

# Yamakawaism and the Japanese Communist Party

GEORGE M. BECKMANN

*University of Kansas*

Late in the winter of 1926-27 a small group of Japanese Communists made the long trip to Moscow to discuss with Comintern officials the strategy and tactics of the Japanese Communist party. The results of those discussions are well known. They gave birth to the so-called "July 1927 Theses," which were to provide an ideological foundation for Communist strategy in Japan over the next few years.<sup>1</sup> The 1927 Theses followed formulas laid down in the 1922 Draft Platform for the most part; but at the same time, there was recognition of changing conditions in Japan. The Theses pointed out, for example, that Japanese capitalism had developed with unusual rapidity and in contrast with Great Britain and the capitalist countries of Europe was "undoubtedly now on the rising curve of development." Japan, as a consequence, had been transformed into a "first-class imperialist power in Asia." Yet, despite these changing conditions, the Theses, like the 1922 Draft Platform, adhered to the concept of a two-stage revolution—one to complete the bourgeois-democratic revolution by destroying feudal remnants, and the other to achieve socialism by destroying capitalism. The Japanese Communist party, as the revolutionary vanguard of the proletariat, was directed to provide the leadership and organizational skills required to attain these goals.

The Comintern had called the Moscow meeting not only to formulate party strategy but also to criticize two streams of thought that were affecting the character of the Japanese Communist movement in general and of the Japanese Communist party in particular. These have come to be known as "Fukumotoism" and "Yamakawaism," after the two influential intellectual leaders Fukumoto Kazuo and Yamakawa Hitoshi. The 1927 Theses

condemned both. Fukumoto bowed before the Comintern officials and renounced his errors. Yamakawa, who had already abandoned the party, was not willing to change a course which he strongly felt to be more realistic in view of the peculiarities of the Japanese social scene.<sup>2</sup>

Yamakawa Hitoshi, born in Okayama Prefecture in 1880, was one of the so-called Old Bolsheviks in the Japanese left-wing movement. Largely self-educated, he became interested in the various kinds of socialist thought that were beginning to influence the Japanese intellectual world at the turn of the century. He was a frequent contributor to various newly established left-wing journals and a political activist. His writings, directed against the ruling establishment, and his participation in the socialist political movement led to his arrest and imprisonment on four different occasions, in 1900, 1907, and twice in 1908. His second arrest in 1908 and subsequent sentence to two years at hard labor probably prevented him from being involved in the famous Kotoku treason case.

In 1910 the police arrested Kotoku Shusui, an anarchosyndicalist, and a group of his followers, and charged them with plotting to assassinate the Emperor Meiji. They were quickly convicted of treason. Eleven of them, including Kotoku, were executed, and another twelve were sentenced to life imprisonment. The incident so shocked the Japanese people and so stimulated police suppression that the entire left-wing movement was cast in a shadow from which it did not emerge for a decade. Socialist leaders hardly dared risk even publicizing their ideas. Some renounced their beliefs. Others, like Katayama Sen, quit Japan and went to the United States or to Europe. But police suppression as an instrument of state power had another kind of impact on the left-wing movement. Leaders like Sakai Toshihiko, Arahata Kanson, Osugi Sakae, and Yamakawa, who remained in Japan and quietly continued to work on behalf of the socialist cause, were increasingly attracted to paths of radicalism—generally a mixture of anarchosyndicalism and revolutionary Marxism.

The Japanese left-wing movement gained new life in the period following World War I. The leadership, as earlier, was largely intellectual, but in the new industrial Japan it had some foundation in the reviving labor movement. The Socialist League, established

in December, 1920, included, for example, prewar socialists, representatives from university student groups, labor leaders, and members of various cultural associations. The dominant ideas were radical: anarchism, syndicalism, and Communism, the last of which had begun to emerge as a distinct ideology following the Bolshevik Revolution in Russia.

Yamakawa was strongly influenced by the Russian Revolution and soon became a convert to Communism. He followed developments in Russia as closely as he could in order to grasp what he called "the realities of socialism." He soon understood that Communism was something very different from anarchosyndicalism, and he came to believe that it provided a more practical approach to the problem of transforming Japanese society. The concept of historical inevitability and the initial successes of the Communists in Russia were added attractions. Along with Sakai Toshihiko, he spread Communist ideas through articles and speeches among intellectuals, especially university students, and to a much lesser extent among labor leaders. Those who grouped around Yamakawa and Sakai were not many in numbers, but they were ardently devoted to the new radicalism.

This interest in Communism on the part of a small group of Japanese intellectuals coincided with the plans of the Comintern to establish a network of Communist parties in Asia. In 1920 the Comintern's Far Eastern Bureau at Shanghai made direct contact with radicals like Yamakawa, Sakai, and Osugi. But only Osugi, the leader of anarchosyndicalist elements in Japan, was willing to risk the dangers involved in consulting with Comintern representatives at Shanghai. He proved to be an unlikely convert to the international Communist cause. The Far Eastern Bureau at Shanghai again in 1921 made direct overtures to Yamakawa and Sakai and this time found them amenable to the idea of forming a "Japanese branch of the Comintern."<sup>3</sup>

The first step toward the establishment of a Japanese Communist party was taken in April, 1921, when Yamakawa and Sakai as leaders joined with three other veteran socialists, Arahata Kansō, Hashiura Tokio, and Yoshikawa Morikuni, and with Kondo Eizo, Takatsu Seido, and Watanabe Mitsuzo to form a "communist group." Sakai was elected chairman, and the others became members of an executive committee. There was no idea of forming a political party

at that time. As Arahata had made clear, discussion was confined to "vague talk about establishing a communist propaganda group."<sup>4</sup> Sakai and the committee, however, did want to establish relations with the Far Eastern Bureau of the Comintern. They sent Kondo as their representative to a Comintern-sponsored meeting at Shanghai and later dispatched two young converts, Takase Kiyoshi and Tokuda Kyuichi, to the Far Eastern People's Congress held in Russia in January, 1922.

After their return to Japan in May, 1922, Tokuda and Takase took the lead in trying to persuade Yamakawa, Sakai, and their younger, more militant followers to form a Communist party. They urged that a party be organized in time for recognition by the Fourth Congress of the Comintern, scheduled to convene in November, 1922. While Yamakawa and Sakai still questioned the feasibility of establishing a political party, there was strong support for the idea among their younger followers, members of the defunct Enlightened People's Communist party<sup>5</sup> who had been released on bail, and a small number of labor union leaders and members. When Arahata Kanson responded affirmatively, Yamakawa and Sakai acquiesced, although they continued to regard the move as premature. Arahata has described the situation in his memoirs as follows:<sup>6</sup>

Anyhow, as a result of the instructions which Tokuda and Takase brought on their return home, the feverish desire to organize a Communist party grew and reached the point that the task could not be put off for even a day. From the first, Sakai and other elder leaders seemed to have taken the prudent attitude that a Communist propaganda group should be formed to spread ideas widely among labor unions before the formation of a party on a popular basis. In addition, they may have entertained a tincture of misgiving because of Kondo's recent blunders. This may be the reason that they were [later] criticized for favoring spontaneity of following the masses, and even at that time they may have made most of the unexperienced young comrades feel dissatisfied with them. This was no wonder because the older veterans, who had survived the many years of repression and persecution, were prudent, if not cowardly, about everything, while the juniors, under the spell of the illusion that revolution might occur the very next day, wanted to form a party quickly. Naturally there were cleavages. Thinking that there would be an early revolution, I, for one, helped to kindle the fire for the immediate organization of a Communist party.

The Japanese Communist party was formally organized on July 15, 1922, at a secret meeting in Takase's house in Tokyo. The meeting has come to be regarded as the first party convention, although only a small group was in attendance. Sakai was named chairman; and Yamakawa, Arahata, Yoshikawa, Hashiura, Tokuda, and Takatsu, members of an executive committee. The group adopted a tentative constitution based upon that of the British Communist party; in fact, the constitution was disguised to appear to be that of the British Communist party. It conformed to the twenty-one conditions for admission to the Comintern as determined by that body's Second Congress in 1920. The new party pledged "to act positively as a branch of the Comintern and as a leader of the revolutionary movement for the proletariat."<sup>7</sup>

The party, whose membership in these early years rarely exceeded fifty in number, succeeded to much of the sectarian character of the radical left-wing movement. In fact, it was hardly a party at all in the sense of a unified organization with an accepted platform and operational tactics. There was no solidarity. There was no effective central leadership, and party members continued to work primarily in their own cliques, the most influential of which were the intellectual and publishing circles around Yamakawa and Sakai. Only a few members held important positions in the labor movement and spread Communist influence in it. The youthful Nosaka Sanzo, who returned to Japan from Moscow in the spring of 1922, was head of the International Section of Sodomei and became leader of a group called the Labor School Society, a Communist cell. Sugiura Keiichi headed a Communist cell among the machinists, and Yamamoto Kenzo among the steelworkers. Perhaps the most effective of the Communist labor leaders was Watanabe Masanosuke, head of the Nankatsu Labor Association, which organized small-scale industry in the poorer sections of Tokyo.

Since the Japanese Communist party was organized in secret, there were no public declarations associated with its name. But Communists as individuals or as members of small cliques actively contributed to various journals, which tended to serve as semi-official organs of the party. *Vanguard* and *The Proletariat* were quite similar, devoted primarily to current affairs. *Studies in Socialism* was generally more theoretical and concentrated on left-wing ideological developments abroad. Later, in April, 1923, these three journals

merged to form *Red Flag*, which was more like a true party organ. Communist labor leaders like Nosaka published in such journals as *Labor* and *Workers' News*.

Yamakawa proved to be the most influential of the Communist writers. His understanding of Marxism, which was matched only by that of Sakai, and his knowledge of European history, especially of the Russian Revolution, helped to place him in the position of leading party theorist. His views came the closest to being the equivalent of party dogma. This was certainly true in the case of his influential treatise "Change of Direction in the Proletarian Movement," which appeared in the July-August 1922 issue of *Vanguard*.

Yamakawa began his treatise with the statement that "the proletarian movement arises from a movement of a small number of persons who have become class conscious earlier than the masses," and went on to expand upon this as follows:<sup>8</sup>

This period is one in which the few forerunners must, first of all, certainly make sure of themselves and ascertain the objectives of the proletarian movement. This small group increasingly purifies its ideas and increasingly fully understands them. Its class consciousness becomes clearer, and its ideas regarding the capitalist system become deeper. Wholeheartedly it rushes directly toward the natural conclusion. It arrives at the clear and definite thought that there can be no emancipation of the proletariat other than by the destruction of the capitalist system. It will act in the firm belief that a movement for improving immediate daily life is useless. Thus the words and actions of the few forerunners will become increasingly radical and take on increasingly a revolutionary coloring.

According to Yamakawa, when these militant elements who, although small in number, "are ready to take drastic action based on drastic ideas," unite in some form, "the proletarian movement will take its first step forward." In his judgment, the Japanese proletarian movement had already taken this first step. He demonstrated this by separate analysis of the "two aspects of the proletarian movement—the socialist movement and the labor union movement." He began with the socialist movement as follows:

The past twenty years have been a period in which the Japanese socialist movement separated from the proletarian masses and made certain of its own position. This was a necessary process in order to build up the ideas, ideology, and views of the proletariat itself at a time

when the proletarian masses were still completely controlled by capitalist ideology and psychology. The Japanese socialist movement was successful in this. It has thus been based on the principles of class struggle and revolution throughout the past twenty years. It is safe to say that the thinking of the Japanese socialist movement has never been mixed with compromising views, opportunism, or reformism. Perhaps no one has been looking more unmistakably toward the final goal of destroying capitalism than the Japanese socialists.

Yamakawa pointed out that the socialist movement was, however, based upon the commitment of a very small group, and he lamented that in perfecting its ideology, "it paid a high price" and became "parted from the masses." He conceded that "the socialist movement has had to grow in unfavorable circumstances without parallel in the world," but still he used strong words:

Ten or twenty enthusiasts get together, dream about the next day of revolution, and make big talk, and at best they would satisfy their "rebellious spirit" by taking "revolutionary action" against a policeman and spending a night under police detention. Although they reject the capitalist system, they actually do not lay even a finger on it. As long as they adhere to such a passive attitude, they become more isolated from the proletarian masses, although the socialist movement becomes more purified in terms of its ideology. Although such an attitude is the ideal of nihilists, it should never, of course, be the attitude of the socialist movement or of the mass movement of the proletariat. We have certainly fallen into this mistake.

He said much the same thing about the labor union movement:

The total membership of labor unions is very small, and the number of central and active elements is even smaller. The Japanese labor union movement today, instead of being a mass movement of the proletariat, has for the most part the character of a movement of a small number of forerunners. These forerunners, although small in number, are not in the slightest degree inferior, compared to foreign labor union movements which have histories of one hundred or one hundred and fifty years, in terms of clear class consciousness, the perfection of ideology, and the purification of it. But at the same time, to the extent that they have perfected and purified their ideology, these few forerunners of the proletariat are apart from the ordinary union members around them and even more so from the masses of the working class.

Yamakawa had set the stage for his call for "a change of direction." He asked that the small vanguard "take its perfected,

purified ideology and once again enter among the masses which were left far behind. 'Into the Masses!' must be the slogan of the proletarian movement." He then went on to define what he meant:

... In the second period of the proletarian movement, we must unmistakably see what the masses actually demand, although we must at the same time keep the final goal of the proletarian movement in sight all the more clearly. Our movement must be based on the present demands of the masses. Our goal is the destruction of capitalism. We know that any reform short of that can never liberate us. But if the proletarian masses demand the improvement of their immediate daily life rather than the destruction of capitalism, our present movement must be based on this popular demand. We know that production must be controlled by producers themselves. But if the proletarian masses now demand only an increase by ten sen a day in their wages instead of control of production, our present movement must be based on this concrete demand. Our movement must be built on the concrete demands of the masses, and it must draw strength from them. Is this not a fall from the principles of revolution to reformism? This is certainly not the case. This is because there can be no revolutionary conduct isolated from the conduct of the masses; and there can be no mass movement separate from the concrete demands of the masses. The difference between the principles of revolution and reformism lies not in the point of whether we concede or do not concede to the concrete demands of the masses in the daily movement, but whether we endeavor or not to elevate the concrete demands to a concrete movement and a concrete struggle and advance to the final goal.

As a result of our concession to concrete demands in order to take an uncompromising attitude toward the enemy, we must from today take all the more seriously the movement representing the present interests of the proletarian masses, the movement for improving their current life, and the movement which has as its goal partial victory. In other words, our movement must become more practical.

Yamakawa also made it clear that the proletarian movement could not remain indifferent to bourgeois government. "On any front where capitalism expresses authority and control, we must move on from the attitude of simple rejection to an attitude of positive struggle on behalf of all questions affecting the actual life of the proletarian masses."

... The political front is the place where the authority and control of the bourgeoisie find their most naked and direct expression. If the



proletarian movement only rejects bourgeois politics ideologically and remains indifferent to all political matters, it will be evading a struggle against the bourgeoisie on the political front. To simply reject the existing system of bourgeois politics ideologically cannot bring the slightest injury to it. If the proletariat truly rejects bourgeois politics, it must not be simply passive; there must be a positive rejection. In other words, the proletariat must fight bourgeois government positively. It must put up proletarian politics against bourgeois politics.

Yamakawa did not define what he called "proletarian politics" in terms of political tactics, i.e., suffrage and political parties, but he did very briefly in terms of political demands.

In this connection, however, the labor union movement of Japan has recently been undergoing a remarkable change. One slogan of this year's May Day was the demand for the recognition of Workers' and Peasants' Russia. This was obviously a political demand of the proletariat. The demands concerning the rights of living, settlement of the unemployment problem, and the recent opposition to the Radicals Control Bill—these are all political demands since they are all demands on the state by the working class. Thus it is safe to say that they constitute the political movement of the proletariat.

Yamakawa concluded his treatise with a summary of his main points and with the following warning:

"Into the Masses!" However, at the same time we must not dissolve ourselves into the masses who are still under the spiritual control of capitalism. If the small vanguard, which has taken the first step with so much difficulty, dissolves itself into the masses, it will not be a step forward by the proletarian movement but a fall from revolutionary principles to reformism and also opportunism.

The official lore of the Japanese Communist party holds that Yamakawa wrote this treatise on party orders in order to explain the two slogans "Advance into the Masses" and "Advance Toward a Political Struggle," both of which had been adopted by the Third Congress of the Comintern in 1921.<sup>9</sup> Yamakawa has denied that the party instructed him to prepare it, and Arahata, in his memoirs, supports his contention.<sup>10</sup> The time relationship between the inaugural meeting of the party and the publication of the treatise also tends to support Yamakawa.<sup>11</sup>

Yet it would be foolhardy to hold that Yamakawa was not influenced by Comintern declarations, especially when they reinforced

his deep concern about the course of development of the Japanese proletarian movement. He wrote later that he had had the impression that the movement was largely one in which "those defeated in the competition of capitalist society as well as stragglers, cynics, and grumblers flocked together to indulge in tall talking for self-complacency."<sup>12</sup> He strongly opposed this tendency, and like Osugi Sakae, he attacked the intellectual penchant for abstract theory. His emphasis upon the need to link the labor and socialist movements with the everyday demands of the masses influenced radical and moderate leftists alike. He was especially anxious to free labor leaders from the hold of anarchosyndicalism and therefore stressed the political role to be played by the proletariat. He was not clear, however, as to the nature of that role, for he continued to advise the proletariat to put no faith in parliamentarianism and to abstain from voting should universal suffrage become a reality.<sup>13</sup>

As for the vanguard, or Communist party, he viewed it as a small but expanding group of Marxists which would seek to develop a mass base through its support of the popular demands of workers and at the same time gradually to impose its leadership on the proletarian movement as class-consciousness deepened among the working class. The revolution, led by the vanguard but based upon a solid foundation of mass support, would be the natural culmination of this process.

Yamakawa was a little clearer with regard to tactics in an article published in the August issue of *Emancipation*.<sup>14</sup> In this case, his thinking was quite clearly influenced by general Comintern instructions regarding the need to establish a united front among labor unions. The Executive Committee of the Comintern had taken a position in support of united fronts in labor movements in December, 1921, and the Central Executive Committee of the Red International of Trade Unions, or the Profintern, issued a declaration on united fronts in January, 1922. Yamakawa was aware of their content; in fact, a summary of them had been translated into Japanese by Nishi Masao and was published in the July 1922 issue of *Studies in Socialism*. Yamakawa urged the establishment of a united front in the labor movement as a means to mobilize the working masses and to develop class-consciousness among them. He insisted that this would not lead necessarily to compromise and alliance with "reformist, social democratic, or bureaucratic leaders

of labor unions." He argued that the Communist party had to preserve its independence and therefore explicitly called upon it to criticize the policies of "reformist and bureaucratic labor leaders." What he was asking proved to be difficult, if not impossible, to achieve under the conditions existing in the Japanese labor movement.

The Fourth Congress of the Comintern recognized the Japanese Communist party as a branch of the international Communist movement, and a special committee on Japan formulated a Draft Platform for action by the party in Japan. There is no evidence that the Japanese delegates played any role in its actual preparation,<sup>15</sup> although Katayama Sen was probably consulted. The platform was the product of the collective will of the Comintern officials, especially Bukharin, Zinoviev, Radek, and even Lenin and Trotsky.

The Draft Platform<sup>16</sup> began with an analysis of the stage of development of Japanese society. This was no simple task because Japan did not fit the classic Marxist European pattern of industrial societies, nor was it in the pattern of Asian or African colonial societies. At the outset, therefore, the Japanese Communist party was warned "to take into consideration the peculiarities in the development of Japanese capitalism." Peculiarities were defined as characteristics of former feudal relationships. "The greater part of the land is today in the hands of semi-feudal big landlords; moreover, the biggest of these is the emperor." The draft went on to describe the consequences of this with regard to the nature of the Japanese state and the current political struggle in greater detail as follows:

... Remnants of feudal relationships are manifested in the structure of the state which is controlled by a bloc consisting of a definite part of the commercial and industrial capitalists and of the big landlords. The semi-feudal character of state power is clearly shown in the important and leading role of the Peers and in the basic features of the constitution. Under such conditions the opposition to state power emanates not only from the working class, peasants, and petty bourgeoisie but also from a great segment of the liberalistic bourgeoisie who are also opposed to the existing government.

With the continuing development of capitalism, the political demands of the liberalistic opposition have increased. These demands concentrate upon the right of universal suffrage and the democratization of state power. On the other hand the forceful development of

capitalism and the progress of the bourgeois revolution drives the working class and the great mass of peasants into the struggle. Thus the masses become an active political factor in the life of the country. The severe economic depression in the postwar period caused by the decline of Japanese industry has intensified even more the class struggle and political crisis throughout Japan. Under such circumstances the course of social development points toward the revolutionary overthrow of the existing political system, against which a variety of social forces and classes are united. *Since the completion of the bourgeois revolution in Japan is dependent upon a powerful proletariat and the mass of revolutionary peasants, who have as their aim the abolition of farm rent, it can be a direct prelude to the proletarian revolution, which has as its aims the overthrow of bourgeois control and the realization of proletarian dictatorship.* [Italics added.]

The Japanese Communist party was directed to make every effort to mobilize all social forces capable of carrying on the struggle against the existing government. For according to the Draft Platform, "the overthrow of the existing government is an inevitable stage in the struggle of the working class to achieve dictatorship." The Draft Platform specifically called for the "abolition of the imperial system." "Only after this first direct task has been fulfilled . . . must the Japanese Communist Party strive to advance the revolution, deepen it, and make efforts toward the acquisition of power by soviets of workers and peasants." It was to be Russia in 1917 all over again!

The Draft Platform in closing emphasized the crucial role of the party:

It is the duty of the party to use every means for gaining influence among the masses of peasants, particularly the poor peasants. As for the movement of the bourgeoisie against the government, the party must make use of it, while ruthlessly criticizing all contradictions in its activity and disclosing any acts of treachery which the liberalistic bourgeoisie is bound to commit out of their fear of the rise of the working class.

All this advice was a combination of Leninism and classical Marxist thinking. Lenin, like his revolutionary progenitor, had insisted that precapitalist Russia had to experience a capitalist, democratic revolution before it could undergo a proletarian, socialist revolution. He broke new ground with his call for action by the proletariat before the time for a socialist revolution had arrived.

He insisted that the party of the proletariat should conduct the class struggle not only in opposition to the bourgeois democracy which would result from the democratic revolution but also by itself participating in that revolution and guiding it in a direction that would make the later transition to socialism easier. This being the case, the party needed two programs: a maximum program and a minimum program. The former would deal with the principal aim of the proletarian party, the socialist revolution—the overthrow of the power of the capitalists and the establishment of the dictatorship of the proletariat. The latter would deal with the immediate aims of the party, aims to be achieved before the socialist revolution—democratization and the improvement of economic conditions for the masses.<sup>17</sup> This was a strategy to enable the proletarian party not only to capture leadership of the peasant masses, who by definition could not be expected to aspire to Marxist aims, but also to form temporary alliances with other political groups like the urban petty bourgeoisie. The immediate objective was in the case of Japan to eliminate the vestiges of feudalism and complete the bourgeois-democratic revolution as a necessary stage in the revolutionary process.

The Japanese Communist party did not formally consider the Draft Platform until March, 1923, when it called a special meeting, which was attended by some twenty-three members. The discussion focused on two major topics: (1) revolutionary strategy, including the question of abolition of the imperial system, and (2) political action tactics. Discussion of the nature of the coming revolution was heated, and no conclusion was reached. One group argued that, in view of the rapid development of capitalism in Japan, the revolution would have to be a proletarian one. Another supported the Draft Platform line of a bourgeois-democratic revolution in which workers and peasants would play an active role. Sakai Toshihiko tried to prevent discussion of the question of the abolition of the imperial system, explaining that the question of the emperor was already well understood. Mindful of the past, he warned that it might unnecessarily create "victims." Like most of the older Bolsheviks, he had been careful to avoid discussion of the emperor. Some of the younger party members, however, had no qualms about attacking that august institution.<sup>18</sup> In the end, the meeting approved the demand for the abolition of the imperial system as a key

objective, but there was general agreement not to include it in any statement of immediate action policy.<sup>19</sup>

No decision was reached, however, on a political action policy for the party. The most pressing issue that confronted the party was that of the universal suffrage movement, but there was no consensus. Sakai, for example, favored participation in the universal suffrage movement and representation of a legal proletarian party in the diet. Others opposed this view and advocated boycott of the movement. The former position had wider support, largely from two groups as follows: one, those party members like Tokuda Kyuichi who were anxious to follow the lead of the Comintern, and the other, those like Akamatsu Katsumaro who were leaning more toward the social democratic position of reform through parliamentary action. The opposition to participation in the universal suffrage movement came largely from the followers of Yamakawa Hitoshi.<sup>20</sup> Yamakawa, unable to overcome his anarchosyndicalist heritage, argued<sup>21</sup> that "to enter parliament" was not necessarily the only way to fight the political power of the bourgeoisie. "Sometimes it is more effective not to enter the parliament." What then did he advise?

What then is the actual situation in Japan? In this regard, I have stated my personal views in the article, "Universal Suffrage and Proletarian Tactics." I for one believe that in the actual circumstances of Japan to abstain from voting, to boycott voting, provides more effective political opposition than voting. But there is one condition to this. Abstention must mean something more than simple political indifference or negative rejection. There must be the prospect that it will grow into a positive mass movement.

He called this the "true spirit of the change of direction."

There was general agreement that it was necessary to establish a legal party based upon workers and peasants. In the minds of party members, there was no contradiction between the existence of a Communist party and a legal mass party, although they could not agree on the role to be played by the latter in the kind of revolutionary process described by the Draft Platform. And how the Communist party was to be related organizationally to such a party was a question left unanswered, if not untouched. This was no doubt a reflection of Yamakawa's failure to relate the vanguard to a joint front party.

Quite clearly, then, the Japanese Communist party was unable to reach decisions on key issues raised by the Draft Platform. The party decided to discuss the Draft Platform again at a meeting scheduled for April, 1923, but this was not done. Shortly thereafter the party began to feel the full impact of suppression by the state.

Suppression, especially the June, 1923, arrests of party members,<sup>22</sup> and the prospect of universal suffrage,<sup>23</sup> which tended to increase factionalism within the party—the government policies of “whip and candy”—ultimately forced the dissolution of the Japanese Communist party. While there is some disagreement regarding the attitudes of a number of party members, there can be no doubt that Yamakawa and Sakai no longer saw the need for an illegal Communist party. The influence of Yamakawa was probably decisive. Yamakawa believed that conditions in Japan were not ripe for the establishment of a Communist party. It was necessary first, he argued, to lay certain foundations by concentrating upon the development of mass organizations like labor unions, peasant associations, and student federations. He was convinced that an illegal party could not do this effectively, for it tended to separate the vanguard from the masses and to invite persecution by the state. He advised his comrades instead to work through mass organizations and a legal proletarian party, seeking thereby to create conditions for a mass Communist party at a later date. Lastly, he reluctantly acknowledged the defeat of his abstention theory and advised the proletariat to utilize its right to vote in the event of the establishment of universal suffrage.<sup>24</sup> Talk about dissolution became increasingly widespread among party members during the autumn of 1923,<sup>25</sup> and the decision to dissolve the party was formally made at a meeting in February, 1924.

Yamakawa held to this position and played no role in the efforts to reestablish the Japanese Communist party during the next few years. He did not rejoin the party when it was formed again in December, 1926. His ideas continued to be influential especially as guides for the proletarian party movement. And for that reason, they were constantly under attack by the Comintern officials and by new and younger Communist theorists like Fukumoto Kazuo. The 1927 Theses made the Communist position on Yamakawaism crystal clear. The Theses branded Yamakawaism as a kind of

"liquidatorianism" against which the Japanese Communist party had to fight. It stated as follows:

One of the principal errors of the Japanese Communist leadership consisted in the underestimation and misunderstanding of the role of the Communist party, and in the underestimation of its specific importance in the labor movement. The idea that the Communist party can in any respect be substituted by Left trade union factions or a broad workers' and peasants' party is fundamentally wrong and opportunistic. Without an independent, ideologically sound, disciplined and centralized mass Communist party there can be no victorious revolutionary movement. The struggle against every form of liquidatory tendencies, particularly those which found their expression in Comrade Hoshi [Yamakawa's] policy is therefore the first task of the Japanese Communists. Just as in the struggle of all toilers, it is necessary in the interests of all that the most advanced revolutionary section, the working class, should take the leadership, it is also necessary that in the interests of the struggle of the working class, the Communist party, its revolutionary vanguard, should take the lead.

Yamakawa joined with his old comrades Sakai and Arahata and with younger intellectuals like Inomata Tsunao to publish a new "theoretical journal of militant Marxists," called *Labor-Farmer*. The first issue appeared in December, 1927. This group, known as the Labor-Farmer faction, constituted the extreme left of the legal proletarian movement in the prewar period. Yamakawa and Inomata were the most influential theorists in the group and developed its basic strategy and tactics.

Yamakawa was very clear about the basic task of the proletariat.<sup>28</sup> "The object of the present political struggle is the political power of the imperialist bourgeoisie. This is almost explicit. The fact that the present stage of capitalism in our country is the period of monopoly finance capitalism generally implies this . . . I denounce those who do not recognize this as protectors of the bourgeoisie." He moved directly from an analysis of the present stage of Japanese capitalism to a definition of political power. He began by tracing the historical process by which bourgeois government came into existence. According to his interpretation, the Meiji Restoration was basically a bourgeois revolution against absolutism; but because the bourgeoisie was weak, the lower samurai played the major part in it. They stood on the economic basis of the newly rising bourgeoisie



and represented the latter's class interests. Their bureaucratic clan government was not a democratic government, particular to the bourgeoisie, but a transitional, middle government. Yamakawa explained that subsequently a complete bourgeois government did come into existence. "The bureaucracy and the military clique at one time seemed to be growing into a force opposed to the bourgeoisie, but, without an economic foundation of their own, they were quickly assimilated by the bourgeoisie." He went on in this vein as follows:

I have described the process of the establishment of bourgeois political power historically and theoretically. I warned that at present the bourgeoisie has assimilated power left over from absolutism and despotism. In evidence of this, the House of Peers and Privy Council have become part of bourgeois political power. Secondly, the landlord class is completely subordinate to the bourgeoisie. Thirdly, the political power of the upper strata of the petty bourgeoisie has rapidly lost its independence and special character and finally is subordinate to the political power of the big bourgeoisie. Fourthly, as for the recent universal election, the bourgeoisie has spread its influence among people of all social strata and tried to place them under its leadership.

He characterized the bourgeoisie as "a reactionary imperialist force," corresponding to the stage of imperialism in world capitalism. He insisted that the Communist classification of the Seiyukai as a landlord party and of the Kenseikai as a party of urban commercial and industrial interests was no longer valid. "The decisive factor today is the international differences within monopoly finance capitalism."

What, then, was the task of the proletariat and its vanguard? According to Yamakawa, it was to take up the demand for democracy, which the bourgeoisie had abandoned, and struggle for it, thereby providing the fundamental conditions for socialism. To this end, the proletariat and its vanguard had to mobilize all classes and social groups opposed to the imperialist bourgeoisie, including the lower strata of the petty bourgeoisie, to form a powerful anti-bourgeois front and political force. What he had in mind was the creation of a single mass political party as the instrument of revolution. "And depending upon the development of the struggle against the reactionary bourgeoisie and depending upon a decisive victory in a decisive struggle developing and continuing from it, the duty of

the proletariat and its vanguard is to establish the basic conditions for the transition from capitalism to a new social order."

The position of the Labor-Farmer faction as developed by Yamakawa, Inomata, and others challenged both the strategy and tactics of the Japanese Communist party in two fundamental ways. By denying the existence of feudal remnants and focusing upon a single revolution against the bourgeoisie, they removed the need to attack the imperial system and thereby were able to remain a legal segment of the left-wing movement. And, with the sole exception of Inomata, the members of the faction minimized or denied the need for a Communist party, emphasizing instead a mass party of workers and peasants which would constitute a united front against the despotic, imperialist bourgeoisie.

Yamakawism survived, then, as the basic strategy and tactics of the Labor-Farmer faction. Yet, while legal, the Labor-Farmer faction tended to be isolated from the mainstream of the left-wing movement because of its doctrinal extremism. The mainstream continued to move to the right, and this trend was even more pronounced after the Manchurian Incident. At the same time, the Japanese government, influenced increasingly by the military, was determined to eliminate revolutionary groups of all kinds. The outbreak of hostilities in China in July, 1937, sealed the fate of revolutionary critics. Yamakawa, Inomata, Arahata, and others of the Labor-Farmer faction were arrested and joined their former Communist comrades in jail in December of that year.

## NOTES

1. The complete English text of the 1927 Theses appeared in *International Press Correspondence* (January 12, 1928), pp. 50-54. The most convenient source for the Japanese translation is Ishido Seirin and Yamabe Kentaro, *Komintern no Nihon teze shu* (Texts of Comintern theses pertaining to Japan) (Tokyo, 1961), pp. 28-45.

2. This short paper on Yamakawism is based upon a larger study of the history of the Japanese Communist party conducted by the author in collaboration with Mr. Okubo Genji.

3. Kondo Eizo, *Komintern no misshi: Nihon Kyōsantō sōsei hiro* (Secret emissary of the Comintern: a secret history of the creation of the Japanese Communist Party) (Tokyo, 1949), p. 106.

4. Arahata Kansō, *Sa no memmen: jinbutsu ron* (Everyone of the left: a discussion of personalities) (Tokyo, 1951), p. 162.

5. After his return to Japan, Kondo played a leading role in establishing the

short-lived Enlightened People's Communist party. For a brief account of his activities and of the party see Kondo, *Kamisteru no michi*, pp. 128-32; and Rodger Swearingen and Paul Langer, *Red Flag in Japan: Communism in Action, 1919-1951* (Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1952), pp. 13-14.

6. Arahata, *Se no memen*, pp. 170-71.

7. Tateyama Takaaki, *Nihon Kyōsantō kenkyō hishi* (Secret history of the Japanese Communist party arrests) (Tokyo, 1929), pp. 100-105.

8. Yamakawa Hitoshi, "Musankaikyū undō no hōkōtenkan" (Change of direction of the proletarian movement), *Zemē* (Vanguard) (July-August 1922), pp. 16-25. The text is also included in the special issue on Yamakawa of *Shakaisugi* (Socialism) (October 1950), pp. 103-10.

9. Ichikawa Shoichi, *Nihon Kyōsantō itō shishi* (Short history of the struggles of the Japanese Communist Party) (Tokyo, 1946), pp. 61-62. Ichikawa has written that the original spirit of the slogans was distorted by Yamakawa, not deliberately, but because he was representative of the petty bourgeois and syndicalist remnants, which prevailed in the party. Yet Ichikawa concluded that, because of Yamakawa's treatise and other activities of party members, the Japanese proletariat began to "march rapidly in the direction of political struggles under the flag of communism."

10. Yamakawa Hitoshi, *Shakaisugi e no michi wa hitotsu de wa nai* (There is no one way to socialism) (Tokyo, 1957), pp. 199-200; and Arahata, *Se no memen*, pp. 174-75.

11. For a discussion of this point see Yamabe Kentaro's serial article "Kōryō mondai no rekishi" (History of the problems of party programs), *Zemē* (August 1957), p. 174.

12. Yamakawa Hitoshi, *Ara seiji no kiroku: shakaisugiaka no nanjūnen* (Record of an ordinary man: seventy years a socialist) (Tokyo, 1951), p. 362; and his autobiography, *Yamakawa Hitoshi jūden* (Tokyo, 1961), p. 274.

13. See his negative conclusion in "Futsusenkyō to musankaikyū no senjūtsu" (Universal suffrage and proletarian tactics), *Zemē* (February 1922), pp. 148-56.

14. "Musankaikyū no kyōdō sensen" (The common front of the proletariat), *Kaishō* (Emancipation) (August 1922).

15. Tateyama, *Nihon Kyōsantō kenkyō hishi*, pp. 91-92; and Yamabe, "Kōryō mondai no rekishi" (July 1957), pp. 118-21.

16. Nihon Kyōsantō Shiryō Inkaï (Historical Materials Committee of the Japanese Communist Party), *Kamisteru Nihon mondai ni kansuru hōshinsho ketsugi shū* (Collection of Communist policies and resolutions on Japan) (Tokyo, 1950), pp. 5-11.

17. The Draft Platform included, for example, such objectives as follows: the right to universal suffrage for all men and women over eighteen years of age; complete freedom of organization for labor unions, labor parties, labor groups, and other labor associations; complete freedom of publication, assembly, and demonstration; the right to strike; the eight-hour day for workers; control of production by factory committees; progressive income tax; and the nationalization without compensation of the land of the emperor, big landlords, and temples.

18. Nabeyama Sadachika, *Watakushi wa kyōsantō no uteto* (I discarded the Communist Party) (Tokyo, 1949), p. 62; and Tokuda Kyūichi, *Waga emōide* (My reminiscences) (Tokyo, 1949), p. 49 ff.

19. Takase Kiyoshi, "Hiwa—daini no taigyaku jiken" (Unknown story—the second high treason case), *Jiyū* (Freedom) (October 1962), pp. 128-37.

20. Shinobu Seizaburo, *Taisho demokurashii shi* (History of democracy in the Taisho period) (Tokyo, 1959), III, 985. Professor Shinobu cites the court protocol of Tokuda Kyoichi.

21. Yamakawa Hitoshi, "Hōkōtenkan to sono hihyō" (Change of direction and criticism of it), *Ōmei* (February-March 1923), especially pp. 54-59.

22. The police arrested some fifty party members on June 5, thirty of whom were indicted under the Public Peace Police Law and subsequently tried. With the exception of Yamakawa, who was found not guilty on the ground of insufficient evidence, most of the accused received from eight- to ten-month prison sentences in accordance with the final verdict reached by the courts in April, 1926. A small number of Communists who did not appeal their cases received similar sentences earlier.

23. The Yamamoto cabinet announced on October 16, 1923, that universal suffrage would be enacted soon, and appointed a committee to prepare legislation for the purpose. Although the Yamamoto cabinet fell from power shortly thereafter, the public believed that an extension of the suffrage was not far off.

24. Yamakawa published his views on universal suffrage and political policies for the proletariat in a number of articles and pamphlets which were reprinted in *Musankaikyū no seiji undō* (Political movement of the proletarian class) (Tokyo, 1924). These include "Nihon ni okeru demokurashii no hattatsu to musankaikyū no seiji undō" (The development of democracy and the political movement of the proletariat in Japan), pp. 178-248; "Shin keisei to shin hōsaku" (The new situation and the new policy), pp. 249-62; and "Seiji seiryoku no bumpy to musankai-kyū no seitō" (The distribution of political forces and the political party of the proletariat), pp. 277-326.

25. Arakata Kansō, *Kansō jidō* (Autobiography of Kansō) (Tokyo, 1960), p. 445; and Nabeyama, *Watakushi wa hyōsantō no naita*, pp. 74-77.

26. His views are summarized in "Seijiteki tōitsu sensen e—musan seitō gōdō ron no konkō" (Toward a united political front—the basis of the argument for the merger of the proletarian political parties) *Ron* (Labor-Farmer) (December, 1927), pp. 2-48.