

# Three Japanese Anarchists: Kotoku, Osugi and Yamaga

Victor Garcia

Victor Garcia, a Spanish militant, (sometimes known as 'the Marco Polo of Anarchism' for the length and breadth of his travels) tells the story of three of the major figures of Japanese anarchism, each of whose sheds light on only on the history of Japanese anarchism, but on that of the whole country.

"to have been an anarchist in this period of Japanese history meant a probable early death, either at the hands of the state, or by suicide as an alternative to long years in the Mikado's dungeons. This is amply highlighted in this pamphlet, which catalogues many other anarchist activists and their activities."

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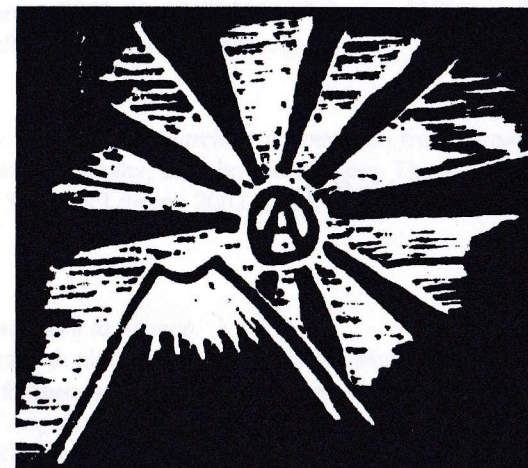


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and Yamaga**



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### *Kotoku: Portents of the challenge*

Denjiro Kotoku was born in Nakamura on 22 September 1871. He was the son of a pharmacist and was able to pursue quite advanced studies, although he never qualified as a doctor, so the title 'Dr' sometimes appended to his name is undeserved. He was the favourite disciple of Nakae and was active alongside him up until his mentor's death. Kotoku moved from Rousseauian liberalism towards socialism and joined Sen Katayama and Nanoe Kinoshita in founding the Japanese Socialist Party (*Shakai Shugi Kyokai*) before moving on to anarchism. We do not know precisely when Kotoku first described himself as an anarchist although we have a clue in a letter he wrote from Odawara on 10 August 1905 to his Californian friend, Albert Johnson. He had just come out of jail after a five month sentence for having written and circulated subversive propaganda and he declares: 'I went in a Marxist and came out a staunch anarchist.' Up to that point, the socialist movement had been one, but that unity had been under strain for some time. A split was formalised at the *Shakai Shugi Kyokai* congress of 17 February 1907. Twelve days previously, on 5 February, Kotoku had published a belligerent article in the *Heimin Shimbun* (Common Man's Daily) entitled 'My thinking has changed', wherein, identifying with Kropotkin's ideas as set out in *The Wage System*, and analysing the sclerosis of German socialism, he stood out against elections and declared his support for direct action. One section reads thus: 'Universal suffrage and parliamentarism do not bring about true social revolution and, if we are to bring that revolution about, there is no alternative to direct action through the union of all workers.'

The socialist congress ended with three clearly defined schools of thought: the blatantly anarchist current of Denjiro Kotoku, Sen Katayama's current which embraced parliamentarism,<sup>1</sup> and a current headed by Toshihiko Sakai which steered a neutral course.<sup>2</sup>

By this time Kotoku already stood out as Japan's leading revolutionary. He had gone to the United States after leaving jail in 1905 and returned after a year with his head filled with anarchism. Tireless in his work as a populariser, he launched the review *Yaradsu Chohu* (Direct Action), went on to set up *Tatsu Kwa* (Iron and Fire) and, when it was not banned, contributed to *Hikari* (Lightning Bolt) and *Chokugen* (Forwards) and crowned his journalistic endeavours by launching the most important Japanese socialist newspaper, *Heimin Shimbun*, which he set up after he came back from the United States and managed to issue as a daily for a short time.<sup>3</sup>

None of this activity stopped him from touring Japan on an ongoing recruitment campaign and he spent his time writing major works and translating from the European anarchists. In a letter sent to his friend Johnson on 3 May 1907, we read: 'In recent months I have been harried by all sorts of government



crackdowns. Our newspaper (*Heimin Shimbun*) has been suspended. Many comrades are in jail. I am out of work. I have no money but I can still write... Right now, I am translating Arnold Roller's pamphlet *The Social General Strike*. My book, a collection of essays on militarism, communism and other extremisms, has been banned and impounded by the government. Luckily the publisher, an out and out rogue, had already sold nearly a thousand copies. I am presently thinking of spending my time translating Kropotkin's works.<sup>4</sup>

In another letter on 28 May he writes: 'The *Heimin Shimbun* affair has been settled. The manager and editor in chief have been sent to jail for publishing my speech. I, who delivered it, go free. That's a stroke of luck but it is odd.'

'With the newspaper suspended, we have no platform. Some would like to get a hearing through a weekly but as they are supporters of parliamentarism, we cannot trust to them'. And the letter contains a personal note: 'My mother has returned from the city of my birth. She is living with us. She is 67 years old...'

Kotoku's revolutionary endeavours were colossal. He never eased up, never slept and did the work of several men, as did the handful of libertarians who had deserted the parliamentarist path for anarchist activity. At the gathering at which the differences between authoritarians and libertarians were consolidated, Kotoku's arguments were so unanswerable that the congress voted to drop from the Socialist Party's statutes a clause that Sen Katayama had managed to have inserted the previous year whereby the organisation called for 'socialism within the law.' Katayama had been wholly absorbed by the parliamentarist theses approved at the 1904 reformist congress in Amsterdam at which he had embraced Plekhanov, upon whom he would later turn his back when, along with the Indian M.N. Roy, he became the most effective apostle of communism in all of Latin America. In spite of Katayama's internationalist credentials, he was defeated by Kotoku's oratory and arguments.

This growing popularity and open option for the revolutionary path prompted the Meiji government to revert to ruthless repression that would end with Kotoku and his closest comrades murdered.

The jails were filling up with anarchists, although this did not seem able to curb the revolutionary élan behind their ideas. In Kotoku's correspondence with Johnson, there are references to the crackdown by the Japanese police and army. On 28 May 1907 he wrote: 'The manager and editor in chief (of *Heimin Shimbun*) have been sent to jail: 'The newspaper has been suspended.' By 3 February 1908, he was writing that 'I have some bad news for you. Comrades Sakai, Osugi and four others have been arrested.' In a letter of 7 July 1908, he was reporting: 'I have more bad news for you. In Tokyo numerous anarchists have been arrested en masse.' By 19 August 1908 he was reporting that

'Comrade Sakai is in jail with thirteen other comrades, including some female comrades.' And so on and so on.

As far the government was concerned the main target was Kotoku himself who had to keep on the move, giving the slip to police traps, constantly changing address and hounded by a repression that had just been stiffened by German instructors introducing the most up to date European detective methods. In the last letter received by Albert Johnson on 11 April 1910 we read: 'Due to the persecution and economic problems that this implies, I have had to withdraw to Jugawara. The police would not let me rest in Tokyo. All of my activity and my movements are savagely and sordidly harassed, meaning that I cannot earn my living. I have been here for three weeks now. I am writing a book to prove that Christ never existed, that the Christian mystery is rooted in pagan mythology and that the Bible is, for the most part, a fraud. Suga Kanno (his partner) is with me.'

Western readers will be taken aback by Kotoku's intention to expose Christianity, a religion with virtually no practitioners in Japan. Not so. The avalanches of western technology reaching Japan was not arriving unaccompanied. They brought Christianity in their wake and Japan was being populated by dogged missionaries who looked bound to meet with more success than St Francis Xavier and his followers had encountered. Kotoku, upon returning to Japan in 1906, noticed the changes in his homeland and mentioned them to his correspondent in California: 'Christian clergy have received considerable funding from the government. Now, under State sponsorship, the clergy are going all-out to spread the gospel of patriotism. Prior to the (Russo-Japanese) war, Christianity was the religion of the poor. Now it has turned its coat. Within two years Christianity has turned into a huge bourgeois religion, an adjunct of the State and of militarism.'

In August 1910, Kotoku tried to take ship for Europe to attend the International Socialist Congress due to take place in Copenhagen. The police managed to place him under arrest at last. Into the dragnet fell 24 other anarchists, including his 31 year old partner Suga Kanno. The police pulled out all the stops to depict the anarchists as having been hatching the *Dai Yaku Jiken* (Great Revolt) and after summary process twelve of the arrested anarchists were sentenced to hang - hanging being yet another borrowing from Europe, introduced to Japan under the Meiji. The rest of the accused were sentenced to life imprisonment. The names of the martyrs deserve to be made known:

Denjiro Kotoku

Suga Kanno, Kotoku's partner

Umpei Morichika, director of the *Heimin Shimbun*

Tadao Niimura

Tokichi Miyashita



Rikisaku Hurukawa  
 Kenshi Okumiya  
 Seinosuke Ooishi  
 Heishiro Naruishi  
 Uichita Matsuo  
 Uichiro Miimi  
 Gudo Uchiyama  
 and Akaba<sup>5</sup>

The eldest of the martyrs was Kenshi Okumiya at 54 years of age, followed by 45 year old Seinosuke Ooishi and the 41 year old Kotoku. The rest were in the flower of youth, like 25 year old Sadao Niimura or 28 year old Rikisaku Hurukawa.

This was a crime of rare viciousness and people in Europe and America refused to credit the reports transmitted by the international news agencies.

The execution took place on 24 January 1911 and the world stood aghast. The veneer of modernity so carefully cultivated by the Meiji government was completely shot full of holes. Even though this tragedy was happening on the other side of the world, the western world was as moved by the news as by the shooting of Francisco Ferrer or the sending of Sacco and Vanzetti to the electric chair. The killing of a doctor, a writer, two journalists, a Buddhist priest (Gudo Uchiyama), a farmer, a student, a printing worker, a businessman, two landowners and a civil servant made it plain - given the wide disparity of professions involved - that the *Dai Yaku Jiken* story could have had no truth to it.

The State had come to the conclusion that international disgrace was preferable to revolution. It considered the slaughter the lesser of two evils. Japanese anarchism would take years to recover from such a damaging blow, especially when the terror raged on for several more months.

Denjiro Kotoku was a prolific writer. He wrote for all of the revolutionary newspapers of the day, not necessarily just the anarchist ones. Were they to be collated, his articles would fill several hefty volumes. Among his chief works we might cite *Shakai Shugi Shinzui* (The Fifth Essence of Socialism, 1903), *Shorai no Keisai Soshiki* (The Economic System of the Future), *Jiyo Shiso* (Free Thought), *Teikoku Shugi* (Imperialism), *Rekishi to Kokumin no Hakken* (History and Nation Meet), *Kindai Nippon no Keisei* (The Shaping of Modern Japan), *Kirisuto Masatsuron* (Breaking with Christ, completed in jail in 1911). In 1908 Kotoku translated Kropotkin's *The Conquest of Bread* into Japanese as *Pan no Ryakushu*. There is also an erudite edition of the *Works of Denjiro Kotoku* that contains - in addition to the above titles - a huge number of articles by the great Japanese anarchist martyr.

## Osugi: Sighting the mountain-top

The repression was still raging in 1913 when one of Kotoku's last publications, *Kindai Shoso* (Modern Thinking) resurfaced. In charge of the new version was Sakai Osugi and Arahata, and, two years on, in 1915, Osugi resurrected the immortal *Heimin Shimbun*.

Osugi took up where Kotoku left off and was on a par with his teacher. Turning again to Kotoku's precious correspondence with his friend Johnson in the United States, we find him writing in a letter dated 18 December 1905: 'My partner was in the public gallery that morning during the trial of comrade Osugi. He is a young student of our persuasion and I feel very attached to him. They put him on trial for breaching the press laws. From a French anarchist newspaper he translated an appeal "To the Conscripits" and published it in the newspaper *Hikari*. I await the verdict anxiously. No doubt he will get many a long month in jail...'

After these 'long months in jail', Osugi was released and threw himself back into the fray with added gusto. Targeted by the police, it was not long before he was back behind bars. As Kotoku himself reported to Johnson in a letter of 3 February 1908: 'I have some bad news for you. Comrades Sakai and Osugi and four friends were arrested on Friday, 17 January...'

The police had raided a conference taking place on premises leased by the "Friday Society" set up by Sakai, Osugi and Kotoku himself and arrested the six anarchists mentioned who had put up the greatest resistance to the authorities' attempts to arrest them. They were charged with breaching the public order legislation.

It was this jail term that saved Osugi's life since he could not be included in the State's *Dai Yaku Jiken* frame-up, being in custody at the time. In this way he was able to outlive his friend and mentor, Kotoku, by twelve years and achieve the seemingly impossible in the wake of the vicious repression mounted by the police after the mass execution of the twelve martyrs on 24 January 1911.

Sakai Osugi was born in 1885 in Aichiken where he received his primary schooling and part of his secondary education until, at the age of 17, he moved to Tokyo where he met Kotoku and committed himself wholly to the anarchist ideal. As we have seen, with the repression raging and recently discharged from jail, he publicly defied his powerful foes by publishing *Kindai Shoso* and in October 1914 he managed to resurrect the *Heimin Shimbun*, the principal mouthpiece of the Japanese anarchists (analogous in terms of its importance and impact to *Freedom* in London, *La Protesta* in Buenos Aires, *Solidaridad Obrera* in Spain, *Le Libertaire* in Paris or *Umanita Nova* in Italy, as well as the other big guns of the western anarchist press which have been especially outstanding in their articulation of anarchists ideas in their country).



Osugi, cognisant of the social situation in Japan at that time, decided to go for broke yet again. They had to show themselves and demonstrate that anarchism and the *Heimin Shimbun* would rise again like phoenixes. There was a widespread unrest in the country with political, economic and war-like crises, contradictions in a new regime conjured into existence by decree and summoned from the middle ages, without any sort of transitional period, and thrust into the modern age: this had caused upsets throughout, including on the work scene. In 1914 there were 50 strikes in Japan involving 8,000 workers. But that was only the beginning: within four years the number had risen to 497 strikes with 60,000 workers involved. But the social unrest reached its peak in 1918. Fuelled in part by the advice from the cabinet to the effect that: 'The time has come for the people to show self-discipline and curtail their rice consumption.' That was the final straw. The populace took to the streets, wrecking everything in their path. Food stores, markets, police stations, clothing stores, furniture stores, hardware stores, town halls; all felt the people's wrath. When the authorities lost a grip on the situation there was no end to their savagery. No less than 7,000 people were sentenced to life imprisonment.

On paper, Japan's needy were no longer described as *heimin* and *eta*, but it is common knowledge that promulgation of a constitution does not signify the abolition of that which it recommends the abolition. The 1889 Meiji constitution did away with the caste system but the wretched conditions of the lower orders, described up until 1889 as *heimin* and *eta*, remained - for which reason a brand new name, *musankaitin* (from *musan* meaning dispossessed and *kaitin* meaning class) was devised. In Japan these *musankaitin* came to occupy the same position as the proletariat did in the west. In contrast with them rose the omnipotent *zaibatsu*, the world's mightiest trusts, abolished by MacArthur and the 1947 constitution but resurrected by the Japanese "economic miracle" of the 1960s. The *zaibatsu*, or, to use a different term, the *Iusankai tin*, represented the exploiter class.

The task facing Osugi and his comrades proved as tough as that faced by Kotoku and his, but it can be argued that they brought it off and that anarchism in Japan not merely recovered from the wounds of the 1911 crackdown and thereafter but attracted large audiences for its ideas by successfully distributing libertarian literature galore.

There is no denying that anarchism in Japan mirrored the image and likeness of anarchism in the west. Ever since the Meiji had opened the floodgates in Japan to western civilisation, the prevailing climate among the Japanese (if Toynbee and his panel of Japanese interviewees to be credited), a climate of 'adaptability', was geared to adaptation of imported ideas and this was achieved at a rate that stunned Europe and America.

While waiting for home-grown thinkers to emerge, progressives threw themselves into exploration of western ideas.

The urge to make anarchist ideas accessible to the Japanese masses was what impelled Kotoku to make translations from the libertarian philosophers and especially from Kropotkin. Osugi had the same notion in mind when he translated Darwin's *The Origin of Species*, numerous books by Wallace, Gustave Le Bon, Howard Moore and others, thanks especially to a stunning facility for languages that afforded him mastery of half a dozen western languages.

He also translated Kropotkin's *Mutual Aid*, a decision that he made after realising the harm being done in the Japanese social context by social Darwinism. Two of the regime's favourites, doctors Kato Hiruyoki and Oka Osagiro scribbled furiously to misrepresent Darwinian thought and push the survival of the fittest and the necessity of the triumph of the stronger for the good of the nation.

There are startling similarities here to what happened in Britain in the late 19th century when Kropotkin, championing human solidarity and refuting the (in Kropotkin's estimation, mistaken) Darwinist views of T.H. Huxley, published in *The Nineteenth Century* a series of articles which would be collated in 1902 as *Mutual Aid*. In Japan it fell to the anarchists to vindicate Darwinism as a rational moral standard as happened in Europe and Osugi's view was that there was no better lever for this argument than Kropotkin himself.

Although only 38 when he died, Osugi left behind a wealth of written output. Much of it has been collated and there is a 24-volume edition containing the essence of his writings, including, naturally, a lot of autobiographical writing - one of his books being entitled *Autobiography*. Prison was his university, as he himself indicated in another of his books *My Life in Prison*: 'As a man I am a product of jail. My culture, my knowledge, my ideas and my character have been shaped and moulded in prison.' It was in jail - in Chiba jail especially - that he learned Esperanto, Italian, German and Russian, having previously mastered French and English.

It was Kotoku who instructed Osugi in Kropotkinism. The scientific outlook of the great Russian anarchist made an unparalleled impression upon the methodical Orientals, including also the Chinese libertarians. Which is why Osugi returned to the tasks of translation and circulation begun by Kotoku, to whom we owe the Japanese translations of *The Conquest of Bread*, *The State, Its Historical Role*, *Anarchist Morality* and other lesser works of Kropotkin.

He soon realised, though, that temperamentally he was more attracted by Bakunin, a later discovery. As he himself admitted: 'I feel respect for Kropotkin but no attachment, no appetite. I find the innate anarchist and, in constitutional terms, rebel more likeable. Rebellion that will never end, not even in the context



of an anarchist society. The man who is neither conventional nor orderly in his habits, who leads a disorderly, Bohemian existence. I cannot help smiling to myself when thoughts turn to the life of Bakunin, our father.'

And there was yet another Russian who fascinated him: Nestor Makhno. The Ukrainian guerrilla opened his eyes with his dynamic strategy and his bewildering tactic of keeping permanently on the move. Osugi named his own son Nestor. I myself have had occasion to see both their names carved into the grave they share in the Itoshima cemetery on Kyushu island. He also named some of his four daughters after well-named international anarchists: Emma and Louise, after Emma Goldman and Louise Michel.<sup>6</sup> The likelihood is that this preference for activists and public speakers over the academic in his library or laboratory, can plausibly be explained in terms of his stammer. Osugi was afflicted by a stammer: 'I can stammer in seven languages' he used to say and in his heart of hearts he must have envied our more famous spokesmen their persuasive talents.

'If the accusation were to be levelled against me that I too am a translation of anarchism' - Osugi writes - 'I have to confess that I could not deny the charge.' Such was the duration, profundity and consistency of his immersion in libertarian texts and so short of time was he to do everything he wanted to do that, in the battle joined with the national authorities, he eventually opted for translation as his calling rather than undertakings of his own: 'I am in fact a socialist in translation' - he added in a syntactical construction that will not be pleasing to the strict grammarians - 'most of my libertarian education comes from translation of European books dealing with anarchism and the social movement into which I have dipped persistently and profitably.'

Here we are confronted with the prototypical Japanese, forever self-effacing and making little of his efforts which of course have their merits. The fact is that Osugi's translations were vital for a movement that had no roots. To all intents an improvisation without any native antecedents, in that the genuinely Japanese predecessors such as Ando Shoeki (the William Godwin of Japan) were only brought to light later, once researchers had gained access at a much later date to the documentary sources of the nation's history. But Osugi was not just 'an anarchist in translation.' He digested the teachings from the west in an excellent way but was able to filter them through his surprising intellect and indefatigable efforts as a publicist. A revolutionary who confined himself to making translations would not have the powers of persuasion required for making recruits. The Zen priest Sukeo Myajima, who professed to be a disciple of Osugi, by no means regarded his mentor as a go-between dipping into western teachings and simply passing them on, unaltered, to eager Japanese minorities and his novels and fictional writings, so saturated with libertarian thinking, mirror the

influence of a teacher rather than a satellite content to reflect light from elsewhere.

Moreover one need only immerse oneself in the widely varying range of anarchist publications founded, maintained, sponsored, distributed and, for the most part, filled by Sakai Osugi to appreciate that Osugi, when he coined that phrase about being an 'anarchist in translation' was deferring to the education fed to the Japanese and bred in his bones from time immemorial and which consists of being self-effacing, in one's own estimation as well as in that of others.

Starting with *Kindai Shiso* (Modern Thinking) which he started to publish just as soon as he was freed from prison in 1913 (in conjunction with Asahata Kanson, a socialist who later drifted towards communism and settled in the USSR) and finishing with the omnipresent *Heimin Shimbun* which outlived all of Japanese anarchism's martyrs, Osugi filled the pages of the whole Japanese anarchist press with the most prolific and original writings out of all of those who helped maintain and circulate anarchist newspapers.

In *Kindai Shiso* in 1913, traumatised by years behind bars and memories of the recent judicial murder of his mentor, Kotoku, and his eleven comrades, Osugi expended his best efforts on pointless polemics with the 'young sons of the bourgeoisie' as he himself confessed. He attacked ivory tower individualism and exalted collective struggle as the essential goal of the revolutionary. Life cannot be enhanced or perfected unless class differences, privileges and economic, political, social, cultural and religious oppressions are done away with.

Soon, though, he woke up to the futility of such controversies with dilettantes who wanted for nothing and claimed to know nothing of poverty and he decided to scrap the review: 'Instead of arguing about unintelligible abstractions with young bourgeois we must press on alongside the workers, our real friends.' That was the epitaph with which he laid *Kindai Shiso* to rest and wound up his (to borrow the term devised by Gerard de Lacaze Dauthiers) 'artist-ocratic' phase. From 1915 on Osugi definitively embraced anarcho-syndicalism and revived the immortal *Heimin Shimbun* which had its ups and downs. If the authorities failed quite to stamp it out, they ensured that the harassed mouthpiece of the anarchists appeared only intermittently and at lengthy intervals. Due to the persecution of *Heimin Shimbun*, Osugi resorted to the stratagem that all anarchists employ in such circumstances: launching other mouthpieces. And so we see the emergence of papers like *Rodo Shimbun* (Labour Daily) and *Rodo Undo* (Labour Movement), so that the Japanese libertarian movement was never without a platform which, although its title might change, always carried the same anarchist contents.



Enjoying an international reputation, Sakai Osugi was invited by the promoters of the IWA that was to be refounded in Berlin in 1923. He managed to leave the country by clandestine means and got as far as Shanghai where the Chinese anarchists furnished him with a passport on which he was able to travel on to Europe.

Agitation in Europe, the bulk of the labour organisations there and the presence of personnel of some mettle within the anarchist camp could not have helped but make an impression on Osugi who was arriving from a country where repression was rampant and where, just a decade earlier, twelve anarchists had been hanged with impunity just for being anarchists. With his fluent command of French, Osugi was invited by Parisian anarchists to participate in a libertarian rally in the Saint Denis district north of the great city to mark May Day 1923.

Osugi's presence had already been reported by the Japanese embassy to the French police and at the request of the former Osugi was arrested. France, the land of asylum, besmirched herself with the filth of ignominy, knowing fine well that by sending Osugi back to Japan, shackled and incapacitated, the French government would be responsible for the fighter's death.

And so it was. The Japanese police exulted at the extradition of their much-wanted compatriot and two months later, in collusion with the Japanese army, they murdered him. The ship delivered Osugi home to a Japanese port in July and on 16 September, Sakai Osugi and his 19 year-old partner Noe Ito and a 7 year old nephew, Soochi, were basely done to death.

General Fukuda, promoted to commander-in-chief of the Tokyo region, capitalised upon the sorry coincidence of the 1 September earthquake that desolated the Tokyo- Yokohama region, made use of the chaos and ordered their deaths, issuing instructions that the bodies be dumped into an unused well.<sup>7</sup> His intention was to pass the whole thing off as yet another tragedy to be credited to the earthquake.

Twenty days later the rotting corpses of Osugi, Ito and Soochi were discovered and the courageous denunciations of Osugi's selfless friends triggered a protest that spilled beyond the shores of Japan, since Osugi was a familiar figure to revolutionaries right around the globe. The Japanese government had to feign a wish to bring Fukuda to justice and a trial was mounted at which the captain who had carried out Fukuda's orders was sentenced to 10 years' imprisonment. Even this derisory sentence was not served and Captain Amakasu was released after a few months.

Osugi was 38 when he died and had just attained his physical and ideological maturity. The Japanese and worldwide anarchist movement had lost one of its stalwarts. Even today Osugi's command of so many and so varied a selection of the branches of human knowledge is stunning, as is his prolific

activity in all areas of research and agitation, not necessarily anarchist ones either. In 1906 when just 21 years old, Osugi had founded the Esperanto Association of Japan and might be regarded as the first propagandist on behalf of Dr Zamenhof's artificial language in the Empire of the Rising Sun.

The deaths of Osugi, his partner and little Soochi were no isolated events. The earthquake was seized upon by the Japanese authorities as a unique opportunity and they made the most of it. From 1 September onwards police goons threw themselves into the task of peddling rumours crediting revolutionaries and Koreans - Japan's eternal *lumpen-proletariat* - with the detonation of bombs, poisoning of wells, burning down of houses, murders and robberies, all of which (given the hysteria created by the natural disaster that had claimed the lives of more than 100,000 people) found fertile soil in the popular mind, enabling paramilitary organisations like New Society and the Ex-Servicemen's Association to seize control in the cities and commit all manner of outrages against militants of the revolutionary left. Lots of homes belonging to known anarchists were ransacked and their inhabitants arrested and savagely tortured. Thus, at the *Yun Rodo Kumai*, a workers' organisation in the Kumaido district, the anarchist secretary, Harisana, was arrested along with ten other libertarians. Taken to the local police station, they were sabred to death along with a sizeable number of Koreans and all of their bodies were burned.

This sort of thing was going on in every police station and on premises commandeered by the reactionary organisations. The precise numbers of those sacrificed by the hordes of obscurantism is unknown.

### *Interlude of martyrs*

The Japanese authorities saw fit to operate in cycles at the end of which they seized upon the most suitable pretexts to wipe out the regime's enemies en masse in a ruthless way so as to sow terror in the ranks of revolutionaries who, as the government saw it, would inevitably be smashed and have to abjure their yearnings for liberation once and for all. This is apparent from the *Dai Yaku Jiken* or Great Revolt of 1910 which led to the executions of Kotoku and his colleagues on 24 July 1911. And it was also the case with the 'heaven-sent' earthquake on 1 September 1923 which furnished the pretext for the police and military to have a free hand in the murder of hundreds of revolutionaries which would be written off as casualties of that awful natural disaster.

The cycle ran its term and the State butchered the revolutionaries but the theory according to which a polled tree will not bud again proved sensationally wrong on every occasion.

Thus three months after the killing of Osugi, Kyotaro Wada wrote in *Rodo Undo*: '... they would have us believe that Osugi's death was the work of



Amakasu on his own when we know that the militarists have for years been nurturing the idea of killing off all revolutionaries and even used to mention this in their routine harangues to the troops: The State looks forward to waging war on revolutionaries in the near future... From which it follows plainly that the mass killings were not the products of individual minds but of a government under heavy pressure from the militarists.'

And so it was that on 1 September 1924, to mark the first anniversary of the earthquake, Wada attempted the life of General Fukuda (who was an honoured guest at the commemoration ceremony) holding him to be the brains behind the killing of the anarchists and renowned for the Tsi Nan Fu massacres in China, when hundreds of Chinese had been butchered at his behest. Fukuda was merely wounded, whereas Wada was sentenced to a 20 year jail term. He could not bear the prison regime in Akita penitentiary and on 20 February 1928 he availed of the favoured escape route of Japanese with their backs to the wall and committed suicide. Wada was only 35 years old when he met his end. He had made the acquaintance of Osugi as a 21 year old and worked alongside Osugi and Arahata on *Rodo Undo*, which he managed to keep going after Osugi's murder, in concert with the libertarian group made up of K. Kondo, H. Hisaita and K. Nakamura. Outside of the group he enjoyed a high reputation under the alias of Kuy-San. His best-known book *Gokuso Kara* (From A Prison Window) has been translated into French.

Other notable anarchists who managed to survive the army crackdown in September 1923 were Kentaro Goto, Daijiro Huruta, Tetsu Nakahama, Humi Kaneko and Genjiro Muraki. However, these too perished for their ideas before reaching the age of 40.

The first to die was Kentaro Goto. He was barely 30 years old when he decided to take his own life inside Kanasawa prison on 20 January 1925. He was a revolutionary poet and had had occasion to contribute to the libertarian press where his articles and his poetry had been acclaimed. He had been arrested in Ikayama while putting up anti-militarist posters on the walls in the town. He left behind a number of writings of which *Labour*, *Emigration* and *In Jail* were the most important.

Daijiro Huruta, one of the top targets of the Japanese police, fitted the bill of the ideal revolutionary. Courageous to the point of recklessness, keener on action than on writing, he was nevertheless capable of penning fiery articles for *Kosakunin* (Peasant), another libertarian publication that appeared in Hasuta. He was well-equipped to do so, for he had studied at Waseda University, Tokyo and proved it again when, after his capture, trial and sentencing he wrote *Shikeishu no Omoide* (Memoirs from Death Row).

Huruta was born at the turn of the century, in 1900, and in his short life - he was hanged on 15 October 1925 - became the Oriental prototype of those who embraced 'propaganda by deed'. He had organised and taken part in bank hold-ups to raise large sums for the anarchist group of which he was a member in the great industrial city of Osaka. That group went by the name of "Guillotine". On one of its expropriation operations against a leading Osaka bank, the owner of the bank was killed and Huruta was arrested along with comrades from the "Guillotine" group, among them Tetsu Nakahama. They were both sentenced to death.

Moments before he died, Huruta wrote: 'Comrades: I am to die. Farewell and power to your elbow. 15 October 1925, 8.25 a.m.' Family members who visited the morgue to claim his body noted that there was a smile on Huruta's face.

Tetsu Nakahama was an alias. His real name was Chikai Tomioka, but among his colleagues, he went by neither name, being known simply as Hamatetsu. He was three years older than Huruta, having been born in Hishakuda Moji, in the far north of the southernmost of the main islands of Japan, Kyushu, in 1897. After secondary schooling he had enlisted as an army telegrapher in Tokyo. Like many others he was posted to Tientsin in China until, having completed his military service, he returned to Japan. By 1920 he was a member of the Japanese libertarian movement. He met Osugi and many other anarchist comrades and was active mainly in Osaka and Tokyo. Nakahama was inflamed by Daijiro Huruta's fiery nature and thus both were involved in several expropriations up until most of the members of the "Guillotine" group were arrested and the courts sentenced Huruta and Nakahama to death.

In spite of Nakahama's role in the 'propaganda by deed' school of anarchism, his considerable and erudite contributions to anarchist letters were to count for more in the eyes of posterity which has immersed itself in eagerly and profitably reading Nakahama's books. Among his books we might mention *Kuro Pan* (Black Bread), *Kokudan* (Black Bullet), *Doksaisha kara Doksaisha e* (From Dictatorship to Dictatorship), *Kokka* (Black Mishap), and the like. And there is an anthology of his writings (*Hamatetsu no Shisun*), an autobiography (*Jijoden*), a huge number of poems and a best-selling novel, *The Last Day of Heihachiro Oshio* (about the famous samurai who led the Osaka revolt in 1837), *In Jail*, and others. In addition, he founded the review *Aka to Kura* (Red and Black) in 1923.

In 1926 the backlash cost other libertarians their lives. While the "Guillotine" group went on trial in Osaka, the authorities in Tokyo were laying down yet another smokescreen at the expense of the anarchists, revolutionaries and the Koreans. The allegation was conspiracy to commit lese-majeste against the Emperor, but the charge was so absurd that the authorities decided not to



proceed with the trial. Three years elapsed between the arrest of the victims and their being produced in court. Sentence was delivered on 25 March 1926 and two Koreans - Boku Retsu and Kiu Schau Kan - were involved (which explains why the case has gone down as the 'Korean conspiracy case'), as well as a Japanese woman, Humi Kaneko, the partner of Boku Retsu.

Kaneko was born in Aichiken, like Osugi, in 1905, but from a very young age she had moved to the Asian mainland with her parents and lived in Korea until she was 16, at which point she returned to the Japanese islands, linking up with Boku Retsu in 1922. Together they published *Refractory Korea* and set up the group of the same name. Kiu Schau Kan was also a member of the group.

Korea also harboured anarchist ideas and a large number of works of anarchism had been translated into Korean. Kropotkin's *The Conquest of Bread* went to three consecutive editions. When Humi Kaneko returned to Japan at the age of just 16 she had already drunk deeply of anarchist ideals in Korea, a peninsula well-trampled by Russians, Chinese, Japanese and people of every nationality. As for her partner Boku Retsu, his story was the same. On arriving in Japan and before either had met the other, they both had a good grounding in anarchism.

The presence of these Koreans among the anarchists prompted the police to pursue them with even greater venom, if possible, than they pursued ordinary Japanese anarchists. The death sentences passed on them in 1926 were attributable to their being Koreans, since the evidence produced against them on the charges brought fell apart right from the opening session. And they were so patently innocent that the death sentences themselves were commuted to life imprisonment.

To a nature as sensitive as the Japanese female's, the effect was the same and Humi Kaneko eventually committed suicide in her cell on the morning of 23 July 1926. She was just 21 years old.

Kiu Schau Kan was sentenced to three years. As for Boku Retsu, once the Second World War ended, he was freed, almost in his fifties and returned to Korea where, the Korean anarchists say, he resumed his revolutionary and liberation struggles.

Genjiro Muraki was another of those who outlived Osugi and the hundreds of revolutionaries killed in 1923. However, like Kentaro Goto, Daijiro Huruta, Tetsu Nakahama, Humi Kaneko and Kyutaro Wada, he only survived the tragic epilogue to the 1923 earthquake by a few years. In 1929, on 24 November, laid out upon the black flag of anarchism, he breathed his last.

Muraki was born in Yokohama in 1890. His father was a businessman and, rather unusually, a Christian. Accompanying his father to church one day, he made the acquaintance of Kansan Arahata and Hattori, both of whom later joined

the socialists after Arahata had worked with Osugi on the publication of *Rodo Shimbun*; Arahata was converted to the Leninist viewpoint years later in Russia. It is possible that this meeting with Arahata and Hattori, older than Muraki, and their defection from the Christian ranks, had an effect upon the evolution of Muraki's social thinking. Through the usual transitional stages of atheism and socialism, he switched from Christianity to anarchism. By 1907 Muraki was well grounded in anarchist ideas and attended the demonstration organised by libertarians in Kanda<sup>8</sup>, the so-called *Ata Hata* (Red Flag) demonstration which was the immediate consequence of the split that year between anarchists and socialists after the former agitated for direct action and the latter for the parliamentary route. As Kotoku put it to his friend Albert Johnson (in a letter dated 6 December 1907): 'Henceforth, the Japanese movement is split into two. On one side the parliamentarists, on the other the supporters of direct action, of general strikes, the anti-militarists and also the terrorists...'

The *Ata Hata* (subsequently the Communist flag) in 1907 was an umbrella for a number of revolutionary acts fomented by anarchists. Especially those carried out by the *Hokoku Kai* (North Wind Association).

It was through this that Muraki had his first taste of jail life. He was to spend many years in his brief life coming and going from jail and caught TB in the Mikado's dungeons. His final arrest came in 1924 and was connected with the trial of the "Guillotine" group from Osaka. The prison doctor, realising that Muraki had only hours to live, urged the authorities to set him free lest he die in prison. That way they could avert a certain scandal. In fact, he died within days of being freed in the room from where *Rodo Undo* was published, in spite of the attentions of his colleagues.

The Japanese anarchist movement has been very generous with its people and their lives. Here we must unjustly pass over many of its martyrs and selfless libertarians whose names and deeds we cannot recount. Such is the reluctant omission into which one is forced in a first draft that can be amended later on.

However, what I have stated so far ought to provide some inkling of the martyrdom endured by the Japanese revolutionary movement - reminiscent, in spite of the distance and other features separating Japan and Spain, of the notorious repressions unleashed in Spain, particularly in Barcelona, between 1919 and 1923, at the hands of the *Sindicato Libre* set up by the bourgeoisie and the authorities for the express purpose of putting paid to the Spanish CNT. Sakai Osugi and all of the anarchists done to death under cover of the confusion of the 1 September 1923 earthquake disaster, were quite simply victims of the criminal practice of the *Ley de fugas* [execution whilst "attempting to escape"] with which the people of Spain are only too familiar.



Not every anarchist died on the gallows, was foully done to death or turned to suicide when driven to despair. Some survived that heroic period which was closed by Japan's military defeat in 1945 - 50 years of selflessness and self-sacrifice that hoisted the Japanese idealists into the front ranks of the revolution.

Not all anarchists perished in the struggle. Many fought on and carried on with theoretical work. One such case was the teacher Sanshiro Ishikawa who was active alongside Kotoku and Osugi. He was friendly with Kropotkin, Elisee Reclus and Edward Carpenter and bequeathed the studious precious essays such as *Anarchism from the Aesthetic Viewpoint*, *Anarchism: Its Principles and Achievement*, *Socialist movements in Europe and America*, *History of Western Civilisation*, *Study of Japanese Mythology*, *Biography of Elisee Reclus*, as well as numerous writings on religion or anarchism in Japanese and foreign publications. Ishikawa died at a very great age in 1956, beloved by generations of younger anarchists and respected even by his enemies.

We might also mention Toshihiko Sakai who died in 1933 at the age of 63. Along with Kotoku he had founded the *Heimin Shimbun* which first appeared in 1903, but he sought to remain neutral in the controversy between Kotoku and Sen Katayama, a controversy that ended with a split in the Japanese socialist movement in 1907, as we have seen above. Sakai who resisted the siren songs of the 1917 Russian revolution, illusions about which devastated the ranks of anarchists in every organised movement around the world, clung to a pre-Leninist socialism and always stayed on fraternal terms with the anarchists. One of his daughters married the hard-working, well-read libertarian Kenji Kondo, whom I met on my first trip to Japan. In 1904 he helped Kotoku translate the Communist Manifesto and was always known as a revolutionary. He wrote many books including memoirs *Sakai Toshihiko Den* and *Nihon Shakai Shugi Undosai* (History of the Japanese Socialist Movement) where he notes that 'Anarchism played an important part in the task of preventing orthodox socialism from becoming corrupted by reformism as well as stopping it from being diverted into the Communist path.'

Less spectacular but just as crucial to the survival of the Japanese anarchist movement in its heroic years, the end of which coincided with the end of the last world war, was a long list of militants whom, I confess, I am not equipped to catalogue without doing grave injustice through the many names I might omit. On my first trip to Japan in 1957 I managed, thanks to Taiji Yamaga, to make the acquaintance of many aged anarchists who had been active alongside Sakai Osugi and, in some cases, the most elderly of them, even alongside Kotoku: there was Jo Kubo from Osaka, a homeopathic doctor and acupuncturist who

succumbed to polio himself: Ogawa, from Nagoya, a friend of Morichika Umpei, the founder of the *Nihon Heimin Shimbun* in Osaka who was hanged alongside Kotoku: Miura, whose house in Yokohama was the first I ever stayed in Japan and who is still putting out *Giyu Gin* (The Libertarian), a publication that reaches every part of the world, and who has written several books and many essays: Kenji Kondo, whom I mentioned earlier, author of several books, including especially *History of the Anarchist Movement in Japan*: Shakimoto, doyen of the Osaka libertarians: T. Soejima from Fukuoka, a consummate artist with the *Hakata* puppets; J. Sugito, miner and militant of the *Nippon Tanko Rodo Kumiai*, an organisation regarded as among the most hard-line of Japanese revolutionary syndicalist unions: K. Konda, E. Oshima, Y. Hashimoto, Yamaguchi, Tasaka and lots of others whose names escape me now.

#### *Yamaga: End of the heroic era*

Taiji Yamaga brings the heroic period of Japanese anarchism to a golden conclusion. Although he was not done to death by the law or by Japanese militarism as the other two were, he completes a trilogy with Kotoku and Osugi. Yamaga was born in Kyoto on 26 June 1892 and died on 6 December 1970. His 78 years represent the most dynamic and eventful life of all the Japanese anarchists and his continually being on the move was no impediment to his numerous intellectual offerings.

From a very young age he was conversant with the type-setter's trade. In 1874, just six years into the Meiji era, his father Zembrei Yamaga set up a print shop in Kyoto, the city that had been the empire's capital for over a thousand years and which was the most jealous guardian of Japanese tradition as well as the most dogged opponent of the progress coming from the west. The Yamagas' press was the first ever established in Kyoto. To the inhabitants of court society, the act seemed virtually blasphemous. Later, after the Second World War, we came upon Taiji Yamaga churning out anarchist newspapers and manifestos on the tiny press in his little home in Ishikawa and could appreciate that his skill in the manipulation of type face, the setting stick, roller and inking pad had a lot to do with his childhood days in Kyoto when he would help his father by getting to grips with the sublime art of printing.<sup>9</sup>

In Japan as in China and many western countries, the eldest son inherits the family property and the others have to defer to the authority of the oldest son or, if they are restless rebels, they must leave home. Taiji's older brother Seika was the one chosen to take over from the aged Zembrei when he departed this life and Taiji, realising this, decided to leave home and Kyoto for Tokyo, the great industrial city of Japan.



However, old man Yamaga's legacy proved less than expected. The print shop went bankrupt and instead of spending his last remaining years in retirement, Zembreo Yamaga had to return to the Confucian school where he had formerly taught to teach Kyoto children until the end of his days. There was effectively no legacy left to his heirs other than a bequest of *haiku*<sup>10</sup> poems that the critics adjudged as excellent.

Seika tried to keep to his father's trade by adopting a new tack and became the best embroiderer and tapestry artist in the country.

When Taiji Yamaga arrived in Tokyo he was instantly attracted by the revolutionary ferment. He was also beset by an irrepressible itch to deepen his cultural background. He was attracted like a magnet to both revolution and culture. And so at the age of 15 and within months of arriving in Tokyo, Yamaga embraced anarchism and came to be secretary of the *Japana Esperantista Asocio*. That was in 1907.

As in Europe (with the exception of England, the English having always held that theirs is the international language par excellence) the Japanese Esperanto organisations were receptacles for the most restless minds in the land. The front rank of the revolutionaries turned to Esperanto out of an irrepressible urge to get in touch with the outside world. Many Japanese anarchists, like Sakai Osugi and Toshihito Sakai, belonged to the Esperantist Federation, so the elevation of Yamaga to the position of its secretary implies that the lad from Kyoto was a renowned Esperanto-speaker. Like Chinese, Tagalog or Farsi, Esperanto is a language that grows with the passage of the years. Every libertarian address in the west has been bombarded by Esperanto summaries from the Japanese anarchist press since 1945-1946 when the Second World War ended: every pacifist or anti-militarist association has received the *Mondcivitano* (World Citizen) that Yamaga published in Esperanto and circulated to all parts of the globe. Yamaga became the leading and most consistent connection between Japan and the outside world and this was all thanks to his command of Zamenhof's artificial language. And it was thanks to Esperanto, too, that we Spanish speakers have learned of the ideas of the great Chinese philosopher Lao Tse as seen through Yamaga's eyes.<sup>11</sup>

At the time of the *Dai Yaku Jiken* in 1910, the great conspiracy hatched by the state to dispose of Kotoku and the leading anarchists as well as to dismantle the Japanese anarchist movement, Yamaga was only 18 years old, seven years younger than the youngest of those sent to the gallows - Tadao Niimura. Thanks to his youth he was not listed among the major targets sought by the police and the military. By the time that his name came up, Yamaga had put some distance between himself and Japan. He had moved to Formosa, which was then a Japanese possession as a result of the Sino-Japanese war of 1894-1895. From

Formosa it was child's play for him to reach the Asian mainland and we find him flitting through Canton, Peking, Nanking and finally Shanghai.

It was in Shanghai that Yamaga spent most time, becoming a valuable collaborator of Shi Fu, the leading anarchist in China at the time. Shi Fu had lost a hand a short time before while assembling a bomb at home. It was while in hospital that Shi Fu decided to renounce violence, but his faith in anarchism was redoubled. He took his rejection of violence to the lengths of converting to vegetarianism so as not to eat the flesh of slaughtered animals and he never used jackets, shoes or other leather articles because implicit in the use of leather was the death of a living creature. Shi Fu, a very learned man, may well have been familiar with the existence in India of Jainism, a religion that prohibits the killing of any living creature, whether it be an ant, a tiger, a snake or a criminal and he embraced its precepts as part of the libertarian pacifist creed. Shi Fu published *Ming Sing* (The People's Voice) and that anarchist paper appeared in a bilingual edition, half in Chinese and the other half in Esperanto as *La Voco de la Popolo*. Yamaga took charge of the Esperanto content.

Those were years of great revolutionary activity when Yamaga was wholly committed to the circulation of anarchist ideals. During this time such monumental works as Kropotkin's *The Conquest of Bread*, *Address to the Young*, or Paul Berthelot's *The Gospel of the Age* were published in Shanghai. As was *A Debate between Chiang Kang Hu and Shi Fu*, the former being a leading social democrat who championed the State and authority against Shi Fu who, being an anarchist, professed anti-statist and anti-authoritarian beliefs.

When the First World War broke out and chauvinist sentiment ignited around the world, Oriental anarchism, whether Chinese or Japanese, shared in the collapse that was experienced elsewhere around the world. The famous *Manifesto of the Sixteen* which was to cause mayhem in libertarian ranks in Europe and in the Americas when Kropotkin and his friends openly came out in favour of one of the belligerent camps, had no impact in China or in Japan. Correspondence had broken down and would not be resumed until 1919. In the interim, Yamaga had gone home to Japan and linked up with Mika, his partner, for the remainder of his days. She shared his vagabond ways. They had a son and a daughter together.

Yamaga had earned a reputation in Shanghai for selfless hard work and in 1927, when a Labour University was founded in that great Chinese city, the University Council decided to invite Taiji Yamaga and Sanshiro Ishikawa to join the teaching faculty. Thus Yamaga became a university lecturer in Esperanto, whilst Ishikawa, whose erudition and expertise in the field of history were proverbial, taught the history of European revolutionary movement.



At the time, China was passing through explosive revolutionary ferment. An explosion upon which Chiang Kai Shek was trying to keep down the lid through mass criminal methods and by instructing his troops that it was 'Better to kill a hundred innocents than allow one revolutionary to escape.' Anarchism had not only numbers but quality to be proud of and in spite of the Maoists' efforts to erase them from the record, its feats persists as does the memory of the names of many anarchists. Later, the passage of time and the avalanches of official versions having succeeded in strangling the historical truth, the researcher may find it hard, indeed impossible to pick up the trail of China's anarchists. At present, the Chinese Communist Party cannot erase the memory completely, thanks to the testimony of those who survived massacre at the hands of Chiang Kai Shek and the zealots of the *Little Red Book*.

Taiji Yamaga was one witness of repute who has lectured large audiences upon the importance of anarchism in China prior to its eradication by the advent of Maoism. Yamaga spent years on intense libertarian activity in China and his friends included not just Shi Fu but also the brothers Lu Chien Bo and Lu Kien Ten, the translators of Kropotkin, the famous Li Fei Kan and many other libertarians from Peking, Shanghai, Canton, Nanking and Hong Kong as well as other Chinese cities restless with the revolutionary notions spread by anarchists.

Shortly before the outbreak of the war of the Three Sevens (7 July 1937) which belatedly formalised the declaration of a war that had been raging for years through Japanese militarism's systematic onslaught against China, Yamaga left the mainland. Paradoxically, his greatest enemies were his own countrymen in uniform. The presence in China of the Mikado's army was incompatible with the presence of the Japanese anarchists on the same soil.

Yet again the ease with which Yamaga could migrate was apparent. Migrating through a good thirty parallels, he arrived in the Philippines, where he was surprised by the Second World War that deprived him of his son.

His facility for languages ensured that he picked up the most widely spoken Filipino tongue, Tagalog, quickly. As a result he was able to find work, and work at that which suited his dispositions as a writer and printer. He was employed as editor on the Manila newspaper *Manila Nichi Nichi Shimbun*, which, whilst targeted at the Japanese colony in the Filipino capital and at the occupation army, also had sections in their own language for Filipino readers. His taste for research encouraged him in more long-term pursuits and in conjunction with a Filipino of Spanish origin, a Professor Verzosa, he compiled the first Japanese-Tagalog dictionary.

When the war ended, Yamaga returned to Japan. Japanese militarism had been smashed. The emperor had been stripped of his divine status. The United States imposed the 1947 Constitution, Article 9 of which stated that 'Japan

renounces war forever' and added that 'there are to be no land, sea and air forces or any other war materials. The State's rights of belligerency will not be acknowledged.' The prospect of revolutionary activity pursued on his own native soil seemed to be opening up in front of Yamaga. From the moment he arrived home, he embarked upon all-out activity, publicising, making recruits and mingling with the anarchists.

He was to sustain this rate of activity for twenty years and, whilst not neglecting ongoing liaison within the Japanese anarchist movement which bounced back after the end of the war, he was engaged in correspondence reaching out to every corner of the globe - a correspondence which has left those who have had sight of the enormous list of his correspondents around the world simply open-mouthed. The first decision that the Japanese anarchists made once the war was over was to launch an anarchist federation. On 12 May 1946 they held their foundation congress at which Yamaga, being a polyglot, acted as secretary for foreign relations. Until an apoplexy attack felled him to the tatami,<sup>12</sup> Yamaga remained in charge of his onerous task of keeping Japanese anarchists abreast of what was going on in world anarchism and keeping the latter briefed on the activities of Japan's libertarians. Now and then Yamaga also took over the post of general secretary of the federation.

He was also a consistent contributor to *Heimin Shimbun* which the Japanese anarchists had decided to revive (the first issue of the new series bearing the date of 15 July 1946) and was in charge of the Esperanto section which was enclosed separately with any copies sent abroad so that anarchists in Europe and the Americas could get some idea of the *Heimin Shimbun* contents and topics.

Yamaga is not known ever to have raised his hand in anger. It may well be that the pacifist Shi Fu had had a very great influence upon him. He had openly joined the WRI (War Resisters International) which left him open to criticism from supporters of indiscriminate violence.

Yamaga had successfully pursued three strands of activity that he managed to keep separate and independent. He placed his anarchism at the heart of his efforts but had no difficulty enlisting in Esperantist ranks which were not necessarily anarchist and could pursue his Esperanto activities quite independently. The same thing was true of his involvement in the activities of the WRI, the membership of which was similarly not necessarily libertarian, especially in Japan where the atomic bombs in Hiroshima and Nagasaki had turned huge swathes of Japanese into conscientious objectors and dyed-in-the-wool pacifists.

When confronted at meetings by anarchists arguing that proselytising work should be confined to the ranks of the Anarchist Federation, Yamaga retorted



that they had to go out and look for the libertarians of the future wherever these might be. In every Esperantist he saw a potential internationalist and what was needed was to point them towards the finest vehicle for internationalism - anarchism. He took the same line with regard to conscientious objectors too: every war resister was the finest exponent of human solidarity and the ideal that best mirrors that is anarchism, so we had to make ourselves known as an organisation to each and every one of the objectors belonging to the WRI. In the 17 August 1952 edition of *CNT* published out of Toulouse as the organ of the Spanish National Confederation of Labour (CNT) in Exile there is a letter from Yamaga in which, as representative of the JAF (Japanese Anarchist Federation), he addresses the FIJL (Libertarian Youth) in Exile, and says: 'our movement's history here in Japan tells us that we have often fought using violent methods (many comrades having deployed firearms and bombs and punished their enemies through assassination). Since the war and the atom bomb, violence strikes us as pointless. Which is why we are devising so-called "passive resistance" propaganda, "disobedience to injustice" along Gandhian lines and we declare that our essential cultural basis is that we are citizens of the world and we plump for Esperanto as a world language.'

It can be stated without fear of exaggeration that the Japanese anarchist movement, but for Yamaga's donkey-work and talents, might not have been able to keep up the links that ensured the success enjoyed since the third JAF congress on 1 May 1948 in Tokyo which was attended by 200 delegates drawn from all over Japan as well as from Korea. At the congress there was great emphasis laid on liaison with the outside world and a commission was appointed to oversee such connections. The hardest working member of that commission was Taiji Yamaga. If they could only be collected, all of the letters written by Yamaga in Esperanto, English, Chinese and, of course, Japanese, would amount to a huge volume affording us the most detailed and enthusiastic history of Japanese anarchism.

Taiji Yamaga's consistently untiring efforts, with his antennae permanently tuned in to every corner of the globe, resulted in his becoming the best known anarchist in the whole of Japan. Yamaga's correspondents covered the entire globe. Upwards of fifty French, US, British, Canadian, Dutch, Italian, Latin American, Australian, Filipino, Korean, Chinese, Indian, Indonesian, Indochinese, German and Swedish cities appeared in his well-organised address book. His post bag was stunning in that he never wearied in his impressive letter-writing endeavours. Yet, in spite of the time demands of his post-bag, Yamaga was a regular contributor to the Japanese libertarian press, and an obsessive reader and a regular fixture at all of the gatherings and conferences held by the JAF, the Japana Esperantista Asocio and WRI Japan.

Among his correspondents we might cite such renowned idealists as India's leading anarchist M.P.T. Acharya, the Esperantist Eugene Lanti, the unforgettable WRI promoter Anthony Smythe, the Chinese Lu Chien Bo, the unforgettable Hem Day, the Korean Ryu Rim, the first World Citizen Gary Davis and an endless selection of revolutionaries, progressives and intellectuals.

Yamaga was able to keep up so much activity because, being Japanese, he did not regard sleep as the insistent necessity it seems to us westerners. The Japanese do not customarily sleep regular hours and if they have research, work or some sort of thing that needs doing, during the night they get on with it without a second thought. The following morning they can use the train, metro or bus journey, meal breaks or any break in the day to grab some shut-eye and doze for a while in a chair on the tatami or on the edge of the kerb. In the tiny apartment occupied by Yamaga and his partner Mika in Ishikawa, just an hour's train journey out of Tokyo, an apartment comprising one tiny room and a kitchen, whilst I, a prisoner to western ways, bedded down on the welcoming tatami during the night hours, Yamaga would be working with his composing stick, his *romaji*<sup>13</sup> type, his roller, his pots of ink, and, by daybreak had put together and run off a manifesto.

If he was lucky enough to find a seat on the one hour train trip into Tokyo, Yamaga would take out his papers, sometimes to read them through, sometimes to scribble on them. He did the same in the restaurant as we waited to served a portion of *mori soba*,<sup>14</sup> or when sat in company, when the conversation drifted in the direction of the nondescript and he lost interest in it.

In 1960 Yamaga made his last quixotic move. As a member of War Resisters International, he attended the 10th congress of the WRI in Gandhigram in India. The voluntary contributions of Japanese libertarians, conscientious objectors and Esperanto-speaking friends defrayed the costs of Yamaga's journey to India.

Yamaga was gratified to rub shoulders with and make the acquaintance of many of his correspondents from all over the world. He also met Mahatma Gandhi's most famous disciple, Vinoba Bhave who reintroduced the old communal arrangements to India. Through the efforts of Bhave and his followers, these communes liaised through *Bhoodan* (land donation) and then *Gramdan* (farming socialism). Vinoba Bhave's achievements are too well known in the west for us to dwell at length upon them, other than to mention that Bhave was yet another of the many personalities included in Yamaga's long list of associates.

Yamaga, the invited guest of the Indian conscientious objectors who had organised the tenth WRI congress, had occasion to visit a number of farming collectives operating under the land donation system and being worked in



common and was pleasantly surprised and deeply impressed by what he saw. Remember that Yamaga had only compromised where violence was concerned, in connection with one extremely desperate case. Shi Fu had inculcated pacifist ideas into him in Shanghai and later, as he immersed himself in Gandhi's ideas he openly declared himself to be a supporter of non-violence. Nor should we overlook the pacifist message in Buddhist philosophy. Nor that Yamaga was a great admirer of Lao Tse as he had proved with his book on *Lao Tse and his Book of the Way and of Virtue* and that it was Lao Tse who said: 'If you do not fight, none on earth can fight with you.'

The collectives championed by Vinoba Bhave put Yamaga in mind of the Israeli kibbutzim and especially of the peasant collectives upon which much of the economy of revolutionary Spain had been dependent in 1936-1939. He was impressed and this gave him hope that India too might go down the revolutionary road.

When Yamaga returned to Japan he did so with a profound conviction that the first stirrings of revolution might come from the farmer rather than the urban citizen.

In 1961 Yamaga suffered a stroke. A few years earlier he had undergone serious surgery which reduced his stomach to one third its size. A gastric ulcer had required that surgery. Heedless of his health, he ignored the warning signals that he had been receiving from his body for years past and when he suffered a perforated stomach and underwent an emergency operation, they had had to remove two thirds of that essential organ.

By the time of Yamaga's death on 6 December 1970 he had spent nine years prone on his tatami, unable to rise except with assistance from his partner Mika. Half of his body had been left paralysed, but Yamaga's correspondents continued to receive news of the Japanese anarchist movement, albeit at wider intervals and in greater brevity. Yamaga had learned to write with his left hand, an effort that he made in the knowledge that he had commitments to be honoured.

We have seen before the ease with which the Japanese resort to suicide as a means of escaping from life. The anarchists Kentaro Goto, Humi Kaneko, Kyutaro Wada and many others had cheated the State's 'justice' by ending their own lives in their cells. The famous author Akutagawa Ryunosuke, author of the successful book *Rashomon* became even more famous following his suicide and the same thing happened more recently with Yukio Mishima, who was little known until he committed *seppukku* (hara-kiri) and became a world celebrity. We have the case of another Japanese writer, a famous one this time having won the Nobel prize for Literature, Yasunari Kawabata, who opted for suicide by gas.

Taiji Yamaga could have resorted to suicide. He knew that his days were numbered from 1961 when a stroke had laid him low. But he rejected the 'Japanese solution', realising that a revolutionary lives on his determination and that the decision to commit suicide is negative because determination means struggle whereas suicide means giving up. Yamaga never shirked a struggle and it was impressive to see his little home teeming with Japanese anarchists who had travelled out to Ishikawa to hearten the old militant and sound him out regarding the problems that were arising. This when the decision was made in 1968 to wind up the Japanese Anarchist Federation, for reasons not readily understandable by westerners, militants decided to consult Yamaga and seek his views on the matter. When the announcement of the winding-up reached anarchist movements in Europe and America, it was stipulated that Taiji Yamaga had been consulted on the decision. In the west, once it was known that the decision had the backing of the famous anarchist, the decision was accepted, albeit that it was regarded as a tactical error. Knowing that Taiji Yamaga was in favour of dissolution of the JAF was enough to set them thinking that they were not conversant with the conditions in Japan and that the far eastern anarchists had to be trusted on this. Such acceptance from the European and American movements would not have been forthcoming had Yamaga's name not been on the announcement. Such was the prestige (earned over so many years of dogged activism) that he enjoyed that it never occurred to anyone to reject the Japanese decision.

The Japanese anarchists paid a proper tribute to Taiji Yamaga. There are two biographical essays from the pens of Kou Mukai and Selichi A. Miura which can provide the basis for the full biography that Yamaga deserves. That, however, would require a committed team to scour the pages of three quarters of a century of the anarchist press to collate Yamaga's output, although the ideas of Yamaga, which must be scattered throughout the world in countless letters sent to the four corners of the world could never be reconstructed, since so many of his correspondents would be unknown.

In a tiny little fishing village called Numazu, where Yamaga's daughter Aino works as a schoolteacher, and where his partner Mika retired to after Taiji's death, there is a little 'museum' containing everything of the great far eastern libertarian that they have been able to collect. Among the more surprising exhibits are some Japanese and *romaji* printing characters, a rudimentary roller, a fixing plate, a compositor's stick and some pincers. Nothing of any great note and yet these were the tools with which Taiji Yamaga managed to keep Japanese anarchism in contact with all of the anarchist movements around the world.

Adapted from *Ruta*, (Caracas) No 24, 1 September 1975



## Notes

1 Sen Katayama had been Japan's leading socialist. In 1904, after the outbreak of the Russo-Japanese war, he attended the International Socialist Congress in Amsterdam and embraced the Russian delegate Plekhanov to indicate that the war between their two countries would not affect the international unity of the working class. Later he broke with the Second International and joined the Politburo of the Third International. Along with the Indian M.N. Roy, after the Russian revolution Katayama toured most of the countries in Latin America and successfully launched several Communist parties in the region.

2 Toshihiko Sakai was born in 1870 and died in 1933. His ancestors belonged to the samurai caste. He pursued several trades such as journalist, schoolteacher and freelance writer. He was a great friend of Kotoku and like him regarded himself as a disciple of Atsunuke Nakae. He helped Kotoku launch the *Heimin Shimbun* in 1903 and together they brought out the first Japanese edition of *The Communist Manifesto* in 1904.

3 Our reference here is of course to the newspaper's second incarnation, after the split in Japanese socialism. *Heimin Shimbun* came out as a daily thanks to funding provided by a sympathetic friend of Kotoku's.

4 Kotoku completed the first Japanese version of *The Conquest of Bread* in 1908 and this was published, distributed, sold and read surreptitiously.

5 Ganketsu Akaba, member of the *Heimin Sha* (Proletarian Society) like Kotoku since 1903: a writer and journalist, he founded *Toyo Shakai Shimbun* (Socialist East Daily) in 1908 and was in the United States when the nonsensical *Dai Yaku Jiken* frame-up was hatched but returned early in 1912. He was arrested and jailed and promptly began a hunger strike leading to his death on 1 March 1912. He was 37 at the time of his death and must properly be regarded as yet another casualty of the *Dai Yaku Jiken* massacre.

6 Osugi's eldest daughter, Mako, whom I managed to track down in 1957 in Fukuoka, subscribed to her father's beliefs and, along with her husband, Aoki, she published *Teikosha* (Resistance), a libertarian pacifist publication.

7 Although it only lasted for 30 seconds, the 1 September 1923 earthquake cost the lives of 100,000 people, 40,000 of whom were cremated in the army clothing depots. Another 43,000 were reported as missing. 54% of homes collapsed and 70,000 homes were burned down.

8 Kanda being one of the busiest parts of Tokyo. It holds the biggest book shops and cultural centres. Along with the Shinjuku it makes up the most intellectual and restless quarter in the world's largest city.

9 *CNT* (Toulouse) carried in its 17 August 1952 edition a letter from Taiji Yamaga addressed to the Libertarian Youth. In it he says: 'I have aged

considerably; but I have the help of younger comrades in composing and publishing in a simple and primitive fashion - without a machine! - in my tiny room. With the money sent us by Russian comrades in the United States, we have bought 2,500 type characters and a crude hand-operated lithopress we can use to print by pressing the paper down on the type. Buying a dearer machine is out of the question, so we make do with this. Characters that require accents - a reference to *Esperanto* characters - I make for myself on a zinc plate.'

10 The *haiku* is a very short poem of 5+5+7 syllables and in Japan it is looked upon as the highest form of poetry, much favoured by Zen Buddhism.

11 Published in Spanish by Tierra y Libertad in Mexico in 1963, 128 pages. Yamaga translated his own libertarian construction of Lao Tse into Esperanto and Eduardo Vivancos, the celebrated Spanish anarchist Esperantist, translated that into Spanish.

12 The floors in Japanese homes are covered by thin, rigid tatami mats made of rice straw. These are usually one metre by two metres upon which the residents and their visitors walk unshod, shoes being removed at the front door. Life is lived at ground level on the tatami. A little table some 20 centimetres high, a few cushions and some eiderdowns make up the only authentic furniture in the Japanese home.

13 *Roma* (from Roman) and *ji* (for language). *Romaji* is the name given to Japanese written with Roman characters, i.e. with our alphabet. Proper Japanese script is made up of Chinese ideograms so *romaji* is an attempt to approximate to western languages.

14 Noodle soup, regarded as the cheapest item on Japanese restaurant menus.



*About the author:*

**V**ictor Garcia: Pen-name of Germinal Gracia Ibars, who joined the CNT textile union in 1933 and belonged to the Libertarian Youth in Gracia, Barcelona. A self-educated activist and writer, his earliest writing appeared in *El Quijote de la Ideal* and in *Ruta* (the mouthpiece of the Libertarian Youth in Catalonia).

In the civil war he served in the *Los Aguiluchos* column but quit the front in protest at militarisation of the militias and joined a collective in Cervia (Lerida) where he set up a Libertarian Youth chapter and served on the Libertarian Youth Catalanian regional committee. After the Ebro disaster he joined the 26th Division and, after being wounded in Tremp, crossed into France where he went on an odyssey through the concentration camps and jails in Marseilles and Lyon. Arrested in Dauphine as a resister, he was arrested and confined in Vernet d'Ariege concentration camp from where he escaped when they tried to ship him out to Dachau.

By the time of the liberation of France he was in Paris. He attended the 1945 CNT congress and at a plenum in Toulouse joined the FIJL national committee. Later he was the administrator of *Ruta* and *Solidaridad Obrera* and was the first secretary of the IJA (Antifascist Youth International), hence his attendance at the Faenza convention in July 1946 and launched its Esperanto mouthpiece.

Late in 1946 he smuggled himself into Spain to support the Libertarian Youth in the interior but was arrested and jailed (until mid-1948). In prison he drafted the bulletins *Esfuerzo* and *Acarus scraber*. On his release he managed to escape a police ambush, went to ground in Montjuich and was smuggled across the border. Now 'compromised' as far as the struggle was concerned he moved to Venezuela (to revive *Ruta*) and travelled the world (1953-1958) working at several callings.

A tireless militant and propagandist, he wrote loads for the movement press and his writings were of a quality well above the norm. Sometimes known as 'the Marco Polo of anarchism' for his travels.

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