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# THE JAPANESE ANARCHISTS.

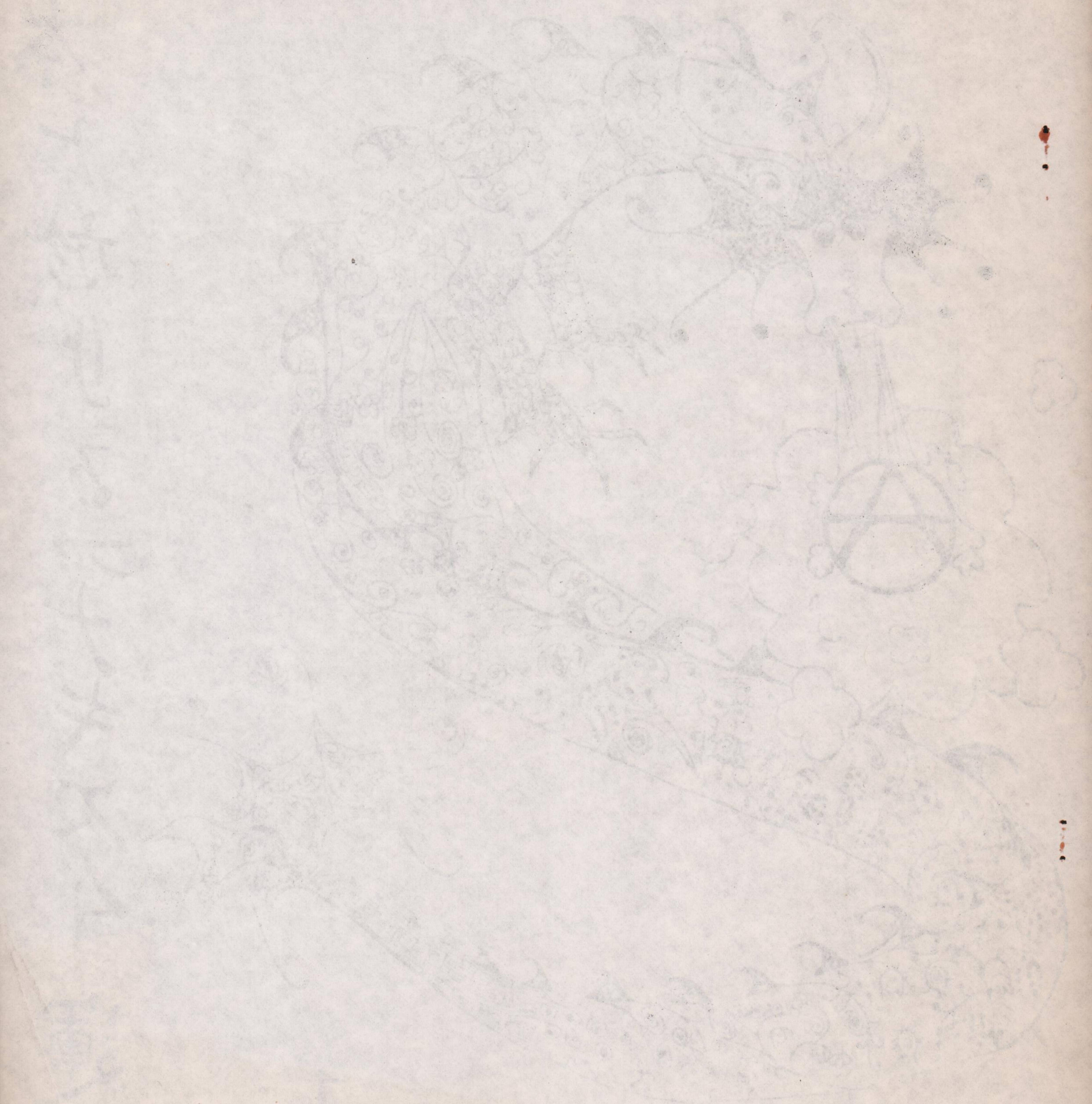
日本に於けるアナキズム運動



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THE GARLANDS OF THE EAST





Direct Action Pamphlet No. 4

THE JAPANESE ANARCHIST MOVEMENT

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## I THE PRONUNCIATION OF JAPANESE NAMES

The names of two major theorists in the Japanese anarchist and anarcho-syndicalist movement will appear during the course of this pamphlet. As romanisation of Japanese names does not always correspond to reality I shall first give some notes on pronunciation.

The first Japanese intellectual to openly espouse anarchism was one: KOTOKU SHUSUI: PRONOUNCE CORE-TO (as in top)-COO SHOE-SUEY (as in chop suey). OSUGI SAKAE: PRONOUNCE OR-SU (as in super)-GEE (as in geezer) SA (as in sahib) CA (as in can't)-E (as in ever).

A place name which will crop up during the height of working-class militancy is KAWASAKI: PRONOUNCE CAR-WAH-SAKI dockyards, which are in KOBE PRONOUNCE CORE-BE (as in bet).

## II THE FIRST STAGE--NEWS FROM RUSSIA

If we are to understand the atmosphere in which news of the activities of the Russian terrorists was received, we must first understand the political, social and economic environment by and within which this atmosphere was created. The modern era in Japan had begun with what is now known as the MEIJI RESTORATION of 1868, when an alliance of the military and the new business classes overthrew the feudal system of government and set Japan off on the path of emulation of the West, while retaining the hereditary emperor as a symbol of the persistence of the traditional Confucian virtues. To say that the government which they set up was autocratic would be to understate. There were no elections, no right of free assembly, nor of free association, all combined with a programme of rushed industrialisation. Education before 1868 had been the privilege of the nobility and largely remained so, with the result that thinking men were almost without exception ex-samurai.



The working-classe, as I have said, were unable to organise and in any case retained most of their old peasant characteristics (the economy of Japan before the Restoration had been almost entirely agricultural). after being forced to move to the towns as the government's industrialisation programme swung into action. We should also note that, since the sixteenth century, when the feudal system had been consolidated, and all foreigners forcibly ejected, there had been no contact with the West at all (save for a small Dutch trading centre). This isolation was broken only in 1854 when the Americans (predictably) forced the rulers at cannon-point to open trade relations. There was thus no chance at all for progressive ideas to develop before the last quarter of the nineteenth century.

This then was the situation. After 1868 the country was thrown open so that: "Knowledge shall be sought for all over the world and thus shall be strengthened the foundation of the imperial polity." It was in this heady atmosphere that those few intellectuals who had been in touch with the events in Europe of the last ten years came to hear of the activities of the narodniks and the nihilist terrorists in Russia. By 1882-1883, when these activities were rife following the assassination of Alexander II, three books had been published in Japan on the Nihilists. At the same time, following the establishment of the National Diet in 1881, the first formal anarchist group, the Oriental Socialist Party was set up. Pressure from politicised intellectuals had forced the government to allow reform, and counter-pressure from the government forced the OSP to dissolve itself in 1883. But not before it had had time to issue a plea for direct action. The group had no president nor head of any kind, and its short description of its aims shows the influence on its members of the Russian terrorists:

"The government should immediately be abolished as it is the offspring of evils. The day that the government is abolished will be the day the world of true civilization at which we aim is attained."



Following suppression by the government, the Japanese socialist movement went underground to lick its wounds while the intellectuals debated various ways of putting their theories into practice. By 1904 anarchism had come to replace nihilism as the standard term for revolutionary assassination, and these two terms, along with 'terrorism' came to be used to mean one and the same thing. Simultaneously, however, the practise of the Japanese socialist movement was turning against violence and was becoming condescending towards the violent acts of the Russian revolutionaries, especially after the Japanese victory over Russia in the war of 1904-1905, after which they came to be seen as reacting instinctively against a difficult situation. This was a period of relative quiescence in Japan, while the government introduced compulsory universal education enabling the liberal parties to flourish in the Diet. We thus see the liberalisation of the Japanese socialist movement for the next twenty years.

### III THE SECOND STAGE--INTELLECTUAL CONVERSION

It should be understood that the socialist movement in Japan was not developing in an atmosphere of oriental escapism. Indeed, several things had happened in Europe to worry the Japanese government. The broadening of the intellectual revolution in Russia after the 1880's together with the activities of the Social Revolutionaries; the founding of the Second International and its subsequent captivation by Bakunin; the great English dock strike of 1889; the recovery of the French working-class after the fall of the Paris Commune; and the forced repeal of the anti-socialist law in Germany after the socialist parties swamped the Diet, all put the Japanese government on its guard. The immediate result was the passing of the Public Peace Police Law in 1900, making it illegal to organise trade unions. This



was followed by a brutal literary inquisition and an increased crack down on political dissent. The last few years of KOTOKU SHUSUI's life are a reflection of the times. KOTOKU was an ex-samurai from a rural fief, and tended towards populist views, centring his ideas on the countryside and a 'revolution of the majority of the people'. Three factors finally influenced his open admission of anarchism: the first was his five-month sentence for printing a Japanese translation of the Communist Manifesto and an article in which he praised the Russian Social Revolutionary Party; the second was the news of 'Bloody Sunday' in St. Petersburg in 1905; the third, and the most interesting, was his correspondence and friendship with the elderly Californian anarchist Albert Johnson. On a visit to San Francisco immediately after the earthquake of 1906, he became convinced, by the manner in which a new way of life had been established to cope with the disaster, of the viability of an anarchist society. At the invitation of Albert Johnson he stayed on in the Bay Area to study revolutionary ideas. His chief influence now became the IWW the International Workers of the World, which aimed at the overthrowing of the economic power of the capitalist state by direct action, culminating in the general strike, the ultimate phase in working-class consciousness. Government would be replaced by trade unions and the whole world would be federated under 'one huge union'.

The Japanese socialists of the first few years of the twentieth century had been influenced by Marx's tactical mistake in suggesting that workers in some highly developed nations might be able to achieve the revolution by parliamentary means, and this had caused a swing to the advocacy of social-democracy. One can thus imagine the bombshell that fell when KOTOKU returned with the conviction that Marxist social democracy was an outmoded idea and that anarchist-inclined direct action was now the only means by which the working-class could realise their ambitions. KOTOKU and the People's



Association formed around him had been the focus of Japanese left-wing politics since 1900, but the group had been non-doctrinal and included such strange birds as the Christian Socialists, drawing its cohesiveness from a joint opposition to the war policies of the government. We thus see how the socialist movement in Japan passed from intellectual experimentation with revolutionary ideology to the more complex problem of providing a workable rationale for Japanese labour organization. The differing approaches to this problem can also be seen to reflect the doctrinal rivalries then current in Europe. While joining in an attempt to found an all-socialist newspaper, KOTOKU condemned the others both for their agitation for adult suffrage and for the economic aid they were advising for the low-paid workers and the unemployed. He urged instead a direct attack upon the system of social and political constraints on the workers' freedom. This, by definition, devalued any pre-revolutionary political involvement, consciousness being germinated by the overthrow of all authority, to give way to a totally free environment in which individual necessity would be the guiding principle and individual desires in tune with this end. The apocryphal destruction of society which this implied would leave man free to develop his natural virtues. KOTOKU thus echoed Bakunin:

"We must overthrow from top to bottom this effete social world which has become impotent and sterile... we must first purify our atmosphere and transform completely the milieu in which we live; for it corrupts our instincts and will, and contracts our heart and intelligence. The social question takes the form primarily of the overthrow of society."

Yet at this stage and up to the beginning of the 1914-1918 war, Japanese anarchism was little more than intellectual masturbation. In September 1906 a new magazine appeared, Review of Revolutions, which was concerned entirely with revolutionary assassination and violent revolution. Articles on Western anarchist theory and experience, with introductions to Western theorists were also produced. The chapter headings of the first issue included: "Secret



Bomb Factories", "Anarchism in Spain", "The Tsars in Hell", "Epitome of Revolutionary Heroes--Michael Bakunin" and the like. The magazine lasted ten issues and its chief effect was to establish Bakunin and Kropotkin as the heroes of the revolution. It had links with the revolutionaries in both Russia and China.

Yet sales of the magazine were relatively small, and the first real breakthrough on the working-class front came at a meeting of the Japanese Socialist Party, which had always been controlled by moderates who advocated "all measures to achieve socialism within the confines of the law". In February 1907 it was generally agreed to move towards socialism by all means deemed necessary. Of the 62 delegates, 22 voted for KOTOKU's platform, which had by now become an anarcho-syndicalist one, and only two members voted against the motion. By 1908 KOTOKU and his ideas dominated the socialist movement.

This meeting, then, formed the first attempt to bridge the gap between the theorists and the practitioners. The rapid forward motion of the socialists from this point on, and the increasingly numerous calls to overthrow the authority of the state, provoked a vicious reaction from the latter. In the most notorious of all the many examples of the Japanese government's suppression of the socialists, the Lese-Majeste Incident of 1910, KOTOKU and several other anarchists were arrested, accused of plotting to assassinate the Emperor, and were executed in January 1911. KOTOKU left as his testament a mandate to future socialists:

"The advancement of the welfare of labour unions as a whole will make little headway if the matter is entrusted to a parliament. Affairs of the workers must be advanced by the workers themselves."

Yet the necessary conditions for the outburst of creative violence



which this mandate called for were not yet apparent in Japan. The most positive effect of the government's oppressive policy was a cohesive one on Japanese intellectuals. "All existing socialist publications were banned, activist comrades across the country were jailed, newspapers and magazines across the country were not allowed to publish, freedom of assembly and speech for socialists was completely denied." The result was a coming-together of left-wing minds and a general search to clarify their own positions and political perspectives. The awareness cultivated in the prison cell led to an increased realisation of the need to put their various ideas onto a firm footing.

Following the execution of KOTOKU, the foremost libertarian thinker became OSUGI SAKAE. Osugi spent the best part of two and a half years in prison following the Red Flag Incident of 1908, another instance of the government's oppression, and was released in November 1910. He had earlier been very influenced by the thought of Max Stirner, though always with the awareness that there must be a social dimension to his individualism, and arrived at the conclusion that "there was only one way of life for the individual, the way of action, and only one environmental reality, oppression... the only kind of meaningful action was resistance". However, OSUGI's story is really more concerned with the next phase. Predictably, the beginning of the war in 1914, in which Japan was fortunate enough to join the winning side, gave rise to all manner of crises de conscience among left-wing intellectuals, as had happened in Europe, and in terms of practice the Japanese socialist movement became subdued for the next four years, although as we shall see, OSUGI was busy working out his anarcho-syndicalism.



#### IV---THE WORKERS: FROM ANARCHISM TO ANARCHO-SYNDICALISM

As the title implies, this was the period in which Japanese working class consciousness began to make itself felt. As had happened in Europe again, the war had accelerated the rate of industrial expansion and once more an explanation of the social, political and economic environment is necessary to an understanding of the situation in which anarchism developed into anarcho-syndicalism in this period. The first event to give notice of impending rebellion against government policies was the Rice Riot of 1918. The war boom, accentuated inevitably by the profiteers, had led to a continuing increase in the price of rice. To a nation by now well into the industrial revolution, with a steadily multiplying urban working-class, this was a disaster. Riots and incendiarism took place in 180 cities, towns and villages throughout the country during three weeks of a hot August. Troops were called out and many thousands were arrested. The immediate effect of the riots was to cause the fall of the present coalition government and the rise of a Conservative one pledged to a policy of "law and order".

Japan continued in the swing of the war boom until 1920. Capitalism was unashamedly prospering and the subsequent gap between rich and poor widening. Thus when the depression did arrive the effect was, as in Europe, catastrophic. Many industries were forced to close, and unemployment spread throughout the country. Workers were forced to strike, not for positive advantages, such as higher wages etc., but to protect their already shaky position, against the lowering of wages and mass dismissals being carried out by the capitalists. Thus the fluctuations of the capitalist system did for the Japanese working-class what the theorists had not been able to do--brought them their first bleeding in the field of political conflict. A survey of statistics on labour disputes in the period 1916-1918 serves as a fitting prelude to the final awakening: it shows a seven-fold increase in the number of workers taking part--from 108 strikes with 8,413



participants in 1916, the number increased to 417 strikes with 66,457 participants in 1918. In conjunction with this coming-of-age of the working-class there arrived for the left-wing intellectuals the heartening news of the success of the revolution in Russia, and renewed oppression by the Japanese government fell upon a very different environment from that of the pre-war years.

In February 1920 the new Conservative government dissolved the House of Representatives, thus scotching the hopes still held out by the moderate left for the introduction of universal suffrage. The government gave in the following statement the reason for its decision:

"It (universal suffrage) undermines the stability of class system and menaces the modern social organization."

Hence, in conditions of open conflict, the struggle between capital and labour began. The overall number of trade unions mushroomed in this period, going from 107 in 1918 to 273 in 1920. It should be noted that it was still illegal to form a trade union, and was to remain so until 1926, so workers' organisations were brought together under such names as the "Faithful Friends Society", and the "Justice Promoting Society". An organization known as the "Friendly Society", which had started out in 1912 to create harmony between capital and labour, now transformed itself openly into a trade union dedicated to the fight against capital in the interests of labour. OSUGI and his group of fellow anarchists came to exercise great sway directly over the printing and newspaper workers' unions. In the great strike at Kawasaki dockyards in Kobe, over 35 thousand men were involved, no small number when you remember that the industrial revolution was really only six years old. Police attacked the workers with the traditionally-carried sabres, with the result that one worker was killed and many injured. Nonetheless, the workers took over the docks and held them for one month before voluntarily going back to work. Strikes of this nature and dimension were to spread all over Japan, all of them with anarcho-syndicalists actively fighting in the front lines.

OSUGI's influence was increasing steadily. He still maintained his subjective



approach to this more militant attitude in the unions, which he saw as necessary to combat the strong centralising influence now being wielded by the Bolsheviks in the Socialist Party. The spread of the strikes throughout the country convinced him that the time was approaching when regional syndicates to follow the classical lines of the general strike could be organized:

"The general strike must not be regarded as a deus ex machina which will suddenly appear to solve all difficulties, but as the logical outcome of the syndicalist movement, as the act that is being gradually prepared by the events of every day. However remote it may appear, it is not a Utopia and its possibility cannot be refuted on the ground that general strikes have failed in the past and may continue to fail in the future. The failures of today are building the successes of tomorrow. And in time the hour of the successful general strike will come."

In 1920 also was held the first May Day demonstration in Japan, celebrating the birth of the Trade Union Alliance. Although only one thousand workers were involved, this was a considerable number in conditions where there was no right of assembly and officially no trade unions.

In the summer of that year there was one last abortive attempt to forge a left-wing coalition but the absolute disagreement over the ultimate end of Japan's workers, bolshevisation or syndicalisation, allowed the Socialist League but a short life. Neither side was eager to label itself, and thus we find the strange sequence of events beginning with OSUGI's attendance at a Comintern-sponsored "Conference of Far-Eastern Revolutionaries" at Shanghai in the autumn of 1920 and ending with the break-up of the Bolshevik-Anarchist coalition in 1921. OSUGI's subjective approach was irreconcilable with the 'Scientific Socialist' approach of his Would-be allies. He rejected any theories of permanent organisation of the working-classes as being a deterministic limitation on man's ability to construct his own reality in and by the moment. The closest he ever came to admitting the possibility of rational planning and organisation was in his study of French syndicalism. His main point was the requirement of economic and political decentralisation, federalism, with the natural proviso that any group or individual be free at any time to break contact with the organisation. What he saw then was not so much the direction of the labour



movement towards ends conceived only by some higher authority, but the orchestration of labour violence towards the general strike. He shared Sorel's feelings on the 'social myth' of the general strike;

"The catastrophic nature of the general strike enhances its moral value. The workingmen are stimulated by it to prepare themselves for the final combat by a moral effort over themselves...The general strike therefore raises socialism to the role of the greatest moral factor of our time".

OSUGI'S approach to the syndicalist union federation stemmed from his reading of Kropotkin's Mutual Aid, save that the natural obstacle to be overcome is the oppressive social system. Hence his idealisation of the "creative power of the worker instinct" was directly in line with Kropotkin's ideas. The goals of individual and social revolution were to be realized simultaneously in the free environment of the syndicate, whose very raison d'etre was in the ultimate execution of the general strike, the supreme act of consummation.

Meanwhile the struggle between the Bolsheviks and the anarchists was coming to its climax. May Day of 1921 saw tens of thousands of Japanese workers in the streets, demanding the eight-hour day, a basic minimum wage, reform of the conscription laws, the right to collective bargaining and the right of the workers to control their industries. OSUGI thus had reason to maintain his confidence. But a chain of shady events led to a final split with the Bolsheviks. At the meeting in Shanghai he was persuaded to accept a Russian contribution towards a socialist newspaper in Japan. The money was not forthcoming and he soon discovered that the Japanese Bolsheviks had plotted to exclude the anarchists from participation in the paper. Despite the rise of labour violence during these times, the old 'Friendly Society' had stated its opposition to anarcho-syndicalism in January 1921 and came to align itself with the Bolsheviks. Nevertheless, OSUGI remained strong in the printers' unions and the two sides came to face each other behind the editorial policies of their respective newspapers. This was the



position when they met for the final confrontation.

#### V--THE FINAL STAGE: END OF AN IDEA

Thus by the beginning of 1922 we find a clear-cut split in the struggle ideological influence on the workers' movement. Attention was focussed on the forthcoming conference to be held in September in Osaka, the 'Conference for the Establishment of the General Coalition of Labour Unions'. In July the Bolsheviks presented their position: "Change of Direction for the Proletarian Movement". At the conference itself the Bolshevik-controlled group made its stand for an organization with a strong national centre. The anarcho-syndicalists insisted on a loose national federation. The debate hinged on 'centralised unionism' versus 'autonomous organization', but the conference ended in violence and government suppression and the issue was not resolved, although later a resolution was issued proclaiming that 'centralised unionism' was the correct policy. This, however, did not prevent the anarcho-syndicalists from issuing a counter-statement in the name of nineteen organizations, nor did it prevent OSUGI from presenting his argument in the next issue of his newspaper. His article was entitled Union Imperialism and consisted of an indictment of communist morality, especially Trotsky's materialist justification for deception in the interest of forming a united front under party leadership. His opposition to organization rested on the idea that the workers' instinctive, violent response to oppression would create what little organizational structure the Japanese labour movement needed. But it was too late. The Japanese labour movement was off on the trail of rationalisation and counter-rationalisation which led to reformism and its complete subjugation by the militarists during the 1930's. OSUGI left to take part in the International Syndicalist conference in Berlin, and from there moved to Paris, to attend the 1923 May Day Demonstration. He was deported and arrived back in



Japan later in that summer.

OSUGI did not live long after the disastrous Osaka conference. On 1st September 1923 Tokyo was struck by one of the worst earthquakes in its history. A rumour spread quickly about Tokyo, helped along by the military police, of a plot to set up a Communist Government in the aftermath of the earthquake. In this atmosphere the police were able to organize gangs of rowdies to attack the radicals and in that week OSUGI, his wife and their nephew were assassinated along with many other known anarchists during a period of martial law. This, together with what became known as "The First Communist Round-up" of June that year when more than fifty communists were arrested, signalled the end of the radical movement for some time. At the same time the government announced its intention to adopt a system of general election, allowing the moderates to return to the forefront of the Japanese socialist movement, since when it has never returned to the force which it wielded during these years. In real terms anarcho-syndicalism was finished. The idea lingered on to be subsumed in the spread of nationalistic fervour of the 30's - and we all know what happened next.

THE END

Erratum. p.4. International Workers of the World should read  
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