he was "fighting the whole of Japan," he believed that he and Kanno could move to the countryside, perhaps to his native village of Kochi, to die in peace. His concern over Kanno's failing health, and to rid himself of police harassment, and the malicious rumors and attacks from within the socialist and capitalist-based Tokyo press, as well as his own doubts about the plot, all seemed alluring.

Koizumi, in March, approached Hosono Jiro, a member of the lower house of the Diet, somebody who knew Kotoku personally and was independently wealthy, to agree to finance Kotoku for the next couple of years. The catch was that Kotoku would have to give up his radical activities and just write non-political history. Hosono and Matsui met also with Hirata Tosuke, the Home Minister in the Katsura Cabinet, and claimed that Kotoku had a change of heart, that they would vouch for him and hoped his talents could be used for the benefit of the nation. They also suggested to Hirata that the government could help in this by easing the pressure on Kotoku. Next, Hosono and Koizumi visited the Commissioner of Police, Kamei Eizaburo, who was a good friend of Hosono's, several times. Their visits were designed to arrange police cooperation in this venture, by easing the restrictions on Kotoku. This would only be done, however, if Kotoku were to compromise."

In mid-March, after securing police and government promises of co-operation, a meeting was arranged in Kojimachi between Kotoku, Koizumi Hosono and a Home Ministry representative. Hosono openly urged Kotoku to "recant"; and, Koizumi suggested that he withdraw from the socialist movement for a couple of years, to write a history of the Segoku (late Ashikaga) period. If this were done then, it was hinted, several thousand yen could be found via Hosono and Koizumi. If agreed, it would be wise if Kotoku were to leave Tokyo for a while, perhaps to his favorite retreat of Tennoya Inn, in Yugawara. Kotoku revealed some interest, and Koizumi attempted to convince Kanno of the plan. On 22nd March, they closed the Heimisha and both left for Yugawara. During the next couple of weeks Kotoku worked on a history of the Sengoku period, and police harassment ceased.

The time they spent there was not a happy one, and any "hints" of money didn't materialize. Also, Kanno had no reservations and wanted to die in battle. She accepted responsibility for the fines in the Jiyu Shiso case, because she knew that Kotoku's health would not stand up to another bout of imprisonment. When she left Yugawara from prison both knew that their relationship had ended.

En route to prison she met the others to discuss plans for the assassination attempt, whereupon it was agreed that no attempt would be made until after her release from prison in 3 1/2 months time. She was alarmed over the lack of security, especially on Miyashita's part, but

²⁵ Shloda Shobel, op cit., p. 171.

was still committed to it. She had already drawn the winning lot and would throw the bomb immediately on her release from prison in August 1910.

True to form, Kotoku fulfilled his obligations. His talent was literary and was used in the service of the Anarchist movement. His last work *Kirisuto Massatsu Ron* (Rubbing out Christ) was, in his own words, about "...I am writing a book in which I mean to assert that Christ never existed, but was a myth; that the origin of Christianity is found in pagan mythology, and that most of the Bible is a forgery..."²⁶

This was his final letter to Albert Johnson and was, in effect, much more an attack upon Christianity: it extended to "rubbing-out" the emperor-deity-system as well, but in intellectual terms. To realize this we have to know about the introduction and influence which Christianity had upon Japan from the early Meiji era (1868) onwards. Obviously, it was a western notion, and became so ingrained in the general socialist movement at the time (also a Western idea) that Kotoku had witnessed the subtle stranglehold that it had on people. For instance, when he had attempted to assemble a reliable core of militants whilst in America, he found that they accepted Christianity, much to his surprise. This situation was even worse in Japan itself, where there was not only a Christian movement, but a self-avowedly Christian-Socialist one.²⁷ This attack upon Christianity then, was in keeping with his Anarchist views of "No Gods, No Masters," and was also an attack on all myths, including the emperor-deity one. Much of the research for the book was carried on in the San Francisco library when he stayed there. Also, we should recall that in prison (1905) just prior to going there he was reading two types of literature: Anarchist and Anti-religious. He had also been sent much Anti-Christian literature by his Anarchist friend, Albert Johnson, who was a militant atheist. Ironically, when he was arrested on 1st June 1910, he was trying to board a train for Tokyo in order to find a publisher for the book. Miyashita, Kanno and the others were trying to kill the emperor; Kotoku was killing the idea of an emperor.

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Postscript

There is one other item, which appeared too late to be consulted here, but which must be mentioned: the Libertaire Group’s *A Short History of the Anarchist Movement in Japan* (Tokyo, August, 1979). Conceivably unique in the history of anarchist publishing, the book becomes an even more astonishing achievement when one considers that it was produced entirely by Japanese people with no help from native speakers of English. Within its 252 pages it contains, apart from a “Historical Sketch” by Hagiwara Shintaro and a Chronology by Sakaira Junji, more than 200 pages of documents compiled and translated by Hashimoto Yoshiharu, dating from the popular: Rights Movement of the 1870’s, to the Anarcho-Communist party of the 1930’s. Included are writings by Nakae Chomin, Kotoku Shusui, Osugi Sakae, Kondo Kenji, Mizunuma Tatsuo, Furata Daijiro, Hatta Shuzo, Ito Noe, Takamura Itsue, Tsuji Jun, Ishikawa Sanshiro, Iwasa Sakutarō, Kubo Jo, Suzuki Yasuyuki and Uemura Tei, as well as the rules of the Oriental Socialist Party and the platform and regulations of the Jiren syndicalist labor federation. Each selection is prefaced by an explanation and a historical note by Hashimoto, together with brief biographies of the people mentioned, and the whole is tied together by short linking — pieces to provide continuity. This book is a must for all readers of the present volume, providing the documentary background to the activities of the many individuals described here.

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Against the God Emperor
The Anarchist Treason Trials in Japan
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