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My Socialism

Takagi Kenmyo (Ensho)

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1959

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Takagi Kenmyo (1864–1914) was a Jodo Shinshu cleric from Higashi Hongaji, expelled from the order because of his involvement in the socialist-anarchist movement. He was tried and convicted for seemingly fabricated charges of conspiring against the emperor's life and died in prison, allegedly at his own hand. Translated by Robert F. Rhodes.

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who recite Namu Amida Butsu are included among the inhabitants of the Land of Bliss. Inasmuch as this is what the nembutsu signifies, we must process from the spiritual realm and completely change the social system from the ground up. I am firmly convinced that this is what socialism means.

In closing, I wish to cite a passage from one of Shinran Shonin's letters, which is (often) quoted in pro-war arguments, and ask my friends, the readers, to see if it advocated the opening of hostilities or whether it is a gospel for peace.

The Go-Shosoku-Shi (A Collection of Letters), first column, right-hand section of the fourth page (the first part is abridged), states:

“In the final analysis, it would be splendid if all people who say the nembutsu, not just yourself, do so not with thoughts of themselves, but for the sake of the imperial court and for the sake of the people of the country. Those who feel uncertain of birth should say the nembutsu aspiring first for their own birth. Those who feel that their own birth is completely settled should, mindful of the Buddha's benevolence, hold the nembutsu in their hearts and say it to respond in gratitude to that benevolence, with the wish, “May there be peace in the world, and may the Buddha's teachings spread!”²¹

Alas, this is an example of the old adage that “fear makes us see monsters in the dark.”²² Although the passage above is a gospel for peace, have people mistaken it for the sound of a bugle commanding us to attack the enemy? Or did I mistake the bells and drums of battle for injunctions for peace? I shall leave it up to my friends, the readers, to decide.

However, I am fortunate in that I hear both bugles and bells of battle as gospels for peace. Many thanks. Namu Amida Butsu.

²¹ *The Collected Works of Shinran*, vol. 1, p. 560.

²² A well-known phrase from the *Lieh-tzu*.

Preface¹

My socialism does not derive from that of Karl Marx. Nor does it follow from Tolstoy's pacifism. I do not seek to interpret it scientifically and propagate it throughout the world, like Mr. Katayama,² Kosen,³ or Shusui.⁴ However, I have a faith that is mine alone, which I have put down on paper as I intend to put it into practice. Though my friends, the readers, may oppose my position and subject it to laughter, what follows is something of which I am firmly convinced.

Main Discourse

I do not feel that socialism is a theory, but rather a kind of practice. One person says that it is a prophetic call for social reform, but I think socialism is the first step (towards such a reform). Thus we hope to put it into practice as extensively as possible. I think we need to reform the social system rapidly and change the social structure completely from the ground up. Yet another person is propagating socialism as a political theory. However, I consider socialism to be related much more deeply to religion than to politics. In proceeding to reform society, we have to, first of all, begin

¹ Ensho is Takagi's pen-name, taken from the name of his temple, Enshozan Josenji. This essay is one of two pieces of Takagi Kenmyo's extant writings, which was discovered by Yoshida Kyuichi among Takagi's confiscated papers and published for the first time in Yoshida 1959, listed in the bibliography below. According to Takagi's own note attached to the paper, “This draft was complete in the... month of Meiji 37 (1904).” The translation is based on the amended text found in Takagi Kenmyo Tsuito Shukai, ed., *Enshoki kiroku*, pp. 19–25, also listed below. Parenthesis in the translation indicates words added by the translator, while square brackets indicate passages found in brackets in the original text.

² Katayama Sen (1859–1933), an influential socialist activist and leader of the Japanese trade union movement.

³ Refers to Sakai Toshihiko (1871–1933) also known as Sakai Kosen, a leading socialist who started the *Heimin Shinbun* with Kotoku Shusui in 1903.

⁴ Refers to Japanese anarchist Kotoku Shusui (1871–1911)

from our own spirituality. Hence I should like to set forth the gist of my faith and practice just as I understand it, without borrowing from past systems of those socialists who are my so-called elders.

I shall discuss socialism by dividing it into two parts. The first is the object of faith while the second is the content of faith. The first (part on the) object of faith will be further divided into three sections: (1) the doctrine (2) the teacher and (3) society. Next the second (part on the) content of faith will also be further divided into two sections: (1) the revolution of thought and (2) practical action.

What, then, do I mean by the doctrine, which is the first (topic concerning) the object of faith? It is *Namu Amida Butsu*. “*Namu Amida Butsu*” is an Indian word, and it is truly the saving voice of the Buddha, which shines like a light in the dark night, protecting us with absolute equality. Even though it is working to provide peace and comfort to intellectuals, scholars, government officials and the wealthy, Amida’s main concern is with the common people. (*Namu Amida Butsu*) is the mighty voice that grants happiness and comfort to ignorant men and women.

Expressed in Japanese, *Namu Amida Butsu* is the voice calling on us not to worry because the transcendental being of universal good called Amida Buddha will save us, and to have no fear because he will protect us. Ah! It’s *Namu Amida Butsu* that gives us strength and life!

It is truly the absolute transcendental compassion. It is the Buddha’s universal love. We can only be appalled by those who delight in hearing that *Namu Amida Butsu* is a command to killing. This evidently goes to show that only a few people in our country have understood either religion or *Namu Amida Butsu*.

In short, I think that *Namu Amida Butsu* refers to peace and comfort as well as salvation and happiness provided equally to all. How can we misunderstand this *Namu Amida Butsu* to be a command to subjugate the hated enemy?

gata’s mind of compassion. [“Open ourselves up” or “bear with patience”? Perhaps it is better to use the expression “truly recognize here, rather than “bear with patience.”]²⁰ We must practice it. Even a haughty seventy-year-old marquis who has received the Grand Order of the Chrysanthemum cannot be called an ideal human as long as he treats a pretty seventeen or eighteen-year-old like a toy. Even though a general may have been victorious in war, if he pays no attention to (the number of) soldiers dead or wounded, he is not worth a penny to us. A person who beats a child just for peeping into a nobleman’s house is truly despicable.

No, we do not wish to become recipients of the Grand Order of the Chrysanthemum, generals or noblemen like them. We are not laboring in order to become such people. The only thing I wish is to accomplish through my great energy and labor is progress and community life. We labor in order to produce and we cultivate our minds so that we can attain the Way. But look at what’s happening! We cannot help but lament when we hear that religious functionaries are praying to gods and Buddhas for victory. Indeed, a feeling of pity arises in my heart and I am sorry for them.

We must take our stand within this world covered over by darkness, and propagate the saving light, peace and happiness (of *Namu Amida Butsu*). Only then can we fulfill our great responsibility. My friends! Pray recite this “*Namu Amida Butsu*” with us. Cease taking pleasure in victory and shouting “*banzai*.” This is because “*Namu Amida Butsu*” is the voice that leads everyone equally to salvation. My friends! Pray recite this “*Namu Amida Butsu*” with us, cast off your aristocratic pretensions and cease looking down upon the common people. This is because *Namu Amida Butsu* is the voice of expressing sympathy with the common people. My friends! Pray recite this “*Namu Amida Butsu*” with us, remove all thoughts of the struggle for existence from your minds, and exert yourselves for the sake of community life. This is because people

²⁰ This is Takagi’s editorial note to himself

over this point, speaking of “taking refuge (in Amida Buddha) in one instant of thought” or the “practitioners faith.”

As I have stated above, when we come to seek the ideal world upon receiving instructions from teachers like Shakyamuni, and reflect deeply within our minds by hearing the voice of the savior Amida calling to us, we then gain peace of mind, feel great joy and become vigorous in spirit.

This is truly so. We live in a country where the common people in general are sacrificed for the fame, peerage and medals of one small group of people. It is a society in which the common people in general must suffer for the sake of a small number of speculators. Are not the poor treated like animals at the hands of the wealthy? There are people who cry out in hunger; there are women who sell their honor out of poverty; there are children who are soaked by the rain. Rich people and government officials find pleasure in treating them like toys, oppressing them and engaging them in hard labor, don't they?

The external stimuli being like this, our subjective faculties are replete with ambition. This is truly the world of defilement, a world of suffering, a dark night. Human nature is being slaughtered by the devil.

However, the Buddha continually calls to us: “I shall protect you, I shall save you, I shall help you.” People who have discovered this light have in truth gained peace and happiness. I believe that they have been released from the anguish that makes them turn away from the world and have gained hope.

Our thoughts cannot but change completely: “I will do what the Buddha wishes me to do, practice what he wishes me to practice and make the Buddha's will my own will. I will become what the Tathagata tells me to become.” This is the time of great determination!

Second, practical action. Since the revolution in thought discussed above is the result of a profound empathy with the Buddha's universal love, we need to open ourselves up to the Tatha-

I have heard Dr. Nanjo⁵ speak several times (where he exhorted his audience by saying) “if you die, you will go to the Pure Land, so (don't worry about your life and) attack the enemy!” Did he stir up feelings of hostility (in his audience)? (If so) isn't this pitiful?

Second, the teacher [meaning the “teacher of human beings”] refers to my ideal person. First is Shakyamuni. Each of his works and phrases reflects his theory of individualism. But what about his life? Casting away his royal rank, he became a mendicant monk, all for the purpose of removing suffering from and giving happiness to people. He spent his entire life with only three robes and a begging bowl, and died under the bodhi tree. At the time of his death, even birds and animals wept in sorrow. Wasn't he a great socialist of the spiritual realm? [Though his socialism is not identical in theory with that of the Heiminsha⁶ or that of the followers of Chokugen.⁷] He thought little of social rank or status. (Through his teachings), he reformed part of the social system of his time. Indeed, there is no question that he succeeded in changing a number of things.

Although I could name a number of teachers in India and China. I shall not mention them here. In Japan, people like Dengyo (767–822),⁸ Kobo (774–835),⁹ Honen (1133–1212),¹⁰ Shinran

⁵ Nanjo Bun'yu (1847–1927). A scholar and priest of the Otani branch of Jodo Shinshu. He was one of the first to undertake the study of Sanskrit Buddhist texts in Japan. From 1903 to 1923, he served as president of Otani University.

⁶ A socialist organization created by Kotoku Shusui and Sakai Toshihiko in 1903, which published the weekly *Heimin Shinbun* (Commoner's News). However, the newspaper was forced to close down in 1905 due to government repression and lack of resources.

⁷ Another socialist weekly, which took the place of *Heimin Shinbun* after its closure. In eight months the newspaper was also banned by the government.

⁸ Refers to Saicho, the founder of the Tendai school. The imperial court posthumously granted him the title of Dengyo Daishi (Master who Transmitted the Teachings)

⁹ Refers to Kukai, also known as Kobo Daishi (The Master who Spread the Dharma). Founder of the Shingon school.

¹⁰ Founder of the Jodo school

(1173–1262),¹¹ Ikkyū (1394–1481),¹² or Rennyo (1415–1499)¹³ all reserved their deepest sympathy primarily for the common people. In particular, when I remember that Shinran spoke of “fellow practitioners walking together in the same direction” and stated that “the venerable titles of monks and priests are used for serfs and servants,”¹⁴ I realize that he was really not only deeply sympathetic towards the common people, but that he was also, without a doubt, a socialist who realized a life of non-discrimination in the spiritual realm. [However, even this is different from the theory of present-day socialists.] In light of these points, I declare Buddhism to be the mother of the common people and the enemy of the nobility.

Third is society, which refers to the ideal world. What do you all think? I consider the Land of Bliss (i.e. the Pure Land) to be the place in which socialism is truly practiced. If Amida is endowed with the thirty-two marks,¹⁵ the novice bodhisattvas who gather (in the Land of Bliss) are also endowed with the thirty-two marks. If Amida is endowed with the eighty minor marks,¹⁶ the practitioners in the Land of Bliss are also endowed with the eighty minor marks. If Amida enjoys delicious meals of a hundred flavors, sentient beings (of the Land of Bliss) also enjoy delicious meals of a hundred flavors. If Amida is the “sublime unity of the accommo-

¹¹ Honen’s disciple and founder of the Jodo Shin school.

¹² A popular Rinzai Zen monk known for his eccentric behavior.

¹³ The eighth abbot of Honganji of the Jodo Shin school.

¹⁴ Paraphrase of the second and third lines of the 12th verse of *Gutoku hitan jukkai* (*Gutoku’s Lament and Reflection*) which is part of Shinran’s *Shozomatsuwasan* (Hymns of the Dharma Ages). Cf. *The Collected Works of Shinran*, vol. 1, p. 423

¹⁵ Thirty-two distinguishing marks which all Buddhas are said to possess on their bodies.

¹⁶ Eighty minor physical characteristics which all Buddhas are said to possess.

dated body and the fulfilled body,”¹⁷ then the practitioners are also “sublime unity of the accommodated body and the fulfilled body” (Those born in the Land of Bliss) gain supernatural powers identical with those of Amida Buddha – Including the ability to see anything at any distance, the ability to hear any sound at any distance, the ability to go anywhere at will, the ability to know the thoughts of others, the ability to recollect their own former lives and of others – and, realizing that “the Buddha mind is the mind of great compassion,” become beings who continually fly to other lands in order to save people with whom they are karmically related. This is why it is called the “Land of Bliss.” In truth, socialism is practiced in this Land of Bliss.

We have never heard that beings in the Land of Bliss have attacked other lands. Nor have we ever heard that they have started a great war for the sake of justice. Hence I am against war (with Russia).¹⁸ I do not feel that a person of the Land of Bliss should take part in warfare. [However, there may be those, among the socialists, who advocate the opening of war.] [This refers to Mori Saian (1871–1938).¹⁹]

I shall now discuss the section of the content of faith: the revolution of thought. Specialists (of Shin Buddhist doctrine) wrangle

¹⁷ All Buddhas are said to possess three bodies: (1) the accommodated body (Nirmana-kaya) or the body with which Buddhas manifest themselves to save sentient beings, (2) the fulfilled body (Sambhoga-kaya), or the body which Buddhas receive as the result of their past practices, and (3) the Dharma body (dharma-kaya), or the body of Buddhas identified with the Dharma itself. In Pure Land Buddhism, there was a major controversy over whether Amida Buddha should be understood as the accommodated or fulfilled body. On this point, Shinran states as follows in the preface to the Chapter on True Realization in the *Kyogyoshinsho*. “Amida Tathagata comes forth from suchness and manifests various bodies – fulfilled, accommodated, and transformed.” *The Collected Works of Shinran*, vol. 1, p. 57

¹⁸ The Russo-Japanese war (lasted from February 1904 to September 1905)

¹⁹ Journalist and priest of the Shingon school. Publisher of the newspaper *Muro shinpo*.