

# **AGAINST THE GOD EMPEROR**

## ***The Anarchist Treason Trials in Japan***

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## **AUTHOR'S INTRODUCTION**

The methods of State repression are universal... all use exactly the same methods to repress, to kill, to suppress discontent, using any and all dirty tricks possible to maintain themselves in power. Sometimes to understand what is happening around us very clearly, it is necessary to step outside the situation, to see the wood for the trees, so to speak. By using the example of Japan which is, both geographically and culturally, so different from Europe and North America, we can see what is happening to us who live inside these countries

If we can recognise the methods of repression in Japan as being the same as those which we have to suffer, then we have the possibility of understanding them, so as to combat them both physically, mentally and spiritually. To know the enemy and to know the rules of the game are important; not only to survive, but also to stand some chance of defeating the enemy. Hence this pamphlet is designed to show some of the methods or dirty tricks of the Japanese state.

However, it is also our intention to show the less well known history of an Anarchist movement: the characters involved, their actions and their ideas. This movement deserves to be better known than it is, and clearly stands as one of the finest in Anarchist and Revolutionary history. The parallels between what these Japanese Anarchists did (their actions), such as the creation of organisations, printing presses, publications, centres etc., and our own actions, so very similar, if not identical today, should not go unnoticed. Neither should their motives for doing so, their ideals, along with their integrity for maintaining them, especially against such unfair opponents, the state and capi-

talism. By concentrating on a handful of individuals we keep alive the spirits of these people, and thereby the movement of which they are the symbolic representatives. To show that they as individuals confronted the same basic problems as us today indicates that we too are part of the same tradition: Anarchist and thereby anti-capitalist and anti-statist. This shows too that we are not just individuals, but form part of a "wider-we", a collective. Despite being separated by time (80 years), space (a different continent) and culture (language); the recognition that their lives and struggles are the same as ours is sufficient to demonstrate that we do form part of the same struggle and movement.

If their struggle is the same as our struggle today, then this also indicates that what we are struggling against is still the same: injustice and tyranny. That the State and capitalism, despite undergoing important structural changes are fundamentally the same, and that we are the present representatives of a movement that has no frontier, or cultural limits. That our contribution to this movement, no matter how great or small, is still an important contribution, and that this movement can only continue as long as the causes for its existence are still in existence. Namely, injustice and tyranny, the state and capitalism.

## Taigyaku Jiken: "High Treason Case".

On 18th January 1911 the cry of "Museifu Shugi Banzai" (Long Live Anarchy!) was heard in a Japanese court room. It was shouted by Kanno Suga, one of the twenty six defendants, in response to a verdict of death by hanging for twenty four of them, and jail terms of eight and eleven years for the other two. The defendants were charged with conspiring to assassinate the emperor of Japan in what has become known as the "High Treason Case" (Taigyaku Jiken).

A series of preliminary hearings for the trial began on 10th December: the defendants were allowed one chance to present their views, and all defence witnesses were rejected by the judge. When the trial began it was held in camera (secretly) which was to stop the defendants using the dock as a platform for their ideas; to prevent them from becoming martyrs by becoming public figures; and, for Yamagata Arimoto, the mastermind of the State's conspiracy theory, the very idea of a public trial was an insult to the throne. The procurator, Hiranuma Kiichiro, (of whom we shall hear much of later, along with Yamagata) got through reams of evidence and called for the death penalty by 25th December 1910. The defence lawyers had just three days to present a case for all the defendants, 27th-29th December. The decision of the judges was unanimous.

The international outcry and demonstrations that took place in Europe and America (1) were such that on 19th January twelve of the condemned defendants had their sentences commuted to life imprisonment, by imperial decree. However, at 8 a.m. on 24th January 1911, eleven

were hung; Kanno Suga shouting "Banzai!" from the gallows was hanged the following day. A brutal discipline was meted out to those serving prison sentences: Takagi Kennei died in Chiba prison in 1914, and Okabayashi Toramatsu in Nagasaki prison was driven insane; others tried to commit suicide.

The names of those legally murdered are: Kotoku Shusui; Kanno Suga; Morichika Umpei, former editor of the Osaka Heimin Shimbun; Niimura Tadao, peasant-turned journalist; Miyashita Takichi, factory worker; Furakawa Rikisaku, gardener; Okumiya Tateyuki, veteran people's Rights Movement activist; Oishi Seinosuke, Kotoku's doctor; Naruishi Heishiro, shopkeeper; Matsuo Uita, journalist; Niimi Uichiro, journalist; and Uchiyama Gudo, Zen priest. Their ages ranged from Okumiya, who was 55, through Oishi (45) and Kotoku (41) to Niimura (25) and Furukawa (28).

It has been claimed that: what the government "had in fact done in order to concoct its conspiracy was to throw together three completely separate cases, hoping thus to deal a blow to the movement that would not be forgotten. These three were the actual 'assassination group', composed of four people; Uchiyama Gudo's secret printing activities; and the personal and medical relationship between Kotoku and the doctor Oishi Seinosuke, who had once met with Morichika Umpei to discuss 'the nature of the Japanese revolution'. None of the protagonists in these three affairs knew of the doings of the others, and there was no conspiracy except in the minds of certain reactionary politicians." (3) So, what were the events of the time?

On 25th May 1910, Miyashita Takichi, Niimura Tadao, Nitta Toru and Furukawa Rikisaka were arrested after the police had found a stockpile of bomb-making materials, which Miyashita had obtained. Kanno Suga had already

entered prison on 18th May instead of paying a hefty censorship fine, so had no need to be re-arrested. Kotoku was arrested on 1st June and sent to Ichigaya prison in Tokyo. This sparked off the arrests, interrogations and torture of literally hundreds of Anarchist and Socialists. From the pre-trial interrogations and trial testimony it is clear that the government could have made the arrests earlier than they did, but deliberately delayed, in order to "incriminate" as many people as possible.(4)

It is generally agreed that Kanno, Miyashita, Niimura and possibly two or three others were involved in an assassination plot. In fact, these three had drawn lots on 17th May to see who would throw the first bomb; Kanno had won and would make the attempt in August after her release from prison. Kotoku himself became the "connecting link" between all the defendants. It was part of the prosecution's case that Kotoku had provided information on how to make bombs to Miyashita, information he had received from Okumiya Kenshi and his friends, all of whom had been active in the "People's Rights Movement" of the 1880's.(5) Kotoku had commented upon an article by Oishi in the Shakai Shimbun (Social News) in July 1907, and afterwards they had become friends. On his way to Tokyo from Nakamura, in July 1908, just after finishing his translation of Kropotkin's "The Conquest of Bread" (which was secretly published in January 1909) he called in to see Oishi. Oishi was so alarmed by Kotoku's physical condition, that as a doctor, he recommended a month's complete rest. Kotoku refused and continued, visiting Uchiyama in Hakone. The latter ran one of the many underground presses and had published clandestinely, amongst other things, the German Anarchist Arnold Roller's pamphlet "The Social General Strike" in 1907. This pamphlet (6)

Kotoku had acquired when visiting San Francisco in 1906, where he was fully converted to Anarchism by the personal influence of Albert Johnson, and the writings of Kropotkin. This pamphlet, along with Kotoku's notion of direct action stemming from his Anarchism, paved the way for Anarcho-Syndicalism in Japan. It was published in *Shorai no Keizan Shoshiki* ("The Economic System of the Future").

The police themselves were well aware that not more than five individuals were involved in the plot: Kanno, Kotoku, Miyashita, Niimura and Furakawa. (7) Furakawa had pulled out a few months before May, and even according to Kanno's testimony at the trial, Kotoku had not only rejected the plot the preceding January (1910), but later that spring, they didn't even dare mention it in front of him because he would have given a "disapproving lecture". (9) However, the death penalty was mandatory even for the intent for those wishing to cause harm to the emperor of Japan. Technically, then, these five could have been found guilty as charged; but this does not apply to the other twenty-one defendants, and certainly excludes all those others (hundreds) arrested, imprisoned and tortured. Part of Kanno's prison diary, which was discovered in the 1950's, written after the trial and before her legal murder absolves all the others: "...Oh, my poor friends and comrades! The most of them have been unhappily entangled into a scheme contrived by 5 or 6 persons. Merely because of our acquaintanceship they have been forced to be martyrs..." (10)

The records of the trial were not made publicly available until half a century later, until 1963, and even then they were incomplete. They proved quite conclusively that a State conspiracy had taken place. Thus: "The implications behind the trial were taken to heart by all those that still nursed radical sympathies. Kotoku and the others had been

hung for 'intent' to harm the emperor. In other words, it was for their ideas that they had been put on trial, and radical intellectuals were simultaneously stunned and chastened. Only half a decade later would the Japanese Anarchist and socialist movements completely recover from this bitter blow. In the meantime, during a period known as the 'winter of socialism', the socialist movement disappeared completely." (11)

## The Emperor Myth

To know why this handful of people should adopt this course of action we have to know what the social and political conditions were, and in doing that we can reveal the cowardly and barbaric methods the Japanese ruling class (and all rulers) use to suppress discontent. For up to now we have shown how the Japanese State deliberately used the *Taigyaku Jiken* for certain purposes - arrest, torture, murder and intimidation - based on evidence now provided by the Japanese State itself: its own trial records. However, this does not explain why a few individuals would adopt a policy of killing one person (an emperor); of why such a policy was considered necessary; and whether any other courses of action was open to them.

Miyashita Takichi was a machine operator in a saw mill at Akeshina, Nagano prefecture, three hours train ride from Tokyo. After completing a primary school course he obtained a knowledge of machinery whilst working in various plants. In January 1907 he became acquainted with the *Heimin Shubun* (Common Peoples Newspaper) and visited Kotoku, who was editor. In 1908 Uchyama gudo pub-

lished Nyugoku Kinen, Museifu Kyosan ("In commemoration of their Imprisonment for Anarcho-Communism") when the sentences were passed on the defendants in the Akahata Jiken ("The Red Flag Incident") - which will be discussed later. In it Uchiyama expressed his contempt for the emperor, amongst others: "There are blood-sucking ticks - the emperor, the rich, the big landlords." Miyashita had become converted to Anarchism after reading the clandestine publications of Uchiyama, Heimin Shimbun, Kemuriyama Sentaro's Kinsei Museifushugi ("Modern Anarchism") Published in 1902, and hearing Morichika Umpei talk about the bloody origins of the imperial family.

Miyashita had made several attempts at organising his workmates, but grew disillusioned when every strike was viciously suppressed by the police. Also, whilst he could obtain agreement from his workmates about government injustices, there was an impenetrable superstitious brick wall concerning the emperor himself. This became obvious to him on 10th November 1908, when the emperor was about to pass by train through Obu station. He began by giving out Uchiyama's pamphlet and discussing it, only to realise that not only was criticism of the emperor rejected out of hand, but that when the police instructed that there could be no work done in adjacent fields the peasant-workers willingly complied. From this moment on he resolved to kill the emperor, to dispel the myth of imperial divinity.

On 13th November 1908 Miyashita wrote to Morichika expressing his conviction that the emperor had to be killed in order for socialism to progress in Japan. Morichika showed this letter to Kotoku. On 13th February 1909 Miyashita visited Kotoku, staying at the Heiminsha office and expressed again his belief that the emperor had to be killed, the best way being to: "...make bombs..(and)...throw

them at the Imperial carriage." (12) Kotoku agreed with Miyashita's reasoning concerning the emperor and said that: "...such measures will no doubt be necessary; hereafter there will arise individuals who will see that such measures are carried out." (13) Miyashita wrote to Kotoku on 25th May 1909 stating how far his bomb-making activities had progressed, as well as confirming his willingness to "die for the cause". In early June he visited the Heiminsha again and discussed his ideas on assassination with both Kotoku and Kanno Suga. Kotoku recommended Niimura and Furakawa to Miyashita as persons who could be thoroughly trusted as well as having "firm ideas". The latter had first met Niimura in the preceding February, when visiting the Heiminsha, and Miyashita voiced his assassination ideas to Niimura who readily agreed.

Niimura had decided to visit Kotoku in February, just after he was released from Maebashi prison for violation of the press laws in regard to the socialist journal Tohoku Hyoron. Out of work, he stayed at the Heiminsha, until Kotoku managed to secure him a job with Oishi's pharmacy in Shingu. Miyashita wrote to him there in June 1909, saying that he had begun experimenting with the construction of bombs. He had obtained 2lbs of sandarac from a friend under the pretext of refining steel from iron ore. After consulting an encyclopaedia as well as talking to a friend who worked in a fireworks plant, he realised that ten parts of potassium chlorate with five parts of relagar (arsenic monosulfide) could cause a powerful explosion. However, these chemicals were difficult to get, and believing that he had exhausted the limit of a safe purchasable supply he wrote to Niimura requesting further materials.

In July or August 1lb of chlorate of potash was procured from a pharmacy; and in September a muller for crushing

