

## CHAPTER III

### THE JAPANESE LABOR PARTY

On December 1, 1925, the very day of its formal organization in Tokyo, the first Socialistic political party to be launched in Japan was dissolved by order of the Home Minister. The edict of dissolution was based on Article 8 of the Public Peace Police Law, which severely limits the partial guarantees of freedom of speech, assembly, and press established "within the limits of law" by Article 29 of the Japanese Constitution. Article 8 of the comprehensive Police Law reads:

In case it is deemed necessary for the maintenance of peace and order, the police can either restrict, prohibit, or break up outdoor meetings, mass movements, or crowds of people. They can also break up indoor meetings.

If societies organized fall under the purview of the foregoing paragraph, the Home Minister can veto them. One who may consider that his rights are infringed by such action on the part of the Home Minister may file a suit in the Court of Administrative Litigation.

Japanese radicals have their full share of the ingenuity which is a national characteristic. Realizing that the fundamental reason for the government's action was the activity of communist intriguers within their ranks, they began immediately to revamp the outlaw organization. On March 5, 1926, a second Japanese Labor party was organized in Osaka, much more than Tokyo the industrial center of the nation. The government has put no obstacles in the path of this new proletarian effort. On the contrary, men who are high in

councils of state maintain in unofficial conversation that the development is welcome; perhaps because it promises to be a much-needed cleansing force in Japanese politics; perhaps because it promises to divide, and thereby weaken, liberal strength.

For the uninitiated it is difficult to spot the fundamental difference between the proscribed and the legitimate organization. The first was called the Peasants' and Laborers' party. The name chosen for the second is the Laborers' and Peasants' party. In structure the original attempt was a grouping of agricultural and trade union *organizations* for sharply reformist political action. Technically, the subsequent experiment is an association of *individuals* for an identical end, though the same organizations lend informal support.

The first Labor party was designed to support a platform of thirty-four detailed objectives, of which only half a dozen are not at the present time possessed by citizens of the United States. Some of these demands, however, were of a scope to offset the moderate nature of the bulk of the platform and were illustrative of zeal rather than intelligence among the founders; for instance, the demand for "abolition of capitalistic education in primary schools," or that calling for "provision of perfect institutions (*sic*) for the convalescence and health improvement of the proletarians." The second Labor party, on the other hand, prefers to stress a program of generalities, aiming "to establish the right of living for the proletarian class and . . . to insure fairness and equity in the production and distribution of wealth."

The major and vital difference between the disbanded and the recognized parties is that in the former Communists could automatically become members through the adherence of organizations to which they belonged,

while now, on the basis of individual membership, they can be kept out.

It is this last distinction which is all important. The Japanese authorities at the present time are in a state of nerves about communism curiously at variance with the amicable diplomatic relations sedulously cultivated with Soviet Russia. Sometimes, the police measures taken to check Red propaganda are amusingly clever, as when the members of a Russian labor delegation were unhesitatingly admitted, only to be followed like shadows during their entire visit by secret service men assigned to each potential agitator as personal guide and attendant. As often the police precautions may be painfully stupid, as in the case of a most reputable Swiss business man recently subjected to an examination at the Korean frontier grueling beyond the average, seemingly because the suspect is tall and has a beard. The average foreigner, however, has no annoyances from registration rules and that sort of supervision. Only visitors from Russia are suspect. Clever or stupid, the campaign of precaution is, in their case, always thorough, for the proximity of Soviet territory and the social unrest produced in Japan by unsatisfactory economic conditions combine to cause constant anxiety.

Yet, out of the 60,000,000 people numbered in Japan proper, the Communists claim only 45,000 adherents, while those Japanese actually affiliated with the Third International probably do not exceed 7,000 in number. Even in a country less strongly imbued with nationalistic sentiment, less strongly fortified by social traditions against resistance to authority, this would be an insignificant proportion of the population. It would seem to be a realization that repressive measures may be both unnecessary and unwise, fostered by the growth of a liberal spirit now strongly apparent throughout Japan,

which has much to do with the tolerant attitude accorded by the government to the new Labor-Farmer party.

Considering the very temperate rebukes given the government by the liberal press for its repression of the first radical venture in politics, the extravagant editorial welcome extended to its lineal successor by the same journals is doubly noteworthy. The elimination of graft and corruption in politics, the awakening of political interest among the newly enfranchised voters, the advent of truly representative government in Japan are among the predictions made by a large section of the "capitalist press" as a result of the formation of a distinctively proletarian party. When one considers that this new party was launched with fewer than 200,000 nominal adherents throughout the nation, that leaders and members are alike without political experience, that organization must be built from the ground up, and that no wealth and few men of national stature back the enterprise, these optimistic prophecies seem at first inexplicable. A glance at the depressing state of Japanese politics at the present time is necessary to show why they are made.

By its disclosures and hints of seemingly unlimited scandals, the 1926 session of the Diet succeeded in shaking the country out of much of the traditional Japanese apathy toward politics. National pride was shocked and reformist ideas stimulated by the rapid succession of unsavory cases. The president of the Seiyukai (major opposition party) was charged with permitting serious irregularities with the large sums entrusted to him as Minister of War at the time of the Siberian expedition. Immediately, the Seiyukai leaders retorted by seeking to impeach the Kenseikai (government party) leader, who sponsored the attack, on the ground that he had received money from Soviet Russia. On top of all this, widespread corruption was disclosed in connection with

the removal of a brothel quarter in Osaka, an incident the more unpleasant because said not to be the first instance of its occurrence in Japanese political life.

With serious incriminations falling impartially on all parties, Japanese commentators have pointed out that blame should attach not so much to individuals as to the anomalous constitutional structure whereby the Diet is entrusted with much less responsibility than our Congress, while the administration is relatively free from parliamentary oversight. The faults in the Japanese system of government, which has worked so successfully to span the enormous gap between feudalism and democracy, are becoming more and more obvious as the latter objective draws nearer. The pronounced executive responsibility of the British system and the careful checks and balances in our own method of divided control are both absent. Now, simultaneously with the spreading demand for better public control over administration, comes a new political party claiming to speak and act for those who have heretofore been divorced from any voice in government. Clearly, the Labor-Farmer party has potentialities beyond its apparent strength, provided there is sufficient intelligence in its leadership to dodge radical ideology in favor of important constitutional reforms. If the proletarian party misses this opportunity, another is sure to seize it. Viscount Goto, a courageous liberal of independent viewpoint with a large public following is, for one, endeavoring to create a reform party. Its chance of practical success among the newly enfranchised will be greatly augmented if the Labor-Farmer party proves intellectually narrow.

However this may turn out to be, its organization is well worth considering. On the agricultural side the strength of the Socialistic party is provided by members of the Japanese Farmers' Association, which four years after its organization numbers some 60,000 tenant

farmers. The president of the association, Mr. Motojiro Sugiyama, is also chairman of the executive committee of the new party, which committee is responsible to an assembly composed of elected representatives from the various local branches. Mr. Sugiyama is an agricultural economist, a Christian, and a close friend of the well-known social worker and author, Toyohiko Kagawa, himself a supporter of this new political movement. A third well-known adherent is Professor Isoo Abé, of Waseda University, who has been instrumental in the promotion of workers' study classes in Japan, not to mention his quarter-century of devotion to the cause of popularizing baseball.

On the industrial side the Labor-Farmer party owes most of its strength to the support of the General Federation of Labor, which with a membership of about 35,000 is easily the strongest unit in the poorly organized Japanese industrial labor movement. There are only about 220,000 trade unionists in all Japan, and nearly half of these belong to company-organized unions.

In conversation with Bunji Suzuki, president of the General Federation of Labor, this foremost of Japanese labor leaders expressed to me qualified optimism about the future of the new party, predicting that it will elect a group of from ten to fifteen members to the House of Representatives at the next general election. That event, however, is not expected immediately, since uncertainty as to the opinions of the newly enfranchised electorate makes both Diet and Administration anxious to postpone a national election until the present government's maximum constitutional term of four years has expired—until May, 1928, in other words. And ten to fifteen Laborites in a House containing 465 members is not a very formidable proportion.

Nevertheless, it is the opinion of Mr. Suzuki, who, as a graduate of the Imperial University and a man of wide

cultural background, is somewhat misleadingly called "the Japanese Gompers," that the Laborers' and Peasants' party may be expected to play a rôle in Japan roughly comparable with that of the British Labor party in Great Britain.

He anticipates that it will do much to educate politically many Japanese who have as yet only the vaguest ideas of what is meant by representative government. He believes that it will result in a better system of land tenure than that now ruling in Japan, whereby only one-third of the agricultural population are "landed farmers," and many of the tenant peasantry are paid not in monetary wages but in kind by the land owners. He believes that it will result in strengthening trade-union organization in Japan, in reducing the present standard of a ten- or even eleven-hour day, and in increasing the very low wages for which a majority of Japanese artisans work. Finally, Mr. Suzuki thinks, as do others who have less personal interest in the venture, that the new party will forward the process of making government in Japan more responsive and responsible to the popular will which, quite as much as in America, is interested in preserving in international relations the courtesy and friendliness which are deep-rooted characteristics of the Japanese people.

The Labor-Farmer party of Japan may not succeed in its ambitions. Communist intrigue may blight the tender plant by trying to twist its growth to revolutionary rather than parliamentary ends. A more real danger is that it may evolve as Socialistic in the purely imitative and doctrinaire sense, thereby permanently losing to other political ventures the support of important liberal elements which now regard this interesting experiment with undisguised approval. But as a portent of the trend of thought in Japan the significance of the new party is unaffected by what the future holds in store for it.

Steadily and necessarily Japan is becoming industrialized, drawing the raw materials and semi-finished products of other nations to her shores, then re-exporting them as articles which native skill and craftsmanship much more than shoddy cheapness stamp as desirable. The transformation from the self-contained feudal country of seventy-five years ago is staggering and, naturally, the mental change has been less marked than the physical transformation. In many ways this is desirable, for none would wish to see the spiritual beauty of old Japan stamped out by the machine. In other ways it is undesirable, for the power given by industrialization should be fettered by the free spirit and open self-criticism of democratic rule.

Unquestionably, the establishment of a workers' party in autocratic Japan is symptomatic of the blossoming of mental freedom among her people. It is as indicative of the future in that country as the mobilizing of three thousand police to "keep order" at a mass meeting of eight thousand Tokyo laborers on May Day of 1926 is indicative of the past. Whatever line solution of the labor problem takes, its existence, even in fairly acute form, is more encouraging than otherwise. Here is one, and not the least, of the abundant signs that Japan is modernized in many other ways than armaments, and has many other things of more importance than jingoistic patriotism to think about.