

## **Anarcho-syndicalism in Japan: 1911 to 1934 - Philippe Pelletier**



An essay on the rise and fall of organized anarchism in Japan in the early 20th century, with special emphasis on its anarcho-syndicalist dimension, with interesting details concerning the disputes, splits and controversies that plagued the Japanese movement and which were surprisingly similar in their basic contours to those that affected the anarchist movement in the West during the same period.

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The history of anarcho-syndicalism, anarchism, and more generally the workers and peasants movement in Japan between the two world wars, is of unprecedented richness. It also contributes powerful lessons in all domains: tactical, strategic, ideological and philosophical. If a conclusion can be drawn from this experience, it is this: on the other side of the world hundreds, if not thousands, of people fought for an ideal of libertarian emancipation expressed in values that, of course, while depending on the local context—Japanese and more broadly Asian—were nonetheless, and still are, of universal significance.

The Japanese anarchists and anarcho-syndicalists, however, did not evolve in a closed environment. They were always informed, sometimes after a certain delay, of the theoretical trends and strategic debates of the movement in the rest of the world. They were always making contacts, traveling and translating. Kotoku Shusui (1871-1911) went to the United States; Osugi Sakae (1885-1923) to France and China; Ishikawa Sanshiro (1876-1956) to Belgium and France (where he was the guest of Paul Reclus) and to China in 1927; Iwasa Sakutarō (1879-1967) to California and China; Yamaga Taiji (1892-1970) to China, Taiwan and the Philippines. Besides learning to speak western languages, many of them also spoke Esperanto (Osugi Sakae, Yamaga Taiji, etc.). They were thus participants in numerous international initiatives. Anarchists were also more numerous than communists in the Japanese delegations that attended the preliminary conference for the “Far Eastern Peoples’ Congress” held in Irkutsk in November 1921. The anarcho-syndicalist Yoshida Hajime was even a member of the delegation that attended the plenary conference in Moscow in 1921.<sup>1</sup>

This history, however, presents difficulties to the would-be investigator. Besides the problems posed by the linguistic barriers to understanding the texts, we must call attention to at least two factors that have long constituted obstacles to this project: the predominance, among the historians of the post-war period, of not only the viewpoints of liberal democracy, but also of the Marxist left, in the interpretation of the pre-war period, which has resulted in the concealment or marginalization of the role played by the anarchists and anarcho-syndicalists; the extreme weakness of the Japanese anarcho-syndicalist and anarchist movement during this same pre-war period, linked in part to the factor mentioned immediately above [Marxist and liberal predominance] and also to the dramatic changes undergone by a country that over the course of thirty years was transformed from a developing country (as it was categorized by the geographer Yves Lacoste in the fifties) to one of the major industrial powers.

Fortunately, the Japanese, whose culture places such a high value on the written word and memory, have preserved multiple traces of this history. Some of its militants have attempted to translate it into English. Furthermore, after about fifty years, a new generation of western researchers and historians has been able to take a fresh look at the works of their predecessors (George Beckmann, Fred Notehelfer, Thomas Stanley, Stephen Large) who were, to say the least, “commissioned” by the American authorities, in the framework of the cold war, with the job of knowing the global communist enemy; this new generation produced works of high quality, on Japan as well as China (Korea was, at the time, the big missing piece in this picture).

In this connection we must emphasize above all the contribution made by historians like John Crump, Byron Marshall, Phil Billingsley, Arif Dirlik, Edward Krebs and Peter Zarrow (the last two have written about China). The other original contribution of these investigations, although one does not necessarily have to share their perspectives, lies in the fact that, apart from a few exceptions, they offer the invaluable advantage of not distorting the principles or the history of anarchism or anarcho-syndicalism. We must also mention in this regard the work of the Biographical Dictionary of the International Workers Movement, edited by Jean Maitron (the volume on Japan was written by Shiota Shobei, a pro-communist author) [*Le Japon*. Shiota Shobei, *Dictionnaire biographique du mouvement ouvrier international*, collection Jean Maitron, Editions ouvrières/Editions de l’Atelier, 1978, 2 tomes].

### **1. From the “Peoples Party” (*Heiminsha*) to the “era of winter”**

1911 was a crucial and tragic year for both socialism and anarchism in Japan. It was in this year that, alleging a plot to assassinate the Emperor, the Japanese state capitalized on this opportunity to crush the nascent socialist movement (*Taigyaku Jiken*), and branded participation in the movement as “high treason”.

At the conclusion of a trial without any possibility for appeal, 24 persons were condemned to death; 12 of them were executed. Among the latter were Kanno Sugako (1881-1911) and his comrade Kotoku Shusui (1871-1911). Both were anarchists. Kotoku was also the leading socialist figure in Japan during this period, a Japanese counterpart of Jean Jaurès, but more clearly and explicitly anarchist. Kotoku’s importance was further magnified by the fact that he had evolved, after much reflection and after contacts with foreign movements (especially the IWW), from a more or less Marxist-style social democratic position to anarchism, as well as the fact that he was successfully propagating direct action and antiparliamentarianism among the majority of the supporters of the

Japanese socialist movement of the time. It was Kotoku Shusui who introduced the idea of the general strike (*zenesuto*) to Japan between 1905 and 1910.

We may mention in passing that during that period, despite their ideological discourse, all the socialists, in the broadest sense of the term, were on good terms with one another and engaged in friendly contacts with each other. This situation lasted until the end of the 1920s, broadly speaking—resulting in the Bolshevization of some socialists—because their minority and even marginal position within Japanese society and politics fully justified such an attitude. The bonds among the socialists were strong, and although they were often strained, they existed nonetheless. Thus, Kanno Sugako distanced himself from one of the founders of the Japanese Communist Party, Arahata Kanson (1887-1981), to join with Kotoku; Ito Noe (1885-1923) split with the Dadaist Stirnerian Jun Tsuji (1884-1944) in order to support Osugi Sakae; the anarchist Kondo Kenji (1895-1969) married one of the daughters of the great Japanese Marxist, one of the founders of the Japanese Communist Party, Sakai Toshihiko (1871-1933), etc.

This mixing of socialist militants thus persisted because certain ideological clarifications had not been resolved which depended, to some extent, on the internal development of the Japanese movement, as well as on the development of the international workers movement, especially after the Russian Revolution. Depending on how quickly these factors were grasped and analyzed, and on the accuracy of the available information, the ideological reconfigurations would take place more or less rapidly.

Thus, as in other countries but slightly later, by the 1920s in Japan, most of the founders and leading militants of the JCP came from the anarchist movement or had worked in close collaboration with the anarchists. This was true, among the founders of the Party, of Arahata Kanson, who recommended the anarchists Osugi Sakae and Ito Noe for editorial posts on the journal, *Kindai Shiso* (“Modern Thought”); this was also true of Takao Heibei (1893-1923) and the theoretician Yamakawa Hitoshi (1880-1958), who were both very close to anarchism before they became Marxists. Among the first members of the Party, we may cite the case of Watanabe Masanosuke (1899-1928), a worker, an organizer for the libertarian trade union, *Kokushoku Rodo Kumiai*, in the Kameido district of Tokyo, who joined the JCP when it was founded and who would become one of its leaders in 1927.

The situation underwent further developments in the 1930s, but took a new turn as a consequence of the dramas engendered by bolshevization and the political-ideological clarifications that subsequently took place.... We must also call attention to the fact that the majority of the original members of the Communist Party who were former anarchists would later be expelled from the Party by the Stalinist machinery of the Comintern and its Japanese followers.

Japan had changed a great deal between 1910 and the 1930s. Those areas of Japan, which was still a profoundly rural country, which were least affected by these changes, were distinguished by a layer of landowners, often absentee landowners, who exploited tenants and sharecroppers.... Industry, however, at first light industry, and then heavy industry, expanded and urbanization accelerated. Socially and culturally the country was undergoing modernization in every domain (art, literature, gender relations, etc.). The socialist movement undeniably participated in this process.

Politically, the imperial regime instituted a few democratic reforms: this was the period known as “Taisho democracy”. Two laws were promulgated in 1925: the first, which replaced an electoral system based on property qualifications, granted the right to vote to all men over twenty-five years of age. This was the carrot dangled in front of the mule. The second law, the “Peace Preservation Law”, reinforced the repression that was unleashed within the terms of the “Public Security Preservation Law”. This was the stick.

We must insist on highlighting two things about this repressive legislation.

First of all, it constituted a direct response to the progress made by the socialist movement and more precisely by the trade union movement. The law of 1900 was enacted just after the emergence of the first trade unions in Japan, which were founded in 1897 (*Rodo Kumiai Kiseikai*; the newspaper, *Rodo Sekai*) and at about the same time that the first specifically socialist groups were formed (*Shakai*

*Shugi Kenkyukai* in 1898, which became *Shakai Shugi Kyokai* in 1900; *Shakai Minshu To* in 1901; *Heiminsha* in 1903).

Furthermore, this repressive legislation severely hamstrung all socialist, communist and anarchist activity; indeed, this was its very purpose. Its enforcement even affected the liberal and democratic sectors. But it was particularly viciously enforced against the radical, communist and anarchist tendencies. All the new parties that were “too” radical were soon prohibited. Newspapers were regularly suspended or shut down. Public meetings and congresses were almost regularly broken up by the police, militants were detained (between 1925 and 1945, more than 75,000 people were arrested and tried for infractions of the Peace Preservation Law); those found guilty were often tortured and mistreated in prison, where they finally ended up dying. Or they were simply murdered, as was so often the fate visited upon the anarchists.

The result: all the socialist groups functioned chaotically, in clandestine or semi-clandestine conditions (the JCP, for example, would never be tolerated, which obliged the bolsheviks to resort to organizational subterfuges) which sometimes led some militants to engage in the practice of terrorism (especially in the anarchist movement and its fringes), sometimes led others to hyper-pragmatism, or triggered disputes in which some comrades were blamed for an intensification of repression, or caused some militants to become extremely attentive to the question of organization (centralism or non-centralism), as well as leading to a personalization of tendencies around the figures of leaders, who were themselves subject to victimization by the repression.

In Japan socialism first won popular support due to its role in anti-war protests, especially during the Russo-Japanese War of 1905. Japanese socialism was linked very closely to imperialism. Its strength would therefore be inversely proportional to the power of imperialism and thus its fate would be completely determined by the development of the international situation.

Christianity played an important role in the development of socialist consciousness in Japan, due to its identification as a western, modern ideology that was concerned with social reality and was opposed to the imperial system because the latter was based on a pagan god, the emperor. Most of the first socialists were Christians or former Christians, including some anarchists, at least during the early stages of the movement (Ishikawa Sanshiro, Muraki Genjiro, Hatta Shūzo, Hisaita Unosuke, etc.), but a Christian background was much less common among the Marxists and the social democrats. Kotoku Shusui was always hostile to Christianity. His last work was unambiguously entitled, “On the Suppression of Christianity” (*Kirisuto Massatsu Ron*).

In 1911, the socialist movement was broadly divided into three tendencies: one social democratic, more or less sympathetic to Christianity; one Marxist-leaning, which would later undergo bolshevization; and one anarchist tendency in the process of becoming anarcho-syndicalist.

With the onset of the repression, the socialist movement entered what the militants of the time, and then also the historians, called the “era of winter” (*fuyu no jidai*). The reawakening took place in 1918. Japanese capitalism emerged much reinforced from the First World War. Politically, it was on the side of the allies, the victors; it thus gained territories and political benefits. Economically, it took advantage of its new opportunities. Industrialization and urbanization accelerated and along with them proletarianization and popular discontent. There were 50 strikes involving approximately 8,000 workers in 1914; in 1918 there were 497 strikes involving 63,137 workers.<sup>2</sup> The “rice riots” (*kome sodo*, 1918) heralded the beginning of a new phase and the socialist movement was finally able to emerge from its lethargy. Trade unionism also experienced a resurgence.

Here I shall limit my discussion essentially to the conceptions and development of this trade unionism from the anarcho-syndicalist perspective as it was expressed in the rural and urban environments. Therefore, I shall not address, or I shall only do so in passing, other aspects and arenas of intervention of the socialists and the anarchists of the time, which are nonetheless also very important, such as the world of the countryside, the women’s movement, the struggle of the *burakumin* pariahs, the struggle of the Korean immigrants, the cultural movement, etc. These arenas of action and reflection were to a certain degree linked to the development of trade union strategies, which in any event constituted the center of gravity, at least in numerical terms, of the socialism of

that period. The anarchists would attempt to reorient the popular movement during the early 1930s in order to transcend the divisions within the libertarian movement and to find common platforms.

The Russian Revolution was equally stimulating. But its effects took a much longer time to fully work themselves out. The realignments that it brought about in the revolutionary movement took place for the most part in 1921-1922. All the arrogance and cynicism of the agents of the Comintern had to be deployed to rid the communist organization of a powerful anarchist and anarcho-syndicalist faction. This process was just as necessary in Japan as it was in China. Linguistic difficulties, cultural differences, the geographical distance from the European scene, and the impact of local eccentricities, were other factors that explain why the anarchists distanced themselves from the Comintern, which is sometimes explained by reference to the mistrust of the Japanese and Chinese militants who sought to control their own affairs.

In 1912 a national federation of trade unions was formed under the leadership of a Christian militant, the future socialist deputy, Suzuki Bunji (1885-1946). Its ideological basis was the collaboration of labor and capital, as its name clearly indicated: the *Yûaikai* ("The Friendly Society"). At first consisting of small embryonic groups, but responding to the desires that were expressed among the new working class, this trade union underwent rapid growth: it had 15 members in August 1912, 1,295 in June 1913, 7,000 at the end of 1915, 20,000 in April 1917, and 30,000 in 1918.

Concurrent with this period of rapid growth, and under the impact of socialism in the broad sense of the word, the *Yûaikai* adopted more hard-line positions. Many militants, in their engagement with the class struggle, moved towards anarchism. Takada Waitsu (1895-1970) thus attempted to purge the *Yûaikai* of its moderate intellectual militants, seeking to form a left wing in the trade union and engaging in frenetic activity among the shock troops in the front lines of the great strikes of the naval shipyards of Kawasaki and Mitsubishi in 1921 in Kobe, which marked a turning point in working class consciousness. Takada, together with his comrade Yamamoto Kenzo (1885-1942), was one of the leading figures among the "radicals of Tsukishima", a small island in Tokyo Bay where he and his comrades had no lesser ambition than to found the Kronstadt of Japan.<sup>3</sup> They discussed Kropotkin, the Russian Revolution, the IWW, the CGT and other workers movements throughout the world.

## 2. Osugi Sakae, the spur

Alongside the already organized anarchists, an individual and his group, Osugi Sakae and his friends, played a very important role in the radicalization of the *Yûaikai*. During the same period when the journal *Kindai Shiso* was being published, Osugi Sakae, in collaboration with Arahata Kanson, formed a "group for the study of revolutionary syndicalism" (*sanjīkarizumu kenkyūkai*) that held numerous public meetings between 1913 and 1916. Quite significantly, Osugi, in an article written a few years later, in 1920, would change the name of this group to "the association for the study of anarcho-syndicalism" (*anarukosanjīkarizumu no kenkyūkai*). This shows that the term anarcho-syndicalism was current in Japan and accepted as such. The term "syndicalism" (translated into Japanese as *sanjīkarizumu*), without adjectives, must be understood in its Anglo-Saxon definition as "revolutionary syndicalism".

Osugi won the support of most of the Japanese anarchists of that period: Miyajima Sukeo (1886-1948), author of *Kofu* (*The Miner*, 1916), considered to be a masterpiece of proletarian literature; Watanabe Masataro (1873-1918), a veteran of the anarchist movement; Wada Kyutaro (1893-1928); Hisaita Unosuke (1877-1922); Mizunuma Tatsuo (1892-1965); Mochizuki Katsura; Kondo Kenji, who organized the *Tokyo Rodo Undo Omei Kai* in 1919.... Some of them even shared lodgings with him and his lover, Ito Noe.

Osugi became one of the outstanding figures of the anarchist group known as the "North Wind Society", founded by Watanabe and given that name in 1918 after Watanabe's death. Osugi helped create a "Society of True Progress" (*Seishinkai*), a printers' trade union, founded in December 1919 after a strike.<sup>4</sup> He also influenced a typographers' trade union, the "Society of True Friends" (*Shinyūkai*), founded in November 1916, as well as the formation of the trade union of typographers who set Roman letter type (*Oyukai*, founded in 1907). The printers' *Seishinkai*, and the typographers' (Mizunuma Tatsuo, *et al.*) *Shinyūkai*: we shall frequently encounter the names of these two trade unions that would play such a fundamental role in the syndicalism and anarcho-syndicalism of Japan.

Osugi Sakae's contributions were highly original. His spiritual, political and organizational mentor, Kotoku Shusui, was the representative of the older generation. Kotoku, a descendant of Samurai, was strongly influenced by Confucianism and the collapse of the Meiji regime. Osugi Sakae, on the other hand, was the symbol of a new Japanese modernity. Like Kotoku, or possibly even more so, he appreciated the modern science, philosophy and literature of the West (he read Nietzsche, Stirner, Bergson, Sorel, Romain Rolland, etc.). A passionate student of languages and an internationalist, he helped introduce Esperanto to Japan. He was also an anti-militarist. Like Kotoku, he chose to live in accordance with his ideas, and this included the practice of free love.

Osugi, however, had less contact with the rural world than Kotoku or his predecessors: he was a city dweller, the embodiment of a new form of urban modernity in Japan, the new resident of Tokyo. Osugi's personality was warm and colorful. He loved children, the elderly and women. He was a "bon vivant" who was yet capable of militant asceticism. Although prone to stuttering, he lost this handicap when he was making passionate speeches before the public. He was a rebel who had become a revolutionary.

Osugi Sakae tirelessly denounced the intellectual elites—Marxists and social democrats—who wanted to take over the leadership of the workers movement: he was closely acquainted with a good part of the movement; he saw what was going on; he also noted the spontaneous emergence of numerous trade unions, especially in the printing trades. Sakae popularized libertarian theories (Kropotkin, Bakunin, etc.) and provided information about the tactics of the international anarchist movement. Besides these achievements, and besides his talent as an organizer as well as an indefatigable propagandist, Osugi Sakae's most important theoretical-practical contribution consisted in a combination of individualism and anarcho-syndicalism: he praised the liberation of the "ego", the rise of the subject in all domains (social, political, sexual, art, etc.), as the authentically innovative development in a Japanese society ridden with "mass anonymity" and consensus. He also saw this "ego" as liberated and integrated in a collective project based on syndicalism. And he attacked all the bureaucrats and intellectual elites who wanted to take over the leadership of the workers movement.

Osugi Sakae said that, "*the revolution will not begin as the result of the acts of one or two terrorists*".<sup>5</sup> He did not often use the word, "revolution", which seldom appeared in his texts, probably in order to avoid censorship. He supported the direct action of the working class, and rejected all reformism and bureaucratization. The following passage illustrates the ambitious scope of his anarcho-syndicalism:

*"But insofar as the workers are human beings, the workers movement can never be content with making only biological demands. Our situation as workers is not completely defined merely by eating well. We have demands that go much farther. A workers movement that does not take this human element into account has not understood just what a workers movement really is.... I repeat: a workers movement is a movement of self-mastery on the part of the workers that follows an independent path. It is a human movement for the individual."*<sup>6</sup>

He also said:

*"The workers movement is not the monopoly of the workers. This does not mean that the intellectuals should be allowed to join it, but rather that while it is absolutely necessary for the workers to remain the center of the movement, to define its spirit, the workers movement is nonetheless the conquest of all the workers capacities, it is the movement of the conquest of humanity. The intellectuals must above all embrace this essential point. It is necessary for these intellectuals, whose historical task has been to defend the ruling class and deceive the oppressed class, to decide to take the side of this new party and become the true ally of the oppressed class. Its complaints and its arrogance both derive from this lack of introspection and commitment."*<sup>7</sup>

Quoting Goethe's famous saying, "*in the beginning was the deed*" (*hajime ni koi ga aru*), Osugi Sakae elaborated a veritable philosophy of action, along the lines of Camus:

*"The principal historical goal of philosophy is to ask the question, what is humanity, with the alleged philosophers giving different answers. But humanity is not a book written long ago and published in its*

final form once and for all. It is a blank page upon which each man writes a word, a sentence. Humanity is lived by men.”<sup>8</sup>

Osugi Sakae attempted to put this philosophy of action into practice in both his everyday life as well as his life as a militant. The following paragraphs, which relate an episode from his activities as a militant, is quite illustrative of this desire, as well as of the personality behind it:

*“But the audience understands more quickly. This audience is the people. The audience that at first loudly complained about what troublemakers we were, gradually started to take our side. Finally, almost everyone was on our side. The alleged ‘order in the court’ took on a new form and was preserved, magnificently.*

*“That was at the end. At first, we had given up our intention to deliver a speech because almost everyone in the auditorium was on their feet, shouting that we should be thrown out or forced to remain silent. The police surrounded us. They were punching us and kicking us, but as we showed some fortitude, the situation changed so that ‘order in the court’ obtained a new meaning, now that force was being used against us. When they tried to assault us, the popular instinct of solidarity was immediately aroused, which then protected us. Seeing this, the police immediately withdrew.*

*“We then sought to take advantage of this opportunity and stepped up our loud verbal abuse of our opponents. We exposed the contradictions and the ambiguities of the speaker, providing further elaboration of a point that he had not addressed and which we wanted to call attention to. Our exclamations hit home. The crowd applauded us and some began to ask the speaker questions. Furious, the speaker, the organizers and the police, could do nothing but remain silent. Finally, I mounted the podium. The crowd that had at first rejected me, called me crazy and insulted me, applauded me more vigorously than they had applauded the preceding speaker. I then attempted to initiate a debate between the audience and the speakers. This was the first time I had ever spoken in front of hundreds, or possibly thousands, of people. Since I am a stutterer, a terrible speaker and so timid that I never felt comfortable when attending large rallies, I asked myself if I could achieve anything by doing this.*

*“But once I was standing on the podium, I immediately felt better. I had not prepared a speech in advance. I considered speaking about the kind of ‘order’ that had been imposed on this gathering but everyone already understood that issue quite well. A new spirit was awakening throughout the audience.*

*“I utterly forgot that I was a stutterer, a bad speaker and a timid person, I felt good, as if I was intoxicated, and I conversed naturally with the audience. And I debated with the members of the crowd. It was the first time that I had such a positive experience at a rally.”<sup>9</sup>*

While it is true that he impressed and influenced numerous militants, it is debatable whether the ideological legacy of Osugi Sakae endured after his death. His thought was too closely bound to his activity and his charisma. Never having set himself up as a model, he was a spur. After his death the anarchist and anarcho-syndicalist movement ultimately chose to intensify its commitments in other directions, combining a strict, hard-line and purist Kropotkinism with a re-appropriation of certain social structures of rural Japanese society.

### **3. The movement at its peak: the rise of syndicalism and anarcho-syndicalism (1918-1922)**

In August 1918, the *Yûaikai* was renamed *Nihon Rodo Sodomei*; in May 1920, it assumed the name of *Rodo Kumiai Domei Kai*; and in October 1921, it changed its name back to *Nihon Rodo Sodomei* (known as *Sodomei*). These name changes, while reflecting the difficulties experienced in trying to maintain a stable organization under the impact of repression, were also a result of the influx of new trade unions that joined the organization. They also express the debates concerning what kind of syndicalism the group should construct. Three tendencies, all with approximately the same degree of support, faced off over this question: reformists, bolsheviks and anarchists. Generally speaking, it could be said that prior to 1921 the anarchist influence in *Sodomei* was stronger in Kanto (thanks to Osugi Sakae) than in Kansai, where moderates such as Toyoshiko Kagawa (1888-1960), Hisatome

Kozo (1891-1946) and Kimura Jokichi (1870-1948) played a major role. For two years, from 1920 to 1922, the dominant position was to accept the unity of the three tendencies, to a greater or lesser degree. Except for the Marxists, it seems that they had no other alternative: they were still very weak, poorly organized and ideologically unstable. The reformist bureaucrats already entrenched in strong positions, who constituted informal caucuses controlling hiring in certain sectors (Nishio Suchiro, Matsuoka Komakichi, Aso Hisashi, etc.), were, however, much more hostile to this truce.<sup>10</sup>

The struggles within the organization passed through three stages: at first, the anarchists directed their attacks exclusively at the reformist socialists (1920); then they formed an alliance with the bolsheviks who were gaining popularity (1921); and finally the anarchists were displaced by an alliance between the socialists and the bolsheviks, an alliance that was formed explicitly against the anarchists (1922). In every case the disputes were always about the same issues: “direct action” (*chokusetsu kodo*) vs. “parliamentarism” (*gikaishugi*); “decentralization” (*jiyu rengo*) vs. “centralization” (*godo rengo*).

During the seventh congress of *Sodomei*, on August 31, 1919, the anarchists—led by the delegates of the metal workers trade union of Tokyo, Waitsu Takada and Yamamoto Kenzo—obtained majority support for their positions: the rejection of parliamentarism; and the adoption of the principle of the general strike. They even succeeded in expelling the trade union leaders who were deemed too reformist such as Tanahashi Kotori and Toyoshiko Kagawa, a veteran of Japanese socialism, who then devoted himself to even more intensive propaganda among the peasants.

At the Osaka congress, however—held in October 1920—the anarchists were dealt some setbacks: they failed to obtain support for the abandonment of the word, “*Da*” in the organization’s name and the definitive abandonment of the name, “*Yûaikai*”, both of which they felt were too compatible with capitalist and imperialist values. They successfully prevented the adoption of the demand for universal suffrage as a statutory goal of the *Sodomei* (a proposal that would only be approved in 1924). But they were defeated on the question of centralization (which implied that the decision to go on strike should be made by the organization’s central leadership) and on the question of whether the organization should join the ILO.

*“In retrospect, the congress of 1920 demonstrated the ability of the anarchists to stimulate controversies in the Sodomei even though many of their most important proposals were rejected.”*<sup>11</sup>

Many anarchists were opposed to Osugi Sakae, who sought to preserve the united front within the *Sodomei*. These dissident anarchists were very active in the “North Wind Society” (*Hokufûkai*): some members of this group were Miyajima Sukeo, Yoshida Hajime, Muraki Genjiro (1890-1925), Wada Kyutaro, Hisaita Onosuke and Takao Heibei (1893-1923, the future founder of the JCP in 1922; he resigned in February 1923). In April 1921 they founded the journal *The Workers (Rodosha)*. Ishikawa Sanshiro (1876-1956), an anarchist theoretician who would only later become well known, also opposed Osugi Sakae’s policies of a united front, but when he left Japan to live overseas his views were to have less resonance in Japan.

Osugi Sakae and his comrades, who comprised the majority of the anarchist tendency in the organization, were therefore in favor of a united front with the bolsheviks, and at first they favored a united front regardless of the circumstances. Osugi even traveled to Shanghai in October 1920 to attend the Congress of Socialists of the Far East, organized by the Comintern. We must point out that the Japanese Marxists who were invited made excuses for not attending the Congress and instead insisted that Osugi should go, who, at the Congress, became sceptical and rejected any political leadership from the Comintern but did accept money to publish a new series of his journal, *Rodo Undo* (The Workers Movement) in cooperation with the bolsheviks.

In this newspaper, which reappeared in January 1921, one therefore finds opposing viewpoints on the questions of ideology, organization, and the events in Russia.

The tensions mounted. Osugi, a great admirer of the Makhnovshchina, together with his comrades, disseminated the critical analyses of Alexander Berkman and Emma Goldman concerning the



disastrous role played by Bolshevism in the Russian Revolution. Finally, Osugi unambiguously condemned the bolshevism of the dictatorial state established by the Bolsheviks in Russia.

*“A critique of the Bolshevik government? I have been discreet for a long time. Nor was I alone—most of the world’s anarchists exhibited the same attitude. And there are even some who have advocated a position in favor of collaboration with the communists.... We do not want to do anything that would lead people to call us counterrevolutionaries. But the reality is becoming more and more obvious with each passing day. Now, even the government of the soviets, that is, the government of the workers and peasants, has become a counterrevolutionary factor. Everyone joyously supports the Russian Revolution; but who can support this Bolshevik government?”<sup>12</sup>*

For Osugi Sakae, the situation was clear: the Bolsheviks are “the betrayers of the revolution” (*Kakumei No Uragimono*, the title of his article in the August 1922 issue of *Rodo Undo*).

The break between the anarchists and anarcho-syndicalists and the Bolsheviks in Japan was finally consummated. Known as the “*anaboru ronso*” (polemic between anarchists and bolsheviks), it spread throughout the entire socialist movement in the broadest sense of the term: the syndicalist and feminist movements, and the movement for the liberation of the *burakumin* pariahs. In 1923, the JCP announced its support for the liberation movement of the pariahs—having joined the *Suiheisha* (an association for equality and liberation of the pariahs, founded in 1922)—and subsequently underwent a *tenko* (i.e., a sudden policy reversal) before joining it again; the anarchists Asada Zennosuke (1902-1983) and Kitahara Daisaku (1906-1981) tailored their organizational efforts in response, during the year 1925, undertaking various propaganda tours to stop the spread of bolshevization.<sup>13</sup>

*Rodo Undo* temporarily ceased publication after June 1922. It would reappear in December with an exclusively anarchist and anarcho-syndicalist orientation. On the political plane, the organization formed for the purpose of uniting all the socialists—from the moderates to the anarchists—the “Socialist League of Japan” (*Nihon Shakai Shugi Domei*), founded on December 10, 1920, at the initiative of, among others, Osugi Sakae, which had about a thousand members, dissolved on May 28, 1921, amidst bitter disputes as well as, let us not forget, under the impact of government repression.

In September 1922, in Osaka, the “unitary trade union” descended from the *Yûaikai* held an extremely important congress, under the name of *Nihon Rodo Kumiai Sorengo* (the General Association of the Trade Unions of Japan, GAT). The congress was attended by 60 delegates who represented 59 trade unions with 27,430 members. Often interrupted by police raids, the proceedings ended in confusion.

At this congress the reformist and bolshevik tendencies formed an alliance based on the principle of centralism in order to more effectively combat their common enemy, the anarchist tendency. The latter advocated the principles of free federation (*jiyu rengo*) and the autonomy of the trade unions subject to their compliance with the general charter of the Association. A few days after the congress, the reformist and bolshevik tendencies created the *Sodomei* (35 trade unions, with some 20,000 members), from which the bolsheviks split in 1925 in order to form the *Nihon Rodo Kumiai Hyogikai* (Council of Trade Unions of Japan; 32 trade unions, 12,500 members).

The tendency that was generally known as the anarchist tendency made efforts to reorganize after its exclusion-resignation. This process was delayed for several months, however, due to various serious and disturbing events.

#### **4. The assassination attempts of 1924 and the new beginning of 1926<sup>14</sup>**

In the wake of the massive earthquake that struck the region of Kanto in September 1923, the police took advantage of the disorder caused by the catastrophe (142,000 people dead or missing) in order to attack the revolutionary militants. Fifteen of the *Sodomei*’s radical activists were imprisoned and then murdered by the police on September 4 in Kameido, a neighborhood in Tokyo (news of their deaths was only made public on October 10). A few days later Osugi Sakae and his lover Ito Noe, along with their six-year old nephew, were arrested and beaten to death by the same police squad, in Tokyo, on September 16.

This crime, besides the fact that it deprived the movement of two great anarchists, provoked widespread anger among the militants. All the more so insofar as the police captain who led the squad that committed the murders, Amakasu Masahiko (1891-1945), served only three years of his ten-year sentence for the crime.

In September 1924, a group of anarchists and anarcho-syndicalists attempted to take justice into their own hands, but the operation was never carried out. Its members were severely punished. Sentenced to hard labor for life in September 1925, Wada Kyutaro (1893-1928) committed suicide in prison.

Another group, called the "Society of the Guillotine" (*Girochinsha*, founded in the spring of 1922), also implicated in this affair, extended its field of activity with attacks on banks and extortion, but it was broken up. One of its key members, Furuta Daijiro (1900-1925), was arrested and sentenced at the same time as Wada, and executed. Another, Nakahama Tetsu (1897-1926) suffered the same fate (he was executed on April 15, 1926 in Osaka). Another nine defendants were sentenced to long prison terms. Muraki Denjiro (1890-1925) died after becoming ill in prison.

On December 27, 1923, another anarchist, Namba Daisuke (1899-1924), attempted to assassinate the crown prince to avenge the deaths of Kotoku Shusui, Osugi Sakae and Ito Noe, but in vain. He was arrested, sentenced to death and executed two days after being sentenced (*Toranomon Jiken*, "The Toranomon Incident"). Shortly before this took place, the anarchist couple Pak Yol (1902-?), a Korean, and Kaneko Fumiko (1904-1926), his Japanese girlfriend, were arrested two days after the earthquake for conspiring against the life of the emperor and sentenced to death in March 1926. Their sentences were commuted to life imprisonment, but Kaneko Fumiko committed suicide in prison; Pak Yol, meanwhile, was liberated after 1945.

Consequently, from 1923 to 1926, the anarchist movement had to pay a heavy price. The militants decided to draw up a balance sheet of this episode, making changes and reorganizing. During this same period the new electoral law of 1925 transformed the political framework with the creation of the Workers and Peasants Party (*Nomin Rodoto*), of Marxist inspiration and a replacement for the clandestine JCP.

Two libertarian organizations emerged around the same time in 1925, a few months later: [15](#)

"The Federation of Black Youth" (*Kokushoku Seinen Renmei*, or the *Kokuren*, referred to henceforth as simply the "Federation"), with its newspaper, "The Black Youth" (*Kokushoku Seinen*, April 1926-February 1931), an explicitly anarchist organization formed in January 1926;

and "The Free General Association of Trade Unions" (*Zenkoku Rodo Kumiai Jiyu Rengokai*, known as or *Zenjiren* or *Jiren*; henceforth referred to as the General Association), a trade union federation of anarchist inspiration, with its newspaper "Free Federation" (*Jiyu Rengo*, edited by Otsuka Tokusanro), established in May 1926.

In the Federation's newspaper, *The Black Youth*, one may read this assessment written in 1926:

*"We all think that the revolution in Japan will be the work of a collective activity based on the workers movement. Having reflected upon our past, examined the present and foreseen the consequences, we consider that the terrorism of a minority is a failure. At the same time, however, we always have the same impatience for the revolution, which will be carried out by the consciousness of all the people. The way to eliminate exploitation and oppression, the way to freedom, equality and prosperity, is the role that the association of the workers, their free federation, will subjectively fulfill in the revolution. Our position is by no means dogmatic. If this federation of trade unions, villages, factories and cities is achieved, so too will the revolution be achieved."*

The anarchists of the Federation therefore engaged wholeheartedly in the trade union struggle, distinguishing themselves in various strikes (the Keisei streetcars in 1926, Hitachi Kameari Denki with 600 strikers in September-October 1926, the musical instrument company, Hamamatsu, in April-August 1926, with 1,200 strikers and 105 days on strike).

Since the Federation of Black Youth was founded only shortly before the General Association, it is tempting to characterize the anarchists as constituting the active arm if not the leadership of the libertarian trade union. Some even invoked a relation of the FAI-CNT type. But this is not entirely accurate. Along the same lines, one might think that the libertarian trade union was explicitly anarcho-syndicalist. But this was by no means the case. Let us examine why this was so.

Actually, both the Federation and the General Association were divided into two tendencies: the anarcho-communist current, which was supported by the majority in both groups, and the minority anarcho-syndicalist current. These tendencies would later engage in bitter conflicts over ideological and organizational issues during the next eight years, from 1926 to 1934. Their opposition was particularly acute with regard to the question of syndicalism. We must point out that it was not a matter of the Federation, against trade unionism, on one side, and the General Association, supporting anarcho-syndicalism, on the other. No; those who proclaimed their opposition to trade unionism were active in the trade unions of the General Association, and the majority current of the General Association was even opposed to ... anarcho-syndicalism!

The founding congress of the *Kokuren* was held on January 31, 1926 in Tokyo (at the Shiba no Kyocho Kaikan theater).<sup>16</sup> The congress was attended by 700 people; 24 groups were represented, 7 of which were trade unions (many of them from the printing trades). One of the strongholds of the trade union movement was composed of anarchist militants of the Tokyo printers' trade union.<sup>17</sup>

Among the self-proclaimed anarchist groups that attended the congress were the following: the "Society of Individualists" (*Jigajinsha*), with Kuwabara Ichio and Matsunaga Ga'ichi; the "Society of the Workers Movement" (*Rodo Undosha*), with Kondo Kenji, Yoshikawa Tokio and Kawaguchi Keisuke; the "Society of the Cart without an Axel" (*Mujikudosha*), with Hatano Hachiro and Sakano Ryozo; the "Society for the Research of Social Physiology" (*Shakai Seiri Kenkyu Kai*), with Hatta Shūzo; the "Society of the Black Flag" (*Kurohatasha*), with Wataru Onuma (1901-?) and Yamamoto Kansuke; the "Society of the Black Tornado" (*Kokusenpūsha*), with Sugiura Bankameo and Sonoda Ei'chi; the "Society of the Contrary Wind" (*Gyakufu Kai*), with Take Yoji and Iwasa Sakutarō; the "League of the Rural Movement" (*Noson Undo Domei*), with Mochizuki Katsura (1887-?) and Kinoshita Shigeru; the "Emancipation Front" (*Kaiho Sensensha*), with Goto Kakuzo, Takatsu Masamichi, Yamazaki Kesaya, Ueda Kogeki and Kita'ura Ben; the "Federation of the Children of Nature" (*Shizenko Renmei*), with Yamada Sakumatsu, Mukumoto Undan, Yokoyama Kantaro and Maeda Te'ichi; the "Society of Art Criticism" (*Bungei Hihansha*), with Matsumoto Yūzo, Akibara Kanjiro and Asa Magi; and the "Society without Discrimination" (*Musabetsusha*), with Mochizuki Shintaro.<sup>18</sup>

The strongholds of the *Kokuren* were located in Kanto, but it had supporters throughout the country, and even in Taiwan and Korea. The word, "youth", which can be understood as "new departure" or "new group in the process of formation", should not be misinterpreted. In fact, the group embraced the majority of Japan's anarchists at the time.

The founding congress of the *Kokuren* adopted six slogans:

- The emancipation of the workers must be the task of the workers themselves.
- Libertarian federalism (*Jiyū rengo shugi*).
- Destroy all political movements!
- Denounce all proletarian political parties!
- Eradicate all trade union corporatism!
- Repeal the Public Security Preservation Law!

The Federation was largely, although not in a hegemonic sense, libertarian communist (anarcho-communist), especially after May-June 1927, when the anarcho-syndicalist minority resigned. The group that emerged from this split, *Kurohatasha*, then founded the journal, *Han Seito Undo* (The Anti-Political Party Movement), which was boycotted, according to Kondo Kenji, by the other groups.<sup>19</sup>

Kondo Kenji, a friend of the murdered Osugi Sakae and one of the main figures in the anarchist movement after Sakae's death, participated in the foundation of the Federation, in which he advocated anarcho-syndicalist positions. The new newspaper of the Federation, *The Black Flag*

(*Kurohata*), established in January 1930, published articles by Aizawa Hisao (1908-?), Miyazaki Akira (1889-1977) and Hatta Shūzo (1886-1934).

The impact of the *Kokuren* was very hard to assess, and it was not easy to ascertain just what it stood for; this was undoubtedly due to its many groups and its low profile and flexible structure. The groups of Kansai and Shikoku founded an *Anarukisuto Renmei* (Anarchist Federation), with its corresponding journal called *Kurohata* (Black Flag), in April 1930.

The General Association is much more easily characterized than the Federation. 400 delegates attended its founding congress in May 1926, representing 25 trade unions with a total membership of 8,400 workers. Its total membership reached 15,000 in 1927. It was not yet a real mass organization, but it was not a tiny sect either. In comparison, the trade union organization controlled by the bolsheviks, formed in the previous year (1925; see above), was not much larger, with its 12,500 members. The anarcho-syndicalists and anarchists were not entirely unrepresented, nor were they merely tiny sects within the workers movement, even after the assassination of Osugi Sakae and Ito Noe, as liberal and Marxist historians so complacently proclaim—and one can easily see why.

In order to understand just how deeply the General Association was rooted in the various trades throughout the country, we must examine its component parts. The General Association was composed of:

- “The Free Federation of Trade Unions of Kantō” (*Kanto Rodo Kumiai Jiyu Rengokai*): day laborers, printers (Tokyo, Yokohama, Jomo), the newspaper workers (Tokyo, Shizuoka), mechanics, textile operatives, tenant farmers in Saitama, the UL of Shizuoka.
- “The Free Federation of Trade Unions of Kansai” (*Kansai Rodo Kumiai Jiyu Rengokai*): casual laborers, printers (Kyoto, Osaka), mechanics. The anarcho-syndicalist Henmi Yoshizo (1903-?) was a secretary of the Mechanics Trade Union of Osaka (*Osaka Kikai Giko Kumiai*), founded in August 1924; so, too, was Yashima Shigeru.
- “The Free Federation of the Trade Unions of Chūgoku (i.e., Okayama) (*Chūgoku Rodo Kumiai Jiyu Rengokai*): mechanics, textile operatives, workers in the rubber industry.
- “The Free Federation of the Trade Unions of Hiroshima” (*Hiroshima-Kure*): casual laborers, workers in the rubber industry, printers (Hokkaido, Hakodate, Sapporo).

The importance of the printers’ trade union in libertarian syndicalism is apparent. Japan is not exempt from this rule that applies to the anarchism of almost every country in the world.

After the metal workers (1897) and the railroad shop mechanics (1897), the printers’ trade unions were among the first trade unions founded in Japan (1898). They rapidly came under the influence of anarchism, especially the printers of Tokyo, as we have already seen.

- The *Nihon Insatsuko Kumiai Shinyukai* (known as the *Shinyukai*, the “Society of True Friends”), founded in March 1918, organized typographers for the most part. One of its members was Mizunuma Tatsuo (1892-1965), who was in contact with Osugi Sakae and Sakai Toshihiko during this period, and who was to become its secretary. In 1919, this trade union had 1,500 members and was distinctly anarchist in its orientation. Also, the *Insatsu Kumiai Rengokai*, founded in 1924 in opposition to the *Shuppan Rodo Kumiai*, a pro-communist trade union;
- The *Shimbunko Kumiai Seishinkai* (known as the *Seishinkai*, “Society of True Progress”), founded in July 1920, organized the printers for the most part, with 500 members, including Wada Eitaro (1894-?).

The *Shinyukai* and the *Seishinkai* were among the first trade unions to join the *Yūaikai*, helping to radicalize it and within which they constituted the libertarian faction. In 1923, they formed a “General Federation of Printing Workers”, with 3,850 members in 1924.

Numerically speaking, with 5,000 members, the “Trade Union of the Graphic Arts of Tokyo” contributed the bulk of the troops of the General Association, and constituted its ideological axis. But this trade union was shaken by the libertarian communist-anarcho-syndicalist conflict and, like the Association itself, underwent a split.

This is the text of the Charter<sup>20</sup> adopted by the congress of the *Zenkoku Jiren* in 1926:

- *We accept the class struggle as the basis of the movement to liberate the workers and the tenant farmers.*
- *We reject all political movements and exclusively insist on economic action.*
- *We approve of libertarian federalism organized by industry and we reject centralized authoritarianism.*
- *We are opposed to imperialist aggression and we call for the international solidarity of the working class.*<sup>21</sup>

John Crump discerns a major influence from the Charter of Amiens of 1906. I would venture to say, or so it seems to me, that he is going a little too far: while the Charter of the *Zenkoku Jiren* is based on the principle of the class struggle, and privileges the economic terrain of struggle, it is much more explicit with regard to its libertarian aspects, such as federalism and anti-authoritarianism. I would say that it is more similar to the CGT-SR. Furthermore, the second issue of the journal, *Rengo*, devoted an article to Fernand Pelloutier, and its ninth and tenth issues contained a report on the founding of the CGT-SR.

The General Association grew quite rapidly after its founding and admitted new trade unions (at least 14), in new sectors (casual laborers, Koreans, Tokyo Gas, Hitachi, Tokyo cooks, Jaizumi fishermen, etc.) and in new regions (Yokohama, Senshu, Kobe, Niigata, Asahikawa, etc.). Its total membership therefore rose, as we saw above, to 15,000.<sup>22</sup>

It was in 1926-1927 that the Association entered a period of hectic activity.

Strikes: the Hitachi Kameido plant (September-October 1926); printers; strikes in support of Sacco and Vanzetti (executed on August 23, 1927).

January 1927 witnessed the debut of the fifth series of *Rodo Undo*, edited by Kondo Kenji, Yoshikawa Tokio, Yamaga Taiji, Mizunuma Tatsuo and Wada Eitaro, with contributions from Ishikawa Sanshiro, Iwasa Sakutaro and Hatta Shūzo.

## 5. The disputes between tendencies and the split of 1928

In May 1927, the General Association dispatched three delegates to the Congress of the Trade Unions of the Pacific held in Hankow, China: Henmi Yoshizo, Utagawa Noboru and Onuma Wataru. Henmi, arrested in Formosa and forcibly repatriated to Japan, could not attend. Utagawa Noboru (1895-1944), however, was able to attend the congress. The *Kokuren* was overwhelmingly opposed to this participation (which it judged to be “opportunist”) in an operation led by the Profintern.

Tensions were aggravated between anarchists and anarcho-syndicalists within both organizations, but especially in the *Kokuren*. The anarcho-syndicalist tendency in the *Kokuren*, feeling that it did not have adequate means of expression, created its own group, *Han Seito Undo*, referred to above. The polemic was re-initiated with the publication of a pamphlet by Iwasa Sakutaro, “This Is How the Anarchists Respond” (*Museifūshugisha Wa Kotaero*), in July 1927, because he rejected the theory of the class struggle and adopted iconoclastic views.

The anarcho-syndicalist Katamichi calmly responded (*Jiyu Rengo*, August 5, 1927). Mizunuma Tatsuo’s reply was published in the next issue (September 5, 1927). He explained that he was not attacking the idea of the class struggle but that he did refuse to transform it into a theory to explain and reduce all social phenomena to a simplistic schema of the conflict between capital and labor. He raised the question of the tenant farmers in the countryside, and criticized the narrow view of a proletariat that is merely an industrial proletariat, since the latter only embraces 10% of the workers.

*“The class struggle upon which libertarian federalism is based does not only insist on the transfer of the means of production from the capitalists to the workers, as comrade Katamichi claims. This must be the initial means for further progress towards the creation of a really free and egalitarian society, without classes, in which all social exploitation will be abolished.”*

The General Association held a congress on November 19-20, 1927, in Tokyo; Mizunuma Tatsuo (*Tokyo Ippan Rogumi*) was its chairman, and its co-chairman was Sugimura Naotaro (*Waizumi Gyogyo Kumiai*). The membership and credentials of the trade union, *Osaka Goseirogumi*, however, were challenged, because it was suspected of having been infiltrated by the bolsheviks. The congress spent almost all its time in debates over this affair, and ended in confusion. At the same time, the tension between anarchism (*anâkizumu*) and syndicalism (*sanjïkarizumu*, which included anarcho-syndicalism) was further exacerbated.

Alerted of the divisions that threatened to split the Japanese movement, the comrades from overseas tried to act as mediators:

Augustin Souchy (1892-1984), who was at that time the secretary of the IWA, sent a letter to the General Association on October 4, 1927, expressing his wishes that the upcoming congress of the Association should be successful, a letter that was only published in *Jiyu Rengo* on January 10, 1928:

*“Comrades, we have been notified of the theoretical dispute that is currently taking place between the pure anarchists and the pure syndicalists within the Japanese libertarian movement. If we may be allowed to offer our opinion, we think that this is not the proper moment to argue over this question. It is taking on a totally theoretical character. On this occasion, we would like to direct your attention to Argentina and the countries of South America in general. In these countries, the activities of the workers movement are inspired by Michael Bakunin and are at the same time under the spiritual direction of our indomitable trailblazer Errico Malatesta. In these countries, all the anarchists participate heroically in the syndicalist movement while, at the same time, all the syndicalists are fighting to abolish the oppressive machinery of the state and to resist capitalist exploitation. In Spain, as well, anarchists and syndicalists are applying themselves to both economic questions as well as the spiritual aspect of life, in such a way that theoretical disputes do not arise.”*

Jean Grave also wrote a letter, “To the Japanese Comrades”, a few years later, in March 1933, in response to a circular he received from Japan.<sup>23</sup> He begins by rejecting both opposed “camps” of the Japanese anarchist movement. He expresses his support for the involvement of anarchists in syndicalism, seeing that they must at least avail themselves of a weapon for day to day reforms, and in the best case scenario, a means for revolutionary agitation, “an arm of combat”, but that it cannot, nor should it ever be, more than that. The revolution, according to Jean Grave, will not be the work of the trade unions alone, nor will the construction of the future society. “*The task of organizing the future society will not be the job of the trade unions*”, but that of groups of a new type. Jean Grave then elaborates the classical position of libertarian communism, one that is not so very remote from the position defended by the anarcho-syndicalists of Japan, which demonstrates, on the other hand, a trait he shares with other figures, that he did not understand what was taking place in Japan; nonetheless, he was not against syndicalism. He also confessed that he was not very well informed about the situation of revolutionary syndicalism in the West, and his letter, which deplores the calamitous state of the anarchist movement, ends on a negative note.

Augustin Souchy’s letter did not really reduce the fever pitch of the Japanese disputes. One month later, the *Kokuren* sought admission to the IWA in a letter in which it declared that the federation had been engaged since 1927 in a struggle against “*the traitors, opportunists and imperialist syndicalists*” of the *Zenkoku Jiren*.

On February 19, 1928, the powerful “Printers’ Trade Union of Tokyo” held its fifth congress, where its statutes were revised and it broke with the principles of the Charter of Amiens and anarcho-syndicalism. It later submitted a proposal to revise the Charter of the General Association at the latter’s second congress held on March 17, 1928 in Tokyo (the Hongo Congress). This proposal sought to replace the first article of the Charter with the following statement:

*“We accept libertarian federalism as the basis of the movement to liberate the workers and the peasants.”*

The “Trade Union of Casual Laborers of Tokyo” objected to this proposal, and proposed instead that the Charter should be revised in such a way as to explicitly reject centralism and support libertarian federalism, while also advocating the principle of the class struggle:

*“We accept the class struggle as the basis of the movement to liberate the workers and the peasants.”*

After several hours of intense and stressful debate, punctuated by insults and mockery, the split was consummated. The anarcho-syndicalist tendency resigned from the General Association. Its departure affected not just the trade union milieu but also the entire libertarian movement, including the *Kokuren* as well as the movement for the liberation of the pariahs, the movements in the arts, the feminist movement, etc. In April 1929, the “Printers’ Trade Union of Tokyo” also split along the same lines.

In 1928 the *Koto Jiyu Rodosha Kumiai*, led by Onuma Wataru (an anarcho-syndicalist who later became a Marxist) was excluded from the General Association due to a dispute over the reform of the Association’s statutes.

## **6. Theoretical debate: libertarian communism vs. anarcho-syndicalism**

To summarize the situation at this juncture, one could say that three theoreticians embodied the debate that led to the split. Hatta Shûzo and Iwasa Sakutarô advocated “libertarian communism” (*museifukyosan*), or “pure anarchism” (*junsei museifushugi*), as it was called by their opponents. Ishikawa Sanshiro advocated “anarcho-syndicalism” (*anaruko-sanjikirizumu*), or just plain “syndicalism” (*sanjikirizumu*), in the eyes of his opponents.

Hatta and Iwasa took Kropotkin’s theories to their logical extreme. For them, the theoretical and practical (ideological and organizational) structure of the libertarian movement, which aspires to the emancipation of all of society, cannot correspond to the structure of contemporary capitalist and authoritarian society. It must abolish the harmful division of labor as it currently exists, and its project must be based on a different conception, one that unites consumption with production and places the emphasis on consumption. Its basic cellular form thus cannot be the trade union or the industrial union but the commune, and especially the rural commune.

Hatta and Iwasa expressed an anti-urban sentiment that had long characterized much of the Japanese anarchist movement, one that was based on both the reality of a Japan that was still very rural but also on a nostalgia for its somewhat mystified rural past. Agrarianism (*nohonshugi*), which reached its peak in the 1930s in Japan, affected all the political currents. It thus served as an inspiration for most of the factions of the extreme right and peasant fascism in Japan, which expressed their opposition to the urban elites and the bourgeoisie.

This was the case with two major political figures. Kita Ikki (1883-1937), a friend of Kotoku Shusui and Sakai Toshihiko, with whom he was acquainted in the group, *Heiminsha*, was later associated with the ideologue of the extreme right, Okawa Shûmei (1886-1957), who elaborated a kind of theory of Japanese national socialism based on the nationalization of key industries and a profound agrarian reform. Gondo Seikyo (1868-1937), a friend of Kita Ikki and Okawa Shûmei, a rightist since he first became involved in politics, had been a proponent since 1920 of a type of agrarianism that entailed a state composed of communities of self-managed villages under the direct authority of the emperor (*kanmin kyoji*, the “co-rule of people and emperor”), liberated from bureaucracy and monopoly capitalism. It should also be noted that both Kita Ikki as well as Gondo Seikyo advocated Pan-Asianism and the emancipation of the peoples of Asia. Through the anarchist Hashimoto Yoshiharu, the ideas of Gondo Seikyo influenced Ishikawa Sanshiro and Iwasa Sakutarô.[24](#)

Of course, the large-scale rural Kropotkinism of the “pure anarchists”, as expressed by Hatta, Iwasa and the theoreticians of the “Rural Youth” such as Yasuyuki Suzuki (1903-1970) and Miyazaki Akira (1889-1977; see below), was not fascist: it was opposed to capitalism, money and authority, and advocated the socio-economic autonomy of the rural communes; it also displayed a great deal of hostility towards technological progress (it rejects electrification, for example). One also encounters

the same tendencies in the libertarian movements of China and Korea. It is clear that the Kropotkinist vision generated a naturally favorable echo in the agrarian countries of East Asia.

But how much of this tendency was informed by nostalgia, and even by myth?

Reading an early text of Ito Noe, published in *Rodo Undo* in 1921, which contains a description of the quasi-anarchist functioning of her hometown of fisherman and farmers on the coast of Kyushu, we cannot fail to be impressed by a frankly idyllic vision of a situation that conceals the oppressive aspects of this “utopia” (patriarchy, paternalism, collectivism, a lack of privacy, etc.). Another paradox: most of the anarchists who aspired to an absolutely anti-urban, rural Kropotkinism lived and worked in Tokyo. Except for a few trips to the countryside, at the most, they elaborated their ideas in the capital. The Kropotkinist insurrection of the “Rural Youth” that would take place in 1935-1936 in the mountains of Nagano, four years after the dissolution of the city-based *Noson Seimensha* of Suzuki and Miyazaki, is an example of this disconnection.

The defense of communalism and, more frankly, of Kropotkinist libertarian communism, led Hatta and especially Iwasa to a blanket condemnation of mass struggle and any form of organization based on the principle of mass struggle. Thus, they criticized anarcho-syndicalism, which, in their view, was based on that principle.

In “This Is How the Anarchists Respond” (*Museifūshugisha Wa Kotaeru*), published in July 1927, Iwasa Sakutaro set forth the theoretical foundations of what would be referred to as “pure anarchism” (*junsei museifushugi*).<sup>25</sup> The subtitles of this text make its purpose explicit:

*“What we call revolution takes place gradually through progress, it is not something that anarchists can bring about.... The history of humanity is the history of the class struggle. Even so, for anarchists, the revolution is not a class war.... The ruling classes use the law and the legislature to enforce their power and to achieve their goals. To achieve our goals, we can never use those means.”*

Iwasa Sakutaro then provides his answers to the questions and the claims that are frequently set forth with regard to anarchism:

*“Human life needs organization. This organization is politics. But for the anarchists, there is no organization. Its implementation is thus impossible.... Man possesses many facets and comes in many colors. But he is not perfect. Laws are necessary which provide norms for action. The world, however, is submerged in total darkness.... Society is an organism. This organism is ordered by the center. Man is led by his brain, society is led by the government.... Classes exist in society. Then comes the epoch of socialism, and then that of anarchism.... An orchestra needs a conductor. The same is true of society. If there is no government, it will not function.... If there are men who refuse to work, what do we do? [...] What do we do with criminals?”*

We must point out that Iwasa did not dismiss the existence of the class struggle, nor that of organization.

*“The history of humanity is the history of class struggles. The anarchists do not deny this. But that is not all there is to history. It is either a movement that is essentially conservative, or a compromise, or, instead, a coming to terms with the past. Or it is a reformist movement for which the emancipation of all of humanity has no meaning. As a result, it cannot foresee the progressive stages of the future.”* (p. 8)

In October 1927, Hatta Shūzo published a pamphlet entitled, “An Examination of Syndicalism” (*Sanjīkarizumu No Kento*).<sup>26</sup>

In this text, Hatta first emphasizes the historical failure of syndicalism, from the English Chartists to Bolshevik Russia, with regard to its inability to avoid political recuperation. It is therefore necessary to conceive of a totally different movement, with new foundations, as defined by Kropotkin. He also refers to Malatesta’s position at the anarchist Amsterdam Congress of 1907 and the position of *Nabat* in the Ukraine during the Russian Revolution.



For Hatta, since syndicalism is essentially a practical doctrine, it can only be ideologically oriented from the outside, whether by Marxism, by anarchism, or by both. *“In this sense, syndicalism is an amphibious creature”*, he wrote. For Hatta, it was Marxism that made the greatest contribution to syndicalism: the class struggle, which grants supremacy to the most conscious elements of the working class, the *“creative violence”* that is not incompatible with Marxism and which allows an active minority to dominate the majority; and the industrial division of labor, a reflection of capitalist society and therefore itself imposed upon the society of the producers as seen by Marx.

It is this last point that Hatta insists upon in his conclusion: the division of labor—and its corollary, mechanization—deprives the worker of responsibility and requires a coordinating and directive authority, an incipient techno-bureaucracy, which is incompatible with the principles of libertarian communism as defined by Kropotkin. If the trade unions emerge victorious after the general strike, they will only reproduce the economic, and therefore also the political, division of labor. From this moment forward the need for a different type of organization is imposed.

Hatta Shūzo underscored this idea in “The Failure of the Theory of Class Struggle” (*Kaikyu Tososetsu No Gokai*), published by the *Zenkoku Jiren* in installments between August and October 1929; this essay served as the topic of discussion for various public meetings.<sup>27</sup>

Iwasa Sakutarō would adopt an even more acerbic tone. He published a pamphlet in 1931 that stimulated a lot of discussion, entitled, no less, “Concerning the Trade Unions and Their Gangster Theory” (*Rodo Kumiai Sanzokuron*). In this work Iwasa utilizes the gangster metaphor to illustrate the generic bond that links conventional syndicalism to the capitalist class: it aspires to take the place of the latter. A gang boss always has a rival who wants to take his place, and the struggle between them may be very bitter. A class, even one that is overwhelmingly working class in its composition, that only thinks about its own interests, can also become a ruling class. This was a critique, despite its clumsy formulation, of the Marxist-Leninist theory of the “dictatorship of the proletariat” that was very fashionable in Japan, as it was in other countries.

Iwasa Sakutarō had already employed the gangster metaphor in his text, “This Is How the Anarchists Respond” (*Museifushugisha Wa Kotaeru*), published in July 1927:

*“They [the syndicalists] can no longer be distinguished from the highwaymen of days gone by. Their movement, that is, the class struggle, does not represent a fundamental break with the exploitation and oppression of the capitalist system, in its essence. It is cooperating with capitalism, it makes compromises with capitalism, it is in reality a conservative reformist movement that prolongs exploitation and oppression. It is therefore incapable of emancipating society as a whole.”*<sup>28</sup>

The anarcho-syndicalists, of course, rejected this argument. Iwasa was characterized, for example, as a “petty-bourgeois sentimentalist” by the anarcho-syndicalist Yamaguchi Kensuke.<sup>29</sup> The anarcho-syndicalist Kubo Yuzuru (1903-1961) published his response to Iwasa’s article in a text entitled “On the Class Struggle and the Everyday Struggle” that appeared in *Kokushoku Undo* in 1928:

*“The tactic of the class struggle is not the monopoly of the Marxists. We know there are many superficial dogmatists and idealists who confuse Marx’s class struggle with our class struggle.... The same is true with regard to the everyday struggle.... The desire to get more bread, the conquest of bread, was in fact the source of modern socialism. If the workers had not been concerned with improvements in the immediate future, there would have been no emancipatory movement. Without an emancipatory movement, there would have been no anarchism.... Alongside the economic struggle, there is also the political struggle. Alongside the economic exploitation of the capitalists, there is also political tyranny.”*

Kubo Yuzuru therefore emphasized his view that the struggle must be prosecuted on all fronts against authority, in every domain. He concluded his text with a discussion of the type of organization that he felt was necessary:

*“Without the adequate means to achieve the goal, everything remains in the realm of fantasy. To leave everything to fate and to ‘look out for number one’ does no good at all. We must seize every*

*opportunity and utilize every aspect of social phenomena to lay the foundations of the new society. Verbal violence and the romanticism of those who misinterpret today's violence as propaganda of the deed, achieve nothing. In other words, the everyday struggle is a never-ending struggle."*

Ishikawa Sanshiro weighed in on the side of the anarcho-syndicalists. In 1927, he wrote his "Considerations on Syndicalism" (*Sanjikirizumu No Hanashi*), which provoked scornful jibes from the *Zenkoku Jiren*, but which would be accepted as a theoretical basis by the *Jikyo*. Ishikawa, who had lived in Europe for several years (Belgium, France, a short time in England), relied upon the knowledge he had acquired of the European libertarian and workers movements. He was a frequent guest of the Reclus family, in particular.

In a text entitled, "Anarchism and Syndicalism" (*Museifushugi To Sanjikirizumu*), published in 1926-1927, Ishikawa Sanshiro wrote:

*"In view of the experience of the anarchist movement in France, it can be concluded that the more the anarchist movement separated itself from the workers groups, the more likely it was to become completely desiccated. And we may also point out, again with reference to French history, that the anarchist movement reached its peak when it became involved in syndicalism."*<sup>30</sup>

But the differences between the disputants were often trivial. Ishikawa was, with regard to several issues, very close to Hatta and Iwasa, such as in his views on the importance of the rural commune and the roots of Asian Culture. Ishikawa and Iwasa, along with Yamaga Taiji, traveled together to China in August 1927 at the invitation of Chinese anarchists, who wanted them to participate in conferences being held at the recently established National Labor University (*Laodong Daxue*) in Shanghai.<sup>31</sup> Iwasa remained in China until 1929. This led to his temporary marginalization from the internal polemics of the Japanese movement, which he nonetheless contributed to with his writings.

In 1933, Ishikawa Sanshiro published a study of the *Kojiki*, an ancient text of imperial mythology; from then on he devoted his literary efforts to researches in Eastern culture. During the war, he published "One Hundred Classes on the History of Eastern Culture" (*Toyo Bunkashi Hyakko*, three volumes published in 1939, 1942 and 1944, respectively). Iwasa Sakutaro also became more interested in Japanese history and in one text ("On the State and its Principles", *Kokka Ron Taiko*), which some believe is a forgery manufactured by the government, he defends the Japanese imperial system, which he characterizes as organic and benevolent, unlike the tyrannical monarchies of the West.<sup>32</sup>

Like Iwasa, Ishikawa also cultivated paradox. In April 1930, he did not hesitate to begin one of his texts, causing quite a sensation, by saying: "*I am a conservative, because the movement of things, for example, the movement of the Earth around the Sun, is a repetitive movement and therefore, in a certain sense, conservative.*"

Ishikawa would later develop an entire nihilist or individualist worldview, one that was often similar to that of Han Ryner. His journal was entitled, *The Dynamic* (November 1929-October 1934). He was interested in many topics, including energy and the concept of History.

## **7. Split (1928) and reunification (1934)**

In April 1929 the anarcho-syndicalist tendency created a new trade union: the *Nihon Rodo Kumiai Jiyu Rengo Kyogikai* (The Libertarian Federal Council of the Trade Unions of Japan), known as the *Jikyo*.

The new trade union's major stronghold was in Kanto (metal workers, printers, chemical workers, office employees).<sup>33</sup> In June, some trade unions left the *Jiren* to affiliate with the *Jikyo*, especially trade unions in Kansai: in Kyoto (printers for the most part), Waizumi (fishermen), Kishiwada, Osaka, Kobe.

The *Jikyo* published a newspaper, *Kokushoku Rono Shimbun* (the "Newspaper of the Anarchist Workers and Peasants", from July 1930 to 1932, printed in Kanto), which was later re-named *Rodosha Shimbun* (the "Workers Newspaper") in June 1932; the newspaper featured contributions

from Enishi Ichizo, Takahashi Kokichi, Shirai Shimpei, Tsuruoka Naokazu, Mizunuma Tei, Murata Jojiro, Utagawa Ichiro, etc.

In September 1932, various militants, in many cases the same ones involved in the publication of *Rodosha Shimbun* (Takahashi Kokichi, Shirai Shimpei, Mizunuma Tei, Shionaga Goro, Ejima Ei'ichi, Yamada Kensuke, Nakamura Kichijiro, Tadokoro Shigeo, etc.), with the collaboration of some of the veterans of the movement (Ishikawa Sanshiro, Kondo Kenji, Yarita Ken'ichi, Okutani Matsuji, etc.), founded a theoretical journal called "Under the Folds of the Black Flag" (*Kurohata No Shita Ni*), as a counterweight to *Jiyu Rengo Shimbun* and *Kurohata* of the *Jiren*.<sup>34</sup>

The *Jikyō* would launch various struggles. It attained some popularity over the course of a strike in April 1931 in a factory in Senjū, a district in Tokyo, where it led a hunger strike, a method of struggle that was still rather novel in Japan, during which a militant brandished a black flag.

In 1931, the *Jikyō* had about 3,000 members (2,968 to be exact). During the same period, the *Zenkoku Jiren* (which still existed) had 16,300 members. John Crump insists on the fact that the latter figure is twice the number of members that the *Jiren* had when it was founded in 1926, that is, 8,400 members, which he adduces as evidence that neither theoretical disputes nor any other controversies, not even the split, had a quantitative effect on the libertarian movement. The starting figure of 1927, however, must be estimated at 15,000, when the unitary *Zenkoku Jiren* basically functioned for one year after its creation. In four years, from 1927 to 1931, the *Zenkoku Jiren* did not really grow. If at first it seemed to not have suffered too much from the hemorrhage of militants and the split, its collapse would be rapid after 1931.

To account for this fact, we must also take into consideration the context of accelerating Japanese imperialism (the Manchurian Incident of September 1931), intensified repression, economic crisis, and the waning combativeness of the workers. The decline also affected the communist movement, which, due to a series of arrests, saw some of the most eminent members of its political bureau, such as Sano Manabu (1892-1953) and Nabeyama Sadachika (1901-1979), draft a collective public letter in which they renounced communism and expressed their support for the Japanese imperial regime. This sudden reversal (*tenko*), which became a deliberate and minutely crafted strategy of the Japanese state, would successfully reduce the membership of the JCP by more than one-third. In addition, right wing and ultra-right wing groups were beginning to infiltrate the workers movement. They created their own organizations or took over the existing ones. The historical context was therefore unfavorable for radical or revolutionary activity.

The membership figures for the *Jiren* fell from 11,000 in 1932 to 4,359 in 1933, while the *Jikyō*'s membership declined from 2,850 to 1,100 over the same period. Some talented militants abandoned the movement (Yamamoto Kansuke, Nakamura Bo'ichi, Yamanaka Sei, etc.). For the disillusioned veteran activist Kondo Kenji, "instead of a workers organization, the *Zenkoku Jiren* was during that period an organization for theoretical debate and its newspaper, which represented this tendency, the *Jiyu Rengo Shimbun*, was controlled by the *Kokuren*".<sup>35</sup> In the same vein, Komatsu Ryūji relates the testimony of the anarchist Aizawa Hisao, who claimed that the *Zenkoku Jiren* did not even hand out leaflets in front of the factories anymore.<sup>36</sup>

The libertarian movement responded to this situation. May Day, 1932, provided the opportunity for various groups from both tendencies to initiate a joint auto-critique. In 1932, the *Jikyō* issued numerous appeals for united action. In April 1933, during its third congress, the *Jiren* engaged in (self-) criticism targeting the excesses of the pure anarchist tendency and admitted a representative from the *Jikyō*. Both organizations held joint celebrations of May Day in 1932, together with elements of the revolutionary left.

More generally, libertarian militants would participate in four kinds of activity:

- Planning for the reunification of the libertarian trade unions, which was consummated on January 14, 1934, followed by a national conference on April 2, 1934 attended by 150 delegates. The reunited *Zenkoku Jiren* had 4,000 members at that time, but only 2,300 a year later, in 1935;<sup>37</sup> it would be dissolved in 1936.

- The founding of the “Anarcho-Communist Party” in January 1934.
- Agitation in the peasants’ movement.
- Adoption of the tactic of the “Anti-fascist United Front”.

What could be referred to as the “Anti-fascist United Front”, motivated by the Japanese situation but also by Hitler’s rise to power in Germany and the fascistization of Europe, was defended by anarchists in several regions, especially Kansai. It nonetheless remained an embryonic development. It was, however, one of the factors that worked in favor of the reunification of the libertarian trade union movement.

Agitation in the peasants’ movement passed through two stages: theoretical preparation, from 1931 to 1932, and then a rural insurrection to put the resulting principles into practice in 1934-1935. Some theoreticians of rural agitation, as well as their organization, the *Noson Seinensha* (“Society of the Rural Youth”), were paradoxically absent from this second stage (Miyazaki Akira and others were arrested and imprisoned). From a certain point of view, this reinforced the principles that were then dominant in the movement which consisted in abolishing all specific organizations in order to focus on disseminating libertarian communism among the masses.

The *Noson Seinensha* was founded in Tokyo in February 1931 and was dissolved in September 1932. It had fourteen members when it was founded, including: Miyazaki Akira, Suzuki Yasuyuki, Hiramatsu Hideo, Junji Hoshino (1906-?), Yoshio Wasada, Akiko Yagi (1895-1983), Ono Nagagoro, etc.<sup>38</sup> Its two leading theoreticians were Miyazaki Akira and Yasuyuki Suzuki. In a text that would cause a sensation, “Appeal to the Peasants” (*Nomin He Uttaeru*), published in Kurohata in February 1931, Miyazaki encouraged the peasants to turn their backs on the cities, refuse to pay taxes or recognize any aspect of the state’s authority, including military service; and to immediately organize a federation of village communities based on libertarian communism and self-sufficiency in production and consumption. The *Noson Seinensha* not only sought to turn away from the cities but also from the political sects that swarmed only in the cities.

Some anarchist groups had already attempted to organize the peasants, including the “Society of Tenant Farmers” (*Kosakuninsha*) and the “League of the Rural Movement” (*Noson Undo Domei*), led by Daijiro Yoshida, Watanabe Benisu, Nagashima Shin, Kinoshita Shige, Mochizuki Akira, etc.<sup>39</sup> The *Noson Seinensha* went beyond mere organizing. As John Crump points out, the *Noson Seinensha* reappropriated some of the positions of anarcho-communism that had already been developed in Japan, such as the critique of the cities,<sup>40</sup> libertarian federalism, and Kropotkinism, but pursued them to their logical extremes, especially with regard to the question of decentralization. The workers of the cities were thus considered to be the exploiters of the impoverished peasants of the countryside, a theory that was similar to the analyses of Hatta Shūzo concerning the new urban workers aristocracy. In his “Handbook of Japanese Anarchist Theory” (*Nihon Museifushugi Shoron*), published in May 1932, Suzuki asserted that the principles of “from the bottom up” and “from the periphery to the center” inherited from the First International and from Bakunin did not go far enough, and were even mistaken.<sup>41</sup> In his view, we do not need a center or a periphery, a bottom or a top, but libertarian communism everywhere. The logic of this idea rests upon the rejection of any specific organization. This at least partly explains why, after a wave of repression that led to the arrest of some of its members, the *Noson Seinensha* dissolved its organization a year and a half after it was founded.

These ideas, however, would have repercussions, especially in the mountains of central Honshu and in the prefecture of Nagano, which underwent a period of insurrection in which several villages were mobilized and several hundred people participated in 1934-1935. The movement was repressed, however, and the agitators arrested in the wake of the anti-anarchist repression provoked by a different affair involving the Anarcho-Communist Party.

Having originated from a previous group, the “Federation of Anarcho-Communists of Japan” (*Nihon Museifukyo Sanshugisha Renmei*), founded in December 1933, the “Anarcho-Communist Party” (*Museifukyosanto*) was founded on January 30, 1934 by a handful of anarchists: Hisao Aizawa (1908-?), Eizo Umemoto (1904-1943), Uemura Tai (1903-1959), Shigeo Tadokoro, Toshio Futami (1906-1967), etc. Hisao Aizawa, for example, who first became involved in the anarchist movement in 1927, joined an anarchist group in 1928 (*Kokushoku Sensensha*, later known as *Kokkisha*). Together with Irie Ichiro and Endo Sakan, he founded the “Trade Union of Office Employees in the Tokyo Region”

(*Tokyo Chiho Shiyonin Kumiai*), an affiliate of the *Jiren*, from which it withdrew in February 1933. He then became an editor of the recently established *Jiyu Rengo Shimbun* (the Newspaper of the Independent Trade Union).

These militants, who were all around thirty years old and constituted part of the new generation, were exasperated by the movement's internal disputes. They called for unity. At the same time, they were concerned with the growth of Japanese militarism, which would pose a danger to the entire revolutionary movement, libertarian or otherwise, without making any distinctions. For them, what was therefore needed was a powerful and secret organization.

The situation was quite favorable for such an initiative. Besides their age and their dynamism, they also took advantage of the proliferating signs of weakness exhibited by the old guard. Mortally ill, Hatta Shūzo was no longer actively involved in the movement. Ishikawa and Iwasa (who were in their fifties during this period) devoted most of their time to historical research.

In August 1934 the "Anarcho-Communist Party" adopted a "program" (*koryo*) as well as an "action program" (*kodo koryo*). The former was a restatement of the classic principles of anarchism. The latter combined radical slogans (abolition of the capitalist system) with demands of a more practical nature (an unemployment insurance plan funded by the government and the capitalists). Aizawa and his comrades considered themselves to be members of a group whose purpose was to go beyond the exclusive initiative of the masses, which according to them was fatally limited, in order to hasten the onset of the revolution, achieve social hegemony and then to self-dissolve once these objectives are attained. The Anarcho-Communist Party therefore simultaneously combined vanguardist positions and reformist slogans. It would induce the reunified *Zenkoku Jiren* to adopt these positions.

This anarcho-communist party and its predecessor group assiduously worked for unity and merger of the federations, and the *Zenkoku Jiren* and *Jikyō* finally reunited. At the same time, the Party assumed control over the newspaper, *Jiyu Rengo Shimbun*. However, due the paranoia and vices of clandestinity, the Party plunged into an internal purge that resulted in the assassination of one of its members, an alleged spy, and also engaged in a spree of bank robberies.

The government took advantage of this situation by launching a vast police roundup. 400 people were arrested in the fall of 1935. Shortly thereafter, as a result of the repression of the "Rural Youth" referred to above, another 350 people were arrested in May 1936. These prisoners comprised almost all the anarchists of Japan as well as their sympathizers, real or alleged. Toshio Futami, the murderer of the alleged spy, was sentenced to death, but his sentence was commuted and reduced to life imprisonment. Akira Aizawa was sentenced to six years in prison, Akira Miyazaki and other members of the "Rural Youth" to three years each. Just a few months before the outbreak of the Spanish Revolution, all the libertarian organizations of Japan were destroyed.

This episode marked the practical disappearance of the organized anarchist and anarcho-syndicalist movement in Japan prior to 1945. Amidst the burgeoning militarism and imperialism of Japan, radical activity of any kind became almost impossible.

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This review of anarcho-syndicalism in Japan between the wars failed to address a certain number of topics. One topic that would have to be discussed is the succession of the generations of militants and the transformation of their social origins in order to evaluate the role of the various personalities and their sociological characteristics in relation to their time. Between the trailblazer Kotoku, still infused with the Confucian severity that was the heritage of his landowning samurai family, and Aizawa, the son of a humble schoolteacher, one can trace the passage of an entire era characterized by increasing social mobility. In almost every case, however, one will find the same passion for reading, for writing, for journalism and for the debate of ideas.

We should also add a discussion, in the case of Japan, of the regional differences characterized by a very profound socio-cultural distinction between the world of Kanto (the Tokyo region) and that of

Kansai (the Osaka region). This distinction affected militant practice and ideological choices. And its traces persist to this day.

Each person may pass their own judgment on the choices made by the anarchist and anarcho-syndicalist movement in Japan, and may try to assess, insofar as it is possible to do so, the impact of the disagreements of both an ideological and an organizational nature. It is hard to determine whether the hemorrhage of militants suffered by the libertarian trade union movement during the early 1930s was due to frustration caused by the movement's internal disputes; or due to the movement's inability to confront the urgent demands of the moment (unemployment, economic crisis, militarism, imperialism); or due to competition from the socialists and communists; or due to the socio-cultural transformation of Japanese society; or due to repression. All of these factors played a role, of course, but what was the relative importance of each?

One answer to this question may be suggested by the fact that after the war the libertarian trade union movement never recovered its former importance. This was not only true of Japan, however: other factors operating on a worldwide scale were implicated. Another answer can be suggested by the history of the organized movement in the post-war era, which, after a brief period of unity, reproduced in a surprisingly identical fashion the splits and divisions of the past, with the essential difference that their social impact was infinitely smaller.

A certain kind of anarchist extremism, more or less organized and often sterile, led some militants to join the JCP when it was founded in 1922, although many later resigned. Too late, however, because the damage was already done. The anarchist militants, or militants who were influenced by anarchism, thus handed over to the Communist Party their working class base, without which they were nothing but so many more or less *déclassé* intellectuals. Furthermore, the fear of Marxism and Marxist hegemony induced the libertarian militants to reject anything that, whether closely approximating or distantly related, even gave the appearance of Marxism or bolshevism. This attitude served as the basis for particularly intransigent ideological battles and purges that sometimes rivaled those of the enemy, which were justified by their alleged necessity for purposes of clarification and coherence.

Beyond the particular conditions and the locally imposed issues, it is necessary to analyze, from an idealistic-realistic historical perspective, even though only briefly, the relation between the libertarian ideology and the socio-economic situation of Japan during this period.

It is altogether obvious that it was the thought of Kropotkin—translated, assimilated, and interpreted and reinterpreted to its most extreme limits—that constituted the pivot, if not the very core, of the ideological orientations of the organized libertarian trade union movement. This feature was not just limited to Japan, however, since it was also found in neighboring countries such as China and Korea.<sup>42</sup>

There can be no doubt that the Kropotkinist aspiration for a decentralized communalism that unites field, factory and workshop on a communist foundation touches a nerve in the profoundly rural and collective society of Asia, characterized as it is by the quasi-communitarian values and practices of irrigated rice cultivation. Kropotkinism embodied an answer to the passage of a peasant civilization towards modernity, by adapting technical and scientific advances to local identities, freed from feudal, patriarchal and bureaucratic constraints. The radical, aggravated and even extremist rejection of any idea of the division of labor, as expressed in the theories of Hatta Shûzo, is undoubtedly influenced by a certain nostalgia for the traditional village community. The rejection of electricity, formulated by certain fractions of the "Rural Youth", corresponds to a desire to cease to rely on the city but can also be interpreted as an anti-industrialism and a form of traditionalism.

The fundamental question that is really posed is this: what kind of labor and what kind of division of labor? As everyone knows, this is a question that the whole socialist workers movement never ceased to ask. For Hatta Shûzo, whose thought was so influential in the Japanese libertarian movement between the wars, the answer is clear: we must reject all division of labor, because it inevitably gives rise to the specialization of individuals or social groups, which endows them with power—the technicians and the political or trade union leaders are ultimately the victors. Anarchism, which rejects power, can only reject, in his view, the division of labor.

This question is still being asked. One can posit that not every kind of division of labor is necessarily capitalist or authoritarian, on the condition that labor is considered from the perspective of the task to be accomplished rather than from that of its remuneration. The relation between each job and the workers as a whole, which Hatta resolved by an appeal to free distribution ["taking from the pile"] and the priority of consumption, in fact constitutes the pillar, the foundation itself, of any social organization that anarchists and anarcho-syndicalists formulate in terms of libertarian federalism.

It is the development of society itself that compels us to reconsider the rejection of the division of labor and the Kropotkinist analysis. It is going too far, it is even mistaken, to identify all division of labor with the immanent development of capitalism without taking into account the anthropological characteristics inherent in humanity, the aspirations and needs of both individuals as well as collectives to carry out one or another activity. Thus, the systematic rotation of jobs contains its own limits.

The Kropotkinist theory itself, as it is formulated in the book, *Fields, Factories and Workshops*, which advocates the "decentralization of industry" as well as "small industries and small industrial towns", is an ambiguous expression of both an ideal desire for a future society and a prospective analysis of capitalist society itself. This being so, it seems that some of its pages would not be out of place in a description of contemporary "meta-politicization" or "re-urbanization", and that they could easily be supported by certain advocates of a more flexible capitalism who are busy relocating their smaller production units to the countryside. In this context, of course, centralization via computers and stock market speculation replaces redistribution via libertarian communism.

Kropotkin's position was relatively simple: technical progress and real rationalization that are not implemented at the expense of individuals would lead to the improvement of society and consequently confer greater objective and material consistency to the libertarian communist project. To summarize: decentralize, decentralize more, there is always something else that can be decentralized.

It was the very development of the contemporary Japanese society of "high growth", "the thirty glorious years", which led to an incredible acceleration of the division of labor and an almost total desertion of the countryside, that undermined the foundations of a Japanese Kropotkinism that lost the symbols of its identity and its militant forces. Revolutionary syndicalism itself, based on the industry or the factory, rather than on the more or less rural commune, became a minority fraction in its confrontation with an original form of Kropotkinist syndicalism, and its influence only diminished further as the weight of bolshevism and the JCP, especially during the post-war era, finally destroyed its last organized expressions in the bitter framework of the cold war, Soviet Russian communism and the close proximity of Chinese Maoism. The operating space for an anarcho-syndicalism oriented towards the discovery of a synthesis, even a tactical one, would be considerably reduced.

Philippe Pelletier

Translation (completed in June 2013) of the Spanish Translation by Frank Mintz and María Ester Tello, "El Anarcho-sindicalismo en Japón desde 1911 hasta 1934" available online at: <http://www.anarkismo.net/article/17560>

French original: Philippe Pelletier, "Un oublié du consensus : l'anarcho-syndicalisme au Japon de 1911 à 1934", in *De l'histoire du mouvement ouvrier révolutionnaire, actes du colloque international "Pour un autre futur"* (Paris, May 2000), Paris, Editions CNT-RP/Nautilus, 2001.

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- [1](#). George Beckmann and Genji Okubo (1969), pp. 39-45.
  - [2](#). Stephen Large (1981), p. 19.
  - [3](#). Stephen Large (1972), p. 37.
  - [4](#). Thomas Stanley, p. 114.
  - [5](#). Yamaga Taiji, statements recorded by Mukai Ko (1984) and published in *Yamaga Taiji: Hito To Sono Shogai* [Yamaga Taiji: The Man and His Life], Tokyo, Jiyu Shisosha, 300 pages.
  - [6](#). "Rodo Undo No Seishin" [The Spirit of the Workers Movement], *Rodo Undo*, Vol. I, No. 1, October 1919, *Zenshû*, VI, p. 3.
  - [7](#). "Chishiki Kaikyû Ni Ataeru" [Appeal to the Intellectual Class], *Rodo Undo*, Vol. I, No. 2, November 1919, *Zenshû*, VI, p. 27.
  - [8](#). "Shakai Teki Riso Ron" [On the Social Goal], *Rodo Undo*, Vol. I, No. 6, June 1920, *Zenshû*, VI, pp. 44 *et seq.*
  - [9](#). "Shinchitsujo No Sozo—Hyoron No Hyoron" [Establishing a New Kind of Order—Critique of a Critique], *Rodo Undo*, Vol. I, No. 6, June 1920, *Zenshû*, VI, pp. 53-54.
  - [10](#). Stephen Large (1981), pp. 31-40.
  - [11](#). Stephen Large (1981), p. 43.
  - [12](#). "Naze Shinko-Chu No Kakumei Wo Yogo Shinai No Ka" [Why I Do Not Support the Course the Revolution is Currently Following], *Rodo Undo*, September 1922; *Zenshû*, VII.
  - [13](#). Ian Neary (1989), *Political Protest and Social Control in Pre-war Japan: The Origins of Buraku Liberation*, Manchester University Press, pp. 97-98.
  - [14](#). This fitting expression was coined by Komatsu Ryuji.
  - [15](#). For the details, see John Crump (1993) and (1996a) and Komatsu Ryuji (1972).
  - [16](#). Komatsu Ryuji (1972), pp. 198 *et seq.*

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- [17.](#) John Crump (1993), pp. 69 *et seq.*
  - [18.](#) The list of the groups represented at the congress can be found in Komatsu Ryuji, p. 98, and a more comprehensive list is provided in Kiyoshi Akiyama, p. 209.
  - [19.](#) See the Reminiscences of Kondo Kenji, p. 272.
  - [20.](#) John Crump (1993), p. 77.
  - [21.](#) *Jiyu Rengo*, No. 1, June 5, 1926, p. 7. Komatsu Ryuji (1972), p. 202.
  - [22.](#) John Crump (1993), p. 78, citing Komatsu Ryuji (1972), p. 84.
  - [23.](#) The letter was published in *Révolte* and *Les Temps Nouveaux*, No. 81, July 1933. I would like to express my thanks to Girard for having sent me this document.
  - [24.](#) Yoshiharu Hashimoto (1979), p. 208.
  - [25.](#) Reprinted in 1984 by *Kokushoku Sensensha*, 46 pages. In his preface, Sakutaro emphasizes the fact that it was his intention follow in the footsteps of Osugi Sakae's response to John Bullet's *Objections against Anarchism*. "John Bullet poses twenty-four questions. I give eleven answers", he wrote.
  - [26.](#) Reprinted in 1983 by *Kokushoku Sensensha*, pp. 1-18.
  - [27.](#) Reprinted in 1981 by *Kokushoku Sensensha*, "Hatta Shūzo Zenshū-Museifukyosanshugi", pp. 209-230.
  - [28.](#) For the Japanese text, see *op. cit.*, p. 12; part of the article was also translated by John Crump (1993), p. 112.
  - [29.](#) Komatsu Ryuji, p. 209.
  - [30.](#) Komatsu Ryuji, p. 216.
  - [31.](#) Concerning this university, see Arif Dirlik (1991): *Anarchism in the Chinese Revolution*, Berkeley, University of California Press, 328 p., pp. 262 *et seq.* He does not mention, however, the participation of the Japanese anarchists.
  - [32.](#) The forgery hypothesis, which is mentioned by John Crump (1996), is endorsed by a veteran of contemporary Japanese anarchism, Eizaburo Oshima, the editor of *Kokushoku Sensensha*. Hashimoto Yoshiharu, however, a member of the group, "The Libertarian", points out that while Iwasa Sakutaro was a mentor of the newly formed AFJ (Anarchist Federation of Japan) after the war, he still maintained his positions on the imperial system, which earned him the criticisms of the young anarchists (*op. cit.*, p. 200). As for Akiyawa Kiyoshi, in addition to calling attention to Iwasa's exaggerations in denouncing the syndicalists as counterrevolutionaries at the moment when the *Kokuren* was founded, also took pleasure in recalling Iwasa's (verbally) terrorist past, when he lived in the United States during the period when Kotoku Shusui visited that country, in 1906.
  - [33.](#) Kiyoshi Akiyama, p. 213.
  - [34.](#) Komatsu Ryuji, pp. 212-213.
  - [35.](#) From the Reminiscences of Kondo Kenji, p. 283.
  - [36.](#) Komatsu Ryuji, p. 221.
  - [37.](#) The first figure is taken from Goto Akinobu, the second from John Crump and Komatsu Ryuji.
  - [38.](#) The complete list can be found in Komatsu Ryuji, p. 217.
  - [39.](#) Komatsu Ryuji, p. 218.
  - [40.](#) The newspaper of the *Kokuren*, *Kokushoku Seinen*, had been publishing articles denouncing urbanization and praising the role of the countryside since 1926. See John Crump (1993), p. 72.
  - [41.](#) Reprinted by *Kokushoku Sensensha* (1979); see p. 44 in particular.
  - [42.](#) Philippe Pelletier, "L'influence kropotkinienne en Asie orientale", *Itinéraire*, No. 3, 1988, pp. 43-48.