

Terror, Taboo and Silence: Speaking out on the Emperor system

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On January 18 this year, Motoshima Hitoshi, mayor of Nagasaki, one of the two cities which suffered atom bomb strikes at the end of World War Two, was shot by Tajiri Kazumi, a member of Seiki-juku, a Nagasaki-based rightwing organization. The attempted assassination was a direct result of Motoshima's statement in the Nagasaki City Assembly on December 7, 1988 that Emperor Showa bore some responsibility for World War Two. Although the mayor escaped from death, the incident sent a shock wave not only throughout Nagasaki but across the nation.

On the same day, the government announced the official schedule of the Sokui-rei (enthronement ceremony of the new Emperor) and Daijosai (the Great Food Offering Ritual in which the new Emperor will follow the imperial family's tradition of eating sacred new rice harvested from an imperial rice field) in autumn.

While the mass media reported on the Emperor and the Imperial family using high honorifics and words of praise, it described Tajiri's action as an abuse of freedom of speech and as a challenge to democracy. The way they reported, however, evaded the issue of the Emperor's war responsibility in the abstraction of the freedom of speech.

Motoshima's statement on the Emperor's responsibility was in fact a reply to a question posed by a Nagasaki City Assembly member belonging to the Japanese Communist Party. It was made out of pure common sense based on Motoshima's own wartime experience. (He was an instructor of an education unit.) It was made, however, in an abnormal atmosphere, the so-called 'self-restraint mood' encouraged mainly by the mass media due to Emperor Showa's worsening illness. A member of another local assembly who made a similar statement was ordered not to attend the assembly.

As expected, Motoshima's Liberal Democratic Party pressured him to withdraw his remark. When this was not forthcoming, the LDP removed him from the post of advisor of its Prefectural Association. Matsuda Kuro, president of the Party Executive Committee of the LDP's Prefectural

Association, then said that no members of the Diet belonging to the LDP would accept a petition from him.

"Motoshima should know who made him mayor of Nagasaki," he added. Rightwingers initiated street campaigns, descending on the City Hall in a violent protest. They destroyed a door of Motoshima's Supporting Association Office and a man with a knife pressured people at the office for a meeting with Motoshima. With several rightwing groups, the Nagasaki Prefectural Conference for the Protection of Japan formed the Association to Reform Motoshima's City Administration and conducted a rally protesting against Motoshima. Threatening mail, with bullets enclosed, was sent twice to the Mayor in February and March last year by Kajiyama Shigeru, a director of this newly formed Association.

On the 31st of March, 1989 several bullets were shot into the room of the Treasurer of the Nagasaki City Hall. On the same day, the rightwing Association was dissolved and there was a pause in these violent actions even though Motoshima did not succumb to the pressure but in fact reiterated his assertion in public.

In an interview with Asahi Shimbun (one of the three major national newspapers), Sato Ryo, chairman of the Nagasaki City Assembly and LDP member said, "It was important to advocate freedom of speech but I don't see any sense for the mayor to repeat his remarks. It might be seen as a publicity stunt. I would like to suggest that the mayor finish this by announcing that he will no longer make any statements regarding the Emperor's war responsibility and concentrate on the job of being a mayor."

In a meeting of the City Assembly, the LDP-backed members demanded that the mayor, who had not yet yielded to their pressure, stop wasting money on a security guard for himself. Motoshima called off his guard. The new year came and Motoshima was shot.

Nagasaki, known as an atom-bombed city, has other faces. It is a corporate town dominated by Mitsubishi Heavy Industries, which has the largest arms factory in the city. It is also the capital city of

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Nagasaki Prefecture which is known as a stronghold of right wing education. In 1984, the Nagasaki Prefectural Conference for Protection of Japan, a right wing group, submitted an "Appeal to Revise the Education Basic Law," which was adopted by the Assembly of Nagasaki Prefecture. Kajiyama Shigeru, a vice chairman of the Conference, was the family doctor of the President of "Seicho-no-Ie," a new religion linked with right wing groups based in Nagasaki and an advisor to the Nagasaki chapter of Shokyo Rengo (a political/religious group based in Japan and linked with Moon Sun Myung's Unification Church). He is a vice president of the National Council of Education Problems which promotes "normalization of



The protest banner reads: Taboo contradicts democracy.

education" and takes a stand against the Japan Teachers' Union.

There were former cases of right wing terrorism targeted against those who publicly presented criticism against the Emperor. In 1960, a right wing person attacked the home of the president of Chuo-Koron Publishing Company, killing a servant and heavily injuring the president's wife. The Company had published in their magazine, Chuo-Koron, the story of "Furyu-Mutan," by Fukazawa Shichiro, which imagines the execution of the Imperial family. The violence of the rightwing strengthened the taboo of criticism against the Emperor. While at the same time, a media campaign was conducted to beautify the Imperial Family through reports of marriage of the Prince, now the Emperor Akihito. Another flare up of right wing terror focussed on author Kiriya Shu and his publisher. His 1983 novel "Partisan Legend" describes a plot to blow up the Emperor's train.

And it is not only the press who are terrorized.

During the past year, which was regarded as a mourning period for the Emperor Showa, right wing terror was surprisingly frequent: intimidation or violence include attacks on the photo exhibition of Fukushima Kikujiro who took pictures of the devastation World War produced in people's lives and on Mugari Dojo, a commune on Amami Island which takes a public stand against the Emperor system. Also, the plaintiff in the "Hinomaru trial" (the desecration of the Japanese flag) was repeatedly threatened by right wing people. He burnt a Japanese flag at the opening ceremony of the baseball games of Okinawa National Athletic Meet in 1987 as a protest against Japan's historical domination of the island.

The police's approach to right wing terrorism is almost nothing compared to enthusiasm the police displayed during the Emperor Showa funeral. Just before the funeral, check points were established throughout Tokyo, frequently stopping traffic and even monitoring pedestrian traffic and checking houses in local neighborhoods. The police in Nagasaki has already started to strengthen its forces in preparation for the Tree-Planting Ceremony by the Emperor and Empress this coming May. Would anybody dare to say that this is a waste of taxpayers' money?

But the shock of the assassination attempt on the Nagasaki mayor has provoked many Japanese citizens to denounce rightwing terror. Statements of protest were made at various places throughout the country. On February 4, 150 citizens in Osaka made public their protests responding to a letter published in a newspaper by a reader calling for citizens to speak out.

On February 24 and 25, a rally and march were also organized in Nagasaki in defense of freedom of speech. One thousand people from all over Japan participated in the event. Among the views expressed during the rally, it was impressive to hear a woman saying, "As citizens we have allowed the shooting to occur but in order for this not to happen any more, we ourselves have to speak out that we don't want the Emperor system. Silence will not bring an end to this kind of terror, but the growing reaction to rightwing intimidation cannot avoid the difficult problem of the entire Emperor system."