

The Emperor's Legions

A History of Japan's Right Wing

By Hayashi Masayuki

'92

A Strange Atmosphere

"What a strange atmosphere... Are they all right-wingers?" the German journalist asked me. We were standing there in the cold, watching the people lined up, bowing toward the imperial palace. Many wore black suits. They had gathered to pray for Emperor Hirohito, who had coughed up blood, and to sign their names into his get-well book. This behavior seemed strange to the foreigner standing next to me.

So what exactly is our "right wing?" How did these words originate? In the period following the French revolution, the radical Jacobins sat to the left of the chairman's podium and the Girondins to the right. This was the beginning of

the concept, "left" and "right." Today things have become more complicated: we have the right and left wing, "rightists" and "leftists," the "ultraright" and the "ultraleft."

If we take this general concept, that "left" means progressives and "right" conservatives, then the postwar Liberal Democratic Party, with its emperor-worship and nationalism, is clearly the "right wing." Its party platform aims to "amend" the Constitution. Former prime minister Kishi Nobusuke, who the LDP made their president, was a class A war criminal. The LDP is supported by the same *zaibatsu* that supported Japan's aggression in World War II. But the LDP, at the same time, is a modern and liberal political



Rightists fly the Hinomaru (photo by Paul Takeuchi)

party. It's not the right wing I'll talk about here. The LDP is clearly different from the "rightists" who occasionally come into the spotlight, the people in military garb who drive through towns in their black trucks, waving big *Hinomaru* flags, blasting martial songs.



The Rightists: Guides into a "Holy War"

Emperor Hirohito (or Emperor Showa) died on January 7, 1989. The right wing went into mourning. But just after 3 p.m. on January 18, 1990, soon after the end of the year-long mourning period, a rightist shot Nagasaki Mayor Motojima Hitoshi in front of the city hall. The mayor was hit by a single shot from a .22 caliber gun from a distance of between 1 and 5 meters. Motojima had publicly stated that Hirohito bore responsibility for the war. He had made the comments nearly a year before, and had received complaints from both the rightists and the LDP (to which he belonged), but the rightists waited a whole year before they acted.

The assailant, Tajiri Kazumi, was a member of the Shokijuku, or the "right spirit school." Shokijuku was organized in 1981, and has ties to the major *yakuza* group Yamaguchi-gumi. Its leader, Wakashima Seishiro, denied any organizational involvement in the incident, but in a TV interview in 1987 said that the right wing's basic character was violent, and that it was natural for them to attack people with different opinions. The Motojima Incident came as a great shock to people in other countries. In south Korea and Japan it was front page news. The Associated Press, too, sent out its lead story as "Japan Mayor Shot."

The roots of the Japanese right wing go back to the Genyosha, or "Society of the Mysterious Ocean" founded by Toyama Mitsuru in 1881. It was originally connected to the Jiyu Minken Undo (Democratic Rights Movement), but in 1886 it changed position and became an armed foe of that movement. Toyama later participated in the Togakuto Uprising in Korea and met with Sun Yat-sen, then in exile from China. One of Toyama's close adherents, Uchida Ryohei, was infuriated with the Triple Intervention that followed the Sino-Japanese War, went to China and became a spy. In 1901 the two formed a new group called the Kokuryukai, which later be-

came notorious in the United States as the "Black Dragon." They raised the ideology of *zettai tennoshugi*, or "belief in an absolute emperor-rule," and were Pan-Asians, which meant they planned to exclude Europeans and build a great nation of "coexistence and coprosperity."

The Russian Revolution of 1917 had a decisive impact on Japanese social movements and forced the rightists to change their attitude. Two other incidents, the Rice Riots of 1919 and the emergence of the nationalist March 1st Movement for independence in Korea pushed them toward a new line. Their aim then became to foster nationalist reforms and prevent socialism from entering the country. The main theorists of this new idea, Kita Ikki and Okawa Shumei, organized the Yuzonsha "Society for the Preservation of the National Essence" in 1919, which began a new tendency from the other — Genyosha and Kokuryukai — line.

By 1933 there were about 700 rightist groups, but few had any relations, as they do today, to *boryokudan* (organized crime syndicates). These rightist groups began to organize coups d'état by recruiting members in the military and then working with them. The first of these, organized within the army headquarters, was Sakurakai, the "Cherry Society." The group was covertly accepted not only by military leaders, but by some bureaucrats, businessmen, and even members of the imperial family.

In this era rightists also became more influential within the bureaucracy especially at the Interior Ministry and the Ministry of Commerce and Industry. Among this self-titled "progressive bureaucracy" was the future prime minister Kishi Nobusuke. He began his career by opposing the decision of the Hamaguchi Cabinet to reduce government salaries by 10% — and later held posts in both the puppet Manchukuo government and the wartime Tojo Cabinet. He was responsible for both shooting Chinese people and forcing them to work to death. His class A status didn't prevent him from becoming a prime minister and later a leader of the movement to revise Japan's peace constitution. There are many cases like his.

Kita Ikki wrote a booklet called *Dainippon Kaizo Hoan Taiko*, or "An Outline Plan for the Restructuring of Japan," and it became a sort of

bible for the prewar rightists. It proposed a coup under the emperor's control which would abolish the Constitution and proclaim martial law throughout the country. It would abolish all parliamentary institutions, establish both a cabinet and a council of "national reform," whose representatives would be elected only by men over the age of 25, nationalize the emperor's property, set limits to private wealth and land ownership, and begin wars to increase Japanese territory beyond Korea, Taiwan and Karafuto (Sakhalin), (which were already colonized), to India and Australia. Japan's invasion of Asia, and its aim of a Greater East Asian Co-Prosperity Sphere, followed this scheme.

In the prewar period there were many incidences of violence carried out by the right wing. These served to put fear into society, to increase the weight of military power within government and business circles, and to create an atmosphere in which the army could not be opposed. It transformed the war with the Western powers into a "holy war." When it seemed certain that Japan would lose the war they could then also call for resistance to the coming U.S. invasion of the Japanese mainland.

The Postwar Period

After WW II, MacArthur's General Headquarters (GHQ) dissolved about 230 right-wing groups. Many leaders of the right, including Okawa Shumei, Kodama Yoshio and Sasagawa Ryoichi were incarcerated as class A war criminals in Sugamo Prison. But this dissolution was only an apparent one. In fact the Counter-Intelligence Corps under Gen. Charles Willoughby took the rightists under its arm. They tamed them along with the thought police, or *Tokko*, to make the occupation of the country easier. The typical right-wing attitude of viewing British and Americans as "White Devils" changed into a positive one. Kodama Yoshio, for example, a class A war criminal who later became a *kuromaku* (wirepuller) for the right wing, volunteered to give GHQ secret anti-Communist information (according to Kyodo Press, January 3, 1990).

Many of the initially-dissolved right-wing organizations soon began to reorganize. It was in this period that Nakasone Yasuhiro, who was to become prime minister in 1982, organized the

Seiunjuku (Blue Cloud School).

In August, 1951, after the outbreak of the Korean War, the initial repression of the right wing was completely abandoned, and the movement became active again. About 750 organizations started working, including many made up of a single person. These new groups included Akao Bin's Dai Nippon Aikokuto (Greater Japan Patriot Party), Kageyama Shoji's Daitojuku (Greater Eastern School), Takahashi Yoshito's Nippon Gijinto (Japan Party of Moral Men), and Yasuoka Masaatsu's Zenkoku Shiyukai. Their main activities were intervening in the activities of the labor movement and the Japan Teachers Union (Nikkyoso) as well as creating anti-Soviet propaganda.

Nikkyoso was founded under the slogan of, "never again must we send our students to war." At the time of the Korean War crisis, they were the center of the anti-war movement. Whenever they held meetings, rightists came to harass them, calling them "reds" and blasting martial music toward their meeting halls. These attacks were backed by money from the Liberal Democratic Party and private companies. The right wing turned to wherever they could find money.

Their anti-Soviet activities included firebombing the house of Kono Ichiro, a politician who was pushing for better relations with the USSR, and attacking the visiting Vice President of the Soviet Union. Today this kind of movement manifests itself in right-wing demands for the return of the four islands forming the "Northern Territories."

Labor movement harassment, however, proved to be the most lucrative form of activity for the rightists. In 1960, a member of the rightist Yamashiro-gumi stabbed to death Okubo Kiyoshi, a striking worker from the Mitsui-Miike mine. In 1962, the chairman of Sanko Taxi's union, which was then under dispute with the company, was killed in front of his little son.

The 1960 Struggle and Political Recovery

In the early 1960s, the rightists took a step toward recovering political power. Kishi Nobusuke became prime minister and began efforts to renew the Japan-U.S. Mutual Security Treaty (known as *Ampo* in Japanese). Kishi was an enthusiastic supporter of rightist groups.

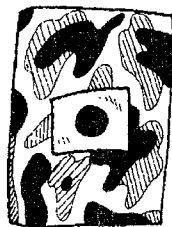
In March 1959, the Zennippon Aikokusha

Dantai Kaigi "Zenaikaigi," (National Conference of Patriot Associations) was organized, with as its highest advisers rightists Kodama Yoshio, Inoue Nissho and Tachibana Kozaburo. In the next two years they organized two new groups, the Jikyoku Taisaku Kyogikai "Jitaikyo" (Council for Current Policies), and the Seinen Shiso Kenkyukai (Youth Ideology Study Association), essentially the youth branch of Zenaikaigi. These organizations were intended to be a united front against communism. The organizers claimed that Aikokukaigi was made of groups with different ideas and policies, with no agreement on general principles except those of the "protection of the emperor-state," retention of national policy and anti-communism.

In 1960, U.S. President Eisenhower was planning to come to Japan, with Emperor Hirohito scheduled to go out to Haneda Airport to meet him. Prime Minister Kishi was concerned about the political situation in Japan, and made plans at that time to mobilize rightists to protect the two figures from attacks by anti-*Ampo* forces.

According to Ushijima Hidehiko, "At that time Kodama Yoshio was in the hospital caring for his wife who had been injured in a traffic accident. Some rightist leaders came and asked him whether they should cooperate with the LDP as guards. Kodama discussed the matter with Kawashima Seijiro, the secretary general of the LDP, and subsequently encouraged the rightists to accept the proposal. As it turned out, 10,000 street booth keepers (*tekiya*), 18,000 gamblers, 4,000 members of various rightist groups and 5,000 other people were mobilized. The *Ampo* Committee of the LDP gave them 60 million yen." (from *The Story of Rikidozan* by Ushijima Hidehiko)

This group, which was formed to attack demonstrators, was called the "Yukoku Shinno Doshikai" (Brotherhood of Concern for the Nation and for the God-Emperor). They were very well organized. They prepared propaganda bills (2 million), head bands, arm bands, cherry blossom badges, helicopters, Cessnas, large-size trucks (20), as well as a command car, transport trucks and rescue cars just in case the dispute became drawn-out. Women were also organized to prepare food for the fighting men.



At the last preparatory meeting in Shimotani Shrine, the organizers ensured that a total of 15,000 people would be mobilized. They held discussions with the National Police Agency, and decided to divide their people into four groups, place them at certain key locations and have one additional mobile group.

It was to have been an "anti-communist army." But fortunately, this plan was never carried out. Ike's visit to Japan was cancelled when his press secretary James Hagerty's car was trapped by students — he was pulled out by a U.S. Marine helicopter. This plan would have resulted in the sacrifice of a large number of workers and citizens.

There were many instances of right-wing violence in the years following the eventual renewal of the *Ampo* Treaty. Then, in December 1961, the first coup attempt since WW II was unearthed by the police. Kawaminami Hosaku, president of a company with ties to the CIA, Sakurai Tokutaro, a former army officer, Mikami Suguru, who was involved in the May 15 Incident and Koike Kazuomi, a graduate of the army's staff college, planned to establish an "anti-communist government." They plotted to attack the National Diet, confine the bureaucrats and declare martial law, while another group would be responsible for shooting all members of the Socialist and Communist Parties and General Council of Trade Unions of Japan (Sohyo) as well as occupying the central government and press facilities. Only twenty four persons who were directly involved in the plan were arrested. The police found rifles, Self Defense Force uniforms and U.S. army gas masks. The main organizers had connections to the CIA, so the investigation could not delve into the background.

The Rise of the *Yakuza*

In January 1963, Kodama Yoshio made a plan, the "Toadoyukai Koso," to form a united front of right-wing groups, claiming it to be an organization of "comrades working for the peace and prosperity of East Asia." It was to be, however, nothing more than a united front of gangsters. But because of disputes between the crime syndicate Yamaguchi-gumi and Hondakai (today's Dainippon Heiwakai) in the Kansai area, this

group was only successfully organized in the Kanto area. It was, however, too enthusiastic in its jurisdictional disputes, committed many crimes under the name of "Kantokai," and in the end the police devised a strategy to clean up *yakuza* groups. The Kantokai was dissolved.

However, each of these groups continued to grow under different names. In 1964, the police outlined a policy for regulating gangsters and started arresting leaders. In May 1978, the police amended the Traffic Control Act in order to control *bosozoku*, or youth motorcycle gangs, who provided recruiting grounds for gangster groups.

In October 1982, the police cracked down on another main activity of the *yazuka*, so-called *sokaiya*, or people who went to corporate shareholder meetings and blackmailed executives into giving them money. An amendment of the Commercial Law Act banned these people from getting money. However, this change allowed the *sokaiya* to receive money as long as they became

legitimate political organizations. This prompted many *yakuza* groups to transform themselves into rightist political organizations beginning in the 1960s and continuing rapidly in the '70s and '80s. They began raising money by intervening in violent civil affairs — financial problems, pollution disputes, Buraku discrimination, land speculation, scandals. They also got money from business circles and politicians.

There are at present about 980 rightist groups with a total membership of more than 120,000. Five hundred and fifty, or more than half of the groups, however, are somehow tied to gangsters. There is an increasing number coming from *yakuza* groups such as the Yamaguchi-gumi, Inagawa-kai, Sumiyoshi-kai, as well as from the Nippon Kikusui Kai. One group frequently seen in Tokyo, the Sanbonsugi Club of the Shingawakai was transformed into the Taikosha in July 1981. They formed local bureaus throughout Japan and merged with other gangster groups in different districts.

The group with the strongest organizing power is the Nippon Seinen Sha (Japan Youth Society), a group active in the Tokyo area. Their founder and former president was once the vice-president of the gangster group Sumiyoshi-kai. They carried out an attack on ultraleftist group Chukakuha (a group which launched missile attacks on the imperial palace), forcing their way into the group's headquarters on trucks loaded with gasoline tanks. They also constructed a lighthouse on a disputed island, and support the Mujahiddin in Afghanistan.

They have also carried out attacks against TV stations. In one incident, TV personality Beat Takeshi got into a dispute with a photo magazine that had exposed facts from his private life, and the Nippon Seinen Kai used this to begin an attack on the "dirty TV business." As a result of this campaign, it is reported that they received "gifts" of ¥50 million from certain broadcasting corporations. (*Broadcasting Report*, March 1988)

In another incident, they threatened a futures trading company, claiming that they lost ¥60 million because a quotation price had fallen, and saying they would



Rightists demonstrate (photo by Paul Takeuchi)

ask *sokaiya* to break off relations with the companies. The company informed the police, who arrested five leaders of the Nippon Seinen Sha.

The Support of Former *Zaibatsu*

Large numbers of rightists regularly show up to hinder meetings of the Nikkyoso. There are always groups of young people among them, usually sitting in the speaker trucks (big grey or black vans, typically garnered with Hinomaru flags, that blast martial music and speeches). These youth are not volunteers — they get ¥10,000 to ¥15,000 per day, plus three meals, not a small wage.

Where do the rightist groups get their funds? Their biggest source is from corporations. There is always a variety of corporate ads in the rightist publications, and the companies pay inflated sums of money for them. In the *Taiko* organ published by Taikosha (related to Inagawa-kai) or in the publications of the Hino-Family (related to the Sumiyoshi Federation), there are ads from the big corporate groups — Mitsui, Mitsubishi, Sumitomo, Fuyo, Sanwa, and Daiichi Kangyo Bank.

Since the amendment of the Commercial Law Act, these magazines have continued to carry corporate ads, but with the addition of editorial comments saying that they are tokens of appreciation for support. *Taiko* first appeared in August, 1981 and carried 321 corporate advertisements, 95 related to the large groups mentioned above.

Some rightists groups have also registered to the Ministry of Home Affairs as political organizations. These groups are required to make their incomes public, although their statements are hardly credible. In 1988, according to these reports, the various groups received more than ¥8.5 billion from more than 750 corporations or organizations. For example, Shin Nippon Ikueikai got ¥299 million from real estate businesses; Genyosha Kansai Bureau was given ¥170 million from regional consultation development firms; Soryukai Gokoku Teishintai got ¥50 million for "taking measures to flush out rightists"; and Soryukai received ¥65 million as fees for plans to trade in real estate. In 1989, Taikosha's income was about ¥120 million (¥65 million from membership fees, ¥30 million from publications sales).

Land speculation became a big social problem

after Nakasone Yasuhiro became prime minister and set up the so-called "Minkatsu" initiative. It involved redeveloping urban areas using private construction companies. The rightists found it easy to take advantage of this situation to get money. They also began to use the Northern Territories issue to get money from local governments.

Corruption in the LDP

The LDP states firmly that they oppose the crimes of the rightists, insisting that they obey laws and preserve democracy. Despite this, many LDP leaders come from rightist groups and many Diet members have ties with these groups. For example, Hamada Koichi, was a junior leader of Tsurumasa-kai, an organization tied to Inagawa-kai. In June, 1982, the President of the House of Councilors and some other Diet members participated in a meeting organized by Taikosha. When the chairmen of Taikosha was arrested on charges of forcibly obstructing business, the names of the then Minister of Education and of another Diet member as top advisers were found among the documents seized by the police.

Conclusion

Some of the activities of the Japanese ultrarightists are dramatic and put fear into the hearts of many Japanese. There is another right wing which is separate: the National Shrine Headquarters, the religious groups, and the anti-communist groups such as the International Federation for the Victory over Communism (IFVP). There are also groups of intellectuals like the "National Council to Protect Japanese" who use such slogans as "Respect the Emperor" and "Reform the Constitution."

These groups are often tied to LDP politicians, conservative community groups (town or women's or veteran groups), and have the power to mobilize hundreds of thousands of people. They are the "rightists in suits."

The role these groups play is that of creating an atmosphere in which violence can be allowed. I would like to write at another time about them, and I hope through the such articles to confront the "right-wing terror" created by the Japanese economic superpower.